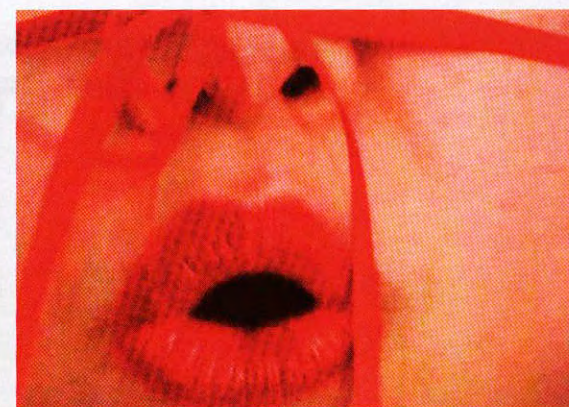




Left: Sturtevant, *Pac-Man* (working title), 2012, still from a video animation, 1 minute 15 seconds.

Above: Sturtevant, *Blow Job*, 2006, still from a three-channel color video, 1 minute 30 seconds.

First Position



Left: Sturtevant, *Duchamp Fresh Widow*, 1992, enamel paint on wood, leather, brass knobs, glass, 30 1/4 x 20 1/4 x 4 1/2".

Right: Sturtevant, *Trilogy of Transgression*, 2004, still from a three-channel color video, 1 minute 40 seconds.



Sturtevant goes into action, deploying media contra medium-specificity, and through repetition hacking the loop of the “same” to leak the extremity of difference.

Sturtevant, *Picabia's Ballet Relâche*, 1967. Performance view, School of Visual Arts, New York, November 20, 1967. Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.



Conceptual-Happenings-Rauschenberg circle. That vast archive: It harbored material information about Sturtevant's otherwise elusive performances, printed matter (programs from the various Fall and Spring Gallery Concert series) and photographic documentation (contact sheets, prints).

As art historian Carrie Lambert-Beatty has pointed out, it is not an overstatement to say that, like much of the extant knowledge of New York's 1960's avant-garde as a whole, much of the extant knowledge of Rainer's art has been preserved in “the view through the lens” of Moore's camera. And it is also not an overstatement to claim that without the diligent eye of this “remarkably dedicated documentarian”—and without Moore and his wife's archiving of the more than half a million photographs along with ephemera that provides dates, names, contextual details, corroborating evidence, as close as can be gotten to the “complete details of the continuity plus program info”—not much would be known about Sturtevant's Rainer at all.

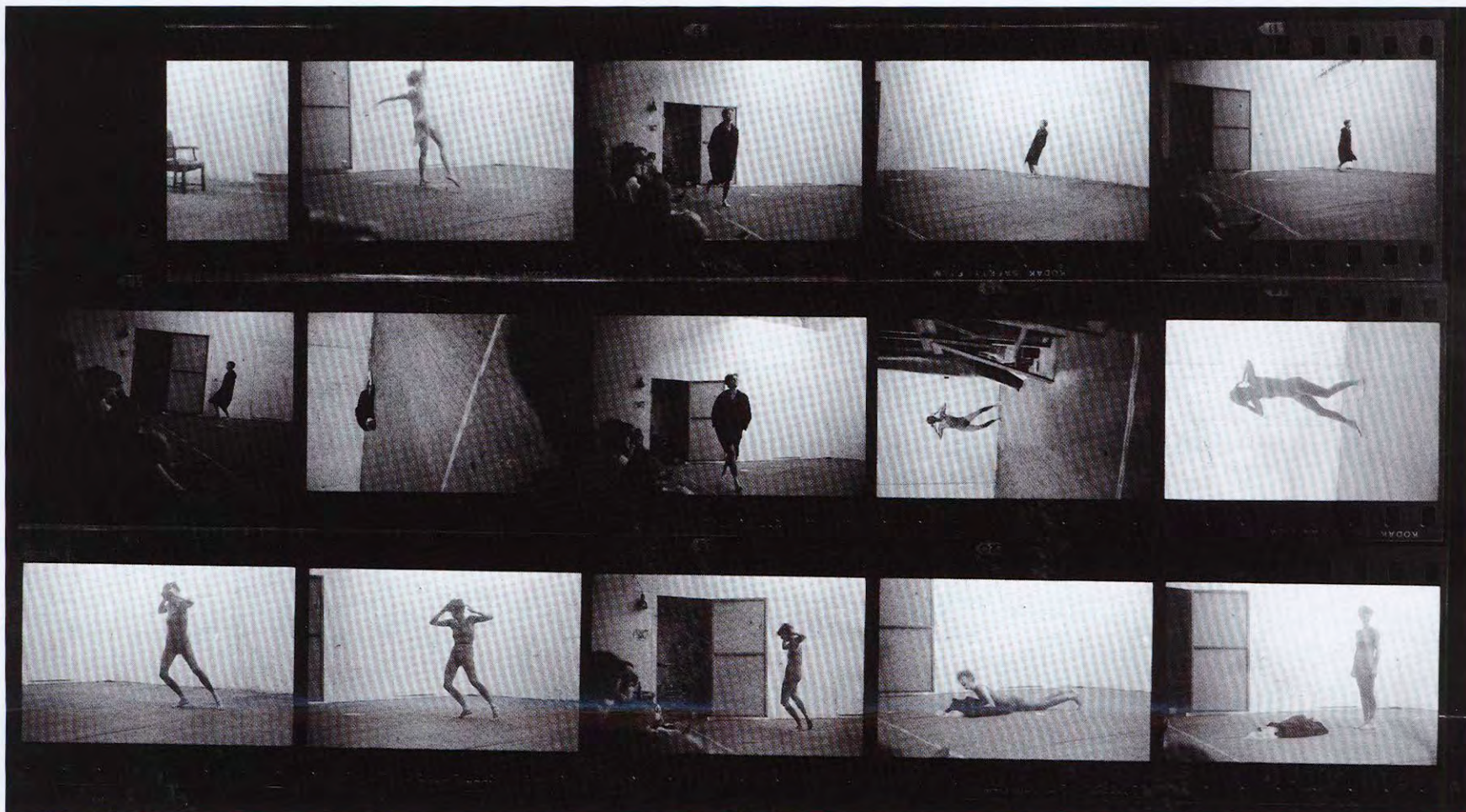
Unlike many other artists, Sturtevant, throughout the 1960s and '70s, only rarely relied on language, whether explanatory texts, manifestos, public statements, or interviews. Appearing as the work of others, her art, passing as status quo and seemingly responsive to its patter, undoes all that surety, the artist achieving such deranging criticality through the repetition of what she simultaneously cancels: The cut becomes . . . is . . . is already . . . the suture; the future yesterday; the dancer the dance.

THE CONTACT SHEET for Peter Moore's view of Sturtevant's *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"* consists of thirteen opportunities to approximate the reality of what her body looked like dancing—some inherent drama of the event conveyed in his pacing of what “attitudes” best framed the performance of her thinking. Six shots follow Sturtevant through the different paces of Part I, to which the lush last movement of the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto provided counterpoint. She (1) rushes into the performance space through a door, stage left, chin up, her body draped in a large dark overcoat. Moore captures her (2) arrested, upstage, about to (3) change course, running or dog-trotting the periphery in the opposite direction from which she started—only to (4) reverse course yet again. She drops, prostrate, (5) her body slightly curled, on the wooden floor of the stage, whose “apron” is marked by a chalky kind of line, effectively making the loftlike venue resemble a makeshift squash court. The sequence of the first part of *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"* seemingly loops (6) to find the artist in almost the same position as she was in the first shot—staring ahead, striding forward, hands in coat pockets, as if motion were her element, having in the meantime utterly scrambled, once-over twice, where all the emotion and complexity and virtuosity really ever are. Part II: Sporting a lightly colored unitard and footless tights, Sturtevant (7), upstage left, assumes a position, fingertips placed lightly on each side of her head, limbs in awkward,

elbow-out, wing formation; stripped down to basics, holding this odd, under-arrest position, she (8) sways her right hip out to begin her weird peregrination from the corner (stacks of stuff pushed against a wall in ramshackle storage), (9, 10) undulating, if that's the term, diagonally across the performance zone toward the open doorway (11), downstage right, all to the music of tables and chairs scraping in the recording of La Monte Young's composition. While the artist may not have been trained as a dancer, her body, toned and agile, cuts a fit figure, possibly from years of tennis and swimming; with the juts of her hips, lithe arms inverted, raised akimbo, she makes her way, Gwen Verdon meets the Velvet Underground, gleaned the *écarté* ghosted in the movement. Throughout, although Sturtevant's gaze seems focused intensely elsewhere, a sense of athletic accomplishment permeates the sequence, her body's gravity and energy focused by the strange intention that gives her *Study* its power.

