

During the course of working in dance, there have been four events that have led to large discoveries in my work.

The first came with my initial work with John Cage, early solos, when we began to separate the music and the dance. This was in the late forties. Using at that time what Cage called a 'rhythmic structure'—the time lengths that were agreed upon as beginning and ending structure points between the music and the dance—we worked separately on the choreography and the musical composition. This allowed the music and the dance to have an independence between the structure points. From the beginning, working in this manner gave me a feeling of freedom for the dance, not a dependence upon the note-by-note procedure with which I had been used to working. I had a clear sense of both clarity and interdependence between the dance and the music.

The second event was when I began to use chance operations in the choreography, in the fifties. My use of chance procedures is related explicitly to the choreography. I have utilized a number of different chance operations, but in principle it involves working out a large number of dance phrases, each separately, then applying chance to discover the continuity—what phrase follows what phrase, how time-wise and rhythmically the particular movement operates, how many and which dancers might be involved with it, and where it is in the space and how divided. It led, and continues to lead, to new discoveries as to how to get from one movement to the next, presenting almost constantly situations in which the imagination is challenged. I continue to utilize chance operations in my work, finding with each dance new ways of experiencing it.

The third event happened in the seventies with the work we have done with video and film. Camera space presented a challenge. It has clear limits, but it also gives opportunities of working with dance that are not available on the stage. The camera takes a fixed view, but it can be moved. There is the possibility of cutting to a second camera which can change the size of the dancer, which, to my eye, also affects the time, the

rhythm of the movement. It also can show dance in a way not always possible on the stage: that is, the use of detail which in the broader context of theatre does not appear. Working with video and film also gave me the opportunity to rethink certain technical elements. For example, the speed with which one catches an image on the television made me introduce into our class work different elements concerned with tempos which added a new dimension to our general class work behavior.

The fourth event is the most recent. For the past five years, I have had the use of a dance computer, Life-Forms, realized in a joint venture between the Dance and Science Departments of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. One of its uses is as a memory device: that is, a teacher could put into the memory of the computer exercises that are given in class, and these could be looked at by students for clarification. I have a small number of particular exercises we utilize in our class work already in the memory. But my main interest is, as always, in discovery. With the figure, called the Sequence Editor, one can make up movements, put them in the memory, eventually have a phrase of movement. This can be examined from any angle, including overhead, certainly a boon for working with dance and camera. Furthermore, it presents possibilities which were always there, as with photos, which often catch a figure in a shape our eye had never seen. On the computer the timing can be changed to see in slow motion how the body changes from one shape to another. Obviously, it can produce shapes and transitions that are not available on humans, but as happened first with the rhythmic structure, then with the use of chance operations, followed by the use of the camera on film and video and now with the dance computer, I am aware once more of new possibilities with which to work.

My work has always been in process. Finishing a dance has left me with the idea, often slim in the beginning, for the next one. In that way, I do not think of each dance as an object, rather a short stop on the way.

—MERCE CUNNINGHAM