

Danspace Project

Conversations Without Walls: Barbara Dilley & Yvonne Rainer with Wendy Perron

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Judy Hussie-Taylor

Welcome to Danspace Project and our Conversation Without Walls. I'm Judy Hussie-Taylor, Executive Director & Chief Curator. I'm honored to welcome three people I hold in high esteem, Barbara Dilley, Yvonne Rainer, and Wendy Perron. Thank you all for joining us today to celebrate Wendy's new book "The Grand Union: Accidental Anarchists of Downtown Dance 1970-76" published by Wesleyan University Press. So this is an exciting occasion. I just quickly want to thank our Danspace staff and our behind the scenes wizards, especially Yolanda Royster and Ben Kimitch, for holding us all together today on the Zoom. So all three of our guests have extensive histories with Danspace Project. Barbara Dilley co-founded Danspace Project, along with Mary Overlie and Larry Fagin in 1974. Prior to that, Barbara was a member of Merce Cunningham's company from 1963 to 1968. She danced with Yvonne Rainer from 1966 to 1970 and was a member of the Grand Union, which you'll hear a lot about today. She was instrumental in the founding of Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, which is where I met Barbara. She designed the dance department and served as the University's President from 1985 to 1993. Most recently, she is the author of "This Perfect Moment, Teaching Thinking Dancing," which is part autobiography, part workbook. Choreographer, filmmaker, and the author of many books, Yvonne Rainer was a co-founding member of Judson Dance Theater in 1962. Her 1970 "Continuous Project-Altered Daily" eventually morphed into the Grand Union. Over the past decade, Yvonne has been an active member of the Danspace Project community, including performances of "Assisted Living: Do You Have Any Money?" in 2013, performances with Steve Paxton and Simone Forti in 2016 and 2017, and a wonderful screening in 2015 of "Rainer Variations," a collaborative film with Charles Atlas. Dancer and writer Wendy Perron is the reason we have gathered here today on the occasion of the publication of her latest book. A historically important, spirited, and thoroughly researched book about the legendary, but ever-elusive, performance collective, the Grand Union. Wendy has participated in and documented dance in New York City for four decades. She co-organized Judson Dance Theater's 20th anniversary at Danspace Project in 1982, and was a motivating force behind Judson Dance Theater's 50th anniversary at Danspace in 2012. So, without further ado, my heartfelt thanks to the three of you for making the time to be here today. And I'm going to leave you three in the Zoom room and hand it over to Wendy. Okay.

Barbara Dilley

Bye.

Judy Hussie-Taylor

Bye. [Judy leaves Zoom]

Wendy Perron

Bye. Thank you, Judy. I often think that Grand Union happened in a certain time, in a certain place. So I want to ask you, Yvonne, what were the other things that were happening in the country at the time that Grand Union started?

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah, I made a list of things to just establish a social, historical context for what we were doing. We weren't operating in a social vacuum. So the Rolling Stones we were all listening to, going to John Cage's concerts, and studying with Merce Cunningham still. Watergate happened in 1972. Nixon went to China. Angela Davis was released from jail. "The Godfather," Coppola's "Godfather" was released. US bombs Hanoi. The Black Panthers were in the headlines. The Supreme Court rules the death penalty unconstitutional. I'm talking about 1970-72, of course. The last US ground troops withdrawn from Vietnam and the continuous bombings of North Vietnam and Cambodia. And I remember there were five of us maybe going off to Oberlin College for a couple of weeks and someone commented we were like a rock group. And so there was this cultural surround that we were operating in.

Wendy Perron

The pictures, the publicity pictures for Oberlin bear that out. But I wanted to add one other thing about that time, it was the very beginning of the second wave of feminism.

Yvonne Rainer

Yes.

