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The Birth of the Judson Dance Theatre: “A Concert of Dance” at Judson Church, July 6, 1962

Sally Banes

The Judson Dance Theatre was a loosely organized “collective” for avant-garde choreography in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s. From 1962 to 1964, members of the group met weekly to present choreography for criticism and they also cooperatively produced twenty concerts of dance—sixteen group programs and four evenings of choreography by individuals. The Judson Dance Theatre became the focus of a new stage in American modern dance, the seedbed out of which post-modern dance developed over the next two decades.

The Judson Dance Theatre, which grew out of a choreography class taught by Robert Dunn, drew on and consolidated various currents of avant-garde choreography in the 1950s—most notably developing from Anna Halprin, James Waring, and Merce Cunningham. It was a vital gathering place for artists in various fields who exchanged ideas and methods, seeking explicitly to explore, propose, and refute definitions of dance as an art form. The issues that concerned the group ranged from training and technique to choreographic process, music, performance style, and materials. There was no single prevailing aesthetic in the group; rather, an effort was made to preserve an ambiance of diversity and freedom. This attitude gave rise to certain themes and styles: an attention to choreographic

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process and the use of methods that metaphorically stood for democracy; the use of language as an integral part of the dance; the use of "natural," or ordinary, movements; dances about dance. The first concert produced by the Judson Dance Theatre, "A Concert of Dance [#1]," was presented on July 6, 1962, at Judson Memorial Church.

In the spring of 1962, the members of Robert Dunn's choreography class, given at the Merce Cunningham studio, decided to put on a public concert of works they had been showing to each other in class. At the end of the previous year's course there had been a showing of dances for friends at Cunningham's studio in the Living Theatre building at Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue. By the end of the second year of the course the class was larger and the students more ambitious. "There was a body of work which it was called a shame to waste without at least a public showing, and Judson was asked and they were agreeable. But it was intended as a one-shot concert," John Herbert McDowell remembers. "We decided to put on the concert just for the adventure of it," Steve Paxton adds. "Going out and doing something elsewhere. The Living Theatre was too small."¹

Yvonne Rainer, who had seen the first Judson Poets' Theatre production in the choir loft of Judson Memorial Church, suggested that the class look into holding the concert there. Paxton met with Al Carmines, the minister in charge of the church's arts program, and set up a date for an audition. On the appointed date Paxton, Rainer, Ruth Emerson, and perhaps Robert and Judith Dunn went to the church, where Paxton, Rainer, and Emerson danced. Rainer danced *Three Satie Spoons*; Emerson, her *Timepiece*; and Paxton may have performed *Transit*.^{*} Paxton's memory of the audition is that "it was a pretty weak showing. But they said, 'Fine.'"² Emerson, who thinks that much of the impetus in planning the concert came from Rainer, who was ready to show her accumulated work, recalls:

^{*}The "perhaps" and "may have" suggest some of the problems in reconstructing events nearly twenty years later. There will be a number of places in this account where people's memories differ on a particular point, and there is now no way to arrive at "the truth."

A CONCERT OF DANCE

BILL DAVIS, JUDITH DUNN, ROBERT DUNN, RUTH EMERSON, SALLY GROSS, ALEX HAY,
DEBORAH HAY, FRED HERKO, DAVID GORDON, GRETCHEN MACLANE, JOHN HERBERT MCDOWELL,
STEVE PAXTON, RUDY PEREZ, YVONNE RAINER, CHARLES ROTMIL, CAROL SCOTHORN,
ELAINE SUMMERS, JENNIFER TIPTON

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
55 WASHINGTON SQUARE SOUTH
FRIDAY, 6 JULY 1962, 8:30 P.M.

The flyer designed by Steve Paxon for "A Concert of Dance," courtesy of William Davis.

Steve and Yvonne and I went down one very hot evening, and I think I was asked just because I was around. I remember having the feeling that Al wondered if we'd take all our clothes off or do something terrible. We did a couple of pieces. We came prepared to be really serious and to show him how we worked. I don't even know if he saw all our pieces. After ten minutes he said, "Oh, this is wonderful, this is great. No problem." And we all started laughing.³

Judson Memorial Church, an architecturally eclectic building at 55 Washington Square South, at the corner of Thompson Street, was designed by Stanford White in 1892. Its stained-glass windows were designed by John LaFarge, and its baptistry was built by Herbert Adams from plans by Augustus St. Gaudens. The church itself was built by Edward Judson in memory of his father, Adoniram Judson, who went to Burma in 1811 as one of the first American missionaries. The church, dually affiliated with the American Baptist Church and the United Church of Christ, was a base for labor union organizing in the 1930s and for the civil rights movement, school integration activities, and drug addiction rehabilitation programs in the 1960s. In 1961 the parish played an active role in overturning a ban on folk-singing in Washington Square park—after a year of protests and sit-ins—and in the same year the chief minister, Howard Moody, was elected head of the Village Independent Democrats.⁴

After World War II, when many of the church's members moved out of the city, Robert Spike, minister from 1948 to 1955, started an arts program, partly out of personal inclination and partly to stimulate the life of the church. Concerts and plays were given and paintings exhibited. Then Moody, who came to the church in 1956, organized the Judson Gallery, which showed works by Pop artists Jim Dine, Tom Wesselman, Daniel Spoerri, Red Grooms, and Claes Oldenburg as early as 1959. The "Judson Group" put on a program of Happenings, *Ray Gun Spex*, in early 1960; and later that year Dine presented his *Apple Shrine*, an Environment. A group called the Judson Studio Players performed *Faust* in the sanctuary of the church in 1959.⁵

In 1960, when Moody decided to start a resident theatre group in the church, he hired Al Carmines, who had just graduated

from Union Theological Seminary, to coordinate the arts program and organize the Judson Poets' Theatre. While at the seminary, Carmines had gone to parties for divinity students at Judson; he also remembers having attended an early Allan Kaprow Happening there. When Carmines heard that there was an opening for someone to run the arts program at the church, he applied for the position. When he became associate minister—on a part-time basis for the first two years, while he earned a master's degree—Carmines continued the church policy of aiding as many artists as possible and supporting the avant-garde without censorship.⁶

The first production at the Judson Poets' Theatre, on November 18, 1961, was a double bill of one-act plays: Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias* and Joel Oppenheimer's *The Great American Desert*. About two weeks later, on December 3, Carmines organized a "Hall of Issues" at the Judson Gallery, to which the public was invited to contribute artworks and polemics. During the 1961–62 season, Judson Poets' Theatre presented three more programs of one-act plays (opening in January, March, and May), and in May Peter Schumann gave a masked dance/play, *Totentanz*, with the Alchemy Players. In the summer of 1962 Carmines began writing music based on popular forms for the Judson Poets' Theatre, starting with George Dennison's *Vaudeville Skit*.⁷ Carmines's approach to making theatre in the church was, he admitted, unconventional for a minister.

When I started the theatre in 1961 with the help of Robert Nichols, who's an architect and playwright, we had two principles. One, not to do religious drama. Two, no censoring after acceptance. . . . [The fact that our plays are performed in] a church liberates me more than any other place would. I've discovered for myself that God doesn't disappear when you don't talk about him.

Like a lot of ministers, the real world was not part of my life. Ministers are often preoccupied with themselves. The theatre broke it all open for me. A source of revelation.⁸

Carmines remembers that when the dancers approached him to ask whether they could put on a concert in the church, "I was scared of the kind of dance they did. I was used to ballet, maybe Martha Graham. I hadn't seen Merce Cunningham. I said they'd

have to give their first three concerts in the gymnasium, and the board of the church would have to decide whether it was proper to do it in the sanctuary.”⁹

The concert was planned for July 6, 1962. According to Rainer, “the selection of the program had been hammered out at numerous gab sessions, with Bob Dunn as the cool-headed prow of a sometimes overheated ship. He was responsible for the organization of the program.” Paxton remembers that “it was largely reasons of necessity that determined what had to follow what: who had time to be where when, who needed to be free at a certain time so they could change. Certain things weren’t possible.” He also recalls that “Dunn made the order of the dances, including some that were shown with each other, which was a popular idea at that time: ‘Let’s have chocolate and strawberry at the same time.’”¹⁰

Elaine Summers recalls:

Steve and Yvonne and Bob and Judy said, “Let’s do a concert and everybody can pick one work of their own, or two, and it can be anything you want. Make your own decision about what you’re going to present, and let’s do a concert in July. It’ll be hot, and there won’t be anyone there, and we’ll just have a wonderful time.” And then we all did whatever it was we had to do.

Everyone in the group was extremely responsible. Everybody had their chores to do, and everybody did them. And lo and behold, we had this concert. And we had so much material it started at eight and went until midnight. It was hot in there—ninety degrees—and we were totally amazed because so many people came. It was absolutely crushed!¹¹

Steve Paxton and Fred Herko formed the publicity committee. Paxton designed the flyer, which is plain, clear, and also witty in its hint of repetition and reversal. Herko wrote the press release, dated June 22, which explained that the “young professional dancers” involved in “A Concert of Dance” used a variety of choreographic techniques. The participants were named: Bill Davis, Judith Dunn, Robert Dunn, Ruth Emerson, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Richard Goldberg, David Gordon, Gretchen Maclane [*sic*], John Herbert McDowell, Steve Paxton, Rudy Perez, Yvonne Rainer, Carol Scothorn, Elaine Summers, Jennifer Tipton. This release lists

choreographers and performers together as participants, without setting up a hierarchy. "Indeterminacy, rules specifying situations, improvisations, spontaneous determination, and various other means" were named as choreographic strategies, and a concluding paragraph stated that the event would show a diversity of work, and that the concert would "be of interest as it signalizes [*sic*] a new concern on the part of the younger dancers to explore dance with the concerns and responsibilities of the choreographer as well as those of the performer." An abbreviated version of this notice, consisting of the first paragraph and the names of all the participants, appeared in the *Village Voice* on June 28. The flyer was sent to names on the church mailing list, as well as the dancers' friends and acquaintances.¹²

The program for the concert lists the following credits: lighting design, Carol Scothorn; lighting operation, Alex Hay; musical direction, Robert Dunn and John Herbert McDowell; costume consultant, Ruth Emerson; stage manager, Judith Dunn; film projector operation, Eugene Freeman [*sic*]; advisory, Judith Dunn, Robert Dunn.¹³

