In the last year I have seen the word “choreography” used in our local newspaper, the Los Angeles Times, to describe troop movements in the war in Iraq, the motions of dog whisperer Cesar Millan, the management of discussion at board meetings, and even the coordination of traffic lights for commuter flow – all these applications of the term in addition to the patterning of movement observed in a dance. This variety of usages suggests that choreography has come to refer to a plan or orchestration of bodies in motion. And in this refined definition, the plan is distinguished from its implementation and from the skills necessary for its execution. Choreography would seem to apply to the structuring of movement in highly diverse occasions, yet always where some kind of order is desired to regulate that movement.

At the same time that the term is proliferating beyond the context of dance, it is also being ignored or suppressed within certain dance events. In their first seasons, two recent and highly popular TV shows that feature dance, So You Think You Can Dance and Dancing With the Stars, consistently refrained from addressing the creative process of selecting and sequencing the movement that was performed. Although the young artists who auditioned for So You Think You Can Dance devised their own original dance in order to be eligible, once they were accepted onto the show, they were placed in technique classes for weeks and judged, not on the basis of their compositional skills, but instead on their abilities to “take class” – that is, to faithfully copy what another body was doing and then perform that movement fully. Over subsequent seasons, more emphasis has been placed on the choreographers who provide the audition pieces, however, their work is championed as exemplary of a particular tradition of dancing – jive, contemporary, or jazz, among others – and the emphasis of the competition has remained on the execution of that tradition. Similarly, the “trainer-partners” on Dancing With the Stars who make up the
routines that make the stars look good in performance are only credited with being excellent dancers and partners. Why ignore or suppress their labor? Both programs seem to promote a pure or natural performance, achieved by hard work at disciplining the body but not at crafting its motions. Is this a function of their reluctance to imagine that one’s identity can be and is shaped through the moves one makes? Or does it follow from the distinctions to which they may be conforming between dance as “art,” emphasizing composition and creativity, and dance as “social” or “popular” pastime?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers two definitions for the word “choreography”: the first, a simple assertion, informs us that choreography is “the art of dancing”; and the second, marked as an obsolete usage, refers to choreography as “the art of writing dances on paper.” The first definition identifies all aspects of dance as choreographic, whether the process of teaching someone how to dance, the act of learning to dance, the event of performing a dance, or the labor of creating a dance. The second definition, used perhaps for the last time by Rudolph Laban in his *Choreutics* (1966), specifies choreographers as those who endeavor to notate the spatial and rhythmic properties of movement through the use of abstract symbols. Neither definition seems to convey its current usage as the act of arranging patterns of movement.

This chapter traces the various meanings and usages of choreography since its first widespread implementation in the early eighteenth century. It examines how the practice of choreography, just as in the TV shows’ or newspaper’s versions of the term, has served to validate some forms of dancing while excluding others. In its eighteenth century meaning as the art of notating dances, choreography provided the basis upon which the separation of making, performing, and learning dance took place. It likewise set forth criteria for technical skill and virtuosity in dancing. And it established the means through which dances from around the world could be categorized. Falling out of use in the nineteenth century, choreography reemerged in the early twentieth century as the process of individual expression through movement. Since that time the notion of choreography has been challenged, expanded and transformed, its meanings proliferating even as it continues to instantiate typologies of dance with distinctive artistic and social merit.

The word “choreography” derives from two Greek words, *choreia*, the synthesis of dance, rhythm, and vocal harmony manifest in the Greek chorus; and *graph*, the act of writing.¹ The first uses of the term, however, are intertwined with two other Greek roots, *orches*, the place
between the stage and the audience where the chorus performed, and chora, a more general notion of space, sometimes used in reference to a countryside or region. Where choreia describes a process of integrating movement, rhythm, and voice, both orches and chora name places. Four of the earliest efforts to notate dances draw upon these three Greek roots: Thoinot Arbeau’s treatise on dancing, sword play, and drumming, Orchésographie (1589); Raoul Auger Feuillet’s Chorégraphie (1700); Weaver’s translation of Feuillet, Orchesography (1706); and John Essex’s application of Feuillet’s system to English country dances, For the Further Improvement of Dancing, A Treatise of Choreography (1710).

Both orches and choreia had long been associated with dance. The Dutch classicist Johannes Meursius, who inventoried every reference to dance in ancient Greek texts, published his findings under the title Orchestra in 1618. Choreography itself, however, has had a shorter life in the English language. It was first used at the end of the eighteenth century to refer back to the practice of notating dances, instigated at the beginning of that century when Feuillet’s Chorégraphie was first translated by Weaver. In contrast, choreography, Essex’s subtitle for his adaptation of Feuillet notation, signaled his effort to neologize a new English word, or else to indicate a connection between the newly invented notation and the well-known sub-discipline of geography known as choreography. Concentrating on the study of a region or landscape, choreography developed intensively in England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a practice of mapping and also describing and analyzing a locale’s terrain and inhabitants. Perhaps Essex, who would have known this meaning of the term, hoped to suggest an analogy between traditional choreographies and his notation which focused on the routes taken by dancers in a variety of line dances performed by multiple couples.

Although we cannot know what motivated each of the authors to name their treatises as they did, the proliferation of titles, all referencing the same project, signals a complex relationship between process and place, a relationship that was then translated into a written document. Choreography thus began its life as the act of reconciling movement, place, and printed symbol. The project of translating from moving bodies to words and symbols was embraced by all these authors as both imminently achievable and a hallmark of progress. They saw no opposition between the written and the live, nor did they lament the potential loss of some aspect of movement that might not be documentable. (This sentimental notion of documentation emerges more in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.) Instead, the first choreographers presumed that their contributions to documenting
dance would better preserve it for subsequent generations and, in addition, improve the status of dance. What exactly did they document and how did their efforts work to construct a relationship between movement and its surroundings?

Inventories and taxonomies

Sometime in the 1670s, Louis XIV ordered principal Dancing Master Pierre Beauchamps to “discover the means of making the art of dance comprehensible on paper.” According to Beauchamps he set about to apply “himself to shaping and disposing characters and notes in the form of tablature in order to represent the steps of the dances and ballets performed before the king and at the Opera” in such a way that the dances could be learned “without need of personal instruction.” Along with Beauchamps’s system, at least three other distinctive notation systems emerged in response to Louis’s mandate, yet Feuillet’s collection from 1700 utilizing Beauchamps’ system predominated, becoming so popular that new collections of dances in notated form were distributed annually through the 1730s, and Feuillet notation, as it came to be called, was widely adopted in England and throughout northern Europe.

These collections of notated dances documented a small number of theatrical dances, mostly solos, as well as a variety of dances to be taught and then performed at aristocratic balls and other social gatherings. They fortified teachers with new material with which to instruct their students and alerted practitioners to some of the latest fashions in the art of dancing. They did not thoroughly detail dancing on any of the various stages, whether the elite, licensed productions of the Opera or the experiments with pantomime at the fair theaters. Nor did they document the kind of aesthetic traffic in styles and vocabularies proliferated by itinerant companies of dancers who traveled back and forth across the continent and to England. Nonetheless, this regularization of dances so that they might travel and be reproduced “without the aid of personal instruction” profoundly influenced both the conceptualization of dancing and the categorization of diverse dances.

Feuillet’s system first posited the existence of a small number of essential elements from which dancing was composed: “Positions, Steps, Sinkings, Risings, Springings, Capers, Fallings, Slidings, Turnings of the Body, Cadence or Time, Figures, etc.” The system then integrated these elements into a single planimetric representation of the dancing body that highlighted its directionality, the path it took through space,
Figure 1.1 This excerpt from a “Balet for Nine Dancers,” collected in Raoul Auger Feuillet’s *Recueil de Danse* (1703) shows the symmetrical and interweaving patterns of dancers’ floorpaths as they progress across the room. Courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles, Performing Arts Special Collections Library.
and the motions of the feet and legs. Sinking, rising and springing were measured in terms of the body's vertical positioning, whereas sliding and turning marked its horizontal progress through space. A single line notating the dancer's path was embellished on either side by characters indicating the position and action of the feet – the direction in which they extend, their height, on the ground, on half point, or jumping in the air, and their interactivity in bearing, paralleling, or turning. The line marking the body's path through space also referenced the vertical placement of the body since it suggested the basis for one leg or the other to gesticulate on either side of a continuous and stable skeletal structure. Thus the graphing of motion summoned the body into and located it within a geometrically defined grid stipulating both horizontal and vertical positionings.  

Prior efforts at documenting dances did not systematize movement in this way. Instead, they listed the sequence of steps with occasional references to spatial path and facings for each dancer. For example, Italian Dancing Master Fabritio Caroso's explanation of the Laura Suave (Gentle Lady) in 1581 included this description:

the gentleman does a symmetrical variation . . . [of] two limping hops with the left foot raised and the right limping, two fast half Reverences . . . two falling jumps, one foot under with the left and a cadence with the left forward; repeat beginning with the right. The lady does two doubles in French style . . . two double scurrying sequences together, turning first to the left and then to the right in the shape of an S; and approaching each other, they take customary hands.

The "reverences," "falling jumps," and "doubles" referred to here were standard steps in the sixteenth century court dance repertoire. A major innovation of Dancing Master Thoinot Arbeau, who first made the effort to notate these dances in 1589, consisted in substituting abbreviations for the names of the steps.

Arbeau's Oechesography was organized around a dialogue between instructor and student who, together, produce the classifications and descriptions of specific dances. Although the ostensible aim of the manuscript was to record dances so that "posterity" would not "remain ignorant of all these new dances," Arbeau could not escape entirely from the physical interactivity of dancing and learning to dance. As his eager student Capriol sought guidance in one dance after another, asking questions about one aspect of the movement and then another, Arbeau was prompted to reveal how the dances were
each related one to another, and hence, to specify an order in which to learn them. For each dance Arbeau recounted a brief history and a general sense of the function and feeling of the dance, whether solemn, lively, sedate, or gay. He then identified a basic set of steps and placed these alongside the musical accompaniment in order to indicate their sequence and timing. He also accompanied this notation with a narrative of the experience of performing each particular dance that indicated changes in direction from one step to the next, engagement with one’s partner, and a suggested path for the dancers to take through the room.

For example, in describing La Volta Arbeau began by asking Capriol to place himself,

hypothetically, facing me with pieds joints. For the first step, make a rather short pied en l'air while springing on to your left foot and at the same time turning your left shoulder towards me. Then take a rather long second step with your right foot, without springing, and in so doing, turn you back to me.\textsuperscript{11}

Arbeau continued his narration by examining the relationship of the partners in this dance that is full of turns:

he who dances the lavolta must regard himself as the centre of a circle and draw the damsels as near to him as possible when he wishes to turn . . . To bring her nearer to you proceed as follows: 

Make your révéverance . . . and before you begin turning take a few steps around the room, by way of preparation . . . When you wish to turn release the damsels's left hand and throw your left arm around her, grasping and holding her firmly by the waist above the right hip with your left hand. At the same moment place your right hand below her busk to help her to leap when you push her forward with your left thigh. She, for her part, will place her right hand on your back or collar and her left hand on her thigh to hold her petticoat and dress in place, lest the swirling air should catch them and reveal her chemise or bare thigh.\textsuperscript{12}

Although La Volta required far more detailed descriptions of the partnering than many of the other dances, Arbeau’s narrative nonetheless presents the categories that he found it necessary to discuss in order to comprehensively account for any dance: the steps, their size, their timing and sequence (indicated through their placement alongside the musical notation), the location of the dancers in space, their protocols
DE THOINOT ARBEAU.

zardez & interessez.Le vous en ay deja dit mon opinion.