When Rainer reflected on her own *Three Seascapes* for a retrospective exhibition about the Judson Dance Theater in October 1981, she paid particular attention to her body in the second part:

“Goofy glamour” Steve Paxton once used to describe my act. This [photograph by Al Giese] is the second section of a three-part solo, a diagonal passage nearing its end, during which I slow-motion from one corner of Judson Gym to the other like a goofy, sexy, crippled, possessed, audience-be-damned, nothing-to-lose, shameless, female critter.



Contact sheet showing Sturtevant's *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967. Photos: Peter Moore/VAGA.

Sturtevant is most Sturtevant when she appears to be, seemingly, doing Rainer. Perhaps even more paradoxically, Rainer is most Rainer when Sturtevant is doing her.

It's difficult to discern, in Moore's stills of Sturtevant's phrasing of the diagonal passage, any goofy, critter wantonness (which doesn't necessarily mean it wasn't performed), but perhaps not so difficult to glimpse a nothing-to-lose abandonment to something, whether to the "shameless" or "sexy" or to the bravado of her endeavor, whatever it is glimmering as part of the elsewhere otherness of her gaze, ignoring—damning—the audience.

Finally, Part III: A single frame (12) captures the artist on her stomach, roughly center stage, screaming, white gauze and overcoat beneath her, head slightly raised, feet pointed down, caterwauling der-vish breaking up.

The final document of the performance (13) arrests the havoc: The dance completed, Sturtevant, again center stage, stands, maelstrom of coat and gauze abandoned in front of her, taking her bow, unbowed. The audience that can be seen through Moore's lens proves tightly packed, close enough to the action to have caught any look, breath, and gesture of whatever just happened.

Jill Johnston appears to have been the only writer who tried to confront whatever had just happened.

Given her streetwise knowledge of the contemporary countercultural area, especially of dance, especially Rainer's, she was able to position Sturtevant's pursuit as few others could have. After setting the scene ("Spring Gallery Concert of music and dance . . . given May 14–16 at a loft on the Bowery [the YMCA building, 222 Bowery] by two composers and three choreographers"), she observes:

Elaine Sturtevant assumes a unique position of making her work the work of other artists. Having simulated the techniques and images of some well-known Pop artists, she here undertook a dance project in the form of a "Study for Yvonne Rainer's 'Three Seascapes.'" Her tempo and serious deadpan of the first section—running around in an overcoat and occasionally lying down (to Rachmaninoff) seemed just right. She wisely abbreviated the screaming of the third section and the middle section, originally a difficult, intentionally awkward slow motion walk across stage, with undulating pelvis and plastic irregularities of hands moving at the head, became a rather painfully awkward version of awkwardness as executed by a non-dancer. Which is okay I think (why not?) and simply puts the movement into another (awkward) dimension.

No condescension in Johnston's approach to Sturtevant's project: The artist is one of "three choreographers"—Trisha Brown and Deborah Hay were the others—presenting work. Attuned to the artist's "unique position" as well as to her various affective results—"serious deadpan," "awkwardness"—the critic pinpoints aspects that too frequently vanish from any wrangling with Sturtevant's elusive, challenging actions. To dwell on certain alterations—the abbreviation of the third section, the doubled awkwardness of the second—in Sturtevant's performance would be to get lost in the shoals of surface discrepancy rather than to Esther Williams through the strong currents of the artist's thinking. With the *Study*, Sturtevant demonstrates, yet again, the catalytic motility fueling all her pursuits; she also emphasizes that, whatever the difference in mode or material, her game is more demanding. "People who look at art see it as detail, a painting or a group of paintings by a specific artist," Sturtevant once explained. "They rarely see art as part of a total phenomenon. They don't use horizontal thinking." With her X-ray vision, she spied invisible consequences, not only in making her work the work of other artists or in the specific works of the artists whose work she made but also of the infrastructure supporting it all. She took the artists whose work she made at their word and took the percepts of their art as insight for incitement, a call to action; such horizontal thinking led her beyond a limit the artists themselves never quite trespassed. (For example, in terms of Lichtenstein: She throws the gasoline of his words ["The closer my work is to the original the more threatening and critical the content"] on what's already burning in his paintings [say, *Image Duplicator*, 1963], some of the result of her aesthetic conflagration looking relentlessly like Lichtensteins themselves.)

Sturtevant knew the "content" of her work was no longer anyone else's or any kind of "duplicate." All of which points to the importance of Johnston's discerning the "awkwardness" in Sturtevant's dance, a discernment that becomes abundantly clear when that quality is put in relation to the expanding horizon of dance, which the critic would soon do. To provide a gloss on the choreographic significance of *awkwardness*, she enlisted no less than one of dance's masters. "I like the quote in Calvin Tompkins's [sic] *New Yorker* profile [of Merce Cunningham]: 'I think dance only comes alive when it gets awkward again,' implying that between being awkward there's a period of submission and conformity to professional training demands." It is exactly this "alive"-ness—discombobulating "submission and conformity" to professionally sanctioned modes of proceeding—that Sturtevant mainlined. Johnston's formulation of Sturtevant's procedural method ("making her work

the work of other artists") remains useful, and with her conclusion that the artist puts not only Rainer but also movement itself "into another (awkward) dimension," she adumbrates the total structure with and within which Sturtevant operated, folding space-time, shattering dimensionality, like some rogue Bene Gesserit.

"It was terrifying to do, but that was because of what I was hoping to achieve by doing it, not because I was afraid of the audience's or other artists' reaction," Sturtevant confessed, having been asked (in reference to responses to her work, hostile and otherwise, in the mid- to late 1960s), "Were you afraid?" Averting any clarification about what, exactly, she was hoping to achieve by doing what she did, the artist raises only one possible affective consequence (terror) of doing it—which leaves several questions waiting in the wings. Among them: By dancing her *Study for Yvonne Rainer's* "Three Seascapes", what did Sturtevant hope to achieve?

CUE RAINER.

Elaine—Have gone to Calif. Don't despair. Keep working. You know the dance. In 2 days I shall send you complete details of the continuity plus program info. Sometimes one has to run away from everything. Yvonne.

In the postcard, sent not even two weeks before Sturtevant undertook the dance, it is hard to interpret Rainer's final quasi-epigrammatic ministration, however much it seems to encourage a focus not on the emotive but on the performative ("Don't despair. Keep working. You know the dance"). Wavering between acknowledgment and advice, the fugitive statement dodges straightforward address: It isn't clear that the indefinite pronoun ("one") doesn't refer to Rainer herself, writing from California. A certain declarative gravity adheres in the sentence that could be taken to clarify matters important to both Rainer's and Sturtevant's repertoires, despite the radically different ways the artists put those repertoires into action.

Sometimes one has to run away from everything, to get to where one wants to be.

When Rainer did, infamously, say no to "many facts in the theatre today" ("NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe . . ."), she did so in the same issue of the *Tulane Drama Review* in which Sturtevant (as "Elaine") made her splash in the script of Oldenburg's *Washes*—an exploit giving no clue that she was already interrogating, via her double negatives, many of the things to which Rainer was saying no: thwarting any privileging of the visible over the invisible, abandoning imposed teleologies, jettisoning

continued on page 299

dearest yvonne.
i heard last week from Bob R.
that you were sick - i feel so
sorry and sad for you - was
unable to write but instead
sent WAVES -
great good ones - strong ones -
listen, yvonne - i think that's
just enough of that nonsense -
especially out in that faraway
land where you and Bob are.
So isolated - so tell those
doctors to shape up -
wish i had all sorts of amazing
things to tell you - but alas
there are none (that i know
of) sorry i didn't get to see
you after Italy - how did
it go - did you enjoy it -
how many people do you

Above and below: Letter from Sturtevant to Yvonne Rainer, 1967.

get to take next year. 
dea and Loren were away at camp
all summer which was glorious for
me. and a most incredible ex-
perience. ~~working~~ - i concentrated on not
working - almost totally successful
except for lots of things that went
on in the head.
tried paper down in Nags Head
all odours, sun and water
etc. - it was nice seeing paper
and of course we ate all the
glorious meals!
where is Bob staying - is it not too
bad. and do you have any idea
how much longer you will be
there - poor things - it must be
miserable for the both of you
- my love and thoughts -
elaine

clude aggressiveness or evade the consequences of gender—even if the artist's project is not limited or reducible to such conditions. Rather than questions of femininity or feminism per se, Sturtevant opens a dossier on the polemics of engendering, its fraught relation to being, becoming, identity, and selfhood. Unlike what Johnston determines as Rainer's determining hemorrhage, the screaming in the final part of Sturtevant's *Study* is pitched indeterminately: Does it resonate as battle cry or groan of frustration, cry for help or *cri de coeur*?

