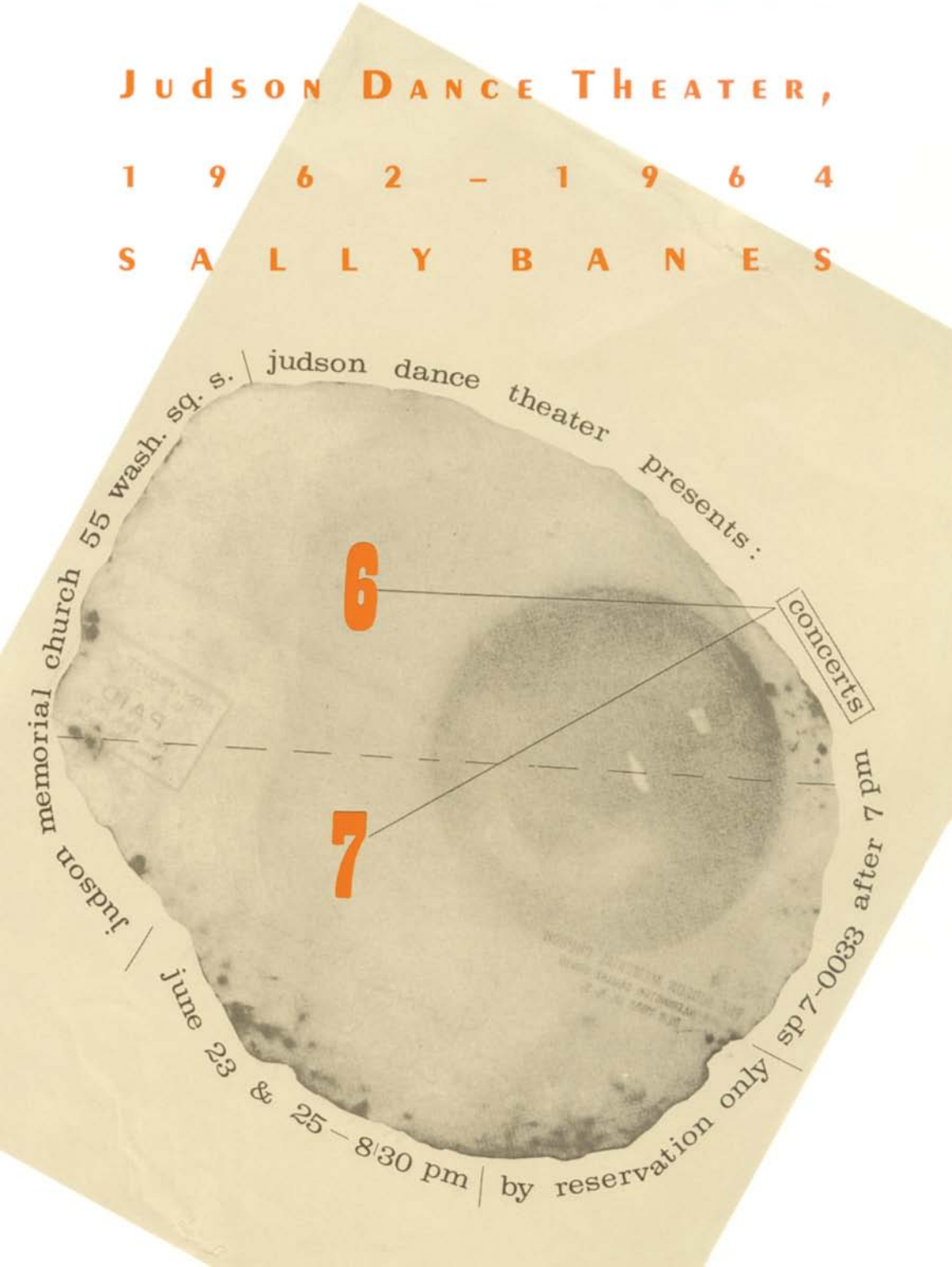
DEMOCRACY'S BODY

Judson Dance Theater, 1962–1964

SALLY BANES



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Introduction

In the summer of 1962, a group of young choreographers decided to present a concert of works they had made for Robert Dunn's choreography class, taught from 1960 through 1962 at Merce Cunningham's studio in the Living Theater building. These choreographers were not all dancers by training; their numbers included visual artists and musicians. Dunn himself had studied music theory with John Cage, the avant-garde composer and Cunningham's collaborator, at the New School for Social Research.

In looking for a place to show their experimental work in a professional concert format, the group found a welcome at Judson Memorial Church, a liberal Protestant congregation that was housed on the south end of Washington Square in Greenwich Village. There the ministry and parishioners had long been active in reform politics, civil rights, and arts activities. Already the site of Happenings, the Judson Poets' Theater, film screenings, and the Judson Gallery, where exhibitions of Pop Art and political art were held, the Judson Church soon also became the center for avant-garde dance in the city.

A Concert of Dance #1 was open to the public free of charge. It lasted for several hours, with twenty-three dances on the program by fourteen choreographers. This concert, given on 6 July 1962, proved to be the beginning of a historic process that changed the shape of dance history. It was the seedbed for post-modern dance, the first avant-garde movement in dance theater since the modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s. The choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater radically questioned dance aesthetics, both in their dances and in their weekly discussions. They rejected the codification of both ballet and modern dance. They questioned the traditional dance concert format and explored the nature of dance performance. They also discovered a cooperative method for producing dance concerts. For young artists who did not want to be judged by older authorities in the field, or who wanted the freedom to experiment in a familiar space that was easily accessible, this was an alternative to uptown juried concerts. Attracting a grassroots audience of Greenwich Village artists and intellectuals, the Judson Dance Theater affected the entire community and flourished as a popular center of experimentation.