Capriol.

Ce vertigues & tornoimentos de cerveau me faschoiroi.

Arbeau.

Dancez donc quelque autte torre de dance. Ou il vous dirair, cette cy à la gaulche, recommencez une autre fois de la
dancer à la main droitië, & par ainsi redonneriez à la secunde
tois, ce que vous aurez torné à la premiere.

Air d'une volte. Mouvements que les danseurs doivent faire en dansant la volte.

Petit pas en sautant sur le gaulche, pour faire
pied en l'air droitië.

Plus grand pas du droitië.

Saut majeur.

Posture en pieds joingtás.

Petit pas en sautant sur le gaulche, pour faire
pied en l'air droitië.

Plus grand pas du droitië.

Saut majeur.

Posture en pieds joingtás.

Petit pas en sautant sur le gaulche, pour faire
pied en l'air droitië.

Plus grand pas du droitië.

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Posture en pieds joingtás.

Petit pas en sautant sur le gaulche, pour faire
pied en l'air droitië.

Plus grand pas du droitië.

Saut majeur.

Posture en pieds joingtás.
of touch, and in some cases, the dancers’ experience of it. (In the case of La Volta, its performance frequently made one quite dizzy.)

Feuillet’s system differed markedly from these earlier attempts to record dances because it broke steps, such as a skip, a turn, or a triplet, down into constituent parts, posited as universal actions. Whereas the “reverance” or “double” in Caroso’s description named a step that could be sequenced in different orders or performed at different speeds, the “sinking,” “rising,” and “springing” actions in Feuillet notation denoted properties or characteristics of a given step. In addition to these basic actions, movements that served as adornments, such as beats, circulars, or changes of orientation, were identified as such and could be appended to different steps. The result was a system that suggested an infinitely variable compendium of possibilities. Arbeau had anticipated these new foundational principles by specifying some of the positions to which the body should return between movements, however Feuillet’s analysis detailed an entirely new level of specificity, all organized around horizontal and vertical axes. Because these characteristics were imbued with universal status as actions occurring within vertical or horizontal dimensions of space, they served as tools for analyzing any and all dances.

Feuillet notation thus conformed to research being conducted in other fields of inquiry within the Royal academies, each of which was being asked to establish the basic precepts and norms of its discipline. For example, botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort created one of the first universal systems of plant classification in 1694 based on the shape of a plant’s flower. Like Tournefort’s taxonomy, Feuillet notation asserted that a small number of seemingly neutral motions or aspects of the body subtended all dance movements. These could be varied and recombined in an infinite number of ways to produce any and all dances. To secure the neutrality of these motions, Feuillet notation used symbols that appeared to reference basic and universal aspects of the body such as its upright carriage and the support of that carriage provided by two semi-autonomous feet. The symbols used in Feuillet notation also signified underlying principles of movement that referred only to its direction, timing, and the spatial orientation of the body performing it. Movement was reduced to a set of possibilities to elevate and lower, to trace a semi-circle or line, etc.

Implementing these geometric laws of movement, the cultural specificities of particular dances were smoothed out or erased. As Jean Noël Laurenti explains:

The French dancing masters had to unify a vocabulary of steps with diverse origins, from the provinces or from abroad: to
Figure 1.3 In this image from Kellom Tomlinson’s collection of notated dances, the solitary male figure stands, secure and self-possessed, at the center of space with a variety of options for moving all laid out around him.

Kellom Tomlinson. *The art of dancing explained by reading and figures: whereby the manner of performing the steps is made easy by a new and familiar method; being the original work first design’d in the year 1724, and now published by Kellom Tomlinson, dancing master*. London. The second edition. 1744. Book 1, plate III

Courtesy of The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles
discover what this vast repertoire had in common, it was necessary to first distinguish all the constituent parts. This would permit the use of the same signs (in different sequence of course) to note down a minuet or passeped, originally from the west of France, as well as a gavot or a rigadoon, imported from the southeast, or a “Spanish-style” sarabande or chaconne.\textsuperscript{19}

Such a system allowed instructors to master various regional styles and assimilate them into a single repertoire. What had been a region’s indigenous production was transformed into stylistic features of a single repertoire that set one dance apart from another. Cultural and historical specificities of particular dances were homogenized by a system that implemented absolute conceptions of space and of time. Perhaps for the first time, dance was asserted to be a universal language.

Not only did Feuillet notation propose clear underlying principles that governed each movement, but it also taught the body a new locatedness in space. As part of the instructions for learning to read the notation, Feuillet discussed the relationship of the aspiring dancer to the page on which the notation was printed, even detailing how to hold the book while learning the dance:

\begin{quote}
You must observe always to hold the upper end of the Book against the upper end of the Room, and whether the Dance have any Turning in it or not, you must carefully avoid removing the Book from the Situation above demonstrated . . . For Example, in a quarter Turn to the Right, you must put your left Hand to the farther part of the Book, and your Right to the nearest. Your Hands being thus prepared, in turning your quarter Turn, bring your left Hand in to you, whilst your right removes from you; so that both Hands will by this means be equally advanc’d before you, holding the Book by the same places before mention’d, and you will find, that in turning a quarter round, the Book will still remain in its former Situation.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

These instructions suggest that the body’s ability to remain oriented with respect to the fixed horizontal planes of floor and paper could not be assumed. In order to keep the page aligned with the front of the room, Feuillet explained to the reader holding the notation how to adjust the hands in order to perform a quarter turn. He found it necessary to provide these meticulous instructions so that dancers could maintain a kind of “true north” even as their bodies wound along a circuitous path.\textsuperscript{21}
Feuillet notation thus taught dancers to maintain a single directional orientation and also to cultivate a bird’s eye view of their own path while at the same time, regularizing each step. The effect of Feuillet’s notation on various dance forms was not unlike that of Tournefort’s and subsequently Linnaeus’s taxonomies for classifying the world of plants. Paul Carter argues that Linnaeus’s taxonomic system extracted each object of scrutiny from its ecology, its historical and geographical surroundings. In this process it loses all power to signify beyond itself, to suggest lines of development or the subtler influences of climate, ground and aspect. In short, its ecology, its existence in a given, living space is lost in the moment of scientific discovery.22

Feuillet’s notation similarly erased the locality of dance steps in order to place all dancing on the plane of pure geometry where each dance’s specificities could be compared and evaluated. Performing this evaluation, dancers disciplined by the notation enjoyed a consolidated and singular perspective onto the world from which to track their own progress in relation to others.

This kind of conceptualization of a pure space, capable of being organized only according to abstract and geometric principles, intimated a profound reorganization of corporeality. It not only supported the notion of a centrality that extends itself outwards in space towards a periphery, but it also reinforced a bodily experience of having a center that extends into and moves through an unmarked space.23 The act of moving through such a pure space was characterized as value-free, and any labor entailed in traversing this space went unregistered. Within such a space, neutral bodily features and motions, such as those identified in Feuillet notation, operated to confirm the existence of an absolute set of laws to which all bodies should conform. The notation bound the dancing to the ground on which it occurred, not to its indigenous location, but rather to an abstract and unmarked ground.

Traveling and disseminating

Feuillet’s system migrated to England with remarkable alacrity. At the encouragement of his patron, the renowned dancer and Court Dancing Master Mr. Isaac, Weaver began to study and apply Feuillet’s system soon after it was published. As early as 1703 Weaver began notation Isaac’s dances, and followed his translation of Feuillet with a collection
Figure 1.4 In this imaginary visit by Louis XIV to the Royal Academy of Science, he seems to be surveying the homologous investigations of structure evident in the skeleton hanging on the wall, the globe positioned at his feet, and even the garden seen through the window.


Courtesy of University of California, Los Angeles, Special Collections Library
of Isaac’s work published in the same year. Several translations and amended versions of Feuiller’s system appeared soon thereafter: P. Siris in 1706; John Essex, in 1710; and E. Pemberton in 1711. All these publications were made possible through the donations of subscribers who patronized the Dancing Masters, and their numbers grew consistently from Weaver’s translation which listed thirty-one contributors to Tomlinson’s The Art of Dancing (1735) which boasted 169 supporters. Like their French counterparts, a substantial number of English Dancing Masters worked with notation and found it useful for transmitting the latest dances and consolidating an English style.

As the English Dancing Masters clearly apprehended, the advantages of the system seemed to lie not only in its capacity to collect and store diverse dances, but also to record and transport new ones. It enabled the dissemination of the latest and most fashionable urban and court innovations, while at the same time securing the value of those who could read and teach the collections. Especially valuable for provincial instructors, these collections set forth a basic rubric for the teaching of dance – a set of fundamental positions and steps for the student to practice. Like books of fashion plates depicting the latest sartorial inventions, they also celebrated the most recent vogue in dancing. This motion from the urban centers to the periphery helped to consolidate recent efforts across the continent to build the nation state. Securing the dominance of urban over rural aesthetics, it reinforced class-based hierarchies while at the same time transforming regional distinctiveness into genre or style.

During Arbeau’s time, notation was construed as preserving dances and guiding instruction, but dancing still required personal interaction. As documented in Arbeau’s dialogue with his eager student, knowledge about dancing was co-produced by the two people who cogitated on a given subject. Among the upper classes, even dancing itself was largely envisioned as a practice of incurring mutual indebtedness. Whether a slow bassadanza, or a livelier ballet, all dances involved a careful self-presentation, an assessment of others, and a judicious intermingling of performers. Reigning the body in, and then calibrating its position and distance in relation to others, each dancer should evidence the ability continually to readjust one’s location in relation to all the other bodies moving through the space. Courtiers deciphered the proximity between bodies, how close someone was sitting or standing to someone else, as a sign of their relative status and as an appropriate performance of gendered identity.

In this ongoing flux of bodies mutually readjusting and reassessing their relationships to one another based on each body’s most recent
movements, pathways through the space were not defined against a stable and constant plane. Instead, the room itself had to be read and reread based on the progress of each dancer. Only through this ability to self-accommodate to a changing spatial flux could dancers participate effectively in the civil intercourse of dancing, scrutinizing one another's bearing and comportment. As Arbeau described it, dance was a form of mute rhetoric that allowed dancers to persuade viewers of their nobility, spiritedness, modesty, and grace. Far from being ornamental, their decorousness offered evidence of their morality. In this way dancing seamlessly attached to quotidian interaction as an extension of the ongoing project of fashioning oneself in manner and measure, while at the same time, scanning others for any lapses or ruptures in their composure. Caroso identified this back and forth display of identity as a "pedologue," or foot conversation.\textsuperscript{28}

Mark Franko argues that in its eloquence, the dancing body served as a means of acquiring both social and political capital.\textsuperscript{29} As all bodies continually recalibrated their manner and measure in response to one another, they built up a framework of mutual indebtedness. Sir Thomas Elyot, remarking on the advantages of learning to dance as part of the education necessary to govern responsibly, put it this way: "In every of the said dances, there was a concinnity (fitness) of moving the foot and body, expressing some pleasant and profitable affects or motions of the mind."\textsuperscript{30} Needing both to profit and to please, dancers performed proof of their goodness that yielded the profit of power over others.\textsuperscript{31} As men asserted their fierce courage and women displayed mild and timorous meekness, the dance bound each couple into a felicitous and morally upright union. Both within and among all couples, the ongoing indebtedness to one another augmented with each successive movement performed. Arbeau's inventory of the means through which this negotiation of the civil took place thus constituted a certification of that accumulation and the resulting moral wealth of its practitioners. Dancing served as a tool for upward mobility, and eager students paid for lessons to improve their grace, agility, and mannerly comportment. Skill at dancing demonstrated men's worthiness as potential administrators and governors and women's suitability as their spouses.\textsuperscript{32}

With the introduction of Feuillet notation, it became possible for dancers to participate in an entirely new economy, one in which they purchased the collections of dances and then modeled the latest fashion. Rather than a mutual indebtedness, incurred through the "pedologue" performed in every dance, dancing became a display of virtuosity and social standing, but also a sign of access to novelty. Male and female dancers no longer embodied the moral attributes appropriate to their
distinctive roles in society as in Elyot's time. Instead, the notation cast male and female bodies onto the same plane where their performances differed in amount or degree but not in essence. The strength displayed by the male dancer in the height of his jumps or the number of beats and the delicacy evident in the female dancer's turns did not give proof of their moral character, but rather demonstrated their facility at executing their roles.

