GENE FRIEDMAN
3 Dances

What is a dance? In *3 Dances*, Gene Friedman attempts to answer just that, by presenting various forms of movement. The film is divided into three sections: “Public” opens with a wide aerial shot of The Museum of Modern Art’s Sculpture Garden and visitors walking about; “Party,” filmed in the basement of Judson Memorial Church, features the artists Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Robert Rauschenberg, and Steve Paxton dancing the twist and other social dances; and “Private” shows the dancer Judith Dunn warming up and rehearsing in her loft studio, accompanied by an atonal vocal score. The three “dances” encompass the range of movement employed by the artists, musicians, and choreographers associated with Judson Dance Theater. With its overlaid exposures, calibrated framing, and pairing of distinct actions, Friedman’s film captures the group’s feverish spirit.

WORKSHOPS

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, three educational sites were formative for the group of artists who would go on to establish Judson Dance Theater. Through inexpensive workshops and composition classes, these artists explored and developed new approaches to art making that emphasized mutual aid and art's relationship to its surroundings.

The choreographer Anna Halprin used improvisation and simple tasks to encourage her students "to deal with ourselves as people, not dancers." Her classes took place at her home outside San Francisco, on her Dance Deck, an open-air wood platform surrounded by redwood trees that she prompted her students to use as inspiration. In New York, near Judson Memorial Church, the ballet dancer James Waring taught a class in composition that brought together different elements of a theatrical performance, much like a collage. In the same building, the pianist Robert Ellis Dunn and his wife, the dancer Judith Dunn, taught courses that took the influential composer John Cage's ideas of chance and structure as their starting point. The Dunns encouraged their students to observe rather than approve or disapprove of one another's explorations. When the cycle of classes finished, in 1962, the participants—too numerous to fit into the workshop studio for their end-of-semester performance—petitioned the church to make room for them.

DOWNTOWN
Sites of Collaboration

In 1962, Judson Memorial Church—a socially engaged Protestant congregation in New York's Greenwich Village—offered the students in Robert Ellis Dunn's composition class a space to perform. The church was already playing host to visual artists from the surrounding community, who had organized Happenings at the Judson Gallery, located in the church's basement, and to theater-makers who performed at the Judson Poets' Theater. Throughout downtown Manhattan, artists came together to use churches, warehouses, bars, and streets as places to make and show their artwork. They often participated in one another's work, drawing their real-life interactions onto the stage and presenting their group dynamics as part of their art. New magazines, literary newsletters, and publications written by local residents, like the *Village Voice*, the *Floating Bear*, and *An Anthology*, reported on the collaborations, disagreements, and personal stakes involved in sustaining these communities.

Simone Forti's Dance Constructions are performed Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 3:30 p.m.

Yvonne Rainer reflects on the downtown art scene in the early 1960s. Enter 284 on MoMA Audio or moma.org/a284 on your phone.

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Judson Dance Theater was informed by a number of other newly established organizations in downtown New York City. The ones highlighted in this gallery can be found on this map.

1. THE LIVING THEATRE
MERCE CUNNINGHAM STUDIO
530 Sixth Avenue

2. REUBEN GALLERY
61 Fourth Avenue

3. CHAMBERS STREET LOFT SERIES
112 Chambers Street

4. THE FIVE SPOT CAFÉ
5 Cooper Square

5. THE FLOATING BEAR
309 East Houston Street

6. JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH
JUDSON GALLERY
JUDSON POETS' THEATER
JUDSON DANCE THEATER
55 Washington Square South