Wendy Perron

And there was some intersection between feminism and the anti-war movement. One of the great pleasures of writing this book was my continuing conversations with Yvonne, and Barbara, and the other members of Grand Union. And I wrote the book because I remember going to Grand Union a few times, not a lot, but it was enough to remember how unpredictable everything was when you went to see a Grand Union performance. And there was no leader. It was a true collective. It came out of Yvonne's piece "Continuous Project-Altered Daily." And I'm just going to say now who the members were. First of all, in "Continuous Project," it was Yvonne, Barbara, Steve Paxton, David Gordon, Douglas Dunn, and Becky Arnold. And then when it morphed into Grand Union, it added three people who were Trisha Brown, Nancy Lewis, and Lincoln Scott. And we're going to start with "Continuous Project-Altered Daily," a small excerpt of the working rehearsal at Connecticut College American Dance Festival in 1969. So, Yvonne or Barbara, do you want to say anything about "Continuous Project" before we show this little clip?

Yvonne Rainer

Hm. Oh, what was the date of it? 1970?

Wendy Perron

The clip is the summer of '69. And it was in March of 1970 that you did it at the Whitney as "Continuous Project-Altered Daily."

Yvonne Rainer

Right, right. But it began in a -- at Connecticut College in '69, when there were about five of us there. Barbara was one of them. And I was working out some of the permutations that were in my head. And that's what you're going to show right? That first um--?

Wendy Perron

Yeah, some of those sort of task oriented things and game oriented things.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah, yeah.

Wendy Perron

You were moving objects like a big carton or a--

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah I was playing a lot with moving things and making equivalencies between objects and bodies, you might say. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

And Barbara, do you remember anything about like the pillows or any of the scores that you were doing?

Barbara Dilley

Not specifically, but one of the realizations I had when I watched the clip that we're all going to see was about trust, and how much trust was developed among us during that time. I mean, it's such a key aspect of the kind of ensemble that we became was trust. And I think "Continuous Project-Altered Daily" really developed a relationship that was -- went beyond just traditional rehearsal performance. We really learned how to respond to one another a lot. Right away, from the beginning we were paying attention to each other in a big way.

Yvonne Rainer

And you were contributing to the process, to the creative process.

Barbara Dilley

Right.

Yvonne Rainer

I was not directing it as a traditional choreographer. Yeah.

Barbara Dilley

Yeah, so that started training us a lot. As you started to open up our choices and options, we slowly started to learn how to handle that. It was phenomenal.

Wendy Perron

I think both those things are kind of the foundation of the Grand Union. The trust on the one hand and the ability to bring in your own stuff on the other hand. So let's watch this little clip and we'll be able to comment during it and tell you who this person is or who that person is during the clip, and then we'll talk a little bit about it afterwards, too. So let's have that first clip.

[Film 1: "Connecticut Rehearsal" (excerpt) 1969 begins playing without audio.]

Yvonne Rainer

Oh, that's me putting Douglas on the floor. And there's Barbara.

Barbara Dilley

And this is what I mean about trust, that kind of throwing yourself backwards.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

Wendy Perron

And this is Douglas Dunn.

Barbara Dilley

And learning to work with props. I mean, one of the things we did so much of in "Continuous Project" was work with props, and it became something we all could do.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah, wherever the pillow landed, that was the first part of your body to reach the floor, be it your ass or your elbow.

Barbara Dilley

There's Becky.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

Barbara Dilley

Douglas. (laughs) I love those backward throws.

Wendy Perron

This is David Gordon on the ground now.

Yvonne Rainer

And Barbara. Oh, I love this. This is my favorite part. A huge amount of effort expended with a very small result, like moving the paper, the piece of paper on the box. Yeah, he's preventing me just barely from reaching the piece of paper. There I go.

Wendy Perron

And I love how Yvonne and David have almost the same haircut.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

[Film clip 1: "Connecticut Rehearsal" (excerpt) 1969 ends.]

Wendy Perron

Okay, so that was just a little piece of that. And then it seemed like the freedom that you gave the dancers, Yvonne, sort of got bigger, maybe a little bit more freedom than you thought.

