Mark Morris and the American Avant-garde: From Ultra-Modernism to Postmodernism

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Importing tuning systems and temporal structures from both ancient and non-Western music into their compositions, West-Coast American composers Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, and Lou Harrison became known as “ultra-modernists.” Mark Morris’s choreography to their music reflects not only these audible components but also their external references, displaying a deep understanding of the composers’ work. Like these composers, Morris thrived on self-education that went beyond Western subjects in his childhood and youth. At the same time, Morris makes many references in these works to the pioneers of American modern dance, suggesting a self-reflexive process that makes his work less ultra-modern and more postmodern.

Throughout his choreographic career to date Mark Morris (b. 1956) has repeatedly returned to the music of American avant-garde composers Henry Cowell (1897–1965), Harry Partch (1901–1974), and Lou Harrison (1917–2003). (See Table 1.) Like Morris, these three composers were born on the West Coast of America and exposed in their youth to a range of cultures, including Samoan, Tahitian, Japanese, Chinese, and Indonesian. For different reasons each man experienced isolation in his childhood and held an ambivalent attitude toward formal education, but—highly intelligent, independently minded, and drawn to an esoteric and eclectic range of subjects—each read widely. Cowell, Partch, and Harrison drew from this eclecticism, which looked backward to the past as well as outward to other cultures, to develop their own experimental compositional techniques and to create what became known as “ultra-modern” music.¹

A close reading of the dances Morris made in response to music compositions of these West Coast avant-garde composers reveals that each choreography reflects not only the aural content and structures of the music, but also its way of incorporating aspects of historical and non-Western techniques of composition to make radical, new work. Of course, looking back to the past and out to other cultures (what David Nicholls terms “retrospection and extraspection”)² in the last decades of the twentieth century represents a very different
practice from what it may be presumed to have been in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Whereas Cowell, Partch, and Harrison incorporated into their music sounds and structures that were new and strange to the majority of their audiences, Morris, in the 1980s and 1990s, was working in a world where such borrowing could easily be accused of being cultural appropriation and/or Orientalism (in Edward Said’s use of the term).³

The case presented here is that Morris sidesteps such accusations by taking a knowing, self-reflexive stance toward his own borrowings from the past and from other cultures. Morris’s “retrospection” in these pieces goes back in time just so far as the early modern dance pioneers of the 1930s and in some cases quotes their references to non-Western dance through the use of identical movements, costumes, or properties. However, in my readings of the relevant works, I argue that these components are \textit{radically juxtaposed} with other movements, costumes, and text, and gender inversions abound to make it evident that quotations of 1930s modern dance are reflective recursions rather than a simple continuation of such practices. Similarly, Morris matches so many aspects of the dance to the music that at times his work resembles the \textit{music visualizations} of Denishawn. Again, though, his juxtaposition of this “conformance” (to use Nicholas Cook’s term)⁴ with more recent and radical strategies, movements, and costuming shows that he applies this idea in a knowing, postmodern way.⁵ The contention is that, by so doing, Morris is not only working in full consciousness of his later historical, social, and artistic situation but has also moved from ultra-modernism to postmodernism.

\textbf{Henry Cowell and Elastic Form}

Michael Hicks describes Henry Cowell’s childhood as having been “so remarkable that, as a psychologist of the time put it, it resembled ‘a fairy story.’”⁶ After a few years in which the

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³ I am grateful to Inger Damsholt for first articulating this idea in her Ph.D. thesis “Choreomusical Discourse: The Relationship between Dance and Music,” University of Copenhagen, May 1999.
Cowell family lived as part of the artistic, bohemian set on the edge of Chinatown in San Francisco, Cowell’s father left home and Henry and his mother returned to his birthplace, Menlo Park. A combination of poverty and the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 sent mother and son looking for refuge with relatives on Kansas farms and to a position as caretakers of a grand house in Greenwich Village, where they were, in Cowell’s words, “shockingly poor,” without enough money even to eat properly.  

During these various moves, Cowell made forays into public education where, in the third grade, he was found to be “below his grade in drawing and penmanship, at the fifth grade level in math, the sixth in geography and at a fully adult level for reading.” He was mercilessly teased and frequently abused as an oddball, with the added affliction of childhood chorea (“St Vitus’ Dance”), so, soon after he started fourth grade, his mother decided to home-school him. As Hicks points out, this soon became “self-education” with Cowell exhausting the juvenile section of libraries in towns they stayed in and finally roaming at will through the New York Public Library.

When Cowell and his mother returned to their old cottage in Menlo Park, Cowell (then only thirteen years old) supported them both by walking miles out into the hills to collect ferns and other plant specimens to sell to local wealthy residents. When his mother became worried about the number of cougars in the hills, Cowell first worked as a janitor at the local school and then taught neighbourhood children the piano. Hicks describes how Cowell himself learned the piano in an ad hoc fashion, exchanging a few weeks of gardening for piano lessons until either his neighbour-teacher gave up or left town, or Cowell’s piano became hopelessly out of tune. “All the while, however, he played ahead in his lesson books, bought an occasional extra piece . . . and began writing his own pieces.” This determination to keep going despite all sorts of setbacks, and especially to keep going along his own path,
was common to all four men and, in Cowell’s case, led to some extraordinary childhood pieces and performances.  

Hicks notes the sixty plus pieces of juvenilia that Cowell wrote from 1911–13, often for his young piano pupils, and the recitals he gave in the region “probably in any place that had a decent piano.” At one recital Cowell played his *Adventures in Harmony* (1913), exhibiting, for the first time, his *tone clusters.* Tone clusters are produced by using the fist, the side of the hand, or the whole forearm on the keys of the piano to play all the notes between two specified pitches. The use of fists and forearms, combined with Cowell’s experiments in stroking and or striking the strings *inside* the piano, led to a playing style that made him both famous and notorious. Cowell was not averse to the publicity thus gained, since it helped his performance career, but in *New Musical Resources* (1930) he explained the serious reasoning behind his use of tone clusters.  

In the following year (1914), Cowell was able to develop his theory of dissonances as one of the first small group of composition students studying “dissonant counterpoint” with Charles Seeger at the University of California, Berkeley. Hicks gives a detailed account of what he calls “[Seeger’s] playfully subversive attempt to stand the traditional methods of writing counterpoint on their head.” Seeger constructed a system in which what would conventionally be considered to be the most dissonant intervals (such as minor seconds and major sevenths) were thought of as “the most ‘stable’ intervals in the system.” Seeger also constructed a hierarchy of “rhythmic dissonance” in which the ratio of beats in a cross-
rhythm followed the ratios of the overtone series.” Cowell’s music frequently employed both clusters of minor seconds and sustained passages of cross-rhythm (as seen in the *United Quartet*, below) but he also took these ideas further, applying the same ratios to the dynamics of his music in a manner reminiscent of Arnold Schoenberg’s serial techniques. Seeger had introduced Cowell to the music of Schoenberg, among other contemporary composers, and Cowell later combined certain aspects of Schoenberg’s serialism with ratios derived from the overtone series in his “theory of musical relativity,” as he outlined in *New Musical Resources* (1930): “It is discovered that the sense of consonance, dissonance and discord is not fixed, so that it must be immovably applied to certain combinations, but is relative. It is also discovered that rhythm and tone, which have been thought to be entirely separate musical fundamentals (and still may be considered so in many ways) are definitely related through overtone ratios.” Thus, Cowell (and Partch and Harrison, as we will see) worked in interconnected forms and integrated relationships in his music. Similarly, as a choreographer, Morris has focused on the interrelationships between various elements of movement—for example, the line traced by a dancer’s arm and the path taken across the stage.†