Feuillet notation empowered "choreographers," those with the ability to read and write the dances, to participate centrally in the circulation and sale of dances to students eager to master the latest trends in physical accomplishment. Dances became authored for the first time. They moved from city to country across regional and national boundaries, entering a new economy of self-fashioning based on hierarchies of sophistication, urbanity, and inventiveness. Like the sphere of exchange shared by botanists who had begun to inventory and evaluate the world's plants based on a shared system of taxonomic naming and classification, the ephemeral dance could be collected and sold, secured by the permanence of its representation in symbols.33

Dance's new economy was based in the same assumptions of value and worth that launched the new national economy based on the issuing of bank notes, a kind of paper money. John Law, who proposed the adoption of paper money in 1709, argued that coinage or goods, much like Arbeau's steps, could become devalued according to demand and availability. Paper money, in contrast, secured a universal system of constants that could effectively respond to the urgent vicissitudes of a world trade with a vastly expanded credit market. Law advocated issuing paper money that was secured and backed by land, the only absolute constant whose value never decreased:

The Paper Money Propos'd is equal to its self; but to continue equal to such a Quantity of any other Goods, is to have a Quality that no Goods can have: For that depends on the Changes in these other Goods. It has a better and more certain Value than Silver Money, and all the other Qualities necessary in Money in a much greater Degree, with other Qualities that Silver has not, and is more capable of being made Money than any thing yet known. Land is what is most valuable, and what encreases [sic] in Value more than other Goods; so the Paper Money issued from it, will in all appearance not only keep equal to other Goods, but rise above them.34

Like Feuillet's symbols that could be combined and recombined in innumerable ways, paper money generated whole new systems for
creating wealth in the form of credit and debt. The principles of movement indicated in the symbols, like the land quickly transforming into property, secured the value of movement.

Like the implementation of paper money, the notating of dances could even assist in the colonial expansion from Europe and England into the rest of the world. The fact that dance’s ephemerality had been conquered by notation intimated success in all kinds of colonizing projects, as this excerpt from Soame Jenyns’s poem “The Art of Dancing” written in 1729 suggests:

Long was the Dancing Art unfixed and free;  
Hence lost in Error and Uncertainty;  
No Precepts did it mind, or Rules obey,  
But ev’ry Master taught a different Way:  
Hence, e’re each new-born Dance was fully try’d,  
The lovely Product, ev’n in blooming, dy’d:  
Thro’ various Hands in wild Confusion toss’d,  
Its Steps were alter’d, and its Beauties lost:  
Till Fuillet [sic] at length, Great Name! arose,  
And did the Dance in Characters compose:  
Each lovely Grace by certain Marks he taught,  
And ev’ry Step in lasting Volumes wrote.  
Hence o’er the World this pleasing Art shall spread,  
And ev’ry Dance in ev’ry Clime be read:  
By distant Masters shall each Step be seen,  
Tho’ Mountains rise, and Oceans roar between.  
Hence with her Sister-Arts shall Dancing claim  
An equal Right to Universal Fame,  
And Isaac’s Rigadoon shall last as long  
As Raphael’s Painting, or as Virgil’s Song.35

In Jenyns’s estimation seventeenth century dance had been saturated with uncertainty and confusion because it lacked rules or precepts, and hence, each teacher could interpret it differently. The transformation in form resulting from the person to person transmission of dances compromised or even contaminated their original beauty. Only the invention of Feuillet notation at the beginning of the eighteenth century imbued dance with a composed permanence and newfound clarity, creating a parity with dance’s sister-arts of painting and poetry, and also an opportunity for dances to travel around the world. Notation hardened dance, giving it a masculine status and securing its equal rank within the arts.
In Jenyns's ambitious vision, the fact that dances could now travel to every climate of the world confirmed the triumph of rules and order over undisciplined variation. Notation could likewise introduce the world's dancers to the finest accomplishments of a colonial power, or at least maintain a crucial aesthetic continuity between those living at home and those living in colonies. Perhaps this kind of transportability could also assuage anxiety over the profuse varieties of cultural difference that colonists encountered and the impact that such difference might have on British culture.

The earliest British colonists in the New World arrived on the East Coast of North America in the same decade that Arbeau was writing his treatise. In Jamestown and subsequently in Plymouth, the British observed native dances and also indigenous practices of documenting their history. Algonquians, for example, typically archived negotiations and treaties through the beading of wampum belts and the decorating of hides. Edward Winslow of Plymouth noted yet another practice among the Wampanoag for preserving a memory of events which he described in these terms:

Instead of records and chronicles, they take this course. Where any remarkable act is done, in memory of it, either in the place, or by some pathway near adjoining, they make a round hole in the ground, about a foot deep, and as much over, which when others passing by behold, they inquire the cause and occasion of the same, which being once known, they are careful to acquaint all men, as occasion serveth, therewith; and lest such holes should be filled or grown up by any accident, as men pass by, they will oft renew the same, by which means many things of great antiquity are fresh in memory. So that as a man travelleth, if he can understand his guide, his journey will be the less tedious, by reasons of the many historical discourses will be related unto him.36

Winslow's account identified the process of documentation as one that involved distinguishing events that were "remarkable," commemorating these events by marking the site where they occurred, and transmitting a verbal account at that site to those who passed by so that the entire community became a repository and maintenance system for the knowledge.

Not unlike Arbeau's dialogue with his student, the Wampanoags that Winslow observed required the sustained presence of individuals to receive and pass on the information. Their archive was maintained through the physical labor of traveling to the place where history was
made. Events deemed of historical worth could not be separated from the land on which they were enacted. Knowledge was passed along generationally through the labor of all the individuals who assisted in witnessing the telling of the past.

By the time Feuilllet notation recorded dances on paper, native lands and practices of historical preservation had been disrupted or eradicated by colonial expansion. In the way that it was constructed, the notation made evident how this colonization could be so successful. By breaking steps down into component parts, and specifying how each of these parts should be performed, the notation stipulated foundational units out of which all movement was derived and clear guidelines regarding the execution of all steps. These kinds of guidelines assisted those who followed Winslow to the New World by confirming the existence of standards for comportment and exchange. Practicing a dance from the notation, the dancer enacted a connection between step and written symbols that objectified the movement so that even as one was performing the step one was aware of its proper features. The notation thereby took the dancing out of the body, and away from body-to-body contact, and placed it in circulation as a codified symbolic system.37

Although a satiric exaggeration of the practice of learning and teaching from notation, a letter in The Tatler from 1709 vividly conveyed this connection between symbol and step. In it the author claimed to have been suddenly startled awake by a convulsive sound, repeated several times. Conferring with the Landlady and then heading up the stairs, he peeked in the keyhole,

and there I saw a well-made Man look with great Attention on a Book, and on a sudden jump into the Air so high, that his Head almost touch’d the Sieling. He came down safe on his Right Foot, and again flew up alighting on his Left; then look’d again at his Book, and holding out his Right Leg, put it into such a quivering Motion, that I thought he would have shak’d it off. He us’d the Left after the same Manner, when on a sudden, to my great Surprize, he stoop’d himself incredibly low, and turn’d gently on his Toes. After this circular Motion, he continu’d bent in that humble Posture for some Time, looking on his Book. After this, he recover’d himself with a sudden Spring, and flew round the Room in all the Violence and Disorder imaginable, till he made a full Pause for Want of Breath.38

Knocking on the door, he was greeted by the young man who obligingly responded to his request to see the book. However, when the author
asked that it be explained to him, the dancer replied, “It was one he
study’d with great Application; but it was his Profession to teach it,
and could not communicate his Knowledge without a Consideration.”
He went on to explain, “That now, articulate Motions, as well as
Sounds, were express’d by proper Characters; and that there is nothing
so common, as to communicate a Dance by a Letter.”

Although a very small number of individuals mastered the system,
those who could read and write it probably achieved considerable
facility at translating the dance from page to motion. Perhaps they
even devised new dances through writing them down, able to rehearse
the sequences in their imagination. As The Tatler story depicts the
process, the choreographer studied the page briefly and then tore into
violent and disordered motion, leaping around the room. The symbols,
however, confirmed that there was a logic and order to his motions.
What is more, they consolidated a livelihood in the form of a precious
source of knowledge that could be shared only by agreement and for
a price.

Like the new system of money, Feuillet’s symbols constructed a sign
that authenticated the existence of the step. In so doing, the symbols
also produced the potential for an excess to be borrowed, and increased
or lost. Both in dance and in the economy, the new system of symbols
created the possibility for credit. In Arbeau’s time worth was asserted
through the mutually defining actions of the individuals who performed
and watched one another. Now it was amassed through the existence
of a sign that stood in for and certified that worth. Credit, the theoretical
capacity to borrow and expand wealth, and the wild fluctuations in
value and worth that it provoked, became a major preoccupation of
the eighteenth-century English economy. Similarly, in dance, because
the step itself now existed apart from any particular execution of it,
new criteria for excellence were consolidated to evaluate various
enactments of it, and along with these criteria, the very possibility of
superseding them in the exceptional or virtuoso performance. Virtuosity
in dance emerged as the equivalent of financial credit and with it, dance
expanded to include the dazzling, astonishing, and unspeakably
brilliant performance.

Both credit and virtuosity acquired reputations as fickle and
unreliable. Editor of The Spectator Joseph Addison even reported
having a dream of a ballet in which Lady Credit, as the symbol of
credit’s nefarious changeability, played a central role. Surrounded by
phantoms of tyranny, bigotry, atheism, and anarchy, dancing “together
for no other end but to eclipse one another,” Lady Credit faints, the
sacks of money against which she is propped change into hags of air,
and the piles of gold transform into bundles of paper. Yet in the midst of this seeming crisis, amiable phantoms enter, performing measured duets that pair Liberty with Monarchy, and Moderation with Religion, prompting the bags to reswell with guineas. The spectacular performances of the phantoms, working only to “eclipse one another,” highlighted dance’s newfound capacity to acquire wealth, not through the system of mutual indebtedness but through its ability to project a value beyond that of the step itself. Although the measured duets of Liberty and Monarchy might momentarily restore order, the appeal of the virtuoso performance, like the lure of credit, would eventually prevail.

Authorship, narrative, and technique

By the 1740s and 50s, the limits of choreography as a system for documenting dancing were clearly recognized. Although it assisted in consolidating a repertoire of English social dances early in the century, it fell short in preserving the actions of the face and arms, the positioning of dancers in relation to one another, and their interactions. These elements of dance, increasingly evident on the concert stage, began to carry more of the dance’s significance than the footwork and pathways stipulated in the notation. Collections of notated dances stopped appearing in the 1730s, with Tomlinson’s publication, originally organized in 1724, issuing in 1735 as one of the last. Even though Louis de Cahusac featured the system in his essay for the Encyclopédie in 1755, it had long fallen out of use. In 1760 Jean Georges Noverre, composer of a large number of full-length story ballets, railed against Feuillet notation as obsolete and incapable of capturing stage action, particularly facial expressions and groupings of bodies.