Yvonne Rainer

No, just it was -- no. There were -- I set up the situations and basic instructions and we went to town. I accepted whatever they did. Barbara isn't that your impression?

Barbara Dilley

Well, there was there was kind of an evolution, I seem to remember. Like things were more established for a while and then there'd be options. And then there was the great Kansas City KCMO performance, where Steve and I were in Champaign-Urbana, and you gave us instructions by mail. And so there was a big kind of opening up of possibility.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

Wendy Perron

And I think, Yvonne, you told me that Barbara egged you on, that Barbara was one of the people --

Yvonne Rainer

Oh. Well, that came later when we started to tour my work. I was invited with my group to various places. And Barbara and I shared a hotel room together. I remember very specifically. And Barbara, you broached the question, "Why can't we...?" I don't know. I don't know whether we used the word improvised or not. Or, "Why can't we open this up?" Do you remember that?

Barbara Dilley

I don't. And I don't think we used the word improvised.

Yvonne Rainer

No, no, not then. No.

Barbara Dilley

It was just not part of any vocabulary that I remember.

Yvonne Rainer

Ah, but it was in Kansas City where we were doing this funny, traveling step with the box and bumping into each other. And I started -- you and I started to laugh uproariously. That kind of behavior, which is prohibited in formal dancing, that opened up for me -- that opened up a whole new sphere of possibilities that we could react emotionally to what was happening on the spot. Yeah.

Barbara Dilley

That's great. That's a great signature moment.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

Wendy Perron

But weren't you laughing because Barbara had a hunchback that you --

Yvonne Rainer

Yes. Barbara had this prop under her shirt that made her deformed so called. And she was doing this funny bopping around, and I started to laugh. Yeah. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

But you had set it up with inviting, I think her name was Debbie Hollingworth, or something?

Yvonne Rainer

Yes. To make these props.

Wendy Perron

Yeah, one was a big sombrero hat. One was the hunchback and --

Yvonne Rainer

A lion's tail. There was a lion's tail and--

Wendy Perron

And wings maybe? Wings?

Yvonne Rainer

Wings. There was a set of wings. Yeah. And you could put them on whenever you wanted. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

So you would set up this situation that laughter was, you know, was almost inevitable with this. And I think throughout the whole six years of Grand Union, there were always moments when laughter could happen. There were also moments where almost nothing happened.

Yvonne Rainer

A lot of those (laughing).

Wendy Perron

A lot of those, but I think that those costume adjuncts did create a feeling of play. And that laughter was like, oh, we can play.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Just to tell people what happened from there was eventually, Yvonne sort of evacuated as the leader and said to the others, you know, you figure out what you want to do as a group. And I'll come back in. And Barbara, I think, for the most part, it's true, no one thought of improvising, but when I read what Steve Paxton wrote about it, he I think sort of felt like, improvisation was inevitable if there was going to be this totally open score. And I want to emphasize that those of you who -- there were nine people at the most, but usually only six or seven people in Grand Union. It was not monolithic in terms of what you all thought Grand Union was, or what you thought the rules, if any, were there. So even at that very beginning, Steve was kind of waiting for everybody to realize that improvisation was going to happen because nobody wanted to follow each other's scores.

Yvonne Rainer

Right. And I should say, at the very beginning, it was not easy for me to let the horses out of the stable. I made several attempts to pull them back in and then realized it was too late at some point

Barbara Dilley

(laughs)

Yvonne Rainer

And accepted the outcome, yeah, of relinquishing my authority. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

And once you let go, it really was a leaderless group.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Which is one of the things I find fascinating about it. So we're going to look at the next clip, which is from LoGiudice Gallery from May 1972, and this group of videos from LoGiudice Gallery, which is at the library for the Performing Arts and a couple of other places at NYU Fales Library. And it was it was the team of video -- videographers was headed by Carlota Schoolman. So we'll see this little clip and then we'll talk about it.

[Film clip 2: *Grand Union at LoGiudice Gallery, May 1972* begins]

[Film clip 2: Barbara Dilley and other performers speaking "gibberish." Audience laughs intermittently.]