7. CAFFE CINO
31 Cornelia Street

8. LA MAMA EXPERIMENTAL
THEATRE CLUB
321 East 9th Street

9. THE FILM-MAKERS' CINEMATHEQUE
FILM-MAKERS' COOPERATIVE
80 Wooster Street

10. JOINT EMERGENCY COMMITTEE
TO CLOSE WASHINGTON SQUARE
PARK TO TRAFFIC
Washington Square Park

11. THE VILLAGE VOICE
22 Greenwich Avenue

In 1959, Anita Reuben opened a gallery to exhibit art that focused on public events and new genres. She asked the artist Allan Kaprow, who had been involved with the cooperatively run Hansa Gallery, to conceptualize the space's programming. Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* was Reuben Gallery's inaugural program and marked the first of the period's Happenings—performances and events that directly engaged audience participation. Reuben Gallery provided a venue for experimentation for students and faculty from Rutgers University, where Kaprow was a professor, and from John Cage's composition class at the New School, as well as for the artists Simone Forti and Robert Whitman. Although Reuben Gallery was one of the pioneering venues for the development of time-based art, it closed in May 1961 as its programming was not financially viable.

(Reuben Gallery)

The *Village Voice* was founded in 1955 as a biweekly newspaper combining news, investigative journalism, and eccentric coverage of New York City's culture. The excerpts shown here chart the achievements of the Joint Emergency Committee to Close Washington Square Park to Traffic (JEC) campaign against Parks Commissioner Robert Moses's plan to transform downtown Manhattan into a dense cluster of highways. As a result of the organization's protests, city officials agreed to permanently close the park to vehicles in 1963. The writer Jane Jacobs, a member of JEC and an activist against urban renewal that ignored existing communities, declared that "cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody."

(Village voice/JEC)

In 1958, minister Bernard "Bud" Scott invited artists to clear out the basement of Judson Memorial Church to create studios. The following January, the space became Judson Gallery, a meeting place for artists making Happenings and other work beyond traditional mediums.

In this space, Jim Dine and Claes Oldenburg organized the three-day event *Ray Gun Spex*, during which they staged performances in environments constructed from materials found on the street. Stan VanDerBeek shot Oldenburg's segment *Snapshots from the City* and transformed it into a film that emphasizes the theatricality of the performance by inserting moments of complete darkness.

(Judson Gallery/Snapshots)

The Living Theatre, founded in 1947 by the actress Judith Malina and the painter Julian Beck, was a venue for experimental plays, many of which featured nonactors. Jack Gelber's *The Connection*, one such work from 1959, is a play within a play in which a film crew attempts to shoot jazz musicians and heroin users waiting for their drug dealer. In the early 1960s, the Living Theatre was located in the same building as the choreographer Merce Cunningham's dance studio; its proximity, and the resulting connections between visual art, theater, dance, and music, fostered downtown New York's dynamic artistic discourse. After moving locations a few times, the Living Theatre went on tour, producing plays in prisons and steel mills, among other venues.

(The Living Theatre and *The Connection*)

In 1960 Yoko Ono rented a loft on Chambers Street where she organized performances and public events with the composer La Monte Young. In Ono's home, John Cage, Simone Forti, Allan Kaprow, and others presented their works. When Young was subsequently asked to edit an issue of *Beatitude* magazine, he invited many of those who had participated in these programs to contribute content. Although the issue was never realized, the materials—essays, musical notations, visual and concrete poetry, graphics, and instruction-based works—were assembled in Ono's performance space and published, in 1962, as *An Anthology*. The cross-disciplinary experimentation that characterized these contributions would later define the Fluxus movement.

(Chambers Street Loft Series)

The Five Spot Café was an influential jazz club in Greenwich Village that hosted the groundbreaking musicians Cecil Taylor, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman, and Bill Dixon. A gathering place for artists, it brought together black avant-garde musicians and the participants of the local visual art scene. The pianist and composer Cecil Taylor held one of the first residencies at the Five Spot. Taylor and the trumpeter Bill Dixon would go on to collaborate with dancers at Judson Memorial Church. The Five Spot was active at its original Cooper Square location from 1958 to 1962, and then moved to St. Marks Place.

