where (in 1964) we did the piece three or four times a week for six to eight weeks, it was very difficult to do a completely different thing every night. A couple of times we were in such sterile situations that Alex Hay, my assistant, and I would actually have to be part of the set. The first time it happened was in Dartington, the school in Devon. That place was inhabited by people with a very familiar look - that Black Mountain beatnik kind of look - but they occupied the most fantastic and beautiful old English building, all of whose shrubs were trimmed. There was nothing rural or rustic or unfinished anywhere. For the first time, there was absolutely nothing to use. There was a track at the very back of the stage that had lights in it, so the dancers couldn't use that space. About an hour before the performance, I asked Alex whether he had any shirts that needed ironing, which was a nice question to ask Alex because he always did and he always ironed his own shirts. So we got two ironing boards and put them up over some blue lights that were back there. When the curtain opened, there were the dancers and these two people ironing shirts. It must have looked quite beautiful, but we can't be sure absolutely. But from what I could feel about the way it looked and the lights coming up through the shirts, it was like a live passive set, like live decor. It didn't occur to me then but it does now that it might have been difficult to tell whether we were choreography or set. I knew and I assumed it would be perfectly clear. Knowing that my job was to do decor, it might have been in bad taste, but I did it in all innocence. [...]

The first piece I did, *Pelican,* I had no intention of being in; but since I didn't know much about actually making a dance, I used roller skates as a means to freedom from any kind of inhibitions that I would have. That already gives you limitations - puts you in a certain area that you must deal with.

Kostelanetz This is an example of how your choice of physical ideas determines your possibilities.

Rauschenberg it was a using of the limitations of the material as a freedom that would eventually establish the form. I auditioned dancers for the piece; and to my surprise, I found that dancers who had skated when they were children, and some of them quite well, couldn't roller skate now because of their dance training. They froze, and it was very awkward. They needed a kind of abandon to actually do it. You see, in their thinking, dancers have an ongoing dialogue between themselves and the floor, and I had put wheels between them and the floor. They couldn't hear the floor any more, and their muscles didn't know where they were.

Kostelanetz Did roller-skating movement become the syntax of the piece or a unifying image?

Rauschenberg No, it was just a form of locomotion. T the dance too. It was just that once I established the the piece a dance and didn't want it to be a skating ac ingredients had to adjust to that; so that Carolyn Brot.................. „ .кл sRdies was dancing on points, which is just as arbitrary a way of moving. It would not have occurred to me- well, once I say it, it occurs to me and I think it could be done - that someone could have possibly *walked* in that piece. Like when you do a black-and-white painting, you just give up the idea of different colours, even though you could put colours in. But if your focus is on the black and white, then that's where you are. [...]

other wheels in vas going to call lehow the other „as not on skates,

Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Kostelanetz, extracts from Robert Rauschenberg', in Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (New York: Dial Press, 1968) 80 83.

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When Yvonne Rainer started using the term 'postmodern' in the early 1960s to categorize the work she and her peers were doing at Judson Church and other places, she meant itina primarily chronological sense. Theirs was the generation that came after modern dance, which was itself originally an inclusive term applied to nearly any theatrical dance that departed from ballet or popular entertainment. By the late 1950s, modern dance had refined its styles and its theories, and had emerged as a recognizable dance genre. It used stylized movements and energy levels in legible structures (theme and variations, ABA, and so on) to convey feeling tones and social messages. The choreography was buttressed by expressive elements of theatre such as music, props, special lighting and costumes. The aspirations of modern dance, anti-academic from the first, were simultaneously primitivist and modernist. Gravity, dissonance and a potent horizontality of the body were means to describe the stridency of modern life, as choreographers kept one eye on the future while casting the other to the ritual dance of non-Western culture.' Though they were especially conscious of their oppositional role to modern dance, the early postmodern choreographers, possessed of an acute awareness of a historical crisis in dance as well as in the other arts, recognized that they were both bearers and critics of two separate dance traditions. One was the uniquely twentieth-century phenomenon of

modern dance; the other was the balletic, academic *danse de l'école,* with its strict canons of beauty, grace, harmony, and the equally potent, regal verticality of the body extending back to the Renaissance courts of Europe. Rainer, Simone Forti, Steve Paxton and other postmodern choreographers of the sixties were not united in terms of their aesthetic. Rather, they were united by their radical approach to choreography, their urge to reconceive the medium of dance. [...]

