

Proceedings

Society of Dance History Scholars

Twenty-Second Annual Conference

University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

10 - 13 June 1999

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Conference Papers

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Juliette Willis, Compiler

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Dance Criticism After the End of Art

Dr. Larry E. Lavender

Today I'd like to share some thoughts that have grown out of a larger project of mine to grasp whether or not there are any significant connections to be drawn between dance criticism and Arthur Danto's theory of the "end of art." Danto claims that during the 1960s art completed its quest of becoming fully self-conscious of its philosophical nature, and it literally became its own philosophy. With this, the master narrative of art ended, and the "post-historical" era began. Post-historical art is radically pluralistic, and does not allow itself to be represented by any master narratives for this would necessarily exclude one or another artistic tradition, or style.

My strategy here is to play along with Danto, to assume that his reading of the end of art is right. I do this in spite of an abundance of theorists who seek to refute him. I play along with Danto both because I want this essay to do more than rehearse the differences between him and his detractors, and because none of them have convinced me that he is wrong insofar as his theory concerns my concern with dance criticism.

I am specifically interested in evaluative criticism for three reasons. First, while non-evaluative criticism can serve important functions, I think criticism without evaluation is a bit cowardly. Second, our critical tradition developed in tandem with the master narrative of art that is now allegedly ended. That is, qualitative criteria for evaluating art closely followed artists' qualitative solutions to the problem of discovering what art, in fact, is. But if Danto is right that question has come to closure. As he puts it (1998), "Art can look like a Brillo box if you are a pop artist, or like a panel of plywood if you are a minimalist. It can look like a piece of pie, or it can look like a curl of chicken wire" (89). This means that art and criticism no longer have the kind of future they once did because the apparently endless series of artistic revolutions that re-defined art in our century over and over again — each time introducing new critical ideas — did end. This ending made two central concerns of criticism irrelevant — that of determining whether or not a work is, in fact, art, and that of evaluating the degree to which a work reveals the essence of art. Some say judgment is irrelevant, too, which is my third reason for being

interested in it. I detect among many in the dance world a strong anti-judgmentalism — an inclination not to make critical judgments. I think this is an unfortunate symptom of the end of art.

For those who wonder if dance is included in the art that has ended — it is. In Danto's work and in this essay, the term "art" refers to the fine arts traditions in the West; works that are puzzled over in galleries, museums, concert halls, and in theatres of all description. The more broad sense of art as the vast array of human behaviors related in some way to image-making and ritual is not much discussed by Danto. He is interested, and so am I, in the narrative that provided developmental structure to Western art; a narrative in which dance is inextricably bound up.

To demonstrate this latter point, and also to lay bare a root of anti-judgmentalism in dance criticism, consider the Judson Church era, a moment when the theoretical discourses and the artistic practices in the arts coincided in ways they had rarely, if ever, done before. To risk a generalization, the leading practitioners in all the arts were in their own ways in the grip of Clement Greenberg's (1966) imperative for each art to make its materials its subject matter. Greenberg's prescription, as you recall, was for each art to eliminate "any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art" (102). To this end, the same sorts of reductive, self-reflexive experiments were undertaken in all the arts. A dominant theme — a theme with a thousand variations — was to close the gap between art and reality. The embracing by art of the ordinary — which is the theme of Danto's book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (1981) — was no less pronounced in dance than in other arts. Danto considers this transfiguration the final chapter in the master narrative of art. At the close of the chapter art gave up the pursuit of a visible distinction between itself and the commonplace.

Now, as for the roots of anti-judgmentalism, listen to David Gordon (1975): "The policy of the Judson Dance Theatre," he writes, "was that no choreographer could be turned away, or, rather, there was no policy, because no one would take the responsibility of making qualitative judgments on the work of anyone else" (45). No doubt one reason for this was the anti-au-

thoritarian sentiment that was in vogue; it is no surprise that judgment should have been deemed distasteful by those infected with that fever. But a more important reason judgments were shunned, I think, was that the dance makers did not create with aesthetic considerations particularly in mind. In fact, they did the opposite; perpetuating the modernist erasure of everything previously thought to comprise the aesthetic essence of art. Some regarded this, wrongly I think, as a reason for dance criticism to shift into a highly descriptive mode that minimized evaluation. Throw in the relativism associated with multi-culturalism and it is clear why anti-judgmentalism today seems for many an appropriate critical stance, certainly one that many of my students initially choose.

