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DANCING THE MIAO-YU: ASIAN INFLUENCES IN THE DANCE  
ARTS OF MERCE CUNNINGHAM AND ERICK HAWKINS

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

M.F.A. 1984

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DANCING THE MIAO-YU:  
ASIAN INFLUENCES IN THE DANCE ARTS OF  
MERCE CUNNINGHAM AND ERICK HAWKINS

by  
Kathleen Verity Shorr

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
WITH A MAJOR IN DANCE  
In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

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John M. Wilson  
Professor of Dance

*1/30/84*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## DEDICATION

To my mother, whose shared enthusiasms for Eastern art and thought inspired all of us. With gratitude and love.

## FOREWORD

"Two monks came to a stream, one Hindu, one Zen. The Indian began to cross the stream by walking on the water. The Zen monk became excited and called to him to come back. 'What's the matter?' the Indian monk said. The Zen monk said 'That's not the way to cross the stream. Follow me.' He led the Hindu monk to a place where the water was shallow and they waded across."

John Cage, A Year from Monday, p. 135.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to compare some aspects of the work of these two choreographers with certain traditions of Chinese and Japanese art forms and with some ideas from Zen Buddhist philosophy.

Cunningham's Zen studies provided support for his trust in the use of chance operations in choreography and indeterminacy in performance, whereas Hawkins' affinity for the quieting effect of Zen meditation led him to create dances which contemplate nature and which are made up of only natural, kinesiologyically correct movements. According to Hawkins, the moving body's natural response to gravity is the curve, which is also the primary line found in classical Japanese dance and may explain the long dancing lives of Japanese dancers.

Whereas Hawkins' dances contemplate nature, often in modes influenced by more traditional Zen-influenced art forms such as Noh Theater and Southern Sung Dynasty monochrome landscape painting, Cunningham's dances attempt to become nature and provide us with what he calls a "marvelous adventure in attention." (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 60.) This last could easily be a modern reference to

mioa-yu, which stands for the world transformed by meditation into a place for celebrating the present. Both Hawkins and Cunningham make dances to share this vision.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

As a choreographer in New York in the late 1960's and the 1970's, I was fortunate to see several concerts by both the Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins companies. When I later came to live in the Southwest, the Oriental Studies Department at the University of Arizona introduced me to Buddhism and Japanese aesthetics, both of which immediately brought to mind the work of these two choreographers.

The dances of both Cunningham and Hawkins, dissimilar as they are, are choreographed visions of the miao-yu. Miao-yu, which literally means the "marvelous existence" or "marvelous actuality" of this world, is a technical term used to refer to the transfigured world of the Buddhist meditator. The happy result of this meditative experience was a revaluing of the world and a sensitizing residue which ideally leaves the meditator more compassionate, more loving and more at one with the universe. (Dr. Robert Gimello, lecture, University of Arizona, Spring 1983.)

The focus of this thesis is the influence of Asian thought and art forms in the dances of these two

contemporary choreographers. It is interesting to me how these two artists, exposed to approximately the same material, chose to transform it so differently. The thesis attempts to compare some aspects of their choreography with certain traditions of Chinese and Japanese art forms and with some ideas from Zen Buddhist philosophy.

Both Hawkins and Cunningham began their careers during the formative period of American modern dance. Both were members of the Martha Graham Dance Company and their break with her began a new generation of choreographers which, for the first time, was dominated by men, Hawkins and Cunningham among them. Both choreographers have changed the way other choreographers make their dances and the way the rest of us look at them.

Hawkins' interests extended to kinesiology, an area which had been the concern of only a few dancers since the 1930's, which Mabel Ellsworth Todd's book, The Thinking Body, was published. The book was an operating manual for dancers moving in cooperation with the body's natural laws and with gravity, and has much in common with Hawkins' "normative" technique. Todd's work was continued by her disciple Lulu Sweigaard and by Margaret H'Doubler, who founded a dance program at the University of Wisconsin that included courses in kinesiology and biological sciences in the dance degree curriculum. While Hawkins was not connected with the Wisconsin program, he too was

reacting against ballet and the Graham technique, though not against all modern dance as it was then taught, for a few other "normative" techniques, like Margaret H'Doubler's, existed besides his own. Moreover, in the past two decades it is probably safe to say that modern dance in this country has consisted of techniques that are concerned with maintenance of body structure as well as the exploitation of line and design.

I have selected dances to write about which, I hope, make the connections to Asian thought most clearly, and have thus not included material, important as it is, on the "Greek" periods of Erick Hawkins, or on the American Indian influences in his work, nor have I included Cunningham's earlier "intuitive" dances. Moreover, the study makes no value judgments; it merely attempts to enhance our appreciation by suggesting some possible relationships between their Western dancing and Asian thinking.

The thesis is limited in scope because there is very little written on this topic and because both Cunningham and Hawkins were unwilling or unable to talk about their Asian interests. The most helpful sources of information have been John Cage's writings, the publications by Hawkins' Foundation for Modern Dance, and the biographical information on Hawkins in Sheryl Popkin's doctoral dissertation.

Each chapter on the choreographers will begin with a short history of their discoveries of Asian philosophy and dancing and continue with an examination of how these discoveries might be reflected in their choreography. The section on Cunningham looks at the use of chance techniques in composition and indeterminacy in performance and how these relate to the Zen notions of flux, perception and enlightenment. Hawkins' choreography will be discussed in the context of these last three elements as well as other, more traditional Zen-influenced art forms such as Noh theater and Southern Sung Dynasty monochrome landscape painting.

The dances of both these choreographers require an audience characterized by the qualities of openness, acceptance and tranquility--qualities more highly valued in the Orient than in the West. Perhaps, thanks in part to artists such as Cunningham and Hawkins, the twentieth century will be remembered as well for the Western discovery of Eastern perspectives on the world.-

## CHAPTER 2

### MERCE CUNNINGHAM

There's a rhythm in the world  
and he captures it... He  
moves the way I think the  
world moves.

Louise Nevelson

Merce Cunningham was born about 1919 in Centralia, Washington.<sup>1</sup> As a child he studied tap dancing with ex-vaudeville star Maude Barrett and toured the rural vaudeville circuit with Mrs. Barrett's daughter Marjorie. In the 1930's, after completing high school, he followed a brother to Washington, D.C. and briefly attended George Washington University. Deciding that he really wanted to be an actor, he returned to Washington state and enrolled in Seattle's Cornish School. "'Nellie Cornish (the founder) was a great lady,' he recalls. 'Her idea of the arts was that you should study all of them. I had gone to be an actor, but here I was studying dance with Bonnie Bird, who had been with Martha Graham.'" (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 27.) The accompanist for this class was John Cage, who was to become a major influence in Cunningham's life and who later introduced him to Asian thought.

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1. The exact date of his birth is unknown.

Bonnie Bird recommended Martha Graham's 1940 summer session at Mills College to Cunningham, and he so impressed Graham that she invited him to join her company in New York. Although Graham created major roles for Cunningham in "Letter to the World" and "Appalachian Spring," the psychological motivation and symbolism inherent in the Graham lexicon did not appeal to him. His search for a new idiom began almost immediately and it brought him to the zoo where he studied how the animals moved. The results of these observations are continuing to appear in such dances as "Rainforest" and many of his own solos. He also began to study ballet at Balanchine's School of American Ballet, the school of what was later to become the New York City Ballet, and he renewed his acquaintance with John Cage, who encouraged him to choreograph.

When Cunningham began to make his own dances, he asked Cage to compose the music. In 1944 he and Cage gave their first recital at the Doris Humphrey-Charles Weidman studio in New York. Since 1944 he has performed only his own choreography, first as a soloist and then with his own company, which he formed in the summer of 1953 while he and Cage were teaching at Black Mountain College in North Carolina.

Cunningham's relationship to Cage, which has endured since 1937, has often been compared to that of

Graham's to Louis Horst. Cage was the accompanist for Cunningham's first modern technique class, as was Horst for Graham's first class at Denishawn, the school founded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn. Both these composers have wielded tremendous influence in the lives and work of their collaborators.

In the late 1930's, while teaching at the Cornish School in Seattle, Cage attended a lecture by Nancy Wilson Ross on "Zen and Dada." "It was very important to me," Cage has said. "It drew a parallel for me with its insistence on experience and the irrational rather than on logic and understanding." (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 62.) Cage pursued the subject, attending lectures by Alan Watts, an early interpreter of Zen to American audiences. In New York in the 1950's, both he and Cunningham attended Dr. D. T. Suzuki's lectures on Zen at Columbia University. Suzuki was the first major Japanese thinker to introduce Zen to the West and his lectures were attended by many New York painters and poets, who applied Zen ideas to their own creative process, as did Cunningham and Cage. Both men did much reading in the literature and in the early 1950's they explored the differences between Eastern and Western tone scales and their effect on music and movement. (Cage, 1965, p. 90.)

Of the artists attending Suzuki's lectures, Cage has been perhaps the most voluble about the experience, in over four books and countless lectures. For the Cunningham Dance Company, Cage has served as musical director and guru, as well as occasional promoter, apologist and, on tour, chef de cuisine. Carolyn Brown, the company's leading dancer for twenty years, has reported that Cunningham "has heard John's lectures, read his books, and has been profoundly, that is to say, practically, influenced. He carries certain of the ideas into his everyday life (his work) and the results are often curious." (Klosty, 1975, p. 20.) "Curious" was not what the rest of the world said. More often it was "Chaotic," and other, less-than-kind adjectives. But the company kept on, regardless, reminding themselves as Henri Bergson said, that "Disorder is simply the order we are not looking for." (Klosty, 1975, p. 30.)

#### On Zen

At the Columbia University lectures attended by both Cage and Cunningham, Dr. D. T. Suzuki introduced a description of the universe that may have later shaped Cunningham's vision. The philosophical basis for the Zen tradition lies in the Chinese Hua-yen, or Flower Garland School of Buddhism (in Japanese, Kegon). Central to the teachings of Hua-yen Buddhism is the Theory of

Non-Obstruction and Interpenetration, or the theory that the part includes the whole, the whole includes the part.

The Hua-yen universe is arranged so that everything is simultaneously a cause and a condition for every other thing. These cause/conditions have no edges, for they are not separate entities; rather they overlap and flow through each other while retaining their unique identities. They are simultaneously themselves and totally dependent on all other cause/conditions for their own identities. Since the only true permanance in Buddhism is change, or flux, this image is a highly effective attempt to render the Buddhist conception of reality.<sup>2</sup>

The metaphor most commonly used to express this image is the Jewel Net of Indra, which has a jewel set at every knot reflecting every other jewel in the entire net. The play of light in this image is helpful to give one a

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2. Hua-yen incorporates all previous Buddhist teachings and recombines some older ideas into new teachings. Earlier Indian Buddhists emphasized the contemplation of emptiness, or what things are not, and it took the Chinese several centuries to develop an acceptably kataphatic expression for the seemingly negative idea of emptiness. One of these was the expression Miao-yu, the "marvelous existence" of this world. Another was the Theory of Non-obstruction and Interpenetration, with which, since the meditator found it impossible to describe how things really are, he could at least contemplate how they are related.

Francis Cook, in his book Hua-yen Buddhism, compares the idea of interpenetration with that of a seed which "borrows" soil, sun and water to become a plant.

sense of the undamaged particular within a plethora of multiplicity, both of which create a wholeness in constant flux.

Since the ultimate reality in Zen Buddhism is impermanance, it would seem that in order to describe the world accurately, the artist must use only verbs. In an attempt to capture the idea that everything is flux, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges has written a short story "Thon Ukbar and the Third World" which is entirely written in verbs. Dance and music are perhaps more appropriate for dealing with impermanance and flux since they occur in time, and thus can give us the sense of evanescence, which verbs cannot. Unlike our perception of language, that of music and dance is always direct and intuitive, as is the flash of insight in Zen.

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2. (Con't.) He admits that the only problem with this analogy is that the flow of cause and effect is unidirectional which is not the case in the Hua-yen view of the world. He writes:

Since any dharma (a Sanscrit word with many different meanings, used here to denote "thing") seen from the standpoint of itself, possesses the qualities of all the aiding conditions within itself, and since everything in existence is a condition aiding the one dharma, then there is an infinite interpenetration of all dharmas... Interpenetration results from a situation in which the cause includes the conditions within itself while at the same time, being a result of other causes, its qualities are being absorbed into the other... Finally, the whole which is included in the one part is already a whole which includes the part so that the interpenetration of dharma and dharma is repeated over and over, infinitely. (Cook, 1977, p. 68.)

Hua-yen shares with Zen the idea of meditation as kata, the Japanese word for form, involving both mental and physical discipline. The purpose of meditation is, of course, enlightenment, which has three primary components: seeing things as they really are, knowing one's own true nature, and compassion.

Zen meditation can be helpful to the artist to get rid of his formants and cultural blinders. He is, for a moment, open to experience, and the result is what is termed in Zen an "Ah ha!" experience, or a glimpse of the world transfigured, even for just an instant, by our own insight. This coalescing of subject and object is the ideal condition for creation. Continued practice, however, is such a quieting experience that usually there is no longer any need to create art.

Zen-influenced art forms, such as Sung Dynasty monochrome landscape (which became the model for the later Japanese form), the tea ceremony, haiku and Noh theater all attempt to capture the opportunity for revelation that living on earth affords. Each in its own manner seeks to lure us into the kung, or void, so that we may return with expanded horizons. Cage puts it this way: "The function of art at the present time is to preserve us from all the logical minimalizations that we are at each instant tempted to apply to the flux of events. To draw us nearer to the process which is the world we live in." (Cage,

1981, p. 81.) What is essential to the artist working in such a form is restraint. He must keep himself from the usual overmanipulation of the raw materials so that they remain themselves and yet are sufficiently distilled so as to be able to speak to us.

