

## THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

**INTERVIEW WITH:** YVONNE RAINER (YR), choreographer, filmmaker

**INTERVIEWER:** CONNIE BUTLER (CB), the Robert Lehman Chief Curator of Drawings, MoMA

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### BEGIN AUDIO FILE RAINER\_T01

[Crew Discussion]

CB: I'm Connie Butler, Chief Curator of Drawings at MoMA. It's July 7<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 and I'm here with Yvonne Rainer to have the Oral History Conversation for MoMA's Oral History project and the Archives.

YR: It's 2011. I'm Yvonne Rainer and we're going to have a conversation. I'm a, currently a choreographer. I was a filmmaker for a number of years, between being a choreographer and a choreographer.

CB: So, since, Yvonne, I know you just walked through MoMA's fourth and fifth floor galleries, the Painting and Sculpture galleries here at the Museum, I thought maybe we could just warm up and start with, a little bit, with that journey as a way to kind of warm up into talking about your work in MoMA's collection. I know you walked through the galleries of Minimal art and some of your colleagues from the '60s and that period, and I wondered if you just wanted to reflect a little bit on what you saw.

YR: Mm-hm. Well, I'd like to go back, even earlier, 1956, when I first came to New York and stood in front of the collection of Cubist and Impressionist work. And I requested today that we go look at [Rousseau's Sleeping Gypsy \[MoMA # 646.1939\]](#), which was one of my favorites back then, this ominous dreamlike landscape with the lion sniffing this prone body. So, my first introduction to the art world was through [Al Held](#), who I had met in San Francisco. And Abstract Expressionism was my entrée

into New York culture. And I learned everything I knew about, or was to know about painting from Al Held. But, yes, standing in the Minimal art rooms, I can't say I feel completely at home there. It was a big influence at the time, but I think [Rauschenberg](#) was the bridge between Abstract Expressionism and, for me, between Abstract Expressionism and what came after, not necessarily Minimalism, but Pop Art and the relation to [Duchamp](#) and Dada and humor was, I think, more influential on me than Minimalism. Yes, when I first saw Rauschenberg's Monogram I all but – I've written this in a memoir – all but rolled on the floor in a convulsion of laughter. It was such a relief from the high aspirations of the Abstract Expressionists. But Minimalism, and I've always had an ambivalence about it, its high seriousness. Originally, there was a humor in, like in [Robert Morris's](#) grey plywood objects, but I don't experience that now. It's entered the canon of Modernism, and it's lost that, for me, that humorous edge. Although I guess you can still see it in some of my work. The idea of pedestrian movement, the everyday, the lack of monumental scale; certainly, I have to acknowledge my debt to Minimalism to some extent.

CB: And maybe talk a little bit about that time, about the 1960s, because I think your work as a choreographer, and then as a filmmaker, up until recently, has always been associated, I think, in some ways with Minimalism and those peers. Is that who you were in dialogue with at that time?

YR: I lived with, on and off, with Robert Morris, for seven years, so of course, there was an ongoing dialogue there. And he was very interested, and even invested, as a performer, in those early performances at Judson Church that came out of the Cunningham Cage nexus. So, but yes, I have to acknowledge the overall influence was certainly John Cage. I started studying with [\[Merce\] Cunningham](#) in 1960, when he had a studio on 14<sup>th</sup> Street above the Living Theater. It was a new studio, and there was this air of excitement and anticipation about all of the ideas that were swirling around at that time. It was a very small group of people, relative to today, in terms of audience and participants. Like, you saw the same people at dance concerts, at music concerts, at happenings, at the Living Theater, which was in the same building as the Cunningham studio, 14<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I feel very privileged to have come on the scene at that moment when I did.

CB: Let me ask, I'm just going to be bringing you back to MoMA occasionally, just for some reflection on, kind of, the institution and its history. It occurs to me as you're talking that in the 1960s, MoMA certainly stood for Abstract Expressionism. And in fact, Minimalism and those artists that you now see in the galleries upstairs, at that time, were not championed by this Museum.

YR: Well, or, the work had hardly begun to be made yet, in the early '60s.

CB: Right; right. So I'm curious, at that moment, say, in nineteen -- I don't know. If we want to talk about Judson, say, 1962, right; Minimalism hadn't been invented yet. But, was the Museum, in terms of your milieu in New York and the places you went, was the Museum a frequently visited place? Was it a center of activity and thought for you?

YR: Let's see. By 1960, I was taking ballet classes at Carnegie Hall, Ballet Arts, mainly with Nina Stragonova. And I, let's see. '59-60, I would go in the morning to take a Graham, a class at the Martha Graham school. And then I'd go to Ballet Arts to take a ballet class. And then, in the afternoon, I would come to MoMA to see films. And, I got my film education, silent films, mainly, '20s classics and Chaplin and Keaton<sup>1</sup>, yeah, so, that was a very heady time for me. I'm trying to think what else I saw here. Yes, so, MoMA was very important. Yes.

CB: So maybe skip, then, to the early '70s, since we're talking about film, when you yourself abandon choreography -- we can go back to that in a minute -- and you started making films yourself. Can you talk about that moment? You've written about it, but, that moment of deciding to move away from choreography and movement and dance into film and narrative.

YR: By the late '60s, I was beginning to feel the constraints of the kind of movement I made. I didn't deal with story, narrative, pantomime. It was abstract and gymnastic. Yes, infused with the ideas of minimalism, I guess, in terms of its, there's a lot of running and walking. And I would show slides. And there were short films I had

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<sup>1</sup>In her revisions Yvonne Rainer included Keaton

already made by '68, '69, I was making these short, experimental, minimal films, like, one thing happening.

CB: These are The Hand movies.

YR: Hand, a close-up of a hand, a close-up of legs with a volley ball. A chicken coop for ten minutes, and the duration was based on the 16 millimeter camera roll. But I realized that the specifics of daily life, of sexual conflict, [social] interactions, melodrama, I wanted to deal with. And the new American cinema was also, I saw as a constraint, with its methods of systemic, yeah; systems and repetitions and long duration. Like Michael Snow and. I was influenced by, I guess primarily by Hollis Frampton, his use of language in some of his films. So I saw this possibility for expanding the content in my work with the possibilities for intercutting speech and inter-title print and image, the possibilities of cutting in 1/24<sup>th</sup> of a second from indoors, to outdoors, to close up, et cetera, et cetera. So, by '72, I was still choreographing, but I also got an NEA grant and I used it to make my first film, Lives of Performers. Which is a 90-minute feature, experimental narrative.

CB: And you've talked about, I believe, also, at that moment, of turning to film as a way to almost reintroduce content and narrative into the work, where you didn't find that possibility in, as much, in choreography. Can you talk about that a little bit?

YR: Well, yes, I should talk about going to India, and seeing the Katha Kali in 1971. And I came back in a state of culture shock, as many people did at that time. And the dance drama of the classical Indian form and its appeal to a wide audience impressed me quite a bit. And so I made a piece called Grand Union Dreams, which had different groups of people who had studied with me – I had been teaching in my loft to dancers and non-dancers. And there was speech, and reading, and I divided the groups into the gods, mortals, and heroes. And it was kind of a quasi epic, of sorts. And this was an anomaly. I mean, didn't pursue this kind of mythic reference. But in '73, I did a, I produced a multi-media theater event that combined dance, and there were three performers. We spoke, and there were projections, slides and titles. So language became more and more important in the work, but not necessarily spoken by the performers, but read as print, projected print, by the

audience, that told these emotional situations in these little vignettes. So I was into a kind of narrative and dealing with emotional and sexual material content, expanding my palette, you might say. And by 1975, I'd left dance totally and gotten into film. The specifics of, also of political and social issues, I didn't feel was available to me in the kind of choreography I'd been involved with.

