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LETA E. MILLER

Henry Cowell and Modern Dance: the Genesis of Elastic Form

It is not an exaggeration, I believe, to claim that the great patron of twentieth century music has been the art of dance.

William Schuman

Although dance studio accompaniment provided a stable, if not lucrative, source of income for many twentieth-century American composers, the job could easily become tedious. Even John Cage, whose creative life was intertwined with dance from the 1930s until his death in 1992, found studio accompaniment quite intolerable. In 1939 he wrote to Lou Harrison: "I have the possibility of a job in Taos this summer. . . . I wouldn't get paid very much if at all; but it would be a step away from [dance] accompaniment—drudgery which I hate."¹ (It is tempting to speculate that Cage's impatience with studio work contributed in some measure to the composition method he ultimately worked out with Merce Cunningham in which sound and movement components were developed independently.) There was also a stigma associated with the label "dance composer." In 1940 Harrison wrote to Henry Cowell: "I never imagined this damned dance-curse

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I have would pop up in N.Y.! . . . This is one reason I am giving up dancers—critics and musicians are trying to make a new Delibes of me!”² At the same time, the job occasionally generated important—even revolutionary—musical developments. While Cage was playing for one of Bonnie Bird’s classes at the Cornish School in Seattle, for instance, a metal rod rolled into the piano, prompting experiments that led him to the prepared piano.³

Despite potential pitfalls, Henry Cowell composed numerous works for contemporaries in the modern dance world (Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Bonnie Bird, Erick Hawkins, Marian Van Tuyl, Tina Flade, May O’Donnell, Jean Erdman, and others), turning a potentially dreary job into an opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange of aesthetic ideas. (A selection of Cowell’s dance works is given in Appendix A.) Mary Anthony recalls Cowell’s memorable persona at the Hanya Holm studio in the 1940s:

Henry’s shaggy grey eyebrows arched in constant anticipation of the reward of being joyously alive. . . . He either wore the same suit or had many versions of one suit—all a little too small. . . . His coat was always closed by one button that seemed about to pop off. . . . He spent so much of his time sitting crosslegged—either on the floor or a chair—that when he stood up straight [his pants] . . . bulged forward at the knees. Not that Henry stood still very often. I have the memory of him bounding like a wooly kangaroo from drums, to gongs, to piano, to center of studio to perform a few dance steps and then back to the drums to make a point.⁴

Modern dancers in Cowell’s time were grappling with the problems of “interpretive dance”—that is, developing choreographies to previously composed music—a process that potentially cast movement in a servile position to sound. Some choreographers dispensed with music entirely, dancing in silence. Others constructed their choreographies first, and then brought in a composer to write the score. Cowell, Cage, Harrison, and others—notably Louis Horst, Martha Graham’s resident composer from 1926 to 1948—all worked in this manner, watching the dance, taking down the “counts,” and then devising music to match the choreography. Cowell, however, sought new solutions that would treat both art forms with equal respect. As his ideas developed, he published them in a series of articles in dance periodicals from 1934 to 1941 (see Appendix B).

In the earliest of these articles, “How Relate Music and Dance?” (1934), Cowell complained that the major problem with interpretive dance was that

in almost no instance was the music really interpreted. The interpretive dances . . . were usually just about alike, no matter what the music. . . . The form, melodic line, and harmonic structure of the music were not considered. The dances usually had no outline.⁵

But even with the greatest of choreographers, Cowell cautioned that interpretive dance had potentially debilitating drawbacks. Isadora Duncan's works, for instance, were performed to the accompaniment of "the greatest classical masterpieces," but

the music was so interesting that it tended to distract the auditor from the dance. One missed the primitive relationship of the movements to the actual beat. . . . If one watches the dance, one loses interesting musical values. If one listens to the music, the dance is not duly appreciated.

Cowell's solution in 1934 was to create a contrapuntal relationship between music and dance, in which "the music rises to its point of interest when the dance is quiescent, and then the music dies down in interest while the dance rises."⁶

Though he trumpeted his success in developing this process in collaboration with Martha Graham, Cowell failed to name the work in question. Nevertheless, it is clear that he is referring to *Synchrony* (1930), a work he subsequently revised and orchestrated. *New York Times* reviewer Carter Harman wrote in the liner notes for the 1967 recording:

The novelty of "Synchrony" was to be that instead of the music providing a "floor" for the dancers . . . , the two elements were to perform in counterpoint and even in opposition. . . . In a program note written for a premiere that never took place, the creators stated their [solution to] . . . the age-old conflict between choreographer and composer for the attention of the audience. . . . "Just as in a three-part polyphonic musical work one will find very often one . . . part stationary while the other two move in contrary motion, so one finds in 'Synchrony' that, if the music is at its climax the dance is quiescent and vice versa. . . . The attention of the auditor will not be diverted by trying to follow two climaxes at the same time."⁷

The third contrapuntal part was to have been lighting effects. But *Synchrony* was never performed with dance, and the concert version (premiered by Nicolas Slonimsky in Paris in June 1931) was heavily revised.⁸ Nevertheless, we can derive some insight into Cowell's con-

trapuntal concept through a short score of the original version of *Synchrony* at the Library of Congress, for the manuscript contains scribbled references to the dance.⁹ In one example (at rehearsal 16 in the orchestral version), a section labeled “Poetically; poco a poco dim. e rit.” is accompanied by Cowell’s direction, “Dancers enter, get *faster* as music slows.” Similarly, preceding rehearsal 26, the music dies down to a series of long chords, after which Cowell wrote: “Hold long, add moving harmonies [~~crossed out and amended to ‘change scoring’~~], dance fast.”