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† In music the term *dynamics* refers to how loud or quiet a sound is, whereas in dance it refers to the speed, force, and weight of a movement or, in the specific terms of Laban Movement Analysis, to qualitative attitudes toward space, weight, time, and flow. There is clearly a crossover in the two different uses of the term, since a string bowed or plucked (or a column of air made to move) faster is louder than one moved slowly. Indeed, the terms *amplitude* and *volume* carry connotations of size as well as of loudness. See Sophia Preston, “Tension and Release across the Borders of Dance and Music,” in proceedings of *Border Tensions: Dance and Discourse* (Guildford, UK: University of Surrey, 1997): 229–37.

In Schoenberg’s serial method of composition, the composer pre-selects a “twelve-tone row” (consisting of all twelve semitones), which determines the order of pitches in a piece through a rule that no note of the row can be heard again before the whole row has been played through. In later developments of serial music, the ratio of the frequency of adjacent pitches in the tone row also determines both the duration and the volume of the notes. For a detailed account of serialism in music see Arnold Whittall, *Serialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

† See, for example, interviews with Mark Morris in “Dance Spotlight: Mark Morris Dance Group and Boston Ballet” (2006), at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KH-6O1Bgvu4 (accessed October 13, 2013), and in “Mark Morris: On the Structure of his Dances,” a video clip on the PBS website Online Hour http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/markmorris/index.html (accessed October 13, 2013. Morris says in the PBS interview that while he does not necessarily want the audience to notice such interrelationships consciously, he feels that they help to lend coherence to a dance.
As well as introducing Cowell to a broad spectrum of contemporary music, Seeger exposed him to cylinder recordings of Amerindian music. This music added to Cowell’s already wide range of musical experience, which included “hearing Irish folk tunes from his father, the Ozark mountain tunes sung by his mother and the folk songs and lullabies of his Japanese, Chinese and Tahitian playmates.” Later, while on tour in Europe in 1926, Cowell heard Moravian folk music played live, and the following year he wrote an essay that identified within this music “many effects we have considered to be of recent invention in ‘modern’ music, many things not to be found in any known music new or old, and above all, a method of procedure of its own.” He suggested that “an entirely new set of musical values and a new art music may result from the building of a structure from the ground up based on the Folk conception of music,” which he believed would set the world on its ear.

Cowell continued to study what he termed “primitive music,” folk music, and the court music of other cultures throughout his life. In 1931 and 1932 he travelled to Berlin to study Erich von Hornbostel’s extensive collection of recordings and also to work with teachers of Javanese and Balinese music and dance. Later in his career, Cowell learned to play the Shakuhachi at a high level of skill and (according to his wife) even passed a test to check that he could hear and reproduce the micro-tones and complex rhythms of Persian music. He also continued to suggest in his writings that composers could find radically new compositional strategies, including sliding tones and flexible, open structures, from the centuries-old, yet living, traditions of music of other cultures.

* David Paul makes it clear that American scholars applied the word “primitive” to the cultural products of “rural peoples of non-European stock,” while they “reserved the rubric ‘folk’ and its various derivatives—folklore, folk music, folk song—for the cultural materials of rural people who were of European origin.” See “From Ethnographer to Cold-War Icon: Charles Ives through the Eyes of Henry and Sidney Cowell,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 59, no. 2 (2006): 399–457. On the other hand, Suzanne Robinson notes that Cowell “never defined primitive music in the sense of either ‘simple’ or ‘unsophisticated’; rather, he envied non-European music for its liberty from the myriad irksome constraints of the music of his own culture.” See “Percy Grainger and Henry Cowell: Concurrences between Two ‘Hyper-Moderns,’” *Musical Quarterly*, vol. 94, no. 3 (2011), 280.
In his first thoughts about devising open, flexible forms, Cowell looked back to older performance practices, harking back to the times of European itinerant minstrelsy, when he proposed to Percy Grainger that “a greater amount of minstrel-like freedom [be] introduced into musical composition.” He drew on improvisatory forms of certain non-Western musics, though, when he added,

I wish to compose works so flexible [sic] in form that a fine performer can legitimately contract or expand the form; that, following a general central idea which would be introduced to him by the composer, he may have in as many places as possible a choice of forms, a choice of different chords or counterpoint, etc. At any rate, I am working to make such an apparently fanciful idea practical. Cowell went on to develop his own solutions to this “fanciful idea,” including “to offer sections of music which the performer may place together in many ways” and “to give a selection of several different ways in which a certain section may be played, with the performer urged to make further developments.” Cowell used the first of these procedures particularly when writing music for dance, working with such leading choreographers of the day as Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Erick Hawkins. In two articles he wrote for Louis Horst’s Dance Observer (in 1934 and 1937), Cowell outlined the different ways that choreographers had worked with music in the first few decades of the twentieth century. He suggested that “while the dance errs on the side of too great a tendency to possess vague structure, and to be improvised in creation, music today undoubtedly errs in the opposite direction of being too rigid.” Cowell recognized that choreographers needed to be able to adapt and change the length of a piece of choreography as they worked on it, but he also wanted to retain an inner musical structure. In 1937 he wrote, “in order to establish a meeting ground for musical and dance composition, in which the dance will be more definite than usual in form, although just as free to make changes, and the music will be less rigid than usual, although no less containing structure, I would propose the establishment of what
might be called elastic form.”

As Miller records, this elastic form contained “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.”

In his writing about how music and dance might relate to each other, Cowell again looked to the past and to other cultures for possible models. “In ancient art music” he wrote, “a composition was the kernel of an idea, and its actual production was expected to vary, each performer being expected to add his own touches to it.” He suggested that the underlying difficulty of “relating music and dance” arose in the West from a separation of the two when music was employed, and later developed, as part of Christian worship, while dance “continued . . . as a secular means of having fun.” Cowell added a footnote: “in the Orient, the art of the dance and its association developed continuously, and there is no problem in the relationship there; since in all Oriental cultures, both the movements of the dance and the sounds that go with them have been formalized, and certain philosophical meanings are ascribed to them.”