Polemics were heated during the year Sturtevant undertook her *Study*, and it would be convenient to let contextual circumstances assuage the problems of what might have been heard when she screamed. But however convenient, it mistakes the force of Sturtevant's intention to hear it as feedback to or protest against the Vietnam War or as an echoing response to Sturtevant's beating the day before the opening of *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, which happened a little more than a week prior to receiving, via postcard, Rainer's instructions not to despair but to "keep working."

Instead, see that in slow motion, across the course of a year, 1967, and against the double negatives of the *Relâches*, Sturtevant cleaves the everything of *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, her virgule consisting of the *Study* for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"—but the climax of her *Study*, unlike Rainer's own *Three Seascapes*, was not centered by the diagonal undulations of a "sexy, crippled, possessed, audience-be-damned, nothing-to-lose, shameless, female critter"; not centered either by the "self" or the "feminine" or something as effective and awkward as a woman doing *female impersonation*. Rather, her dance disturbed because nothing about gender, about any "female critter," was being reified, but liberated into its unknowable, simultaneous multiplicity.

SOME THINGS remain beyond any articulation, but sometimes you have to scream just to be heard. While the dance solo of *Study* for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes" might have made a new multiple mode of "self" visible, dancing for all to see, it was only another movement in Sturtevant's ongoing drive "to articulate visibilities: to make thought visible," whirling all of it on "the question of invisibility" and "a way of using the mind," as the artist wrote in a letter to Virginia Dwan. Ignoring parallels of style or sensibility like those on which many critics insisted, Sturtevant, instead, by repetition, danced a dance: paradoxically, performing something weirdly vitally her own, fresh-footed; availing repetition for nothing repetitive; abandoning the known for a tango with all that's not.

Deleuze would be the first to Labanotate what she performed:

A single and same voice for the whole thousand-voiced multiple, a single and same Ocean for all the drops, a single clamour of Being for all beings: on condition that each being, each drop and each voice has reached the state of excess—in other words, the difference which displaces and disguises them and, in turning upon its mobile cusp, causes them to return.

Knowing the dance allowed her to put it all out to sea.

CUE STURTEVANT.

Dearest Yvonne

*I heard last week from Bob R. that you were sick—
I feel so upset and sad for you—was unable to write but
instead sent WAVES ~~~~~*

Great good ones—strong ones—

*Listen, Yvonne, I think that's just enough of that
nonsense—especially out in that faraway land where
you and Bob are so isolated—so tell those doctors to
shape up—*

*Wish I had all sorts of amazing things to tell you—
but ALAS there are none (that I know of) Sorry I didn't
get to see you after Italy—how did it go did you enjoy
it—how many people do you get to take next year
[smiley face]*

*Dea and Loren were away at camp all summer which
was glorious for me—and a most incredible experience—
I concentrated on not working—almost totally success-
ful except for lots of things that went on in the head.*

*Visited Jasper down in Nags Head [drawing of
horse or unicorn]—all dunes, sun and water [drawing
of sun and water]—it was nice seeing Jasper and of
course we ate all his glorious meals!*

*Where is Bob staying—is it not too bad—and do
you have any idea how much longer you will be there—
poor things—it must be miserable for the both of you
—my love and thoughts—*

Elaine

BRUCE HAINLEY IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ARTFORUM.
HIS BOOK ON STURTEVANT, *UNDER THE SIGN OF [SIC]*, IS
FORTHCOMING FROM SEMIOTEXT(E).

COOKE/CHAMBERLAIN continued from page 241

NOTES

1. "Robert Creeley on John Chamberlain," in *Chamberlain* (Bern, Switzerland: Kunsthalle Bern), 1979, 17. Among the disparate influences, including van Gogh and Schubert, regularly cited by Chamberlain were the poets Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and Creeley, whom he first encountered at Black Mountain College in 1955–56, that is, after the visual artists had departed. Chamberlain's idiosyncratic approach to titling is indebted to the often quite abstract ways in which these writers interacted with language and, more specifically, with quotidian words, not only as referent but also as sound and mood. Among the many notable titles are *Catnip*, 1960; *Miss Lucy Pink*, 1962; *Toasted Hitlers* (from E. J.), 1977; *Scotch Vapour*, 1989; and *Felonious Orchid*, 2003. Klaus Kertess, another of Chamberlain's staunch supporters, reputedly once read a toast on the artist's work comprised solely of a list of its titles.

2. Judd, "In the Galleries," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 6 (March 1962): 48.

3. When questioned about his preference for junked metal, Chamberlain responded variously, noting that he was not interested in the material's literal source in mass culture, but that it was cheap and plentifully available; that he liked its industrial color and the fact that it already had a certain form to it; and that Michelangelo had had a lot of marble in his backyard.

4. In his first major retrospective, at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1971, Chamberlain installed a giant barge in the rotunda, from which visitors could watch other visitors as they wandered along the ramp occupied by Chamberlain's metal, Plexiglas, and small-scale foam sculptures.

5. Julie Sylvester, "Conversation with John Chamberlain," in *John Chamberlain: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Sculpture, 1954–1985* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1986), 24.

6. Thomas Crow, "Figures of Emergence in the Recent Work of John Chamberlain," in *John Chamberlain: New Sculpture* (New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2011), 4–8.

7. Dave Hickey, "John Chamberlain: Steel Couture," in *John Chamberlain: Choices*, exh. cat., ed. Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2012), 38–39.

ROELSTRAETE/KLAPHECK continued from page 253

NOTES

1. *The Conversation Series 3: Konrad Klapheck & Hans Ulrich Obrist* (Cologne: Walther König, 2006), 18.

2. See her essay "The Art of a Miracle: Toward a History of German Pop, 1955–1972," in *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (New York: Abrams, 2009), 154. Mehring also notes how "the old machines featured in Klapheck's work pointed to the forgetfulness that went hand in hand with the economic miracle—or rather, to the active suppression of history that was both precondition and goal of postwar economic and cultural policies," 157. This interest in the obsolescence of certain industrial forms would also be a decisive factor in the formulation of the artistic program of two of Klapheck's better-known colleagues at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf—namely, Bernd and Hilla Becher, who developed a very different pictorial approach to the machine world. As the title of Mehring's essay makes clear, finally, Klapheck's work must also be considered in the larger context of the Pop phenomenon—another postwar appraisal of prewar realist and figurative traditions. There is certainly a strong, undeniably Pop element of cartoonish exaggeration at work in Klapheck's own *Sachlichkeit*.

3. Obrist, *The Conversation Series 3*, 8.

4. In a review of the "Art of Two Germanys" exhibition that helped revive critical interest in Klapheck's work, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh references the discussion of the "banality of evil" in the following remark: "While the Zero Group constructed their shimmer and glitter machines and performed their festivals to signal the arrival of spectacle even on the provincial shores of the Rhine, Klapheck painted machines of a fundamentally different kind: memory machines spelling out the uncanny transition and perpetual transfer from everyday banality to its normalization as anonymous evil at the collective level of the state." Buchloh, "How German Was It?," *Artforum*, Summer 2009, 298.

5. Ursula Peters and Roland Prügel, "The Legacy of Critical Realism in East and West," in Barron and Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys*, 77–78.