The early postmodern choreographers saw as their task the purging and melioration of historical modern dance, which had made certain promises in respect to the use of the body and the social and artistic function of dance that had not been fulfilled. Rather than freeing the body and making dance accessible even to the smallest children, rather than bringing about social and spiritual change, the institution of modern dance had developed into an esoteric artform for the intelligentsia, more remote from the masses than ballet. The bodily configurations modern dance drew on had ossified into various stylized vocabularies; dances had become bloated with dramatic, literary and emotional significance; dance companies were often structured as hierarchies; young choreographers were rarely accepted into an implicit, closed guild of masters. (Ballet, for obvious reasons, was not acceptable as an alternative to modern dance. So something new had to be created.) Although Merce Cunningham had made radical departures from classical modern dance, his work remained within certain technical and contextual restraints - that is, his vocabulary remained a specialized, technical one, and he presented his dances in theatres for the most part. Cunningham is a figure who stands on the border between modern and postmodern dance. His vertical, vigorous movement style and his use of chance (which segments not only such elements as stage space, timing and body parts, but also meaning in the dance) seem to create a bodily image of a modern intellect. In his emphasis on the formal elements of choreography, the separation of elements such as decor and music from the dancing, and the body as the sensuous medium of the artform, Cunningham's practice is modernist; his work and the theories of John Cage, his collaborator, formed an important base from which many of the ideas and actions of the postmodern choreographers sprang, either in opposition or in a spirit of extension. In a sense, Cunningham moved away from modern dance by synthesizing it with certain aspects of ballet. Those who came after him rejected synthesis altogether.[2]

By breaking the rules of historical modern dance, and even those of the avant-garde of the fifties (including not only Cunningham, but also such choreographers as Anna Halprin, James Waring, Merle Marsicano, Aileen Passloff and others),[3] the postmodern choreographers found new ways to foreground the medium of dance rather than its meaning. Their programme fit well with a cultural trend given expression in Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation,* a book of essays written between 1962 and 1965. In the title essay, Sontag calls for a transparent art - and criticism - that will not 'mean', but will illuminate and open the way for experience. 'What is important now', Sontag wrote, 'is to recover our senses.'

We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all... The function of criticism should be to«show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.[4]

The dances by the early postmodern choreographers were not cool analyses of forms but urgent reconsiderations of the medium. The nature, history and function of dance as well as its structures were the subjects of the postmodern inquiry. A spirit of permissiveness and playful rebellion prevailed, foreshadowing the political and cultural upheavals of the late sixties. The younger generation of choreographers showed in their dances that they departed not only from classical modern dance with its myths, heroes and psychological metaphors, but also from the elegance of ballet and even from postmodern dance's closest influences. The breakaway period lasted roughly from 1960 to 1973. Within that time, the first eight years saw an initial bursting of forms and definitions, and several major themes of postmodern dance were set forth: references to history; new uses of time, space and the body; problems of defining dance.

The first of these themes was, in a sense, a way of looking back, of acknowledging the heritage these choreographers had set out to repudiate. Through references to other dance traditions, often couched in ironic terms - such as Rainer's screaming fit in a pile of white tulle in *Three Seascapes* (1962), or David Gordon's instructions for how to make a successful modern dance in *Random Breakfast* (1963) - these pieces set themselves in dialogue with their own history.

The second and third set of themes looked at the present and the future, asking through practice what new dance could be. In works like Simone Forti's *Huddle* (1961), in which the performers take turns crawling over the huddled group for about ten minutes, or in Elaine Summers' *For Carola* (1963), which consisted of lying down very slowly, or in Steve Paxton's *Flat* (1964), which included getting dressed and undressed in unhurried real time and striking frozen poses, or in Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), a catalogue of uninflected movements, time was flattened and de-theatricalized, stripped of the dynamics of phrasing typical of modern dance and ballet: preparation, climax, recovery.

The use of space was explored both in terms of its articulation in the dance (i.e. the use of architectural details in the design of the dance or the exploration of a surface other than the floor) and in terms of place (i.e. art gallery, church or