When asked about the very close relationship between dance and music so frequently observed in his work, Morris has suggested that a good way to approach his dances is as one might an example of “classical . . . Indian dance and music.” Like Cowell, Morris refers to the formalized relationships between dance and music in “Indian performing arts,” and the meanings ascribed to them, saying,

It wouldn’t occur to you to dance a rhythm that’s against the one that you’re listening to, although it’s super-sophisticated and improvisatory, it’s within very, very strict, very, very big and strict rules. It’s like, of course [emphasis in original] when it goes up, you go up, when it goes down, you go down. When you’re addressing someone here [gestures diagonally right] on this angle you speak, and you respond this way [gesturing diagonally left].
Here, some seventy years after Cowell, Morris echoes the composer’s knowledge of, and admiration for, particular aspects of non-Western dance and music. Like Cowell, Morris has developed and retained a profound interest in Asian music, describing himself as a “huge, huge fanatic,” having first visited India in 1981 (with Laura Dean and Dancers) and returning annually for many years.\(^{38}\)

**Harry Partch and Just Intonation**

Harry Partch did not work in elastic form, but he did employ cyclical forms in which phrases, and indeed whole sections of music, are repeated in different combinations. Moreover, Partch, like Cowell, was exposed to, as a child, and drew from, both non-Western and ancient music to develop new, “ultra-modern” compositional and performance techniques. Although born in Oakland, California, Partch spent his boyhood in Arizona on an isolated ranch near a small, run-down railroad town. Partch’s biographer Bob Gilmore notes that when Partch was asked how he was able to live alone for so much of his life, he replied, “I suppose I got used to it when I was young. I had to play alone, I had to create my own worlds. There was no-one to help me create a world. Out in the Arizona desert I had very few playmates.”\(^{39}\) Partch also shared with Cowell an early exposure to various non-European musics. His parents had been missionaries in China, and he recalled seeing many Chinese books at home as well as hearing his parents speak Chinese with visitors and his mother sing Chinese songs. He also remembered seeing Yaqui Indians as a child: “Later, when I heard the Yaqui Spring Ritual on a record, the sounds seemed amazingly familiar to me.”\(^{40}\)

Like Cowell, Partch was largely self-taught in music performance. He recalled that the family bought almost everything by mail order, “including a cello, a violin, a mandolin, a guitar, a cornet, and numerous harmonicas.”\(^{41}\) Partch started to teach himself how to play these instruments and his mother’s reed-organ at around the age of five, and he got his mother to teach him how to read music. He became so adept a musician that when he was fifteen he
played piano for silent films. He also wrote music, composing *Death on the Desert*, according to Thomas McGeary, “an example of his early interest in music based on dramatic situations.” Partch’s father died three years later and his mother was killed in an accident the following year (1920), just after Partch had enrolled in a music programme at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. McGeary notes that Partch stayed in the programme for only a few months, “later [stating] he left because he found his teachers no older and wiser than he.”

Depicting early experiences in music similar to Cowell’s, McGeary writes that “having given up on both private music teachers and music schools, Partch began to read about music in public libraries and to compose music free from academic restrictions.” On one of these forays, in 1923, Partch came across Hermann Helmholtz’s *On the Sensations of Tone* and “began his lifelong investigations into music theory from the standpoint of acoustics and just intonation.” Just intonation is a system of tuning notes in accordance with the harmonic series, so Partch was here, like Cowell, focusing on the overtone series. In his *Genesis of a Music* (1949), Partch defined just intonation as “a system in which interval- and scale-building is based on the criterion of the ear and consequently a system and procedure limited to small-number ratios.” He identified his particular system of just intonation, Monophony (the division of a single string), as “a development of the theories deduced by

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* The harmonic series can be heard by lightly stopping a vibrating string at particular points. A string (or monochord) stopped lightly at its mid-point sounds an octave higher than the open string. As the stop moves closer to either end of the string, harmonics can be heard at specific nodal points creating pure or “just” intervals that to Western ears sound increasingly “out of tune.” This is because (most) Western people have grown up in a world tuned by equal temperament. Equal temperament is a system of tuning that makes all the twelve semitones within an octave equal in size, which more or less distorts the pure intervals of the harmonic series. Equal temperament was invented to make it possible to play fixed pitch instruments, like a keyboard, in any key, not just one or two. However, people accustomed to just intonation find nearly all the intervals of equal temperament to be ugly compromises.

† Harry Partch, *Genesis of a Music* (New York: Da Capo, 1949; rpt. 1974), 71. Employing low-integer ratios of the division of a vibrating string (2:1, an octave; 3:2, a perfect fifth; 4:3, a perfect fourth and so on) yields a particular tuning system—just one of a selection of just intonation tunings. A major third in just intonation can be created through the low-integer ratio of 5:4 (which sounds narrower than a major third in equal temperament) or (in a different tuning system) through a large-integer ratio of 32:25 (which sounds wider than a major third in equal temperament). Lou Harrison also had a particular fondness for the low-integer ratios.
Pythagoras of Samos on his monochord, in the sixth century B.C." Partch frequently made reference to the ancient origins of the tuning system he developed, and he responded to claims that he was a “revolutionary” composer by saying, “I had never thought of my work as revolutionary, but only as evolutionary.”

In order to work in this Pythagorean tuning system, Partch had to establish the precise pitches of the scales it generated and also to invent instruments that would make it possible to mark them out and play them. At first he adapted existing instruments, lengthening the neck of a viola, so that he could use it like a “glorified Euclid monochord, with the marks of forty-three true musical ratios indicated on its fingerboard.” Partch developed a “one finger technique” for playing his adapted viola so that he could slide from one “ratio” to another—a technique he described as being “much closer to the spirit of Indian vina playing than it is to [the set discrete steps of] the pipe organ.” Thus, Partch, like Cowell, made references in his writings to music from other cultures as well as from the past.

In some ways Partch’s “one-finger” sliding from ratio to ratio brings him in line with Cowell’s suggestion in *New Musical Resources* (which Partch had read soon after it was published) that “sliding tones . . . may be made the foundation of an art of composition.” Cowell, however, writes that “such a composer would build perhaps abstract music out of sounds of the same category as natural sound—that is, sliding pitches—not with the idea of trying to imitate nature, but as a new tonal foundation.” Far from building an abstract music, Partch was always alive to the embodied, even ritualistic, aspect of music performance, and he used the sliding between microtonal pitches available to him on his adapted instruments to emulate human speech patterns.

Partch used the term *corporeal music* “for the essentially vocal and verbal music of the individual” adding that “the epic chant is an example, but the term could be applied with equal propriety to almost any of the important ancient and near-ancient cultures—the
Chinese, Greek, Arabian, Indian, in all of which music was physically allied with poetry or the dance.”\footnote{53} This is just one of many examples in which Partch, like Cowell, acknowledged the importance of incorporating musical understanding from the past and from other cultures. Partch wrote, “that there is, in total experience, a deep and abiding tie with peoples removed both in time and space, seems to me beyond argument.”\footnote{54}

Soon after Partch constructed his adapted viola he made a decisive break with his early work by burning all his previous compositions. Partch described this “auto-da-fé” as “a confession to myself that in pursuing the respectable, the widely accepted, I had not been faithful.”\footnote{55} He often wrote of the division he felt between himself, as one of the small minority of composers working in just intonation “to the satisfaction of the inner ear,” and “those who believe[d] in Equal Temperament, in compromising the capacity of the inner ear for the sake of expediency,” dubbing the split “a two-thousand-year cleavage among theorists.”\footnote{56} Later, he described himself as having “done something to relieve the Western World's current three hundred years of 12-tone paralysis.”\footnote{57}