CB: So, staying on that moment, I wanted to ask you a little bit about the politics of that moment. And I know that early on, and for the first couple of films, you didn't sort of accept a feminist reading of those films. And

YR: Mmm, yeah, that's kind of troubling to me. I didn't call myself a feminist, not because I was anti-feminist. I mean, it was feminism that gave me permission to explore aspects of my life that I hadn't before. But I thought I didn't deserve to call myself a feminist because I wasn't on the barricades, I wasn't an activist; so, that caused some confusion. But by '75, I remember, I was teaching at Cal Arts and Miriam Shapiro was there, and she persuaded me that I was a feminist. And so I stopped that charade of not calling myself a feminist. But it still, yeah, like you seem to know about this detail of my life that keeps coming up, like the No Manifesto. [laughing]

CB: Well, I'm interested in that moment, also from the perspective of MoMA, in a way, and other institutions in the City, like the Whitney Museum, where feminists were protesting on the barricades. Also around this museum, certainly, the formation of the Art Workers Coalition and the protesting of the Viet Nam War, and I'm curious – I know you come in, sort of in and out of that, and you were certainly in dialogue with a lot of people who were involved in that. Maybe you could reflect a little bit more on that.

YR: Well, I can't say that the Art Workers Coalition necessarily was a feminist outgrowth, although anti-sexism and racism and colonialism, neo-colonialism, were part of their message. But yes, I was involved following, in '71, especially following the Cambodian invasion by the Nixon administration, there were a lot of militant actions in the art world, and I participated in some of these protests on the steps of the Met, at the Guggenheim protesting the shutting down of the Hans Haacke exhibition. I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts at the time, and I organized my students

and others to put on black armbands and go through Soho in this formation like a funeral procession, influenced by the workers coming out of the factories in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. With our heads bowed, we just, three abreast, we walked through Soho. So there were a lot of actions by, in groups; Angry Arts Week was another series of performances and film showings. I remember at Hunter College there was something.

CB: So maybe you could talk a little bit more about the first couple of films, *Lives of Performers* from '72, you've mentioned, *A Film About a Woman Who*, '74. And then in '75, you have what's called *An Evening with Yvonne Rainer* here at MoMA. Maybe you could talk a little bit about that.

YR: I don't remember that. Can you remind me?

CB: Well, I think what it was- is an evening of film showing. I imagine that that's what it was.

YR: But, '75?

CB: In '75.

YR: So it would have been two films and maybe the short films? I don't know.

CB: Possibly the short films<sup>2</sup>.

YR: I have no memory of that event. It would have been here in the theater?

CB: Yes, and it was, I believe with Adrienne Manacci [Manacia]?

YR: Oh yes, Manacia. Adrienne Manacia. Jon Gartenberg, yes, okay. But you don't have the program.

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<sup>2</sup> Transcribers note: Cineprobe series screening of *A Film about a Woman Who*, introduced by Adrienne Manacia, April 22, 1974

CB: I don't.

YR: Well, if it was '75, it was my first two films. *Lives of Performers*, is this, yes, like a quasi – it's called, the subtitle is, A Melodrama. And it begins with a quote from Leo Bersani about cliché is the purest art of intelligibility. It tempts us to view, and I'm paraphrasing now, the very familiar tropes of melodrama as with the appearance of necessity, or something like that. And so I was very aware that dealing with the clichés of passion and sexual interactions, that I was following the Hollywood model, but the methods and the treatment, of course, were totally different. It contained documentation of rehearsals for a performance that was coming up at the Whitney Museum. There's a solo by Valda Setterfield that was inspired by Nazimova's *Salome*, the dance she does, the solo dance in the middle of that film. And there's, again, little vignettes. There's no sync sound. I had the performers watch a rough cut of the film, and spontaneously you hear their responses, like, "Oh, I look like an old fashioned movie star." Or they read or paraphrased pieces of the script. So you hear the performers responding to what the audience is seeing, as though they're seeing for the first time and explaining. And I used their first names. So it was somewhat confusing to the audience that was familiar with the new American cinema to have all these emotional, melodramatic scenes narrated, and using our first names. So there was some confusion about whether it was real or not. It was all made up; some based on my own life, some based on other people's lives. So that was my first foray into a kind of narrative. It ends with, it's called a, there are thirty-six shots at the end that are based on Pabst's *Pandora's Box*. And I had the performers, the lighting changes, and Babette Mangold made very chiaroscuro lighting, and a series of tableaux vivant each lasting for twenty seconds, and then the performers disassemble and set up for the next shot. The second film, *A Film About a Woman Who*, continued this exploration of emotional life and melodramatic situations. There is sync sound in that, and narration, a voiceover; and I used the same performers I'd used in *Lives of Performers*. There's some dancing. All of my films deal, in one way or another, with performance, with people who are, their roles as characters, are involved with performance of one kind or another.

CB: One of the things that occurs to me as you're talking is, and that I've always thought about your work and its importance, is this idea of transdisciplinarity, in a way. I mean, you're mentioning the names of dancers, Valda Setterfield, who's most likely trained in a classical way, but also, Babette Mangold, who was a photographer and filmmaker at the time, the films themselves which involve narrative in different ways but also have very clear references to a museum institution, to the art world, to.

YR: Mm-hm.

CB: I'm wondering if you could speak about that, because I think at this moment, your work -- and others around you, but speak, of course, about your work -- that's one of its, I think really paramount influences, in a way, is this way of working across as many disciplines and draws on many different strategies.

YR: Well, yes, it's odd you say that, because my current work is very kind of technophobic. I mean, I don't use projections at all. There is, in the last two dances, there is a microphone. People come to the microphone and read, or I read with a hand-held microphone. And there are objects, which refers back to yes, my earliest or mid-career choreography, using objects and the focus being on the unwieldiness of certain objects, like mattresses or big sheets of plywood, or

CB: Which goes all the way back to the earliest work. [0:29:42]

YR: Yes, yes, so, like, in this last piece of choreography, I'm in the background of the dance, proper. There are three people. I'm one of them. And the lighting designer and the scenic designer are moving these objects around the periphery of the space: a wine barrel, a mattress, folding chairs, free weights. So that kind of effort is going on simultaneous with the performance of trained dancers. Yes, so I'm always, I guess, mixing it up in some way: the trained, the untrained; choreographed movement and pedestrian movement. But the kinds of mix-ups are different now than they were.

CB: [coughs] Excuse me.

YR: Yes. The kinds of mix-ups are different from what they were in the '60s, '70s, '80s.

CB: So then, let's move into, maybe talk about *Kristina Taking Pictures*, which is the next

YR: Talking.

CB: Talking Pictures; sorry.

YR: *Kristina Talking Pictures*.

CB: Yes, *Kristina Talking Pictures* from 1976.

YR: Okay. So from emotional life and sexual life which characterized the first two films, I dealt with a specific political issue, which was oil pollution from -- they were just beginning to publicize the dangers of these big oil tankers. So I had read this report by I think a South African journalist who traveled on an oil tanker for a few months and about the dangers of running aground for these big tankers that were electronically controlled. So I devised this scenario where one of the characters, my brother, actually, was a sailor, had been or was a sailor on one of these tankers, and he recited long passages from this book. And I took the role of Kristina which was the name of a lion tamer I had seen in a one-ring circus in Germany when I was there. A remarkable woman in her, she must have been around fifty, in a glittery bikini with scarred legs from having been mauled by tigers or lions. So I talked about the, I recited passages from reports or what I had read about lions and the social life and mating habits of the lions. So there was this juxtaposition, long passages with the camera tracking over the bed and our bodies.

CB: You were in this film.

YR: I was in it. Yes. And my brother was in it. So that was the first specific political issue that I took on in the film. And following that, what was the next one? '76, the next one was, *Journeys from Berlin*, I believe?

