

Barbara Woehler: What is your background in modern and/or classic dance ?

David Gordon: I began dancing when I was an art major in college. I thought I was going to be a painter. I began dancing [REDACTED] in the modern dance club. Soon, quite by accident, I met a man named James Waring and was asked to be in his company although I had had very, very little training, almost nothing at that point [REDACTED] except some classic schooling. One of the things he did exceedingly well was he made material for performers within the range of what they could do that made them look wonderful. [REDACTED] At that time I started taking ballet classes with him.

BW: That time is...?

DG: 1956 or 1957, something like that. I also started taking class with Merce Cunningham [REDACTED] he introduced me to [REDACTED] Basically that was my training; Cunningham and Waring [REDACTED] I worked in the Waring company for four to six years, during which time I met Valda Setterfield, who is my wife. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] working with that company

The Judson Church... what happened there was that there were a series of composition classes at the Cunningham studio held by Robert Dunn and his then wife Judith Dunn. I took those classes along with people like Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha [Brown] and a whole lot of others, all amazingly converged in New York at the same moment in the same space. People began to look for a [REDACTED] <sup>SPACE FOR</sup> performances [REDACTED] based on the work being generated by the classes. The Judson Church [REDACTED] WAS FOUND [REDACTED] and we all went and performed there. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Actually, the very first performance of my own work in New York City was at the Living Theater, <sup>PRESENTED BY JAMES WARING</sup> They used to allow other people to use the space when they weren't performing there. [REDACTED]



NOT improvised. In Judson there were set pieces, [REDACTED].

I don't know whether I'm thinking of the original performances, or a little later on, but Elaine (Summers) was one of the few people who used improvisation and who used the audience as performers. Most of the people who made work at the time of the Judson for those performances made set work in response to classroom assignments in which they either did solos or used other people. I did only solos, but other people did duets or larger groups. The things were rehearsed. Another thing that happened at the Judson was, once it was established as a performing base, a continuing workshop went on there in which everybody became the <sup>RESOURCE</sup> pool of everybody's <sup>WORK</sup>. [REDACTED] If somebody wanted a piece with thirty people in it, everybody would be in it, But I was a loner, and so I never went to those workshops. I never wanted to be in the pieces of people whose work I didn't admire, so I kept away. I'm sorry now I did because I think it would have been very interesting for me to give up that isolationist policy of mine, but I didn't.

BW: What do you think made that movement end ?

DG: I don't think it ended. I think what happened is that people worked together for the amount of time that there was a kind of excitement about working together and about being responsive to each other. Then I think people began to be more sure of their own areas of concern, and were not so interested in working in everybody's work. They began to go off and choose the people amongst whom they wanted to work and perform with under more separate circumstances.

BW: The pieces at Judson were mainly rehearsed and set, but one of the main themes was working with chance...

DG: Yeah, Merce's pieces were all made with chance, but they're all set. I mean, you arrive at a product. The chance procedure is only used to manufacture the work. What the person or persons are going to do and under what conditions. The conditions are established, then you rehearse it and do it. Maybe the only way that chance procedure



Br.: Approximately when was this?

DG: Oh, I would say it was about '61 or '62. The first Judson performances were in '62. I continued to study off and on with Merce for years. When I stopped making my own work in 1965, I joined the Yvonne Rainer company and was in that until 1970, when the Grand Union evolved out of that company. At the time that the Grand Union began, [REDACTED], I started making work again [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]

[redacted] [redacted] was incredibly supportive  
in getting me back to making work. I really was not going to do it  
and she arranged circumstances in which it would become necessary for  
me to do something. I really owe her a great deal because of that.  
[redacted]  
for Trisha, who was very supportive during the time of the Grand Union.  
I [redacted] about improvising.

BW: Was Dunn an [redacted] influence ?

DG: I don't think I was very influenced by Robert Dunn. I have said this before and I feel sorry to say it. So many people say they were influenced by him but I don't think I was. I think I learned a great many of the chance procedures, which all emanated from John Cage, in composition classes with Jimmy Waring. The first piece I made [REDACTED] utilized a great deal of chance methodology. So by the time I got to the Dunn class, I knew a lot about those procedures. What was really quite special about the Dunn class was not Robert Dunn himself, for me, or Judith Dunn, but the fact that in that room there were an amazing group of people. Their response to those procedures was to make work that was very exciting to be in the midst of and that generated other work. So it was not him so much as the class.

