Confronting the Boundaries of Art and Recovering the Futurist Legacy:
The Futurist Avant-Garde and Avant-Garde Dance of the 1960s

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Spring 2010
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Introduction

In The Founding Manifesto of Futurism, published in the French newspaper Le Figaro on February 20th, 1909, Italian poet and provocateur F.T. Marinetti coined the term futurisme. Marinetti’s manifesto envisions the dramatic birth of the Futurist poet out of an automobile crash: “When I came up—torn, filthy, and stinking—from under the capsized car, I felt the white-hot iron of joy deliciously pass through my heart! And so…we, bruised, our arms in slings, but unafraid, declared our high intentions to all the living earth.”1 Marinetti proceeds to introduce the founding tenets of Futurism, proposing that art should be dynamic as opposed to static, forward-looking and “futurist” rather than passéist. Part myth, part pamphlet, the first Futurist manifesto called for poets and artists of the modern era to reject the creative graveyard of the museum and all worship of the past. Futurism quickly grew from Marinetti’s initial and primarily literary concerns to include a modern or “futurist” aesthetic for painting, sculpture, music, and theater. The many Futurist manifestos remain the most definitive testament to the Futurist’s aesthetic interests. Among these were the manifestos on painting by Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Gino Severini, Luigi Russolo’s Art of Noise, and Enrico Prampolini’s Futurist Scenography. Marinetti himself would write not only on literature, but also on variety theater, cinema, and dance.

Futurism, as outlined by Marinetti and his compatriots, stood in dramatic opposition to the aestheticism of bourgeois modernism. Futurist artists attempted to challenge the boundaries of and between autonomous artistic genres. They conceived of their aesthetic innovations as a propulsive force that would eventually collide with life to end the reign of

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passive aestheticism. Their ideals of progress, activism, and perpetual motion applied both to art and to Futurist life and functioned as the central tenets of the Futurist movement. In the aggressive rhetoric of Futurist manifestos and performances that attempted to directly engage with a reader or spectator, their art also confronted a new political and social activism. Formally, dynamism and motion were also essential themes of Futurist work. Even in the plastic arts, Futurists attempted to capture the character of the fast-paced and increasingly mechanized urban modernity. Their theoretical interest in activism was reflected in a formal kinetic concern. Given the group’s diverse interests in a variety of different media, dance, as an inherently kinetic practice, would seem to be a logical arena for the representation of Futurist aesthetics.

However, in studies of Futurism, dance has been largely marginalized. The reason for this may be two-fold. Futurism itself has been a highly contested issue in scholarship. While, it is often cited as one of the first truly avant-garde artistic movements, it is also one of the most problematic. In The First Futurist Manifesto Marinetti declared, “Admiring an old picture is the same as pouring our sensibility into a funerary urn instead of hurling it far off, in violent spasms of action and creation.”² As demonstrated by this passage, Futurism was often reactive to the point of seeming violent and polemical. Marinetti’s glorification of war as the “ultimate hygiene” and as an aesthetic ideal is ethically problematic in light of the experiences of both World Wars. Coupled with the questionable politics of a number of Futurists, including Marinetti’s own relationship with Mussolini, Futurist aesthetics have been aligned with the political goals of Italian Fascism. In Futurist Performance, Kirby attributes the rejection of or lack of interest in Futurist performance in the postwar period to precisely this

² Marinetti, “The First Futurist Manifesto,” in Flint, 42.
political sensitivity. He argues that while the discourse on visual art is accustomed to formal evaluations of a work, theater is generally interpreted in relation to “something else.” “This something else,” Kirby writes, “is frequently politics.”\textsuperscript{3} The Futurists’ theoretical contributions are problematically entwined with their polemical rhetoric and fascism.\textsuperscript{4}

In addition, and most likely because of the problems already discussed, Futurism was often considered only in it relation to Dada and considered of little importance on its own. In \textit{Dada Art and Anti-Art} (1965), Hans Richter wrote, “Futurism was one of the main arsenals from which Dada drew its weapons.”\textsuperscript{5} Futurism has often been considered in this manner—as a problematic (i.e. Fascist) predecessor of French Dadaism and Surrealism. John Cage, who attributes the inspiration for his aleatory methods to Marcel Duchamp and French performance theory, has dominated the discourse on the neo-avant-garde. Much of the authoritative scholarship on the Futurists and other pre-World War I and interwar avant-garde movements emerged in the 1960s and 1970s when contemporary artists rediscovered avant-garde tactics and strategies. The Futurists’ writings and manifestos did not appear in English until the late 1960s and early 1970s. Until this time, a linguistic barrier had also contributed to a marginalization of Futurism in the literature. Nevertheless, the aesthetic that developed from the political bent of Futurism, predating Dada—its rejection of the autonomy of art, rhetoric

\textsuperscript{4} Kirby was one of the first scholars in the late 1960s and early 1970s to reexamine the legacy of Italian Futurist performance in relation other early-twentieth century avant-gardes as well as latter-day performance theory. His introduction in \textit{The Drama Review}’s issue from autumn 1970 pointed to a growing interest in Futurism (\textit{TDR} 15, no. 1). The issue also included an English translation of the Manifesto of Futurist Synthetic Theater. Kirby’s book, \textit{Futurist Performance}, was published one year later.
\textsuperscript{5} Hans Richter quoted in Estra Milman, “Futurism as Submerged Artistic Paradigm for Artistic Activism and Practical Anarchism” in \textit{South Central Review} 13, no. 2/3 (1996), 173.
of activism, and direct engagement with the spectator—has had long-term implications for theater and dance apart from their relationship to particular political ideologies.6

The silencing of Futurism because of linguistic barriers and ideological objections is coupled with a general lack of scholarship on dance. Dance history faces many difficulties when confronted with limited evidence of an essentially ephemeral art form. Given the combined weight of these two obstacles, it is thus not entirely unexpected that the Futurist legacy for dance, has received only marginal attention. In *Futurist Performance*, Michael Kirby concludes, “The Futurists were active in almost every arena of performance. Except for the field of dance, they made important theoretical and practical contributions in each.”7

A similar point of view is expressed in Patrizia Veroli’s “The Futurist Aesthetic and Dance.” In this essay, Veroli traces the role that dance originally played for the Italian Futurists, concluding that the productions of what can be called “Futurist dance” are few and feeble. She claims that, “Futurism did not make a substantive contribution towards the development of Italian modern dance,” based on their amateurism and lack of interest in the body and the formal principles of dance.8 She concludes that while the Futurists may have experimented with an *idiom* of dance, they were unable to create a unique style of “Futurist dance”: “The Futurist experimentation in the field of dance never led [to] the establishment of a ‘school.’”9 For Veroli, “dance” remains conspicuously linked to a traditional definition—to the form and codified technique identified with a unique discipline or “school.” She

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6 In the introduction to her text, *Inventing Futurism* (2009), Christine Poggi notes that monolingual scholars hindered the publication of significant studies of Futurism in the English language. Kirby’s *Futurist Performance*, published in 1971, was crucial in bringing a body of Futurist work before this monolingual public.
9 Veroli, 448.
ultimately denies the validity of the term “Futurist dance” in its totality. While Veroli focuses on the role that “dance” as an aesthetic category played for Futurist artists, she largely ignores the importance of Futurist theatrical endeavors for later avant-garde dance practices. Moreover, the search for “Futurist dance” as an independent aesthetic category fails to take into account the Futurists’ avant-garde project—their purposive blurring of the boundaries between artistic genres. Rather, it is through the gradual proliferation of avant-garde performance theories by which “dance” as a category can be systematically questioned that the connection between these two twentieth century avant-gardes can be made.

While “Futurist dance,” as such, may not have made many theoretical or practical contributions in the arena of actual performance, I argue that Futurist performance certainly has implications for dance. In addition to defining the term avant-garde as it applies both to the early and later twentieth century, I concentrate on an analysis of the formal and theoretical innovations of Futurism, and the shared tactics that link Futurist and postmodern dance avant-gardism. In the first section of my thesis, I look closely at the Futurist serata in order to pull out the characteristics that are as exemplary of the Futurists’ avant-garde project. In the second section, I focus on the work of Yvonne Rainer as a case study within post-modern dance in order to trace a continued engagement with a “Futurist” avant-gardism.

In doing this, I am not suggesting that the Futurists conceived of an avant-garde dance that was characteristically postmodernist; but rather, the Futurists developed new techniques in performance that would be embraced and expanded upon by later dance-artists. Nor do I contest the fact that Futurism was tied to a particular historical moment, and had only limited

10 While I am explicitly reconsidering Futurism through the lens of contemporary practices and theories, I would like to acknowledge directly the theoretical questionability of such an endeavor. I believe the past must continue to be evaluated not only as an isolated subject of interest but also as practices with resonance for the present. A similar goal, it seems, is reflected in much of the scholarship on the avant-garde.
ties to the professional dance world. Instead, from the perspective of post-modern dance and later avant-garde movements, Futurism as a historical phenomenon acquires a historical legacy. Particularly in the case of Futurist dance, this perspective serves to underscore not only the importance of the Futurist legacy for dance but also the importance of movement and dance to the Futurists’ avant-garde project. It can be argued that although the Futurists’ made few “official” forays into the dance medium, Futurist performance tactics, exemplified by a direct engagement with the audience and coupled with the group’s interest in technology and eventually film, prefigured a broadening of the formal aesthetic boundaries of dance as a performance art.
Historical Avant-Garde: Futurism

Futurist Avant-garde: Challenging the Boundaries of Medium

To begin, we must elaborate what is meant by this and by the Futurists’ “avant-garde project.” As described by Peter Burger in *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), the avant-garde attempted, at the most basic and theoretical level, to merge art and life.11 Burger relegates this utopian tendency to the turn of the twentieth century, pointing to specific historical conditions that fostered such utopianism. He suggests that the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century (Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and the leftist movements in Russia and Germany) responded to the particular conditions of bourgeois Aestheticism and the art institution.12 Burger suggests that the ambivalent status of bourgeois art against which the avant-garde rebelled was characteristic of the turn of the century. Bourgeois art in its subject—the specificity of medium—acknowledged its own distance from the “praxis of life,” and yet, in its form and function, remained radically unaltered. Where bourgeois art was passive, the avant-garde would be active. Burger’s historical avant-garde pushed art in the direction of activism by directly addressing political, economic, and social issues. The avant-garde forced the rupture between aestheticism and life through formal means in the manifesto, collage, and multi-media performance that similarly challenged the boundaries of artistic media, issues of authorship, the traditional separation of audience and performer.