CB: *Journeys from Berlin* is a little earlier, though, we should talk about it, too.

YR: No, that was '79, '80. I had had a fellowship, a residency in West Berlin, the DAAD, *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst*, an exchange program for artists. And it was a time when West Berlin, in the middle of East Germany, was being plumped up as representing the democracy and culture of the so-called free world. And a lot of artists were there. And a lot of the Baader Meinhof gang, so-called, was still active. I was there '76, '77.; and I decided, I was beginning to think about a film about political violence. My parents had been anarchists, not violent, but I was aware of the history of political radical activity in the '20s in the U.S. And my father had been involved with this anarchist newspaper called Blast. And I was aware of the pre-Russian-Revolutionary women radicals who had attempted *attentats*, the assassinations, and Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman. So while I was there, I didn't do much in terms of developing this film, but when I returned, I began to write the script. And it developed into this multi, not multi-channeled, but these threads of narrative. One of the main ones is of a woman, a middle-aged woman in some kind of analytic therapy. It was actually shot in the Whitechapel Gallery in London. And Annette Michelson was the, took on this role, quite phenomenal memory feats, these long monologues dealing with her, everything from her sexual life to her frustrations about politics and not being politically active. And I intercut this with scenes, tracking shots in Berlin, West Berlin, and readings, voiceover readings from Emma Goldman, and ruminations about, from Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. So it's a complicated film, long; it's over two hours. And the word "terrorism" is never mentioned. It was always, yes, it dealt with the repression, the backlash of the German government against the radicals. In fact, while I was in Berlin, I stayed in the apartment of an academic, a woman, who was, who had been fired from the university because of her radical background, her politics. She was living in Paris and the DAAD rented her apartment, which I lived in.

CB: [coughs]

[Crew Discussion]

[0:39:30]

CB: Can you talk about the choice of Annette Michelson as the main protagonist, Annette Michelson being, of course, a critic,

YR: Film historian, writer,

CB: And writer about dance early in the '60's, as well.

YR: Yes. Well, she was a friend, and she had actually aspired to be an actor in her youth. And somehow I knew she could handle these long recitations. And we rehearsed for a good six months, a couple of times a week, and it was quite a virtuosic enactment for her.

CB: And were you aware at the time of other artists, like, say, [Gerhard Richter](#), whose Baader Meinhof paintings come to mind?

YR: What year did he make those paintings?

CB: I think they're actually a bit later, but

YR: Yes. No, I wasn't so aware, then.

CB: So, I think that, so, after *Journeys from Berlin*, which is '79, I think the next film is 1985, right? *The Man Who Envied Women*.

YR: Yes.

CB: And what was that gap? Was that just

YR: Oh, the gap between films got greater and greater, because the difficulty of raising money, the increased cost of labs and crew. So each film, the cost was double what its predecessor had been. Yes, so there were five-year gaps in between my later films.

CB: So talk a little bit about that film, *The Man Who Envied Women*.

YR: The Man Who Envied Women is an odd one. [laughing] Well, They're all odd, I guess, in different ways.

CB: It's one of your most- considered to be one of your most important films, though, I think.

YR: Yes, it dealt with aging. It dealt with contradictions like, the main character, who is played by two different performers, is an academic and a philanderer, so

CB: It's very funny.

YR: Yes. So, I developed him partly through a long lecture he gives based on Foucault. A friend of mine had been an assistant to Foucault, I interviewed him. What's his name<sup>3</sup>? Oh god, anyway, so I used this interview, which is pretty dense and only partly intelligible, while the camera tracks around this empty loft, with these kind of bored students lounging around at desks, and finally ends up in this kitchen of this remodeled loft. So there was this interplay between this character and his situation which involved his wife, who is some kind of performer or video artist, who never appears on screen. She's the voiceover, tells the story about separating from this guy she had lived with, the academic, and getting involved in a housing program that I was actually involved in. The city, which had taken over these abandoned buildings on the Lower East Side, was making them available to artists who were to come up with, to organize and come up with proposals for remodeling these buildings. And this was all done to the detriment of the people who were living on the Lower East Side and were not aware of this happening. It was middle class, white artists who jumped in and were making these proposals. So I found myself, as the voiceover says, "Almost overnight, we met the enemy, and it was us." So it ended up in a city council hearing with proponents for both sides speaking, and I brought in a camerawoman to record, to document this hearing, and you actually see people going to the, presenting their cases to the council members, in this very elaborate chamber with gilt chandeliers. So there are all these contradictions that were

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Zummer YR

brought forward visually and through the language. And so that was one of the main issues developed in this film. It was, it contained this kind of rant against the development of Soho. There are tracking shots along the storefronts of Soho.

CB: Can you talk a little bit more about the role of language in this film and in general in the films? You've mentioned Foucault, and you also at this time talk about, have talked about, your interest in psychoanalysis, which was coming from your own lived experience of it, rather than the theory, but I know the theory has also played an important part in the work.

YR: Yes. There is a kind of a coda at the end of *The Man Who Envied Women*, in a narrow hallway, between Jack Deller, this academic, the main character, and an old or a current flame of his. And what I wanted – it's not entirely successful – was two things happening at the same time: a very sensual erotic interplay between them physically, while they're each reciting these long monologues. His is based on Foucault, about power. And hers is from an Australian feminist theorist, Morris; what's her name?

CB: Megan

YR: Megan Morris, yes. And so it's kind of funny. I mean, hers is very ironic and funny about all the dilemmas, facing the good feminists in how to act, how to speak, how to, all the ambivalences of heterosexuality and power relations between men and women. And so I choreographed the interactions of these two people separating, going toward each other, embracing, and in this very narrow space.; sometimes she's wearing a very sexy dress, sometimes she's wearing coveralls. And it's very stagey; it doesn't quite work. But yes, the theories, from both sides, Foucault and Morris, are very important to it.

CB: And was that a reflection of your own, in a way, that battling back and forth between, sort of, French theory and feminist theory, a reflection of kind of your own feeling about the operation of theory in the art world at the time?

YR: Well, I was reading all this stuff, and of course, Laura Mulvey's famous essay, *Visual Pleasure*, was very important. And I took that particular essay very literally in *The Man Who Envied Women*. I removed the female protagonist's physical presence, so there was no way of projecting, objectifying her; she is the controlling voice. This is one of the main strategies of that film. She's played by, voiced by, Trisha Brown.

CB: Again, Trisha Brown, a fellow choreographer and friend, coming from that world.

YR: Yes, yes. And Trisha actually appears. There are a series of shots where Jack Deller, the philandering academic, is in the foreground and behind him are a series of clips from various films, mainly Hollywood melodramas: Barbara Stanwyck and Bette Davis, and some of them in which women collude with men's projections on them as being dangerous and destructive of male power. Like, Bette Davis says, I forget the title of the film. She says to Franchot Tone, "I'm bad; I don't mean to be, but I'm bad luck for you." [laughing] And Barbara Stanwyck in, with Fred MacMurray in that culminating scene where she shoots him in, what's that Billy Wilder film? *Double Identity*?

CB: *Double Indemnity*.

YR: Indemnity, right. So, there are these films. And there's also Trisha Brown in *Babette*, Mangold's wonderful slow motion film of her Water Motor, a famous dance of hers, solo. All this is happening behind Jack Deller while he is reciting from the letters of, oh god, the letters of -- oh god, who wrote- who was the writer for *Double Indemnity*<sup>4</sup>? Anyway, one of the main writers for film noir in Hollywood; his name will pop up. And all about his feelings about women, which are permeated with sexist analogies from the '40s and '50s. So that yes, there are all these juxtapositions, radical juxtapositions of image and foreground, background. Yes, it's a complicated film.