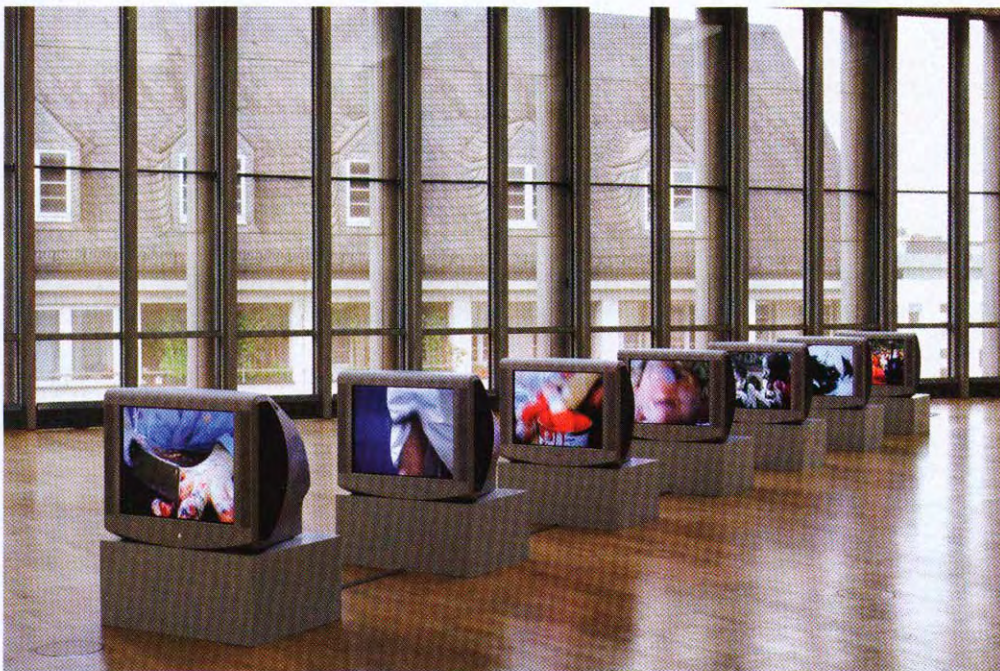
6. In an interview with Heinz-Norbert Jocks published in *Kunstforum International*, Klapheck himself reflects on the growing size of the typewriters, noting that some of them "share something with fascist architecture." *Kunstforum International*, no. 108 (June–July 1990): 259. Here again a comparison with the Bechers could be brought in: Klapheck's typewriters and sewing machines acquire the architectural grandeur of a water tower, a gas tank, a cooling tower, or a blast furnace. On the other hand (and much more recently), Klapheck has also compared his first, enormous typewriters to his "father's beloved cathedrals and castles of the Middle Ages"—a reference to the architectural history he taught at the art academy in Düsseldorf before his dismissal in 1934. See the artist's conversation with Christopher Williams in *Konrad Klapheck: Paintings from 1955 to 1998* (Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2008).

7. The relationship of Nietzsche to his typewriter is discussed at some length in Friedrich Kittler's *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

8. Theodor Adorno with George Simpson, "On Popular Music," in Adorno, *Essays on Music*, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 440.

Caption acknowledgments

Page 88: Andy Warhol, *Dolly Parton*, 1985. © The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. **Pages 226, 227, 230, 233, 234:** All photographs of Sturtevant, *Study* for Yvonne Rainer "Three Seascapes," 1967 © Estate of Peter Moore/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Page 229:** Claes Oldenburg, *Washes*, 1965. Photo © Robert R. McElroy/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Page 229:** Robert Rauschenberg studio, New York, 1965. Photo: Ugo Mulas. © Ugo Mulas Heirs. All rights reserved. **Page 235:** Photos: Yvonne Rainer Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. **Pages 236–241:** All works by John Chamberlain © John Chamberlain/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. **Pages 243:** Alexander Calder, *Vertical Foliage*, 1941 © Calder Foundation; Joel Shapiro, *untitled*, 2011; Jesus Rafael Soto, *Ovoide Mediano Negro y Rojo*, 2003; Richard Artschwager, *Exclamation Point* (Chartreuse), 2008; Robert Indiana, *Hope*, 2008 © Morgan Art Foundation. All © Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. David Smith, *The Unity of Three Forms*, 1937; Alex Katz, *Weeping Cherry 1*, 2005; Louise Bourgeois, *Avenza Revisited II*, 1968–69. All licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. **Pages 248–253:** All works by Konrad Klapheck © Konrad Klapheck/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. **Pages 258–261:** All single-frame images © Photoplay Productions/Kevin Brownlow Collection. **Pages 268–269:** All works by Alighiero e Boetti © Estate of Alighiero e Boetti/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome. **Pages 270–271:** All works by Willem de Kooning. © The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



Above: Sturtevant, *The Dark Threat of Absence Fragmented and Sliced*, 2002, seven color videos. Installation view, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, 2004. Photo: Axel Schneider.

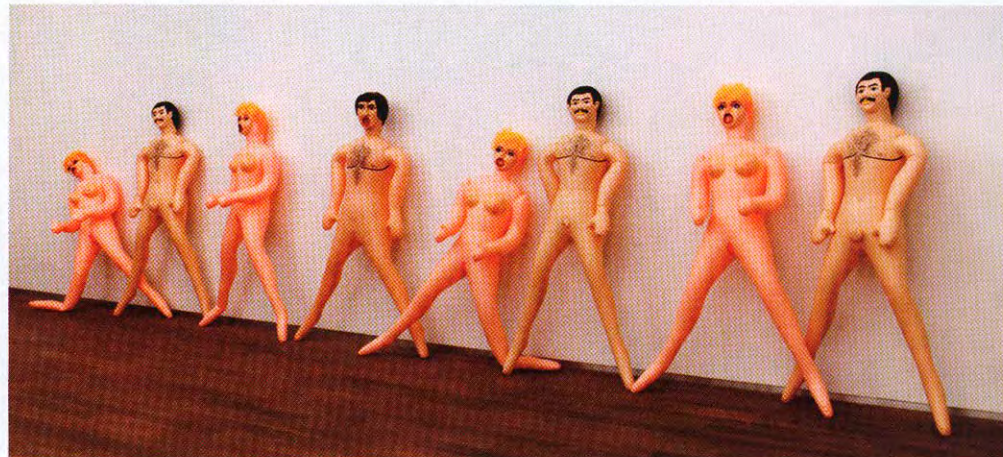
Below: Sturtevant, *Spinoza in Las Vegas*, 2008. Performance view, Tate Modern, London, November 1, 2008. Photo: Sheila Burnett.

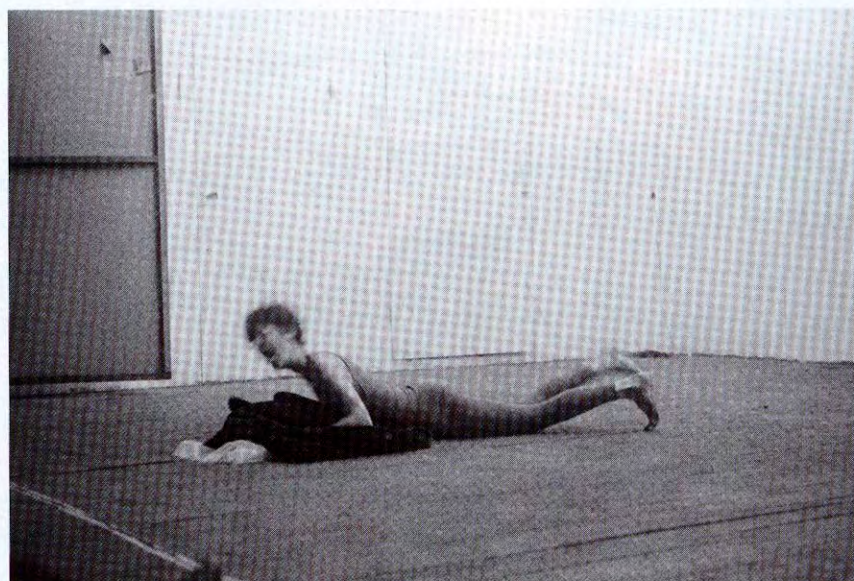
WE CAN'T GET ENOUGH. We love to rediscover **STURTEVANT**, to relive her relentlessly recombinant logic. We love the way her work multiplies, whether as hyperspeed sexed-up video clip or scandalously wholesale copy or the readymade we never really knew. And we've probably reinterpreted the legendary Paris-based artist as many times as she has reinterpreted the work of others. But over the past several years, Sturtevant has seemed to outstrip even the manic proliferation suggested by her reproductions of Warhol Marilyns and factory-line sex dolls. Her recent videos and theatrical environments unleash a terrifyingly decadent spawn of images and information. This is a system about to explode its limits, to consume itself—perhaps the apotheosis of what the artist deems “our pervasive cybernetic mode.” The fantastic screen-orifices in Sturtevant’s *Trilogy of Transgression*, 2004, and *Blow Job*, 2006, find new echoes in the amusement-park tunnel that swallows visitors in *House of Horrors*, 2010, and in the anthropophagic graphics of *Pac-Man* (working title), an animation piece currently in progress. The latter will debut—along with other new works and a refabrication of her *Duchamp Fresh Widow*, 1992—at the artist’s survey show opening at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm this month.