But the dance world as a whole cannot choose this because it leaves too much vital work undone: too many judgments about too many dances must constantly be made by too many dance professionals simply to keep the engines of the dance world running. Dance historians must judge which works best exemplify an artist's style; critics are still widely expected to judge the works they review; choreography teachers must evaluate student works; and panelists evaluating grant proposals must watch endless hours of video tape to judge which choreographers will get the money. How are these judgments to be made, after the end of art? In wrestling with this question I will explain in a bit more detail Danto's theory — linking it to the demise of Kantian aesthetics and to today's critical anti-judgmentalism. Along the way I will briefly discuss found and conceptual art, two key contributors to the blurring of the distinction between art and reality. Finally, I will try to explain why, even after the end of art, we still need evaluative aesthetic criticism.

In October 1964, Arthur Danto published an essay called "The Artworld." Widely repudiated in its time, this essay has become the virtual basis for philosophical aesthetics in the second half of this century. A full analysis of the essay is tempting, but I must limit myself to Danto's discussion of Andy Warhol's exhibition of effigies of Brillo Boxes earlier that year because here we find the seeds of Danto's theory. As we consider Danto's take on Warhol, bear in mind that Warhol's innovations are attributable, at least in part, to the influence of dance. Warhol attended a number of performances by Yvonne Rainer and others at Judson, and he was quite influenced by the ideas of Cage, Cunningham, and Rauschenberg.

Danto wonders what makes the Brillo boxes art when their virtually identical counterparts on grocery

shelves are merely "real things." His answer weaves together two insights. First, he notes that there being works of art that look exactly like ordinary things means that what makes one of them art but not the other can not rest on any visible property. This insight is powerful because, as Danto (1992) writes, "it had always been taken for granted that one could distinguish works of art from other things by mere inspection" (7). Now here was the claim coming from within art itself that the way something looked was no longer part of the definition of art, if the purpose of the definition was to explain how artworks do in fact differ from real things.

Danto's second insight was that what makes something a work of art in one era but not in an earlier one is an enfranchising theory of art that carves out the philosophical space necessary for the work to be recognized as art. Danto (1964) explains:

What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is... Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory... It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible (581).

To illustrate, Danto lists some major movements in 20th century art — fauvism, cubism, futurism, abstractionism, surrealism, dada, expressionism, abstract expressionism, minimalism, conceptualism, photorealism, abstract realism, and neo-expressionism, to name just a few — and reminds us that each requires considerable, and often considerably complex, theory so that the sometimes very minimal objects that exemplify the movements can be seen as art. Again consider the Judson dances, and so many that have followed. If Danto is correct, these works depend in part for their artistic identity upon critics and others understanding the anti-narrative, any-movement-is-dance theories that are embodied by the works themselves and articulated by their makers. And, to the extent that these theories transfigure various works into art, the theories are as integral to the works as their visible properties. That so many artworks in this century can not be identified as art without an accompanying theoretical exposition suggests the plausibility of this point.

Over the past 35 years Danto has developed his argument that art was gradually subsumed by theory. In our century, each successive art movement and manifesto raised afresh the question "what is art?" — so much so that, as Danto (1984) explains, "it began to seem as if the whole main point of art in our century was to pursue the question of its own identity" (110). Works of art began to depend more and more upon theory until finally, in conceptual art, the objects virtually disappear as their theory becomes voluminous, so that virtually all there is at the end is theory, the work disappearing into what Danto calls "a dazzle of pure thought about itself" (111). And so, as Danto (1997) explains, "everything is possible nothing is historically mandated: one thing is, so to say, as good as another" (44).