The group that put on A Concert of Dance #1 was invited to continue meeting and performing at the church. Over the course of the next two years, nearly two hundred dances were given by the Judson Dance Theater (as the group began to call itself by April 1963), either at Judson Memorial Church, or under the group's auspices in other locations. When in the autumn of 1962 Robert Dunn did not continue his choreography class, the group began to meet independently on a weekly basis, first at Yvonne Rainer's studio and then at the church.

This book provides an account of the Judson Dance Theater and documents the dances the group produced and the dynamics of the workshop itself. So much important work and theory in dance grew out of Judson Dance Theater that numerous myths and misconceptions about the group and the work have arisen. Although several books on post-modern dance have recently been published, there is still no comprehensive study of the origins of this entire movement in the fertile experimentation that took place at Judson. Don McDonagh's *The Rise & Fall & Rise of Modern Dance* includes an interview with Robert Dunn and some material on the Judson choreographers, but the book does not provide extensive documentation. It is, rather, a survey of modern dance in the 1960s and 1970s. It does not differentiate between Judson Dance Theater as a collective entity and work by members of the workshop after the collective disbanded. McDonagh's work also does not draw sharp distinctions between avant-garde dance and the modern dance that is contemporary while following the older traditions of composition, technique, and performance. Anne Livet's *Contemporary Dance* is an anthology of useful interviews with some of the Judson choreographers, as well as historical and critical essays by Michael Kirby, Deborah Jowitt, Clive Barnes, and Don McDonagh. These essays are transcripts of lectures given at the Fort Worth Art Museum. However, Livet's book also does not attempt to document all the dances choreographed by these people during the Judson years: choreographers who were not part of the Judson Dance Theater are included in this book. My own *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* examines the work of ten choreographers and one group, taking into account some of the Judson dances, in the context of the careers of the choreographers concerned, and discussing the new aesthetics and activities in dance beginning with Judson Dance Theater. But *Terpsichore in Sneakers* is selective, covering the work of only some of the members of the Judson workshop, and the book includes chapters on three choreographers who were not part of the workshop, as well as a chapter on Grand Union, an improvisational collective formed in 1970, long after the Judson days. Jill Johnston's *Marmalade Me* and her reviews of dance concerts in the *Village Voice* give a lively account of the Judson Dance Theater performances and polemics,

but they present only a partial view of the events, and *Marmalade Me* also covers events in the mid-1960s and later years.

One problem faced in writing this book was the definition of Judson Dance Theater in terms of both chronology and personnel. James Waring, for instance, was a choreographer who choreographed one dance in Concert #12, gave evenings of his own choreography at Judson Church (which were sometimes publicized as presented by Judson Dance Theater), and used members of the workshop in his dance company. However, Waring was never a member of the Judson workshop. He was an influence on many of the younger dancers who were members of the cooperative; he was one of the avant-garde choreographers of the 1950s whose teaching and choreography helped to set the stage for the emergence of the Judson Dance Theater. But he did not consider himself, nor did the group consider him, part of Judson Dance Theater. Therefore, his work is excluded from this book, except for *Imperceptible Elongation*, in Concert #12. The same is true for other mentors of the Judson group, like Aileen Passloff, Beverly Schmidt, and Katherine Litz. Also, concerts of dance given at Judson Church after the group dispersed are still advertised as Judson Dance Theater events. However, it is commonly agreed that the original Judson Dance Theater—that is, the cooperative group that originally took on this name and produced concerts that grew out of weekly workshops at the church—no longer was an entity after the last numbered concert, Concert of Dance #16, on 29 April 1964. In fact, the name Judson Dance Theater nowhere appears on the posters or programs for *The Palace of the Dragon Prince*, a ballet by Fred Herko, one of the original workshop members. The term Judson Dance Theater, then, will be used in the narrowest possible sense, to mean the choreographers associated with the cooperative group and workshop, and the body of their choreography in Concerts #1 through #16, plus four evening-long concerts featuring the choreography of four individuals in that group: *Terrain* by Yvonne Rainer; *Afternoon* by Steve Paxton; "Motorcycle" by Judith Dunn; and *Fantastic Gardens* by Elaine Summers.

The above list illustrates the system of punctuation I have used throughout the book: names of dance works are underlined; evenings comprising various dances are enclosed in quotation marks, except for nontitled evenings, like A Concert of Dance #1; parts of dances are also enclosed in quotation marks. Thus, *Motorcycle* is one of the dances in "Motorcycle," as is *Astronomy Hill*; but "Play" is one of the sections of *Terrain*.

Another problem faced in this book is that confronting any attempt to recapture a performance that has very little written text. Any history of performance is fragmentary; the historian tries to assemble as many frag-

ments as possible. The account of Judson Dance Theater is a collection of images, narratives, partial recollections, imperfect reminiscences, and a few scores. I have used oral history as much as possible, interviewing all the members of Judson Dance Theater I could locate, as well as other people peripherally involved with the project. Facts were checked against written sources but, as the reader will discover, sometimes sources conflicted and the "true" version was impossible to discover. During the interviews, questions were posed about Judson Dance Theater as an artistic and social milieu. Questions were also asked about the specific details of the dances and concerts, such as: What was the structure of the dance? What was its intention in terms of form? Content? How did it use time? Space? Movement? How long was it? Was there music? What kind? What was the relationship between the dancing and the music? Were there special costumes or lighting effects? Were props or scenery used in the dance? How was the dance taught to the dancers? Were scores used, either in choreographing or teaching the dance? How long was the rehearsal period? How many people were in the dance? Where did they come from? What was the audience response? How did the dance fit into the concert as a whole? What was the concert like as an event? How did this dance relate to other works (dance or nondance) by the same person? By other choreographers? How did it relate to contemporary artworks? Interview subjects were also asked about the works of choreographers other than themselves.