CB: And did your work on, sort of, what you're describing as the gaze and the politics of the gaze, and the turning around of the figure or withdrawing of the figure, did, at the

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Chandler

time, were you thinking at all about back to early work in choreography where you were similarly concerned with your own presence as a subject of dance, your averting your gaze,

YR: Yeah. [0:53:50]

CB: Turning your gaze away from the audience?

YR: Yeah. Early on, I began to question the pleasure I took in being looked at, this dual voyeuristic exhibitionistic relation of dancer to audience. And this was before the British feminists were dealing with this subject in relation to Hollywood films of the '40s and '50s. So I made this dance that has survived, mainly because I continued to teach it and perform it, and there's a film of it, in 1978. But in '65-'66, it was first performed, it was called *Trio A*, which originally consisted of solos, three solos performed simultaneously that are not in unison. The prime tactic of it is that the performer never looks at the audience. So this collusion that I ascribe to, the balletic presentation of the self, where the audience becomes the mirror and the dancer is always checking out the mirror of the audience's gaze, this was problematized in this dance. So when my body faced the audience, for instance, I devised a movement for the head, or redirected the gaze, so it's very obvious I am never, the performer is never looking at the audience. So, this preoccupation, you might say, years later, in '85, makes its appearance in *The Man Who Envied Women*, with this removal of the female body. I mean, it's funny; it was a different preoccupation. I mean, the female body in dance, I didn't exclude, certainly. But, I mean, it's a metaphor or analogy that applied to this later film, where the female body and that possibility for sexualizing -- there could be no voyeuristic relation to this character. She is a voice. And relating it to film noir, where it's the man's voice that always controls the narrative, I had a female voice controlling the narrative of *The Man Who Envied Women*.

CB: I want to just ask you, again referring back to MoMA, in 1982, you got an invitation from Bill Sloan to deposit your films here.

YR: In the MoMA vault?

CB: In the film collection.

TR: In the film collection.

CB: I think on a kind of semi-permanent deposit. And in the contract you scrawled, "Hot diggety." I guess, at the time, this was

YR: Really! [laughing]

CB: Yes, something that made you very happy. So I don't know if you have any further reflection about that or whether it was kind of an important, perhaps an important moment for you?

YR: Well, how to preserve the negative materials for those films, it's an, I mean, it's coming up now, I am negotiating with MoMA to make new negatives and new masters, video masters. So getting the films, getting these materials out of the various labs that I had dealt with and into one place, I was very grateful for that opportunity. I thought it was Bill Gartenberg<sup>5</sup> who arranged that. It was Bill Sloan?

CB: It might have been, but, I have both of their names here, so they were both probably involved. And can you talk a little bit about, again, just, sort of, for the record, how you think about presentation of the films now? Because of course, now, the use of film in contemporary art, there are all manner and sort of theories about displaying it in the gallery versus in the theater, showing it on video versus film as film. Can you talk a little about how you feel about those issues of presentation?

YR: Well, I've never been averse to having my films shown digitally. I mean I'm not a purist in that way. But I am- I do have rigorous ideas about how a feature-length film should be shown. It should not be shown in a gallery where people walk in and out. It should have a scheduled beginning and end and have comfortable seats, which is

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<sup>5</sup> Yvonne Rainer meant Jon Gartenburger Assistant Curator Department of Film 1982, Bill Sloan, Librarian, Film Circulating Library of the Department of Film.

not always the way that museums, especially, show film. I'm not including MoMA, because MoMA has a theater with comfortable seats. But you know, I've had the experience of films being shown in a room with a slatted bench, you know with other films, one after the other, with no identification, and people don't know what they're looking at, and come and sit and are uncomfortable, [laughs] and after ten minutes, they leave. That doesn't happen often, but it's happened often enough that it gets my back up.

CB: And is that, how do you feel about *Trio A* and the hand movie and those early shorts? Because I know you have shown those recently. Actually, at MoMA, we showed those in the gallery situation. Those seem to be slightly different.

YR: Yes, I call them my early, short, boring films. Well, I'm talking to Sabine [Breitwieser] right now about this corridor, what to show in this corridor. And those short films, because they're so repetitive, they would lend themselves to that kind of treatment. *Trio A* is slightly different. I mean, it's true, it lasts five minutes, so you can even, I would, it's okay with me if someone stands for five minutes to watch it. It's done twice; no, it's done once in that film, and then there are details for five more minutes; ten-minute duration all together. Yes, I mean, you don't have to sit and watch those films, for the most part, although there's one called *Line* that has a narrative, you might say. There's an object that moves from one corner to the other. It takes ten minutes, and there are various maneuvers by a figure in the frame, so there is a kind of narrative there. But the *Rhode Island Red* chicken coop for ten minutes, chickens fluttering around, the hand movie. There's one called *Trio* which is two nude figures and a big white balloon that is- has choreographed executions in it, so, but that's ten minutes, also; no, that's about fifteen minutes, I think, yeah, a little longer.

CB: Those were shown recently in the On Line exhibition, in 2010, on a video monitor with G.O.A. projected.

YR: Right, projected, yeah. Uh, that's okay. [laughing]

CB: I remember you had mixed, you were nervous about doing that, I think.

YR: Yeah.

CB: Or maybe more to the point, you were, of this conversation, you were nervous, I think, about, in a way, I think you called it the fetishization of Trio A.

YR: Of Trio A, yes, yes; how it gets shown so often. But it is, you know, one of the only survivors of that early period of choreography. I wondered, in the Line show, what it had to do with the show. But that's a curatorial conceit; you might say, yes, the choice of it, yes.

CB: I think it's, I mean, what I have said to you before, but I think it has become, outside the context of that show, but it has become a really canonical work of that period. And I know you said to me, you think it's canonical because it's the one everybody knows. But I think – and there may be an element of truth to that – but I do think, in terms of postmodern choreography and the history of the '60s, it is now this, it's kind of your masterpiece, in a way, I think, of that period.

YR: Mm-hm.

CB: And we installed it also, as you know, in 2009, in a collection; you may not have seen that but it was a collection installation on the second floor of the contemporary collection. And in that context, it was, I thought, very much about the use of the floor. I got interested in the juxtaposition of that work with [Bruce Nauman](#),

YR: Ah, yes.

CB: And of work on the ground,

YR: Where he walks in the periphery

CB: Beckett Walk [[Slow Angle Walk \(Beckett Walk, MoMA # 1177.2008\)](#)] yes, and also an installation that we own where there's concentric circles of making tape on the ground, and it's kind of about off balance, decentering.

YR: Right.

CB: And so we installed it in that context, trying, I think, to really bring it in dialogue with other sculptural works from the period.

YR: Right. What's the date of those Nauman performances?

CB: 1972 is Beckett Walk.

YR: Oh yes, okay.

CB: And of course, at that time, he was working with Meredith Monk and dance and movement was very important to him in those videos. One of the things I wanted to ask you, and now is as good a time as any, is, this relationship between your choreographic movement from the mid-60s and earlier, and sculpture. You talked a little bit about the moving around of objects in the background of certain films, and sort of almost the juxtaposition of movement and sculptural objects. And if we think about, you know, Morris, Robert Morris's both his work as a choreographer and dancer and sculptor, there's also that kind of relationship of sculptural form and movement. And I wondered if you could think about that for a moment, I guess, particularly with the Judson work, but also.

YR: I didn't move pieces of abstract sculpture around. I moved

CB: Things.