By 1937 and his article “Relating Music and Concert Dance,” Cowell had decided that the key to music-dance equality lay in large-scale formal planning. Noting that choreographic works typically emerged from repeated improvisation in the studio, he lamented the burden placed on composers. As the dance evolved, the composer was forced to alter the score. Attempts at simultaneous composition were even less satisfactory; the result tended to be a “string of movements” with “little in the way of form or logical sequence.” Cowell’s solution: dance must become more structured, music less so. “While the dance errs on the side of too . . . vague [a] structure . . .,” he cautions, “music today . . . errs in the opposite direction of being too rigid.”¹⁰ To “establish a meeting ground for musical and dance composition,” Cowell proposed elastic musical forms, containing units that dancers could expand, contract, repeat, omit, transpose, invert, or interchange in various ways—allowing the sound to respond to the choreography without disturbing its own validity. Cowell recommended writing sections or sentences as “block-units” whose order could be shuffled; composing melodic phrases with the potential for extension or curtailment; authorizing the repetition or omission of entire sections; and varying the instrumentation.

The whole work may, then, be short . . . or as long as is desired. . . . It may be performed with percussion alone, with piano alone, with orchestral instruments, or with one orchestral instrument, or with any combination of these. The whole work will, in any of its ways of presentation, have form; but it may be easily adapted to the changes and freedoms so essential to the dancer’s creation.¹¹

Cowell illustrated his article by an unpublished composition for three melody instruments and two percussionists: *Sound Form No. 1* (see ex. 1).

Accompanying the score are six pages of instructions, in which Cowell offers performance suggestions and elastic alternatives. For instance:

Example 1. Cowell, *Sound Form No. 1* (1937), sections A and B. Reprinted by permission of the Cowell estate. The explanatory text in this example is taken from Cowell's autograph manuscript.

A

B

C

Rhythm theme:

inversion:

retrograde:

Form, AABC, compounded from rhythm of single measures every four and sixteen measures

Tempo Comodo

A (these letters indicate main divisions)

> ++

I

II

III

[Percussion] I

[Percussion] II

ff

ff

ff

ff

ff

(ground-tone)

*

*

*

*

*

>

>

>

>

ff

ff

ff

ff

*

*

*

*

>

>

>

>

* These accents apply to all parts, and show the rhythmic form of individual measures and notes.

++ These accents apply to all parts, and show the form of four measure groups.

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in three systems. The first system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The vocal line begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is written in a single line with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The piano accompaniment features a treble staff with a key signature of one sharp and a bass staff with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *mf* and a series of chords and single notes. The second system continues the vocal melody and piano accompaniment. The third system shows the final measures of the piece, including a key signature change to one flat (Bb) for the piano part. The score is written in a clear, legible font with standard musical notation.

The musical score for 'Last time to Coda' is presented in a multi-staff format. It includes a piano introduction (marked 'f') and a main section. The piano part features a treble and bass staff, while the main section includes a guitar staff (marked 'f') and a bass staff. The score is written in 4/4 time and concludes with a 'Coda' symbol. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' and the key signature has one sharp (F#).

Example 1. Con't.

B

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system contains five measures. The vocal line begins with a melisma 'B' (circled) and a fermata. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand. The second system contains four measures. The vocal line continues with a melisma 'B' and a fermata. The piano accompaniment introduces a more active texture with sixteenth-note patterns in the right hand and a moving bass line. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The score concludes with a final measure in the second system.

Example 1. Con't.

- the entire piece, major sectional divisions, four-measure units, and even individual measures may be repeated;
- instrumentation may be altered (flute, clarinet, and bassoon is preferred; percussion instrumentation is flexible);
- the melody may be performed alone without accompanying parts;
- the percussion figuration may be transplanted from one section to another.¹²

Cowell had experimented previously with movement flexibility (the five movements of his *Mosaic Quartet* of 1935 can be played in any order and repeated at will), but the open-ended elastic possibilities of *internal* expansion and contraction proposed in *Sound Form* arose in direct response to the needs of the choreographer. Cowell empha-

sized that no matter how the sections and subsections of *Sound Form* are rearranged, the work will maintain musical coherence since it has been constructed so that “the larger sections follow the same plan of accents and dynamics as [are] found within smaller divisions.”¹³ Three markings—accent, circle, and horizontal dash—appear simultaneously on various metric levels. These marks represent, on a relative plane, loud, soft, and medium dynamics within the context of the overall sectional dynamic.¹⁴ The dynamic pattern in the Percussion II part illustrates the correspondence of the micro- and macrostructural levels (see fig. 1): an AABC pattern forms the basis of the composition from the largest organizational unit down to the individual measure. The beat-level stress patterns in Percussion II are mirrored in the upper parts at the level of the measure and/or the four-measure unit. An interesting parallel to this type of rhythmic organization may be seen in Cowell’s *United Quartet*, completed at about the same time as *Sound Form No. 1*. In the quartet, two dynamic levels (strong and weak) are arranged in groups of five (strong strong weak strong weak); this pattern appears on the level of the beat, the measure, groups of measures, and the entire five movement complex.¹⁵

Section AA (internal form: AABC plus repeat)

> > ° - | > > ° - | ° ° > - | - ° > > | = a a b c A
 > > ° - | > > ° - | ° ° > - | - ° > > | = a a b c A
 ° ° > - | ° ° > - | > > ° - | - ° > > | = b b a c B
 - ° > > | ° ° > - | > > ° - | > > ° - | = c b a a C

Section B (internal form: AABC with the materials of Section A rearranged;
 thus BBAC in relation to Section A above)

° ° > - | ° ° > - | > > ° - | - ° > > | = b b a c B
 ° ° > - | ° ° > - | > > ° - | - ° > > | = b b a c B
 > > ° - | > > ° - | ° ° > - | - ° > > | = a a b c A
 - ° > > | ° ° > - | > > ° - | > > ° - | = c b a a C

Section C (a retrograde of Section A)

- ° > > | ° ° > - | > > ° - | > > ° - | = c b a a C
 ° ° > - | ° ° > - | > > ° - | - ° > > | = b b a c B
 > > ° - | > > ° - | ° ° > - | - ° > > | = a a b c A
 > > ° - | > > ° - | ° ° > - | - ° > > | = a a b c A