BW: Looking back on it now, what would you say was significant of Judson Church ?



DG :

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] <sup>the</sup> most significant thing for me  
was the group of people who managed somehow to be there and who were  
making their work. This was an enormous group of people. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The first Judson performances were  
four or five hours long, because it was also a wonderful democracy in  
which nobody could say that anybody's work wasn't any good. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

But, the people whose work I continue to admire and relate to ~~that~~ <sup>and that</sup> were there, was for me the  
real exciting basis of what happened. It was a situation in which,  
for a moment in a city in which everybody works absolutely isolated  
in their studios, people came together in a unified way. They formed  
this giant structure which caused a great deal of comment, because it  
was so many people gathered together. If all of these people had done  
all of their work as everybody does now, in their own little studios  
up on the fifth floor of their own little building, nobody would have  
paid any attention. It is the fact that everybody did it simultaneously,  
in a specific space for specific periods of time, that's what seemed  
to me to be important.

[REDACTED] ?  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

BW: Was another particularity of Judson the fact that the material  
was worked out together as I understand happened in Grand Union or was  
everybody doing their own thing in the same spot ?

DG: Grand Union [REDACTED] improvised. [REDACTED] These performances [REDACTED]

GENERALLY WERE



is ever dealt with in performance is that Merce says that a piece of his like SCRAMBLE has the ability to be scrambled. You can take any section, you can throw all the sections into a hat and pull them out, and that determines the order of the evening. But, in fact, he never does that. Once the order is determined, it remains that way unless he's doing events, in which case he pulls parts of pieces out of pieces and re-orders them, but even those are re-ordered by him.

BW: How was Grand Union similar to or different from Judson ?

DG: Grand Union had nothing to do with the Judson. Judson was long over by then. Grand Union was the attempt by Yvonne Rainer to give up the leadership of the Yvonne Rainer dance company. The Yvonne Rainer dance company at that time included people like Paxton, Barbara Dilly, Doug Dunn, me and Becky Arnold. I can't remember if there was anybody else at the moment. Yvonne, in the course of a piece of work entitled CONTINUOUS PROJECT ALTERED DAILY began throwing bonerangs into the material. For instance, people became more mobile in the sixties. It used to be that people joined a dance company in New York City, and they were in New York City until they left the company fifteen years later. But this group of people was far more mobile. Steve and Barbara went off to teach separately from each other at Urbana in Chicago. Yvonne sent them material through the mail that could be performed when we all got there. We had a date to perform but we were not rehearsing with them. They rehearsed separately and we rehearsed by ourselves. We didn't know what their material was and when we got there, their material was placed in the performance. We got to see them perform this material that we didn't know existed. Little by little, that kind of information began to come in, and choices were given to the performers about things to do in performance of these various materials...how many times you wanted to do something, ordering the program in a different way. The only rule at the time that I remember was that you had to use all the material that was in the piece, whatever order we placed it in or however long we spent on



something. We were making choices about how something was shown, how many people did it, in what direction you faced, all the kind of decisions you can make in performance about material. What clearly began to happen was that Yvonne was giving up authority. She had decided at some point along the line that she had quite an extraordinary company of innovative people and that they should be making some of the decisions. At the point that we decided to have a new name, and the Grand Union came into existence, it was because Yvonne by then had given up almost total authority over the work, and people were being asked to start bringing in their own possible ideas into the work. Our reputation in this country was as the Yvonne Rainer company and as long as Yvonne was getting dates we were going out under her name. Nobody would understand that this was now, more and more a company of individuals making individual choices. So we came up with the new name, which had nothing to do with the word "dance". It did not appear in the title, because that was one of the problems when people came to see us and say: "that isn't dancing". At first we went out under the name "Yvonne Rainer and the Grand Union", because she was still the name that was getting the dates. Nobody (else in the company) would get us anywhere and then, little by little, we dropped her name from the title. When she went off to India, in 1971, for some months, we very calculatedly performed in New York every weekend for weeks and weeks as the Grand Union without her, to establish the fact that we could function as a company, in which members could come and go, and be independent, and the work would go on. It was not the Grand Union's original intention to be an improvisational dance company. It was, in fact, the original intention that each of us would submit work, which we would all learn. But, in fact, we were all such different people that...we didn't seem to want to learn each others' work. We made things as difficult as possible for each other about learning each others' work. We would not easily collaborate on work, and so improvisation became a medium in which we could all participate without feeling the necessity to respond to anybody's idea at any given moment because, one of the things you could do was respond when you wanted to do it, and not respond when you didn't want to do it. That could all happen live in performance. I was the hold-out, because I thought an entire evening of improvisation was insane. There wasn't anything I could think of that could last for an entire evening if it wasn't set. While they were trying out all kinds of improvisational situations, I was holding on to whatever set material I had from any time in my life, and performing it lunatically. At that time, Trisha had been invited to come and join us, and had, I'm happy to say, accepted. She was very interested in improvisational verbal material at that point.



