

Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A"

Carrie Lambert

October, Vol. 89. (Summer, 1999), pp. 87-112.

Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A**

CARRIE LAMBERT

For one to whom the real world becomes real images, mere images are transformed into real beings—tangible figments which are the efficient motor of trancelike behavior.

—Guy Debord,
The Society of the Spectacle (1967)

Approached through its photographs, Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) is a spectacular dance. Images from performances in the mid to late 1960s capture a dance of physical expansiveness, of dramatic and athletic display. Although the deadpan, gray photographs of *Trio A* depict the bare stages and street clothes that signaled Rainer's departure from the conventions of theatrical dance, her performers' articulate bodies animate these spare, muted images. Dancers stretch their spread-eagled figures. They balance in classical arabesques. They launch their extended bodies gracefully into the air. Performers trace dynamic, almost calligraphic shapes across these pictorial fields. Even when they carry themselves with less than balletic grace, the camera stills the dancers of *Trio A* in moments of physical drama.

Trio A's photographic record thus seems particularly misleading. For nothing could be further from Yvonne Rainer's proclaimed interests in the 1960s than

* This essay, part of my doctoral dissertation, was written while I was a Critical Studies fellow in the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program. An earlier version was given as a talk at the symposium "Views From the Whitney Program" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, May 20, 1998. Thanks to Ron Clark, Thyrsa Nichols Goodeve, and Pamela Lee for their critical readings of earlier versions of this text; to Annette Michelson for her critical and editorial suggestions; and to Colin Beatty for sharing his thoughts in an ongoing dialogue on performance and photography. I am especially grateful to Benjamin Buchloh for his invaluable guidance through the many stages of this project. Finally, I want to thank Yvonne Rainer, both for her assistance with materials for this essay and for her extraordinary openness to new interpretations of her work.



Above: Yvonne Rainer. Trio A. 1966. Performed by Rainer as Lecture in The Mind is a Muscle. 1968.

Below: Rainer. Trio A. Performed by Steve Paxton, David Gordon, and Rainer as part one of The Mind is a Muscle. 1966. (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)





Trio A. Performed by David Gordon in *This is the story of a woman who . . .* 1973. (Photo: Babette Mangolte. © Babette Mangolte.)

images of spectacular dance effects: “NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe . . .” In art history, at least, choreographer¹ Yvonne Rainer may be best known as the voice of an avant-gardist litany of 1965, in which she captured what she has called the “oppositional aesthetic” of the 1960s. “No to seduction of the spectator by the wiles of the performer,” she announced, “no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.”²

If the articulate, articulated bodies in *Trio A*’s still images seem to contradict this radically antispectacular dance program, a 1978 film produced by dance historian Sally Banes preserves something more like the expected vision of Rainer’s choreography.³ The film’s stationary camera frames an empty, gray space, in which Rainer performs her piece at a deliberate pace and with quiet concentration. *Trio A* chugs along like a well-running, if slightly quirky machine. The movement itself is inventive—body parts seem to move out of sync, like separately functioning mechanisms—but the dance never tries to startle the viewer with skillful

1. And filmmaker. It is not incidental to the concerns of this paper that Yvonne Rainer gave up performance in the early 1970s and has been known since then as the writer/director of films such as *Lives of Performers* (1972), *Journeys From Berlin/1971* (1980), and the recent *MURDER and murder* (1996).

2. Yvonne Rainer, “Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts of Some Sextets*, Performed at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March 1965,” *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Winter 1965); reprinted in *Work 1963–71* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 51.

3. *Trio A* (*The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1*), silent, black-and-white, 10 min. 20 sec. Produced by Sally Banes, 1978.

tricks. The dancer does not rouse the audience with kinetic or emotional special effects. Instead, a kind of rocking, ticktock motion permeates the dance—arms rotating in their sockets; feet tapping out neat, rhythmic circles; a half turn to the right tidily undone by a rotation to the left. These back-and-forth movements within *Trio A* become metonymic for the dance as a whole, which beats on—funky, but determined clockwork.

With its fixed camera and black-and-white stock, the Banes film presents *Trio A* in a purposefully prosaic mode. But *Trio A* has long been associated with a certain lack of affect. Imagine the dance as it was first performed, accompanied by the rhythmic clatter of wooden slats dropped to the stage from a balcony above. Falling one by one, they added what Rainer called a “metronome-like regularity” to the uninflected rhythm of the dance itself.⁴ Indeed, critics at the time of *Trio A*’s debut described this brief dance as “a long business,” and “a sort of boring continuum”; even a sympathetic writer like Jill Johnston of the *Village Voice* likened *Trio A* to “woolen underwear.”⁵

While many witnesses of the original performances of *Trio A* remember the excitement that attended Rainer’s new choreography, and while plenty of viewers (myself included) find even the filmed version of *Trio A* both fascinating and strangely beautiful, there is certainly some justice in the woolen underwear analogy. Yvonne Rainer’s art of the 1960s was both serviceable and scratchy—utilitarian in feel, and for this, insistently oppositional. This is especially true of *Trio A*, which epitomizes a particular period in performance history: the years in which Rainer and her cohort of young choreographers, encouraged by chance methods and inclusive aesthetics learned from John Cage and other artists of the neo-avant-garde, developed a range of strategies to counter what they considered the rarefied, exhibitionist technical vocabularies of even advanced modern choreography.

Much could be (and has been) said about the lines of influence and opposition that tied the work of choreographers such as Rainer, Steve Paxton, Simone Forti, and Trisha Brown to Cage’s innovations and those of his choreographic collaborator, Merce Cunningham.⁶ To tell this story, one would want to remember that it was at Cunningham’s Fourteenth Street studio that these young choreographers encountered John Cage’s indeterminate structures, graphic scores, and abstract constraints, as Robert Dunn applied them to dance composition in a series of special workshops beginning in the fall of 1960. One would then explain how

4. Rainer, “Some Non-Chronological Recollections of *The Mind is a Muscle*,” in *Work 1963–71*, p. 75.

5. Jill Johnston, “Rainer’s *Muscle*” (1968), in *Marmalade Me* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1971), p. 38.

6. See Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) and, for valuable historical detail, her *Democracy’s Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), chapt. 8; Nick Kaye, *Postmodernism and Performance* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), chapt. 5.

Cunningham's dance itself became an authoritative form for the younger generation of choreographers to refute—how despite his use of chance procedures Cunningham's emphasis on balletic skill and on the trained dancer's specialized body was anathema to the new aesthetic of inclusivity.⁷ One would show how Cunningham's virtuosity became a model against which they worked in dances that incorporated found motion: walking, running, speaking. And after recounting these Oedipal dramas, one would describe the special role the young dancers played in the downtown avant-garde art scene of the 1960s, when Rainer, Forti, Paxton, and others found a space and an audience ready for a new type of antiheroic, antispectacular modern dance at Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, and began putting on concerts under the name Judson Dance Theatre.

I do not question the artistic oppositionality of Rainer's choreography, nor the radicality of *Trio A*'s aesthetic relative to the mainstream modern dance of its time. Nor do I wish to challenge the special place of Judson Dance Theatre in the history of the American avant-garde. But I am attempting to tell a different sort of story. I want, not to spin out the lines of influence that no doubt helped constitute Rainer's aesthetic, nor to recount the dramas of repudiation that animated her choreography's contentious stance—I want, instead, to keep an eye on the pictures.

