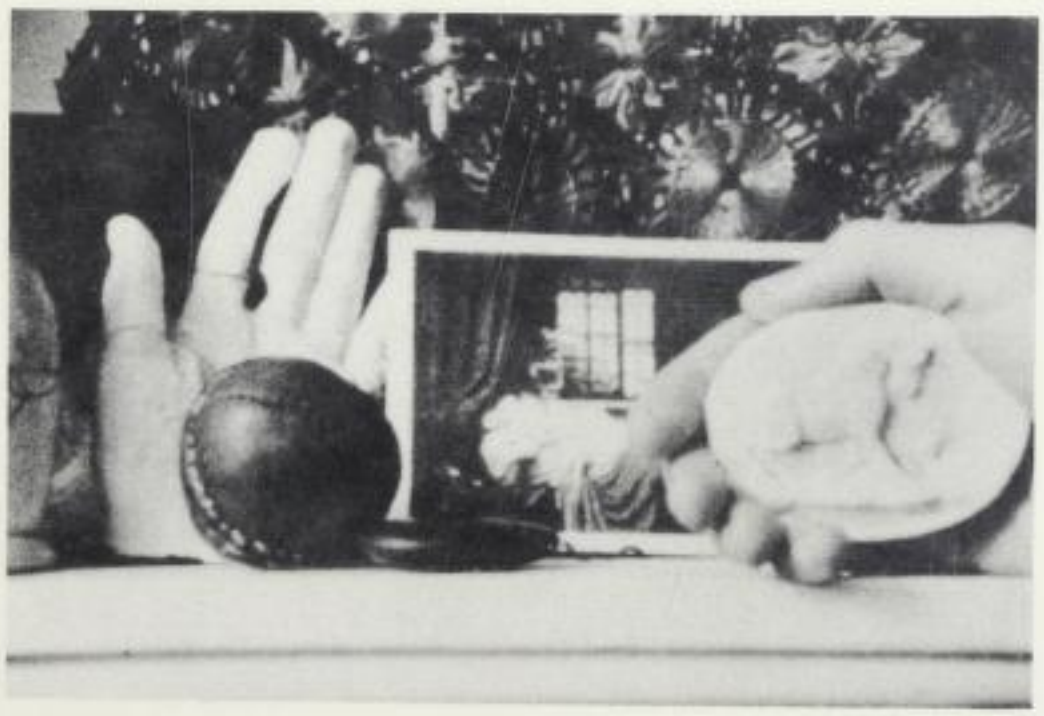
RADICAL JUXTAPOSITION

The Films of Yvonne Rainer

by Shelley Green



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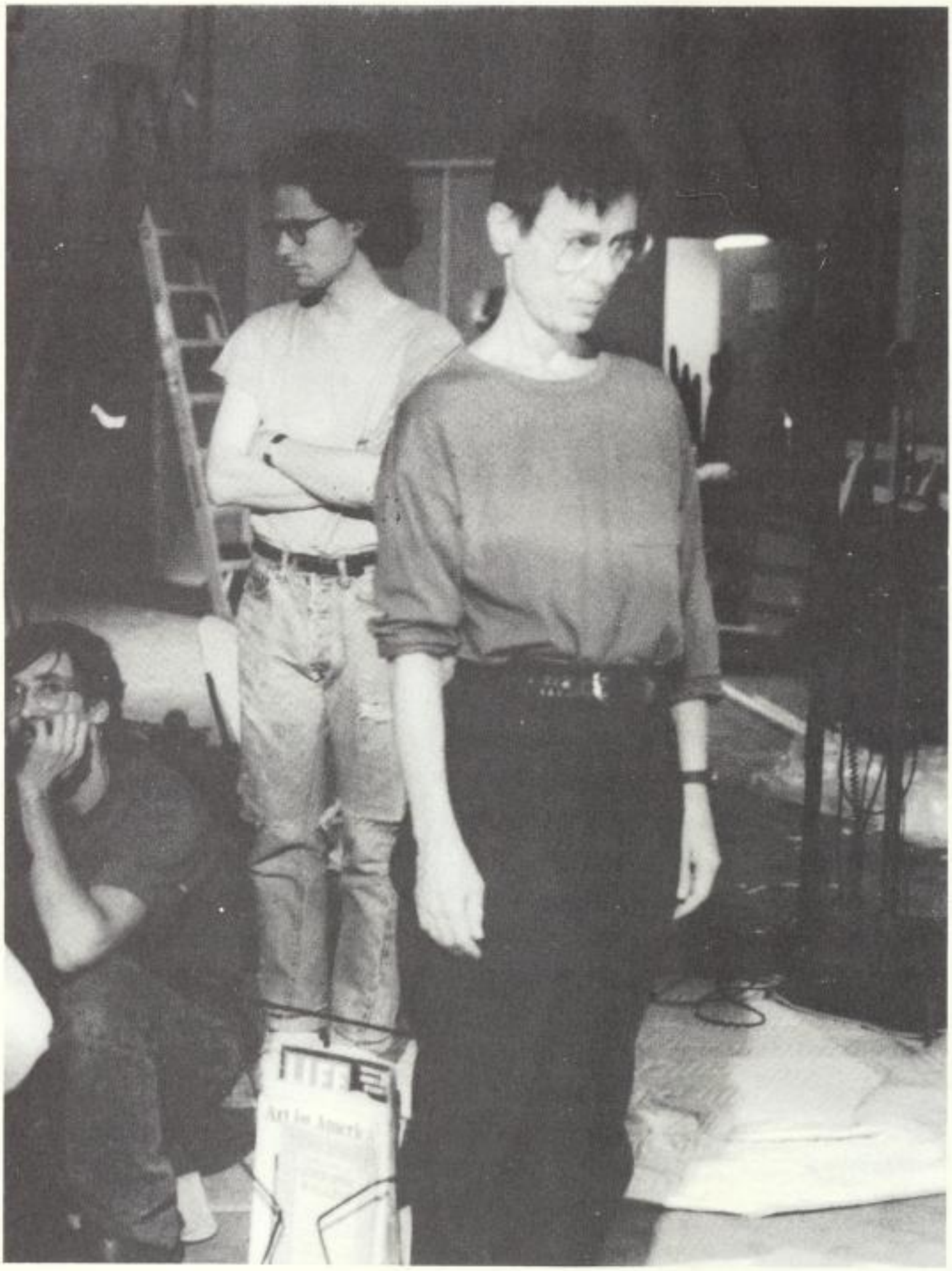

Yvonne Rainer and film crew at work during shooting of *Privilege* (1990).

Radical Juxtaposition:

The Films of Yvonne Rainer

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Shelley Green

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For Andy and Zooey

Wherever life touches us most directly, that's where you'll find the cinema. And that's what'll survive. Nothing else.

—Werner Herzog

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Grappling daily with Rainer's filmic texts was a challenging and enlivening experience. If my treatment of Rainer's work occasionally borders on the adoring, it is almost certainly because, in this case, I could see the opportunity not to be cynical or ironic. It was refreshing for me to so openly admire Yvonne Rainer's original vision and her artistic and personal integrity.

Introduction

In 1980, B. Ruby Rich assessed Yvonne Rainer's contributions to American independent cinema this way: "Rainer has influenced the course of avant-garde filmmaking in the past decade more thoroughly perhaps than any other one person."[1] Over a decade later, Rainer has sustained that reputation and clearly established herself as one of avant-garde's central figures. From a present-day perspective, it is interesting to note that in 1971, considering her then very recent involvement in film-making, Rainer invoked the statement, "My films are not to be taken that seriously" to convey her sense that the film work she had done to date was "a boring hybrid, too obvious and too simplistic to work as either film or dance."[2] The series of short, silent films done with various cinematographers from 1967 to 1969 (see Filmography), represented "filmed choreographic exercises that were meant to be viewed with one's peripheral vision."[3] Indeed, it is her transition from dancer/performer/choreographer to filmmaker that propelled Rainer from an already well-established position in the avant-garde dance world to one of the most original and continually provocative independent filmmakers of the last two decades; it is also significant to note that it is probably *because* of her beginnings in dance that her films remain unique. Her performance work is what prompted Frederick Castle to write

> Yvonne is the Master of a synthetic art called Art, or for the benefit of the young and ill-informed, the Abstract of All. Like many of Art's Masters, she also performs in an abstract manner, so there can be no doubt as to what she is about. The content of Art is Art. The meaning of one thing at a time is meaning anywhere. . . . A show by Yvonne Rainer is a survey and summary of everything.[4]

Rainer's manifold contributions to film through her feature-length works from 1972 to the present have received similar critical recognition and financial support. (The MacArthur Foundation of Chicago named

Rainer as a recipient of one of its annual genius awards in 1990.) With each new and rich film she has consistently proven her cinematic power and prowess, just as she did in dance. The attention to specificity and detail that accompanied her early performance work (and, likewise, the construction of her journalistic book, *Work: 1961-73*) finds form in her often brilliant reconstruction of cinematic narrative. From the transitional *Lives of Performers* (1972) and *Film About a Woman Who ...* (1974), the pivotal *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976) and ultimately through her later films, the demanding and complex *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), and *Privilege* (1990), Rainer has distinguished herself as a considerable force. In the exploration and definition of narrative strategy she has few peers; her work is relentless in its examination of film process and convention. Rainer's films have not only been taken seriously since the early seventies but they have also established her as one of the leading figures of the avant-garde.

Born in San Francisco in 1934, Rainer describes her early childhood as "very depressed. . . . I can't remember having other interests except basic survival and avoidance of embarrassing situations."[5] Her father and older brother's influence in her mid-teens provided her with a political (anarchist), artistic and radical milieu that centered around the Workman's Circle in San Francisco. (Her mother's financial assistance later supported her and allowed her to take acting and dance classes full-time.) She became part of the Theater Arts Colony, and it was there she found: "I loved being on the stage and I loved the whole ambiance of the theater. So I studied acting."[6] Because she was affected by a lisp, overcoming that problem became, at twenty-one, her "first triumph."[7] "It was like my first sense of achievement in transforming myself."[8]

In the mid-fifties Rainer met the painter Al Held and eventually followed him to New York in 1956. There she enrolled at the Herbert Berghof School of Acting where she took classes from Lee Grant. Later, when she attended Paul Mann's Actor's Workshop, she was "criticized for being too 'cerebral'"[9] and lost interest. She took her first dance class in New York in 1957, an experience she found totally exhilarating,[10] saw Erick Hawkins's *Here and Now with Watchers*, and decided to become a dancer.[11] This began a series of events, both personal and professional, that propelled her on a course that would eventually lead to her career in dance. She forthrightly discloses, "I decided that I was 'fucking around' in more ways than one, that I was getting too old to be a dancer, that I had better buckle down."[12]

Because the phrase she used in the above illuminating reminiscences would later resurface in mock autobiographical form in *Kristina Talking Pictures*, Rainer also points to her career as a filmmaker and the components of a narrative style that utilizes personal experience, even from this point. Rainer's autobiographical *Work: 1961-73*, published in 1974, is full of words, phrases, and language that reappear in various contexts throughout the films and are interesting to discover, if one is detective enough. For example, we learn that Rainer's father called her his "little Cookie." Amusingly, the distraught male caller in *Journeys From Berlin/1971* bemoans, "My father never called me 'Cookie.' " It is this kind of collage or perhaps surreal technique (plucking found, diverse elements and reinserting or rearranging them in a new and radical context) that she maps out in "Rudimentary Notes Toward a Changing View of Performance," in *Work*. It is important to understand these methods if one is to understand Rainer and the scope of her career and style. These are her "Levels of Performance Reality":

> Primary: Performing original material in a personal style.
> Secondary: Performing someone else's material in a style approximating the original, *or* working in a known style or genre.
> Tertiary: Performing someone else's material in a style completely different from, and/or inappropriate to, the original.[13]

Such discovery and reintegration of texts, objects, phrases, and autobiographical elements begin as early as *Lives of Performers* and continue to develop through *The Man Who Envied Women* and *Privilege*.

Between 1958 and 1960, Rainer studied with Martha Graham and saw films at the Museum of Modern Art, "getting a film education in old movies."[14] Her other early influences came from work with Robert Morris and Simone Forti. She cites Forti's *An Evening of Dance Constructions* as one of the seminal events of the early sixties.[15] Additionally, in Ann Halprin's workshop "this whole world of ideas developed: chance procedures, improvisation, task-movement generated by everyday tasks, use of the voice while moving, playing with words."[16] It was here she met Trisha Brown (who later became Trisha in *The Man Who Envied Women*) and others who remained influential. She further cites her work with James Waring in 1961," the mixture of camp and balleticism in his work," which she did not appreciate until much later.[17] It was Merce Cunningham's work that Rainer admits:

> . . . really stimulated me intellectually. The work did not deal with stories, with drama, with music. It seemed totally independent and freewheeling. It was difficult. It was ironic. There was something uncompromising in the way . . . he was not pandering to the audience either through music or high drama or psychological drama.[18]

In this, his work was antithetical to Graham's. Rainer's work with Robert Dunn at this time also introduced her to making dances that utilized John Cage scores, and it is both Cage and Cunningham whom Rainer often cites as major influences. "Ideas," she recalls, were "coming from all over."[19] Clearly, these radical and avant-garde forces were primary factors in shaping Rainer's development and modernist aesthetic sensibilities.

To summarize Rainer's important contributions to dance from this time until she gave her final public performance in 1975 is perhaps unfair (especially because much of her experience as performer and choreographer finds form in later cinematic exercises) but necessary in terms of this project. Full and enlightening biographical overviews of Rainer's breakthrough work in dance can be found in, among others, her *Work: 1961-73*, which includes a chronology of her own performances as well as those of others in which she has appeared and an "etymology of objects, configurations and characters" that have occurred in her performances. Also informative are Don McDonagh's "Yvonne Rainer/Why Does It Have To Be That Way?" in *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance*, Annette Michelson's *Artforum* articles, and Jill Johnston's "Modern Dance." Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp's "Performer as a Persona," Lyn Blumenthal's very complete *Profile*, which is used substantially (and gratefully) here, and the *Camera Obscura* Collective's "Yvonne Rainer: Introduction and Interview" incorporate extensive interviews with Rainer, who is always forthcoming and astute in her observations.

As one of the founders of the Judson Church group in the mid-sixties, Rainer presented such key performances as *Ordinary Dance*, *We Shall Run*, *Word Words*, *Terrain*, *Room Service*, *Shorter End of a Small Piece*, *Part of a Sextet*, and a version of *The Mind is a Muscle*, to enthusiastic reception. Rainer's success at that time, and her description of it further anticipate themes that become enunciated and developed in her film work.

> [Success meant] mutual enthusiasm on the part of the performers. What excited me was that we had done it together. It was definitely a social and cooperative group event with a tremendous feeling of solidarity and *esprit de corps*. . . . It certainly seemed an alternative to that single-

> minded social structure that fulfilled personal ambition and was a very isolated event.[20]

The spirit of artistic collaboration, examined with such depth of feeling in *Lives of Performers* and *Kristina Talking Pictures* (and, in a more general sense in *Privilege*) further underlined the bridge between a dancer's "love [of] the body" and its engagement in various other activities, especially in movement with objects, with "the superstylization of the dancer. Interaction and cooperation on the one hand; substantiality and inertia on the other."[21]

Other dominant concerns that come out of this structure become transformed into cinematic productions, among them, as Rainer notes, "undermining or making reference to certain kinds of theatricality that I was then becoming more and more in opposition to."[22] Dances that incorporated pedestrian movement like running or walking, experimentation and her infatuation with language,[23] recitation, use of repetitive and chance procedures, and Rainer's complex use of fragmentation and autobiography emerged and began to evolve. Rainer's description of one section of *Terrain* is revealing.

> We learned the story independently and learned the sequence of movements, and I had no predetermined notion of where the movement would mesh with the image. There were lines like "My grandfather told me that his grandmother baked huge round cookies; and, whatever animal my father asked for, my great-grandfather could quickly bite the cookie into that shape." Of course, whatever shape the dancer's body was in then or traversing, you were immediately able make this connection. With the coherence but also the diversity of detail in these stories, I had no doubt that there would be points of convergence that would make themselves manifest to the audience. Sure enough, there were.[24]

Rainer's refusal to "pander to the audience or seduce them with my presence"[25] signaled her early rejection of the narcissistic, exhibitionist display of virtuosity inherent in performance. In one performance she blackened her face. In *The Mind is a Muscle*, she refused to face the audience. "Every time the body would face the audience . . . the eyes would be closed, and I would avert my gaze, literally block it."[26] Such a device is representative of her narrative work in film; for example, in the long bedroom scene with her brother Ivan in *Kristina*. Her imbedded photo shows eyes closed; her gaze (or friendly gesture) is aimed directly at Ivan

or down toward the blanket, even though the scene might be shot from head-on. This distancing device, in part, helps to confound what might otherwise be considered a spectator-seductive scene. Indeed, at times the audience of a performance was *so* unseduced that Rainer reports

> At that point the audiences at the Judson were getting tired of some of the minimalist work. They were bored. . . . The only way out of Judson, if you were in the audience, was to walk across the performance space, and that is what happened at that concert. People trudged unhappily [and] disconsolately across that space to get out.[27]

By about 1970, Rainer helped to form what would become the Grand Union. Her continuing use of written (or spoken) texts, such as words sewn onto aprons or bibs; slides; *tableaux vivants;* developing the separation of performers into characters; juxtaposing ideas about scale; and the minimalistic preoccupation with objects, such as the rolling staircase seen later in *Lives of Performers,* combined to provide Rainer's ultimate "entry into narrative."[28] In addition, she says, "I left dance for film because I wanted to deal with emotional issues. Film . . . offered the possibilities of integrating imagery and literature in more complex ways than I felt were available to me in the theater."[29] Rainer's changing use of texts, initially to disrupt a sense of temporality, presents an important component in her filmic narrative strategies, one that is often underrated and overlooked.

> I use time in ways that were never possible for me before. . . . You don't know when those events were happening, or what time the author, the director, me, is trying to indicate that they happen, except in obvious places where a commentary says, "two weeks later," or "now he is thinking about something that happened a couple of months ago . . . ." There's no attempt to create some kind of consistent illusion about the passage of time. And yet a passage of time *is* conveyed through the dialogue and narration. . . . The text now is an attempt to build a fictional continuity and cohesiveness. The text in the past was an isolated element that was meant to enrich a sequence of events and very often replaced music. It was often very disjunctive. Yet even the very first text I ever used, which was [an] autobiographical monologue of *Ordinary Dance* in '62, had its own consistency. . . . [Additionally, the sound of a text] is still very important.[30]

Rainer's critical transition from dance to film was thus begun and initially manifested in approximately 1971, a year of some consequence for her.

> The conventions of cinematic narratives seemed to offer more possibilities. I was already thinking in terms of framing and voice-over. In 1971, I did what was to be a precedent for this intermediary state [between dance and film]. It was called *Performance*. I also shot and rough cut a version of *Lives of Performers* that went into *Performance*. Dual versions that were done simultaneously. The last section of *Lives of Performers* was presented as film on one side and *tableaux vivants* on the other. . . . I was not happy in my physical condition. I was unhappy with being looked at, with that whole thing. . . . My condition of performing was not longer satisfactory. And I was ready to move on. It was not an easy transition.[31]

"In 1961 [performing] was the most urgent thing I could do," Rainer states. By 1972 she admitted, "It means less and less to me; I don't need performance to survive, and at one point I did."[32] The significant change in the treatment of performance that she does *not* desert, however, is the development of the

> performer as persona. I'm now involved in trying to develop a certain kind of narrative and since my work in a broad sense is always autobiographical, my present point of departure is my own persona of performer.[33]

Thus, performers or artists exist in one manifestation or another, if only because that is what Rainer represents when she appears, in most of her films.

Under a travel grant awarded by Experiments in Art and Technology, Rainer spent part of 1971 traveling in India. While there, she attended musical and dramatic events and "went into a deep funk and was flooded with contemptuous feelings toward my culture and my place therein."[34] Her "Responses to India" article in *Drama Review* of 1971 chronicles her experience immediately thereafter. Affected by India's stories, legends, and mythologies, their profound impact helped to change her relation to dance and narrative. The immediate result, stemming also from an intense amount of reading of and about Jung as well as a book by Colin Turnbull titled *The Forest People*, was the creation of *Grand Union Dreams*. Culling sentences and paragraphs from these sources and incorporating objects

and images that had previously appeared in Grand Union performances and her own work, the characters (Gods, Heroes and Mortals), texts, images, etc., constituted part of what would become *Lives of Performers*. Valda Setterfield's solo, originally choreographed for *Grand Union Dreams*, is incorporated as well.

Notably, 1971 was also the beginning of the end of Rainer's work with the Grand Union. Uncomfortable with the authoritarian role bestowed on her (mostly from outside the group) as leader and chief creative controller at that time, Rainer opted out.

From this time forward, Rainer was unquestionably moving toward narrative investigation related to cinema. When asked, she cites influences that are more directly rooted in film art. Andy Warhol's stationary camera and prolonged time sense allowed a character to emerge. Her narrative relation to Jean-Luc Godard is felt by audiences, in his continual questioning of cinematic structure and its relation to complex ideas and politics, although Rainer disallows his direct influence. She repeatedly mentions the independent filmmakers Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton; Snow's landmark *Wavelength*, and Frampton's *Otherwise Unexplained Fires* are quoted in *The Man Who Envied Women*. "Anyone who uses a repetitive camera movement must acknowledge Snow's influence," Rainer accurately observes.[35] She further cites Renoir, Vigo, Bresson, and also Dreyer for his sense of pacing and stillness; her viewing of Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* early in life made a significant impact. Beyond the realm of film, she has always referred to Duchamp, Cunningham, and Cage as sources. Typically, however, she asserts (and intentionally puns?), "It seems unproductive to refer to these remote 'fathers.' The limb one goes out on is finally one's own."[36]

Her resonant and singular film work from 1972 forward is detailed in the following chapters. The major contributors to scholarship of Rainer, beyond those already cited for their useful biographical information, are B. Ruby Rich, whose monograph for the Walker Art Center in 1981 offers a summary of her brilliant analyses of Rainer, Lucy Lippard, Patricia Mellencamp, Peggy Phelan, Robert Storr, and any of Rainer's own revealing articles and interviews. Teresa de Lauretis's exceptional insights in previously published essays are valuable. *The Films of Yvonne Rainer*, which she edited, includes five scripts, an interview, and several essays.

The viewer of a Rainer film must analyze Rainer's devotion to the primacy of narrative. As an artist of accretion and intersection (or Master of Art and All), it is her adeptness and dexterity in juggling the disparate

and disjunctive elements that she unabashedly exhibits that provide compelling and complex work. A relentless choreographer, she structures a filmic milieu that provides abundant opportunity for multiple components to find "points of convergence," as she did in *Terrain*. More importantly, perhaps, it is her determination to challenge the spectator to find meaning or other connections in her fragmented and distancing narratives that renders her films unquestionably difficult (or perhaps, too cerebral). But it is just such diversity in the cinematic fabric that contributes to a resuscitation of form. "Incongruity can transform the banal into the fantastic," Rainer writes. "Two images—familiar in ambiance but incongruent in time—when juxtaposed, create a third reality."[37] Meditations on relationships of all kinds, Rainer's constructs are transgressive in the way they blithely maneuver cinematic conventions or create new conventions as needed, creating their own realities. What results almost dependably in every film is a radical way of looking, a radical understanding of personal experience and public event, and the radical juxtaposition[38] of colliding and contradictory ingredients.

Notes

1. B. Ruby Rich, "The Revolutionary Psyche," *Chicago Reader* 4 April 1980, sec. 1:16.
2. Rainer, *Work: 1961-73* (Halifax: Press of Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), 209.
3. Ibid.
4. Fred Castle, "To Go To Show Them," *Art News* (Summer 1968): 34-35.
5. Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, eds., "Yvonne Rainer," *Profile* 4.5 (1984):3.
6. Ibid., 4.
7. Rainer, *Work*, 3.
8. Blumenthal and Horsfield, "Yvonne Rainer," 4.
9. Rainer, *Work*, 3.
10. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 4.
11. Rainer, *Work*, 4.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 130.
14. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 6.
15. Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "The Performer as a Persona," *Avalanche* (Summer 1972): 54.
16. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 9.
17. Rainer, *Work*, 6.
18. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 6.
19. Ibid., 11.
20. Ibid., 14.

21. Rainer in Castle, "To Go," 35.
22. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 14.
23. Rainer, *Work,* viii.
24. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 17.
25. Ibid., 19.
26. Ibid., 20.
27. Ibid., 21.
28. Ibid., 27.
29. Noël Carroll, "Yvonne Rainer: Mortal Questions," *SoHo Weekly News* 7:20 (1980):42.
30. Bear and Sharp, "Performer as a Persona," 55.
31. Blumenthal and Horsfield, 27-29.
32. Bear and Sharp, 57-58.
33. Ibid., 50.
34. Rainer, *Work,* 189.
35. Chantal Pontbriand, "Interview with Yvonne Rainer," *Parachute* 10 (1978): 47.
36. Ibid., 48.
37. Rainer, *Work,* 276.
38. Carroll, "Mortal Questions," 4.

Chapter One

Lives of Performers

> Cliché is, in a sense, the purest art of intelligibility; it tempts us with the possibility of enclosing life within beautifully inalterable formulas, of obscuring the arbitrary nature of imagination with an appearance of necessity.
>
> —Leo Bersani

This declaration, which begins Yvonne Rainer's 1972 film *Lives of Performers*, suggests a convenient springboard to meaning by which an audience could ultimately hope to read and understand Rainer's unconventional and intricate first major film project. But it is textual meaning and cinematic convention both that seem to concern Rainer, whose sensibilities, while iconoclastic, mirror avant-garde artists of the seventies whose direction provided new cinematic models. Self-reflexivity; the use of distancing devices to achieve nonillusionary or self-conscious art; experimentation with rhetoric, language, and cinematic sound; the modernist tendency away from traditional narrative codes of form and structure; and the often intentionally ironic interplay between the personal, autobiographical and emotional intent of the filmmaker and any resulting meaning or functional significance often provided the paradox upon which beautifully inalterable formulas could be systematically challenged and, often, discarded or reinvented. Thus, in *Lives of Performers*, Yvonne Rainer offers an elegantly balanced and repetitive melodrama that re-examines the nature of cliché, in interpersonal relationships as well as in art. The reworking of the narrative, cinematic genre, techniques, and images (and for Rainer, in particular, corresponding commitment to this kind of examination in dance and performance, resulting in contemporarily synthesized art forms) is tightly juxtaposed with a set of romantic, psychological, emotional, and behavioral clichés whose patterns are at once

familiar and recognizable (from real life), yet made so repetitive, predictable, flat, and self-conscious as sometimes to seem silly or banal. Since this is the essence of cliché, the viewer has the unique experience and pleasure of participating in the construct (we recognize the underlying truth in any cliché) and of being simultaneously distanced from it (we are reminded constantly that the film is a series of performances, rehearsals for performances past and present, and that even these performances will be repeated due to the nature of film).

In *Lives of Performers* we are indeed tempted to enjoy the pleasant romantic melodrama enacted for us but, as we are reminded throughout the film, because the action in *Lives* is an enactment, an experiment by definition, it is the more complicated structure, the film itself, which becomes of paramount interest and importance. It is the imagination behind the film, behind the movements of the dancers and performers (acting as fictional characters, yet using their real names), behind the lines of written (or at times improvised) dialogue, behind the matrix of sound track, editing, and image that allows the viewer an authentic, profoundly meaningful experience. *Lives of Performers* is not a wholly detached or didactic meditation on process or style, nor is it simply the melodrama that it rather coyly claims to be. Rather, through its devices and strategies it is a dynamic examination of the relation of the audience to the performer and, ultimately, to the creator of the artifact and to the artifact itself.

It might be said that one important result of this kind of cinematic composition is that somewhere between the creation of that artifact and the performance of it, the spectator's apprehension of the work reveals the true impact and dispels the cliché. The appearance of necessity is the compelling force that drives the sequences of this (melo)drama, engages the viewer, provides the intensity requisite for any spectator involvement; but it is the radical examination of the formulas and of the lives within those formulas that often drives the avant-garde artist. "Not showing off my skill but revealing my involvement," as Rainer once assessed her relationship to dance and her audience.[1] Not only does cliché tempt us to enclose life within inalterable formulas, but it also tempts us to enclose film and art in those same unshifting, unquestioned patterns. More complicated (and increasingly more radical) structures are often the result of improvisatory elements—in dance and in film—and Rainer's attention to improvisation and performance, to both the random and tightly composed elements of the conventions of film, and to the study of the balance and

structure (reconstruction) of the narrative, provide the seductive visual and verbal discourse of *Lives of Performers*.

Probably the most compelling aspects of *Lives* stem directly from Rainer's early work in dance and theatrical performance, and it is these stylistic elements that consistently resonate throughout the body of her work in cinema.

> The problem now at hand was that of locating new terms for the composition of fictional structures consistent with . . . secular modernist consciousness. How, indeed, was one to compose a narrative work without succumbing to the temptations of fictional illusionism and mythical reference? First, by falling back . . . to the terrain of the private, personal experience in the feeling that one's own life is as viable as any other material (more accessible, more usable at least). Next came the location of one's fictional resources through recognition that the forms and rhetoric of those psychological situations which compose the repertory of domestic drama, constitute a material which has at least the authenticity of one's own somewhat desperate investment of emotional energy. Finally, the conviction that one's analytic culture provides the point of departure for a series of formal variations upon disjunction (between sound and image, between present and past, between character and voice, between reading and speaking) that will render the fragmented Self which stands at the center of that fiction.[2]

While Annette Michelson (who appears in Rainer's 1980 film *Journeys from Berlin/1971)* here expertly discusses the evolution of *Grand Union Dreams*, Rainer's 1971 dance composition, these same tenets also summarize and designate the functional conventions of *Lives of Performers*.

Consistently, Rainer's vision is articulated through the multilayered technique of fragmentation, which is revealed in the complex composition of the film, in the performances and temporal action unfolded there, in the dramatized lives of its characters, and in its sound track. Beyond the boundary of the filmic text, the narrative's fragmentation plays a major role in determining the audience's reaction to and interaction with the film. Moreover, the filmmaker's control and her occasional comic ambivalence about the nature of that control are all similarly developed out of this compelling narrative device. Again, Michelson offers a succinct summary.

> The film is composed of parts, sequences or pieces which give it the total, compositional aspect of a "recital." And it cannot . . . be described as an integral whole; its parts, while not wholly disjunct from one

> another, function as variations upon a number of given themes and strategies. Rainer's first use of disjunction is for the creation of a semblance of fictional continuity out of situations which are, nevertheless, experienced as largely discrete with respect to the notion of an enveloping fictional whole. The film then begins to project a series of variations upon its themes and strategies.[3]

The most significant connection is made when fragmentation (or disjunction) and the other major structural elements of the film, cliché and repetition, meet to become the ultimate organizing principle of the dance, the narrative, and even of the lives of performers.

The film's action begins, silently, with a sequence that shows a group of dancers exercising and rehearsing *Walk, She Said* (for a live performance at the Whitney Museum). As an opening, it is also our introduction to the performers who will make up the "cast" of *Lives of Performers,* to the choreographer of the dance and the director of the film, and also to Rainer in her initial role as filmmaker. Because the film reflects Rainer's previous work in dance, this section (and others immediately following it) appropriately functions as a transition from dance into film for Rainer. It also seems appropriate that her first major film should begin silently and in black and white, interestingly paralleling the inception of cinema. Several other elements, incorporated later in the film, such as the often stagy and static camera positions, the use of intertitles, the magical disappearance and reappearance of characters in one sequence, the melodramatic use of close-ups of faces posed in stylized gazes, and even the overwrought emotional complexities of the characters all suggest conventions of silent film. Here, Rainer reinvents that part of film history but presents it in a revitalized context, as will be seen.

The serious examination of the artistic process is a focal point throughout Rainer's career, both in dance and film, and these early opening connections telegraph to the audience the notion that, while Rainer's direction in cinema is forward, it is grounded in her past as well as developed from a structural formalism, with respect to artistic and aesthetic references. Hence, the repetition or quotation of a recognizable and well-used filmic form is taken out of the realm of cliché.

One way this is achieved at the outset is through Babette Mangolte's elegant camera work, lighting, and editing. The camera here pans in slow, circular, widening clockwise movements that alternately display the heads, arms, and legs of the dancers as they practice in a bare, functional space. One cannot help but be consciously drawn to the camera move-

ment, which is certainly as balletic, if not more so, than the performers' exercises. The camera's balanced, rhythmic presence (it too touches down gracefully across the floor, then lifts from it) points up Rainer and Mangolte's collaboration and, again, the alignment and convergence of the two art forms. Because the setting is so spare, the dancers' movements at this point so perfunctory, their attire so plain and functional as opposed to what might be expected for a performance, Mangolte's camera movements and the images she presents are most involving and beautiful to the spectator.

Edited into these images, Rainer's intermittent voice instructions integrate the fragments of performance, image, body, and camera movement. This becomes apparent when Rainer's voice first interrupts the silence of this section with her "1. . . 2. . . 3. . . 4" nonsync voice-over. Her rhythmical count reflects the balance of the dance and introduces and reinforces the rhythm and balance of the enveloping sequences of the film within each of the fourteen sections as well as overall. As the dancers work individually or as a group, Rainer teaches them the dance, again in nonsync voice-over. "Your gaze is . . . No! Your gaze stays . . . Keep your body there. *Keep* your body there." The reinforcement of the disembodied instructions, the resonance of Rainer's voice as she repeats "keep" or "gaze," the repetitious body movements of the dancers (especially a tribal cross-hands, scissoring gesture), and the accompanying complicity of Mangolte's repetitive and balanced camera movement present a composed structural whole. Though the elements of this opening sequence are separate or disjointed (we even hear disruptive traffic noises), they function together to link the many disparate elements: past rehearsal with future performance; Rainer's instructive narration, done at some time removed from the actual filming of the rehearsal; Rainer as choreographer to Rainer as filmmaker; dance to film. They simultaneously tie the spectator to the group, to the individuals who compose the group (both as individuals and as performers), and to the structural patterns that will eventually become the main important components of the narrative. Thus, the opening section stands as a microcosm for the film overall and effectively predicts the spectator's ultimate reactions to it. In her 1976 interview with the *Camera Obscura* collective, Rainer asked, significantly, "Do strategies provide the commentary?"[4] Since the spectator is at once involved in this way and distanced (by questioning the nature of the film), one can say at this point that the strategies, as presented by Rainer and Mangolte, are indeed meaningful.