Despite Carmines' original plan, the concert was given in the sanctuary of the church, one flight up from the street-level entrance on Washington Square. A curtain was hung from the edge of the choir loft, at the opposite end of the room from the altar, and served as a divider between the lobby-entrance and the performing space in the sanctuary proper. It also served as a backdrop for the "stage," which was simply the space in front of the curtain. An architectural rhythm for this setting was provided by the four columns supporting the loft. The audience walked in through the lobby, across the bare space, and to their seats. At that time the church still held traditional "high Baptist" services. There was a pulpit and a large cross at the altar, at the south end of the sanctuary, and the congregation sat in movable pews facing the altar. The Poets' Theatre performed in the large choir loft, not on the sanctuary floor. The dancers altered the arrangement of the sanctuary by moving the pews around and putting them in front of the altar, facing north, and along the sides of the room, clearing the rest of the space for the dancing.¹⁴

"A Concert of Dance" was arranged with a slightly asymmetrical balance of solo and group dances, solos by men and by women, dances with and without music, with live and recorded music, talking and singing, slow and fast and variable tempi, simple and complex choreographic structures, plain and fancy costumes. The twenty-three items on the program were divided into fifteen units. Dance number one was actually a film, and it was billed under a musical term: *Overture*. So from the moment the concert started, the irreverent trespassing of artistic boundaries was present. A group work followed, then a solo by a woman, then three solos by men, then another group work. In mirror sequence, the next six dances were group, male solo, three female solos, another group. The only duet was performed during the intermission. Following the intermission, there were nine more dances: group, two male solos, group, two female solos, male solo, female solo, group. Two pieces of music by Erik Satie were heard as accompaniments in the first half of the program (perhaps the same piece), but in between them were two dances in silence that themselves sandwiched a dance to music by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. *Cartridge Music* by John Cage, which was also used for two different dances, was played only once, as the dances were done either simultaneously or overlapping one another.¹⁵

Several aspects of this concert would later become essential features of the Judson Dance Theatre, as this group of choreographers soon came to call itself: the democratic spirit of the enterprise; a joyous defiance of rules, both choreographic and social; a refusal to capitulate to the requirements of "communication" and "meaning" that were generally regarded as the intention of even avant-garde theatre; a radical questioning, at times through serious analysis and at times through satire, of what constitute the basic materials and traditions of dance.

As the audience entered the sanctuary at 8:15 on the evening of July 6, a film was being projected. McDowell recalls:

[The film] was Bob Dunn's doing and was beautiful. The dance concert was announced to start at 8:30. The audience was admitted at 8:15, and they went upstairs into the sanctuary to find that in order

to get to their seats they had to walk across a movie that was going on. It was embarrassing, and Bob's whole point was to discombobulate them, to quash their expectations. This movie consisted of some chance-edited footage by Elaine [Summers] and test footage that I made, all of which was blue-y. . . . And W. C. Fields in *The Bank Dick*. And we went on exactly, precisely for fifteen minutes. The last sequence in the film was the final chase scene from *The Bank Dick*. And then there was a marvelous segue between the unexpected film and the dance. The first dance, which was by Ruth Emerson, started on the dot of 8:30. As the movie was just about to go off, the six or so people involved came out, the movie sort of dissolved into the dance, and as the stage lights came up the dancers were already on stage and the dance had already started.¹⁶

The authors of *Overture* are listed as W. C. Fields, Eugene Freeman [sic], John Herbert McDowell, Mark Sagers, and Elaine Summers. Summers was then learning filmmaking from Gene Friedman, an assistant cameraman in commercial television and cinema who was also a friend of McDowell's. Summers remembers being so stimulated by the chance methods Dunn taught that she suggested making a chance movie. Friedman had been giving Summers assignments that, though they were traditional problems for beginning filmmakers, bear a striking similarity to some of Dunn's assignments in the choreography class.

He would say, "Take a three-minute reel of film and do a complete story nonverbally with it. And no cutting, you have to do it in the camera." And then he would want one that had zooms.

So I had a lot of scrap movies, and Gene was contributing not only his guruship but also films—tail ends of movies, called short ends, from the TV stations where he was working. And John had some W. C. Fields movies.

John, Gene, and I got together and used a chance system from the telephone book. We took all the film strips and we rolled them up and we put them in a big paper bag. They had numbers on them, like one foot, two feet, three feet. We'd get a number from the telephone book, like 234-5654, and we'd have to put the film strips together in that sequence.

I remember saying, "This certainly brings out the stubborn in one, because I don't want to put a two-foot strip here, I want to use a six-foot one." And of course, that was one of the exciting things about the chance method. You suddenly realize that you have a lot of opinions.¹⁷

A CONCERT OF DANCE
Judson Memorial Church
55 Washington Square South
Friday, 6 July, 8:30 P.M.

1. OVERTURE: W. C. Fields, Eugene Freeman, John Herbert McDowell, Mark Sagers, Elaine Summers
-

2. Ruth Emerson: NARRATIVE
(performers: Judith Dunn, John Herbert McDowell, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Elaine Summers)

Ruth Emerson: TIMEPIECE

3. Fred Herko: ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK I PUT ON SNEAKERS TO GO UPTOWN
(music: Erik Satie; pianist: Robert Dunn; costume: Remy Charlip)

Steve Paxton: TRANSIT

John Herbert McDowell: FEBRUARY FUN AT BUCHAREST
(music: Marc-Antoine Charpentier)

4. Elaine Summers: INSTANT CHANCE
(performers: Ruth Emerson, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Gretchen MacLane, Steve Paxton, John Herbert McDowell, Elaine Summers)

5. David Gordon: HELEN'S DANCE
(music: Erik Satie; pianist, Robert Dunn)

6. Deborah Hay: 5 THINGS

Gretchen MacLane: QUBIC

Deborah Hay: RAIN FUR

7. Yvonne Rainer: DANCE FOR 3 PEOPLE AND 6 ARMS
(performers: William Davis, Judith Dunn, Yvonne Rainer)
-

8. INTERMISSION: (coffee will be served in the lounge)
Yvonne Rainer: DIVERTISSEMENT
(performers: William Davis, Yvonne Rainer)
-

The original program for "A Concert of Dance," courtesy of
William Davis.

9. Elaine Summers: THE DAILY WAKE
(structure realized by the following performers:
Ruth Emerson, Sally Gross, John Herbert McDowell,
Rudy Perez, Carol Scothorn)
(music: Robert Dunn, John Herbert McDowell,
Elaine Summers, Arthur Williams)
 10. David Gordon: MANNEQUIN DANCE
(music: James Waring; costume: Barbara Kastle)

Fred Herko-Cecil Taylor: LIKE MOST PEOPLE--for Soren
(costume: Remy Charlip)
 11. Steve Paxton: PROXY
(performers: Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Jennifer
Tipton)
 12. John Cage: CARTRIDGE MUSIC

Carol Scothorn: ISOLATIONS

Ruth Emerson: SHOULDER
 13. William Davis: CRAYON
(music: The Volumes, Dee Clark, The Shells)
 14. Yvonne Rainer: ORDINARY DANCE
 15. Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Charles Rotmil: RAFLADAN
-

Lighting design: Carol Scothorn; operator: Alex Hay
Musical direction: Robert Dunn, John Herbert McDowell
Costume consultant: Ruth Emerson
Stage manager: Judith Dunn
Film operator: Eugene Freeman
Publicity: Fred Herko, Steve Paxton
Advisory: Judith Dunn, Robert Dunn

(Thanks are due to the public spirit of Judson
Memorial Church for the use of their facilities
and for coffee; further thanks to the Merry-Go-
Rounders, to Thomas Skelton, and to Michael Malce,
for vital assistance.)

According to McDowell, some of the segments were upside-down and backwards.¹⁸

Allen Hughes, the dance critic for the *New York Times*, called *Overture* "a moving picture 'assemblage'" and wrote in his review of the concert:

The overture was, perhaps, the key to the success of the evening, for through its random juxtaposition of unrelated subjects—children playing, trucks parked under the West Side Highway, Mr. Fields, and so on—the audience was quickly transported out of the everyday world where events are supposed to be governed by logic, even if they are not.¹⁹

Item number two consisted of two dances by Ruth Emerson. Judith Dunn, John Herbert McDowell, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Elaine Summers danced in *Narrative*, a three-section dance. Each dancer was given a score that indicated walking patterns, focus, and tempo, and also cues for action based on the other dancers' actions. The instructions were not dramatic or psychologically descriptive; they referred to abstract movements and individual focus rather than interaction. For instance, directions to dancer B (Paxton) include the directive "Take great care never to focus on G [Rainer] or to direct your movement at her." Three of the dancers walked along geometrical paths during part one: Paxton along diagonals, Dunn along a rectangle, and Summers along a circle; McDowell walked backwards at random, and Rainer walked sideways at random. The focus for each dancer was quite specific, and each had to cue his or her tempo to those of the other dancers. In the second section Dunn sat with focus down, Paxton did a movement pattern (two quick diagonal extensions of the foot and arm, and a turning arm gesture in plié, with focus up) seven times, and Rainer did another movement pattern (fouetté with arms, break at elbow and relax), four times. (The scores for the other two dancers in the second section have been lost.) Part three was an orchestration of patterned exits, chiefly along diagonal lines.²⁰

Narrative was not taught to the dancers or written with expressive overtones in psychological terms, but Emerson says that she was trying to make it a dramatic dance—

Dramatic in the sense that by placing people in the space and by turning them in different directions, I could show something about relationships. There was little that happened, except people changed their [spatial and temporal] relationships to one another. It had very little tension, which is what I obviously would have liked to achieve. I didn't feel it was a brilliant success. I think I did not know very much about groups of people and was finding out more about *my* body and how to construct material for me. That was more productive.²¹

The first live dance on the program, then, was a new twist on an old modern-dance theme. The title suggests a literal meaning, of the sort that the older generation of modern dancers always offered an audience. And modern-dance choreographers often used diagonal lines to connote dramatic tensions. But Emerson's *Narrative* was a drama without a narrative, without specific or coherent symbolic meaning.