Faced with the surprisingly dynamic poses in the images of *Trio A*, most dance historians would shrug. It is no wonder the images of *Trio A* don't correspond to the intentions and effects of the dance itself. Dance, after all, is an art of time and motion; photography, of the temporal and spatial freeze. Images of dance *never* capture the energy, dynamism, or power of a live performance. They are pale representations, at best, of an inherently ephemeral art.⁸ Any dance photographer would remind us that the inherent incompatibility of a performance and a photograph is the structuring condition of dance photography. As the introduction to a recent volume of dancer images proclaims,

The wedding of dance and photography—with dance the often reluctant bride—has long been called, naturally enough, “dance photography.”
But in reality there can be no such thing; photographers may want to

7. Rainer's 1973 book *Work 1961–71* concludes with a short essay about Cunningham, which gives her version of this story. Its plot follows a classic pattern of admiration, rebellion, and reconciliation.

8. William Ewing catalogs the incompatibilities in his *The Fugitive Gesture: Masterpieces of Dance Photography* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987): “Dance is the movement of bodies through space and time. Dance is fluidity and continuity. Dance connects, dance unfolds. Dance envelops us; it enters through the eye and the ear. Photography imprisons in two dimensions. Photography flattens and shrinks. Photography can tell the ear nothing. It fragments time and fractures space” (p. 27). Of course, it is because of what this set of oppositions assumes about dance and image, bodies and representations that dance photography demands continuing critical exploration. Another approach would be to investigate the work of photographers who have used dance as subject matter—not only the performance documents under discussion here, but studio practices such as those of Lois Greenfield, where images are produced in a kind of collaboration between dancer and photographer.

photograph dance, but like a camera-shy beauty, dance doesn't particularly want to be photographed.⁹

This passage's gendered language alone sets off warning bells: any wedding with a reluctant bride probably ought to be questioned. And indeed, this coupling of terms needs to be more carefully considered. The question of whether there can be any "such thing" as dance photography merits examination, and so does its corollary: what would be at stake if there were? For photography, of course, is more than a mode of documentation. It is a mode of representation and, in the visual realm, a cultural dominant. And dance—at least in the 1960s, at least when Yvonne Rainer is dancing—is a deeply oppositional affair. And so I want to focus on a case in which the categorical conflict of dance and photography is embodied, set in motion, reworked. This review of *Trio A* closes in on one particular aspect of Rainer's danced manifesto: its engagement with the photographic spectacular. I am interested in the way *Trio A* looks when we take seriously the fact that Rainer specifically designed this, her most famous individual dance, to oppose photographic effects.

*

Trio A was composed as the first section of a larger work called *The Mind is a Muscle*.¹⁰ In an essay written that same year, Rainer contrasted her new dance to previous modern choreography with its conventional structure of individual phrases.¹¹ In the dance phrase, she wrote, "there is always maximal output or 'attack' at the beginning of a phrase, recovery at the end, with energy often arrested somewhere in the middle." Rainer suggests that this phrasing convention is the formal structure that supports a dance of exhibitionism and display. For when dances are founded on the conventional formula of attack, suspension, and recovery, "one part of the phrase—usually the part that is most still—becomes the *focus* of attention." These central moments are, she says, "*framed*": they are "*focal* moments," and dances oriented to them become exercises in "getting from one

9. Owen Edwards, foreword to Howard Schatz and Beverly Ornstein, *Passion and Line: Photographs of Dancers* by Howard Schatz (New York: Graphics Press, 1997), p. 6.

10. Although *Trio A* was first performed on its own by Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, and David Gordon at Judson Memorial Church on January 10, 1966, its title that night was *The Mind is a Muscle Part I*. Indeed, while my interests here necessitate a close focus on *Trio A* itself as a distinct piece of choreography, it should be remembered that the dance was usually performed as part of another, longer, dance work. At last count, *Trio A* had at least twenty-two distinct, performed incarnations. In my larger project I am interested in extending the arguments made in this essay to a consideration of *Trio A*'s evolving history. For my purposes here, let it simply be noted that preserved on film, worked into more than twenty subsequent performances, and designed to be taught by and to anyone who is interested, *Trio A* is Yvonne Rainer's most reproduced and reproducible dance.

11. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," in *Work 1961–73*.

Rainer. Duet Section. From Terrain. 1963.
Performed by Rainer and Trisha Brown. (Photo:
V. Sladon.) Note: damaged original.



point of *still* ‘*registration*’ to another.” And, as if this language of focus, framing, and stills didn’t make her metaphorology clear, she zooms in: the unmoving center of the dance phrase seems frozen before the viewer’s eyes, “registering like a photograph or suspended moment of climax.”¹²

Rainer’s disdain for dance with frozen moments that capture attention, registering photographically in the audience’s memory, suggests the special significance for her of the act of being still. Her coding of motionlessness goes back to at least 1963. In Rainer’s evening-length work *Terrain*, a dance called *Duet Section* brought Trisha Brown onstage in a black bra to perform a hip-thrusting burlesque number, while Rainer herself, in a matching costume, danced an adagio combination from ballet class.¹³ Then, lest the audience miss the point that classical and peep-hole dance are *equally* structured on the viewer’s visual pleasure, Rainer and Brown together ran through a series of still stances. Like pinup girls flirting with the camera, the two avant-garde dancers preened and posed. Rainer had recorded directions in her notebook: “focus out—coy over r. shoulder and l. hand,” said the directions for one such stance, “head up, mouth open . . . r. hand under l. tit,” read another.¹⁴ The instructions transcribe a genre of images—the

12. All quotes from *ibid.*, p. 65 (italics mine).

13. Rainer, “Terrain,” in *Work*, pp. 12–43.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

displayed female bodies familiar from decades of Hollywood publicity photographs.¹⁵ What Rainer would later denounce as the “narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing” was expressed, in *Duet*, by pinup posing; that is, by literally “registering like a photograph.”¹⁶

Compare this to another photographic moment in dance history. In a book of photographs of dancers, Annie Leibovitz comments admiringly on choreographer David Parsons: he, unlike other dancers, “understood what a photographer is looking for.” Parsons knew how to dance for the camera. The results, as one would expect, are a spectacular convergence of conventional dance and popular photography—special effects, Rainer’s “focal moments” to the nth degree. But the Leibovitz-Parsons collaboration stands as a counterpoint to Rainer’s *Trio A* not only because the choreographer cooperated with the camera rather than resisting photographic effects, but because of how Leibovitz says he did so. “[H]e didn’t just keep moving and dancing,” she noted. “The photograph is about moments, a specific split second, and he gave me split seconds rather than continuous motion.”¹⁷ Nothing could be further from the movement of *Trio A* as Rainer described it: “the end of each phrase merges immediately into the beginning of the next with no observable accent. . . . the body is constantly engaged in transitions.”¹⁸