The end of art marks the rejection of the Kantian paradigm of the work of art as a specially made, autonomous aesthetic entity. In our post-historical era the word "art" refers to things that are found, things that are replicas of ordinary objects, things that are merely conceived, and things created just as legitimately through random, accidental, or industrial processes as through any process of thoughtful aesthetic shaping by an artist. Also out of fashion is Kant's idea of the aesthetic object as residing in a disinterested realm separate from the realms of cognition and morality. Under the Kantian paradigm the object of art was set apart as a kind of special object, and art criticism developed as an instrument, and an industry, aimed at revealing what makes the special object so special, what makes it "art." We inherit from Kant, then, the theoretical basis for the now much maligned notion of criticism as a secondary art appropriately concerned with those tangible elements in the art object that give it its material being and its particular aesthetic value.

The rejection of these ideas has come from nearly every quarter — from Dada and Duchamp, on through to Cage, Kaprow, Rainer, Warhol, and beyond. Suzi Gablik sums it up when she lambastes the idea of art as "a collection of prestigious objects, existing in museums and galleries, disconnected from ordinary life and action," and when she vilifies the mythology of the artist as "the lone genius, isolated from society, and relieved of social responsibility," and when she dismisses "the paradigm of vision" as the basis for art critical practice (1995, p. 1-3). At the heart of these sentiments is the suspicion that the notion of disinterested aesthetic value conceals what is really a very "interested" system of elitist impulses. Indeed, today virtually all traditional institutions and professions of art

connoisseurship stand accused of concealing and promoting an untenable agenda of one sort or another. What specifically is held as untenable, of course, depends upon who is doing the accusing. The political right demonizes art by accusing it of undermining morality and proper social values. And from the ostensible left — within the artworld — many, like Gablik, reject aesthetic art, calling for an art — and a criticism — that emphasizes art's social and political utility. Gablik's paradigm for what she calls environmentally responsible art is Dominique Mazeaud, whose piece "The Great Cleansing of the Rio Grande River" consisted of the artist ritually cleaning garbage out of the river with trash bags donated by the city of Santa Fe. Gablik reports, by the way, that Mazeaud is no longer doing this; she finally just started to walk along the river, having realized that it was just as much an artist as she was.

Antagonistic as Gablik is toward Kantian ideas, two earlier and more interesting attacks upon them — because they came from art itself — are found and conceptual art, two movements which appear to sanction what has been called the "murder of the artist." William Fowkes explains this term in his insightful book, *A Hegelian Account of Contemporary Art* (1981). Hegel is important here both because it was he — in 1828 — who first claimed that art would be subsumed into philosophy, thus ending the historical moment of art, and because Danto presents his own end of art theory as a neo-Hegelian one. According to Fowkes, found and conceptual art result from a fracturing of elements whose synthesis constituted Hegel's ideal of art. These now fractured elements are **form** (what Hegel called "matter") and **content** (what Hegel referred to as "spirit"). By sanctioning as art things that have not been created by an artist, found art minimizes "the manipulative contribution of spirit" (3). Works of found art thus encourage viewers to attend to their physical properties of shape and form without any concern for the presence or absence of an inner meaning. In response, conceptual, or "idea artists," argue that the world is full of objects, more or less interesting; we don't wish to add any more. Interestingly, once conceptual art makes this claim, it separates into two factions. The first faction, as Fowkes describes it, "conceives the function of artists to be the origination of ideas which craftsmen, technicians, or laymen then carry out in the external world" (5). The second faction asserts that "only the idea is of any aesthetic interest or value," and so the idea need not be actualized in the world. Thus, each in their own way, found and

conceptual art murder the artist — insofar as she is conceived as a skilled maker of meaningful things — by isolating one of the two elements of art — shape and idea, respectively — and construing the isolated element as the essence of all art. Taken together, these extremes reduce art to any and every form, on the one hand, and any and every idea, on the other. Thus the category “art” applies to everything and, therefore, to nothing — another way of diagnosing the end of art.

