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## Merce Cunningham's *Event #32*. A Modularized Contribution to the History of Dance in Museums

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### Abstract

Questo articolo dà un contributo alla storia della danza nei musei. Offrendo un'analisi a più livelli (o modulare) di *Event #32* di Merce Cunningham (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 1972), l'articolo fa luce sui seguenti interrogativi: cosa ha portato all'avvicinamento della danza ai musei negli anni Settanta? Quali sono state le implicazioni per le arti, gli artisti, le istituzioni e il pubblico? Quale può essere la duratura eredità di questo avvicinamento? Piuttosto che evidenziare le differenze ontologiche tra danza e musei, l'articolo si concentra sulle loro connessioni produttive, offrendo così una nuova prospettiva. Lavorando su materiale d'archivio, l'articolo rivela il ruolo notevole che Merce Cunningham e il Walker Art Center hanno svolto nel preparare la strada per la messa in scena della danza nei musei così come la vediamo oggi.

This article contributes to the history of dance in museums. Offering a multilevel (or: modularized) analysis of Merce Cunningham's *Event #32* at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, in 1972, the article sheds light on questions such as: What led to the approximation of dance and museums in the 1970s? What were the implications for the arts, artists, institutions, and audiences? What may be its lasting legacies? Instead of highlighting the ontological differences between dance and museums, the article focuses on their productive intersections, thus offering a fresh perspective. In working from archive material, it reveals the remarkable roles Merce Cunningham and the Walker Art Center played in paving the way for the staging of dance in museums as we see it today.

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## Merce Cunningham's *Event #32*. A Modularized Contribution to the History of Dance in Museums

With dance gaining visibility in art museums around the world, it may come as a surprise, that the history of dance in museums has not yet received much scholarly attention. In fact, most of today's writing devoted to dance in museums focuses on very recent examples and, if at all, merely mentions some historical "predecessors"<sup>1</sup>. A partial exception being Claire Bishop's essay *The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum*, in which she sketches three historical waves of dance in museums, the third of which is in the present<sup>2</sup>.

This essay aims to make a more in-depth contribution to the history of dance in museums by examining one historical performance, *Event #32*, by Merce Cunningham and his Dance Company (MCDC) at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis in 1972<sup>3</sup>. According to Bishop's model, it was part of the second wave of dance in museums in the early 1970s. Dance critic Sally Banes even claimed that «by the late sixties, galleries and museums had become the most common venue for post-modern dance performance»<sup>4</sup>. Leafing through archival documents of major US museums like the MoMA or the Whitney Museum confirms an increased interest in dance from these institutions in this era<sup>5</sup>.

*Event #32* was by no means the first dance performance in a museum but there are many good reasons to choose it as an example here. Firstly, Merce Cunningham plays a central role in dance history

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1. Cf. Mark Franko – André Lepecki, *Editor's Note. Dance in the Museum*, in «Dance Research Journal», special issue *Dance in the Museum*, n. 46, 2014, p. 1.

2. Bishop defines a first, second, and third wave in the 1930s and 1940s, in the 1960s and 1970s, and today. Cf. Claire Bishop, *The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney*, in «Dance Research Journal», special issue *Dance in the Museum*, cit., p. 63. A "proto-wave" around 1900 should be added here when dancers like Mata Hari and Isadora Duncan made occasional museum appearances. Cf. Gabriele Brandstetter, *Tanz-Lektüren. Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde*, 2. erweiterte Auflage, Rombach, Freiburg 2013, pp. 84 ss.

3. This essay is based on a chapter from my Ph.D dissertation in Art History which will be published in Summer 2021 under the following title: *Performance on Display – Zur Geschichte lebendiger Kunst im Museum (Performance on Display – On the History of Living Art in Museums)*. I thank Tristan Hickey for smoothing out some of my bumpy English wording in this article.

4. Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers. Post-Modern Dance*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1987, p. xviii.

5. For example, from 1968 the Whitney Museum hosted contemporary music and dance in its *Composers' Showcase* series. MoMA started a series called *Summergarden* in 1971, which also presented music and/or dance in the museum's sculpture garden.

and was among the most frequent collaborators to museums from the field of dance<sup>6</sup>. Secondly, the Walker Art Center looks back on a remarkable history with respect to the performing arts in general and dance in particular, and yet it has received far less attention than its powerful fellow institutions in New York. Moreover too, the performance has been fairly well documented so that this study can draw from a range of photographic and video sources as well as documents from the museum's archive<sup>7</sup>. The artist's perspective is accessible through numerous published statements and interviews as well as the publications of MCDC-archivist David Vaughan<sup>8</sup>.

An important source on Cunningham's *Events* has been compiled by art historian Hiroko Ikegami who shed light on this hitherto neglected part of Cunningham's work on the occasion of a major Cunningham retrospective at the Walker and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, in 2017<sup>9</sup>. Dance scholar Carrie Noland recently published an insightful monograph on Cunningham, partly drawing from earlier work, where she discussed Cunningham's *Events* as a way to navigate the tension field between avant-garde innovation and legacy building<sup>10</sup>.

I will be less concerned with modes of archiving and collecting dance than with exhibiting dance in museums via public programming, although both aspects are closely intertwined. Following Claire Bishop, who frames Cunningham's *Events* as a «blueprint for dance within galleries»<sup>11</sup>, I read *Event #32* as an exemplary museum dance event from its era.

But what exactly made *Events* a "blueprint" and Cunningham's style so compatible with museums? Sally Banes suggested it was the visual artist's growing fascination with dance in the 1960s which conversely lead to a situation when «dance events fit both aesthetically and practically into the programming of museums and art festivals»<sup>12</sup>. While this seems valid, further aspects remain to be discussed, for instance, what it was that motivated these collaborations and in what ways they challenged artists, institutions, and audiences.

«What is dance doing *for* the museum» and «what is the museum doing *to* dance?»<sup>13</sup> Mark Franko

6. The Walker Art Center alone lists a total of nine residencies, three commissions, and seventeen other engagements during Cunningham's lifetime. Cf. *Walker Art Center and Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago Copresent "Merce Cunningham: Common Time" the Largest Survey of the Artist and his Multidisciplinary Collaborations Ever Mounted*, 21/9/2016, online: <https://walkerart.org/press-releases/2016/walker-art-center-and-museum-of-contemporary> (accessed 9/6/2020).