The next dance was Emerson's solo *Timepiece*. It was another dance structured by chance, based on a chart that extended the categories she had worked with in earlier dances. The chart had columns for quality (percussive or sustained); timing (on a scale from one to six, ranging from very slow to very fast); time (units of fifteen seconds, multiplied by factors ranging from one to six); movements (five possibilities: "red bag, untying; turn, jump, jump; hands, head, plié; walking forward side back side side; heron leg to floor"); space time (ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, or stillness); space (five areas of the stage plus offstage); front (direction for the facing of the body, with four square directions, four diagonals, and one wild choice, marked "?"); and high, low, or medium levels in space. The qualities having to do with movement and timing were put together, along the graph of absolute time, separately from the qualities dealing with space. Thus changes in area, facing, and level in space might occur during a single movement phrase. *Timepiece* started out with stillness. "To my utter horror," Emerson recalls, "I had to get over the fact that I could start a piece with forty seconds of stillness. One of the reasons I liked the piece was that I learned I could do that."²²

Timepiece, with its components tightly governed by various independent temporal controls, punningly refers to a stopwatch or clock, the legendary accouterment of both John Cage and Robert Dunn. It also seems an appropriate step, in terms of the increasingly upset expectations of the audience, in instructing the spectator. After the first dance, *Narrative*, made clear what this new work would *not* be, the second dance presented a paradigmatic chance dance, an example of what much of the new work *would* be.

Paxton remembers Emerson's dancing in *Timepiece* as "boundy"—"Very long-limbed. Not particularly articulate. A lot of large shapes, big sweeps. . . . "We talked a lot about her performance, because she looked very glazed when she performed. I remember trying to encourage her to be less glazed. And I remember Judith Dunn looking disapproving, perhaps because that's how she [Dunn] looked when she performed. But somehow that was appropriate to her."²³ The question of the dancer's performing presence was one of the issues this group was trying to understand and resolve in a way consonant with their emerging styles. "We didn't want to emote," Paxton explains. "On the other hand, the glazed look was obviously becoming or already had become such a cliché."²⁴

Unit number three on the program comprised three solos by men, which may have indicated that they were performed simultaneously, or else that they were performed in close sequence, without a break. These solos were Herko's *Once or Twice a Week I Put on Sneakers to Go Uptown*; Paxton's *Transit*; and McDowell's *February Fun at Bucharest*.

Jill Johnston, writing in the *Village Voice*, described *Once or Twice a Week* . . . (which had music by Erik Satie played by pianist Robert Dunn, and a costume designed by Remy Charlip): "Herko did a barefoot Suzie-Q in a tassel-veil head-dress, moving around the big open performing area . . . in a semi-circle, doing only the barefoot Suzie-Q with sometimes a lazy arm snaking up and collapsing down." He performed "with no alternation of pace or accent."²⁵ Allen Hughes devoted one-fifth of his review of the concert in the *Times* to this dance.

Fred Herko came out dressed in multicolored bath or beach robe with a veil of lightweight metal chains covering his head and face. . . . One's attention was riveted to his dance, which was no more than a kind of unvaried shuffling movement around the floor to the accompaniment of a piano piece by Erik Satie. (Satie, incidentally, would have loved it.)

This was the *Sneakers* dance, but Mr. Herko was barefoot all the while.²⁶

Remy Charlip remembers that he made a cap based on an African design for Herko, with strings of beads ending in small shells that hung down over his face and head, expressly to emphasize, in sound and movement, the swaying that was the dance's motif. Charlip also thinks that the title was a kind of ironic reverse snobbishness: if the bohemians and avant-gardists downtown danced proudly in bare feet, then to put on sneakers was to dress up, a humorous concession to "above Fourteenth Street."²⁷ Like the Pop artists then working in Greenwich Village, Herko was using material from popular culture as the subject of his work, for what Johnston called a Suzie-Q might also have been described as the Twist, just then enjoying an enormous vogue in New York dance clubs.

Herko was friendly with Andy Warhol, whom he had met at the San Remo Coffee Shop at Bleecker and MacDougal streets in the Village. Warhol remembers Herko (who committed suicide in 1964) as "a very intense, handsome guy in his twenties . . . who conceived of everything in terms of dance." Warhol notes:

He could do so many things well, but he couldn't support himself on his dancing or any of his other talents. He was brilliant but not disciplined—the exact type of person I would become involved with over and over and over again during the sixties. . . . Freddy eventually just burned himself out with amphetamine; his talent was too much for his temperament. At the end of '64 he choreographed his own death and danced out a window on Cornelia Street.²⁸

Paxton was not impressed by Herko's work in general during the Judson Dance Theatre workshops and performance.

It seemed very campy and self-conscious, which wasn't at all my interest. As I remember he was a collagist with an arch performance manner. You would get ballet movement, none of it very high-energy. Maybe a few jetés every now and then. As a dancer his real forte was some very, very elegant lines. But in terms of actual movement, transitions from one well-defined place to another, he did it rather nervously. Holding a position was more what he did than moving from place to place.²⁹

Allen Hughes was more enthusiastic about Herko's style, as both dancer and choreographer.

His dances were architecturally organized. He didn't just go willy-nilly from here to there. He always had a sense of theatrical structure. Herko was a performer with charisma. He may not have been a great choreographer; I'm only saying that he vitalized that movement, he gave it a vividness that many of the others did not. Herko was the brightest performing star of all. He was a happy exhibitionist, which makes theatre. He wouldn't allow himself to go too far off into inner-somethings, because he never wanted to lose his public.³⁰

Al Carmines, who worked more closely with Herko in the Judson Poets' Theatre, recalls that Herko's work "always included humor and pathos and high-class camp. He was an unusual actor, and audiences adored him. He learned to be totally accessible to an audience."³¹

Steve Paxton's *Transit*, following *Once or Twice a Week . . .*, was a solo that presented a spectrum of movement styles, from classical dance (ballet) to "marked dance" (technical movement performed without the high energy usually expended in performance) to pedestrian movement. It also presented a spectrum of speeds, from running to slow motion. Paxton would perform a classical ballet phrase, then repeat it in a marked version, run at different speeds, and stand in tense or relaxed positions. "It was just taking items and playing their scales,"³² he recollects. *Transit* was an analysis by dissection of ballet movement, which is recognizable on stage by one of its essential components: a taut, charged body.

Transit, which Paxton thinks of as a collage, was made specifically for the concert at the Judson, not for Robert Dunn's class. It was eight minutes long. Paxton performed the dance barefoot in black footless tights and leotard. There was no sound accompaniment. Paxton rehearsed the dance for a month; most of the time was spent perfecting the ballet phrase, which was "a pet phrase of Margaret Craske's. That's why I wanted it." Paxton had learned the phrase secondhand from Carolyn Brown, who regularly took ballet class at Craske's studio in the Metropolitan Opera House, as did several other members of the Cunningham company. Paxton went to Craske only occasionally.³³

John Herbert McDowell was among the performers and choreographers in the Judson concert with the least formal dance training. He was a composer, trained at Columbia University, who had begun writing music for dance in the early 1950s. Among others, he had worked with Richard Englund, James Waring, Paul Taylor, and Aileen Passloff. McDowell had met Robert Dunn in 1961, when he hired Dunn to play the piano for Taylor's *Insects and Heroes*. McDowell first took movement courses for theatre from Alec Rubin at the Master Institute and then joined Dunn's choreography course.³⁴

Jill Johnston wrote approvingly of McDowell's *February Fun at Bucharest*

John Herbert McDowell is a composer. He has no dance training. . . . Having no ties or tensions arising from a training and having an inordinate sense of fun, McDowell distinguishes himself as a "natural"—not a natural dancer (although you could think of it that way if you're not too set in your idea of what dancing is): I mean a natural person going about the business at hand, which in this case consisted of a few zany actions performed in a red sock and a yellow sweater.³⁵

Diane di Prima described the dance as "John McDowell in a red sock, leaping about like a demented pixie." McDowell himself remembers that he stood on his head in front of a mirror and pulled his hair out. But these "zany actions" were set against the baroque weight of music by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. McDowell says that the music had nothing to do with the dancing; he simply had to use

other people's music to accompany his own dances. Perhaps McDowell's choice was also governed by an ironic tribute to a special alliance between theatrical dance and religion that preceded Judson Church and its Dance Theatre: Charpentier was, after all, one of the most important composers of Louis XIV's court—renowned for its opera-ballets—where he composed both theatrical and religious music.³⁶

The dance listed as item number four on the program was Elaine Summers' *Instant Chance*. Summers used high, numbered Styrofoam blocks, carved into different shapes and painted different colors on different surfaces, to cue movement for the dancers (Ruth Emerson, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Gretchen MacLane, Steve Paxton, John Herbert McDowell, and Summers herself). The dancers would throw the blocks up in the air. Each dancer had a separate movement choice in response to the three different factors that fell top up. The shape dictated the place or type of movement; the color told the rate of speed; the number governed the rhythm. For instance, Emerson's score indicates that for the cone, her movement should be in the air; for the cube, in relevé; for the column, standing; for the sphere, sitting or kneeling; for the oblong, on the floor. If she saw yellow, she should move very fast; blue, fast; purple, medium; red, slowly; pink, very slowly. The instructions for following the cues dictated by the numbers reads: "Repeat movement, every movement 5 times but the number equals a rhythm. 1=1 (an insistent pulse), 2=2/4, 3=3/4, 5=5/4." Each performer was also assigned a color as an identifying mechanism; Emerson, called Pink, wore a pink leotard.³⁷

Summers says that she called the dance *Instant Chance* because she felt that most chance dances used hidden operations: the moves were determined by chance beforehand, but then the dance was set and the audience had no way of knowing what method the choreographer had used. (For instance, Merce Cunningham has used this technique.) In *Instant Chance* the overt display of the chance method was central to the viewing of the dance. The dance also incorporated improvisation, because Summers gave very broad parameters for movement choices. Although the choreographer set up rules for her dancers, how these rules would come to be