The heightened speed and force of Sturtevant’s recent work are actually reminiscent of her little-known, earlier embrace of performance in the 1960s. So on the eve of her latest retrospective, *Artforum* asked contributing editor **BRUCE HAINLEY**, Sturtevant’s frequent interlocutor, to unearth the artist’s long-obscured engagements with live action, choreography, and Happenings. What follows is a tale of missed encounters, epistolary exchanges, kinetic reenactments, dances of dances. But such a recursive loop is not only historical. It gives us that strange Sturtevant thrill, again.



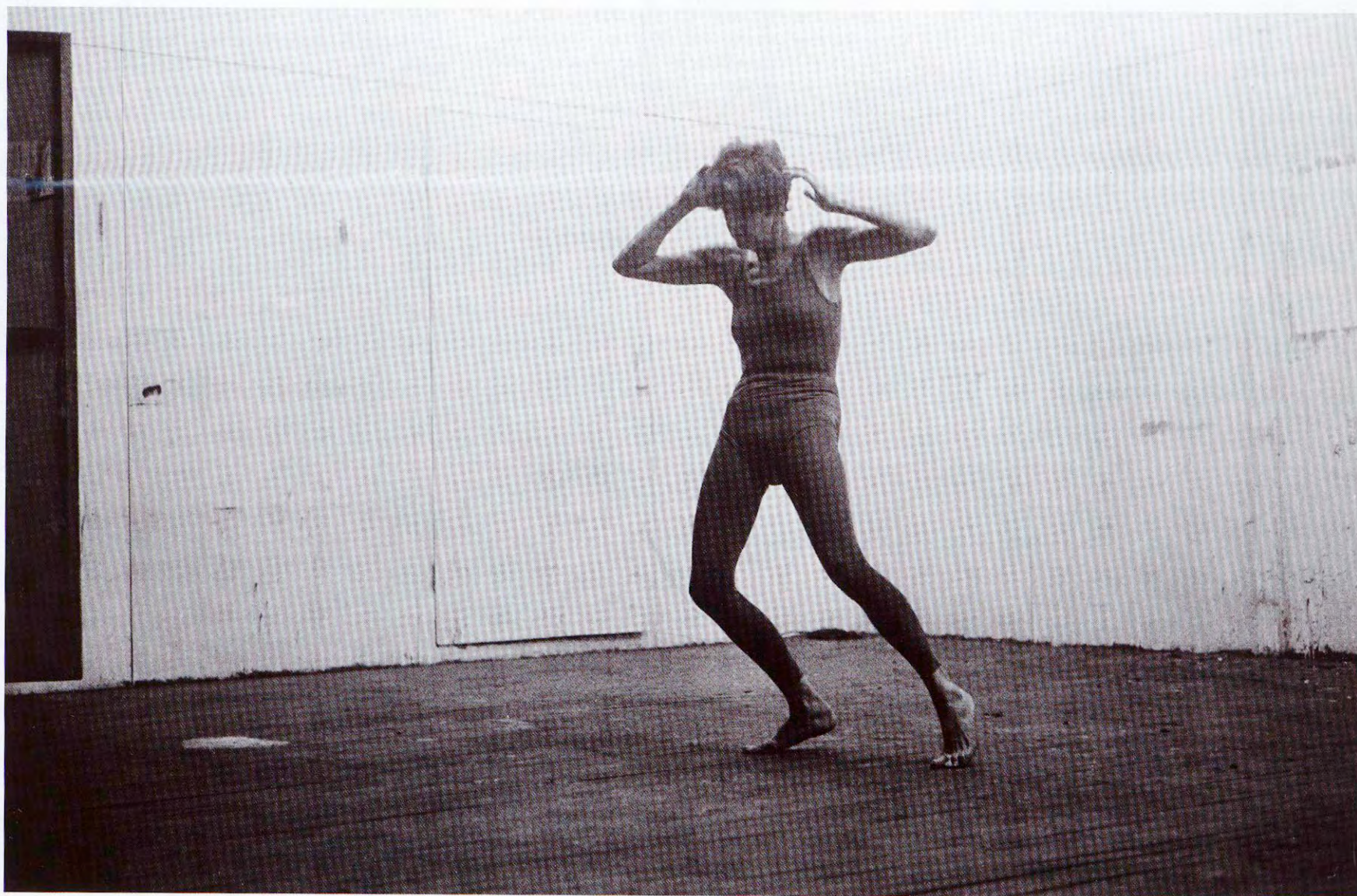
Below: Sturtevant, *Sex Dolls*, 2012, sex dolls. Installation view, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 2012. Photo: Arash Nassiri.





This and opposite page:
Sturtevant, *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes"*, 1967. Performance views,
 222 Bowery, New York, May 16,
 1967. Photos: Peter Moore/VAGA.

BRUCE HAINLEY ON THE EARLY PERFORMANCE WORK OF STURTEVANT



Sturtevant's response to queries about her dancing: "What's interesting about the Yvonne Rainer piece is why I did it—not that I did it."

CUE RAINER.

Elaine—Have gone to Calif. Don't despair. Keep working. You know the dance. In 2 days I shall send you complete details of the continuity plus program info. Sometimes one has to run away from everything. Yvonne.

Cue thinking about Sturtevant dancing.

What does it mean to "know the dance"? What dance? What is a fact? How does something come to be a fact? Sometimes facts run away from everything.

"COMPLETE DETAILS of the continuity plus program info."

Complete details fascinate. Of course they do.

But at the get-go it seemed that complete details about Sturtevant dancing had run or danced away: Other than within the distracting static of rumor, there appeared to be only a single reference in the printed record to Sturtevant's dancing—a lone *chaîné* of substantiation, accomplished in no small part by the editorial machinations of Genesis P-Orridge. (Yes, Genesis P-Orridge.)

In the first edition of the encyclopedic reference work *Contemporary Artists*, published in 1977 and edited by P-Orridge and Colin Naylor, Jane Bell noted: "For Sturtevant has from the beginning of her career [*sic*] as an artist made work by other artists—paintings, sculptures, films, dances and performances that have been exhibited before [*sic*], by such people as Claes Oldenburg, Man Ray, Duchamp, Eadward [*sic*] Muybridge, Yvonne Rainer, Roy Lichtenstein and others."

Sturtevant's Rainer rested in the historical record, but without complete details or program info—no title, no date, no specifics of any sort—and without continuity: There is no Sturtevant entry in any subsequent edition of the book.

As far as can be determined, the artist has never publicly revealed any specifics whatsoever about the dance Rainer knew she knew, but the postmark of

the postcard Rainer mailed to "Elaine" provides a date ("May 4, 1967") around which to begin to choreograph a search for more information about a Sturtevant dance that, Rainer's note makes clear, was being rehearsed for a performance soon to happen—and in front of an audience. Thus the jitters-calming "Don't despair. Keep working" from a highly trained professional dancer to someone who wasn't.

Rainer never recalled what Sturtevant performed in 1967, but about the communiqué itself, she remarked:

Very odd, that postcard. The date tells me exactly when and why I went off to CA but the rest of it is a mystery. I dimly remember that Elaine had asked to learn something of mine, but what it was and if she ever did it???? Have you asked her? I hope she's alive and well.

"You know the dance." What dance?

*I didn't know her well. She was an anomaly to me: fashionable upper East Sider, part of Rauschenberg's entourage (as I was for awhile), and her art that consisted of reconstructing other people's work. Ahead of her time, obviously, now with all these "re-makes" around. I once went to a dinner party in her townhouse. I remember what I wore and I remember she often wore a slim white quilted rancoat, Courreges-like [*sic*]. I also visited her Oldenburg "store" on the lower east side. Didn't take her too seriously at the time.*

Sorry I can't be of more help.

There is nothing about Rainer's statement that doesn't prepossess. Not the least of the provocations is the rendezvous of ellipses and question marks, which might as well be stand-ins for things otherwise occluded but accumulating, almost somnambulistically, in the very odd penumbra cast by Rainer's "help": punctuated placeholders for points questionably suspended, not only about the events of Sturtevant and Rainer, circa 1967, dancing a dance (what dance?) to completely different ends, but also about how certain information remains private even in the bright light thrown by Rainer on "exactly" when and why she went off to California.