In *Trio A*, as in *Duet Section*, it is the stillness of the pose against which Rainer is positioned. Though the specificity of the earlier work’s feminist polemic is not carried into *Trio A*, the later, more abstract dance continues to counter the photographic structure that supports dance-as-display. *Trio A* has a prime directive: constant motion. Rainer’s formal innovation is to suppress all starts and stops within the dance; to level out the modulation and emphases of traditional phrasing. She produces an even, uninflected dance continuum. This is as evident in the film of Rainer performing as it is in her writing about the dance: in the four-and-a-half minutes of *Trio A*, Rainer never seems to speed up, slow down, rest, or pose. At its debut, Jill Johnston described *Trio A* as “a liquid ‘all over’ mosaic.” Indeed, in *Trio A*, even gravity is not allowed to accelerate the body’s motion or heighten the dance’s drama. When the dancer falls to the floor, she does so in stages, so that what might be a dramatic collapse maintains, instead, the dance’s uniform rhythm. Constant, literal motion distinguishes *Trio A* from conventional dance as Rainer understood it, with its dramatically still climaxes and pauses. Antimetaphorical to the core, *Trio A* keeps moving, in order to say “no to moving or being moved.”¹⁹

15. See Tony Crawley, *Screen Dreams: The Hollywood Pin-Up* (New York: Putnum Publishing Group, 1984).

16. The “sexual exhibitionism” quote is from Rainer, “Statement,” in program for *The Mind is a Muscle*, Anderson Theater, April 11, 14, 15, 1968. Reproduced in *Work 1961–73*, p. 71.

17. Annie Leibovitz, *Dancers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1992), p. 12. The studio session Leibovitz describes was for an advertisement for The Gap.

18. Rainer, “A Quasi Survey,” pp. 66–67.

19. This play on “moving” seems to me to be at the heart of one of the most interesting questions

The antispectacular intent of this constant motion is perhaps made most clear in comparison to a dance composed of, rather than in opposition to, the drama of still moments in dance phrasing. David Parsons again: the choreographer who so expertly adapted himself to Leibovitz's camera has thrilled audiences for years with his 1982 *Caught*. The dance is a literal showstopper, arresting motion right before our eyes. Carrying the control to a strobe light in his hand, the dancer leaps around a darkened stage, activating single flashes of light only when he is at the height of a jump. The effect is dramatic: he is both in motion and frozen; he seems to fly, in jerks and stops, around the stage. Technological trickery allows Parsons to make a dance that is *nothing but* climactic moments or Leibovitz's "split seconds"—the anti-*Trio A*.²⁰ As if designed to be everything *Trio A* opposes, *Caught* epitomizes the spectacularization of dance as a photographic effect. The extreme contrast between the two works (a matter, I should think, of the 1960s compared to the '80s as well as Rainer contrasted with Parsons) makes it clear how in maintaining an even, regulated, and invariable motion continuum in *Trio A*, Rainer finds a formal solution to the problem of dance whose climactic moments register photographically.

Like the regulated fields and all-over structures of contemporary works by Agnes Martin or Eva Hesse, which limit compositional incident and artistic decision making to the confines of a continuous, predetermined structure, *Trio A*'s constant, "metronome" rhythm and phraseless, uninflected continuum produce a dance field void of the dramatics of traditional choreography.²¹ Indeed, Rainer briefly literalized the parallel with nonhierarchical visual structures in one section of *The Mind is a Muscle*, when a huge wooden grid descended behind the performers.²² Just as grids contested the rules of dynamic composition that had governed traditional image making, the quality of constant transition—Rainer dubs it "the smoothness of the continuity" of *Trio A*—is directly opposed to conventional wisdom

about Rainer's career: her transformation from choreographer to filmmaker in 1972–73. Although the problem is outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the pun on "moving and being moved"—emotion and the literal motion of both dance and film—is explored in Rainer's first full-length film, *Lives of Performers* (1972). The film ends with a famous sequence in which Rainer's performers pose in *tableaux vivants*, reenacting film stills from G. W. Pabst's 1928 melodrama *Pandora's Box*. This sequence is the bookend to another near the beginning of *Lives*, in which the camera focuses on still photographs of a dance performance, as Rainer and the cast discuss the emotional entanglements that were going on behind the scenes at the time of the performance.

20. Indeed, the dance intentionally celebrates the photographic. According to a Parsons Dance Company spokesman, *Caught* was composed after Parsons had a session in photographer Lois Greenfield's studio, subject to the strobe light she used as a flash.

21. See Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), pp. 8–22.

22. In addition to recalling nonhierarchical painting and sculpture, the grid backdrop is reminiscent of the theatrical set design of the Russian avant-garde (for instance, Rodchenko's gridded screens for *The Doll With Millions*). A connection to Constructivism has, of course, been an issue for Minimalism generally. One facet of the problem that is of particular interest here is the fact that Constructivist design work done for the theater is known primarily through photographs.



Trio A. Performed by Rainer as Lecture. 1968.
 (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)

about what makes a dance make sense. To understand a normal dance, the viewer must be able to recognize its component parts: dance theorist Susan Leigh Foster explains that viewers have to be able to “focus on the structural organization of the dance, first by deducing its basic moves and then by learning how these moves are put together.”²³ But in *Trio A* “basic moves” are impossible to locate, dissolved as they are into the work’s phraseless continuum.

Ten years later, a verbal version of *Trio A*’s phraseless effect would appear in the *SoHo Weekly News*:

there is no part of this article that is any more important than any other part each word sentence paragraph carries the same weight as any other and its smoothness lies not only in the equal weightedness of each word sentence and paragraph but in the juxtaposition of one paragraph to another which causes the reader to react to the article as a whole rather than as segments.²⁴

23. Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 89.

24. Jean Nuchtern, “An Yvonne Rainer Collage,” *Soho Weekly News* November 4, 1976, p. 17.

This text, inserted into an interview with Rainer by critic Jean Nuchtern, describes what its typography attempts to enact. That is, the slurring that occurs when discrete words bleed into one another on the page is meant to level their meanings. Nothing is set off or emphasized: “no part . . . is any more important.”²⁵ The compressed paragraph thus mimics the way Rainer herself tests the role of phrasing in the production of meaning. For *Trio A* is itself a sort of run-on sentence. A dance of constant transition from one movement to the next, its syntax is purposefully slurred. This is a particular variation on what Annette Michelson identified early on as the paratactic structure of the New Dance of the 1960s.²⁶ *Trio A* makes a double attack on the dance phrase: it suppresses both difference (the differential values of the parts of the phrase) and differentiation (the ability to discern phrases themselves). And the effect, again, is an insistent leveling of incident. As Jill Johnston noted, the normal dance phrase “is, in microcosm . . . an expression of the whole hierarchical structure of traditional dance.”²⁷ *Trio A* disarticulates phrases and their internal hierarchies with the result that, as Rainer put it, in this dance “no one thing is any more important than any other.”²⁸

Trio A was first performed just one year after Donald Judd’s “Specific Objects” essay appeared in *Arts Yearbook*. Rainer’s insistence in 1966 that “no one thing is any more important than any other” in *Trio A* echoes Judd’s pronouncement of the year before: that in the new art, traditional composition was replaced by an order of “continuity: one thing after another.”²⁹ Her dissolution of dance phrases likewise corresponds to Judd’s dismissal of “part-by-part composition.” In fact, Rainer was quick to acknowledge the connection between her work and that of Judd and company. Her essay on *Trio A* was entitled “A Quasi Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*.” At four-and-a-half minutes, *Trio A* is indeed quantitatively minimal. But it is also Minimalist in some of its formal concerns. And these include not only the paratactic, nonhierarchical composition of the dance, but also (and relatedly) the physicality upon which it insisted.