The dancers continue, changing directions as Rainer's disjointed voice directs their gaze and physical movements (which may, in fact, suggest a peripheral focus. A wider interpretation would note the filmmaker's change in direction from dance into film and might also note the modern change in the narrative's direction). Rainer makes an error in her directions to the dancers: "Feet face closet. No, the paper." She questions, "There's no closet behind that paper?"—a joke on the conventions of traditional illusionary performance whose practitioners might suspend disbelief long enough to imagine that the door on the set is real. The group dissolves into laughter, to use Michelson's canny term.[5] ALL AT ONCE OUR TENSION VANISHED, an intertitle announces. The sound-over and intertitle provide a transition, even in this fragmented narrative, to the film's second section.

Correspondingly, the use of narrative connectives or transitions were a factor in Rainer's early work in dance, such as in her 1962 *Ordinary Dance,* where she gave a disjunctive monologue composed of self-referential names, dates, places, and phrases that were, no doubt, meaningless to the audience. However, the suggestion that such a narrative might have meaning here comes from the fact that Rainer became the unifying subject providing, for at least one person, a story that made sense but provided little connection to the spectator.[6]

In film, the play between narrative fragmentation and narrative continuity signaled by the use of such transitions, among other devices, again provides some cohesiveness. Rainer explains.

> Those of my techniques that can be called "disjunctive" are not used with the intention of extending, obfuscating, or disrupting what might otherwise be a continuous narrative, which seems to be an aspect of many "new novels." Where narrative seems to break down in my films is simply where it has been subsumed by other concerns, such as the resonances created by repetition, stillness, allusion, prolonged duration, fragmented speech and framing, "self-conscious" camera movement, etc. Because they are interesting and beautiful to me, *not* because they alienate or distance the audience. In short, I am no more committed to narrative than to antinarrative. . . . Sometimes I feel I have to invent transitions as flimsy as "Meanwhile back at the ranch." My method is that of a collagist as would-not-be writer turned filmmaker.[7]

So, voice-overs, other sounds, and intertitles bracket distinct units or sequences of the film. They help to provide a steady accretion of images through cinematic ellipses, as well as balance and rhythm and balance

through punctuation. Though Rainer obviously shares the minimalist tendency against a naturalistic, smooth narrative flow, these small supports seam together the discrete parts of the narrative. Without question, this film departs, in a radical way, from traditional narrative; paradoxically, however, the pleasures from these various punctuations or interruptions within the discourse do allow the spectator to become consciously aware of the artistic construct while making an immediate transition within its fabric. Therefore, the narrative is constantly broken or reconstructed, leaving each sequence distinct in time, space, and meaning. Each carries its own weight and retains spatiotemporal integrity, yet *Lives* remains a balanced, choreographed presentation.

In the second section, then, instead of fluidity in camera or body movement, we are given a collage of still photographs, a scrapbook of performances past, which introduces and re-creates the feeling of the original for the audience. "This is the first of eight photos of 'Grand Union Dreams,'" Rainer narrates. She continues to inform the audience about the performances, using herself, objectively, as a character: "David and Yvonne have just finished dragging them on the fake grass in a small arc . . . while passing the red ball back and forth." What follows in these sequences is a rather abrupt change for the spectator because emphasis is placed on the flow of words more than on images. In this section Rainer will begin to catalog many of the devices revealed not only in *Lives* but also those that were begun early in her work in dance in the 1960s, such as in *Trio A* and *Terrain*, and that are developed throughout the body of her work in film.

Found objects, like the red ball, the box introduced in the opening section almost as another character as it shared the frame equally with Fernando and Shirley, and the suitcase next to it each recur in some new placement or context within the film. Functional or tasklike activities performed by actors or dancers who are used more like objects themselves, flat and unemotional readings with accompanying ambient sounds (such as papers being turned as they are read) juxtaposed with the repetition of the above undercut the spectator's expectations of spectacle or drama in performance and provide a "method [of] dissociation of form and feeling, as though you were to tell somebody you were crazy about them in a monotone of embalmed apathy."[8]

Though the dancers in the photographs play the dramatic roles of gods and mortals, Rainer here begins to adapt a form of movement and

storytelling that is, as she explains in this section of *Lives*, more intimate, less epic. In her interview with *Camera Obscura* she explicates further:

> One of the turning points in my move from performance to film was *Grand Union Dreams* of 1971, which was performed in a large gymnasium. I was struck with the absurdity of having a performer walk across the entire width of the place to tip his hat or shake a hand. It was an absurdity that worked once, twice, or even three times, but after that you knew the space was dominating the director rather than the other way around. That was the last gymnasium I performed in. The filmic frame is far more adaptable for my purposes. It can be intimate or heroic.[9]

This assessment clearly delineates Rainer's movement from dance to film, or, more accurately, her method of incorporating movement, space and story into film.

Additionally, because the camera is now focused on smaller, more minute details in this regard, the action and "drama" also begin to focus on small, banal, and sometimes maddeningly minute details of the performers' lives and emotional upheavals. Even while Rainer discusses the content of the performance ("My question is, 'What does it mean?' Are they celebrating something? Yes, that sounds good. It is a dance of pleasure at the advent of spring"), one of the "characters" interrupts to make a personal observation. "Actually it was spring when we began working on this piece and I first met you, Fernando," Valda relates, melding reality and fiction. Similar interruptions push their way into and take over sections of the film and, as we watch the static images (which do change slowly as new pictures are displayed), the audience begins to be seduced not by the performances or the stories that unfolded there, but by the complexities of the relationships being unfolded and established by the principals, Valda, Shirley, Fernando, and John.

Another important relationship is begun here as well. Yvonne Rainer's rather ambiguous connection to her audience as director, choreographer/teacher, and performer/character provides an interesting alternative to the traditionally submerged or unself-conscious authorial (non)presence. Curiously, because we are never made to identify with the characters, since we will often be reminded that every aspect of the film *is* a performance, it is the director who at times becomes our guide and who is, perhaps, a conscious center of the film. All Rainer's films raise questions about the extent to which autobiography plays a part, and Rainer

does seem to be drawn to creating that kind of connection to her audience, at least in some measure.

> I want my films to reflect whatever complexities I feel about being alive, and the most I can ask of myself is that I create work that retains a powerful connection to my own experience, whatever distance from literal autobiography it traverses. But just as I make art to justify my existence, so I must sooner or later make words to justify my art.[10]

She further seeks to

> reflect the reality of my own experience, which continues to be about loving, hating, acting stupid, "waking up," trying to "sleep," being in despair, being courageous, being terrified, getting courageous, getting outraged, laughing. I want everything I make to reflect my whole life.[11]

There is an ambiguity in this aspect of making anti-illusionary or spectator-distancing art. If Rainer's "performance" in the film is consciously flat, if her script-reading is unemotional and detached, are valid connections to the spectator made? If her art reflects private experience and the problems of projecting it[12] in the way Rainer explains, then can art, by definition, legitimately be composed of cliché and banality? Are common, everyday emotions, objects, tasks, and behaviors its only real concerns? It is exactly this debate that humorously takes place over the course of this section of the film, in which "Yvonne" (as a character) initially begins to discuss performance, art, and the "sweeping revelations of great men," to which she suggests rather ironically that she is attracted, while Valda, Shirley, and Fernando drag the discussion back to their story, which is often melodramatic.

> Fernando: "Joo" asked if I had any booze. That was where I first had a hint of your humor.
>
> Shirley (later): Oh, I'm discovered in my discomfort but he's sympathetic.

New photographs appear and here objects, performers, and even the dance become objects of melodrama.

> Shirley: And there's Fernando in the box.
>
> Yvonne: With suitcase. Why does Fernando have the suitcase? Is he going away or has he just arrived? Why is he in the box with the

> suitcase? Is he trying it out as a body-supporting device? And what is in the suitcase? Dirty socks?
>
> Fernando: The complete works of Aristotle in Greek.

After this, several stories are retold involving the intimate "personal" details of first meetings, of a performance the players attended to which a standing ovation was given ("Oh God, do we have to [stand up], too?"), and of the many machinations concerning who would sit where at that occasion. Later, the same kind of subjective recollections, real or fictional, occur when a day at the airport is retold and Valda reveals to Fernando, "My breast momentarily rested against your hand which didn't move." Valda, in another instance, receives Fernando's letter, which "seemed too intimate to show to anyone . . . ." Also, a party is recalled and attention is given to Shirley's gesture with a bottle of brandy. There, Fernando and Shirley squeezed outside onto a landing and Shirley remembers, "Oh God, you gave me so much room."

These kinds of human "gestures" provide a section loaded with psychological and physical "maneuvering" in the same way that section one examined direction and gaze. It almost unwittingly creates a story and develops questions for the spectator about the characters/performers as they reveal every intimate aspect of their thoughts and feelings, as they try to figure out someone else's intentions. Again, with Fernando's thick accent and Valda's theatrical voice, these elaborate and overly sentimental presentations continue to recall the transition from silent to early melodramatic films. Even in the performance, the box and suitcase become the recipients of melodramatic attention. (Though comically, the mysterious contents of the suitcase are something much less banal; it contains more sweeping revelations of great men. Its appearance and purposes are much less complicated than Yvonne had assumed.)

The pattern introduced here continually develops within the film's structure. It is one that juxtaposes the creation or understanding of art and seemingly meaningful or important revelations with those that seem banal or mundane (or most often, simply emotional). As the film audience sees photographs that display a line of performers whose pants are dropped, we hear Rainer describe the performance.

> Yvonne: Here the mortals have become an inexorable wall . . . shuffling forward on Kleenex box-shod feet. One of the gods, David, is walking about in great agitation in very squeaky shoes. Doug stands behind Valda, obscuring her face with a grey cardboard disc. Doug reads

> a speech from Jung. . . . "Whenever we give up, leave behind," quote, "whenever we give up, leave behind and forget too much there is always the danger that the things we have neglected will return with added force," unquote. Somehow I transposed that into David's squeaky, agitated walk. Understated passion.

Amazingly, we are made to see, first, how an idea from Jung could be conceivably transposed in a Rainer performance into Kleenex box-shod feet, an unlikely juxtaposition and a leap that viewers could not possibly make. And, importantly, that idea, about the forgotten returning with added force, becomes a key element transposed into later Rainer films, particularly *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, where mnemonic devices are often used. Also, because Rainer obviously reads from a script, we are again made aware that even this rendering of a past performance becomes part of a performance intended for this film.

Later in this same scene Valda interjects, "I want to finish about the airport. I have to tell you this." Her personal remembrance causes Fernando to associate it with another line whose source is uncited but which is definitely not personal. Thus, personal is interspersed with poetic and united in an unusual way. After the personal is intimated, Shirley sarcastically interrupts with, "The touched heart madly stirs." Rainer (as director?) responds, "Bullshit." Valda replies, "Oh for Chrissake Yvonne, get with it." We hear a savvy audience's laughter and Rainer's "OK, OK, go on. I'm really enjoying all this." Again, Rainer's directorial presence and her refusal to let these base recollections continue render her an interesting and objective voice. Even the audience's presence is engaging in its knowledgeable and rather hip rejection of such banal sentiment. When Rainer discusses the line, "Oh God, you gave me so much room" with the other performers, almost as if relaying a good joke, it too turns out to be merely a literal, rather banal statement; one that comes not from the lives of Shirley and Fernando but from a performance of it. "For heaven's sake, we've just been going through that. It was in the text," Rainer reminds Shirley. "It's about people and they're maneuvering around . . . and they go out on this landing and she says, 'Oh God, you gave me so much room.'" Rather than a weighty line of dialogue that might serve as a symbol of male-female relations, Rainer undercuts such drama and sentiment with simple, literal reality. The maneuvering is just that—physical. Shirley then jars the spectator by asking, "Yvonne, were you saying that or reading it?" Yvonne responds, "I was remembering it from Hofstra."

Audience laughter is heard and Shirley asserts, "Let's go on. I'm tired of all this."

In what seems a series of simple pronouncements, Rainer ingeniously points up issues of autobiography (through the device of the remembrance of a previous performance at Hofstra), of nonillusionary drama ("Were you reading that?"), and of narrative disjunction, since Shirley's remark becomes a transition (though not a smooth one) to the film's following sections. Moreover, we are reminded throughout this section of the conscious presentation and re-presentation of cinematic performance and process. Further, the embedded audience continues to function as knowing and sympathetic observers, adroitly promoting exactly that kind of feeling on the part of the film audience as well.

Thus, these kinds of intratextual signifiers, plus the thematic threads woven through the initial sections of *Lives*, operate as bridges to participating in and understanding the array of formal parallels and disjunctions that operate in its overall structure. The camera will become more intimate as it correctly parallels the performers' arguments and observations in their most intimate maneuvering. Sentimentality (or cliché) in the terrain of complex human interaction as well as in art becomes the focus of upcoming exchanges, and it is appropriately mirrored through the nuances of camera movements that scrutinize and minutely survey the subjects in question. But it will also remain a fixed and dispassionate witness when the spectator is made to be distanced—calculating, weighing, and estimating the different permutations of emotions and reactions. Clearly, Rainer's style is composed of a radical juxtaposition of sweeping camera movement (though in an intimate space) and static placement that alternates with choreographed movements of the performers, no movement, or movement that is essentially circular or repetitious (resulting in stasis). Add to this the interplay and variations between the vital visual and aural components; from this labyrinth emerges synthesis in the midst of fragmentation, where all the previous patterns become implicit parts of the film's careful symmetry.

The next few sequences convey this well. After a static camera focuses on a typed paragraph with a resting hand poised on it, the camera now floats slowly and closely as it did in the opening section around a set. It attentively surveys the textures of fabric and the flatness of paper walls. As it pans to Shirley's heavily lined eyes, Valda, in voice-over, observes, "You look like an old-time movie star," reinforcing the idioms of that genre. The group laughs. The camera continues to roam back and forth,

showing the faces of Fernando and Shirley while the performers, again in voice-over, interpret the possible and multiple motivations and intentions of the characters on screen. "He's very tired of her indecisiveness." "She finds . . . ." "She thinks . . . ." "She resents . . . ." "She wonders . . . ." Yvonne instructs them, "You don't have to talk all through it. Just put in an occasional comment. We don't have to fill that time with everything that may be going on." The camera slowly pans up and down the two standing bodies facing each other. Fernando, in voice-over, proposes, "He wants to know why she's afraid." Shirley contributes, "She says she's worked in a form always which disappears as soon as it reveals itself." But when discussing her relationship to Fernando, she says of her character, "She does not want to be observed as fixed and final."

Shirley's first remark obviously suggests that film is by nature such a transitory medium that the substance of her performance might be lost, in essence, as soon as the audience leaves the theater, or sooner—as the frame leaves the viewer's consciousness. Perhaps that is why, initially, the camera remains fixed on a still photograph, with a hand on top to capture it. However, her second remark suggests that, ironically, in a romantic relationship her *character* would like to be thought of in a less rigid, more malleable way. This theme is drawn later when, in her letter to Valda, Shirley bristles at being put in a box and labeled by Fernando, where one is reduced to "sickening, cliché-ridden, schizophrenic categorizations." "Maybe you can live with the pattern or break it," she writes. "I mean, I don't know how to phrase it, but I suppose that he is split." Here, Yvonne's remark about filling up time reminds the spectator, once again that we are watching a construct in progress. In art as well as in romance, process, change, and improvisation are critical. Fittingly then, Rainer's camera relentlessly moves. Remarkably, the dichotomy between the lives of performers and the performance of lives is artfully established.

An intertitle announces, SHE STARTS TO LEAVE, THEN CHANGES HER MIND AND REJOINS HIM as a transition to the next unit that continues in the same way. Here the removed performers blithely continue to offer possible explanations of the characters' intimate feelings, but Shirley wants to know simply, "Do you have any money?" The internal audience titters throughout, conveying as before that they are wise enough to see through the romantic clichés. Yvonne interjects, "That comes later," and we see Shirley actually say (mouth), "Do you have any money?" "*There!*" Yvonne shows us. Shirley rejoins, "She *says*, 'Do you have any money?'"

Again, both director and performer clearly map out the film's structure for the spectator. Because Yvonne knows what will come next and signals this for us (acting again as guide), watching the narrative unfold becomes, for the viewer, very much like watching a friend's home movie or slide show, with the film's maker narrating over it, canned laughter included. Therefore we feel an intimacy with the performers and director, which is, perhaps, more legitimate intimacy than the traditional one established in illusionary film, where the spectator feels a specious link to the fictional *characters*. Because the camera work is self-conscious (and in a later scene we even hear Mangolte's voice explaining to Yvonne, "I pan here. I pan. I pan again") and the set is obviously a construct, we are prevented from becoming hypnotized by the events and melodramatic emotions and are thus distanced from the characters. But because the voice-overs are informative and funny, we are included, like the imbedded audience, in the joke.

When Valda appears, there is a close-up of her face, but the camera pans slowly back and forth over and slightly beyond it. Her narration explains what her character might be feeling, how and what she enjoyed in a trip to the country. She saw an old woman in a film whose performance affected her deeply. Both she and her companion, John, had cried, but "as usual John had turned critical . . . and deemed his previous opinion sentimental." Here, Valda reacts in a valid way to a performance, while John refuses to be swayed by its effects, perhaps embarrassed by such emotion. An intertitle interjects, I REMEMBER THAT MOVIE. IT'S ABOUT ALL THOSE SMALL BETRAYALS, ISN'T IT? (And, in many ways, *Lives of Performers* is that movie.) This becomes a transition to the following section where Valda answers the intertitle by saying, "You might describe it that way," effectively reading the mind of the spectator as he has just read (and therefore thought) this.

Valda, Shirley, and John now face us, as on stage, and robotically move into various positions, facing each other alternately, the camera static. Valda narrates over.

> It's a story about a man who loves a woman and can't leave her when he falls in love with another woman. Or I could tell it from the point of view of the first woman. She loves him and endures his cruelties, yes cruelties. You see, from her vantage point his weaknesses become, yes become, cruelties. Yes, endures his cruelties . . . because she really does think, no feel, that she really can't live without him. Or I could tell it through #2 woman.

Eventually Shirley faces the camera and in the first example of sync sound challenges the film's audience, "Which is the director most sympathetic to?"

Here, the process of creating alternate "story lines," and hence alternate interpretations, and finally alternative narrative structures is further amplified. The robotic movements that render the character flat and depersonalized (#1 or #2), Valda's voice-over explanation; and intertitles corroborate and incorporate these concepts. Later this is illustrated when John and Fernando, then Valda and Shirley sit, alternately placed in one another's positions, as interspersed intertitles propose random life clichés: "I'm not afraid to die, but I don't want to." "All of this being the case, how can I continue to be his friend?" "We're going to be married."

In a parallel way, Valda's flat and rhythmic presentation of "cruelties" and "become, yes become" mirrors Yvonne's previous "*Keep* your gaze" in that the balance and rhythm of these phrases constitute a poetic message of their own, apart from what is actually said. Moreover, Shirley's direct and abrupt questioning of the spectator is likewise reflected in the earlier offscreen line, "Yvonne, were you saying that or reading it?" or later, when Yvonne inserts, "Did I mention I was going to be taking some of John's parts?" Such open, self-referential challenges continue to appear in the film, again breaking with the classical constraints of narrative continuity, yet within the course of the text, providing balance and cohesion. Consequently, the structure developed from the flux of repeating and alternating visual images or from providing rhythmic counterpoint in the sound track (or from eliminating sound and/or including extraneous noises) persists with elaborate and striking variations.

The last, most central sequences that underscore this concept fill the final portions of the film. Shirley recounts a dream in which she climbs a schoolyard wall of steel mesh. In doing so, she feels a sense of exquisite freedom and energy. She recounts, "It is, in fact, the schoolyard across the street from the house where I was born. I am happy, bouncing a large volleyball." She runs around, feeling alive and free, exhilarated at "having all that space to myself," as she recalls. What we focus on visually, however, is a young girl against a background that frames her in a white square. She rhythmically bounces a ball in slow motion while a cat enters and sits unfazed behind. As she bounces the small ball, she eventually turns in a circular pattern. In a lyrical way, Shirley's dream is abstractly reflected in the image. (Ironically, dream is reflected in reality, in addition to the other way around. The ball also recalls the one passed between the

gods and mortals at the beginning of the film, linking the sections. It obviously further summons up that previous performance, as well.) The wall, schoolyard, and volleyball find counterparts in the lone girl, the white frame, and her ball. The sense of freedom and pure emotion, though, is undercut in the kind of movement we've seen before, when repetitious and essentially static movement are exhibited. The white square behind her and even the filmic frame trap this girl, whereas the dream was extended in space and time, and through memory. Shirley could "always get in or out by climbing by [her] own physical nimbleness."

The recounting of the dream exposes and frees a character's inner self, a psyche free of melodramatic or false sentiment. It provides a linear landscape apart from the circular constraints of cliché and repetition. But the concurrent imagery both upholds and contradicts this, as does the following section, where Valda tries on an eyeshade, posing with it for the camera. Yvonne narrates, "The face of this character is a fixed mask. We shall have her wear an eyeshade to reveal her inner and outer appearance." There is an intertitle ONE WEEK LATER, and over the same scene Yvonne continues, "She must function with a face of stone and at the same time reveal her characteristic dissembling." The title suggests a temporal or spatial displacement (almost exactly like those in a surrealist text, such as Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*), but it is *not* one week later and we were *not* viewing the literal physical manifestation of a dream in the previous scene. The suggestion of linear movement (in the dream) is counterbalanced with circular and repetitious movement (the girl bouncing the ball). Similarly, a character's close-up, which is normally intended to reveal her, instead provides a mask. The characteristic dissembling is thus a major element of the character drawn as well as the narrative composed.

An analogous variation is presented when short units of balanced length alternate with intertitles, one after the other, to provide staccato, more rapidly paced sections; yet these are balanced with an interlude like Valda's solo, which is one long, unbroken choreographed section of graceful and prolonged movement and theatrical performance. Ironically, though it is Valda's solo, two Valdas dance, since her shadow moves or freezes with her, revealing another split or fragmented self as the spotlight encircles her. This sequence is shot as a beautifully staged performance or perhaps as a silent film, in long take with a fixed camera. This section oddly balances the girl-bouncing-ball unit since, framed in her spotlight, Valda moves gracefully in a choreographed dance back and forth across

the stage's space, while the girl circled in random movement. Thus, balance, counterpoint, and rhythm provide a field to exhibit elegant symmetry versus boring repetition, sincere expression versus inhibiting mask or exaggeration of sentiment, careful choreography versus improvisation. Correspondingly, the silence over some sections (such as Valda's solo) effectively balances the sections where intense and intricately scripted readings predominate.

Finally, even the last portion of the film provides balance and rhythm in the midst of structural fragmentation. The intertitle FINAL PERFORMANCE reminds us again that the little dramas unfolded here have been and will be planned, rehearsed, executed, scripted, staged, and filmed—both in their original forms and here—as fiction. While there is, predictably, no narrative closure for *Lives*, the final thirty-five shots do indeed provide a fitting dénouement. Against a black background and in silence (for the most part), each tightly composed shot is presented in units of rhythmical, balanced *tableaux vivants*. In images taken from stills of G. W. Pabst's 1928 film *Lulu* (*Pandora's Box*), the performers appear in heightened, stylized, increasingly melodramatic poses, now a part of a new dramatic situation.

The performers sustain their attitudes, then break from the poses and exit the shot. The fact that these formalized presentations were taken from production stills, which were extracted from a film, which was based on real events (the Jack the Ripper incidents), which were then transposed into melodrama, which is here transformed through choreography into another film, in another era, redoubles and triples the compendium of connotations that Rainer's idiom invokes. Because the performers break their poses, they consciously remind us that this final piece, too, is a performance; the story unfolds, true to form, in a broken series of isolated stills or sections, the characters appearing in alternate placements, often affecting exaggerated expression or gesture. The spectator cannot relate to the characters objectified in this way but can only admire the style and form of the presentation. A valise that appeared earlier in a Rainer-choreographed dance, in a filmed rehearsal, and in the fictional text of *Lives*, reappears here. A bit of "No Expectations" by the Rolling Stones is played over as a pun or joke on narrative expectations. Ultimately, these and previously detailed gestures, feelings, objects, movements, words, allusions, and the various scraps that intricately form this cinematic collage become brilliantly organized, choreographed, and integrated. Relation-

ships—emotional, cinematic, and artistic—become the filmic foundations for an enlivening exploration of structure and style.

Notes

1. Camera Obscura Collective, "Yvonne Rainer: Introduction and Interview," *Camera Obscura* 1 (1976):77.

2. Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part 2: *Lives of Performers*," *Artforum* 12 (1974):30-31.

3. Ibid., 31.

4. Camera Obscura Collective, "Introduction and Interview," 81.

5. Michelson, "*Lives of Performers*," 34.

6. Camera Obscura Collective, 56.

7. Ibid., 89.

8. Jill Johnston, "Modern Dance," in *The New American Arts*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Horizon, 1965), 188.

9. Camera Obscura Collective, 93.

10. Ibid., 95.

11. Ibid., 96.

12. Steven Koch, "Performance: A Conversation," *Artforum* (December 1972):58.

Chapter Two

Film About a Woman Who...

❖

Film About a Woman Who...(1972-1974) is Yvonne Rainer's second major film; it forcefully represents her continued artistic and aesthetic radical experimentation with cinematic narrative form. Typical of many independent filmmakers, her pleasure is obviously derived from shaping, investigating, and invigorating structure. Not surprisingly, the title of the film (taken from her performance piece entitled *This is the Story of a Woman Who*) puts emphasis on the first word—film—and, appropriately, cinematic narrative is clearly one of its chief concerns. The basic framework of *Woman Who* is built around variable combinations of love relationships between men and women. We view staged domestic or social scenes, become privy to intimate conversations and recollections and, in general, travel along the rocky road or sandy beach that represents the terrain of contemporary romantic and emotional life. We hear (read/think) a wave of words, earnestly expressed or repeated visually, which invites the spectator to

> play out the valences of their [the characters'] interdependencies in word and gesture, gaze and stillness, in "unhinged fragments of reality" (to use Louise Brooks' phrase) further fragmented by distortions in speed, time, placement of objects, and bodily orientations.[1]

Some aspects of Rainer's technique (as well as some of the performers) are recognizable, directly developed from the complex strategies of process formulated from her performance work in dance and in *Lives of Performers*: "a process of making—that continues to be important to me," acknowledges Rainer.[2] "In her extraordinary synthesis and reinterpretation of form," B. Ruby Rich observed in 1976, "Rainer succeeds in

fashioning...one of the truly seminal films of our decade."[3] Rainer, in character, describes *Woman Who* this way.

> OK here goes: "This is the poetically licensed story of a woman who finds it difficult to reconcile certain external facts with her image of her own perfection. It is also the same woman's story if we say she can't reconcile these facts with her image of her own deformity. [Intertitle: Her shit got more attention than she did.] She would like to engage in politics but she can't decide whether to join the big women or the hunchtwats...[Intertitle: box-stops] What is this...boxtops? Oh...box--stops. Neither is she attracted to the naive notion of the hunchtwats that every connection brings bed-chains...How long can you go on this way, mmmm? You still think it's all going to come out right, don't you? Just deciding which side you're on should insure that all the best things will beat a path to your door. Right? Her pretense of innocence must end. [Intertitle: She feels like a fool.] Nothing is new anymore, thank god. Now at last she can use her head and her eyes...Thanking you for your immediate attention to this matter. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest possible convenience. Respectfully...blah, blah, blah." Yeah, I think it's pretty good. I think they'll get the message.

This "letter," engagingly read in offscreen narration by Rainer toward the end of *Woman Who*, astutely articulates many of the essential syntactical components found in her sumptuous work. This snippet of poetically licensed story presents a woman, an Everywoman, who paradoxically visualizes herself in images of perfection and, alternately, deformity, and clearly paradox is a fulcrum on which the words and images of this impressive film will balance. Self-criticism, even self-loathing, are a part of the film's subtext, in which authorial and autobiographical relationships are posed. "Is she for or against herself?" an intertitle will ask. "Do you think she could find her way out of a paper bag?" another later questions. "She sees only the flaws in the work." Here, an unnamed woman "would like to engage in politics, but she can't decide" on which side, if any. Similarly, on the question of feminism, Rainer has repeatedly hedged.

> I should stop playing this game and just stand on my hind legs and admit it. It's just that I guess I make a distinction for myself. I didn't come to be an artist or an independent person directly dealing with this female experience through the women's movement, so I'm reluctant to proclaim myself. I don't want to get on the bandwagon.[4]

Moreover, the use of abstract connections so common and important in *Lives* and in this film on both visual and verbal levels here concurrently develop. Word-play in the narration and simultaneously displayed intertitles occurs with the several configurations of "box-stops." Also typical in a Rainer work, the audience is directly engaged and challenged: "You still think it's going to come out alright, don't you?" This becomes a question that plays on the spectator's desires and expectations that the complex and disjointed narrative (not to mention the letter itself) will be eventually framed in a happy ending or even *any* ending. Certainly, in the revitalization and reinterpretation of form that, like *Lives, Woman Who...* will attempt, using one's "head and her eyes" is paramount, perhaps now even more than using her dancer's body. At the end of the letter, after revealing intimate and deeply felt emotions (albeit in the third person), the closing becomes oddly formal, businesslike, clichéd, and meaningless—"blah, blah, blah." Hence, the personal as well as the depersonalizing agent that is inherent in the conventions of that form are immediately identified and counterbalanced (as they are in the final shot of the film when an intertitle, in an interesting change in point of view, philosophizes, "You could always have an ocean ending"). "I think it's pretty good," Yvonne, as narrator, comments. "I think they'll get the message," she drolly presumes—and she is right.

In narrative structure, function, and discourse, *Film About a Woman Who* presents a tightly detailed and fundamentally poetic collage, similar to *Lives of Performers* in aspects of characterization, audience expectations, and performance; in the pervasive examination of fragmented, discontinuous, and self-reflexive narrative, founded in autobiography. Persistent and inventive use of words, language, and written texts, intertitles that anticipate or recall images and states of mind, ellipses, objects, and other tactically reconstructed textual elements are maintained and formally expanded.

Because *Woman Who* continues to develop (or undevelop) characters who are not concretely named or otherwise personalized (here they are referred to simply as he or she), the viewer is once again distanced from them and the story (which is, again, barely a story, although it hints at being/becoming one). Thus, "the identities of [Rainer's] characters seem to shift or alter themselves; Rainer has concretized the drama of 'sliding signifiers.' "[5] The narrators (there are two: one male and one female) or the intertitles used throughout could conceivably refer to the narrators or the four characters presented (two male, two female) or to none of them.

"Maybe I'm trying to have my cake and eat it, too," Rainer says. "There are these strategies that constantly keep you from identifying with any one of the people that you are seeing and any one of the people that you're reading about."[6] Rainer, as in her early work in dance and in *Lives*, continues to see her characters as "neutral purveyor[s] of information" in a kind of "archetypecasting";[7] so, writing the characters in the third person allows for further detachment from the material similar to the effect achieved in *Lives* by calling the fictional characters by the same names as the performers.

However, the difference here is that emotional empathy and audience connection with the characters sometimes is sincerely felt; a duality exists because we see photos from family albums of the performers, recall family vacations at the beach, travel to exotic places where the characters have visited, by way of postcard stills or slide presentations, and because we hear the expressions of their emotional pain in lines such as, "I am living a loneliness I never expected. I feel so vulnerable, so inferior, so unsure of myself," which "demand a sympathetic hearing, and in themselves seem to contradict the formal framework which gives them a different tone, the peculiar lucidity that comes with detachment."[8] Additionally, their "lines" are not as self-consciously read or scripted as in *Lives*, even though there is a definite sense of detachment or even irony in their presentation. Here, too, there is the fascinating possibility of identification with the performers and the director of the work, more closely established than with that of the characters. Further, it is plausible for the viewer legitimately to anticipate autobiography throughout, since the "she" could easily be identified with Rainer, both through content (as above) and because she reads the female narration. Therefore, in this there is an element of recognizability, if not direct identification.

The lack of humor in the film also distinguishes it from *Lives*. Rainer maintains

> Humor is a way of removing from pain....In this film, it was a very conscious attempt to get the audience and myself much closer to the pain of that material and not disguise it or maintain the same kind of removal that I had in my previous film.[9]

Thus we have no interior audience that by its laughter weighs and translates the material for us, as it did in *Lives*. (We do, however, *see* the group of four performers who function throughout the film as an embedded audience, watching slides or film, though with different results.)

Whether there *is* intentional humor in the film is problematic to an extent; Rainer has observed that audiences who have seen it more than once invariably find it funny.[10]

In *Woman Who,* Rainer's innovative and inviolable methodology of manipulating narrative structure and coherence is parallel to that of her first film, though an arguably more complex and sophisticated artifact results. The same self-reflexive and self-reflective components that draw our attention away from content and toward the process of filmmaking are sustained but, even though smooth narrative flow is still successfully thwarted, *Woman Who* often achieves a less detached formalism. The letter's "pretense of innocence" slyly reacts to an art form in which "nothing is new anymore." Rainer addressed this conflict between the degree of detachment and engagement in a key discussion with Lucy Lippard, who worried about

> the downgrading of emotional intelligence which threatens the art audiences with the same disembodied, disengaged stance as that affected before a television set; for over a decade now an imposed—perhaps masculine—detachment masquerading as "modernism." On the other hand, Rainer suspects, "There is no way to go back" to an emotional involvement without some removal element to set it in relief. "It's like wishing for a lost innocence."[11]

In *Lives of Performers* and *Film About a Woman Who...*, these remain the "politics of representation"[12] where Rainer does choose sides. Thus, in some important ways, *Lives* prepares us for *Woman Who* because it is there that we learned to read Rainer's hand. Babette Mangolte's lush black and white cinematography continues to provide a film with a tactile and textural aesthetic richness. Furthermore, Rainer observes, "It's nostalgic and...refers to cinema history in a certain way...an old movie quality almost."[13] This concept resonated clearly in *Lives* and again becomes interpolated here, along with the structurally and historically appropriate intertitles, which now appear variously as intertitles or supertitles over images as well as on their own, white against black or the reverse; carrying semantic, rhythmic, or ironic weight in numbered sequences, appearing side by side with photographs or art reproductions, etc. As a direct result, there is continued and intensified competition for the spectator's attention, ingeniously developed from the tension alternating between our focus on language (written, spoken, read) and on image, character, and content. Sound is correspondingly used or deleted as punctuation and ellipsis, or

for dramatic reverberation (e.g., the thunder and rain, or the sharp sound of a fork falling from a table). These echo *Lives'* extraordinarily integrated and artistically incorporated effects.