7. I would like to deeply thank the Walker Art Center's archivist Jill Vuchetich for her generous support and James Klosty for trusting me to use his photograph for this essay.

8. Cf. David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, edited by Melissa Harris, Aperture, New York 1997.

9. Cf. Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement. The Merce Cunningham Dance Company's "Events"*, in Fionn Meade – Joan Rothfuss (edited by), *Merce Cunningham. Common Time*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis 2017, pp. 73-88.

10. Cf. Carrie Noland, *Inheriting the Avant-Garde: Merce Cunningham, Marcel Duchamp, and the "Legacy Plan"*, in «Dance Research Journal», n. 45, 2013, pp. 85-121; Carrie Noland, *Merce Cunningham. After the Arbitrary*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2019.

11. Claire Bishop, *Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone. Dance Exhibitions and Audience Attention*, in «The Drama Review», n. 62, 2018, p. 28.

12. Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, cit., p. xviii.

13. Mark Franko – André Lepecki, *Editor's Note*, cit., p. 1. Emphasis by the author.

and André Lepecki ask somewhat provocatively in their introduction to the 2014 DRJ-special issue on *Dance in the Museum*. Rather than questioning the power economies inherent in relationships between artists and institutions, I will focus on their productive moments and ask: what led to the approximation of dance and museums? How did dance react to the visual arts and the museum space and vice versa? What were the implications for the arts, artists, institutions, and the public? And what may be the lasting legacies?

This paper takes the shape of six coexisting modules, a nod to Cunningham's choreographic vocabulary, opening up a variety of perspectives: Module #1 introduces *Event #32*; Module #2 focusses on the Walker Art Center and its institutional and architectural history with the performing arts; Module #3 reveals the performance's organizational framework and some of the friction points between the dance and museum worlds; Module #4 considers the event's funding; Module #5 sheds light on Merce Cunningham's *Events*; and, finally, Module #6 locates the *Event*-format within Cunningham's artistic practice, highlighting moments of compatibility with the museum. In conclusion, these modules will contribute to the bigger picture of dance in museums as a phenomenon of the 1970s.

## **Module #1: *Event #32* – A Partial Reconstruction Based on Archival Material**

*Event #32* was the closing event of a week-long residency of the MCDC at the Walker Art Center. The piece, which was performed on the evening of March 12, 1972, by Merce Cunningham and nine dancers from his company, extended from the museum's lobby into three adjoining galleries on the ground and first floors of the museum<sup>14</sup>. It lasted roughly one and a half hours and was accompanied by live-music from avant-garde musicians John Cage, Gordon Mumma, and David Tudor.

Three black-and-white photographs by James Klosty give a good first impression of the performance's context. They show how the performance shared the space of three different exhibitions, which other than displaying work by living artists had no substantial connection to one another. As we will see later on, all gallery spaces, albeit varying from spacious to intimate, were white and windowless and lit by spotlights mounted on a white concrete ceiling.

The first photograph is a view of Gallery 1 in which three dancers in casual training clothes enter the gallery space from the right in synchronous gait (fig. 1). They face a white semi-spherical structure, a *Fibonacci Igloo* by Mario Merz, the centerpiece of a solo exhibition by the artist<sup>15</sup>. Merce Cunningham

14. The names of the dancers, according to a program leaflet, were Carolyn Brown, Ulysses Dove, Douglas Dunn, Meg Harper, Nanette Hassall, Susana Hayman-Chaffey, Kris Komar, Sandra Neels, and Valda Setterfield. Cf. the program of the MCDC dated 9/3/1972 and preserved in the Walker Art Center Archive, Performing Arts Coordinator: Suzanne Weil, Merce Cunningham and Dance Company Residency 1971-1972 (from now on: A-WAC), Folder 2.

15. The work is adorned with glowing neon numbers of the Fibonacci Series, which also transgressed the gallery space and



Fig. 1: Merce Cunningham: *Event #32*, performed by Merce Cunningham and Dance Company, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, March 12, 1972. Artwork: Mario Merz: Fibonacci Igloo, 1972. Photograph: © James Klosty.

is pictured to the left of the igloo, immersed in a solo. Somewhat further back, a man, likely John Cage, sits at a small table. At the bottom and on the left of the picture a fair number of spectators sit on the floor or lean against walls, watching with concentration.

The second photograph captures two dancers in Gallery 2, lying under an extensive installation of rough wooden planks that are suspended from the ceiling by a v-shaped arrangement of ropes. It is striking how the dancers blend into the space between the installation and the white concrete floor, their resting bodies tracing the horizontal alignment of the planks in space, corresponding to their mass and weight pulled down by gravity. The installation is a work by Philip Ogle and was part of the group exhibition *Introduction: 7 Young Artists*, presenting work by post-minimalist sculptors from the Minneapolis region.

The third photograph reveals the more intimate setting of Gallery 3, where a retrospective by photographer Bill Brandt<sup>16</sup> is on display. In front of a series of black and white nudes, two female

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“moved” through the museum.

16. Hermann Wilhelm (Bill) Brandt (1904-1983) was influenced by the surrealist photography of Man Ray, which is evident in the high degree of abstraction and the play of light and shadow in his nude photography.

dancers are captured in ballet poses, bending their legs in a *plié* and holding their arms up in the third position, their light and dark clothing corresponding with the black and white bodies on the photographs.

The video footage gives a better idea of the choreography<sup>17</sup>. As opposed to the carefully composed photographs, the video's aesthetic is rough. The camera constantly zooms in and out and jumps back and forth between the galleries. Several times the heads and bodies of other spectators obstruct the camera's eye, which testifies to a fragmented viewing-experience.

The first scene of the video captures the dancers entering Gallery 1, some stopping, others pacing from one gallery to the other, passing through the crowds. No discernible pattern guides their routes, yet, they move fast and with an earnest determination, with expressionless faces. Such a "neutral" posture, in addition to frequent changes in speed and dynamic, characterizes the entire choreography.