I return now to anti-judgmentalism, the most direct manifestation of which I find among students, many of whom when asked to articulate a judgment of a work of art say something like this: “The only judgment that matters is my own and I don’t want to impose it on anyone or have anyone’s judgment imposed upon me. After all, no way of looking at things is any better than any other way.”

This attitude is at once highly subjective — insofar as the only judgments these students regard as meaningful are their own — and it is highly pluralistic in that it stipulates that all other judgments are no more or less valid than their own. This stance — which I term “subjective pluralism” — is based on the correct observation that critics often formulate radically incompatible judgments of a work. The mistake is concluding that debate and evaluation are fruitless. By allowing one to function critically in a rudimentary manner without having to formulate a reflective evaluation of a work, or attend to those of others, subjective pluralism fortifies each critic’s biases, justifies leaving them unexamined, and protects the critic from charges of narrow-mindedness. Such charges, after all, would only make sense if it were assumed beforehand that some judgments were more informed and applicable to the work at hand than others. But this is precisely what subjective pluralism categorically denies. Under the guise of tolerance, subjective pluralism stipulates that all judgments are equally valid. However, once that stipulation is made, the door closes on critical debate — the one means by which we might actually determine if all judgments were, in fact, equally valid, or if any were valid at all in the sense of being grounded in the work. Subjective pluralism claims that it is not worthwhile even to hear other critical opinions. Thus tolerance, which used to mean coming to know and understand points of view contrary to one’s own, now means accepting these views in principle without coming to know them. This is a false tolerance, it is born of laziness rather than of human fellowship or genuine interest in art.

I see subjective pluralism as a consequence of the end of art condition that Danto says we are in:

when it is no longer possible even to distinguish art from non-art, the subjective pluralist surmises that criticism is not worth bothering with. As I mentioned, it is true that the end of art closes off many of our habitual critical avenues. For example, there no longer seems to be any point in saying something is or is not art, or in advocating the true path for art to take, for every path is already a path of art. Moreover, after the end of art the common practice of claiming that a work is or is not “original” seems to have lost much of its critical force; at the least we ought to re-think what we now might mean by “original.” And if we accept conceptualism’s claim that art need not exist in material form, then perhaps in our most advanced art there is, in a sense, nothing “there” for criticism to criticize. Each of these reasons seems enough for many to choose subjective pluralism.

But there are other causes of anti-judgmentalism, and others besides students who adopt it as a critical stance. In educational settings, for example, the rhetoric of the self-esteem movement leads many teachers to conclude that to help a student feel good about her creative work is more important than helping her to recognize its bright spots and its flaws, and teaching her to do better.

A third cause — in dance departments, anyway — is the persistence of expression theory. The construal of art as the deep and unique expression of an individual’s ideas or emotions often shapes entire choreography curricula, and often turns discussions of dances into amateur psychotherapy sessions. Evaluation is stifled under these conditions; when dances are discussed primarily as extensions of the personality of the artist no set of evaluative norms appears suitable for judgment of the work because judging the work is equated with judging the artist as a person. I pray the flaws in this reasoning need not be explained here.

But while the expressionist paradigm, the rhetoric of self-esteem, and subjective pluralism are important causes of anti-judgmentalism, cultural pluralism is no doubt the most powerful cause of it. I do not wish to bemoan cultural pluralism — but we do need to consider that powerful rationales for anti-judgmentalism, and in some cases a genuine loss of critical courage, have developed as a by-product of it.

The central and unproblematic insight of multicultural aesthetics is that concepts and practices of art differ across cultures. It is also the case that many contemporary works in the West embody principles derived from non-Western art. The mistake is to conclude from this that judgment cannot proceed in any

nated; there is no longer any status to be lost or gained through association with any particular moment in the development of art. To paraphrase Warhol paraphrasing Marx, one may be an abstract expressionist in the morning, a minimalist in the afternoon and a critic after supper. The critic needs only to be clear about her values, and in her descriptions of how a work does or does not embody them.