Besides these live interviews, information was also collected from videotaped interviews, some of which I conducted, carried out by the Bennington College Judson Project, as well as from printed programs, scores (in the form of written or drawn notations), notes, letters, journals, diaries, films, reconstructions of the dances (live or on videotape), and photographs. I have made extensive use of the archive at Judson Memorial Church, the Dance Research Collection of the Library and Museum of the Performing Arts (New York Public Library at Lincoln Center), and the private files of several choreographers, as well as the photographic files of Peter Moore.

The book unfolds chronologically. The first chapter documents the seminal dance composition course given by Robert Dunn at the Cunningham studio from 1960 through 1962. Here most of the works performed publicly at the first Judson concert were first shown and discussed. Dunn's teaching methods, the choreographic structures and the methods used in class, and the artistic milieu within which the class functioned are examined. The second chapter is devoted to the first Judson concert, A Concert of Dance #1. Chapter 3 covers the second concert, given later that summer in Woodstock, New York; the convening of the workshop in the fall of 1962; the dynamics of the workshop; and Concerts #3 and #4, the first

series of concerts to be produced from the workshop. In Chapter 4 two watershed events in the dynamics of the group are considered: *Terrain* by Yvonne Rainer, the first solo choreography produced by the workshop as a separate evening of dance, and Concert #5 in Washington, D.C., an event that signaled the consolidation of a nucleus within the larger group, and that nucleus's ties with the visual art community. Chapter 5 documents Concerts #6, #7, and #8 at the Judson Church and Concerts #9 through #12 at the Gramercy Arts Theater during the summer of 1963. And Chapter 6 documents the final season of the Judson Dance Theater as a workshop and cooperative producing agent, considering Concerts #13 through #16 and three solo choreography concerts: *Afternoon* by Steve Paxton, "Motorcycle," by Judith Dunn, and *Fantastic Gardens* by Elaine Summers.

In many ways the blossoming of the Judson Dance Theater as a center for avant-garde activity in dance was a fortuitous occurrence. Robert Dunn offered his class; a number of young dancers who were ready and willing to experiment at a professional level came to the class, where they formed a rich medium for some of Dunn's ideas, as well as their own. There were models among older choreographers in two senses: the older avant-garde of the 1950s, like Merce Cunningham, James Waring, Paul Taylor, Aileen Passloff, Beverly Schmidt, and Merle Marsicano, provided a precedent for breaking with the modern dance "academy,"[1] and the academy itself provided the methods, techniques, and definitions that were once avant-garde but now served as the givens of the art—there to be sampled, borrowed, criticized, subverted. Finally, the church was there for the asking: a large space to dance in, with performance and rehearsal facilities free of charge.

The time was ripe for such a movement in dance in Greenwich Village, for both theoretical and practical reasons. The country's postwar mood of pragmatism was reflected in the various arts, from the Happenings that made use of environments at hand, to the New Realism, or Pop Art depiction of figures and objects and making reference to industrial subjects and styles. The economy was expanding, and the new Kennedy administration stressed youth, art, and culture. There were few grants for individual dancers, but there was a spirit of willing participation and an interest in using inexpensive materials; one could live cheaply and make art cheaply. In Greenwich Village, beatnik culture had catalyzed a renaissance of the "bohemia" that had long been the reputation of the neighborhood. The area was an intensive center of theatrical, literary, and artistic activities, and ideas spread freely and flowed from one art form to another. The philosophical fascinations with Zen Buddhism, existentialism, and phenomenology fit well with certain aspects of American art in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The concreteness of existence, the interest in the everyday

actions people practice, the questions of identity, both individual and collective, that were the topics of these philosophical systems—at least in their popular versions—were appropriate questions for modernist artists after the middle of the twentieth century. The phenomenological exhortation "Zu den Sachen!" ("To the Things!") was echoed in the manifestoes of artists in every field. Poetry, music, theater, and dance stressed performance more than the literary aspect of their forms, aspiring to more immediacy, more "presentness," more concrete experience. The descriptive, methodological thrust of phenomenology found an analogy in the reflexive formalism of the various arts and the movement toward descriptive criticism. If the Village was a place where artists and intellectuals gathered to partake of the diversity and community spirit that gathering created, and to pursue a new identity that could only be formed in such a community, it was also the place where they examined the identities of those arts, working at the edges of artistic conventions and analyzing the process of making that art.

