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**How Dances Signify: *Trio A* and the Myth of Ordinary Movement**  
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## How Dances Signify: *Trio A* and the Myth of Ordinary Movement

*Jill Sigman, New York City*

### Introduction

I recently found myself in a discussion with some academics of a philosophical bent who know that I am a philosopher and that I also make dances. Knowing that I take dance to be a vehicle for intellectual communication, they thought that, at last, I might provide the long awaited answers to their questions. "But how can you," they asked perplexedly, "refute an argument in movement?" The question makes me laugh, for although dances have meaning and philosophical arguments have meaning, making dance is not doing philosophy, and I have no interest in refuting arguments in movement. But you can see how they might be confused. Dance has left behind the codified gestures of the Romantic ballet, the conventions that endowed a movement of the hands with recognizable semantic value. No longer able to see dance as a kind of semaphore, as viewers, how do we go on?

My dance students often experience the same vertigo. In a workshop on the history of American modern dance, I gave an exercise--a task dance--based on the explorations of the Judson Dance Theater in the 1960's. A group of students sat in a circle, each whispered instructions for a task to the next, and the rest of us watched the mayhem that followed. One person tried to shake the hand of another person who tried to take the T-shirt off of a person who tried to remain lying on the ground. Another person tried to sweep the floor free of the two who were wrestling on it until she was picked up by someone attempting to blindfold her... Everyone agreed that it was hilarious, but not everyone was content. "It's really fun," said one woman, " but if I paid to see this, I'd want my money back." I asked her why. "Well, what does it mean?" she said.

True, it's hard to see how the sweeping and the blindfolding and the wrestling could refute arguments in movement. In fact, it's hard to see how this chaos could accrue meaning in even a more general way. There was much about the postmodern dance of the 1960's that provoked the same incomprehension, both then and, from those not so familiar with the canon of American dance history, now. In dance, as in life, the sixties was a time of great change: rebellion against tradition and constraint, experimentation and innovation, renewed interest in politics, populism and equality. People began to use dance to say new things and to find new ways to use it to say them. And the results of such efforts and experiments in dance, what we now in fact call "postmodern dance", prompted many viewers to wonder if, exciting as they were, such things had meaning, how they had meaning, and very often if they even *were* dance.

But in the early sixties there was room for dance to raise such questions. Sally Banes describes the political climate that both enabled and permitted such philosophically and politically challenging dance:

*Expectations were rising after the economically and culturally stagnant decade of the Fifties. And now the arts seemed to hold a privileged place in that democratic vision, not merely as a reflection of a vibrant rejuvenated American society, but as an active register of contemporary consciousness--- as its product, and also as its catalyst. The Kennedy-era White House sponsored ballet performances and enjoyed European couture and cuisine, but the youthful, glamorous First Family also played touch football and danced the Twist. The very spirit--and economy--that could generously support elite culture paved the way for a distinctly twentieth-century, postwar, postindustrial American avant-garde art: democratic yet sophisticated, vigorous and physical, playful yet down-to-earth, freely mixing high and low, academic and vernacular traditions, genres and media. There was a feeling--so unlike the early 1990s-- that all things were possible... and permitted.*<sup>(1)</sup>

What we learn from the 1960's explorations of meaning in dance is that our ideas about meaning were wrong. Dance is not the artistic semaphore that the academics were seeking, where arabesques constitute counterexamples and movement passages are refutations. Nor is it, as they wanted quickly to conclude instead, meaningless-- merely decorative, a bauble to be savored for the sake of aesthetic pleasure alone. There is certainly something between fitting the model of natural language and existing solely as sensuous form. What that middle ground is, how dances can mean and still not be reducible to natural language, is the subject of this paper.<sup>(2)</sup>

Let's consider a seminal work of sixties postmodern dance, Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*. *Trio A*, or *The Mind is a Muscle*, Part I, has been performed as a solo, as a trio, and in relay teams of ten. It has been taught to hundreds of people, dancers and non-dancers, had incarnations in eight different dances, and has been quoted in improvisational performances.<sup>(3)</sup> It was first performed in 1966 and became not only a signature piece for Rainer but a sort of signature of the times.<sup>(4)</sup> Here are two statements about it by members of the "danceworld" (emphasis is mine):

*Approached at one level Trio A can be seen simply as an undifferentiated choreographic blob, a bland series of unmotivated shuffles and shrugs. At another level, however, this almost diabolically didactic exercise can change the way one looks at, and thinks about, movement. It **forces** one away from the waiting for the fouetté syndrome and **suggests** that 'natural' or 'ordinary' movement can have intrinsic interest and beauty. If theatrical artifice constantly replaces the simple and the direct, it **seems to argue**, then we have lost a great deal.*<sup>(5)</sup>

*Trio A **tells** us of a world in which people use their bodies with skill, intelligence, coordination, and economy. The skill it embodies is an unpretentious one which, though it requires effort and concentration, does not demand any special status or training for its proper performance. The dance **speaks of** a healthy, direct joy in the body's capabilities, in its powers of memory and organizational faculties, as well as 'its actual weight, mass, and unenhanced physicality.*<sup>(6)</sup>

These analyses of *Trio A* attribute meaning to the dance. More specifically, they grant it the ability to suggest, to repudiate, to speak of-- indeed to force us away from looking at dance in a certain way. This seems a lot for a dance to do! The real question to be grappled with is how does the dance manage to do those things? If *Trio A* can in fact say something about natural movement or who can dance or what sort of thing dance can be, how does it say such things?<sup>(7)</sup>

By using the word "say" in this context, I do not mean to suggest that dance functions the way language does, that it deals in propositions that are either true or false. I am not asking how dance can do what language does, nor trying to import a theory of meaning from philosophy of language (as if that were such a simple matter), nor asking how dance differs from language. I am asking something much more basic and fuzzy: how does a dance convey something? How does it function cognitively? Or to put the question in a more accessible and general way, we might ask, how do dances mean?

But meaning is a messy thing. I take it that dance has the ability to communicate intellectual content. But talk about meaning tends to involve more metaphysical commitment than that. In the interest of staying metaphysically agnostic, of trying to keep the starting question as simple and as unladen with assumption as possible, I will consider not how dances *mean* but how they *signify*.<sup>(8)</sup> I use "signification" here in the most attenuated sense possible. Different philosophers will have various more robust notions of signification; for example, according to Goodman, signification amounts to symbolization and so to reference. But to assume such a view would be to stack the cards in advance. Signification, at this point, is merely a vehicle for asking how dances convey their content. To put that question as straightforwardly as possible, I will ask *how dances signify*.<sup>(9)</sup> And to continue to speak more colloquially, I'll often speak about how and what dances can *say*, but without thereby attributing to them what we might attribute to a speaker making an utterance in natural language.

So, how do dances signify? This is a question we can hardly begin to answer in a satisfying way by thinking about it in such general terms. And so, it is worthwhile to spend time wrestling with an example in the hope that we might learn more about the nitty-gritty of signification. The postmodern period in dance is an especially fruitful place to begin. Works of that period pique our curiosity; they make us take notice. A work in which people writhe naked in wet paint with raw chickens and fish does not seem innocuous and empty. It can't be dismissed as a mere decoration, something designed for passive viewing pleasure. Such works make us notice that they are saying something, doing something: rejecting, showing, challenging, arguing, questioning... And in seeming to do such things, the works of this period lead us to ask how they signify.

Although this is a question that can be asked of all works, those of the postmodern period seem to beg for the question to be asked. Perhaps they themselves even pose the question. Before the sixties, dance was more easily taken to be decorative, not to signify at all. Or, given examples from the Romantic ballet or Denishawn exotica, it might be possible to take dance to signify by simple mimesis. Dance itself didn't seem caught up in such worries. Dances like *Trio A* may have been necessary to raise the question about

signification. In light of this, I take *Trio A* to be an especially appropriate subject for exploration; it is a work which, conscious of such issues about signification, perhaps highlights features of dance that are harder to recognize in other works. I will thus devote this essay to the question of how *Trio A* signifies in the hope that a detailed case study will bring more insight in the long run.

## **Discussion of *Trio A***

### ***Background***

To begin to answer this question we need to look much more closely at *Trio A*. *Trio A* was in many ways the evolutionary product of those demythologizing tendencies of 1960's dance, so we need to know where those came from, how postmodern dance was different from the half century of "modern dance" that came before it. This might seem like a digression to some, but context may play a role in signification and the role of context is certainly more likely to be noticeable if we know something about it.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, modern dance grew out of diverse movement traditions and institutions. It rebelled against the European ballet, and in doing so defined itself in contrast to it. It drew upon the Follies or popular entertainment circuit, which often involved pseudo-ethnic or "oriental" dance. And it adopted the barefoot physicality of the American calisthenics and physical fitness movements of the early 1900's, which in particular provided new, more athletic ways for men to dance.<sup>(10)</sup>

In the thirties and forties, Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey developed their respective dance techniques, new movement vocabularies that were the basis for their dramatic, predominantly psychological choreographic works. They sought to codify dance, to give it rigor and foundation, for after all, they were making something out of nothing; they were creating a new art form. Their works were concerned with heavy ideological and mythic themes: the struggle against Fascism, the role of women in society, the confrontation of psychological spectres and demons. They danced as stars in their own works and were strong women, not only in their portrayals of mythic figures but in their virtuosic show of their own dance techniques. Both Graham's revolutionary use of the contraction and Humphrey's emphasis on fall and recovery required great physical strength and extensive training.<sup>(11)</sup>

In the fifties, Merce Cunningham rejected their psychodrama and presented cool, technically virtuosic explorations of chance procedures, stressing the autonomy of dance from other artistic media. Through artistic collaborations, the most famous that with John Cage, he showed far more than his predecessors that dance was an independent art form. The dance could exist in the same space as the music, the lighting, the decor, but was in no way parasitic on them. Furthermore, Cunningham showed that dance could exist independent of story or representational themes; he presented dancers as bodies moving in space-- not as Shakers, pioneer women, or Clytemnestras-- and thought that drama

came from this pure, unadorned movement of the body. But the break with tradition achieved by Cunningham and his contemporaries only went so far; the movement was refined and technically demanding, the vocabulary often balletic, and the partnering traditional male/female *pas de deux*.<sup>(12)</sup>

For young artists of the 1960's this level of abstraction was not enough. Cunningham still retained the virtuosity and the company organization of previous generations. As Robin Silver Hecht explains, "in the case of Cunningham, who was beginning to strip away the pretentiousness of classical modern dance, starting to explore the possibilities of pure movement for its own sake--- there was still the 'dancer-as-star' system..."<sup>(13)</sup> And although many of the dance heroes of the sixties respected, trained with, or danced for Cunningham, the arts seemed to them to hold new possibilities for experiment and democracy. But how? These artists weren't interested in turning back to the old social realism of the Depression, the images of migrant farm workers and poor urbanites under the El train. As Banes explains, "The self-conscious political significance of the socialist realist artists in the Thirties and Forties was rejected, but so was the political disengagement of the generation of the Fifties."<sup>(14)</sup> Something new was in order.

The people of the New York dance world in the 1960's were captivated by a kind of Sartrean feeling that dance had been living in "bad faith" and accepting assumptions about what it could or couldn't be, and the plethora of works that came out of that period came from a dizzying vertigo, the terrifying, yet intoxicating feeling that 'I can really just do anything'. And they *did* just do anything: they covered themselves with paint, and dried leaves, and raw chickens; they ate sandwiches, and cake, and whipped cream; they vacuumed, and ironed, and carried mattresses; they sang and talked and beeped and screamed and sometimes were completely silent; they crawled and ran and slid down poles and climbed up inclines and walked on walls and popped balloons and stood on apartment building rooves. And sometimes they did absolutely nothing, which was also something, given how they began to look at things.

The conventions that had been associated with traditional dance were deliberately broken. People no longer assumed that they had to dance to music, or that if there was music, dance was a visualization or physical representation of it. They no longer assumed that they had to be virtuosic, to study dance technique; painters, musicians, and ordinary people could dance. Members of the audience could dance. In fact, it wasn't so clear any more where the audience ended and the performance began. Perhaps this was because no one assumed that one had to relate to an audience through gaze or facing, that one had to present oneself to an audience or even acknowledge that it existed. Perhaps it came from the physical blurring of boundaries, the fact that the performers often used the audience's space. Or from the fact that the audience sometimes received instructions from the performers and so by reacting (or not reacting) became part of the work. Or from the fact that performances were often improvisational and welcomed audience participation. People no longer assumed a performance had to be set, or that there was even a clear distinction between performance and rehearsal, or that movement couldn't be taught "on stage". Or that a stage couldn't be anything. No one assumed that there had to be emotion, drama, spectacle--- the things you'd usually find on a stage. Dynamic change, spatial

patterns, repetition and variation, bravura, sensuality, vigor were no longer requisite. In fact, there were no formal requirements.<sup>(15)</sup> But what was really most important, at the root of all of this innovation, was the means of generating dances. Compositional methods were changed completely.