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12 Burger defines the art institution as “the productive and distributive apparatus and also the ideas about art that prevail at given time that determine the reception of works,” in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22.
Burger’s theory challenged Renato Poggioli’s 1964 text of the same title. Poggioli’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* was, by contrast, criticized for its historical ambiguity, positing that:

The futurist moment belongs to all avant-gardes and not only to the one named for it…. The so-named movement was only a significant symptom of a broader and deeper state of mind. Italian futurism had the great merit of fixing and expressing it, coining that most fortunate term as its own label…. the futurist manifestation represents, so to speak, a prophetic and utopian phase, the arena of agitation and preparation for the announced revolution, if not the revolution itself.13

He explores the avant-garde as a “manifold and general phenomenon” of which Futurism is merely one manifestation. 14 However, both Burger and Poggioli conclude that since this historical moment, the avant-garde project has disintegrated. The avant-garde’s utopian dream has been left unrealized; the art institution remains as strong as ever. Burger argues that the historical avant-garde resulted only in the “false sublation” of art into life. He suggests that the neo-avant-garde simply “institutionalizes the avant-garde as art and thus negates genuinely avant-gardiste intention.”15 As a result, he completely rejects the term neo-avant-garde. Poggioli comes to a similar conclusion though his tone is more acquiescent then pessimistic:

As history becomes myth, the illusion of the avant-garde can and ought to become the reality of avant-garde art...That is why the observer should not let himself be deceived, not even by the self-denial apparent in so much of the latest avant-garde art...Thus it may also be that the avant-garde is destined to become art in spite of itself, or even in the out-and-out denial of itself.16

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14 Burger, 49.
15 Burger, 65.
16 Poggioli, 231.
If, as Burger and Poggioli insist, the avant-garde project has failed, how can the significance of Futurists’ formal and aesthetic innovations be determined and their resonance for latter-day artists measured? In *The Futurist Moment*, Marjorie Perloff focuses on Futurism—the first avant-garde—in order to understand not only how its aesthetic modes functioned but also to explore their resonance for the more recent avant-gardes—how similar issues are confronted with difference. Her definition of avant-gardism thus provides a model for exploring the connection between the historical and neo-avant-gardes. She takes her title from Poggioli—“The *futurist moment* belongs to all avant-gardes not only the one named for it…”—and emphasizes Poggioli’s generalized notion of avant-garde practice. In addition, she stresses the significance of Burger’s notion of the formal, productive, and receptive innovations of the historical avant-garde. However, Perloff rejects both their pessimistic evaluations of the neo-avant-garde, acknowledging that though the “historical” avant-garde system of thought is tied to a historical moment, their formal and theoretical innovations have significant resonance for artists of the later twentieth century. She rejects the idea that the avant-garde conflation of art and life necessitates the teleological negation or dissolution of art itself.

Instead, the utopian goal of merging art and life is tied instead to a broader understanding of artistic practice. Though art obviously lived on after the historical avant-garde, the legacy of the avant-garde continues to resurface based in a constant confrontation.

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17 Perloff’s final chapter is dedicated to bridging the gap between past and present. Through an examination of the work of Robert Smithson and Roland Barthes, Perloff suggests that it is the particular “utopian buoyancy” of the *avant-guerre*, and Futurism especially—that is, their belief in the revolutionary potential of their endeavors—that eludes present day avant-garde. *Avant-guerre* optimism was violently countered by the traumatizing experience of two world wars. Nevertheless she argues that, later in the century, the avant-garde would react against structured forms of high modernism by adopting the techniques of the Futurist moment. Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant-Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

18 Poggioli, 68.
with aestheticism and the every-day in art. While their aesthetic revolution failed to destroy art itself, a utopian belief in the validity and importance of politically and social engaged art continued to resonate with art makers later in the twentieth century. Perloff focuses on this conflict as an aesthetic of “rupture” rather than an attempt to dissolve aesthetics itself. She points to the subversive strategies utilized by the avant-garde to effect this “rupture” with the institution of art, writing, “Futurist modes” such as collage, manifesto and performance, “call into question the stability of genre, of the individual medium, and of the barrier between artists and audience.”19 According to Perloff, even if the historical avant-garde was unsuccessful in creating a total synthesis of art and life and in negating art itself, the movement’s tactics were nonetheless significant for artistic production: “The ‘Futurist moment’ has a special pathos for us who live in the late twentieth century.”20 For Perloff, the formal and theoretical goals of the “Futurist moment” are symptomatic of a more general avant-garde spirit with noted parallels in the later twentieth century. Thus the Futurist avant-garde project resonates in later twentieth century avant-grades’ continued confrontation with the boundaries of artistic media and modes of reception.

From the start, Marinetti’s work attempted to blur aesthetic boundaries. In The Founding Manifesto of Futurism, Marinetti writes, “We will sing of great crowds excited by work; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals.”21 Perloff describes how Futurism and the early twentieth century avant-gardes pioneered the new artistic forms of the manifesto, collage, and performance as a way to figure the avant-garde confrontation between art and life. The manifesto directly mimicked the

19 Perloff, xviii.
20 Perloff, xvii.
tactics of political parties and thus formally emphasized its connection to “life”—that is, political activism. Now put in the service of art, the manifesto also attempted to publicize the artistic movement itself as a type of social engagement, paralleling political affiliation. Nevertheless, in the manifesto, Marinetti’s “aesthetic” clearly takes on social implications. Marinetti argued that any creative endeavor in the modern era should propel society forward and be a direct reaction against what came before. Often published in newspapers, handed out like political pamphlets, and read aloud at Futurist performances, the manifesto became a major expression of avant-garde engagement. Both the form and the rhetoric of the manifesto functioned as a critique the autonomous institution of art and echo instead what Burger calls the “praxis of life.” With the manifesto, the Futurists adopted a political strategy usually invoked in support of people, policies, or ideologies. As an art form, the manifesto, by its very nature, declared that art was public, interactive, and could circulate It performed its role as institutional critique, operating at the intersection of art and politics. Thus, the form and content of the Futurist manifestos attempted to merge political and aesthetic goals, exemplifying their avant-garde project.23

By contrast, Marinetti’s 1917 Manifesto of the Futurist Dance reads more like a play-script. It is less performative than it is something to be performed. In the text, Marinetti describes three dances in which a female performer or danseuse imitates shrapnel, a machine gun, and an airplane (fig. 1). While he denounces the use of music as passéist, he uses basic mimetic forms with decisively symbolist origins, depending on placards to create meaning.24 In the “Dance of the Machine Gun,” Marinetti’s danseuse pounds the ground with her feet in

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22 Burger, 22.
23 Institutional critique was also a major concern of artists of the 1960s and 1970s and a major part of their avant-garde project.
24 Marinetti, “Manifesto of the Futurist Dance,” in Flint, 137-147.
order to imitate the “mechanical hammering of the machine gun” and then quickly displays a sign painted in red that reads, “Enemy at 700 meters.” The dancer holds white and red orchids in her hands to represent the rapid fire of the gun; she spins in circles to show the fall of the bullets; finally, she gets on her hands and knees to imitate the shape of a gun. “Stretching her arms forward,” Marinetti writes, “she will feverishly shake the white and red orchid like a gun barrel in the act of firing.”

This collage-like performance might suggest a link to avant-garde tactics, for both Burger and Perloff point to collage as an important formal innovation of the historical avant-garde. While a kind of collage of signifying elements seems to be present in Marinetti’s dances—costume, movement, and text—it fails to capture the power and dynamism of the futurist assault on the senses. Burger writes:

A theory of the avant-garde must begin with the concept of montage…. The avant-gardiste work neither creates a total impression that would permit an interpretation of meaning nor can whatever impression may be created be accounted for by recourse to the individual parts, for they are no longer subordinated to a pervasive intent. This refusal to provide meaning is experienced as shock by the recipient…. Shock is aimed for as a stimulus to change one’s conduct of life…

Though the “subject” of Marinetti’s dances is not human, they are narrative sketches that depend on characterization. Marinetti’s Futurist dances are certainly not “shocking.” In her article “The Futurist Aesthetic and Dance,” Patrizia Veroli focuses on Marinetti’s ignorance of dance forms and terminology and his apparent distrust of movement alone to convey meaning. She argues that the amount of “dance” in Marinetti’s “Futurist Dance” is negligible and almost comic in its amateurism. When performed and read aloud at a Futurist

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25 Marinetti, “Manifesto of the Futurist Dance,” in Flint, 141.
26 Burger, 77.
event, the manifesto functioned as a literal enactment of the Futurists’ radical position—at once aesthetic and political. Marinetti’s dances fall short of the Futurists’ avant-garde project by similarly failing to embody the Futurists’ polemical position, instead representing their problematic aestheticization of war through heavy-handed symbolism.

As a literary endeavor, however, Marinetti’s manifesto is aligned more closely with the avant-garde project. Marinetti was a writer and not a dancer, and the text implies a much more revolutionary concept than the dances themselves. He writes,

In this Futurist epoch of ours, when more than twenty million men form with their battle lines a fantastic Milky Way of exploding shrapnel stars that bind the earth together; when the Machine and the Great Explosives, cooperating with the war, have centupled the force of the races, obliging them to give all they have of boldness, instinct, and muscular resistance, the Futurist dance can have no other purpose than to immensify heroism, master of metals, and to fuse with the divine machines of speed and war.  

