

INDEPENDENT FILM MAKER: YVONNE RAINER

Born San Francisco, 1934  
Lives New York City

"In 1956 I came to New York to study acting. Serious involvement in dance and choreography ensued when I started studying with Martha Graham and subsequently with Mercer Cunningham. Also studied ballet with Mia Slavenska, James Waring, Peter Saul, and others, and composition with Robert Dunn and Ann Halprin. Began choreographing my own work in 1961. In 1962 Steve Paxton and I formed the workshop that spawned the Judson Dance Theater, a generative force behind the modern and "post-modern" dance activity in America in the 60's. In 1970 I helped form the Grand Union, a co-operative New York-based performing group.

My choreographic works have been seen throughout the United States and in many European cities. They have made use of large numbers of people - both skilled and inexperienced in dance techniques - and incorporated speech, objects, film, slides, and elaborate choreography to music. By 1972 my growing interest in film resulted in a 16mm feature-length narrative film entitled "Lives of Performers," which I wrote and directed. In recent work I have continued to explore the relationship of language and image. Film and slides play an increasingly important role in my performances as a necessary visual and fictional dimension."

Major performance works:

1963 We Shall Run)  
Terrain )  
Room Service)  
1965 Parts of Some Sextets  
1966 Carriage Discreteness  
1968 The Mind is a Muscle  
Untitled Work for 40 People  
North-East Passing  
1969 Rose Fractions  
Performance Fractions for the  
West Coast  
Connecticut Composite  
1970 Continuous Project-Altered Daily  
WAR  
1971 Grand Union Dreams  
1972 In the College  
"Performance"  
1973 This is the story of a woman who...

Film and film-centered performances:

1967 Volleyball  
16mm, b/w, 10 minutes  
1968 Hand Movie  
8mm, b/w, 5 minutes  
Trio Film  
16mm, b/w, 13 minutes  
Rhode Island Red  
1969 Lime  
16mm, b/w, 10 minutes  
1972 Lives of Performers  
16mm, b/w, sound, 90 minutes  
1974 Performance around a film about  
a woman who...  
16mm, b/w, with simultaneous  
35mm slides, sound, 120 minutes

Teaching: New School for Social Research, Goddard College, Connecticut College, George Washington University, Vancouver Art Gallery, School of Visual Arts, University of California-Fresno, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Resources Center of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Performance around a film about a woman who... is a mixed-media version of Yvonne Rainer's as-yet-unfinished 16mm Film about a woman who... The film - written and directed by Rainer, shot by Babette Mangolte - in this version is a workprint. "Performance" is provided by the presence of the director, by her live "voice-over" narration and intermittent commentary plus recorded speech and music, all of which will eventually comprise the optical soundtrack of the completed film. The projection of the workprint during this performance is complemented by adjacent 35mm slides of intertitles and photographs.

The performers are Dempster Leech, Shirley Soffer, John Eriman, Renfreu Neff, Epi Kotkas, James Barth, Sarah Soffer, Valda Setterfield, and Yvonne Rainer. The running time is less than two hours.

"There is a bit of insanity in dancing that does everybody a great deal of good."

Edwin Denby  
Dancers, Buildings, People  
in the Streets  
New York, 1965

"The Performers have abandoned the rehearsal of their private dramas. They are part of another fiction, and we sense from the trajectory of glances and tension of bodies, the sudden changes of costume accessories, the extremely artificial studio lighting, that, in fact, they constitute another fictional world in which the impulses of cruelty, guilt, and violence are played out in an entirely different register of intensity."

Annette Michelson  
Artforum, February 1974

1. Reacting to that "insanity", or the illusion of a weightless transcendent physical presence, I explored, with presumed rationality, a more elemental existence before the audience. Running. Spontaneous laughter. Watching a colleague perform. What performers do. What people do. The credulity of the spectator was a central "problem", which, once established, could sustain flights of fancy and, eventually, a return to illusion via film.

2. The whole body in a field delineated by the eye of the viewer is replaced by a head, a nose, a hand, a person in a field particularized and delimited by the eye of the camera. This potential for greater intimacy with, and control of, physical presence makes possible another shift in focus: the body merges with fictionalized character. Furthermore, filmic devices - such as intertitle and voice-over; slow-motion and close-up; the play between moving and stillness, between the camera and subject - offer a "permission" to investigate metaphor, cliché, and transition, as well as specific emotional incident. These have become increasingly difficult to deal with - at least for me - in live presentations. There is a bit of insanity in the movies that I now find liberating.

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