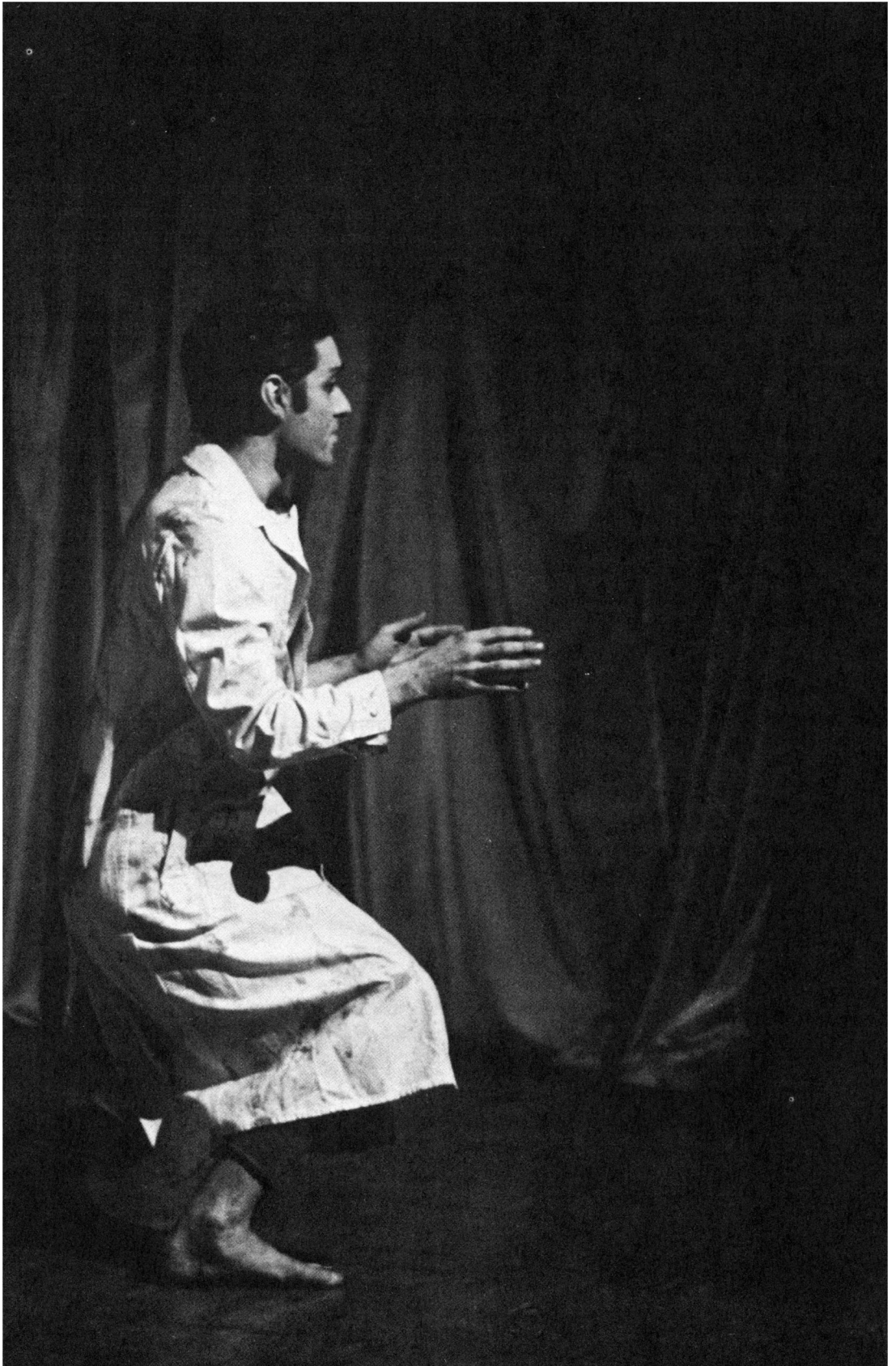
expressed depended on both the rolling of the “dice” and the immediate decisions those circumstances and instructions prompted in the dancers. Summers explains, “If ‘red’ and ‘one’ meant cover space and leap, I didn’t know how that person was going to leap, or how they were going to cover space.” With this score, Summers was also trying to confront the glazed or else overly expressive faces that plagued so much of modern dance, and to produce instead a look of engagement and intelligent concentration. The dance also promoted a sense of spontaneity and childlike play, valuing freedom of choice and action.³⁸

In his review of the concert in the *Times*, Hughes explained the apparent mechanism of the dance, but he could not explain his reaction to it

Six performers appeared to be playing on a beach. They had various objects, including a ball, that they tossed around like dice, and the objects were numbered. The numbers that came up on the objects probably gave the dancers clues as to what they would do next. In any event, there was movement of all kinds going on steadily, and for some reason or other, it was interesting much of the time.³⁹

According to David Gordon, whose *Helen’s Dance* was item number five on the concert, his piece was one of the weapons he used in an ongoing attempt to make Dunn’s class uncomfortable.

The primary concern of the Dunns was to teach chance procedures, and they rigidly persevered against any chance occurrence that might alter the course of an evening’s schedule. A flick of the long yellow pad and “let’s get on with what we have to do” generally put an end to spontaneous discussion. The dogmatic approach of the class often irritated me, and I sought ways to beat the system. *Helen’s Dance* was made to a piece by Satie as a class assignment. We were given the options of using the music in various ways. None of these options included the possibility of ignoring the music, which is what I chose to do. The apartment that I lived in then was a three-room railroad flat, and I had no studio space available to me so I made a long narrow piece that moved through the three rooms. I performed it in about twelve feet of space at the Judson. *Helen’s Dance* was a series of twenty-odd activities performed in a straight line, one after another, including some gestural dance material. Miming planting a flower was one of the things.



The costume, I remember later, had black-and-white striped tights and a black-and-white geometrically patterned top trimmed with jet fringe. At the Judson performance I probably wore black tights and a black tank top leotard. . . . The piece was named for a friend who died of cancer at that time, and it became inexorably confused with her death in my mind until I realized that I was performing it in a terribly sentimental fashion, and I never did it again.⁴⁰

Like Herko, like the choreographer Simone Forti, who had been an early member of the Dunn choreography class, like the composer La Monte Young, and perhaps even like Satie in a way that he never intended, Gordon chose to amplify concentration on a single phenomenon—another way to get closer to the “facts” of things, to list things is an elemental form.

Number six on the program contained three solos: Deborah Hay in her *5 Things*, Gretchen MacLane in her *Qubic*, and Hay again, this time in *Rain Fur*. All three dances were done in silence, and it may be that they overlapped in some way, as Paxton suggested about the arrangement of the program as a whole. (Neither choreographer can remember, however, whether this was the case or not.)

Hay, one of the youngest members of the group, had grown up in Brooklyn, learning dancing first with her mother and then at the Henry Street Playhouse. After a summer at Connecticut College, where she became fascinated by Merce Cunningham’s work, she enrolled in Dunn’s choreography class with her husband, the painter Alex Hay. Hay destroyed her dance scores in 1971, and she remembers very little about her early dances at the Judson. She thinks that in *Rain Fur* she reclined on the floor in front of the audience, with her back to them, “in a very familiar, painterly lying posture.” She then rolled over to the other side and faced the audience. Perhaps this is the dance that Rainer recalls from the first concert in which Hay wore a skirt made of small hoops that hobbled her, severely restricting her movement possibilities.⁴¹

Like Hay, Gretchen MacLane, who had grown up in Chicago studying ballet, tap, and character dancing, discovered Cunningham

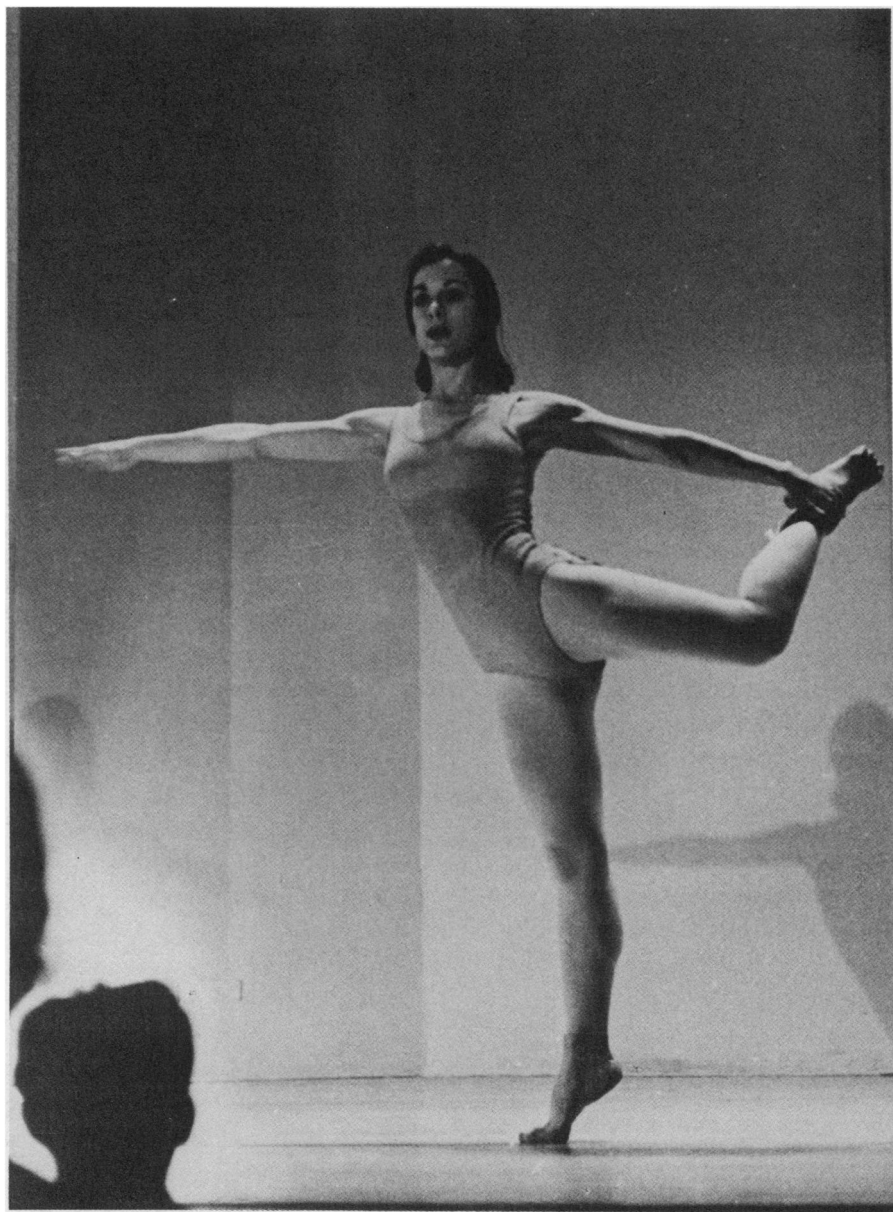
during a summer at Connecticut College. She remembers seeing Cunningham and Carolyn Brown dancing *Night Wandering*, and for the first time being moved by modern dance. About her *Qubic* (pronounced "cubic") she remembers only that it was made for Dunn's class, and that it must have been in response to an assignment about space, because she named it after the three-dimensional tic-tac-toe game then popular.⁴² Paxton remembers that in Dunn's class, MacLane was "somebody who had a gift for being really droll and constantly fought it." MacLane remembers watching Paxton's work and being "bored out of my mind." "But," she adds, "it wasn't bad being bored in those days."⁴³