When a critic's judgments enhance others' perception and evaluation of a work of art, that critic gains what I call "aesthetic authority." Some critics seek authority merely by virtue of their a-priori position of power over the works they judge; they seek what I term "institutional authority." The Dance faculty automatically has institutional authority — we can make students' dances visible or we can make them disappear — whether or not we try to achieve aesthetic authority. In that infamous essay "Discussing the Undiscussable" (1994) — which should have been titled "discussing the unseen" — Arlene Croce tried to assert institutional authority over Bill T. Jones — she had not seen his dance, and she had no claim to aesthetic authority. If the end of art fuels anti-judgmentalism in dance criticism, it will be aesthetic authority that is lost. The dance professionals I mentioned at the start who must make judgments will still make them, and dances will become visible or invisible because of them. But if these judges learn that they do not need to achieve aesthetic authority, and instead become subjective pluralists who rely on institutional authority, aesthetically ungrounded judgments like Arlene's will more and more be elevated to the position rightly occupied by aesthetically grounded ones. This is bad for art because it negates the shaping influence upon artists that incisive aesthetic criticism might yet exert. Moreover, to privilege institutional authority over aesthetic authority reduces art to a commodity and criticism to advertising. Maybe art is just a commodity — but if so, it is all the more necessary that those critics who determine which dance commodities gain visibility and which do not are those who will continually struggle to achieve aesthetic authority. Whether an artist intends her work to be aesthetic, unaesthetic, or anti-aesthetic, our primary experience of it is aesthetic, and it is in that experience that our criticism must be grounded. I thus reassert the primacy of seeing, and of aesthetic analysis, as the means by which we must individuate and evaluate dances if post-historical dance criticism is to matter at all.

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Re-Thinking the Thinking Body: The Articulate Movement of Merce Cunningham

Roger Copeland

One of the many differences between pre-Cunningham and post-Cunningham modern dance is the attitude that each displays toward intelligence: the value of possessing it, the strategies for displaying it—above all, the manner of defining it. What this contrast reveals most clearly are two radically different conceptions of the ideal relationship between mind and body. In the rhetoric of pre-Cunningham modern dance (a long tradition extending from Duncan through Graham), we often hear references to the “thinking body” and the “whole” person. But in practice, this wholistic philosophy all too often translates into the triumph of body over mind. Alas, if the mind/body ethos of pre-Cunningham modern dance were to be summed up in a single slogan, it might well read: “Man cannot live by head alone.” Perhaps this helps explain why Doris Humphrey, a pioneer of pre-Cunningham modern dance, wasn’t the least bit embarrassed to suggest that:

The person drawn to dance as a profession is notoriously unintellectual. He thinks with his muscles; delights in expression with body, not words; finds analysis painful and boring; and is a creature of physical ebullience.¹

Modern dance, in fact, proved only too willing to volunteer its services as a therapeutic antidote for the supposed cerebral excesses of technocratic civilization and Cartesian conceptions of thought. “Bodily thinking” was defined in a manner generically different from verbally expressible forms of intelligence. Edwin Denby, sums up the conventional wisdom on this subject when he writes that

Dancing is physical motion. It doesn’t involve words at all. And so it is an error to suppose that dance intelligence is the same as other sorts of intelligence which involve, on the contrary, words only and no physical movement whatever.²

Denby of course is talking about dance-in-general. He doesn’t distinguish between modern dance and

ballet. (The anti-intellectualism of the ballet world is a different matter entirely.) Indeed, one can argue that the guiding spirits of pre-Cunningham modern dance practice a sophisticated brand of anti-intellectualism that is peculiar to artists and intellectuals. That is: a distrust of intellect rather than a lack of intellect. What Susan Sontag once said about the differences between a viscerally charged painter like Francis Bacon and more cerebral artists such as Duchamp and Johns is equally applicable to the contrast between pre-Cunningham and post-Cunningham modern dance:

It is obvious from Bacon’s work that he is extremely intelligent. But Bacon’s work (unlike Duchamp’s or say, Jasper Johns’) is not “about” being intelligent. It is “about” being in pain.³

Something similar can be said of Doris Humphrey—as well as of Duncan, Fuller, and Graham: It is obvious that they are intelligent; but their work is not “about” being intelligent. One would be reluctant to describe most pre-Cunningham modern dance as “brainy.” (To be sure, “brainy” is an adjective rarely applied to modern dance before the advent of Cunningham and the Judson era.) In what, I’m not at sure that Graham would have considered that word much of a compliment! Deborah Jowitt recently referred to the Cunningham company’s “high IQ limbs.” It’s difficult to imagine her praising Graham’s dancers in the same way—even though their bodies are just as technically high-powered.

Many of the dancers who have performed with Cunningham first gravitated toward his work (at least in part) because it struck them as “brainy.” Braininess in this context includes—but is hardly limited to—what Denby referred to as verbal forms of intelligence. And Cunningham himself, who danced with Martha Graham between 1939 and 1945, has confessed that one source of his growing dissatisfaction with the world of Graham and early modern dance was its intellectual narrowness and its indifference—if not outright hostility—toward ideas:

It was difficult for me at the time—probably still is—to talk with dancers. Not that I don't like them. They would mainly talk about the way somebody did something: they didn't like this or did like that, it always had to do with personalities. It's like gossip. That's entertaining and I like it too, but I also want to talk about ideas and there wasn't anybody I could talk with, except John (Cage). I couldn't talk with dancers.⁴

He has also acknowledged that

probably a lot of dancers who have worked with me may have wanted to study with me originally because of the ideas.⁵

Especially in the late '60's and early '70's, a number of dancers drifted away from other companies and toward Cunningham precisely because his work struck them (above all) as "intelligent." Albert Reid for example, who danced with Cunningham between '64 and '68, left his previous venue, Alwin Nikolais' company, largely because he found the work so "simpleminded."

The aura of toughminded intelligence that radiated from the Cunningham company in the late '60's was more than a matter of on-stage "attitude." Reportedly, the sort of conversation one overheard in the studio was a heady brew that freely mixed dance-related matters with philosophical aesthetics and terminology drawn from the visual arts. Gus Solomons Jr. held a degree in architecture from M. I. T. Carolyn Brown had been a philosophy major at Columbia. This was a brainy bunch. By contrast, the sort of conversation one overheard in other dance studios of the period sounded more like that of The Brady Bunch.

True enough. But it would be misleading to equate Cunningham's conception of the thinking body with the intellectual "buzz" his dances generate in the form of conversation. The "intelligence" of his movement is, first and foremost, a quality inherent in the movement itself. (Yet Cunningham's mode of bodily intelligence remains comfortable with—rather than suspicious of—the verbal dimension of thought). In an essay about Cunningham and Duchamp, Noel Carroll and Sally Banes provide a beautiful description of the differences between the image of the human mind we derive from both Graham and Cunningham:

Whereas the image of human thought in Graham was heavy, organic, brooding, and

altogether nineteenth century, in Cunningham, it is permutational, correlational, strategic, exact, rarefied, and airy. This is not to say that Cunningham presents a pantomime of the mind, but that he presents the body as intelligent in a specifically contemporary way.⁶

What accounts for these differences? In what ways does the movement of the body serve to generate images of the mind? (After all, it's not as if Cunningham's dancers announce their intelligence by reciting passages from the works of Descartes, Wittgenstein, or Bertrand Russell). Presumably, the difference between "organic" and "brooding" on the one hand and "permutational" or "correlational" on the other is (literally) embodied in two different movement vocabularies.