Figure 1. Dynamic stress patterns in the Percussion II part of *Sound Form No. 1*

Although Cowell's primary concern in developing theories of elastic form was to accommodate the needs of evolving choreographies, there was another more practical—and more tragic—motivation behind his 1937 article in the *Dance Observer*. At the time, he was unable to visit any dance studio in the country, observe a choreography, and match a score to it because he was in San Quentin prison.¹⁶ On March 20, 1937, Martha Graham wrote to Cowell's stepmother, Olive, and asked her to set up a visit to San Quentin, since Graham would be in San Francisco for recitals the following month.¹⁷ During the resulting visit, Graham requested music for her dance "Immediate Tragedy," a "dance of sorrow over the Spanish Civil War."¹⁸

Norman Lloyd recalls the day Cowell's score (*Sarabande*) arrived in Bennington, Vermont, for the premiere.

Louis Horst and I looked at it and agreed that we had never seen anything like it. Cowell had written two basic phrases to be played by oboe and clarinet. Each phrase existed in two-measure, three-measure, [and] eight-measure versions. . . . All that was necessary was to fit a five-measure musical phrase to a five-measure dance phrase—or make such overlaps as were deemed necessary. The process, as I remember it, took about an hour. The total effect was complete unity.¹⁹

Graham agreed. She wrote to Cowell on August 1 that she was impelled and energized by his "impassioned" music and that she considered "Immediate Tragedy" her best dance since "Frontier."²⁰ Unfortunately, as of this writing Cowell's music has not been located.

During his four years in prison, Cowell explored various permutations of elastic form in dance works for Bonnie Bird in Seattle and Marian Van Tuyl in Oakland. The Seattle connection was instigated by Cage, who had accepted a position as dance accompanist to Bird in 1938.²¹ As soon as Cage moved to Seattle he organized a percussion ensemble on the model of the one he had begun in Los Angeles.²² Cowell's influence on Cage's Seattle activities is striking. In his first percussion concert (December 9, 1938), Cage programmed three compositions from a 1936 issue of Cowell's *New Music Orchestra Series*.²³ For the second concert (May 19, 1939), he solicited percussion music from composers around the country and received, in response, Cowell's *Pulse*. On the third program (December 9, 1939), Cage premiered Cowell's *Return* (a companion piece to *Pulse*) and quoted Cowell in the printed program on the "future of music." This pronouncement by Cowell may well have stimulated Cage's own essay, "The Future of Music—Credo," delivered at a meeting of the Seattle Artists League in February 1940 (not 1937, as has often been stated).²⁴ Thus, when Bonnie Bird set out to choreograph Jean Cocteau's

Marriage at the Eiffel Tower for a performance at the Cornish School in March 1939, it seemed natural that Cage would include Cowell in a compositional collaboration on the model of Les Six's famous version of 1921. The resulting work contained movements by Cage, Cowell, and George McKay (at the University of Washington).

Cowell sent Cage five numbers for *Marriage*: a "Hilarious Curtain Opener" for piano, a "Train Finale" for six percussionists, and three "Ritournelles."²⁵ Bird used only the first two pieces, finding the ritournelles too "unyielding" for her dance. Cowell wrote to her on April 2, 1939, apparently in response to a letter in which she had described the March 24/25 performance.

I am sorry that [the Ritournelles] were written in such unyielding meter. I had somehow gathered the idea that the music was meant to flow along regularly, while you did irregular things. . . . It is not at all difficult for me to apply the "elastic" form idea in such a manner that you can do irregular rhythms, changing freely from one to another as you choose.²⁶

Despite Cowell's assurances, only one of the three ritournelles is elastic. Like *Sound Form No. 1*, it is notated completely but allows for rearrangement of individual measures or groups of measures. The work is a "larghetto cantabile" in 3/2, set in binary form: a twenty-four-measure opening section is followed by an eight-measure trio. In the introductory notes to the printed score, Cowell suggests twenty alternative versions of the first section (three to twenty measures in length), and eight versions of the trio (three to seven measures).²⁷ The alternatives all contain measure-groups from the beginning and end of the section; some also include measures extracted from the middle. For instance, among the alternatives for section 1 are (a) measures 1 and 23–24; (b) measures 1–3 and 23–24; (c) measures 1–2, 13–14, and 15–24; and (d) measures 1–5, 19–21, and 22–24. As David Nicholls has shown, some of these abbreviated versions are decidedly more successful than others.²⁸ Cowell also invites performers to explore other arrangements of the ritournelle that he claims can work as comfortably (or uncomfortably) as those he has proposed.

Nearly a year after *Marriage at the Eiffel Tower*, Marian Van Tuyl premiered two of Cowell's elastic compositions at Mills College: *Ritual of Wonder* and *Chaconne*. Whereas the Seattle collaboration came about through Cage, the Van Tuyl connection was stimulated by Harrison, who had been studying with Cowell since the fall of 1935. Harrison had accompanied Cowell to Stanford the day before Cowell's arrest on a morals charge in May 1936, and during Cowell's internment had visited him as often as possible for composition lessons "through prison bars."²⁹ On Cowell's recommendation, Harrison was hired by Mills

College in 1937 in a capacity similar to that of Cage in Seattle.³⁰ During his first year, Harrison accompanied dance classes and recitals by Tina Flade. But in the fall of 1938, Flade left Mills and was replaced by Marian Van Tuyl from Chicago.³¹

On October 7, 1939, Van Tuyl apparently accompanied Harrison on one of his visits to San Quentin. "Thank you so much for coming to see me on Saturday," Cowell wrote to her two days later. "I enjoyed your visit and Lou's very much indeed. It is stimulating to talk to those who are interested in the same field that I am!"³² The letter continues at some length about a proposal for an elastic chaconne. Though *Ritual of Wonder* is not mentioned, it evidently took shape in the same period, since both works were premiered on a recital on April 5, 1940. Van Tuyl herself ascribes the work to 1939.³³

Ritual of Wonder is an extended composition that combines Cowell's pastiche composition method in the lost *Sarabande* with the types of sectional and instrumental variability found in the elastic "Ritournelle" and *Sound Form No. 1*. Two movements were fully composed by Cowell: no. 6, a "Sentimental Blues (Without Apology to 'Porgy and Bess')" and an opening "March," given in example 2, which can be performed as written (the "harmonic dissonant version") or in a "simple form" with only melody and bass. The March appears both ways in the final work: in the simple form at the beginning, and in full after the intervening Reel, as the following breakdown of the movements illustrates.

