

SIOBHAN DAVIES DANCE

Yvonne Rainer: The Choreography of Film

Yvonne Rainer, one of the founders of the Judson Dance Theater (1962) and most important choreographers of her day, made seven experimental feature-length films between 1972 and 1996. These films can be seen as crucial interventions in cinema, combining a critical exploration of narrative with innovative strategies, political commitment and humor. They address many important topics – including emotion, power, sexuality, social privilege, gender inequality and notions of ageing – but refuse to offer them a simple, one-sided treatment. Instead, they traverse a number of viewpoints and the complications and contradictions contained within them. This retrospective sees all seven of her feature-length films and one more recent video work screened, with introductions from special guests.

Programmed by Oliver Fuke.

Special thanks to: Yvonne Rainer, Video Data Bank and Zeitgeist Films.

Biography: Yvonne Rainer, one of the founders of the Judson Dance Theater (1962), made a transition to filmmaking following a fifteen-year career as a choreographer/dancer (1960-1975). After making seven experimental feature-length films — “Lives of Performers” (1972), “Privilege” (1990), and “MURDER and murder” (1996), among others — she returned to dance in 2000 via a commission from the Baryshnikov Dance Foundation (“After Many a Summer Dies the Swan”). Since then she has made six dances, including “AG Indexical, with a little help from H.M.,” “Assisted Living: Do you have any money?” and “The Concept of Dust: Continuous Project – Altered annually.” Her dances and films have been seen throughout the U.S. and Europe. Museum retrospectives of her work, including drawings, photos, films, notebooks, and memorabilia, have been presented at Kunsthau Bregenz and Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2012); the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; Jeu de Paume, École des Beaux Artes, La Ferme du Buisson, Paris, and Raven Row, London (2014). A memoir — “Feelings Are Facts: a Life” — was published by MIT Press in 2006. A selection of her poetry was published in 2011 by Paul Chan’s Badlands Unlimited. Other writings have been collected in “Work: 1961-73” (1974); “The Films of Y.R.” (1989); “A Woman Who...: Essays, Interviews, Scripts” (1999); and “Moving and Being Moved” (2017). She is a recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships, a MacArthur Fellowship, and a U.S.A Fellowship.

Tue 27 Feb

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* (1972), with an introduction by Siobhan Davies. This will be followed by a screening of a more recent video work, *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan: Hybrid* (2002).



Description: Rainer's first feature-length film, *Lives of Performers* (1972), can be seen as a groundbreaking intervention in avant-garde filmmaking. Working with and against narrative, the film begins with a rehearsal of a unison dance, *Walk She Said*. In an exploration of both the conventions and power of melodrama, *Lives of Performers* utilizes tableaux, a script read off-screen and intertitles to suggest a narrative involving a love triangle, infatuation and emotional entanglement. This film also incorporates photographs from Rainer's earlier performance, *Grand Union Dreams* (1971), and ends with a series of 35 *tableaux vivants* based on the production stills from G. W. Pabst's film, *Pandora's Box*.

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *Lives of Performers*, 1972. 90 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 6 Mar

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *Privilege* (1990), with an introduction by Rachel Moore.



