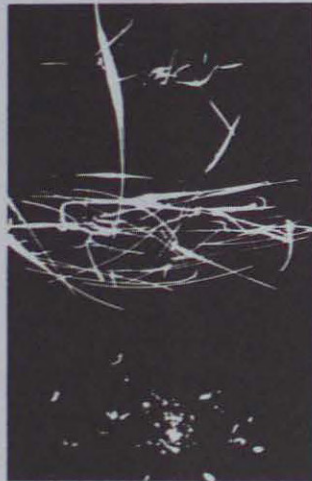


Space - Dance: Theater



O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

W.B. Yeats, *Among School Children*

I. OVERTURE AND THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF SPACE - DANCE: THEATER

In his *Institutio Oratoria*, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian describes in considerable detail how imagined buildings could serve as mnemonics for orators, the rooms, passages and other architectural features becoming mental storage places for points to be covered in a speech. With the mind's eye you could go inside and find things always in their places as pictures of little boxes each with its idea displayed like a trophy on a pedestal. It was, I think, a tomb-like house he was describing, a place outside of time and sitting four-square in the imagination like a stolid rock in a turbulent sea. In such a house it would not be possible to memorize the dance.

It was for this reason that the old choreographer, when he thought about his theater-house, saw the space inside as a function of time and dreamed a nascent architecture which flowed like ribbon streamers from his dancers' limbs. It was said that he could dream of time as a pure essence, seeing it pictured in pure movements and that he could take any of these kinetic passages and hold it together so time became a simultaneity. Then slicing it through as though it were an orange, he could look inside of time. The structure there was always poised and potential, restless and coming apart.

When the choreographer and his dancers first met the architect to discuss how they would work together, the distances between them were vast. You could sense it in the desiccated speech passing between them. How do you speak to the choreographer? How does the choreographer speak to the dancers? How would either speak to the architect? And after it has begun in some simple way, once you have agreed, for example, that to say "blue" means, for the moment at least, the same color to everyone -- the color, say, of the sky -- and that this is a window and that a teacup, then what will be next? Teacups becoming windows; windows filled with blue? Or about more complicated words and what they are to mean and so to go from colors to objects, from objects to qualities, from qualities to values and from values to judgments.

It was late in the afternoon; the group was breaking up. The architect sitting apart by a window was drawing aimlessly on a small white pad, assembling little ink lines into a little house. The choreographer came up behind him where he could look over the architect's shoulder.

- "It is quite wonderful to watch someone draw," he said politely.

- "But perhaps you could tell me, what is the first thing you want to know about a line in your drawing?"

- "Why, how long it is," the architect said without looking up.

The choreographer looked down at his feet and shook his head.

- "No," he said softly, "The first thing you want to know is how the line was made."

The architect thought for a moment.

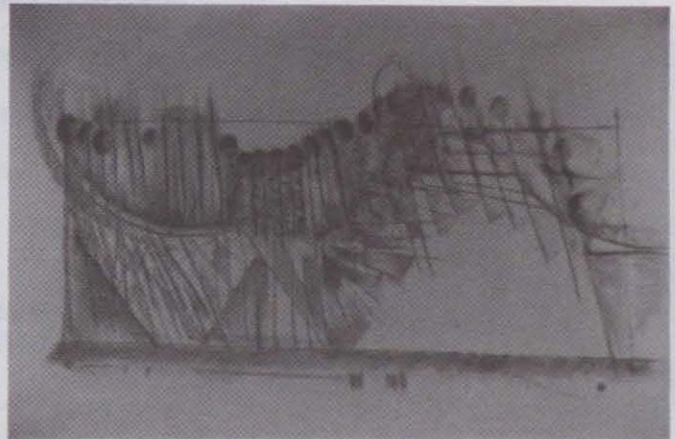
- "You mean with a pencil or a pen? You mean was it freehanded or drawn with an instrument?"