The twelfth dance in the concert (item number seven on the printed program) was Yvonne Rainer's indeterminate *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*. It had first been performed on the March 24 program at the Maidman Playhouse during the New York Poets' Theatre festival of 1962. Rainer describes the dance as "a trio consisting of an improvised sequence of predetermined activities." It was first danced by Rainer, William Davis, and Trisha Brown; at the Judson concert Judith Dunn replaced Brown, who was in California for the summer.⁴⁴

The movement options, as might be expected from the title, emphasized the dominance of the arms, although the whole body was set in motion. The arms often led, worked independently of, or were set against the rest of the body's motion. In a sense the dance was a probing analysis of the function of the balletic port de bras. The choices that the dancers could make included ten "movements," three "actions," and two "positions." At the beginning of the dance, the three performers stood upstage for a moment, then all three did the third "movement": a turned-in attitude with spread-eagle arms that pulled the body around, the whole action traveling downstage. For the next fifteen minutes, the performers freely made their own choices from the gamut supplied by Rainer, except for one restriction: when anyone started one of the "actions"—

Yvonne Rainer in *Ordinary Dance* as performed in February 1963 at Judson Hall. Photograph by V. Sladon.





Yvonne Rainer in *Ordinary Dance* as performed in February 1963 at Judson Hall. Photograph by V. Sladon.

the one that Rainer describes as “‘Blam-blam. Blam. Blam-blam,’ accompanied by flat-footed jumping about”—the other two had to stop what they were doing and join in. Rainer’s examination of arm movements included a balletic port de bras, nicknamed “Flapper,” done with limp arms, while the dancer traveled forward in a relaxed alternating fourth position. In another “movement” the body engaged in “foot-play with one hand ‘consciously’ moving the other hand about the body. Hands alternate being ‘animate’ and ‘in-animate.’” Another “movement” was a series of activities including a relevé with the right palm gliding up the nose, scratching the arm while walking in a circle, then throwing the head back while bending the knees in parallel plié. The arms “swim” or droop, the hands place themselves on the body while the dancer walks in plié and squeaks, or the hands clasp the ankles during bourrée steps, or the hand and head vibrate while the rest of the body collapses into a squat. The other two “actions,” besides the flat-footed “blam-blam,” were moving the arms as quickly as possible and simultaneously descending into the prone position as slowly as possible, and rocking from side to side while the hands play a sort of game with the head—trying to clasp each other without the head noticing. The two “positions” were “ghoul” and “twist with eye-balls up—perched on one leg. Placed either d.[own] s.[tage] right or d.s. left.”⁴⁵

After seeing the first performance of *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*, at the Maidman, Jill Johnston called it “dazzling” and announced that Rainer had “arrived” as a choreographer. Maxine Munt, writing in *Show Business* about the same concert, thought the dance “redundant and disaffectingly gauche.”⁴⁶

William Davis, who was a member of Merce Cunningham’s company at the time, remembers *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms* as one of his happiest performing moments.

I remember waiting for the curtain to go up at the Maidman Theatre. I think it was the first time dancers were waiting for a curtain to go up without having any idea whatsoever of the shape the dance was going to take.

That kind of thing was being done musically [in the work of Cage and his colleagues]. But what this really resembled was jazz musicianship, more than chance operations, in the sense that we knew the “themes,” but not the “orchestration.” We would all be working

for a time when we might, for example, do this, or, seeing what someone else was doing, think, "Oh yes, I can connect this to that," or "They're doing fine, I'll just let them go at it." It was a sense of shape taking place in three people's minds as the dance was going on. It was wonderful to perform.⁴⁷

The demands of the movements themselves so taxed the dancers' coordination that to be as aware of each other's actions as Davis describes required a finely tuned sensitivity to the other performers. Logically extending John Cage's use of indeterminate music scores—something Cunningham himself had not attempted—Rainer created a dance that both gave control generously to the performers and demanded their utmost concentration, attention, and intelligence.

Intermission, numbered eight on the program, followed *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*. The program noted that coffee would be served in the lobby. But Rainer also presented *Divertissement*, in the tradition of ballet entr'actes in European operas. Spoofing dance partnering, Rainer and Davis entered the sanctuary from behind the curtain, grasping one another clumsily. Their legs interlocked so that they could barely walk, and then only sideways. They stumbled across the floor, lurching through three or four different steps, then exited through the lobby.⁴⁸

In a way, *Divertissement* was a comment on Rainer's own work and the work of her colleagues as well as a satire on traditional theatrical dance. Coming directly after *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*, probably the most radical dance on the program in terms of its structure and movements, *Divertissement* acknowledged that *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms* and the other unconventional dances on the program were not devoid of roots in a historical dance tradition.

After intermission came Summers' *The Daily Wake*, number nine on the program and the fourteenth dance. This was a group piece based on reading newspapers as scores. The credits say that the "structure [was] realized by the following performers: Ruth Emerson, Sally Gross, John Herbert McDowell, Rudy Perez, Carol Scothorn." The music was by Robert Dunn, John Herbert McDowell, Elaine Summers, and Arthur Williams, a downtown playwright.

Summers herself made up a movement sequence inspired by the scores, then gave the dancers written instructions specifying movement qualities for the three sections of the dance. She also personally taught them a series of poses taken from photographs in the newspaper. The dance began in stillness. Then all five dancers performed individual dances at individual tempos during the first section of the piece. When they had finished, each assumed the first pose assigned him or her for section two, until all five had assumed poses, and the series, including group poses, began. The positions included the Twist, swimming, an umpire, soldiers, a handshake, Rockefeller, a bride, graduation, and a Pantino advertisement. In the third section, each dancer was assigned certain numbered movement phrases, certain actions and qualities to apply to these phrases, a floor pattern that corresponded graphically to a newspaper layout design, and a time pattern.⁴⁹

Summers explains her use of the newspaper as a method for generating a score:

The Daily Wake was based on the front page of a daily newspaper, the *Daily News*. What they have reported is already dead and finished, so it has a wakelike quality. I took the front page and laid it out on the floor and used the words in it to structure the dance, and used the photographs in it so that they progressed on the surface of the page as if it were a map. If you start analyzing that way, you get deeper and deeper. You get more clues for structure, like how many paragraphs are there? Beginning with *The Daily Wake*, I became very interested in using photos as resource material, and other structures as maps.⁵⁰

The interest in photographic freeze-frames of movement, which also informed Paxton's *Proxy*, signals an analytic concern with the moment-to-moment process of human movement, almost as if the choreographers wished to appropriate the filmmaker's ability to slow down a film and watch it frame by frame. It is also a strategy for making movement without submitting to personal taste.

Item number ten on the evening's format consisted of David Gordon's *Mannequin Dance* and Fred Herko's collaboration with Cecil Taylor *Like Most People—for Soren*. According to Gordon,

Mannequin Dance was made, in response to another class assignment, while standing in a bathtub waiting for A-200 to take effect on a bad case of crabs. In the piece, I turn very slowly from facing stage right to diagonally upstage left and slowly make my way down to lie on the floor. That about covers the territory that a bathtub has to offer. The piece took about nine minutes to perform, during which I sang "Second Hand Rose" (after Fanny Brice and *before* Barbra Streisand) and "Get Married Shirley," two songs to which I had become addicted. It was slow, tedious, concentrated, theatrical, virtuosic, and long.⁵¹

After he had begun lowering himself to the floor, Gordon raised his hands gradually until they extended out in front of him and wiggled his fingers slowly and regularly. The effect was both soothing and macabre. Besides the singing, music was provided by James Waring, who passed out balloons to the audience and asked them to blow up the balloons and to let the air out slowly.⁵²

The reason the piece was called *Mannequin Dance* . . . was that I had had the idea to rent department-store mannequins and place them dressed or nude at various points in the performing area and to perform the piece ten times in one evening with two- or three-minute intermissions between performances. During the intermissions, the mannequins would be moved to different positions, or have their costumes changed. I never performed it more than once in an evening, and I never rented the mannequins, but the name stuck.⁵³

Diane di Prima, who was fascinated by Gordon's singing during *Mannequin Dance*, noted the touching qualities of his performance: "David Gordon stands still a lot. The flow of energy, like a good crystal set. The receiving and giving out one operation, no dichotomy there. One incredible dance, *Mannequin*, where he moved slowly from one off balance plié to one other, *singing* all the while, [was] somehow terribly moving." Jill Johnston described some of the movements in Gordon's two dances more specifically: "The body bent off center, the head awkwardly strained back, the elbows squeezed into the ribs as the flattened hands and forearms made the painful beauty of spastic helplessness. As though the body were straining, yelling, against an involuntary violence."⁵⁴

Rainer and Gordon were not the first modern choreographers to use awkward movements. The modern dancers of the 1930s were criticized for using distortion and dissonance in their choreography, and they responded by arguing that these were the qualities necessary to represent modern times.⁵⁵ The awkwardness of Rainer and Gordon, however, was not symbolically expressive. It did not mean pain, as the Graham contractions did in *Lamentation*, for example. In the matter-of-fact attitude toward life and art of the dance of the early 1960s (with movement one component of both), awkwardness was one part of a gamut of movement and body possibilities—and, perhaps because less familiar in art but more familiar in life, a more intriguing one to young choreographers who had never seen firsthand the strident modern dance of the 1930s, but only its mutated, classicized descendants (like the dances of Cunningham and Taylor) and its more diluted or softened forms (late Graham and her followers).

The only extant description of Fred Herko and Cecil Taylor's *Like Most People* is di Prima's review in *The Floating Bear*, in which she was frank about her friend's shortcomings.