*What was revolutionary about the dancing? It had to do with throwing away preconceived notions about how to arrive at structures and even movements for dances, it had to do with starting all over from scratch, looking for fresh possibilities for generating and framing movement and non-movement. It had to do with forgetting beginnings, middles and ends, and sometimes forgetting climaxes. It had to do with performing tasks and doing ordinary activities ordinarily and talking about what you were doing while you were doing it and it had to do with walking around forests and on tightropes, silence, nudity, improvising, using spaces other than stages, stillness, using non-dancers, looking at objects and making objects.*<sup>(16)</sup>

Probably the single most powerful influence on choreographic methods in the 1960s was the dance composition class led by the musician Robert Dunn.<sup>(17)</sup> After a final class showing in 1962 at the Judson Church in Greenwich Village, the class evolved into an informal collective that came to be known as the Judson Dance Theater, a group that over the next two years produced twenty public concerts, and then fragmented into other collectives and independent choreographers. Judson and the explorations that followed left a tremendous mark on postmodern dance; in many ways they are responsible for what we see in dance today. Judson left in its wake contact improvisation, casual athleticism, and neutrality, three major hallmarks of contemporary dance, and it planted the seeds for the limby, floppy, silken contemporary movement styles known under the heading of "release techniques".

### ***Yvonne Rainer***

Yvonne Rainer was one of the original and perhaps most representative members of the Judson Dance Theater. After Dunn's class, she went on to develop the athletic, pedestrian, populist aesthetic that came to be associated with Judson, and more broadly, with postmodern dance. "The natural movement of the Judson group has often been the raw, rugged action of running at top speed, falling in disorganized heaps, or rolling and sliding the way a child might roll down a hill or slide into home base. The excitement is in the sheer informal physicality of it."<sup>(18)</sup> No one typified that informal physicality more than Rainer. She herself jokes that during the sixties Steve Paxton invented walking and she invented running.<sup>(19)</sup>

Yvonne Rainer came to dance relatively late, studied modern and ballet techniques, became a captivating performer, and then rejected traditional modern dance for her own brand of anti-eroticism, a reaction to the seduction, exhibitionism, and narcissism of choreography as she knew it.<sup>(20)</sup> At the time she was hot-headed and righteous and she summarized her ideology of denial in a manifesto that, as she says in *Eye on Dance*, now comes back to haunt her:

*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 the spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.*<sup>(21)</sup>

Although righteous and extreme, Rainer's ideology led her to innovate ways of moving that were both novel and revolutionary. With other choreographers of the Judson era, she forged a new aesthetic, a new way for dancers' bodies to look and move. Elizabeth Kendall describes it well:

*This ideology led Rainer to a new kind of body and a new kind of movement. She ploughed it all under for a plain, bare, honest and uninflected kind of movement, a democratic dance to fit our times. Of course, Rainer was among friends-- the rest of the Judson Church choreographers of the sixties-- but she was probably the most passionate one of them and the most scrupulous about her relations with the audience. She practically invented the new dance body, that squarish and genderless entity which... eschewed all airs and graces, all dips and bends and especially all traces of exhibitionist dance virtuosity... The bodies in her sixties task-inspired works, in which mattresses and other objects were carried about, constituted a sort of plebeian ballet corps with a deliberately limited range of action.*<sup>(22)</sup>

This plebeian aesthetic had neither the drama of Graham nor the virtuosic look of Cunningham. Rainer's rejection of both sorts of exhibitionism led her to an exploration of task and work. She was interested in people walking, running, jumping from heights, carrying mattresses and other objects, balancing pillows on their heads, and crawling over boards and beams. Critics and commentators like the ones cited below testified to the work-like, ordinary look of Rainer's choreography,<sup>(23)</sup> a quality which, whether enchanting or disenchanting, was new and surprising:

*She went about it by stripping from her choreography most of the ingredients which usually make up dance productions... even the beautifully effortless or artfully effortful look custom has made us associate with professional dance theater.*<sup>(24)</sup>

*The object of performing the movements, which are natural and undancy, seems to be to accomplish them rather than display them... The entire work has an undramatic, relaxed, informal, even-paced, work-like attitude surrounding it. It is utterly different from all other dancing I've ever seen.*<sup>(25)</sup>

*The audience observes the performers navigating a cumbersome object, noting how the working bodies adjust their muscles, weights, and angles. If the dance is performed correctly, there can be no question of superfluity of expression over the requirements of practical purposes, because the raison d'être of the piece is to display the practical intelligence of the body in pursuit of a mundane, goal-oriented type of action-- moving a mattress.*<sup>(26)</sup>

Rainer's use of tasks, objects, and work did not stem from nor was it meant to suggest a repudiation of the body. Her rejection of the high-gloss of the work of Graham and Cunningham was not a rejection of the body but rather a modernist reduction to the body. Take away the glitz-- the costumes, the lights, the dance technique, the bravura-- and you're left with pure body, and what Rainer famously called "unenhanced physicality." Jack Anderson calls Rainer a "puritan as hedonist" in virtue of this reduction; "once she has stripped away all spectacle from the dance," he says, "she is left with choreography's irreducible medium, the dancer's body. She loves the body-- with all its nerves, muscles, bones, and sinews-- as a physical instrument which can accomplish a multitude of things."<sup>(27)</sup>

### ***Description of Trio A***

We see this unenhanced physicality perhaps most directly in *Trio A*. The dance, first performed as a trio in *The Mind is a Muscle* but often presented as a solo, is a five minute string of unaccented, uninterrupted movement, a physical monologue delivered in a monotone with a smoothness and effortlessness reminiscent not of the bravura of a ballet dancer but rather of the competence of a pedestrian walking on the street. Much of the movement too seems pedestrian and ordinary. Rainer begins standing in profile. She bends her knees then turns to look away from the audience. She swings her arms casually and unenergetically, then takes two steps upstage... Some of it could be mistaken for something we'd see on the street, a person waiting for a bus perhaps; some of it is more playful and less ordinary but still executed with the same sense of detachment and unselfconsciousness.

There is almost no change in movement quality throughout the dance-- a small folk-dancy step and a sexy hip roll are executed with the same uninflected flatness. It all seems matter-of-fact and unpretentious; no matter how difficult, the movement is done in a way that looks workaday and unvirtuosic. Small circles of the head or swinging of the arms seem to require the same amount of effort, skill, and attention as handstands and arabesques.

The piece does not seem in the least performative; that is, it does not advertise or telegraph the fact that it is performance. The dancer never acknowledges the existence of an audience; she either looks elsewhere or closes her eyes when facing the audience. She seems unemotional and uninvested like a surveyor measuring a tract of land or a world-weary flight attendant. Watching her nonchalantly roll, pick up a leg with one hand, squat, promenade, and swing the leg is like watching a person do calisthenics. The dancer seems detached and uninvolved.<sup>(28)</sup>

She also seems like a person with a short attention span. There are constant shifts of weight, level changes, and changes of direction. Nothing is repeated. As soon as the dancer begins a new kind of movement she drops it; as soon as she starts off in a new direction she reverses. She isolates one body part and then begins to move another (head forward and back while left toe taps a semi-circle on the ground, arms rotating in small circles while walking upstage, head circles while leaping downstage on the diagonal).

The effect is that of many overlapping movements of isolated body parts but very little full body movement. Jack Anderson claims that the movement vocabulary is "based on the physiological fact that a person is able to move several parts of his body simultaneously, a simple example being his ability to pat his head while rubbing his belly. Enormously complicated and difficult movement patterns can be developed from these simultaneities, but they are patterns which suggest physical fitness exercises rather than ballet or the technical systems codified by the older generation of modern dancers."<sup>(29)</sup>

Perhaps the most salient feature of *Trio A* though is that there is nothing *pretend* about it. The dancer doesn't pretend to be lighter or heavier than he is, to expend more or less energy, or to be something other than the person he is. Things happen in real time. The dancer is not a body pretending to be a body moving in space; he is simply a body moving in space and the choices about movement quality draw our attention to that fact. Describing part of *Trio A* Rainer said, "The body is weighty without being completely relaxed. What is seen is a control that seems geared to the *actual time* it takes the *actual weight* of the body to go through the prescribed motions, rather than an adherence to an imposed ordering of time. In other words, the demands made on the body's (actual) energy resources appear to be commensurate with the task... getting up from the floor, raising an arm, tilting the pelvis, etc."<sup>(30)</sup>

Of course, when it comes down to it, what we see as viewers is *always* the actual weight of the body moving for the actual time it takes the body to move. But there are times when it is as if we are meant to believe that the weight of the body is different from its actual one and the time elapsed is longer or shorter than the "real time" of the dance or of a dance passage. In the classical ballet, the ballerina typically looks lighter than she is. In the Romantic ballet she appeared to levitate, and pointework, leaps, and lifts evolved to contribute to her seeming defiance of gravity. Some ballets supposedly unfold over the course of a day or days; the kind of virtuosic *allegro* that Balanchine demanded of his dancers seems to make prances and leaps take far less than the time a body usually takes to prepare for a jump, spring into the air, and land on the ground. But such examples are by no means limited to the ballet.

What is different in *Trio A*, Rainer points out, is that the amount of physical control and effort exhibited by the dancer is meant to reveal, not disguise, the weight and speed of the body.<sup>(31)</sup> There was supposed to be a kind of simplicity and truthfulness about moving in this way. Such ideas about movement had already been introduced by Cunningham in the 1950s. He noted a trend in the arts that crossed disciplinary boundaries: "These ideas seem primarily concerned with something being exactly what it is in its time and place, and not in its having actual or symbolic reference to other things. A thing is just that thing." Walking was just walking, jumping was just jumping; Cunningham thought we should love them for what they are and not look for symbolism or representation. "It's like this apartment where I live-- I look around in the morning and ask myself, what does it all mean? It means: this is where I live. When I dance, it means: this is what I am doing. A thing is just that thing."<sup>(32)</sup>

## **Reactions to Trio A**

To see such things presented as art was shocking at the time. It also prompted a great deal of interpretation. Dance critics, commentators, audience members and dancers had reactions to works like *Trio A*, reactions that ranged from reviews in the *New York Times* to making a black and white film of the dance. At the first performance of *The Mind is a Muscle* one performer even waved a white handkerchief tied to a piece of decor. These reactions often constituted or tacitly assumed interpretations, at least rudimentary interpretations, of the work. Such interpretations seem to fall into three groups, or cluster around three themes, two of which we've already encountered in the statements we looked at initially from Mueller and Banes.

Many read *Trio A* as a political statement against the elitism of dance. Rainer's work was one of the first instances in which performers were not showcased for their technical virtuosity and choreography was not justified in terms of technical innovation. It thus seemed to present an image of dance as something for the people, something everyone could relate to and everyone could do:

*Rainer thought of Trio A as a populist dance and in the thirteen years since it was choreographed it has shown up in a number of her dances and performances, in dances choreographed by others, in Grand Union performances and at parties. It has been performed by both trained and untrained dancers, learned during performances and taught to hundreds of people. Through its form and its history, Trio A functions as a repudiation of the elitism of art dance, the cult of the star and the fetishism of the perfectly trained and shaped body.*<sup>(33)</sup>

*The other modern dance companies I had seen were either still committed to storytelling, psychological analysis, sentimental drama, or general over-pretentious theatricality--- the use of the dancer as a show piece for technical virtuosity and the choreographer's brilliance (Graham, Limón, Lange, etc.)... Feeling this way about the prevalent situation of modern dance in 1969, I was ready for what Yvonne Rainer had to say, or more precisely, choreograph. I was ready for the relaxed way in which the dancers approached the movements and tasks, the unpretentious way in which they responded to objects and each other, the apparent structure of equality upon which the performance was based, where everyone did movements of similar stress--no performer striving for more attention than any other performer--all casually working out the material of the performance.*<sup>(34)</sup>

Another streak of interpretation took Rainer's work to be a celebration of and elevation of the body, something that showed that the body and its natural ways of moving, its "unenhanced physicality" could be beautiful. Of course, this message was related to the previous populist ideology, for the work was taken to show that the natural body *too*--not just the trained dancer's body-- could be beautiful or compelling. And the ways it moved without training were seen as captivating in their own right. Rainer's choreography was a sort of emancipation of the body and argued for the value of its "natural" movement:

*Miss Rainer has achieved, to borrow a Cocteau phrase, a 'rehabilitation of the commonplace.' ... Yvonne Rainer is jealously guarding the human body. In order to do so, she has had to rush into the playhouse and knock down the idols of the theater, and if that action sometimes seems extreme to those of us who also enjoy other dance forms, the result for Miss Rainer has been a way of dancing in which the body looks at once ordinary and exhilarating.*<sup>(35)</sup>

*"Trio A"... ventures into a whole new approach, for Westerners, to human movement. Much like the most ancient of body disciplines, Tai Chi, it is based on the body's relation to gravity-- its giving in to and working with this pull in a relaxed, symbiotic manner. This feel is also a key to Rainer's group movements, with their relaxed, subtle play of pressures and pulls-- between the group members and with their environment.*<sup>(36)</sup>

There was also the tendency to associate Rainer's work with minimalist art in other media and with the contemporary movement of Pop Art. It was thus seen as a statement about what art could be, what it was reducible to, and also about the everyday commodities that had been thought to be outside of the realm of art. Warhol's Brillo boxes, for example, were introduced in 1964 and Jill Johnston makes a connection between Warhol's renderings of mass-produced pop icons and Rainer's deadpan presentation of potentially emotionally charged movement situations:

*There seems, then, no necessity to treat any object or event with conventional reverence. Andy Warhol makes a monumental image of a Campbell soup can. Rainer reduces love to a plan of action. People are moved by the new context in which they find their familiar objects and events.*<sup>(37)</sup>

Carroll and Banes too compare Rainer's work to the visual arts:

*The choice of ordinary working movement as the subject of Room Service is on a par with the 'demythologizing' tendency toward fine art that one finds in many of Jasper Johns's pieces... The Johns examples, as well as Warhol's Brillo boxes, attempt to literalize this type of theory by proposing masterpieces that in terms of certain relevant features are indistinguishable from everyday objects... these dances are able to articulate the modernist theme of anti-illusionism precisely because their movements are completely practical--a literal performance of a task...*<sup>(38)</sup>

Rainer herself compares *Trio A* to minimalist sculpture in her essay "A Quasi-Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora". These interpretations of her work, even if different, all take her to be making a statement in art theory; she is seen as saying something about what sort of thing is appropriate to the realm of art by framing ordinary movement in a certain way. We need not enumerate interpretations of Rainer's work more comprehensively though. We can now turn back to the general question about how *Trio A* signifies.