In this passage, Marinetti suggests war itself is the true Futurist dance. In this sense, Marinetti’s “Futurist dance” would be the ultimate realization of Burger’s avant-garde, in which art and the praxis of life are one. However, this synthesis is highly problematic. In Marinetti’s dance manifesto, his politically and ethically controversial aesthetic is foregrounded. Walter Benjamin has famously problematized this “aestheticization of politics,” in his seminal 1936 essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” Here, Benjamin describes the logical result of Marinetti’s rhetoric of the hygiene of war as an inherently Fascist and non-revolutionary endorsement of destruction. However, most of the Marinetti’s Manifesto of the Futurist Dance is devoted to describing the pantomimes “Shrapnel,” “Machine Gun,” and “Aviatrix,” which, as Veroli argues, do little to suggest a

revolutionary “Futurist dance.” Ultimately, as both a manifesto and a “play script,” the Manifesto of the Futurist Dance fails to rupture the boundaries between artistic mediums.\(^{28}\)

The significance of the “Futurist aesthetic” for dance lies primarily in its avant-gardism—the confrontation with the boundaries of individual artistic genres and the direct address of the audience. In “The Futurist Aesthetic and Dance” Patrizia Veroli briefly suggests that the Futurist’s subversive strategies—their amateurism and their challenge to the dividing line between audience and performer—would be taken up by later dance artists of the 1960s and 1970s. While it is not the goal of her article to link these two practices, it is significant that “Futurist dance,” as exemplified by Marinetti’s “Shrapnel,” “Aviatrix,” and “Machine Gun,” falls short of these avant-garde goals and embodies some of the most glaring difficulties in Futurist rhetoric and theory. “Futurist dances” cannot serve to link the Futurist avant-garde practice with later dance and performance art.

While the Futurists’ avant-garde aesthetic is largely absent from the Manifesto of the Futurist Dance the Futurist legacy for later performance art can be clearly established from the avant-garde performance structures of the Futurist evening. The serata or “Futurist evening,” by contrast, is exemplary of Perloff’s aesthetic of “rupture.” This collage-like performance functioned as a kind of mock political rally in which Futurist manifestos, poems, and Russolo’s noise-music were performed, accompanied by exhibitions of Futurist paintings (fig. 2). The Futurists’ emphasis on action, dynamism, and perpetual motion was reflected in the literal dynamism of the actions occurring on stage and in their ultimate goal of propagandistic agitation. In the radical and absurdist character of these multi-media events,

the Futurists confronted the literal boundary of the theatrical medium by breaking down the fourth wall, inspiring the audience to act and react.

A year after the publication of *The First Futurist Manifesto* in 1909, Marinetti returned from France to his home country. Amid political turmoil and rising nationalism in Italy, he began to present “Futurist evenings” with other artists. As public spectacles, Futurist events did not go unnoticed by the media, the public, or the police. The first Futurist evening took place in Trieste, chosen specifically for its pivotal role in the Austro-Italian conflict.\(^{29}\) Under the watchful eye of the Austrian police, Marinetti railed against the impotence of traditional art and manners. Later, he presented a Futurist manifesto to the audience. Through a variety of means, the Futurists attempted to incite their audience, establishing a reputation for troublemaking. Following the evening’s performance, the Austrian consulate filed a formal complaint with the Italian government.\(^{30}\) Subsequent evenings were organized throughout Italy. At each event, Futurists would use a variety of techniques to rile the audience, including double booking seats, covering seats with glue, and shouting insults at the audience. Though their methods were both extreme and absurd, their goal was clear—to publicize their aesthetic agenda and to rouse their audience. Futurists would activate their audiences by any means necessary, compelling them to respond in an impassioned and even aggressive manner. In 1914 at the Teatro Verme in Milan, Futurists shredded an Austrian flag, inspiring brawls that spilled into the streets.\(^{31}\)

Marinetti himself wrote in 1913 that theater was the literary form that could most effectively serve Futurism. “Performance,” he declares, “was the surest means of disrupting a


\(^{31}\) Goldberg, *Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present*, 16.
complacent public. It gave artists license to be both ‘creators’ in developing a new form of artists’ theater and ‘art objects’ in that they made no separation between their art as poets, as painters or as performers.”

In performance, the Futurist might attempt to concern himself, “not with psychological photography, but rather to move toward a synthesis of life in its most typical and most significant lines.”

In Futurist Performance, Michael Kirby argues that the Futurist evenings contain the seeds for later Futurist performance. These events were the first attempts by the Futurists to challenge bourgeois aestheticism in an extremely public and exclamatory manner. Futurist evenings operated as both performance and political event. In their ambiguity, they exemplified Perloff’s reading of the Futurist avant-garde project. As a hybrid performance, the Futurist evening questioned the barriers between artistic genres, between artist and audience, and above all, challenged the efficacy of an autonomous aesthetic category.

Not only does the Futurist evening embody an avant-garde project that questions the stability of aesthetic categories, providing a structural link to later post-modern dance performances, but the dynamism of the performer’s body is also significantly less problematic than Marinetti’s danseuse described in the Futurist dance of the “Machine Gun.” As evidenced by memoirs of the evenings and the manifestos that stated the Futurists’ intentions, the Futurist evenings suggest a Futurist avant-garde dance in which the importance of movement—the dynamic use of the body—is significantly heightened.

Umberto Boccioni’s caricature of a serata from 1911 shows Futurist artists Boccioni, Pratella, Marinetti, Carrà, and Russolo on a stage with Futurist paintings displayed in back

32 Marinetti, quoted in Goldberg, Performance: Live Art 1909 to the Present, 15.
(fig. 3). Each artist is caught mid-gesture—arms spread wide, fists in the air, feet energetically pounding the stage. A large band accompanies the action—at the bottom of the sketch, we see cellos, trumpets, drums, and tubas. Lines emanating from tubas at the right capture the noise of the event. The faces of outraged spectators mid-shout are visible around the stage. Finally, the bodies of the passéists are littered across the stage—their classicism finally defeated by the Futurists’ energetic modern perspective. Boccioni’s drawing itself seems to capture the dynamism of these events. The intense physicality of the Futurist performance is described by Francesco Cangiullo’s recollection from an event at the Verdi Theater in Florence in 1914:

The showers of potatoes, oranges and bunches of fennel became infernal. Suddenly he [Marinetti] cried, ‘Damn!’ slapping his hand to his eye. We ran to help him; many in the public who had seen the missiles land protested indignantly against the bestial cowardice, and, with what we shouted from the stage, the place became a ghetto market where things were said that cannot be repeated, much less written.

I see Russolo again with saliva running from his mouth; I hear Carrà roaring, “Throw an idea instead of potatoes, idiots!” And now the spectators shouted at Filiberto Scarpelli who, to demonstrate his solidarity, wished to be with us on stage, ‘Hey you? You! Poor Gianchettino (that was his pseudonym), what do you want? Buffoon!’

I, with a table leg in my hand, wanted to look for a place to support it in the audience. But Marinetti reproached me.34

Thus, from the documents that remain, the serata emerges as an inherently physical performance.

While first Futurist evening in 1910 was an occasion for Futurist artists to read their poetry and manifesto, Marinetti would later recognize the signifying potential of the body in this context and wholly apart from traditional or codified dance technique in “Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation.” The first “Evening of Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation” took

place on March 29, 1914 in Rome. In describing this event, Marinetti is specific about its movement aspects. “Dynamic declamation,” for instance, provides the basis for the dance-like elements of the Futurist performance:

The Futurist declaimer must declaim as much with his legs as with his arms. This lyric sport will oblige poets to be less lachrymose, more active, more optimistic. The declaimer’s hands should wield his different noise-making instruments. No longer will we see them flapping spasmodically around in the audience’s turbid brain. No longer will we have those orchestrated conductor gesticulations shaping phrases, or the gesticulations of the courthouse, more or less decorative…all these will disappear in the declaimer’s dynamic totality. 35

Likewise, Marinetti’s 1916 manifesto, Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation, describes it as a “lyric sport”—that is, it must be both expressive and physical. Marinetti specifies that the performer should dress anonymously, dehumanize his voice and face, and “gesticulate geometrically.” In direct opposition to the “feminine” softness and fluidity of line popular in Art Nouveau, Marinetti advocated a hard-edged clarity of movement that would have the “sharp rigidity of semaphore signals and lighthouse rays, to indicate the direction of forces, or of pistons and wheels, to express the dynamism of words-in-freedom.”36 Dynamic and synoptic declamation advanced new theories about the incorporation of the performer’s movement into performance in order to revive Italian intellectual and artistic community, encouraging action on a larger scale. However, movement was not encouraged for its own sake; rather it was performative—figuring a new activation of the body politic and political dynamism. Therefore, Marinetti required that speeches had to be declaimed with the whole body, using all the power of the voice and gesture.