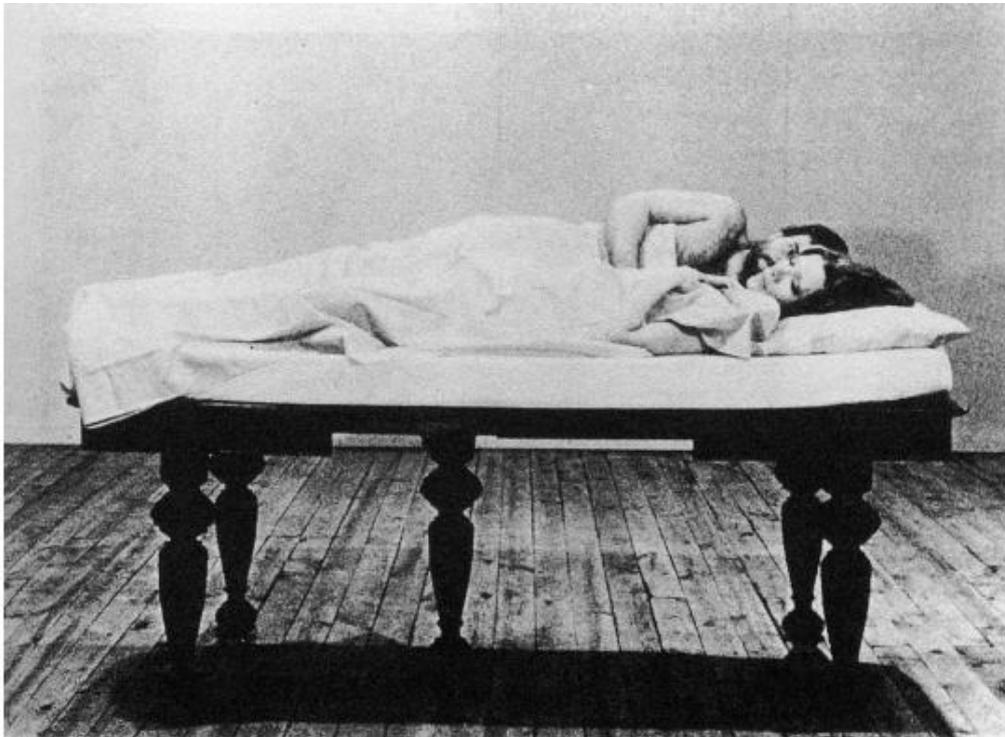
Description: Rainer's sixth feature-length film, *Privilege* (1990), follows a filmmaker, Yvonne Washington (Novella Nelson), making a documentary about menopause and female ageing. She interviews her friend, Jenny (Alice Spivak), about her experience. The conversation focuses on a particular event in New York and, as it unfolds, the many layers of privilege and power contained within it. Rainer's film, which combines archival, documentary and staged footage, offers a complex, multifaceted analysis of discrimination relating to age, gender, race and class. Rather than equate these issues, the film leaves the viewer to decipher how they might relate to each other.

Rachel Moore teaches at Goldsmiths, University of London in the department of Media and Communications. Her writing focuses largely on the historical avant-garde, experimental film, and artists' moving images. Her theoretical approach leans heavily on the work of the College of Sociology's search for the sacred in everyday life and the Frankfurt School's notion of the radical historical materialist's task of 'reawakening'. These interests were initially explored in her book *Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic* (Duke, 2000). Her forthcoming book with Anke Hennig for DeGruyter looks at transgression, animality, and revolution in Kalatozov's most radical films: *Salt and Sugar: A Contribution to Comparative Revolutionary Studies*; a study of screens in public places and the concept of Boredom; an investigation of films of 'contact' across time and space conducted during her Guggenheim Fellowship entitled 'In the Film Archive of Natural History'. She has published articles on such filmmakers as Jean Epstein, James Benning, Kenneth Anger and Patrick Keiller, as well as a monograph on Hollis Frampton's *nostalgia* (MIT/Afterall, 2006).

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *Privilege*, 1990. 103 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 13 Mar

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974), with an introduction by Professor Laura Mulvey.



Description: Rainer's second feature-length film, *Film About a Woman Who...* (1974), pushes the director's investigation of narrative conventions even further than in previous work. In a paper given at the Edinburgh Film Festival, Rainer asked: 'Can the presentation of sexual conflict in film or the experience of love and jealousy be revitalized through a studied placement or dislocation of clichés borrowed from soap opera or melodrama?' In *Film*, Rainer explores this question, combining many of the most important aspects of melodrama – including its focus on emotion and sentiment – with a very different handling of narrative and experimental strategies. The different sections that comprise this film make for a multi-layered work. They variously incorporate stills from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, present a choreography based on depictions of Isadora Duncan, and make reference to the way the affectionate letters that Angela Davis sent George Jackson were used by the press in an attempt to undermine her political work.

Laura Mulvey is Professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. She is the author of *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989, new edition 2009), *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996, second edition 2013) and *Death Twenty-four Times a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006). She made six films in collaboration with Peter Wollen, including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983), as well as *Disgraced Monuments* (1994) with artist/filmmaker Mark Lewis.

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *Film About a Woman Who...*, 1974. 105 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 20 Mar

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), with an introduction by Sophie Mayer.