Weaver, shortly after translating Feuillet into English, contributed substantially to the obsolescence of choreography by embarking on a series of experiments with pantomime that helped to launch the new genre of the story ballet. His pantomime ballets also inaugurated a new approach to documenting dance – the narrative account of the story and action. Responding to continental comedia del arte productions, seen in London since the 1670s and working alongside a growing number of English artists experimenting with pantomime, Weaver investigated the use of rhetorical gesture in creating danced dialogues that could convey a plot without the aid of spoken or sung text. The fact that these dances were relatively short, appearing as entre actes between acts of a play or between different genres of entertainment, allowed for flexibility in developing the new form, and
these danced vignettes began to be mined intensively for the innovations they could produce.

Weaver’s scenario for *The Loves of Mars and Venus* (1717) made evident the discrepancies between Feuillet’s capacity to document dance and the kind of action increasingly seen on the stage. It also demonstrated the relative lack of familiarity at reading this new action that Weaver assumed on the part of his viewers. Following its production at Drury Lane, Weaver published a thorough description of the plot and action. Scene Two began as follows:

After a symphony of Flutes, etc. the Scene opens and discovers Venus in her Dressing-Room at her Toilet, attended by the Graces, who are employ’d in dressing her. Cupid lies at her Feet, and one of the Hours waits by. Venus rises, and dances a Passacaille: The Graces joyn her in the same movement as does also the hour. The Dance being ended the Tune changes to a wild rough Air. Venus, Graces, etc. seem in Surprize; and at the Approach of Vulcan, the Graces, and Cupid run off.

Enter to Venus, Vulcan: They perform a Dance together; in which Vulcan expresses his Admiration; Jealousy; Anger; and Despite; And Venus shews neglect; Coquetry; Contempt; and Disdain.\(^\text{45}\)

Weaver then continued by recounting in detail the physical appearance of each of these feelings:

This last Dance being altogether of the Pantomimic kind; it is necessary that the Spectator should know some of the most particular gestures made use of therein; and what Passions, or Affections, they discover; represent’d or express.

Admiration is discover’d by the raising up of the right Hand, the Palm turn’d upwards, the Fingers clos’d; and in one Motion the Wrist turn’d round and Fingers spread; the Body reclining, and Eyes fix’d on the Object; but when it rises to

Astonishment, both Hands are thrown up towards the Skies; the Eyes also lifted up, and the Body cast backwards.\(^\text{46}\)

Weaver carefully described the gestures, facial expression, gaze, and bodily positioning for each of the fourteen passions from which the danced dialogue was composed.

Weaver pioneered in crafting such gestures into danced action, and he also helped to promote interest in how emotions should be represented by physical action. John Bulwer had published a comprehensive study
of rhetorical gesture, *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand, and Chironomia: or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*, in 1644. Drawing on classical writings, Bulwer argued vigorously for greater attention to the physical presentation of an argument, detailing hundreds of actions for hands and fingers that would express a speaker's ideas. His description of admiration was remarkably similar to Weaver's: "The palm (the fingers all joined together) turned up, and by the return of the wrist, in one motion, spread and turned about the hand, is an action convenient for admiration." By the time Weaver began to investigate pantomime, Bulwer's study and others such as Charles LeBrun's *Méthode pour apprendre dessiner les passions* were being consulted by actors and visual artists in their efforts to expand the range and specificity of their portrayals of feeling. Acting theory, as Joseph Roach explains, outlined the actor's craft as one of assuming the poses in a sequence of passions, rhythmically structured with pauses for particularly climactic tableaux. This general burgeoning of interest in the representation of the passion affected many aspects of public culture.

As representation of the passions increasingly dominated the action in theatrical performances of dance, audiences lost interest in the body's perambulations along a path through space, and instead, became absorbed with the body's ability to paint a picture as it moved from one gesture and position to the next. Most often adapting well-known myths and familiar classical stories, the Dancing Master, as he was called, now translated these narratives into danced pictures. The brief vogue in committing dance to symbols and the livelihood that it promised was replaced by a new enthusiasm for sequencing feelings and arranging the responses of others to those feelings. Likewise, the potential that notation had offered to serve as a kind of copyright of one's own inventions was eclipsed by the new interest in which stories might be best adapted to stage and how to accomplish their translation into dancing. The capacities for classification and exchange that notation had promised were eclipsed by the possibility to tell a story and represent feelings through movement alone.

Despite its failure to deliver as pedagogical tool, fashion template, or portable collection of dances, Feuillet notation nonetheless helped lay the groundwork for the subsequent development of dance technique, and it asserted the criteria upon which virtuosity in dancing could be evaluated. In her comparison of mid and late eighteenth century dance manuals, Sandra Noll Hammond shows the consistencies in their cultivation of the basic principles of movement that Feuillet had identified. Students practiced each position and the accompanying posture necessary to perfect its presentation, and then they practiced the
plies and relevés, formerly sinkings and risings, that prepared the body to execute more complex steps and sequences. These positions and basic steps entered both concert and social dance repertories, offering a skeletal pedagogy upon which to build instruction in dancing.

Analogous in many respects to the musical exercises practiced by students acquiring expertise at instrument playing, these sequences confirmed the suggestion, implicit in the notation itself, that music and dance were separate yet related arts forms. In Arbeau’s analysis of dancing, the musical meters and rhythms were discussed first, and the movements were presented as a translation or emanation of musical structure in steps. Feuillet notation, in contrast, presented a catalogue of possible types of steps, without making any mention of musical types or rhythmic structures that would necessarily correspond to these steps. The several collections of dances that used Feuillet notation likewise detached dance from music, placing the musical notation at the top of the page and the notated dance below. Dance movement thus began to acquire a materiality, one that suggested an egalitarian relationship, rather than a fusion, with music.

When Feuillet notation was devised, the acts of composing a dance, learning a dance, and learning to dance were conceptualized as overlapping, if not identical projects. The Dancing Master performed professionally, and also taught students to dance, not so much by training them in a profession of exercises, but by teaching them progressively more complex dances. The analysis of dance movement that the notation offered implied a new status for dance in which these three functions, composing, performing, and practicing would, over time, become distinct practices. It laid the groundwork for the acquisition of skills based on a progressively more difficult set of exercises. And it imparted an objecthood for dancing as a pursuit separate from music or theater. Not only were movements broken down into their most basic units, but each movement was located within a specified sequence, one that could be altered in the same way that the individual moves could be varied and embellished. The arrangement and rearrangement of movement thus emerged as a practice through which an individual achieved recognition as the author of those arrangements.

The term “Dancing Master” or “Ballet Master” continued to refer to the creator, arranger, and teacher of dances, yet the role and responsibilities of this person began to change. Required to create a variety of dance presentations – divertissements, entre-actes, dances within operas, and short and full-length story ballets, Dancing Masters were credited by name in programs, and their work evaluated in the press, but the specific selection and sequencing of movement was never
documented. Only when they devised scenarios for story-ballets was their work given fuller description. Printed as part of the program, the scenario, rather than any form of notation, began to serve as the document of the danced action.

Addressing the new responsibilities of the Dancing Master, Noverre identified an impressive number of skills which they needed to acquire: painting (for its depiction of groups); poetry (for renditions of emotions); anatomy (for how to train the dancer); history (for subjects suitable for ballets); music (for combining movements in the dance); and daily life (for the variety and liveliness of its characters). The Dancing Master needed to become a discerning imitator of Nature by finding a persuasive and visually acute story to tell, and rendering the narrative with innovative and appropriate movement carefully matched to the music. Like Weaver who wrote on dance history and anatomy while also working as a Dancing Master in devising pantomime ballets, Noverre divided his attention between the knowledge necessary to create a story ballet and the insights emerging from the new discipline of anatomy that pertained to a dancer’s training. These constituted distinctive arenas of study, all under the command of the Dancing Master.

In the early nineteenth century, Carlo Blasis, an Italian Dancing Master who worked in London from 1826 to 1830, identified a similar set of skills that reflected this dual importance of teaching dance and creating dances. Blasis produced two lengthy studies of dance; the first, Traité Élémentaire Théorique et Pratique (1820) set forth a training program for the dancer that included a remarkable set of drawings indicating correct placement of the limbs while performing various steps. The second, The Code of Terpsichore, translated into English and published in London in 1828, incorporated and expanded upon the first book while also adding major sections on the history of dance, pantomime, and most noticeably, an extensive consideration of “The Composition of Ballets.” Although Noverre covered many of the same issues, his organization seems haphazard in comparison with Blasis’s systematic breakdown. Blasis discussed in detail the crafting of the plot, its beginning, middle, and denouement; the evaluation of potential stories for use as ballets; the implementation of dramatic gesture; the need for spatial organization onstage and also variety and contrast between scenes; and the relations between dance and the arts of music, costuming, and scenography.

Blasis’s extensive coverage of composition reflected the new status of the story ballet as a distinctive and popular genre, and he was among the first to identify the distinctive labor entailed in creating a new
dance, as suggested in this passage addressing the Dancing Master’s pedagogical duties:

Finally, to create the accomplished artist, the master must infuse his pupil with the spirit, sensibility and enchantment of his art. Should the student have a flair for composition and show imagination the wise master will encourage it by letting him arrange dances and instructing him in design and the beauties of choreography.\textsuperscript{51}

Here choreography refers to the art of making dances, one of its first and very rare appearances with that meaning throughout the nineteenth century. As described by Blasis, this process of composition consisted largely in selecting and arranging steps congenial to one’s physical appearance, aptitude, and temperament, but it did not include the invention of new steps. Blasis advised dancers who showed talent to pursue the art of arranging dances, and he also noted that many soloists arranged their own solos to feature their specific proclivities and accomplishments.\textsuperscript{52}

Blasis’s theories of composition retained much of Noverre’s aesthetics, however his drawings of proper positions and steps showed the dancer in an entirely new relationship to geography and geometry. Instead of the “wavings of the feet” (Feuillet’s term) and the markings along the horizontal plane that documented the dancer’s progress, Blasis’s dancers posed on a tiny line that represented the floor with no particular location or perspectival relationship to a landscape. Shown in a variety of positions that inventoried different relationships among arms and legs, the dancers’ placement in each position was highlighted by a dotted line running along each limb. These lines emphasized the geometric designs the limbs should make – right angles as the leg was lifted, perfect ovals as the arms were raised overhead. They also illustrated the vertical orientation of the body with respect to the floor. Rather than follow a line along the floor as Feuillet’s dancers did, here, the line was internalized, embedded within the flesh, with the musculature wrapping around it.\textsuperscript{53} It was as if the geometry in which the dancer had been located by the notation was now absorbed into the body and capable of being reproduced through the correct movement of the limbs. Not only had the sinkings and risings evolved into \textit{pliés} and \textit{relevés}, but the geometric designs of the floor-patterns were transformed into geometric patternings within the body.

\textit{The Code of Terpsichore} also included a markedly new history of dance, one that focused obsessively on the influence of an African dance known as the \textit{chica}. Unlike Weaver, who located the antecedents of
contemporary dance in the Greek and Roman theaters, Blasis organized his remarks according to nation state, reviewing Greek, Roman, and then Italian accomplishments before taking up the problems with Spanish dancing. The first historian of dance to elaborate a theory of climate's influence on temperament, Blasis argued that tropical heat induced excessive wiggling of the hips and an unrestrained enthusiasm for performing movement that produced a dance known as the *chica*. Migrating from central Africa via the Moors into Spain, the *chica* transformed into the Fandango and other related dances, ennobled in some cases by the "pride" that the Spanish took in their dancing. Both women and the "lower orders," Blasis cautioned, were susceptible to lasciviousness and vice following their exposure to the *chica*.