YR: Things that had very specific uses in everyday life. And the mattress piece was, those references were about dreams, death, sleep, illness, sex, et cetera. That's how it resonated for me; in addition to being weighty objects that required particular effort on the part of the performers to move around. Or [it] could be used in a play situation, like running and jumping on them. Yeah. Also in that piece were things I picked up on Canal Street: a flywheel, heavy gears, and those were carried around. The piece I did at the Armory in that Theater and Engineering show in 1966

extended this kind of, this way of thinking about objects. But the objects were, with the exception of [Carl Andre's](#) Styrofoam beams, those were the only art objects in that piece. Yeah, that's true. The rest were all from the lumberyard or the hardware store, I mean, going from a piece of typewriter paper to an eight-by-four foot piece of sheet metal. And that was, I guess, the most specific reference or co-existence with Minimalist ideas, the whole, the floor of this armory covered with these objects that were all rectangular.

CB: And the Continuous Project work at the Whitney was also like that, this kind of sculptural material as

YR: What was the sculptural material in that? There was a screen, a white, like a movie screen, that was carried around.

CB: And weren't there also these large pieces of cardboard or,

YR: Oh no, they were boxes.

CB: Boxes, that's right; boxes.

YR: Cardboard boxes; yeah; yeah yeah; right; yeah; uh-huh; yeah.

CB: There was just so little difference, I mean, really, the materials of sculpture and the materials that you were using were the same, it's the same material. And the same form, often, too.

YR: Yes, yes. There were folding chairs there. What else?

CB: Pillows? Chair pillow?

YR: Oh, pillows; yes; right; right. A mat, a pole, yes, uh-huh. Yes.

CB: And how did, in terms of the creation of the choreographic work, were you working in, you know, at home? Using studios? I'm also thinking about, sort of, the sculpture studio versus the studio for dance, as often being sort of one and the same place for

YR: A dance studio is always empty. [laughing] And a sculpture studio is full of stuff; right. But, yes; Morris and I shared this huge loft and his contained those grey, he was dealing with that

CB: The felt?

YR: The felt and also the grey boxes – what was the material? Fiberglass. And my half had a big mirror in it, and that was it; yes.

CB: Well I guess, I know we're jumping around a little bit, but maybe – you started to talk about, with the move to New York in '58, and then

YR: Fifty-six.

CB: Fifty-six. And then I think you mentioned Anna Halprin, but I have a note about you meeting Halprin in '59 and then taking part in her summer workshop, and that being very important in terms of this idea of chance procedures, task-based movement. Maybe you could reflect a little bit more on that.

YR: Yes, I had met Simone Morris; she was married to Robert Morris at the time. I had met her at the Graham school, and she and Morris were going back to California. She told me all about Halprin; she had performed with her. So I, August of 1960 or July, yes I took that course. And Halprin, at that point, was not dealing so much with chance as improvisation, using the voice, using objects, moving with objects. And that was a very direct and specific influence on me. It, "*In Parts of Some Sextets*", *The Mattress* piece, and this carrying of weighty objects while you were moving, came right out of that workshop. Making sounds and a lot of improvisation, and just being around people more experienced than I, like Simone. I met Trisha Brown at that workshop. And Ann herself was, you know, a very dynamic presence, and I was absorbing – it was all new to me, and I was very impressionable, and it was a great

summer. So then, I came back to New York, and immediately got involved with Robert Dunn's workshop in the Cunningham studio. Robert Dunn was an accompanist for the Cunningham classes. He was also a kind of disciple of John Cage, an accomplished musician, and he gave this workshop where he explained some of the methods, the chance procedures of Cage. And there I made my first two dances, there's a solo and then a duet with Trisha Brown, I utilized chance, some of the very particular aleatory strategy that came out of this workshop.

CB: And there was the Evening of Dance Constructions in '61.

YR: Then Simone, ah, [Yoko Ono](#) had rented this space on the fifth floor, a big loft, a rough loft on Chambers Street. And every Friday night there were events there, mostly music: [La Monte Young](#), Henry Flynt. I remember one evening there was a grand piano and David Tudor, who had been-who had worked, was working with John Cage, again, an accomplished pianist, who crawled around on his knees with a window squeegee making squeaky sounds on the side of the piano. So there were all these assaults on the classical instruments which were very amusing, provocative, enraging to some people. And Simone did this *Evening of Dance Constructions*. And some of those pieces she's still reviving today: the Slant Board, See-Saw I was in with Robert Morris, performance on a see-saw. We shared a, on Great Jones Street, the three of us shared a studio for a while and rehearsed there. And from Simone I really, it was my introduction to the everyday movement, or to stillness, to using ordinary objects, to using the voice in - while moving. She was a great performer. So that was '61, and by '62, the people who were involved in the Dunn workshop, we realized we had a body of work. And yes, Judson Church had already, under the auspices of or the direction of Howard Moody, they had been showing things in the gallery: [Oldenburg](#) and [Robert Whitman](#) and [Kaprow](#) were already showing work in the gallery. And in the choir loft were the poets, the Judson Poets' Theater. And so we, a few of us, went down and auditioned for Al Carmines who was the artistic director, and Al, later, was to say, "I didn't quite know what I was looking at but I sensed that it was important." And he invited us in, and the Judson Dance Theater was born.

CB: What do you make of all the nostalgia for that period and that moment? I mean, I must say, it sounds so exciting, as you describe it.

YR: Yes. I think it's one of those rare decades, not only in the arts, but in civil rights, politics, social life, feminism. There was this challenge and rupture with the past. 1900 Vienna might have been like that. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Paris, was like that. Post World War II art, Abstract Expression may have been like that. And 1960 to '70 was a decade like that. And I don't know that there has been a decade like that with so many cross-disciplinary social challenges and ruptures being made. So people feel they – you know, I've heard dancers, choreographers who came in after that, in the 70s, they feel they missed out on something. But I don't know. Yeah, people keep looking back to that decade as though there's nothing new. Well, John Cage said back then, "There's nothing new under the sun, there are only new ways of organizing it." So even then, we were aware of reassembling what already had happened, redistributing, rethinking. And I guess that's what the new is, always, in cultural life. You bring it with you, you know. I bring ballet with me now. You know? I haven't turned my back on these traditions. Certainly I use ballet-trained people who have that range of skills, but can do things, do ordinary things, also.

CB: I want to ask you, and then maybe we'll take a break, but you mentioned Simone and re-performance of her work. But also as you mentioned working with ballet dancers, you've also recently allowed Trio A to be performed by non-dancers, non-movers.

YR: In very specific situations. I don't think untrained people doing it alone makes much sense. And I, doing it now, in a geriatric-at an advanced age, it doesn't make sense unless I contextualize my aging in it. So I've taught it, I teach it at UC Irvine, to dancers, trained and untrained people. And there was a performance, six people, half of them had no training, and there were three- half of them were trained. And so that juxtaposition makes sense. You see the movement, and you see the different kinds of vulnerability and range of skills, and that makes sense to me. But I've seen untrained people do it alone, and it just looks clumsy, right? But in another context, it looks interesting.

CB: Well, when we did it here at MoMA in 2009, as part of the Performance series, Pat Catterson did it.

YR: With the two Brits, yes.

CB: The two men.

YR: Yes, the two men.

CB: And Simone also was part of that series, some of her works we saw, and others were re-staged. So as far as re-performance in general with dance, let's say, what is your feeling about that? That it's a case by case situation?

YR: Yes.

CB: Choreographer by choreograph [INAUDIBLE 1:22:30] people?