American modern dance, since its beginnings at the turn of this century, has been a series of avant-gardes. Each generation called for a new set of subjects, a new dance technique, a new relationship to musical, literary, visual, and theatrical arts. By the late 1950s, a number of choreographers were considered more radical than the dominant modern dance choreographers and teachers, such as Martha Graham, José Limón, Tamiris, and Hanya Holm. Merce Cunningham, who had been a soloist in Martha Graham's company, combined the flexible spine used in modern dance with the crisp footwork of classical ballet in a technique that was precise and articulate. His experimentation with chance in choreography affected the look of his work in a number of ways: It decentralized space, created unexpected and often witty combinations of body parts in movement, and decentralized time in the dance in the sense that there were no logical climaxes or developments. A working relationship with John Cage allied Cunningham to the most advanced movements in music; the method of collaboration was that the music and the dancing simply occupied the same space at the same time. Although juxtaposition sometimes lent dramatic expressiveness to either music or dance, such correspondences were not planned. The Cunningham-Cage collaboration was an important influence on the Judson Dance Theater. Some of the members of Cunningham's company participated in Judson, and the Judson dancers respected Cunningham's accomplishments as a choreographer—rebelling against what was sometimes felt as a hierarchy of authority in modern dance and cleansing the dance of its often psychological overtones. The dancers learned from Cage's teachings—his interest in Zen Buddhism, in moving from music toward theater, in the writings of Antonin Artaud, in chance

methods, in the value of the everyday. Through Cage, a younger generation of artists found a heritage in the history of European avant-garde art and performance.

James Waring, a choreographer and artist who was born in San Francisco and trained in ballet technique on the west coast and at School of American Ballet in New York, was another crucial influence on the Judson group. Like Cunningham, Waring taught technique; he also taught composition classes to his students beginning in the late 1950s. Waring's influence on the Judson group was both practical—several Judson dancers gained performing experience in dancing in Waring's works—and aesthetic—Waring taught his protégés a great deal about collage techniques, music, theater, and art. Waring, Paul Taylor, David Vaughan, Aileen Passloff, and several others were involved in Dance Associates, a choreographers' cooperative organized in 1951. And socially, Waring was a link between the dance world and a group of poets—including Diane di Prima, Alan Marlowe, and others—who were also connected to the Living Theater.

Several of the Judson group studied with Ann Halprin in San Francisco. From Halprin came another kind of freedom in dance: freedom to follow intuition and impulse in improvisation. Related to this freedom was a desire to be closer to nature; students worked out-of-doors on an open platform in the mountains of Marin County. Halprin also encouraged an analytic approach to anatomy and kinesiology; students were asked to understand and analyze the physical changes they experienced during the course of their improvisations.

Besides these three teachers, other choreographers influenced the Judson dancers. Aileen Passloff was trained in ballet but, lacking the typical ballet dancer's body, was determined to choreograph her own style of dances. She became noted not only for her wit and theatricality, her collaborations with visual artists and avant-garde composers, but also for her independence, as were Beverly Schmidt, who had danced with Alwin Nikolais, and Merle Marsicano.

The Judson aesthetic, as this books shows, was never monolithic. Rather, the Judson situation was deliberately undefined, unrestricted. Styles of choreography grew out of the groundwork done at Judson, but the wealth of dances created by Judson Dance Theater show, above all, a remarkable diversity. Still, within the group a few specific themes and interests arose, just as eventually several choreographers emerged as the most productive and influential. Within the Judson workshop, a commitment to democratic or collective process led on the one hand to methods that metaphorically seemed to stand for freedom (like improvisation, spontaneous determination, chance), and on the other hand to a refined con-

sciousness of the process of choreographic choice. In general, questions of technique and its perfection were considered less important than formal compositional problems. This was true in part because the performers available to the choreographers were a mixture of experienced and inexperienced, trained and untrained dancers. But also, it was an aesthetic and even political choice, allowing for full participation by all the workshop members and giving the works an unpolished, spontaneous, "natural" appearance. Questions of the relationship of music to dance were explored anew. Perhaps even more important than the individual dances given at Judson concerts was the attitude that anything might be called a dance and looked at as a dance; the work of a visual artist, a filmmaker, a musician might be considered a dance, just as activities done by a dancer, although not recognizable as theatrical dance, might be reexamined and "made strange" because they were framed as art.

In retrospect, several important individual choreographic styles grew out of the rich culture at Judson: Yvonne Rainer's dialectical work, mixing ordinary or grotesque movement with traditional dance techniques, pushing the body's operations and coordination to the limits, and testing extremes of freedom and control in the choreographic process; Steve Paxton's fusions of nature and culture, his framing of mundane actions like eating and walking as noteworthy for attention and perception, his flattening of time; Robert Morris's task dances, using objects to focus the attention of both performer and audience and his references within the works to other artworks, creating an historical context for the work in the work; Lucinda Childs's cool performance style, rooted first in handling of objects and later in pure movement structures; Trisha Brown's improvisations and flyaway movements. This analytic, reductive wing of the post-modern dance movement was one aspect of Judson. A second aspect was the theatrical, often humorous, baroque style—in the work, for example, of David Gordon, Fred Herko, and Arlene Rothlein. A third aspect was the multimedia work exemplified in Elaine Summers's *Fantastic Gardens* and, later, Judith Dunn's *Last Point*. Work developed along all three of these lines in the later 1960s and 1970s, but it was the analytic, reductive side of the Judson work that proposed and tested theories of dance as art.