The essential dynamism of the early Futurist evenings was later formalized in “Dynamic

36 Marinetti, “Dynamic and Synoptic Declamation,” in Flint, 144.
and Synoptic Declamation.” In this 1916 manifesto, Marinetti describes a kind of “movement spectacle,” making use of an improvisatory structure in which the performer was also to make use of props, interact with other performers, and move to different parts of room. Though Marinetti’s idea of “dynamic declamation” underscores both the Futurists’ highly problematic gender politics and their much criticized cult of the machine, performance itself is characterized by a much more open structure. In the evenings of dynamic and synoptic declamation, both performer and spectator were clearly involved in an almost choreographed—certainly planned—dynamism. The performance hinged on their participation. The Futurists’ avant-garde project is most fully realized in these events, which anticipate the performative strategies of later avant-garde artists.
From Futurist Dance to Film

In the *Founding Manifesto of Futurism*, Marinetti proclaimed, “A racing car is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.” Following this model, Futurist painters announced that their painting would no longer depict a static object or a “still-life” of any sort. Rather, their goal was to portray “the dynamic sensation itself.” In *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash* from 1912, Balla attempted to capture the movement of a dog and its owner, blurring their legs to suggest movement, creating an almost flipbook-like effect (fig 4). Motion, speed and dynamism play an integral role in Futurist writings from the start. However, as seen in the *Manifesto of the Futurist Dance*, dance proved problematic for the Futurists. Dance’s connection to the body—and to the female body in particular—stood in direct conflict with Marinetti commitment to a masculine Futurist aesthetic that would contrast to the “femininity” of romantic and symbolist aesthetics. In most Futurist writings, activism and progress are characterized as masculine; but the ultimate ideal was the machine. Speed, dynamism, and innovation were summed up by the potential of mechanization.

The Futurists’ mechanistic ideal received its clearest articulation in Marinetti’s *Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine*:

> On the day when man will be able to externalize his will and make it into a huge invisible arm...[he] will master and reign over space and time. This nonhuman and mechanical being, constructed for an omnipresent velocity...will be endowed with surprising organs: organs adapted to the needs of a world of ceaseless shocks.38

This passage makes two important points. The first and most significant is the anxiety tainting the Futurist utopian dream. In her recently published book, *Inventing Futurism*, Christine  

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Poggi argues that the Futurists’ celebration of modernity and progress was situated within a larger, overarching “anxiety” about modernity. She points to the delayed urban and industrial development in Italy, as well as Italy’s “economic backwardness… corrupt parliament and lack of prestige on the world stage” as fostering the group’s revolutionary tendencies. Poggi invokes Freudian terminology, describing the Futurists’ attempt to construct a kind of “stimulus shield” against the jarring effects of modernity. The Futurists’ cult of mechanization is a good example of their attempt to construct a kind of protective shield. Secondly, Marinetti’s more general rhetoric of progress, repeated also in his manifesto, *The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic*— “Put your trust in Progress, which is always right even when it is wrong, because it is movement, life, struggle, hope”—might be attributed to this anxiety. This passage makes explicit Marinetti’s Nietzschean call for the externalization of the internal “will to power” through mechanization. However, this transformation functions metaphorically as a shoring-up of power in the face of modernity. Thus, the Futurist rhetoric of progress, mechanization, and movement, assume metaphoric significance. The Futurists’ adamant masculinity might be viewed as a similar polemic, but the underlying gender issues are not so easily dismissed.

In the *Manifesto of the Futurist Dance*, Marinetti proclaims that among contemporary dance artists, “We Futurists prefer Louie [sic] Fuller and the ‘cakewalk’ of the Negroes (utilization of electric light and mechanisms).” The Futurists’ problematic relationship to dance and the cult of the machine are met and worked out in their esteem for the work of Loïe

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40 This was even more accurate in Russia, where a second branch of Russian Cubo-Futurism or Rayonism took hold in the work of Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov.
41 Marinetti, “The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic,” in Flint, 82.
Fuller. An American dancer, Loïe Fuller first tasted fame at the Folies-Bergère in Paris in 1892. She used metal rods attached to her arms to move her billowing silk skirts on which colored lights were projected (fig. 5). Her act took full advantage of the shift from gas to electric lighting in theater, exploiting the new possibilities of electric light to create fantastically luminous images. The dramatic, “Fire Dance” from 1896 was described in a New York review:

The powerful red lights were thrown on Miss Fuller as she danced above the glass plates in the stage, wavering an enormous silk scarf, a great flood of light seemed to envelope her, illuminating her drapery beneath, from the interior of her skirts as well as exteriorly. She seemed a mass of living fire and her scarves great tongues of fire.43

The result was an abstract, oscillating image of light and color. Mallarmé described Fuller’s dance as “intoxicating art and, simultaneously an industrial accomplishment.”44 Artistically, Fuller was most closely linked to the Symbolists and the more popular Art Nouveau. Her dance was intended not only to be technologically spectacular and kinesthetically expressive, but also to embody various natural elements—volcanoes, clouds, flowers, insects, etc. Art Nouveau-style lithographs advertising Fuller’s performances show a svelte dancer (in reality, Fuller was much stockier) swathed in sheer glowing fabric, as if enveloped in fire (fig. 6). However, it is Fuller’s “industrial accomplishment” that primarily interested the Futurists—that is, the abstract qualities of her work and her innovative embrace of technology.

In addition to being a dancer, Fuller was also an inventor, patenting many of the lighting devices she used in her performances. For example, her patent no. 513,102, “Mechanism for Production of Stage Effects,” describes her design for under-lighting that

43 Quoted in Sally Sommer, “Loïe Fuller,” The Drama Review 14, no. 1 (March, 1975), 60.
allowed light to be projected through a glass panel in the stage floor, magically illuminating her garments: “By turning on a light from below and by illuminating, if desirable, from the wings of the stage by projected light, the figure will, as before stated, be apparently suspended in the air. Graceful evolution may be performed without marring the illusion.”

She pioneered many of the tinting treatments for the glasses and gels that were used to produce different colored light. Fuller’s extensive notes on her “Radium Dance” reveal the full extent of her innovative spirit and interest in scientific discovery. She marveled about this fantastic new lighting source that could glow in total darkness and imagined dances with radium applied to her skirt to create luminous effects. It seems that Pierre and Marie Currie, who had recently discovered the element, persuaded her it was too dangerous to use in a theatrical setting or to embellish a garment.

Her work minimized the presence of the body by concealing it in drapery that became a screen for the projection of light. For Marinetti and the Futurists, Fuller’s work was exemplary in that it was able to capture the essential and abstract dynamism of light. Art historian and scholar Giovanni Lista has written on Loïe Fuller’s work as a significant antecedent to Futurist performance and scenography. The influence of Fuller’s act can best be seen in Giacomo Balla’s *Fireworks*—a collaboration between Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and the Futurists, performed at the Consanzi Theater in Rome on April 12, 1917 (fig. 7). Set to a score by Stravinsky, with a visual installation by Balla, this work radically threatened the barrier of dance by eliminating the human performer entirely. Balla’s “dance” consisted entirely of an orchestrated kinetic light display, in which light was projected on geometric

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45 Albright, 189.
constructions placed about the stage. Here, Fuller’s body, expressive fabric, and Symbolist flair are replaced with a Futurist geometric object.

The Futurists admired not only the metaphoric potential of Fuller’s dynamism but also her technical abilities that merged scientific and artistic within popular theater. In Fuller’s earlier works, her costume functioned as a moving screen upon which light was projected. Ultimately, both Fuller and Marinetti moved from the abstract, mechanized dynamism of projected light to cinema. The flat film-screen allowed for the total kinetic experience of dynamic light and moving pictures. For the Futurists, both the work of Fuller and film drew together their aesthetic of progress and dynamism, cult of mechanization, and their interest in the popular. Marinetti writes in his manifesto on Futurist cinema:

With the two volumes of *Futurist Synthetic Theater* containing eighty theatrical syntheses, we have begun the revolution in the Italian prose theater. An earlier Futurist manifesto had rehabilitated, glorified, and perfected the Variety Theater. It is logical therefore for us to carry our vivifying energies into a new theatrical zone: the cinema.

Cinema functioned both as a realm of pure dynamism and as entertainment for the masses, developing into the ultimate propaganda machine within the first few decades of the twentieth century. Film, in both its essential form and later content, was inherently tied to the Futurist avant-garde aesthetic—the propaganda film would aestheticize everyday life by re-imagining it cinematically. The avant-garde tactics for which the Futurist movement is remembered were first developed in the arena of performance and then carried over to cinema. While the contradictions between Futurist rhetoric and practice can be seen particularly in Futurist dance, which rarely lived up to the polemical character of Futurist rhetoric, film offered the

46 Fuller’s most famous film was *Le Lys de la Vie* (1920). Some Futurist films of note are: *Vita Futurista* and *Il Perfido Incanto* both from 1916.
47 Marinetti, “Futurist Synthetic Theater,” in Flint, 131.
possibility not only of solving the problem of dance and the body for Futurist artists but also of providing the most effective outlet for their avant-garde project.

The body remains a site of difficulty for post-modern dance. Whereas the Futurists’ problematic relationship to dance was an expression of their almost science-fiction-like cult of the machine, post-modern dance artists confronted the body in its dynamic possibility, as a moving object itself, free from the technical vocabulary and expressivity of previous dance techniques. The work of the Judson Theater in the 1960s and particularly that of Yvonne Rainer, provide an opportunity to explore the continuing avant-garde concern for the boundaries of the body and performance.
II. Avant-Garde Dance in the 1960s and 1970s

A true avant-garde dance—avant-garde as Perloff defines it—did not develop until the second half of the twentieth century; and especially since 1960, dance has changed dramatically. This shift is most discernable in the group of New York artists centered on Robert Dunn’s experimental composition workshops. The first of these workshops was given at the Cunningham studio in 1960. Beginning in 1962, these artists began to present work Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village. These works broke with the aesthetic of classic modern dance choreographers such as Martha Graham and even Merce Cunningham. Cunningham had experimented with chance procedures and choreography. Yet aspects of his work maintained a link to traditional dance forms. Judson artist Steve Paxton recalled that the Cunningham company of the 1960s shared the hierarchical structure of the era’s ballet companies. ⁴⁸ Far from developing any kind of codifiable technique, Judson’s “post-modern” choreographers expanded notions of dance and performance, embracing a new approach both to movement invention and to theatricality.