Partch went on to design and build a whole ensemble of percussion instruments (made out of bell-shaped glass jars and hardwood), plucked string instruments, and reed organs, all tuned to Pythagorean ratios. He then spent the rest of his life trying (and failing) to find a suitable home for the ensemble with the right conditions for both instruments and players. This was just one way in which Partch found himself to be outside even the contemporary music establishment in America, with only occasional support from foundations and individuals, including Cowell and Harrison. On his return from a study tour to Europe in 1934 (when he explored ancient Greek tuning systems in the British Museum), Partch found himself in the midst of the Great Depression and took to the road as an itinerant worker or, as he himself termed it, a “hobo.” Over the next eight years he experienced a few periods of comparative stability writing travel guides as a worker in the Federal Writers’ Project or
staying with friends long enough to gather his instruments together and prepare performances, but in between such opportunities he lived on the road, walking and hitching rides up and down the West Coast and signing up for agricultural work or other physical labour where he could get it.

Lou Harrison and Cyclical Forms

One of the few people who supported Partch until the end of his life was Lou Harrison, who had himself become completely converted to just intonation after reading Partch’s *Genesis of a Music* soon after it was first published in 1949. Born in Portland, Oregon, Harrison moved many times in his childhood, as his father went from one new business enterprise to another. In what is becoming a familiar story with these avant-garde composers, Leta Miller and Frederick Lieberman note that “the family’s frequent moves provided Harrison little opportunity to develop long-term friendships. Instead, he retreated into books, reading avidly on a wide and idiosyncratic range of subjects.” Miller and Lieberman suggest that “the breadth of his interests prompted [Harrison] to connect disparate influences throughout his life,” and, as with Cowell and Partch (and Morris), these included historical music (Harrison remained fond of Gregorian chant throughout his life) and music from diverse cultures.

Harrison lived in San Francisco from 1934 to 1942, earning his living as a florist and waiter. Among the books he borrowed from the San Francisco Public Library were Cowell’s *New Musical Resources* (1930) and *American Composers on American Music: A Symposium* (1933) as well as Joseph Yasser’s *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (1932).* Harrison later

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*Joseph Yasser, *A Theory of Evolving Tonality* (New York: American Library of Musicology, 1932). Yasser’s theory was based on a version of the Fibonacci series that, instead of starting with 0 and 1 (leading to a series of 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, etc.) or 0 and 2 (0, 2, 4, 6, 10, 16, etc.), employed combinations of 2, 5, 7, 12, 19, etc. It thus still created a series by adding together the previous two numbers in the series. Yasser felt that scales in tuning systems from around the world had evolved from this series, building from pentatonic scales to seven-note ones, through the twelve-tone division of the octave of equal temperament to nineteen and even thirty-one note scales. 
recalled of this time, “there was a Chinese opera I went to every week . . . . By the time I was mature I had experienced a lot more Chinese than Western opera—scads more, by astronomical units.”

He also heard Indonesian gamelan music played live at the “Treasure Island World's Fair in the middle of San Francisco Bay”: “it was wonderful—this whole island of beautiful things. And also in San Francisco then, because of the fair, I saw my first Javanese dance in a theater and began to read articles and transcribe things from gamelan.”

Harrison’s serious study of non-Western music began when he took Cowell’s course “Music of the World’s Peoples” as part of an extension programme at the University of California, Berkeley. Just as Cowell had with Seeger, so Harrison quickly became Cowell’s star pupil and began to show him his compositions. When, in 1942, Harrison moved to Los Angeles, he attended composition classes with Schoenberg, studying serial compositional techniques assiduously and successfully. Early on, Harrison began to develop his own compositional procedures, which can be seen to draw on the disparate influences of Schoenberg’s (and Cowell’s) integration of pitch, duration, and dynamic through a shared set of ratios, and the repetitive, cyclical forms of gamelan music.

A traditional Javanese gamelan piece is built from a core melody called a **balungan** (meaning “skeleton” and acting as a skeletal frame), which determines both the decorative patterns played by the smallest instruments and the **colotomic structure** (the punctuation of the melody) played by the larger gongs. The **balungan** is constructed from multiples of four groups, or **gatras**, of four beats, often with patterns that recur from one gatra to another. The whole **balungan** is repeated (sometimes speeding up and sometimes slowing down to half-speed) as many times as the drummer leading the ensemble dictates. Thus, the structure of a **balungan** is the basic building block of structural design in gamelan music, and a basic unit of the unity of the whole piece.

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* Richard Kostelanetz, “A Conversation, in Eleven-Minus-One Parts with Lou Harrison, about Music/Theater,” *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 76, no. 3 (1992), 407. A gamelan is a percussion orchestra of differently sized gongs and metallophones tuned to two matching scales: **pélog**, consisting of seven notes within an octave, and **slendro**, consisting of five. The tuning of each gamelan is individual and the pitches do not correspond to equal temperament, although the **slendro** scale is **very approximately** similar to a pentatonic scale formed by playing the black notes of a piano.
traditional Javanese gamelan piece can be thought of as an example of one type of the elastic form Cowell devised.

Moreover, the repetition of small melodic patterns from one *gatra* to another is echoed in Harrison’s method of “composing with melodicles,” which, along with his methods of “interval control” and “duration control,” he described in his *Music Primer* (1971). A “melodicle” is a small group of pitches, from which “one makes a mosaic, so to speak.” Harrison suggested that melodicles could be transposed “up or down the tones of . . . a 5, 6, 7, or more–toned mode” and used “in backward (retrograde) forms . . . or upside-down (inverse) . . . or both of these at once (inverse-retrograde).” The composer also devised short rhythms or patterns of what he called “icti” (events, or strikes of a sounding instrument) that could, similarly, be repeated and/or reversed. Interval and durational control were Harrison’s systems for limiting the number of intervals and rhythmic patterns in any one piece, while, again, allowing for both to be inverted or played in retrograde. The exposition of melodicles in the *Primer* ends with, “Henry Cowell taught me most of this,” but its first line emphasizes the way he drew on music from the past and other cultures to formulate his compositional strategies, stating, “in some form this is the oldest known method of musical composition, probably deriving from Mesopotamia & Egypt.”

As well as teaching Harrison, Cowell helped him to get work as an accompanist for dance classes taught by Tina Flade at Mills College. Harrison had already written a percussion score for a dance by Carol Beals (a local choreographer and student of Martha Graham), and he went on to write many more for emerging young choreographers in the area, learning Labanotation so that he could notate the dance as it was made and compose the music to fit it. Flade had been a member of Mary Wigman’s company a decade earlier and had taught at the Mary Wigman School from 1928 to 1931, so she was used to developing pieces through improvisation with her dancers. This meant that Harrison, like Cowell, found
that the dance kept changing in structure throughout the rehearsal process. The younger composer, therefore, worked with his melodicles and small rhythmic patterns as small building blocks that he could repeat and build into larger structures as necessary in performance.

