



Being Watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960s (October Books)

By Carrie Lambert-Beatty

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In her dance and performances of the 1960s, Yvonne Rainer famously transformed the performing body -- stripped it of special techniques and star status, traded its costumes and leotards for T-shirts and sneakers, asked it to haul mattresses or recite texts rather than leap or spin. Without discounting these innovations, Carrie Lambert-Beatty argues in *Being Watched* that the crucial site of Rainer's interventions in the 1960s was less the body of the performer than the eye of the viewer -- or rather, the body as offered to the eye. Rainer's art, Lambert-Beatty writes, is structured by a peculiar tension between the body and its display. Through close readings of Rainer's works of the 1960s -- from the often-discussed dance Trio A to lesser-known Vietnam war-era protest dances -- Lambert-Beatty explores how these performances embodied what Rainer called "the seeing difficulty." (As Rainer said: "Dance is hard to see.") Viewed from this perspective, Rainer's work becomes a bridge between key episodes in postwar art. Lambert-Beatty shows how Rainer's art (and related performance work in Happenings, Fluxus, and Judson Dance Theater) connects with the transformation of the subject-object relation in minimalism and with emerging feminist discourse on the political implications of the objectifying gaze. In a spectacle-soaked era, moreover -- when images of war played nightly on the television news -- Rainer's work engaged the habits of viewing formed in mass-media America, linking avant-garde art and the wider culture of the 1960s. Rainer is significant, argues Lambert-Beatty, not only as a choreographer, but as a sculptor of spectatorship.

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Editorial Review

Review

A brilliantly vivid description of Rainer, Judson, and art making in the 1960s, *Being Watched* sets a new scholarly standard for dance and performance studies. Combining impeccable archival work, a nuanced understanding of the drama of vision, and a lyrical sensitivity to movement, *Being Watched* is an absolute pleasure to read. In these pages, Rainer emerges as a muscular thinker, a complicated personality, and one of the most influential choreographers of our time. Great artists need great commentators and here we are fortunate to see a truly compelling duet.

(Peggy Phelan, The Ann O'Day Maples Chair in the Arts, and Professor of Drama and English, Stanford University)

The book is a fantastic read and an exemplary text...a highly original analysis, this study is sure to become a classic.

(MJ Thompson *TDR: The Drama Review*)

About the Author

Carrie Lambert-Beatty is Assistant Professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture and the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University.

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