Unlike the lively dances of Gypsies, Scots, or Hungarians, the unruly wiggling of the *chica* threatened to compromise the artistic standards of ballet. Still, if properly restrained, it, like the other national dances, promised to enrich the story ballet with exotic differences. The very lines that composed proper positioning of the dancer for Blasis could be
Choreographing empathy: kinesthesia in performance

utilized to docileize the foreign forms, giving them intrigue and novelty while assimilating them into a standardized style of execution. Thus a large number of ballets set in various locations around the world began to appear on the early nineteenth century stage. Rather than a parade of different types, held together by a single narrative proposition as in early eighteenth century ballets, these productions began to be staged with various exotic populations and their customs. Gypsy, Native American, Caribbean as well as Scottish, Hungarian, Italian and Russian dances, all assimilated into the vocabulary and style of classical ballet, imbued each ballet with local color while simultaneously displaying the ballet's mastery over all forms. Where the eighteenth century representations of foreigners typically borrowed a stereotypic gesture or piece of attire to signal the culture, nineteenth century productions ballelicized actual phrases of movement. What had begun in notation as a rubric for collecting dances had now evolved into a system for assimilating them into the dancing body. Whether a Scottish Hornpipe or a Spanish Cachucha, all foreign dances were infused with an emphasis on the geometric shaping of the body and the metered timing of the steps. (See figure 3.5 from Chapter 3.)

Blasis argued that the Ballet Master who knew about these different dances could use them to infuse the ballet with diverting innovations. When combined with the ability to translate a gripping narrative to danced action, the incorporation of exotic movements would produce a successful ballet. Even individual dancers responsible for arranging their own solo variations, or pas, could surge to prominence through the judicious arrangement of foreign material. When such innovation was executed with technical brilliance, also defined by ballet's criteria for virtuosity, the result would ensure a marketable product and a successful career. Instead of dance supporting an economy of mutual indebtedness, as in Arbeau's time, dance now offered an opportunity to fashion individualized commodities for public consumption.

The gendered division of labor in accomplishing this marketability relied upon the female dancers to excel at the display of dancing while male dancers, although playing a supporting role onstage, typically crafted the narratives and arranged the steps. Men were thus empowered as creators and producers of ballets, and women functioned as performers. Whereas choreography as notation had secured a masculine permanence for dance by fixing the steps and documenting specific dances, as Jenyns proclaimed in his poem, once narrative took over as the principal form of its organization and documentation, and the largely female cast literally fleshed out its story, dance moved to the margins of the arts. Dance was severed from the symbolic system that
had given it materiality and parity with the other arts. Without that system, the guarantor of movement, equivalent to the land or government that secured paper money, dance was reframed as the most feminized and trivial of accomplishments. As Hegel observed, dance was not a "real" art, since it did not evolve from a fundamental medium of expression. Instead, it merely ornamented story with movement.

Along with the collections of notated dances, the term "choreography" generally fell out of use during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both French and English languages. When it was utilized in newspaper reviews or journals, it named indiscriminately the acts of dancing, learning to dance, or making a dance. Choreography's legacy as a system of symbols that defined the steps was to determine the repertoire of exercises through which the body was trained for dancing. Clearly specified in that repertoire were the limitations on what could constitute dance movement as well as what superior execution warranted the status of virtuosity. Instead of supporting variation through the infinite variation and combination of specific positions and steps, the system now enforced its own borders, allowing in fragments of the foreign to rejuvenate its appearance. Leaving to narrative the task of documenting the dance, choreography as notation disappeared into the pliés and tendus of the dancer's daily regimen.

Revealing and testifying

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the term "choreography" came into widespread and new usage, both in Britain and the US. No longer a vague and infrequently used appellation for dancing, it now named specifically the act of creating a dance. Although its use coincided with the emergence of the new genre known as modern dance, the term "choreography" was not initially applied to that work. As Martha Graham reminisced about her earliest training, from 1914 to 1923 with Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn: "I had never heard the word choreographer used to describe a maker of dances until I left Denishawn. There you didn't choreograph, you made up dances." Although Graham clearly specified the act of making a dance, there was no special name given to it.

Instead, the term was first used in response to the innovations in ballet introduced by Nijinsky and Fokine when their works toured to Britain and the US. Le Sacre du Printemps prompted a large number of reviews when it premiered in 1913 that invoked choreography to identify Nijinsky's radical innovations in vocabulary and sequencing of movement. Many of the other Ballets Russes productions likewise
inspired the use of choreography to name the new blendings of classical steps with other sources of movement. As one anonymous source explained, the

sources of choreography are three. The interpreters use the ballet steps and movements that have been universally known and practiced for generations, as in *Papillons* and *Les Sylphides*; they introduce the barbaric, startling native dances of their steppes as in *Prince Igor*, and they freely employ [sic] the oriental and classical, as in *Scheherazade*, *Cleopatre* and *L’Après-midi d’un Faune*.59

Uses of the foreign, implicit in Blasis’s analysis of dance-making were evidently explicit in the general reception of the Russians’ works, and their use of “barbaric” and “oriental” materials foregrounded the creative labor of constructing new movement as well as arranging well-known steps. St. Denis likewise integrated foreign movement vocabularies into her dances, yet perhaps because she did not weave together classical and unfamiliar steps so much as she assimilated foreign poses and motions into a new matrix of movement, her dances were not credited as a specific kind of innovation. Or perhaps the eighteenth century term “choreography,” originally allied with the Dancing Master and subsequently translated into ballet, resurfaced, renewing its attachment to ballet by specifying a new function.

Whatever the causes of the transformation, the terms “choreography” and “choreographer” quickly gained momentum and, by the mid 1920s, specified the contributions of an arranger of movement in a variety of genres including Broadway musicals and reviews.60 The terms were used regularly in concert programs and newspaper reviews where they specified the author of an original work and highlighted the inventive engagement of the artist in crafting movement.61 Taken up enthusiastically by those involved in the new modern dance, choreography began to specify the unique process through which an artist not only arranged and invented movement, but also melded motion and emotion to produce a danced statement of universal significance. In 1933, dance critic and apologist for the new modern dance John Martin asserted this apocalyptic vision of the role of the artist:

The major purpose of the artist is to make known to you something that is not already known to you, to make you share his revelation of something higher and nearer the truth, to rob the material symbol of some of its appearance of substance and disclose the essence, the reality, of which it is a transient representation.62
Unlike entertainment, which offered only a momentary escape, genuine art should lift viewers up, giving them a permanent new vantage point from which to glimpse either the ultimate or the infinite. Dance as an art form used bodily movement, arranged in such a way as to transcend any individual's power to express by rational or intellectual means. Even though people did not speak a common language, Martin explained, they moved "in generally the same way and for the same reasons," and as a result dance had the capacity to communicate across all cultures, classes, and ages.

The use of choreography to name the creative act of formulating new movement to express a personal and universal concern was supported by the new pedagogy in dance education entering universities across the US. One of the first dance educators, Margaret H'Doubler, who was hired in the Women's Physical Education Department at the University of Wisconsin to develop a course of study in Dance in 1917, argued that dance is the translation of emotional experience into external form. In order to accomplish the development of feeling into movement, H'Doubler set forth a curriculum in which the body's responsiveness as a physical mechanism could be mastered. Advocating a kinesiological understanding of the body's movement capabilities as a way to understand its propensity to move, H'Doubler often worked with her students blindfolded, asking them to explore the range of motion at each joint, based on their study of the human skeleton. Abhorring any pedagogical approach based on imitation of movement routines, H'Doubler arranged classes so that students improvised most of the movement rather than copying combinations performed by the teacher. Eventually, this training would enable students to produce "Art," defined by H'Doubler as the free translation of internal emotional experience into external bodily form. Thus each student investigated her own impulses to move, and her own anatomical proclivities to realize such impulses.

Where Feuillet's legacy inculcated an awareness of the relationship between bodily structure and horizontal and vertical grids, H'Doubler's approach traced the connection between impulse and its kinesiological realization. For H'Doubler, mastery over the body entailed an understanding of the "intelligent appreciation for, and application of, force and effort." This awareness would empower students to overcome inhibitions and obstacles to their freedom of control. Unlike Feuillet notation, which implied standards of execution to which the body could be trained to adhere, H'Doubler envisioned her pedagogy as undoing obstacles to a natural and hence desired performance. This approach to training would construct the foundation upon which students could produce new dances.
Figure 1.6 Here, in a master class at Mills College in the 1970s, Margaret H'Doubler asks students to locate and feel the actions of the shoulder girdle in relation to a skeleton.

Courtesy University of Wisconsin Archives
Photo by James E. Graham

To her scientific exploration of bodily capacity, H'Doubler added sessions in which students collaborated, under the teacher's guidance, on the making of a dance. For their first experiments in learning composition, she argued, students could work on devising movement sequences for a select piece of music. She explained:
When the phrasing is understood, have the class skip to the right for one phrase . . . Then ask the class what to do next. Some will suggest going on in the same direction for another phrase; others will recommend going back to the left. Try both. The class will discover that skipping back for a phrase gives balance. Now ask the class if they have a satisfying sense of completion, or if they feel the need of repeating what has been done. Of course, some will want to repeat. So this should be done. They will soon realize that in this case repetition makes for monotony.68

H'Doubler guided her students through the process of exploring different effects that resulted from the addition of different materials. Her own aesthetic preferences, masked beneath the investigatory rubric of trying different options, clearly led students in a certain aesthetic direction, cultivating their ability to craft phrasing, floor path, and ensemble shapes, and to detect the interesting from the monotonous. From these discoveries, students could extend themselves further into composition. However, the underlying intimacy established between idea and action continued to inform their explorations, and the potential for this inquiry to yield new insights would undergird dance pedagogy for decades.

In response to the growing popularity of modern dance on the concert stage, as well as the pedagogical efforts of educators such as H'Doubler, Bennington College launched a summer program of study in 1934, one which attracted an impressive number of students who went on to become university educators of dance. Beginning in 1935, the curriculum distinguished among technique, composition, and choreography courses.69 Where H'Doubler asked students to improvise much of the movement generated in class, by the 1930s, one trained to become a modern dancer using a more prescribed regimen of exercises, often devised by the choreographer, that, on one hand, exemplified the choreographer's aesthetic vision, and on the other, embodied "universal" principles of motion. Where H'Doubler based her course plans on the body's kinesiological capacity to move in any and all ways afforded by its structural organization, Bennington technique classes, taught for example by Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Hanya Holm, proposed distinctive sets of principles as the underlying foundation for dance movement.70 Students enrolled in two-week courses with two of these four choreographers, and they also studied continuously with Martha Hill in a course entitled "Principles of Movements."

Hill's Principles of Movement, like her approach to composition, implemented universal conceptions of space, time, and weight. Whereas
Figure 1.7 Martha Hill dancing the power and momentum of the volumetric body at Bennington College c. 1935
Courtesy of Janet Mansfield Soares & the Martha Hill Archives.

Feuillet notation located the body spatially in relation to horizontal and vertical axes, and temporally in relation to a metricized progression across space, Hill envisioned space as a void into which the body projected various shapes and energies, and time as a measure of the
quickness or slowness of motion. Rather than positioning the body at the calm center of an embroidering periphery, as Feuillet indicated, Hill activated a momentum-filled relationship between central and peripheral body. Both Feuillet’s and Hill’s systems imagined that they could accomplish an analysis of all dance movement, but Feuillet notation assumed that this was possible because all bodies share the same mechanics – the ability to rise, sink, turn, and so on – whereas Hill, borrowing from Rudolph Laban and Emile Jacques-Dalcroze, assumed that all movement shares the same fundamental properties of shape, rhythm, and force. Where Feuillet notation located all movement along a universal horizontal plane, the new modern techniques foregrounded gravity as a universal within and against which the body articulated its dynamism. In the same way that Feuillet notation occluded the labor of moving from one place to the next, so this conception of gravity rendered equivalent the efforts of all bodies in all places.