As the choreography unfolds, solos, duets, and group scenes either alternate, or take place simultaneously. There is, for example, a *pas de deux* by Carolyn Brown and Ulysses Dove in Gallery 3. In the beginning, Dove moves and crawls around the floor while Brown circles around him, climbing over his arms and legs. Then, Dove stands upright, and Brown, facing him, makes several slow bows, which he follows with his eyes. Suddenly, she jumps into his arms, holding on to his shoulders, legs straddled, upper body bent backward, until, a few seconds later, she abruptly jumps back to the floor. Now, the roles change: Brown stands still while Dove makes several jumps in front of her. Later, in Gallery 1, Merce Cunningham circles Mario Merz' *Fibonacci Igloo* by slowly assuming and dissolving his poses. For example, he stops on one leg, bends the other knee upwards in front of his body, leans over, and takes a step. In similarly controlled movement-sequences, he goes from standing to kneeling to laying down, arms and legs upwards, sideways or down, resting in every position for a short moment before moving on to the next.

Highly concentrated scenes like these are juxtaposed with animated group scenes. At one point in Gallery 2, several dancers motion back and forth, measuring the space with rapid steps and jumps. Others meanwhile stand still and wait for an invisible cue to take their turn at similar jumping routines. Later, all dancers position themselves in front of the Philip Ogle installation. Opening and closing their legs and arms in a rhythm reminiscent of creatures underwater they create brief moments in which their poses seem to take up the directions of the ropes in space. In yet another group scene, all dancers gather in a circle and wrap their arms around each other's shoulders, leaning slightly inwards. By creating this formation next to an installation of large upright plexiglass tubes, they seem to reference the circular shape of this very installation. After a brief moment of stillness however, the dancers break away from

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17. This video recording is kept in the Walker Art Center Archive (12/3/1972, N.N., MCDC, *Event #32*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, b/w, sound, 31:19 min, digital copy). According to Jill Vuchetich, it was shot by a museum employee. The author was given access to this video via a private viewing link.

this formation and begin other scenes elsewhere.

All of these scenes seem to be connected in a kinetic concatenation, but their structuring principle remains unclear. As soon as a pattern begins to materialize, a change occurs so that no comprehensible narrative can unfold. The same motif applies to individual movements that appear mechanical and without flow. Floor contact, creeping movements, and dragged feet underline the dancer's body weight. All movements are executed with great precision, any expressive gestures are avoided. The movement repertoire is based on classical ballet but broken up by everyday movements, such as relaxed walking or elements reminiscent of gymnastics or yoga.

Finally, the video captures the music of the performance. There are non-rhythmic horn tones produced by Gordon Mumma, merging with incoherent "diarylike prose"<sup>18</sup> read by John Cage in a monotone voice. Meanwhile, an electronic soundscape, by David Tudor, unfolds, swelling and fading with industrially pulsating noises, buzzing, and feedback. The incoherency of this sound construction highlights the dancers' disassociation who seem to ignore the music completely. Just as for the soundscape, so too for the visual artwork. Despite the dancer's spatial proximity to the visual art, they never interact with it, nor do they even seem to take notice of its presence.

Despite the lack of a readable narrative, or, perhaps, because of it, the encounter between dance, music, and visual art evokes connections on an associative level. The overall choreography, therefore, appears to blend in naturally with its museum environment and to stand out at the same time, calling attention to the nature and design of the museum space.

## **Module #2: The History of the Walker Art Center and its Relationship to the Performing Arts**

Like many art museums in the United States, the Walker started as a private foundation, in 1879<sup>19</sup>. Its first dedicated museum building, erected in 1927, complied with the museum standards of the time and, therefore, was clearly not designed to host performing arts events. Behind a playful (and orientalist) Neo-Moorish façade an open lobby welcomed the visitors. A grand staircase led up to the main floor, where mostly 19<sup>th</sup> Century French paintings were displayed in a linear sequence of galleries. On the ground floor sculptures and applied artworks from different ages and continents were on display.

During the New Deal era, the Walker went through major changes. In 1940, with support from the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project, the Walker was transformed into a Community Art Center. Breaking with the former bourgeois grandeur, the new focus was on education and

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18. Some of these passages have been published in John Cage, *M. Writings '67-'72*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 1973.

19. It was founded as Walker Art Gallery by Lumber Baron Thomas B. Walker (1840-1928).

community engagement. The programming was considerably dynamized through temporary exhibitions, educational programs, and new collection principles championing not French but contemporary American art. In 1944 a radical makeover of the museum's façade into a plain modernist cube reflected this development. With this orientation towards the contemporary and the temporal, it is hardly surprising that this was also the time when the first dance events and concerts, mostly by local artists, took place at the museum. In lack of a theater stage, the lobby and a courtyard were used for such events<sup>20</sup>. A likely incentive (or at least inspiration) for such events were the activities of the Federal Dance Project, which perpetuated the popularity of Modern Dance in the United States in this era<sup>21</sup>.

With events becoming ever more frequent, in 1953 the Walker took a step towards professionalizing what today is called "public programming" by founding the so-called Center Arts Council (CAC). This volunteer committee was responsible for organizing performing arts events and film screenings. Its activities increased considerably when in 1963 the Tyrone Guthrie Theater was erected on the land right next to the Walker. Formally two independent institutions, both collaborated closely and the Walker was able at times to use the Guthrie's stage rent-free. This opened up new possibilities for performing arts events and for a few years, the Walker even had its own opera company<sup>22</sup>. Among the notable dance events from this time was Merce Cunningham's first performance in Minnesota in 1963 and a commissioned work by Alwin Nikolais in 1965<sup>23</sup>.

The Walker entered into yet another era when in 1969 the old building was demolished to be rebuilt in the shape of a cubic tower-like structure designed by architect Edward Larrabee Barnes. Barnes' concept replaced the former linearity of exhibition spaces with differently shaped and sized galleries winding helically around a core of stairs and elevators<sup>24</sup>. This decentral, modular, and flexible design was intended to be able to display the greatest possible variety of artworks. According to museum director Martin Friedman, these extremely versatile spaces were a direct reaction to the visual arts' moving beyond their frames and pedestals at the time<sup>25</sup>. Barnes thought of the building itself as a «pedestal» for art and chose a discreet «white on white» aesthetic for its interiors, where individual

20. The first dance event at the Walker was a *Spring Dance Festival* by choreographer Gertrude Lippincott in 1940. Cf. Joan Rothfuss – Elizabeth Carpenter (edited by), *Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole. Walker Art Center Collections*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis 2005, p. 32.