YR: Yes, like, this French group, Christophe [Wavelet], a philosopher and trained dancer in France, started this group called Quatuor<sup>6</sup> or, they started a group with trained and untrained people. Xavier Le Roy was part of that group. They- and their mission was to revive what they felt were classics from modern dance history and postmodern dance. I think they revived a Doris Humphrey dance. And they turned their attention in the `90s to one of my last dances, *Continuous Project-Altered Daily*. I had very sketchy documentation of that in notes, in photos, and I sent them what I could. The notes had been published in my first book "Work"<sup>7</sup>. One of the first performances was in the Montpellier Dance Festival, in, I don't know, `97, `98? Or even earlier. And I worked with them and they performed it, as they performed it, I was in the audience in the front row, and I suddenly remembered something from the dance. And I entered the performance space. Part of that dance was about teaching and a range of polished and unpolished material, so we actually rehearsed as part of the performance. So I entered the stage area and I taught another element to the

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<sup>6</sup> Or Albrecht Knust- YR post interview addition

<sup>7</sup> 1961-1973

dancers. I accepted their so-called reconstruction, fragmented as it was, in the case of this dance, because it always had this kind of ad hoc feeling to it. It was a series of moves that could be called up by the performers themselves, and then every performance was different. And so they performed it quite a bit, I mean, relatively recently in Vienna, with a different group. And again, I entered, I was there, and I entered the space and taught something else. So, yes, my dancers, my own dancers that I've been working with were there. And Pat Catterson, who studied with me in '69, still dancing with me, doing her own choreography, she was appalled, because she had seen the original with Steve Paxton and Barbara Dilly and David Gordon, and, there were six of us in the original. But the others who had never seen the original, they were fascinated. [laughing] And I accept it, in all its imperfection and roughness. But other dances of mine cannot be reconstructed. They had very particular structures, and I don't remember them, and they've been inadequately documented. There was no video then, you know; they've been lost.

CB: Why don't we break. I want to come back to your return to dance and your return to Trio A initially.

YR: Yes.

CB: But maybe, are you feeling like we should take a little break?

YR: Yes, sure.

CB: Why don't we do that.

[ Crew Discussion].

**END AUDIO FILE RAINER\_T01 at 1:27:17**

**BEGIN AUDIO FILE RAINER\_T05**

[Crew Discussion]

YR: Raymond Chandler

CB: Yes, oh right, the writer. That's right.

YR: Yes the writer. I used his letters for my male protagonist.<sup>8</sup>

CB: It's because he was from LA, Yvonne, that's why you blocked him.

[laughter]

[Crew Discussion]

CB: I wanted to go to 1997, now, where you, which is the year that you return, more or less, to dance with your own performance of Trio A with Judson in New York. I wonder if you can reflect on that.

YR: I called it Trio A Pressured. Pat Catterson performed it backwards. She taught it to several other people, but she, on her own behalf, she taught it to herself in retrograde. So, she did it backwards. Then there's a version called Facing, where one person does it forward and the other runs around keeping the gaze of the performer in view, which, of course, is, obviates the original premise of not meeting the gaze of the observer. And then, three of them, Steve Paxton I had re-taught it to him, and Douglas Dunn, I re-taught it to, and Pat – oh, I did the facing with a former student from the Whitney program, a non-dancer who ran around keeping contact with my gaze. And then, Steve Paxton and Douglas Dunn and Pat did it together with the Chambers Brothers' "In the Midnight Hour". Baryshnikov was in the audience, and he had already contacted me, I think. He called up one day, said, "This is Misha Baryshnikov." And I said, "Who?" And he suggested that I make something for his White Oak dance project, his company. And I must have hesitated. He said, "Well, you don't have to, you can think about it." I said, "I don't

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<sup>8</sup> The name Raymond Chandler comes to Yvonne suddenly while waiting for the crew to finish. Yvonne is referring to an earlier exchange about *The Man Who Envied Women*. Chandler wrote *Double Indemnity*.

have to think about it; I'll do it." And I hadn't choreographed for five- twenty-five years, but.

CB: So it was his call that prompted you to?

YR: Yeah, yeah; yeah. And Pat Catterson was my assistant, continues to be; she has a memory like a steel trap. We recreated from my notes, from photos, my files, a kind of hodgepodge of fragments, and taught six people, including Misha, a dance called After Many a Summer Dies the Swan, which was the title of a Huxley novel from nineteen, the late '30s, I think. And I subsequently learned it was a line in a Tennyson poem, but it seemed very apt for a dance involving Baryshnikov, who was leaving his classical background with swans and sorcerers and whatever, to take on postmodern choreographers. So that was the beginning. That was performed in 2000. And there have been about three, four dances since then commissioned by Performa, which is a kind of unofficial booking agent for me now.

CB: One of the things that Performa has been very much a part of, I think, in this city and beyond, is a sort of renaissance of performance art,

YR: Right.

CB: And also has really, in part, sparked this discourse around what I was calling re-performance and what you call reconstruction.

YR: Mm-hm.

CB: And I wonder if you could think about that, for a moment, in relationship to your own work? You have recreated or reconstructed Trio A. Earlier, you mentioned there was the Continuous Project reconstruction, but how, sort of, philosophically, what are your thoughts about re-performance and reconstruction?

YR: Well, originally, reconstruction was simply a remounting, I'd say, of a ballet, by someone who was in the original production and remembered it. You might call it reconstruction or revival, whatever. *Trio A Pressured* is a new version of the

original. *Continuous Project Altered Daily* as done by Christophe Wavelet's group, was a new version, I guess. I don't know what re-performance, r e dash performance is really, it's not, hasn't entered a specific category yet. What [Abramovic](#) did here in MoMA, I guess, she called it re-performance? Yeah? Or what did she call that?

CB: I'm not sure if she herself called it re-performance, but that is the terminology that has become attached to it, I think, when she did *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim, the sort of restaging,

YR: Restaging, yes.

CB: It's part restaging, [re-performing? 0:10:00] reconstructing, too.

YR: Yeah, yeah; uh-huh. You know, it depends on the original documentation, how precise it is, how good the memories are. All this terminology is up for grabs.

CB: As you think about the legacy and the future life of your own work and say, taking *Trio A* as one example, are you, how will it be preserved, and what are your intentions for it?

YR: It is preserved by me doing it in '78, which was thirteen years after it was created.

CB: For film.

YR: In the film, yes. So that's sort of the template. But that's very inexact. It had a fixed camera. There are some close-ups of the details of it, but I had not performed for three or four years, and I was not in very good condition. I don't consider it an ideal reproduction of the dance. And I mean, the floor patterns are very precise, and you can't see what the floor patterns are in the dance, what with the foreshortening of the space. I sent a copy of that DVD to the Library of Congress. I am applying, finally, at this late date, getting it copyrighted, for what that's worth. And there are four people who are authorized to teach it. Pat Catterson is one, Emily Coates, Linda Johnson on the west coast, now a student of mine, a former student from Irvine, to

whom I taught it, Sara Wookey. She is authorized to teach it. So there are these younger people who, and after them, I don't know. I think a dance like that will inevitably suffer, you know, in fifty years, say, it will not be the same, although Sara Wookey is the one who has made very detailed notes on my language, my metaphors that I use to teach it. I mean, the very beginning, the arms circling the body, I always teach it with "rocks at the end of a string," right? So you can imagine what that is. Rather than a placement of the arms, it's very relaxed, like a weight at the end of your arms. So she has made notes on that. She's tried to get them published, even. So all of this helps in the preservation of a dance.

CB: I want to just remark that it was, for the record, that it was also re-performed by Sally Silvers and her, I believe her group of dancers, but also Pat Catterson, I know, was involved, when it was at MoMA PS1 in conjunction with the Whack exhibition.

YR: Oh.

CB: The film was shown, and then a number of early dances, as well as Trio A, were redone, which was, I think, a wonderful response to that history that was laid out by that exhibition, and the film was part of the exhibition, too. And then, of course, you redid it again recently, calling it Trio A Geriatric with Talking in 2010.