Restraint characterized the Southern Sung (1127-1279) landscape painters and calligraphers who used only black ink, with shades of grey, and left most of the painting surface empty. Blank silk was helpful, they felt, in dealing with things felt rather than seen, or more generally unknowable. The great haiku poet Basho wrote only one poem about Mount Fuji and it describes a day when he could not see the peak for the clouds.

The Chilean poet Pablo Neruda is a Western champion of blank silk. He feels that "There is too much shelter and furniture loose in the world." By this I believe he refers to the "logical minimalizations" that we inflict on our perception of the world. The Dhammapada, an old Pali Buddhist text (chapter 11, verse 9) uses the metaphor of the house to represent our cravings for shelter, both physical and conceptual. We build "houses" so that we don't have to think very much about what we don't know. However, when we gain prajna (wisdom or insight achieved through a moral and meditative life) we must have courage because thereafter there is no refuge, no haven -- we are "homeless." The Dhammapada speaks of

"rafters shattered, ridgepoles broken." Cage writes:  
 "What is important is to insert the individual into the current, the flux of everything that happens, and to do that, the wall has to be demolished; tastes, memory and emotions have to be weakened, all the ramparts have to be razed." (Cage, 1981, p. 58.)

After we leave our house, however, we often find we didn't need it in the first place. Enclosed, the Miao-yu is beyond our reach. This being so, writes Cage, "there is no need to cautiously proceed in dualistic terms of success and failure or the beautiful and the ugly or good and evil, but rather to walk on 'not wondering'... (Cage, 1965, p. 47.) Once the artist has shed this duality, the resulting ambiguity can be a great source of richness and mystery. Silence can be part of the sound, stillness just as eloquent as movement, and we can see the dance again and again each time with new insight.

The image of the Indra's net could almost be a description of a Cunningham dance, with its ensemble of soloists, its spare use of unison movement, and its similarity to natural processes. In addition, as in the Hua-yen universe, no moment or movement is any more important in a Cunningham dance than any other. Movements do not depend, as in dances by other choreographers, on sequence for their value. All movements are not only

potentially dance movements, but all are equally valuable and equally important.

The influence of Zen on Cunningham appears in several aspects of his work: his choreography, his creative process, and his teaching methods. All of these show the importance of chance, indeterminacy and relativity, concepts he developed partly as a result of contact with Asian thought and especially with Zen.

#### On Zen

Bolstered by what they had discovered in their studies of Zen Buddhism, both Cunningham and Cage began working with chance procedures in composition. If, as in the Zen universe, all things are imbedded in a complex web of interrelationships with every other thing and cannot be extricated without losing their own unique identities, then any movement and any combination of movements in any sequence would work. Cage had been using some very involved and time-consuming chance procedures in composition when he discovered the I-Ching (The Book of Changes), which was a book of divination and possibly the most important book in China during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.). Soon thereafter Cunningham also began using this ancient book of prophecy to guide his own creative processes.

In its simplest form, Cunningham uses chance by drawing up a chart consisting of various possibilities, such as the length of the dance, whether sections are to be performed by men or women, which direction the dancers will face, and so on. These variables are then decided by a toss of the coin and the resulting choreography remains set. This trust in the raw materials of dancing was essential to Cunningham's use of chance in composition as it made the result of every toss of the coin totally acceptable.

Cunningham hoped his use of chance would bring his dances closer to the natural, unreasonable processes of the world. He wanted to remove himself from the means and ends of choreography by getting beyond his own movement tastes, prejudices and memory; and to keep his dance materials away from the confining literary and psychological themes common in the modern dance of that time.<sup>3</sup>

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3. He expressed his views on chance in 1968 to Carolyn Brown as follows: "When I choreograph a piece by tossing pennies -- by chance, that is, I am finding my resources in that play which is not a product of my will, but which is an energy and a law which I too obey... The feeling I have when I compose in this way is that I am in touch with a natural resource far greater than my own personal inventiveness could ever be, much more universally human than the particular habits of my own practice, and organically rising out of the common pool of motor impulses. (Brown, Carolyn, 1968, p. 23.)

Cunningham's first group dance using chance procedures was "Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three" (1951) and was based on the nine permanent emotions of the Indian classical theater. He could see no reason why the dark and light emotions were arranged in the traditional order and so tossed a coin to determine his own sequence. "If you use chance," Cunningham has said, "all sorts of things happen that wouldn't otherwise." (Tompkins, 1968, p. 260.)

About the same time, Cunningham used chance to create three solos for himself, dividing the body into parts, listing the possibilities of these parts and then tossing coins to select movements. Unfortunately, as Carolyn Brown has recorded, "he discovered that the execution of the resulting movement was nearly impossible, and it took months of rehearsal to accomplish." (Brown, Carolyn, 1968, p. 14.) "In 'Lavish Escapade,' some of the final movements superimpositions were so difficult he was never able to realize them completely. Clearly, this was not a practical method for making group works." (Brown, Carolyn, 1968, p. 14.) Later, when Cunningham had a company for which to choreograph, he modified his use of chance to accommodate larger numbers of dancers. In solos for himself, the detail of "Lavish Escapade" is retained, while the movement for the group is done with a broader "brush."

Cunningham's much later "TV Event" can give us a glimpse of what this procedure might achieve. In one section there is a typical classroom ballet combination going on in the feet. However, the arms and hands are highly unconventional, the knees are bent and the carriage of the torso is uncharacterically askew. The result is that it is no longer classroom ballet, but something we have never seen before.

In the same dance, Cunningham made a solo for himself, in which, at first, he seems like some strange, uncertain, other-worldly creature, perhaps a visitor from some other planet. Farther into the solo it seems the creature has wings and can fly, an image supported by the bird-like head and the fact that the creature does not seem completely comfortable on its feet.

Cunningham also extended his use of chance to the performing area itself. In his choreographic terms, center stage is no more important than any other place on the stage. In teaching "Summerspace" to the New York City Ballet for example, he had a very difficult time trying to persuade the dancers to venture into the corners. There is no need for a focal dancer or any movement or sequence of movements to be more important than any other, or any particular part of the dance which should mark its beginning or end. This is why Zen and chance have an

affinity for each other. If everthing is merely part of everything else, then hierarchy and sequence are unnecessary.

Cunningham, naturally, finds the ambiguities of dancing much more interesting than those of words, which are fixed, and he likes to compound them by opening the performing space to viewing from any point. Unlike ballet, which has only one front, Cunningham finds movement equally interesting from any side. Thus the members of the audience, whom he regards as a collection of individuals, will see a very different dance from point A than they will from point B. This pleases him very much. With no front, the dancers must rely on visual cues, which gives them a very pleasant and visible sense of community. Performing in non-proscenium spaces also is a way of saying that any place is a place for dancing, and just possibly it is going on everywhere else as well. Like Mies van der Rohe's glass houses, which reflect the environment, or Richold Lippold's see-through sculptures, a dance taking place in the plaza or the museum includes the environment within itself and helps to give us a sense of the compatability and oneness of things.

Cunningham feels that each dance has its own life and his job is not to overly interfere with it. He leaves the dancers alone to do the movement in their own way, which he feels is the right way. He values the unique

qualities of each dancer and wants the dancing to be sufficiently transparent to allow those qualities to shine through as in "Septet." Despite its conventional intuitive construction, Septet includes short interludes of casual, non-dancerly behavior, such as shaking hands, nods, arm-in-arm strolls and highly pedestrian walking on and off the stage. "Walkaround Time" has a break where dancers do what dancers do during long pauses. They chat, they stretch, they go over the particularly knotty sections of their part. "Variations V" has someone riding a bicycle while somebody else pots and repots a rubber plant. In the context of a tremendous amount of spectacularly difficult and excellent dancing, these mundane activities catch us unaware and the result is what is termed in Zen an "Ah ha!" experience.

James Klosty has written that "Cunningham uses chance as much as he might use a magnet to draw possibilities to him from beyond his reach and to arrange his materials like iron filings into relationships." (Hodgson, 1976, p. 86.) The arrangements can decide the time of the dance, and/or its sections and their order, the use of space and the number of people on stage at one time, whether dancers dance together or separately, and so forth.

"Suite by Chance" (1952) took several hours daily for several months preparing charts and throwing coins. The movements contained in the charts, according to

Cunningham, "were purposefully as unadorned and flat as I could make them... My own experience while working with the dancers was how strongly it let each of the dancers appear, naked, powerful, and unashamed." (Hodgson, 1976, p. 86.)

Regarding one of his solos choreographed by chance procedures, Cunningham has written that "the dance as performed seems to have an unmistakable dramatic intensity in its bones. It seems to me that it was simply "allowing" this quality to happen rather than (forcing) it." (Percival, 1971, p. 44.) In order to "allow qualities to happen," the dancer must first of all be tranquil, a quality always present in Cunningham's dancing, and in that of his finest dancers.

Cunningham's use of chance techniques in choreography had precedents in other fields. One impetus for him was an article he had read about the Institute of Random Numbers, where random numbers had been used for certain scientific procedures and had worked just as well as specific numbers would have done. Also Cunningham's friends have always tended to be artists and sculptors and chance had been important in their work as well. Some Surrealists, for example, used a chance procedure where they would allow their hands to wander over the paper, drawing unguided patterns which would then be used for conscious development. The procedure was intended to

create a detour around the conscious mind so as to reach directly into the unconscious.

Although Cunningham began using chance in composition to free himself from his own limitations, he soon discovered certain practical advantages to choreographing in this way. He needed to have dances which could be danced by a cast that changed of necessity. The usual problems of rehearsing an underfunded dance company, with all the dancers making their living elsewhere were solved with the use of chance and indeterminacy in performance.<sup>4</sup> These procedures were also useful on tour when there was always someone injured or ill. And, as will be discussed later, it was excellent for sharpening the audience's powers of perception.

While experimenting with chance in his dances, in 1952, Cunningham also became the first American to choreograph to magnetic tape. The piece was Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry's "Symphonie Pour un Homme Seul," in which everyday sounds are electronically transformed on magnetic tape. With this piece, Cunningham carried his use of chance one step further by applying it to the relationship of music and movement.

The concept began innocently enough: magnetic tape, unlike "normal" music, has no meter. It is a wash

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4. For discussion of indeterminacy see page 25.

of sound in which dancers, formerly so dependent on counts, can become lost. Since the tape was uncountable, Cunningham decided that the dance could just as well have its own counts and share only the same duration as the tape. (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 25.) And since in Zen everything is merely part of everything else, this seemingly laissez-faire relationship of dance and music should still produce a work of art. In Cunningham's hands it has; since 1953, his dances and their "accompaniments" have been separate entities which share the same length of time but nothing more. Cunningham's piece "Septet," choreographed in 1953, was the last dance in which he used completely intuitive procedures and relied entirely on inspiration and conscious decision-making.

Cunningham's use of chance reflects his philosophical disposition and attitude toward movement. For him, the subject of dancing is dancing and any movement is potentially dance movement. He is interested in all the infinite number of ways of getting from one position to another, or from one place to another, and in extending the range of dancing. He has never been interested in doing what had been done before and has always felt that if it is better for the artist not to pamper himself with his own likes and dislikes, but to look for what he does not already know. "My use of chance methods" Cunningham wrote in 1955, "is not a position

which I wish to establish and die defending. It is a present mode of freeing my imagination from its own cliches and it is a marvelous adventure in attention."

(Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 60.)

Cunningham's 1953 "Unititled Solo" was something of a revelation in this regard; apparently, what the body can grasp is limitless. "This solo made me realize you could go from one movement to another that was not in your memory, your own coordination, and that probably the body could accept more than what it thought." (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 64.)

Cunningham has experimented with chance composition in collaboration with some of the major forces in twentieth century music and painting, such as John Cage, Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, and Frank Stella. "Collaborators" may not be the right word as he never tells them what he is going to do or asks what they are planning. He will tell the composer the length of the dance, and the length of its sections if it has any, but that is all. Perhaps more with Rauschenberg than the others he has shared an interest in presenting things the way they really are. Their goal is not to express something, but to look at things exactly the way they are and organize them in a totally new way.

The reluctance to tell other people what to do extends also to his dancers. Unlike some other choreographers who encourage their dancers to dance the subtext as well as the dance, Cunningham might only say, as Balanchine is reputed to have said, "Do everything right and don't smile too much." He looks for dancers who are "resilient in the head so that they can change and move in a variety of ways" and often makes movement as challenges to his individual dancers. (Audiotape 1977.)

As a teacher, Cunningham prefers action to words, in the manner of a Zen master. He sees the danger in "acquiring a technique that can constrict, can make you think that's the way you have to do it; the lively part of it can be if it makes the way you would naturally dance more natural and extends what fits you." (Cage, 1967, p. 54.) The extremely bad teacher he says, "gets in the way of the dancer and his dancing, while the good teacher stays out of it and the best doesn't do any teaching at all." (Audiotape, 1977.) When asked by a dancer for further explanation of a movement, Cunningham will invariably say "The only way to do it is to do it" and go on doing whatever he was doing before the interruption.