II. CHOREOPRAXIS AND THE SECOND PERFORMANCE OF SPACE - DANCE: THEATER

On certain further points the notes which began to arrive from the choreographer seemed quite specific:

1. The dancers are to be selected at random from the general population.
2. The dancers are to be taught the steps and movements of the dance.
3. The steps and movements of the dance are to emulate those of the general population.

Then followed a more general narrative in which it was first stated that the dance had been performed at such and such a time and place,



- "What I mean to say is this, was the line made with the fingers or with a gesture."

Later that night the architect found an envelope slipped under his door and inside a single sheet of paper on which the choreographer had copied out in neat block letters, perhaps from memory, the following paragraph from Rudolf Laban's *The Language of Movement*:

Movement is, so to speak, living architecture -- living in the sense of changing emplacements and changing cohesion. This architecture is created by human movements and is made of pathways tracing shapes in space and these we call "trace forms."

Below on the same sheet, but written in a more musing hand of script characters like figures in a soft drawing, the choreographer wrote, "If it were in my power to do it, this is the way I would make my house. You see, a line, even when it passes through chaos, develops its own logic and measure."

then that it had not been performed, and finally that it did not matter if it was or was not performed. There was also a small box containing 52 black and white photographs tied together with a red ribbon and a white card on which it said that the photographs had been taken at precisely thirty second intervals throughout the twenty-five minute rehearsal of "Space - Dance: Theater."

In the narrative the choreographer commented on the hopelessness of trying to make a record of something fluidic and continuous through a discontinuous and static medium like photography.

"You should not, therefore, take these photographs to be a record of the dance," the note said. "Rather they are likened to a ruin where time has worked over something whole, removing parts and more parts until only a few are left to us."

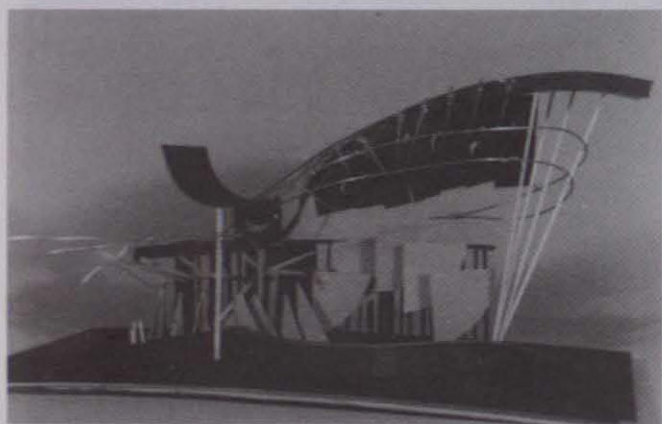
More instructions followed:

"You may shuffle the packet of photographs anyway you wish and have someone cut them through as though they were a deck of playing cards. Then when you are satisfied, deal them out, one at a time, into a line in any order whatsoever. The photographs, as you deal them, will be the performance."

The photographs did indeed picture people dressed in leotards and dance tights, caught at some point in a movement which to a trained eye might suggest both a reasonable lead-in and follow-through. But the length of the intervals between them and the fact that the pictures were dealt out at random made it impossible to agree upon any logical connection between them. What was even more unusual about the photographs were the backgrounds. Each put the dancer in a different scene: One a freeway, another a city street, a third an airport landing strip, a fourth a bucolic meadow, and so on. Always there was a strange detachment between the dancers and the background as though someone had cut out the dancer's pictures and pasted them down onto the background scenes. For although the dancers were always pictured prominently in the foreground, sometimes dangerously positioned directly in the path of a speeding automobile, they were totally unaware of what was going on around them just as passers-by appearing in some of the photographs seemed equally oblivious of the presence of the dancers. On the back of the photographs the choreographer had penciled in what he called "musical notes" for each pas-

she demonstrated many times, took only a few seconds to complete. But in the choreographer's dream every part of it was eternal. And each time it was done, he could imagine himself inside the sphere of the dancer's motions, feeling the space suspended gracefully all around him. Inside that sonorous, moving space it was impossible to fix himself to any one position before that vantage point and view dissolved into another and another.