“If my rage at the impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing can be considered puritan moralizing,” wrote Rainer in the program notes distributed at the debut of *The Mind is a Muscle*, “it is also true that I love the body—its actual weight, mass, and unenhanced physicality.”³⁰

25. The initial impact of Nuchtern’s string of characters suspends linguistic signification. We can’t make out individual words, and can’t establish meanings; moreover, the elimination of spacing levels the differential values by which meaning is constituted. However, the effect is fleeting: language quickly reasserts itself over typographical manipulations. This is significant in relation to the analogy between this compressed text and *Trio A*. As Rainer has pointed out, *Trio A* doesn’t so much eliminate discrete dance signifiers as suppress the breaks between them.

26. Annette Michelson, “Yvonne Rainer, Part One,” *Artforum* 12 (January 1974), p. 59.

27. Johnston, “Rainer’s Muscle,” p. 38.

28. Rainer, “A Quasi Survey,” p. 67.

29. Donald Judd, “Specific Objects,” in *Complete Writings 1959–75* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 184.

30. Rainer, “Statement,” p. 71.

Countering a dance of seductive display with one of pure materiality, Rainer sets up an opposition between dance as image and dance as corporeal substance. If conventional dance freezes the performer into mere images, Rainer's was meant to offer contact with the facts of the body in motion, its physical effort. In *Trio A*, she explained,

What is seen is a control that seems geared to the *actual* time it takes the *actual* weight of the body to go through the prescribed motions. . . . [T]he demands made on the body's (actual) energy resources appear to be commensurate with the task—be it getting up from the floor, raising an arm, tilting the pelvis, etc.³¹

This factual quality is the essence of Rainer's dance theory—the source of what she called “task-like dance.” Later she would correct an interviewer who thought the concept of task had provided a way for Rainer to organize movement. “No,” she said, “it was an attitude about performance.”³² While the phrase “task performance” is often used to refer to work structured by imposed rules (actual tasks), Rainer's dance is like a task in its very quality of movement.³³ The ideal of her tasklike performance is an equation between the dancer's apparent expenditure of energy and the simple requirements of the motion being performed. The “unenhanced physicality” that Rainer loved about the body thus finds its danced manifestation; each perceived motion is governed by—and signifies—nothing but the presence and action of the physical body itself (“no to transformation”).

This emphasis on the actual, present, and physical body obviously participates in the Minimalist aesthetic: in their opaque physicality, the “specific objects” of Donald Judd or Robert Morris were meant to hold viewers in a real-time experience of both the objects' materiality and their own physical location as they viewed them. Indeed, as Michelson and others have suggested, it was the New Dance of the 1960s that showed artists such as Morris the way to an art of the body in space and time.³⁴ But in Rainer's case, at least, this experience was mounted as a counteroffensive. For the particular configuration of *Trio A*'s oppositional aesthetic

31. Rainer, “A Quasi Survey,” p. 67. For in-depth discussion of the question of temporality in Rainer's dance, see Annette Michelson, “Yvonne Rainer, Part One,” and her “Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression,” in *Robert Morris* (Washington, D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1969), pp. 55–59. In the essay on Rainer, Michelson defines the “operational time” of tasklike dance in contrast to the “rhythmic, mimetic time, generated by music and/or the narrative situation of traditional dance and theatre” (p. 58).

32. Rainer further adds that the idea of task “wasn't primarily about organization. The organizational battle had been fought for the most part by Cunningham and Cage, as far as I was concerned” (Liza Baer and Willoughby Sharp, “Yvonne Rainer,” *Avalanche* 5 [Summer 1972], p. 52; Rainer participated in the editing of this interview).

33. For example, Simone Forti's *Slant Board* (1961) and other “dance constructions” were activities in which a set of rules generated movement.

34. Michelson, “Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression,” pp. 55–59.

suggests why both composition without spectacular climaxes and performative art with phenomenological immediacy seemed so urgent at this time.

*

The historical specificity of Rainer's critique of dance convention has to do with the way it is framed in terms of exhibition, display, and images. When *Trio A* was performed as the first section of *The Mind is a Muscle* in March 1968, the concert's program notes included a protest against dance as sexualized display (recalling the feminist protest of *Duet Section*), but also looked to events of the performance's historical moment. And these were understood precisely in terms of the art work's relation to an image-world. "The world disintegrates around me," Rainer announced, admitting to her dance's distance from "the tenor of current political and social conditions"; her "connection to the world-in-crisis remains tenuous and remote."³⁵ Although its tone is almost apologetic, this program note strikes me as less a self-castigation than a special kind of aesthetic and political statement. For in conclusion Rainer crucially suggests that the lack of manifest content in her dance—its "remoteness," its reluctance to address the historical events of a "world-in-crisis"—is a response to the conditions of artistic production circa 1968. And in her account these conditions are not wars, assassinations, violations themselves, but their status as representations:

This statement is not an apology. It is a reflection of a state of mind that reacts with horror and disbelief upon seeing a Vietnamese shot dead on TV—not at the sight of death, however, but at the fact that the TV can be shut off afterwards as after a bad Western. My body remains the enduring reality.³⁶

The genre of the movie Western is a spectacularization of an imperialist drama of the past. In Rainer's scenario, television programming collapses this spectacle with images of an imperialist war of the present moment. The horror lies precisely in this leveling of representations, which allows the viewer to watch both instances of the "bad West" with detached contemplation.³⁷

35. She elaborates on the distance between her work and the events of the time: "I can foresee a time when this remoteness must necessarily end, though I cannot foresee exactly when or how the relationship will change, or what circumstances will incite me to a different kind of action. Perhaps nothing short of universal female military conscription will affect my function (the ipso facto physical fitness of dancers will make them the first victims); or a call for a world-wide cessation of individual functions, to include the termination of genocide" (Rainer, "Statement," p. 71).

36. Ibid., p. 71.

37. Of course, Rainer was not alone in this reaction to "the living-room war." Her aesthetic strategy bears comparison to more obviously committed practices of these years—for instance, to the photomontages made by Martha Rosler, which literalized the imperative in their title: *Bringing the War Back Home*. Rosler, like Rainer, seems to have been responding to the war as a rift between a "here" and a "there" bridged all too tenuously by the reality-effect of photographic media.



Trio A. Performed by Becky Arnold in Performance Demonstration. 1968. (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)

“My body remains the enduring reality”: in the system of meanings that informs *Trio A*, the body’s obdurate physicality is meant to act as ballast in a “disintegrating” world of insubstantial images. Dance historian Sally Banes writes about the “human materiality” that Rainer “was committed to installing center stage,” presenting this return to materiality as a negation of conventional dance’s idealization of the body.³⁸ While there’s no question that Rainer contested specialized dancer physique and the transformation of base materiality it implied, I am suggesting that her notion of physicality in dance was also constituted in relation to another opposite. The “enduring reality” of Rainer’s own, known, experiential body was opposed to what Guy Debord, in these very years, was calling the “pseudo world apart” produced by the operations of spectacle culture. This is the context for Rainer’s urgent reprioritizing of physical presence—and for her suspicion of image-oriented dance.

*

Instead of the rather spectacular photographs of *Trio A* with which I began, then, perhaps an image of *Trio A* as it was performed in Rainer’s 1968 *Performance Demonstration* is a more appropriate signifier of the dance. For in this photograph,

38. Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 190–91.