Sturtevant's response to queries about her dancing: "What's interesting about the Yvonne Rainer piece is why I did it—not that I did it." Any follow-up was stymied by her insistence: "No, I think that's—I think that's enough."

All of which, as an answer, could be seen as frustrating.

Not enough.

With her statement, Rainer provides a matrix for how matters from long ago get remembered ("dimly"); for how much can remain a "mystery" (everything someone might want to know), even for those involved; and for how it all has something to

do with not being taken "too seriously."

And if someone who or something that's not been previously taken seriously starts to be taken seriously, what causes that to happen, and who decides when?

Anomalies, town houses, being ahead of one's time ("obviously"), and possessing no small degree of chic would seem to inhibit being taken "too seriously."

As would an art of schismatizing.

With what Rainer refers to as a "reconstructing," Sturtevant disrupts both the uses and misuses of history, while inducing something akin to amnesiac effects.

"PART OF RAUSCHENBERG'S entourage (as I was for awhile.)"

By 1967, Sturtevant, in addition to solo shows at Bianchini Gallery in New York and Galerie J in Paris, had participated in Oldenburg's *Washes*; in "9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering"; in Gene Swenson's "The Other Tradition" and "Art in the Mirror"; and in the group show to benefit E.A.T. at Leo Castelli—basically, in most events of any importance in the Big Apple's mind-fucking heyday.

At the climax of a panel signaling "the new interest in the '60s in combining mediums that had, heretofore, been clearly demarcated" broadcast on WBAI in New York in late 1966, Larry Rivers mused about what an "interesting experiment" it would be to "take someone else's work and do a version of it." Vouching for an interest in such experiments, Rauschenberg jumped in: "You mean like Elaine Sturtevant?" Rivers replied, "No," and didn't elaborate, but as another person within the tidal pull of Rauschenberg's entourage clarified: "Elaine was . . . around quite a bit—at Max's et al."

Contacting those artists who moved in, between, or around whatever might be construed as "part of Rauschenberg's entourage" and the Judson Dance Theater not only would be a way to flesh out networks of the New York art scene, circa 1967, and the productively promiscuous reach of Rauschenberg's influence but also would be a way to start figuring out what Sturtevant was doing with Rainer (what she did, why she did it).

Contact Robert Whitman, Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Ann Wilson, John Giorno, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Morris, various widows and widowers, miscellaneous slyboots, even, among others, Rauschenberg himself.

Some will never reply. Some will eventually reply, but not helpfully. "In response to your email I must say that I hardly remember an iota about Elaine."

A few of those who hardly remember an iota appeared on many dance and music programs with the artist or "met" her "for drinks" at her home, etc.

And of those who hardly remember an iota but

appeared on the programs of various Happenings or hobnobbed over cocktails, etc., with Sturtevant, there was even an individual, let her remain nameless forevermore, who performed with the artist in one of her films and claimed, "I hve [*sic*] no memory about that film. Are you sure it is me?"

That's history.

It's also a plan for how to succeed in show business.

THEN, OF COURSE, there's Steve Paxton.

A quicksilver exception to the mostly amnesiac status quo.

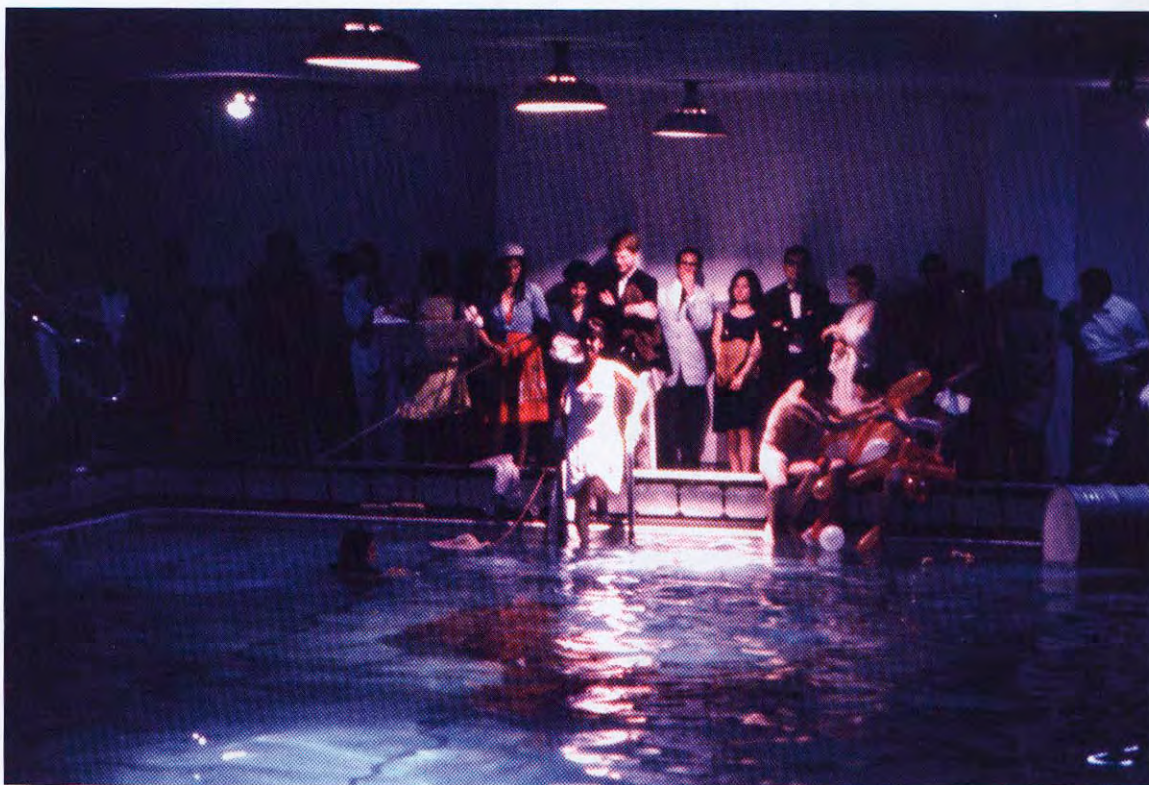
No wallflower in relation to the hubbub of what it might have meant to be "part of Rauschenberg's entourage," the dancer-choreographer rallied answers to questions prompted by nagging archival curiosities and outtakes: Paxton encased in blank plaster for the "Segal" (as in George) component of Sturtevant's *7th Avenue Garment Rack with Warhol Flowers*, 1965 ("Yes I recall it, in her studio. I have no idea why she asked me"); Paxton (in a photo posed by Ugo Mulas) watching TV with Christopher Rauschenberg while Sturtevant and Rauschenberg talk in the background ("It is clearly RR's studio at 809 Broadway"); Paxton in the control room for Rauschenberg's *Open Score*, 1966 ("I was the video mixer in the balcony. It was easy, a matter of learning a few switches. . . . Around this calm cloud, all hell was breaking loose. Engineers were working triple shifts, artists trying to create works around commissioned technology which sometimes didn't work as expected. I don't recall Elaine at all in this situation, though I expect she was there"); Paxton putting Sturtevant to work as a cast member of his *Physical Things*, 1966; Paxton at her *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, 1967 ("Yes. I assisted her"); Paxton slated for the role of Another Man in Sturtevant's *Picabia's Ballet Relâche*, 1967, canceled.

He had an interesting mind, joie de vivre, and a pretty body that could move and moved like no other, and there he was moving through what would too soon hibernate in aporia:

Elaine commissioned works from several of us. I recall her working with Yvonne Rainer.