One day in 1938 Harrison opened the door of his San Francisco apartment to a young man who said, “My name is John Cage. Henry Cowell sent me.” The two men became lifelong friends, sharing an interest in music from non-Western cultures, what Cage called “love of the modern dance” and, in particular, an abiding enthusiasm for percussion orchestras. Harrison and Cage took advice from Cowell and raided junkyards and hardware stores for “found instruments,” such as car brake drums (which, in the 1930s, were made from spun steel and were particularly resonant) and sheet metal. They gathered instruments and friends together to rehearse and perform whole concerts of music of their own writing, entirely for percussion. As Miller and Lieberman suggest, “in the process, they developed a new percussion vocabulary that permanently altered the sonic landscape.”

Miller and Lieberman claim that when Harrison read Partch’s *Genesis of a Music*, like Cowell and Partch before him, he “suddenly realized how ancient Greek theories could be resurrected in modern practice.” They also argue that Partch’s book “launched [Harrison] down a path he would never leave; a love of the mathematically pure, nonbeating intervals that would thereafter influence his compositions in all genres from the piano to the symphony orchestra to the gamelan.” At first Harrison looked for ways to work in what he called “truly tuned” music (i.e., music in just intonation) by writing for voice and non-keyed instruments such as strings and the trombone. He also travelled to Japan and Korea.

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* John Cage, quoted in Leta Miller and Frederick Lieberman, *Lou Harrison: Composing a World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 17. Modern dance enthusiasts have reason to be grateful to Lou Harrison, because it was he who recommended to Cage that he take up the post of dance class accompanist and composition teacher at the Cornish School in Seattle, where Cage first met Merce Cunningham. Harrison also invited Cage and Cunningham down to the 1939 summer school at Mills College, which hosted the Bennington summer programme for a year and at which Cunningham met Martha Graham.
learned both the P’iri (a Korean double-reed instrument) and the Cheng, a Chinese zither that is effectively a series of “monochords” (as Partch would have called them) with moveable bridges, making it ideal for tuning to low-integer ratios.

In 1967, Harrison and his partner, William Colvig, started to build what at one stage they called “An American Gamelan” but later dubbed “Old Granddad.” This was a percussion orchestra that combined tuned aluminium slabs suspended over tin-can resonators, cut-off oxygen cylinders, large metal garbage cans, ranch triangles, and conduit tubing, all designed to enable Harrison to work in just intonation. It was only after he had written a number of gamelan-inspired pieces and works for “Old Granddad” that Harrison began to study how to play Javanese gamelan, with Ki K. P. H. Wasitodiningrat (known informally as Pak Cokro) in 1975. Then, almost immediately, at Cokro’s suggestion, Harrison began to write for the Javanese court gamelan that Cokro had brought over from Indonesia.†

To Harrison, all music was hybrid. He interpreted a speech that Cowell had made at a Tokyo conference in 1961 to mean “don’t underrate hybrid musics BECAUSE THAT’S ALL THERE IS” (Harrison’s emphasis). He added, “It is as though the world is a round continuum of music . . . and always the music is a compound, a hybrid of collected virtues. This whole round living world of music—the Human Music—rouses and delights me; it stirs me to a ‘trans-ethnic,’ a planetary music.”

As Miller and Lieberman point out, Harrison’s hybridity called upon music from the past as well as from other cultures. They suggest that his “synchronic integrations of East and West [are] a natural development from the diachronic integrations [he] had employed for

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† Colvig built an ingenious tuning machine that enabled Harrison to check and tune precisely the pitches of the instruments they made, so that he could experiment with a range of low-integer ratio intervals and select for any one piece a specific group of intervals.

† Daniel Schmidt described the shocked reaction when Schmidt first asked the players of the gamelan at University of California, Berkeley, to rehearse Harrison’s piece. As Schmidt put it: “several students off in the corner probably fainted” at Harrison’s audacity of daring to write for gamelan when he had hardly learned how to play the instruments and had not even visited Indonesia (quoted in Miller and Lieberman, Composing a World, 69). Harrison was surprised by the controversy.
years: his adoption, for instance, of Medieval forms.” It seems that both influences led Harrison towards the non-progression of cyclical forms he loved. His particular favourite was the Estampie, which dates back to medieval times and of which Harrison wrote:

In this delightful form, each of five or seven melodies is repeated — but at the first ending a “half cadence” is used, and at the ending of the repetition a “full cadence.” These cadences are complete little melodies, the “half” called “Overt,” the “full” called “Clos”…Furthermore, these two formulae remain the same throughout the composition though the main melodic material of each strophe is, of course, fresh.

As Miller and Lieberman note: “The form thus includes both repetition and variation and allows for irregular expansion”—as is also the case in Harrison’s beloved gamelan music.

Partch and Cowell shared Harrison’s fondness for cyclical musical forms allowing for a flexible number of repeats and “irregular expansion.” Gilmore also talks of expansion when he states that “the term Partch frequently uses to describe the pitch resources of his system of extended just intonation is fabric . . . . The word fabric with its connotations of texture, places emphasis on the system’s internal coherence—and on the fact that it can grow if woven further—rather than viewing it as a closed structure.” Similarly, Cowell’s use of phrases that could be combined and/or repeated in any order in his elastic form pieces meant that these, too, were cyclical and could expand and contract, as opposed to remaining fixed in length or structure. This means that one of the shared characteristics of the three composers’ work was a feeling of “steady state” rather than of development toward a climax and resolution. Partch talked of “tonality flux” in his work, “preferring the neutral sense of the word flux,” as Gilmore puts it, “to the usual implications of terms like progression and modulation.” Similarly, Wilfrid Mellers claims, “the word symphony implies for [Harrison] the notion of voices sounding in togetherness, but without any undercurrent of progressive evolution.”
It is clear that all three composers were led toward open-ended forms through their interest in both ancient and non-Western music. Nicholls feels that this combination of retrospection and extraspection formed a large part of their ultra-modernism. He suggests that their “radicalism was capable of pushing the boundaries of acceptance not only forwards (i.e. prospectively, into the “advanced” territory of dissonance and complexity, . . .) but also backwards (i.e. retrospectively, into apparent conservatism) and—most importantly—outwards (i.e. extraspectively, into the exploration of musics other than those of the Eurocentric art music tradition).”82 It remains to be seen to what extent Morris’s choreographies to the music of Cowell, Partch, and Harrison reflects this three-way push—an argument I pursue in the second half of this essay. But first, a short résumé of Morris’s childhood and early development as a choreographer reveals some commonalities that may explain how and why Morris is able to respond with such empathy to the three composers’ works and ideas.