In the work of Judson choreographers like Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, and Simone Forti, movement might seem pedestrian, its interest lying in ordinary rather than virtuosic expression and quality. Experimenting with alternative theatrical elements became a place of exploration, utilizing text, alternative spaces, and dynamics. Banes has attributed a spirit of democratic innovation, collaboration, and exploration to the Judson group’s activities in the early 1960s. The period was also marked by extraordinary cross-fertilization among the arts.

As dance artists looked to the Happenings and Events of the self-proclaimed neo-Dada group, Fluxus, performances began to blur the lines between dance, theater, and the visual arts. 49

In “Dancing on the Edge” published in *Theatre-Communications* in May 1983, dance scholar Sally Banes addresses the critic’s dilemma of how to write about performances that no longer look like what has been traditionally called dance. She writes, “We can now go to an event advertised as a dance concert and see movement that is neither rhythmic nor wordless.” 50 Banes defends dance as newly defined by Judson and post-Judson artists—as open to new possibilities of text, theater, silence, and noise. Though dance today often still finds itself enmeshed in the values of expression and technique, many artists, as well as critics and audiences, have come to embrace the more open definition of what constitutes dance.

Certainly the work of dance artists in the last few decades indicates the continued dialogue with 1960s performance and choreographic techniques. Applied retroactively, this more open definition of avant-garde dance can be extended to recover the significance of Futurist avant-garde performance for dance. From this perspective, we can conceive of Futurist performance as a kind of “dance”—as an event in which movement becomes an essential element of a performance. Though the tenor of the polemical Futurist evenings differed in many ways from the exploratory and collaborative works of early Judson choreographers, the two shared a similar avant-garde goal. The challenging of boundaries between media and re-activating spectatorship—so typical of artists in the 1960s—revealed a flourishing new avant-garde spirit. The multi-faceted and audience-engaging Futurist performance discussed in the previous chapter can be viewed as an antecedent to this much later post-modern dance.


Yvonne Rainer’s “Audience Problem:” Challenging the Boundaries of Media

Though known best for translating minimalist principles into dance, Yvonne Rainer was significantly concerned not only with the essentials of dance and the movement of the body, but also with the relationship of the performer and the performance as a whole to audience.\(^{51}\) Her early work between 1960 and 1962 explored the chance games of Cunningham and Cage, absurdity, and theatricality, using technical dance steps as well as everyday and voice. Sally Banes argues that a significant shift occurred in Rainer’s work with *Room Service* (1964) and her subsequent “No Manifesto.” *Room Service* followed a game structure in which three teams of people played a kind of follow-the-leader through an obstacle course of objects created by the sculptor Charles Ross (fig. 8). In this work, Rainer’s choreographic interest lay in the quotidian accomplishment tasks. She has said:

> At the time I came into art making [the avant-garde] had a very specific meaningfulness in relation to all the arts, which were about to make this break with modernism or with previous modernism. So in dance, for the more extreme kinds of activity, it meant a refusal of what you had been taught, a refusal of classical and modern dance technique which would mean ballet and graham…. the most extreme example of this kind or refusal was ordinary movement.\(^{52}\)

In 1965, Rainer published her celebrated “No Manifesto.” Despite its name, this “manifesto” appeared simply as a postscript to Rainer’s “Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called *Parts of Some Sextets.*”\(^{53}\) It reads:

> NO to many facts in theatre today…NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to glamour and transcedency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to

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\(^{51}\) See Rainer’s, “A Quasi Survey of Some ‘Minimalist’ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A,*” in Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 55.

\(^{52}\) “Rainer Variations” in *A Woman Who….: Selected Works of Yvonne Rainer*, (Chicago, IL: Video Data Bank, 2002), DVD.

In *Terpsichore and Sneakers*, Banes, nevertheless, attributes manifesto-like significance to this text, arguing that Rainer’s subsequent work embodies an “aesthetic of denial.” She describes how Rainer broke down dance to its essentials and freed dance finally from the endless debate of technique over expression or vice-versa by aligning her work with neither. She focuses her discussion on *Trio A*—a piece developed by Rainer between 1966 and 1968.

*Trio A* was originally performed as three simultaneous solos by Rainer, David Gordon, and Steve Paxton at the Judson Church on January 10, 1966 as a part of *The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1*. Each solo consists of a four-and-a-half minute series of unpunctuated gestures and larger movements. Some movements are clearly related to technical modern dance; others are quirkier isolations of hands and head bobs—all performed with matter-of-fact ease and without rhythmic emphasis (fig. 12). A video from 1978 of Rainer performing the sequence shows her, at one point, simply walking around the space; she then extends a leg with flexed foot and retracts it loosely just bypassing a recognizable passé position. She seems to trip over her feet across the spaces as her head lolls around, hands hanging by her side like a rag doll’s. She then moves purposefully upstage: stepping with one foot crossing behind with the other and untwisting her body. She goes to the floor, bending her knees, falling onto her right side, and just as quickly gets up off the floor and continues. There are no repetitions except as independent actions: several arm swings alternating to the front and back of the body begin the dance, a few quick toe taps are performed in the middle etc. As Banes

55 “Trio A” in *A Woman Who….: Selected Works of Yvonne Rainer*, DVD.
explains, there is repetitiveness in each of these “modules,” but the modules themselves are never repeated.⁵⁶

Banes claims that, “With Rainer’s Trio A the cycle is at last broken….The possibility is proposed that dance is neither perfection of technique nor of expression, but quite something else—the presentation of objects in themselves.”⁵⁷ She aligns Trio A with minimalism and Rainer’s “No Manifesto.” However, the extent to which Rainer’s work follows her rhetoric must be seriously questioned, first and foremost by Rainer’s own charisma as a performer, noted by scholars, critics, and audience members alike. Moreover, the apparent simplicity of Trio A and the evenness with which it must be performed is contrasted with the actual difficulty for the performer of achieving that monotone quality. Finally, and most significantly, while the performer’s gaze is constantly averted from the audience, the audience is not meant to be ignored. Art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty in her book, Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s, describes what she calls Rainer’s “audience problem.” Rather than focusing, as Banes does, on Rainer as a “medium-specific” dance artist, Beatty emphasizes her culturally informed interest in spectatorship. In the introduction to her book, Beatty recalls that a friend, on seeing a video of Trio A, noticed that the movement looked the way someone might dance at home if they thought no one was watching. When Beatty passed this comment on to Rainer, thinking the choreographer would take it as a compliment that her intention was absolutely clear even to someone unfamiliar with dance, she was shocked when Rainer said she was sick of people thinking she ignored

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⁵⁶ Banes, Terpsichore and Sneakers, 45.
⁵⁷ Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, 49.
the audience.\footnote{Carrie Lambert-Beatty, \textit{Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer in the 1960s} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 6-7.}

The significance of the “No manifesto” and its relation to \textit{Trio A} must be complicated. Moreover, if Banes’s argument holds, that \textit{Trio A} posits a dance in which the body must be viewed as an object, then the body must be an “object” in Michael Fried’s sense of the word.\footnote{Banes, \textit{Terpsichore in Sneakers}, 49.} Fried’s seminal 1967 essay “Art and Objecthood” offers a critique of minimalism, suggesting that in their theatricality, minimalist objects approach non-art. He argues that the value of a work ought to exist absolutely within its formal properties. He charges that the value of a minimalist object is located instead in its confrontation with the body of the spectator. The work is complete only in its physical and spatial relationship with the viewer. His argument is heavily based on statements made by Robert Morris, a peer and collaborator of Rainer’s, who wrote:

\begin{quote}
The better new work takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer’s field of vision. The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive because one’s awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work is stronger than in previous work, with its many internal relationships. One is more aware than before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions.\footnote{Robert Morris, quoted in Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” originally published in \textit{Artforum} 5 (June 1967): 12-23, in Michael Fried, \textit{Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 153.}
\end{quote}

Rainer’s \textit{Trio A} seems to follow a similar program. Yet Fried’s disavowal of latent theatricality in minimalist objects would, in this case, lose its grounding, since dance deals necessarily with performance and the interaction of bodies in space. Banes describes Rainer as an essentialist, focused on the body and on movement. However, from the subtle complexities of \textit{Trio A}, it is clear that Rainer’s concerns lay not only with the dancing body,
but also with the nature of performance and relationship between the performer and audience. This experience would be enhanced as the Trio A movement series was altered and integrated into works that Rainer designed over the next few years.

In 1981, Rainer reflected that, “On the face of it, my work can be, and has been read as a kind of reductivism coming out of ‘60s Minimal art, a view which I myself held when I was making dances.” In that same text, however, she also points to the influence of the surrealist traditions interpreted in the “collage strategies” of Cage, Kurt Schwitters, and Robert Rauschenberg. In her “format pieces” of the late 1960s, Rainer embraced this collage aesthetic, included props, text, and video within the structure of her dances. These works further elucidate the complex relationship between Rainer and her audience, engaging with the legacy of Futurist avant-garde through a collage-like multi-media performance that confronts the boundaries of media and the separation of audience and performance.

The final version of The Mind is a Muscle was performed at the Anderson Theater in the East Village in April 1968. Trio A was one element in the eight-part performance that included music and speech as well as movement. The structure of The Mind is a Muscle recalls the “compartmentalized” structure defined by Michael Kirby as a series of disconnected actions or events presented simultaneously or in series as part of a whole work, rather than a continuous narrative of traditional theater. Kirby traces the derivation of this structure from earlier Futurist and Dada avant-gardes to its integration as an essential feature in 1960s “New Theater” and Happenings. The Mind is a Muscle was comprised of just such a series of events that included the original Trio A danced by three men and a solo version called “Lecture.” In “Lecture” from The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1 (1966), Peter Saul danced a

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61 “Looking Myself in the Mouth” in Yvonne Rainer, A Woman Who…: essays, interviews, and scripts (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 94.
balletic version of the *Trio A* movement sequence that added pirouettes and leaps wherever possible. In the final 1968 version, Saul was unavailable. Instead, Rainer herself performed *Trio A* in tap shoes (fig. 10).\(^{62}\) In several performances of *The Mind is a Muscle*, “musical” accompaniment for *Trio A* was provided by a number of slats thrown from a ladder, recalling the noise of Cage and his Futurist predecessors.