His style of teaching has been likened to the Zen master described by Eugen Herrigal in Zen and the Art of Archery. According to Carolyn Brown,

"Merce seems to feel... That the instructor's business is not to show the way, itself, but to enable the pupil to get the feel of the way by adapting it to his individual peculiarities." Shunning longwinded instructions and explanations, the (master) contents himself with perfunctory commands and does not reckon on any questions from the pupil. Impassively he looks on at the blundering efforts, not even hoping for independence or initiative, and waits patiently for growth and ripeness. Both have time; the teacher does not harass, and the pupil does not overtax himself. "As a description of Merce it's near perfect." (Klosty, 1975, p. 23.)

How audiences have responded to the natural force of chance at work in Cunningham's dances has varied perhaps more than with any other choreographer. At a performance at a New England college, a classical dancer remarked that the concert looked like ballet to her. The Chinese gentleman standing next to her, on the contrary, said that it looked Chinese to him. Commenting on all the varied responses to his choreography, of which this example is typical, Cunningham has said

My work is not a matter of reference... but of direct action. One draws from one's own experience and what someone sees in the dance is something that refers to his experience, but it is not necessarily my experience. That doesn't make it invalid; a dance offers a multiplicity of meanings to a number of different people. (Mazo, 1977, p. 207.)

#### On Indeterminacy

Indeterminacy prevents a dance from ever being performed the same way twice. Dancers make their own decisions about the dance while they are dancing, based on a "shopping list" from the choreographer. Indeterminacy

in dance and music and its accompanying aspects of lighting and costume or set design changes our experience of the piece every time it is performed. Hopefully, the audience takes nothing for granted, looks more intently and sees things they otherwise might have missed. Some may take this new way of perceiving out of the theater with them and apply it to the rest of their lives. As dance critic Marcia Siegel wrote in reference to a Cunningham dance, "We found our attitude sharpened. We learned to appreciate changes rather than similarities, to keep readjusting our standards and finding new pleasures instead of trying to recapture old satisfactions, and most of all we came to value that very evanescence that was supposed to be dance's biggest liability." (Siegel, 1977, p. 27.) This appreciation for the more fleeting aspects of life is typical of Japanese art which often expresses the transient nature of human existence as characterized by the short-lived cherry blossoms. (Tsunoda, 1958, p. 176.)

The tea ceremony has a motto "one time, one meeting." The moment of meeting is what is important and poignant, but it is most profound when it is uncalculated and spontaneous. In the same way, non-repetition encourages the dancers' and the audiences's awareness of the instant's unique qualities, and allows the dance to take on more of the life qualities of a natural process.

As Cage has written, "The prepared piano, impressions I had from the work of artist friends, the study of Zen Buddhism, ramblings in fields and forests looking for mushrooms all led me to the enjoyment of things as they come, as they happen, rather than as they are possessed or kept or forced to be." (Cage, 1967, p. 8.)

"Possession" for Cage and Cunningham has to do with permanence and history, both of which define the way most dance companies operate. Repertories are usually made up of dances that can be repeated almost exactly the same way at every performance. Cunningham feels that dancers who perform repeating patterns merely know how to "behave" and do not have opportunity for as much growth as dancers who are constantly thrown into new situations where something new is demanded of them. (Audiotape, 1977.)

Cunningham does not see his dances as permanent entities, but as containing a life of their own. Thus, like all living things, his dances are constantly subject to change. He explained the choreography of "Scramble" this way: "The order of things (in the choreography) can be changed and the timing. We can stop and start at any point. I've kept it that way on purpose... it is taking its own shape and life, from now on my job is to avoid interfering with it." (Hodgson, 1976, p. 86.)

Elsewhere, Cunningham described dance in terms similar to the Zen Buddhist definition of a life ideally lived: Dance, he said, "is concerned with each single instant as it comes along." (Palmer, 1978, p. 151.) Cunningham would prefer to have us experience the immediacy and thus the transitoriness and mutability of his dances rather than worry about what they "mean." Since impermanence is the only "reality" in Zen, it would seem that dance, with its basic evanescence, would be the best way to describe or "capture" this idea, even more accurately than the image of Indra's net, which seems static in comparison.

Cunningham's most indeterminate dance is "Story," closely followed by "Field Dances," "Dime-A-Dance," "Galaxy," "Paired," and "Rune." There are other dances which have accompaniment and/or decor that varies, but only "Story" has both.

"Story" has sets and costumes by Robert Rauschenberg that were created anew for each performance out of objects found in the particular theater or performing area. The dancers made their own decisions during the performance and were free to change the spacing, the timing and the order of events. "Story" was part of the repertory for the Cunningham Dance Company's six month 'round the world tour, during which the decor varied from country to country. Cunningham, however, was never happy

with it. Apparently he had relinquished too much control for even his satisfaction and every performance was invariably followed by the choreographer emphatically stating that they were "never going to do THAT again." (Klosty, 1975, p. 25.)

"Field Dances" was made to be danced by any number of dancers, in any space, for any length of time. The dancers have a series of movements in different sequences that they can choose to do alone or with someone else, in any part of the stage. They are also free to leave the stage at any time and to repeat or omit movements. The dancers stop when the music (Cage's "Variations IV") stops.

"Rune," choreographed in 1959, was Cunningham's first dance with no fixed order of events. It is made up of five sections of five minutes each, capable of being done in any order. However, the transitions between sections proved to be hazardous and so the order had to be set far in advance of performance to provide for rehearsal time. In this case, Cunningham's goal of paring down rehearsal time was not possible.

"Dime A-Dance" has the order of its sections determined by audience members drawing cards from a pack, and in "Signals," John Cage decided what he would do next for the accompaniment by consulting the I-Ching during performance. Even the lighting has been subjected to the

spontaneity of the lighting designer, sometimes to the dismay of the dancers and the audience. Cunningham has described the lighting for "Winterbranch" as "done freely, each time differently, so that the rhythms of the movement are differently accented and the shapes differently seen, partially or not at all." (Cunningham, 1969, p. 45.)

One of the most playful pieces in the company repertory is "How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run." The movement is based on sports, and the accompaniment is Cage reading anecdotes at the rate of one per minute. He sits at a table downstage left, with a glass and a bottle of champagne which he slowly consumes as the dance progresses. The anecdotes recall Cage's childhood, Cunningham's childhood, company life on tour, bits of Oriental wisdom and they are read in a different order at every performance.

Everything going on in "How to Pass..." is important and it is the responsibility of the audience to sort it out, or not sort it out. "My intention in putting the stories together in an unplanned way" writes Cage, "was to suggest that all things -- stories, incidental sounds from the environment, and, by extension, beings -- are related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in the person's mind." (Cage, 1967, p. 260.)

Cage's goal as a composer has always been to wrap the audience in a type of aural Indra's net and his view of the role of the performer in this situation is quite beguiling. In Silence he uses some indeterminate music by Morton Feldman as an example:

"Do you remember, in myth, the hero's encounter with the shape-shifting monster? The way it sounds as the two performers shift their somethingness suggests this. Now what does the hero do? (You and I are the heroes and incidentally Morty too.) He doesn't get frightened but simply accepts what the sound-shifting performer happens to do. Eventually the whole mirage disappears and the prize or sought-for something (that is nothing) is obtained and that something-generating nothing that is obtained is that each something is really what it is, and so what happens? Live happily ever after. And do we need a celebration? We cannot avoid it since each thing in life is continually just that." (Cage, 1965, p. 144.)

The next logical step in the "imitation of nature in her manner of operation" was to proceed from impermanent sections of dances to impermanent dances. These were "Events" which were numbered instead of named. "Event #1" took place in the Twentieth Century Museum in Vienna in 1964. It was made up of fragments of various dances put together end to end and/or simultaneously to a new accompaniment. Each new accompaniment changed the look of the movement even more than its new order and environment.

Cunningham has often been compared to an ecologist and his "Events" to recycled choreography. The historical material is still vital thanks to its indeterminacy, and

as it is presented in a new present tense, it reminds us that our own continuity is change. He says that he "borrowed" movement from one event for another"... but what became clear in reordering is that I didn't have to make new movement. We could live off the interest of the first order, using motions in different places, where something was not necessary for exiting or entering or changing places, it could be used later." (Cunningham, 1969, p. 156.)

#### On Nature

It was probably in the mid 1940's that Cunningham discovered the writings of Indian philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, who wrote that the function of art was to "imitate nature in her manner of operation." (Cunningham, 1969, p. 3.) Since Cunningham understood "nature" to include the advances of science, the latest technology has always been welcome in his dances and their accompaniment.

Cunningham's respect for nature is such that, ideally, he probably would like the dance to make itself. That is what would make it most alive. Unlike Graham, Cunningham is less interested in self-expression than in

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5. "Nature" is used here solely for the purpose of comparison with Hawkins, as in Cunningham's case it is inextricably tied to his concept of chance.

removing himself from the creative process, a stance typical of many Zen-influenced artists who feel that nature makes better art than they can. But Cunningham loves to move, and in his attempt to satisfy his appetite for motion he has made dances that are as close to natural processes themselves as a human can make them. For this reason, chance is an appropriate tool as it is itself a natural process.

The Zen attitude toward nature may also be seen in Cunningham's own dancing. Even when he is performing prodigious technical feats, his dancing appears as natural and as casual as breathing is for the rest of us.

Both these adjectives are uncannily appropriate for a choreographer who believes that movement should be allowed to be itself and not a vehicle for expressing an individual's feelings or ideas.

Like the dancers in the Hawkins company, Cunningham's dancers make the most complex movement look natural. Their bodies are never rigid, the movement never looks imposed. "If he wants to move his dancers from one spot to another, Cunningham has them walk there. But he doesn't like them to get too comfortable.' I think dance only comes alive when it gets awkward again,' he says." (Hodgson, 1976, p. 88.) Cage does not use the word "awkard." He says "irritating" which is perhaps too

mild a word for the often excruciating volume in his scores which have been known to throw the dancers off balance.

This idea of art having its own life was common among the Ch'an (Zen) painter monks of the Southern Sung Dynasty (1127-1279.) Accuracy in Chinese painting has always been secondary to "Ch'i yun" or spiritual resonance. To achieve this the painter must allow the subject to take life within his own body.

This attitude, common to both Taoist and Zen thought, insists that the artist, whether by intuition or flash of insight, must grasp the inner reality and energy of the subject. In the late Southern Sung Dynasty a sect of Ch'an monks became the leading painters of the time. Unlike their Confucian gentlemen-scholar predecessors, they were uneducated, and believed that the perfect life was to be found in solitary contemplation in nature.

Nature for the Ch'an monks had a special significance, for it was considered to be the most important manifestation of the Tao ("The Way"). The Tao is limitless and in all things, and knowledge of it is always direct, mysterious and ineffable.

Nature holds an equally important place for Cunningham in that it is something of which all of us are a part. He wants his dances not only to resemble nature, but to be nature, free of his own limited view of

things so as to be able to achieve their own purpose. Whereas botany and zoology interest him enormously, the individual and his concerns interest him very little, much like the Sung monochrome landscape artists who minimized the individual, drawing the humans in their paintings as tiny specks in the midst of towering mountains or a vast lake. In the Taoist scheme of things, man is no more important than anything else -- except in consciousness. He is there to experience wonder (as Hawkins also believes), which is one of the classical "permanent" Indian emotions suitable for a work of art.

Cunningham was interested in presenting a view of nature with man restored to his proper place. To do this he put his trust in natural processes like chance and indeterminacy. By abdicating much of the decision-making process, the choreographer allows nature to take over and he assumes a more humble place in the natural scheme of things.

In the interest of communion with the Tao, the Sung painters also put aside self-expression. The Western lake and the mountains around Hangchou were painted an endless number of times, and many of the scrolls resemble one another to a much greater extent than they do in Western painting. This is because the aim of the Sung painter was not to assert his individuality but to achieve spiritual freedom. The Sanscrit word for this is "Moksha",

which is called the ultimate purpose, the only true meaning in life, and thus the highest good that is humanly possible. Art was a part of religion, with a social end of bringing people together to experience a common life that was wider and deeper than the individual experience. The landscapes were never desolate or menacing even in storms (unlike some of Turner's for example) because in Taoism there is no "other."

Cunningham's respect for nature is reflected in his abandonment of meter in favor of rhythm. Rhythm, he says, is a "length of time you can divide any way you like." (Mazo, 1977, p. 219.) What makes rhythm in dancing is the shift of weight, as in walking.

"'You don't need a meter to walk in the streets' he says. 'You stop and go and slow down and speed up, and I take my premise of a human moving from walking. We all walk with the same mechanism, but we all walk differently. We all use the same technique, so to speak, but we all express ourselves differently, just by walking. Dancing is simply an extension, in a big way, of walking; if we don't need a metric beat for walking, we don't need it for dancing.' (Mazo, 1977, p. 204.)

In choreographing, Cunningham allows the movement phrase to find its own time. The rhythm comes both from within the movement and the natural qualities of the dancer who performs it. When the phrase has "settled in" with its performer, the choreographer begins to time it with a stop watch. According to Carolyn Brown, "Accuracy of time is necessary to maintain the desired space. Change the

space and the time changes, unless the speed of the particular phrase is changed in order to keep the time the same. Change the time and the space and the movement changes." (Brown, Carolyn, 1968, p. 12.)

Cunningham, for most of his career, has not used conventional instruments or metric beat for accompaniment. Like Hawkins, he finds melody too associative. Without melody he feels he has more choreographic freedom. This way, "the dance is free to act as it chooses, as is the music. The music doesn't have to work itself to death trying to underline the dance, or the dance create havoc trying to be as flashy as the music." (Tompkins, 1968, p. 243.)