1. March 1, simple form (melody and bass only): ABA
2. Transition to Reel³⁴
3. Reel: A B C sections, which may be repeated in various patterns
4. March 2: repeat of March 1 in the "harmonic dissonant version"
5. Transition to Blues³⁵
6. Sentimental Blues (Without Apology to 'Porgy and Bess'): AABA
7. Meeting Section
8. Climax—speed up
9. Conclusion (verbal instructions only: "On first beat of measure play chords of March in succession. 28 m. to curtain").

For the remaining movements, Cowell provided a set of thirty-seven cells, mostly one measure in length, that could be arranged as needed for the dance (selections are given in examples 3a and 4a). He then entrusted Harrison with the task of composing all movements except the "March" and "Sentimental Blues," and assembling the final work. Harrison did so in consultation with Cowell and based on stu-

Example 2. Cowell, *Ritual of Wonder* (1939), March, section A. Reprinted by permission.

(A)

Fine

dio interaction with Van Tuyl. Each elastic movement contains only a few cells, which can be inverted, retrograded, transposed, or altered in subtle ways (such as introducing minor variants in intervallic structure). A simple example is Harrison's realization of the "Transition to Reel" movement (ex. 3b), which uses cells 30, 31, and 32 as shown. Note the exchange of right- and left-hand material (for instance, mm. 1–2), the alteration of a whole step to a half step (cf. mm. 2 and 4, left hand), and the additional note in the right hand in measure 6.³⁶ Within individual movements, thematic organization is carefully preserved: for example, in the "Meeting Section," one of the longest movements in the work, the parts danced by the full group are based on cell 5, while intervening solo sections feature contrasting cells. Solo 2, for instance, is composed of material generated from cell 11, though the generation involves the freedom and imagination of a composer (ex. 4b).

Example 3. Cowell, *Ritual of Wonder* (1939).

a. A sample of Cowell's cells for building the piece (cells 27–34)

Example 3a displays eight musical cells (27–34) from Cowell's *Ritual of Wonder*. The notation is presented in two systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 8/8. The cells are numbered [27] through [34] above the first staff of each system. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and chords. A fermata is present over a note in cell [28].

b. “Transition to Reel” movement, arranged by Lou Harrison, using cells 30–32

Example 3b displays the “Transition to Reel” movement, arranged by Lou Harrison, using cells 30–32. The notation is presented in four systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor), and the time signature is 8/8. The movement is marked with the tempo instruction *accelerando* above the first staff of the second system. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and chords. The cells are numbered [30], [31], and [32] above the first staff of each system. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, rests, and chords. A fermata is present over a note in cell [31].

Example 4. Cowell, *Ritual of Wonder* (1939).

a. A sample of Cowell's cells for building the piece

This musical score displays 15 numbered musical cells, each consisting of a two-staff piano arrangement. The cells are numbered [2] through [15]. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and articulation marks. The time signatures vary across the cells, including 4/4, 3/4, and 2/4. The key signature is predominantly one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The cells are arranged in three rows: the first row contains cells [2], [5], [6], and [7]; the second row contains [8], [9], [10], and [11]; and the third row contains [12], [13], [14], and [15].

b. "Meeting section," excerpt

This musical score shows an excerpt from the "Meeting section" of Cowell's *Ritual of Wonder*. It is divided into two parts: "Group" and "Solo 2." The "Group" section, marked with a [5], is a two-staff piano arrangement in 4/4 time, featuring complex chordal textures and some rests. The "Solo 2." section, marked with a [11], is also a two-staff piano arrangement in 4/4 time, featuring a more melodic line in the right hand and a supporting bass line in the left hand. The notation includes various accidentals and articulation marks. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor).

b. "Meeting section," excerpt Con't.

M.V.T. [= Marian Van Tuyl]

[2]



Group

[5]



Cowell authorizes sectional rearrangement and variability in the "Reel," which contains three parts (seven, seven, and two measures respectively) that can be repeated in various configurations. One of the two manuscripts of this work at Mills College shows how the Reel was performed in the premiere: AABBC AABC BC. Both Mills manuscripts also provide alternative orchestration for the first March and the Sentimental Blues in the form of optional trumpet parts.

The *Chaconne*, programmed by Van Tuyl under the title "Fanfare—Variations," allows for less radical alteration because of the nature of the genre. Cowell wrote seven versions of a sixteen-measure theme: (1) a "Foundation melody," (2) "Foundation plus counterpoint above," (3) "Foundation with 2nd counterpoint (below)," (4) "Foundation and counterpoint in acceleration," (5) "Foundation with running counterpoint of theme in acceleration," (6) "Foundation with chordal setting," and (7) "Foundation with delicate dissonant counterpoint." The need to preserve the chaconne's harmonic structure precludes the type of internal expansion and contraction typical of Cowell's other elastic works, but does allow for the interchange of variations or portions of them. Manuscripts at the New York Public Library and a (silent) film of the dance preserve the performance version worked out by Harrison and Van Tuyl for the 1940 premiere:

1—2—6—3—7 (first half)—5—7 (second half)—3—6.