(Five Spot Cafe)

This free literary newsletter, coedited by LeRoi Jones and Diane di Prima, featured new work by poets and writers such as William S. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, and Frank O'Hara, as well as reviews of music, art, theater, and dance events such as Judson Dance Theater's Concert of Dance #1 in 1962. The candid nature of the reviews—and the back and forth of opinions between readers and authors in the letters section—made the newsletter a source of gossip and conflict. Di Prima's apartment on East Houston Street (and later on East Fourth Street) served as the newsletter's hub, where artists and writers came together for marathon weekends of compiling and mailing each issue. Some, such as Fred Herko and Cecil Taylor, went on to collaborate after meeting there.

(Floating Bear)

In November 1961, Judson's high-spirited minister, Al Carmines—also a composer, actor, vocalist, and accompanist—initiated Judson Poets' Theater to host works of experimental theater. Along with spaces such as Caffe Cino and La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, it emerged as a reaction against the commercialism and professionalism of Broadway theaters. It staged plays by Gertrude Stein set to Carmines's music as well as musicals with scores written by Carmines, such as *Home Movies*.

Although these productions were modest in scale, many were critically acclaimed and some even became commercially successful. Carmines resigned in 1982, and while the church continued to occasionally put on shows, the heyday of Judson Poets' Theater was synonymous with his passionate commitment.

(Judson Poets' Theatre)

Judson Memorial Church was founded by the clergyman Edward Judson at the end of the nineteenth century as a place of worship for immigrant communities in Greenwich Village. The church actively engaged with social issues; it provided medical support for homeless people, drug users, and sex workers, and in the late 1960s offered an abortion-referral service.

From 1962 to 1979, ministers Bernard "Bud" Scott and Al Carmines facilitated the church's artistic endeavors, hosting Judson Dance Theater, the Judson Gallery, and Judson Poets' Theater. "A group of people were anxious to have a place to work," recalled Carmines. Judson Memorial Church still plays a vital role in its community, providing a space where religion, art, and social activism converge.

(Judson Memorial Church)

SANCTUARY
Judson Dance Theater

The workshops in the basement of Judson Memorial Church were developed by the Judson group into performances that were presented in a series of sixteen free concerts between 1962 and 1964. The artists assembled the programs using a Quaker model of consensus, requiring unanimous agreement from the group, and they participated in each other's performances in varied roles—as performers, organizers, lighting designers. Most of the concerts, which took place at different intervals, from a few days to a few months apart, were presented in the church's basement gym or in the sanctuary (with the pews moved out), but some extended beyond the church into various locations in the city. So did the other performances the Judson Dance Theater group organized, which expanded their influence on the larger artistic scene. Some of those activities are represented in this gallery through photographs, films, musical scores, and oral histories.

David Gordon and Aileen Passloff reflect on the welcoming environment of Judson Church. Enter 287 on MoMA Audio or moma.org/a287 on your phone.

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ORDINARY GESTURES

Judson artists included everyday gestures and objects in their works, thereby expanding what counted as dance. Mundane actions like running, walking, catching, falling, and climbing were executed beside leaps and spins. The artists brought onto the stage activities typical of the street or the home, like combing hair or reading a newspaper, and emphasized the real time it took to complete these tasks rather than subjecting them to the illusory time typical of traditional theater. Judson's emphasis on ordinariness extended to the use of nondancers in some of its performances, whose presence functioned as a critique of the notion that the dancer's body must be heroic and virtuosic.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Judson artists rejected the traditional dance company structure, in which the lead choreographer is venerated as a kind of demigod or hero. Instead, they adopted a group-based approach, shifting the focus from a single performer to the collective. This model of collaboration did not, however, eliminate individual autonomy and decision-making: performers were encouraged to execute tasks and interpret scores based on their individual styles and experiences.