Most dances keep the beat of their accompaniment, but Cunningham feels that since everyone has a different natural beat anyway, conventional music would be too confining. The lack of a beat means each dancer allows the movement its own fullness and wholeness. With magnetic tape as accompaniment, the range of sound is enlarged, any kind of sound can co-exist with the dance, and the uncountable sound leaves the dancer and the choreographer freer. Unlike conventional instruments, electronic music can change volume and rhythm almost immediately.

The only connection between Cunningham's dances and their accompaniment is that they both occur in the same amount of time. One of his favorite pastimes on

airplanes is to listen to music on the earphones while watching the football game, and he feels that music and dance should co-exist in the theater as sight and sound do in our daily lives. And, as in our daily lives, their interaction happens in the minds of the audience. Dancing is a natural force and needs nothing to support it, so that music and dance can be both independent and interdependent at the same time. Curt Sachs, in his World History of the Dance, suggests that perhaps early man danced before he thought of having an accompaniment. (Tompkins, 1968, p. 243.) As is typical of him, Cunningham leaves it up to the audience how to make these connections and he has faith that we can do it because of the complexity of our lives. We are multi-visioned, we do not think in a linear fashion and as far as he is concerned "the more that goes on the better ... the multiplicity of things is interesting." (Audiotape, 1977.)

At least one dance critic has commented on the similarity between Cunningham's choreography and natural processes. Marcia Siegel points out that Cunningham's dances give you the feeling that they are merely "tuning in on some cosmic process that they convert into a momentarily useful activity. The transformation of energy may be incomplete, fragmentary, interfered with by static in our consciousness, but whatever part of this we can focus on

is the part he'd like us to see. It has no more need to be selected or organized or embellished than rain or interplanetary dust." (Siegel, 1977, p. 278.)

Nature has provided the subtext for such dances as "Rainforest," with its flora and fauna, and "Inlets," which is danced to the sounds of rustling pine cones and water in conch shells. And, as in much of Hawkings' choreography, there are Cunningham dances which spring out of "facts." "Summerspace" for example, is based on the "fact" that its steps carry the dancers through the space and not only into it. "Winterbranch" is about the "fact" of falling. "Summerspace", "Winterbranch", and "Rainforest", among other pieces, are full of non-dance production elements which are not meant to obscure the dance, but to add to the enjoyment of the complexity of our daily lives. These dances help us to see, to listen, to perceive the world as it really is, which in Zen is something to delight in. "Summerspace", for example, has pointillist costumes and backdrop into which the dancers literally disappear when they stop moving. "Winterbranch" has a lighting design and sound score which qualify for audience abuse and has been said to be "about" nuclear war, concentration camps and (this from a sea captain's wife) a shipwreck. (Percival, 1971, p. 45.) The "backdrop" for "Rainforest" is floor-to-ceiling mylar, helium-filled

pillows by Andy Warhol which drift when passed or seemingly even breathed upon by a dancer.

### On Asian Theatrical Traditions

Critics have often compared Cunningham's dances to Asian theatrical forms in that they are made up of dance, music, and an equally important art component. In recent, more appreciative reviews, critics have used such words as "beautiful" and "edifying" as well as "humble", and "serene," which have a distinctly Asian cast. (Croce, 1977, p. 339.) As in Japanese dance, Cunningham uses very little aerial movement as compared to extremely fast combinations of steps and stamping. "For aerial movement he substitutes 'incredibly rapid shifts of weight and direction, and packed staccato changes of pace on the ground.'" (Croce, 1977, p. 132.)

The changes of pace do not omit stillness. The nine classical "permanent" Indian emotions suitable for a work of art contain four black emotions, four white, and one subjectively grey on in the middle, which is tranquility and which is Cunningham's favorite.<sup>6</sup> One of the words he likes best is "still." Like Hawkins, Cunningham has no qualms concerning long periods of slowness or stillness in his dances. They throw new

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6. They are: Erotic, heroic, odious, furious, terrible, pathetic, wondrous, mirthful, peaceful. (Cage, 1965, p. 103.)

light on the negative spaces and slow down our sense of time, giving us instant-by-instant and point-by-point perception of the dance as it goes by.

The program note for "Suite for Five in Space and Time" says "The events and sounds of this dance revolve around a quiet center, which, though silent and unmoving is the source from which they happen." (McDonough, 1976, p. 238.) Noh attempts, and almost succeeds in making the "quiet center" visible, particularly in its famous gliding walk in which the dancer seems to be drawn through space.

"Night Wandering" has a very long, slow, walking sequence and "Rune" has much to do with stillness. The energy is condensed, not splayed, and time, in both these dances, seems to slow down. These elements combine to create a meditative state separate from our linear sense of time. As Maria-Gabriele Wosien remarks, "Meditative practices slow down the flow of time, and the division between inner and outer disappears. In the moment without duration, opposites are transcended; and it is made possible for the spirit to be encountered anytime or anywhere, rendering the Divine Centre ubiquitous." (Wosien, 1974, p. 31.)

Several of Cunningham's dances have small "borrowings" from Asian theater, such as the flamboyant, Kabuki-like exit for a male dancer in "Aeon," or the solo

for hands in "Second Hand" which resembles a bulky mudra without the details. "Roadrunners" has a sense of ordered calm along with suggestions of Asian temple dance and sculpture, rituals, jokes and games. The score, called "Geography and Music," is by Yasunao Tone and is scored for piano, viola and Tone himself reading old Chinese fairy tales, and bits of Oriental wisdom. Among other things, Tone reports what Confucius said in reply to some curious questions, and gives directions to far away kingdoms.

Another aspect of Asian theatrical tradition shared by both Cunningham and Hawkins is a very long performing career unusual for Western dancers. In the Orient a dancer is not considered to be an expert until the age of fifty, nor a master until the age of sixty. Both of these choreographers are past the age of a master and are still performing, but not in a typical Western mode.

Cunningham's "Solo" for himself is spare and striking in its simplicity of movement design. In "Event #83" he gives himself more use of body weight than space, holding long, still poses while his company fills the space with highly energetic dancing. In "Rebus" his movement contains only the bare essentials: the energy is directed inward unlike his dancers who fling and spill the energy in all directions. Describing "Rebus," Marcia Siegel has written

Dancers enter as if for a class. He works among them sometimes beginning their much more taxing combinations, dropping out while they continue, joining in again. He's out of their league now, he hasn't got stamina to burn -- but he can make them all disappear with a turn of his head. (Siegel, 1977, p. 289.)

Cunningham's dancing now is characterized by centeredness, where the limbs, instead of being flung away from the torso, are held in more closely, working often in curves. His famous aerial quality is by necessity now more grounded, and his use of stillness allows the movement its wholeness and draws us into the negative space. It also slows our sense of time.

Interestingly, these are also some of the primary elements of Oriental dance. Japanese dance, for example, keeps the limbs very close to the body and uses very little space, the better to draw us to our own still point. Western dancers, with their movement that is both aerial and linear, seem to use more space than they really do, while a Japanese Noh dancer seems to fill the space while hardly moving. The great Noh playwright Zeami instructed his actors to move their spirits "ten-tenths" and their bodies "seven-tenths." In Oriental dance the smallest spaces are the most magical, the most highly charged. The Western virtuoso excels in elevation, air turns, batterie; the "Easterner acquiesces, he is rooted in the earth. When the Oriental dances, God Descends." (Cohen, 1978, lecture.)

One of the most intense condensations of space in dance is the Japanese one-mat dance which has its source, I think, in symbol (sacred labyrinthine spiral) and in architecture. Early ritual dance was often performed around a stupa or reliquary with the floor pattern relating to a central point. (Wosien, 1974, p. 98.) The ground thus danced upon became safe, man-created space, with the unknown and undoubtedly dangerous space outside. One-mat dances have to do with the creation of inner space, both physical and spiritual, which is one of the reasons why Cunningham can make his dancers "disappear."

The Cunningham Company is made up of an ensemble of individual soloists who are rather remote on stage. They give one the feeling that they would be doing this dance whether or not an audience were there to see it, just because they like doing it. This distance between the audience and the dancers somehow seems to add to the suggestion and intensifies our own perception of the dance, much as in Noh theater where the use of masks, negative spaces and understated dynamics both contain and suggest immeasurable potential. As in Noh, dances by both Hawkins and Cunningham involve the extension of sensibilities and the same deepening of experience.

## CHAPTER 3

### ERICK HAWKINS

His dances so closely approach  
the flow of natural phenomena,  
and are so filled with the  
pulse which lives beneath the  
apparent diversity of things  
that they epitomize the  
special meditative atmosphere  
and semblance of "meaning"  
which is the basis of Oriental  
poetry.

Jamake Highwater

Erick Hawkins saw his first dance concert when he was close to twenty years old. Born around 1906 in Trinidad, Colorado, where his father was an inventor of crude oil engines for irrigation, he had little opportunity to view dance performances and scarcely any exposure to foreign culture, except for the pages of his mother's missionary magazines, some of which contained photographs of Asia.<sup>7</sup>

At Harvard University Hawkins chose to major in Greek, considering it to be the only Western culture with a developed aesthetic sense as well as an admiration for the human body. He was, and still is, an avid reader,

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7. The exact date of his birth is unknown.

and during his early years at Harvard he aspired to be a concert pianist. (Popkins, 1978, p. 10.)

One Christmas vacation from college he attended a dance concert in New York. The concert changed the course of his entire life.

"'It was at the old Craig Theater on Fifty-fourth street, which has since been torn down,' he recalled. 'Harold Kreutzberg and Yvonne Georgi were dancing and I kept saying to myself, 'This is what I want to do...' I was seventeen and charmed. I remember that Kreutzberg, being an artist himself, made a flamboyant use of the visual. Later I went back to my high school drama teacher, Miss Burton, and asked why she hadn't told me about dance. 'Well,' she said, 'I didn't know about it.' The truth is, it was so new there was not that much dance to be seen. But from about the time I saw Kreutzberg, this has been the age of dancing, the glorious age in Western civilization.'" (Dunning, p. 2.)

Also while at Harvard he visited the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and was "bowled over," as he says, by the Japanese pottery. (Popkins, 1978, p. 13.) About that time a classmate gave him a copy of Okakura Tenshin's Book of Tea, written in 1906. It was there that Hawkins first saw the word Zen. As he later recalled, "I could smell that the idea was very different from anything I had known." (Popkins, 1978, p. 14.)

After graduating from Harvard, Hawkins moved to New York City to study ballet at the School of American Ballet and he danced with Ballet Caravan (later the New York City Ballet) from 1936-1938. In 1938 he joined the Martha Graham Company, first as soloist and later, for

five years, as Graham's husband as well. During these years his choreography was heavily influenced by Graham and he choreographed some intense, dramatic pieces, the most notable of which was "John Brown." However, in 1945, while performing with Graham, he injured both his knees and his lower back, an experience which led him to question the violence done to the body by both ballet and most forms of modern dance.

Throughout this period Hawkins had only peripheral contact with Asian writers and artists, but what he learned from them remained a latent source of inspiration. During his first winter in New York, for example, he saw a performance by the renowned Indian dancer Uday Shankar and was so fascinated that he saw him perform twenty-three times that season. Sometime later a friend gave him D. T. Suzuki's Essays on Zen, which contained some beautiful illustrations of Chinese and Japanese painting.

It was only in the 1940's that, in his search for an alternative aesthetic, he came across an essay by A. C. Coomaraswamy, then curator of the Oriental art collection at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Coomaraswamy made the point that whereas Western artists since the Renaissance have created out of their own emotional turmoil, the Oriental artist's only goal is to point the way to enlightenment. This idea of art as an aid to enlightenment became the basis of Hawkins' choreography.

However, only after Hawkins and Graham were divorced (around 1951) and he left Graham's company, did Hawkins begin to develop a new choreographic style that incorporated Asian philosophical ideas. Graham, who had studied Hinduism and Buddhism, had a turn in her vocabulary which she identified as "Balinese", but her orientation remained essentially Western in its resistance to gravity and its emphasis on self-expression. Although Hawkins rejected this approach to movement, he still had not found his own. A chance encounter with Zen Buddhist writings seems to have given direction to his search and a supporting "structure", if Zen can be called such, for his own emerging intuition.

Around the corner from his studio in New York City, Hawkins discovered a book shop called Orientalia. There he found a book by R. H. Blyth, published in Japan, called Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics which was soon followed by the author's four volumes of English translations of Japanese haiku, seventeen-syllable poems. These two books led to a series of collaborations with musician-composer Lucia Dlugozewski and designer Ralph Dorazio. The first of these dances, choreographed in the early 'fifties, was a series of five solos called "Openings of the (Eye)," the first Erick Hawkins dance to express a clear Asian religious theme.

"(Eye)" refers to the Buddhist notion of the third eye which, in Jennifer Dunning's words, sees with "perfect perfection." The dance was "a metaphor of important ideas of the spirit put into sensuous form." (Dunning, p. 4.) One of the solos in "(Eye)" was "Goat of the Gods," the first dance presenting Hawkins' prime concern with the Zen Buddhist idea of immediacy. He used the image of the goat because, he said, the goat is egoless and lives only in the present. The "animal-like existence of the moment-by-moment I coupled then with my growing understanding of just the immediacy of movement and the correctness of the body." (Popkin, 1978, p. 17.)

In 1956, again in the Orientalia bookshop, Hawkins discovered F. S. C. Northrup's The Meeting of East and West. Its effect on him was profound. "I just awakened up." (Popkin, 1978, p. 17.) The book gave Hawkins a basic understanding of the differences in Eastern and Western ways of looking at the world. As he said, "To have the totality of the best life for everybody, we need the complementary use of these two (Eastern and Western) ways of knowing." (Popkins, 1978, p. 19.) This book thus helped Hawkins clarify his own basic premises regarding his work and his own life. Specifically, Northrup's views showed him a way to combine Eastern and Western (i.e. Greek) aesthetic and philosophical principles. "Naturally, I was stimulated and excited for the first time about not

trying to go to heaven but staying right here." (Popkin, 1978, p. 17.)

