

A Fictional Choreographic Encounter within a Fictional Choreographic Encounter: Hauer with Rainer

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It might be said that Hauer's practice rests on the presupposition that choreography is everywhere and hence consists in identifying choreographic situations where there are seemingly none. Yet her work does not suggest that everything is choreographed; it rather looks at the condition under which choreography might emerge. If many dancers and choreographers have asked what might constitute dance, a choreographed movement, or movement itself, Hauer, instead, might lean towards and shift that question to "when is there choreography"?

This questioning of the possibility of movement and performance, in Hauer's case, takes place within the field of the visual arts, through the use of an array of mediums ranging from writing, video, photography, and graphic work, most of which stage or are based on performances, constellated around what she calls "choreographic encounters". If this is not formalised or explicitly thematised in her work, one such encounter might be with Yvonne Rainer—a highly important figure for Hauer's work—and the secularising and objectifying of dance¹ that she initiated: an encounter in the form of choreographic movement, bringing Hauer close to Rainer.

In 1965, Rainer wrote: "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to

seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved."² From her early days with the Judson Dance Theatre and her engagement with Minimalism to her turn to filmmaking with *Lives of performers* (1972)—marking the integration of narrative elements in her work—a certain radical agnosticism runs through Rainer's work. As such, her oeuvre appears to produce a catalogue of the body's skills and possibilities, while at the same time seeming to test that body against its social and political conditions. Thereby Rainer conducts a quasi-physiological analysis of its somatic qualities and functions, in their entanglement within linguistic and communication systems.

In this regard, we may wonder about the nature of the encounter between Hauer and Rainer and to what extent we might be able to make sense of it. Do Rainer's strategies and attitudes towards the body, the stripping bare of dance from all traces of the ego and conventions, constitute a model to think about Hauer's practice? Let us turn to two video works by Hauer: *Semaphore Dance* (2014) and *speech is to be looked at* (2015). The first also exists as a graphic work (*Semaphore Dance*, 2015), which rendered on photographic paper spatialises parts of the performance text of its video equivalent: *speech is to be looked at*—the second video work. Hence, all three pieces operate through such dynamics of intertextuality—the content of one work reproduced in another by way of a game of associations—and intermediality, as well as through a process of translation that pro-

1 Annette Michelson, "Yvonne Rainer, Part One: The Dancer and the Dance", *Artforum* (January 1974), <https://artforum.com/inprintarchive/id=34238> (accessed August 2015).

2 Yvonne Rainer, "Some Retrospective Notes on a Dance for 10 People and 12 Mattresses Called 'Parts of Some Sextets,' Performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March 1965", *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (Winter 1965), p. 168.

duces its own system of equivalence: one piece existing as moving-image work and in printed matter. Etymologically “semaphore” — from *sema* and *phoros* — means “bearer of sign or signal”; Hauer thus “anatomises the game of communication”.³ Furthermore, her body acts as the very physical bearer of these signs, “dancing” them into a sentence, attesting to the fact that language is never disembodied but is a technology, inscribed in material apparatuses.

While *Semaphore Dance* uses semaphore language, in *speech is to be looked at* Hauer produces her own idiosyncratic visual dialect. Still photographs show plates of canvas bearing graphic depictions of a skull, a pipe, an egg, or a chicken, as well as sign-language letters. The title of the piece unfolds as the visual sequence nears completion. While each plate appears in a linear order, the combination of sign language and pictures emphasises the former’s pictoriality, with language being redefined as a visual question. This very structured mode of display is contrasted by Hauer’s feet holding the plates, suggesting that this well-ordered scene hides an off-screen situation in which the artist performs an improbable contorted dance.

In writing about aesthetics, anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan has noted that signs and symbols result from a gradual process of “intellectualization of sensations”. A process which “has stripped the real forms of their contents and kept only the signs. Writing comes after visual aesthetics, its images being purely intellectual and its symbol completely interiorized”.⁴ From this perspective, it could be said that Hauer’s constellations of linguistic, bodily, and material objects contest and reorder this relationship between sign, symbol, writing, and aesthetics, extracting it from its historicity. This is not without reminding us of Rainer pondering on the formation of

the subject through language: “She knows that thought is not something privileged, autonomous, originitive, and that the formulation ‘Cogito ergo sum’ is, to say the least, inaccurate. ... Yet all the same magical, seductive, narrative properties of ‘Yes I was talking ...’ draw her with an inevitability that makes her slightly dizzy. She stands trembling between fascination and skepticism. She moves obstinately between the two.”⁵

Moving between the two poles of language, concrete and expressive, between sign and object, might be what defines the “common notion” shared by both Hauer and Rainer, “common to all minds [...] to the extent that they are first the idea of something which is common to all bodies”.⁶

3 As rightly put by Natalie Ferris.

4 André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge MA, and London: MIT Press, 1993), pp. 271–73.

5 Yvonne Rainer, “Looking Myself in the Mouth”, *October* 17 (Summer 1981), pp. 65–66.

6 Gilles Deleuze, “Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza’s Concept of Affect”, *Cours de Vincennes*, 24 January 1978, http://www.gold.ac.uk/media/deleuze_spinoza_affect.pdf (accessed August 2015).