YR: Right. Which is a whole new version that acknowledges my ancient status [laughing] and my difficulties with- especially with getting up and down off the floor. And so I comment on that as I am doing it, and intersperse the dance with readings from Coetzee's<sup>9</sup> novel, pages I've spread around the floor. So it's something else entirely. I made a new dance out of it. But if you look at it as a re-performance of *Trio A*, I mean, it's really kind of pathetic. It's not the dance, it's something else.

CB: Well, it reminds me of this term that you have often used, calling yourself a collagist

YR: Yes.

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<sup>9</sup> Diary of a Bad Year (2007) YR

CB: That part of your strategy, you think of as one of collaging.

YR: That's true. Or, I always use Susan Sontag's term "radical juxtaposition," placing things that are incongruous or don't seem to go together, pushing them together and seeing what happens, like language and movement. And that goes way back to my first, oh, 1963, my first evening-length work called *Terrain*. It was at Judson, and there's a section in there called *Solo Section*. It's a series of movements that were made independently of the stories by Spencer Holst, two different stories, about his grandfather, and the movement and the recitation are totally independent, and slide along simultaneously with each other. The body does one thing, the voice does another. So I was always interested in that, rather than interpreting a text, but rather juxtaposing a text.<sup>10</sup>

CB: So, since we're there, talking about the evening of late work in '63, maybe you could also just briefly touch on the *No Manifesto*?

YR: Yes, the *No Manifesto* was a kind of a rant: No to spectacle, No to, oh, it started with, No to spectacle, ended with, No to moving or being moved. And it was [the end of] an essay that followed the *Mattress piece*, *Parts of Some Sextets*. I was thinking about if the implications of that dance had been taken to an extreme, or a logical extreme, it would have resulted in the following statement: No to spectacle<sup>11</sup>, No to the wiles of the performer, No to camp, No to trash imagery, No to- and I've since modified all of this. I mean, it was never meant to be prescriptive. It was simply an extreme statement that is meant to clear the air, or rethink, or to problematize things-givens or idées reçues. Hardly anyone-and there has hardly been anyone who has ever written about my work who hasn't brought it up, and I have to constantly explain what the original context was. It's like a dog barking at my heels for forty years [laughing].

CB: It's a little like [Richard Serra's](#) Verb drawing.

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<sup>10</sup> For *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan*, I used that same movement sequence with a Nabakov essay. YR

<sup>11</sup> No to transformation or magic YR

YR: Verb?

CB: List of verbs.

YR: Oh, what is that?

CB: It's a similar kind of a manifesto, although, of action, I guess. No sneezing, no running,

YR: Oh yes, I think I've, right; right. Pushing, yes; I've read that.

CB: And it's kind of related to the process-based sculpture, but it's occurs to me that it's a similar sort of

[Crew Discussion]

CB: In the 1984 interview that you did with Lynn Blumenthal, at the end of that interview, she asks you what constitutes success in your work. And one of the things you say is this very interesting idea about two things, really. One is creating a social resonance, making a work that continues to ask questions and create discourse. And I thought that was really interesting. You also talk about this idea of doubt, or almost dissonance. I don't think you used the word dissonance, but, I wonder if you could sort of reflect on those two things, particularly the idea of a social resonance.

YR: Well, that's very idealistic. I never expected art to change the world, although it has certainly created upheavals in various places. You might say Facebook, is that art? I don't know. It certainly has contributed to what's happening in the Middle East. Social resonance. Also, I never expected my work really to reach a large audience. I have been satisfied with fairly specialized audiences, cognoscenti who are familiar with the terms and the history of what I do.

CB: And yet, recently

YR: Oh, and yes, I just lost the thread but it came back. Like, I can't imagine, although I may have once aspired to performing in a place like [the] Brooklyn Academy of Music, or like- but now I feel my work is intimate and I perform it in fairly small venues. So the social- and also, there's the preaching to the converted with the more political implications and subject matter of my films, say. I feel that yes, art can give sustenance to people who are of the same mindset or sensibility or political agreement with oneself. And that's a social contribution, I feel, yes.

CB: When you speak about making work or being satisfied with an intimate audience for the work, it makes me think, actually, of MoMA and of institutions like this where contemporary art has become really a success story, and where we have this abundance of audience all the time.

YR: Numbers, they're counted, yes.

CB: Absolutely. And how, in a way, part of our job, both, I think, as an artist, but also from the museum perspective, is about translating these very specific and often intimate ideas to such a broad public and such a constant public like there is here.

YR: Yes.

CB: And as you think about your work in the context of MoMA, I wonder if you think about that issue of the audience at all?

YR: No, as I said, I'm not interested in broadening my audience. I really am not, less and less. I'm making the work and keeping the people who work with me interested. And although it isn't just for friends, certainly, but it's for a small audience, pretty much; yes.

CB: That's really nice. Let me just look here, what else we might want to

YR: Is Connie being miked? I mean, is what she says going to be in this? Because it doesn't make sense, just one side, you know. I mean, we're having a conversation. This always happens. I mean, we're having a conversation. Are you picking up on what Connie is saying?

CB: Apparently not.

MJ: Are you asking me? Yes.

YR: Yes. You are.

MJ: Yes, I understand that there is a method to what we're doing.

CB: I think afterward, I'm supposed to go back and restate some questions, which is actually going to be almost impossible for me to do. [laughing]

YR: Yes; yes; yes. No, I should have worked this out beforehand. You should be on camera, and yes, we should both. I mean, it's an equal proposition, here.

CB: Well. Well, I know this is probably going to be hard for you because I feel like we're sort of winding up and I just, but, just going back and hitting a couple of things we didn't maybe speak about, and thinking, again, in the context of MoMA's collection of Fluxus, for example. But I was thinking, you mentioned Robert Morris and his texts and thoughts about anti-form in terms of sculpture, but I was also thinking about happenings and how that was very much a context and a discourse in the 1960s, and if you might want to reflect on that at all, Allan Kaprow and so forth.

YR: Yes, I certainly went to a lot of happenings at the Rubin Gallery, [George Segal's](#) farm in 1963. Yes, I thought a lot of – I was a dance person, and the painterly happenings didn't affect me very much. A lot of the work was very visual, and pictorial, and macho and, yes, I was more specialized. But I went to everything. I mean, the milieu was, it was just provocative, yes. I can't say I was directly affected by it, by a lot of the work. And Fluxus I always found kind of silly [laughing] but funny, yes, in a Dada sort of way.

CB: Silly, how?

YR: Oh, like the, it went directly back to Dada or to the Futurists, Futurist Sintesi, like the orchestra is there and the conductor comes out. He raises his baton and the lights go off. A Futurist event was, a man comes out and he says, "I have no idea what I'm doing here;" and he leaves. [laughing] That was it. So, yes, there was the shock of the ridiculous that was operating, and I enjoyed that; yes.

CB: And also you mentioned earlier, of course, Merce Cunningham as being really an important beginning point for you. And I think you mentioned Duchamp, as well, and I wonder if you wanted to elaborate a little bit on those ideas, Duchamp's ideas, which were certainly circulating again in the 1960s.

YR: Yes, well, the unlikely object that demanded to be looked at as art, and that was a big influence on a lot of what went on at Judson. Steve Paxton and I used to joke that he invented walking, and I invented running, because these two activities had never been seen in a formal theatrical setting. And now you see dancers walking all the time. Even Cunningham did not – they walked in a particular way, a very stylized way, or they ran with their arms shaped, held at their sides. They still do. So, they said of me, when I started out, there were critics, "She walks as though she's in the street;" which was descriptive, very true, and something that I took for granted that yes, that was the way I was going to walk.

CB: Which is in a way, this Duchampian idea of the found gesture.

YR: Yes, the found object, the found movement. Yes; right; exactly. And then Cage taking this up with the, you turn on a blender and that's music; right? Yes. Stillness, everyday sounds, et cetera.