At the same time that Cowell explored elastic musical forms, he also continued to contemplate the possibilities of music-dance counterpoint. In "A Discussion of Percussion" (1938) he expanded his old contrapuntal concept to embrace the area of articulation. On one end of the spectrum is the "incisive" style, exemplified by percussion

music. On the other is the "flowing" style, such as Renaissance vocal music. Dance can aim at but never achieve the incisive style, because one motion cannot avoid leading into the next. Furthermore, dance has no equivalent to silence—an essential component of incisiveness; its medium (the body) is always present. Percussion, on the other hand, can never be truly flowing since every sound begins with a distinct articulation. "Most well-balanced art partakes of both elements in judicious mixture," Cowell cautions. Overemphasis on the incisive style results in a composition that is "over-intellectual, dry, scientific, and formalistic"; overemphasis on the flowing style can result in a work that is "turgidly and unreasoningly emotional."³⁷ Hence percussion music needs the flow of dance just as dance needs incisive music. Cowell recommends combining them in "contrapuntal contrast." At the end of this short article, he cites an illustrative work, *Deep Song* (1937), composed for Graham as a companion to *Sarabande*. Unfortunately, like *Sarabande*, the music is lost.

What about the other side of Cowell's equation that music must become less structured, dance more so? He spoke directly to choreographers on this issue in his 1941 article "Creating a Dance: Form and Composition." Most choreographies, he noted, are constructed through casual experiment, by improvising and then stringing together a series of selected gestures. In music, claims Cowell, improvisation is useful only as an initial indication of talent, since the improviser tends to gravitate toward familiar configurations, resulting in a work that is a jumble of ideas taken from others. At worst, such compositions wander aimlessly; at best, some balanced phrases emerge. In *true* composition, on the other hand, one must

build up . . . every sound and rhythm . . . toward an inevitable climax point, through many . . . smaller climaxes and recessions. Melodies, rhythms, harmonies, tone qualities and counterpoint [must] . . . enhance each other, and broader unity . . . [be] achieved through development of motives, contrasts, leading passages which presage something of importance, and recapitulations of ideas in which the original form has gathered more meaning through new connotations.³⁸

Cowell suggests that dance composition could be improved if choreographers would imitate procedures used by composers. After devising an initial idea, he recommends fixing the point of climax. This section should be composed first, along with the passages leading up to it and away from it. If the piece will contain only one idea, build a plan for its repetition and development. If there are two ideas or more, decide how to balance them. How much of each will appear? How often will it be repeated? How will one idea link to the next? How

will recapitulations be set off to be recognizable? Only then is it appropriate to compose the details.

After his release from San Quentin in 1940, Cowell no longer needed to compose in elastic forms to work with dance, since he could collaborate directly with the choreographer in the studio. But he continued to explore the ideal relationship between the two art forms. In his 1941 article "New Sounds for the Dance," he addressed questions of musical timbre. Noting that Western instruments had reached such a pinnacle of refinement that their sounds were "too tonally complete, too entirely adequate and self-reliant," Cowell advocated rough, unrefined, unfinished sounds as dance accompaniment, especially those in which "a certain amount of irregular vibration [is] mixed with the regular periodic vibration"—that is, sounds with a high noise-to-pitch ratio.³⁹ The more melodic the sound, the less rhythmic. Since accentuation is basically noise (that is, irregular vibrations), tones with a high noise component are inherently more percussive and therefore more suited to the dance. The work Cowell cited in this discussion was *Trickster (Coyote)*, composed for Erick Hawkins's first solo dance recital on April 20, 1941, at the YMHA in New York.⁴⁰ Performers were Cowell and Martha Graham's accompanist Ralph Gilbert.⁴¹ Gilbert played percussion and Cowell played a variety of (mostly) non-Western wind instruments that have a notable noise component—for example, the Chinese dizi (a transverse flute that has an unfingered hole covered by a vibrating onion-skin membrane), the Chinese oboe (the sona), and a "Hungarian pipe" (by which he probably means the furulya, typically played with simultaneous humming by the performer). The percussion instruments included rattles, drums, and a thunder stick (a board on a string which the performer swings in circles).

In his efforts to balance music and dance, Cowell anticipated a number of developments in contemporary music, including flexible composition and performance techniques. In this case, as in so many others, his role in the American experimental music scene during the first half of the twentieth century has often been underestimated. In part, the fault is Cowell's own: he rarely trumpeted his contributions or sought to impose his views on others. A typical example is a comment in his 1939 letter to Van Tuyl regarding the *Chaconne*:

In case you or Lou wish to add or subtract any of [the percussion parts], you are welcome to do so. In fact since this sort of arrangement must need be so experimental, let us say that if it seems a good thing, you may subtract all the music I send entirely . . . ! But in that case, write in and say so, and I'll have another try at it.⁴²

Never didactic or self-righteous, Cowell's articles seem rather to reflect his boundless enthusiasm for life and art, and his eagerness to share each new discovery with colleagues and friends.

Cage, who didn't always acknowledge Cowell's influence, did at least indirectly hint at his debt to elastic form. Some of Cowell's works, wrote Cage in 1959,

are indeterminate in ways analogous to those currently in use by Boulez and Stockhausen. . . . [In his] *Elastic Musics*, the time lengths . . . can be short or long through the use or omission of measures provided by him. These actions by Cowell are very close to current experimental compositions which have parts but no scores, and which are therefore not objects but processes providing experience not burdened by psychological intentions on the part of the composer.⁴³

But Cowell's aesthetic in the elastic works from the 1930s was quite different from that of Cage. Rather than *removing* the composer's intentions, Cowell's goal was a score that *reflected* his intentions while at the same time providing alternative performance realizations. He sought a middle ground between a fixed score and a work developed through improvisation.