loft as venue, instead of a theatre with a proscenium stage). Forti, never a member of the Judson Dance Theatre, presented her two earliest works, *Rollers* and *See-Saw* (both 1960), in an art gallery, and her evening of dance constructions (1961) in Yoko Ono's loft on Chambers Street, where the audience walked around the relatively static dances as if they were sculptures. Not only was her use of space a break from the practice of modern dance, but the particular places she used shifted the locus of her activity from the dance world to the art world and raised the choreographer's status to that of a serious artist. Trisha Brown danced on a chicken-coop roof and in a parking lot. Her Equipment Pieces set people walking down buildings and trees and on walls. The members of the Judson Dance Theatre performed in the church's gym and in its sanctuary, as well as in a roller-skating rink in Washington, D.C., and in the tiny Gramercy Arts Theatre, which had a proscenium stage so small that it reduced all the dances to minimum action. Paxton gave his *Afternoon* (1961) on a farm in New Jersey, and he and Deborah Hay performed on the grounds of a country club in Monticello. New York, in 1965. By the late sixties, entire outdoor dance festivals were being organized by producers; the impetus towards performing outside moved from the choreographer's aesthetic choice to the producer's marketing tactics. And also by the late sixties, galleries and museums had become the most common venue for postmodern dance performance. This was possibly partly because visual artists moved away from making objects in the sixties, presenting performances or videotape installations, rather than things to be stationed on the walls or on the floor. In this context, dance events fit both aesthetically and practically into the programming of museums and art festivals both in the United States and in Europe.

Issues of the body and its powerful social meanings were approached head on. The body itself became the subject of the dance, rather than serving as an instrument for expressive metaphors. An unabashed examination of the body and its functions and powers threaded through the early postmodern dances. One form it took was relaxation, a loosening of the control that has characterized Western dance technique. Choreographers deliberately used untrained performers in their search for the 'natural' body. Another form was the release of pure energy in dances such as Carolee Schneemann's *Lateral Splay* (1963), in which dancers hurtle through space until they meet an object or another person, and Brown, Forti and Dick Levine's 'violent contact' improvisations (1961). Yet another form was the use of nudity, in works such as Paxton and Rainer's *Word Words* (1963) and Robert Morris' *Site* (1964) and *Waterman Switch* (1965). A number of dances involved eating onstage, and several of Paxton's works used inflatable tunnels that were reminiscent of digestive tracts. Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964) and Rainer's 'Love' duet in *Terrain* (1963) dealt with explicitly sexual imagery in different ways.[5]

The problem of defining dance for the early postmodern choreographers was related to the inquiries into time, space and the body, but extended beyond them, embracing the other arts and asserting propositions about the nature of dance. Games, sports, contests, the simple acts of walking and running, the gestures involved in playing music and giving a lecture, and even the motion of film and the mental action of language were presented as dances. In effect, the postmodern choreographers proposed that a dance was a dance not because of its content but because of its context - i.e. simply because it was framed as a dance. This opening of the borders of dance was a break from modern dance that was qualitatively different from issues of time, space and the body. To be nude was more extreme than to be barefoot, but it was still an action of the same sort. To call a dance a dance because of its functional relation to its context (rather than because of its internal movement qualities, or content) was to shift the terms of dance theory, aligning it with the contemporary 'institutional' theory of art.[6] [...]

1 For an explication of traditional modern dance structures, see the three bibles of modern dance composition: Louis Horst, *Pre-Classic Dance Forms* (New York: The Dance Observer (1937); reprinted Dance Horizons, 1972); Louis Horst and Carroll Russell, *Modern Dance Forms* (San Francisco: Impulse Publications, 1961); and Doris Humphrey, *The Art of Making Dances* (New York; Rinehart, 1959; reprinted Grove Press, 1962); see also the many reviews and histories of modern dance.

2 [footnote 6 in source] For descriptions and analyses of Cunningham's work, see Merce Cunningham, *Changes: Notes on Choreography,* ed. Frances Starr (New York: Something Else Press, 1968); Sally Banes and Noel Carroll, 'Cunningham and Duchamp', *Ballet Review,* no. 11 (Summer 1983) 73-9; Roger Copeland, 'The Politics of Perception', *The New Republic* (17 November 1979).

3 [7] On the avant-garde of the 1950s, see Jill Johnston, 'The New American Modern Dance', in *The New American Modern Arts,* ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Collier Books. 1967) 162-93, and Selma Jeanne Cohen, 'Avant-Garde Choreography', *Criticism,* no. 3 (Winter 1961) 16-35; reprinted in three parts in *Dance Magazine,* no. 36 (June 1962): 22-4, 57: (July 1962) 29; 31; 58 (August 1962)45; 54-6.

4 [8] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966) 14.

5 19j These and many of the following dances are described in the body of *Terpsichore in Sneakers* and in Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body:Judson Dance Theatre 1962-64* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983).

6 [10] On the institutional theory of art, see George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

Sally Banes, extracts from introduction to the paperback edition, *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) xiii-xviii.