[Film clip 2 ends]

Wendy Perron

So just to identify some people, it starts with David Gordon and Trisha Brown, and then there's Barbara coming up doing her gibberish, and at the very end, behind David and Trisha slow dancing, is Yvonne being a plank and passing herself through the audience.

Barbara Dilley

Right. And there's a very interesting moment in there that I hadn't seen before where Douglas comes in and picks up stuff on the floor. I don't know what it is. But that kind of behavior, to use Yvonne's word you know, where we cleaned up the space or took stuff out of the space that was in people's way or whatever, he just does that it kind of in the background, and then he goes off into the audience. I don't know what he's doing.

Wendy Perron

I just want to say that kind of thing of two different things going on at the same time, you know, full blown psychodrama between you, Barbara, and David and Trisha. And then Douglas just very quietly doing his task.

Yvonne Rainer

And I'll just add, shortly after that clip ends, the audience in that front row is delivering me across the laps. And when I come to Valda Setterfield, she says to me, "Yvonne, I don't understand why you're so heavy. There's nothing ever in your icebox when I'm over there, but celery."

Wendy Perron

"How can you weigh so much when you only eat celery?" And I also Yvonne, I felt like that moment of you passing yourself was sort of like you being an object. There were so much dealing with different objects.

Yvonne Rainer

Mhm.

Wendy Perron

And I also want to say that it took me several times of watching that clip to realize that, Barbara, you were heading in a circle to meet Nancy. Nancy was also crawling through that. And that that was your end point. That was your destination, to meet Nancy.

Barbara Dilley

Well, you see, I'm not sure exactly when Nancy entered the project. That's not seen on the video. I don't know that we started at the same time. She may have seen what was going on and entered toward the end. So I think a lot of things were us watching stuff evolve and then seeing where we could enter in or seeing ourselves in the situation and going and getting in it.

Wendy Perron

Yeah, I think that's true. And for me writing the book, it was hard because there was only one camera view on all of these things. So that's all I had to go on.

Barbara Dilley

Yes, it's one of the interesting frustrations for me of the early videos, is that they get fixated on one event, and the audience is having a multi-visual event, you know. And sometimes -- and I think this was a nice shot because the audience is very out in the light and right there with us and, you know, sitting in these little folding chairs. I mean, it's not a proscenium environment at all, you know, and they oftentimes -- if you look at the audience, you see some people looking in one direction and some people looking in another direction. It was such a multi-visual three ring circus.

Wendy Perron

That's even on the cover of my book because in the middle of you four performing is James Klosty and Carolyn Brown, and one of them is looking in one direction the other one's looking in the other direction.

Barbara Dilley

That's great. That's great. (laughs)

Wendy Perron

Choosing -- I want to say that choosing clips to show is another difficult thing because it would go for hours without much happening. And that was really what was interesting for me is how there could be almost nothing and then slowly something coalesces. Like Barbara said, one of you would see something and kind of enter it. But to choose the clips to show you, I choose sections that are a little more coalesced than some other sections. So now we're going to go to Oberlin in January of 1972. This was before LoGiudice. Oberlin invited -- actually it was Brenda Way at Oberlin, she's now still the head of Oberlin Dance Collective, although right now it's in San Francisco. She decided to ask Grand Union to come and spend three weeks during their winter term at Oberlin. And actually just talking to Nancy Lewis recently, she told me how freezing cold it was. And Barbara, I think that explains why you were wearing long underwear in this performance. And this one, Steve was there. This was a -- Trisha was not there for this performance. There were many performances where one person was gone, like even in the "Continuous Project," that first clip that we showed, Steve, who was part of "Continuous Project" just happened to not be able to be there for that Connecticut rehearsal. So this is Oberlin in their -- I think. I forget what the hall is called, but it's a performance space. And there was a student playing music on a piano. And this was kind of off to the side. This is something that started as a solo and became a duet. And I really like to look at the kind of natural sense of counterpoint that you, Barbara, and Steve had during this. So let's see this clip.

