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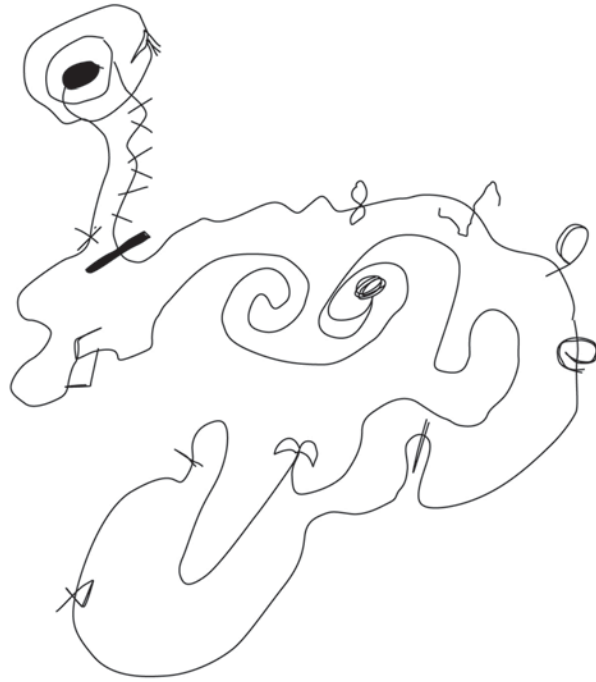
Making Plans: The Notations of Merce Cunningham and Architectural Drawing

Throughout Merce Cunningham's career, dance notation served as an important generator of choreographic ideas. Cunningham used notation to consider a vast range of issues: from groupings of dancers, to bodily positions, to movement across the stage. Rather than codify this practice into a rigid, repeated system, his notations constantly evolved: as if new ways of drawing were an important precursor to new ways of dancing. The paper considers the implications of Cunningham's dance notation, and specifically his use of plan view, for the way we think about the plan in architecture. The work is based on research with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company Choreographic records at the Jerome Robbins Performing Arts Library in New York City where the author redrew several hundred examples of Cunningham's notations from his choreographic notebooks. Where dance notation is often used as a documentary tool to maintain a completed work into the future, Cunningham saw his "paper work" as a form of personal note-taking projecting possibilities for as yet unmade dance-works. The notations were not destined to be read or interpreted by others, but rather served as a kind of heuristic for the creation of movement, a tool that Cunningham used to set tasks for his dancers. This made them markedly different from the musical scores of John Cage -- Cunningham's collaborative partner - which functioned as latent texts whose direct interpretation by performers would activate and open their potentials. Cunningham guarded his notations to himself and dismissed their value when the resulting dance proved uninteresting or impossible: bodies often pushing against their own limits when confronted by the notational combinations. Cunningham saw the space between his notations and the final work as a necessary and useful distance of negotiation and possibility, such that the notes needed to be confronted with the physical, material and tectonic work of bodies in the rehearsal room.

The paper introduces the different types of drawing that Cunningham used in his choreographic notes with a brief summary of the results of the archival work in New York. Looking more specifically at the use of plan view drawings, the paper considers the role that chance operations played in the development of these drawings and the ways in which these notations organized possibilities of position, sequence, speed and groupings within a variously delimited or defined spatial field. Thinking about Cunningham's notes in relation to architectural plans leads to a productive and specific interrogation of architectural drawing itself: in terms of drawing's relationship to time and space, agency and authorship, and drawing's mediating role in the generation of the "work" of architecture. That the built-work of architecture is generally

understood to be radically different from the dance-work of choreography makes Cunningham's notes and their implications for architectural drawing even more intriguing: a potential reconsideration of the projective process that links thought to building through the making of plans.

Sony Devabhaktuni teaches architecture at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). With Raffael Baur and Patricia Guaita from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, he founded the Building Cultures/Open City Research Platform to investigate local construction techniques and spatial knowledge; for the past four years they have tested open-ended design strategies on a construction at the Open City in Ritoque, Chile working with Pr. David Jolly Monge from the School of Architecture and Design in Valparaiso. With John Lin at HKU, he is currently studying informal alterations to vernacular houses in three Chinese villages. His research on Merce Cunningham was supported by a grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts.



Undated drawing from notes for "Sixteen Dances for Solist & Company of Three"; 1951: redrawn after Merce Cunningham