21. Cf. Samantha Schmeer, *Dance and the New Deal*, in «Proceedings of GREAT Day», vol. MMXIX, Article 11, 2020, pp. 111-115.

22. The Center Opera Company was founded in 1963 with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation and focused on avant-garde opera. It later became the Minnesota Opera.

23. Cf. Joan Rothfuss – Elizabeth Carpenter (edited by), *Bits & Pieces*, cit., p. 31. Cunningham's performance was organized by the CAC but took place at a place called The Woman's Club. Nikolais' work *Vaudeville of the Elements* was presented at the Guthrie Theater.

24. The design combined the concepts of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum and Marcel Breuer's Whitney Museum in New York. Barnes, who lived in New York, had studied with Breuer at Harvard.

25. Cf. *Works for New Spaces (1971)*, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ByNPuUNtRQ>, min. from 00:00:45 to 00:02:10 (accessed 27/10/2020). In pointing out that the new museum met the artist's wish for "raw space", Friedman also highlighted the spatial parallels of the museum to industrial studio lofts (Cf. *ibidem*).



artworks were to be experienced «in space»<sup>26</sup>. Highlighted by Barnes and Friedman as a positive quality, this intentionally “neutral” atmosphere is likewise reminiscent of the concept of the white cube which Brian O’Doherty would criticize some years later for its commodifying sterility<sup>27</sup> and the concept of theatricality as coined by Michael Fried with respect to minimal art<sup>28</sup>. The new Walker building was theatrical also in a very literal sense: it included a small stage and a screening room and shared its lobby with the adjacent Guthrie Theater.

In 1970 the Walker created a regular department for performing arts, probably the first of its kind in any museum. Suzanne Weil, a former member of the CAC, became its first director<sup>29</sup>. During the two-year closing period of the museum’s rebuilding, she programmed events all around the city. For the reopening Weil hosted a residency by the Judson Dance collective Grand Union, setting the tone for her commitment to avant-garde dance in the following years<sup>30</sup>. She cross-financed such experimental performances with popular pop and rock concerts<sup>31</sup> but was ever careful not to “sell-out” and stick with the traditional priorities of the museum, as she «felt always very strongly that the music and performing arts had to be in line with what the museum did on the walls and on the floor»<sup>32</sup>. From today’s view, this navigating between the popular and the avant-garde seems as typical for public programming in museums as the ongoing clear prioritization of the visual arts.

### Module #3: The Organizational Framework of the MCDC Residency

The spontaneous and “natural” impression of *Event #32* may conceal the meticulous planning which predated the residency. It started about nine months earlier with a mutually signed agreement between the Walker and the Cunningham Dance Foundation, the institutional backbone of the MCDC. The document sets a rough time frame for the residency as well as the company’s fee<sup>33</sup>. It refers to the

26. Edward Larrabee Barnes – Mildred S. Friedman, *Walker Art Center 1971*, in «Design Quarterly», n. 81, 1971, pp. 1-22: p. 11.

27. Cf. Brian O’Doherty – Thomas McEvillery, *Inside the White Cube. The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1999.

28. Fried lamented a tendency towards the theatrical in what he called «literalist art», by which he meant the presence of objects in space instead of a timeless (modernist) presentness which he championed. Cf. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood (1967)*, in Gregory Battcock (edited by), *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, Dutton, New York 1968, pp. 116-147.

29. She remained with the Walker until 1976, moving on to become the director of the *Dance Program* at the National Endowment for the Arts, one of the most powerful positions in the US-American dance world.

30. Among the choreographers and companies booked by Suzanne Weil for residencies were: Dance Theater of Harlem, Trisha Brown, James Cunningham, Laura Dean, Murray Louis, Pilobolus Dance Theatre, Yvonne Rainer, Valda Setterfield/David Gordon/Douglas Dunn, and Twyla Tharp. Cf. Joan Rothfuss – Elizabeth Carpenter (edited by), *Bits & Pieces*, cit., p. 36.

31. Of bands like Led Zeppelin, The Who, or Frank Zappa (all in 1969). Cf. Suzanne Weil, *In the Beginning. Recollections from the Walker’s First Performing Arts Coordinator*, in *ivi*, p. 33.

32. *Suzanne Weil in Conversation with Philip Bither*, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DjJEYu-bJk>, min. 00:14:00 (accessed 26/10/2020).

33. Cf. the agreement, dated 7/5/1971, signed by Jean Rigg and Suzanne Weil, preserved in A-WAC, Folder 1.

Walker as «local sponsor» and mentions the co-financing through the National Endowment for the Art's Coordinated Residency Touring Program<sup>34</sup>.

A preliminary tour plan reveals that the MCDC's visit to Minneapolis was part of a packed North America tour<sup>35</sup>. The residency in itself was closely timed, filled with performances, workshops, lectures, and masterclasses on every day of the stay<sup>36</sup>. The somewhat romanticizing idea of an artist residency as a creative time-out does not apply here. On the contrary, this was a regulated working relationship with clearly defined benefits and requirements for the dancers as well as the museum<sup>37</sup>. A document titled *Basic Requirements* precisely lists the MCDC's needs, such as stage sizes and flooring conditions, privacy and safety measures, or storage requirements<sup>38</sup>. The document refers primarily to proscenium stage productions but also gives information for non-proscenium performances, such as *Events*. Here, the regulations for the flooring and backstage rooms are looser but there is an extra focus on safety measures and limitations to repertoire-choices. In this respect, the document is a reminder of a self-evident fact: some stage-oriented choreographies are simply not suited for museum spaces. The hard and smooth museum floors as well as the art objects can pose a risk of injury to dancers and make certain movements like jumps or quick steps unfeasible. Most likely there is a lack of rehearsal and private spaces for performers. Also, of course, the «aesthetic integrity» of a choreography created for a proscenium stage may be compromised.

Not only the dancers had to take risks. The museum, having to guarantee the safety and integrity of the works of art and the public was also faced with challenges. Suzanne Weil recalled later that performances within installed exhibitions, like *Event #32*, were an absolute exception, even at the Walker. She also doubted that combining dance and visual arts by all means created added value<sup>39</sup>. While this may be a question of taste, there were also serious insurance-related issues. Weil recalled an incident, in which Yvonne Rainer planned a participatory event inside the museum involving bouncy red rubber balls. Threatening to damage the artworks, the event had to be canceled<sup>40</sup>. What is more, evening events such as *Event #32*, which started at 8 pm, exceeded the museum's regular closing times,

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34. Cf. *ibidem*.