### **How does *Trio A* Signify?**

## *Clarifications*

I will focus on interpretations of the second strain. If *Trio A* is in fact saying something about the beauty of pedestrian movement or its place in art, how exactly does it do this? We could equally engage in the same sort of inquiry using any of the other readings of the work sketched here; I choose this interpretation just to have a place to start. I don't intend to argue for its correctness. Quite likely Mueller is right when he takes *Trio A* to be saying something about natural movement. That's not something to be debated here; I will take it for granted in this context. *Given* that *Trio A* is a work of art dance, and that it says something about ordinary movement, *how* does it do it? If we can answer this question we will be on the road to explaining how in general dances signify.

But first a few clarifications... I don't think the answer we are looking for will be a simple one. We might be tempted to think that signification reduces to what a choreographer says. Saying that a dance signifies is not just a shorthand way of saying that by making that dance a particular choreographer says something. Or a dancer says something. In that case, signification collapses into linguistic saying and what is signified corresponds to what is attributable to some person responsible for the work. We might then think that *how* a dance signifies is not so different from how a person says something, and probably is a direct result of that person's intention to say what he says. But dances have a life of their own apart from the artists who made them, and we need to address them in their own right. Works of art function differently from people, and besides, they are too rich and too interesting to reduce what a work says or does to what an artist says or does. Furthermore, the intentions of choreographers and performers, however thoughtful those people may be, are too vague and continually in flux to be even indirectly responsible for how a work signifies. Saying that a work signifies the way a person says would artificially limit signification to what a person could intend, or would leave us unreasonably dependent on theories of the subconscious.

We might also be tempted to think that what is signified by a work is just a matter of context. *Trio A* in the eyes of Deborah Jowitt is very different from *Trio A* to someone who has never before seen a dance performance. *Trio A* on the heels of Graham and Cunningham is very different from *Trio A* before American modern dance even existed. *Trio A* danced in Times Square is very different from *Trio A* on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. What a dance *can* say is severely affected by such contextual factors. I don't underestimate the power of such factors, but context doesn't tell the whole story. What a work says will vary from one context to another, but given a particular context, how does the dance manage to say what it does? The question about signification cannot be dismissed by handwaving about context. Sure, in part, *Trio A* says something about ordinary movement because it's different from classical ballet. But many things are different from classical ballet. Context alone isn't enough to account for how *Trio A* signifies.

Now let's begin our exploration by tentatively considering one way *Trio A* might succeed at saying something about pedestrian movement and the untrained body. The first, most natural reaction might be to say it signifies simply by *being* those things. In fact, if we

can say that *Trio A* itself proposes an answer to the question, that would seem to be the answer it proposes; after all, it ostentatiously *appears to be* pedestrian movement. On this view, *Trio A* would say something about pedestrian movement because it is a case of pedestrian movement and so has the ability to make us think something about it; it instantiates its subject. This mechanism is a common one. I might, for instance, be taken to say something about how women can be philosophers in virtue of the fact that I am a woman and am also a philosopher. Since it's common and obvious, I'll consider this option first. Then, if we encounter difficulties, we can move on to conclude otherwise-- that *Trio A* doesn't signify by being ordinary movement but by bearing some other relation to it, perhaps by representing it.

### ***Answer #1: Signifying By Instantiating Ordinary Movement***

#### *Trio A As Ordinary Movement*

For now, let's assume that a dance like *Trio A* is in fact ordinary pedestrian movement. Pedestrian here might mean two things. It might be that the movement is the sort of thing you'd see pedestrians doing, something you'd expect to see on the street. Steve Paxton's 1967 dance *Satisfyin Lover* in which forty-two people walked slowly across the performance space, stopping to sit or stand, is an example of such pedestrianism. In fact, in many of the Judson works "The dancers do not mind adjusting their clothes or brushing their hair out of their eyes if it makes them more comfortable. These are inadvertent everyday gestures."<sup>(39)</sup> Or it might be that "pedestrianism" has more populist connotations, that it just means the sort of thing anyone (non-dancers included) could do. "An amazing thing about the movements," said Jack Anderson of Rainer's *Rose Fractions*, "was that they all looked like things I fancied I might be able to do..."<sup>(40)</sup>

In fact, 1960's postmodern dance was concerned with both of these ways of being pedestrian, but the latter applies more readily to *Trio A*. Many "non-dancers" learned and performed *Trio A*. So if *Trio A* makes its point about natural movement by *being* it, then it makes its point by being the sort of thing anyone could learn and do successfully. Still, there *are* other ways in which *Trio A* seems pedestrian-- the uninflected quality, the distracted gaze, the distinct lack of drama. In this sense too, the movement is ordinary or natural. But, of course, there are many instances of natural movement that don't seem to be making the statements attributed to *Trio A*; when we see someone walking in the street we don't think it forces us away from the "waiting for the *fouetté* syndrome". In getting us to think such things, *Trio A* seems to have a different status. How can we explain this?

#### Disturbational Art

"It is an attempt to collapse the distinction between Art and the Real that one finds rampant in the Happenings and sculptures (that is, Robert Morris) of the Sixties," says Noël Carroll. "Just as Minimalists revolted against Abstract Expressionists, striving to remove all the expressive traces and marks of the artist from their canvases, so Rainer revolts against modern dance, especially the Graham tradition, by denuding dance of emotive references as well as climactic phrasing. Rainer's goal is to present movement

pure and simple."<sup>(41)</sup> In short, this sounds remarkably like what Danto refers to as "disturbational art," a class of art objects in which reality is an actual component; the thing *really is* that which it represents. "So it is disturbance when the insulating boundaries between art and life are breached in some way the mere representation of disturbing things cannot achieve just because they are representations and are responded to as such."<sup>(42)</sup> For Danto this sort of reality-encapsulating art is often disturbing; it often involves obscene or violent or dangerous content. But the salient feature, and that most interesting for our purposes, is the idea that in certain works the boundary between reality and representation dissolves. He cites Jasper Johns' paintings of numerals, letters, maps and flags as paradigmatic examples. A painting of a numeral is still a numeral while a painting of a haystack is not a haystack. Further, it's not just incidentally a numeral; the fact that it *is* the reality it represents, that it also is its content, is salient.

Danto suggests that such art is a vestige of a much earlier phenomenon, a kind of magic by which a god could be present in the midst of dionysian ritual frenzy or a saint was mystically present in an image representing him on an icon. In brief, these earlier works or events were incantatory; they invoked and evoked the reality with which they were concerned. Danto believes that disturbational art seeks to return this sense of magic to art, to restore "to art some of the magic purified out when art became *art*."

*The disturbatory artist aims to transform her audience into something pretheatrical, a body which relates to her in some more magical and transformational relationship than the defining conventions of the theater allow. And she means to achieve this by some transformation of herself, which consists in taking off the protective and powerfully dislocative atmosphere of theatrical distance and making contact with a reality.*<sup>(43)</sup>

This pretheatrical high priestess sounds remarkably like the high priestess of the *avant garde*, Yvonne Rainer. Rainer takes away the theatrical distance in *Trio A*, not only by moving like an ordinary person but by refusing the high-gloss of theatrical dance. She refuses the gaze of the performer, the glitter of costumes, the bravura of movement with great amplitude. Nothing heralds the beginning of a dance, nothing signals a break with real life. There is no boundary between this world and that; her dance is immediate in the way a ritual would be. Ironically, she doesn't look at or acknowledge her audience, but in being self-contained, a Sartrean *en soi*, she allows them to see what she does as continuous with their own lives and their own movements. She is just a person moving, a body like theirs moving in the same space in which they sit to watch-- not an alien sort of creature. She does not inhabit another world; she does not move in a mannered way. There is not the gulf between what she is and what she appears to be that there is between a heavily made-up woman dancing *en pointe* and the dying swan she represents.

If anything is, Rainer's *Trio A* is a good candidate for being what Danto calls disturbational art, not because it's particularly disturbing but insofar as it makes reality and representation one; and some have even found it disturbing for that very reason. But it remains to be seen whether there can really be such a thing as the disturbational art Danto describes. Sure, Rainer wears street clothes and doesn't confront the audience, but are we misguided to think that she does what Danto proposes, that any work of art can in

fact accomplish that? Perhaps incorporating reality and restoring magic are just impossible tasks for something that is art.

### Problems For Danto

Danto himself seems to call the viability of disturbational art into question. He claims that he always feels on the outside of such art and always sees it as "pathetic and futile"; he also seems to think it has a bad track record, that even the best haven't succeeded. "If Richard Wagner could not bring it off, neither, I dare say, can Laurie Anderson..."<sup>(44)</sup> But is the problem simply that it's something that's difficult to do, or is there something conceptually wrong with it?

Danto is a bit ambiguous about the examples he offers. The restaging of Malevich's *Victory over the Sun* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music is futile and pathetic, Johns' numerals are perhaps not fully examples of real disturbance, but Chris Burden's *Deadman*, in which he has himself tied in a sack and placed on a California highway does seem like a convincing case. It's hard to say what Danto really thinks about whether disturbational art is a live possibility. Nehamas is more resolute when he says, "But part of what makes the fine arts fine is precisely the distance they have managed, over time, to insert between representation and reality; this distance can no longer be eradicated."<sup>(45)</sup> He sees disturbational art as necessarily fine art and so in virtue of what it is, not able to involve reality. It would be impossible to blend the two, to blur the boundary between reality and representation as Danto suggests, and thereby to be truly disturbational.

But how have the fine arts inserted distance between representation and reality? Nehamas believes that once we recognize something as art we no longer project its features directly onto reality; that is, we no longer take it to be transparent, a neutral window onto the world. The arts call for interpretation: "The fine arts, we believe, bear an indirect, interpretive relationship to the world, and further interpretation on the part of audience and critics is necessary in order to understand it."<sup>(46)</sup> So the arts exhort us to remember that we are seeing something through a frame, that the frame chooses what we see and affects how we see it. It is naive to take what we see, in the realm of art, as a mere duplicate of what occurs in the world, and it is a mistake to think that no interpretation is necessary to understand the complex relations between what we see in the work and what exists in the world.

Given that art calls for this kind of interpretive stance, it forces, Nehamas would say, a certain amount of distance between the viewer and the work. To interpret, and so to regard something *as art*, one cannot feel like it is just an ordinary piece of the world, continuous with one's experience, or in the case of performance, something that *just happens*.<sup>(47)</sup> Once we interpret, the thing is no longer transparent. Nehamas thus thinks that the notion of something as "present" to us, magical in the way Danto describes, is incompatible with the notion of art. Danto and Nehamas both agree that there's some tension here, either between representation and reality or between regarding something as representation and regarding it as reality. But while Danto writes as if the blending of the

two is still possible, and profound in some way because of that tension, Nehamas thinks the tension makes them an impossible combination.

We might wonder though if Danto should be so optimistic, given his more elaborately articulated views about art. For Danto there is a sharp boundary between art and non-art. It would seem in virtue of his ideas about what gets something to be art that the possibility of disturbational art should not exist. Danto goes even further than Nehamas in saying that interpretation is analytical to the concept of an artwork. His claims seem to support Nehamas' worries about the viability of disturbational art. It is thus worth exploring Danto's view briefly to see if it too precludes the possibility of disturbational art.

For Danto an object, or what he calls a "mere real thing", can only become an artwork under an interpretation. And what does interpretation involve? "To interpret a work is to offer a theory as to what the work is about, what its subject is."<sup>(48)</sup> One offers such an account by developing a complex network of identifications; one identifies pieces of the work which eventually lead to larger conclusions about its subject in general. For instance, when faced with Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, one points to a dab of white paint and identifies it as Icarus' legs. One identifies the blue ground as water and then, more specifically, the white dab as the legs of Icarus which are attached to Icarus who is under the water. One picks out an orange sphere as the sun, and then the painted ground behind it as sky. And then one identifies the whole thing as a landscape and that thing there as a plowman in the landscape and more specifically, a plowman going about his business despite the fact that Icarus has just fallen into the water because he's flown too close to the sun. This kind of identification can go on and on weaving an increasingly more complex theory as to the subject of the newly transfigured artwork.