Rainer’s interest in these radical juxtapositions continued in her work of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Rainer included *Trio A* in seven other “format pieces” and would continue to make variations on the original movement series. The hybrid and synthetic structure of these events not only parallels that of the Futurist evening, discussed in the first section on Futurism, but they also effect a direct confrontation with notions of dance as a genre and a technique. *Continuous Project—Altered Daily* began as a series of solos and group dances with *Trio A* as a base. It was first performed at the University of Illinois in May 1969. The loose structure left room for improvisation, and order was left to the performer. Later incarnations of *Continuous Project* also included a variety of props from the every-day to the idiosyncratic: paper, stuffed objects, a white screen, cardboard boxes, a sombrero, and a huge pair of strap on wings. Rainer described the version of *Continuous Project* performed at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1970 as a culmination of her interests: “movement problems, objects, film, and also the range of situations that would normally occur prior to performance: teaching, social interaction, working out of new material, conversation and other rehearsal-like situation.”\(^{63}\) Though movement was at the core of *Continuous Project*, its structure was improvised, which resulted in a much more varied and theatrical kind of performance. With

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the integration of props, in particular, the performance straddled the boundary between the hyper-ordinary and the completely absurd, challenging notions of dance.

Moreover, though not directly engaged—as they were in Futurist evenings—spectators were involved in the performance of Continuous Project at the Whitney. Not only were they required to choose which performers to watch in the space, but they were also encouraged to physically move through the space to view the events occurring in various spaces of the museum (fig. 11). A similar idea appeared in Connecticut Composite from 1970—a work that Rainer made for the opening of a new building on the Connecticut College campus. One part of Connecticut Composite called “Audience Piece” was performed on chairs: viewers were invited to sit among the performers and view the work from the inside (fig 12). Meanwhile, other events were simultaneously taking place in different parts of the building. Rainer conceived of Connecticut Composite as “four simultaneous dance concerts going—one in each theater—with both performers and audience running back and forth between. Gee whiz.”64 The program provided audience members with a schedule for choosing between events and a map to get them to each venue (fig 16).

Rainer’s acknowledgement of the audience is made clear in these works, in which the viewer is, literally, mobilized. However, for Rainer, the audience members remains firmly, if problematically, in their role as spectator. In Continuous Project—Altered Daily at the Whitney, the audience was requested, when moving between rooms, to proceed around the sides of the space rather than through the center of the performance space.65 Though the audience was more active in these later works, in 1969 Rainer continued to insist on the

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64 Quoted in Beatty, 215. Rainer to Jan Stockman, 23 October 1968, copy in Rainer’s files, folder “Correspondence 1969.”
65 Beatty, 222.
significance of the “audience-performer gulf,” declaring, “I do not wish the audience to participate in my thing; neither do I wish them to focus on themselves, but rather on arbitrary and carefully focused situations external to themselves within clearly delineated social areas.” Nevertheless, it is clear that the “audience problem,” as Lambert-Beatty calls it, was a crucial issue for Rainer. *Trio A* was a core element of Rainer’s “format” pieces, which far from dealing with the essentials of movement, confronted issues of performance and audience.

Rainer’s “audience problem” developed out of an avant-garde tendency to question the boundaries of dance as a performance-based art. In addressing issues of audience, Rainer challenged the most literal boundary of the medium—the fourth wall that separated the work from the spectator. In *Trio A* she denies the audience by refusing to acknowledge it; in the performance of *The Mind is a Muscle* at the Whitney Museum, she simultaneously encourages and limits audience involvement. Although alternatively asserting separation, Rainer was clearly engaged with issues of audience in her work—if not directly with the audience members themselves, as the Futurists did. In direct contrast to the Futurists’ active engagement of their audience, Rainer resolutely and paradoxically maintained her distance: “Proper physical distance produces psychic distance that I (as audience) find extremely important. Perhaps this is my problem.” Her stubborn stance on this point makes explicit her complex relationship to issues of spectator and performer, and the integral role this line of questioning played in her artistic practice.

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66 Quoted in Beatty, 225. Yvonne Rainer to Don McDonagh, 29 December 1969, in Rainer’s files, folder “Correspondence 1969.”

67 Quoted in Beatty, 225. Yvonne Rainer to Batya Zamir, 21 December 1969, in Rainer’s files, folder “Correspondence 1969.”
From Avant-Garde Dance to Film

It is clear that Rainer’s concerns lay not only with movement but also with dance as a performance art and specifically with its boundaries. This concern would be exaggerated in the 1970s as her work began to deal more directly with social and political issues—that is, with life itself. In 1970, she performed *Trio A with Flags* at “People’s Flag Show,” organized at Judson Church to protest the laws cracking down on the desecration of flags at the height of the Vietnam conflict (fig. 14). Rainer, David Gordon, Nancy Green, Barbara Dilley, and Lincoln Scott entered the space, stripped off their clothing, and performed the phrase nude with only flags tied around their bodies. As Rainer’s artistic goals became more integrated with a social concern, she began to work more with film. While Banes has described Rainer as an essentialist, focused on the body and on movement, the subtle complexities of *Trio A* and in her later transition to film make her avant-garde goals all the more explicit. Rainer always occupied an “adversarial position” and was inspired to question traditional notions of dance as a medium. In defining the avant-garde position in relation to her own artistic project, she has said,

> I guess [the avant-garde] an adversarial position—yes, that is a crucial part of the definition. Adversarial against tastemakers, notions of high art, historical notions of good art…. Because of this narrow definition of avant-garde, ultimately when I wanted to deal with social and political issues, I had to leave dancing and move to something else because dancing was very much about a conversation with immediate predecessors in dance.\(^{68}\)

Thus, for Rainer, her move to film was also predicated upon a need to escape the confines of dance. Dance, she has said, was too tied up in a debate with what had gone before—in combating the expressionism of classical modern dance.

\(^{68}\) “Rainer Variations,” *A Woman Who…* DVD.
The Futurists’ love of cinema maintained a logical link to their cult of the machine. Alternatively, Rainer’s dance works do not immediately seem to play into any kind of machine aesthetic. However, although the performer in Trio A does not necessarily “gesticulate geometrically,” as in Futurist dynamic and synoptic declamation, the movement’s plodding regularity recalls an industrial and mechanistic pace. As Carrie Lambert-Beatty notes in Being Watched, the falling wooden slats occasionally provided a metronome-like accompaniment to Trio A in The Mind is a Muscle, enhancing this feeling of regularity and repetition. Moreover, in her essay, “Some Nonchronological Recollections of The Mind is a Muscle,” Rainer writes,

At one session something David [Gordon] was doing looked strange to me. I asked him what kind of imagery he was using. He said “I’m thinking of myself as a faun.” I said ‘Try thinking of yourself as a barrel.’ More recently I had a similar experience with John Erdman, only at a different point in the dance. John had learned part of Trio A from Barbara Lloyd, who is the only person, to my knowledge, who was never officially “taught” Trio A, but, rather, picked it up entirely on her own by observing me, Steve, David, and Becky Arnold. On inquiring how Barbara described a particular movement, John said “birdlike.” I retaught it to him as “airplanelike.”

This last description—“airplane-like”—immediately recalls Marinetti’s dance of the aviatrix. Rainer instructs performers to think of themselves as objects, neutral and devoid of persona. Post-modern dance may be said to engage with a machine aesthetic in the sense of exploring the most basic functioning of the body and movement. Rainer’s interest lay in bodies that would execute movements efficiently and without embellishment, carrying out the task of moving in performance. Instead of a Futurist mechanized body, Rainer’s interest lay in the bodily machine and actions that are rote and quotidian. Rainer placed her dance in relation to

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69 Yvonne Rainer, “The Mind is a Muscle,” in A Woman Who: essays, interviews, scripts, 42.
classical modern dance, creating a similar kind of "futurist" body through her choreographic innovation.

While Futurism clung to the mechanized ideal in opposition to the metaphorical vulnerability and passivity suggested by the human body, Rainer’s “mechanization” is linked to her anxiety about the dancing body itself and a kind of minimalist dance. In her 1966 essay “The Mind is a Muscle,” Rainer attributes the machine-like characteristics of Trio A to the realization that “Dance is hard to see. It must either be made less fancy, or the fact of that intrinsic difficulty must be emphasized to the point that it becomes almost impossible to see.” The form of her dance and her relationship to the audience discussed in the previous chapter function as a direct engagement with the nature of dance as an ephemeral art form. Rainer’s interest in film is best explored as an extension of the difficulties of dance and her “audience problem.” In her essay “Yvonne Rainer: From Dance to Film,” scholar Peggy Phelan describes how the averted gaze of Trio A anticipates a kind of “filmic voyeurism” in live performance. The term “filmic voyeurism” refers to the way in which the performer never confronts the gaze of the audience member. The film-goer, separated from the action on screen by the technological apparatuses of the camera and projection and placed in the darkened space of the cinema, is freed from the possibility of the actor and performer’s mutual gaze. In Trio A, since the dancer never visually confronts the spectator, Rainer creates a similar situation: the audience is free to look without being seen by the performer whose gaze in constantly averted. In film, Rainer’s spectator is shifted from a position of bodily engagement associated with the minimalist object to the disembodied immersion associated with the cinematic image. In both dance and film, however, the audience plays an active

70 Rainer, “The Mind is a Muscle,” 35.
role—the audience-member’s body is implicated in looking and moving. Far from a denial of her body or of her audience, Rainer’s move to film was predicated on her concern with the nature of dance, and, once again, with the literal boundaries of her medium. From the hybrid structure of her “format pieces” and her concern with dance and movement, Rainer entered film with a particular concern for a dynamic encounter between filmic object and spectator. The viewer was implicated in Rainer’s work as she began to address socio-political issues beyond the art-world, stage, and screen.