**Mark Morris Follows a Different Drummer**

At first glance, Mark Morris’s childhood might not seem to hold much in common with that of Cowell, Partch, or Harrison; Morris was born half a century later and was brought up in a stable middle-class home in Seattle. Closer examination reveals, however, a similar independence of spirit and curiosity, which meant that Morris, like Cowell and Harrison, never really fitted in at school. He was often “removed from class for being disruptive” in elementary school and had as little as possible to do with high school, not counting his involvement in music and drama projects, until he graduated, a year early, at age sixteen.*

Like the three composers before him, Morris educated himself through reading widely, often

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* Joan Acocella, *Mark Morris* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 36. In an undated interview with Eugene Cerna, “Conversation at KCTS 9,” at [http://blip.tv/kcts-9/conversations-at-kcts-9-mark-morris-2791301](http://blip.tv/kcts-9/conversations-at-kcts-9-mark-morris-2791301) (accessed April 7, 2013), Morris remembered: “I had some friends and I went to as little school as I possibly could. Really, I detested it. I cheated my way through most things. I was in honors everything, because I was smart. So, since we were left unattended to work, we all just did a little bit and shared it and we all did fine.”
as part of his intensive research into the music to be used for a dance. In his youth, Morris also listened to, and sang in the school honours choir, and attempted to play on the piano a wide range of music, including (like Harrison) Gregorian chant. 

Morris also seems to have shared with Cowell, Partch, and Harrison an independence of thought and action that meant that he was considered “weird,” but which also gave him the self-confidence to get on with what interested him. A friend’s account of Morris at junior high school sounds like Henry David Thoreau’s man hearing the beat of a “different drummer”: “If you were weird and you were white it was very easy to get beat up . . . . But Mark seemed to walk right through it. It was [as though] he had some sort of song playing in his head that no-one else could hear, but it made him strong in the center of what was then called weirdness.”

At least some of this inner strength may well have come from Morris’s passionate and all-consuming involvement with dance. After seeing a performance by the José Greco Company when he was only eight, Morris persuaded his mother to take him to Flamenco classes, which they found at Verla Flowers Dance Arts. Recognizing Morris’s ability and enthusiasm immediately, Flowers soon added to Morris’s individual lessons in Flamenco regular classes in ballet and various “national dances.” Another way in which Morris’s childhood experience echoed Cowell’s is that, by the age of thirteen, Morris was already teaching other children Spanish dance at Verla Flowers. He began to “make up dances” (as he likes to put it) to pieces of music that he, even at this early age, arranged so that they could

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* In a short discussion of his piece Empire Garden during an interview with the author (Mark Morris Dance Centre, Brooklyn, March 2011), Morris made passing reference to Gandhi, spinning, and the salt boycott marches; the wearing of Scottish tartan in Africa; the influence of Dutch colonialism on Indonesian batik; Bahasa Indonesia; the emergence of the violin in nineteenth-century South-Indian music and a comparison of the instrument with the vina; and the colours of heraldry.

† Acocella, Mark Morris, 21. Flowers remembered Morris’s tremendous application to the complex rhythms and movements she taught him, describing him as having a “brain like a sponge.” She added, “No class could have kept up with him. He really intended to be a professional Spanish dancer, as soon as possible. It didn’t matter to him that he was nine.” Ibid.
be played live by his friends. In this way Morris began to follow a conviction that has stayed with him throughout his choreographic career: that live dance must be accompanied by live music."

Morris also shared with the three composers an awareness that, by growing up on the West Coast of the United States, he was closer to parts of Asia than to Europe. In an interview with the author, he remembered: “The Chinatown in Seattle was not that dissimilar to the Chinatown in San Francisco that Cowell and everybody grew up with. . . . My friends, when I was growing up, were all Japanese . . . and Samoan . . . it was great. When I was in the fifth and sixth grade I would go to the . . . street dances of the Buddhist church with my Japanese American friends.” But Morris also became deeply involved with certain European folk dance traditions when, at the age of thirteen, he joined the Koleda Folk Ensemble in Seattle. Koleda was a Balkan dance and music ensemble of some thirty to fifty people, all older than Morris, who rehearsed three or four times a week and spent nights and weekends away together in residencies and performances. Acocella describes what she calls the “blessings” of Koleda for Morris: “the respect of adults, the chance to go wild, the feeling of community, the mental pleasure of mastering the difficult, game-like Balkan rhythms [and] the physical pleasure of doing the hearty Balkan dances.” It is worth noting that both Flamenco and Balkan dance have extremely complex rhythms that often work in exact rhythmic unison with their music and, as is often remarked, this is also characteristic of Morris’s dances (see below). Moreover, when Morris moved to New York in 1975, the choreographers he danced for (Lar Lubovitch, Eliot Feld, Hannah Kahn, and Laura Dean) worked in close connection with music, matching both the sonic qualities and the musical structures of the pieces they choreographed.

* In 1996 the Mark Morris Dance Group made a resolution that it would always work with live music and has done so ever since, not only for all rehearsals but also for all classes—including the community classes at the Mark Morris Dance Center in Brooklyn. Mark Morris Dance Group website “History” in “Resources” at http://markmorrisdancegroup.org/resources/history (accessed October 14, 2013).
Choreomusical Analysis

Mark Morris has frequently made it clear that his prime motivation for making a new work is “always the music,” and the work of Inger Damsholt (2007), Rachel Duerden (2008 and 2010), Stephanie Jordan (2011), and Sophia Preston (1998 and 2000) reveals just how closely Morris works with music in all his pieces. These four dance scholars are all working in the growing field of what (using Paul Hodgins’s term) is now called “choreomusical analysis.” They undertake close readings that combine detailed structural analysis of both the music and the dance with examination of the external references brought by either art form (and any other component part such as set, text, lighting, and costume) to the work as a whole. The relationships between the internal characteristics of the dance and the music, and the interplay among external references and associations from each component, lead to a choreomusical analysis. Increasingly, scholars have become aware of how much we use metaphor to identify these relationships, and Jordan has traced a clear theoretical development from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s theory of metaphor in linguistics, through Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier’s construct of “conceptual domains,” to Nicholas Cook’s proposal of metaphor as “a viable model for cross-media interaction.”

In Analysing Musical Multimedia, Cook looks at multi-media as “a distinctive combination of similarity and difference,” with the two no longer being thought of as a binary opposition. Instead, Cook sets up three levels of similarity and difference with the possibility of a dynamic flow between them: conformance, which is so close a match that in dance and music it has become known as “Mickey-Mousing” after the Disney cartoons; contest, in which the various media are so separate that there is the “potential for irony” as one comments on the other, and complementation, which lies between these two extremes. Jordan notes that, while she still uses terms such as parallelism and counterpoint, she is
careful to limit these terms (and others like visualization and mirroring) to the level of structural relationships.  

Duerden’s paper (2008) on Mark Morris’s *Falling Down Stairs* (1995) identifies the way that Morris’s choreography to Bach’s *Suite No. 3 for Unaccompanied Violoncello* keeps moving between conformance, complementation, and even, fleetingly, contest, so that his setting is not so much “predictable” as “inevitable.” Damsholt’s detailed choreomusical analysis (2007) of Morris’s *Gloria* (1981) makes the point that, while there is enough conformance between dance and music to call to mind the music visualizations of Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn, the inclusion of points of contest, combined with sometimes extreme conformance, allows for ironic comment and parody of that same process. Preston (1998 and 2000) and Jordan (2011) similarly identify an almost semaphoric matching of gesture for word in Morris’s *Dido and Aeneas* (1989). Preston contends that the fact that the sources for these gestures include vernacular movement, popular culture, and high art from a number of different cultures, again indicates that the very close setting of the opera is itself a “knowing quotation” of such conformance leading to a double-coding to use Charles Jencks’s term. 