Cowell did not use elastic form in dance compositions such as *Trickster (Coyote)* or the *Hanya Holm Music*, written after his release from prison. But his student Harrison did, building on Cowell's ideas in a number of theater and dance pieces from 1941 to 1987.⁴⁴ In 1962–63, as Wayne Shirley has shown, Cowell's interest in elastic form reawakened. He reworked his old *Mosaic Quartet* of 1935 into the *Symphony No. 15 ("Thesis")* and composed the *Hymn and Fuguing Tune 15–B* for violin and cello, "made of brief, gnomic segments—all either eight or ten measures in length—any of which can succeed any other."⁴⁵ Ultimately Cowell filtered the principles of elasticity through the lens of Cagean indeterminacy to create *26 Simultaneous Mosaics* for violin, cello, clarinet, percussion, and piano (1963), in which performers play their unrelated parts in any order, repeat or omit movements at will, and intersperse their choices with silence. *26 Simultaneous Mosaics* is not a dance work, but its lineage from Cowell's experiments in the 1930s is clear. It is not that Cowell suddenly had become a student of his students, for in a sense he always was. Rather, his mind was constantly receptive to ideas from diverse sources, whether from dancers, from visual artists, from scholars, from teachers, and, not least of all, from those he instructed.

APPENDIX A

A Selective List of Works Composed by Henry Cowell for Dance

Catalog Number	Date	Title-choreographer-scoring-notes
L. 423	1926	<i>Atlantis</i> ; Doris Humphrey (soprano, alto, bass soloists and chamber orchestra. Commissioned by Alice Barney, but abandoned as too expensive).
L. 457	1930	<i>Men and Machines</i> ; Elsa Findlay (piano).
L. 464	1930	<i>Synchrony of Dance, Music, Light</i> ; Martha Graham (orchestra; retitled <i>Orchesterstück: Synchrony</i> for concert version).
L. 476	1931	<i>Dance of Work</i> ; Charles Weidman (original title: <i>Steel and Stone</i> ; piano. Arranged for ten instruments [L. 476a]).
L. 482	1931	<i>Dance of Sport</i> ; Weidman (original title: <i>Competitive Sport</i> ; piano. Arranged for ten instruments [L. 482a]; companion piece to L. 476).
L. 483	1931?	<i>Heroic Dance</i> ; Graham (ten instruments; arranged for piano [L. 483a]).
L. 484	1932	<i>Two Appositions</i> ; Humphrey (orchestra; original version lost; string orchestra and piano versions survive [L. 484a, b]).
L. 491	1933	<i>Six Casual Developments</i> ; Graham (clarinet and piano; 4 movements arranged for clarinet and chamber orchestra [L. 491a]; arranged for wind quintet [L. 491b]).
L. 510	1935	<i>Dance in the Early Morning</i> ; Tina Flade (piano; music lost).
L. 511	1935	<i>Dance of the Evil Hands</i> ; Flade (piano; music lost).
L. 512	1935	<i>Fire Cycle</i> ; Flade (piano; music lost).
L. 516	1935	<i>Salutation</i> ; Hanya Holm (flute, piano, percussion; music lost).
L. 521	1936	<i>Sound Forms</i> (variable, but flute, clarinet, bassoon, 2 percussion preferred).
L. 534	1937	<i>Sarabande</i> ; Graham (oboe; clarinet; percussion; music lost). Written at request of Graham for "Immediate Tragedy."
L. 537	1937	<i>Deep Song</i> ; Graham (woodwinds, percussion; music lost; companion piece to <i>Sarabande</i>).
L. 563	1939	<i>Marriage at the Eiffel Tower</i> ; Bonnie Bird (piano, percussion; joint composition with John Cage and George McKay).
L. 539	1939	<i>Ritual of Wonder</i> ; Marian van Tuyl (two pianists, trumpet, recorder, percussion. Lichtenwanger dates it [incorrectly] as 1937. Dance score assembled by Lou Harrison from elastic materials provided by Cowell).
L. 596	1939–40	<i>Chaconne</i> ; Van Tuyl (piano; Lichtenwanger dates it 1940. Premiered on same concert as <i>Ritual of Wonder</i> [April 5, 1940]).
L. 609	1941	<i>Trickster (Coyote)</i> ; Erick Hawkins (percussion, various wind instruments).
L. 622	1941	<i>Hanya Holm Music</i> ; Holm (piano).
L. 623	1942	<i>La Valenciana</i> ; Paul Draper (tap dancer, soprano, alto, chorus, flute, bassoon, 2 guitars, castanets).

L. 637	1942	<i>Killer of Enemies</i> ; Hawkins (music lost).
L. 703	1946	<i>Irish Epic Set</i> ; May O'Donnell (piano, strings, keyboard).
L. 721	1948	<i>Deirdre of the Sorrows</i> ; Gertrude Lippincott (piano).
L. 734	1949	<i>Madman's Wisp</i> ; Lippincott (piano).
L. 753	1950	<i>A Full Moon in March</i> ; Lippincott (piano, low male voice).
L. 761	1951	<i>Clown</i> ; Hawkins (piano).
L. 805	1954	<i>Changing Woman</i> ; Jean Erdman (piano, drums, harmonium).
L. 938	1964	<i>Zapados Sonidos</i> ; Draper (double chorus; tap dancer).

Source: William Lichtenwanger, *The Music of Henry Cowell* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1986).