35. The plan which is kept in the Walker Art Center Archive lists visits to New York and Toronto, several locations in the Midwest of the USA and then in Philadelphia, all in just one month between mid-February to mid-March.

36. A press release from February 21st by which the Walker announced the MCDC residency lists a total of seven different events. Cf. A-WAC, Folder 1, p. 2.

37. This could be an entry point into a discussion of art and labor which is not the focus of this essay.

38. Cf. the information sheet *Basic Requirements* kept in the Walker Art Center Archive. Cf. A-WAC, Folder 1.

39. «We almost never performed in the galleries. [...] nothing turned me off [more than] somebody who came to see me who said [imitating a naïve tone] «Hi, I wanna do a dance among the sculpture». [...] I think once in a while it's appropriate and it works but most of the time it's a gimmick and it's silly» (*Suzanne Weil in Conversation with Philip Bither*, cit., min. 00:14:00 [u.v. 26/10/2020]). In the same conversation Weil implies that she made an exception for Cunningham because she considered him a friend. Cf. *ivi*, min. 00:35:05 (accessed 26/10/2020). Knowing his work, she would have known it was neither improvised nor participatory nor involved objects or other material that may have threatened the art or the audience.

40. Cf. *ivi*, min. 00:33:40 (accessed 26/10/2020).

generating additional operating and personnel costs.

## Module #4: The NEA Coordinated Residency Touring Program: A Motor for Dance in Museums

When asked about the special focus on dance in her programming, Suzanne Weil stated:

Those were halcyon days in the dance world. I started to book dance right away because of the Dance Touring Program of the National Endowment for the Arts [...] Of course dance companies don't have homes so they're on the road. They need help getting on the road – number one. Number two they wanted to get away from one-night stands. So you could book for no less than a half week [...] – or for as long as you want. [...] I wasn't any more interested in dance as I was in theater or music or anything but it was so much easier to bring dance<sup>41</sup>.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is the federal agency responsible for funding the arts in the United States<sup>42</sup>. It was founded in 1965 in the middle of the ravaging Cold War to foster the arts and a creative society and thereby help build an image as a cultivated nation. Installing a thoroughly funded Dance Program, the NEA revived the special focus on funding the performing arts and dance from the New Deal years and later<sup>43</sup>.

Among the many innovations of the NEA was the establishment of artists-in-residence programs as a way of supporting artists and bringing the arts from urban centers to more remote regions. Institutions like schools, universities, theaters, and museums could apply for matching grants<sup>44</sup> to invite artists and art theorists. The Coordinated Residency Touring Program was the respective initiative in the field of dance<sup>45</sup>. Here the NEA acted as a kind of agency. An annually published program presented all participating companies. It listed their projected and completed performances as well as their terms and conditions, like spatial and technical requirements, rehearsal times, or fees<sup>46</sup>.

The program was extremely successful. After a pilot phase with only four companies touring in Illinois (among them the MCDC)<sup>47</sup> in 1968, by 1971 there were already 22 participants. By 1976 the

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41. *Ivi*, min. 00:16:25 (accessed 26/10/2020).

42. The agency's annual reports are a reliable source to track its changing programs and projects. All of the reports quoted in the following are available online: <https://www.arts.gov/about/annual-reports> (accessed 27/10/2020).

43. Cf. Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export. Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown 2012; Sarah Wilbur, *Endangered Strangers. Tracking Competition in US Federal Dance Funding*, in Sherril Dodds (edited by), *The Oxford Handbook of Dance and Competition*, Oxford University Press, New York 2019, pp. 87-110.

44. This means that at least half of the project costs had to be provided by the receiving institution.

45. More detailed information in National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1969*, p. 16; National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1976*, p. 21. The initiative for the program came from the NEA, but it was carried out through the local State Arts Agencies.

46. Cf. *Coordinated Residency Touring Program. Directory of Dance Companies*. Years 1974 to 1979 are available online: <http://scua.library.umass.edu/nea/dance-touring-program-directory-of-dance-companies/> (accessed 27/10/2020). In particular, cf. the 1976 program, p. 49.

47. The other three companies were by Alwin Nikolais, Paul Taylor, and Glen Tetley. Cf. National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Report 1968*, p. 29.

portfolio had grown to 92 companies, and by the late 1970s to well over a hundred. With a budget of three million US-Dollars, the program was the most extensively funded section within the NEA's Dance Program at the time. In respect to museums as receiving institutions the comparison of the programs throughout the 1970s reveals that more and more companies started to indicate museums as possible venues for performances and an increasing number of museums were listed in the tour plans<sup>48</sup>. The NEA, therefore, prides itself today with being responsible for the US-American dance-boom of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>49</sup>. Certainly, its Dance Touring Program was a central motor for the second wave of dance in museums in the United States. Merce Cunningham and his company were at the very center of this development, being among the most extensively NEA-funded artists during the 1970s<sup>50</sup>.

## Module #5: A Short History of Merce Cunningham's *Events*

Although *Event #32* may appear to be site-specific, a one-week residency with such a busy schedule would likely have been too short for developing and rehearsing a choreography of this length and complexity. According to Hiroko Ikegami, Cunningham had initially chosen *Canfield* (1969)<sup>51</sup>, a repertoire piece with décor and costumes by Robert Morris, as the residency's closing performance, «but for reasons that are unclear they instead danced an *Event*»<sup>52</sup>. The most plausible explanation for this change of mind is related to spatial concerns. According to the museum's files, the Guthrie Theatre was the venue initially discussed, but it turned out unavailable, so the performance was moved to the museum<sup>53</sup>. It was unthinkable to perform *Canfield* here, since the piece was conceived to be viewed frontally and included a set design far too large for any of the museum's galleries<sup>54</sup>. Only Cunningham-experts would have noticed, however, that *Event #32* consisted mainly of fragments from *Canfield*<sup>55</sup>.