His answer to how to "stay right here" was the 1957 "Here and Now with Watchers" which Hawkins worked on for two and a half years. A long dance consisting of eight sections which alternate solos and duets, it explores man's potential for immediate perception and for love. The Asian influence was obvious. As Anna Kisselgoff wrote about it, "Anyone who has experience with dance forms of Asia will have no trouble... Typically, there are melting leaps, incredible gliding steps, an aura of effortlessness, a peacefulness and harmony radiated by the dancers and an unabashed sensuousness." (Kisselgoff, 1976.) Marcia Siegel described it as a "cryptic love-play, Oriental in the sparseness of its gesture and its drawn-out methods of getting to the point... (one of the dancers) walks sinuously with her knees together like a geisha, and undulates her arms and hand." (Siegel, 1977, p. 228.) Don McDonagh said "Here and Now" "has elements of ritual, humor and mystery presented with flowing, nondramatic movement having the flavor of Eastern ceremony." (McDonagh, 1976, p. 298.) Interestingly, "ritual, humor and mystery" are some of the identifying characteristics of Japanese Noh plays, and Hawkins, almost thirty years later, is still weaving these threads into his dances.

"Here and Now" was Hawkins' second signature works and it marks the beginning of a series of dances which emphasize perception. Other Hawkins dances stress oneness with nature and American Indian and Greek themes. There are also three which could be called Americana dances: "Classic Kite Tails," "Hurrah!" and "Parson Weens and the Cherry Tree." In all, however, Oriental values and theatrical traditions prevail in the Hawkins style and repertory.

#### On Nature

In his choreography Hawkins sought to get away from the early modern dance rule that each movement had to mean something; for him the best metaphor was nature. His love of nature probably originated during his childhood in rural Colorado and it endures to this day. "I, personally, start to think about the starting point, the metaphor of a dance, by using nature... (for example in "Eight Clear Places") if you speak about eight clear places in nature, maybe you can arrive at eight clear places in the human soul, too." (Rogosin, 1980, p. 47.)

In nineteenth century Western art, nature was seen as irrational, in contrast to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, and was inextricably bound up with our dreams and subconscious. In the Orient however, according to Lucia Dlugozewski's essay "What is Sound to

Music?", nature is not "the other" to be dominated, nor the enemy. "Nature is the aesthetic perfection with which we aspire to become identical, the purest radical, empirical immediacy stripped of all thinking and feeling distortions (Nirvana, 'perfect nature'.)" (Popkin, 1978, p. 41.) This sense of immediacy, identification with and rejoicing in nature, and indifference to death are all present in Hawkins' choreography.

In viewing Hawkins' choreography, F. S. C. Northrup found his own ideas translated into visual terms and he has referred to Hawkins' dances as "unique butterfly poetry," a description that aptly captures the choreographer's goal of becoming nature, rather than imitating it. (Cohen, 1965, p. 105.) Hawkins sees theater and dance as rituals to help man become one with nature, and he carries on the Shinto idea of all natural things as life-containing. The ancient Japanese lacked a word for man as separate from nature. (Edward Putzar, University of Arizona, lecture. Fall, 1982.) It saddens Hawkins that "in our present day society, it's easy to adapt to the values of machine-made comfort. We've lost our basic relation to nature. When a people, whether primitive or sophisticated, feel close to nature, they're apt to look at it with wonder and express themselves poetically." (Rogosin, 1980, p. 45.)

### On Normative Technique

Given Hawkins' sensitivity to nature, it is hardly surprising that he was influenced by The Art of the Dance, a collection of essays by and about Isadora Duncan. He was particularly moved by Isadora's statement "For me, the dance is not only the art that gives expression to the human soul through movement, but also the foundation of a complete conception of life, more free, more harmonious, more natural... The first law for the study of dance: study the movements of Nature." (Brown, Beverly, 1971-1972, p. 8.)

The movements of nature comprise one of the cornerstones of Japanese dance which considers the most appropriate subjects for dancing to be the elements, the weather and certain forms of flora and fauna. Hawkins dances include, among other things, the stars, butterflies and thunder and lightning as subject matter, but he took Isadora's suggestion one step farther in his studies of how movement naturally occurs, i.e. kinesiology, and his development of what he called a normative technique.

If choreography were to become one with nature, then so must the technique used to train the dancers to dance the "butterfly poetry." For this to happen, the study of kinesiology was essential. Hawkins felt that ballet and the other existing modern dance techniques violated the body. Along with Isadora Duncan, he shared

a particular animosity toward the point shoe. "The human foot is beautiful and noble, and when you dance barefoot you join the rest of the world." (Dunning, p. 3.)

Hawkins' respect for nature, heightened by his own injuries, led him to study kinesiology in the hope of finding a way to move that obeyed natural laws, both of the human body and of gravity. "Existing techniques," he said

both ballet and modern dance, are bound by a subtle Puritanism that is rooted in effort and work as opposed to play. Both Brown and Marcuse show that the psychological reasons for this are basic egotistical fears involved in anything one does not dominate." (Hawkins, "The Body is a Clear Place" p. 11.) The human body should move at its most beautiful like a glorious animal that moves in accordance with nature, without violence or egotism, with that utterly instinctive rightness of animal movement. (Dunning, p. 4.)

Hawkins eventually developed a normative technique that combined the Western science of kinesiology with Zen Buddhist thought. Its aim was to develop dancers who could move without personal eccentricities or limitations, in a non-egotistical, universal form, a sort of body Esperanto. Because this training required great sensitivity to the kinesthetic sense, as well as a full knowledge of anatomy, Hawkins dancers never force the movement and thus avoid injury.

Hawkins' inspiration for this technique came partly from his discovery that the Chinese ideogram for dancing

is made up of two radicals which mean "without effort or opposition." He realized that it was undesirable and unnecessary to move willfully or with inappropriate tension. According to Beverly Brown, one of his leading dancers for several years, Hawkins' theory of dance "emphasizes ease, free flow of movement, together with an Oriental gentleness. He believes that dance should be a visually sensuous experience. (Brown, Beverly, 1971-1972, p. 93.)

Unlike ballet, which defies gravity, or the Graham technique, which resists it, Hawkins technique most resembles Rudolf Laban's "free flow." Laban himself used his knowledge of Eastern philosophy to justify many of his theories, among them the idea of multiple centers of the body (Eastern) as opposed to only one (Western.) Instead of emphasizing effort effort and domination of the body (nature-in-man) in order to "make" the movement happen, Hawkins' technique does quite the opposite.

"Sensuousness is effortless and has no sense of the dominating exhilaration of competitive achievement, nor the morbid excitement of aggressive violence. Sensuousness is impossible with tight muscles. Tight muscles cannot feel." (Hawkins, 1969, p. 107.)

My technical approach to effortlessness is the same as I wanted to find in my own life. People don't have to fight. Ballet dominates the body and the body doesn't like the kind of vocabulary that modern dance started out to be. The range

of the body is infinite, its rhythms, shapes, and dynamics endless. The body must move in accordance with the laws of deep efficiency in nature. My motivation was that movement should be scientifically correct, never using the musculature or bones against ascertainably correct laws of kinesthetics. And what I most quickly saw was the importance of the effortlessness of correct human movement coupled with spiritual, psychic effortlessness, the letting go of liabilities. We have the idea that art must show stress and strain. I find that life-denying. We know it's there. You don't have to wallow in it. (Dunning, p. 4.)

Hawkins' dances thus reflect the repudiation of the Western view of the body as inferior to reason. He is very fond of Blake's line "That called body is a portion of the soul discerned by the five senses." (Rogosin, 1980, p. 48.) The perception of oneness has to do with the senses, with eros, while reason and the intellect, on the side of logos, only operate after the fact. Hawkins feels that the human body is nature in people, and if nature is divine, then so are we. If nature is to be contemplated, as in the Orient, then man must be open and receptive; for the dancer this means the study of anatomy and kinesiology along with the development of the kinesthetic sense.

Many Western dancers do not take easily to this prescription, particularly if they have been trained to perceive their own dancing in the usual Western mode which is imposed-from-without rather than allowed from within. A Hawkins class is made up of a "fairly balanced emphasis

on both the sensation of movement and the sensation of activated muscles, with a notable lack of emphasis during training on the look of the movement." (Elias, 1978, p. 33.) Also many dancers have their Puritan work ethic to overcome: "Our guilt-ridden psychology distrusts the (kinesthetic) sense which exists as such a disturbing, effortless free gift. Our cultural tendency is to ally ourselves rather to strife, suffering and work." (Woodworth, p. 9.)

A Hawkins class begins, as does a Graham class, in seated position, as both teachers feel that it is easier to experience center on the floor. Centering in dance has much in common with pottery, where the ability to set the clay in the exact center of the turning wheel is crucial. If the clay is even slightly off-center, the resulting pot will topple over. In dance, centering has also to do with the gathering of energy to one's center of gravity so as to find the placement that will ensure balance and facilitate the flow of movement from the solar plexus.

Hawkins considers gravity to be a friendly force and all his movement is designed as a natural response to it. Ballet and early modern dance techniques were constructed on the mistaken assumption, he feels, that the muscles of the lower back support the spine. A Hawkins

dancer, on the contrary, uses the iliopsoas unit to support the front of the pelvis while letting go down the back. The result is not the high, lifted rib cage of the ballet dancer, but a stance that is both alive and serene.

This stance is reminiscent of the instructions found in Noh and the martial arts for drawing on "ch'i." Ch'i of tai ch'i ch'uan, or "ki," as in aikido, means energy in many different senses, from everyday human energy to the universal power of nature. In Zen meditation, aikido and Noh, what unifies body and spirit is control of the seika-no-itten, the dancer's center of gravity, located in the lower abdomen. (In tai ch'i the location is very specific, exactly two inches below the navel.) By sending his energy to this spot the dancer reinforces the sense of gravity and appears to give the body more substance and weight. To do this, the Japanese dancer is told to lower the hips, although, in seeming contradiction, he is not supposed to overly bend the knees. The ideal stance gives the dancer the sensation of being beautifully suspended between the downward pull of gravity and the lift of the upper torso, and is a stance typical of a Hawkins dancer. (Wolz, 1977, p. 60.)

To project ki, the dancer imagines lines of energy radiating in all directions from the center of the body. This requires tremendous energy but the body must not be tense. "Your shoulders are too hard," the teacher will

frequently say. To create this impression of enormous energy and still be relaxed and effortless requires great concentration and a freedom that comes only from years of discipline. Ki tends to take over as the older dancer's physical powers diminish and it appears in the current dancing of both Hawkins and Cunningham.

Unlike the ballet choreographer, Hawkins does not find linear movement, where the limbs are maximally extended, either natural or desirable. As in classical Asian dance, his movement is concentric, following the body's natural response to gravity. In his article "The Body is a Clear Place" Hawkins quotes Andre Levinson on this matter:

The movement of the (classical) Oriental dance is concentric. The knees almost instinctively come together and bend, the curved arms embrace the body. Everything is pulled together. Everything converges. The movement of the (Western) classic dance, on the other hand, is excentric. The arms and legs stretch out, freeing themselves from the torso, expanding the chest. The whole region of the dancer's being, body and soul, is dilated. (Hawkins, 1969, p. 7.)

In class he often speaks of "'loops' to refer to the paths of the body parts through space when they move in harmony with the law of gravity." (Brown, 1971-1972, p. 21-22.) This gives the impression of great ease and ensures movement that is never jarring to the body or the eye of the beholder. Hawkins also often speaks of "tassle-like" legs moving in cooperation with gravity, and

of the pelvis tracing a "U" as opposed to a "V" in "chassee," both of which give the movement great fluidity. Since the natural flow of moving things responding to gravity is the curve, it is not surprising that Hawkins dancers do not seem to consume as much space as their counterparts in other companies.

In his approach to rhythm, too, Hawkins reveals an Oriental acceptance of natural laws. According to Beverly Brown, Hawkins defines rhythm as the "alternation between resisting and yielding to gravity." (Brown, 1971-1972, p. 21.) He talks about rhythm in terms of Yin and yang, doing and not doing.

Hawkins often uses the Indian word "matra" to refer to the subdivision of a pulse. It was Faubion Bowers' book The Dance of India that inspired Hawkins to explore the endless possibilities of rhythm, which he finds more intriguing than those of space.

When the immediacy and pure existence of movement is the prime concern, time is a much more serious problem of dance than space. Time is also a much richer material of dance than space. Actually, if time is sensed intuitively, instant-by-instant, the space is created automatically point-by-point. The liveliest excitement of Flamenco and Hindu dance lies not in its emotional impact, dazzling structure and virtuosity, but in its instant-by-instant sensing of time." (Popkin, 1978, p. 141.)

Hawkins acknowledges both The Bhagaved Gita and Zen and the Art of Archery as introducing him to the idea of allowing the movement to happen. Zen and the Art of

Archery, by the German philosopher Eugen Herrigal, reinforced Hawkins' idea of "just letting the movement happen, (and) not investing it with psychological willfulness and physical tension." (Siegel, 1979, p. 318.) The novice archer's ultimate lesson is that the course of the arrow has nothing to do with his will. "It shoots, it hits." In his teaching, Hawkins tries to teach his dancers to abandon their willfulness and tension to allow "It" (nature or dancingness) to dance in their bodies. He tells them not to attempt to duplicate an image with the body, but rather to allow the movement itself to dance within the newly transparent body. If the dancer can make "It" visible, the "actual movement execution is resilient with a kind of brilliance and passion that reads neither emotion nor personality." (Rochlein, 1965, p. 23.) In other words, as the poet N. B. Yeats wrote, the dancer becomes the dance.