[Film clip 3: *Grand Union residency at Oberlin College, January 1972* begins]

[Film clip 3: "Tomorrow May Not Be Your Day" by Taj Mahal plays.]

[Film clip 3 ends]

Yvonne Rainer

Real dancing.

Barbara Dilley

(laughs)

Wendy Perron

Yeah, it's a pleasure to be able to show the actual dancing because a lot of the dancing was just sort of amorphous people on their own. But this really became a duet. And Steve is so polymorphous in this, so polyrhythmic and polymorphous.

Barbara Dilley

Yeah. And I remember when I first saw this, I was so fascinated to see that moment where Steve initiates the duet between us as something because he's the one who takes my hand. He actually says, okay, I'm there, we'll do something. Or, you know, because I was already not doing the rhythmic thing. I was already moving into slow motion. But he's the one that picks up my hand. And it's, it's the place where the thing was -- that was the moment of conception, you could say --

Wendy Perron

Where it crystallized into a duet.

Barbara Dilley

Exactly.

Wendy Perron

Because before that, he went in front of you and he was he was replacing you kind of and --

Barbara Dilley

He was just club dancing or something. But then when I moved in slow motion and I extended my hand, I wasn't asking for him. It was just an extension of my arm. But then he took my hand and it was like, boom, there we were in a duet.

Yvonne Rainer

It's very clear, yeah.

Wendy Perron

And Barbara, I also love when you did this and were looking at the light. And there really -- there are a lot of moments in the Grand Union videos where someone is experimenting with light. And that happened a lot at Oberlin, and also later in Missoula. But as you were, you know, that was just such a beautiful --

Yvonne Rainer

And the shadows on her face. Yeah, the fingers.

Wendy Perron

Yeah, yeah. So we'll go to another one at Oberlin. And this is more like the kind of almost nothing thing that happens. But I want to tell you that it happens after Nancy Lewis has this thing in a corner where she's kind of -- she's got a mic and she's got her boots on, and she's doing sort of a Rolling Stones imitation or something. And she's just going crazy as a rock star having a tantrum. And it's like she has nowhere to go from there, from this kind of tantrum. And then Barbara, you took this swath of silk and

started to envelop her with it, and then David puts his arms around her, and then everything calms down. And what we're seeing now is sort of the calm after that particular storm. So let's see this next video.

[Film clip 4 : *Grand Union residency at Oberlin College, January 1972* begins]

[Film clip 4: "I'll Never Leave You" by Harry Nilsson plays]

[Film clip 4 ends]

Wendy Perron

I think the underwear theme went through in a way that Steve was wearing his underwear in this part and Lincoln Scott was wearing underwear, so maybe, Barbara, you started something in terms of the underwear theme?

Barbara Dilley

I don't remember how that came about. I think -- I just don't remember. We all stayed in a kind of a communal living situation. I have some vague idea they put us up as a group in a -- it was -- I don't have a lot of memory about how that came about. It was -- it's not usual for us to show up in similar clothes and I think it may be because we were in residency and I don't know. But I do want to say that that piece of silk, I still have it. I have it. And it's a beautiful piece of blue China silk and it just is very lively, and there's the prop thing you know that coming through from "Continuous Project" having props. And we used to show up to, or I would show up at performances with a bag that would have whatever I wanted to bring that night, including records. And that's Harry Nilsson, right?

Wendy Perron

I think so.

Barbara Dilley

That was a very common environment for a period of time. That particular song and many of Harry Nilsson's songs. I think it was David who brought those records.

Wendy Perron

Cat Stevens was another one that I heard a lot of. In order to find out the music, I would use the Shazam app and apply it to the videos. And so at the end of my book, I have a whole list a whole playlist of the different musics. Let me just say that the Oberlin video was the only one where Lincoln Scott was in it because he was not in -- actually the Oberlin video might be the very first video. Yeah. And then he left sometime between January and May so he was not in the LoGiudice tapes.