This "is" of artistic identification is in fact what's responsible for the transfiguration of the mere real thing into a work of art. Saying that dab of paint is Icarus or that actor is Hamlet or that lump of marble is a tree stump is, according to Danto, participation in the artworld, and a transfigurative act that makes a lump of marble more than just a lump of marble, in fact not just a lump of marble at all.<sup>(49)</sup> Obviously, Danto puts a lot of weight on this special act of identification, this transfigurative "is". But he characterizes it mainly by analogy:

*This is an is which is of transfigurative kin to magical identification, as when one says a wooden doll is one's enemy, sending, by means of pins, vexations to his body; to mythic identification, as when one says the sun is Phoebus' chariot (not as a manner of speaking but as a matter of unobvious fact); to religious identification, as when one says the wafer and wine are flesh and blood; and to metaphorical identification, as when one says that Juliet is the sun...*<sup>(50)</sup>

But there is a salient difference between these forms of identification and the artistic identification they are provided to illuminate. For one to identify magically or mythically or religiously, one must really believe that A is B. Artistic identification, however, is consistent with believing its literal falsehood. In fact, for me to truly identify artistically

when I say that that man there is Hamlet, I must believe the literal falsehood of what I say. If I think that that man really *is* Hamlet, I'm not transfiguring something mundane into art, I'm just sorely confused.

But disturbational art seems more like the voodoo doll or the Eucharist than the actor who waits tables. That is, for disturbational art to be what Danto says it is it would seem that we have to really believe it is what we identify it to be. Otherwise it wouldn't have that component of reality; it would just be like seeing a play in which an old friend plays Hamlet. If the work of art is to present what it represents, we must believe that it really is what we take it to be. In Rainer's case, we must believe that she really is someone moving naturally and unselfconsciously.

But there are various tensions in this. If disturbational art is indeed supposed to present what it represents, to be both reality *and* art, then we should both believe in the truth of the artistic identification and not believe it, and naturally this is impossible. This is another way to put Nehamas' point. Further though, there is an inconsistency in Danto's work; his view of art shouldn't allow for something like disturbational art. And most problematically, this suggests that the mechanism through which *Trio A* says what it says is not disturbance. In order to take the work to be saying anything at all we must be interpreting, regarding it with an interpretive stance. But if we're doing this we can't see it as we would need to for it to be disturbance.

### An Alternative: Exemplification

Where does this leave us? Does the untenability of disturbational art mean that *Trio A* can't say something about ordinary movement by simply being ordinary movement? Or is there still some way for the dance to *be* ordinary movement and be an interpretable work of art? Goodman's notion of exemplification provides an interesting new hope for this option. This is, after all, apt since it is one of his "symptoms of the aesthetic", one of the mechanisms that plays a role when we interpret artistically.

According to Goodman, something exemplifies a property if it both possesses and refers to that property.<sup>(51)</sup> Another way to say this is that something exemplifies one of its properties if it acts as a sample of that property. We use exemplification frequently. For example, a fabric swatch in an upholsterer's shop exemplifies red brocade; it *is* red brocade and it acts as a sample of it. If you specify that one you presumably want your couch to be covered in that very shade of red and that very pattern of brocade. Although it possesses the properties of being made on a Tuesday and being two inches square, it doesn't act as a sample of those properties. You wouldn't expect your couch to be covered with two inch square pieces of fabric or fabric that had been manufactured on a Tuesday. Somewhat mystifyingly, very much based on context and experience, we usually know how to deal with exemplification, to recognize instances of it and to use it in everything from ordering cupcakes to doing logic.<sup>(52)</sup>

So perhaps *Trio A* says something about ordinary movement by exemplifying it. Goodman himself suggests that one of the main ways that modern dance signifies is

through exemplification.<sup>(53)</sup> That would mean that *Trio A* is an instance of ordinary movement and refers to it.<sup>(54)</sup> It's still not clear what it is for something to be an instance of ordinary movement; in fact, that's a very messy issue. But we might argue that *Trio A* is ordinary movement on the basis of any of three things: that it's movement anyone could do, that it has an uninflected and unselfconscious quality, that it involves common movements like walking and lying down-- or maybe a combination of all three. We might also think that it refers to ordinary movement, that it somehow points to or makes us notice that feature of it. Various things seem to help highlight the fact that it is ordinary movement: the exclusive use of that sort of movement (it's not a two hour classical ballet with three seconds of ordinary walking thrown in), the fact that it is performed in street clothes and (often) sneakers, and the place it occupies in the history of dance. What was happening in dance right before Judson makes the pedestrian quality of a dance like *Trio A* even more noticeable, and the atmosphere of rebellion surrounding 1960s dance made it clear that this wasn't just a bad attempt to do the sort of thing that Graham had done twenty years before!

### Is Exemplification Enough?

But, interestingly, to make a point about ordinary movement it would seem that *Trio A* has to do more than just exemplify ordinary movement. If it exemplified only ordinary movement we might notice that it was ordinary movement, but we wouldn't know what to conclude about it. We wouldn't necessarily think it suggested that ordinary movement could be beautiful or is the stuff of concert dance or is important and interesting in its own right. If it just pointed to ordinary movement, the work might get us to notice or think about ordinary movement, but it wouldn't guide our reflection. In fact, it might do no more than give us occasion to think what we already thought about this way of moving. In that case, exemplification wouldn't seem a very precise or efficient vehicle for signification.

Perhaps to say what Mueller attributes to it, the dance must *also* exemplify concert dance; it must be an example of concert dance and point to the fact that it is. Here we have the beginning of an answer to our question about how works of art have the potential to signify. Although Goodman goes so far as to explain that, "The exemplified patterns and properties may reorganize experience, relating actions not usually associated or distinguishing others not usually differentiated, thus enriching allusion or sharpening discrimination,"<sup>(55)</sup> he never gives a more detailed account of how exemplification of multiple properties functions in dance. How do exemplified properties allow works to signify? How complex is their interplay?<sup>(56)</sup>

If a work of art exemplifies two different properties, A and B, it is ripe for certain conclusions like "some A's are B's", "all A's are B's", "A and B are not incompatible as we thought", "A leads to B", and so on. For instance, in Klimt's ambiguous painting *The Kiss*, the woman exemplifies both ecstasy and repulsion. She seems both to struggle and to be submissive. It is a scene exemplifying romance and also violence, and so we might take the work to be saying that romance is sometimes violent, or always violent, or at least that these two things we thought were incompatible can coexist. The

exemplification of the two properties certainly underdetermines the message that we get from the work, but it delimits a range of possible messages; it tells us that this thing is saying something about A's and B's and the relationship between them.

What more specifically we should conclude is further determined, although in most cases still not uniquely determined, by other features of the work like what Goodman calls multiple and complex reference, syntactic density, etc. To refine our conclusions about the Klimt we would also have to look at what the painting alludes to. Are there features of the work, references that it makes, which make the situation seem unique or generalizable? The fact that the scene is set in an otherworldly landscape instead of on the subway matters to what we take to be the precise relation between A and B. Are there things about the man and woman which make them seem like all people or rather like individuals? How does the fact that they are painted in part two-dimensionally and in part three-dimensionally matter? If there were other men or women in the picture we would have to look at how they were rendered. Would they be syntactically different, different symbols with a different semantic value? This might make us take the man and woman in the embrace to be more unique, the message not to be "all A's are B's". If however, there were couples locked in the same kind of embrace sprinkled throughout the landscape, this might lead us to take the connection between A and B to be universal.

Still, such features of the work will often leave room for a judgement call on the part of the viewer, and so the prior experience, epistemological commitments, and assumptions of the viewer will be brought to bear. Even after considering the other symptoms of the aesthetic the Klimt seems ambiguous. A viewer who is predisposed to see men as brutes will rule differently on the painting than one who is not. A viewer who has read many fairytales about magical vines and golden cliffs will generalize differently from a person who only reads sociology. A viewer who knows that Klimt was a contemporary of Freud will try to assimilate the painting to early twentieth century intellectual history. Viewers will fill in gaps and weight features differently depending on who they are epistemologically.

So if *Trio A* exemplifies ordinary movement and exemplifies concert dance the obvious conclusion is that ordinary movement can be presented as concert dance. But if one thinks that concert dance must be beautiful he or she will take the work to suggest that there is beauty to be found in such ordinary movement. If one thinks the salient thing about concert dance is that it is art one might conclude that there is art everywhere, that ordinary movement in other contexts is also art. All sorts of other things will also condition the message we take from the work. Who is performing it-- someone trained or untrained? Someone who looks physically fit or someone to whom unathletic people can relate? How many people? Men? Women? Both? Do they look different? Are they different ages? What do they wear? Is there music? The answers affect what we take to be the connections between features the work exemplifies. What one could conclude varied when Rainer performed the dance in tap shoes, when it was performed by the first untrained non-professional, Frances Brooks, when it was performed by Peter Saul in a balletic way, when it was danced to the Chambers Brothers, when the dancers wore American flags, and when it was taught *during* the performance.<sup>(57)</sup>

## Exemplifying Concert Dance

But now that we've seen something about how the interplay between an active interpreter and different exemplified properties allows the dance to say something, let's take a few steps back to see just how it is that *Trio A* exemplifies concert dance. First of all, *Trio A* is an instance of concert dance. It is not just movement that happens inadvertently and is witnessed by chance. It is performed in a performance space, arrangements are made to occupy the space, the event is advertised, tickets are sold, reviews are written. It is intended to be dance and carefully thought about before it is presented even though it seems spontaneous.

But to exemplify concert dance *Trio A* must also refer to it. It draws attention to the fact that it is an instance of concert dance in various ways. It is performed in a space that is separate from ordinary life, not in the street or on a bus or in the supermarket but first in the Judson Church which by that time had gained a reputation as a space to see *avant garde* dance. Furthermore, the Judson Church is not just any church. The performance space is big, white and dizzying with a very high ceiling, a balcony, and a cold stone floor. It's not a warm and intimate space and it doesn't seem very ordinary. In the first performance, wooden slats were thrown down from the balcony one at a time at regular intervals. They highlighted the architectural space of the church-- one had to notice the balcony and the upper space-- and they also acted as a kind of boundary between audience and performers, a physical, visual, and auditory boundary that suggested all the more that this was performance and not 'real life'. In addition, a viewer would have first paid for a ticket and then taken a seat in the space. Even though there was no fanfare to the beginning of a performance, the action often seemed spontaneous, and the performers dressed in street clothes, the experience of coming to the space, having to be on time, and gaining entrance would point for the viewer to the fact that this was concert dance.<sup>(58)</sup>

Interestingly, this already suggests that *Trio A* is no instance of ordinary movement plain and simple. We see that many features of the context in which it was presented (from performance space to slats falling in front of the audience) suggest that this is a complex movement situation. But let's recall what something had to be to be ordinary movement-- perhaps something anyone could do, perhaps something one would see on the street, perhaps something with the qualities of what one sees on the street. The context doesn't immediately disqualify it from being any of these things. But is it really pedestrian in any of these ways?

### Is *Trio A* Really Pedestrian?

In brief, *Trio A* is a lot more virtuosic than it looks. It involves a great deal of coordination, especially because of the unconnected activity in two or three body parts where which parts are involved are constantly changing. Moving a head one way and feet another is difficult enough, but switching quickly from head and feet to other body parts is even more challenging. *Trio A* also involves lots of movement quotations, movements that seem recognizable as part of one vocabulary or another. To make them read is difficult; to switch rapidly from one to another, like changing languages mid-sentence, is

even harder. Rainer shifts from a chorus-line style hip movement to a Humphrey style fall in a matter of seconds.

There are also subtleties that are less easily visible but even more difficult to pull off. Sally Banes explains, "The dance flattens energy and complexifies movement in order to show that dancing is difficult to do and just as difficult to watch... In order to perform it in a completely uninflected way, with transitions no more or less important than an arabesque, a handstand, or a jump, one has to execute some movements with their actual effort (rather than making them look easy) but excise the preparations and effort of others."<sup>(59)</sup>

Furthermore, some of the movements are simply difficult to accomplish. One passage requires slowly rising into relevé on one leg and repeatedly alternating legs. Another involves squatting and extending the left leg fully to the back, then bringing it under the torso and through to the front without losing one's balance. Later in the dance there is a turn in front attitude while the torso inclines forward and twists sideways toward the leg--movement of the torso on two axes while rotating on one leg! This can't be done successfully (although it can be approximated or fudged) without a lot of central strength from the abdominals and inner thighs. Many of the difficult movements don't look difficult or spectacular. At one point the right leg is held slightly off the ground with the foot flexed; the dancer slowly rolls from the top of the head down through the spine, vertebra by vertebra, never changing the position of the right leg. Try it.

Rainer admits that *Trio A* was a hard dance. In a television interview, she talks about the difficulties and how touching it was to see Sara Rudner, a long-time dancer with Twyla Tharp and an extremely accomplished technician, struggling with the material.<sup>(60)</sup> She has acknowledged difficulties teaching it to other people, that one sweats a lot doing it, and how difficult it was to perform it when she was recovering from an operation. But does this mean it's not ordinary movement?

In a sense, it *was* the sort of thing anyone could do. Many non-dancers learned it. Many weren't even instructed by Rainer but learned it second, third, fourth hand. But Rainer too had a cut-off point; there *were* things that just didn't count as *Trio A*.