Trio A is pictured in its oppositionality: literally moving against the flow. Moreover, this photograph documents a moment in which the lack of mediation so central to *Trio A*'s stance was brought to a high resolution. For when this picture was taken during performance, Rainer herself was actually onstage, teaching the dance to Becky Arnold (the dancer in the center). Later Rainer would experiment with wholly improvised dance in the group Grand Union. Here she moves toward such immediacy by doing away with rehearsal as a prerequisite for performance—or rather by collapsing preparation and presentation into one time and space. Learned in performance, *Trio A* announces itself as a dance in and about the present tense: without even the prior work of rehearsal to mediate it, *Trio A*'s opposition to dances constructed around predetermined images is complete.

However, there is an element in this picture that signals quite a different interpretation of *Trio A*. In the front row of the audience sit three slide projectors. These machines, of course, had a practical function: they were to be used for effects later in the performance. But for me their significance is multiple. For the projectors also shine light, as it were, on the photographic unconscious of *Trio A*.

*

In dance understood as a system of meaning, signs are a matter of motion: the perceptible actions of the moving body constitute dance signifiers.³⁹ Rainer's *Trio A* is a reworking of the way these signifiers operate.

Earlier, I described *Trio A* as a metronome or a clockwork system, in order to evoke its particularly regularized and continuous rhythm. But *Trio A* was granted a mechanical character by at least one contemporary observer, who announced, quite as if it were a matter of fact, that the dance was "a simulation of cogs-and-gears, cams-and-levers."⁴⁰ Rainer herself corrected dancers who were using mythical or natural imagery to guide themselves through the dance. When she heard that one of them was doing *Trio A* by thinking of himself as a faun, she told him to try thinking of himself as a barrel instead. When another dancer described a particular movement in *Trio A* as "bird-like," Rainer retaught it to him, she says, as "airplane-like."⁴¹ And this inanimate or mechanical imagery is carried into the dance's very mode of meaning. For Rainer once described her dance project as "thinking of oneself in dancing as a neutral purveyor of information."⁴²

A physicality that was "unenhanced," a dance that said "no to transformation," a dancer who was "a neutral purveyor of information"—in *Trio A*, Rainer was

39. For an extended discussion of the semiotics of dance, see Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing*.

40. Jerry Tallmer, "Rebellion in the Arts: 4. The Advanced Dance," *New York Post*, August 4, 1966, p. 25.

41. Rainer, "Some Non-Chronological Recollections," p. 75.

42. Rainer, in Baer and Sharp, "Yvonne Rainer," p. 50.

shorting out the circuits of substitution that constitute coded communication. In her 1974 essay on Rainer, Annette Michelson evoked the “seamlessness” of *Trio A*, its “refusal to inflect motion.” This is an “evenness of utterance,” and a “revision of choreographic grammar.” I, too, have turned to metaphors of language in my description of *Trio A*—referring to its syntax, dubbing it a run-on sentence—but I now want to suggest that despite the temptation of grammatical metaphors, what *Trio A* aims for in its peculiar, slurred version of parataxis is a specifically analog or nonlinguistic art (no “phrases”); one of *actual* correspondences (“no to transformation”).

Signification, in *Trio A*, is a rigorously balanced equation between performed motion and the needs of the moving body. In Rainer’s new dance there was to be a one-to-one relation between the action seen by the audience (the signifier) and the action felt by the performing body (signified): not only was there to be no excess movement (none of the frills of balletic carriage, of decorative body placement) and no gratuitous modulations of energy (the pauses that offset a dramatic move) but the character of the movement *seen* was to be the direct outcome of the requirements of the movement *produced*. Rainer’s word for this relation is “geared”: what the audience perceives is “geared to the actual time it takes the actual weight of the body to go through the prescribed motions.” Tooth-in-groove, the actual qualities of the body in motion materially affect the dance signifier.⁴³

In a remarkable pair of essays from 1977, and in various writings since, Rosalind Krauss has used C. S. Peirce’s notion of the index to specify the structure of those works of art that make meanings not by coded signs (a picture of a hand, say) but by an indexical relationship (handprint).⁴⁴ Peirce says that the index is a sign “which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object.”⁴⁵ There is a system of material cause and effect embedded in the concept of the index—and it is precisely this relationship that Rainer’s dance develops in terms of the human body. Insofar as they achieve the “factual,” “matter-

43. One can imagine that performed by three people at once (as it was at its debut and in *The Mind is a Muscle*—thus, the “trio” of the title) the dance might have made Rainer’s image of “gearing” somewhat literal: the performers danced each at his or her own pace and were thus slightly out of sync, and it might very well have seemed that one dancer’s movements were being triggered by another, or that certain motions were traveling from dancer to dancer. Hence, it would seem, the critic’s impression of Rainer’s dance as a simulation of “cogs-and-gears.”

44. Rosalind Krauss, “Notes on the Index: Part 1,” and “Notes on the Index: Part 2,” both in *Originality of the Avant-Garde*, pp. 196–220. To my knowledge, the first use of Peirce in art criticism is by Annette Michelson in “Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression,” pp. 17–23, 49–50. Michelson engages Peirce’s category of “firstness” in comparison to Michael Fried’s writing on “presentness” to elaborate the metaphysical stakes of this version of modernism, and to distinguish from this complex Morris’s resolutely secular investigation of *temporality* as the condition of aesthetic perception. She also takes up indexical versus iconic modes in discussion of Morris’s work with casting, impression, and his EEG self-portrait.

45. Charles Sanders Peirce, “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs,” in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955) p. 102.

of-fact," "neutral," or "actual" qualities Rainer hoped for, tasklike dance works are works structured indexically.⁴⁶

The second part of Krauss's 1977 "Notes on the Index" opens with an example taken from the dance stage. Krauss describes a performance by Deborah Hay in which the choreographer stood before an audience and announced that instead of moving, she was going to speak. Hay talked about her body, her awareness of its inner courings, and its presence before the audience. Her goal, she said, was to arrive at a state of awareness of her body's every cell. For Krauss, Hay's performance exemplifies an indexical dance. Movement, the basic currency of dance communication, is here radically reduced to the movement of blood, cells, and structures within the body—what Krauss calls "a kind of Brownian motion of the self." This literalization of the dancer's presence ruptures the systems of symbolic coding of movement by which dance normally produces signs, and Hay's dance is, therefore, "a message without a code." Because it is thus uncoded, speech is necessarily appended to the dance—a supplemental text, like the caption of a photograph.⁴⁷

But the particularly inanimate and mechanical metaphors Rainer used to describe the kind of movement she wanted in *Trio A* distinguish the mode of her work from this precedent for the discussion of dance in terms of indexicality. Compare Hay's vision of bodily presence and energetics, expressed through an indexical dance, with Rainer's dance of a decade earlier. Where Hay says "i [*sic*] dance like a deer," Rainer moves "like an airplane." Rainer wants to dance as a "neutral purveyor of information;" Hay says "i am dancing breath."⁴⁸ Indeed while Rainer, like Hay, concerns herself with energy as the basic medium of dance, Rainer mechanizes the metaphor. Hay, in the '70s, talks about energy flow: Rainer's '60s rhetoric is about an economy of energy. She is concerned with the body's "energy resources"; with "conserving (actual) energy."⁴⁹

This is the language of the conservation of energy; a body-rhetoric not of Hay's cosmology or even biology so much as physics or mechanics. Indeed, the

46. The very title of *Trio A* might be understood to signal this reading of its indexical structure. Peirce frequently mentions the labeling letters used by lawyers or mathematicians as examples of indices. (These are indexical in the sense of a shifter, like the pronouns "I" or "you" [see Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1"].) Rainer often used letters or numbers to refer to dances or sections of a dance. It should be noted that in my analysis of the indexical structure of *Trio A*, I am diverging from Michelson, who uses Peircean terms in a different way in a section on dance in her essay on Robert Morris. She suggests that dance offered Morris the possibility of a "total coincidence of work and process" not available to him in traditional visual arts. "Neither icon (such as the I-Box)," she writes, "nor index (electrode-encephalogram) could afford that totality of fusion" (Michelson, "Robert Morris: An Aesthetics of Transgression," p. 57). My intention here is to suggest that the indexical structure of *Trio A* actually drives a wedge into that image of dance as total fusion; as beyond or outside the contradictions and discontinuities of image- or object-making.

47. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2," pp. 210–11.

48. The Deborah Hay quotes are from Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, p. 126.

49. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey," p. 67.

impression one gets from Rainer's rhetoric tends to support the maverick critic who described *Trio A* as an imitation of the displays at "the old Museum of Science and Industry at Rockefeller Center."⁵⁰ That is to say, the body in *Trio A* is understood and deployed as a system of weights and forces. Where Hay concerns herself with the body's cells and rhythms, Rainer seems to be considering the body in terms of muscles and tendons—the "cogs-and-gears, cams-and-levers" of the flesh.⁵¹

The model of the body Rainer seems to have been using, then, was the perfect complement to (if not the necessary outcome of) the mode of signification she employed. For despite Rainer's claim to be opposed to spectacular forms of dance which "register like a photograph," and in addition to the premium she placed on the corporeal, in *Trio A* she turns to a particularly automatic mode of meaning production. The body as a system of weights and forces is a body image appropriate to a dance of "gearing"—to Rainer's version of an indexical dance.⁵²

Hay's involution of dance movement with its linguistic supplement and Rainer's automation of dance signification represent different embodiments of an

50. Tallmer, "Rebellion in the Arts," p. 25.

51. Not only are we dealing here with the gender-, race-, and desire-neutral body of Minimalist phenomenology; we are also dealing with a body underwritten by a model of mechanical neutrality. It is possible to see, in this mechanical body, the faint shadow cast by an old model of corporeality. In *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity*, Anson Rabinbach traces the nineteenth-century European preoccupation with labor through its favorite metaphor for the worker's body. Following developments in thermodynamics, social scientists began to apply theories of energy conservation to the bodies of animals and of working people. Taylor's infamous attempts to rationalize the motions of industrial workers in the interest of time and energy efficiency were the American outcome of this Continental science of work. The critic who compares *Trio A* to a museum of science and technology thus gets it exactly right: Rainer's employment of the mechanical body model is an act of historical preservation. Perhaps, unconsciously resonating with this model of the human motor, Rainer's body mechanics represent what Raymond Williams calls a "residual formation"—an oppositional mode that takes up practices considered out of date by the dominant culture. For Rabinbach argues that the model of the human motor finally fell out of favor as automation practices advanced in the mid-twentieth century, and popular and sociological thinking about work gave up the image of physical labor in favor of a preoccupation with the exchange of information. Although it means taking rather a large interpretive leap, it does make a kind of historical sense for Rainer to have picked up aspects of this old model in her efforts to oppose an information- and communication-driven economy—i.e., the society of the spectacle. As she says, in *Trio A* "[t]he desired effect was a worklike rather than an exhibitionlike presentation" (Rainer, "A Quasi-Survey," p. 67). However, I will suggest that insofar as the indexical model imports into this very "geared" body a mode intrinsic to the new image culture, the oppositionality of *Trio A* must remain one pole in a thoroughly dialectical formation. See Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). See also Malcolm Turvey's discussion of the human motor in this issue of *October*.

52. Mechanical forces and models of mechanical reproduction would come together in another interesting way in Robert Morris's 1970 installation at the Whitney Museum, entitled *Continuous Project Altered Daily*. The museum was transformed into a work site, specifically engaging ideas of lever and pulley—the museum's elevator was used as an enormous counterweight to hoist wood, steel, and cement—while viewers became documentarians, using tape recorders, still cameras, and movie cameras to record the event. Rainer would borrow Morris's title for her own extended performance project at the Whitney in 1970. For more on both projects, see Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One," and her "Three Notes on an Exhibition as a Work," *Artforum* 8 (June 1970) p. 62–64.

indexical mode. But while a dance inflected with notions of the mechanical, the uncoded, and the material distinguishes Rainer's '60s performance from Krauss's discussion of indexical dance, it is this very complex of modalities that links *Trio A* with Krauss's extended meditation on the meaning of indexical structures in contemporary art, and that folds back on the question of *Trio A*'s relation to the spectacle of photography. For the index, in Krauss's 1977 essays and in much of her writing since, is inflected by the most common and compelling instance of an indexical image. As she reminds us, "[e]very photograph is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface."⁵³ While *Trio A* resists linguistic models of meaning in its focus on the physical facts of human movement, this is not to say that it escapes a representational order. Rather, it proposes a mode of meaning for dance that corresponds closely to that of the photograph—a mode in which the relation between signifier and signified is at once material and semiotic. Movement "geared" to the physical needs of the performing body is, I am arguing, a danced equivalent of that "physical imprint" which is at the heart of photographic semiotics.⁵⁴

Trio A's continuous and nonhierarchical structure, we know, was developed in opposition to the phrasing conventions of theatrical dance. Moreover, it specifically contested the spectacularization inherent to most of this dancing, which Rainer conceptualized as a photograph-like effect. However, *Trio A*'s phraseless, nonhierarchical composition is also a form appropriate to its indexical ambition. In 1961, Roland Barthes famously characterized the photograph's mode as "the message without a code." He arrived at this aphorism by pointing out that in photographic communication "it is in no way necessary to divide up . . . reality into units and to constitute these units as signs."⁵⁵ This is another way of describing the photograph's indexicality: unlike other kinds of representation, a photograph does not involve a coding of reality into pre-existing signs. Photography's mechanical representation automatically transfers the whole of the visual field onto the surface of the image. But Barthes's evocation of indexicality via the lack of *division* in photographic signification has a special resonance with Rainer's *Trio A*. For the suppression of individual phrases was the structural foundation of her dance's mode of meaning. It is the phraseless continuum of motion that allows for the indexical relation between danced signifier and bodily signified in *Trio A*—and this form, as well as the quality of the movement, approaches a photographic

53. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 1," p. 203.

54. My larger project tracks the photographic in its many manifestations in Rainer's practice: onstage projections, dances that quote historical images, archive and montage strategies in her publications, and not least, of course, her eventual decision to give up dance for filmmaking. All of these engagements with the photographic lend support to my basic contention here—that photographic modalities are more central to the formal structure and social meanings of Rainer's practice than has previously been supposed. But each instance deserves to be considered in its particularity.

55. Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message" (1961), in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 17.

structure. For, as Barthes put it, a corollary of the photograph's indexicality is that "the photographic message is a *continuous* message."⁵⁶

*

But there is yet another way in which the semiotics of *Trio A* approaches photographic modalities. *Trio A*, I'm arguing, uses indexlike models of meaning production to create its compelling experience of immediate physicality and presence in time. In practice, however, the performance of this unmediated bodily activity was something of an illusion. For one thing, the movement of *Trio A*, however inventive and unusual, is haunted by images of dances past. Here, the ghost of an arabesque or a *rond-de-jambe*, there something that looks suspiciously like a Graham contraction or a Cunningham quirk of the leg. As Rainer herself has suggested, she inscribed *Trio A* with the traces of the very dance conventions she was working to displace.⁵⁷ Whether these elided, barely perceptible quotations are taken as sarcastic send-ups of previous dance, as statements of mastery in the anxiety-of-influence vein, or as cues signaling the oppositional stance of *Trio A*, these traces cut into the perception of the dance as tautological, self-generating, in and of the performative moment.⁵⁸

But the tracing of *Trio A* must go even further, to the dance's very structure and mode of performance. For the direct, indexical equation between movement and physicality proposed by this dance was, Rainer readily admitted, actually only a quality of "the look" of *Trio A*. "In order to achieve this look [of tasklike, factual movement] in a continuity of separate phrases that does not allow for pauses, accents, or stillness," she wrote, "one must bring to bear many different degrees of effort just in getting from one thing to another."⁵⁹ In order to create the phraseless continuum, she is saying, the dancer must actually modulate her energy—even while striving for the effect of a direct relay between bodily effort and visual appearance.

If stripped-down, tasklike effort testifies to the "unenhanced physicality" of the dancer's body in *Trio A*, then the differential expenditure of energy needed to create such a direct display must also be understood to *erase* that very order of simple signification. In other words, to create the appearance of unmediated energy, the dancer dissimulates—effectively replacing the real economy of effort with its own image, supplementing the index with the trace.

56. Ibid., p. 17 (italics mine).

57. Conversation with the author, June 3, 1998.

58. Michelson notes the effects of texts read aloud during a later Rainer project: in *Continuous Project Altered Daily* (1969), "readings of assigned texts, mostly reminiscences of performers in film's silent period, superimposed the dimension of reference to past, completed performance upon a present, evolving one" ("Yvonne Rainer: Part One," p. 61). The fact that it was descriptions of filmed performance that created this effect is of particular interest.

59. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey," p. 67.

Again, comparing Rainer's indexical dance to that of Deborah Hay highlights the structures at work. Through a hyper-consciousness of her body, Hay aspired to pure, embodied presence—her appearance before the audience, her own heightened awareness of her body in time. In the aesthetic of *Trio A*, on the other hand, the body's pure presence slides instantly and insistently into the past tense: there is never a moment of presence here that is not also a trace.

In the second of her 1977 essays on the index, Krauss describes the work of Lucio Pozzi, whose small panel paintings index the surface of the walls they hang upon at P.S. 1.⁶⁰ Where the walls change color from gray to white (as walls do in such institutional spaces), Pozzi hangs a small gray and white painting such that the division between the colors on the panel directly corresponds to that between the two areas of the wall. The painted signifier thus responds to the wall, its signified; "its relation to its subject is that of the index, the impression, the trace."⁶¹

The trace. The paintings push the index into the past tense. Even as Pozzi's paintings index the shifts in wall color that are their referents, they also erase them. Without breaking the rules of art viewership by lifting up the painting to compare it to the surface of the wall beneath, it is impossible to finally verify, however likely it seems, that the wall beneath is in fact identical to the painting. As Krauss insists throughout her essay, these works are not only indexical, they are indexical in the manner of a photograph—in the sense of a trace.⁶² Rainer's dance, which responds to the mechanics of the moving body *at the same time as it replaces them with their own image*, is indexical in this sense as well. In terms of classic examples of the index, then, *Trio A* operates less like a weathercock or a shadow, which can only indicate their referents in the present tense, than like a snapshot. For photographs, as Barthes was noting in the 1960s, signify not the presence of the subject of representation, but its "having-been-there."⁶³

Performing the traces of previous dance—itsself tracing the bodily facts it makes present—*Trio A* is characterized by a complex and specifically photolike temporality. And it is this tracelike quality that finally allows us to locate the dynamics of Rainer's most famous dance, I argue. For *Trio A*'s mode of signification is positioned precisely at the point at which indexical directness flips over into photographic mediation.

60. Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Part 2," p. 212.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 212–15.

62. In her essay Krauss enumerates the several other ways Pozzi's paintings approach photographic modes of representation through operations such as cropping, reduction, and flattening (*ibid.*, pp. 212, 216).

63. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image" (1964), in *Image, Music, Text*, p. 44. On shadows and photographs and the function of these indexical forms in art, see Denis Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates: Photographs Don't Cast Shadows," trans. Rosalind Krauss, *October* 69 (Summer 1994), pp. 111–32. On the historical coincidence of Barthes's early investigations of the photograph and art practices of the 1960s, see Krauss, "Perpetual Inventory," *October* 88 (Spring 1999).

Compared to linguistic representation, photographs offer a mode of startling directness. In contrast to live performance, however, even indexical images are secondary and mediating artifacts, the residue that necessarily inflects any approach to the performance art of the past. But *Trio A*'s own involvement with photographic modes centers around precisely this duality: it is thus that it can be both radically performative and forever past tense. And while this temporal dialectic is, perhaps, a foundational condition of the photographic mode, it is one with particular historical relevance in the era of *Trio A*. Rainer's writing on the media's representation of the Vietnam War is only the most obvious manifestation of the currency of this issue, of the recognition that indexical technologies which bring distant events and people into shocking presence also banish those events and people to the spectacular, spectral realm of the merely represented. As *Trio A* engages it, the photographic is both that which makes present and that which mediates; to use Denis Hollier's terms, it is both performative and descriptive.⁶⁴ Rainer's critique of normal dance operations in *Trio A* involves, at the level of the political unconscious, a dialectic of indexicality. Her dance's complex relation to the photographic is intelligible only if this dialectic is maintained.

Rainer's decision to raise these issues in the program notes of *The Mind is a Muscle* underscores the fragility of the distinction between the categories at play: dance and spectacle. That document makes it clear that the formal issues addressed in Rainer's dance are themselves a response to—"a reflection of"—a world whose crisis is one of representation itself. It is worth remembering that Rainer was working on *Trio A* in the same years that Guy Debord was developing his model of late modernity in *The Society of the Spectacle*, a model in which the mode of production has become indistinguishable from the field of representation such that image and reality can no longer be understood as distinct entities. Rainer's danced manifesto embodies just this conjuncture. The photographic returns to *Trio A* not as an actual image, but as a structuring paradox. Art is not so much made with photographs, as of them: no matter how it opposes the world of television, pinups, or dances registering like photographs, *Trio A* is suspended on the axes of a photographic imaginary.

It begins to make a bit more sense, then, that a dance as carefully unspectacular as *Trio A* produces such dramatic photographs; that images of *Trio A* and pictures of more conventional dance approach one another in such striking ways. While the photographs of *Trio A*—with their high contrast, broad fields, and grainy quality—rely on conventions of documentary rather than studio photography, the bodies in these photographs seem to return *Trio A* to the world of conventional dance, and to the conventions of dance photography. As I began by suggesting,

64. Hollier, "Surrealist Precipitates," p. 126. Discussing the effect of Breton's inclusion of photographs in *Nadja*, Hollier is interested in the performative realism of the photograph in contrast to the descriptive realism of texts.