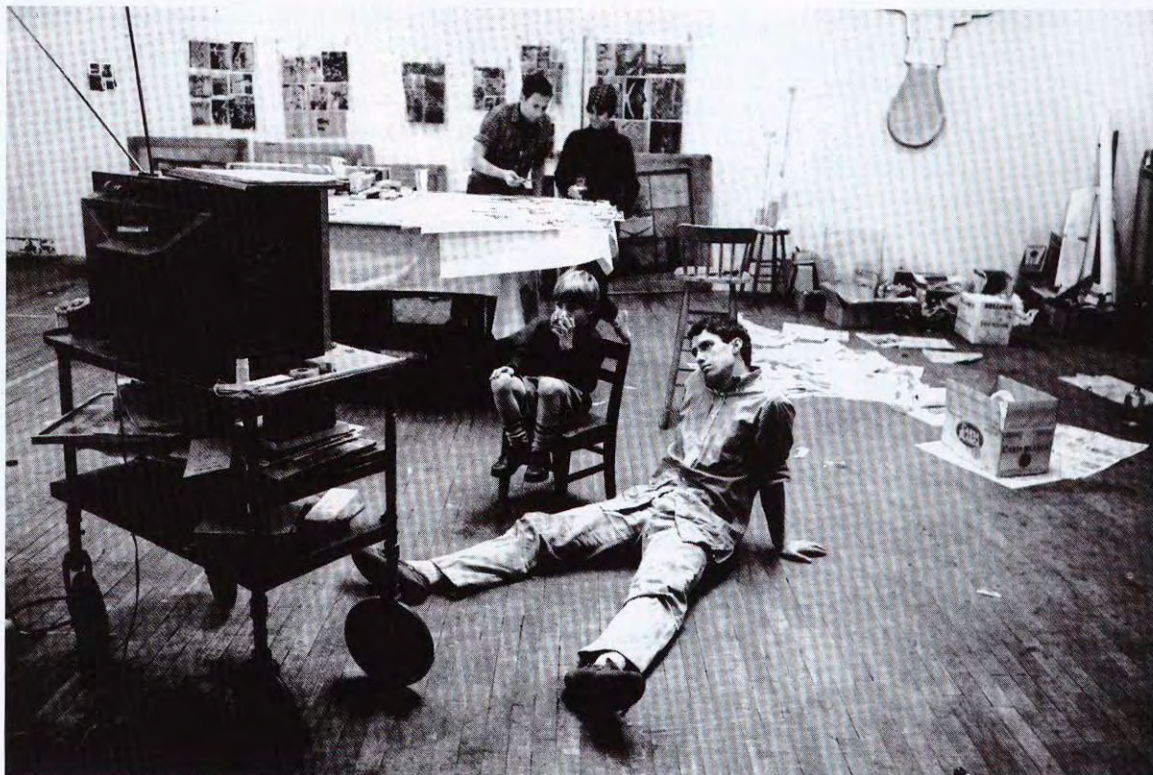
I think you are right, The Mind Is a Muscle is far too ambitious for Elaine to have done. On the other hand, so is Trio A. She had no physical training, and the dancer's memory for movement is a result of training. It may seem obvious, but Rainer's 62 solo Three Seascapes is a likely candidate. Ask if there was a white veil or overcoat involved.

Despite Paxton's generosity and his suggestion that the Rainer in question might have been *Three Seascapes*, no corroborating materials or witnesses emerged to prove that that was the case.



Above: Claes Oldenburg, *Washes*, 1965. Performance view, First New York Theater Rally, Al Roon's Health Club, New York, May 1965 (Sturtevant, center, in white). Photo: Robert McElroy/VAGA.

Below: Robert Rauschenberg and Sturtevant (rear), Christopher Rauschenberg (in chair), and Steve Paxton (on floor), Robert Rauschenberg's studio, New York, 1965. Photo: Ugo Mulas.





Sturtevant, *Study for Yvonne Rainer's "Three Seascapes,"* 1967.
Performance view, 222 Bowery, New York, May 16, 1967.
Photo: Peter Moore/VAGA.

BUT IF IT WERE SOMETHING like *Three Seascapes* that Sturtevant danced, what kind of thing was that? Rainer described the dance in 1974:

Three Seascapes: Solo in three parts: 1) Running around the periphery of the space in a black overcoat during the last movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto. 2) Traveling with slow-motion undulations on an upstage-to-downstage diagonal during La Monte Young's Poem for Tables, Chairs, Benches. 3) Screaming fit downstage right in a pile of white gauze and black overcoat.

Accounts of the dance's debut in 1962, at the Maidman Playhouse, weren't so neutral. One reviewer, not wishing to appear ungroovily out of step with any countercultural potential of the choreographer's experiments, called Rainer's work "far out" and "off beat."

And then there was Jill Johnston.

Jill fucking Johnston.

On the beat, doing her job, brilliantly, tweakily.

After admitting how "repetition could be a deadly bore" and demonstrating (courtesy of a quotation from *Lectures in America*) how and why Rainer "comes close to what Gertrude Stein was doing in her writing," Johnston got down to it:

In "Three Seascapes" Miss Rainer makes three

incidents employing the same method even more stringently. First she dog trots all over the stage, and sometimes lies down and gets up, wearing a black coat, to a luscious and amplified movement from the Rachmaninoff Second Piano Concerto. Two, she progresses ONCE across the stage, like a slow-motion spastic, if you can believe it, to the accompaniment of a number of tables and chairs moaning, scraping across the floor in the lobby ("Poem for Tables and Chairs," by Lamont [sic] Young). And three, she puts her black coat over a long piece of white gauze, lies down under both, and has a beautiful fit of screaming in a flying mess of coat and gauze.

Johnston would give *Three Seascapes* pride of place throughout the 1960s when considering Rainer's work. In her lively essay "Rainer" (which served as the program note for two evenings of dance Rainer would perform at the Avery Theater of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford in March 1965), Johnston, after emphasizing the importance of repetition, again via Stein's writing, zeroes in on what the dance was starting to mean, since, whatever its immediate jolts of pleasure, the new rarely strikes on its meanings in a similarly immediate enlightening flash, eureka-like, but, instead, arrives more slowly, thought rumbling like thunder in the distance.

In one of the three sections she wore a winter coat and kept running around the stage and sometimes she would lie down, then get up and start running again. The accompaniment was the most romantic movement of Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Concerto. I thought it was a spoof on romance, or Rachmaninoff, or the whole past idea of romantic music wedded to romantic dancing. But she says no, her idea was to shift the focus from the intricacy and intensity of the dance (with the music as background, in traditional practice) to the dance as the simplest thing she could think of to do, so that all the emotion and complexity and virtuosity would be in the music.

Johnston concludes her essay with special attention to the scream:

The screaming . . . belonged to a whole gamut of what a critic called "irresponsible noises" that she began to incorporate as expressive elements in her dances. Barking, grunting, mumbling, stammering, wailing.

A sonic rupture echoing the moaning and scraping across the floor of a number of tables and chairs, which La Monte Young's *Poem* already provided. Not unlike questions of the serious and the not, "irresponsible" and responsible noises operated dialectically alongside the kind of movements and moving Rainer brought into action. If the Rachmaninoff accompaniment in the second part of *Three Seascapes* shifted where "all the emotion and complexity and

virtuosity would be," the sounds and noises (some a literalization of Satie's *musique d'ameublement*), by stark contrast, allowed expressivity or its divestiture center stage, for delight as well as confusion.

Returning to *Three Seascapes* at different junctures of Rainer's early career, Johnston attempts to trace how Rainer's choreography became identified as her own by attending to her stripping of movement down to "the simplest thing she could think of to do"—the choreographer perhaps not quite yet manifestly saying no to emotion, no to intricacy, no to intensity (as she later infamously would) but rather formulating "unlicensed" modalities of emotion, intricacy, and intensity; situating gesture at the edge of expressivity, articulation; unleashing vocality as sheer force, while exposing the body as body.

Using years of training, skill, and motor memory—mastery?—not for virtuoso spectacles but, instead, for some sort of Prospero-like renunciation, Rainer was not the only artist thinking about these desubjectivizing or neutralizing aims: the tension between the virtuosic and the everyday, rallied by the potential of what could only be performed by an exchange between trained and untrained bodies; the range of motions and emotions when nondancers appear onstage in a dance. Many of the goings-on of the Judson Dance Theater and those involved in "Rauschenberg's entourage" tested limits of the various conventions of the performative and its part in taking apart the supposed unity of the self.

Over her years of watching Paxton's choreography transform, Johnston also noticed how the "performing bodies" of his troupe were no longer "like Paxton's, like the 'trained' ideal type body." Engaging the Whitmanesque possibilities of what gets brought on stage in his *Satisfyin' Lover*, 1967, Johnston continued:

And here they all were . . . thirty-two any old wonderful people . . . walking one after the other across the gymnasium in their any old clothes. The fat, the skinny, the medium, the slouched and slumped, the straight and tall, the bowlegged and knock-kneed, the awkward, the elegant, the coarse, the delicate, the pregnant, the virginal, the you name it, by implication every postural possibility in the postural spectrum, that's you and me in all our ordinary everyday who cares postural splendor. Like the famous ordinary people who are certain they will see and be seen whether they fall down or keep walking in a forest with or without other famous ordinary people there is a way of looking at things which renders them performance.