*When I first began teaching Trio A to anyone who wanted to learn it--skilled, unskilled, professional, fat, old, sick, amateur-- and gave tacit permission to anyone who wanted to teach it, I envisioned myself as a post-modern dance evangelist bringing movement to the masses, watching with Will Rogers-like benignity the slow, inevitable evisceration of my elitist creation. Well, I finally met a Trio A I didn't like. It was 5th generation, and I couldn't believe my eyes.*<sup>(61)</sup>

It was supposed to be the kind of thing anyone could do successfully, but that's clearly an exaggeration.<sup>(62)</sup>

But was it something one would see in ordinary life? Some of it: the walking, some of the arm swinging, a roll on the floor... Still, although the movement quality is casual and

familiar, we don't usually see people with their torsoes inclined forward turning their heads from side to side and fanning flies by their ears. Yet what we are willing to consider ordinary life is not clear. I have seen much more baroque movement passages on the subways of New York. Are subways ordinary life? mental institutions? children playing? Even some of the more complex movements in *Trio A* are things one might see in other contexts, depending on how broadly one is willing to look.

At least, the dance has salient properties of much of ordinary movement. This is the sense in which Rainer herself acknowledged that it was pedestrian.<sup>(63)</sup> It has the uninflected, unaccented, monotonous feel of the way people move ordinarily. But is even this the case? I think that in some performances it has that quality-- a sort of lumpy, sloppy quality that ordinary people have when they walk, sit down in a chair, get up to answer the phone. Rainer has that quality in the video of *Trio A* made in 1982 when she was out of shape and rather nervous about performing. But some performances are different. In the film of *Trio A* made in 1978 Rainer has a mesmerizing seamless quality; she might look like a person competently executing a task, but she also looks fluid and very connected. The parts of her body seem very connected to her center and even her distal movement seems to be controlled by it.

### Doubts About Ordinary Movement

Whether *Trio A* has the qualities of ordinary movement in some general way is pretty ambiguous. We should question though whether the property Rainer identifies, the uninflectedness, is really typical of ordinary movement. At first sight we might think that ordinary movement doesn't usually have the same kind of increased energy and amplitude that we see in other forms of dance, although even that might not be true; people who are angry or in a hurry move with a lot *more* energy and amplitude than one finds in the folk dance one sees at carnival in Binche. It's just not true that ordinary movement is continuously uninflected and plodding. Certainly there are dynamic changes in unselfconscious movement; one doesn't always move at the same tempo. There are *staccato* movements (a tap of the fingers, a turn of the head to see who's there, shaking an orange juice carton before opening it), and there are accents (plunking a glass down after a last sip, pulling a door closed behind you, throwing up your hands in disgust).

There are also more virtuosic movements in "real life". A swimmer, a rock climber, and a bowler all move in inflected, accented ways. Their movements exhibit energy, phrasing, and extension beyond the immediate kinesphere of the body. For these people, what they are doing is still ordinary, still a part of life as they know it. Where does the realm of the ordinary end? Perhaps Rainer artificially limits the scope of ordinary movement. But perhaps we should say the movement of swimmers and bowlers isn't ordinary because these people were specially trained to move in this way. What then should we make of people performing seemingly more ordinary daily tasks-- a person who beats eggs? a person who crochets? When I was in Turkey I saw a woman seated on the floor rolling out pancakes with a wooden stick; she moved with the speed, virtuosity and bravura of a magician. Yet to make pancakes is completely ordinary to her; she makes them every

day. Do we want to discount these things too as ordinary movement because of the training involved? What doesn't require some minimal training?

All of this leads us to two conclusions. First, we see how unclear the notion of ordinary movement is; it is not clear what it means or whether it even makes sense to talk about ordinary or natural or pedestrian movement at all. Secondly, it looks pretty unlikely that *Trio A* succeeds in saying something about ordinary movement by being ordinary movement. We are no longer sure there is such a thing as ordinary movement for it to be, and besides, the handstands and arabesques of *Trio A* now seem far from ordinary. Without further grappling with the problem of what ordinary movement could be, I will move on to consider a new alternative. Perhaps *Trio A* says something about ordinary movement not by *being* it but by *representing* it.

## ***Answer #2: Signifying By Representing Ordinary Movement***

### Does *Trio A* Represent Ordinary Movement?

But isn't it just as controversial to represent something that might not exist as to be something that might not exist? What I mean here is that *Trio A* might represent something that we *readily identify as* natural or ordinary movement, whether or not ordinary movement is a myth. We have no problem identifying the subject of certain representations as unicorns or fairies even though they don't actually exist. Philosophers may cash out this sort of representation differently, but no matter how we describe it philosophically, it certainly seems to be something we can make sense of.

So how does something represent ordinary movement? Goodman argues convincingly that it's not resemblance that's responsible for representation.<sup>(64)</sup> Further, what makes us take something as a realistic representation is seldom accurate imitation of the real thing. Regarding sculpture, Goodman says:

*If in a tympanum over a tall Gothic portal, Eve's apple were the same size as a Winesap, it would not look big enough to tempt Adam. The distant or colossal sculpture has also to be shaped very differently from what it depicts in order to be realistic, in order to 'look right'. And the ways of making it 'look right' are not reducible to fixed and universal rules; for how an object looks depends not only upon its orientation, distance, and lighting, but upon all we know of it and upon our training, habits, and concerns.*<sup>(65)</sup>

Elizabeth Kendall makes the same observation regarding dance when she concludes after watching the improvisational performances of the Grand Union that "theatrical 'live behavior' is different from live 'live behavior'." She talks about how when an event is theatricalized there is no waiting around, static, killing time, and indecision. The performers can commit themselves to the event all the more when it is theatricalized and stylized; it allows them to seem more wholehearted, emotional, and spontaneous, in short, more human.

*Ironically, the most thrilling picture of "live behavior" I've ever seen on the stage belongs to one of the oldest ballets in the Western repertory-- Bournonville's "The Guards of Amager" (1871), recently presented on the Met stage by the Royal Danish Ballet. A scene in a country inn showed people old and young running, dancing, eating, serving tables, playing the piano, falling down, flirting. The mimed material was entirely pre-arranged in sophisticated counterpoint and its rhythmic clarity enabled the dancers to execute it wholeheartedly.*<sup>(66)</sup>

So it would seem that what makes something a representation of ordinary movement is different from what makes it an instance of the real thing. *Trio A* takes certain features which we recognize as characterizing ordinary movement-- the uninflectedness, the pace, the amplitude-- and makes them extreme and homogeneous. In real life movement isn't always uninflected, plodding, and limited in range but the dance distills those qualities since they're qualities we'll recognize; it presents movement that is, or at least appears to be, uniquely so in order to present movement that will seem natural or ordinary.

If *Trio A* in fact presented the same kind of physical diversity as ordinary movement, it wouldn't be able to represent it, not to mention the fact that it probably wouldn't be able to represent anything. The same kind of exaggeration that Goodman speaks about regarding Eve's apple is evident here. *Trio A* also displays some qualities that ordinary movement doesn't have; the technical difficulty, the excised transitions that Baner describes... these are qualities like the counterpoint and mannerism described in Kendall's example. They are qualities the original doesn't have that surprisingly enough allow something to be a representation of it.

But how do these various qualities allow *Trio A* to be a representation of ordinary movement? This is a much bigger and more difficult question than it first seems. To answer it we need a story to tell not only about *Trio A* but about representation in general. Essentially, we are asking what makes one thing a representation of another. In virtue of what is X' a representation of X?

### Representation: Resemblance, Intention, and Symbol Systems

The question about representation warrants a digression to look briefly at the main sorts of theories of representation. I will consider views on which X' represents X in virtue of resembling X and in virtue of the intentions of the creator of X'. I will then turn to Goodman's symbol theory of representation. There are many ways, however, to divide up theories of representation and I present here only one broad classification among many.<sup>(67)</sup>

In short, representation is like the Emperor's new clothes. Philosophers have many accounts of what representation is but all defer the problem; the question 'in virtue of what does X' represent X?' comes up in some form or other eventually. And no one is willing to say that we simply don't have a good unified answer to the question of what fixes representation. In general, the question parallels other questions about fixing reference. We argue equally about what makes our words stick to the world, what fixes

linguistic reference. Although representation (or what Goodman calls depiction) is a form of reference, most people see it as distinct from reference in language. They assume that what gets things like dances and pictures and novels to represent things in the world is different from what gets words to refer to things in the world.

Ordinarily, we wouldn't take looking or sounding like a thing (resemblance) to be what gets a word to refer to that thing; however, many people take resemblance to be crucial to representation. Consider, for example, the reaction of the American painter Thomas Eakins when one day Mrs. Joseph W. Drexel, of whom he was painting a portrait, refused to come to his studio to pose for the portrait and sent her maid instead. Understandably concerned about the reference of his portrait, Eakins, renowned for his realism, wrote to Mrs. Drexel explaining that he could not proceed under those conditions.<sup>(68)</sup> If Eakins had gone on painting the maid instead and ended up with a painting that didn't resemble Mrs. Drexel, would he still have made a portrait of Mrs. Drexel? Perhaps X' represents X if and only if X' resembles X.

Let's examine this possibility in the context of *Trio A*. Suppose that by "ordinary movement" we mean something like movement we see commonly in mundane daily activities. We might note then that *Trio A* takes certain features of ordinary movement and makes them extreme. It caricatures the uninflectedness, lack of performative focus, sense of passive weight, frequent shifts in direction and attention that we see in daily life. It thus shares features with ordinary movement, and in that sense resembles it. Could sharing features of ordinary movement make something a representation of it?

This mimetic view has obvious problems. Goodman has pointed out many of them. For example, resemblance is reflexive but representation isn't; we don't take movement we see on the street to be a representation of *Trio A*. A thing resembles itself to the maximum degree, but we don't regard movement we witness at the bus stop to be a representation of itself, of ordinary movement. Nor do we take *Trio A* to be a representation of *Trio A*. Many things which resemble each other are not representations of each other. Twins and pennies are not representations of each other. Two people doing household chores probably resemble each other more than *Trio A* resembles either of them, yet they are not representations of ordinary movement or each other.<sup>(69)</sup>

Furthermore, resemblance is too easy a criterion of representation. Everything resembles everything else in *some* way. It seems that under this theory there should be no end to representations. If everything that shared some feature with ordinary movement were a representation of it, then all movement would represent ordinary movement since it all shares with ordinary movement the property of being movement! Negatively, many written descriptions of ordinary movement wouldn't qualify as representations when it strikes us that they should, and the ones that did-- because they were casual, unselfconscious, uninflected, etc.-- would seem to do so for the wrong reasons.

On the other hand, we might think we have been failing to take into account the point Kendall raises. Perhaps *Trio A* doesn't resemble ordinary movement in virtue of features it shares with it. Perhaps it is just those places where it takes liberties, where it

exaggerates or departs from ordinary movement, that are responsible for the resemblance. But it certainly seems even less tenable to say that things are representations of ordinary movement in virtue of the qualities they *don't* share with it. In that case everything would be a representation of ordinary movement. And picking out the particular ways in which something must *not* be like ordinary movement in order to resemble it and therefore represent it seems hopeless.

Consequently, we might turn to another common view, the view that intention is responsible for representation, that X' represents X in virtue of the fact that some person A intends it to represent X. We might think this solves the problems with resemblance, that it explains how something might resemble and not represent or represent and not resemble. But placing the fact of the matter about representation in the head of the creator has some pretty extreme consequences. Suppose *Trio A* represents ordinary movement because Rainer intended it to. This disregards all the ways in which the movement in the dance is related to ordinary movement. It allows that *Trio A* could have represented Viennese waltzes had Rainer intended it to, or that an actual Viennese waltz could have represented ordinary movement! It also suggests that a movement sequence identical to Rainer's *Trio A* but created without the intention to represent ordinary movement, perhaps executed by someone sleepwalking, would not represent ordinary movement while Rainer's dance would. This view seems to grant intention the magical power to confer the status of representation onto anything.

Still, it seems reasonable to involve people in some way. Things don't just represent things; people use things to represent things. We might be tempted by a view like Putnam's about symbolization. He believes that "[it] is not that language mirrors the world but that *speakers* mirror the world--i.e. their environment--in the sense of *constructing a symbolic representation of that environment*."<sup>(70)</sup> Although Putnam's construction of symbolic representations is not as extreme a process as Goodman's worldmaking<sup>(71)</sup> it still seems that Putnam wants to say we have a hand in representing. We use language to represent the world; nothing represents in virtue of its properties alone. That is, nothing represents in a vacuum.<sup>(72)</sup>

To deflect the kinds of problems with intention mentioned above, Putnam appeals to a kind of holism of intention which is not articulated at length in the literature. Still, it is well worth considering. The idea that intentions come in nice neat chunks like individual propositions seems misguided. Intentions, especially those of artists at work, are often inchoate and constantly in flux. There probably never was an "intention to represent ordinary movement" on Rainer's part, although she was certainly quite conscious and full of intentions in developing *Trio A*. The model of intentions as self-contained discreet proposition-like packets leads to absurd conclusions about representation, some of which we saw above. But perhaps a more holistic picture of intention, one that was modelled on a complex net, could anchor representation in a more reasonable way and block certain incongruous cases. On such a view, examples like "suppose Rainer made *Trio A* intending to represent rodeos" might no longer make sense. A more sophisticated view of intention would either render intending to represent a rodeo incompatible with making *Trio A*, or would perhaps lead to a new and interesting reading of the dance.