Yvonne Rainer

Becky Arnold disappeared very early.

Wendy Perron

She left even before that. Yeah. And she moved, actually. But she also wasn't comfortable in an improvisational situation. And then three years later, in '75, Trisha left.

Yvonne Rainer

I left in '72.

Wendy Perron

Yes, yes, after the LoGiudice, you left. And so the group went ahead without you. And then there were about three years with Trisha, and then she left and that's -- the year she left was 1975 was the year I joined Trisha's company. So for me, it was sort of a dovetailing thing to do this book. And let me just say too that the end of that video, was all of you coming together and just swaying together in a huddle. It was really quite beautiful to watch.

Barbara Dilley

And that was on a stage, right? That was a real traditional theater environment that we performed in.

Wendy Perron

It was but there was also the Warner gym, and I believe you also had a performance in Warner gym because Nancy remembers having to do Bolero in the gym.

Yvonne Rainer

Hm.

Barbara Dilley

I don't remember that. But did Steve Christiansen shoot that video?

Wendy Perron

Yes, he did, and Steve and I -- no one had looked at that video until about two years ago when I contacted Steve Christianson, and we worked together to convert that video digitally.

Barbara Dilley

Did he shoot the last video at Missoula?

Wendy Perron

No, he didn't shoot that, but he somehow found it.

Barbara Dilley

Oh, okay.

Wendy Perron

That's another story where I was told there was no video, that the video had been stolen. And then it turned up that Steve had it which was great. Steve also -- Steve Christiansen also videotaped, either that afternoon or the afternoon before Steve Paxton's work "Magnesium," which was Steve's workshop for men and that eventually morphed into Contact Improvisation. So we come to the last video, and Yvonne, I'm going to ask you to introduce this video.

Yvonne Rainer

Okay, well, I owe it to you that in this video, I am reading an excerpt from Jerzy Kosiński's "Steps." I had total amnesia about the source of that reading.

Wendy Perron

Let me just say that not to me it was Nancy Dalva who saw it on a clip at this Skirball thing, and she was the one who told me.

Yvonne Rainer

Ah, okay. Yeah. So it's a semi-pornographic reading. And I don't know -- I don't think I enlisted -- Did I? I don't remember whether I asked Trisha and --

Wendy Perron

Douglas.

Yvonne Rainer

Douglas to enact what I was reading or if they just volunteered for it. I have no memory of how that transpired. But I was at a microphone standing and reading this text and they took off with it.

Wendy Perron

Well, let me say that at the end of it, Trisha says, "Oh Yvonne, now I know why you wanted me to do this section." I think you did enlist her because Trisha was very flexible.

Yvonne Rainer

Right, right, right, right. It's quite possible. Yeah. The most flexible of all of us. Yeah. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

In fact, that other clip where Barbara is doing gibberish and Yvonne, you're being passed in the audience as a flat plank. Pretty soon after that when Trisha and David are slow dancing together, she says how when she studied tap, acrobatic, and ballet, she was best at acrobatic. That was her strong suit. So let's see this clip.

[Film clip 5: *Grand Union at LoGiudice Gallery, May 1972* begins.]

Yvonne Rainer (in film clip 5)