CB: What else have we missed? Is there anything else here? I think we pretty much got all the films. *Murder and murder*.

YR: The last one, the last feature; yes. 1996, it was about a lesbian relationship, somewhat autobiographical. Two women get together in middle age. One is an academic, the other is some kind of performance artist. And they have their ups and downs. One of them gets breast cancer, which I was diagnosed with in '93. Had a

mastectomy, as one of the characters goes through. Then there's a whole thing about the medical profession, and, what else is in that film? Yes, there are various enactments of the contentiousness of the relationship. There is a boxing ring with breast cancer statistics on the canvas. And we actually went to Stillman's Gym in Brooklyn and learned some maneuvers for sparring. And there are my two protagonists in boxing gloves, duking it out. And it ends with –(yes, I've used this device before) you hear a phone ringing, and Doris, one of the women, she goes to a corner of the ring, she picks up a telephone, and says, "Yes?" And says, "Oh yeah, that's great. Yes, see you later." And she turns around, and says, "Mildred, we've got a cat!" And they embrace, and Doris says, "How about dinner and a show?" So it's resolved. And so, yes, all the ways in which everyday life can be performed, that's one of the things that I was interested in, in film. Like, I put some of their arguments on a stage, a garishly lit stage. Or, there's a, Doris is looking at a video. It's of me in a tuxedo doing some rant about homophobia. And Doris responds, "Oh, is that PBS?" So I've found these ways of mounting these everyday, soap-opera-like situations as performance, on TV, on a stage, in a boxing ring, et cetera.

CB: And thinking maybe more broadly about the social context of the subject of that film, there's the relationship of these two women, and that film's made in 1996. And thinking about now, as you anticipate coming back to New York, a place where gay marriage has just been, last week, written into law, what do you think about that?

YR: Yes. Right. I'm of two minds about it, frankly. My parents didn't get married until after my brother and I were born. They didn't believe in marriage. They got married because they had property and for legal reasons. I mean, one part of me thinks the state has no business sanctioning or interfering with private relations, and the only reason to get married is to get the other guy's pension, you know, or their benefits, economic and legal benefits. But there's this other aspect of it, and it has been elaborated in the papers and in articles, that sexual difference is being elided in this drive to be normal, and a standardized idea of what constitutes normal behavior. Also legally, incredible complications. You get married in one state, but you live in another, and if you want to get divorced, how do you come back to New York and

stay there until you can get divorced? I mean, it's just, it's going to be a mess. And ethically and legally there are just many sides to it.

CB: I just wanted to get that in. I totally agree with you. I think, is there anything else that you, that might be a comment specific, because this is an oral history taking place at MoMA, when we were talking about collage, you mentioned Picasso, which is true, but a bit of a reach, as well. Is there any other reflection that you have on, again, sort of, walking through the galleries upstairs, when you were talking about the politics of work, yours and others, I was thinking that the way that Minimalism is presented in museums in general, is so emptied out, actually, of the politics of that moment, or even of the humor, it seems.

YR: And the history, the particular history. Yes, they're just objects without meaning, yes, without social meaning. It's odd. It seems very dead, the Minimal rooms. And that's unfortunate. It was a very vital time, and how do you communicate that? I mean, why isn't there voiceover in those galleries? Well, I guess, are there headphones?

CB: Not with the artists' voices, mostly with another kind of narrative.

YR: Not the artists. Yes, with more pontifical, yes. Yes. They are rooms you just walk through. There's nothing to study, or, you're not given much to think about.

CB: In those galleries, because they were just installed, we installed, as I'm sure you saw, that gallery with [Hannah Wilke's](#) work. [MoMA exhibition #2138]

YR: Oh yes, now that's an interesting room with all of her work.

CB: It feels to me very much like the introduction of content, subjectivity, feminism, perhaps.

YR: Yes yes, yes. And the [Broodthaers](#) room [MoMA exhibition #2138], you sense a discourse about nationality, I mean, all the Belgian references. But the Judd [laughing] and the – there's no Morris in there, right? There's no Morris at all.

CB: Not at this moment. He is usually. He is not there at the moment.

YR: Yes; yes. Because I remember when he first showed those grey pieces, they were hilarious. They were such a statement about presence and protest and rejection.

CB: Rejection of what?

YR: Their immediate past- right? I mean, it was such a – I remember he told me that Philip Johnson, his platform, when he saw that, he said he wanted to swat it. [laughing] I mean, there was something so challenging about the presence of these smooth, identity-less objects. But now, you know, now, yes, they are identity-less, these objects, and their challenge is removed, you know, or their sense of there-ness and what they meant then. But I mean, that's, it's not inevitable, but I think Minimalism, minimalist sculpture, especially, suffers from this. I remember going to [McCracken's](#) apartment on Houston Street with Bob Morris. McCracken was unknown. He was another generation. And we looked at this column, wood, it was, white painted column. We circled around it, studiously, dutifully. And when we left, I said to Morris, "You and [Donald Judd](#) have, the two of you have created a [laughing] generation of cretins." Even then, the next generation's, like, it was over. You know? That statement had been made. Why embellish it? It couldn't be improved on. Which is not the case with a lot of art movements, I don't think, but I feel this about Minimalism.

CB: It's certainly not the case with feminism, just thinking again of Hannah Wilke. But certainly, the legacy of feminist art, and yours included, I guess, in that category, I think continues to be so rich. But, many other things, as well. Um, is there anything else you want to add?

YR: Well, my recent choreography, maybe, I can say a few words about the way – I mean, it's odd. I've returned to choreography, but I don't expect it to say any more than what it said in the '60s. But I need, in each piece I make, I need language to give some other dimension to it. So in the last piece, Assisted Living, what I read, I read from a book about the history of human rights. I read from Cynthia Carr's book about racism and the Ku Klux Klan. So, it has nothing, no direct connection, to the

dance, but yet, there are these two things going on that are necessary, I feel. The dance alone is not enough. The choreography is not enough. And in the preceding dance, *Spiraling Down*, the dancers went to a podium and read various statements from Sylvia Plath, from<sup>12</sup>, I mean, whatever I'm reading that interests me at the moment during the time in which I am rehearsing a dance, I put in there, like Coetzee's novel for *Trio A*. And it's very important that we read, not recite. It's very clear that we don't own, we have not written, this material; we don't own this material. We are reading, we are quoting, so, the act of reading is important for me.

CB: Maybe in closing, I was thinking that, you are doing this first of these oral history interviews, you're actually the first one to do it. And in this kind of first run of artists who have agreed to participate, I think you're the only performer. You're the only – I'm sure you're the only dancer. But I think institutionally, we really felt that it was increasingly more and more important to include performance, to include dance, choreographic work, in the narratives of modernism and post modernism that we tell of the last century and this one. And that's the reason for the inclusion of *Trio A* increasingly in the permanent collection installations. It's happened once; I'm sure it will happen again. But I wonder what you think about, in a way, the legacy of these multiple ways in which you've worked. I think, I mean, you're here at The Museum of Modern Art where, which has been a temple of painting and sculpture historically, but also many other media are in the collection, and now, again, trying to represent those in different ways. It's not so much a question as a

YR: I mean, for the Museum to acquire those interviews, like [Lynne] Blumenthal. There was another in Boston, Gardner, Robert Gardner did a series. And I'm sure there are many, many others. And in a way, it gets harder and harder for me because, as I told you earlier, the names disappear. I'm reciting or remembering what I already said, and so to have a fresh take on what one does or did is kind of hard. So, but, I'm sure it, or I hope, it will be useful, and you get a sense of certainly a personality, the way I rock back and forth [laughing] and the way people use their hands.

[Crew Discussion]

**END RAINER\_T05 at 0:47:53**

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<sup>12</sup> Marcel Mauss and others

**END INTERVIEW**