Melodrama and cliché, while not the focal points of *Woman Who,* continue to surface here as they did in *Lives.* Music, as counterpoint and as dramatic intensifier, is rendered with surprisingly evocative and emotional repercussions. Music, as well as the use of written or read texts, such as the letter discussed earlier, while calling attention to the mechanics of form, also demands that we make the necessary connections between life and art, domestic pleasure or pain, humanism and formalism, nostalgia for the past and the emptiness of the present, and finally between spectator and artist. Early in the film, the female narrator "had to admit that her own life was more interesting than that of anyone who might portray it in performance, or she couldn't deal with anyone else's life as interestingly as her own." Rainer, on her return from India, revealed

> The American way is that each person has to carve the possibilities for communication out for himself—we have no continuity, we have no traditions, we have no exemplars in myth...This throws us back on personal experience. It's as though my own life contains possibilities for a mythology.[14]

It is this personal framework wherein:

> The real crux of the deliberate reality/illusion conflict in Rainer's films lies...[in] the audience's identification with personally meaningful aspects of the "story" rather than in what certain audiences know or think they know about the director/author's private life.[15]

"My work," Rainer contends, "is much more novelistic in the way it weaves autobiography and fiction."[16] Because the title of the film mysteriously leaves unanswered questions about who the woman is and what secret about her the film will divulge (the ellipsis underlines this), we are immediately tantalized with the promise of a story to be told, a drama to be unfolded, an author and performer's life unveiled. Rainer explains

> I was using these repetitive structures, the chance procedures....Then I began to think about a more coherent kind of language...that was not based on a theme and variations nor on a coherent progression or development. It was very fragmented. I began to think about a coexis-

> tence of a coherent story line on one hand and these very cut up movement sequences on the other.[17]

As early as 1963, then, the formulation and synthesis of both story and disjointed movement were a primary focus in the examination of the constraints of composition—here, of dance. Because these mechanisms of movement are so inherently a part of the filmmaking process, one can correctly extrapolate that the traps so characteristic of the process of creating dance and performance also apply in film.

It is from these struggles with concepts of narrative, or sequential causality,[18] that Rainer relentlessly questions and tests filmic structure.

> I suppose that there have always been those works that can rightfully be called neither narrative nor non-narrative, works that share *both* narrative and non-narrative characteristics....A series of events containing answers to when where why whom gives way to a series of images, or maybe a single image, which, in its obsessive repetitiveness, or prolonged duration, or rhythmic predictability, or even stillness, becomes disengaged from story and enters this other realm, call it catalogue, demonstration, lyricism, poetry, or pure research....And there may always be the possibility for a simultaneous co-existence of these modes....The tyranny of a form that creates the expectation of a continuous answer to "what will happen next?" fanatically pursuing an inexorable resolution...in space and time...seemed more ripe for resistance....Can the presentation of sexual conflict in film, or the presentation of love and jealousy, be revitalized through a studied placement or dislocation of clichés? Can specific states of mind...be conveyed...without being attached...to particularities of place, time, person, and relationship? Are faces such as belong to Katharine Hepburn and Liv Ullman the only vehicles for grief and passion? Can an audience learn to abandon its narrative expectation...? Can subject matter dealing with perceptual and photographic phenomena be sequentially—rather than narratively—linked to material that has already been invested with "storyness?" What kind of clues tell us, the audience, when to read an image—or series of images—narratively, when to read parataxically, and when to read iconographically? What constitutes unity in film? Can narrative and the other-than-narrative exist simultaneously in the same shot...?[19]

As an elegant and representative polemic, anticipated through her work in dance and in *Lives of Performers*, *Woman Who* is far from being an example of pure research into the subversion of narrative form. Rather, it

represents a culmination of Rainer's sincere efforts to illuminate cinematic text, exacting a kind of Godardian concentration on style envisaged when one thinks about the impact of the French *nouvelle vague*, for example, and certainly when one sees Rainer as a vital, principal part of the American independent movement. In this film, she adeptly articulates and quotes elements from past works and introduces devices that will eventually become key components that mark her later films.

One of the most unifying, warmly felt, and easily recognizable aspects of this strategy comes from Rainer's continuous exploration of memory, through the construction of bits and pieces of a personal past which, in an eidetic way, become shuffled and juxtaposed, one against the other, to create a cinematic montage, collage, or to use a more contemporary term, meta-art. Like Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* (1978), another roughly contemporaneous work that more obviously combines experimental narrative form with mainstream story line and character composition, the spectator is witness to the personal, emotional frustrations of the men and women in question, while, during the course of the film, becoming randomly informed about their past experiences, relationships, and emotional and psychological states of mind. In this, *Annie Hall* has a cumulative effect; we sift the pieces of a personal and narrative puzzle while questioning the extratextual implications of autobiography. Both films brilliantly draw attention to narrative reconstruction and filmic mechanisms, but Rainer's "nervous shuffling of components" additionally juxtaposes different media, such as photos, slides, printed texts, etc., in an effort to provide "frequent digressions, interruptions, detours, and flip-flops in point of view and continuity," as she notes in her revealing letter to *Artforum*.[20] In *Woman Who*, if there are any valid spectator-character or unifying connections established, they are developed through these mnemonic devices by which "images slowly [acquire] meanings and associations as the film progresses."[21]

Evocative and increasingly complex examples abound. The film begins with a loud boom of thunder (reminiscent of the initial rifle report in Bruce Conner's *Report*, which also consciously connects cultural memory to narrative expectation, and uses sound, image, and text to elicit multiple connotations) and a recollection.

> He had run into her on the way to the shooting. He hadn't seen her for a year. Now he is reviewing the conversation in his mind. "She hasn't changed a bit." His mind works in spirals as he watches the slides.

In this illustration, the viewer is at first unsure exactly how to identify the clap of noise or even the phrase "the shooting," and the concept of the past providing new ramifications, developed through chance encounter and recently resuscitated memories (engendered by watching the slides) all attain central and considerable significance in rendering the spirals of thought and memory with which *Woman Who* is preoccupied.

> The rain makes her think of when she was 18 years old spending a summer in Chicago....It had started to rain heavily. A woman...was talking about her babysitter. She said, "I hope the stupid girl has enough sense to close the windows." Without a second thought, she reached over and shut the window.

Here, the rain becomes a catalyst for memory. It is further employed to synthesize past and present experiences, all contingent to and dependent on each other.

Directly following, the viewer sees the first of several beautifully filmed beach scenes, landscapes that are juxtaposed with and contrapuntal to the narrator's exposition, which tells us, "She thinks about the snow in Vermont and their last night in the cabin....Again she repeats to herself the remembered phrase: 'easy locomotion between comfort and discomfort.'" In these cases, the waves become touchstones to memory: repetitive, eternal, and fluid reminders of a past that, in sound and image, begin to become a compelling part of the viewer's anchor in this narrative, an illustrated and mythopoetic assimilation of free associations and transmissions. Our locomotion within the narrative does indeed become alternately easy and difficult, as we traverse the emotional and stylistic ground. The connections are as abstract but as valid as those linking a beach scene to a snowy memory, but should we rely on any comfortable or convenient equations among experiences related or images expressed,

> continuing this hall of mirrors, our screen is transformed into their screen and becomes filled with a second level of images, snapshots, and slides of a life and a trip not our own and only possibly theirs (the characters) or hers (Rainer's). Lest the audience be tempted to grab this easy way out and identify itself with the visualized audience within the film, thus compressing the carefully separated layers into one, the image is calmly switched.[22]

Thus, the intricately utilized devices that present performer-as-spectator, image-as-abstraction, and narration-as-navigation are methodically con-

structed and then reconstructed to provide kaleidoscopic representation of time, space, image, and memory, since they both confirm and deny the audience's apprehension of what we hear and see.

An assortment of stills, photographs from family albums, or a memorable sequence of art reproductions (a Cluny tapestry, an Etruscan fresco, Versailles, the Grand Canyon, Las Vegas, or later, Mont St. Michel, with sheep) appear like postcards received from a friend, while Yvonne, in narration, explains, "She had the kind of mind incapable of encompassing historical data. She could understand an event only through illustration." Later in the film, the narrator explains

> Not having seen any familiar landmarks for awhile, she realizes she is lost and experiences a powerful exultation. The discomfort of her body, the presence of the night, her solitude—all give her an acute sense of the moment....She remembers standing in the street across from the hotel that morning.

Here, discomfort and exultation are linked: finding no point of reference, becoming lost and immersed in the sense of the moment, ultimately leads to memory, and, for the spectator, a mutual sense of becoming awash in the maze of recognition (in the wave of cinematic illustration of the places or people, in the authenticity of the feeling) and uneasiness. (Who is the she in the narrative, in the memory? When do the images support it? When do they confound it?)

These feelings are further underlined when, at various points in the film, Rainer relates: "Her mind overruns with the faces of people gone from her life." (The visual information is unrelated.) "Then she remembers what the scene had reminded her of." (We view a couple embracing on a stretch of beach, waves crashing behind them.) Or another recollection.

> The sky with its leaden clouds, the wet spray of the sea, the thump of surf against the rocks. She didn't remember a single argument, not even the kind of maneuvering for brief privateness that people do when they are together constantly. At this remove it seemed impossibly idyllic. Looking at those two weeks against the backdrop of later events, she was at a loss to understand her feelings.

In similar sequences, as the camera pans slowly back and forth across the faces of Shirley, Yvonne, and Renfrue, Yvonne narrates: "She finds herself

looking at the other woman with curiosity. She has a way of talking—delicate, precise and lilting—that reminds her of women she has had disdain for in the past." In addition, the male narrator (John Erdman) observes, "She tries to go back to the earliest move that had launched this particular series of *faux pas*."

Between units, an intertitle will explain for us: "Her thoughts drifted back to the first time she heard the music. Her brother had just begun to collect 78s and Strauss, Mahler, and Beethoven daily flooded the house." As music accompanying this title fades, Renfrue Neff's voice, in sound-over, interrupts, "Doesn't that make you think of the movie?" Shirley Soffer, in sync-sound, asks, "What movie?" Neff's voice replies, "*2001*." Later, Rainer's voice informs us, over a photo of an elderly woman in a field, "She remembers a similar scene. Was it Dorothy Lamour or Betty Grable?—a movie she saw when she was no more than nine or ten." In an abstract yet pointed way, the passage of stills included from the brutal shower scene of *Psycho* can also be recalled and are relevant here. In these instances, a network of music, the imprint left on the mind from movies of various eras, and "the faces of people gone from her life," like the naturalistic elements such as sea, rain, clouds, and sky before, flood or overrun the narrative. They link, or more accurately appear to link, past and present events as well as spectator and character, to become the dense and overwhelming backdrop, diary, or subtext of the narrative.

These assorted recollections also occur and accumulate as various objects attain symbolic visual parallels: for example, in a pile of dishes, stacked absurdly beneath a fish that Neff eats, as she distractedly fingers her necklace. "This?" she asks in lip-sync, as if answering directly a question put to her by her companion or perhaps by the viewer. "Oh, this was given to me by a friend of my brother's when I was fifteen." As she continues, the necklace and dishes become visual points of reference, similarly stacked up before us. (In the undressing scene with Renfrue Neff, Rainer wears a necklace with a large seashell attached, recalling the ocean and its connotations in the film, as well as Neff's necklace, *and* the couple of recollections concerning brothers.)

Therefore, these devices act as visual cues, reminders of psychological states and emotional accretions. Furthermore, they embellish physical or psychological gestures, the "earliest moves," or "maneuvering" found throughout the film and in *Lives of Performers*, just as the ball that is part of a beach scene and is later used in a choreographed dance serves symbolically to link units of the film. It further activates aspects of the

viewer's memory that has become subconsciously connected to it and, amazingly, links this film to *Lives of Performers*, and finally connects both of these films to Rainer's dance compositions.

A short series of beach scenes, in which a family of three poses (with the ball), then breaks the pose and forms a different snapshot pose, a composed scene where another family of three is seated around a table, the series of formally choreographed dance sequences that use a ball toward the end of *Woman Who*, and the more improvised-looking series of running scenes (first, three people running back and forth in the rain, then a shot of a couple's bare feet running back and forth across an indoor rehearsal floor), both reflect and recall one another within the film and, in an extratextual way, recall the images, movements, and objects of *Lives*, which itself quotes images, movements, and objects from other dances, photographs, and films.

Thus, the familiar landmarks of this multilayered masterpiece provide a spiraling, criss-crossing, and zig-zagging narrative. Emphasis on text, objects, and music, whether parallel to or in sync with the image, help to develop a Joycean chain, even in this parataxical construct. That is, like the Throwaway in *Ulysses*, Rainer's artistically constructed syntactical components, both visual and aural, appear, disappear, and reappear with force within and even beyond the text. Discontinuities in sound, image and time mixed with sudden congruences between the spoken and written text and other disjunctive devices that confound continuity and prevent prolonged involvement with image or character, and both uphold and reject sentiment steadily accumulate to at once seduce and antagonize the viewer. As B. Ruby Rich wisely suggests

> It is the abstracted narrative that advances the emotion instead of the emotion advancing a super-imposed narrative....By preserving these elements while altering the nature of their relationship, Rainer suggests a new direction and meeting ground for...formal and psychological concerns....This constant frustration of an audience tendency perceived as conservative, indicates Rainer's determination to confront the viewer's obstinacy, forcing the viewer at every moment to reconsider her/his position as spectator, to assume an active role in the shaping of the film, and to re-examine at every single step the ultimate validity of her/his role.[23]

Rainer's unshakeable fidelity to the inversion of narrative conventions and her promise to free the audience rather than manipulate it[24] ultimately

provide the spectator who has worked through and examined its codes a rewarding and important film.

Notes

1. Rainer, in Camera Obscura Collective, "Yvonne Rainer: Introduction and Interview," *Camera Obscura* 1 (1976): 72.
2. Jonas Mekas, "Film About a Woman Who," *Village Voice*, 23 December 1974: 94.
3. B. Ruby Rich, "The Films of Yvonne Rainer," *Chrysalis* 2 (1977): 117.
4. Lucy Lippard, "Yvonne Rainer On Feminism and Her Film," *Feminist Art Journal* 4.2 (1975). Reprinted in *From the Center*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: Dutton, 1976), 269.
5. Mary C. Gentile, *Film Feminisms* (Greenwich: Greenwood, 1985), 9.
6. Mekas, "*Woman Who*," 94.
7. Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "The Performer as a Persona," *Avalanche* (Summer 1972): 56.
8. Lucy Lippard, "Talking Pictures, Silent Words: Yvonne Rainer's Recent Movies," *Art in America* (May-June 1977):88.
9. Mekas, "*Woman Who*," 95.
10. Rainer, Screening of *Film About a Woman Who...* Audiotape. Recorded 19 May 1975. Walker Art Center, Department of Film. Minneapolis, Minnesota.
11. Lippard, "On Feminism," 278-79.
12. Rainer, in Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, eds., "Yvonne Rainer," *Profile* 4.5 (1984): 37.
13. Rainer, Audiotape 19 May 1975.
14. Rainer, "Responses to India," *Drama Review* (Spring 1971): 139.
15. Lippard, "Talking Pictures," 88.
16. Lippard, "On Feminism," 271.
17. Blumenthal and Horsfield, "Yvonne Rainer," 16.
18. Gentile, *Film Feminisms*, 7.
19. Rainer, "A Likely Story," *Idiolects* 6 (1978): 13-14.
20. Rainer, Letter to *Artforum* (September 1973): 10.
21. Lippard, "Talking Pictures," 87.
22. Rich, "Films of Yvonne Rainer," 117.
23. Ibid., 119.
24. Rainer, "Responses to India," 140.

Chapter Three

Kristina Talking Pictures

❖

> For the next three weeks we worked especially hard. Her fervor was contagious. She would arrive an hour early to practice the steps, repeat a fragment of the choreography over and over again until she was satisfied that her execution of its nuances meshed exactly with her conception . . . . Then [the others] began to pay closer attention to her motions, to the tiny adjustments of timing, gesture, tilt of the head, etc. Rising to meet the challenge of their revealed intelligence, I focused with ever more precision on configurations that soon were entering an arena of shared interests and purpose. . . . I observed from a distance and marvelled at this paradigm of communal activity. No matter that I alone had instigated it. We now found ourselves engaged in patterns of social interaction that could be viewed as both primitive—in the ideal sense of a community of shared belief—and utopian.

It is with these shared and compelling intimations that the female narrator of Yvonne Rainer's third film, *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976), summarizes an experience linking elements of Rainer's early career in dance to her immersion in film, an experience this pivotal film embodies. Reflecting important stylistic and conceptual components of her two previous films and anticipating the structural strategies and thematic concerns of her following two films, *Kristina Talking Pictures* crystallizes Rainer's commitment to and emerging involvement with broad political, moral, and social conflicts, while simultaneously detailing the effects those forces exact on the individual psyche.

The profound disjunctions that result are choreographed and enunciated here in ways typical of a Rainer construct. Repetition, fragmentation in dialogue, characterization, scenes, perspectives, psyches, and the nuances of continual adjustments, alignments, and executions of these configurations, as the above description suggests, comprise the film's

form and become its central exercise. Its poetic attention to the multiple possibilities in narrative assemblage and its intense and crowded collage of images, language, and disparate texts provide an ingeniously uplifting/depressing, confusing/coherent, nihilistic/utopian, silent/talking picture. Like the choreographer described by the narrator above, Rainer's balancing act commands deft, detailed, and almost unimaginable precision that ultimately reveals shared and increasingly significant connections. The structure of appearances, sometimes calm and smooth on the surface but increasingly sinister or empty at the core, demands that the spectator discover or rediscover the truth that is often masked in pre-existing patterns. Rainer's fluid locomotion and often startling juxtapositions display a supple and extremely careful sensibility that recognizes and reveals the subtlest correspondences where they occur. Rainer has summarized the film this way:

> Within its form of shifting correlations between word and image, persona and performer, enactment and illustration, explanation and ambiguity, *Kristina Talking Pictures* circles in narrowing spirals toward its primary concerns: the uncertain relation of public act to personal fate, the ever-present possibility for disparity between public-directed conscience and private will.[1]

Thus, accretion, disjunction, collision, and a network of connections contribute to a process that is constructed and reconstructed like the puzzle that reappears throughout the film. Rainer says of this structuring process:

> There always comes a point where I've made all the connections, either thematic or visual or psychological or temporal or whatever, after I have accumulated things that interest me. There comes a point where I've made all the connections I can and there's still stuff hanging around that doesn't fit in. Then I will invent new connections to bring that in, but it isn't a process of knowing where you're going and putting it all together.[2]

Rejecting the traditional process that would begin with a complete or finalized whole only to deconstruct it and begin again, Rainer's collage strategies pluck provocative bits and pieces from a multitude of sources that allow a specifically choreographed piece that is not ultimately linear or seamless but which is instead a gradually interwoven accumulation of coinciding or contradictory elements.

According to Rainer, *Kristina* is a narrative inasmuch as it contains a series of events that can be synthesized into a story if one is disposed to do so.[3] These events center around Kristina, the heroine-narrator, a former lion tamer from Budapest, and her lover, Raoul. Both characters are rather schizophrenically split into multiple personae, with several actors playing each part, sometimes within the same scene. The actors' costumes are made to change within the scenes; the camera often abruptly changes angle or point of view within the scenes; the narration and the spoken or recited dialogue may interrupt, repeat, or lose itself continually within or between scenes. Music is used as counterpoint or punctuation. Words and phrases, such as "lion," "lion's share," "Teutonic lion laugh," "rising," and "diving," correspond to visual cues and representations. A supertanker's tow, after becoming adrift, for example, becomes a toe as the camera drifts down to survey it. These pairings are of such complexity and variety that they are far too profound and numerous to cover here, but they provide the intricate syntactical material on which the entire film is based—it could indeed be entitled *Kristina Talking Poem.*

An array of visual materials, alternating in black and white and color, often appears in ironic detachment to or in isolation from the dialogue and narration. Again, Rainer's method manipulates such varied visual components as film production stills, photographs, documentary footage, posters, postcards and art reproductions, handwritten letters or notes that serve as intertitles, newspaper clippings, chalkboard messages, and visually striking vignettes. These include black and white performances (similar to the *tableaux* of *Lives of Performers*) that employ, in Rainer's terms, the choreography of victimization.[4] Here, the actors portray, in threatening and ominous poses, scenes of sinister impact—in the background or peripherally at first and then chaotically in the forefront as they fill the darkening screen. In such scenes, a sofa becomes "a boat, a barracks, a barricade, a bloody shame . . . a bridge of sighs, a bulwark, a blockade, tip of the iceberg, chain of events" that Rainer gradually links into poetics of rhythm and pace, and evocative language and imagery, as the above narration so lyrically represents. A film of a circus tiger act is projected onto the side of a jeep; an elevator, its roof papered with the images of planets and stars, rises as if into the night; a woman performs a song and dance for her daughter in frozen poses; a supertanker cuts through the sea and the film frame, or the immobile grinning face of James Cagney fills it. The tiger act is performed, complete with an embedded audience of

tigers who, like the audience, repeatedly and silently watch the gaudy and sad domination of these beautiful and noble beasts—their own kind.

Such stark and singular images, colliding in commanding and disorienting ways, relentlessly progress and ultimately compound until the film becomes overwhelmingly provocative. Of the myriad of correspondences and nuances that exist in sound and image, gesture, movement, pacing, and framing, several key illustrations may be bracketed and highlighted in order to pursue them as vehicles of meaning. Rainer's vision demands an all-encompassing scope of sensibility and sensitivity. Increasingly in her films, personal, social, artistic, and political views of experience are necessarily inseparable. One is an extension of the other. Her work, especially in *Kristina*, details the blows sustained from the bombardment of forces outside and beyond one's control as well as those that are self-inflicted. Their repercussions leave a psyche, a sex, a society victimized by the countless (though not unnameable) acts that intersect (explode, erupt, run amuck). If there is any mediating force, any utopia, it is art—and it is through artistic creation that rage can be vented and relief from paralysis, compliance, and an inexcusable lack of will or action can be reached.

A central portion of the film conveys an imminent sense of destruction, chaos, and loss. In case history (the lives of Kristina and Raoul) or history (the holocaust, the homeless in the streets, the inevitability of environmental holocaust made even more palpable and real in light of recent horrors), relentless and ultimately stultifying devastation is ubiquitous. Early sequences of the film show Kristina asleep in her bedroom, abruptly awakened—though not by the clock's alarm; its ticking stops, like a bomb waiting to go off. Its abrupt halt, the lack of something, seems to disturb Kristina and we watch her wake and rush from her bed. As she hurriedly dresses, as if to escape some unknown terror, the audience sees the letter on the floor—a notification of Raoul's departure and a breakup that has already occurred as she slept. The letter is signed, ironically, "Yours, Raoul." The pace and camera work of this scene further reinforce a split because, as the mostly offscreen Kristina hurries, the camera slowly cases the room for us, meandering from bed to chair, drawers, radiator, etc., leaving the letter and then resuming its reading at a similar point where Raoul has written "that we had arrived at a point sufficiently remote from our recent hurt as to resume. . . ." Kristina's activity occurs in haste, but the camera's movement is contrapuntal on its restless and leisurely course as it swings back and forth across the room as if on a gentle trapeze. As if

waiting for the inevitable return, we stay in the room, surveying the destruction and finishing the letter, as Kristina dashes to a taxi, bound for the airport. She does return and, feeling the full force of the attack, appears frozen on the quickly made bed. Dressed in her street clothes, but with the green sequined costume of a circus performer laid over her, she remains—stunned but with eyes open. Her "To hell with it" assures us that the attack (and the scene) is complete. She survives it, though still and numbly paralyzed, dressed in the garb of dual personae—abandoned woman and performer. We feel a sense of absence and loss, as well as an overriding sense of ambivalence.

Other stylistically and emotionally jarring scenes detailing Kristina and Raoul's lives take place throughout the film. One is prompted by Valda Setterfield's remark, "Oh, let's forget it and go to the movies," at which time an intertitle proclaims THE RETURN OF RAOUL, signaling the enjoyable piece of fiction to come. Raoul and Kristina (here played by Rainer) sit side by side in bed, Kristina dressed in her green performer's costume. The sequences of the scene are shot alternately in long take, from high angle, by a static or roving camera, with continually disruptive and symbolic framing. We see pictures next to or above the two that insist on changing, similar to the change from color to black and white occuring throughout. The photos show the real-life Kristina ("Call me Kristina," the film's narrator initially asks, in a Melville-esque manner), a lion tamer from Hungary. They also reveal several groups of Europeans or returning Vietnam prisoners of war. Next to Rainer, we occasionally see a photo of her, eyes closed, which is mounted on a bureau. Above her head, a framed picture of a circus act, a balancing act with a woman performer perched in the middle, is at times aligned with Rainer/Kristina. The camera often leaves Kristina and Raoul to wander down the expanse of blanket covering them or to view the handwritten titles posted in the room. These present commentary or provide a subtext that exists in counterpoint to the lengthy texts about life on a supertanker, spoken by Raoul, or lions' mating habits, spoken by Kristina. Ironically, the texts are flatly recited by the two in this intimate environment, even when their physical gestures are friendly and familiar.

Intercut with these sequences are other precisely meshed clips. They show a tanker cutting through the sea (the intertitle announces VERY LARGE CRUDE CARRIER, and this has extremely comical overtones) and wild animals, either in the circus act, in the act of mating, or caged in what looks to be a zoo, with cars passing inappropriately behind. Additionally,

a man's hand washes dishes in a sink and in sync with Raoul's narration that flatly details "a black rain . . . leaks, spills, dumping, foundering. . . . Oil on the water, oil on the skin of the sea, oil on the plankton, oil on your nipples. . . ." An incarnation of Raoul, performed by David Diao, speaks Chinese, as a handwritten title attached to the side of his head asks, "Why is the prospect of catastrophe softened by poetry?" A group of people, hands raised in the gesture of arrest, also punctuate the final portions of this lengthy and complex scene.

The sound is in sync, nonsync, or totally absent, but it is the meshing of language and words, delivered by narration, speech, intertitle, or text with the camera movement, pace, and framing of these disparate images that render the profound and poetic implications of these scenes, as the above example suggests. The collisions are often so subtle and numerous that they become blows impacting on the spectator as they gradually unfold. The capricious-seeming connections Rainer has constructed begin to accumulate and compound here.[5]

In the performance they are about to begin,[6] Kristina and Raoul become childlike explorers and namers. "What's that?" he asks, pointing to a mark on her chest. She replies, "It's a silver bullet hole." "What's that?" she asks as she places a finger on his nose. "A dagger," he replies and thrusts it at her chest. "No," she corrects him, "it's a nose." This series of physical gestures and the attention to words and identifications of them present the two, especially Rainer, as choreographers or performers, communicating as if they were the first man and woman ever to reveal these connections. Rainer becomes romantic, with her tender kissing of Raoul's palm, but not a romantic, since she clarifies that nose is a nose is a nose. In this, she is funny, sensitive, and appealing in the roles of artist, performer, explorer, realist, and lover—roles that easily meld. The correlations that follow become far less sweet or simple as they accumulate.

As Raoul begins his long description of a seaman's life aboard a supertanker (taken from Noel Mostert's *Supership*) with the experience of walking "out at night on that black expanse," the camera pans down the dark expanse of blanket. In a continuous metaphor, his narration often suggests the connection between the experience at sea and, as the camera underlines, the relationship to the scene we see. Being at sea, or undergoing a sea change are all suggested by this narrative (though these phrases are never used). The computers on board the ship, he relays, are "supposed to decide a course, prevent collision," but when powerless, "all that is left is a useless, drifting shell [the camera drifts], helplessly adrift." The hulk

is likely to "break and pollute the coast." Here, the camera similarly reveals Raoul's hand as he removes it from Kristina's. A Coriolis force affects a ship and makes it navigate differently in critical situations, he recounts.

As if some similar force is operating on the camera or on these two lovers, a sense of impending doom is similarly imposed on this scene. Half of Kristina's face is wiped from the shot and Raoul's face takes precedence, as Kristina remembers a falling out she had with a friend to whom she had refused money for an abortion. "We drifted apart," she recalls. At this point, the picture of the balancing act on the wall above her is visually linked with the upper half of her face and she continues her recollections—memories that had resurfaced, first with her "shrink" and now with Raoul and us.

> They had lined us all up . . . to administer the spanking of my brother. He was to receive the usual ritual punishment. When it came my turn I didn't refuse. I hit his bottom like all the rest.

A photo of Kristina has now been replaced on the wall with one of a row of men with their hands in the air. Kristina begins a story that recalls a painfully remembered time when she was eighteen and living in a room with a shared bath in the hallway. A Swedish girl living across the hall is found with her boyfriend by the husband and wife who, like Kristina, witness the two lovers in bed. Running for the manager and loudly upbraiding the girl, who valiantly counters in her own defense, the couple berates her. Kristina's response is what troubles her now. "Frozen [in] anger, fear and indecision" she had heard the arguments, "like a nightmare of confused, unpleasant noises outside my door." As the accusations flew, she recalls, "I couldn't bring myself to tear open the door. . . . I remained still, stunned by what I had heard, appalled at my loss of nerve." The dishwashing vignette is intercut at this point and, immediately after, the text and message appearing on Diao's face is juxtaposed. We read, additionally, two ruled pieces of yellow paper, tacked to the wall of the bedroom. They say, in part:

> They recited their stories as though the power of their words might reveal paths of action or absolution. . . . They still regarded the world of external events as a source of raw material for their efforts and development, and not as a factor conditioning them. They possessed a finely tuned capacity for commiseration and passionate protest. Yet, they continued to feel

> that, despite their professed horror, at their center they remained uncommitted and untouched.

The scene continues, but it is at this point that so many of the chief correspondences in the film are articulated. The collision of words with experience and of the camera with words becomes overwhelming; the spectator is likewise meant to navigate these troubling waters. Personal divisions and losses can be charted here: hands drift apart as relationships do—the remains left broken and foundering. The tenuous connections of aborted friendships are coupled with the leviathans of the sea, the oil tankers, which approach senility and signal horrific and catastrophic accident. Chaos, on all levels, is flatly recounted here and is thus made more insidious and terrifying. Moreover, Kristina's (and perhaps even Rainer's) balancing act suggests that the individual and artistic psyche is consistently torn; Rainer has observed, "To varying degrees and from early on, all of us can characterize our lives as a struggle between closing and opening our eyes, sleeping and waking, knowing and refusing to know."[7] On this level, the photo of Rainer/Kristina is also clearly connected.

One of the most sinister of all connections is that linking personal violence and culpability to violence and complicity on another level. The performance of the choreography of victimization, the photos reminding us of war, the tanker promising disaster as it plows through the water, and the march of recited texts that (as in the corridor scene of *The Man Who Envied Women*) could not be even remotely considered real human communication even in this setting, all abstractly bespeak holocaust and chaos on a global scale. The remembered stories are painfully relevant. Because she would not act to help her friend, Kristina becomes a victimizer. Because she acts, with all the others, to hit and humiliate her brother, she becomes a silent and willing partner to those administering punishment. The same is true of the incident involving the Swedish girl. Kristina's silent complicity leaves her a paralyzed and culpable party to the violence occurring just outside her door, recalling incidents so unforgettably retold by witnesses of nighttime, nightmarish Nazi raids. The performances of arrest, where a crowd marches down empty city streets, or the series of *tableaux* that suddenly confront us or rush past us in later parts of the film, all refer to an evil force, a threatening presence, arising out of a deceptive calm. The air of death or disappearance is omnipresent as people pass in the streets or pass away, as in the later matter-of-fact narrations that begin,

"Max, I heard you died," and "Mama, I heard you died last night." They reflect losses rather coolly noted from a distance.

Furthermore, the language of Kristina's narration is full of phrases associated with the holocaust: "lined us all up," "ritual punishment" and, "I didn't refuse." (Later, when Raoul disappears, no one in the performance group "as though by unspoken agreement. . . referred to Raoul's absence. . . . A subtle lag in concentration began to be felt." Lil Picard's accented voice, never directly linked to the woman found by Kristina on her steps, but logically associated with it, additionally provides this linguistic link.)

Perhaps the most troubling relationship is that which includes the artist/performer in this silent and dangerous complicity. The notes appearing in split messages, attached to Diao's head and in Kristina's room, introduce this factor in an insightful way. Does poetry render catastrophe or the prospect of it somehow more palatable or beautiful? Does the fictionalizing of evil and the artist's recounting of it signify his or her political action or absolution? An alternate manifestation of Raoul's persona explains

> I don't think that kind of person even exists. . . . The sensitive intellectual or artist agonizing over the nature of his existence . . . who suffers a thousand pangs of conscience and crises of will over the temptation to be a passive onlooker. He contemplates alternative modes of action and protest, like voting, writing letters . . .

or, perhaps, creating art.

Does that person exist? "Oh God, I'd give everything up for this," a note next to Rainer/Kristina in the bedroom scene surprisingly insists but, stripped of its romantic connotations or eroticism (in part due to an intertitle in the same scene that dryly announces PHOTO OF ERECTION OR PENIS ENTERING VAGINA, or to the monologues delivered at cross-purpose) this type of flat and empty representation of personal well-being and human interaction is no substitute for the real thing (or, as René Magritte would have it: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*). Further stripped of its traditional cinematic love scene conventions, this sequence becomes a series of unnatural acts (doubly so, since Raoul is played by Rainer's brother, Ivan). "One wonders why they cooperate in such unnatural acts," Raoul's voice-over pondered earlier, thereby including the performers, the world's witnesses to terror, *and* the audience in this unreal substitute for experience or action.

These questions on art and morality are first proposed by Rainer here, but they find form (and better answers, as will be seen) throughout the film and become central to her next two films as well. If it is true that the artistic sensibility constantly balances personal and political chaos and displacement, and similarly battles the inevitable pull toward political action with the personal and artistic stance of sensitive observer/recorder/performer of experience, then emptiness, paralysis, or impotence might indeed be a probable result.