In Composition courses students learned structuring principles that imparted an ability to analyze movement in terms of space, time, and weight, creating short studies that demonstrated their understanding of the possibilities for shaping the body as a three-dimensional object in space, and for sequencing those shapes according to various musical structures. Drawing on musical structures such as theme, contrasting theme, return to theme, ABA, or the rondo form ABACADA, students explored how movement could be developed from an original phrase into its repetition, inversion, amplification, or contraction. They also explored strange, asymmetrical positionings of the body and dissonant and contrasting textures.

Familiarizing themselves with movement as a malleable material that could be shaped and re-formed in diverse ways, students could then investigate potential connections between movement’s attributes and various psychological states. Influential teacher of composition, Louis Horst, who was also composer, accompanist, and adviser to Graham, introduced his Pre-Classic Forms and Modern Forms courses at Bennington in which he proposed style as a feature of movement that tied individuals to a social temperament. For each style, Horst delivered a succinct summary of movement qualities and characteristics. In “earth primitive,” for example:

The dancer is alertly sensitive to the feel of the earth under his feet. It is the genesis and grave of all living things – the source and the finale. The movements are in the lower areas and oriented to the floor. They can be clumsy and animalistic. They can be brutal and threatening. They can project the lyricism of wonder, or the
tenderness of the giver of life. They may have a drum-like percussiveness. But always they are simple and meagerly articulated; lean and taut.\textsuperscript{74}

Here the notion of the primitive as both a psychological and social attribute was mined for the spatial and temporal characteristics associated with stereotypic images of it. Horst drew from these characteristics feelings states such as brutality or tenderness, and he intimated connections between movement and psyche in word choices such as “lean” and “taut.”

In addition to the more historical and psychological forms, Horst associated styles with particular peoples and regions:

The Air Primitive has to do with uncanny airy things; with birds, feathers, witches, fire and fire magic, with omens, apparitions, and enchantments, and with the sun and the wind. The Southwest

\textbf{Figure 1.8} Iris Mabry performing an example of Horst’s “Air Primitive.”

Photo by Louise Dahl-Wolfe

Courtesy of Louise Dahl-Wolfe

Archives: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Arizona board of regents
Indians begin their dance prayers with aspirants such as “hey-ah.” Their gods are the Great Spirit (Great Breath) and air-borne divinities such as fire gods, the Thunderbird, the Plumed Serpent [...] all of Europe, except Spain, is earth-minded, while the aboriginal cultures of the Americas (Spanish and Indian) are air-minded.75

In contrast, Jazz style “retains attributes brought from Africa: jerky, percussive movements and accents. It displays qualities of syncopation which grew out of a disintegrated people: a melancholy and lassitude, resultant of slavery.”76 “Americana” consists of “big, free and extended movement ... It is swinging and out-going - a wide stance in the legs ...”77 As these latter examples make especially clear, Horst conflated individual and cultural stereotypes, assuming that personality or temperament could stand in for or symbolize key cultural values and ways of being. The well-made study would transcend the stereotypes through its innovative interpretation of both the individual and the cultural and also through its mastery of movement’s thematic development.

Unlike Blasis and other nineteenth century Ballet Masters who borrowed actual sequences of steps from various regional dance forms, but then imbued them with the essential characteristics of ballet’s aesthetics, Horst assumed that each style of moving could be assessed in terms of spatial, temporal and qualitative attributes that could then be absorbed into one’s own original study. Nineteenth century ballets transformed regional dances by making the bodily shapings more geometric, the timings of steps more precise, and the spatial orientations of dancers clearly presentational towards the viewer observing the contents of the proscenium. The zest, ferocity, or charm in the dances that remained, a product of the unique rhythms of steps or carriage of the body, referred back to the “spirit” of the people that originated them. For Horst, in contrast, dance movement consisted not of steps and positions but instead of patterns within motion. Aspiring choreographers who could observe, analyze, and reproduce the “swinging, outgoing” quality of Americana or the “syncopated lassitude” of post-slavery African-Americans could incorporate the specificities of a time or culture into their larger statement about the human predicament.

In Composition classes, students probed the complexities of motion’s patterns, but they did not create “dances,” conceptualized as the development of a vision or argument in movement. Only in the Choreography Workshop, where an already recognized artist created a new work for students in the course, could dancers witness and assist
in the birth of a dance. When in 1936 Bennington added a new Program in Choreography, a course in “independent composition for advanced students,” who each “completed and presented two full-length compositions,” it reaffirmed this elite conception of choreography by identifying an exceptional few students as eligible for its study. Both studies and dances, however, were envisioned as outcomes of a hyper-personalized process wherein the individual became origin of the movement, host to the creative process, and craftsperson of the dance’s development. The choreography, as the outcome of the creative process, was seen as the property of an individual artist, not as an arrangement of steps that were shared amongst a community of practitioners, as in Feuillet’s time, but rather, as a creation of both the movement and its development through time. The choreographer was one who could synthesize the knowledge gained through the study of compositional craft with a unique, inspired vision, a process that replicated and reinforced the mandate for a dance to fuse personal and universal concerns.

Reflecting back on the burgeoning of what she called “choreographic theory” in the 1930s, Doris Humphrey speculated that the social upheaval provoked by World War I prompted dancers to reevaluate their mission as artists:

In the United States and in Germany, dancers asked themselves some serious questions. “What am I dancing about?” “Is it worthy in the light of the kind of person I am and the kind of world I live in?” “But if not, what other kind of dance shall there be, and how should it be organized?”

For Humphrey, the new modern choreographers were galvanized by a social conscience that aspired to redress injustices and create new visions of the potential for human society. Yet, as Susan Manning has demonstrated, the new conceptualization of choreography functioned in an exclusionary capacity because of the prejudicial aesthetic criteria applied to artists of color. The universal subject posited by choreography was, in fact, an elite white subject. Thus, black artists, in particular, were expected to produce “natural” and “spontaneous” movement, and this assumption either barred them from dance-making or else discredited their compositional labor. A number of critics, including John Martin, who taught criticism at Bennington, frequently rated African-American choreographers who followed the modern dance approach to choreography as “derivative” rather than “original” artists; whereas when they foregrounded Africanist elements, he, along
Figure 1.9 Ted Shawn in *Invocation to the Thunderbird* (1931), one of his many works utilizing imagery from Native American dances. Courtesy of Jacob's Pillow Festival, Inc. Photo by Robertson.
with other critics, considered them “natural performers” rather than “creative artists.”

At the same time, white artists such as Graham, Ted Shawn, and Helen Tamiris felt empowered to represent all the world’s peoples in their dances, casting their own white bodies in the performance of Negro Spirituals, Native American dances, and Cakewalks. Because the choreographer was an artist who could tap the universal fundamentals that all movement shared, they could dance out the concerns and values of all peoples of the world. However, when Katherine Dunham used “primitive” forms from the Caribbean as the raw material for her modernist dances, she was criticized for being too sexual and therefore too commercial. As Gay Morris has documented, the white choreographic practice of modern dance ensured its elite status by working to exclude both social dance and forms of dance that purveyed entertainment. Increasingly, the choreographer, an inspired individual artist, took on a new luster in comparison with the roles of social dance teachers and arrangers of dances, such as those who were setting pieces for revues, night club entertainments, or other Broadway attractions. Even after World War II, when a larger number of African-American artists appeared on concert stages, their works were required to display the values and issues associated with their specific racial communities, while white artists could continue to “experiment” with an unmarked radical newness in form and meaning.

Still, African-American choreographers such as Dunham, Pearl Primus, and Talley Beatty among others persevered in exploring the parameters set forth by modern dance, while at the same time challenging its epistemology. Their works subtly undermined the claimed separations between elite art and entertainment, between dance as the product of an extra-sensitive individual and the community that surrounded and supported that artist, and between the innovative and the traditional. Dunham, for example, contested the image of the choreographer by earning advanced degrees in anthropology and conducting extensive fieldwork on African diasporic dance forms. She produced work in highly commercial as well as elite venues, and she often integrated folk and social vocabularies into her dances in such a way as to preserve their identity while also refashioning them for the proscenium and blending them with balletic technique and modern dance syntaxes.

Although African-American choreographers began to carve out a space on the modern dance stage, the new conception of choreography continued to function as exclusionary by securing a special place for dances authored by a single artist as distinct from forms of dance
practiced worldwide that could not be traced to a single creator. Implementing the opposition then asserted in anthropology between tradition and innovation, many white modern choreographers claimed that the movement vocabularies they devised were entirely new. Although they borrowed extensively from Native American, Asian, and various folk forms, along the lines suggested by Horst, they distanced themselves from these “unchanging” and “deeply embedded” practices even as these dances were becoming more familiar to audiences through photographic, cinematic, and sometimes live presentations of them.83 Thus alongside the modern dance artists who experimented with “new” forms of movement, the “ethnological dancer” emerged as one who studied and mastered various enduring world forms.

Russell Meriwether Hughes, known as La Meri, claims to have invented the terms “ethnic dance” and “ethnological dancer” as ways to distinguish dances that “reflect the unchanging mores of the people of all classes . . . of a particular land or race” from ballet, the product
Figure 1.12 La Meri dancing the Philippine dance-game Tinikling. Although the costume and arm positions differ from her version of the Chethat-al-Maharma, the smiling face and welcoming stance are remarkably similar. By performing various dances one after another and implementing similar production values for each, La Meri suggested an equivalent status for all the world's dances.

Martin, John. The Dance: the story of the dance told in pictures and text. Tudor Publishing Company; NY. 1946
of an international elite, and modern dance, the reflections of a genial individual. La Meri studied Flamenco, Bharata Natyam, Javanese dances, and several European folk forms, and then arranged her own versions of the dances which she performed one after another on a single concert. Acclaimed by audiences around the world throughout the 1930s and 40s, the concerts seemed to offer a window onto diverse societies, signaling the desire to know and communicate with foreign cultures, but also displaying those cultures as small, collectible, and lacking in complexity. Not unlike Feuillet’s notation of various regional dances, her concerts removed the dances from their original locations, reframing them within the space of the proscenium and suggesting that they had not and would not change over time.

According to La Meri, these dances had been spawned by a universal dance of life, a more fundamental and generative energy than that evinced in either ballet or modern dance forms. In this assertion La Meri reiterated the views of Curt Sachs, whose World History of the Dance (1937) presented the first attempt to collate and compare dances from around the world, and who argued that all dance originated in an “effervescent zest for life.” Both agreed that cultures look different on the surface, but their underlying structures reflect the contours of the human predicament. Thus, dances may manifest in a vast diversity of forms, yet they are unified by their common function of providing an ecstatic alternative to quotidian life. Also like Sachs, La Meri found in all dances formal elements which she identified as aspects of their choreography. Sachs, however, focused his discussion of choreography on the range and variety of floorpaths or patterns of locomotion through which dances were organized. La Meri, in contrast, looked at the development of movement motifs, their dynamics, design, and rhythms, as signifying eternal elements of the human condition.