Hawkins' acceptance of Coomaraswamy's statement that the goal of the Oriental artist is to present ideas that can point the way to enlightenment carries over to his teaching. He firmly believes that dancing and living should enhance each other and his teaching is always laced with his philosophical musings on this matter. Starting a floor movement he may say "'We do this little exercise for the same reason Buddha existed.'" Recalling the centuries-old words of (the monk) Joshu who, when asked the essence

of Buddha, replied perfectly: 'The magnolia tree in the garden.'" (Woodworth, p. 7.)

### On Asian Sources

Just as Isadora Duncan found inspiration for her dances by imagining what ancient Greek dances might have been like, so Hawkins found nurturance for his art in Oriental thought. Unlike Isadora, however, Hawkins has never been to his adopted land. His affinity for the Orient rests primarily in the aesthetic way of knowing, the lack of which, he feels, accounts for much of the West's violence and sense of alienation.

Before a performance Hawkins tells his dancers, "Just do the movement." The purpose of dancing for him is not self-expression but aesthetic perception which, being egoless, frees the spirit (moksha.) This idea is in accord with the classical Oriental notion of dance as an invention of the gods, (in Japan a goddess.) The Japanese, in particular, sensed the scaredness of the natural world and danced to create a bond with it. Early Shinto worship took the form of dancing as the gods could be appeased by an art form they themselves had created. (Ashihara, 1965, p. 39.)

All Zen-influenced arts, such as monochrome landscape painting, calligraphy, landscape gardens, the tea ceremony and Noh theater, exist in praise of the

present and celebrate the here and now. They share with Hawkins' choreography a quiet beauty and oneness with nature made visible by the simplest and most economical of means. All make much use of highly charged empty space (Kung, in Noh "Moments of no-action") or stillness and the gentlest dynamics.

The Sung monochrome equivalent of stillness is the "kung" or void. Emerging from an Indian tradition that had a horror of empty space, the Sung painters responded with paintings that were mostly empty space. Like Cunningham, they felt no need to put anything "center stage," the most extreme examples of this being the "sidehorn" paintings where "host" and "guest" mountains all occupy a narrow margin on one side of the picture. Instead of painting the entire mountain, as did the Northern Sung painters, the Southerners painted, at most, one slope. The kung may be a transparent ink wash, blank silk, or appear as mist, but its essential quality is emptiness, an endless nothingness from which all is created, the dwelling place of the Tao.

Other cultures have developed different techniques for entering this void; the Tibetans lie on their backs and look into the sky, the Japanese gaze at a bare wall, Dervishes spin, but all are "aimed at letting the mind reach the state beyond the dissolution of forms, at identifying with the Nothingness which is the All."

(Wosien, 1974, p. 30.) For the Sung painters, the whole purpose of painting was to enter the kung.

It would seem that landscape and kung are both interdependent and synergistic, and achieve much of their impact from what they do not tell us. In fact, they really do not "tell" us anything, they merely suggest. In the same way, Hawkins' choreography, in its concern with essence, derives much of its power from what it merely suggests.

The Japanese, in particular celebrate the qualities of natural materials, including the aging process. The most extreme example is the tea ceremony ideal of "sabi," from the verb meaning literally, "to rust" or "to become desolate." Significantly, dancers who are trained in Hawkins' normative technique will most likely have much longer dancing lives than those whose movement habits violate the body. Xenia Zarina, a long-time student of many Oriental dance forms, describes the aim of classical Japanese dance as

"to express the very essence of a particular time, place or person and to do so by naturalness of movement. Naturalness does not mean realism. Japanese dance is too conventionalized and symbolic to be realistic. But it is natural in the sense that none of the movements causes great physical strain, such as do the aerial leaps and tours de force of European classical ballet. That the movements used in Nihon Buyo (classical Japanese dance) are based on nature, are understated and unstrained is evidenced

by the fact that the greatest Japanese dancers are often men of great age." (Zarina, 1967, p. 190.)

Like Cunningham, Hawkins is still dancing at an age when we would long since have expected him to have hung up his dancing "shoes." With age his roles become quieter, though not less powerful. He usually takes the part of the pivotal ritual figure such as Orpheus, in "Meditation on Orpheus," and Death, in "Death is the Hunter."

Two terms from Japanese aesthetics which seem appropriate to Hawkins are "karami" and "shiori." Karami means lightness, delicacy and is usually used to describe a good poet who can deal with profound subjects with a light hand, as Hawkins does with his "Death is the Hunter." In calligraphy it stands for not overdoing, not using too much ink and holding the brush lightly and gently. In medieval Japan, karami was the opposite of melodrama, standing for deep but quiet beauty. Hawkins' gentle dances depicting an ideal world are full of karami.

"Shiori", a quality admired by both the painters of the Tosa School in Japan and by Basho, the great haiku poet, has to do with understatement. It has several layers of meaning, as slenderness, sparseness, or the suppleness of one's ideas, and was the identifying quality of the tea ceremony.

Zen is not the only Asian influence on Hawkins' choreography. Several of his dances might resemble the Western Paradise of Pure Land Buddhism. Whereas Zen meditation, which tries to limit the imagination, frowns on visions, Pure Land Buddhism exploits the tendency of the mind to frolic in the sensuous play of light and sensation.

The Western Paradise might indeed resemble one of several Hawkins' dances, such as "Geography of Noon" or "Angels of the Inmost Heaven". "Geography" is Hawkins' butterfly dance. It alternates between "Geography" (very formal, linear movement and floor patterns) and sheer "butterflyness". The effect is one of great purity and tranquility. The title "Angels of the Inmost Heaven" refers to the Buddhist ideal of the bodhisattva. One step below the Buddha in terms of wisdom, the bodhisattva, who could leave the world of suffering if he so chose, decides instead to remain and help others attain enlightenment. "Angels of the Inmost Heaven" is what Hawkins refers to as his "tender gesture" dance (Popkins, 1978, p. 132.) and concerns ideal relationships.

#### On Asian Theatrical Traditions

As is the usual practice in Indian and Cambodian dance concerts, Hawkins always places the musicians on stage as an integral part of the piece. In "Classic Kite

Tails" the conductor's entrance is choreographed with as much care as a dancer's. Since the start of his independent career, Erick Hawkins has worked with Lucia Dlugozewski, the musician-composer, and with designer Ralph Dorazio, who not only creates sets and costumes, but new musical instruments as well. These instruments add to the Oriental atmosphere. Imaginatively designed in a variety of decorative shapes and materials, their effect is as "pleasing to the eye as is the semi-Oriental haze of sound that they produce." (McDonagh, 1976, p. 40.)

As in Japanese dance, the movement of the costumes is extremely important and Hawkins' costumes are always completed before he begins to choreograph. The idea of the sets and costumes being equally beautiful from all points of the compass is also Oriental and was appreciated by Hawkins early in his career. He applied it to Isamu Noguchi's sets for "John Brown" and "Stephen Acrobat" which he choreographed while he was still with Graham, and later to the insides as well as the outsides of Ralph Dorazio's masks.

For anonymity, the leading Noh player is always masked, and Hawkins uses this convention for the same reason. Noh costumes are larger versions of Japanese court costumes of the tenth century, which were fairly massive to begin with. A typical outfit for a lady-in waiting might consist of ten separate garments all worn at

at once, perhaps to display her affluence, but more likely to conform to court protocol and to show off her impeccable taste. Clothing of this sort also helped to safeguard the Emperor from physical attack because nobody in the palace could possibly move quickly.

Because of the restrictions imposed on movement by these costumes, Japanese dances for women use many isolations of the hands, shoulders, face and head, the last of which may or may not be voluntary due to the great weight of the wig. As the dances were modified by the Noh theater, they become more and more refined, the dancer appearing to move less, the costume and accoutrements to move more, as though on their own; and with great eloquence. The illusion created is movement without moving, and in watching a Japanese dance, the spectator does not see a human body "carving" through space, but a gorgeous piece of fabric taking an infinite number of beautiful shapes all of which are highly emotionally charged.

An emotionally more neutral but similar use of fabric is seen in Hawkins' "Black Lake" and "Dawn Dazzled Door", both of which are pieces about the night sky.

"Black Lake" (1969) is a dance in eight sections about the planets and phases of the night sky, described with the help of paper costumes, props and masks. It is performed by six dancers and four musicians and, as in Noh

the floor length costumes worn by the dancers disguise and add bulk to the body. Like those of Kabuki, these costumes change in front of our eyes. The dancers' long, straight black tunics, which de-emphasize their humanness, rotate to reveal a milky way pattern. Thunder's costume is a fluttered rectangle, heretofore Night Bird's wings. The paper props, as in the Japanese tradition, are mere suggestions of what they represent. The moon is a "silvery white disc carried through the air in smooth arcs. Two figures in black run swiftly around (the moon) with rustling sheets of tissue paper, like wispy clouds blowing across the moon." (Siegel, 1968, p. 196.) First Star is a four-pointed star headdress, and a comet is merely paper streamers pinned to a woman's hair.

"Dawn Dazzled Door" (1972) is danced by two moons, two stars, two suns (the only men) all in large, floor length robes and appropriate headdresses. They form a procesional that makes its way between Ralph Dorazio's two sculptures. The dance moves ceremoniously in circles and lines. "Surprising and subtle dynamics came to the fore as dancers bowed, fell, solemnly turned a wrist or lifted a foot." (Kisselgoff, p. 2.) "Bows, turns, lunges, the kinds of small gestures Hawkins loves, moves of the kimono or sharp attacks of the bare feet, all built within narrow space and carefully defined timing to great power." (Steele, 1974.)

The ritual bows, lunges and falls are similar to the "kata" of Noh dance. Kata is a form in time and space and it is sequences of kata, or kumiawase, that make up a Noh dance. Kata are performed to accompaniment and are made up of kamae, a position, and "hakobi," a progression. Examples of kata include "tatsu" (to stand), "sashikomi" (to point with the hand or fan), and "hiraki" (to open the arms to the side, always done while stepping backwards).

Although kata are limited, no two dances are alike. There are variations on the basic pattern, sequence changes and interpolations of other kata are made according to the text. In "Dawn Dazzled Door," as described above, the kata are as simple, formal and ceremonious as those found in Noh, and the result is not "rhapodizing or intellectualizing on the lightening forces of nature, but merely in being them..." (Woodworth, p. 15.)

"Death is the Hunter" also shares many traditions of the Noh theaters. The curtain rises on an empty stage and after a long pause Death enters from stage right (as does the shite or leading character in Noh) in a long, slow gliding walk (hakobi),<sup>8</sup> characteristic of Noh. Death wears a large, floor-length robe that makes him appear huge. He is masked, again like the mysterious shite, and carries a ritual bow. He crosses the stage in silence,

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8. For further discussion of Hakobi, see p. 72.

every step seeming to take an hour. Fully one half of the dance takes place in silence; the other half is accompanied by Wallingford Riegger's 1927 "Study in Sonorities." Hawkins says of it, "There's no entertainment, it's purely existence." (Stoop, 1978, p. 89.)

When Death finally arrives at the sculptured enclosure at stage left, six dancers enter on a diagonal line and one by one they pause and put on their masks (birth), still in silence. The dancers wear white and green leotards and tights streaked with a few black stripes suggestive of animals. Their movement also suggests animals, but perhaps those who have since become extinct. They are primitive, awkward, and lacking in strength. Death emerges and aims his arrow. The dancers become agitated and two lie in formation on wood pillow blocks and remove their masks (death.) Death lets the arrow swing loosely from the bow and lowers both in extreme slow motion.

"Death is the Hunter" is not traditional Noh as it has a plot which takes place in chronological order, in the present tense, but it has the same manipulation of time and quiet, unquestioning acceptance of the inevitability of death. Following its premiere a Chinese dancer in the audience commented that Hawkins showed a "remarkable understanding of the timing that makes Asian drama so compelling for many." (Kisselgoff, 1975.)

The gliding walk or hakobi is traditionally learned by carrying a water pitcher on the head and imagining a piece of paper hovering between the dancer's foot and the floor. The walk is considered to be more important than the gestures, as the mask limits other movement possibilities. In "Death is the Hunter", "Death" uses the Noh hakobi or gliding walk. During the hakobi as "Death" performs it and as it should be performed, the body is held in the basic position as if it were a piece of sculpture being transported through space. Although the forces emanating from the body go into all directions, the forward direction is usually dominant and the dancer looks as though he is being drawn forward by this stronger force. With the slight lean forward and no body rotation, there is a strong focus into the forward or sagittal plane, reminiscent of the slight tilt of the torso in Zen meditation. Turns are most often subtle and unobtrusive, but important to redirect this sagittal focus to the new part of the stage.

There is some variety in the manner of walking depending on the role, but basically it consists of sliding the whole foot forward and then lifting the foot in a straight line at an angle to the floor while maintaining heel contact. The whole foot is then lowered as a new step is taken. What gives it its lightness is the smooth control of a subtle suspension, or off-balance

feeling, between the point of raising the foot and the transfer of weight to a new support. The result, a gliding or floating quality, is important to the content of many plays which deal with spirits and ghosts. The tempo of this walking is slow and shows the contemplative nature of Zen-influenced arts in which only a few elements are presented to be viewed quietly and leisurely.