It is perhaps why Trisha, the artist-narrator of *The Man Who Envied Women*, functions as political conscience when she asks questions such as, "Are you more important than poor people?" It is why Kristina, the performer who left the circus after being inspired by Godard and Graham, balances these propositions: "Did you march on Washington and let a friend bully you to tears?" "Did you stop paying taxes to protest the war and do a song-and-dance when your daughter asked you to?" It is why Kristina is left ambivalent and languishing on her bed after receiving Raoul's letter. It is why she stands flabbergasted and frozen, staring at us aghast after having her purse stolen. It is why the most positive action (re-action) she may take is shown in the scene following the mugging. She stands among a roomful of chairs, throwing them in the air in a frenzy (of slow motion), venting her rage. Disturbingly, we had viewed her assailant sneaking up on her but were unable to warn her, and thus we become silent, helpless, immobile, and impotent witnesses. Even in Valda Setterfield's final love letter she notes

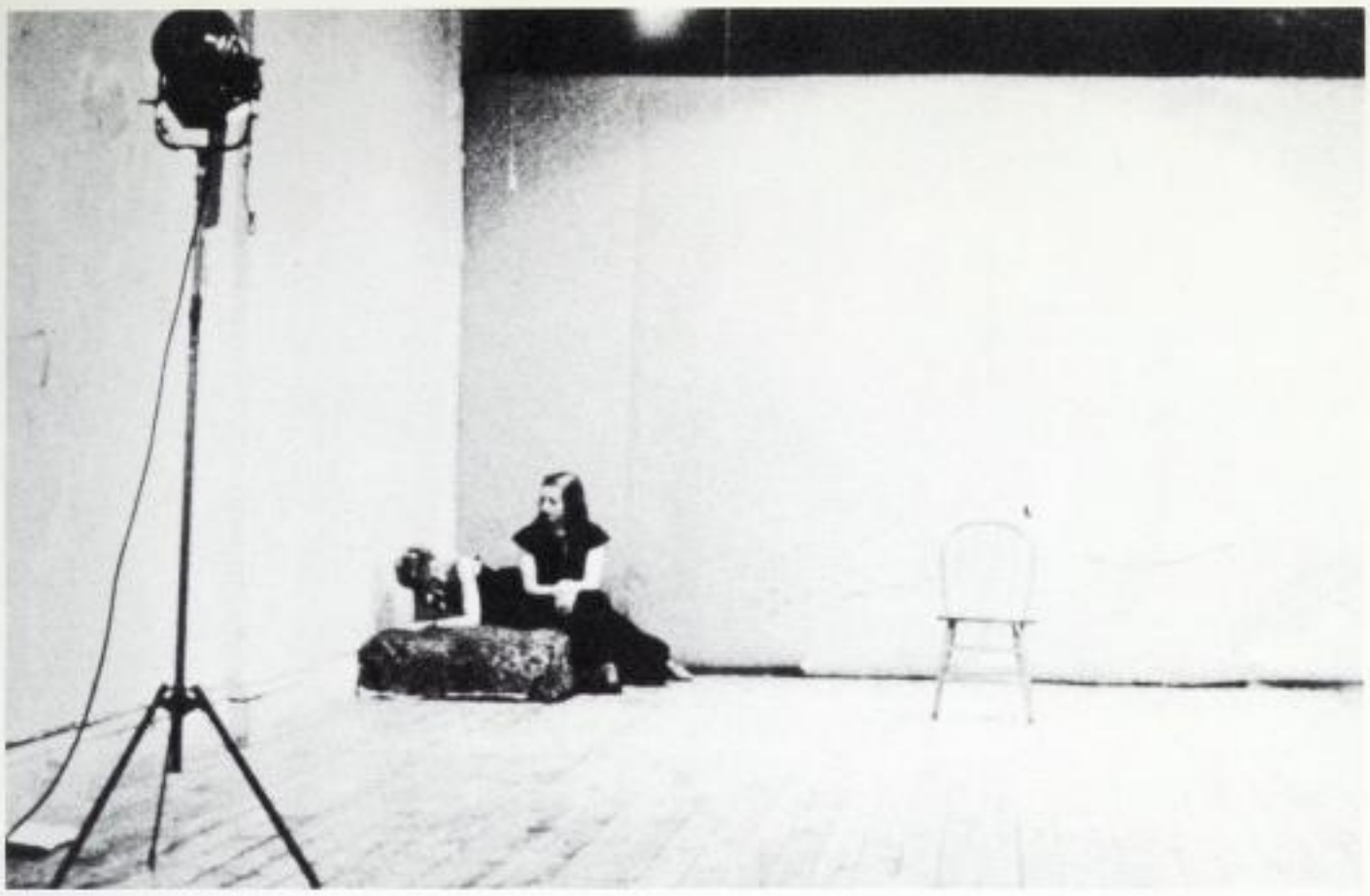
> Visions of black pages turned over in my memory. . . . It is as if one had seen the origin of one's own mind and how it might have worked if it had not been distorted and petrified with anger and fear. . . . It may seem like a childish expression of helplessness for me to insist on writing. . .

Black pages, black expanses, and black holes (here even related to Jean Baudrillard's rocket terminology in cinema theory in his "The Precession of Simulacra") represent vast, apocalyptic spaces where the blackest actions of human experience become lost and perhaps even consigned. They even take shape in a face. When Rainer's face, in the photograph of her with eyes closed, becomes distorted in a series of grainy disfigurations, her eyes and nostrils become black holes, as Rainer notes in the script to *Kristina*, expressing at once ecstasy, pain and horror.[8] (Likewise, the visual and verbal references to "cunt" made throughout the

film obliquely reinforce the dark depths of some Freudian apprehension of woman's "deceptive" surface that underneath promises entrapment.) She describes her aging face as too intense and "even looking angry . . . like Nixon's. In the absence of stimulus will [it] refuse today to respond?" Kristina's voice-over continues, "Today I will remember how to enjoy myself among people, express interest, concern, etcetera, look into the face of my conversant just often enough to convey sincerity, keep panic and bitterness at bay." The slow left to right track of the camera over photos of faces of Gustave Diessl, Nixon, Kristina, *Potemkin,* and of extermination camp corpses and, in counterpoint, a grinning James Cagney (an actor's face "swollen with a masklike beauty"), accompanies this section and Kristina's recollection of "the stupor that seized me then [which] has not left me yet. I often stop, flabbergasted, at the sight of this incredible thing that serves me as a face." Concurrently, Blondell Cummings continues to recount the Julio Cortazar story that "says that the tiger is in the Kid's study." The tiger, at this point so symbolic of the destruction of the face caused by age—its lines, its wrinkles—has invaded the youth's heretofore secure territory. Kristina's own face has turned her in, has become a silent but sure informer.

Thus the banality of evil, on every level, is illustrated through tone, gesture, language, image, pace—or through the lack of any of these. Banality and horror or injustice are equally balanced. While chewing on a piece of toast (a dull and banal activity), Kristina is forced to acknowledge her compliance in another crime—being ripped off by men. In another instance, Raoul flatly relates (as we view photos of returned prisoners of war and army convoys), "They come over for dinner. They talked about the Marx Brothers. We ate meatloaf. I stare at her rings." "He is wondering why I find it hard to look at him," Rainer narrates. Later she continues, "He hears the hammering of the SS." As Kristina (played by Setterfield) makes a phone call, we see the phone number penned onto her forearm as a reminder, but here the numbers startle the audience into a reminder of something entirely different, less mundane, and more horrifying.

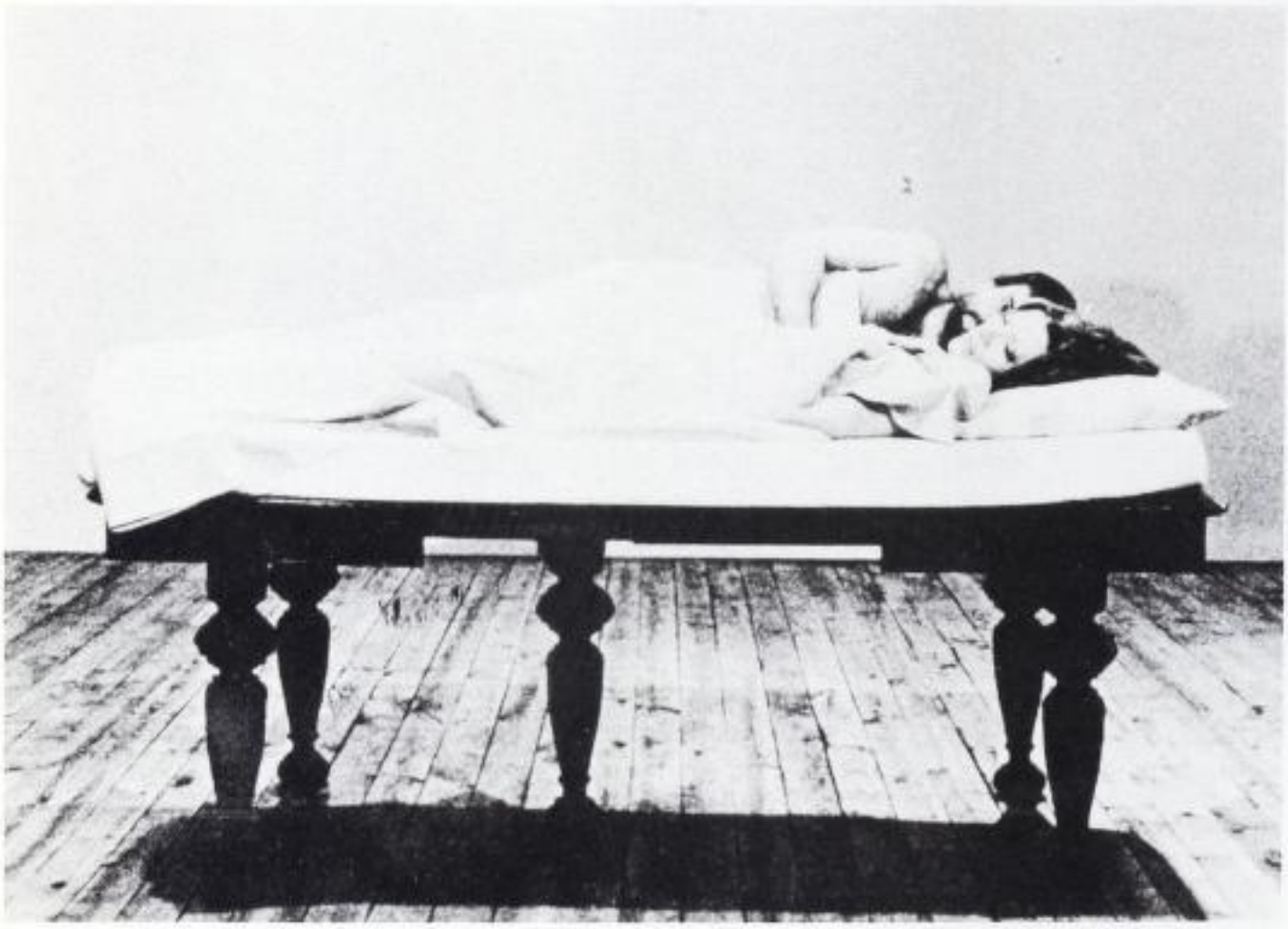
Ultimately, Rainer finds one unassailable stronghold, a refuge from the daily and eternal molestations and muggings that bombard the psyche. In opposition to the stance of incredulous, crestfallen stupor, of frozen, open-mouthed, closed-eyed disbelief or unwillingness to acknowledge arises (literally) the utopian haven of artistic creation and productive



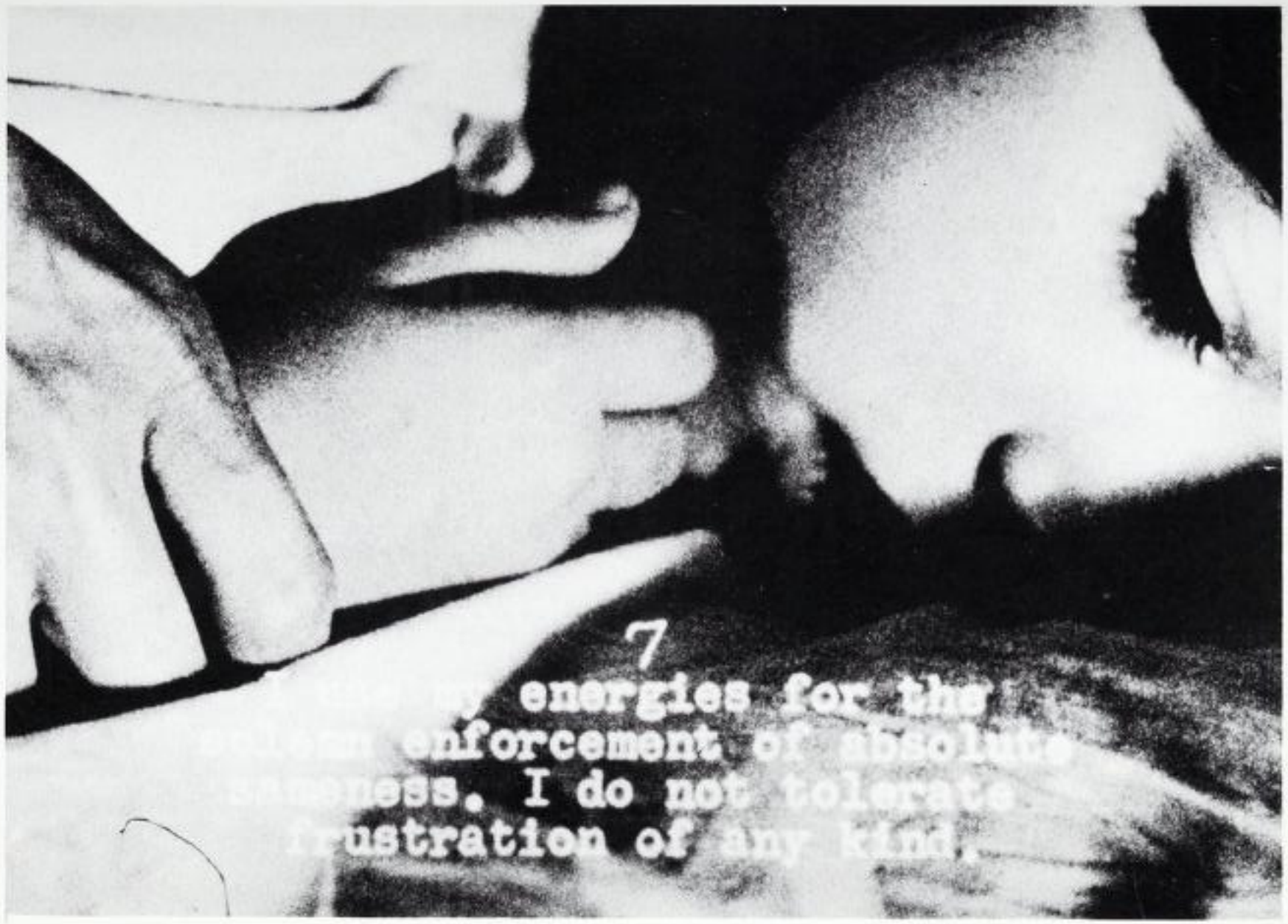
Valda Setterfield and Shirley Soffer in *Lives of Performers* (1972).

Valda Setterfield in *Lives of Performers* (1972).

Valda Setterfield and John Erdman perform the exaggerated expressions and gestures in *Lives of Performers' tableaux vivants.*



Dempster Leech and Renfreu Neff in *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974).



Shirley Soffer in *Film About a Woman Who…* (1974).

Half-naked female figure and man's arm from *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974).

Valda Setterfield reading book and Shirley Soffer on the table in *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976).

Blondell Cummings and photo collage from *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976).

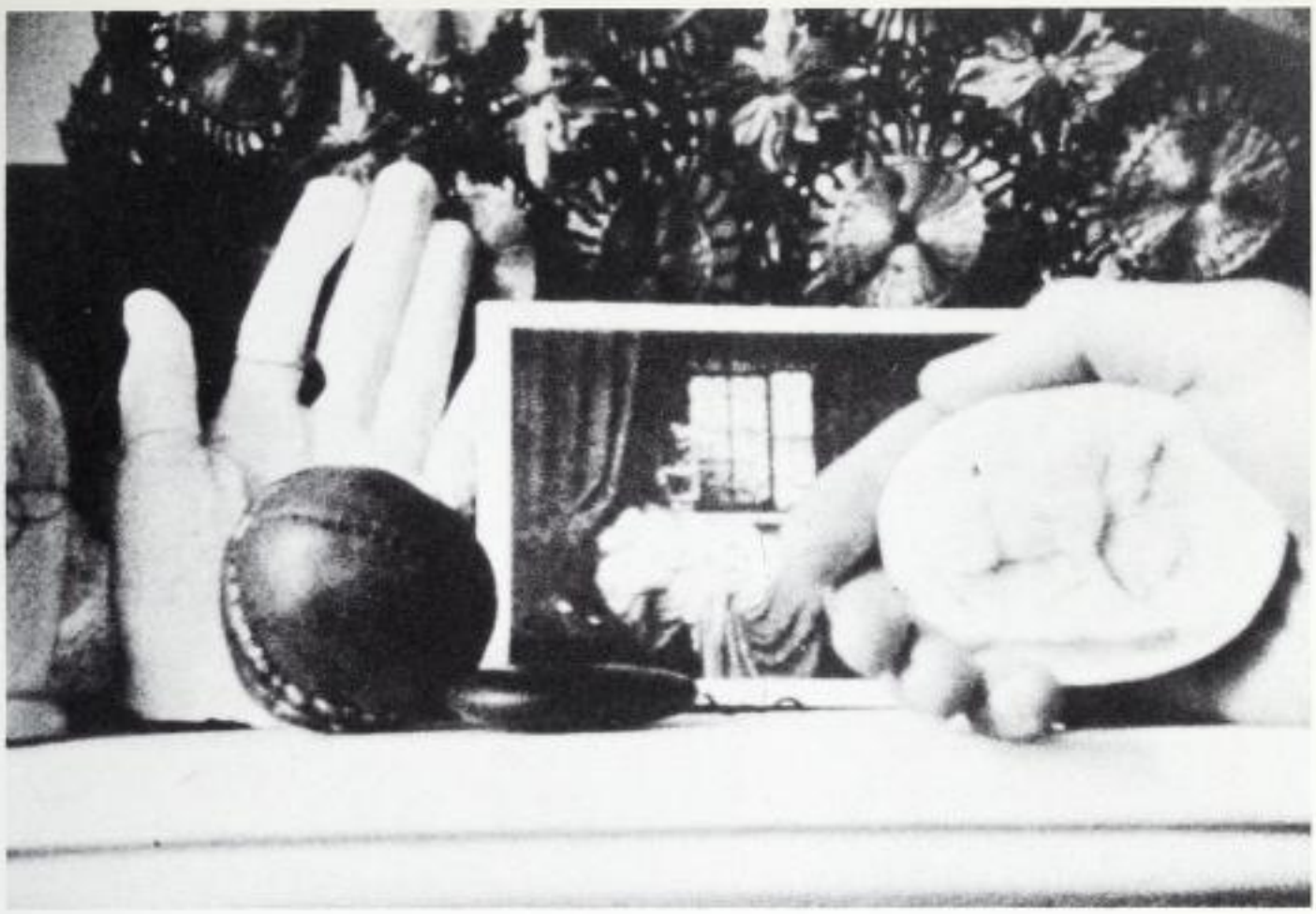
Stultifying devastation: Kate Parker as Kristina in *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976). Dressed in the costume of dual personae—abandoned woman and performer.

Ivan Rainer and Yvonne Rainer in bed in *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976).

Lil Picard, lying on sofa, in *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976). A different kind of cooperation is implicitly more positive, more life-affirming.

Close-up of Cynthia Beatt and pagoda from *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980).

Annette Michelson and Gabor Vernon as patient and analyst at desk in *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980). "What I'd really like to have are moral or ethical *feelings*."



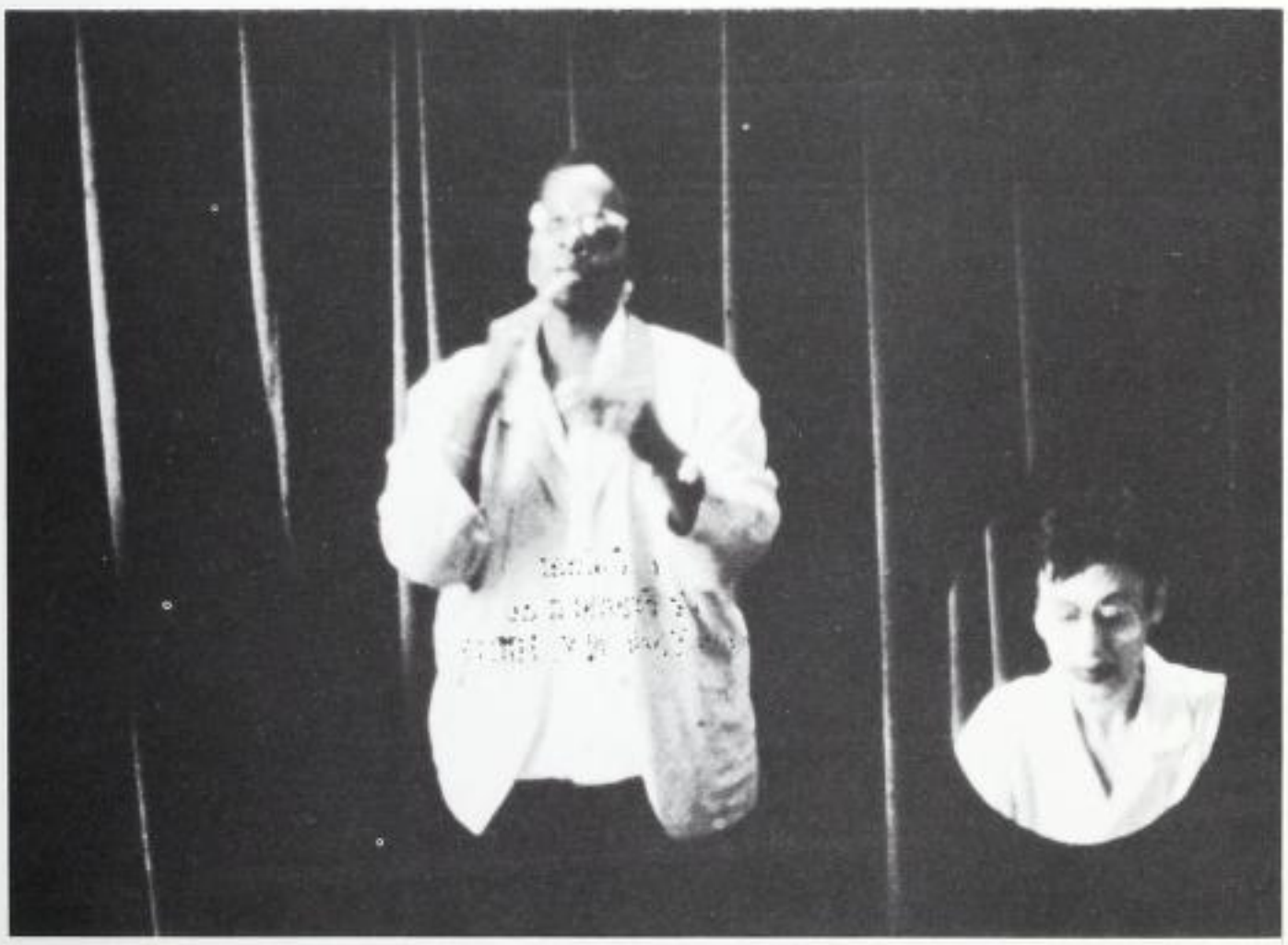
Frame enlargement of mantlepiece with hands and picture, part of the mantle's changing and accumulating array, from *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980).

William Raymond in front of a clip from *Un Chien Andalou*, in *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985). An attempt to open our eyes. Visual juxtapositions parallel juxtapositions of modes of address.

Yvonne Rainer and William Raymond in *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985).

William Raymond, as Jack Deller, standing in front of Trisha's collage in *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985).

Melody London, Jackie Raynal, and William Raymond in *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985). Like the party-goer who momentarily visits the hallway, we study the two oddities there, trapped in the maze and the rhetorical stand-off of a theoretical come-on.



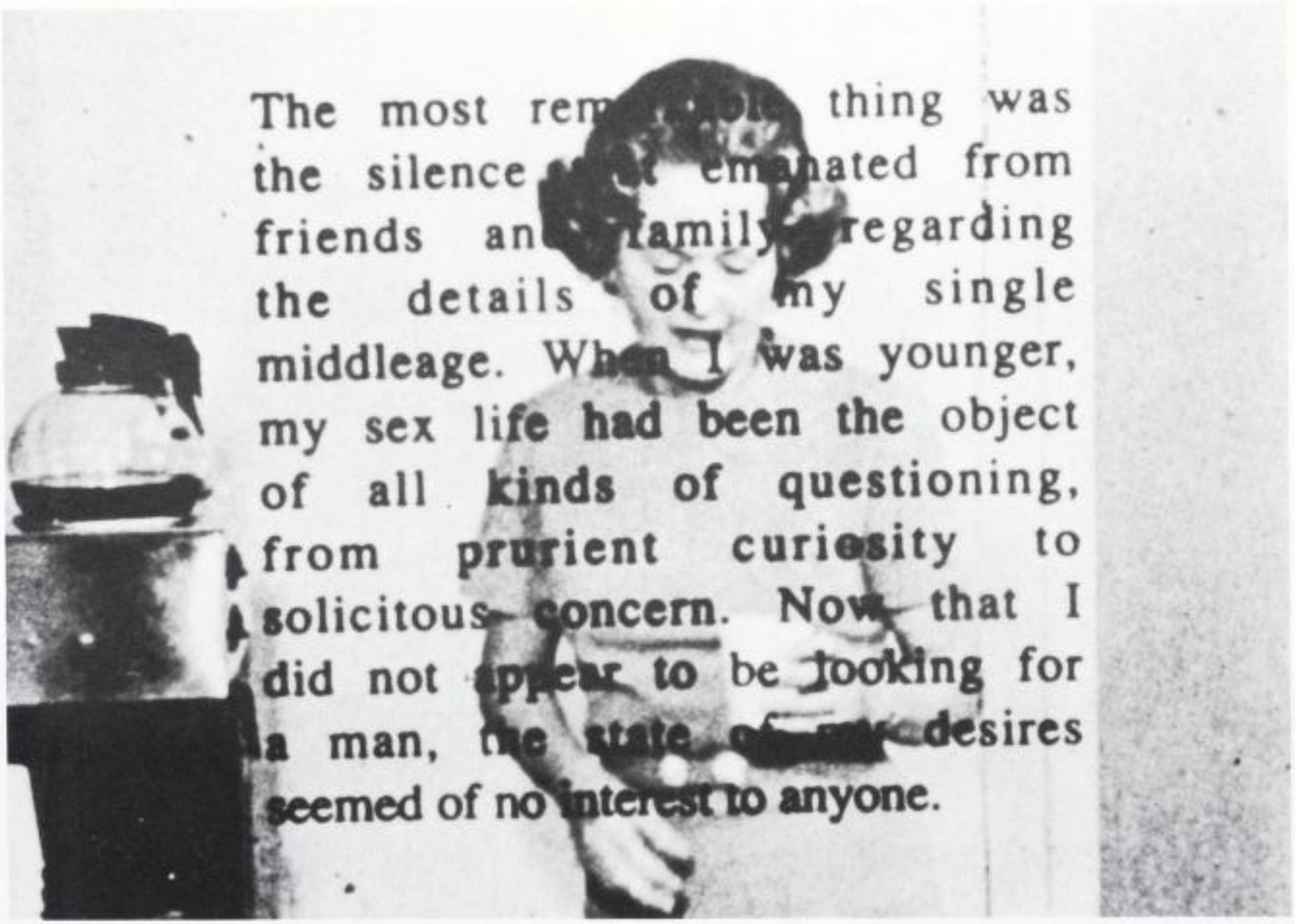
Claudia Gregory, deaf signer, and Yvonne Rainer (in insert) as Helen Caldicott in *Privilege* (1990). "We've done nothing yet."

Novella Nelson as Yvonne Washington in *Privilege* (1990).

Blaire Baron and Rico Elias in *Privilege* (1990).

Dan Berkey and Alice Spivak, as Jenny, in *Privilege* (1990). Paralyzed with horror, women awaken in the middle of the night and sit bolt upright. "My biggest shock on entering middle age was the realization that men's desire for me was the linchpin of my identity."

Gabriella Farrar, dressed like Carmen Miranda, and car with crew in *Privilege* (1990). Our genial guide, Digna, acts as the omniscient narrator of a moral travelogue.



Frame enlargement, woman with coffee-maker and text, from *Privilege* (1990).

participation. It is from this shared process, initiated by the artist and her vision, that a flexible and fluid reintegration may take place.

In the opening of the film ("Is it finally ending?") the narrator details a crablike groping along the bottom where she hardly dared to breathe in those depths wherein the body turns to gelatin and the brain lies in colloidal helplessness, listening to its own muffled cries. Indeed, the film begins in a languid and heavy state, as we watch Blondell Cummings staring disconsolately out a window, but it quickly takes an ascending turn.

> Now the single bright shaft angling towards me from above remains fixed and clear. So I know I am rising, or have started to rise, to the foreseeable surface. . . . A familiar excitement is rising with me, like the brightness of imminent discovery. Perfumed images jostle rhetorically against tenacious objections.

How like the bright shaft of light issued forth from a film projector perched above the spectator seated in the dark depths is this image; how like the excitement of the imagination and assemblage of perfumed images is the will to create cinematic art. As she continues, a foreseeable form begins to take shape—a cinema in which:

> My actors will not move with indolent ease through painted landscapes filled with their spoils. . . . Their faces are not swollen with a masklike beauty. Their actions will not lead them, unquestioning as mindless automatons, into senselessly violent entertainment. If they become pawns or bullies or cowards or avengers or victims, if they are corruptible or bored it will only be for a moment.

The artist rises, somewhere between the circus of spectacle (i.e., the thralldom of an industrial, conventional, mind-numbing cinema of consumption or performance as exhibition, display and dominance) and the creation of art. If poetry unwittingly cooperates in softening the effects of catastrophe, if artists and performers use/abuse experience for their own ends (leaving them ultimately uncommitted and untouched), then salvation comes in the utopian act of artistic creation and execution, especially in the "shared interests and purpose...of communal activity" suggested earlier. On the one hand, one is caught in blank despondency, disheartened or caught in tacit cooperation with the enemy: with the mugger, molester, male lover, manager of the apartment house, oil company, factory ("Medallion Mills") that shares one's block, or with commercial and deadening

cinema and other similar forms of escape. In one scene, Lil's voice interrupts, "It takes four years for a bottle to drift around the world." Cagney's voice-over replies, "I guess there's a need for that kind of thing. It keeps the mind busy." "Let's forget it," Valda had interjected at a troubling point, "and go to the movies." (This point is also humorously made when Diao slops ketchup onto a movie-book opened to a page entitled "The Crowd Roars," further connecting the audience to the aforementioned tigers.)

A different kind of cooperation is implicitly more positive, more life-affirming. As the narrator in the opening sequence continues to detail the more blissful and heroic aspects of shared and fruitful performance, the camera discovers a building and pans its open window and facade on which "shaft-way" is stenciled, obliquely recalling a film projector's shaft of light. Another shaft of light rises beautifully midway through the film. After throwing roses at the same building mentioned earlier, Kristina returns to speak to an impoverished, lone woman planted on her doorsteps. At this point, all the questions of morality and conscience asked throughout the film seem to be answered when Kristina helps the woman up and brings her into the apartment. While there is no dialogue, the scene in the elevator shaft is a model of sincere, shared communication. In fact, Kristina's demeanor refuses the kind of humiliation or charitable patronage one might expect from this gesture. As the woman shares postcards and clippings from her bag, these found images become part of the environment as Kristina carefully places them on the rising elevator's ceiling. Using the same technique as the filmmaker, this bag lady becomes an artist figure, both because of her delight in the disparate images she has collected and in her cooperation with Kristina as they redesign the space (and the universe). The elevator's ceiling contains a windowlike opening through which a bright light reveals the shaft and sky-paper, as well as the steadily ascending movement of the elevator. Here it is perhaps interesting to connect this moving apparatus to a cinematic concept of apparatus that seems applicable. Dziga Vertov, the revolutionary Soviet filmmaker, provides an enlightening perspective, written in 1923, enlarging the scope of this scene.

> I'm an eye. A mechanical eye. I, the machine, show you a world the way only I can see it. I free myself for today and forever from human immobility. I'm in constant movement. I approach and pull away from objects. . . . I fall and rise with the falling and rising bodies. This is I, the machine, manoeuvering in the chaotic movements, recording one

> movement after another in the most complex combinations. Freed from the boundaries of time and space, I co-ordinate any and all points of the universe, wherever I want them to be. My way leads towards the creation of a fresh perception of the world. Thus I explain in a new way the world unknown to you.[9]

From the point of view of the elevator's inhabitants, the vantage point the spectators equally share, this kind of utopian structuring and reworking of experience is made concrete in relation to the apparatus's movements. It synthesizes the perceivers of experience with the creation of it, coordinating any and all points of the universe, vis-à-vis the camera.

In a modern reworking of Baudelaire's theory of the *Flaneur,* the 19th-century stroller and eternal voyeur of the passing parade, critics Ted Colless and David Kelly create a similar but revised version, the *neo-flaneur,* who:

> manoeuvers himself into a mobile viewfinder from which he could observe the spectacle in mid-pulse. Parody, irony, and above all a studious indifference become not just facile affectations, but tense existential strategies to maintain even the possibility of continuing to speak.[10]

The elevator, as mobile viewfinder, is thus such a device; however, it fluidly permits the process necessary to promote creative and moral cooperation. It rises above irony or callous indifference. The symbolic rise of its inhabitants, newly met on the street, stands as a measure of the kind of spontaneous and mutual association leading to the kind of harmonious collaboration cited by the narrator in her earlier description of ideal social symmetry and interaction. The amicable participation also stands as opposition and antidote to the street scenes that depict group arrest and terror.

Another scene that briefly conveys this sense of accord utilizes, ironically, a distanciation device. It occurs in the love letter section when Valda, dressed in glamorous garb (representing Kristina's performer persona), asks for the cue for her next line of dialogue from an offscreen Anna. (Her lines here recall "struggling with my distraught projections," an appropriate metaphor.) The artistic collaboration between those involved in the filmmaking process that is consciously embodied, however minutely, in this vignette further counters the undertone of paralysis pervading the film.

In *Kristina* there is a climax, but it is not one propelled by plot. Instead, there is an overwhelming sense of urgency, first signaled by the onrushing of images in the *tableaux* that enact the fear or devastation of the cluster of souls which have been heaped together in lifeless piles, as for burial in a mass grave. It continues through Valda's monologue and begins to end with her assurance:

> I feel I can fly over the fields or ruins in my memory and all of it is alive and continuous and makes sense. . . . I think there would not be any other way to cope with the unnameable impetuosity that I have lived through and still do and desperately want to continue.