Interestingly Cunningham's very first *Event* was also created for a museum space during the

48. Among them the MCDC, Trisha Brown, Grand Union, Viola Faber, and Twyla Tharp. Within the 1974 program, the keyword "museum" appears only four times, whereas in the 1979 program there are more than sixty mentions. Cf. National Endowment for the Arts, *Coordinated Residency Touring Program. Directory of Dance Companies 1974*; National Endowment for the Arts, *Coordinated Residency Touring Program. Directory of Dance Companies 1979*.

49. Cf. Douglas C. Sonntag, *Dance*, in Mark Bauerlein (edited by), *National Endowment for the Arts. A History 1965-2008*, with Ellen Grantham, National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC 2009, pp. 171-183: p. 182.

50. Adding up all grants that Merce Cunningham and the MCDC received from different NEA-programs during the 1970s amounts to more than two million US Dollars. Cf. National Endowment for the Arts, *Annual Reports (1970-1979)*, online: <https://www.arts.gov/about/annual-reports> (accessed 27/10/2020). The company went on to receive major grants in the following decades, but this is not the focus here.

51. More on *Canfield* in David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., pp. 168-171 *passim*.

52. Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement*, cit., p. 82.

53. The Walker Art Center Archive holds correspondence between Suzanne Weil and David Hawkanson (for the MCDC) which discusses this issue. Cf. A-WAC, Folder 1.

54. Robert Morris' décor included a seven-meter-high movable light column designed to blind the audience with a high-power spotlight shining on a reflective back wall as well as the dancer's reflecting leotards.

55. Cf. Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement*, cit., p. 82.

MCDC's first world tour in 1964 in a very similar situation. When invited to perform at the Museum of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Vienna it turned out that the museum building, a modernist steel and glass cube, provided neither a stage nor a backstage area. Being unable to present a piece from the repertoire here, Merce Cunningham and John Cage took a cue from their notorious intermedia-chance-choreography *Black Mountain Happening* from 1953 and created *Museum Event #1*<sup>56</sup>. This was a 2.5-hour compilation of excerpts from the company's repertoire, compiled by a chance mechanism and complemented with music by John Cage and some clownish performance interludes by Robert Rauschenberg<sup>57</sup>. The experiment was a success and still on the same tour, the Moderna Museet in Stockholm hosted two similar performances<sup>58</sup>. The company also followed an invitation from Museum Haus Lange to Krefeld, Germany, which at the time presented a Rauschenberg-exhibition. In this respect, it seems likely that Cunningham attracted the attention of European museum directors because of his close collaboration with Rauschenberg who was a rising star in the visual art world at the time<sup>59</sup>.

With the company's growing success in Europe and Asia, its popularity in the United States also increased and so did its touring activities, not least because of the aforementioned intensive support from the NEA. *Events*, due to their versatile nature, soon became an integral part of the MCDC's repertoire and were presented not only in museums but also in universities, schools, gymnasiums, and public places<sup>60</sup>. While every *Event* followed similar principles, *Events* were also highly individual due to their site-specificity. Cunningham explained that «the decor is most often the performance space itself; thus, the combination of movement, music, and decor, as well as the arrangement of the choreographic and musical material, are unique for each event»<sup>61</sup>. The fact that «the pieces were not [...] made to fit into a given space, but rather that you could simply look at each new situation and see how to deal with it»<sup>62</sup> allowed him «to break away from the idea that the only place you could perform, so to speak, was in a theater»<sup>63</sup>.

In addition to artistic ingenuity and a pioneering spirit, *Events* bear witness to Cunningham's down-to-earth pragmatism. Cunningham, who referred to himself as «a practical man (the theater

56. This performance took place on June 24, 1964.

57. Cf. David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., pp. 138-139; Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement*, cit., pp. 74-76; Carolyn Brown, *Chance and Circumstance. Twenty Years with Cage and Cunningham*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2009, p. 387.

58. As part of the series *5 New York Evenings* organized by Pontus Hultén on September 8th and 15th, 1964. Cf. David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 142.

59. Rauschenberg won the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial in 1964.

60. Among them spectacular sites like St. Mark's Square in Venice or the ruins of Persepolis. Cf. David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 186.

61. National Endowment for the Arts, *Coordinated Residency Touring Program. Directory of Dance Companies 1974*, cit., p. 26.

62. Merce Cunningham, *Stages, Audiences, "Events"*, in Id., *The Dancer and the Dance. Merce Cunningham in Conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve*, Boyars, New York-London 1985, pp. 167-178: p. 176.

63. *Ibidem*.

demands it)»<sup>64</sup> said about his *Events*, that they «allowed us as performers to do things in places where otherwise we might not be able to do anything at all»<sup>65</sup>. This statement also reveals an entrepreneurial spirit. Since even in large cities the number of theater stages is limited and their booking policies and capacity calculations can put a lot of pressure on the success of a performance, the flexibility the MCDC gained through *Events* meant a real breakthrough. Being able to book tours much more densely contributed significantly to the company becoming financially successful<sup>66</sup>. Between 1973 and 1975 the MCDC presented nothing but *Events*, at times reintroducing the format back onto the proscenium stage. *Event #32*, performed in 1972, thus marked the tipping point towards *Events* becoming a routine or a “blueprint”, with hundreds of iterations to come<sup>67</sup>. The later evolution of the format included spectacular performances such as the one in Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall within Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* in November 2003 and many more museum performances, some again at the Walker<sup>68</sup>. Since the museum realm is closely identified with the selection and conservation of art for posterity, Cunningham’s frequent staging of *Events* in museums last but not least points towards a pronounced consciousness for legacy-building. Cunningham thus did not oppose institutions in a traditional avant-garde sense<sup>69</sup> but he rather embraced them innovatively as the next module will show.

## **Module #6: *Event #32* in the Context of Merce Cunningham’s Aesthetics: Reduction – Coexistence – Chance**

*Events* were composed of repertoire fragments and therefore closely connected to Cunningham’s stage-oriented choreographies. To illuminate how they drew but also differed from his other work, I will now take a brief look at Cunningham’s aesthetics, focusing on three closely connected concepts: reduction, coexistence, and chance.

First and foremost, Merce Cunningham was one of the most radical representatives of minimalism in dance. «[W]hat is seen, is what it is. I do not believe it is possible to be “too simple”»<sup>70</sup>, he noted in

64. Merce Cunningham quoted in David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 151.

65. *Ibidem*.