Description: *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980) mainly revolves around a psychoanalytic session and a kitchen conversation between two disembodied voices (played by Amy Taubin and Vito Acconci) about political violence. This film can be seen, as Noël Carroll explained, as a 'dialogue of dissonant and at times contradictory voices discoursing on topics like political and psychological domination [...] and the interrelation of the two'. However, instead of offering 'theoretical exposition', Rainer explained, '*Journeys* offers contrast and contradiction.' In the film, as in many of Rainer's, her friends play important roles. The celebrated critic and film historian Annette Michelson, for example, plays the part of an analysand. Her words are less that of naturalistic speech, as in conventional cinema, and more a bizarre kind of recitation. Rainer creates further instability through having the psychoanalyst played by three different actors: a man, a woman, and a nine-year-old boy who barks.

Sophie Mayer is a feminist film activist. She is the author of *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (2015) and *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love* (2009). She is part of the queer feminist film curation collective Club des Femmes, and of Raising Films, a community and campaign for parents and carers in the film and TV industry. Her most recent book is the self-published *From Rape to Resistance: Taking Back the Screen* (2017). @trOubleMayer

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *Journeys from Berlin/1971*, 1980. 125 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 27 Mar

A screening of *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976), with an introduction by Catherine Wood, Senior Curator of International Art (Performance) at Tate Modern.



Description: *Kristina Talking Pictures* (1976) utilizes a voiceover to suggest a narrative about a lion tamer (played by various different women, including Rainer herself) who moves from Budapest to New York to become a choreographer. This film, like Rainer's previous works, utilizes biographical and fictional elements. However, it is also concerned with broader political problems like pollution and 20th century state violence. The latter is suggested through the haunting presence of shadow-like figures in the background of many shots. This film is perhaps Rainer's most challenging, employing many experimental techniques including independent camera work, split sound and voices changing mid-sentence.

Catherine Wood is Senior Curator of International Art (Performance) at Tate Modern.

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *Kristina Talking Pictures*, 1976. 90 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 3 Apr

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985), with an introduction by Oliver Fuke.



Description: *The Man Who Envied Women* (1985) is a comical and critical portrait of the artistic and intellectual community in 1980s New York. This film is structured around the breakup of a relationship between a university professor, Jack Deller (played by both William Raymond and Larry Loonin), and an artist, Trisha. In a move inspired by feminist film theory, Trisha doesn't have visual presence in the film but is the voice of choreographer and dancer Trisha Brown. The film is concerned with a number of social issues, including the contradictions of theory and everyday life and the housing crisis in New York. Throughout the film, the mismatch between Deller's theoretical commitment to feminism and his womanizing is played out. In a further exploration of complicity and complication, the film also incorporates footage Rainer shot documenting public hearings about the 'Artists-Homeowner's Program'. Here Trisha and the other artists involved discover they are unwittingly complicit with gentrification and the resulting social displacement that follows.

Oliver Fuke is an independent researcher. He co-runs [Again] – an organisation seeking to foster an independent intellectual community in London – and previously studied Visual Cultures and Modern European Philosophy. He curated '*Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Beyond The Scorched Earth of Counter-Cinema*' at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, in 2016. This retrospective subsequently toured to HOME, Manchester and NYU, New York.

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *The Man Who Envied Women*, 1985. 125 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

Tue 10 Apr

A screening of Yvonne Rainer's *MURDER and murder* (1996), with an introduction by Professor Lynne Segal.



Description: Rainer's seventh feature-length film, *MURDER and murder*, is a love story between Mildred (Kathleen Chalfant), a life-long lesbian, and Doris (Joanna Merlin), who is in love with a woman for the first time. This film is also populated by different figures that are invisible to Mildred and Doris. These include characters from different times – Doris's deceased mother, Jenny, and Young Mildred, who both comment on the central characters' relationship – as well as Rainer herself, who appears as a narrator wearing a tuxedo. This film, which layers different narratives on top of one another, is an important reflection on female aging, lesbian sexuality and breast cancer.

Lynne Segal is Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies, Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London. Her books include *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism & the Making of Socialism* (with Sheila Rowbotham and Hilary Wainwright); *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism*; *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*; *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*; *Why Feminism? Gender, Psychology and Politics*; *Making Trouble: Life and Politics*; *Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing*. Her latest book is *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy*.

Image credit: Yvonne Rainer, *MURDER and murder*, 1996. 113 minutes. Image courtesy of Zeitgeist Films Ltd.

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