I arrived at my comments on the relationships between the structures, aural characteristics, and external references of the dance and music in Morris’s choreography to pieces by Cowell, Partch and Harrison through close reading of live and recorded performances of the dances. It would be impossible (and tedious for the reader) to fit into this article the detailed description and analysis of entire pieces that underpins the observations of conformance, complementarity, and contest between dance and music. Instead, I describe selected moments and aspects of the dances to illustrate the conclusions arrived at through detailed choreomusical analysis.
Dances to Music by Harry Partch

One of the first dances Morris made, for himself and fellow students at Verla Flowers Dance Arts when he was only fourteen, included music by Harry Partch. *Boxcar Boogie (piece by piece)* (1971) used a selection of the music on a bonus, promotional record called the “Wild Sounds of New Music,” which had been produced the year before. The EP includes sections of works by Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Jacques Lasry, Luciano Berio, and Conlon Nancarrow as well as Partch’s *Castor and Pollux* (1952). All the music Morris chose for *Boxcar Boogie* was for newly invented, or at least “extended,” instruments.” Just two years later, Morris choreographed the whole of Partch’s *Barstow* for a summer dance camp, and he was so confident of this piece that he put it into the debut programme of the Mark Morris Dance Group (presented at the Merce Cunningham Studio on November 29, 1980), unchanged.

*Barstow (1973)*

The text for *Barstow: Eight Hitch-hiker Inscriptions* was taken from graffiti Partch found pencilled on a wooden railing, while he was resting by the side of the road on the way out from Barstow, California. It includes advice for good places to go for “an easy handout,” religious exhortations, grumbles about how few cars are stopping, what Partch called “a “Lonely Hearts Club” of U.S. 66” and the final line, “Why in hell did you come anyway?” (See Appendix 1 for the full text.) Originally, Partch performed *Barstow* as a solo, accompanying his own “intoning” voice with his Adapted Guitar. Later, though, he made

* Columbia Masterworks BTS17 *Wild Sounds of New Music* New York: Columbia Records/CBS. 1970 (images of the front and back covers available at [http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=420429](http://www.discogs.com/viewimages?release=420429). The full playlist of the disc is: Terry Riley - *A Rainbow In Curved Air*; Lasry-Baschet – *Chronophagie*; Harry Partch - *Castor and Pollux*; Luciano Berio - *Sinfonia*: Section 3; Steve Reich - *Violin Phase*; Conlon Nancarrow - *Study #7*. Morris used all but the Riley and Berio. The Lasry piece is written for the Structures Sonores instruments by Bernard and Francois Baschet and the Nancarrow piece is for player piano with the famously complex and subtle cross-rhythms Nancarrow achieved through the mathematical precision of holes punched on a piano roll. Reich’s *Violin phase* employs the very gradual phasing achievable only with the juxtaposition of slightly different-length loops of tape-recordings of the violin and *Castor and Pollux* is for Partch’s own ensemble of instruments.
several revised versions of the piece, incorporating new instruments as he constructed them. The version Morris used was the one recorded by Columbia Records, *The Music of Harry Partch*—Partch’s 1968 (and final) revision of the piece. This version is for one singer/intoner, one narrator/intoner, and four instrumentalists playing, respectively, the Diamond Marimba (the xylophone-like instrument heard between each “inscription”), the Bamboo Marimba (or “Boo”), the Surrogate Kithara (a plucked stringed instrument), and the Chromelodeon (a reed organ).

Morris matches the six musicians (four players and two vocalists) with six dancers: three men dressed in overalls or waistcoat and trousers, with an added scarf for Morris himself, and three women in respectively, a cotton dress, a skirt and top, and a blouse and cropped trousers. These clothes are practically timeless; they could have been worn in the 1930s, but also resemble second-hand garments that Morris and his friends might have picked up in charity shops in the 1970s. With each new refrain of rapid, descending five-note melodicles on the Diamond Marimba, a dancer enters, to be discovered spinning, with outstretched arms, downstage left, as the lights come up fully. Over the course of each of the first six inscriptions, an individual dancer traces a solo path across the front and then diagonally up stage where each one joins the others. Once part of the group again, dancers repeat condensed versions or fragments from the previous solos, as if each was the embodiment of an inscription left behind by a different hitchhiker. The whole group dances Number 6 (“Jesus was God in the flesh”) and Number 8 (a much angrier diatribe against the itinerant life), moving restlessly along the same pathways.

Partch describes the inscriptions as “both weak and strong, [as] unedited human expressions always are,” adding, “It’s eloquent in what it fails to express in words. And it’s epic. Definitely, it is music.” The music sets this vernacular text in a combination of straight narration and the more mannered (archaic and even epic) tones of an intoning, and
singing, voice. This is all accompanied by the unique sounds of Partch’s instruments: the sustained, reedy tones of the Chromelodeon, the twanging plucked strings of the Kithara, the dry sounds of the Bamboo Marimba, and the more resonant tones of the Diamond Marimba.

What Morris’s choreography appears to respond to is precisely this odd juxtaposition of unfamiliar rarefied sounds with direct, everyday vernacular texts. For example, in the first male solo, the dancer’s movements are clearly referential: dropping the upper body sideways, one arm hanging limply across the body, the other loosely reaching toward the ground (a movement performed to the words “broken” and “dead”); pedestrian walks and skips; mimetic gestures such as pressing one hand into the lower back, as if to ease an ache; and quotations from ballet—a *pas de basque* into a *chassée*, a few quick *passées*, and a *pirouette en dehors*.

Morris’s choreography also reflects the verse-and-refrain structure of the music. Just as melodicles and short rhythmic patterns are heard sporadically throughout the verses, alongside the sustained intoning and singing, so movements from each of the solos reappear in the new solos and in the “background movements” of the rest of the cast. Although this structure has a cyclical quality to it, at the same time there is something of a build-up to a climax during the last verse, in both the music and the dance, as the narration increases in length, speed, and volume and all six dancers crisscross the stage. As the complaints of Number 8 come thick and fast, Morris has the dancers join, one after another, in a canonic, quick, two-foot stamping pattern, following each other’s pathways across the stage.

While Morris often has clear referential gestures accompany the words of *Barstow*, even in this very early piece he does not do so slavishly. The first man’s solo has the same movement to accompany “broken” and “dead” but does not repeat a movement for the two instances of “I am a man.” The first time, the man takes the iconic (slightly bent arms held out at shoulder height) position of Christ on the Cross, seen again in the Jesus section, but the
second time he simply walks through the word “man” and then claps his hands together in a
dismissive gesture. This occasional “contest” (to use Cook’s term) between the text and the
dance, along with the juxtaposition of such a range of movements from so many different
sources, suggests that the “conformance” between the dance and music structures is much
more than a straightforward matching, such as one might expect from a sixteen-year old.
Instead, it suggests a breadth of knowledge and self-reflexive capacity that is remarkable in
one so young.