We used to attempt to rehearse to find out what it was we could do together. In one rehearsal situation, Trisha began a whole talking thing, I got very excited by it and picked up on it, Trisha found out I could talk, so she began to push the Grand Union's direction in terms of this verbal material. I think that became the basis of our work over the next 5 years.

BW: By verbal material do you mean talking while dancing, or talking then moving?

DG: Both, everything. Talking while dancing, talking about dancing, talking while watching somebody else dance, singing, shouting, whatever verbal material arose out of the situation.

BW: What made Grand Union end?

DG: Once again people became more and more interested in their own area of exploration, and were having to make more and more concessions in working together for other people's interests. It seemed time to dissolve.

BW: You mentioned you didn't want to use the word "dance" in the name of the group.

What kind of transformation of the audiences' expectation of what a dance performance might be were you able to witness as a member of both Judson and Grand Union in that time interval from the early 60's to mid 70's?

DG: It's very hard to answer that because you're talking about different audiences. At the Judson, you're talking about a New York audience.

BW: Didn't the New York audience for the Judson expand from there?

DG: Very little, very little...the Judson was free. I mean, you paid contributions, and that could mean nothing. There was a large audience of people who came to see free performances and who sort of grew with us. Many of the people involved in the Judson

\_\_\_\_\_ had art, visual art, connections. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Other artists knew them and would come to see what they and the rest of us were doing. The audience was an art audience as well as people who liked free performances in the Village. They were more generous to these experiments than they might have been under other circumstances in another place. When we were going out as the Yvonne Rainer company, more frequently across the country, we were running into across-the-country audiences, mid-western audiences, and they were not nearly as generous. Because we would be advertised as a dance company, the audience would start out about 200 people who had come to see a dance concert, and end up about 20 people. I mean maybe a hundred people would walk out during the course of the performance and about 20 people would come up afterwards with shiny eyes and say "you changed my life,". But that was not the rule, that was the



exception. One of the reasons we took the word dance out of the title was, we began to wonder if we wouldn't be better off trying to reach any kind of audience that didn't have dance expectations. Because we didn't feel we weren't dancing. We just felt we weren't dancing to fulfill the expectations of the people/<sup>we</sup>were coming in contact with. We even wondered at the time whether, by having a name like the Grand Union, we might not be able to get some of those people who were just then starting to go <sup>en</sup>in mass<sup>a</sup> to rock concerts, and show them that they could probably have a reasonably good time seeing us. We never got them, they never came.

BW: What about Grand Union? Did you find a change in the audience's expectations since its founding in 1970?

DG: We had a very loyal, large audience in New York. We would go out across the country to do residencies, and the people would fall in love with us, literally fall in love with us. We would do mostly universities, which is where you get higher (dance education in <sup>the</sup>USA) and they would leave school. The next thing, you would find them in New York or California, looking for you, wanting to do some new work. They didn't feel that the schools were making it available to them. The Grand Union was peculiar because the people that liked us thought we were very entertaining. I mean, we were doing this thing called "art" except it was often very funny, very theatrical, and very dramatic. The people who hated us thought we very boring, and that waiting for the "good" moment to emerge was not worth the effort. So it's peculiar to try to categorize the audience in any way. The audience was all young. Younger than us, often enough. In the various places we would be sponsored, they began making requests that we put into the program the sizable biography of our technical and academic backgrounds, so that the students would understand that we didn't just rise out of nowhere and jump around expressing ourselves; that we had trained to be the people we were, and that the training helped to make the decisions that were involved in the improvisation. They were frightened that the students might think this was all so free and easy that they all wanted to be it and do it. In fact, it was hard. We began writing all that stuff down on the programs. Also, some parts of the audience always thought that we inspired them to join us, and in fact we never wanted anybody to join us. Late in the game we began making announcements at the beginning of performances, that the audience was not invited to join the performance.