Rainer’s reasons for moving into film appear to be two-fold. First and foremost is the fact that “dance is hard to see.”71 A film, unlike a dance, can be replayed. It is not subject to the particularities of live performance. There is a continuity between the minimalist concerns of Rainer’s early work, and her first short films of the late 1960s, all shot in silent black and white. They are concerned with objectifying the body, neutralizing it through fragmentation, and the necessary distance that exists between bodies on screen and the film viewer. In Hand Movie (1968), a vertical hand fills the screen, cut off at the wrist, palm facing away from the camera (fig. 15). The film was shot when Rainer was in the hospital and depicts Rainer dancing in the only way her illness would allow. From the confines of her sickbed, she systematically explores on film the specific motions of her hand. However, Rainer’s increasing dissatisfaction with the confines of minimalist neutrality is paralleled in the progression of her work on film. This tension appears even in the program note for The Mind is a Muscle performed that same year. She writes:

The choices in my work are predicated on my own peculiar resources—obsessions of imagination, you might say—and also on an ongoing argument with, love of, and contempt for dancing. If my rage at the impoverishment of

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71 Rainer, “The Mind is a Muscle,” 35.
ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing can be considered puritan moralizing, it is also true that I love the body—its actual weight, mass, and unenhanced physicality.

I can foresee a time when this remoteness must necessarily end... This statement is not an apology. It is a reflection of a state of mind that reacts with horror and disbelief upon seeing a Vietnamese shot dead on TV—not [solely] of the sight of death, however, but at the fact that the TV can be shut off afterwards as after a bad Western. My body remains the enduring reality.

At first, the hand in Hand Movie functions in the abstract. The hand is disembodied, moving and contorting in utterly unfamiliar ways. However, as the film continues, each of the fingers seem to acquire a personality of their own—one finger insistently nudges the other, another sneaks around to tap a few fingers down. The minimalist object is once again complicated, through the visceral experience of bodies.

Carrie Lambert-Beatty describes how Trio Film, also from 1968, similarly confronts this tension (fig. 16). The film is set takes place in stark white room with a couch and two chairs in a minimalist style. Two nude performers—Becky Arnold and Steve Paxton—are seen casually playing with a huge white balloon. They toss the balloon, chat casually with one another (though the film is silent), walk with the balloon pressed between their pelvises, and systematically move up and down the couch, replacing each other and the balloon. The size of the balloon seems to suggest that it functions as another body in the space—though it is a weightless body. Yet, just as the balloon is given anthropomorphic characteristics, the matter-of-fact nakedness of Arnold and Paxton and the neutrality of their actions acquire a simultaneous object-hood. Beatty places this in the context of minimalism, as a relationship between bodies in space. However, she points to the final scene as a challenge to minimalism’s vaunted neutrality. Arnold cannot suppress a smile as she sits on the couch next to Paxton, who jumps up and down on the couch visible only from the waist down, holding
the balloon at his belly, “causing his penis and testicles and her breasts to bounce like so many white balloons.” Beatty goes on to suggest, “It is as if the whole exercise had been a test: how long can you keep pretending your nude body is neutral— that your physicality is the same as that of a white balloon, or that sexual difference can be stripped from human bodies as easily as clothes?”

In an interview, Rainer describes, “It was through language that I was going to address the specifics and particularity of the problems of daily life— social contradictions, sexual conflicts etc… the interaction of image and language… Film seemed so much more suited to thinking about these things.” While dancing, Rainer dealt constantly with her “audience problem,” questioning the nature of dance and the traditional barrier that is constructed between performer and audience in performance. Rainer’s concern with the boundaries of media provides another continuity between her dance and film projects. Rainer’s shift to film is significant not only to show that her artistic interest literally broke the constraints of genre, but also to show how continued to deal with the boundary of art by embracing her growing political concerns. Beginning in 1972 with Lives of Performers, Rainer began to work on feature length films, dealing increasingly with the confluence of the personal and political, gender, identity, and sexuality.

Rainer’s previous confrontation with the boundaries between dance performance and the quotidian movements of everyday life is collapsed in her move to the popular medium of film. The role of film as a popular form of mass entertainment expanded Rainer’s target

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72 Beatty, 191.
73 Beatty, 191.
74 “Rainer Variations,” in A Woman Who…: Selected Works of Yvonne Rainer, DVD.
audience significantly from the relatively small community that typically attends dance performances. The dissolution of this boundary is contradictorily met by the necessary boundary that film constructs between spectator and event—that it effectively distances and objectifies. Nevertheless, for Rainer, film offered an alternative to dance:

Dance is ipso facto about _me_ (the so called kinesthetic response of the spectator not withstanding, it only rarely transcends that narcissistic-voyeuristic duality of doer and looker); whereas the area of the emotions must necessarily concern both of us. That is what allowed me permission to start manipulating what at first seemed like blatantly personal and private material. But the more I get into it, the more I see how such things as rage, terror, desire, conflict, et al., are not unique to my experience the way my body and its functioning are. I now—as a consequence—feel much more connected to my audience and that gives me great comfort.75

Thus, Rainer’s films embody the avant-garde concern with the boundaries of medium that similarly characterized her dance performance, allowing her address the larger political significance of her work.

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75 Quoted in _A Woman Who…: essays, interviews and scripts_, 5.
Conclusion

Approaches to performance and artistic paradigms dramatically shifted in the 1960s. As the historical avant-garde had done earlier in the twentieth century, dance artists began to engage with issues of spectatorship and audience. Challenging the traditional role of the audience member became significant in the work of many artists. It is evident that Futurist performance was an important precedent for the development of avant-garde movements in the arts later in the twentieth century—Futurism stands out as the first avant-garde movement to radically challenge notions of performance, the autonomy of art, artistic genres. Dance, in particular, took from the historical avant-garde not only formal elements of performance and simultaneity, but the concepts of dissonance, engagement, and a concern with boundaries of mediums and art itself.

Although the connection between Futurism and the avant-garde dance of the 1960s is often mentioned, it has not previously been the subject of much inquiry. John Cage has often dominated the discourse on the development of the Judson Theater in the 1960s and performance art more generally. His interest in the French avant-garde of the 1920s has obscured the fact that many Futurist ideas were absorbed into Dada, and thus entered American avant-garde performance via French performance theory. The Futurists’ problematic relationship to Mussolini’s Fascist regime in Italy presented an ideological barrier to wider acceptance of their endeavors. Moreover, most Futurist texts and manifestos were not translated into English until the late 1960s and early 1970s. While there is significant theoretical and temporal disconnect between the work of the Futurists and that of Yvonne Rainer, the significant theoretical continuities between Futurism and dance should not go unrecognized.
According to Marjorie Perloff, the “futurist moment” is exemplary of a more general avant-garde spirit. In its formal and conceptual innovations, Futurism serves as a precedent to later avant-gardes that attempt to challenge aestheticism. The Futurists’ admiration of film along with their multi-media performances challenged notions of autonomous and hierarchical artistic genres. But they also confronted the boundary between art and life itself through the forms of collage, manifesto, and performance, creating an art that engaged with the social and political everyday in both form and content. Perloff recovers the term neo-avant-garde from Burger and Poggioli’s outright rejection on the basis that the questioning of artistic genres serves as the root for later inquiries. Significantly, the neo-avant-garde’s aesthetic of “rupture” recalls the formal tactics and confrontational character of the historical avant-garde. The Futurist legacy is visible not only in the structure of late-twentieth century performance—the “compartmented” and multi-media performance noted by Michael Kirby—but also in the continual confrontation with the literal and theoretical boundaries of artistic media.

In dealing with her “audience problem,” Yvonne Rainer is concerned with precisely these aspects of performance. In the work of Yvonne Rainer, an avant-garde aesthetic of “rupture” emerges first and foremost from her challenge to both the proper content of dance performance and to the traditional relationship between performance and audience, performer and spectator. For the Futurists, film embodied an abstract, utopian, and mechanized dynamism that was only superficially and metaphorically represented by the mechanized dancer of Marinetti’s “Futurist dance.” But, more importantly, film was a medium that could be harnessed for propaganda. The importance of film for both Futurism and for Rainer serves to illustrate the continuation of the avant-garde aesthetic of rupture. For the Futurists, film
was thus not only formally in line with their aesthetics but, by engaging the masses, film also seemed to ensure progress and political activism—the realization of their avant-garde project. For Rainer, film functioned as a similar solution to her problems with the dancing body. The content of Rainer’s work following her shift to film echoes the political activism of the Futurist aesthetic—yet another confrontation with life itself. Finally, in the 1970s, Rainer attempted to give up dancing altogether. Thus, Rainer’s shift to film functions as the ultimate challenge to the boundaries of artistic mediums.

The Futurist legacy survives as an avant-garde questioning of the relationship between formalism and aestheticism on the one hand and political efficacy and physical or social realities on the other hand. The avant-garde performance tactics developed by Futurists provide an important precedent for the development of avant-garde dance later in the twentieth century. Therefore, from a discussion of Rainer, it becomes clear that the avant-garde in dance took from the historical avant-garde the concepts of performance, dissonance, engagement, and an interest in the popular media of film that developed out of a concern with boundaries of mediums and art itself.
Appendix

Manifesto of the Futurist Dance

July 8, 1917

Once the glorious Italian ballet was dead and buried, there began in Europe stylizations of savage dances, elegant versions of exotic dances, modernization of ancient dances. Parisian red pepper + panache + shield + lance + ecstasy in front of idols that have lost all meaning + undulations of Montmartre thighs = an erotic passéist anachronism for foreigners…

With Nijinsky the pure geometry of the dance, free of mimicry and without sexual stimulation, appears for the first time.