Fred Herko's work still less clearly defined than those two [Gordon and Rainer]. Seems to come from more varied places. His dances happen inside his costumes a lot. . . . *Like Most People* he performed inside one of those Mexican hammocks (brightly colored stripes) and Cecil Taylor played the piano. It was some of Cecil's very exciting playing, and after a while the dance started to work with it, and the whole thing turned into something marvelous and unexpected.⁵⁶

Paxton remembers that Taylor fell asleep backstage, and Herko woke him up just before the dance began. Taylor "stumbled right out and started to play." The jazz pianist Taylor and Herko probably met through LeRoi Jones and di Prima, co-editors of *The Floating Bear*, a literary newsletter that primarily published new poetry, but also carried reviews of music (especially jazz), art, theatre, and dance. Herko, a friend and neighbor of di Prima's since the mid-1950s, occasionally wrote for *The Floating Bear* and helped with its production, as did James Waring and Cecil Taylor; Soren Agenoux (whose pseudonym was taken from Kierkegaard and the

French phrase meaning "on one's knees") was another member of *The Floating Bear* circle.⁵⁷

Steve Paxton had made *Proxy*, item number eleven, while on tour with the Cunningham company in 1961. A trio, danced by Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Jennifer Tipton, *Proxy* was a "slow-paced dance in four sections, with two photo movement scores for [sections] two and three: instructions for [sections] one and four." The dance involved a great deal of walking, standing in a basin full of ball bearings, getting into poses taken from photographs, drinking a glass of water, and eating a pear. Paxton speaks of the dance as a response to the work in Dunn's class with John Cage's scores. He wanted to go beyond arranging movement by chance procedures and actually made the movement using aleatory techniques. "If you had the chance process," Paxton wondered, "why couldn't it be chance all the way?" Paxton wanted to remove the choreographic process also from the cult of personal imitation that surrounded modern dance, a cult that began with a direct transmission of movements from teacher to pupil and ended with a hierarchically structured dance company.⁵⁸ In *Proxy*, that learning process was mediated by the use of a photo score, which had been made by gluing cut-out photographs of people walking and engaged in sports, and cartoon images (Mutt and Jeff, plus one from a travel advertisement) on a large piece of brown paper. A movable red dot marked the beginning, which could be chosen at random by each dancer. The score was large enough that the dancers could look at it on the wall while they were dancing. After choosing their beginning point on the score, the dancers could also choose whether to take a linear or a circular path through the images. The rules set down by Paxton dictated that they must go all the way through the score and perform as many repeats as were indicated on it. But timing and transitions between the postures were left up to the dancers. In rehearsing the dance, Paxton primarily worked on getting the details of the postures translated accurately.⁵⁹

The first section consisted of eating and drinking. A small square had been marked off with yellow tape on the floor; one performer came into the square, sat down, and ate a pear. The next person came out, stood in the square, and drank a glass of water.



Steve Paxton's *Proxy* in a 1966 performance with Lucinda Childs, Robert Rauschenberg and Trisha Brown. © 1966 by Peter Moore.

The dancers then walked around the backdrop seven times in large circles. On one of the circuits, the basin with ball bearings was deposited on the floor, and one of the dancers stood in it while another led her around in a circle. In the next two sections, the picture scores were performed, and in the final section, the performers walked again and picked up the basin.⁶⁰

The walking, which by the late 1960s would become a hallmark of Paxton's choreography, was intended to create a placid, authoritative, reduced pace. "I tried not to tamper with it too much, so that it wasn't too special and it just occurred. . . . Just someone walking," Paxton explains. The title was a deliberate play on words, also a hallmark of Paxton's later dances. "The word as a proxy for the dance, the title being the encapsulation of the thing, and the fact that the dancers made decisions about what the movement was. Also, a proxy marriage is one in which a picture is used instead of the person's actually being there."⁶¹ The implication is that the participant can also be the detached observer who—through a Zen-like emotional neutrality, repetition of simple actions, and concentration on ordinary things—can examine and confront personal attachment.

One of the assignments Robert Dunn had given his class was to take something, cut it up, and reassemble it. Both Carol Scothorn and Ruth Emerson had done their dances for this assignment to Cage's *Cartridge Music*. These cut-ups, *Isolations* and *Shoulder r*, together with *Cartridge Music*, are listed on the program as item number twelve. Scothorn, who taught dance at the University of California at Los Angeles, was in New York for a year to study Labanotation; for *Isolations* she chose to cut up Labanotation scores. While making the dance, according to Emerson, Scothorn "had a horrible time. The first thing she had to do was shorten her neck. She almost gave up the whole project, but she's a very stubborn person and she worked it out."⁶²

Scothorn remembers *Isolations* as an attempt to "'push back the barriers,' that is, to expand the body possibilities beyond the reflex vocabulary." She recalls the assignment not as a cut-up but as based on John Cage's *Fontana Mix* score. One or two transparencies were placed on a page of Labanotation score (rather than

music paper). The transparency had crisscrossing lines on it, and Scothorn assigned each line a movement value based on Labanotation concepts. The ends of the lines represented extremes of the movement values and the middles, neutral or medium aspects of the values. For instance, one line ranged from the symbol for extension to the symbol for contraction, another from high spatial level to low spatial level, a third from clockwise rotation to counterclockwise rotation. As the lines crossed the Labanotation staff, which moves up the page vertically and represents body parts with its columns, the movement value of the line had to be expressed by the body part intersecting with that line. Thus the first movement of the dance required that the head move to “place middle.” According to Scothorn:

This means the head must telescope into the neck like a turtle’s, a very challenging task! Actually, it was very satisfying in a mind over matter sort of way. It required total physical concentration to perform the movement sequences in which different parts performed the same movement in rapid succession in a non-logical order.

For instance, the line for clockwise rotation passed through each column, so that the resulting phrase was a series of rotations that passed from head to right hand, right arm, chest, right leg gesture, right support, left support, left leg gesture, torso, left arm, left hand.

There were no horizontal lines on the *Fontana Mix* score, so no movement “chords” were produced. Everything passed rapidly from one part of the body to the other. There were long periods of silence (when no line was crossing the staff). The score was assigned a time value of 1 second to the square.

I remember Merce’s reaction, which was one of interest except that it didn’t travel in space. For that to happen, one of the lines would have had to provide for some other kind of spatial values.⁶³

Although Emerson doesn’t remember what kind of material she herself cut up, her score indicates that she also used elements from Labanotation. Her score for *Shoulder r* lists several categories of elements: space-covering movements (walk, run, triplet, crawl, skip, hop); space (five different areas of the performance space plus

off-stage); geometric patterns (yin-yang circle, circle, vertical rectangle, horizontal rectangle, triangle, wavy line). There are also elements of timing and of absolute time. A second set of categories dealt with body parts (right leg, arm, hand, ribs, head, foot, and left leg, arm, hand, shoulder, hips, and spine) and movement qualities (percussive, swinging, violent, sustained, rotary, heavy). Further instructions included low and high levels, stillness, in the air, sit down; contact floor, focus right, forward, left, down, up, back, stillness, front facing, and smile. Five sets of elements were reshuffled and set in one order; the second group was also recombined and laid next to the first series along the same time-grid, sometimes overlapping. For example, during the first five seconds of *Shoulder r*, the elements were "triplet 4 very slow wavy line low" and "ribs spine slow rotary floor." For the next fifteen seconds, the first part of the chart reads "hop 4—triangle high," while for the first five of those seconds it also reads "ribs hips—rotary floor" and for the next ten seconds reads "head spine very fast rotary smile."⁶⁴

Although Emerson does not remember what the dance looked like, in trying to reconstruct it from the score I felt that Emerson's response to the cut-up assignment must have been as demanding to perform as Scothorn's had been. She had to keep track of both locomotion and the changing movement of separate body parts. Despite the fact that the score sometimes calls for very slow movement, the dance (as I interpret it) has a quality of wild abandon, as if the body were going off in countless directions all at once. There is an energetic awkwardness, deriving from the juxtaposition of actions and quickly shifting levels that was present in the early work of Paul Taylor and Merce Cunningham. Emerson's title was also a joke, because "shoulder r" was one element that never entered into the chart at all.

William Davis's *Crayon* was item number thirteen on the program. Davis, who had been dancing since he was a child in southern California, had moved to New York in 1959 and joined Merce Cunningham's company in 1961. Although Davis had never taken Dunn's choreography class, he was close to many of Dunn's students; he took dance classes with them both at the Cunningham studio and at the Joffrey Ballet School, and he danced in

Cunningham's company with Steve Paxton and Judith Dunn. He danced with Rainer in Waring's work. He also danced in Rainer's *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms* in the Judson program. So he was invited to contribute a dance.

Crayon was a solo accompanied by three rock-and-roll songs: "I Love You," by the Volumes; "Hey Little Girl," by Dee Clark; and "Baby, Oh Baby," by the Shells. In the tradition of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, the dancing was not done *to* the music, but co-existed *with* it in time and space, an effect that was jarring when the music had the four-square, propulsive beat of rock-and-roll. The dance began in silence, and after about twenty seconds the three songs followed in sequence. Davis recalls:

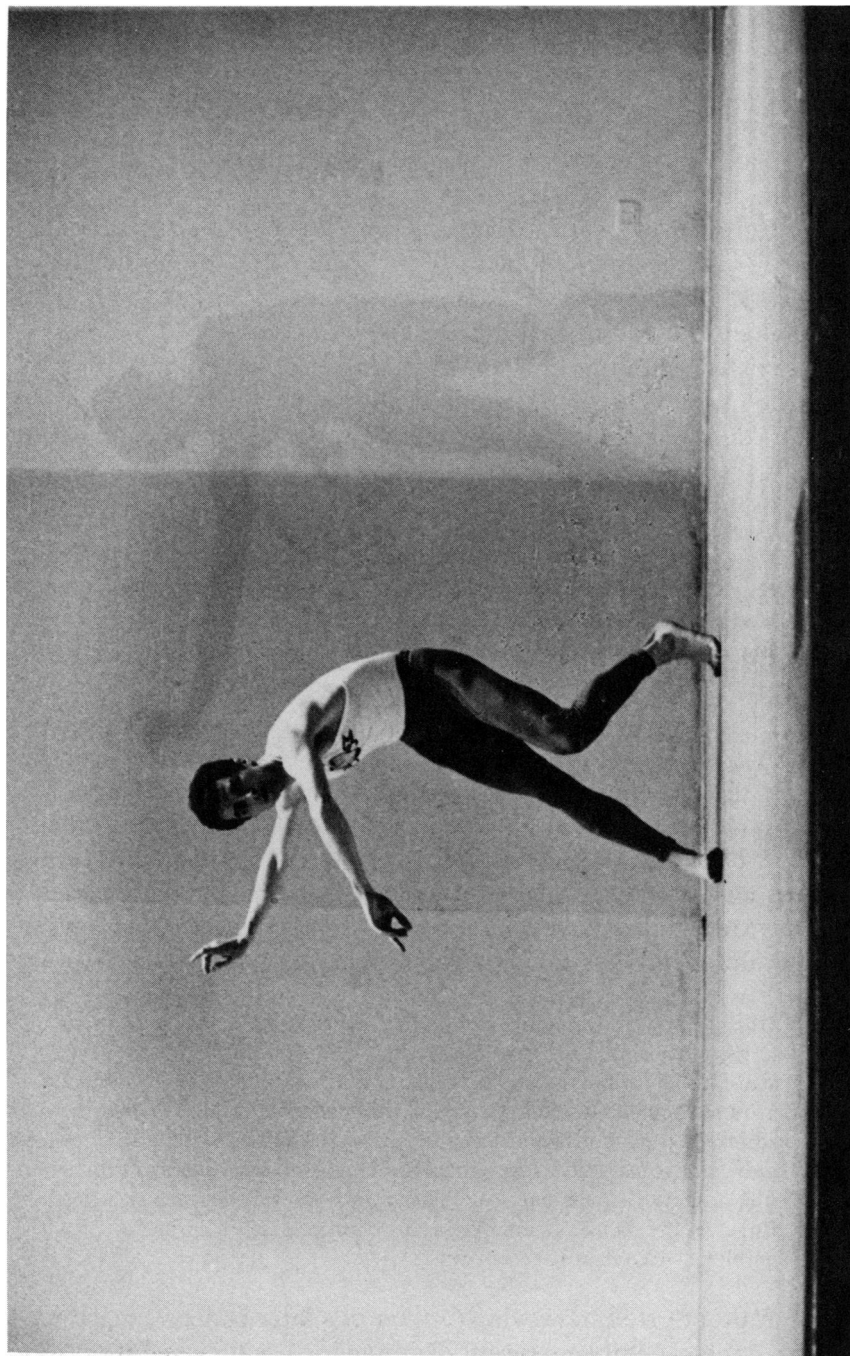
I was hoping to set up an exhilarating surprise, and I felt if I didn't establish a kinetic line first, it might not be possible to keep any separation. The movement was to ride along on top of the sound like riding a wave, and I wanted a paddling head start, to get ahead of the crest and avoid being swamped in the rhythm or the sentiment of the music.

The first record was the Volumes' "I Love You," which takes off with insistent rhythm and a loud rush of harmonic sweetness of sound and lyrics. This was pre-Beatles, and pop music was still just for its own audience. I went straight for sentimental force.

There were no popular dance steps in *Crayon* to correspond with the popular music, nor were there characterizations or movement jokes. "It wasn't overtly funny, though I remember that people reacted with laughter," Davis says. "I suppose the movement must have seemed Cunninghamesque, with overtones of ballet."

Of the actual movements, among the few things I can remember are a large, vertical-circling one-arm port de bras, rather like the "lyre strumming" in Balanchine's *Apollo*; a horizontal circling of one hand around the head (as though wiping a giant halo) while the other hand shimmered palm down out to the side at the end of a straight, extended arm; and some skittering, rabbit-hopping, two-step jumps in relevé plié on a downstage diagonal. There were several uses of a pointing finger in the dance, to indicate a direction of energy, or just as little emblems—like Paul Klee arrows.⁶⁵

Walter Sorrell, reviewing *Crayon* at a later concert, suggests that the dance is emblematic of a hip, angry young generation of



William Davis in *Crayon* as performed in February 1963 at Judson Hall. Photograph by V. Sladon.

rebels.⁶⁵ Perhaps, despite Davis's repudiation of characterization in the solo, the dance did exude the sense of joyous defiance that popular songs in the early 1960s extolled. Paxton remembers being thrilled by *Crayon's* freshness

It seemed like a logical thing to do in a way; it was a collagist mentality. But no one was collaging what was really current. Everybody [in dance] seemed to be into esoterica or surreal qualities in their work. Bill seemed to be pretty up-front about including the whole realm of pop music in the dance scene, suggesting a kind of earthiness and raunchiness that was totally lacking otherwise. Everybody else was either in an intellectual sphere or involved in artistic choice-making that included fairly decadent, decorative art. *Crayon* was very refreshing in this slightly rarefied atmosphere.⁶⁷

Following *Crayon*, Rainer performed item number fourteen, her solo *Ordinary Dance*. Choreographed during the time of Dunn's class, *Ordinary Dance* was not a solution to an assignment; nor did it spring from a score or from chance procedures. "By then I was simply stringing movement together," Rainer says. "Unrelated, unthematic phrases, with some repetition." While she danced, Rainer spoke, reciting a poetic autobiography that listed her family's and her own addresses in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Chicago, up to her first New York address; her grade school teachers' names; and atmospheric sounds. The dance began as Rainer entered and squatted. She immediately began speaking. From the squat she did an elbow stand, fell over, and got up. She stamped her foot heavily each time she said "Whack." For the most part, however, the words, which were written after the movement was made, did not correspond to the rhythms or the connotations of the movement. At one point Rainer imitated the facial expression of an eccentric woman—"my loony-bin subway impersonation." Two extant photographs show frozen moments of other movements. In one, Rainer went on relevé with her right knee up to the side and her arms outstretched, holding the pose momentarily; then she brought her leg and arm in sharply, dipping her torso over and standing up straight again, very quickly. In the other, her torso

curved to the left and her head was held upright, while she walked forward, saying, "Yes yes yes yes yes."

Rainer began making the dance from imagery in Grimm's fairy tales. One of the movements (the woman hallucinating on the subway) was taken from a chance lecture she had given in Dunn's class. Other movements are recognizable as hallmarks of her style, which savored incongruities and awkwardness: the squatting and falling, the bent torso with the head craning upright. Rainer was involved at this point not only in wrenching the body into unexpected, clumsy configurations, but also in heightening the difficulty of the dancer's action by engaging the memory in simultaneously recalling the text and the complicated movement phrases. Though the dance was a series of fragments, for the viewer its shattered texture added up to an expression of alienation. It was a dramatic dance, but its power derived from the meanings that flowed from the rubbing together of disparate elements, rather than from explicit content. Di Prima predicted that *Ordinary Dance* would become a classic. "Naming streets out of her past, moving in her inimitable manner, pausing and twitching, lyric and wooden, a system of Dante's hell in dance, personal as any hell, but terrifyingly clear to the observer."⁶⁸

The first Judson concert ended around midnight with a collaboration among Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, and Charles Rotmil called *Rafladan*. Rotmil played a Japanese flute, Deborah Hay danced, and Alex Hay moved a flashlight around. "I don't think we consulted each other," Alex recalls, "we just did it." His part of the collaboration was to make a frame—invoking his profession as a painter—and to stand behind it, so that his own activity could be seen metaphorically as a painting. "I stood in back of the square in the dark and just did things with little pinlights, flew them around." Paxton recalls that in *Rafladan*, "Alex and Charles Rotmil were background and Deborah danced sporadically, in a very strong performance. One of the movements she did was to pull her arms up and drum her ribs with her fingers. At the end, when the lights faded, Alex and Charles wrote things in the air with flashlights, leaving afterimages."⁶⁹

The concert had begun in darkness with a film projection fading into a lighted dance. It ended by fading back into darkness while the dancing continued. From start to finish, the question of what constitutes a dance had been raised. In *Rafladan* the dancing sometimes happened in the dark, suggesting that the movements of a person not directly visible might still fall within the realm of dance. One could see Alex Hay's movements indirectly by watching the lights as he manipulated them. But Deborah Hay's movements were present to the spectators only by implication.

All the critics who attended the concert realized immediately that it was a signal event in the history of modern dance. Allen Hughes, who began his review of the concert by pointing out that "there was hardly anything conventional about it," concluded that "the same group may appear together on another occasion, and have a total flop. The chances are, however, that their experiments will influence dance development in this country somehow, and because this seems likely, they are worth watching." Hughes, who had seen earlier concerts by Rainer and Herko, had only recently replaced John Martin, the first dance critic of the *New York Times*, who had been a champion of classic modern dance during his tenure at the *Times* from 1927 to 1962. According to Hughes, Martin also went to see the new avant-garde dance but seldom wrote about any performances that happened below Fourteenth Street. Hughes explains, "When I became dance critic, the paper asked me to broaden the coverage. I had seen bits of experimental dance, and as far as I was concerned it was going to happen, and therefore my place was to be there." Trained primarily as a music critic, Hughes was not considered knowledgeable as a dance critic by many members of the dance community. After Hughes reviewed the Judson concert, he noticed that his colleagues disapproved:

The dance establishment wasn't very big then; it was *Dance Magazine*, *Dance News*, the *Times* and the *Trib*. And that was it. Jill Johnston did all sorts of things downtown, but she was not part of it. After I wrote this piece, when I saw my colleagues they turned up their noses. The implication was that since I was new, I didn't know anything.⁷⁰

After concluding that Gordon, Rainer, and Herko stood out as new choreographers, "of definite promise," di Prima wrote:

At this distance, the evening retains its excitement, the high one feels being in on a beginning: these people working out of a tradition (all three are, or have been, members of James Waring's Dance Company, all three have studied with Merce Cunningham and have been highly influenced by both of these masters) yet in each case doing something that was distinctly *theirs*, unborrowed, defined. Yvonne Rainer to a large extent summing up existing techniques, Fred Herko and David Gordon in their unsimilar ways marching uncautiously forward into what may be new romanticisms. Interesting, too, that for all the dance is once more pushing at its so-called boundaries: David's talking and singing in *Mannequin*, Yvonne's street names in *Ordinary Dance*, and Freddie's costumes and that jazz, right there w/him. ok.⁷¹

Jill Johnston's prophecy in her view of the concert in the *Village Voice* was the most extreme.