BW: By Grand Union you didn't mean come and unite...

DG: <sup>No</sup> ~~Yes~~ people would always come up afterwards and say, "I just wanted to get up there with you and do it." They just didn't understand that we had established a relationship



which was part of what we were doing up there. We tried, at various times, to bring other people in. Simone<sup>FORTI</sup> performed with us once, in New York, and it just didn't work. I mean Simone is a master improviser and we were awfully good at what we were doing, but we could not get together because we knew each other so well by that time that she was a stranger.

BW: Often one encounters articles on "new dance" and names such as yourself, Forti, Summers, Paxton, Brown, Dunn keep coming up. What would you say is the uniting factor now between yourself and these dancers' work?

DG: I don't think there is any uniting factor. I don't think we're united at all. I think that Dance Magazine waited 20 years...15 years, after the Judson, to talk about something called "new dance". They were only 15 years too late. In the process of it, what they lumped together is a whole lot of work, in which people are known not to be part of the mainstream of something called modern dance. But I don't think there's any relationship between Simone's work and mine, or Doug's work and mine. If there's any relationship between anybody's work and mine, I think <sup>it's</sup> Trisha's. ~~██████████~~ Although the product...you would be hard-pressed to find a similarity in product. The process by which we deal with things when we speak with each other, which we do with some frequency, about what she's thinking about and working on and what I'm thinking about and working on, we find our minds are moving in very similar directions. But there isn't anybody else I can think of whose working process or product is similar to mine.

BW: Isn't the term "new dance" also trying to give a name to people that are searching or have searched and come up with something quite specific...

DG: Yeah, but it's only another name. I mean, the first name that Yvonne came up with, I believe, was "post-modern dance". People are always dealing with it as something called "innovative dance", "experimental dance", "avant-garde dance" and now there's something called "new dance". But in fact what it is, is people trying to pin down a very large and disparate area of work which they can't fit in anywhere. So they kind of lump it together and call it something. I've been working hard to get rid of the label "experimental dance" because the idea that people have about something called "experimental dance" is that <sup>it</sup> is all improvised and there is no product. One of the things that funding organizations think is that you don't have to rehearse for experimental dance, because it's an experiment.



BW: Yeah, which gives a very distorted picture.

DG: So I've been working at either regaining the old "avant-garde" label, which seems to allow almost anything to exist, or these other things called "new dance" or something.. The only times that I concern myself with that at all are, in this kind of situation when somebody asks...characterize what you do, or in funding situations, when you have to convince a room full of people who think that everybody wears toe-shoes, that there is something else going on.

BW: Now I'd like to talk about your work a little bit more. One of your movement explorations involved analyzing dance phrases and different ways of putting them together...repeating, continuing, splitting up. That's something that has always fascinated me. Do you feel like going into that a little bit?

DG: For me it's expedient. I am not a prolific maker of work. It means I don't come up with 87 new pieces of work a year. I am relatively slow and plodding and I can't afford to throw material around because there's always going to be a lot more. I never believe there's going to be any more. People like Douglas Dunn and Sarah Rudner and Margie Jenkins...Margaret Jenkins in California...seem to have more ideas in the course of a single piece of work than I have had in the course of my entire career. I watch Margie's work, and I look at something and I say, that's very interesting,...I'm going to take that away and turn it upside down and backwards and inside-out and that looks like a good hour's worth of something for me. For her it's one five-second ingredient, in a enormous range of material. The same thing with Doug and Sarah. I just feel that if I come up with [redacted] a movement phrase, [redacted] or a set of movement phrases that interest me, that I then have to find out all the possible permutations of that material, because I don't know when I'm going to come up with my next movement phrase that interests me. So I re-use, alter the image of a piece of material to find out what are the possibilities inherent in it. If you over-lay something onto it, like voice or sound or change of costume, or what are all the possibilities, how do you alter the image of a piece of material? There is a single pose that I did as a solo version of a piece called <sup>THE</sup> "MATTER", in which I came out in a shirt, trousers, and sneakers [redacted] and stood with my arms raised above my head, and my fists clenched, and my face looking up, my eyes squinting. I held that position for some number of counts, like 10 or something. Then I walked away in view of the audience, took



off my clothes, put on boxing shorts and boxing gloves, came back and took exactly the same position. The entire image was altered by the clothing. I went off, removed shorts and boxing gloves, put on a bathing suit, took a beach towel, and went back and held the same position. Now the beach towel was held in my clenched fists in the air and I looked like a sunbather stretching on the beach. Then I walked off, put on a nightshirt, came back and took the same position. The pose never changed but I wound up with three minutes of material based on the alteration of that image by the various disguises that you could do to alter it. The same process can be worked out in dealing with movement. You do it forward then you do it backward, and it doesn't look the same.