1

Robert Dunn's Workshop

John Cage asked Robert Dunn to teach a class in choreography at the Merce Cunningham studio in the fall of 1960.[1] Dunn had taken Cage's class in "Composition of Experimental Music," taught at the New School for Social Research from 1956 to 1960,[2] as had the writers Jackson MacLow and Dick Higgins, the composer Toshi Ichiyanagi, and Al Hansen, George Brecht, and Allan Kaprow, all of whom were later associated with Happenings and Events. The classes Cage gave were small and participatory. Cage later wrote of his teaching method:

> I began each series of classes by meeting the students, attempting to find out what they had done in the field of music, and letting them know what I myself was doing at the time. The catalogue had promised a survey of contemporary music, but this was given only incidentally and in reference to the work of the students themselves or to my own work. For, after the first two classes, generally, the sessions were given over to the performance and discussion of student works.[3]

Dick Higgins remembers that Cage spoke about notation, prepared a piano, gave the class problems to solve, and when the students demonstrated their solutions, discussed the philosophy of each piece. "The technique of the piece was seldom mentioned, except that inconsistencies and incongruities would be noted." Higgins, who credited the class with contributing to the development of Happenings, writes that "the best thing that happened to us in Cage's class was the sense he gave us that 'anything goes,' at least potentially."[4] Al Hansen came to Cage's class interested chiefly in film; he had read in writings by Sergei Eisenstein that "all the art forms meet in the film frame." Hansen also traces Happenings back to Cage's course and his own realization, by the end of it, that "all art forms...meet...in the eyeball. In the head of the observer."[5] He remembers that the class members often brought their friends to class, and it was there that Hansen met artists such as George Segal, Jim Dine, Larry Poons, filmmaker Harvey Gross, and regular class members Florence

Tarlow and Scott Hyde. "To a great extent, and probably to John Cage's disgust, the class became a little version of Black Mountain College."[6]

According to Remy Charlip, then a member of Merce Cunningham's company, the dancers in the company asked John Cage to give a modern dance composition class—as an antidote to Louis Horst's class—in 1957 or 1958. Cage consented, and in the class, which lasted for about six months, taught in a way that was "very free." "Everyone did a piece and then we talked about it, I think in a similar way to how Bob [Dunn] later did it," explains Charlip. Charlip made a dance, called *Crosswords for the Cunningham Company*, in which he took a crossword puzzle and colored in the squares in an arbitrary order with four different colored pencils. "Each dancer had a square, and each person had a color, and when you came to a color, you went to that other person to get a movement." Jo Anne Melsher did a dance to music with a line of people. Charlip says that on the first day of Robert Dunn's class, Dunn showed the *Crosswords* score to his students.[7] James Waring had also taught an "experimental" composition class, at the Living Theater, in 1959 and 1960.[8]

Dunn was not a dancer or choreographer. He was the accompanist at the Cunningham and other modern dance studios at the time. Dunn thinks that Cage asked him to teach choreography because Dunn had a knowledge of contemporary dance and other art forms, and because Cunningham was not inclined to teach composition.[9] Dunn, married then to Cunningham dancer Judith Dunn, was born in Oklahoma in 1928. He studied music composition and theory at New England Conservatory, where he earned a bachelor's degree. He worked in opera as a vocal repertoire coach and accompanist. From 1955 to 1958 he studied dance at Boston Conservatory of Music, chiefly with Jan Veen, a student of Mary Wigman and Harold Kreutzberg; Dunn also taught percussion for dancers at the Boston Conservatory. In 1958, when Cunningham performed in Boston, Dunn accompanied him and was asked to work at the American Dance Festival at Connecticut College that summer. In the fall of that year, Dunn moved to New York, where he worked for Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham as a pianist for rehearsals, classes, and performances. During his years as an accompanist he also worked for José Limón, Helen Tamiris, Pearl Lang, Jane Dudley, Paul Taylor, and James Waring. He no longer danced, but he studied Tai Chi Chuan and Yoga.[10]

Cunningham donated the use of his studio at 14th Street and Sixth Avenue free of charge for Dunn's classes, which ran about two and a half hours, for ten to twelve sessions per course. Dunn charged a fee of twelve to fifteen dollars for the entire course "for each solvent student," except returning students, who were allowed to take subsequent courses without

further payment.[11] During some of the classes, Cunningham sat in his dressing room behind the studio where, Dunn claims, he was listening to the discussion.[12]

Robert Dunn had seen the composition classes given by Louis Horst, Martha Graham's music director, who demanded rigid adherence to musical forms; he had seen those given by Doris Humphrey, who assessed dances according to their theatrical tensions and resolutions.[13] Dunn found the atmosphere in those classes, in which young dancers studied every summer at the American Dance Festival sessions, "so oppressive that it was incredible. If indeed I helped liberate people from Louis [Horst] and Doris [Humphrey] (who was a great woman, but still)—...that was well worth doing."[14]

Unlike Horst, who used preclassic forms, and modern music by composers such as Béla Bartók, Zoltan Kodaly, Alexander Scriabin, Arnold Schönberg, and Aaron Copland, Dunn taught his students the musical structures of later composers, like Cage and the European avant-gardists Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pierre Boulez.[15] These chance and indeterminate structures were given to the students not as musical forms, but as time-structures "derived from and applicable to all the arts or future arts which might take place in time."[16] John Cage's use of noise and silence in music and his move toward theatrics in musical performance were two influences on Dunn's thinking in this regard.[17]

Dunn's classes, both in their heritage from Cage and in their eclectic assimilation of various cultural preoccupations of the 1960s—including Zen Buddhism, Taoism, existentialism, and scientism—were a microcosm of New York's avant-garde art world. It was an art world small enough for poets, painters, dancers, actors, and musicians to know each other and each other's work. So, many of the ideas circulating in the various artistic and social networks around Greenwich Village found their way into the dances and discussions in Dunn's courses. To Dunn, the classes were a generalized "clearinghouse for structures derived from various sources of contemporary action: dance, music, painting, sculpture, Happenings, literature." [18]