66. Cf. Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement*, cit., p. 81.

67. Cf. David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 186. Events were numbered systematically between 1973 and 1979. Cf. Hiroko Ikegami, *A Medium for Engagement*, cit., p. 77, note 5.

68. For example, at the Walker Art Center as part of the aforementioned retrospective in 2017. It is also worth mentioning, that Cunningham chose an *Event* for his company’s final performance after his death in 2009. It was performed in December 2011 in New York City. Cf. Carrie Noland, *Inheriting the Avant-Garde*, cit., pp. 85-86.

69. Noland reflects on Cunningham and the avant-garde conundrum of innovating and becoming part of an established canon. Cf. *ivi*, pp. 86-87. I would suggest that Cunningham was less interested in challenging institutions (as Noland implies) than he was in testing and crossing boundaries in general.

70. Merce Cunningham, *Space, Time and Dance* (1952), in David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 67.

one of his earliest artist statements. In following this principle throughout his career, he strove to reduce dance to what he perceived to be its essence: space, time, and movement<sup>71</sup>. To highlight the spatial and temporal qualities of dance, Cunningham did away with the narrative linearity of traditional dance pieces. For example, he intentionally ignored the frontal vision of the proscenium stage by having his dancers turn their backs on the audience or he stressed the spatial extension and weight of the dancing body by contrasting rest and movement, tension and relaxation, horizontality and verticality.

In championing innovation over tradition Cunningham followed the lead of modern dance icons like George Balanchine (who revolutionized “classical” Ballet) or Martha Graham (as a leading figure in Modern Dance), both of whom he worked with in his early career<sup>72</sup>. As opposed to Graham, Cunningham championed a cerebral and technical approach over emotional expressionism. This applied to his overall choreographies as well as to every individual move or gesture, resulting in an intended lack of prescribed meaning and leaving maximum space for interpretation<sup>73</sup>. This approach was famously criticized by politically engaged art historian Moira Roth as an “aesthetic of Indifference”<sup>74</sup>. In the more factual words of dance scholar Sabine Huschka, the conscious and «complexly coordinated use of the body» gives Cunningham’s choreographies the appearance of «a changing structure»<sup>75</sup>. From this point of view Cunningham’s minimalism creates an aesthetic distance between dancers and spectators, which once again resonates with Michael Fried’s concept of theatricality. This particularly applies to *Events* as fragmented compositions, happening in different places simultaneously. The 360-degree view of the museum space further underlines the decentered and multidirectional spatial qualities of Cunningham’s aesthetic, the visual artworks highlighting its pictorial/sculptural qualities. Interestingly, in terms of temporality, Cunningham adhered to a traditional event-like format and never fully adapted his work to the temporality of museum exhibitions, something only choreographers of later generations would embrace<sup>76</sup>.

Cunningham was a driving force behind the intermedia art experiments of the 1950s and 1960s. Instead of creating an integrated “total work of art”, however, he strove for coexistence and repeatedly

71. «Dancing is movement in time and space» (Cunningham quoted in Sabine Huschka, *Merce Cunningham und der moderne Tanz. Körperkonzepte, Choreographie und Tanzästhetik*, Königshausen und Neumann, Würzburg 2000, p. 206).

72. Cunningham studied with Martha Graham and was one of the first male dancers to become part of her company. He worked with her from 1939 to 1945. Following Graham’s advice, he took classes at the New York City Ballet during Balanchine’s era.

73. Noland rightfully points out that Cunningham’s choreographies were often inspired by actual situations or stories so there was never a complete absence of meaning or narrative. Cf. Carrie Noland, *Merce Cunningham. After the Arbitrary*, cit., p. 3.

74. Cf. Maria Roth, *The Aesthetic of Indifference* (1977), in «AND Journal of Art & Art Education», n. 22, 1990, pp. 3-12.

75. «Komplex koordinierten Körpergebrauch, dessen Bewegungen einen ruhigen, durchdachten, weil bewussten Körper artikulieren, der sich wie ein sich veränderndes Gebilde anschauen lässt» (Sabine Huschka, *Moderner Tanz Konzepte Stile Utopien*, Rowohlt, Reinbek 2002, p. 233). Translation by the author.

76. Such as Boris Charmatz or Xavier Le Roy. Claire Bishop points out that these artists took their «lead from the objectivity of Cunningham and Judson» (Claire Bishop, *Black Box, White Cube, Gray Zone*, cit., p. 28).

stressed that «[n]either music nor dance nor sets support[s] the other»<sup>77</sup>, a state he referred to as to «co-mingle»<sup>78</sup>. This concept of coexistence marked his lifelong partnership with John Cage as well as his collaborations with visual artists such as Robert Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns. It also defined the inner structure of his choreographies, many of which were composed of a varying number of separate and sometimes interchangeable modules coexisting in time. Yet again the *Event*-format stressed these qualities further. As opposed to stage productions, the photographs and installations in the Walker were not created as décor but they were truly coexisting works of art. More generally *Events* took the modular structure of Cunningham's work to the extreme. Including modules and fragments of modules from different works allowed for various Cunningham pieces to coexist in a single choreography.

From the early 1950s and throughout his career Cunningham applied chance procedures to combine pre-figured sets of movements. Like John Cage, he viewed chance as a gateway for life into art and as a possibility to add spontaneity to the creative process<sup>79</sup>. Over the years, Cunningham used a variety of chance mechanisms, such as throwing coins or dice, drawing playing cards, or the Chinese oracle *I Ching*. In his view «working out a large number of dance phrases, each separately, then applying chance to discover the continuity» presented «almost constantly situations in which the imagination is challenged»<sup>80</sup>. *Canfield* for example was such a “passage work”, composed of 27 segments that were in themselves composed by means of a card game. The striking site-specificity of the *Events* owed itself to such chance procedures which enabled an almost automatic adaptation of choreographed fragments to a given situation. Chance not only guaranteed a great spatial and temporal flexibility but also increased efficiency in the production process. Once the sequences and mechanisms had been rehearsed, a performance required relatively little preparation. As opposed to free improvisation, which Cunningham never fully embraced (as opposed to the dancers of the Judson Dance circle, especially the Grand Union), the application of chance procedures allowed him to implement routines, thus putting less pressure on the dancer's individual creativity but also preventing unwanted deviations from his original ideas<sup>81</sup>.