Touched my knuckles. (audience laughs). Each of her movements was now more pronounced. I felt as if she were trying to fuse her spine with my knuckles to make the fleeting contact permanent. Again, I looked cautiously at her. Her lips tightened (audience laughs). Again, I looked cautiously at her, her lips tightened and a slight flush heightened the color of her face. The luncheon ended by mid afternoon. The guests left for their dormitories in the clearings along the wooded road side. The girl and I also left, but we walked quickly into the shelter of the trees. I told her of the excitement I had experienced in watching her act, describing my fantasy of possessing her at that moment of great tension, whether it [inaudible]. She neither paused nor spoke. We walked on. It was now barely light. No wind reached the lower branches of the bridges, and the leaves on the bushes hung inert as though hammered out of land. Suddenly she turned and stripped, laying her dress down on the leaves piled deep at our feet. She faced me, gently forcing me down onto my back (audience laughs). As she knelt over me, she seemed to stocky almost short-limbed. Her forehead (audience laughs) Her forehead rested on my chest. Her hands on the ground behind my shoulders. Her forehead rested on my chest. Her hands on the ground behind my shoulders. Then, in a single smooth movement, she swung her legs into the air (audience laughs). As they passed the highest point of the arc her back made, they seemed to take on the willowy suppleness of young (inaudible) weighed down by falling snow. Her heels (audience laughs) her heels slowly past the crown of her head, with her face framed between her thighs, her knees bending. She brushed my face with -- she brushed against my face, her mouth and womb. (audience laughs) Do you want me to read it again? I mean now that you have material you might--

Trisha Brown(in film clip 5)

Now I understand why you selected me, Yvonne.

Yvonne Rainer (in film clip 5)

(inaudible) Does anyone else want to try it? Anybody in the audience? I'm sure there are some willing thighs in the audience.

[Film clip 5 ends]

Wendy Perron

It's great to see Trisha laugh and I danced with Trisha for three years around that time and when I look at these videos, there are things that she did that I, you know, I've never seen her do. But in this particular one where she cracks up and laughs is actually unusual because you were all so deadpan during the performance. Even when you knew you were doing things that were ludicrous, you were all completely deadpan. So that was an unusual moment.

Barbara Dilley

But then that's that issue of rehearsing in front of an audience or doing something for the first time. And so the audience is kind of present for an exploration of how to go about something, and I think that traces back to an evolution in "Continuous Project."

Wendy Perron

Yeah, didn't you-- Yvonne, didn't you--

Yvonne Rainer

Where I gave permission for behavior? Right? Yeah. Uh huh. Spontaneous behavior.

Barbara Dilley

Where we practiced stuff we'd never done. We started doing things we'd never done before in performance, that you would direct I think? Would you direct us?

Yvonne Rainer

I don't know, the Whitney, that -- records of that performance, as far as I know, don't exist, except for about five minutes that the Whitney bought. I can't remember who photographed it, but it's -- In it, Steve is rehearsing something very athletic and balletic on one leg, over and over again. I don't remember orchestrating that or ordering him. That's what I gave, you know, I began to give you permission to do your own thing that early. I'd forgotten about that. And there is this record of him fooling around. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Yeah, he's working -- he's clearly working on something.

Yvonne Rainer

You know that clip?

Wendy Perron

Yes. Oh, yeah. I've seen it. Yeah. It's the only -- it's the only clip from the Whitney performance, which was the first and the last time that "Continuous Project" was done as "Continuous Project."

Yvonne Rainer

Right. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

He is -- Steve and I emailed about that moment. He's sort of working on having the one leg be the fulcrum of his off balance movement. So he's arched and over and --

Yvonne Rainer

Right, right.

Wendy Perron

-- the way he's working on it. And in this clip we just saw, I like seeing how Douglas is sort of working, you know. When you say, "She moves her legs," and you can see Douglas' hands like, well, how can I help make this happen?

Yvonne Rainer

Right, right (laughs).

Wendy Perron

And one of the things you did, Yvonne, during that period where "Continuous Project- Altered Daily" was opening up, was you -- I think you used Becky Arnold to teach her "Trio A." She didn't know it, but she was learning it in front of the audience.

Yvonne Rainer

Right.

Wendy Perron

And I think the underside of that is to allow the performers some vulnerability to do something they didn't know.

Barbara Dilley

Yeah, well, we got kind of comfortable doing it. I mean Trisha and Douglas were completely comfortable working this out in front of an audience. And it's really wonderful how comfortable and relaxed, and they were kind of enjoying the task, and there was this communication between Yvonne and the two of them. It was terrific.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah. I was responding to what they were doing. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Another thing about that performance that you could see or hear is that the audience was totally with you guys.