But literature was the area least plumbed because, according to Dunn, "we were feeling that dance had been so super-literary in a very destructive way. Burroughs had just come on the scene, making a break in texture with the New American Poetry. Even before he did the cut-ups, his work was collage, hard-edged, perceptually obsessive. A lot of people had read *Naked Lunch.* And all of us had some attachment to the Dadaists."[19]

The concrete approach Dunn used in the class was modeled after Cage's class. But Dunn had felt an unsatisfying lag in productivity as

Cage's classes progressed, and so he added assignments for the choreography students, "materials and ideas put forth for their possible suggestiveness to further work. This was a bit of stategic 'irrigation' of the garden plot, it being very clear to me at the time that the all-necessary seeds were provided by each member of the class."[20] These materials included Cage's graphic production of the chance score for *Fontana Mix* and the number structure of Erik Satie's *Trois Gymnopédies.*[21] Other assignments dealt with an abstract time constraint, e.g., "Make a five-minute dance in half an hour."[22] Others involved collaborations in which autonomous personal control had to be relinquished within a "semi-independent" working situation.[23] Still others had to do with the subject matter, though this was rarer: "Make a dance about nothing special."[24]

Louis Horst had also used Satie's music in teaching modern forms of musical structures for dance composition. But Horst's approach to teaching was more prescriptive and rigid than Dunn's. For example, Horst used one of the *Gnossiennes* as a study in "archaism," in which two-dimensional design of the body is achieved by distortion, tension, formality. The archaic composition was to emphasize "planal design," arresting life "in attitudes that breathe at the same time a potential of movement." Horst prescribed performing the *Gnossienne* study so slowly that the dance would imitate slow-motion cinematography.[25] He also suggested Satie's *Danse de la Brouette* as an accompaniment to an exercise in asymmetrical rhythm. He wrote that the "uneven, oblique, unstable" movement done to a 5/4 rhythm was especially appropriate to express the scattered, frantic feeling of a Madison Avenue executive or a housewife. But, he warned, the "feeling of unbalance [should] not [be] destroyed by gestures which create a too symmetrical design in space."[26] In other words, the quality of expression in the movements in a Horst composition assignment was to resemble the emotion suggested by the musical accompaniment.

In his book *Modern Dance Forms*, Horst gave young choreographers a checklist for evaluating their compositions:

1. Is the work sufficiently beautiful and is its movement delineation striking and ingenious?
2. Is the *formal design* rational and clear?
3. Is its *rhythmic structure* distinct and effective?
4. Does it contain sufficient fullness?
5. Is the demand of *contrast* adequately respected, and the bane of *monotony* avoided?[27]

In a world where concepts of beauty had long since been challenged, where art works that embraced monotony and eschewed rational design had been made at least since Duchamp and the Dadaists, Horst's rules seemed old-

fashioned, even though he was still applying them through the early 1960s. (The book, a record of his teaching methods, was published in 1961.) Comments Horst made in his classes, also recorded in *Modern Dance Forms,* strikingly reveal the difference between his method and Dunn's:

> You always have to know where you're going—how things look to the audience. You must do the impossible. A dancer is an aesthetic acrobat—*must* be—so you can do anything you want to do. . . . A quarter of an inch makes a difference—that sort of exactitude that makes it professional. Nothing casual should happen on stage anyway. . . . I know it hurts. You didn't think it was going to be fun, did you? Dance and be happy?[28]

When Dunn used Satie, his approach was entirely different: "I played the piece and gave them a number structure and they composed a dance, separate from the music but structured with the music in a sort of dovetailing way without any mickey-mousing."[29] The separateness of the dancing from the musical structure was typical of Cunningham's collaborations with Cage and other composers.

In fulfilling their assignments in Dunn's class, students were allowed wide latitude in terms of methods, materials, and structures; as in the Cage class, the discussion focused on how these choices were arrived at and how well the choreographer had succeeded in carrying out his or her intention. The analytic method used in the discussions was also inspired by Cage's ideas about musical form:

> Structure in music is its divisibility into successive parts from phrases to long sections. Form is content, the continuity. Method is the means of controlling the continuity from note to note. The material of music is sound and silence. Integrating these is composing.[30]

Cage was a rich font of principles and methods, but, as noted above, he was not Dunn's only influence. At the time Dunn did not want to be only a musician, preferring the "model of a sort of errant philosopher-poet adventuring in various media, including that of the social occasions surrounding the work." He later wrote of his ideas about teaching as originating in quite disparate sources:

> I was impressed by what I had come to know about Bauhaus education in the arts, particularly from the writings of Moholy-Nagy, in its emphasis on the nature of materials and on basic structural elements. Association with John Cage had led to the project of constantly extending perceptive boundaries and contexts. From Heidegger, Sartre, Far Eastern Buddhism, and Taoism, in some personal amalgam, I had the notion in teaching of making a "clearing," a sort of "space of nothing," in which things could appear and grow in their own nature. Before each class I made the attempt to attain this state of mind, of course with varying success.[31]

Heidegger's writings about the human "world" in which we exist and act but which is not of our making, and about "things-in-the-world" which constitute our everyday existence, together with Sartre's stress on consciousness, find analogues in the interest, among the artists of the late 1950s and early 1960s, in using ordinary objects and amplifying perception of their thingness in relation to the beingness of humanity. For Heidegger, the social world consists of a set of relations between humans, tools, and natural things. This "world," where people manipulate things and use up materials, is in constant strife with the "earth," or natural realm, which remains impenetrable and secluded. The artwork functions as the bridge between these two realms, paradoxically bringing the earth into the world without violating it. The truth that is present in nature takes on a social—i.e., historical—existence. In the artwork, a framework that sets off the thingly nature of an object fashioned by humans is created.