Isadora Duncan creates the free dance, with no preparatory mime, that ignores musculature and eurythmy in order to devote everything to emotional expression, to the aerial ardor of its steps. But fundamentally she merely proposes to intensify, enrich, and modulate in a hundred different ways the rhythm of a woman’s body that languidly rejects, languidly invokes, languidly accepts, and languidly regrets the masculine giver of erotic happiness.

Isadora Duncan, whom I often had the pleasure of admiring in her free improvisations among the veils of mother-of-pearl smoke of her atelier, used to dance freely, thoughtlessly, as if talking, desiring, loving, weeping, to any sort of little tune no matter how vulgar, like “Mariette, ma petite Mariette” strummed on a piano. But she never managed to project anything but the most complex feelings of desperate nostalgia of spasmodic sensuality and cheerfulness, childishly feminine.

There are many points of contact between Isadora’s art and pictorial Impressionism, as there are between Nijinsky’s art and Cézanne’s constructions of volumes and forms. So naturally, under the influence of the Cubist researches and of Picasso especially, a dance of geometrized volumes was created, almost independent of the music. Dance became an autonomous art, the music’s equal. Dance is no longer submitted to the music, it replaces it.

Valentine de Saint-Pont conceived an abstract, metaphysical dance that was supposed to embody pure thought without sentimentality or sexual excitement. Her métachorie consists of mimed and danced poetry. Unfortunately it is passéist poetry that navigates within the old Greek and medieval sensibility: abstractions danced but static, arid, cold, emotionless. Why deprive oneself of the vivifying elements of mime? Why put on a Merovingian helmet of one’s eyes?

In a much more modern spirit Dalcroze has created a very interesting rhythmic gymnastics, with nevertheless limits its effect to muscular hygiene and the description of the work of the fields.

We Futurists prefer Louie Fuller and the “cakewalk” of the Negroes (utilization of electric light and mechanisms).

One must go beyond muscular possibilities and aim in the dance for that ideal multiplied body of the motor that we have so long dreamed of. One must
imitate the movements of machines with gestures; pay assiduous court to steering wheels, ordinary wheels, pistons, thereby preparing the fusion of man with the machine, to achieve the metallicity of the Futurist dance.

Music is fundamentally and incurably passéist, hence hard to employ in the Futurist dance. Noise, being the result of the rubbing together or the collision of solids, liquids, or gases in fast motion, has become by means of onomatopoeia one of the most dynamic elements of Futurist poetry. Noise is the language of the new human-mechanical life. The Futurists dance will therefore be accompanied by organized noises and by the orchestra of special effects [intonarumori] invented by Luigi Russolo.

In this Futurist epoch of ours, when more than twenty million men form with their battle lines a fantastic Milky Way of exploding shrapnel stars that bind the earth together; when the Machine and the Great Explosives, cooperating with the war, have centupled the force of the races, obliging them to give all they have of boldness, instinct, and muscular resistance, the Futurist dance can have no other purpose than to immensify heroism, master of metals, and to fuse with the divine machines of speed and war.

I therefore extract the first three Futurist dances from the three mechanisms of war: shrapnel, the machine gun, and the airplane.

DANCE OF THE SHRAPNEL

Part One I want to give the fusion of the mountain with the parabola of the shrapnel. The fusion of the carnal human song with the mechanical noise of shrapnel. To give the ideal synthesis of the war: a mountain soldier who carelessly sings beneath an uninterrupted vault of shrapnel.

Movement 1: With the feet mark the boom-boom of the projectile coming from the cannon’s mouth.

Movement 2: With arms spread apart describe at moderate speed the long whistling parabola of the shrapnel as it passes over the soldier’s head and explodes to high or behind him. The danseuse will hold up a sign printed in blue: Short to the right.

Movement 3: With the hands (wearing very long silver thimbles) raised and open, as high as possible, give the proud, blessed, silvery explosion of the shrapnel in its paaaak. The danseuse will hold up a sign printed in blue: Long to the left. Then she will hold up another printed in silver: Don’t slip on the ice. Synovitis.

Movement 4: With the whole body vibrating, the hips weaving, and the arms making swimming motions, give the waves and flux and reflux and concentric or eccentric motions of echoes in ravines, in open fields and up the slope of mountains. The danseuse will hold up a sign printed in black: Water duty; another in black: Mess duty; still another in black: The mules, the mail.

Movement 5: With little leaping handclaps and a pose of ecstatic suspension, express the indifferent and always idyllic calm of nature and the cheep-cheep-cheep of the birds. The danseuse will hold up a sign printed in disordered
letters: 300 meters to camp. Then another in red: 15 degrees below zero. 800 meters red ferocious suave.

Part Two

Movement 6: The slow, casual, thoughtless gait of the mountain soldiers who march under successive furious parabolas of shrapnel. The danseuse will light a cigarette while hidden voices sing one of the many war songs:

\[ \text{il commandante del sesto alpini} \]
\[ \text{incomincia a sbombarar…} \]
\[ [\text{the commander of the Sixth Alpines} \]
\[ \text{begins the bombardment…}] \]

Movement 7: The undulation with which the danseuse continues to express the war song will be interrupted by Movement 2 (whistling parabola of shrapnel).

Movement 8: The undulation with which the danseuse continues to express the war song will be interrupted by Movement 3 (explosion of the shrapnel high up).

Movement 9: The undulation will be interrupted by Movement 4 (waves of echoes).

Movement 10: The undulation will be interrupted by Movement 5 (cheep-cheep-cheep of the birds in the placidity of nature).

DANCE OF THE MACHINE GUN

I want to give the Italian carnality of the shout Savoia! that rips itself apart and dies heroically in shreds against the mechanical geometrical inexorable rolling-mill of the machine-gun fire.

Movement 1: With the feet (arms stretched forward), give the mechanical hammering of machine gun tap-tap-tap-tap-tap. The danseuse will show in a rapid gesture a sign printed in red: Enemy at 700 meters.

Movement 2: With the hands rounded like cups (one full of white roses, the other full of red roses), imitate fire as it pours steadily and violently out of the machine-gun barrels. The danseuse will have a large white orchid between her lips and will have a sign printed in red: Enemy at 500 meters.

Movement 3: With arms wide open describe the circling, sprinkling fan of projectiles.

Movement 4: Slow turn of the body, while the feet hammer on the wooden floor.

Movement 5: Accompany with violent forward thrusts of the body the cry Savoiiaaaal!

Movement 6: The danseuse, on hands and knees, will imitate the form of a machine gun, silver-black under its ribbon-belt of cartridges. Stretching forward she will feverishly shake the white and red orchid like a gun barrel in the act of firing.
DANCE OF THE AVIATRIX

The danseuse will dance on top of a large, violently colored geographical map (four meters square) on which will be drawn in large, highly visible character the mountains, woods, rivers, geometries of the countryside, the great traffic centers of the cities, the sea.

The danseuse must form a continual palpitation of blue veils. On her chest, like a flower, a large celluloid propeller that because of its very nature will vibrate with every bodily movement. Her face dead white under a white hat shaped like a monoplane.

Movement 1: Lying on her stomach on the carpet-map, the danseuse will simulate with jerks and weavings of her body the successive efforts of a plane trying to take off. Then she will come forward on hands and knees suddenly jump to her feet, her arms wide, her body straight but shivering all over.

Movement 2: The danseuse, still straight, will shake a sign printed in red: 300 meters—3 spins—climb. Then right away, a second sign: 600 meters—avoid mountain.

Movement 3: The danseuse will heap up a lot of green cloth to simulate a green mountain, then will leap over it. She will reappear immediately, arms open, all vibrant.

Movement 4: The danseuse, all vibrant, will wave in front of herself a great gilded cardboard sun and will run a very fast circle, pretending to follow it (frenzied, mechanical).

Movement 5: With organized noises imitate the rain and the sighing of the wind and, with continual interruptions of the electric light, imitate the lightning flashes. Meanwhile the danseuse will raise up a frame covered with red vellum paper in the form of a sunset cloud and will break through it in a graceful leap (grand and slow melancholy waves of sound).

Movement 6: The danseuse will wave in front of herself another frame covered with dark-blue vellum paper, in the form and color of a starry night. She will step across it, breaking through. Then she will scatter golden stars on the ground around her (gay ironic thoughtless).

Translated by R. W. Flint
in Marinetti: Selected Writings (137-141)
Illustrations

Figure 1: Giannina Censi in a Futurist dance of the aviatrix at the Galleria Pisaro de Milan, October 1931. (Reproduced in Lista, *La Scène Futuriste*, 286.)

Figure 2: A Futurist *serata* at Milan’s Teatro Fossati in 1921. (Reproduced in Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, 17.)
Figure 3: A caricature of a Futurist *serata*, Boccioni, published 1921. (Reproduced in Kirby, *Futurist Performance*, 15.)

Figure 4: *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, Giacomo Balla, 1912.
Figure 5: Photograph of Loïe Fuller [n.d.]
Figure 6: Folies-Bergère, Jules Chéret (French graphic designer, 1836-1932), 1897.
Figure 7: Set and lighting design for *Fireworks*, Giacomo Balla, 1917 (1968 reconstruction).

Figure 9: *Trio A*, Yvonne Rainer, 1968.
(Still from 1978 film. 16 mm black-and-white film, silent, 10:30 min.)


Figure 14: Trio A with Flags, Yvonne Rainer, 1970. Performed at the “People’s Flag Show” at Judson Memorial Church, New York, 9 November 1970.

Figure 15: Still from Hand Movie, Yvonne Rainer, 1966. 8mm black-and-white film, silent, 5 min. Cinematographer: William Davis (Reproduced in Beatty, Being Watched, 174.)
Figure 16: Still from *Trio Film*, Yvonne Rainer, 1968.
16 mm black-and-white film, silent, 13 min. Cinematographer: Phill Niblock.
Performers: Steve Paxton and Becky Arnold.
Bibliography