As Herbert Clark's cornet music continues, we watch the ending credits, which are pasted over a blackboard inscribed with a sentence we have seen before.

In an earlier section, this fragment of Samuel Beckett's *The End* had been the subject of a classroom lecture, delivered in earnest, but taken to be hilarious by all but one of the howling students. Her serious face reads the message as we do.

> The memory came faint and cold of the story I might have told, a story in the likeness of my life, I mean without the courage to end or the strength to go on.

In the final sequence, Rainer takes apart this message and thus converts it, creating her own form and truths. It now reads, where we can unravel the fragmented and colliding chalk words behind the credits, in part: "story," "came faint," "life," "courage," "told, a story," "in the likeness." Because the camera pans one phrase from right to left, or in the opposite direction of normal reading, the audience must read the original phrase, "courage to end" as "end to courage," followed by "the story," "a story," "my life," and finally, "to go on." Ultimately, this sense of continuity, even in the grim face of a lack of courage or will, is strengthened by the certainty that dynamic process and radical progress will prevail. The concluding process of the film is a clear and vivid emblem of this. Though the camera pans in an ever-descending trail, the message is one of overriding strength and the simple will to recover and survive.

Notes

1. Camera Obscura Collective, "Yvonne Rainer: Introduction and Interview," *Camera Obscura* 1 (1976): 72.

2. Lucy Lippard, "Yvonne Rainer on Feminism and Her Film," *Feminist Art Journal* 4.2 (1975). Reprinted in *From the Center,* ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: Dutton, 1976), 276.

3. Camera Obscura Collective, 72.

4. Rainer, "Script of *Kristina Talking Pictures,*" *Afterimage* 7 (1978): 66.

5. Rainer, Screening of Journeys from Berlin/1971. Audiotape. Recorded 26-27 November 1979. Walker Art Center, Department of Film. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

6. Rainer, "Script of *Kristina Talking Pictures,*" *Afterimage,* 51.

7. Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Anecdotes to the Oedipal Net(les) while Playing with De Lauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, but. . . . " *Independent* (April 1986): 24.

8. Rainer, "Script of *Kristina Taling Pictures,*" 57-58.

9. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1979), 17.

10. Mick Carter, "From Red Centre to Black Hole," in *Seduced and Abandoned,* ed. André Frankovitz (Glebe, Australia: Stonemoss, 1984), 76.

Chapter Four

Journeys from Berlin/1971

❖

Within the body of her published script to *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, Yvonne Rainer provides a digression that describes and condenses the essence of her (then tentatively titled) 1979 film:

> *Working Title: Journeys from Berlin/1971* is a semi-quasi-narrative (a perpetually retreating narrative that proceeds as it consumes its own ashes, a narrative that sits on its own tale) in which meanings emerge across interconnectedness of its five "tracks" (image-sound, image, sound, i/m/a/g/e-sound, and image-s/o/u/n/d). These five tracks consist of . . .
>
> 1) Crawling titles that present historical information about Germany since 1953 . . .
>
> 2) The voice of a young woman reading from a diary kept by an American adolescent girl in the 1950s [these are excerpted from Rainer's own journals, written from ages 15-18] . . .
>
> 3) The voices of a man and woman who are never seen. The voices read-argue about terrorism, read from memoirs of revolutionaries. . . . The voices also prepare dinner.
>
> 4) Images that are illustrative of, contrapuntal, complementary, or totally unrelated to (3) and sometimes related (complementary, contrapuntally, etc.) to (5).
>
> 5) An on camera monologue by a fifty-year-old woman designated as "patient" that from time to time becomes a dialogue with a woman, man or nine-year-old boy, all designated as "therapist."[1]

Additionally, the image track is filled primarily with aerial shots of the Berlin Wall and Stonehenge (the latter corresponds to the girl reading her diary) in black and white and color, views from train windows that include industrial landscapes or from apartment windows onto streets. (The film

was shot in New York, London, Berlin, and Berkeley.) A group of people who provide "churning [background] activity,"[2] which recalls movements from Rainer's *Parts of Some Sextets* (1965) and some quickly shown vignettes in *Film About a Woman Who . . .*, accompanies the patient's commentary. Also, left to right pans of a recurring cluttered mantelpiece full of changing objects form and punctuate a portion of the film. A mysterious couple walk in slow motion in front of a pagodalike facade. A young woman (Rainer's niece) gives a recorder lesson to another woman (Rainer) that we overhear and view at a distance from outside an open door. A young man (Rainer's nephew) sits in a comfortable chair in a comfortable living room and dispassionately describes the construction of a makeshift tin radio. These last two tracks use sync sound, as do the patient-therapist sessions. Toward the end of the film, a fictionalized video-letter, also in sync sound, is sent from Rainer to her mother, in tearful monologue, as the script describes it.[3]

As Rainer's complex digression implies, these images, voices, and texts alternately interrupt, oppose, accompany, and comment on each other, forming powerful and dialectical parallels, if not direct correspondences, while relentlessly and meticulously mounting the subtle infrastructure that the narrative's "sheer visual [and aural] accumulation" attempts.[4] In a program at the Walker Art Center in 1979, Rainer gave one assessment of the film's tone as alert melancholy.[5] Her narrative and aesthetic strategies have also been astutely described as approaching "narrative like a bomb squad would a suspicious package; with her formidable array of avant-garde techniques, she maintains distance while tracking down and diffusing its contents."[6] Including Rainer's work as central to and aligned with early feminist projects, Teresa De Lauretis noted that these narratives were

> on one front, the formal-theoretical experimentation with cinematic codes, narrative frames, point of view and image construction, sound-image displacements, etc., in an attempt to alter or invent new terms of vision; and, on the other front, what [B. Ruby] Rich called the educational function of agitational or autobiographical filmmaking which made women visible on the screen by documenting political demonstrations or portraying women's daily, real-life activities in the "pre-aesthetic" sphere, as Silvia Bovenschen called it, of domestic life.[7]

These statements are certainly valid when applied to Rainer's cinematic work to date; her obvious added emphasis on meaning and

content in *Journeys,* however, while involved with the attention to mechanisms of film grammar and attracted to issues of value to feminist readings, clearly develops a different and potentially more inclusive or empathetic component. Detailing the expanding dynamic of recent film theory and narrative poetics, De Lauretis further explicates a narrative form that likewise appropriates both the examination of codes and signifiers as well as promotes an involvement with meaning, on a personal or social field, which includes the spectator. In this expanded dimension:

> The object of narrative and of film-narrative theory, redefined accordingly, would be not narrative but narrativity, not so much the structure of narrative (its component units and their relations) as its work and effects; it would be less the formulation of a logic, a grammar, or a rhetoric of narrative per se, fundamental as the latter has been to our knowledge of cinema and to the establishment of film criticism as a humanistic discipline on a par with literary criticism . . . and it would be less the description of a rhetoric of film narrative than the understanding of narrativity as the structuring and destructuring, even destructive, processes at work in the textual and semiotic relations of spectatorship.[8]

At the film's work print premiere at the Walker, Rainer described her current work in ways that clarify and illustrate the construction and effects of such current narrative strategies, in terms of mechanics, of language as mediating factor, and finally of meaning, in their crucial relation to the spectator.

> I have avoided following a central character around. My films are narrative because they do intermittently tell stories and deal, even if it's only within the limits of voice-over narrative, deal with some kind of temporal continuity. But I am very suspicious of being tied to this kind of narrative. I'm always fighting. . . . I don't feel suspicious of language. I respect language more than images. Language is the only real way to get at reality and truth. Narrative in [traditional] filmmaking provides a kind of thralldom. I prefer to have the audience deal with the language and what the language means . . . than be in the situation where they are carried away by empathy with a character.[9]

Because it is the tendency of a narrative to move dynamically toward its dénouement, in order to avoid the tyranny of chronology in narrative structure, "one must show time moving at different speeds, in different compartments of life." Rainer points to *Last Year at Marienbad,* a narra-

tive with its single chronology, and notes that these varieties of narrative reduce subject matter. "I begin with subject matter," she initially claims, but continues

> No, that's not true. Walking people in slides were exercises in continuity and editing in film. I wouldn't be satisfied with that exercise. The challenge of using an armature for other subject matter—content that could make use of this formal exercise. I can't say that I'm anti-narrative. I don't make films that "deconstruct," so to speak, narrative forms. I make *use* of narrative. My films use narrative and abandon it in the most capricious-seeming ways. That probably is where the problem and challenge in my work is.[10]

Also at this program she described her early dance work in *We Shall Run* of 1963, which contained "movement from my own experience." It juxtaposed "humdrum jog-trotting" with a "bombastic section of Berlioz's 'Requiem,'" containing "all the drama or climaxes that would satisfy the most ardent theatrical desires, so I was always juxtaposing these two sensibilities." She continues to develop the intricacies of juxtaposing banality or the everyday with elliptical, fragmented structure, so closely aligned with her filmic texts, which incorporate personal experience and narrativity "to make for an accumulation of emotional detail. . . . I worked for . . . perspective or balance in these juxtapositions."[11]

"My films are travelogues through the emotions," Rainer explains. "They have that kind of detachment or dislocation of the emotional from a represented character. . . . The actors in my films are stand-ins for people—for you, for me." In discussing spectator-character identification she comments, "I don't sit very comfortably with it. I'm caught up in maneuvers which characterize that [emotional] state of affairs, but I'm not against that kind of identification. It's something very powerful."[12] For this travelogue then, *Journeys from Berlin/1971* traverses a space so richly detailed, with so relentless and profound an itinerary, that it is indeed Rainer's most stridently complex and meaningful work. Full of the onrushing immediacy[13] of images, speech, and text, contrasted with the constant visual reminders of architectural ruins and the Berlin Wall and the continuous textural reminders of political intolerance and torture, *Journeys*' composition and disjunctive discourse interweaves and interlocks personal emotion with political action, concepts of power and powerlessness, and contradictions rife within the female experience with Rainer's signature preoccupation with the primacy of narrative investiga-

tion, explicitly put forth above. "You learn how to look at it," Rainer suggests of the film[14] and, due to her cinematic largesse, learning how to look does indeed become the central and most satisfying memento of this trip.

Since it is such a pivotal work, *Journeys from Berlin/1971* has been examined in great detail by a few very worthy critics on a few very worthy levels, as previously outlined. These avenues of investigation seem appropriate to the historic moment—the minimal, semiotic, and feminist readings are, in the main, valid and extremely useful, and many of their concerns are still relevant. Aspects of *Journeys* that clearly contain compatible and commensurate interpretive value lie in areas which serve to link previously delineated facets of Rainer's cinematic structure and style—problems of autobiography, language, and audience—with *Journeys'* lucid and fine exploration of meaning and the resultant connotations extracted from its content. In style and substance, any main focus derived from this diverse work finds subtle correspondences in Rainer's early work in dance and film.

Perhaps not so surprisingly, it can also be extracted from Rainer's past, as described in the young girl's diary and elsewhere, tracing the different compartments of life from which Rainer's artistic sensibilities were formed: the journeys from the places—physical, emotional, and intellectual—which characterize Rainer's self-reflexive/reflective work. At the Walker, Rainer noted that her journals helped to provide "reworkings of my experience" and writing became a way to fictionalize it. She affirmed

> I always want to deal with personal experience . . . to bring all these things together in some way—not necessarily *compare* them. It's pretty tricky to make one to one analogies. . . . Somehow to make parallel streams of thought, that would be provocative and possibly productive.[15]

While it is impossible and unwise to make one-to-one autobiographical connections in any fictional work (this is especially true here), Rainer has consistently presented enough indications throughout her artistic career to suggest that she frequently applies personal emotion and experience to her work—and that is effectively what gives so many avant-garde films and art forms their stunningly honest and profound impact, even amid the most structurally tough terrains. Because Rainer's work is free of posturing yet full of honest investigation and serious inquiry, her work must

almost always achieve a personal or individual (if not always intimate) status.

Thus, the fragmented self, often presented in contemporary art of all kinds, including Rainer's films, here surfaces in part as the fragmented author. Compartments of life, time, space, emotion, and, ultimately, disjointed narrative structure, find voice, language, and image in the vignettes of *Journeys from Berlin*. They also may present (argue, think through, mull over, point out) aspects of a fractured artistic sensibility—a mind-set such as described above that is at once "ravenous for admiration and [contemptuous] of those who provide it . . . this self-contemplative self," a self caught on "the cusp of this plague, this ellipsis, suspension, anticipation, this retraction, denial, digression, irony." This part of the patient's monologue, read by Rainer (and also included in her "Beginning with Some Advertisements for Criticisms of Myself . . .") at the Walker program during *Journeys*' premiere, and descriptive of her narrative style, can also be read with her statement there on the function of the artist. Haltingly, perhaps in order to avoid the academic or timely cliché, she discusses "memory in the service of a perish-the-thought subjectivity mired in (she was never very good at living with) contradictions." She (the artist?) goes on:

> She felt compromised at the drop of a hat: by being asked a question she couldn't answer, by being held in high esteem . . . by her irresponsible memory which invariably copped out at the punch line, by being looked at, by hearing her name. . . .[16]

Here, the connections of Rainer's sensibilities (or the artist's) to the analysand's voice and, as will be seen, to other prominent elements of the film, are apparent. Parallels exist at least in part because Rainer has often discussed her simultaneous attraction to performance, for example, and her occasional abhorrence at being looked at—both because she did not possess the classic dancer's body and because performer ego or her own magnetic qualities stood, ironically, opposed to her aims in dance. Further, because she often reflects her thoughts in third person, the he's and she's that operate as characters, or stand-ins in both her filmic and critical work often hint at conveying her own artistic sensibilities—genderless and subsumed.

If the patient in *Journeys* is an unreliable narrator of sorts and her alternately rational and extraordinarily absurd mélange of language[17] is representative of a narrative itself, as has been suggested by Roy Scha-

fer,[18] then it can be posited that, in many ways, the film's repetitive imagery, evocative language, and fragmented style present emblems of the mind, as Rainer has suggested of the film's interior shots.[19] Thus, the background of Whitechapel, for instance, where the therapy session takes place, becomes, according to Rainer, a place midway between the patient's introspection and her public life.[20] So, to say that *Journeys from Berlin* is one long cinematic stream of Rainer's consciousness would be folly, as it would be to suggest that it is Faulkner's sensibility that is given voice through the characterization of Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*. However, the tension produced from revealing an alienated artist and the accompanying structural disclosure of an intellectual or emotional sensibility removed from experience both strongly register in the splintered and overloaded clutter of Rainer's provocative and productive narrative.

Illustrations of aural and visual removal are packaged in discrete but intersecting compartments throughout the film. The couple preparing dinner are probably the foremost (non)representation of pure isolation, removed as they are from even the noise of the neighbor's music and completely detached from the visual part of the narrative as well. They are an example of the most interior elements of the film as they discuss radical politics and the most extreme acts while in that symbolic bastion of domesticity, the kitchen. In this instance hermetic activity, Noël Carroll points out,

> insulated from exterior life, echoed in the implied confinement of the images of views through windows and close-ups of personal artifacts on the mantelpiece, is analogous to the experiential distance between the couple and the events they are trying to understand.[21]

Hence, because they are thereby reduced to a merely intellectual or academic understanding (and because he notes later that things like violence get a lot more palatable at a distance, here meaning the passage of time) they approximate the kind of SoHo intellectual Rainer is often accused of being. They *are* dialectical argument. The questions they pose and her often very carefully delivered responses are sincerely put forth but, after all, he can point effortlessly to a paragraph, the two lines in a book, which will easily make his point. They are simultaneously (intellectually, theoretically) involved in and effectively removed from political experience, since the only action they take is to prepare dinner, and even this is not seen by the viewer.

As Carroll and others observe, even those images that attempt to show traveling or convey movement are shot from behind windows or from high above a scene, implying removal. We fly over Stonehenge and the Berlin Wall, view industrial landscapes from inside a passing train, see streets below from inside apartment windows. We are thus made to look out at as opposed to exist within. During the filming of these scenes, when Rainer spent extended time living in Berlin and London, she was admittedly shaken by her experience. In 1979, she briefly discussed the kind of alienation Berlin imposed:

> a kind of sentimentality of this tourist, American, myself, living in the city and of course totally removed from anything like political terrorism . . . or the conditions surrounding it in Germany—not even being able to read the newspaper.[22]

She was deeply affected by the Wall—"the icon of this ruptured country," in a city still harboring the effects of war, shrapnel holes in all the old buildings.[23] The scene in *Film About a Woman Who* that describes a woman lost in another city, removed for a long period from her own language, something important and elemental to Rainer, must correspondingly suggest Rainer's detachment from the experiences and ideas she beautifully projects.

Because the experience of being a filmmaker is by definition a voyeuristic one, Rainer's feelings may also, in this case, approximate the patient's, who admits, "people still exist *for* me rather than *with* me." Discussing characterization, Rainer has similarly explained that "in varying degrees, words are uttered but not possessed by my performers as they operate within the filmic frame."[24] Thus, language, words, characters, images, and the filmmaker become telescoped from experience and time, and lose grounding in performance and construction of the narrative. Very late in the film, during a discussion about shocking violence linked to "psychiatrification" used as an instrument of political torture, the male half of the offscreen couple interrupts his friend: "'No windows,' sure. But that complaint reveals your shock at the sadism with which isolation was thought out, the perfection of its execution, the totality of the destructive will of the authorities." It is probably only half a joke to suggest that when Rainer says, "the problem (not the solution) is clear: to track down the Narrativizing Authority where it currently lives and wallop the daylights out of it,"[25] she is adapting the "author-itative" technique of isolation and removal to her own ends. Something of a narrative terrorist herself, she

will continue to displace and disconnect with perfect execution throughout the film.

Likewise removed from the visual track of the film is the young woman whose diary is read intermittently; her personal sense of removal is also clearly presented. In one section she outlines the "sensations [which] come to me when I hear or read of some outstanding human experience of bravery or perseverance, or a story of great emotional appeal"; however, she rejects those melodramas of a contrived nature or that project unreality. "Intense drama is always so removed from my own life that it leaves me with an empty feeling," she says. "Then what in God's name do those shivers mean?" She also rejects her mother's emotional reactions to the soap operas she views on television. In another instance, while driving, she witnesses two dogs in the sex act, and is shot with a feeling of terrible shame. She further relates her existential confusion while shopping for shoes and feeling dismay at the thought of the salesgirl's routine and banal existence (similar to that of a typist—"for all one's life?" she asks). She feels awkwardly placed in a superior position and leaves without buying anything.

In most of these experiences, the girl's moral, emotional, and latently artistic and political sensibilities are notably formed from her observations of life and people, from her vantage point as a sometimes unwilling or innocent spectator of experience. She is even removed from her own family life to an extent—sadly moved by her mother's reverie and often sorry for her father, relieved that he is away. Shocked by the intensity of real experience and embarrassed by the dramatized spectacle of it, her feelings are intensely felt and, it is important to note, captured in writing. This presentation of a pure and honest consciousness resuscitated from Rainer's girlhood journal is compromised only to a degree: "Everything I've written has been put down for the benefit of some potential reader," the narrator admits. "It is a titanic task to be frank with myself. I fear my own censure. Even my thoughts sometimes appear to consciousness in a certain form for the benefit of an imaginary reader." She remembers her own "childhood acting" and says:

> I don't think I did anything unusual or dramatic at these times, but the things I did do I did with the thought in mind that I was being watched. Now this reaction is becoming more and more unconscious, having been transmitted to my actions, speech, writing and my thoughts. This last is the most unfortunate of all.

This is perhaps as direct and candid a portrait of the artist as a young woman as one could wish for; the girl's sense of performance, her own fine sensibilities detailed in a moment-by-moment account, and ultimately her sense of herself as disengaged observer, performer, and recorder all promote specific and graphic understanding of the artist and witness to be. It is important to note that

> Rainer recalls an instance of her own spectatorship, as a ten-year-old girl watching a Hollywood film, and her intense response of pleasure and anger, identification and subsequent secondarization (in Freud's term): in short, making of a coherence for the self which is not only imaginary but profoundly cleft, inherently contradictory.[26]

The character's physical removal from the narrative accentuates this, rendering her an abstract yet formidable consciousness, one whose sense of her destiny is keenly felt.

Clearly, in several fundamental ways, the young woman exists in direct counterpoint to the fifty-year-old patient. In Rainer's 1981 article entitled "Looking Myself in the Mouth . . ." she advances various conceptions and configurations of the Artist: as Exemplary Sufferer, as Self-Absorbed Individualist, as Changer of the Subject, as Ventriloquist, as Consumer, etc. The patient, an artist, certainly functions as all of the above, though here in detailed visual form, with sync sound. Both she and the girl express alienation from family ("Motherhood is as alien to me as manhood," the patient maintains), from the body, and from feeling. "I saw that what I had been saying did not come from myself," the girl distressingly admits. "Some people don't seem to notice their own body changes, changes of the spirit, the weather, sleeping cycles, dreams," the patient observes. "They eat without hunger and their food is digested in their absence." She later views suicide as "a failure of imagination . . . a failure to imagine what may lie outside one's own experience." "I will learn to love myself," the girl's diary reads, "then I will love humanity." "I had no compassion for the life I wanted to end," the patient returns in a contrapuntal, rhythmic exchange in the narrative body. "I had succeeded in suppressing everything—thought, feeling, doubt—everything. I had achieved complete autonomy and perfect detachment. . . . I was empty and impregnable at one and the same time."

The patient notes with shock that feelings can erode not only one's best interests but one's conscience. Her immense need to feel is shown in the tragicomic story of an affair where even this intellectual "bourgeois

artist," for want of a hug and cuddle, misplaced her emotions in "OK, Bloomingdale's." She finds herself shopping for shoes (like the young girl) and "spending the sperm" with probably one of the most widely recognized living symbols of modern intellectual and creative life, Samuel Beckett. The sections of the film in which she combs her hair again draw the split between the emotional, intellectual, political and artistic consciousness and the ordinary, human, egocentric individual. This failure of integration on the part of the (female) artist conveys the patient as

> estranged from experience, which exists for her only as memories qualified by rationalization. The room behind her supplies vistas and events she is unaware of. She only turns around twice, and each time the act of looking has no visible effect on her. Even the changing gender and age of her therapist has no impact. The patient is presented as having lost all context and meaning from her life, a prime state, as Emile Durkheim has pointed out, for egoistic suicide.[27]

These admissions, alternating with ideas of compassion and empathy, are also put forth by the "she" of the narrative. The removed she convincingly insists that she cannot empathize with others, on either a personal or social level, in effect anesthetized from identification: "What I'd really like to have are moral or ethical *feelings*." Similarly, the patient reveals, "feelings are just plain foreign to me, so foreign that I find it hard to say the words for them." Therefore, the ability to empathize or connect with humanity, on any level, even linguistic, is shown to be a saving grace, in direct opposition to the patient's "atrophy of her feelings."[28] Such a physical and emotional removal promotes and incontrovertibly structures a divided (female) self whose early alienation is drawn in the adolescent girl's diary, becomes mediated by the offscreen she and is articulated finally in the patient's full-blown tumultuous torrent of rage, matter-of-fact regression or reportage, and often surreal visual and rhetorical presentation. She is at once in and out of time, rational and coherent, then adrift, in a rowboat. Even parts of her speech are suspended and elided (indicated here in square brackets) as she discloses/disengages: "I've never held the threat of [suicide] over your head"; "You heard me. I said, ['spending the sperm']." Ultimately, these structural or thematic removals are even linked to exteriorized journeys, as the patient (recalling Kristina in *Kristina Talking Pictures*) predicts "what new topography will appear on my face: creases and barrows as conspicuous as the scars slashed by two world wars into the soil of Europe." The patient's bed trembling and

an image from the interior of a moving car (again an experience parallel to the girl's) gives rise to her question:

> Had they [the neighbors] gone through the same experience? Had it gone through the whole building? A thought intruded: that it was a visitation of the conflagration of twenty-five years previous. Periodically, the old building shuddered in recollection.

So like Rainer's relation to shrapnel-torn buildings of Berlin, the patient's interior experience of life both consciously and unconsciously finds iconographic relatedness in the structures of the exterior world (or even a face) and in the complex rendering of time that exists in multilevel chronological structuring (as well as through the use of memory and objects) in the film.

On another level, Ann Sargent-Wooster accurately draws the parallel to the terrorists who are

> lovingly regarded because of their capacity for feeling and commitment. They are viewed from outside with a nose-against-the-glass wishfulness, as if "Wouldn't it be nice if, instead of experiencing the modern condition of deadness, it would be possible to be aroused and have a central focus of life, as they do. . . ."

The terrorists are also free from the crippling rationalizations of the patient and can employ themselves as single-focus weapons. They are regarded from outside as having simpler and more heroic lives by characters who do not feel their own activities have any meaning. Their capacity for meaningful activity is what separates them from us and is the basis of the admiration accorded them.[29]

Thus, while they are visually absent from the narrative and removed in time, we are reminded of the terrorists and their acts in the march of titles that overwhelm the spectator in their black and white insistence. These acts, described and repeated in such terms, recall the acts of "some outstanding human experience of bravery or perseverance or a story of great emotional appeal" which so ignited the young girl.

In a similar way, the letter of Ulrike Meinhoff vilifying psychiatry and read at the end of the film, is full of passionate rhetoric. Rainer notes:

> At the same time I present myself as an American living in Berlin and I describe the film I had just seen about a man getting out of prison. A contrast—and consequent separation—is made between Meinhoff and me, between my emotionalism over a vicarious experience and Meinhoff's over the harsh reality of her own. Again the distance of the American "voyeur" from the German events is stressed.[30]

Because Rainer's radical separateness finds its form in filmmaking and other forms of art, her political sensibilities are manifested not through political action (unless one perceives the creation of art as political act) but through artistic channels. Nonetheless, because Rainer's videotaped letter is positioned close to Meinhoff's, the two sensibilities seem connected in some abstract way. "I began to have much more sympathy for her," Rainer discloses, and goes on to say:

> Her denunciation seemed more impassioned and justified than hysterical and rhetorical. At that point when our voices intersect, one of the most powerful contrasts in the whole film emerges. They are opposite sides of a culture—her rage and my cultured sensitivity.[31]

Like the young diarist who is both aroused and embarrassed by the sensations stimulated by a song from a movie or from a melodrama, Rainer's cultured sensibility is apparent as she documents her emotions in direct visual and aural confrontation with the viewer in the letter home, which purports to be the result of a film she has just seen in Berlin. As the streets of the city are recognized by the audience of that film, gasps and murmurs are heard in the theater, she recounts. Here, the emotions stem from the dramatic rendering of the real—a tragic time past. Both the audience and the tourist-spectator respond emotionally. Rather than becoming deadened by the conspicuous nonentities of the girl or the nonevents of the patient, this woman becomes immersed in a past made palpably present—through the medium of film. Functioning much like the photos and other objects that crowd the mantelpiece and simultaneously juggle past events or phrases in the film with future embodiments in imagery or language, and the film that Rainer's character is so moved by, the cinematic experience here represents a touchstone to immediate or real experience for its spectator, possessing the tools by which to humanize or empathize with it. Such potent results derived from enacted reality are almost routinely treated by Rainer in this ambiguous way, as

her discussion of spectator-character identification or the effects of filmic thralldom delineated earlier and elsewhere reflect.

On the other hand, the caller, who invades the therapy session with his luridly compelling rhetorical stream and who refuses to be manipulated by spectacle, stands outside the narrative, removed from experience or action.

> Not like those movie women: Katy Hepburn facing the dawn in her posh pad with stiff upper chin, Merle Oberon facing the Nazi night with hair billowing in the electric breeze, Roz Russell sockin' the words 'n' the whiskey to the best of them. . . . I never faced the music much less the dawn. I stayed in bed. I never socked anything to anybody; why rock the boat? I never smiled through my tears; I choked down my terror. I never had to face the Nazis, much less their night. . . . Not for me the heart beating in incomprehensible joy, not for me the vicissitudes of class struggle, not for me the uncertainties of political thought. . . .

His references to being in bed and rocking the boat recall the paralysis of the patient; his hammering home of the phrase "not for me" heightens the level of his exclusion; and these become juxtaposed with the intensity of emotion we witness in Rainer's overly sensitized letter home or in Meinhoff's letter.

So, as a direct result, spectator-author and text-image relations become an implicit focus: in a film of such stark alienation, must the viewer become correspondingly, almost necessarily, removed and alienated? As Rainer wisely states and clearly demonstrates in this film, ironically the opposite is true: "the audience is conditioned to collude with whatever narrative strategies they are observing, even 'deconstructive' ones."[32] On the one hand, our narrative expectations are constantly thwarted, our perceptual and aural apprehensions called into question, and, according to Rainer, "denied that process of identification and/or repulsion that is so comforting to our relief-craving psyches."[33] And on the other hand, *Journeys* provides us with a few unexpected linkages and thus participation—to a degree.

First, we are introduced to the main visual components and chief textual and voice representations early in the film. These simply repeat and become familiar.

> Objects mentioned in the dialogue are arrayed along a recurring mantelpiece or in the background [or on the desk of the therapist] of shots

> of the analytic sessions; we see an image and recall an earlier word, or we hear the word and remember the earlier image. There are verbal images or literalizations. . . . These word/image associations abet a sort of cognitive and perceptual play; the mention of objects and their apparition is particularly important in this respect because of the way it engages the spectator's memory. *Journeys*, in other words, is the kind of film that makes a space for audience "participation."[34]

Therefore, in a complex and active way, we learn how to look at the film. Similar to mnemonic devices so well used in *Film About a Woman Who...*, the objects become our memories. Audience and filmmaker are engaged in the construction of a fictional discourse that is schematized in the spectator relationship of object to text.[35] Accordingly, we cut from one narrative thread to another without the extreme discontinuity which might be expected.[36]

Also, the staged look of the therapy session, despite its background activity and surreal interruptions; the staging of Rainer's letter home, despite its abrupt placement in the film when we have already been introduced to the main sets of images; the shots of the mantelpiece, so familiar a symbol of home and hearth, despite its cargo of spaghetti or dismembered, mud-slathered arms, all furnish and promote direct visual and linguistic confrontation and active inclusion of the viewer. As a spectator, one might even be tempted to place oneself in the role of detective, seeking out rational explanations or links among the mantel's changing and accumulating array and by storing and recalling the narrative's parallel aural clues or those that methodically and factually construct the moment-to-moment document of the terrorists' activities, through the use of the crawling titles. The patient's nonsequiturs, recollections, and observations (and easily one of the most compelling screen performances, by Annette Michelson) mesmerize the viewer and, in their powerful fluctuation between seemingly honest confession and disquieting lunacy, the audience becomes rapt, wondering whether it should approach her as an intellectual or a psychotic. In this, it is a good joke on us—doubly so when one considers Michelson's position as film theorist and critic. Likewise, when Rainer rather suddenly appears to deliver her video-letter, the balance also shifts: Is this show of vulnerability really a product of the director's own experience? If so, even a sophisticated viewer may be taken aback by this seemingly intimate confession and by such a direct and emotional display.

Journeys from Berlin does indeed exemplify a text wherein "meanings emerge across interconnectedness" in its tracks, as Rainer suggests. Its narrative almost totally integrates its incongruous and disjunctive elements of sound, language, image, and written text (while never reconstructing spatiotemporal continuity in a seamless package) as well as the dissonant aspects of consciousness they display—a triumph of the powers of free association and phenomenal editing. Through its different and disunified appearances, it transmits easily the colliding and opposing forces of the political and personal as well as the intellectual and emotional, in a milieu where past and present experience are made immediate and alive. Contradictions seem at home in this work, where the real and surreal simultaneously interact. If immediate confrontation is a tactical political tool, it is a cinematic one as well.

Of all the tensions produced in the work, perhaps the most complicated are those that reflect interiority or the basic relation of a continuous moral and artistic evolution of mind. "*Journeys* can be viewed as an inner dialogue, the various voices portraying radiations of a single consciousness at sea, pondering related questions from multiple, incongruous angles," Carroll rightly perceives,[37] but she falls short of aligning that consciousness with an artist's contemplative self. In this, the film displays a rational, moral, and perceptive wit, whose genius stems from the capacity to grasp a vast chain of ideas and images and, through its manifold capabilities, manipulate and embrace the multitude of its accretions, accumulations, juxtapositions, and connections. Rainer explains

> My films have been expanding away from me in a certain way. I've always brought my own life into my work in the sense I've described [which involves "working out things that are close to me for one reason or another"]. I insisted on forthright use of my own subjectivity. . . . But in *Journeys*, I have dropped heavier rocks into the water so that the ripples form larger concentric circles, cover more area, away from that center. In a sense, the center has disappeared. This film certainly contained greater problems than I've ever had to deal with. I had to find ways to deal with personal life and emotion but also with emotion fairly close to, if not within a moral context. . . . Previously . . . everything was subsumed under the kinds of collage strategies that had characterized my dancing. . . . *Journeys* marks the first time that content made it imperative that I examine my formal ideas. . . . At every turn I was confronted with the possibility of making faulty or sinister connections.[38]

Like Godard or Eisenstein (the latter of whose clashing of opposing passions in filmic dialectics impressed Rainer), Rainer's text often resembles cinematic reduction—it provides the essence of what she intends. For her to suggest that the center, her subjectivity, disappears as a result is a bit unjustified. The written text that appears on the screen at the end of *Journeys* enables the director to get in the last word: her "(emphasis mine)" reveals that, ultimately, it is Rainer's moral perception and artistic nimbleness that is at least parenthetically or at most climactically at the heart of this film. It is her agile sensibility, as opposed to her subjectivity or political partiality, which fills the narrative.

"There's a risk that some of the things I most highly value and have worked out with the greatest effort will get embedded in the general accumulation of ambiguity," Rainer admits.[39] When one looks at the views of Stonehenge in the film, one sees what looks like a precarious assemblage of stones piled one on top of the other. Stonehenge's substantial and fixed quality, and its internal logic, is an apt symbol to apply here, for it is this structure of heavy rocks that forms the center of the recurring aerial shots. It is on a similar assemblage that the capricious-seeming juxtapositions of *Journeys* rest.

In her article entitled "Looking Myself in the Mouth . . ." Rainer alludes to John Cage and his work, "a genius beyond question; the product of that genius beyond ambiguity." She relays Cage's anecdote:

> After I had been studying for two years, Schoenberg said, "In order to write music you must have a feeling for harmony." I then explained to him that I had no feeling for harmony. He then said that I would always encounter an obstacle, that it would be as though I came to a wall which I could not pass. I said, "In that case I will devote my life to beating my head against that wall."[40]

Rainer soon makes a connection.