It's helpful in this regard to examine an observation (a complaint, really) that Simone Forti once made about Cunningham. Forti is a dancer/choreographer whose organic inclinations are fundamentally at odds with Cunningham's. In her Handbook in Motion, she describes her first encounter with Cunningham technique. It was not a happy experience:

I started going to the Merce Cunningham school. I remember watching my teachers, and feeling that I couldn't even perceive what they were doing, let alone do it An important element of the movement seemed to be the arbitrary isolation of the different parts of the body. I recall a statement I made in exasperation one day in the studio. I said that Merce Cunningham was a master of adult, isolated articulation. And that the thing I had to offer was still very close to the holistic and generalized response of infants.⁷

In her own choreography, Forti frequently attempted to emulate the movement patterns of infants and young children. Two of her earliest works, "See-Saw" and "Rollers" (1960) were derived almost entirely from observation of children on teeter-totters and other forms of playground equipment. The goal was to coax the adult bodies of her performers back into movement patterns that children display unselfconsciously.

Note, in the passage quoted above, the contrast Forti establishes between Cunningham's "adult iso-

lated articulation" and the "holistic and generalized response of infants." The word infant derives from the Latin root "infans," which means, literally "unable to speak." Infants are, by definition, pre-verbal; and their movements presumably have not yet been inflected (or infected) by language. Thus Forti's notion of "adult, isolated articulation" takes on a double meaning, linguistic as well as physical.

Is it purely coincidental that the word "articulate" usually refers to a person's verbal proficiency? And is there a connection between the "adult" isolations of Cunningham's movement and its articulateness? Lewis Hyde, in the course of exploring the etymology of the word articulate (whose root is the Latin "artus") notes

To break an uninterrupted flow of letters into words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters (or the older "articles"), to divide it with spaces, commas, periods, indentations and so on, is to articulate it, to make evident the places where thought itself has joints or points of demarcation.⁸

This emphasis on spaces, interruptions, and joints also help explain why we routinely speak of Cunningham's movement as being "highly articulate." The jointedness of his movement, the attention it calls to the clean flexing and unflexing of the joints, is one key to this articulate clarity. One of the first works that fully exhibited what we now think of as "the Cunningham body" was his "Untitled Solo," choreographed in 1953 (the same year Cunningham founded his company). Here Cunningham's head, arms, and legs appeared so oblivious to one another that they could have been grafted together from three different bodies, moving at three different speeds. Indeed, "the Cunningham body" often looks as if it has been assembled by a practitioner of cubist collage. And its great clarity of articulation derives in part from the way its allegro passages emphasize the sheer jointedness of the body.

What Banes and Carroll call the "permutational" and "correlational" image of the mind embodied in Cunningham's movement is reflected in the way his choreography dissects the body, assembling and re-assembling it in a manner that corresponds to the analytical nature of verbally-informed intelligence. Taking another hint from Simone Forti's quote, we can go a step further by exploring the contrast between linguistically-based articulation (a "thoroughly adult" activity) and the "holistic and generalized response of

infants".

Needless to say, a great deal of sophisticated art (including Forti's) illustrates Baudelaire's maxim that creativity is "childhood recaptured at will." The return to innocence—the attempt to see the world once again through the eyes of the child—is a time-honored modernist quest. But the art of a choreographer like Cunningham moves in the opposite direction, toward a distinctively "adult" conception of intelligence. This is evident not only in the "articulate" nature of the Cunningham body, but in its upright orientation as well. Unlike the infant—who neither talks nor walks—the Cunningham dancer is both articulate and squarely planted on both feet.

Indeed, nothing marks Cunningham's break with Graham and early modern dance quite so dramatically as the emphasis his choreography places on upright posture and the prominence it assigns to the dancer's head. Reviewing Cunningham's very first solo concert in New York in 1944, Edwin Denby noted that

his instep and his knees are extraordinarily elastic and quick; his steps, runs, knee bends and leaps are brilliant in lightness and speed. His torso can turn on its vertical axis with great sensitivity; his shoulders are held lightly free and his head poises intelligently. The arms are light and long, they float.⁹

Lightness. Uprightness. The head poised "intelligently." Not the sort of qualities one associates with the typical Graham dancer (certainly not in the 1940s...). But Cunningham's verticality, the importance his technique places on the back rather than the torso, the speed and complexity of his footwork—these are more than just knee-jerk repudiations of that "love-affair-with-the-floor" which virtually defined modern dance at the time. Graham emphasized the tension between spine and pelvis; but Cunningham emphasizes the verticality of the spine. In fact, his dancers often maintain their verticality even when they lean against one another. That is: they tend to tilt without bending at the waist.