APPENDIX B

Cowell's Writings on Music-Dance Interaction and Their Related Musical Compositions

Date	Title/source/description
1934	"How Relate Music and Dance?" <i>Dance Observer</i> 1:v (June-July 1934): 52-53. Suggests devising a contrapuntal relationship between choreography and music. Related musical composition: <i>Synchrony</i> , 1930 (Martha Graham). Never performed with dance; Concert version premiered by Nicolas Slonimsky, June 6, 1931, Paris.
1937	"Relating Music and Concert Dance." <i>Dance Observer</i> 4:i (January 1937): 1, 7-9. Suggests elastic form in music to allow for flexibility in the choreography. Related musical compositions: (1) <i>Sound Forms</i> , 1936: Intended to illustrate the <i>Dance Observer</i> article, but not published with it. (2) <i>Sarabande</i> , 1937 (Graham, "Immediate Tragedy"). Score lost. Dance for the Spanish Civil War. Premiere: July 21, 1937, Bennington, Vermont. (3) "Ritournelle" from <i>Marriage at the Eiffel Tower</i> , 1939 (Bonnie Bird). Music by Cage, Cowell, and George McKay. Premiere: March 24/25, 1939, Cornish School, Seattle. (4) <i>Ritual of Wonder</i> , 1939 (Marian Van Tuyl). Score assembled by Lou Harrison. Premiere: April 5, 1940, Mills College, Oakland. (5) <i>Chaconne</i> , 1939-40 (Van Tuyl, "Fanfare—Variations"). Premiere: April 5, 1940, Mills College, Oakland.
1938	"A Discussion of Percussion." <i>Dance Herald</i> 1:iv (February 1938): 4. Discusses contrapuntal articulation relationships: incisive vs. flowing styles. Related musical compositions: <i>Deep Song</i> , 1937 (Graham). Score lost. Premiere: Dec. 19, 1937.
1941	"Creating a Dance: Form and Composition." <i>Educational Dance</i> (Jan. 1941): 2-3. Presents guidelines for organized choreographic forms based on musical processes.
1941	"New Sounds for the Dance." <i>Dance Observer</i> 8:v (May 1941): 64, 70. Recommends "rough, unrefined" musical timbres for dance. Related musical composition: <i>Trickster (Coyote)</i> , 1941 (Erick Hawkins). Premiere: Hawkins's first solo dance recital, April 20, 1941, YMHA (New York).

NOTES

Epigraph: William Schuman, *Dance Perspectives* 16 (1963): 3.

1. Cage, letter to Harrison (n.d., but the envelope bears the postmark April 20, 1939), University of California, Santa Cruz, Special Collections. Quoted courtesy of the John Cage Trust.

2. Harrison, letter to Cowell, n.d., New York Public Library Cowell papers. Quoted by permission of Lou Harrison. The year can be determined from Harrison's reference to an upcoming performance of his *Sanctus* by Radiana Pazmor. This concert took place on November 14, 1940 (program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Special Collections). Cowell had very recently moved to New York after his release from prison in June 1940.

3. *Bacchanale*, Cage's first prepared piano piece, was composed for a student of Bird's, Syvilla Fort, who eventually became supervising director of the Katherine Dunham School in New York. Cage describes experiments at home that led to the prepared piano in Stephen Montague, "John Cage at Seventy," *American Music* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 209–10. Bonnie Bird recounts the dance-class event in an interview with William Fetterman (*John Cage's Theatre Pieces: Notations and Performances* [Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998], 8) and in conversations with her daughter (Heidi Gundlach Smith, personal communication with author). The two accounts are not necessarily contradictory; the accident in class may well have led to the home experiments. I discuss Cage's percussion works and his residency in Seattle in two articles: "The Art of Noise: John Cage, Lou Harrison, and the West Coast Percussion Ensemble," in *Perspectives on American Music, 1900–1950* (New York: Garland, 2000), 215–63, and "Cultural Intersections: John Cage in Seattle (1938–40)," in *John Cage: Music, Philosophy, and Intention, 1933–50* (New York: Garland, 2002).

4. Mary Anthony, "Percussion with Santa Claus," *Dance Scope* (Spring 1966): 13.

5. Henry Cowell, "How Relate Music and Dance?" *Dance Observer* 1, no. 5 (June–July 1934): 52.

6. *Ibid.*, 52–53.

7. Notes by Carter Harman from the 1967 CRI recording (CRI 217USD), reproduced with the remastered Citadel CTD 88122, 1997. According to Steven Johnson, the work in question is *Six Casual Developments*, but this assumption appears to be incorrect. See Johnson, "'Worlds of Ideas': The Music of Henry Cowell," in *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium*, ed. David Nicholls (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997), 63.

8. Stokowski presented the American premiere on April 1 and 2, 1932; critical reception to the work was very cool (see reviews by Henry C. Beck in the *Philadelphia Record* and Linton Martin in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1932). According to a preview article in the *Inquirer* (March 27, 1932) "the score was written in collaboration with the dancer, Martha Graham, but the sections relating to the dance have been deleted, and the purely orchestral portion will be played." Comparison of the manuscript of the original version with the published orchestral score shows significant revisions but no extensive deletions.

9. Many thanks to Wayne Shirley for providing me with a copy of the manuscript.

10. Cowell, "Relating Music and Concert Dance," *Dance Observer* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1937): 7–8.

11. *Ibid.*, 8.

12. A recording of the work appears on the CD *Dancing with Henry: New Discoveries in the Music of Henry Cowell*, Mode Records 101 (2001). Some of the elastic alternatives used in this performance include insertion of percussion interludes, transference of the melody line from flute to bassoon, substitution of piccolo for flute, and repetition of individual measures or pairs of measures.

