Playwright David Hancock: In his recent The Convention of Cartography, some audience members realized that his narration of "Mike's" adventures was completely invented, some believed it was completely factual, and most couldn't make up their minds until they picked up a program as they left. Since this confusion between authenticity and creativity was one of the major themes of the evening, reviewers of the show had to be careful not to reveal its "secret"—and a feature was only possible after the show had closed.

David Hancock's Theatre phemera

A note to Voice readers!

Originally, we planned to offer in this space a feature on playwright David Hancock, whose The Convention of Cartography ran through fully at the Alley Cat Gallery on 17th Street, produced by Melanie Joseph's Foundry Theatre. Unfortunately, John Stett, the writer assigned to the piece missed deadlines and would not return phone calls. Just before the Voice went to press, a battered manila envelope was delivered to the editorial office. Inside we found a memo clipped to a typed note. It was a handwritten note, scribbled on yellow Post-its, torn pages from notebooks and diaries, and bits of computer printouts with passages from Stett's interviews with Hancock circled. With no other recourse, the editors have taken the unusual step of passing together the following feature on Hancock from these scraps. We apologize for any confusion occasioned by the disappearance of the author.

(Cover memo, last known communication with Ms. Stett, 8/3/94)
TO: Theater ed., Village Voice RES: David Hancock and The Convention of Cartography article
I have done the unforgivable. I pleaded for more time and then... screwed it. I hope you understand. You saw Hancock's play. You know how discouraging the experience was. Finding that little two-room house tucked at the end of a narrow alley in the middle of Manhattan. (Did you know the script calls for the museum to be in an Airstream trailer but the producer didn't want to hassle getting an exemption to alternate-side-of-the-street parking rules from the city?) Then being ushered into the living room where your mind begins seizing up trying to semi- consciously decipher performance notes. No playbill. No set. No lights. No costumes. Four strange objects on the floor: a clear glass, including a motor, and a grimy black baseball cap.

Then Hancock, just a bit too handsome to pass for the son of Roger Ebert, introduced himself as 'curator' of the collected artworks of some guy named "Mike." Remember how he fiddled with those index cards all the time and kept squirming up his forehead, pushing his spectacles back on the bridge of his nose? I remember thinking, 'I paid a baby-sitter for this.'

But when he pointed to the objects and said, 'These are some of Mike's things,' suddenly 'Mike' became real, kind of. Then this "curator" passed around a sample of one of Mike's truckstop poems scribbled on a piece of mat framed neatly under glass. Was this authentic? I held it in my hand. It seemed so. And the cigar box sculptures "Mike" created and left for strangers to find in highway rest-stop bathrooms, or on top of gas station soda machines. We all touched those objects. We were all co-conspirators in Hancock's体内 play.

I sat there watching a videotape of Mike (if I stop using quotation marks around his name does he become real?) at his North Carolina home, which seemed pretty hokey and staged though some people swallowed it. Then suddenly... Hancock's countdown. Did I miss something? And I kept waiting for the 'drama' to begin.

(God! See. Now the work drama appears in quotes.) So sitting there I thought maybe his flesh (the character) would start a fight or Mike would burst in the room and claim his 'artwork' (here quotes signify illusion). Maybe it would turn out that the curator, a self-proclaimed failed artist, killed Mike to steal the glory and raise the price of the work. But no. Nothing happened. No 'dramatic' revelation.

So I wandered into the next room with the rest of the visitors and gazed at this flea market biker-bric-a-brac fashioned into little altars of... art? Homages to Joseph Cornell? Who could have made all this stuff? Were they props? Were they "found" artworks used as props?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Theatre

don't exist outside material reality. Or do they?

Are they "props"?

Hancock assured me that the woman playing his "wife"—serving tea, ushering, helping us as we one-by-one peeled into the eyehole in a cigar box illuminated by a penlight—he swore this actress was his real-life wife. Well, her sec-

ond, actually. Sometimes in the late 1980s, after he got his MFA in playwriting at U. of Iowa, they eloped and managed a bar in North Carolina. At least that was the story...

See, I expected "theater" because... well... I am writing for the theater section, right? So I expected...\n
realism, conventions or signposts like maps. Ahh. Now I get it.

In the last of the many drafts I began for this article I described Hancock as "a postmodern American Pirandello who employs the medicine show hucksterism of Paul Zalom." (God, now I'm quoting myself) Then that line made me do the piece—that description sucks fruit loops. 'We'—the 'we' of critics—can't stop referring to 'standard' works, piling reference onto reference, narrowing down the meaning of those artworks that, like Hancock's plays, deal in reality. But, what's left? Only the raw experience? Is that why Artaud went insane?\n
(Torn scrap from Hancock's script for The Race of the Art Tattoo)\n
Jilly and I were always inventing languages. She had a language of colors and a language of license plates. Most people think that a language is to communicate, but it's really to keep strangers out of your head.

(Stett's diary entry dated July 13, 1994)

Just saw The Convention of Cartography. "Museum" felt strangely like a box, a coffee-bric-a-brac, filled with stuff I used to covet: little maps, old motel postcards, and a few poems scribbled on record jackets. Artist somehow seemed rigged but absent. Shown on video, another "box," forming series of Chinese boxes. Interpretation both for spectators and readers of art and literature always search so desperately for some sort of truth in this show plumbing around, like I was. I wanted clues, contrivances searching for an author.

( Diary excerpt dated July 23, 1994)

My head's bursting. Everything I just read, every section of this piece, I see and enjoy it. I have it. Tell them he writes "good" theater. Ask the other who
SKID ROE? CHIC EATS COME TO THE BOWERY

SAINT MISBEHAVIN': D.A. CHASES NUN IN VOTE ST.

Started Hancock's earlier piece, The Race of the Ark Tattoo, which
Sidehows by the Seashore impre-

sive Deir Zigun called "the most
interesting unsolicited script I've
ever seen." Zigun produced it at
his Coney Island theater last fall.

The audience enters and sees a
fla market setup run by a guy
named Foster, a vociferous prone
foster child of a guy named Homer
Phinney Jr. who wrote "story-
cards" for every object in the
fla market. Foster begins to tell the
audience the stories—in whatever
order the audience picks them out
of his "story ark."—a large toy
model Wasnengo trailer. Foster
"becomes" his foster father during
each tale, emerging at the end
dazed and confused.

The hidden menace in each tale
about asking the "fosters" to the
beach and watching one foster son
(Foster?) smash horseshoe crabs
with the pipe. Or the story of the
child's bloody sock. Or of the jar
of Vaseline. My past lives haunt
me. Maybe my mother took too to
many garage sales. Maybe it's
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[Note appearing on back of index
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law's recipe for "John Wayne
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[Index card note—typewritten]
D.H. wants to write in 1st, not
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Tom's version of William's play.
See, if I wrote the play, I'd have
Tom pass the glass menagerie
around the audience." Makes
viewers active, complicit, experi-
ence immediate. Same reason
comic companies hire perfume
spritzers, right?

[Circled portion of transcript of
interview with M.J. and D.H.]
D.H.: Can I read you this letter?
This man attended a performance
with his young daughter. (reading
from letter) "I feel contempt for
your masquerade... it had mean-
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[Diary entry, undated, coffee-
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