> The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shimmer, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak. All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color, into the clang of tone, and into the naming power of the word.[32]

The artwork shows us that, "at bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary; it is extraordinary, uncanny."[33]

Heidegger's thoughts on art and its mystical relation to the natural realm, as well as the Western interpretation of Zen Buddhism as an anti-intellectual discipline, valuing spontaneity and meditation on the simplicity of everyday things, must have been attractive to a generation that had lived through the politically and socially anxious 1950s. After the "conspicuous consumption" of postwar American life, to live simply and naturally seemed an antidote; after an age of conformism and social pressure, especially for women, people thirsted for the "liberation" and sense of personal autonomy spontaneous behavior connotes, which often seems everywhere present in the natural world.

The use of chance methods and indeterminacy by composers such as Cage, Stockhausen, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff, and other avant-garde composers in the United States and Europe in the 1950s had brought about a new form of musical notation, both as a means of generating a fixed score (but able to express different qualities than those conveyed by traditional notation) and as a way of indicating parameters for a performer who might take an actively creative role in interpreting from the score. Labanotation and other, more personal, movement notation systems were available but not widely known to dancers and choreographers at the time of Dunn's classes. The *writing* of dances—the "-graphy"

in choreography—was crucial to the composition process Dunn outlined for his students, not necessarily in the sense of permanently recording what the dance was, but in order to objectify the composition process, both by creating nonintuitive choices and by viewing the total range of possibilities for the dance.

> Whether we use any other writing material in between, we certainly do inscribe dances on the bodies of the dancers, as a group. We inscribe dances on the body of the theater. When I say choreography, I am always talking about choreography/improvisation....By planning the dance in a written or drawn manner, you have a very clear view of the dance and its possibilities. Laban's idea was very secondarily to make a *Tanzschrift*, a dance-writing, a way to record. Laban's idea was to make a *Schrifttanz,* to use graphic—written—inscriptions and then to generate activities. Graphic notation is a way of inventing the dance. It is part of the conception of the dance. What the choreographer has to do is to choose a world of movement...to invent or choose the graphic side and invent or choose the correlations.[34]

Dunn alludes to Cocteau's statement "We build traps for poetry" in speaking of the release of physical activity and meaning from graphic scores.

> The human body and its doings are so full of meaning that most of what you have to do is release and channel this meaning. A great deal of cleverness and thought is a wonderful thing to get towards making those traps and releasing that meaning, but they do not guarantee it. When you know your movement vocabulary, you can make a metamorphic transfer of many models of other artworks, the structures and relations within them, out of movement material. The fact that you've used a scientific or philosophical or natural model is absolutely no guarantee of the validity of your work.[35]

For all the diversity of models, the unifying and paradigmatic form of choreography in Dunn's class was the aleatory process, which Merce Cunningham had used since 1951.[36] Says Dunn:

> I came to realize very well that chance is a form of choreography, of dance notation. You set up a table of possibilities. Those dice, as you throw them, are writing. They tell you what to do next.[37]

In the fall of 1960, Dunn's first course began with five students: Paulus Berenson, Marni Mahaffay, Simone (Forti) Morris, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer.[38] Mahaffay was a young dancer from Portland, Oregon, who had been trained in ballet and then joined Charles Weidman's company when it toured to Portland, partly as a way of getting to New York. Attracted to the Zen idea that the conjunction of disparate elements has meaning and validity, she soon became devoted to Merce Cunningham "and everything surrounding him." She zealously attended every class given at Cunningham's studio, and Dunn's course was no exception. There she first began to understand Cage's precept that any sound is valid as part of

music, that any movement is valid as part of a dance—"whether it's a cough, a sniffle, or natural movement." And that continuum of sound and of movement extended, critically, to silence and its correlate, stillness. Mahaffay remembers using charts that outline space, movement, and rhythm options in order to make dances by chance. "The possibilities came out limitless."[39]

> I used the rotation of the moon to make one structure, but it could have been anything—for instance, the routine of getting up in the morning and cooking an egg. The path of the moon indicated where things could happen in space, in the dance.[40]

For Mahaffay the ever-present option of stillness—of nothing—was crucial. "When you roll the dice and get stillness, suddenly you are given an image of what preceded that moment—and that creates a kind of meditation on the movement." Giving up cherished control over the dance was an experience as compelling as the use of stillness.

> To give up your own clichés, to give up your own movement that you were so attached to, was very exciting. You might only be given enough time to do the beginning of your favorite movement, or to do it much less than you would have preferred to. You ended up putting movements together in ways that weren't at all obvious or expected.[41]

Mahaffay, a very small woman, was interested in the kind of detailed, meticulous movement she had learned in ballet and in Cunningham's technique classes. She remembers one phrase she made within a larger form that involved the folding and unfolding of the body in various careful ways, "like a box opening and closing, very complex and fast." Other students generally did activity that was less "dancey." Mahaffay recalls Steve Paxton creating a dance that consisted of repeatedly running into the school office to carry out one piece of furniture at a time. Simone Forti did a duet with someone else from the class running together in a large circle for a long time, then breaking that constancy and tension with a series of quiet, abrupt side steps. "The effect of those very simple elements was thrilling. I was so moved by the simplicity and strength of it: the comfortable, clean, expansive run, the quietness of the stepping. Simone [Forti] brought certain ideas from Ann Halprin into a situation of extreme discipline."[42] Mahaffay also remembers Yvonne Rainer doing a meditative study making shapes with her entire body while sitting on the floor.