BW: That pose, if we use that example, acquires all those meanings. Are you exploring how one can view and give meaning to movement? Has that been one of your focuses?

DG: It is a process that can be described...I <sup>made</sup> ~~made~~ this solo piece of material in a recent concert, which is movement material, which lasts for 12 minutes. I perform that material in front of a huge slide projection of a man, a greyhaired, elderly man dressed as the Pope. The Pope is sitting in a chair watching me dance. At the same time, there is a tape of material that I have written describing audiences with the Pope, and how they functioned from their earliest date. It is all nonsense. I have written a whole nonsensical history of something called "Pope dances", dances that were done for the Pope prior to verbal communication. That tape plays simultaneously with this image of what looks like a very real Pope watching this person do this movement. Then I take away those 2 images, and the material is repeated by 3 women with no accessory. It is now, literally, a movement to be watched for its own sake. It has no connection anymore with Pope dances, Popes, or anything like that. It is now about watching abstract movement. You can play a lot with the numbers of people that alter a situation. I mean, a solo activity performed by 40 people is no longer a solo activity. Sound alters...sound, either on tape, or the person speaking all the while they're moving, is very different than a person not speaking all the while they're moving. There's a piece that I've done called CHAIR in which we do the same 8 minutes of material 4 times. It is a piece in which the chair is the piece you're working with and you do every damn thing you can think of doing with that chair. The first time we do it, Valda and I do we do it both to the same side. Everything that happens to the left happens to the left with both of us. The second time we do it, she has learned the entire material reverses so we now do it symmetrically. The third time we do it, we stop the action of the mat



at any point and get stuck in the action, and repeat certain actions a number of times. By the fourth time we do it, we have been dancing for 24 minutes without stopping, doing a very athletic and exhausting piece of work. The fourth time we do it, we sing "Stars and Stripes Forever" while we're doing it. We are neither of us singers. Neither of us have enormous breath control that singers have to have. So we are really kind of pushing out sound at the most exhausting time in the piece, which alters the movement and the whole image of what you're looking at.

BW: So the audience gets to see that same movement with all of these variations.

DG: Ramifications, exactly... ~~you have to have a sense of timing, they called it theme and variations and everybody thought it was fine~~

BW: ~~(murmur)~~ In various pieces, you seem to use taped voice as one of the sounds. If we want to examine your relationship between sound and movement, would you say that your movement and sounds are like 2 parallel roads, or do you use the tapes as a base to bump off on?

DG? Various things at various times. In a recent concert called NOT NECESSARILY RECOGNIZABLE OBJECTIVES in which the concert material was based on error and rehearsal behavior, <sup>\*In NNRO</sup> there was a specific material manufactured which was then taught to a number of dancers who made mistakes in rehearsal. The mistakes were incorporated into the material at the places they occurred. So you learned material plus errors. The errors were then repeated at exactly the same place in exactly the same way every time. A lot of the material of that whole evening's work was based on that idea and on the confusion between what looked like improvised behavior and set behavior.

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Well, the verbal material that was used on tape at the beginning of that evening was from a book by a man named Irving Goffman who writes about personality.. performance of personality. I had a page and a half of material from that book which described how you fail in the performance of your social situation...the things you can do to fail. You can fart, you can belch, you can fall down, you can get drunk, you can

please see next page for insert before "In NNRO"



misbehave in various ways, you can misjudge a response, you can not understand what somebody's saying. This is all real material related to real situations described about real life. The performance that follows this lecture is about falsified real behavior in performance. So it's clamped with the ambiguities of performance and reality and movement. I mean, I know what an attitude is, and I know what an arabesque is, and I use those things in my work. But at the same time, I might come out of an arabesque into a stumbling walk, in which it looks like I tripped, but the trip is choreographed into the piece of work. \*

BW: What kind of margin do we have here, or is there any in your work, between improvisation and structure?