The issue of intention leaves us in a difficult position. It is hard to commit to a locution about representation, to say either that something represents or that we use it to represent; it is hard to know how to speak. To use either locution seems misleading. Saying that works of art represent solely in virtue of their properties, in virtue of 'how they are', doesn't explain representation. On the contrary, saying that we use works of art to represent and representation is all a matter of what we do with them, is oversimplifying. Representation is a hybrid. We make and use works of art to represent, but how we can use them is a function of what they are like. How the work is affects how we use it, and how we use it affects how the work is. There is a constant interweaving of the two. And both are crucial to representation.<sup>(73)</sup>

Goodman, without explicitly talking about intention, is particularly concerned with our role in using symbols to represent. For him, it is just as misguided to talk about what a thing represents as to talk about a way the world is. We make worlds and our interpretations make representations. Elgin writes, "Often a symbol belongs to several systems, and we need to know which and how many of them it is functioning in to understand what and how it represents."<sup>(74)</sup> And how do we know which and how many systems a symbol is functioning in? It's a matter of learning skills and conventions:

*Pictorial learning involves acquiring a wide range of perceptual and conceptual skills and developing a sensitivity regarding their exercise. Pictures represent in many different ways. And different skills are needed to understand pictures of different kinds. But each system need not be learned from scratch. For pictorial learning also involves developing second order skills. These enable us to modify and extend our interpretive abilities and so comprehend pictures in systems related to those we know. The viewer who is already adept at interpreting traditional realistic paintings is likely to have little difficulty learning to understand realistic works with multiple vanishing points.*

*Having mastered a pictorial system, we simply see what its pictures represent. The process is so nearly automatic that we are apt to forget that interpretation occurs.*<sup>(75)</sup>

So on this view, learning to identify representations correctly is a matter of learning to read symbol systems. But there must be more to what makes something a representation than our correct interpretation of it as such. What makes something the kind of thing that would be a representation?

Goodman presents a continuous picture for all types of reference or symbolization. He doesn't want to distinguish sharply, as the resemblance theorist willingly does, between cases of reference in language, or what he calls description, and cases of reference through things like pictures and dances, or what he calls depiction. He does, however, try to account for the accepted sense of difference between these two phenomena by explaining that the symbol systems at play in these different kinds of symbolization can be characterized differently. Unlike systems of symbols used in descriptions, symbol systems that function in depictions are usually dense and replete.

Goodman does not give us any hard and fast criteria, but rather suggests that functioning as a picture is related to being part of an analog scheme and beyond that, one that is replete. Early on, Goodman wrote, "A system is representational only insofar as it is dense; and a symbol is a representation only if it belongs to a system dense throughout or to a dense part of a partially dense system."<sup>(76)</sup> But a dense system is not enough to make symbolization pictorial. Consider an electrocardiogram, which is a symbol in an analog system. As Goodman points out, "The only relevant features of the diagram are the ordinate and the abscissa of each of the points the center of the line passes through. The thickness of the line, its color and intensity, the absolute size of the diagram, etc., do not matter; whether a purported duplicate of the symbol belongs to the same character of the diagrammatic scheme depends not at all upon such features."<sup>(77)</sup> A representation (depiction), say a Hokusai drawing of Mount Fujiyama, is quite different. We could even imagine a drawing identical to the electrocardiogram, but in the case of the drawing everything would matter; all of those features Goodman lists, like color and absolute size, could not be changed without changing the meaning of the drawing and in fact making it a different symbol.<sup>(78)</sup>

### A Closer Look At Representation

In order to understand more about representation, let's consider an example, Gertrude Stein's portrait of Cézanne from her "Three Portraits of Painters":

*The Irish lady can say, that to-day is every day. Caesar can say that every day is to-day and they say that every day is as they say.*

*In this way we have a place to stay and he was not met because he was settled to stay. When I said settled I meant settled to stay. When I said settled to stay I meant settled to stay Saturday. In this way a mouth is a mouth. In this way if in as a mouth if in as a mouth where, if in as a mouth where and there. Believe they have water too. Believe they have that water too and blue when you see blue, is all blue precious too, is all that that is precious too is all that and they meant to absolve you. In this way Cezanne nearly did nearly did in this way. Cezanne nearly did nearly did and nearly did. And was I surprised. Was I very surprised. Was I surprised. I was surprised and in that patient, are you patient when you find bees. Bees in a garden make a specialty of honey and so does honey. Honey and prayer. Honey and there. There where the grass can grow nearly four times yearly.<sup>(79)</sup>*

Regardless of Goodman's own thoughts on the subject, we might consider this a hybrid of description and depiction. On one hand, it is in natural language which refers in its usual way; on the other, we can see clearly that the linguistic system is replete. Changes in the number of words used, which words are used, how they sound, how many syllables they have, would make it a different symbol with a potentially different meaning. If Stein didn't hyphenate "to-day" *Cézanne* would have been a different symbol. If she had substituted "azure" or "cornflower" or "royal blue" for "blue" she would have created a different symbol. If she had written that "Cézanne nearly did nearly did nearly did and

nearly did" or only that he "nearly did and nearly did", we would have a different symbol. The repleteness is evident.

But in virtue of what do we take this to be a portrait of Cézanne? We might be tempted to point out that it refers to Cézanne by using the name "Cézanne". In that manner, it says he nearly did... and more. But is this really what makes the piece a portrait of Cézanne, something we would be tempted to call a depiction? After all, we wouldn't usually think of the sentence "Cézanne nearly did" as a portrait. Instead, we might say that it seems salient that the piece exemplifies certain metaphorical qualities. It has hard edges, repeated units, colors that are bold and warm; it is fragmented, more continuous and unified than a patchwork quilt, more mosaic-like than an academic painting. In brief, it expresses (metaphorically exemplifies) the properties we find in the work of Cezanne. It portrays or depicts him through exemplification and expression. And here we can see how the repleteness of the system allows that kind of exemplification to develop. Without that repleteness, without the fact that repetition and rhythm and rhyme matter, we wouldn't be able to perceive the things exemplified; we wouldn't feel Cézanne's refracting surfaces and hard chalky lines. We would only know that he "nearly did".

Now for Goodman exemplification is in some way at odds with representation. He thinks that representation works through denotation, a process by which a label associated with a property refers to an instance of a property. Exemplification is a different kind of reference; in exemplification, an instance of a property refers to that property. He rejects a definition of representation involving exemplification.<sup>(80)</sup> However, in "Representation Re-presented" he acknowledges that pictures include "also abstract paintings, drawings, prints that do not even purport to denote but refer in other ways, as by exemplification and expression."<sup>(81)</sup>

How can we reconcile the notions of exemplification and representation? We saw how in the case of the Cézanne portrait. The portrait is a representation of Cézanne. But how does it refer to Cézanne? It does so in virtue of exemplifying other things (not Cézanne himself!), properties that we associate with Cézanne, in this case because they typify his paintings. So it's not the case that what is represented is also exemplified. Rather, one kind of reference, exemplification, enables another kind of reference, representation.

This is useful because we can say the same of *Trio A*. *Trio A* represents or refers to ordinary movement by relying on the mechanism of exemplification, as we have already seen. But unlike we thought at first, it doesn't exemplify ordinary movement *per se*; it exemplifies properties which we take to be properties of ordinary movement. These properties-- like uninflectedness, even pacing, lack of performative focus, and seeming lack of effort-- are properties we associate with ordinary movement. As we have seen, they *don't* necessarily actually characterize it. But rightly or wrongly we take them to be properties typical of the sort of movement we commonly see.<sup>(82)</sup>

As with the piece by Stein, it is the repleteness of the system that allows these exemplifications to emerge. Everything about how, where, and when Rainer moves matters. It matters exactly how she does the arabesque, that she closes her eyes when

facing the audience, that she wears sneakers... In a system that wasn't replete, *Trio A* would be the same symbol even if these things were different. But without those differences, it couldn't exemplify what it exemplifies.

We've seen something interesting-- that pictures and the kinds of things we classify with them, including works of art in other media, exhibit density and repleteness and often *in virtue of* these features (not independently of them) are capable of exemplification and expression. And sometimes it is through these mechanisms of exemplification and expression that they are able to represent what they represent. We're seeing something Goodman has often stressed-- that works of art work through chains of reference. But it's useful to see that phenomenon close up. Moreover, what we've seen is compatible with a Goodmanian perspective, but it's valuable even if we don't adopt Goodman's rigid view of representation.

I think it's important to entertain doubts about all the accounts of representation we've seen thus far. Although resemblance and intention lead us to absurd conclusions about representation, we should also question Goodman's cure-all, convention. Is convention really sufficient to explain representation? After all, where do the conventions come from, how do we know how to extrapolate from one case to the next, and how do we proceed (sometimes rightly) when we don't know the appropriate convention?

I think we should seriously consider the possibility that a unified account of representation is not to be found. For the most part, we have no problem picking out things we call representations and knowing what they're representations of. But that doesn't mean there's one common feature all these things share. We're good at picking out things for which we don't have criteria, often intuitively using family resemblances and functioning in much more complex ways than we allow for in our theories. Perhaps such is the case with representation.

At any rate, it's clear that a definition of representation is not something that can be settled or should be attempted in this context. But that doesn't mean that we can't go on. We can function with a fuzzy knowledge of what representation is. We can pick out representations and talk about those things we call representations even if we're not sure what makes them representations. We can appeal to intuitions, ostension, and past usage. And we can continue to explore how representations represent and how representation relates to signification.

### **Representation and Signification**

There are many different ways to get to be a representation of ordinary movement. *Trio A* exemplifies uninflectedness and other salient properties. But Act I of *The Nutcracker*, which also represents ordinary movement doesn't do so through the same means. It instantiates walking, jumping, and dancing but doesn't exemplify any of the properties that *Trio A* exemplifies. It seems much more that Act I of *The Nutcracker* represents through denotation. The walking and jumping are symbols that denote walking and jumping. Perhaps how they manage to do that has to do with both convention and

resemblance. At any rate, *The Nutcracker* is more like a photograph of Cézanne in contrast with Gertrude Stein's portrait. Both are representations of Cézanne but through very different means. In like manner, both dances represent ordinary movement, but *Trio A* doesn't get to be a representation of ordinary movement in the same way as *The Nutcracker*. This is an important point because it is in virtue of such differences that representations of the same thing can signify in very different ways.

Representations of what seems on the face of it to be the same subject can be used in different ways and can say very different sorts of things. A representation of ordinary movement might say something about ordinary movement, but it could proclaim its beauty or lament its boredom or an infinite number of other things. On the other hand, a representation of ordinary movement might say nothing at all about ordinary movement. It might tell us instead about the body of the person moving (that it's long and lanky, that it's tiny and agile, that it's deformed...) or about the weather in the place where he is moving (that it's cold and the wind is hitting his face, that it's warm and sunny and liberating), or about the fact that he's late for an appointment, or lazy and unmotivated, or nervous, or happy... A novel that describes a character wandering around distractedly, resting a hand here and then there without ever looking at it probably says more about that character's psychological state than about ordinary movement.

We can't just equate signification with representation. If a work of art says something about ordinary movement then it represents it, but it's not the case that if a thing represents ordinary movement then it says something about it.<sup>(83)</sup> But if signification somehow goes beyond representation, if we can't simply equate the two, then how does a representation come to signify this or that? How, for instance, does a representation come to say something about ordinary movement?

What a work signifies is dependent on how the work comes to represent in the first place. For example, *Trio A* represents ordinary movement through exemplifying uninflectedness. This means that uninflectedness-- something we associate with ordinary movement-- is highlighted, pointed to. This calls attention to the fact that it's a representation of ordinary movement, and clues us in to the fact that something about ordinary movement may be being said. The situation is not parallel with Act I of *The Nutcracker*. The instantiation of certain properties makes it a representation of ordinary movement but doesn't draw attention to that fact. Walking, jumping and arm waving are instantiated in the party scene, but they're not exemplified. Nothing makes us dwell on the fact that this is a representation of ordinary movement; we might regard it as transparent until we were asked. However, *Trio A* forces the realization upon us; by exemplifying uninflectedness, it calls attention to the "ordinary movement-ness" of the dance, to the fact that it is a representation of ordinary movement. Perhaps through exemplifying properties like uninflectedness, the dance even exemplifies being a representation of ordinary movement and thus seems all the more likely to be saying something about it.

Although *The Nutcracker* doesn't automatically say something about ordinary movement just by representing it, it does have the potential to signify in other ways. It represents

walking and jumping and greeting and dancing; it represents Christmas trees and presents. It represents Christmas. But it also exemplifies various properties. It is fantastic, full of fantasy and it points to that property (how could it not with the Christmas tree growing like it does in the New York City Ballet version?). Perhaps it says something about Christmas and fantasy, that Christmas is wondrous, or is wondrous for children (its being about children is also exemplified, in particular by the fact that in at least some versions actual children are used in the cast). Or since Christmas is only represented, but not highlighted or pointed to in any way, maybe it only says that life is fantastic and wondrous for children and it uses Christmas as a means to say it.

At any rate, different representations of ordinary movement represent it in virtue of different combinations of features and different types of reference. What those are, what other features the representation has, which of those features are exemplified, and ultimately, what chains of reference exist all affect what the representation can signify, or colloquially put, say. Representations don't say anything *just* by being representations. The relationship between representing and saying is as complex and messy as the relation between a work's properties and representing. And so to say something about ordinary movement a work needs to represent it, but it doesn't say what it says through representation alone.