> What a thrilling idea: to be free of the compelling and detested domination of cinematic narrativity with its unseen, unspoken codes for arranging images and language with a coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure, so lacking in the imperfect reality it purports to mirror. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that a particular aspect of narrative, namely character, is a consistent presence in *Journeys from Berlin/1971* as it is—often by dint of its conspicuous absence in my three previous films. . . . Upon closer examination it seems to me that I

> am going to be banging my head against narrative for a long time to come.[41]

What with all this rock-piling, stone-throwing, and banging of one's head against a narrative wall, it is gladdening to note that, as in her previous films (in Valda's solo in *Lives* or the run-walking-rain sequences accompanied by music in *Woman Who*), there is a calmative sense of meditation (*not* dénouement or conclusion) toward the end of the discordant tangle that is *Journeys from Berlin*. The music lesson—simple, straightforward, and observed by the spectator from a quiet distance—presents Rainer (as she presents herself above) in the role of student. With the door barely open, the pupil seated—relaxed and determined—and the quiet voices in synchronized sound, the viewer welcomes the chance to rest. Strengthening ourselves against the advent of the invasion of crawling titles bearing dire messages and overlapping voice-overs, weary from the journeys just undertaken, we, like the woman in the hands of her capable instructor, happily accept an interlude of pure and straightforward creative focus. In opposition to the patient-therapist sessions, this one-to-one representation of secure human connection presents an island in the film, free of ambiguity, obsession, manic movement or lingual sprawl, or isolation. Only the spectator is removed from this experience, but we are privy to it. The film could not end on this scene, since it would be far too safe and hence antithetical to Rainer's risk-taking style, but it does present the passing on and production of art, even on the simplest levels, as a healing and steadying act.

So, while banging her head against the wall may be Rainer's probable destiny, having her back against it is not. Her ease and delight in the mutually complementary acts of the creation and performance of art are documented in her previous work and *Journeys from Berlin*. They are perhaps the most harmonious and symmetrical elements of her films, even while presented in radically disjunctive stylistic ways. Rainer's narratives are always fractured and subdivided, but they never break down. The self (and by extension the places it visits, like the city of Berlin and the country it divided) is correspondingly split and often disengaged or insulated from personal, political, or social connection—though it reflects authentic and concrete experience. Such a displaced person(a), especially one who indisputably possesses such intensely introspective sensibilities, might then likely push even further that sense of dislocation by distancing and isolating its audience/admirers. In this upheaval, *Journeys from Berlin* presents the recurring avant-garde theme of a fragmented self reflected in

a form that is multilayered and resistant to easy access. Like Maya Deren, whose palm is placed flatly against the windowpane as she looks out, in her *Meshes of the Afternoon,* Yvonne Rainer presents angles of a divided psyche through a narrative whose components necessarily overlap, overwhelm, and occasionally obliterate what stood before it. "I guess at any given moment I'm interested in having these things collide," she says, and further explains

> The politics of representation—which not only refer to things outside the film, like social constructs, but to the strategies of the film itself . . . I may begin to get a little disjointed here, in the way that I speak of these things, because I haven't resolved them. . . . I have felt myself beginning to cross this frontier of narrative. I'm scratching at the frontier.[42]

Notes

1. Rainer, "Script of *Journeys from Berlin/1971*," *October* 9 (1979): 83.
2. Rainer, Screening of *Journeys from Berlin/1971*. Audiotape. Recorded 26-27 November 1979. Walker Art Center, Department of Film. Minneapolis, Minnesota.
3. Rainer, "Script of *Journeys from Berlin,*" 105.
4. Ann Sargent-Wooster, "Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin,*" *Drama Review* 24.2 (1980): 105.
5. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.
6. Kathleen Hulser, "Feminist Filmmakers Shake Up the Narrative," *Women Artists News* 7.3 (1981): 15.
7. Teresa de Lauretis, "Strategies of Coherence," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction,* ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 119-20.
8. Ibid., 118.
9. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Sargent-Wooster, "*Journeys from Berlin,*" 104.
14. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.
15. Ibid.
16. Rainer, "Beginning with Some Advertisements for Criticisms of Myself, or Drawing the Dog You May Want to Use to Bite Me With, and Then Going On To Other Matters," *Millenium* 6 (1980): 5.
17. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.
18. B. Ruby Rich, "The Revolutionary Psyche," *Chicago Reader,* 4 April 1980, sec. 1: 16.
19. Noël Carroll, "Interview with a Woman Who," *Millenium* 7-9 (1980-81): 63.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 48.
22. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.
23. Ibid.
24. Rainer, "More Kicking and Screaming from the Narrative Front/Backwater," *Wide Angle* 7.1-2 (1985): 8.
25. Rainer, "Looking Myself in the Mouth," *October* 16 (1981): 74.
26. De Lauretis, "Strategies," 122.
27. Sargent-Wooster, 110-11.
28. Jan Dawson, "A World Beyond Freud," *Sight and Sound* (Summer 1980): 196.
29. Sargent-Wooster, 118.
30. Carroll, "Interview," 51.
31. Ibid., 60.
32. Ibid., 45.
33. Ibid., 53.
34. Ibid., 41.
35. Sargent-Wooster, 106.
36. Abby Turner, "*Journeys from Berlin/1971*: A Film by Yvonne Rainer," *Independent* 3.2 (1980): 16.
37. Carroll, 39.
38. Ibid., 43-44.
39. Ibid., 61.
40. Rainer, "Looking Myself," 70.
41. Ibid., 71.
42. Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, eds., "Yvonne Rainer," *Profile* 4.5 (1984): 37-38.

Chapter Five

The Man Who Envied Women

In an article entitled "In Paris—Miniskirts of the Mind," Richard A. Shweder makes a comical and timely observation: for the French, the latest fashion from Paris does not now only refer to the length of skirts but also to the current style in theoretical discourse. In this enervating climate, a person is made up of syllables and life is really a run-on sentence that only death can bring to an end. The academic vernacular driven by a trendy text (*Being and Nothingness*), trendy author (Sartre, Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Kristeva), or trendy movement (existentialism, structuralism, semiology, feminism, postmodernism) oozes sex appeal, which reflects positively on anyone intellectually dexterous enough to dismantle the impenetrable text/author/ism or savvy enough to differentiate the true master from the imposter. What is more, the French mind, because it is French, has two banks—the left and the right—connected by a bridge of irony. The left bank smiles, heckles, and parodies in impiety. It meanders—to the left. It subverts, scorns attachments, and invites discomfort with the familiar or established. The right bank is involved with administration, methodology, and rational meanings, even where none are to be found. Ironically, each side negates what the other creates. Thus, jaunty Jacques Lacan, comfortably riding the crest of a fashionable New Wave, might set the style for the *nouvel* state of mind, expressed this way: "I think, therefore I am the language that I speak, which is a run-on sentence."[1]

It is this modern condition of *haute culture*, amid the clutter of language resulting from the constant flux of whatever critical analysis is in vogue, from which the stylish individual can no longer remain theoretically innocent. But how can one distinguish the narrative from narrativity?

Speech from *parole?* Language from *langue?* Lack from absence? The penis from the phallus?

In *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), Yvonne Rainer fearlessly plunges into these linguistically tumultuous waters, taking the fashion risk of alienating a large part of her audience. Her ability to lambast prevailing critical discourse, even while making good use of it herself, results in a film in which a prodigious amount of language and speech and a profusion of theory is spoken by characters who can themselves become reduced to an accumulation of words, even while occasionally becoming seduced by them. Rainer's is a classical debate that revolves around, as Helen Demichiel succinctly frames it, "whether ideology, as it is built through language, symbols, myths, is subject to change through action, or whether ideology constructs the subject."[2] Power and control are "fashioned" out of authoritative voices or positions. The jargon, then, becomes a primary construct from which the film views its characters, its ideas, and even its audience. Other kinds of speech and forms of address, most notably expressed through women's voices that are heard from offscreen or overheard in on-the-street or in-the-coffee-shop conversation, punctuate the film's "very gabby" sound track.[3]

Also diving head first into feminist politics with this film, Rainer plays off different modes of character development. She provides for the first time a central *male* character (albeit played by two actors and thus recalling her previous films as well as Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*) and a central female character who is, ironically, decentered in the narrative since she does not appear on the visual track (except only briefly, her back to us, and possessing a different voice). Female voices, including Rainer's and the artist Martha Rosler's, consistently provide wry commentary or ask important questions as they create honest, recognizable, or spontaneous speech, as opposed to the often male text-script-theory dominated lingo. For Rainer, language in all forms helps to construct all forms of experience--personal, political, social, intellectual, and sexual. It literally gives voice to the creation of a female self (or, through fragmentation, of various configurations of a female self, a laudable end in itself), so much denied in conventional American industrial cinema. That is, the female subject is made more palpably present even in its absence in a Rainer film. Notably, too, the film generously and refreshingly acknowledges and embraces its female audience. One is invited to watch it and respond to it as a woman, in a convivial as well as demandingly intellectual way.

The film's structure continues Rainer's collage method of composition, which artfully and deftly interweaves a plethora of diverse elements: serious exposition with deadpan humor; black and white with color; sync and nonsync sound or distorted sound; documentary footage with a dream sequence; newspaper clippings, monologues culled from personal letters and the rhetoric of cinema criticism; sequences from American *films noirs*, surrealist and avant-garde film and the film of Trisha Brown's slow motion *Watermotor* dance; the personal with the political; intimate appraisals with sterile text. We follow Jack Deller ("Tell her") through a roughly chronological series of events, although there is no real plot structure. We see him at home in his apartment/loft; at work in his classroom/loft; on the crowded streets of Manhattan; in a corridor outside a party (which is crowded only with the overflow of intellectual rhetoric); in therapy sessions that are established, oddly enough, as if he were performing on a theater stage, with dramatic films within a film playing behind him (*Double Indemnity, Gilda*) and with an internal audience serving as therapist. This device, which is at once confessional and public, also includes the spectator as analyst, recalling the patient's scenes in *Journeys from Berlin/1971* and our role as changing, ungendered spectator/analyst.

Other scenes that intersect and collide with these document a war of the dispossessed. They contain the documentary-style footage shot by Rainer as she attended meetings and hearings of New York artists organizing to protest U.S. presence in Central America and, alternately, to promote their own lower East Side housing project. The artists become embroiled in a debate that pits their housing needs against the needs of the poor and minorities, becoming unwitting gentrifiers in a skirmish for New York real estate. "We met the enemy," offers the offscreen voice of Trisha, the central artist-character of the film, "and it was us." In a daunting display of her collage/juxtaposition strategies, these sequences are ultimately interwoven with other imminently convergent themes that underline the displacement of the poor on a global scale, as well as personal, emotional, sexual, and even character dislocation and displacement.

The documentary sequences are also juxtaposed with slice of life fictional vignettes (noted above) where we eavesdrop on various conversations in restaurants or on the street; the scenes feel authentic except for the scripted jokes or pointed lines of written dialogue that are consciously acted.

A central part of the film's montage surveys, appropriately, another embedded collage—Trisha's artwork—which employs a series of found materials: articles from the *New York Times;* a medical advertisement promoting conjugated estrogen for women and another ad selling the "sweet smell of success" exuded from the smoke of a fine cigar—both ads aimed ironically at men. There is also a horrifying photo of decapitated Guatemalans and, later, posters created for the Artists' Call and for the avant-garde film by Lizzie Borden, *Born in Flames.*

Additionally, the square and hollow concrete sculptures of Donald Judd occupy a Texas field, squatters in a vast space so foreign to the New Yorkers who battle over the bits and pieces of Manhattan. The blocks exist in contrast to the tracking shots of crowded urban blight or upscale rehab we see.

Technically, the film presents a disunified assemblage and visual mix: blown up, grainy Super-8 is juxtaposed with the black and white contrasts of Hollywood and surreal film; resonant clips are excerpted from Michael Snow's *Wavelength* and Hollis Frampton's *Otherwise Unexplained Fires;* frame within a frame delineation is derived from using video transfers; a dream scene is extravagantly colored as for a fifties Doris Day melodrama—all in an attempt to open our eyes visually, as the inclusion of the eye-slitting scene from *Un Chien Andalou* starkly reminds us. Rainer's concern here is to achieve the "disruption of the glossy, unified surface" that parallels the "uneven development and fit in the departments of consciousness, activism, articulation and behavior that must be constantly reassessed by the spectator." These visual juxtapositions parallel and reflect the "incongruous juxtapositions of modes of address: recitation, reading, 'real' or spontaneous speech, printed texts, quoted texts, et al., all in the same film." What results are "representations of divine couplings and (un)holy triads" that construct films where "in every scene you have to decide anew the priorities of looking and listening."[4]

Rainer compliments her audience by offering these SCREEN TESTS (as the first interpolated film text announces) of our patience and our imagination. Although there is more match-cutting in this film than in previous Rainer films there is not seamless continuity; though there are constant juxtapositions in sound and image, the film has an inner logic and coherence, as in Rainer's previous works. Filmic devices and narrative forms are proposed, undermined, subverted, and reinvented, transmitting different and alternate levels of meaning and vision. Stephen Heath (a brilliant and fashionable master of cinema theory) observes in his (rhetor-

ically dense) discussion of the cinematic apparatus and the "technico-sensorial" codes,

> which are at its programme (in the sense that one speaks of the programming of a computer) . . . although they have machines as their "users," have been constructed by men (inventors, engineers, etc.); moreover the structures which they impose on the information are again treated and mastered—but this time at the level of decoding—by other humans, the cinema spectators who perceive the projected images and understand them.[5]

In this sense, if the apparatus is created by men it is here programmed and translated by a woman and becomes user friendly as it transforms and transmits ideas and images to a receptive, if somewhat anxious, audience.

Any audience familiar with Rainer's work will recognize most of her chief narrative strategies, including those discussed earlier; thus, with six major films and over two decades of producing cinema that makes a central contribution to American avant-garde film, her work is rich in intertextual referents. The Judd sculptures echo, in an abstract way, Rainer's use of Stonehenge in *Journeys from Berlin,* though they are shot from ground level; their hollow yet heavy forms carry symbolic weight. Jack Deller's presentation as analysand against busy and informative background movement invites comparison to *Journeys*' staging of the patient and the accompanying choreographed activity there or to the staging of Raoul's concerned liberal speech with three ominous figures hovering behind him in *Kristina Talking Pictures.* The camera's repeated and returning interest in surveying Trisha's collage mirrors the succession of shots that reviewed and studied the crowded mantelpiece in *Journeys* or Kristina's collage of posters and photos in *Kristina Talking Pictures.* In these films this assortment of disparate and reiterated images commands the spectator's attention and becomes an evocative focal point for the moral, political, social, and intellectual arguments that resurface continually. They further reflect an artist's propensity to shuffle and compare random, contradictory, or previously disassociated materials that do not immediately seem to have relationship or consequence.

It is also significant to note that, with the characterization of Trisha as an artist, questions of the artist's role (here, not only in the creation of art but in the realms of global political, social, and moral processes) and of autobiography and personal modes of representation in cinema and in the film itself are implied. Trisha hints at creating Jack. In a phone conversa-

tion she says, "But I don't wanna create a man you love to hate." She jokes, "I'm going to jump on the next 747 and KILL YOU WITH AX!" (Acts?) Later she reflects,

> Paris streets, 747s, books to buy, innermost terrors to confront—these are but a few of the amenities from which at a safe distance I have followed the struggles of others. Pre-revolutionary Russian women, American anarchists of the twenties and thirties, Rosa Luxemburg . . . and now Central America.

Clearly then, many of the same concerns that were prominent in *Journeys* are reviewed here. In a 1984 interview with Lyn Blumenthal, Rainer discussed her current project, *The Man Who Envied Women*: "I don't want to make a man you love to hate or a man who would be a new man."[6] Consistently, Trisha struggles over concerns that have also been Rainer's.

Many of the same distanciation devices exercised instrumentally throughout Rainer's work control and manipulate the narrative flow here. In previous films, the spectator is asked repeatedly in straightforward, confrontational ways, "Who is the victim here?" or "Which one is the director more sympathetic to?" In *The Man Who Envied Women*, Rainer intrudes on the foreground of a scene to request drolly "Will all menstruating women please leave the theater." Trisha's voice-over asks us, in a more ethically alarming tone, "Are *you* more important than poor people, old people?" She also interrupts Jack's interminable lecture (and it is refreshing to hear a woman interrupt a man for a change) or points out a line of dialogue (which is never heard by the audience) from one of the classic films: "This is where he says, 'A man is nothing without a woman.' Now he's saying, 'Tell me what you want me to be and I'll be it'"—each a sly and ironic reversal on traditionally female dialogue.

Thus, by raising a set of apparently disconnected issues while unflinchingly fashioning complex filmic collages, Rainer continues to be an overwhelmingly powerful and influential force. In this film, her obsession with language, so elaborately iterated in past work, leads to a formalized ground where very separate fields will be colliding constantly,[7] a mechanism that has become by now synonymous with Rainer's style. In order to embark on an analysis of the film's speech, it is perhaps productive to first identify and briefly examine one of its chief purveyors, a pastiche himself, Jack Deller.

As Wittgenstein put it, "To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life"[8] but, in Deller's case, to *appropriate* a language means to

impersonate a life form. Deller has been called by Patricia Mellencamp a transcultural mutant.[9] Since he is not actually the teller of the narrative but is at the center of it (his T-shirt locates his place in the universe: "You Are Here"), he is furthermore a poseur and polemical puppet. That is, his rhetoric is drawn verbatim from an assortment of texts—Raymond Chandler's published diaries and letters, interviews with Michel Foucault, and criticism by Lacan, etc. Thus Rainer makes Deller a mouthpiece for Freudian, feminist, and cinema theory, the droning voice of theory as patriarchy,[10] and for traditional male assumptions about women and sexual/romantic relations.

Devoid of self-awareness, he deploys language,[11] using it as a means for seduction and power (the two are inextricably linked here): "In our culture we have precise verbal activities one enters into," he enlightens us, "a kind of contractual relationship [which] determines who speaks the truth, who has the authority." Within this lecture, which is full of pedantic terms such as "discourse," "formalisms," "deconstruction of cinematic gaze," and, not so surprisingly, "nuclear strike," Jack sermonizes about issues that are, in fact, significant. These are problems in the political discourse, the social discourse, and the discourse of everyday life, even down to the personal. He knows all the buzz words but falls victim to immaculate conceptions—his words and ideas are not his own (though they are, of course, presented as if they were), and they are transmitted in a barrage of lifeless lectures (no academic gets out alive) or narcissistic and sometimes painfully rationalized reflections. In one sequence, he looks at the *New York Times* article written by a priest as "sort of an unpolitical piece" that sees emotions as something self-directed. "You would only cry if something happened to you personally, right?" he interprets. Another of Rainer's maneuverers, he *is* an actor, like the Jean-Pierre Léaud character from another film referred to in Trisha's phone conversation. He never confronts his terror.

Obliquely following a recurrent metaphor of decapitation that runs throughout the film, Jack is cut off from experiencing real emotion. He often determinedly works out on an assortment of exercise machines that simulate real activity, but go nowhere. The real bicycle resting against the wall in his apartment is wrecked—no doubt damaged in an attempt at authentic experience. His intelligence is the kind that is similarly dehumanized and ultimately numbing—probably, as he unintentionally puns in his lecture, a problem of artificial intelligence. His machines and the sterility of the empty and unused kitchen and bathroom to which the

camera restlessly escapes during his lectures convey his insulation and detachment.

Whenever he does go into the streets and out into the world (which is not of his making), he wears a headset. We wonder if it is a two-way street since the device, ambiguously, either cuts him off from the animated conversations and in-jokes *we* hear or artificially allows him to be tuned in—a rare experience for him.

He is not a completely loathsome character, since some of what he observes is right on target, and he manages to convey that knowledge in human speech; for example, when he critiques the KGB article, relating Andropov to Bush, or analyzes the cigar ad in the collage, or simply when he manages some sensitivity in his political or moral insights. It is the deadening posturing and the coded wall of official speech[12] that make him a cardboard man, as well as Rainer's amusing tendency to distort his voice, provide another voice that talks over his, or otherwise "put him on the spot," the way the students in his class do when they shine the glaring light at him. They punch holes in his dogmatic pronouncements by asking such questions as, "What is the need to find something totally stable, universal, and continuous in human experience that is constantly being overturned by the theories of the twentieth century?" Indeed, even his own persona(e) is not stable, since he is played by two actors.

Like the "man on the street" who claims to be a mass of contradictions ("but what do you expect under capitalism?"), he is a womanizer, a man who had been married for over twenty years but, like the main character in François Truffaut's *The Man Who Loved Women*, does not know women or, one guesses, even one woman. He feels that, due to some kind of genetic selection, women possess a deep intelligence about sex, perhaps in the mythic way that blacks exist to whites as the deeper knowers of natural and supernatural experience—Jim guiding Huck down the river. When Trisha visits him, the radio prevents him from hearing her and he is anxious to turn the radio back up. He thus becomes a case study on Why Jack Can't Feel.

He exists, then, as an instiller of order, positioning and repositioning the different components of Trisha's collage, layering one image (and its message) over the next, and thereby burying them. Two scenes involving linguistic seduction, one with a student and the other with a feminist friend who gives as good as she gets, use words in much the same way. (Jackie Raynal's monologue in the corridor scene is taken from the Australian writer Meaghan Morris's witty response to dispensers of overloaded

discourse in "The Pirate's Fiancée.") The student resolutely resists Jack's obvious attempts at seduction through words and through his patronizing correction of hers, as he maneuvers his way around the sofa. In the corridor, Jack's monologues (far too lengthy to quote here) use (or abuse) "a hundred *isms*" and as many *ologies* in order to obliterate, control and seduce—he is a colonizer in another's territory.[13] For Jack, there is no opposition between what is said and what is done in the exercise of power.

The corridor scene illustrates Morris's depiction of female scholars who become seduced by male theorists and further recalls Rainer's fictional (and almost certainly satirical) claim in *Lives of Performers* that she has always had a weakness for the sweeping revelations of great men. As Jack says, as he and Jackie maneuver in the antiseptic corridor, "Power acts . . . according to a system of relays, modes of connection, transmission, distribution, etc. Power acts in the smallest elements . . . in sexual, residential relations. Power runs through it." In a lecture, he maintained, "Words are considered to be substantive; they're real, they affect matter." The matter they affect here is Jackie, who, while countering Jack's dulling verbiage, becomes locked in a doleful, dry, and mannequinlike embrace not with a man but with "the grim world of theory" that "could not even begin to account for its own failure to appeal." A living example that you are what you speak, Jack's fatal flaw "even in his most ardent moments of feminist partisanship" is finally his own failure to appeal. Finally, he is a usurper who has literally and figuratively embraced feminism, while using it to his own ends.

Like the party-goer who momentarily visits the hallway, we study the two oddities there, entrapped in the maze and the rhetorical stand-off of a theoretical come-on.[14] Using seductive movement in constricted space and speaking in constructed language,[15] Jackie delivers a pivotal speech which, if the spectator is up to the task and able to hang on for the ride, becomes in itself the problematized voice of feminist theory itself.[16] With her heavy French accent, sensual intonation, and seductive dress, she immediately seems the embodiment of Richard Shweder's intellectual fashion plate. Her wry remarks, however, here quoted only in part, present the essence of the crucial problem of theoretical mastery, seduction, and masquerade.

> What is happening when women must work so hard in distinguishing the penis and the phallus? What is going on when the privileged areas of Marxist theory become the "subject" on the one hand and the "language" on the other? Passing from the realm of the theory of the

> subject to the shifty spaces of feminine writing is like emerging from a horror show to a costume ball. The world of "theorization" is a grim one, haunted by mad scientists breeding monsters through hybridization, by the haunted ghosts of a hundred 'isms, and the massive shadow of the subject surging up at every turn. Feminine writing lures with an invitation to license, gaiety, laughter, desire and dissolution, a fluid exchange of partners of infinite identity. All that custom requires is infinite variety, infinite disguise. Only overalls are distinctly out of place . . . ; this is a world of style. Women are not welcome here garbed in the durable gear of men. Men, instead, get up in drag. . . . Each performance has its code, however, and the naïve feminist blunders at her peril. The audiences gather to watch her slip on the central shibboleth, the language of psychoanalysis. In Frankenstein's castle, the penalty for careless definition is swift but clean dismemberment. In the shimmering world of feminine impersonation, a worse fate awaits the woman with the wrong style of argument.

These voices are, thankfully, tempered throughout the film by the treatment of other more recognizable female ones that are not the least bit affected by style. They ask, as do the public hearing sequences or the Judd sculptures, do images and representations deserve/need to consume so much space? Do we participate in the construction and maintenance of a world in which 'representation' literally dominates our lives?[17]

Trisha's voice draws our attention directly away from one of Jack's lectures and demands that we view our American lives as more than simply a conglomeration of rhetorical or academic arguments, as with "this expression 'class struggle' that everyone groans at because it calls up more of that Marxist rhetoric and everyone is so sure it has nothing to do with life in America." She draws parallels between the (particularly American) "consumption of goods in the economic sphere" directly to "sexual consumption in the personal." The desire for perpetual novelty thereby entrenched in the American mind-set she finds linked to the marketing of Coca-Cola and Cuisinarts, which goes

> hand in hand with the marketing of being in love again and anti-depressant drugs, symptomatic of a social order that requires the constant turning out of products and personal intimacies alike in the dual creation of depressive, inflationary, emotional and economic cycles.

Jack's voice represents reality as a theory at one's disposal, whereas Trisha's voice—as Rainer suggests—"no matter what its mode of address, is usually a bridge between the documentary and fiction."[18]

Rainer's reasons for using this device are clearly related to feminist concerns that involve the presentation of the female subject and its relation to the viewer:

> I suppose that what I've done with this last film is to simply take the problematic imaging of women in a very literal way and use it as an excuse to see what would happen when the image of the central female protagonist is eliminated altogether. It was a way of giving her a complexity that is produced by the reader/spectator in the same way as, for example when reading, you picture a written description. Whereas to actually see her as an image is, to some degree, always to reduce her, trivialize her, sexualize her, fetishize her. . . . I wanted to avoid all of that. The question in matters of representation for women is not only "Who is speaking?" but "How do we get anyone to listen?"[19]

Therefore, because Trisha stands outside of the narrative, she is uniquely positioned in the arena often afforded men—as omniscient subject. She can thus weigh and judge, reassess, interrupt, interpret, and undermine what is said and shown. Refreshingly free of hollow lingo or formalized jargon, Trisha's voice is intelligent and self-mocking: "How am I? Well, considering my incisional hernia, my edema, my cystic breasts, my uterine fibroids, my absorption problems . . . I guess I'm doing okay!" In this patter, she also mocks the commercial tendency to see women as an accumulation of disorders and diseases that Rainer and Martha Rosler point to later. Above all, she is sensitive, a quality the spectator might traditionally relate to femininity; however, Trisha's ethical feeling reaches far beyond the personal or domestic. She begins the film this way:

> It's been a bad week. I split up with my husband of four years and moved into my studio. The water heater broke and flooded the textile merchant downstairs. I bloodied up a pair of white linen pants. The Senate voted for nerve gas and my gynecologist went down in Korean Airlines flight #007.

Like Rainer, Trisha possesses a consciousness that wrestles with and is affected by everything at once. Her sensibilities recall Rainer's wonderful sing-songy message left on Jack's answering machine.

> I just had lunch with a woman who had an affair with you . . . who's now a lesbian and has a black belt in Karate and it has all these incestuous resonances and all these themes are resonating around—politics and sexuality, in some kind of profound way that . . . lurches toward synthesis.

She recoils from the cold and unfeeling terminology of governmental forces that sends displaced and tortured Guatemalans to "strategic hamlets." "Lately the language has been disturbing my American sleep," she says, as we view an empty coffee shop. "The urban poor of America—where do they go when they are displaced from their homes and neighborhoods? Will they simply wither away?" At another point she struggles with terms that seem to define existence: "The language troubles my New York sleep. Dislocate, displace, disappear, relocate, replace, reappear. Property is profit and not shelter. Property is money and not comfort." Similarly, at the outset of the film she weighs, "Rage at men. The phrase 'rage at men.'" It is clear that Trisha's great strengths lie, both as a character in a film and as a narrative voice, in taking in, defining, assembling, and balancing the "larger scheme of things," from the "collision of continents" to local and global political injustice. She confronts "Brother doctor," the representation of the medical fraternity that keeps women under control "with tranquilizers and pity"; "President Duarte," the representation of political authority that keeps its people under control "with torture and random murder." She is a voice and measure of the bottom line: "Slavery is slavery wherever people cannot change the conditions of their lives."

If the films projected behind Jack represent a kind of cultural unconscious[20] buried deep within the male psyche (and even our own), Trisha's visceral narration represents a more immediate and alive sensibility—a consciousness that demystifies the overridingly male attempt to convert reality into theory and power through the veneer of language. It is Jack who speaks Foucault's words almost as a motto: "There is no opposition between what is said and what is done." Trisha crashes this party, trading the exclusivity and inclusiveness of theory divorced from feeling for a shared discourse of ethical insistence that includes the spectator. She knocks down the wall of speech, exemplified in Jack's tower of babble, and deals directly and honestly with the real events it masks.

Other voices augment Trisha's or substitute for hers—as when Rainer takes over Trisha's dream. Rainer has explained that, because Trisha's role is already invested with power, given her position of narrator and com-

mentator, she felt justified in playing with a split persona without the risk of losing the audience. "People are able to have their identification process confounded and still hear—and assess—what is being said," she maintains.[21] Undoubtedly, the most animated and vital voices are Rainer's own, in her angry condemnation of the *Times* article imperialistically entitled "Keeping the Lid On," and Martha Rosler's, who is interviewed by Rainer toward the film's end. Once again, though these female voices are not concretized visually, they nonetheless represent feminine empowerment, especially in the role of artist.

Rainer and Rosler's dynamic and direct approaches to the images and texts they survey demonstrate a cinematic address that is not tangentially related to image but exists specifically in confrontation with it. Rainer's disgusted reaction to the posted "About Men" column the camera examines is a good example. "Here we are treated to columns about men's sensitivity . . . how a man suffers. . . . It's an absolute focus on the individual. It's an a-social, a-political, a-historical, totally psychological approach." We then see, with Rainer, the image of a successful man in a cigar ad. Its message conveys to her that, "what it takes to make it in this world is being cut off from his emotions." She directly connects this evaluation to the "wimpy priestly statements" so ineffective "when you consider that in this society the priest is not seen as a real man anyway" (and here it is irresistible to comment that the priest is named, appropriately, Father Capon).

Moreover, both Rainer and Rosler's intonations are directly opposed to the studied intonations and rhythms employed in Jack's monologues. In the critiques of the collage, Rosler's interview with Rainer is (at last) a real dialogue, as opposed to Jack and Jackie's duelling monologues. Here, a thoughtful and honest fluid exchange of partners takes place, not only between the two women but also with the spectator who, instead of becoming passively enthralled in narrative becomes engaged and enlightened by it.

We are made to look at appalling images (the photo of the decapitated peasants and the ad picturing a middle-aged woman who looks to be much older, suddenly made not only healthier but younger and more beautiful with the strategic use of pharmaceuticals). Since both the camera and the commentary refuse to let us avert our eyes, we are further asked to examine the sexual, moral, political, and marketing ethics with which we are confronted. In this way, the steady accretion of images and interpretations

parallels our steadily building disgust and hostility toward what is represented by/in the collage.

Thus, in these sequences the role of (female) artist is established as social chronicler, reader, and interpreter of events. We are struck by the ease with which Rosler makes the vital connections among the disparate or initially innocuous-seeming elements. Her economy of language and effectiveness as critic, translator, and guide render her a credible and convincing force. Her voice, filled with genuine feeling and, at times, empathy (when she is so affected by the devastating photo and all it represents that Rainer offers her the option not to go on), is an emotional center of the film. Like Hayden White's chronicler of real events outlined in his "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," Rosler makes a complete sentence out of the disjointed elements with which she is confronted, providing a syntax by which to read them as well as semantic scope. Even as the images are manipulated and rearranged (by the filmmaker or by Jack), Rosler is able to make fluid connections.

Both she and Rainer enlarge the field of our understanding, not by didactic rhetoric or liberal posing, but by sensitive commentary or genuine expressions of rage. Here, the language informs the image, providing narrative tension in the accretion of slowly revealed confrontation and revelation. In this, the film constructs itself as the two women speak. This is an amplifying and enlivening discourse that, like the slice of life scenes, promotes intimacy and camaraderie among the "characters" and spectator. It is not a coded language of seduction or authority but rather an informed, intelligent, and involved conversation. What Jackie says of someone else earlier in the film applies to Rainer here as well: "How you say it? She put her money where her mouth is." On a more serious note, an earlier assessment of Jackie's also applies here: "The only successful form of resistance is through art." In Rainer's radical and complex construction of voice and language in the subversion and reconstruction of narrative her work achieves an added dimension; it is, indeed a successfully political form of resistance. As de Lauretis observes:

> To ask whether there is a feminine or female aesthetic, or a specific language of women's cinema is to remain caught in the master's house and there, as Audre Lorde's suggestive metaphor warns us, to legitimate the hidden agendas of culture we badly need to change: "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." [22]

To struggle with language and terms (a-woman, a-womanly) allows the "naïve humanist-feminist"—male or female—a richer source by which to achieve change than simply changing [his or] her consciousness, as Morris's text, spoken by Jackie, suggests. She continues: "The rigorous feminist plumbs the construction in language . . . winds through the labyrinth to find not a monster but a new position of the subject."

Thus, in the same spirit, Rainer's provocative and productive narrative offers abundant cinematic and political possibilities and raises significant questions in the multiplicity of chords it strikes. If she refrains from issuing filmic or feminist manifestos (which might just become the cinematic equivalent of Jack's dominating lectures), it is because her style and sensibilities refuse that kind of appropriation and stultification. As a portion of the street dialogue in the film warns the audience, "You expect too much. You want solutions to be immediate and neat instead of gradual and incomplete."

Correspondingly, Jack's corridor speech reveals:

> Power becomes effective or not. . . . It is a definite form of momentary and constantly reproduced encounters among a definite number of individuals. It can't be possessed because it is always in play and because it risks itself.

This definition of power, which so ironically defines film itself—according to Raymond Bellour's "The Unattainable Text"[23]—also describes Rainer's approach to the creation of art. Risking everything, her strategies defy prevailing fashion and reconfirm both women's and film's constant predicament of performing to please others' expectations.