Trio A. Performed by David Gordon at the "People's Flag Show." Judson Church. 1970. (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)



George Balanchine. Stars and Stripes. 1958. Performed by Peter Martins. (Photo: Martha Swope. © TIME Inc.)

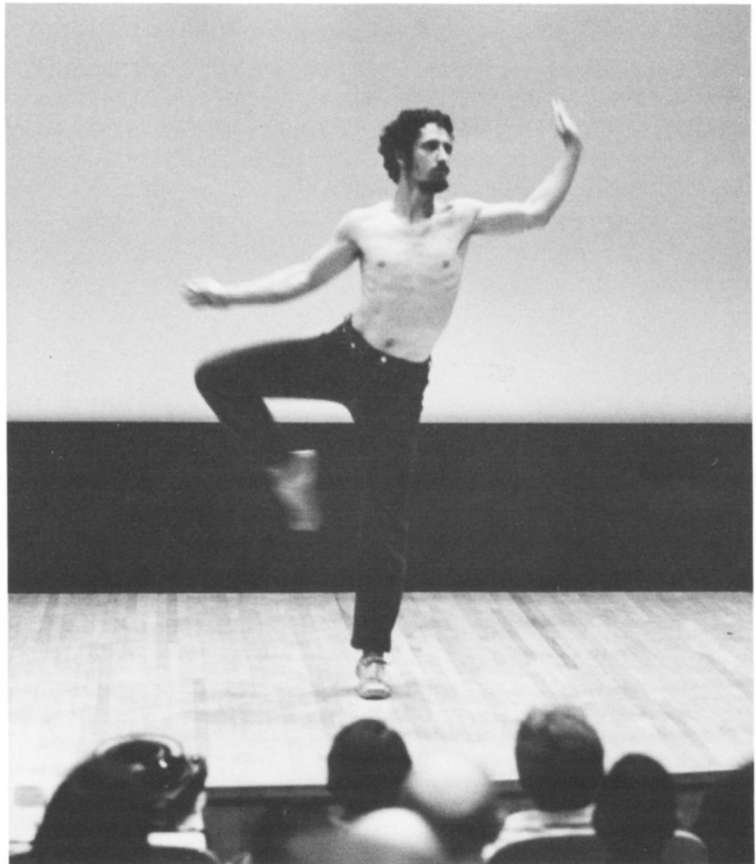
photographs of *Trio A* seem to strip away its radicality. No dance could be more oppositional than the People's Flag Show version of *Trio A* (performed nude, with American flags tied around the performers' necks), and yet in the photographic record this demonstration visually approaches George Balanchine's flag-waving *Stars and Stripes*. If the differences between Rainer's images and typical dance pictures are obvious, their similarities are thus all the more striking: the way a bare-chested Steve Paxton strikes a graceful *attitude*; the way David Gordon, even in the midst of a protest dance, seems possessed by a balletic *ballon*. We might now, however, understand this visual convergence as less a suppression of *Trio A*'s oppositionality than a clue to the conditions of the dance's operation.

For there is a way in which the effects of *Trio A*'s images correspond quite well to the logic of the dance itself. It was the effect of a still picture of the body suspended between the dancer's preparation for a dramatic movement and her recovery from it that, for Rainer, made ordinary dance seem punctuated by photographic moments of display—those perfect, still moments that dance photography strives to capture. *Trio A*, we've seen, has none of these preparations or recoveries; no differentiation between phrases; no internal modulation of energy. But what, then, is left for *Trio A*?—what but that moment in the *center* of the dance phrase? It is the still moment itself which *Trio A* must expand, and it is thus not surprising if we find Rainer's dance itself, on a deep level, "registering like a photograph." However paradoxically, *Trio A* itself occupies a photographic space in Rainer's own logic. And if this logic is built into *Trio A*, then it is no wonder at all that the dance produces such beautiful pictures. For while only a few privileged instants of an ordinary dance look graceful and dramatic when captured in still images, *Trio A* might now be understood as one continuous photogenic moment. Rainer's dance thus offers a surprising answer to the question of whether there can be any such thing as "dance photography," for it might be understood to locate that hybrid form in the moving body itself. The camera does not so much freeze *Trio A* as distill it.⁶⁵

65. Rainer's response to my questioning of the dancerly look of *Trio A*'s documentation: "The dance photographer is conditioned to watch for those moments of suspension that will best 'register like a photograph.' *Trio A* is obviously full of those moments. However much I intended to abort a jump, blur a transition, erase a rhythm, the dance inevitably could not be amorphous, simply because the body is constantly making shapes, whether or not it 'dances.' And what about my own selection of all those photos you showed from Peter Moore's contact sheets? Do you think I looked for the most 'shapeless' and amorphous and least dancelike (whatever that means)? Not on your life. I chose the most dramatic and 'dancerly' ones I could find. Which does not disprove your thesis, necessarily, but maybe you should take the roles of photographer and dancer's vanity into account as further markers in the production of meaning" (Rainer, letter to the author, October 20, 1998). All I will add to this is that a "dancer's vanity" might also be interpreted socially: that is, as this instance would seem to bear out, those photographs which are most pleasing to the ego are those which most closely reproduce the ideals produced in hosts of other images. "Dancer's vanity" understood in this way is another manifestation of the role of a culture of images in the production of this dance and its legacy.

It becomes necessary, then, to reconsider the statement that I have fixed upon in this essay: Rainer's passing fancy that conventional modern dance was phrased so as to "register like a photograph." Rainer has since looked back on the 1966 essay in which she made this tendentious claim and recognized the particularly youthful haste with which she hurried to deconstruct her dance ancestors. Perhaps she would not have been so quick with her critique, she admits, if she had seen more of this classical modern dance in person. And here I have a start of recognition, for Rainer herself provides a precedent for this essay's latter-day approach to her dance through its photographs. "Just as young dancers of the '90s can only follow '60s dance from so many removes," she writes, her generation could only approach the performance work of thirty years earlier through technologies of mediation: "a book, some photos, a scrap of film."⁶⁶

66. Yvonne Rainer, "The Mind is a Muscle," introduction to "A Quasi Survey," in the manuscript of a collection of writings forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press.



Trio A. Performed by Steve Paxton in Performance Demonstration. 1968. (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)

*

That should be the end of this essay. But I keep coming back to the pictures. And I can no longer help noticing that in almost all the photographs of *Trio A*, one small part of the performer's body tends to be out of focus. Hands, feet—they blur out sections of the images, as if making tiny snow angels in the photographic emulsion. It could be argued that this blurring is itself a conventional visual sign for motion “too quick for the camera to see.” But I would rather view these passages as miniature acts of rebellion within the photographs themselves. It is almost as if the dancers of *Trio A* are rubbing out the photographic surfaces, scrubbing away something of the image's ability to fix their bodies' movement into spectacular pictures. Even as the shutter clicks, *Trio A* is still moving. And Yvonne Rainer is always dancing around the problem of the photograph.



Trio A. Performed by Rainer as Convalescent Dance.
1968. (Photo: Peter Moore. © The Estate of Peter Moore.)