

Yvonne Rainer

Early in September of 1970 I was asked by John Hendricks and Jean Toche to participate in a flag show at Judson Church, the purpose of which was to protest recent arrests of people purportedly "desecrating" the American flag. I said I would think about it. In the previous spring — roused by the killings on U.S. campuses and the invasion of Cambodia — I had used M-JValP (so-called because it had been inspired by a sequence in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*) as a protest against these events. Forty people, wearing black armbands, massed in three columns in the middle of Greene Street just below Houston (downtown Manhattan). Swaying in unison from side to side with bowed heads, we snaked our way down Greene, west on Prince (where we were stopped momentarily by a policeman and told to get onto the sidewalk; no one spoke or stopped swaying during this interruption), south on Wooster, east on Spring, then north on Greene back to the original starting point. It lasted an hour; by the end most of the participants had dropped away, and only five of us remained.

During the summer I continued to think about integrating some form of protest against or at least reference to — the horrors perpetrated by the American government. During a three-week teaching stint at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., I insisted that a huge sign be hung in the gymnasium for that duration. The sign read "Why are we in Vietnam?" On several occasions I conducted classes in the Ellipse opposite the White House. We hung the sign on the fence across the street from a long queue of people waiting to visit the White House. When a guard demanded its removal, we complied. Among other things, I was working with the students on 'war games', material that would eventually be incorporated into *WAR*.

Later, the American flag seemed to be an appropriate prop for use in the piece. (I still have memories of heated childhood games of "Capture the Flag".) In *WAR*, proprieties are at all times observed in dealing with the flag in that the performers try not to let it touch the ground and never deliberately step on it. (It can be walked over only if it is sandwiched between two other props: a black overcoat and three-foot square of simulated grass.) The issue of "desecration" did not seem a relevant one in this particular situation. The flag functioned simply as an object that enhanced the subject and imagery of nationalist conflict. For the *Hudson Flag Show*, however, I felt a need for a statement with stronger political overtones. I began to think about the other area in theater that still carries an emotional 'load' in its assault on taboos, viz., public nudity. To combine the flag and nudity seemed a double-barreled attack on repression and censorship.

At 6:30 PM on November 9th, 1970 Barbara Lloyd, David Gordon, Nancy Green, Steve Paxton, Lincoln Scott, and I gathered in the sanctuary of the Church where a large number of paintings and objects and environments dealing with the flag had already been installed. First tying 3x5-foot flags around our necks like bibs, we then undressed totally, dragging non-buttoning upper garments up under our chins, then proceeded to individual spaces to perform *Trio A* twice each.

This particular version was televised by NBC and Global Village. We were not otherwise interfered with, and when we each had completed the task we stopped dancing and put on our clothes. It felt good to do.