In general, signification doesn't amount to representation.<sup>(84)</sup> Although we might be tempted to think that it reduces to denotation in the case of ordinary language, there is another sense of saying even in natural languages that amounts to commenting upon or making a point that goes beyond straightforward denotation.<sup>(85)</sup> In all media, what a thing makes a point about, what it communicates, what it signifies, can't be equated with what it denotes or represents. Dance is no exception. In Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks*, for example, there is extended discussion of musical works by Bach, Beethoven and Wagner.<sup>(86)</sup> But I doubt we'd want to say that the novel is making a point about the music of Beethoven or is concerned with commenting on it. What the novel signifies may include things it represents but shouldn't be equated with or limited to it.<sup>(87)</sup>

So how representation relates to signifying in dance is not unique or unusual. But is representation? In dance, the features of the work allow it to represent in the way it does. But likewise in sculpture and video and ordinary language. In dance, a relevant feature of a work might be its uninflectedness while in ordinary language a relevant feature of a sentence would be that a particular word denotes a particular object. Such features as the denotations of words in a linguistic utterance make for the possibility of linguistic representations.

It is interesting to note though that it's not just the denotative features of words that are responsible for representation in the linguistic case, as we saw in the portrait of Cézanne. Imagine a poem about the sound of hoofbeats. It might be a relevant feature of the words used that they are short and clipped. Their sound too might contribute to how they represent. Of course, sometimes only denotation matters; the length of a word might be completely irrelevant. But in dance too, despite its repleteness, some features matter some of the time and some don't. A dancer's exhalation on a Graham contraction is

relevant to the movement and the dance; an exhalation during one of Charles Moulton's precision ball-passing pieces probably doesn't matter at all. The fact that *Trio A* was first performed at the Judson Church matters; the fact that it was first performed on an even-numbered date doesn't. Dance is not an anomaly in this regard.

### What Can We Conclude?

Let's look back at the question we started with. Assuming it does, how does *Trio A* come to signify something about ordinary movement? We saw that instantiation was a non-starter. First of all, *Trio A* upon reflection doesn't instantiate ordinary movement, if there even is such a thing. Furthermore, we can see that the properties it does instantiate don't lead directly to representation or signification. Imagine a particular performance of *Trio A* in which Rainer dances it as a solo. It instantiates the properties of being danced by a brunette and danced on, say, a Tuesday, but these properties don't seem to contribute to its signification. Just pointing to the properties a work instantiates isn't enough to explain how it signifies.

Instead we should conclude that *Trio A* signifies through chains of reference. In particular, it represents ordinary movement through the exemplification of certain properties we associate with ordinary movement. The exemplification (reference to certain properties) helps the dance to refer to a certain kind of movement. That reference is itself then highlighted or flagged; through the salience of the properties exemplified by the dance and through contrasts between this dance and others,<sup>(88)</sup> the dance also refers to the fact that it is a representation of ordinary movement. In doing so it leads us to think it says something about ordinary movement. What exactly it says will depend on what else is represented and how.

This is sketchy. The network of references remains to be filled in. But it may be that our interpretive skills are more sophisticated than our analytical ones. That is, we know how to make the connections, perceive the references, draw the conclusions... yet we may not be able to spell them all out in overwhelming detail. Nor may we want to. We get a sense of how *Trio A* functions, of how it doesn't work through simple denotation. We have a window into how the dance signifies. We don't need a map of reference just for its own sake.

And we have learned something about dances in general. We have begun to see the complexity of their signification. Signification cannot be equated with representation. What is signified by a dance depends on what is represented and how it comes to be represented. We have seen that the correspondence between the work and what it signifies is not formulaic, and is more intricate than the kind of denotation we take to be typical of ordinary language. Movements in a dance aren't a secret code, asking to be individuated and linked to things in the world in one-to-one correspondence. There is no such simple story to tell.

But most importantly, we have seen that although dance doesn't signify like ordinary language, it still has the potential to signify. In fact, it is perhaps this complexity of its signification that makes it so rich and powerful a medium of expression. People don't see the complexity when they are not used to looking at dances, when they have no idea how to read them. Many are thus tempted to think that if dance doesn't function like ordinary language then it can't have meaning. Don't be taken in.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.3.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of some of the problems with the dance/language analogy see: Graham McFee *Understanding Dance* (London: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 5 "Dance as an Object of Understanding", pp.112-125. Also see Paul Ziff, "About the Appreciation of Dance" in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers (eds.), *Philosophical Essays on Dance* (Brooklyn, Dance Horizons, 1981), pp.69-83.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief description of *Trio A* and its history, see Don McDonagh, *The Complete Guide to Modern Dance*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), p.447.

<sup>4</sup>In writing nostalgically about learning *Trio A* as a student at Harvard, Elizabeth Kendall evokes the aura surrounding the dance. "Dillely also taught us half of Yvonne Rainer's 'Trio A,' which seemed like a witty secret language, a kit of odd accessories; to do it was as satisfying as reciting 'Jabberwocky.' Apparently, there was a brotherhood of 'Trio A' people if we ever got to New York, and a restaurant called Food. There was in fact Soho, a whole domain of dancers, those uncompromising creatures who owned only a pair of tennis shoes and a few personal icons (ready to double as stage props)... Dancers exuded freedom, and they could be recognized in the street by their somewhat scornful air." Elizabeth Kendall, "The Grand Union: Our Gang," *Ballet Review*, Vol.5, No.4, 1975-6, p.48.

<sup>5</sup>John Mueller, "Review of film of *Trio A*," *Dance Magazine*, March, 1979, 43.

<sup>6</sup>Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), p.53.

<sup>7</sup>See the extremely relevant "Post-modern Dance and Expression" by Noël Carroll in which Carroll surveys the types of expression we might attribute to dance. As he says, "Corresponding to post-World War II developments in painting and sculpture, these choreographers--my example will be Yvonne Rainer--attempt to compose dances that are

neither representational or expressive, that is, neither referring to nor suggesting events or emotions, fictions or feelings. These dances are meant to show nothing above and beyond the specific movements employed in making the given dance."(p.96) Carroll argues, as I will, that despite these intentions such dances as Rainer's are indeed discursive. Carroll speaks in terms of expression, but his use of expression in the broadest sense will correspond roughly to what I will call signification. Noël Carroll, "Post-Modern Dance and Expression" in Fancher and Myers, pp.95-104.

<sup>8</sup>Some philosophers who have chosen to talk about meaning in dance are: Francis Sparshott, *Off the Ground: First Steps to a Philosophical Consideration of the Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); David Best, *Expression in Movement & the Arts* (London: Lepus Books, 1974); Trevor Whittock, "The Role of Metaphor in Dance", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol.32, No.3, 1992, pp.242-249; and Julie Van Camp, "Non-Verbal Metaphor: A Non-Explanation of Meaning in Dance", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol.36, No.2, April, 1996, pp.177-187.

<sup>9</sup>We might worry that we need to fill in the picture about signification before we can ask how dances signify. But we can fully separate the question "what is signification?" from "how do we signify?" in the same way that we can separate the more theoretical question "what is swimming?" from the practical question "how do we swim?". I will thus bracket the theoretical question about signification while trying to get a closer look at the mechanics of signifying.

<sup>10</sup>For background on this early period in the history of American modern dance one could read about early modern dance heroines Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller and about the Denishawn school and company founded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. For a good general introduction, see: Joseph H. Mazo, *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1977), chapters I-IV. One finds a brief introduction and some source documents in: Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance as a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance from 1581 to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1974), Section Five, and an interesting and more scholarly treatment of the subject in: Elizabeth Kendall, *Where She Danced: The Birth of American Art-Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). For more on Ruth St. Denis and Denishawn (with good photographs) see: Walter Terry, *Miss Ruth* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1969); for more on Isadora Duncan see: Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (editors), *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.262-302, 438-444. An interesting discussion of these early figures in connection with later developments in modern dance can be found in: Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.145-185.

<sup>11</sup>For more background on Graham, see Mazo, chapter VI; Foster, pp.23-32; Agnes De Mille, *Martha: The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956) or the excerpt "The Dancer From the Dance," *Vanity Fair*, August 1991, 130-139, 150-156; and Graham's own autobiography: Martha Graham, *Blood Memory An Autobiography* (New York: Doubleday, 1991). For more on Humphrey, see Mazo,

chapter V; Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Doris Humphrey: An Artist First*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1972); and particularly helpful in understanding Humphrey's movement vocabulary: Ernestine Stodelle, *The Dance Technique of Doris Humphrey*, (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1978).

<sup>12</sup>On Cunningham see Mazo, chapter VII; Foster, pp.32-41; Cohen, *Dance as a Theatre Art*, Section Seven which includes an essay by Cunningham called "Two Questions and Five Dances"; and Roger Copeland's "Merce Cunningham and the Politics of Perception" in Copeland and Cohen, pp.307-324.

<sup>13</sup>Robin Silver Hecht, "Reflections on the Career of Yvonne Rainer and the Values of Minimal Dance," *Dance Scope*, Vol.8, No.1, 1973-4, 15.

<sup>14</sup>Banes, *Greenwich Village*, p.10.

<sup>15</sup>Such revolutionary dancing raises the obvious question: is this really dance? That these are works of dance can be argued about, perhaps justified by appeal to the kind of view expressed originally by Arthur Danto in "The Artworld", *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.61, No.19, October 15, 1964, pp.571-584. At any rate, at some point these works were taken into the history of dance, whether because of the intentions of their makers, their relation to the history, their acceptance by initiates, their family resemblance to other dances, or the effect they had on what followed. I don't think the fact that they are works of dance is worth quibbling over.

<sup>16</sup>Sally Banes, "Revolutionary Dancemaking," *Chicago Free Weekly*, March 22, 1974. Banes further presents an excellent picture of this period, not only in *Greenwich Village*, but also in her *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, and *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962-1964*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup>Robert Ellis Dunn died on July 5, 1996. For a portrait of his work and a sense of the tremendous effect his workshops had on the choreographers of the 1960s, see the Movement Research journal's memorial issue with contributions by many artists: *Movement Research Performance Journal*, No.14, Spring, 1997, published in connection with the *Performance Tribute to Robert Dunn*, organized by Sally Silvers, May 15, 1997, at the Judson Church. Also see: Robert Ellis Dunn, "Judson Days" *Contact Quarterly*, Vol.14, No.1, Winter, 1989, pp.9-13.

<sup>18</sup>Jill Johnston, "The New American Modern Dance," *Salmagundi*, Nos.33&34, Spring/Summer, 1976, 168.

<sup>19</sup>Rainer said this in a television interview in the series *Eye On Dance*, "PostModern Dance: Judson Dance Theater and the Grand Union," aired June 25, 1990, with host Celia Ipiotis, guests Yvonne Rainer and Sara Rudner.

<sup>20</sup>Hecht, p.21. Also see *Eye On Dance*, and Rainer's own writings on the subject, particularly "A Quasi-Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora," in her *Work 1961-73*, (New York: New York University Press, 1974).

<sup>21</sup>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*, Vol.10 (T-30), Winter, 1965, p.168.

<sup>22</sup>Kendall, pp.45-46.

<sup>23</sup>In the PBS television special *Beyond the Mainstream: Postmodern Dance* made for "Dance in America", Rainer recalls how critics said she walked as if she were in the street.

<sup>24</sup>Jack Anderson, "Yvonne Rainer: The Puritan as Hedonist," *Ballet Review*, Vol.2, No.5, 1969, p.31.

<sup>25</sup>Hecht, pp.13-14.

<sup>26</sup>Noël Carroll and Sally Banes, "Working and Dancing: A Response to Monroe Beardsley's 'What is Going On in a Dance?'," *Dance Research Journal*, Vol.15, No.1, 1982, p.37.

<sup>27</sup>Anderson, p.33.

<sup>28</sup>Mark Franko dwells on the relation between emotion, or lack thereof, and dance for Rainer, and her subsequent exploration of emotion through the medium of film. He believes that Rainer's remarks and, we might add, choreography like *Trio A*, "indicate a certain dissociation of emotion from the personal experience of bodiliness. They indicate that emotions are the body's *social* material, whereas dance only allows the expression of an insuperable privacy or a kind of seduction." See Mark Franko, "Some Notes on Yvonne Rainer, Modernism, Politics, Emotion, Performance, And The Aftermath", p.294 as it appears in: Jane C. Desmond (ed.), *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp.289-303.

<sup>29</sup>Anderson, p.33.

<sup>30</sup>Hecht, p.22.

<sup>31</sup>I would stress that it is not necessarily the effort *expended* but the effort *exhibited*.

<sup>32</sup>Merce Cunningham, "The Impermanent Art," reprinted in: Richard Kostelanetz (editor), *Aesthetics Contemporary* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989), pp.310-314; from *Seven Arts* (Indian Hills, CO, 1955).

<sup>33</sup>Sally Banes, "In Praise of Older Dancers," *Soho Weekly News*, April 12, 1979, p.26.

<sup>34</sup>Hecht, p.15.

<sup>35</sup>Anderson, pp.34, 36.

<sup>36</sup>William G. Sommer, M.D., "Some Like Yvonne Rainer-- And Some Don't," (editorial in response to Clive Barnes), *The New York Times*, March 2, 1969.