If the walk is performed by a ghost, the progression acquires a feeling of being inevitably drawn through space and the dancer feels this force particularly through the sternum. The Japanese modern dance duo of Eiko and Koma use this walk in much of their work. In explaining it to students they speak of smelling the fragrance of the invisible flowers tucked in the front of the kimono. With this image the student can find the correct posture.

In numerous other ways Hawkins' choreography betrays the influence of Noh. An interesting parallel is that of "Black Lake" and the Kyogen of Noh. Kyogen, literally "mad words," are one-act, masked farces serving as comic relief, much as satyr plays functioned in ancient Greece.<sup>9</sup>

"Parson Weems and the Cherry Tree," choreographed in the late 1970's, is a piece of Hawkins Americana, but

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9. Kyogen were Japan's first form of social protest and paved the way for Kabuki to continue the tradition.

was inspired by kyogen. "I learned that all the accoutrements in a comedy piece could be beautiful and funny from seeing a performance of two comic dances done by a Japanese group some years ago. I was impressed because it was the first time that I saw dances that were comic, but at the same time visually exquisite." (Rogosin, 1980, p. 53.)

"Black Lake" also has moments of masked kyogen silliness, such as when big and little bear, in large-nosed masks and tassled tunics rush around making fun of the bigger stars.

Another Hawkins dance with ties to traditional Japanese theater is "Meditation on Orpheus." Choreographed in the mid 1970's, it is a meditative look at a ritual masked figure carrying a lyre. "Meditation," like the "plot" of a Noh play, merely reveals more and more of the protagonist's character. The theatrical devices are borrowed from Kabuki, such as the women's costumes (by Raya) which change length and volume onstage, and the use of the koken, all in black, including hat and mask, who arranges Orpheus' costume.

The koken is a tradition of the Bunraku puppet theater, which was adopted, along with many movement techniques, and scenarios, by the Kabuki theater. In Bunraku, the puppets are about four feet tall and are operated by three men in full view of the audience.

The leading puppeteer supports the trunk of the puppet with his left hand while his right operates the puppet's right hand, another man looks after the puppet's left hand and a third takes care of the feet... The Western observer is at first worried by the fact that the puppeteers are always clearly visible to the audience from the waist up, but after watching the plays for any length of time the convention is soon accepted... The (two secondary) puppeteers wear black cotton hooded robes with a gauze visor through which they can see but not be seen and the inconspicuous nature of their appearance adds one more dimension to the effect of unreality conjuring up reality. After an initial period of adjustment these impassive figures and the economy of their gestures merge with the dynamic action of the puppets... (Scott, 1972, p. 195.)

"Meditation on Orpheus" takes much of its power from Hawkins' restrained and subtle use of gesture. In Noh, gestures are used to accentuate the high points of the play. In many plays the shite, either standing or kneeling, tilts his masked face down slightly and raises either one hand (if the symbolized tears are merely melancholy) or two (if grief-stricken.) Donald Keene writes about the uncanny ability of a single gesture to express intense feeling.

"The text of Nonomiya is a masterpiece, but no one reading the text alone could sense the shattering loneliness of the moment on stage when Rokujoh, standing before the torii of the Shrine in the Fields, lifts her foot to step through, a gesture of symbolic renunciation of the world and Prince Genji, only to return her foot to its place, yielding to a final burst of longing." (Keene, 1966, p. 75.)

In "Meditation," Hawkins uses the same type of highly charged but small and subtle movement to speak volumes, "compressing an experience as vast as the loss of Eurydice into a single startled gesture." (Jowitt, 1975.)

By making dances out of universal spiritual essences rather than personal reportage, Hawkins says his choreography belongs in a sacred context, and that he does "God's thing." (Popkin, 1978, p. 54.)

"If one doesn't pay attention to the divine, one's always stewing around in inadequate juice... Likewise, that's why I don't think you can show anything that is an inadequate solution to some aspect of human experience in a work of art. What you're doing is affecting the whole totality. If you give an erroneous spiritual idea... to an audience, you will affect all their bodies as well as what we call the soul. It's all connected." (Popkin, 1978, p. 47.)

"Plato says if you desire the idea of maturity in all human beings, you will show in your arts only models of maturity and will not wallow in 'reporting' strife, inadequate ways of how men and women get along together. You will not titillate people with patterns of immature behavior and paltry, vulgar images of the self, and they say: 'Life is like this, what a mess!' You will end only in unresolved discouragement, (and) negativism..." (Pennella, 1978, p. 18.)

For Hawkins, art has moral as well as aesthetic implications and it is the responsibility of the choreographer to make dances out of the "pure fact" of movement, uncolored by the emotional experience of the ego, which is both limited and limiting. Through "pure fact" the audience can experience harmony with nature and clarity and immediacy of perception, in other words, enlightenment.

The aim of all non-Western art has always been to bring the audience to enlightenment and not just to have them stew around in their own tragicness and their own conflict. You see, lots of people who want something they call very dramatic think dramatic means that people fight and pull each other's hair out. True tragedy is simply recognizing something that James Joyce says when he speaks of the constant in human suffering. And enlightenment is recognizing that constant element in human suffering and saying, o.k., it's fine, that's us, there's nothing else to do. There's no point to kick against the bricks. The neurotic person is the person who has the illusion that the world owes him a living and that everything is just built for his own existence and the creation of the world and man is simply a part of it, and man, like every other living creature is going to die. And so you say at the very end thank you, hasn't it been ambivalence, but o.k. -- thank you... and that dimension makes for serenity and that serenity is the height of human culture.'" (Pennella, 1978, p. 18.)

Walter Sorell, among others, appreciates the serenity of Hawkins' choreography.

Before entering Erick Hawkins' world I always feel like taking off my shoes and leaving them in the check room with all the street noise and insulting sights of the daily dirt. I feel like reclining in my chair and letting him guide me into his imaginary world where time is of no duration and the West is as close to the East as it can ever be.

Following the philosophy of the Tao te ching which says 'by non-action everything can be done'. Hawkins and his company move with utter tranquility, seeking an expression of purity, the feeling of movement rather than the movement itself. I once said that like the lines of a haiku poem, Hawkins' movements evoke, instant by instant, a sensation of poetic significance, a sensuous impression, a fleeting thought." (Sorell, 1971, p. 7, 12.)

Hawkins' 1961 "Early Floating" does precisely this. Its curvilinear movement design combines with the dancers' cooperation with gravity to quiet the audience to a point close to that of meditation, where immediate perception and wonder are at their height. Wonder is inextricably entwined with the Asian contemplation of nature and critics have claimed "Early Floating" to be a dance that is not about wonder, but one that is wonder. The program note reads "'Early Floating' is a dance of passage, of surprise, of loving playfulness; playing with time to make the watchers aware of it, and playing with movement to create tenderness and wonder. When William Saroyan says 'the surprise of art is not shock but wonder' he describes the essence of 'Early Floating'". (program note, quoted in Hitchcock, p. 37.)

In the early sixties Hawkins choreographed a number of pieces which celebrated nature. The first of these, "Geography of Noon," is a quartet, with each dancer bearing a butterfly name (e.g. Spring Azure, Variegated Fritillary). The dance is made up of alternating

"butterflyness" (Eastern) and formal, geometric floor patterns which are strictly followed using straight body lines (Western).

"Eight Clear Places" is also a contemplation of nature and the "Places" are "North Star," "Pine Tree," "Rain," "Cloud," "Sheen on Water," "Inner feet of the Summer Fly," "They Snowing," and "Squash." The first section, "North Star," is a solo for a woman carrying a large black screen with a four-pointed star on it. In "Pine Tree", a male solo, the dancer wears as a mask a narrow "block of wood with five curved, protruding spines... he turns slowly and stamps his feet... and (moves) in a ritual circling and acknowledging of all points of the compass... One has the feel of a solidly rooted being that also displays little surface shudders, much as a tree will shake in the wind." (McDonagh, 1976, p. 299.)

Stamping is a hallmark of Japanese dance because it was part of the first dance of all time. The sun goddess Amaterasu, displeased by the rude behavior of her brother, Susano-o; hid in the Heavenly Cave, shut the rock door and refused to come out. Outside the world, became dark, so all the other gods and goddesses gathered in front of the door to decide how to persuade Amaterasu to come out.

One wise god suggested (and was unanimously approved) that goddess Ame-no-Uzume no-Mikoto dance in front of the door. Holding a spray of bamboo grass, she stepped up on top of an inverted tub and began to dance, (stamping on) it. (Other sources claim that a strip tease was also part of this dance.) All laughed and applauded. Goddess Amaterasu... could not stand the curiosity, and opened the door a crack to see what was going on. A strong-muscled god, waiting for this moment, quickly put his hand in the crack, opened the door and brought Amaterasu out of the cave. Thus light was restored to the world. This is how dance began in Japan. (Ashihara, 1965, p. 39.)

This myth contains the three cornerstones of all Japanese performing arts, the spiritual/religious element as found in Bugaku and Noh, the erotic element of Kabuki, and dancing, which has always been a fundamental part of Japanese theater. (Ashihara, 1965, p. 39.) Uzume's stamping turned up in rice-planting and harvest dances, and later evolved into prayer dances such as the "Okina" or "Old Man's Dance" which opens every Noh program, and the "Sambaso," derived from the "Okina," which is found in Kabuki. The "Okina," among others, is a prayer dance and only dancers who have undergone purification rites may perform it. (Ashihara, 1965, p. 40.) The toe curls of the hakobi are said to be the final distillation of the stamping dance in front of the sun-goddess's cave, and there is stamping as well at the end of the first Noh play of the day (they are usually presented in a series) without which the audience would feel unfulfilled. Noh stamps are large, with the knees lifted waist-high. Stamping was

meant to drive evil spirits into the ground, wake up the good spirits, and generally to express joy.

Hawkins has much in common with Zeami (1363-1443), the major playwright and shaper of Noh theater. They share the same concern for man's inner life and its relation to the universe and both found a direct route to the interior in a condensed, distilled language that in Noh is almost poetry. They both feel that art is an unimportant vehicle to point to what is important, but ineffable, and which cannot be reached in any other way. This idea of not looking at the art, per se, but at what is beyond it, belongs to Zen and all its art forms and is why "mushin," "the beauty of nothingness" is so important. "Mushin" takes the form of blank silk in calligraphy, kung in painting, and in Noh and Hawkins, "moments of no-action" or stillness.

It is questionable whether Zeami was a Zen Buddhist, because it is uncommon to find a Zen master who is also an artist. Usually they are mutually exclusive, for the practice of Zen is so quieting that it takes one beyond the need to make art. In any case, Zeami used the ideas and values of Zen, as has Hawkins. Both Zeami and Hawkins share the same idea of beauty as restraint, understatement, and allusion to the ineffable. With the exception of the Americana dances which have an entirely different dynamic, Hawkins' dances conform to this aesthetic. Even "Plains Daybreak," his American Indian

dance about a morning at the beginning of the world, shares these qualities. Each animal and then finally "first man" is introduced to the day. The solos are quiet, harmonious, yet very much alive and full of the subtle nuances unique to each creature. The dance has much to say to us, however, and it is said with great simplicity and economy of means.

Both Zeami and Hawkins consider the highest achievement of the artist to be the intuitive sensing of essences -- of starness or butterflyness -- and not their imitation. There is a story of a zealous young Noh actor who followed an old lady down the street hoping to study her movements for future reference. The old lady demanded an explanation and instead of praising the actor for his diligence, she scolded him for being superficial. To study for a role this way, she said, is only good enough for popular theater. In Noh, actors must develop their spirit so that it can feel age even if they are young. (Edward Putzar, University of Arizona, Lecture, Fall, 1982.)

For Beverly Brown, "Black Lake" was an experience in perfect perception. While dancing the Sun-Setting solo, she recalls a "sudden, profound intensity of illumination" of what she was doing moment by moment. "This is where I stand; now I am walking," (Dunning, p. 4.) bringing to mind the walking meditations which sometimes alternated with sitting in Buddhist meditation.

Unlike Hawkins' dances, Noh plays contain an internalized split. The leading actor may admit "I have killed" or "I have discovered the vanity of the world," and attempt to give his failings some nobility. In Hawkins' dances, however, there are no losers. Instead, his dances celebrate (gently, tenderly) all the positive aspects of our humanness. Dlugozewski has described his works as "innocent, therefore wondrous, playful, joyous, and ultimately of life-giving and incomparable and delicate happiness." (Woodworth, p. 10.)

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Erick Hawkins once said that the most beautiful dance "can be, should be, and is a way of saying now." (Sorell, 1966, p. 43.) Despite the fact that both choreographers were strongly influenced by Asian philosophy and theater traditions, this idea is probably the only major one shared by both Hawkins and Cunningham.

Both choreographers rebelled against Graham's psychological approach to her art. Both men had also studied ballet, though they retained some of its aspects in different ways. Cunningham kept the balletic high carriage and emphasis on speed, while Hawkins rediscovered ballet's austere purity in Noh theater. Since leaving Graham, both have performed only their own work with their own companies.

For both choreographers, theater means a totality of music, dance and an equally important visual element, as it does in Asia. Like the Asian artist, who often does not limit his sensitivity to one art, Hawkins has immersed himself in traditional Japanese pottery, haiku

poetry and Noh theater, while Cunningham has always worked with other contemporary artists, mostly painters and musicians.