DG: I am just beginning work with 20 people on a concert that will happen in December. Those people will be asked for part of this work, for instance, to take 10 steps across the space, all the people at once, from stage right towards stage left, or stage left towards stage right. They will then be told that on the tenth step they should change focus and alter the position of their torso in some direction or other. I will then ask them to hold the position that they arrive at for 10 counts. What you'll see is a room full of people seemingly responding to a different interest somewhere in the room. Somebody's attention is called to one corner, somebody's attention is in back of them. That will allow them to make their own gesture at that point. However, all the material that leads up to that, ~~the material is set~~ and goes away from it, <sup>is</sup> set material. So what I'm really doing is, I am choosing performers who interest me by their technical capabilities, because there's some technical stuff, that needs to be done in this piece. I am also choosing people who look interesting to me because a lot of what you will do in this piece is look at people standing still and at various times in various positions and what they look like. Allowing them certain freedoms in relation to small areas of the work, in which it would be absolutely unnecessary for me to set 20 people's directions of heads, arms, torsos, what I want is the look of a crowd. You can get that without wasting time setting all those individual things. The only thing that I would alter is if I got some very eccentric behavior that drew away from the visual look that I wanted, I would tone that down in somebody. // In the pieces that include (i.e., N.N.R.O.) errors, the material was all set. The error actually occurred, it was not an improvisational situation in which I said, O.K., find mistakes. The errors occurred. I watched rehearsals, an error occurred and I said "Hold it, do that one again." I



didn't say "hold it" every time, so that people got used to the making and the holding of an error. Some errors I let pass, some errors I picked up on, the ones that interested me more, and looked visually and sounded more strongly to be part of this material. So people never knew when I was going to say, "that, I want that."

the thing we did in that piece which was very interesting was that there was choreographed movement. It began with 3 people moving back and forth between the 2 walls. At about the third or fourth pass back and forth between the two walls, the middle person, a woman, stopped moving, stood still, and watched the other 2 people pass her, twice, and turned to the audience and said, "I really knew that this was not a trio. I knew it."

care. I really feel liberated by knowing that I can go home, right now, and they can just continue to do this duet without me." At the moment that she says she knows it's a duet, Valda and I join this passing between the two walls and it becomes a quartet. So she knows it's a duet, but it isn't even... it isn't a duet, it isn't even a trio anymore, it's now a quartet. When she finished her speech, we pick her up. I mean, in the passing, she joins us. It now becomes a quintet. We are all doing the same exact thing. She picks up Valda and I and then she picks her up on the right wall. It's the point to the proper ending of this material. She then has a discussion which, in fact, is improvised in performance, about the fact that we have picked her up on the right wall. It's a whole improvisational situation, with a kind of new movement in the piece.

BW" We can probably say that your use of improv, is either to pick up material, or to create it and then set it.

DG: Yeah, but in my work there's a very minor use of improv.

BW: You have mainly a structure which you are calling...



DG: I call... [redacted] I have great difficulty in referring to words like "choreography", "dances", "dance movement". Very often on my program, for instance, when there is a program for a performance, the word "choreography" is never mentioned. It says [redacted] material is constructed by me, work is constructed by me. Whenever a press release goes out, the word dance and the word choreography are never mentioned in the press release. If people want to review it or look at it as dance, that's their business, I haven't called it that.

[redacted] The choreography aspect I understand more, because I ran into it directly. What I don't understand very much, and maybe you could go into it more, is why you don't use the word "dance". Is it because of the expectations that have been put on the word dance?

[redacted] Yeah. In fact, I think that if I am pushed to the wall for a definition of my work, I think of myself as an artist. I think I make art in which movement is a basic and prime ingredient. I don't think I make dances in the way we have come to know dances to be made.

BW: Now you have a company, the David Gordon/<sup>Co,</sup>Pickup Company? These aren't the 20 people you were talking about...

DG: That's this time's Pickup Company.

BW: I see. Pickup is like the open score....?

DG: Pickup means I get to work with who I want to work with, when I want to work with them; how many people I need, under what conditions I want to work. It is precisely what most of the people I know have been doing for most of the years that I know.

[redacted] It is in fact what companies like American Ballet Theatre, who pick up Russian exiles right and left do all the time. But this company, only a year and a half ago, was legally incorporated under that name. One of the things I discovered about funding organizations, is that one of the things they hate are things called "pickup companies" because they make the assumption that people will add more people into their company than they really need in order to get more money. It's my feeling that one of the reasons that people get overwhelmed by the number of people that they have to carry on the



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

BW: But you and Valda work on a continuous basis, don't you?