Even as she endeavored to embrace the world’s dances within a single conception of choreography, La Meri upheld fundamental differences between Western and Eastern forms. Offering her readers a list of some of the most essential contrasts, La Meri observed that occidental dances were built on broad lines that harmonized the entire body, whereas oriental dances manifested infinite shadings wherein each part of the body had a life, a line, and a rhythm of its own. Occidental dances were eccentric and emotionally expressive whereas oriental dances were concentric and compressive. The two traditions also differed in their overall dramatic shape, with occidental dances striving to excite by building to a brilliant and exciting climax, and oriental dances working to soothe by maintaining an emotional level that increased only in intensity. La Meri’s comparison extended
Figure 1.13 This drawing exemplifying La Meri’s conception of “balanced choreography” presents the dancers in an unidentifiable blend of costumes that nonetheless appears authentic because of the simplicity of the dancers’ stance and spatial configuration.
Drawings by Cary
Courtesy of Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, Inc.

Figure 1.14 This drawing exemplifying La Meri’s conception of “broken choreography,” like her “balanced choreography,” blends costuming details and also arm and hand positions from various dance forms into a single ambiguous evocation of the exotic.
Drawings by Cary
Courtesy of Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival, Inc.
to include contrasts in conceptions of art itself — occidental dances were motivated by courtship whereas oriental dances were born in the temple; occidental dances prized novelty and originality whereas oriental dances adhered to ancient rules; and occidental dances pointed to their own accomplishments so that their physical difficulty was appreciated whereas oriental dances masked their mastery of the form.  

Although La Meri’s comparison claimed essential differences between East and West, it utilized the tenants of modernist aesthetics to make its argument. Space, conceptualized as a universal medium, and movement worked together to signify the journey of the psyche as the dancer’s motion either expanded, radiating away from the body, or contracted, compressing in towards its center. Movement itself was a tangible and observable substance through which the dance presented a representation of self and world. Costuming, props, and lighting, although they made a critical contribution to the impact of the dance, were all treated as effects that were added after the fact to the basic substance of the dance — its movement. La Meri’s approach to dance composition thus installed modernist assumptions at the core of the creative process, embracing all forms of dance while at the same time establishing itself as the meta-practice through which all forms could be evaluated. Feuillet’s notation had similarly offered a set of principles through which all movement could be assessed and compared, but its principles remained separate from any emotional or interpersonal significance. Modernist principles, such as Horst’s or La Meri’s permitted a psychologization of culture and an appraisal of cultural difference in terms of personal as well as social attributes.

Making and collaborating

Beginning in the 1960s, the terms “choreography” and “choreographer” began to undergo yet another set of modifications due to the changing nature of dance composition and performance in the U.S. and Britain. The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed the burgeoning of performances by newly formed companies touring from around the world. In addition to numerous ballet companies, a large number of folk dance ensembles, including companies from Hungary, Poland, Mexico were presented on an international circuit along with national ballets from Cambodia, Morocco, Senegal, and Guinea, among others. Participating in the project of cultural diplomacy, these performances promised via dance to provide a vital and immediate window onto the character of a people and their way of life. They also tacitly challenged the concept of
choreography by exemplifying collective forms of dance-making and by embodying the connectivity between dancing, music, and costume such that dancing as a discrete pursuit could not be separated from them.

At the same time, the collaborations between Merce Cunningham and John Cage provoked an altogether different sense of dance composition and the relation of dance to music. Both in the US and on tour, their use of chance procedures for sequencing events and the seeming disjunction between dance and music challenged the prevailing conception of the artist as expressing an inner subjectivity. In addition, many artists such as Daniel Nagrin and Anna Halprin began working with improvisation and alluded to the changing outcome of each performance by referring to themselves as the director, rather than the choreographer.\(^2\) The new interest in utilizing “found” movement, such as the pedestrian tasks and activities deployed by Judson choreographers, also provoked a decentering of the artist-as-genius model of authorship. Artists studying at the newly founded London School of Contemporary Dance likewise explored a variety of new sources for movement vocabulary, expanding out from the Horst-based curriculum in composition to explore new methods of arranging movement through work with sculpture, film and slides, and spoken and recorded text.\(^3\)

As a result, many artists simply titled the work and then used the phrase “by,” rather than “choreographed by.”\(^4\) The subsequent emphasis on borrowing movement from multiple sources and also on integrating dancers’ choreography into the piece resulted in yet other nomenclatures, such as “conceived by,” “directed by,” or “arranged by.”

These various artistic initiatives reflected a new status for the artist as more craftsperson than inspired luminary. The terms “making dances” and “making new work” came to signify a daily decision to enter the studio and construct movement or to sequence phrases of existing movement, thus signaling a redefinition of the artist as laborer and collaborator who worked with the materiality of movement. Feuillet notation had secured a substantiality for movement, but as a lexicon of established principles that could be combined in different ways to create new vocabulary. Horst had imparted a sense of its materiality by showing its possibilities for repetition, variation, and reiteration. For Horst, however, movement was always placed in the service of the choreographer who transformed it into psychological and universal expression. In contrast, the artist as maker of dances assembled movement from diverse sources and arranged it, not as personal expression, but as a statement about movement itself. This imbued the dance with a significance separate from that of its maker’s intent, and at the same time, it reinforced the dance as a made event distinct from
its execution. The choreography, now allied with the process through which it was made rather than the feelings or desires of its maker, became increasingly separated from both the choreographer and the dancer, even as dance companies from around the world demonstrated the interrelationship of movement, feeling, and worldview.

One of the influential exponents of the Cage/Cunningham conception of choreography was Robert Ellis Dunn who taught workshops that resulted in the renowned experimental concerts performed at the Judson Church. Dunn had been a student of John Cage where conversation focused on problem-solving and the philosophy of each student’s pieces. Dunn’s orientation for the course followed Cage’s experimentation with chance procedures for composition and translated his precept that any sound is valid to the realm of movement where any kind of motion could be a valid part of a dance “whether it’s a cough, a sniffle, or natural movement.” One of his first assignments “was to make a dance by combining sets of choices for body parts, durations, parts of the room, and left or right directions in space.” In responding to work that was presented in the class, Dunn asked students to distinguish between evaluation and perception. He worked to eliminate value judgments from the conversation, and instead asked students to contemplate the relation between the compositional process and its results: “What did you see, what did you do, what took place, how did you go about constructing and ordering. What are the materials, where did you find or how did you form them, etc.”

These workshops differed radically from the Bennington model in several respects: Not only did they not offer dance technique, but they even seemed to disregard technique in favor of fresh approaches to composition. Students took different technique classes on the side, but these were seen as peripheral and even incidental to the central mission of dance-making. Also unlike Bennington, the choreographic studies themselves, as a product of periods of investigation in the studio, were not so much the objects of scrutiny as the processes through which the choreography was realized allowing students to contemplate the array of procedures that existed for inventing and arranging movement.

Rather than an integral part of learning to dance, as it had been in the eighteenth century, technique, as developed by artists as diverse as Cunningham and Halprin, became a process of breaking down the body into constituent parts so that one could investigate all the combinatory possibilities for movement. Rather than a preparation of the body as vehicle of the choreographer’s message as in the early modern dance, technique now cultivated the body’s potential for articulation, for displaying a variety of combinatory possibilities for
Figure 1.15 In this excerpt from the score for *Suite by Chance* (1953), Cunningham identifies locations and actions for each of the dancers. Other sections of the score indicate how to use chance procedures to determine parts of the body, motions, and durations.


Permission granted Courtesy of Merce Cunningham Estate
moving. The body was disciplined, not so as to be able to fuse with the self in order to enwrap a given message, but to be able to articulate its various parts so that these could be combined or sequenced differently to produce distinctive physical effects. Dance movement, now seen as entirely separate from music, presented physical effects that were determinedly separated from any connotations of the spiritual or the emotional. Dance makers saw the body itself as meaning-filled, and they believed that the pragmatic execution of movement offered a glimpse into the self of the performer that felt more real and revealing than any performances in which the dancer enacted a character.

The avant-garde initiatives set in motion by Cage’s theories of composition not only redefined technique but also the concept of virtuosity. For choreographers allied with the Judson tradition, virtuosity consisted not in distinguishing oneself by an exceptionally brilliant performance, but instead, in dissolving the self and its achievements into the movement so that the actions themselves were broadcast. Disdaining virtuosity as the act of surpassing what was stipulated in the choreography, they aspired to create a more modest and workmanly image for the dancer. At the same time, African-American choreographers such as Alvin Ailey and Donald McKayle, drawing on a heritage of virtuosity as an affirmation and celebration of communal values, pursued the exceptional execution of diverse vocabularies. Where white choreographers hoped to modify the artist-as-genius model with its claim to express universal issues within each body, African-American artists continued to synthesize the universal with the individual, not as a sign of individual entitlement, but as a contribution to community.

As in modern dance whose universal subject could express any human condition, so in the avant garde the alleged liberatory potential contained in the notion of choreography as a selection of processes and technique and virtuosity as the simple execution of those processes functioned as an unmarked and white set of claims. For example, Cage, Steve Paxton, and many others repeatedly acknowledged the influence from Asian philosophies of mind and art on their work, esteeming Zen and Taoist religious practices for helping them to break through habitualized boundaries and opening up new kinds of aesthetic possibilities. Paxton and those who developed the radical new practice of contact improvisation, borrowing many of its principles from Aikido, asserted the universality of its aesthetics of touch. At the same time, Asian artists were largely denied access to the experimental stage. Critics and many viewers continued to require Asian artists to represent classical artistic practices rather than new and experimental approaches.
Like the African-American artists of the 1940s, Asian artists of the 1960s and 70s were criticized as derivative if they produced experimental work and as natural when they showed more traditional works. As Shobana Jeyasingh remarked in her interrogation of the politics of dance production, Asian-British artists, even as they endeavored to produce experimental and hybrid work, were housed in theaters reserved for “world” dance rather than for white British contemporary artists.

The misunderstandings around these exclusionary operations of choreography and their attendant criteria of excellence predicted even larger epistemological faultlines that became increasingly evident as dance companies from around the world continued to tour to and from the US. Under the loose rubric of multiculturalism, “traditional” dance forms from many countries were being programmed and presented, maintaining the modernist distinction between single authored contemporary work and ambiguously authored ethnic or world dance. Where experimental choreography assumed the role of challenging viewers’ expectations as to the nature of art and movement, these concerts were regarded as purveying joy, exotic excitement, and dazzling physical skills, while providing an “authentic” glimpse into another culture’s values. At the same time, they raised serious questions about the separation of dance into sacred and secular, the assumed autonomy of dance movement from music, poetry, and costume, and the role of the dancer’s performance in relation to the choreography. These issues, however, never received substantive attention, and only in 1997 did the Dance Critics Association pose the question of whether critics should be informed as to the history and aesthetics of foreign dance forms that they might review.

Buttressing this reception of world dance, university curricula slowly added courses in West African dance, Javanese dance, or Bharata Natyam, beginning in the 1970s. These were not studied as proposing distinct theories of choreography, but rather, as techniques that could enrich the student’s awareness of the body while also offering a distinctive “cultural” experience. Taught in the spare modern dance studio, often without costumes, sometimes without live music, students focused on learning the movement first, acquiring technical proficiency, and then dancing a dance. Yet curricular and financial constraints inhibited them from acquiring substantive proficiency. As a result, pedagogy reinforced the image of these dances as traditional and unchanging, since students never learned how to improvise within the forms, how to collaborate with musicians, or how to arrange and rearrange material to meet the specific demands of a given performance.
As compositional ideas for how to make dances and subject matters for dances proliferated, the meaning of choreography began to transform yet again. The choreographer, no longer the visionary originator of a dance, or even its maker or director, became a person who assembled and presided over a collaboration. Unlike the modern choreographers, dance artists no longer formed companies, but instead worked from project to project, picking up a company of dancers with whom to collaborate. Rather than focus on elaborating the singular artistic vision of an individual, or on a rigorous methodology for inventing and sequencing movement, these artists embarked on collaborations that were project driven. Generally, each project required unique skills, and specific repertoires of movement. Presiding over these projects, the choreographer was identified as the facilitator of the work being made.