Both men began their independent careers with an encouraging musician-composer who shared their Asian interests. For Cunningham this person was John Cage and for Hawkins, Lucia Dlugozewski. The accompaniment for Hawkins' dances is always performed 'live and played on conventional instruments or on newly-created ones made of natural materials. Cunningham's accompaniment is also 'live -- even if, as in the case of "Winterbranch," it is LaMonte Young's score for amplified ashtrays scraped on mirrors.

In searching for a new idiom, both Hawkins and Cunningham found they had a natural affinity for Oriental thought with its reverence for nature. With this as a choreographic base, they proceeded in opposite directions. Like the Asian artists, Hawkins has always been concerned with what is beautiful, a concern that has not been shared by Cunningham. Cunningham, I think, accepts the Asian idea of nature as perfection and therefore the movement of all living creatures is welcome in his dances. In the interest of presenting what is, Cunningham, unlike Hawkins, has a few dark works in his repertory. "Crises," "Winterbranch", and "Place" are acknowledgments of the

grimness and evil in the world. Reviewers have often commented on Cunningham's ability to reflect the condition of the times. Hawkins, on the contrary, tries to find relief from the condition of the times in the best of what we share, i.e. the natural world, tenderness (both male and female) and the capacity for wonder. His near-therapeutic teaching method serves similar purposes.

Hawkins also regards nature as the ideal, but it has to be tamed before he will use it. He likes the idyllic, orderly aspects of nature, and unlike Cunningham, he avoids its darker sides. Hawkins' aesthetic preference has to do with morality. He feels very strongly that the artist has a responsibility to inspire his audience with examples of perfection. Like Plato, Hawkins has a very specific idea of what theater should do, i.e. it should uplift and edify as well as reveal wonder and joy.

It is interesting that on discovering Zen both choreographers accepted its "insistence on experience," as Cage called it (Cage 1965, p. 3A.) but Hawkins, with his background in Greek studies, could not abandon logic. Cunningham has been the one to combine experience with the irrational in his choreography, while Hawkins has limited himself to the Platonic ideal of theater which provides examples of how people ideally should treat each other and live in harmony. One of the prerequisites for harmony is, of course, compassion, which is one of the

three elements which comprise enlightenment. Cunningham does not ignore this matter but his use of chance is a powerful equalizer and gives an emotional neutrality to the subject.

Both choreographers have continued to work long past the age when most Western dancers retire. This is in keeping with Japanese tradition, particularly, where the finest artists are not considered to be such until the age of fifty. At sixty they are referred to as "masters" and at seventy, a few may be chosen as "national treasures." Hawkins has said "In trying to understand my own (aesthetic), I didn't go to the Oriental aesthetic ideas just out of trying to rob somebody else's bag artistically. I went because I wanted more complete philosophical ideas so that I could live my life with happiness." (Popkin, 1978, p. 18.)

Both Hawkins and Cunningham occasionally use some of the traditional movements of Asian dance. Hawkins has adopted the Noh walk and the concentric line of classical Japanese dance as his own, along with the traditional economy of means in order to celebrate the present. A Cunningham concert, on the other hand, is anything but sparse. The audience is presented with a barrage of stimuli so complex it can be difficult to make sense out of it. Making sense is not what the choreographer has in mind, however; perception and absorption are.

As choreographer Paul Taylor once dryly commented in reference to his own dances, "... my 'message,' as Humphrey Bogart once said, is nothing you could send by Western Union." (Percival, 1971, p. 59.) The remark could describe Cunningham's work as well.

One of the reasons why Zen Buddhism has been such good material for art is that it does not make distinctions between the outer world and inner experience. The subject of the dance can be dancing and it will move us. Both Cunningham and Hawkins were influenced by Herrigal's book Zen and the Art of Archery, but in entirely different ways. Hawkins used the idea of "It," the binder of inner and outer, to create a technique that emphasized ease and effortlessness. Cunningham, on the other hand, found in "It" support for his trust in chance and indeterminacy. If all things are one, then sets that spontaneously move and occasionally obscure the dance (as in "Rainforest"), accompaniment that varies ("How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run"), and his use of chance and indeterminacy suggest this kind of complex relationship. Hawkins, who unlike Cunningham ignores technology, achieves a sense of oneness by the "contemplation of nature in man," and the lack of effort and tension in his movement gives the feeling of harmony and at-oneness with all things.

As befits his Greek rationality, Hawkins gives meticulous attention to every aspect of his dances,

resulting in pieces that are highly "finished." He is concerned with presenting ideas that can lead to enlightenment, that are immediately perceivable, but that lack the Zen sense of life as constant flux that characterizes Cunningham's dances.

Cunningham is also preoccupied with immediate perception. With this in mind, he has attempted to free dancing from all the restrictions of the proscenium arch and or meter and theatrical conventions such as repetition which tend toward history rather than actuality. His use of indeterminacy in performance helps to keep his choreography from becoming museum material. Life, in Zen, takes place in the present tense, and dances that can never be done the same way twice are more "life-like." Happily, such dances also tend to keep their performers interested in them.

Cunningham wants the viewer to experience the transitoriness and mutability of his dances, rather than ponder what his choreography "means." Since the only constant in Zen is change, dances that are essentially processes, or means instead of ends, are appropriate to express this idea. Writing about Cage and immediate perception in music, Griffiths said "The composer, and by implication the listener, was to remain 'innocent and free to receive anew with each Now-moment a heavenly gift.' -- to keep that 'innocence and freedom' means giving up

anything that might cause the mind to make connections between sounds, or to use its memory." (Griffiths, 1981, p. 22.) To this end, Cunningham created dances that could never be performed the same way twice, and built movement sequences where "'anything could follow anything' -- a Zen-inspired acknowledgment of the randomness in life." (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 64.) Hawkins' route to the same goal was to discover movement uncolored by symbol. emotion or effort, movement that just is ("Pure Fact").

Cage has another statement on immediate perception and music which could also refer to Cunningham's dances.

When we separate music from life what we get is art... With contemporary music, when... actually contemporary, we have no time to make that separation (which protects us from living,...). Very frequently, no one knows that contemporary music is or could be art. He simply thinks it's irritating. (Cunningham would say "awkward.") Irritating one way or another, that is to say keeping us from ossifying. ...with contemporary music there is no time to do anything like classify. All you can do is suddenly listen. (Cage, 1965, p. 102.)

This of course, is contrary to the Western idea that the spontaneous in art can rarely be profound. In Zen, the only profundity is spontaneous and sudden. It is this point, I think, with which Hawkins takes issue. He would say that only carefully prepared (Cage would say "ossified") art work can be important or meaningful. Spontaneity does not enlighten.

Unlike Cunningham, Hawkins desires a very specific response from his audience. While Cunningham finds his own choreography equally interesting viewed from any angle, Hawkins wants his dances to be seen from only one front. Cunningham allows for his dancers' uniqueness in movement quality and rhythm while Hawkins allows for their differences in anatomy. In contrast to Cunningham, Hawkins oversees every aspect of the music composition and costume, mask and set design. He also maintains a firm hand on the choreography and keeps nature at a distance by using it only as metaphor, rather than allowing nature to participate in the creative process, as Cunningham does.

It would appear that Cunningham understands nature in terms of physics, while Hawkins uses nature's more tangible elements such as those studied in botany and astronomy, to shape his aesthetic. If Cunningham relies on nature in his use of chance, rejecting his own intuition as too limited, Hawkins claims that "the Oriental way of experiencing, through concept, by intuition, stays in sensuousness, it stays in immediacy, it stays in the body and so, therefore, it is the way of dancing." (Popkin, 1978, p. 22.)

Cunningham often juxtaposes pedestrian movement and mundane activities against spectacularly difficult dancing. The result is that he catches the audience off guard and they see the everyday as never before. The aim

of Zen meditation is exactly this, and it is a goal that is shared as well by Hawkins, albeit he goes about reaching it in quite a different way. Using tranquil imagery and effortless movement, Hawkins soothes his audience into a calm and receptive frame of mind so their vision gradually clears.

Cunningham dancers are by necessity extraordinary technicians. Cunningham is not bound by a limited movement vocabulary. He is interested in all kinds of movement. The chance procedures Cunningham uses to create movement sequences pit one movement against the next with no visible transition. The choreographer Stuart Hodes said "What Merce did, in effect, was tell you that it was o.k. to wear black shoes with brown pants. You couldn't do that before him in dance." (Kisselgoff, 1983, p. 23.) Most dancers are trained in logical, often predictable sequences of movement so that it is not surprising that Cunningham's dancers have often spent several years studying at his school. Mazo writes:

He did not want to exclude any kind of movement from his work -- he finds that a negative way of approaching dance -- but to deal with movement 'in as many ways as my imagination could conceive...' Any movement is possible in dancing -- walking or virtuoso movements because dancing is 'the amplification of energy' and technique is 'a kind of yoga.' (Mazo, 1977, p. 218.)

Cunningham has trouble with virtuosity when it replaces the dancer. When this happens everyone ends up looking the same.

'Virtuosity narrows the scale,' he says 'and presents less possibility for diversity of human beings... so many dancers think that if they learn to do a step well, that's it, although great dancers go beyond that. You have to get so far beyond it that you can make mistakes again, that something else can happen.' (Mazo, 1977, p. 218.)

This technical facility extended to risk-taking is an echo of the Sung landscape painters who painted in the "Boneless manner of the brush," in other words, with no preliminary outline. "Outlines" in movement terms, can be transitions, familiar movements carried over from technique classes and training exercises which do not occur in Cunningham's choreography. Sung painters did not have the tight wrist muscles which develop with the use of a pen. As a result, they developed a wonderfully fluid facility with the brush. Since there was no color in these landscapes, line had to say everything and it did. It was expected that the painter would have the ability to paint an entire mountainside in one brushstroke. In the same way, Cunningham's dancers are expected to perform an entire dance made up of highly technical movements set end to end without gaps for the preparations that are seen in traditional ballet.

Hawkins' progression from the study of ballet to that of Noh theater would seem at first to be a change in emphasis from body to spirit. However, Hawkins shares with Cunningham a concern for form, austere spirit, purity and rigor. Contrary to the Western emphasis on virtuosity, originality and, especially in the United States, speed, more important in Noh is the creation of a special atmosphere by means of dance characterized by spiritual, as opposed to physical, strength.<sup>9</sup> This quality is one of the trademarks of a Hawkins dance.

Both Hawkins and Cunningham appreciate the importance of tranquility, so highly valued in Asia. But both men use it in quite different ways. A Cunningham dancer must be tranquil so that the inherent qualities of the movement can shine through, while Hawkins uses smooth, floating movement to achieve a tranquil effect.

As in Japanese dance, which is particularly famous for its many bird-like dances, both choreographers use the movement of animals in their dances. In Hawkins' pieces the animals are recognizable; Cunningham's animals,

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9. This emphasis on speed is largely due to the enormous influence of George Balanchine. Lincoln Kirstein described his dances as "'traditional technique speeded up, athleticized, the four-minute mile translated to dance. George said that slowness was only good because it made speed appear faster...' He was also very aware that added speed increased danger and that audiences, as Mr. Kirstein argues, are more interested in seeing dancers risk their necks than in watching them move beautifully." (Rosenwald, 1984.)

however, are not. We know they are not human but in some cases, for example, they appear simultaneously to fly and swim.

Unlike Cunningham, Hawkins has never abandoned his intuitive approach to choreography. For all his respect for nature, Hawkins still feels that he can make a better dance than she can. If Hawkins had been a Chinese landscape painter, man would have loomed slightly larger.

In general, it appears that Hawkins was more influenced by Japanese aesthetics, while Cunningham was more interested in Zen Buddhist philosophy, especially its ideas on interdependency and interpenetration. In his studies of Zen Buddhism, Cunningham found support for his experiments in extending the range of dancing and presenting life as it really is. Hawkins' studies of Zen and such traditional Japanese art forms as haiku and Noh led to his use of a movement dynamic that had been little used in Western dance, one that was gentle, playful and tender. Simultaneously, his studies in kinesiology led him to the conclusion that the reason Asian dancers are often people of great age was that their movement obeys natural laws.

Both men read A. K. Coomaraswamy early in their careers. His description of Asian theater as wholistic and stressing the commonality of man and nature was an important catalyst for both Hawkins and Cunningham. In

addition, Zen, with its highly integrated view of the world, was important to both men but particularly Cunningham. While the process leading to enlightenment initially negates the world for us, the experience of enlightenment rebuilds it by seeing everything as inextricably interconnected with an interdependence on everything else. The consequences of this way of looking at the world is miao-yu, the "marvelous existence" or "actuality" of this world.

The early Chinese and Japanese sense of oneness with nature was related to a philosophical and religious tradition that, unlike the Judaeo-Christian tradition, did not believe in a heaven that was somewhere else. If, as in Taoism and Zen, there is no heaven, then there is only the here and now; the divine is immanent. The miao-yu is the perception of all experience as infinitely valuable because the mundane is, at the same time, the sacred perception which redeems for us the world of ordinary experience.

At first glance it might appear that Cunningham's work reflects a deeper understanding of Zen Buddhist philosophy. In comparison, Hawkins seems ingenuous and, although his use of Noh traditions appears closer to the Eastern aesthetic than Cunningham, in fact his use of Asian elements remains on a purely formal level. This may be by choice. Buddhism is one of the most liberal

religions the world has ever known and, within limits, can be whatever the practitioner wants it to be. Dipping below its surface, however, can be a shattering experience for certain personalities, as some of us do not take well to "homelessness." In any case, both choreographers would agree, I think, that satori (enlightenment), that most profound meditative state where reality is seen for what it actually is, offers a glimpse of this world, not some other. After all, the bodhisattvas are not moving on.

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