CAMP

"A sensibility of failed seriousness" is how, in 1964, the cultural critic Susan Sontag described the deliberate exaggeration and deadpan humor known as camp. Her definition was formulated in part in response to works performed at Judson. In *Carnation*, for example, Lucinda Childs handled sponges, hair curlers, and a colander with great care, the contrast between her cool demeanor and the absurdity of her actions resulting in a kind of slapstick. David Gordon's *Random Breakfast*, in which Valda Setterfield slinked out of a Victorian-era costume and Gordon vamped in drag, borrowed from variety entertainment like striptease and burlesque. And George Herms's photographs of Fred Herko at the edge of a rooftop, posing with his arms extended over his head, take ballet's characteristic sense of line and extension to its extreme.

PROPS

"The alternatives to renew dance are obvious: move or be moved by some *thing* rather than by oneself," wrote the choreographer and dancer Yvonne Rainer. Judson artists treated objects or props as activators and protagonists in their dances rather than as mere supplements for the actors. In *Music for Word Words*, Steve Paxton used a vacuum cleaner to inflate and deflate a plastic structure. Yvonne Rainer's *Parts of Some Sextets* was organized around pulling and turning mattresses. Using props was also a way to eliminate creative decision-making and to deemphasize the role of authorship in making art.

SCORES

A score is a written notation of a musical or dance composition; it allows the work to be performed at a later date or by another performer. As composers incorporated everyday sounds into their music in the 1940s and 1950s, they created new notational forms that could be read by nonspecialists or artists from other disciplines. Dance-makers also used symbols of their own invention to integrate new types of movement into dance. The scores presented here feature magazine and newspaper clippings, expressive drawings of figures, calligraphic line drawings, and color-coded stage directions. These different approaches allowed artists to provide performers with flexible parameters, encouraging variation in how a dance was interpreted.

PROCESS

In the middle of her dance *Geranium*, Lucinda Childs spoke directly to the audience, saying that she did not have the equipment for the upcoming section but that she wanted to perform it anyway. By narrating the performance as it was unfolding and describing what it took to make it, she incorporated the process of composing a dance into the dance itself. Other Judson artists similarly put what it took to make art on display. In *Site*, Robert Morris wore a white painter's uniform and work gloves, representing himself as a laborer and linking the creative process to traditional notions of work. The writer Jill Johnston incorporated what she called "confessional literature," which included personal anecdotes, into her reviews in the *Village Voice* so that the social context of the work she discussed was as important as what happened on stage. These artists revealed the thoughts, sweat, and gossip behind their artworks.

INTERMEDIA

"Intermedia is when you enter the image and get wrapped up in it," explained the artist and filmmaker Elaine Summers, one of the champions of this concept, which emerged in the early 1960s. Intermedia described artworks that existed between different disciplines, as well as those works that mirrored the popular media of radio, television, and magazines, which were increasingly part of people's everyday lives. Artists associated with intermedia combined film with experimental dance so that moving bodies and moving images were integrated. Their complex works often required collaboration between filmmakers, choreographers, and performers.

ENVIRONMENTS

Outdoor dance festivals, galleries, museums, and even the street were common venues for art and performance in the early 1960s. The Judson artists participated in this challenge to the traditional proscenium stage—which frontally frames the performance and distances it from the audience—by exploring nonconventional spaces and incorporating into their works the environments where they were staged.

Steve Paxton's *Afternoon (a forest concert)* was performed on a farm in New Jersey and integrated trees and other elements from the surrounding landscape. Lucinda Childs's *Street Dance* was staged in Robert Rauschenberg's loft, where the audience was invited to look out the window at Childs and her dance partner as they moved on the street.

IMPROVISATION

Works that call for a response to an instruction, an environment, or another performer provided Judson dancers with a structure without completely determining all the elements of a composition in advance. Such improvisation took a variety of forms: Bill Dixon's on-the-spot trumpet playing in *Metamorphosis: 1962–66*; Trisha Brown performing, with abandon, the simple tasks of sitting, standing, and lying down in *Trillium*; and Steve Paxton figuring out how to turn and carry his partners through the woods in *Afternoon (a forest concert)*. Improvisation also allowed for the spontaneous negotiation and expression of group dynamics.