Notes

1. Richard Shweder, "In Paris—Miniskirts of the Mind," *New York Times*, 8 January 1989, sec. 7:28-29.

2. Helen Demichiel, "Rainer's Manhattan," *Afterimage* 12 (1985): 20.

3. Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Anecdotes to the Oedipal Net(les) while Playing with De Lauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, but. . . . " *Independent* (April 1986): 22.

4. Ibid., 25.

5. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 223-24.

6. Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, eds., "Yvonne Rainer," *Profile* 4.5 (1984): 39.

7. Ibid., 38.

8. In Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 8.

9. Patricia Mellencamp, "Images of Language and Indiscreet Dialogue: *The Man Who Envied Women*," *Screen* 28.2 (1987): 90.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 92.

12. Teresa de Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema," *New German Critique* 34 (1985): 170.

13. Jay Carr, review of *The Man Who Envied Women,* by Yvonne Rainer, *Boston Globe*, 7 November 1985, 89.

14. Robert Storr, "The Theoretical Come-On," *Art in America* (April 1986): 162.

15. Rainer, Screening of *The Man Who Envied Women*. Audiotape. Recorded 8 September 1985. Walker Art Center, Department of Film. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

16. Rainer, with Laleen Jayamanne and Geeta Kapur, "Discussing Modernity, 'Third World,' and *The Man Who Envied Women*," *Art and Text* 23.4 (1987): 44.

17. Peggy Phelan, "Spatial Envy: Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women*," *Motion Picture* 1.3 (1987): 19.

18. Dan Walworth, "A Conversation with Yvonne Rainer," *Psychritique* 2.1 (1987): 11.

19. Ibid., 14.

20. Rainer, "Discussing Modernity," 47.

21. Walworth, "A Conversation," 14.

22. De Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory," 158.

23. See Peggy Phelan's discussion of film in this context in "Spatial Envy."

Chapter Six

Privilege

❖

"The attitude is wrong," a rather frustrated black woman remarks, or tries to remark, since her voice is initially suppressed. Her testimony, supported and accompanied by many other women's observations and reflections, forms the basis for the varied arguments and complex questions that drive *Privilege,* Yvonne Rainer's seminal film of 1990. In its often wry and lithe style, *Privilege* slyly guides the viewer through its multiple visions and perceptions, vastly divergent themes, and fragmented details, as well as through Rainer's by now familiar array of contradictory and self-conscious narrative elements. Rainer's spin on such diverse moral and political issues as loss, deficiency, difference, rape, race, class, aging, and menopause clearly suggests that the attitude *is* wrong; that, repeatedly, profound and often awkwardly paralyzing realizations concerning one's personal (and, necessarily, political) status may abruptly change or shift in the face of others' often surprising or confounding assessments, or through moments of forced autoanalysis. A sudden reassessment of reality or of self is always, sometimes bewilderingly, close at hand.

In a metafictional film ("by Yvonne Rainer and many others") which is structured around a documentary film ("by Yvonne Washington and many others"), the deftly balanced mechanisms of Rainer's collage strategies underline these themes. The fragmented self, so jarringly depicted in past Rainer works, is here further divided when the psyche is subjected to abstract definitions of race, difference, age, and class. These political and social divisions find parallels in a narrative whose structure is similarly fractured but whose sustained momentum propels it ultimately toward a recognizable interlude of synthesis and artistic celebration.

Privilege incorporates a central story, a narrative hook, told by the main character, Jenny, a white, middle-aged former dancer and teacher living

in New York City. Her experiences unfold in "hot flashback" during an interview with a friend, an African-American filmmaker named Yvonne Washington (Novella Nelson). Although Washington tries hard to get Jenny to focus on a discussion of her experience of menopause for a film she is making, Jenny delights in recounting a story from her days as a luscious, young starry-eyed dancer in New York in 1961 or 1962.

Interspersed and juxtaposed with Jenny's flashback are multiple female voices, women of different races interviewed by Rainer on a variety of topics, including menopause, aging, feminism, and anarchy. Woven throughout the film, these women exist as survivors, as witnesses, sages, and sufferers, often supported by Rainer's calm and curious off-camera voice. The many questions she sincerely raises throughout the film, either in this context, as the clownishly lipsticked Helen Caldicott or integrated into the fictional form of the film, help to define female experience. Women speak, in public forums; through staged sequences; scripted dialogue; and interpolated texts; in Spanish, English, subtitles, and American Sign Language; in sync or nonsync sound. Here, as in Rainer's other films, voices are doubled, distorted, or fragmented but, in these travelogues through emotions,[1] through the fluid give and take of female conversation or in female narration, and over countless cups of coffee and glasses of wine, women seek to describe and make sense of their experience. In this capacity, "the film provides a kind of clearinghouse for thinking . . . ."[2]

Within Jenny's flashback, in which she appears exactly as she does in present day (but why "hold up this show for some expensive illusionism"?), there are two central stories. Jenny (Alice Spivak) moves into a second-floor apartment in a racially mixed neighborhood in New York, although her building is occupied only by whites. There she meets the young woman who lives below her, Brenda (Blaire Baron), a lesbian who works as a lab technician at Bellevue. One night, Jenny is alarmed by what is apparently one of a series of loud and disturbing fights between Carlos (Rico Elias) and Digna (Gabriella Farrar), a Puerto Rican couple living in the next building. Startled and vaguely unsure of what, if any, action to take, Jenny phones Brenda, who is awake and already accustomed to "the circus." They decide to call the police since Digna's harrowing cries of "Help! He's killing me!" sound somewhat "more horrendous than usual." Curious but uninvolved, Jenny herself earlier admitted that she had tried to ignore the "carnivalesque air" of the neighborhood. When she peeks outside her blinds, isolated and detached from the event (and recalling the

visually detached couple preparing dinner in *Journeys*), a bright light from the street imprints a flash across her face—one of a series of thematically parallel flashes of insight and clarity threaded throughout the film.

The police eventually take Digna to Bellevue where we later see her, seemingly straitjacketed and staged against a blindingly white wall whose textures are schizophrenically split between smooth surface and exposed brick. When she speaks to us directly, as do other characters in the film including Carlos, Washington, and Caldicott, these personal exposures and confessional conversations approach the feel of cinéma vérité; similarly, the interviews provide a Godardian element that locks character and spectator in intimate, real-feeling connectedness. (In a discussion between Rainer and an interviewee, the woman suggests, "There's an assumption that what you're going to get is real," to which Rainer haltingly replies, "Alright, what I get on here may not be real but your experience will be real. There is something real I'm after." If the woman's recollections do or do not accurately reflect reality—she seems to lie about her age in the same interview segment—the film suggests that these interviews, seen against the backdrop of the fictional film, carry the weight of truth. As in all such cinematic situations, the interviews illustrate the gaps between experience, memory, and the retelling of experience. They are vehicles that are not necessarily used to prove how it is but, in their generally candid reflections and apparently sincere aim at truthfulness (some interviewees are Rainer's friends and family), they are valuable illustrations of how to say how it is, a phenomenon described in Royal S. Brown's analysis of Godard's *Deux ou Trois Choses Que Je Sais d'Elle*.[3]

The next day, Carlos confronts Brenda in the street and, while blocking her way into her apartment, asks for her help in getting Digna released. Brenda, who works in a different area of the hospital, reluctantly agrees to help if she can. Some time later, Jenny is again disturbed by screams in the night and realizes that this time it is Brenda. As we watch Jenny's pacing feet and see her phone the police, we realize that Carlos has entered Brenda's apartment and now stands naked over her, waking her from sleep. That night, Jenny and several neighbors initially huddle confused and paralyzed outside Brenda's apartment (recalling a similar experience from Rainer's life that is reworked in *Kristina Talking Pictures*). Jenny's pounding on the door and her "Open up in there—this is the cops!" apparently foils the rape and allows Carlos to flee through a window or air shaft.

In order that the rape vignette be constantly reassessed by the spectator, we will subsequently hear and see differing versions of it (including different actors of different races playing the part of the rapist), but we hear through Jenny's confessions to Washington that she later perjured herself during the trial, claiming that she had actually seen Carlos in Brenda's apartment. Ironically, Jenny eventually becomes romantically involved with the young, rich assistant district attorney (Dan Berkey) during the trial, and we follow their story through both Jenny's recollections and Digna's wise commentary.

Although these stories cast out an undeniable narrative line, it is one that develops by moving chronologically backwards and is steadily interrupted or reeled out and back in again, comically paralleling another fish story—an intercut fictional film's black and white reverse footage of men trying to save the victim of a shark attack without getting hopelessly caught in the boat's ropes: like us, dramatically hooked. Used as reconstructive therapy, diverse themes are concurrently developed and seemingly impossible connections are ultimately made, as in other Rainer films. The cinematic hook ("How do you unhook this audience that dreams with its eyes open?" Rainer has asked) is Jenny's narrative, told in convivial conversation between artist and friend. It makes good use of the conventional ploys of suspenseful, unraveling plot—chock full of violence and sex. Successfully avoiding the tyranny of chronology, however, the story's many digressions, suspensions and ellipses present compartments (apartments) of life and intersections of meaning and (mock) autobiography, intricately linking touchstone words that challenge the spectator and providing visual, aural, and thematic parallels as they are masterfully juggled. Here, for example, the hook is variously represented.

No longer perceived as being attractive to men, Jenny feels that she has become a "fish thrown back into the sea, still longing to be hooked." During an interview, Brenda recites a long, poetic passage of interpolated text (by Joan Nestle) to the flabbergasted young D.A. The story, told in such a starkly intimate and involving way, temporarily grasps the listener as well as the spectator in its enthralling net.

> Wearing my voluminous flannel nightgown, I knelt before the small wood-burning stove . . . . I felt huge and awkward in that position, aware of my rump and falling breasts. . . . My younger lover, small and tight in her body, sat on the couch watching me. I did *not* like what I thought she saw. Then, just as I worked very hard to accept my lack of appeal, she said in a low, firm voice: "You look so fuckable that way." I froze,

> caught in that moment of self-hatred by the clarity of her desire. I stopped all movement, awed once again by the possibilities of life. . . . She grew impatient and reached under the gown, piling up its lengths on her arm like a fisherman pulling in his nets.

Thematically, being off the hook may represent a sort of sexual emancipation, as when an interviewee expresses relief that menopause has let her "off the hook in just all kinds of very surprising ways" or, in a different sense, may refer to moral and political responsibility. Washington, in a discussion with Jenny over Brenda's theories of racism, eventually accuses: "You've let Brenda off the hook." In a similar instance Stew, Carlos's African-American neighbor, reproaches him on race, using dialogue/text taken from Piri Thomas.

> You a fuckin' yellow-faced bastard. You a goddamned Negro with a white man's edge. You think being Puerto Rican lets you off the hook? That's the trouble. Too damn many you black Puerto Ricans got you eyes closed. . . . Just because you can rattle off some different kind of language don't change your skin one bit.

Cinematically, the narrative hook offers the strongest temptations and, in *Privilege*, it tempers Rainer's inclinations toward complex political imperatives without compromising her reliably present challenges to narrative. "There's no story here!" Rainer exclaims early in the film when an interviewee relates some positive aspects of her menopausal experience. "Are you going to finish the story?" Washington asks Jenny at one point. "Which story?" Jenny replies. "The change of life story or the race story? And now we have yet another possibility: the class story. Yvonne, don't tell me you're getting fed up with menopause already." "No, of course not, but now that you've got me hooked I'd like to know how your flashback turned out," Washington admits.

Thus, the skillful presentation of these and other mediating links of word, sound, and image provide exercises in a symbolic association of ideas that is almost psychoanalytic in nature. As in other Rainer films, they work as inventive and intuitive ways of developing and expanding an ultimately symmetric psychonarrative whose lure is derived not from narrative entrapment but from the calculated interplay of scattered references and interrupted or suspended elements that become, through accretion, the framework of the film.

Recognizable anti-illusionist mechanisms of earlier Rainer films underscore *Privilege*, though due to a more linear structure they feel less crowded and compacted. Color is interchanged with black and white film and alternated with Super8 and video; written texts are seamlessly interpolated as dialogue or layered over images; intertitles appear written on computer monitors that flatly deliver appalling medical and other statistics on women. They also carry four distinct short stories or chapters (and one interesting aside) that provide, due to their operatic musical backdrop and crystalline moments of clarity and revelation, a kind of poignant climax late in the film. Obvious sets use photographed backdrops, employ stagy lighting, or reveal film crews and equipment. Documentary footage of physicians dispensing advice to menopausal women and, pointedly, to their husbands, naturally accompanied by a scroll of the assorted warnings, precautions, and adverse reactions thoughtfully provided by the Ayerst drug company are intercut with material as seemingly unrelated as archival footage of Lenny Bruce. Editing occasionally achieves its own punchline and is often used to provide contrapuntal rhythms. The sound track, which also uses music as evocative or rhythmic counterpoint, includes a mix of opera, old rock, a chorus of street-stoop harmonies, Lotte Lenya, and a comically poignant "My Funny Valentine."

These strategies are familiar and consistently demanding stylistic components of Rainer narratives but, as Jenny confesses to Yvonne Washington, "Not everybody is intrigued with my silences and obscure pieces of information." This advisory may obviously also apply to Rainer's audiences. When she first appears in *Privilege*, seated on a stage and reading a scripted public address directly to us or staring in resolute silence, the audience may initially believe that the distressing speech is Rainer's own:

> It's sort of appropriate that this is my last major (I think) public address here to talk to women, because I do believe that the future lies with us in a very deep way. And one of the reasons I'm stopping is that I have to go away and work out how we do it because we've done nothing yet. And we talk all this equal rights and we beg men for equal rights, and we've achieved nothing. Like, I could say a rude word, I'm Australian, but I won't say it. Fifty-two percent of us are women and where is the proportional representation in the Congress? Like nowhere. And it's not right. And you know whose fault it is? It's ours, because we are pa-thet-ic. We haven't got any guts and I say this advisedly and with deep sorrow and I'm one of you and I haven't got any guts either.

And later:

> Okay, nuclear war. Every single town and city in your country is targeted with at least one bomb. All the nuclear power plants are targeted. . . . All military facilities are targeted, all universities participating in nuclear and military research, WHICH IS THIS ONE, all corporations making weapons, which is almost all the corporations now in the United States of America. So everything is targeted. Nuclear war will take about one hour to complete bilaterally.

The speech, interrupted in the narrative, is continued:

> Twenty-two percent of children in this country live in poverty, twenty-two percent! Thirty-four million people live in poverty and they are almost all women and children and black, right? Fifteen million old women live on an amount of $5,000 a year or less. Fifteen million old women in the richest country in the world. So. What are we going to do, folks?

As spectators, we soon learn that these disturbing messages and alarming statistics come not from Rainer but from her burlesque as the character Helen Caldicott, a "funny valentine" indeed (the music notes), as she matter-of-factly smears her mouth outrageously in red lipstick or dispassionately rests her head against a very large container of a cosmetic skin product. (The dilemma noted in one of the computer-generated stories: "Suddenly she didn't know how to dress . . . and when she wore lipstick she looked like a transvestite.") Purposefully casting herself as public performer, political oracle, and role model as well as unfortunate female clown, Rainer seems uneasy. When Jenny remarks to Yvonne Washington, "Caldicott paralyzes us with horror rather than inspiring us to protest—all that apocalypse and doom," we recognize that Rainer too may be acknowledging the relentlessly ominous (and hence stultifying?) messages of this and previous films. In her recent work and in *Privilege*, however, Rainer has attempted to face directly, address intelligently, and embrace her audience specifically as female. She compliments the spectator by way of a style that is marked by anger and sincerity. Here, those emotions are accompanied by humor, irony and, eventually, a "jokey camaraderie"[4] that goes beyond simple consciousness-raising. Her aesthetic sensibilities insist on use of a complex filmic vocabulary juxtaposed with surprising and radical combinations to elicit meaning and "parallel streams of thought."[5]

Through her use of colliding and disparate elements, Rainer achieves far more than the exploitation of fashionably avant-garde formalisms. In her precise and clear manipulations of image, word, and sound, Rainer evokes a catalog of current social, moral, and political themes without the hint of manifesto. Rather, via its straightforward and thoughtful conversations, the modern condition of the experience of loss, difference, deficiency, and displacement are powerfully and personally articulated.

The sphere of private experience is clearly the means by which the film establishes its political ideologies. *Privilege* places women's voices at its center and, as the subject of its main and varied inquiries, women of different ages, classes, races, as well as deaf women, communicate. Significantly, the discussion also actively includes interviewee, filmmaker, and (female) spectator-confidante. In a discussion of her *Riddles of the Sphinx*, Laura Mulvey addresses the developing relationship between, among other things, feminism and experimental film applicable here.

> What recurs overall is a constant return to woman, not indeed as visual image, but as a subject of inquiry, a content which cannot be considered within the aesthetic lines laid down by traditional cinematic practice. Pleasure and involvement are not the result of identification, narrative tension or eroticised femininity but arise from . . . the demands made on the spectator to put together disparate elements. The story, the visual themes and the ideas are not in coherent conjunction with one another....[6]

Because language and speech are used to construct all forms of experience—personal, political, social, intellectual, and sexual—it is in this privileged and divergent discourse that the film finds its strength.

Moreover, beyond the specialized forms of communication primarily seen as the provenance of women (diaries, personal writings, conversation, and intimate confidences) it is simple information that is at the heart of *Privilege*. Because one of the film's ultimate functions is to educate audiences about at least one of its central themes—menopause—shared private knowledge and personal experience represent access to common language and, as a result, an overdue cinematic platform for collective expression about a "rite of passage so humiliating that as a casual conversational subject it's still taboo. Yes, even among women."[7]

As a filmmaker, Yvonne Washington understands: "Don't you know that menopause takes the prize for being the subject the least number of people want to know anything about?" "Why do young women respond

with such reluctance and dread? What do they fear?" the film asks. "But really. Why talk about it?" Jenny asks her friend. "We'll only be reducing women to their biological processes all over again. Anatomy is destiny. When you're young they whistle at you, when you're middle-aged they treat you like a bunch of symptoms and when you're old they ignore you."

In its knowing and friendly format, then, *Privilege* stands as a work that refuses political marginality or emotional suppression. In its enraged observations, outraged accounts, and out-and-out head-shaking incredulity, the film pushes menopause, as well as rape, racism, sexism, classism, and ageism, subjects typically "bumped outside the cultural attention span"[8] to its forefront, despite even its main character's hesitation and lack of will.

Why? Because as Jonathan Rosenbaum correctly observes, "Menopause becomes political at precisely the point where male 'experts' control its social definition."[9] The film appreciates this sentiment, pitting horrifying statistics ("By age fifty, thirty-one percent of U.S. women will have had a hysterectomy. . . garner[ing] 800 million dollars in gynecological fees") and physicians' studied pronouncements regarding "the menopausal patient" against real and fictional women's personal assessments as they begin to try to articulate their experiences. While many observations regarding aging and menopause (scripted or not) are positive, most convey a world-weary, ironic, or, predictably and understandably, angry outlook. Jenny immediately advises Washington:

> My story's not that interesting. You should start with what the word means . . . then you should go into all the distortions that the doctors and shrinks have foisted on us. Like the psychoanalyst . . . who described menopause as women's partial death, or the gynecologists that call it a living decay . . . .

The political ramifications are thus re-enforced in the narration that frequently reminds us by reviewing the stigmatizing language and appropriate idioms: "Menopause is a well-kept secret, something you don't want to know about unless you are a woman who is past her prime, over the hill, has seen better days, let herself go. . . ." When Washington later asks, "Can't we keep our personal histories out of this?" we know that, in light of the above, the only correct postmodern response can be—No. Your body is a battleground. The personal is political. The attitude is wrong. "Our bodies are, by definition, defective" and "need fixing," the narration warns. "The medics try to fix us with hysterectomies and hormone

replacement therapy, so we'll stay young forever." A male doctor's analysis, intercut in the narrative, underlines these assumptions: "My basic thinking is that the menopausal *syndrome* (my emphasis) is a deficiency state." And, there is also the political battle to be fought against prevailing folk wisdom (printed here on a computer monitor) which states that "there is no ovary so healthy that it is not better removed and no testes so diseased that they should not be left intact."

The ultimate effect of these patriarchal pronouncements, medical diagnoses, and linguistic insults is wonderfully expressed by an interviewee who ruefully injects along the way: "I'm not even menopausal. I'm menopaused."

It is perhaps Rainer's greatest strength that she so easily makes logical those philosophical associations that had not previously seemed so; thus, those indignities suffered by menopausal women are easily aligned with the struggles of the deaf: "It was the dominant medical attitudes that needed exposure, the attitudes that tell us we are deficient and diseased, much like the deaf, only our disease begins when we can no longer make babies," the narration explains. A similar, politicized sense of loss and humiliation is inflicted through hypocritical (Hippocratic) attitudes that exclude and isolate the deaf and their system of language.

> Those would-be benefactors, those smug English speakers charged by the nation with improving the plight of the deaf while turning a deaf ear to the history of struggle by the community of signers. . . . Deaf signers have seen themselves not as deficient but as different. And what makes the difference is not their hearing loss, but their ostracized language of signing. . . .

Oppressed, marginalized, stereotyped, and, finally, silent or invisible, women are further rebuffed in society through sexual and racial (in)difference. Rainer develops Helen Caldicott's persona by painting herself as sad clown or removes her glasses and earrings to stare solemnly and silently at us. Jenny's physical characterization is alternately straightforward, lively and natural, or garishly made up in wig, gaudy earrings, leather, and fan (an appropriate symbol of feminine costume and a comic reference to her hot flashes). Digna's transformations take her from plain ("I never been glamorous or anything like that") to straitjacketed madwoman to an extravagantly drawn Carmen Miranda figure—difference personified—and a prototypical example of racial parody and Hollywood caricature.

Viewed as expert practitioners of costume and disguise, (see *The Man Who Envied Women*), women are more often victims of distortion and misrepresentation, as *Privilege* wittily illustrates. Molded to conform to societal, cinematic, commercial, medical and linguistic conceptions,

> The female body has become industrialised; a woman must buy the means to paint on (make-up) and sculpt (underwear/clothes) a look of femininity, a look which is the guarantee of *visibility* in sexist society....Magazines provide the know-how, techniques and expertise; sealing the association of *woman* and *sexuality* in the minds of women themselves. It is almost as though woman herself were a factory, feeding in the means of production, painting on the mask and emerging transformed with value added in the process, a commodity ready for consumption.[10]

Thus, the female moves into the Freudian realm of feminine masquerade and inversion, transformed by society (by cinema, by language, by the medical establishment) and finally by herself (Digna: "Isn't it amazing all the ways we agree to inferior status in our daily lives?") from fractured self to symbol.

That symbolization, the film suggests, resonates in the aging woman's experience and in the expression of the perceived handicap of the deaf. Furthermore, at the same time it parallels the corresponding political, moral, and social ostracism and alienation of any racial "subculture." This allied motif finds its most vivid illustration when the straitjacketed Digna relates to us with wry patience that, during her imposed stay at Bellevue ("Why me and not Carlos? Why me beat up and why me here? Are my rages at Carlos more irrational than his violence toward me? I was no more out of control that night than he was") she is made to recite tongue-twisters in English ("proving that women are more biologically prone to nuttiness than men is this test"), and to list, in reverse order, the presidents of the United States, a task that the abusive and deprecating physician ultimately performs for her. In this one instance, a white male doctor has assaulted Digna linguistically, racially, culturally, medically, and through a host of presumptions so wrong that the experience can only be relayed by Digna, finally, as absurd.

Similar linguistic representation of gender, race, and class is intricately illustrated throughout *Privilege*. In a representation of the rape scene, Brenda, whose determined and steady voice-over narration is simultaneously presented as a barrage of suppressed, enraged epithets, is

slammed against a wall in repeated choreographed sequences of slow motion. Technically silenced during the alleged attempted rape, she is nonetheless one of the film's chief manipulators of dialogue and text. Her text/dialogue consciously uses language to limit, label, and define and, in so doing, emphasizes historical and immediate implications of gender on self and society.

> Man equals human, hero, the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the social being, the mythical subject. Woman equals immutable matter, procreative Earth, landscape, monster, Sphinx, Medusa, Sleeping Beauty, inert obstacle to his transformative striving.

As a sympathetic mouthpiece for feminist principles and radical observation, her dialogue conveys the ramifications of mythic representation on culture.

> Venus. Ever since they knocked your block off your face is so vacant, waiting to be moved in on by men's imaginations. How could anybody love you, having the ugliest mug in the world— the one that's missing.

When she presses charges against Carlos for attempted rape, Brenda deliberately and sarcastically relays the events to the astounded D. A. this way:

> Something woke me up. I didn't know what—I was half asleep . . . and there you were, standing beside the bed, bare-assed naked. I started to scream, maybe I yelled "Get out of here," I'm not sure. And you said, and I'm not sure of the sequence, "You're very beautiful, I want to talk to you, don't be afraid. . . ."

Here, her use of the pronoun "you" signifies that she actively refuses the need to distinguish between the man who attempted to violate her and the male lawyer whom she now confronts. All men function as the potential violator and represent the universal opposition, the interchangeable Other. Her intrinsic ambivalence about men is clearly expressed through representational, confrontational, and connotative language/text, some of which, beyond myth, is embedded in cliché, in the film's play of associated words and images, and in the vocabulary of popular culture. She says to Carlos in an interrupted and repeated sequence:

> And when you look at me the word lesbian might never have been invented. Now you listen, you doctor-lawyer-Indian chief, you engineer-ayatollah-shudder-in-the-loins, you landlord-Lenny Bruce, Chairman-of-the-Board, you Party Chairman, Chief Justice, raving queen. . . . you, you Gang of Chancellors, you Head of Sanitation. As man conquers the world so too he conquers the female. You're no different from Genghis Khan, one of the first guys to make a direct connection between manhood, achievement, conquest and rape.

Carlos himself is centrally positioned in the film as a victim, but a victim of racial representation (a form of mistaken identity). Like all the characters who serve to illustrate Jenny's flashback, he also acts as a political guide on whose sensibilities we rely in order to understand the implications of language in perpetuating the cultural mechanisms that define difference. Representation of gender and race are aligned in a scene between Carlos and Brenda, and an aside to us, which clearly evoke the manifestations of classic jungle fever. In its use of language (and accusing pronoun), Carlos's monologue assumes Brenda's particular apprehensions about race and similarly lets them stand for all white women's.

> Carlos: She has an avid curiosity about my sexual endowments. She enjoys imagining the fucking that goes on among blacks and Latinos on this block. She thinks we're looser and less inhibited because we come from the steaming tropics. . . . When you look at me you see a dark continent, something unknown, exciting, frightening, exotic . . . different.
>
> Brenda: Hey, I'm supposed to be the "dark continent." Freud called women a "dark continent."

The unfortunate dilemma of Carlos's racial and sexual representation is made clear when he describes a defining incident in which a child mistakes him for an African-American. Like the film's women whose personal lives are dominated by culturally defined image and sexual representation (Venus's missing mug), Carlos's text-speech (from Frantz Fanon) reveals the heightened experience of loss, limitation, fragmentation, and displacement when he acknowledges the

> atmosphere of certain uncertainty, provided for me by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories. "Look, a negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. "Look, a negro. . . ." Frightened! They were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh

> myself to tears. But laughter became impossible. I could no longer laugh because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history. I moved toward the Other and the evanescent Other . . . transparent, but not there. Disappeared. . . . Completely dislocated . . . I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. But I did not want this revision.

Literally displaced in America, Carlos's amazement and confusion at his change in status and his newly perceived, other-driven cultural identity is clearly understood here and when he explains the fluid conceptions and delineations of class common to Puerto Rican culture.

> I happen to be what my countrymen call trigueño, meaning I was born with the same permanent tan that the beautiful people spend millions to maintain. You know, racially speaking, being a Puerto Rican in New York City is totally different from the way we look at ourselves in Puerto Rico. Here, we're caught between white and black. Here skin color determines who you are. Not only are there no gradations, but if you look white but have a black Ma-ma, you are still considered black. In Puerto Rico you'd be white. Here, skin color precedes all other kinds of identification. In Puerto Rico there are a lot more classifications other than black or white skin. Besides skin color, there's class, facial features, texture of hair. There are the Blancos . . . Indios or the Indians. Moreños are dark-skinned with a variety of features both negroid and caucasian. Negroes are like U.S. blacks. Then there's the term trigueño. In Puerto Rico a black can become a trigueño by achieving economic status or becoming a friend. . . .

Jenny undergoes a similar realization—that her youthful relationship with Robert, the young attorney, must then actually have been based in part on dynamics of class—sexually slumming, as he seemed to be, among the exotic bohemian artists that she, unwittingly, must have represented to him. Sometimes dressed in her exotic Latin costume and make-up, Digna sticks to Jenny like a conscience, physically following her through her flashback to the events of those heady days of denial ("The upper-middle class was a total turn-on for me!" Jenny now admits). Digna's presence is not a literal one—only we are aware of her—and she is, ironically, never seen by Jenny, underlining Jenny's naïveté about class and Digna's symbolic racial invisibility. Like Trisha in *The Man Who Envied Women*, Digna's running commentary judges, interprets, and undermines the story, but with emphasis on the shifting boundaries of privilege, class, and status. Her more conscious role in that regard allows her to function as a strong

voice of the disenfranchised and as the omniscient narrator of a moral travelogue, as she climbs in the car with Jenny and Robert to illustrate—literally—the limits of social mobility.

> She never saw Carlos again and she never saw me at all. Social distinctions were invisible to her, as I was invisible to her. Jenny was such a dummy when it came to class, a *tabula rasa*. Jenny thought she was free and unencumbered by such things. She wouldn't have admitted to being impressed by Robert's Harvard education, elegant manners, professional status. How could she predict that not recognizing her own social disadvantage would be her undoing. Jenny was no Emma Bovary. . . . There is more that distinguishes the upper from the lower classes than bread crusts left on a plate. The number of heart attacks, for instance. He is much less likely to die from a heart attack after making love than Carlos. A Coca-Colonial diet doesn't lead to long life-expectancy. This country has the highest infant mortality rate in the industrialized world. Many people's stories have premature endings; Jenny's tale is no exception. Her disappearance from Robert's story will happen almost as quickly as Carlos's exit from hers . . . Robert will get tired of her drunken displays of affection at social gatherings and six months from now he will dump her. But don't worry. I won't allow myself to disappear from Jenny's story like Carlos and Brenda. I'm going to hang around.

In this engagingly wise and honest appraisal, Digna's reference to bread crusts left on a plate urges the viewer to make thematic and mnemonic connections about class to one of the computer-generated stories, whose entry describes a storyteller's minute but meaningfully remembered childhood incident. In the story, a black housekeeper habitually removes the crusts from her sandwiches, an unforgivable affectation to the storyteller's lower-middle-class mother. In addition to providing intuitive coherence and inner logic in the film's seemingly disunified assemblage, these intertwined textual allusions (like the hook references) frame convergent themes even while pulling them apart to examine their distinctions—here they force multiple perspectives on class to converge. Digna's genial monologue and the narrative's constant interplay of referents help to create a kinetic and universal dialogue within the film that carries the spectator across multiple perspectives and divisions of time—"ripples form[ing] larger concentric circles."[11]

Similarly, Brenda's psychoanalytically-based "shit theory," as Washington calls it, which aligns a male child's earliest "dual aversion to shit

and blood" to his hatred of both blacks and women, and Washington's quite different historical-economic explanations for racism under capitalism, each contribute to important comparisons and juxtapositions of divergent perspectives, experiences, and radical theories. The pervasive American experience of difference and loss resonates in the film's dialectical presentation of these referents and conversations, where patterns of sexism, racism, and classism are considered in a privileged context—outside the boundaries of traditional narrative cinema.

"So. What are we going to do, folks?" In the face (literally) of Rainer/Caldicott's well-taken question, the film acts responsibly. Once the deep personal (and necessarily social and political) experiences of loss (of status, of desirability, of self) are confronted in the film, they are sometimes met by resignation and defeat (Caldicott's retirement "because the men did me in" or, in Carlos's speech, a "tight-lipped smile"). More often they are met, on the sound track, with screams or, by the characters, with flashes of horror, disbelief, and a kind of shocked realization.

As aural transition, as a logical reaction to frustration and anger, the female screams that punctuate the sound track sometimes seem the final, raw response proposed by the talk-jammed narrative. Digna's offscreen screams for help at the outset of the film are accompanied by others as the film progresses. Interspersed scenes of pompous or wrong-headed medical advice for menopausal women ("so the medics try to fix us with hormone therapy so we'll stay young forever") are contrapuntally met with overlaid screams. Women confronted with attitudes so wrong that they can only react with instinctive existential confusion, paralysis, and stunned amazement silently echo this response.

Paralyzed with horror, women awaken in the middle of the night (sometimes by screams, sometimes by bare-assed naked intruders and the feeling that "Someone's broken in!") and sit bolt upright. In dreams, they stare starkly into the camera when confronted with such emotional terror(ism) or, fully awake, ruefully remember equally humiliating offenses or attempted violations: "He said he'd take everything but my playground. I was horrified," Jenny tells Washington about her thieving physician.

"My biggest shock on entering middle age was the realization that men's desire for me was the linchpin of my identity," Jenny admits. "All of a sudden she didn't know how to dress," a computer intertitle sadly reveals. During a sequence of Jenny's flashback in which she walks along a New York sidewalk accompanied by Robert (and Digna, our reliable guide), he delivers the defining, shocking and summary truism: "You can

always tell the way a woman feels about herself by looking at her legs." It is clear that Jenny's relationship with Robert becomes, in some respect, a tacit cooperation with the enemy (see *Kristina*); aside from his alleged patronizing relationship with Jenny, he is one of the morality police who will turn in Lenny Bruce. Both Jenny and Digna's stalled stance and Jenny's dumbfounded expression in reaction to his statement (while Digna stares at her accusingly) dramatize the sense of utter mystification experienced and internalized by women in the film.

Like the neighbors standing paralyzed in the hallway on the night of the alleged attempted rape, women's isolation and forced detachment occur in direct proportion to the number of emotionally numbing blows to their sensibilities—which they experience as randomly inflicted violence. Into their middle age, the silence surrounding the experience of aging and menopause results in a succession of befuddling surprises. "After menopause women don't have REM sleep anymore. What do you think of that?" Jenny asks Washington. "We don't get that kind of repose anymore." "What about those raging floods when your periods are phasing out?" asks a sympathetic computer message. This experience echoes Trisha's narration in *The Man Who Envied Women* when she notes that, in addition to an accumulation of other daily aggravations and irritations, "I bloodied up a pair of white linen pants." Both convey the unshown but transferred and, to women, common visual shock of blood red on white.