How well did the emerging construction mirror the scene inside the choreographer's mind? For to do so would have meant that all the pre-knowledge memorized in buildings -- rules of statics, materials, the canons of architectural order -- would have to be swallowed up while the architect watched Odile dance until he could see how a beam of steel, which had no mind of its own, could be made to lose its unliability and hang like a dimensionless line in infinite space. In that single disjunction, a gentle and perfect condition of the dance became a chaos of the building. Even as it gave itself over to more substantial stuff, it became like the asymptotic line in a calculus and drawing teasingly nearer and nearer to the choreographer's dream.



sage as, for example, "freeway pulse, 5:30 p.m. --duration 26 secs." or "soft wind rustling trees -- 28 secs."

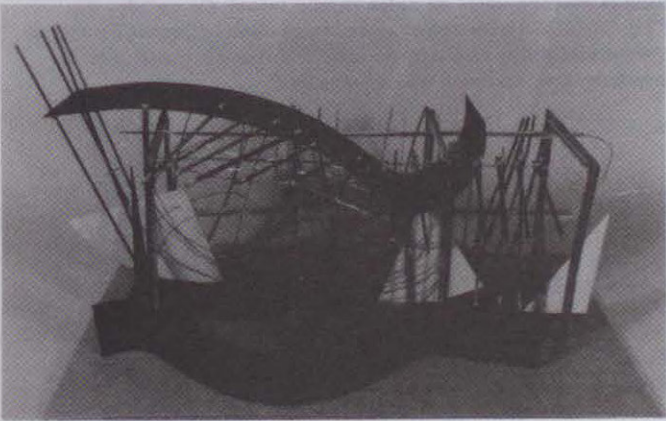
At the conclusion of his note the choreographer again expressed his general dissatisfaction with the limitations of the photographs but concluded that as far as he was concerned this was the dance as well as he could remember it.

III. CHOREOTONICS AND THE THIRD PERFORMANCE OF SPACE - DANCE: THEATER

Odile was a dancer; she was supposed to act the part of the interlocutor. She decided it would be best to begin simply. After dealing one of the photographs from the middle of the packet and studying it for a moment, she announced that she thought she saw the dancer there alighting from a *jete* of leap. The precise movement she called a *Grand Jete en Tournant*. The passage comprised a series of stable movement through a turn, covering a distance of perhaps three paces, which brought her into the Classical first position, feet extended parallel to the shoulders, from which she again turned while gathering herself gracefully into a full extension *en pointe* before launching off into an elegant, soaring, backward leap, coming finally to rest in an *arabesque* tableau. The entire sequence, which

IV. DENOUEMENT AND THE FOURTH PERFORMANCE OF SPACE - DANCE: THEATER

All collaborations are a mystery -- the amatory sorcery when one thing enters the soul of another and makes it new. After the Indian legend in which the God Shiva danced the "Tandava" (Dance of Creation) to the rhythm of the "sacred drum," one could hear the eternal vibration in every creative act. After Sir James Hall who thought a Gothic Cathedral might be grown from trees, pruned to shape and lashed and plaited together, one might see the stone tracery of charters roiling like limbs on ethereal winds of colored light. After the architect, who could see his building rising from the shadows of the gridded, centripetal ooze, reaching for space the way a bird might fill the morning sky with ambiguous undulations, one could see motion without time, captured in its own reflections. Then after, the choreographer began to instruct his dancers in silent, gestural metaphors drawn on the architecture: The motions of his hands manifolded in the precious crystalline tensions of the *exo-sphere*, his movements and the formation of that space reaching to touch and learn from one another. And there were the dancers lost in their movements inside the restless space like feathers drifting on a wind-blown dune.



ILLUSTRATIONS

- Page 44 Trace form photograph, Warm-up exercise for the Dance. Leslie Weitinger.
- Page 45 Trace form drawing for "Space - Dance: Theater I." Leslie Weitinger.
- Pages 46-7 Model study, "Space - Dance: Theater I." Leslie Weitinger.

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