DG: [REDACTED] In fact Valda and I had just begun working together again for the first time in 1974, [REDACTED] which was the point at which she left the Cunningham company after 10 years. During all that time we never danced together. In '74 when she left, I asked her if she wanted to work with me. We began doing some duet concerts and she is in the large group pieces when they occur. She's sort of a permanent member of the pickup company, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

BW: What about the relationship between a piece of yours and the theatre space. There are people, that I've been talking to, that might make a piece just for that space. Are you particularly interested in the spaces in which...

DG: No, I don't really make work in that way. I avoid all outdoor performance spaces. I'm not interested in performing outdoors. The only way that I really deal with space is again about what is expedient, which is if I'm making a piece for this space, it doesn't make sense to make it larger than this space, or smaller than this space. I use this space in the way that it can function. I mean, one of the reasons I'm making this 20-people piece is that the performing space I'm going into is enormous and will accommodate 20 people, which I could never do here. So it seems a really good situation to do a larger piece.

BW: Are you comfortable in a proscenium stage?

DG: Oh yeah. I am comfortable in most performing situations because I try to make work as flexible as possible, because a solo can become a trio, a trio can become a solo. It is possible to go into a smaller performing space and use those portions of the



material in my work which will fit comfortably into that space. Rather than trying to cram work, and show it badly within a given space, unless the space is really impossible and I won't go into it, I can usually alter the numbers of people, or the directions of the material, or I can make some adjustments to a space. A proscenium space is just fine.

BW: If you were to have a performance in your space here, would you have the audience sit on the floor or on chairs, or does it matter?

DG: It matters to me. About 2 years ago I decided I was tired of loft performances in which you were physically uncomfortable, couldn't see, and too many people were crammed into a space. All of it seemed detrimental to the work, and to the viewing of the work. So I go to fairly large expense to rent platforms, seats, so that people sit above each other, rather than all on one level. I can't afford to do a vast seating structure, so there are inevitably one or two rows of people sitting on the floor, but at least two-thirds of the audience are seated in seats, on platforms. I limit the numbers of people who can come in to any given performance and all of that.

BW: What about the tour that you did in Italy with Grand Union? *(date in parens)*

DG: We didn't do a tour, we just performed in Rome.

BW: How did you find the audience and the critics there, in Rome?

DG: The one critic whose review was read aloud in translation to us, said perhaps in America, backwoodsmen liked this sort of thing, but sophisticated Romans surely know better, than to pay attention to this foolishness. I don't know what any of the other critics said.

The audiences grew from 50 people the first night to 200 people the fourth night. That was a lot to do with publicity that we engineered, and I think probably a great deal more to do with word of mouth. I mean, I think people had a very good time, the first night, and called their friends. The audience was very responsive. It was very hard to know precisely what was going on because we each had translators...because there was a lot of verbal material, we each had translators in performance, who simultaneously translated our English into Italian. So sometimes, if there were something like a laugh, which you can always hear, ~~mean you don't know what somebody is just seriously watching~~

~~if you can hear a laugh...if there was a laugh~~ it would often come 20 seconds after the







[illegible]



[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] theatrical feats and they read it as that. They didn't attach any fabulous, deep  
 meaning to it, and that was O.K. That's a way of looking at anything. I think  
 audiences [REDACTED] make up half of what they see. If you ask people to tell you what they  
 saw afterwards, each person's [REDACTED] is very different. So I just make the assumption that all  
 of this is just nuts, or devastatingly peculiar, that people need to make radical adjust-

[REDACTED]  
 Also the possibility exists that an audience will be bored at my work. The possibi-  
 lity exists that they will be bored at the latest movie that they'll go and see. But  
 they won't be offended by being bored at the movie. They won't feel that they have been  
 "taken" or "put on" by the movie. But being bored by a live performance of work of  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] "bore me". Well, it is never the intention.

[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 "good" and that's all, it's over. The experience is over...maybe they're sorry they spent  
 4 dollars, or something, but they would have liked to have seen one they liked. But  
 they weren't threatened by its not being any good to them. I think that's a very  
 interesting and peculiar difference that people make about live performance, especially  
 about live performance when it comes under this category of avant-garde. Avant-garde  
 is supposed to...it has the reputation of being threatening or aggressive, or hostile.  
 I don't think all work is like that, that comes under that label. I mean, I guess the

[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED] on the walls is  
 [REDACTED] doing that

\*\*\*\*\*THE END\*\*\*\*\*