Anyone participating in "Rauschenberg's entourage" had to be open to the implications of that ordinary everyday who cares postural spectrum, the grace to be born and live as variously as possible, as well as what it would mean to make it all invisible or neutral.

Sturtevant was always already dancing, as Nietzsche said everyone must—always already thinking not across the art of the 1960s but into the structures that make such art, such thinking, possible.

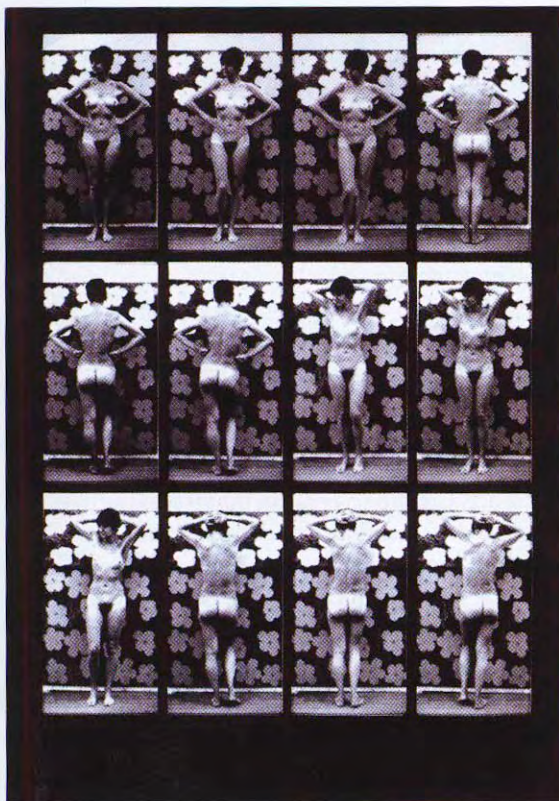
Sturtevant (right) at her *The Store of Claes Oldenburg*, 623 East Ninth Street, New York, 1967. Photo: Virginia Dwan.



ERASE AND REWIND.

Even without knowing, definitively, what Sturtevant danced, consider why she might have rendezvoused with Rainer at all, since Sturtevant was always already dancing, as Nietzsche said everyone must—always already thinking not across the art of the 1960s but into the structures that make such art, such thinking, possible. She was manifesting instead of writing manifestos.

Rather than construe her repetition via *performance* as distinct from or merely in relation to what she accomplishes via objects and images, confront the possibility that with *all* of her repetitions, Sturtevant was always *enacting*, manifesting, dynamically working through the implications of the aesthetic act. Creating a concept that traces the catalytic force of the aesthetic, its action, she not only dealt with the problem of how any given permutation, promise, proxy, or pirouette can be claimed as “art,” thereby breaking herself out of the lockdown of stylistic isms, but also *mobilized* art as a mind-blowing, space-time-shifting pursuit. Oh, yes, there *is* a way of “looking at things” that renders them performative and then some. At Bianchini Gallery in 1965, she exposed the intention of such actions—their implicit velocity and kinesis—with her *7th Avenue Garment Rack with Warhol Flowers*, its plaster “Segal” cast from Paxton’s body, wheeling a rack on which hung works “by” Arman, Stella, Oldenburg, Rosenquist, and Johns, among others: Rather than any readymades, a rack of off-the-rack aesthetics moved, via Seventh Avenue, so as to “push and impel thinking, to engender polemics, to ‘resist’ and to give visible action to dialectics.” Consider her art as a meditation on the onslaught of *speed*, its ambition not to reify successive (artistic as well as critical) styles but to confront what of being or becoming is outmoded when immediacy is no longer instantaneous or present enough: with ever more brutal acceleration, from the working stiff holding his own against the almost cybernetically circuited field of Sturtevant’s *Warhol Flowers* to the artist herself in her *Study for Muybridge Plate #97 Woman Walking*, 1966, a photographic sequence in which, nude, she strides past what appear to be iconic works of Rosenquist, Johns, and Lichtenstein but are really all Sturtevants; from premiering her Rainer dance to opening up *The Store of Claes Oldenburg* and then tackling Beuys actions; from the go-go boy go-going for her *Gonzalez-Torres Untitled (Go-Go Dancing Platform)*, 1995, to her making a clean getaway in her *Dillinger Running* works of 2000. By the time she’s tracking a sprinter from stock footage for a rousing sequence in her recent video barrage *Elastic Tango*, 2010, the artist should not really still have to be explaining her face-off with, among other matters, the fate of “man”



Above: Sturtevant, *Muybridge Plate #136*, 1966, black-and-white photographs, overall 23% x 15%".

Below: Poster for one of Sturtevant's *Dillinger Running* pieces, 2000.

buffeted by the hyperspeed of an existence already lapping him.

To spur these events, Sturtevant goes into action, deploying media contra medium-specificity, and through repetition—jump-cutting to a more pertinent scene—hacking the loop of the “same” to leak the extremity of difference. Repetition, durational as it is differential, catalyzed as a movement—of power and force. Emphatically and early on, the artist demonstrated that leap to concept with her *Relâche*, for which she staged a “cancellation” of a performance as the performance—a repetition of Picabia and Satie’s notorious eponymous 1924 “ballet,” which on the night of its announced opening kept the theater shut tight. Having enjoyed the resulting brouhaha from the relative calm of a nearby bar with Picabia and Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp himself (who appeared in René Clair’s *Entr’acte*, the cinematic component of the crucially multimedia revolt that bisected the theatrical goings-on) attended Sturtevant’s 1967 performance by approaching and then strolling away from the poster pasted on the venue’s door (STURTEVANT’S RELÂCHE) while keeping his taxi waiting. As Johnston wrote of the serious fun the artist was producing: “It was a total success. A cancellation can’t go wrong.” Although for too long hidden in a critico-historical fissure—whether due to

“discourses” still dutiful to certain symbolic notions of seriousness, career, style, and self (to everything, that is, that rushes cognition into recognition, in the sense of both recognizability and accolade, rather than, as Sturtevant would have it, jamming that entire cognitive itinerary) or to something more anxious and unconscious—the fission of the Sturt-event and its aftershocks weren’t lost on Duchamp. The latter was, after all, no arriviste to thinking madly about territories opened up by cancellation: cancellation not as negation but as perpetual splitting and ricochet, everything released back into the flux of becoming. The sly old *respirateur* sent Sturtevant a note not long after her 1967 “theatrical,” acknowledging that when he returned to Manhattan the following October “maybe . . . you will be announcing ‘Relâche 1968.’”

FOR STURTEVANT to make a work by Rainer a) jettisons the notion that her “sources” were “Pop” or that what she was up to was to out-Pop Pop; b) forecloses efforts to characterize her pursuits as simply a reaction against the art market; c) affirms the importance of her contribution to the liberation of aesthetics from conventional medium identity; d) questions what it means to be serious or ambitious and asks who and what garners attention, and by what means; e) renders, physically, the fact that, as Rainer stated, “dance is hard to see,” by performing its unseeability, the concepts shadowing its existence; f) puts her body on the line, center stage.

Given those “givens,” what might pictures of anything that Sturtevant danced be expected to show?

The artist caught in various moments of a short circuit of movement (onrush, harlequinade, prostration) braved for unverifiable intent. No captions.

Which is just what scans of pictures of Sturtevant dancing, when obtained from the artist, really did show—everything and almost nothing, taciturn documents whose Rainer-related purview was suggested by costumes and poses but barely, vaguely. No details, no continuity.

The artist mum. (Which could be seen as frustrating, although if she had relented, finally relinquishing “why” she did it or naming “what” exactly it was she did, would anyone have dogged the matter?)

But then the original prints, flipped over in the archive, revealed a photographer’s stamp: Peter Moore’s.

There was also a date: May 16, 1967.

VAGA, the Visual Artists and Galleries Association, represents Moore’s estate, which is executed by the photographer’s widow, Barbara Moore. She soon provided fugitive (and greatly anticipated) specifics.

By the time of his death, in 1993, Peter Moore had taken more than half a million photographs of performances by the sprawling Judson-Fluxus-