This was an important program in bringing together a number of young talents who stand apart from the past and who could make the present of modern dance more exciting than it's been for twenty years (except for an individual here and there who always makes it regardless of the general inertia). Almost all these dancers and choreographers were in Robert Dunn's composition class at the Living Theatre.⁷²

The dancers, too, were delighted with the results of the Judson concert. Rainer wrote of that evening:

We were all wildly enthusiastic afterwards, and with good reason. Aside from the enthusiasm of the audience [of about 300], the church seemed a positive alternative to the once-a-year hire-a-hall mode of operating that had plagued the struggling modern dancer before. Here we could present things more frequently, more informally, and more cheaply, and—most important of all—more cooperatively.⁷³

The first Judson concert had incorporated choreographic techniques and human values that reflected and commented on both the smaller dance and art worlds and the larger social world the dancers inhabited. Through chance, collage, free association, co-operative choice-making, slow meditation, repetition, lists, handling

objects, playing games, and solving tasks, the dancers and the dances described a world: an innocent American dream pocked with intimations of anxiety; a world of physicality, bold action, free choice, plurality, democracy, spontaneity, imagination, love, and adventure. It was a world where traditions existed to be freely sampled or boldly ridiculed, but also a world where that very freedom was interwoven with the experience of a shattered, fragmented universe.

Notes

1. James Waring, John Herbert McDowell, Judith Dunn, Arlene Croce, and Don McDonagh, "Judson: A Discussion," *Ballet Review*, 1, No. 6 (1967), 32; interview with Steve Paxton, Bennington, Vermont, April 11, 1980. This account of "A Concert of Dance" given by the group later known as the Judson Dance Theatre is adapted from my dissertation "Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theatre, 1962-1964," New York University, 1980. Robert Dunn's choreography class is discussed in Chapter 1.
2. Yvonne Rainer, *Work, 1961-73* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Arts and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), pp. 8-9; interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980. Paxton remembers that he, Rainer, Emerson, and Robert Dunn went to the audition; Rainer mentions only Paxton, Emerson, and herself; Emerson remembers that she, Rainer, and Paxton went (Sally Banes and Amanda Degener, interview with Ruth Emerson, New York, June 10, 1980, Bennington College Judson Project [BCJP]); and Elaine Summers thinks that it was Rainer, Paxton, and both Robert and Judith Dunn who went (interview with Elaine Summers, New York, March 15, 1980). Asked about this, Rainer recalled (in a note to me dated July 29, 1980) that Judith Dunn was there and Robert Dunn was not. Paxton doesn't remember what piece he performed at the audition.
3. Interview with Emerson, June 10, 1980.

4. New York Community Trust, plaque on the front of Judson Memorial Church, 1966; Stanley Kauffmann, "Music by Al Carmines," *New York Times*, July 3, 1966, Sec. 2, p. 1; "Judson Jubilee: Restoring a Well-Used Place," flyer in the Judson Archives, December 1966.
5. Judson Archives.
6. Kauffmann, "Music by Al Carmines"; Jack Anderson, "The Other Theatre at Judson," *Ballet Review*, 1, No. 6 (1967), 74; Wendy Perron, interview with Al Carmines, New York, July 1, 1980.
7. Judson Poets' Theatre Program, November 18, 1961, Judson Archives. (A play by William Packard, *In the First Place*, had already been performed in the choir loft of the church on March 23-26, 1961, by a group called the Judson Gallery Players, directed by Robert Nichols.) H. Sohm, *Happening & Fluxus* (Cologne: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970), unpagged.
8. Interview with Carmines, July 1, 1980.
9. Ibid. In fact, the first concert did take place upstairs in the church sanctuary.
10. Rainer, *Work*, p. 8; interviews with Paxton; Washington, D.C., June 30, 1975, and New York, April 11, 1980.
11. Interview with Summers.
12. "A Concert of Dance" press release, June 1962; "Dance at Judson," *Village Voice*, June 28, 1962, p. 17; interview with Summers. MacLane should be spelled MacLane.
13. "A Concert of Dance" program, Judson Memorial Church, July 6, 1962. Freeman should be spelled Friedman.
14. This description of the space comes from photographs of slightly later concerts, numerous verbal descriptions of this first concert, and my own later viewing of the space; also interview with Carmines.
15. "A Concert of Dance" program, July 6, 1962.
16. Waring, McDowell et al., "Judson: A Discussion," p. 37; Michael Rowe and Amanda Degener, interview with John Herbert McDowell, New York, February 19, 1980 (BCJP).
17. Interview with Elaine Summers, New York, April 26, 1980.
18. Interview with McDowell, February 19, 1980.

19. Allen Hughes, "Dance Program Seen at Church," *New York Times*, July 7, 1962, p. 9.
20. Ruth Emerson, score for *Narrative*.
21. Interview with Ruth Emerson, New York, June 11, 1980.
22. Ruth Emerson, score for *Timepiece*; interview with Emerson, June 10, 1980.
23. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
24. Ibid.
25. Jill Johnston, "Democracy," *Village Voice*, August 23, 1962, p. 9; Jill Johnston, "The New American Modern Dance," in Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *The New American Arts* (New York: Collier, 1967), p. 191.
26. Hughes, "Dance Program Seen at Church."
27. Interview with Remy Charlip, Bennington, Vermont, July 8, 1980.
28. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), pp. 55–6.
29. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
30. Interview with Allen Hughes, New York, April 8, 1980.
31. Interview with Carmines.
32. Steve Paxton with Liza Béar, "Like the Famous Tree . . .," *Avalanche*, 11 (summer, 1975), 26; interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
33. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
34. Interviews with John Herbert McDowell, New York, February 19 and May 17, 1980.
35. Johnston, "Democracy."
36. Diane di Prima, "A Concert of Dance—Judson Memorial Church, Friday, July 6, 1962," *Floating Bear*, 21 (August 1962), 11; reprinted in *The Floating Bear: A Newsletter, Numbers 1–37, 1961–1969*, ed. Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones, Introduction and Notes adapted from interview with Diane di Prima (La Jolla, Calif.: Laurence McGilvery, 1973), p. 239. (Hereafter, references to *The Floating Bear* are to the reprint edition.) Interview with McDowell, May 17, 1980.
37. Elaine Summers, score for Ruth Emerson's *Instant Chance*. *Instant Chance* was reconstructed by Elaine Summers on

June 29, 1980, at the Judson Memorial Church. It was videotaped in black and white by Tony Carruthers and Joan Blair for the Bennington College Judson Project, and in color by Davidson Gigliotti.

38. Interview with Summers, March 15, 1980.
39. Hughes, "Dance Concert Seen at Church." Hughes says there were six performers in *Instant Chance*, but the program lists seven. Perhaps one of the performers did not finally dance in it.
40. David Gordon, "It's About Time," *Drama Review*, 19 (March 1975), 44; Christina Svane, interview with David Gordon, New York, February 28, 1980 (BCJP); David Gordon, personal communication, April 2, 1982.
41. Interview with Deborah Hay, New York, August 2, 1980 (BCJP); interview with Yvonne Rainer, New York, July 20, 1980.
42. Interview with Gretchen MacLane, New York, June 19, 1980.
43. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980; interview with MacLane.
44. Rainer, *Work*, p. 287; program, July 6, 1962; interview with Trisha Brown, Alex Hay, and Robert Rauschenberg, New York, February 17, 1980 (BCJP).
45. Rainer, *Work*, pp. 287-8.
46. Jill Johnston, "Boiler Room," *Village Voice*, March 29, 1962, p. 14; Maxine Munt, "For Dancers Only . . .," *Show Business*, April 7, 1962, p. 6.
47. Interview with William Davis, New York, March 3, 1980.
48. Interview with Yvonne Rainer, New York, July 4, 1980.
49. Program, July 6, 1962; Elaine Summers, score for Ruth Emerson's part in *The Daily Wake*.
50. Interview with Elaine Summers, New York, April 5, 1980.
51. David Gordon, "It's About Time," *Drama Review*, 19 (March 1975), 44.
52. Interview with Gordon. I saw *Mannequin Dance* as part of Gordon's *The Matter plus and minus* in December 1979.
53. Gordon, "It's About Time," p. 44.
54. Di Prima, "A Concert of Dance"; Johnston, "Democracy."
55. See, for instance, the essays in *The Modern Dance*, ed. Virginia Stewart and Merle Armitage, 1935; rpt. New York: Dance Horizons, 1970).

56. Di Prima, "A Concert of Dance."
57. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980; di Prima and Jones, *The Floating Bear*, p. xii; interview with Charlip, July 8, 1980.
58. Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), p. 59; Paxton with Béar, "Like the Famous Tree," p. 26; interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
59. Interviews with Paxton, June 30, 1975, and April 11, 1980; Paxton with Béar, "Like the Famous Tree," p. 29.
60. Interview with Paxton, June 30, 1975.
61. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
62. Interview with Emerson, June 10, 1980; program, July 6, 1962.
63. Carol Scothorn, letter to Sally Banes, April 12, 1982.
64. Ruth Emerson, score for *Shoulder r*.
65. William Davis, unpublished notes, March 24, 1980; interview with Rainer, July 20, 1980; interview with Davis, March 3, 1980.
66. Walter Sorell, "Phyllis Lamhut, Albert Reid, William Davis, and Yvonne Rainer," *Dance Observer* 30 (March 1963), 41.
67. Interview with Paxton, April 11, 1980.
68. Interview with Yvonne Rainer, New York, June 24, 1980; Rainer, *Work*, pp. 288–9; di Prima, "A Concert of Dance." The first photograph described here was taken at KQED-TV in San Francisco in August 1962 and was published in Yvonne Rainer with Liza Béar and Willoughby Sharp, "Yvonne Rainer: The Performer as Persona," *Avalanche* 5 (summer 1972), 46; the second photograph, also taken at KQED-TV, was published in Rainer, *Work*, p. 289. In my interview with Rainer, June 24, 1980, she described and demonstrated these movements. The text for *Ordinary Dance* is published in Rainer, *Work*, pp. 288–9.
69. Interview with Brown, Alex Hay, and Rauschenberg, February 13, 1980; interview with Alex Hay, New York, March 23, 1980; interview with Paxton, April 11, 1975.
70. Hughes, "Dance Program Seen at Church"; interview with Hughes.

71. Di Prima, "A Concert of Dance."
72. Johnston, "Democracy."
73. Rainer, *Work*, p. 8.