In sum, minimalist reduction and the concept of coexistence as well as the renunciation of narrative and suspense favored the modularization of Cunningham's choreographies which then could be disassembled and rearranged by chance principles. All of these concepts were relevant to Cunningham's work in general and particularly evident in his *Events*, which, therefore, are by no means a separate genre within his work but rather its continuation, or even its essence. As Noland rightfully

77. Cunningham quoted in Mike Steele, *The Merce Cunningham Dancers are an Institution Now. But After 30 Years... He's Still "Just Beginning"*, in «Minneapolis Tribune», 1972, preserved in A-WAC, Folder 2.

78. *Ibidem*.

79. Cf. Merce Cunningham, *Four Events that Have Led to Large Discoveries* (1994), in David Vaughan (Chronicle and Commentary by), *Merce Cunningham. Fifty Years*, cit., p. 276.

80. *Ibidem*.

81. A discussion on this issue is in Carolyn Brown, *Chance and Circumstance*, cit., p. 360.



stressed, avoiding meaning was not a central concern for Cunningham<sup>82</sup>, but rather to provide an openness for meaning to arise with every new situation. *Events* can be framed as a complex avant-garde mechanism or even automatism, designed to produce, through repetition and recombination, ever new and interesting spatio-temporal situations while being outstandingly flexible and versatile. Considering Cunningham's later fascination with computer-generated choreography, it seems justified to refer to his *Events* as proto-algorithmic and to link his practice to the rise of cybernetics.

## Conclusion

Bringing the modules of this essay together, some striking conceptual overlaps between Cunningham's *Events* and the Walker's programming and architecture become visible. Both favored a reduced or minimalist aesthetic and an independent coexistence of artistic media, choreographic structures, or program segments. Both aimed to break up linear narratives by decentralizing and modularizing time and space, highlighting flexibility, and the freedom of the arts as well as a freedom of choice/of interpretation for the audience. Thus, both oscillated between a total specificity or adequacy, which they highlighted respectively, and a completely "neutral" adaptability as criticized by theorists like Moira Roth (regarding Cage and Cunningham), Michael Fried (regarding the visual arts) or Brian O'Doherty (regarding gallery spaces). Regardless of such evaluations, it seems evident that this mutual tendency towards a modularized flexibility and theatricality was an important factor in facilitating a new compatibility of dance and the museum at this historical point in time. For the audience, this meant a new level of physicality in the traditionally predominantly visual museum experience. It required a self-reflective awareness of being in space and offered a new freedom of interpretation that could be both challenging and inspiring. From the well-attended *Event #32* it can be concluded that this challenge met with great interest.

The ways in which the Walker's design changed over the years, architecturally as well as conceptually, indicated a turn towards visitor engagement and the contemporary which was mirrored by a steady increase of its live programs. Just as Sally Banes had suspected, and as the concept of the Barnes-building proved, the museum reacted fairly quickly to the performative expansion of the visual arts, paving the way for dance into the museum-program. However, this is only one side of the coin. Cunningham's approach to dance as a spatial structure or tableau also ascribed sculptural and pictorial qualities to dance, which along with the physical presence of visual artworks in many of his choreographies, makes his work appear particularly suited for museum spaces. Thus, the approximation of the visual and the performing arts at the medium and institutional levels was a two-way street. This may also apply, albeit with shifting parameters, to other institutions such as MoMA or the Whitney Museum and a range

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82. This is Noland's central thesis. Cf. Carrie Noland, *Merce Cunningham. After the Arbitrary*, cit., pp. 4-5.

of Cunningham's contemporaries, especially the Judson Dance artists. More detailed research would be desirable in this respect, ideally also going beyond the nucleus of the US dance avant-garde and museum scene.

What can be learned from the example here is that the two-way approximation did not lead to coalescence. On the contrary, the spheres of the visual and performing arts continued to coexist. This was a necessary condition for both Cunningham and the Walker to stage their cooperation as a pioneering crossing of boundaries. As a dancer and choreographer, the "boundaries" Cunningham pushed (rather than crossed) with his *Events*, were those of (modern) dance/ballet and the theatre stage, his motivation was an avant-gardist curiosity for the unknown as well as entrepreneurial pragmatism. The Walker's frame of reference was that of a collecting contemporary art museum. From here, it was likewise looking to expand, aiming to provide an adequate platform for increasingly performative works of art as well as finding new ways to engage with its visitors. The resulting collaboration was additionally stimulated by the availability of public subsidies, which links the second wave of dance in museums closely to issues of (cultural) politics. Taking a step back, the concepts of coexistence or "unity in diversity" as well as the individual creativity championed by both Merce Cunningham and the Walker reflected (perhaps unknowingly) the liberalist ideals central to the domestic as well as foreign politics of the United States during the Cold War<sup>83</sup>. Likewise, the mentioned drive for boundary-crossing by means of deconstructing and rearranging traditional norms and forms is of course a more general characteristic of the zeitgeist at the dawn of the postmodern era. However, as opposed to the radical negation of authority in the Judson Dancer's improvisational approach to dance, the collaboration between Cunningham and the Walker was marked by a very cautious relinquishing of control within a framework of clearly defined rules.

Finally, the close look at *Event #32* showed how dance in museums not only depends on innovative dancers and choreographers, but also pioneering "museum-impresarios" like Suzanne Weil, progressive museum directors like Martin Friedman, sufficient funding and institutional networks as provided by the NEA, and not least an open-minded public. All of this was provided in Minneapolis at this particular moment in time. More generally, the postmodern zeitgeist, the expansion of the arts, museums reacting to current societal shifts, and the major public funding initiatives provided the fertile ground for the second wave of dance in museums. Once this special constellation dissolved, this "second wave" gradually ebbed away, but never completely. Its legacy, and the legacy of Cunningham's *Events*, in particular, was to create a new sensibility within the dance community towards museums as a site for a dance, while *Events* also provided an interesting model for presence-oriented reiteration and conservation practices for museums. At the same time, many museums took to the Walker's model,

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83. This concept of pluralism went hand in hand with the concept of individual freedom and was set against socialist ideas of collectivity.

forming performance and public programming departments, thus gradually institutionalizing dance events within the field of the visual arts. As seen in this example, staging dance in a museum does not necessarily lead to its fixture or confinement, but on the contrary, museums may readily embrace the ephemeral and fluid nature of dance.