> It was visual, it was nondance. Those exercises in meditation that several people were involved in came out of Zen and seemed to relate to Merce [Cunningham]'s philosophy.
>
> You could go to a concert and listen to La Monte Young playing sandpaper for half an hour or forty-five minutes. Sandpaper wears down, and then the sound changes. Or

> he would adjust the sandpaper in his hand, changing the rhythm and texture of the sound. There is an impact when one simple element works against another.
>
> At another concert, someone threw a cord of logs down a staircase, and we listened to the sound it made. Or a musician would sit at a grand piano and never touch the keyboard, making sounds with sponges and window-cleaning squeegees, tapping the piano in various ways.

The students in the class were remarkably resourceful, Mahaffay recalls, bringing in ideas from various places and disciplines. Yet Dunn clearly directed the flow of events in the class.

> Everyone was free to be wherever it was they were coming from; somehow it all fit into what Bob [Dunn] was doing. The way he talked about movement was so all-encompassing, you could do anything! There was something very centering and supportive about him, a deep level of understanding that went beyond what he was teaching. I remember him sitting at the piano with a stopwatch, and with a calmness and centeredness that related to Tai Chi.[43]

Steve Paxton grew up in Tucson, Arizona, where he did gymnastics and started dancing in high school to improve his tumbling. He was trained in Graham technique and toured with a performing group directed by his dance teachers, an Episcopal nun and a woman who taught at the local Jewish Community Center. In 1958 Paxton went to Connecticut College for the summer courses in modern dance. That summer Merce Cunningham was teaching at Connecticut College for the first time, and Paxton studied with him as well as with Graham, Doris Humphrey, and José Limón. Paxton came to New York, where he danced with Limón's company and studied at the Cunningham studio.[44] He got a work-study scholarship with Cunningham; his work was to clean up the studio. "I was very much in love with the company at that time because they all seemed very sprightly, sprightly and droll."[45]

From the beginning of Dunn's class, Paxton was interested in challenging all of the assumptions of modern dance, including the methods and habits of people, like Cunningham, whom he respected. He tried to find sources for movement outside of the by-then refined technical vocabulary of the first generation of modern dancers and Cunningham's ballet-derived technique. Rainer remembers Paxton doing a dance that consisted of his sitting on a bench, eating a sandwich. Paxton says of his work in Dunn's class:

> The work that I did there was first of all to flush out all my "why-nots," to go through my "why not" circles as far as I could until getting bored with the question. "Why not?" was a catch-word at that time. It was a very permissive time.

> The Living Theater was in the same building as Cunningham, and there were concerts there by the Paper Bag Players, who were zany, and by Jimmy Waring, who was eclectic and droll, by the Living Theater itself, which was my first contact with the rise of political consciousness—where I first saw the peace symbol, where I first saw dope smoked, where they were doing plays like *The Connection* and talking about prison reform. Jackson MacLow did readings there. As an environment it was very permissive and form-oriented. [I.e., the approach to making art was formalist.] A MacLow play was described as a chance operation. James Waring was interested in chance and eclecticism. His dances had all different styles. It didn't seem to matter; nothing that had been done before seemed to matter.
>
> Diane di Prima and other poets were there [at the Living Theater], and I remember lectures that they gave, in which the hostile audience would say, "What are you doing? What has happened to art? And they would say, "We're just making art, and why not?"
>
> They [di Prima and her circle] had a title pool. Everyone would contribute titles, and if you needed a title for something, you just pulled one out. Why not?

Paxton remembers Dunn's style as a teacher as Zen-like.

> Dunn himself managed to do something that I've admired ever since. He taught us ideas almost by neglecting us, by mentioning things but tending to disappear at the same time, leaving with a smile. It was rather Zen-like, because how can you teach something that is in a constant state of mutation? What do you teach? He taught forms—Cage forms, Satie forms, basically musical ideas, in rebound, I think initially for him, against Louis Horst's teaching of earlier musical forms, with the idea that music is a key to time, or one of the keys to time. When you listen to a piece of music, you listen to intervals, sections, and structures. You aren't involved with personality and states of presence. So Dunn got us into that.[46]

Paxton never choreographed a dance in response to the Satie assignment. He was less interested in using musical forms—perhaps because Cunningham had already used Satie's music as accompaniment to some of his dances— than in the very process of movement selection itself. For Paxton the history of modern dance had been tainted by cults of personality, and he searched for ways of stripping any trace of the artist's hand from his own work.[47]

Simone Forti was born in Florence, Italy, in 1935. Her family was Jewish, and in 1939 they escaped to Switzerland and then to the United States. Forti grew up in Los Angeles, then studied psychology and sociology at Reed College, where she met Robert Morris. They married and left school in 1956, moving to San Francisco where Morris painted and Forti studied dance with Ann Halprin. Halprin had only recently broken with conventional modern dance. For four years, Forti danced with Halprin in Halprin's outdoor studio near Mount Tamalpais in Kentfield, California, working on free improvisations, kinesiological analysis, and vocal work.[48]

Halprin's studio was a gathering place for other artists who collaborated with the dancers and sometimes taught them. They included the com-