Choreographers as facilitators began to work with dancers in several new ways: they asked dancers to invent some or all of the movement, to propose its staging and development over time, to suggest costuming, and so forth. Additionally, choreographers began working with dancers who brought distinctive sets of skills to the project, such as juggling, gymnastics, skate boarding, and various forms of popular dance including break-dancing, salsa, square dancing, etc. They investigated the movement of animals in relation to human movement. They worked with untrained dancers and with dancers of vastly different ages and training experiences. Inspired in part by a growing awareness of how disabled bodies had been stigmatized and desiring to promote a non-hierarchical affirmation of physical difference, they also worked with dancers of different abilities. Less interested in the physical articulation necessary to execute these actions than with the cultural resonances that these actions evoked, choreographers began to ask: How do these actions signify identity? What kinds of cultural milieus do they represent? What had begun with Cunningham as an embrace of all movement as articulation soon transformed into an interest in all movement as varieties of signifying cultural and individual identity.

Choreographers not only collaborated with dancers but also began working more intensively with artists from other mediums, exploring interdisciplinary modes of performance between dance and theater, film and video, lighting design, new digital media, and also working with set designers and sculptors. These collaborations took a variety of forms, sometimes juxtaposing performances in the different media, and sometimes constructing new intermedia genres in which neither form would exist without the other. Modern choreographers had integrated different media, based on the premise of an organic
Figure 1.16 AXIS Dance company members Judy Smith and Jacques Poulin-Denis.
Photographer Margot Hartford

functionalism in which each art made a distinctive contribution to the whole. As Doris Humphrey observed, music, by contributing a syntax, should serve as the perfect mate, but not master, for dance.\textsuperscript{102} The new collaborations, whether as juxtaposed collages of diverse media or as intermedia integrations of aspects from each art, dismantled and contested any organic differentiation among the arts. Each medium worked with different materials, but did not, as a result, create unique forms of address. Instead, any and all the arts boasted the capacity to expand perception and illuminate one’s apprehension of the world.

The emphasis on borrowing movement from multiple sources and on integrating dancers’ contributions into the piece meant that the dance to be created had no integral relationship with a specific technique
or training regimen. Instead, each dance utilized a pastiche or amalgam of movement skills. Dancers began to train in multiple forms and genres, including ballet, contact improvisation, and jazz, as well as various modern forms, hoping to piece together the necessary all-purpose physicality to accomplish an array of movement tasks. This approach to acquiring technical competence, celebrated in So You Think You Can Dance, severed the connection between training and dancing. At the same time, new adaptations of traditional techniques such as ballet, and new exercise systems informed by anatomical organization proposed to train a universal dancing body. These regimens, including body–mind centering, release technique, Pilates, and varieties of yoga, all claimed to produce an efficient and balanced musculature based on their understanding of the body’s true design. Like H’Doubler they championed a kinesiological analysis of movement, one that would disencumber the body from the distortions produced by psyche and society and reassert its natural grace and integrity.

The new model of collaboration in choreography mirrored new structures of patronage and support for artists. Both public and private funding sources increasingly invited applications for specific projects. Artists applied to these institutions, not for support for the ongoing maintenance of their companies, but for funds for a specific event. Granting agencies also encouraged the leveraging of grants by matching money from various organizations. This resulted in a need for “buy-in” from many different funding agencies, which in turn placed increased pressure on the artist as promoter of one’s own career and as someone who was an effective entrepreneur. The artists did not seek patrons as the early modern choreographers did, but instead, tried to identify new kinds of opportunities for funding and advertisement. The choreographer thus became a manager of a career and of projects. Not a genius, not a crafts-person, and lacking in the expertise to decode the specialized knowledge inscribed in notation, the choreographer now leveraged different funding opportunities in the same way that she or he facilitated the collaborative interaction among all participants. Where Arbeau’s dancers had employed dancing to participate in the accrual of mutual indebtedness shared by all members of the aristocracy, choreographers now contrived to pitch projects that could secure a similar kind of mutual buy-in from all funding agencies.

The new awareness of funding structures and practices was well documented in the Poor Dancers Almanac: A Survival Manual for Choreographers, Managers and Dancers (1983) published by the staff at Dance Theatre Workshop, one of the primary theaters presenting fringe work in New York City. Never intended to give aesthetic advice
to young artists or to teach them about how to make dances, the manual instead enumerated the various financial skills necessary to becoming a successful choreographer. Organized to address the needs of a young artist arriving in New York City to build a career, the manual began with instructions on how to use phone services, libraries, health and medical facilities. It explained how to get discounted tickets to performances, how to find living and working spaces and part-time employment, and how to benefit from government financial services such as food stamps and unemployment insurance. It then embarked on a detailed analysis of how to set up the management for one’s career: whether or not to incorporate as a non-profit business, how to employ dancers and other artists, how to construct budgets, pay taxes, and copyright one’s work. Having guided the choreographer through the process of setting up a management infrastructure, it then offered extensive advice on how to produce one’s work: how to write a press release, obtain photographs, invite critics, produce mailings, posters, and all forms of advertisement; how to find a performing space, negotiate a contract, organize box office and front of house, utilize the stage space, and document the work. The almanac then concluded with chapters on funding and the marketplace for dance. It listed various agencies, federal, state, city, private foundations, and corporations that supported dance, and advised on how to write grants, employ booking agents, establish fees, construct a tour, and even arrange to have one’s work shown on television. The choreographer had become a manager of a career and of projects, a person engaged in artistic and wealth management.

The proliferation of approaches to choreography generated by so many independent choreographers in the 1970s and 80s prompted a break down in any consolidated or systematic approach to the teaching of composition. The American Dance Festival (ADF), tracing its roots back to the Bennington College summer school, offered composition courses based in the model of those taught in 1930s up through the 1970s. These courses generally devised assignments for expanding students’ awareness and mastery of movement’s spatial, temporal, and dynamic aspects. Then in the 1980s, and with greater and greater frequency, composition appeared in one of two new hybrid forms: as a course entitled improvisation/composition or as one called composition/repertory. Improvisation/composition largely addressed the use of improvisation as a way to generate new movement possibilities for oneself or for a group of dancers with whom one might be collaborating. Composition/repertory was taught by some instructors as a traditional repertory course where a new work was set on the students, or as a
blending of the instructor’s and students’ composition studies; or, as in this course description by Liz Lerman, as a collaborative process:

We will make a dance/text piece about how each of us looks to the future. Using personal stories, historical and contemporary events and family recollections we will explore and share the unique visions each generation holds as they imagine what lies ahead. Students will develop unique movement to accompany these stories.\(^{103}\)

The fact that composition began to be parsed into these two separate courses – improvisation and repertory – seemed to indicate that two kinds of skills were needed in order to create new work: ways to generate movement and to work with people, and ways to generate a vision or thematics for a specific piece. This second skill was honed as it had been in the 1930s by witnessing and participating in several different artists’ approaches to the making of work.

Promoting the modernist notion of the choreographer as the creative source of the dance, but allowing for that process to be collaborative, the American Dance Festival instigated a major new initiative on teaching technique and dance-making worldwide, extending the framework of collaboration to facilitate international projects. In 1987 ADF was invited to send teachers to Guang Dong, China to establish a modern dance curriculum there, consisting of technique and repertory courses. Performing in the ambassadorial role of tacitly promoting democratic values, the curriculum emphasized the individual creative process and the necessity of artistic freedom in pursuing new visions of dance. This program was the first of many “linkages” developed by ADF worldwide supporting the exchange of teachers and artists.\(^{104}\)

These schools had, in turn, sent students and artists to ADF where they studied and shared work with US students and artists. The fact that so many choreographers from different countries took classes and taught repertory at ADF stimulated a new intensity of collaborative projects combining, juxtaposing, or otherwise fusing distinctive cultural dance traditions. Support for these projects was extensive, with the USIA (United States Information Agency), the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation all awarding major grants for cultural exchange in the 1990s.

These pedagogical exchanges helped to construct a new global stage where contemporary, rather than traditional dance companies from around the world offered up diverse aesthetics wrapped in the conventional appearance of the two-hour proscenium-framed spectacle. They also helped to inaugurate new intercultural exchanges wherein
dancers trained in diverse traditions might share, juxtapose, or fuse
tyles and vocabularies. Choreography, in these exchanges, has taken
on multiple meanings and valences. In some cases choreography is
interpreted as having depleted the diversity and precision of dance
forms, compromising, by interrupting their historical legacies, and
erasing the nuance, value and meaning of specific practices in favor of
standardized and commoditized movement displays. Here choreography
functions much like eighteenth century notation as a process of
uprooting, accomplished not by the symbolic encoding of movements
principles, but instead, by the application of criteria of marketability,
such as glamour, authenticity, and professional quality, that work to
homogenize dancing for acceptable global circulation. In other cases,
choreography is envisioned as providing an arena in which to encounter
and potentially transcend the histories of oppression, colonization, or
enslavement that form part of the corporeal legacies of potential
collaborators so as to celebrate a common humanity. In both cases, the
drive to deliver “product” for multiple funding agencies often means
that there is insufficient time to sort through these kinds of differences.
Responding to the various mandates to place dance in global
circulation, professional schools for dance training worldwide have
embraced diverse traditions of dancing and offer advanced levels of
study in forms ranging from ballet to Barata Natyam, Chinese Opera,
classical Indonesian, Malaysian, Thai, Flamenco, various West African
forms, and so forth. These technique classes are complemented by
other courses, in release technique, Feldenkrais, Pilates, yoga or
Tai-Chi, envisioned as enhancing the student’s kinesthetic awareness
of the body. Whereas classical or other forms of dance technique are
conceptualized as culturally specific, these provide a “universal”
training that is efficient, anatomically informed, and capable of
cultivating the greatest versatility for the dancing body. Whereas
dance techniques give entry into culturally specific values and
aesthetics, these forms exist uncontaminated by culture, or as beyond
culture. They help to groom the body for global presentation. Thus,
what began with H’Doubler as a kinesiological investigation of the
mysteries of the body, and continued with mid-century dance-makers
as a charting or inventory of physical possibilities, has become a
universal base that authorizes collaboration across any and all
registers of difference.

The opening up of choreography to encompass investigations across
ages, physical abilities, and cultures has yielded diverse hybrid bodies
and movement forms that can impact the viewer in multiple ways. The
universal message that Martin presumed dance could deliver has been
replaced, not by a new singular experience of dancing, but by a vast range of engagements with dance producing distinctive visions of and knowledges about the body. When choreography occurs in such a way as to allow the time and resources to negotiate these differences, viewers may be edified by the results of the artistic labor to exchange points of view and types of skills. Where these differences are submerged or glossed over in the rush to present newness, choreography functions much like the traffic lights system in Los Angeles as a form of collision control.

Choreography first uprooted dances by relocating them onto a horizontal geometric plane and, subsequently, by applying to them a universal principle of gravity, both psychic and physical. In each case, choreography gestured towards the world’s dances only by assimilating their differences into its economy of meaning. Now choreography is convening the world’s dances in order to substitute for each dance’s locale commoditized markers of alterity. In these projects it mobilizes a universally versatile body capable of mastering any and all traditions of dancing. Alternatively, choreography holds out the promise to affirm the local’s connection to the global, recognizing the specific and intensive physical commitment that any body must invest in order to ground itself in the world.