Yvonne Rainer

Right.

Wendy Perron

And that was SoHo. That was because it was part of SoHo. And you all were part of the the repurposing of SoHo as an artists' neighborhood. And sometimes when you went outside of SoHo, there wasn't quite the warm response that there was in SoHo.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah, I remember when we went on the road with "Continuous Project" and it was beginning to open up, audience -- there were spectators who walked out. It wasn't a totally popular show. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

And maybe it's because in SoHo, those of us like me, sort of knew you all. Either we had done a workshop with you, or something like that, so that you are all more known quantities. But being known and being known quantities, you were also so different from each other. What we were watching was each of you being so much yourselves, and Barbara, there are tapes where you're spinning, and you're just getting so into it, and so into it. And sometimes someone would join you, and sometimes someone would echo your spinning in another part of the space. And sometimes the audience, some of them would be looking at you, some of them would not. But you each created your own world and for us to watch how your own separate worlds would sometimes overlap and intersect was a great joy.

Barbara Dilley

And I think that that's addressing a piece that's very important in how I remember all of that, which is that we took our time. And the way we did things is like it wasn't necessary for me to entertain anybody because there were other people doing things out there. You know, there was a kind of ... space in the middle of those Grand Union performances where time just didn't exist in a familiar way. It was very elongated. Things went on for a long time, or, you know, we spoke a little bit about the places where nothing happened. And I remember looking through a clip when we were talking about all of this, and we used to lie down in the space and just lie down and do nothing. You know, I mean, there was a whole spectrum of intense activity, things that went on for a long, long period of time. And then these just very quick little focused events.

Yvonne Rainer

I've always wondered how, especially the New York audiences that I was aware of, what was the fascination? Why did they stay?

Barbara Dilley

I feel the same way, Yvonne! Why people came... hoards of people.

Yvonne Rainer

Yeah, and they stayed there. Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Well, first of all, you were all the movie stars of our neighborhood. So there was the charisma. There was the individual charisma, moving up into the group charisma. And I don't know if people would stand for it today, when I look at videos. Each performance was about two hours long.

Yvonne Rainer

Right.

Wendy Perron

And there was a lot of these almost nothing things happening. But for those of us who wanted to follow it, I felt like things could happen in a Grand Union performance that wouldn't ever, ever happen anywhere else.

Yvonne Rainer

And you never knew when they were going to happen, so you hung in there. (laughing) Yeah.

Wendy Perron

Well also, even when things didn't happen, it was really interesting to watch the relationships between all of you and all of your decisions. So that about wraps it up. And I want to thank you, Barbara and Yvonne, for coming in. And I thank Judy and Danspace, and Ben and Yolanda for engineering all of this. And have a good day.

Barbara Dilley

And I want to thank you, Wendy so much for putting the glorious hours and time into writing that book. It's terrific. It takes that very ephemeral, almost impossible to describe journey that I was part of and made it something that can be shared. So thank you so much for that.

Yvonne Rainer

Ditto. Ditto me.

Wendy Perron

And it was my pleasure. And as I said at the beginning, part of it was talking to both of you, and to David, and Nancy, and Steve, about this kind of magic that you all made.

[Outro]

Seta Morton

Thank you for joining us for this Conversation Without Walls. The Conversations Without Walls 2020 digital series will be broadcasted on YouTube Live for one time only viewing parties. Don't worry if you don't catch us there. The conversations are all pre-recorded and will be posted ultimately in the Danspace Project website in our online Journal in Issue 11: trembling archive. Our Journal Issues accumulate over time with new material added regularly. Apart from this series, you will find video, audio, and written work by Danspace Project artists, curators, and writers. Please also check out Issues 1 through 10 to find works that center the Danspace Project past Platforms, seasons, experiments. The online Journal is really a place to get more insight into some of the internal conversations, research, and work that goes behind our more mainstage public facing programs. So check out the online Journal, and we look forward to having you at the next Conversation Without Walls.