In a 1996 interview, Cunningham told of a remarkable encounter with Helen Keller. The year was 1941. The place was Martha Graham's studio, where Cunningham—then a member of Graham's company—was immersed in her afternoon class. This is what he remembered:

Copeland

At the end of the class, Miss Keller apparently asked if she could touch a dancer. Miss Graham asked me to stand at the barre. Miss Keller and her companion came to my side. I was facing the barre, could not see her, but felt the two hands around my waist, like bird wings, so soft. I began to do small jumps. Her fingers, still around my waist, moved slightly as though fluttering. I stopped, and was able to understand what she said to her companion. 'So light, like the mind.'¹⁰

There's something remarkably poignant about Helen Keller— whose tactile sense was, no doubt, highly evolved— analogizing Cunningham's verticality and lightness to the workings of the mind. The "upward" journey from body to mind is the traditional path of Freudian sublimation. In Cunningham's choreography, we find an art firmly rooted in the body which nevertheless celebrates (rather than vilifies) the analytical propensities of the mind.

We're now in a position to forge a conceptual link between Cunningham's upright posture and theories about the development of human intelligence. Rudolf Arnheim has argued that modern dance—or at least the tradition that culminates in the work of Graham—implies an evolutionary regression. He once spoke of

the modern dancer's assertion that movements should issue from the center of the body, the torso...If one asks observers to compare movements issuing from the head or limbs with those springing from the torso, they describe the former as conveying intellectual, conscious action whereas the latter suggest nonconscious, largely emotional behavior...¹¹

He then poses the following question:

Does this mean then, that in the (modern) dance the conception of man is reduced to a biologically lower, precerebral stage? The dancer seems to be faced with the dilemma that functionally the highest, specifically human powers of the nervous system control the organism from the head, while the visible structure of the body suggests as

the center an area that typically produces non-reflective action, such as in fear, sex, or the lazy stretching of the muscles...On this plane, the phylogenetically late developments of the organism lose weight...¹²

Viewed in this light, Cunningham's balletic verticality takes modern dance in a very different direction—one that re-affirms our evolutionary mandate (which is to say, our upright posture). Verticality of course, also serves to distinguish "adult, isolated articulation" from "the holistic and generalized response of infants." Uprightness in fact, helps to establish an essential division between nature and culture. In an essay titled "The Vertical: The Fundamental Principle of Classic Dance," the Russian balletomane A.K. Volinsky wrote:

With the vertical begins the history of human culture and the gradual conquest of heaven and earth...Standing upright is an act of the spirit that overcomes the natural state and raises man above nature.¹³

Of course one can adopt an upright posture without automatically availing oneself of the intellectual and perceptual advances that such posture makes possible. (Otherwise, the average ballet would automatically exude a different sort of bodily intelligence than do more earth-bound forms of modern dance. Clearly, that's not the case. Possessing such potential and actually utilizing it are two very different things.) Still, the contrast between Cunningham and Graham couldn't be greater in this regard. Cunningham technique pays scant attention to the sort of "floor work" that figures so prominently in a daily Graham class. In fact, Cunningham once admitted that:

I start from a standing position because that's mostly the way we move. We don't really move sitting down much...¹⁴

In other words, Cunningham's movement is based (to a much greater extent than traditional modern dance) on who we are as a species, on where we stand (literally!) in relation to the rest of the animal kingdom. One is reminded of the way Voltaire responded to Rousseau's ideas about the superiority of nature and "natural man" in his Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men.