Victims of regular physical and emotional violence but, more fundamentally, survivors who awaken to sometimes painful realizations, women in *Privilege* experience bittersweet intersections of revelation and dismay. This condition is also poignantly experienced by the spectator, whose privileged access allows him or her to read the computer chapters, which reveal themselves as internalized parables of illumination or function as shared, introspective journal entries.

> A woman who is just entering menopause meets a man at a conference at the University of El Paso. They hit it off. Later, after hearing his lascivious remarks about a much younger woman, she is shocked at having misinterpreted what she had thought was mutual sexual attraction. Toward evening, from the hilltop heights of the university, a Mexican-American student points out to her the sprawling heights of Juarez across the Rio Grande. In the gathering dusk she realizes she *is* on two different sides of two frontiers. Economically, she is on the advantaged side overlooking a third world country. And sexually, having

> passed the frontier of attractiveness to men, she is now on the other side of privilege.

Intensely felt, these shared reflections operate on a level more common to literature: they offer passkeys to a shifting psyche. Beyond that, they force cross-references and create multilayered juxtapositions, crossing still other frontiers: "I guess at any given moment I'm interested in having these things collide," Rainer has said. "The politics of representation—which not only refer to things outside the film, like social constructs, but to the strategies of the film itself. . . . I have felt myself beginning to cross the frontier of narrative. I'm scratching at the frontier."[12]

Often, these small epiphanies may lead to discovery, enlightenment, and growth.

> One day during my first year in high school I was taking the bus home from school. A black woman who had sat down beside me was watching as I leafed through the pages of a *National Geographic*. As I paused at a color photograph of an African man dressed in traditional warrior garb, the woman remarked, "What a handsome man." Her simple utterance was a revelation to me. This was my first encounter with a black perspective, with a black person's sense of being-in-the-world. Here was no strange alien creature. Here was a handsome man.

Yvonne Washington's final monologue, spoken directly to the audience in wry recollection, functions in much the same way.

> I try to monitor my hot flashes when they occur. I'm watching a videocassette of *Sweet Sweet Back's Badass Song*. "Why does an embodiment of black protest have to be a stud?" flashes through my mind. And along comes a hot flash. I'm on the subway, thinking about a friend, "Forget that family crap," I think. Flash! Ready to leave, I put on my coat in an overheated room—instantly I am so hot I have to tear it off. Flash! Reading about the Supreme Court's latest setback to civil rights, one of the Justices is quoted as saying the fact that low-paying, unskilled jobs are overwhelmingly held by blacks is no proof of racism—Flash. Thinking about what I should have said, what I could have said—Flash. . . .

Flashes of light and heat, flashes of alarm and insight—*Privilege* uses film as a communal tête-à-tête and substitutes it for an oral storytelling tradition missing in contemporary American culture, where women might otherwise transfer accumulated knowledge, insight, and common experi-

ence. In so doing, the film adamantly rejects the model of the sadder-but-wiser-but-expendable female ("I don't want to go around uterusless," Liz Taylor's character notes in a clip from a fictional film-within-the-film). Likewise, in its treatment of race and class, *Privilege* drolly illuminates and problematizes the politics of representation in a humanist context—a challenging methodology in radically constructed avant-garde texts.

The film's long final sequence presents the wrap party for the "many others" who participated in making the film, intercut with the credits, the confessional "flash" vignette of Yvonne Washington speaking to the audience, more interviews, and an often criticized computer intertitle that is highlighted as it reads: "Utopia: The more impossible it seems, the more necessary it becomes." The party, shot in Rainer's Manhattan loft, happily celebrates the film's successful completion as well as its members' diversity (in age, race, and sex). For a bit of voyeuristic fun, the roaming camera also allows the audience the diversion that comes from re-encountering/recognizing the players themselves, unmasked and compatible in this informal structure.

While it clearly conveys a welcome feeling of narrative resolution and visually commemorates the joint activity of artistic collaboration and happy communion[13] inherent in filmmaking, this privileged glimpse of artists and intelligentsia can be off-putting in the cozy intermingling of party guests and what we may perceive as their loft-y sensibilities. Unlike the many avant-garde home movies that are grounded in family celebration and domestic imagery, the wrap party's bohemian domain is mainly one of film equipment, film stills, walls of books and conference posters; it clearly celebrates the kinship of the art/academic/film community and by extension those interviewees who are welcomed into the family fold (and in this context it is close in spirit to somewhat more inclusive avant-garde films like those of Jonas Mekas). Peeking over Rainer's back and with only the confusion of random party noises available to us, however, we strain to overhear conversations to which we are not privy.

Like the music lesson at the end of *Journeys from Berlin*, this final scene effectively presents artistic creation as a strong mediating force and healing act. At this party, however, the spectator may be invited to marvel "from a distance" at the "paradigm of communal activity . . . that could be viewed as both primitive—in the ideal sense of community of shared belief—and utopian," more sympathetically presented in *Kristina Talking Pictures*. That is, while we have been otherwise systematically included and purposely engaged by the film's characters, conversations, computer

stories, and, finally, by Washington's direct confessions to us, the bumper-sticker nature of the intertitle that invokes a problematic ideal and the lack of direct acknowledgment of our presence by the members of the party suddenly renders us social, cinematic, and intellectual outcasts. (There is one exception when a young female party-goer's response to us—to the camera—is a mocking dance, a scene abstractly mirrored earlier in the film by a dated dramatic film's version of an informal get-together. Both feature a young and pretty centerpiece whose unselfconscious use of her body celebrates her youth and lack of inhibition.)

This cinematic snub is, perhaps, what limits viewers to merely glimpsing artistic and political utopia while unfortunately discouraging our participation in it, shifting us rudely and unexpectedly to the other side of the privileged narrative frontier we had earlier so enjoyed. Accordingly, the party presents artists ironically distanced from the audience with whom they intended to interact. In its length and form, the wrap party does, however, provide a cordial invitation to contemplate process, as do so many other Rainer films. With the film's long list of credits scrolling through it, the wrap party measures the work's ultimate organic unity, grown from fragments. Like the filmic process Rainer puts to such good use, the party sequence allows us to recognize and pay homage to the film's individual components (real, fictional, seen, and unseen), strengthened by their differences. Though it follows an aesthetic of juxtaposition and distance that emphasizes at least to some degree the spectator's awareness of being situated outside the space of the work, the party may be ultimately experienced and celebrated as the artists' release from the hermetic process and constructed language of moviemaking.

Other visions of utopia arm many of Rainer's films and, as the computer message suggests, they often seem necessary philosophical propositions in the service of self-preservation. As Digna leans against a large American convertible, dressed in a symbolically multicolored striped dress and stripped of make-up and her Carmen Miranda getup, she can barely make herself heard against the din of the New York street traffic. Her lyrically poetic text/speech (by Nicholasa Mohr) offers an answer to questions she has posed earlier: "Tell me, why are Puerto Rican women in this country more vulnerable to mental illness than the rest of the general population? Why do we not flourish here?" Doubled for a moment as she recites it to us, her expressively accented speech offers a view of another home.

> At the sound of the first rooster crowing I would open my eyes and start the day. I see the morning mist settling like puffs of smoke over the range of palm trees that surrounds the entire countryside. Sharp mountain peaks covered with many shades of green foliage that change constantly from light to dark . . . depending on the time of day or the direction of the rays of the brilliant tropical sun. I take the path following the road that leads to my village. I inhale the sweet and spicy fragrance of the flower gardens that sprinkle the entire countryside . . . every mountain village prides themselves on their flower gardens. There were bright yellows, scarlet and crimson hues, brilliant blues, wild purples—every color imaginable flourished in the plants and shrubbery that blossomed in my father's flower garden. I feel the soft, cool, gentle morning breeze as I stand by the road and dig my bare feet into the dark, moist earth.

Set against the New York pavement and its pandemonium, this straightforward and personal presentation of a lush, living, multicolored utopia proposes a moving and sincere look at an even more privileged life than the party offers. In its feeling for harmony and symbiosis (like the interpolated text by Joan Nestle or, perhaps, Carlos's description of the fluid definitions of race and class in Puerto Rico) Poppy's flower garden may represent the film's more sentimental vision of an ethical ideal, apart from the party's urban, aloof and artistic one.

"I know I'm sentimental. You would like these images to be more abstract. It's okay, call me sentimental. You sit in you own homes but I speak with an accent and you don't even know where I come from. These are some images and some sounds recorded by someone in exile." These arresting lines, delivered in voice-over by Jonas Mekas in his *Lost, Lost, Lost* and directed to his friends in the avant-garde community, address the alternative narrative codes and aesthetic constructions assumed to be the domain of radical cinema. But in his stance as individual witness and alien, Mekas claims the right of the displaced person/artist to recognize and record experience personally and even from a perspective of emotion or nostalgia.

In its alternately angry, comic, and poetic visions of loss, displacement and difference, *Privilege* frames woman, person of color, member of the deaf community, and artist in similar privileged circumstance. In its attitude of personal reflection and shared private discourse, the film ultimately seeks to record the images and sounds of (politically charged) concrete individual experience—to know where I come from. In menopause, women are ironically faced with symbolic exile: from their own girlhoods, their "diseased" and changed bodies ("Nobody ever told me

how many hours of the day I'd spend mourning for—what—myself," Jenny says); from one another—due to the taboo nature of a shunned and undiscussed subject; from desire ("Now that I did not appear to be looking for a man, the state of my desires seemed of no interest to anyone"); from their own life experience due to loss of memory; from political representation. Racism and the ostracism of the deaf promise social, political and even linguistic estrangement. Further, the artist or performer finds herself happily isolated within a community of friends (where the spectator/guest may feel alienated) or pops up, incongruously, in the film frame.

In its final section, then, the film may sardonically extol us to have a *good* trip (by extension of Yvonne Washington's nerve-wracking airport experience, which unexpectedly places her in the role of alien and suspect when, during a hot flash, her overheated body threatens to turn her in—to an immigration agent). It also presents a last interviewee, whose matter-of-fact explanation of her prolonged discomfort in menopause ("It's not nice, but I hope it will be over soon") conveys a similarly frustrated and weary acceptance of life under perpetually shifting, shocking, surprising, aggravating (and much, much worse) circumstances. As in other Rainer films, these women's sentiments place the ultimate emphasis on resigned endurance, courage, strength, and survival, celebrated in the figure of the grey-haired anarchist-interviewee reclining in her own literal and figurative garden—comfortable in the lifelong commitment to radical politics that has eventually sustained her. Unlike the film's opening characterization of Dr. Caldicott, whose relentless confrontation with severe political realities forces an early retirement, the majority of the film's real and fictional women exhibit the kind of guerilla sensibilities and jocular equilibrium of those who have seen it all and lived to tell the tale, their senses of humor left intact. In response to the modern experience of anger or ambivalence and alienation (sometimes supported by the mechanisms of avant-garde film), *Privilege*'s involving form and invigorating discourse invites our understanding, interaction, and camaraderie. In the face of such criminally wrong attitudes, that is our right and our privilege.

Notes

1. Rainer, Screening of *Journeys from Berlin/1971*. Audiotape. Recorded 26-27 November 1979. Walker Art Center, Department of Film. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

2. Rainer in Santiago Chiori, "Rape, Race and Menopause: An Avant-Garde Filmmaker Explores Middle Age," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 September 1990.

3. Royal S. Brown, "Jean-Luc Godard: Nihilism Versus Aesthetic Distanciation," in *Focus on Godard*, ed. Royal S. Brown (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 112. In general, his discussion of Godard's uses of allusion, autobiography, scattered references, etc., is useful to contrast against Rainer's style.

4. Georgia Brown, "Flash Points," *Village Voice*, 15 January 1991: 53.

5. Rainer, Audiotape 26-27 November 1979.

6. Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 125.

7. Brown, "Flash Points," 53.

8. Ibid.

9. Jonathon Rosenbaum, "Menopause and Racism," *Chicago Reader*, 8 March 1991: 27-29.

10. Mulvey, *Visual and Other*, 54.

11. Rainer in Noël Carroll, "Interview with a Woman Who, " *Millenium* 7-9 (1980-81): 43-44.

12. Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, eds., "Yvonne Rainer," *Profile* 4.5 (1984): 37-38.

13. Rainer in Brown, "Flash Points," 53.

Conclusion

> In cinema, the battleground is neither between nor outside. The battleground is narrativity itself, both its constructs/images and the means by which they are constructed; both its signs and its signifiers.[1]

To begin to summarize Yvonne Rainer's contributions to film and film grammar is to summarize the recent traditions of the avant-garde itself. Alternative cinema, in its radical political and aesthetic sense, is alternative by virtue of the uncompromising measures it employs to revitalize and challenge basic assumptions put forth by any cinema that preceded it or runs parallel to it. In constructing new ways of seeing, in fashioning alternate and progressive approaches by which its spectator experiences it, independent cinema persistently confounds and acts as foil to its more mainstream counterparts. More significantly, it consistently refuses to accept simple reaction as its central impetus, choosing instead to advance a prolonged and systematic interrogation as the means through which alternate ground may be broken. In its struggle to structure and define a radical art form, avant-garde film's consciously confrontational battleground *is* narrative, as Rainer confirms—in word and deed.

From Maya Deren (whose early work, similar to Rainer's, attempted to resolve the problem of using dancers in film) to Yvonne Rainer, the avant-garde's direction underlines Deren's polemical statement in 1959, "Art must be artificial."[2] Like Rainer, who has consistently focused on the cinematic medium and the formal alternatives that make us consciously aware of the dominance of process and construction of text, Deren described the trenchant aspects of filmic art, achieved only through direct confrontation with its mechanisms.

> Art is distinguished from other human activities and expressions by this organic function of form in the projection of imaginative experience into reality. This function of form is characterized by two essential qualities: first, that it incorporates in itself the philosophy and emotion which

> relate to the experience which is being projected; and second, that it derives from the instrument by which that projection is accomplished.... How can we justify the fact that it is the art instrument, among all that fraternity of twentieth-century inventions, which is still the least explored and exploited.... If cinema is to take its place beside the others as a full-fledged art form, it must cease merely to record realities that owe nothing of their actual existence to the film instrument. Instead, it must create a total experience so much out of the very nature of the instrument as to be inseparable from its means.[3]

As an answer and a cure, Rainer's body of work continues to represent one of cinema's foremost illustrations of an intellectual, emotional, and political framework by which to examine the multiplicity of choices provided in the reconstruction of artifice/artifact. The politics of image and sound, orchestrated through radical juxtapositions and complex disjunctions, simultaneously contradict and construct film's form. As Mary Gentile aptly points out in her *Film Feminisms*, part of this method is obviously connected to Eisenstein's theory of montage, which used editing to suggest a single, predetermined concept. However, as a prescriptive to revitalize the medium:

> Rather than using montage to make a point and to direct the viewer's thoughts in a predetermined direction, use montage to construct and contradict simultaneously to make connections and suggest distinctions. Startle the viewer with the juxtaposition of seeming opposites.[4]

This array would include—among others—colors, directions, rhythms, tonalities, and points of view.

Beyond editing, then, Rainer's radical use of juxtaposition finds far-reaching implications in its relationship to language, to representation, to objects and other materials that operate within the text (intertitles, films, excerpts from private journals, texts), to characterization, to autobiography and fiction, and to personal and political terrains—the latter two often represented as ambiguously related or, alternately, inseparable. As she so lucidly asserted even in the early stages of her entry into filmmaking, those disjunctive techniques she advanced, such as the resonances created by repetition, stillness, allusion, prolonged duration, fragmented speech and framing, self-conscious camera movement, etc., were aggressively employed precisely because she regarded them as interesting and beautiful.[5] Over two decades later, the same remains true. These, and other calculated narrative screw-ups[6] become the bases for Rainer's continual investiga-

tion and occasional obliterations of cinematic practices. In discussing the lengthy corridor scene of *The Man Who Envied Women*, Rainer's explanations detail many of the same concerns voiced here:

> If these scenes are about a conflict between theory and practice, or a contradiction between theory and everyday life, they can also be read in terms of a "return of the repressed," which, operating more than a cheap subversion, constantly pressures theory into re-examining systems of signification, reinventing its own constraints.[7]

This kind-of aggressive reexamination of form and systems of signification (or as a character in one of Rainer's films might stridently assert, "You heard me. I said 'aggressive reexamination'") provides the compelling reason that the spectator is forced to constantly re-evaluate his or her relation to the narrative and the strategies deployed therein. As a fundamental effect of these interesting and beautiful manipulations of signs and signifiers, it must be observed, one's perception and perspective is radically altered. Rather than a cheap subversion or dry exercise, Rainer's contribution has been nothing less than to continue the ongoing process that maintains the significant and sustained pressure to redefine film as art.

Another significant contribution (if the two can be separated) is evidenced in Rainer's indefatigable regard for the spectator. Depending on our perspective and the amount of time or work we are willing to invest in the films, viewers may be rewarded in the complexity of address. We may alternately feel harangued, manipulated, dislocated, or intellectually complimented and embraced. Ultimately, our relation to a Rainer film is complicated. If we follow Rainer's career (or, for that matter, the movement of the avant-garde itself, since the two are intertwined), such direct and forceful interaction with her oeuvre forever affects our perceptions. We learn to recognize the aforementioned contradictions and constructions, and use the anti-illusionist narrative to develop a new relation to cinema—not through identification with characters or through submersion in a story but to the alternate construct of cinema itself.

Constance Penley notes in her helpful summary of Christian Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier" that for Metz, a spectator's primary identification then comes in the activity of looking: "the spectator is the constitutive instance of the film, of the cinematic signifier; the film would not exist without the sight (and hearing) of the spectator."[8] The surprising outcome is that "the spectator *identifies with himself*, with himself as a pure act of

perception: as a condition of possibility of the perceived, and hence as a kind of transcendental subject."[9] Thus, the subject's own act of perceiving allows the primary identification in the film to be with the camera and not with the characters or the depicted events. Watching ourselves watching, or being consciously constructed as subject, we are thereby unified and affirmed as the place of synthesis and all perceptions.[10] Providing us with such a novel and privileged vantage point is then a worthy and productive enterprise.

Rainer's self-reflexive devices, characteristic of avant-garde cinema overall, function independently, however, on levels that defy easy categorization. She is almost routinely (and probably not mistakenly) aligned with feminist filmmakers and theorists, for example. Penley sees Rainer's work as politically motivated, in reaction to the pressure of a specific socio-historic situation. She groups Rainer's films with those of other women filmmakers whose political aims produce narratives concerned less with codes and perceptual processes than with narrative, fiction, and the construction of another subject-relation to the screen. She thus sees Rainer's work as a central attempt to reunify and rephallicize a spectator posed by the film.[11] With regard to such a character and spectator, Rainer illustrates this:

> *She* . . . well maybe she'll stop in her tracks and muse to the female spectator, "Hey, we're wearing the same dress, aren't we? Why don't we pool our energies and try to figure out what a political myth for socialist feminism might look like. . . ." So they (she and she) make a movie together.[12]

Similar to Penley's reading but perhaps a more accurate reaction to Rainer in this regard is made by B. Ruby Rich: "While Rainer does not consider herself a feminist, while feminism is never the central issue in one of her films, her work is central to feminism."[13] That is, by creating a cinema that may both construct and include its audience, Rainer's work has vast implications. Her films do not seem ideology bound, based, or motivated, as Penley's comments would suggest, but they have profound political and artistic applications. While they do not illustrate or pander to the significant body of film theory unfolding (and engulfing) critical discourse, they are eminently readable in this light. While they cover a complicated ground with a manifold range of topics, often internally colliding within each film, they remain distinctively Rainer's own. Thus, in the accumulation of Rainer's films, we find a multiplicity of uses and

ramifications. Above all, Rainer's process demands an active viewer whose participation throughout the film and among the films always requires a renewed willingness and desire to be challenged as opposed to seduced and reinvigorated in the changing modes of cinematic discourse. This is the framework from which she begins and the basis from which her work develops. Rainer observes

> The necessity for digressing from and undermining a coherent narrative line driven by characters, or simply refusing to comply with its demands for spatio-temporal homogeneity, uninterrupted flow of events, closure, etc., has always been a basic assumption in my scheme of things. . . . How do you unhook this audience that dreams with all its eyes open?[14]

It is her obvious dual attraction to both anti-illusionist devices that antagonize the spectator as well as to those narrative strategies which affirm and recognize the spectator's participation in the film that allow her work to thrive in the midst of dichotomy and open ambiguity. Her preoccupation with and pleasure in balancing these directions have, in themselves, helped to forge new codes of narrative structure. Using the metaphor of battle she often invokes, Rainer elaborates

> I do have a private war with narrative film and it's a different kind of argument than structural filmmakers have. I feel that film can encompass all kinds of treatments within the same work. I guess that's what interests me most about it, that it's possible to explore film in terms of process, and structural/formal possibilities, and also deal with fiction and exposition through performers and language. I'm very aware that narrative is a trap. It's something that's very dangerous to deal with. In its ultimate perfected form, it gets into a kind of representation that can only be compared with methods of persuasion and myth that bombard us everyday, and that's something to be avoided. How one chooses to avoid these shoals of narrative film are the crux of the matter for me, and quite fascinating.[15]

Where these concerns—cinematic, political, linguistic, and emotional—intersect is the point at which Rainer's battleground is constructed and revealed. Since Rainer's process is always one in and of flux and accumulation (and because her work in film continues beyond the boundaries of this project, both in time and extent), it is unproductive to label, finalize, or separate her work from other contexts, discourses, and projects, including the film she is working on now. In correspondence, Rainer

described *Privilege*, at that time in preproduction, to be shot in the fall of 1989. Connections to her repertoire were obvious.

> Apropos of narrative strategies, the film will again combine fiction and documentary, fake documentary, flashback, dream, one main character and six substantial supporting roles. The documentary segments deal with women and aging; the fictional parts are about racism.

For the Whitney Museum's biennial film exhibition in 1987, Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women* was presented, "fixed like a figurehead to the prow of the exhibit . . . [and] advanced as the avatar of recent narrativizing trends."[16] From 1972, "the consensus date for the avant-garde's institutionalization," and not coincidentally the date of Rainer's first feature-length film, until the present, according to Paul Arthur,

> almost without exception, the common feature of the very greatest avant-garde work . . . is the reformulation of an autobiographical impulse in which the sincerity and unity of the narrating subject is either interrogated or smashed to bits.[17]

As generalizations go, Arthur's observation accurately pinpoints the avant-garde's previous concerns as well as its recent directions, something difficult to accomplish in a diverse and continually developing milieu; it further manages to convey a central focus, the presence of self as persona, as well as the resonant sense of disruption and dislocation characteristic of a Rainer construct in particular. As innovator and exemplar, Yvonne Rainer exists neither between nor outside the political and aesthetic movements in film, which have, by now, steadily established their own radical traditions. Defined by the strategies her work helped to create and propelled inevitably by her most recent undertaking Yvonne Rainer is, by anyone's measure, one of the most significant and influential artists of the American avant-garde.

Notes

1. Rainer, "Looking Myself in the Mouth," *October* 16 (1981): 74.
2. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-1978*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 42.
3. Ibid., 42-43.
4. Mary C. Gentile, *Film Feminisms* (Greenwich, CT: Greenwood, 1985), 88.

5. Camera Obscura Collective, "Yvonne Rainer: Introduction and Interview," *Camera Obscura* 1 (1976): 89.

6. Rainer, "Some Ruminations around Cinematic Anecdotes to the Oedipal Net(les) while Playing with De Lauraedipus Mulvey, or, He May Be Off Screen, but. . . . " *Independent* (April 1986): 25.

7. Ibid.

8. Constance Penley, "The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary," *Camera Obscura* 2 (1977): 13.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 19.

11. Ibid., 25.

12. Rainer, "Some Ruminations," 25.

13. B. Ruby Rich, "The Films of Yvonne Rainer," *Chrysalis* 2 (1977): 126.

14. Rainer, "More Kicking and Screaming from the Narrative Front/Backwater," *Wide Angle* 7.1-2 (1985): 10.

15. Chantal Pontbriand, "Interview with Yvonne Rainer," *Parachute* 10 (1978): 47.

16. Paul Arthur, "Desire for Allegory: The Whitney Biennials," *Motion Picture* 2.1 (1987):7.

17. Ibid., 6.

Filmography

All films written and directed by Yvonne Rainer.

1967 *Volleyball (Foot Film)*
16mm, b/w, 10 min.
Camera: Bud Wirtschafter

1968 *Hand Movie*
8mm, b/w, 5 min.
Camera: William Davis

Rhode Island Red
16mm, b/w, 10 min.
Camera: Roy Levin

Trio Film
16mm, b/w, 13 min.
Camera: Phill Niblock

1969 *Line*
16mm, b/w, 10 min.
Camera: Phill Niblock

1972 *Lives of Performers*
16mm, b/w, sound, 90 min.
Camera: Babette Mangolte
Editors: Yvonne Rainer, Babette Mangolte
Cast: John Erdman, Shirley Soffer, Epp Kotkas, James Barth, Sarah Soffer, Yvonne Rainer, Valda Setterfield, Fernando Torm

1974 *Film About a Woman Who . . .*
16mm, b/w, sound, 105 min.
Camera: Babette Mangolte
Editors: Yvonne Rainer, Babette Mangolte
Sound: Deborah S. Freedman, Kurt Munkacsi (The Basement), Lawrence Loewinger
Titles: Neil Murphy
Narration: Yvonne Rainer and John Erdman
Technical Assistants: Scott Billingsley, Epp Kotkas, Barry Ralbag, Karl Schurman
Excerpts from: *La Somnambula,* Vincenzo Bellini, Orchestra and Chorus of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; *Maria Elena,* The Baja Marimba Band; Three piano sonatas by Edvard Grieg, *Thanks, arietta, Native Land* played by Philip Corner
Photos: the Mangolte and Soffer families
Derived from performances of: *This is the Story of a Woman Who . . ., Performance around an unfinished film, Kristina (For...a Novella)*
Cast: Dempster Leech, Shirley Soffer, John Erdman, Renfreu Neff, James Barth, Epp Kotkas, Sarah Soffer, Yvonne Rainer, Tannis Hugill, Valda Setterfield

1976 *Kristina Talking Pictures*
16mm, color and b/w, sound, 90 min.
Camera: Roger Dean, Babette Mangolte
Assistant Camera: Byron Lovelace, Marite Kavaliauskas
Editor: Yvonne Rainer
Assistant Editor: John Erdman
Sound: Lawrence Loewinger
Assistant Sound: Anna Delanzo
Continuity: Epp Kotkas
Gaffer: James McCalmont
Assistant Gaffer: Grace Tankersley
Grip: Peter Miller, Hank Dorst
Production Coordinator: Caila Abedon
Words and Music taken from: Samuel Beckett (*The End*), Simone de Beauvoir (*The Prime of Life, Force of Circumstance*), John Cage, Herbert Clark (*From the Mighty Pacific*), Julio Cortazar (*The Bestiary*), Noel Mostert (*Supership*), Lou Myers (*The Old-Age Home*), Jacques Offenbach (*Duet for Two Cellos*), Georgia O'Keefe, Victor Shklovsky (*Mayakovsky*

and His Circle), Susan Sontag (*On Photography*), Albert Speer (*Inside the Third Reich*), Paul Verlaine

Cast: Burt Barr, Frances Barth, James Barth, Edward Cicciarelli, Blondell Cummings, David Diao, John Erdman, Janet Froelich, Epp Kotkas, Kate Parker, Lil Picard, Ivan Rainer, Yvonne Rainer, Valda Setterfield, Sarah Soffer, Shirley Soffer, Sasson Soffer, Simian Soffer

Narrator: Janet Froelich

Voice of James Cagney: Richard Tobias

1980 *Journeys from Berlin/1971*

16mm, color and b/w, sound, 125 min.

Camera: Carl Teitelbaum, Michael Steinke, Wolfgang Senn, Jon Else, Shinkichi Tajiri

Editor: Yvonne Rainer

Sound: Larry Sider, Helene Kaplan, Dan Gillham, Christian Moldt

Cast: Annette Michelson, Ilona Halberstadt, Gabor Vernon, Chad Wollen, Amy Taubin, Vito Acconci, Lena Hyun, Yvonne Rainer, Ruth Rainero, Leo Rainer, Cynthia Beatt, Antonio Skarmeta

1985 *The Man Who Envied Women*

16mm, color and b/w, sound, 130 min.

Camera: Mark Daniels

Assistant Camera: Wayne De La Roche

Additional Cinematography: Emilio Rodriguez, John Murphy, Michel Negroponte, Elliot Caplan

Editors: Yvonne Rainer, Christine LeGoff

Video: Jacki Ochs

Sound Recordist: Helene Kaplan

Assistant Director: Christine LeGoff

Production Manager: Edith Becker

Script compiled from the speech and writing of: Raymond Chandler, Michel Foucault, Russell Jacoby, Frederic Jameson, Joel Kovel, Julia Kristeva, Meaghan Morris, Paul Patton, Mark Rappaport, Yvonne Rainer, B. Ruby Rich, Martha Rosler, Paul Weideger, Peter Wollen, Tom Zummer

Sculpture Field: Donald Judd

Music: "Penguin Café Single," Penguin Café Orchestra

Film Clips: *Un Chien Andalou, Dark Victory, Otherwise Unexplained Fires, Watermotor, Double Indemnity, Night of the Living Dead, Gilda,*

Dangerous, Wavelength, In a Lonely Place, Dead Reckoning, Clash by Night, Caught

Cast: William Raymond, Larry Loonin, Trisha Brown, Jackie Raynal, Thyrza Goodeve, DeeDee Costello, Iris Owens, Antonio D'Agostaro, Kate Flax, Anne Friedberg, Ruth Mullen, Amy Schewel, Fronza Woods, Sabrina Hamilton, Melody London; Speakers at Board of Estimate Hearing: Rob Storr, Norman Siegel, Diana Adorno, Chino Garcia, Ivan Karp, Diana Meckley; Speakers at the Artists' Call Meetings: Daniel Flores Ascencio, Jon Hendricks, Leon Golub, Doug Ashford, Audrey Zimmerman, Lucy Lippard; Collage Voices: William Raymond, Martha Rosler, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer; Party Voices: Ryan Cutrona, Edith Becker, Jackie Raynal, Fronza Woods, Caroline McGee, Sabrina Hamilton; Telephone Voices: Gary Rosenblatt, Ruth Gray, Edith Becker

In Memoriam: Hollis Frampton, 1956-1984.

1990 *Privilege*

16mm, color and b/w, sound, 103 min.

Camera: Mark Daniels

First Assistant Camera: Tony Hardmon

Editor: Yvonne Rainer

Assistant Director: Christine Le Goff

Production Manager: Kathryn Colbert

Production Coordinator: Carol Noblitt

Design Coordinator: Nancy Swartz

Art Directors.: Anne Stuhler, Michael Selditch

Videography: Ellen Spiro, Yvonne Rainer, John Canalli

Sound Recordist: Antonio Arroyo

Sound Editor: Lisa Pram

Second Assistant Director: Robin Guarino

Costume Designer: Alexandra Welker

Music: "My Funny Valentine," Lorenz Hart/Richard Rodgers; "Seeraeuberjenny," Kurt Weill; "Deserie," Leslie Cooper/ Clarence Johnson

Quotation and Literary Sources: Lefty Barretto, Susan Brownmiller, Lenny Bruce, Dr. Helen Caldicott, Eldridge Cleaver, Oliver C. Cox, Frantz Fanon, Piri Thomas, Judy Grahn, Heresies Collective #6, Calvin C. Hernton, Joel Kovel, Harlan Lane, Teresa De Lauretis, Nicholasa Mohr, Joan Nestle, Clara E. Rodriguez, Ntozake Shange, Elaine Showalter

Cast: Alice Spivak, Novella Nelson, Blaire Baron, Rico Elias, Gabriella Farrar, Tyrone Wilson, Dan Berkey, Claudia Gregory, Yvonne Rainer, Mark Niebuhr, Minnette Lehmann

Interviewees (in order of appearance): Faith Ringgold, Shirley Triest, Helene Moglen, Minnette Lehmann, Catherine English Robinson, Evelyn Cunningham, Gloria Sparrow, Audrey Goodfriend, Vivian Bonnano.

In Memoriam: Ronald Bladen, Lyn Blumenthal, Claudia Gregory, Michael Grieg, Leland Moss, "Louie"

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About the Author

SHELLEY GREEN is a film and cultural theorist. She is a graduate of the University of Toledo and earned her M. A. from the University of Chicago. Her Ph.D. was awarded from Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where she was a teaching fellow in the Department of English. Dr. Green has also taught in both the Department of English and the Department of Theatre, Film and Dance at the University of Toledo. In conjunction with the preparation of this volume, she was a guest lecturer at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and, additionally, has participated on panels and presented scholarly papers on avant-garde cinema and popular culture topics at diverse professional conferences.

This volume of the Filmmakers Series examines the work of one of the central figures of the avant-garde from her first feature-length film in 1972, *Lives of Performers,* through *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974), *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976), *Journeys From Berlin/1971* (1980), *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), to *Privilege* (1990). This comprehensive study surveys critical reaction and includes Rainer's critical writings, photos, full biographical information, a complete filmography, and a bibliography.

A valuable resource for students and instructors of critical studies in film, the book investigates dominant structural elements that enliven Rainer's filmic texts: her complex and disjunctive use of language, speech, repetition, interpolated texts, fragmentation, self-conscious camera movement, autobiography, and the formulation of alternative narrative codes. A focal point is the unique relationship established between the filmmaker and the spectator.

Rainer's narrative strategies have been considered in a radical political context; the author specifically analyzes Rainer's aggressive reexamination of form as it contributes to the politics of the personal and the political. Resonances created in complex construction of sound, image, editing, characterization, camera movement, and the obliteration and calculated reevaluation of these techniques often directly lead to a new construction of the female subject as well as the female spectator. By creating a cinema that may both construct and include its audience, Rainer's work has vast implications. The author develops this significant aspect and addresses issues of race, age, and class, especially in later films. Scholars interested in gender theory and multicultural analyses of cinema will find these discussions useful.

Rainer's contributions to film and film grammar over the last two decades summarize recent traditions of the avant-garde. *Radical Juxtaposition* highlights one major filmmaker's systematic and prolonged interrogation of process as a means through which alternate cinematic and political ground may be broken, in a sturggle to advance and define a radical art form.

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