13. Notes accompanying the manuscript of *Sound Form No. 1*, Library of Congress.
14. Thanks to Wayne Shirley for helping to clarify this notation, which is not explained by Cowell. The relationship of various metric levels in *Sound Form No. 1* and the *United Quartet* resembles Cage's micro-macrocosmic form, in which the lengths of larger sections mirror those of their component parts. (Cage began to explore this idea in his percussion pieces two years later.) Although we have no evidence that Cage knew *Sound Form No. 1*, he was in regular contact with Cowell during this period.
15. For a discussion and analysis of the quartet, see David Nicholls, "Henry Cowell's *United Quartet*," *American Music* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 195–217, esp. 212–13.
16. Cowell was arrested in May 1936 on a warrant charging him with violation of section 288a of the California Penal Code, which prohibited oral copulation. The particular case involved a seventeen-year-old boy, who had tried to bribe Cowell by asking for hush money. Cowell pleaded guilty and was ultimately sentenced to fifteen years in state prison. He served four years, during which time he virtually created a prison music school, rehearsing a band and orchestra, teaching music courses, and performing on piano and other instruments. He was released in June 1940 and moved to New York. The following year, Cowell was granted an unconditional pardon by the governor of California, Culbert Olson. For details on this episode in Cowell's life, see Michael Hicks, "The Imprisonment of Henry Cowell," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 92–119.
17. Martha Graham, letter to Olive Cowell, March 20, 1937, New York Public Library.
18. William Lichtenwanger, *The Music of Henry Cowell* (Brooklyn: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1986), 153.
19. Norman Lloyd, "Sound-Companion for Dance," *Dance Scope* (Spring 1966): 11–12.
20. Graham, letter to Cowell, Aug. 1, 1937, New York Public Library Cowell papers.
21. For details, see Miller, "Cultural Intersections."
22. See Thomas S. Hines, "'Then Not Yet 'Cage': The Los Angeles Years, 1912–1938," in *John Cage: Composed in America*, ed. Marjorie Perloff and Charles Junkerman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 65–99; and Miller, "The Art of Noise."
23. Ray Green's *Three Inventories of Casey Jones*, Gerald Strang's *Percussion Music for Three Players*, and two of William Russell's *Three Dance Movements*, all published in Cowell's New Music Orchestra Series, no. 18 (1936).
24. On the dating of "The Future of Music—Credo," see Miller, "Cultural Intersections."
25. The "Hilarious Curtain Opener" and the elastic Ritournelle discussed in this article were published in the *New Music Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (Oct. 1945), during the single year in which Lou Harrison was editor. The "Train Finale" score is reprinted in Cage's *Notations*.
26. Cowell, letter to Bird, April 2, 1939, in private collection. Quoted by permission.
27. *New Music*, 19, no. 1 (Oct. 1945). There are actually only twenty-three measures in the opening section, since the first and second endings of the second half are numbered separately in the printed score.
28. Nicholls, "The Pragmatics of Composing for the Dance," unpublished paper presented under the auspices of the Society of American Music at a joint meeting of fifteen societies on Nov. 3, 2000, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
29. Harrison, personal communication with author. On Cowell's arrest and imprisonment, see n. 16 above.
30. In the summer of 1938 Bird tried to recruit Harrison for the Cornish School job, but Harrison was content at Mills and recommended Cage instead. See Miller, "Cultural Intersections."
31. Marian Van Tuyl, interview by Eleanor Lauer (1977), and résumé, in the Van Tuyl collection at the New York Public Library. See also Elizabeth Goode, "The Dance at

Mills College," *Dance Observer* 6, no. 7 (Aug.-Sept. 1939): 252: "In the fall of 1938 Marian Van Tuyl came from the University of Chicago to take charge of dance activities, and as a result of her energetic pushing ahead, the dance major has taken its place among the leading fields of study at Mills." Van Tuyl was born in Wascousta, Michigan, in 1907 and died in San Francisco on Nov. 10, 1987 (*New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1987.)

32. Cowell, letter to Van Tuyl, Oct. 9, 1939, Mills College Special Collections. Quoted by permission.

33. Van Tuyl's notes on her dances (Van Tuyl collection, New York Public Library). Lichtenwanger places *Ritual* in 1937, but he cannot be correct, since Van Tuyl did not come to Mills until fall 1938; her first West Coast appearance was on Oct. 26, 1938. A preview announcement for this recital states that the program "will mark her first appearance on the Pacific Coast" ("Leaves from the College Calendar," Oct. 12, 1938, Mills College internal publication). Several manuscripts of *Ritual of Wonder* survive (some of them incomplete). These include: (1) New York Public Library: a complete fair copy with pencilled performance notes (identical to Mills A below); (2) Mills College library: two manuscripts (A: a copy of the NYPL score, and B: an incomplete fair copy); (3) Library of Congress: an incomplete fair copy (identical to Mills B), Harrison's autograph materials, and Cowell's autograph of the March, the Blues, and the cells for constructing other movements.

34. Called "first intermission" in Harrison's autograph materials at the Library of Congress.

35. Called "March into Blues" in *ibid.*

36. The added note in m. 6 is apparently not an error, since it appears in all sources, including Harrison's autograph. The upper flat in the right hand in that measure is not carefully placed in the messy autograph and therefore was misinterpreted by the copyist of "Mills B."

37. Cowell, "A Discussion of Percussion," *Dance Herald* 1, no. 4 (Feb. 1938): 4.

38. Cowell, "Creating a Dance," *Educational Dance* (Jan. 1941): 2.

39. Cowell, "New Sounds for the Dance," *Dance Observer* 8, no. 5 (May 1941): 64.

40. The score is published in *Soundings*, vol. 11 (Santa Fe: Soundings Press, 1981).

41. Gilbert had been trained at Seattle's Cornish School, where he accompanied Bonnie Bird's dance classes. His move to New York to work with Graham in 1938 created the opening at Cornish that Cage filled. See Miller, "Cultural Intersections."

42. Henry Cowell, letter to Marian Van Tuyl, Oct. 9, 1939, Mills College Special Collections. Quoted by permission.

43. John Cage, "History of Experimental Music in the United States," in *Silence* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 71 (originally published in German in the *Darmstädter Beiträge*).

44. Examples include the theater kit *Jephtha's Daughter* (1941), and the dance works *In Praise of Johnny Appleseed* (1942) and *Ariadne* (1987). For a discussion of Harrison's musical kits, a derivation from Cowell's elastic form, see Leta Miller and Fredric Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230.

45. Wayne Shirley, "The Hymns and Fuguing Tunes," in *Whole World of Music*, ed. Nicholls, 125.