<sup>37</sup>Johnston, p.170.

<sup>38</sup>Carroll and Banes, pp.38-39.

<sup>39</sup>Johnston, p.167.

<sup>40</sup>Anderson, p.34.

<sup>41</sup>Carroll, p.101.

<sup>42</sup>Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.121.

<sup>43</sup>Danto, *PD*, p.131.

<sup>44</sup>Danto, *PD*, p.133.

<sup>45</sup>Alexander Nehamas, "Plato and the Mass Media," *The Monist*, Vol.71, No.2, pp.226-227.

<sup>46</sup>Nehamas, p.225.

<sup>47</sup>Interpretation, for Nehamas, seems to prevent us from seeing something as real or immediate. We might wonder though whether Nehamas thinks that our own "real-life" experiences never merit interpretation or allow us to be conscious of our own interpreting. Or if they do, what strange distancing effect does this have on our experience?

<sup>48</sup>Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.119.

<sup>49</sup>Danto does equivocate a bit on this point. Throughout *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* he seems to be saying that once something is an artwork, it's no longer a mere real thing. However, in an interview with Annette Balkema and Henk Slager he discusses Beuys' and Antoni's use of real chocolate and seems to leave room for their works to remain chocolate. [Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (eds.), *The Intellectual Conscience of Art*. Amsterdam: Lier & Boog Series of Philosophy of Art and

Art Theory, Vol.11, 1996, pp. 13-21.] Perhaps the difference is in the "just"; it's no longer just a square or a block of chocolate.

<sup>50</sup>Danto, *TC*, p.126.

<sup>51</sup>Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), p.53. In general, see pp.52-57. It is interesting to note that Goodman presented his views on art and such aesthetic features as exemplification only shortly after works like *Trio A* became popular.

<sup>52</sup>One should note that, not able to appeal to properties, nominalists like Goodman and Elgin discuss whether a thing actually refers to the label or the extension of that label. There are reasons to argue for either, but this debate is not relevant to our purposes. We can continue to speak in terms of properties even if only as a shorthand for something else, the details of which need not be decided upon here. For an extremely clear discussion of exemplification and further explanation of these difficulties, see: Catherine Z. Elgin, *With Reference to Reference*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), Chapter V, pp.71-95.

<sup>53</sup>"Some elements of the dance are primarily denotative, versions of the descriptive gestures of daily life...But other movements, especially in the modern dance, primarily exemplify rather than denote. What they exemplify, however, are not standard or familiar activities, but rather rhythms and dynamic shapes..." Goodman, *LA*, p.64. I find both Goodman's classification of movements and his idea about how exemplification is used in dance too narrow, as will become evident from my own discussion of exemplification in *Trio A*. Still, he makes an important point about how exemplification is a major vehicle of reference in the realm of dance.

<sup>54</sup>This might seem, despite the difference in terminology, not so different from Danto's disturbational art. Disturbational art is in fact the reality that it represents. Something which exemplifies a property instantiates the property to which it refers. In both cases we have something referring to that which it also is. So why should we have any hope for Goodman's view when Danto's left us unsatisfied? Although there is a clear parallel, the notions of disturbational art and exemplification are embedded in very different theoretical frameworks.

Danto's framework renders his notion contradictory; something can't both be a real thing and represent it (i.e. be art) because being art makes it no longer a mere real thing. On the other hand, something could both instantiate a property and refer to that property. On Goodman's view there is nothing about referring that changes instantiation; referring to a property doesn't make it impossible that a thing instantiates that property. Danto might try to borrow from this view, but he could only get as far as saying that a thing can be that which it also represents. He wouldn't be able to make the leap to say that the thing representing is also art, and merely representing is not enough for his purposes.

<sup>55</sup>Goodman, *LA*, pp.64-65.

<sup>56</sup>In "What does the 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy' Mean?" Selma Jeanne Cohen takes up Goodman's comments about exemplification in dance and tries to apply them to the issue of signification in the case of a famous dance passage from the canon of classical ballet. She doesn't get very far though, in part because of the limited way in which Goodman applies the notion of exemplification to dance, and in part because her treatment of signification on the whole remains fairly superficial; it is not clear what exactly she has in mind as "meaning" throughout the essay. See Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Next Week, Swan Lake: Reflections on Dance and Dances*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), pp.81-105.

<sup>57</sup>An interesting but difficult question arises: where does signification end and interpretation begin? I don't think there is any clear boundary between them; in fact, they might just be two sides of the same coin.

<sup>58</sup>These are not such unusual circumstances for a dance performance. Do all instances of concert dance then exemplify concert dance? No. Although the New York State Theater at Lincoln Center is bigger, grander and more dizzying than the Judson Church, it is a dance setting to which we are numb. As an environment for concert dance, it is certainly recognizable, but it doesn't draw our attention to the fact that what we see there is concert dance. On the other hand, the whiteness of Judson and the slats falling from the ceiling highlight its formality.

More importantly though, it may be that certain instances of exemplification piggyback on other instances. The same features might not render concert dance exemplified if we went to see *The Nutcracker*, but in virtue of the fact that ordinary movement is exemplified and those features (buying tickets, taking seats, starting at an appointed time) are in such direct contrast with ordinariness and pedestrianism, they are much more noticeable. Such features might be exemplified in the case of *Trio A* in virtue of the fact that ordinary movement is exemplified as well. Consider Goodman's discussion of routes of reference in variation where a feature of a theme could be exemplified in virtue of a shared or unshared feature exemplified by a variation. For more detail on this phenomenon see "Variations on Variation" in Nelson Goodman and Catherine Z. Elgin, *Reconceptions in Philosophy & Other Arts & Sciences* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), pp.66-82.

<sup>59</sup>Banes, *Soho Weekly News*, p.26.

<sup>60</sup>*Eye On Dance*.

<sup>61</sup>Rainer, *Work*, p.77.

<sup>62</sup>Catherine Elgin notes that we need not conclude from this that *Trio A* wasn't the sort of thing anyone could do. "If what A teaches B is not quite what B teaches C, and what C teaches D is not quite what B teaches C, etc., then even if A could teach anyone to do the dance, there would come a point where there is no reason to say that what M teaches N is

still the same dance." This is true. Let it suffice to say though that my mother couldn't do *Trio A* even if A taught it to her.

<sup>63</sup>I spoke with Rainer about this in a conversation after her film screening at The Jewish Museum in New York City, March 11, 1997.

<sup>64</sup>Goodman, *LA*, Chapter I, in particular pp.3-10.

<sup>65</sup>Goodman, *LA*, p.20.

<sup>66</sup>Kendall, p.54.

<sup>67</sup>Since it's not germane to my purposes in this essay I also won't present comprehensively the extensive literature on the subject of representation. For an interesting survey of this literature, see: Dominic Lopes, *Understanding Pictures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Lopes broadly divides representation theories into theories of pictures as perceptual and theories of pictures as symbols. His perceptual theories include resemblance theories and illusion theories while I would classify the latter under resemblance theories.

<sup>68</sup>Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.143. See the chapter "Artists, Models, and Real Things", pp.143-178, for an interesting discussion of resemblance and realism in American art.

<sup>69</sup>See Goodman, *LA*, pp.3-10. For further, more extensive discussion of the problems using resemblance to establish representation also see Elgin's "Confronting Novelty" in *Reconceptions*, pp.101-120.

<sup>70</sup>Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p.123.

<sup>71</sup>Putnam follows Goodman only so far with respect to the claim that we make the stars. See Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp.109-115 on "Nelson Goodman's 'Irrealism'".

<sup>72</sup>This seems related to Putnam's point, which he attributes to Charles Travis and originally to Wittgenstein, that the meanings of individual words are not sufficient to establish the meaning of a claim. The meaning of a claim is highly occasion-sensitive. It depends tremendously and in a very fine-grained way on context, under the heading of which Putnam includes intention. See Putnam's unpublished Royce Lecture #1 (November, 1997), ".....I Thought of What I Called An 'Automatic Sweetheart'".

<sup>73</sup>The situation is a bit like that in the philosophy of science where social constructivists claim that science is just a matter of our construction, that we spin fictions which we think describe a world independent of our making. Scientific realists, on the other hand,

claim that science neutrally discovers a world whose features are independent of us and our description. Neither tack seems the right one to take since both miss features of scientific activity. We need an account of science in which we acknowledge our creative role but also acknowledge that that role is parasitic on something beyond us. And we need a parallel account of representation.

For background reading on the issue in philosophy of science, see such representative works on social constructivism as:

David Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976).

Bruno Latour, "One More Turn After the Social Turn..." in Ernan McMullin (ed.), *The Social Dimensions of Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (London: Sage, 1979).

Richard Rorty, "Science as Solidarity" (1987) in Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

On various forms of scientific realism, see:

Richard Boyd, "The Current Status of Scientific Realism" *Erkenntnis*, 19, 1983, pp.45-90.

Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Rom Harre, "Three Varieties of Realism" in Anthony A. Derksen (ed.), *The Scientific Realism of Rom Harre* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1994).

Ernan McMullin, "Realism and Modern Cosmology" *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 29, 1955, pp.137-150.

Ernan McMullin, "A Case for Scientific Realism" in the useful anthology, Jarrett Leplin (ed.), *Scientific Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>74</sup>Goodman and Elgin, *Reconceptions*, p.118.

<sup>75</sup>Goodman and Elgin, *Reconceptions*, p.116.

<sup>76</sup>Goodman, *LA*, p.226.

<sup>77</sup>Goodman, *LA*, p.229.

<sup>78</sup>For more explanation, see Goodman, *LA*, pp.225-232. Goodman also presents his later thoughts on the subject in "Representation Re-presented", *Reconceptions*, pp.121-131.

<sup>79</sup>Carl Van Vechten (ed.), *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p.329.

<sup>80</sup>Nelson Goodman, "On What Should Not be Said About Representation" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.46, No.3, 1988, p.419.

<sup>81</sup>Goodman and Elgin, *Reconceptions*, p.131.

<sup>82</sup>In an interesting article on how John Cage's music signifies, Noël Carroll presents a similar line of argument. He claims that "Cage's noises, then, are not like everyday noise. They have a semantic function. They are, to use Nelson Goodman's terminology, exemplifications of everyday noise--i.e. samples of everyday noise--indeed samples which within a certain musicological context are supposed to illustrate the latent potentials of noise." It's through being exemplifications that they signify as they do. The idea that Cage's compositions are all exercises in exemplification is a nice one, but we might wonder if the works really exemplify everyday noise, or rather if they exemplify features we find typical or recognizable of everyday noise, as is the case with *Trio A*. Noël Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol.52, No.1, 1994, pp.93-98.

<sup>83</sup>It follows that for art to signify it must be representational. Although one might take issue with this, I use representation here in a very broad sense. I would allow what we might think of as abstract works to represent, as does Sally Banes when she takes *pas de deux* in Balanchine's abstract ballets to represent marriage.

<sup>84</sup>I suspect that a Goodmanite might be uncomfortable with this distinction between representing and signifying and would prefer a continuous picture on which both are part of the same sort of symbolizing. Catherine Elgin talks about different levels of understanding a representation, for example, not understanding a sentence from Henry James' *The Golden Bowl*, even though one understands the individual syntactic and semantic elements of the sentence. (*Reconceptions*, p.117) Perhaps she would propose corresponding levels of representation. On one hand, I feel that if the different layers of symbolic activity are acknowledged it doesn't matter terribly what we call them; it's a matter of bookkeeping. On the other hand, I choose to accept a more received usage of "signification" and "representation" and thus use representation in a more limited way. There is some intuitive appeal to this. We feel comfortable saying that Bill T. Jones' dance *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* represents Harriet Beecher Stowe's story about slavery, a Gospel singer, and a "Last Supper" scene and that it signifies something about the situation of African-Americans in this country. It seems too minimal to say that it represents the situation of African-Americans and to be a bit of a stretch to say that it represents whatever points it makes about that situation.

<sup>85</sup>In the philosophy of language, the study of pragmatics might be taken to be articulating an account of such a sense of saying.

<sup>86</sup>Thomas Mann (transl. John E. Woods), *Buddenbrooks:; The Decline of a Family*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993, originally 1924), see pp.434-443.

<sup>87</sup>Perhaps this casts doubt on Danto's view about artistic interpretation. For Danto, presenting an hypothesis about the subject of a work amounts to picking out representations. He describes it in terms of his "is" of artistic identification, but we might say that Danto's transfigurative claim, "that actor is Hamlet" amounts to saying that a particular man represents Hamlet. For Danto, this is to identify the subject of the work. But it would seem that identifying the subject of the work involves something more than just identifying what is represented. Danto in fact seems to leave room for this, but for him the intentions of the artist and the art historical context tell us how to identify the subject in the way that I'm proposing chains of reference might.

<sup>88</sup>Since I have focused exclusively on reference within the work I have not been able to take up the relation of a dance to dance traditions and the inevitable role of that relation in the dance's signification. In "Post-Modern Dance and Expression", Carroll briefly describes how, "Traditional practice offers a repertory of choices of technique... A dance is seen as a choice *vis-à-vis* a tradition and as a response to it... Part of the role of the critic (or commentator) is to assess the relation of emerging work to the past, to say what is new and what is old in each work and to speculate on its implied significance in terms of our conceptions of dance." (p.102)