*Castor and Pollux (1980)*

Morris included another piece by Partch in the Mark Morris Dance Group debut programme,
tackling his *Castor and Pollux* once again, but this time using the entire piece of music.
Partch describes the narrative of his work in a typically “corporeal” way, saying that it
“begins with one of the most delightful seductions in mythology, that of the beautiful Leda by
Zeus in the form of a swan . . . and ends with the birth of twins, presumably hatched from
eggs.”  
He points out that his setting is “concerned only with the processes of procreation.
The twin eggs are treated separately, first Castor, then Pollux, but there is no pause in the
music. Three pairs of instruments (in duets) . . . represent, in sequence, the Seduction, the
Conception, the Incubation. Finally all six instrumental parts . . . are repeated simultaneously
as a ‘Chorus of Delivery from the Egg.’”

Morris described the music in a radio broadcast as “an incredibly beautiful piece of
Harry Partch’s,” noting that, not only do all the previous pairs of instruments join in the
chorus that ends each section, but so does all the previous music. As ever, Morris did his
homework on the music: “if you’re really obsessed, [as] I was at one point, you can count all
the way through. It’s 234 beats *exactly* in each half, “Castor” and “Pollux,” and it’s in
various arrangements of phrases of seven and of nine. It’s a very exciting piece on Mr
Partch’s home-made instruments.”
Partch reflected that in his double, montage structure of *Castor and Pollux*, “it was necessary to repeat phrases frequently. Yet this helps in gaining familiarity with the themes, and . . . the juxtapositions cause each individual repetition to be heard under entirely different musical conditions. In a sense, the work is a series of calculated “coincidences,” of musical ‘double exposures.’” Gilmore suggests that this example of “what would become Partch’s most characteristic compositional method in later extended works: the multiple exposure … has the effect of refocusing aural perspective and of creating a playful distortion of chronological progression.” Thus, once again, Partch worked in a non-progressional form, building a montage of blocks of previously heard music.

In his 1980 dance, Morris reflects the structures of *Castor and Pollux* at every level. He combines movements from previous parts in each section finale, and, in the last tutti phrase of the final “Chorus of Delivery,” it can be seen that all the movements of the dance have in fact emanated from one phrase which all eight dancers perform in a circle. As with the music, though, the repetitions are “hidden” by being seen in different combinations; distinctive arm movements look quite different when performed slowly, standing still, or by dancers running in weaving patterns across the stage. These constantly re-forming stage patterns, with shifting numbers of dancers, give the dance not just a folk-dance feeling, but also a suggestion of some task or pattern that has to be ritually worked through. The “solution” to this three-dimensional puzzle occurs in the final phrase, ending precisely on the 468th beat of the music as all the dancers rise from the floor to stand in the opening position, and it is simultaneously surprising and satisfying.

Partch’s music, with its shifting groups of 9’s and 7’s, and the extraordinary sounds of the Kitharas, Diamond Marimbas, and Cloud-Chamber Bowls, all in just intonation, sounds literally like nothing on Earth. Similarly, the eclectic range of movements and complex structures of the dance immediately marked Morris out as a choreographer with a wholly new
“voice.” There is some dancing reminiscent of a hoe-down, with hops accompanied by a dropping forward or leaning backward of the body, and a motif in which the dancers land on the back foot to slap a relaxed foot on the floor in front of them. There are also complex turning jumps and *chassées* from ballet, while some of the walks are apparently casual with hands swinging loosely around the hips. It is clear, though, that all the movements are precisely choreographed and performed, as they are put through a complex combination of symmetrical lines and circles danced in close canon.

In both *Barstow* and *Castor and Pollux* there is also what Acocella describes as “unbuttoned” dancing: “the dancers… dive into turns from odd angles and keep pumping the turn until it can go no further… pushed past grace.” This full-bodied commitment to deliberately awkward movement, inter-cut with both vernacular gestures and moments of balletic precision is a remarkably empathetic reflection of the similarly diverse sources and aesthetics of Partch’s work. It also became the hallmark of Morris’s choreographic style: an exciting and intriguing mixture of genres and performance styles with fleeting glimpses of startlingly different dynamics and attitudes to weight and precision acting like flashes of precious metal running through a stone.

**Dances to music by Henry Cowell**

*Prelude and Prelude* (1984)

The unique qualities of Morris’s choreographic voice were recognized by audiences, critics and promoters alike and the Mark Morris Dance Group was invited to perform at the Dance Theatre Workshop for each of the next three seasons. In 1984, Morris was given the final seal of approval by the New York contemporary dance world by being asked to present work at the Next Wave festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In the same year he made his first dance to music by Henry Cowell, *Prelude and Prelude* (1984) to the first movement of Cowell’s *Set of Two for Violin and Harpsichord* (1955), played twice.
Cowell’s Prelude from the *Set of Two* combines references to the baroque period, through its instrumentation, with echoes of older and folk music in the way it occasionally slips into the Dorian mode from D minor. In a subtle combination of meters, the harpsichord plays a single line (never chords) of six descending eighth-notes per measure over which the violin plays a slow melodic line in 5/8. The plucked, and therefore staccato, quality of the harpsichord notes makes this, to a certain extent, a version of Cowell’s characterization of folk music as melody accompanied by percussion. The fact that the harpsichord line starts at the top of a falling line at the beginning of every measure gives the music a cyclical quality in its accompaniment and Morris’s decision to have the piece played twice gives it yet more of a non-progressive feel.

Morris’s dance, *Prelude and Prelude*, like Cowell’s music, looks back both to the past and (at one remove) in that each dancer is holding a fan that is golden on one side, just like that used by Ted Shawn in *Japanese Spear Dance* (1919). Some of the movements and positions, and indeed early costuming, could have been derived from this piece and others performed by Ted Shawn and his *Men Dancers* in the 1930s. In the first hearing of the music, one dancer breaks out from a line of ten to perform a slow sustained solo while the others place their fans in front of their faces, or groins, reach up to one side or drop down to the other, in permutations of a sequence of set positions, never moving from the spot. In the second rendition of the music, the roles are reversed. The soloist is the only one doing the “fan dance” while the others all go through the slow travelling solo, but they do so in a canon achieved by dancers pausing for varying amounts of time in certain positions.

This “free-form” canon (most unusual in Morris’s oeuvre) is strongly reminiscent of the first of Cowell’s suggestions as to how to arrive at an elastic form suitable for “relating

*In early versions Morris asked the dancers to be as near naked as they could cope with and in videos of some earlier performances of the work both men and women are topless with the men wearing only dance belts.*
music to dance.” Cowell suggested that “each melodic phrase should be so constructed that it may be expanded or contracted in length, by the shortening or lengthening of certain key tones.” It is perhaps not too wild a conjecture, therefore, that while Morris was not in complete conformance with Cowell’s Prelude, he was employing a structuring procedure the composer recommended for matching up music and dance. This, combined with the references to Ted Shawn’s work, might seem to suggest that Morris was harking back to the 1930s. Far from being an example of what David Gordon once called “Modern dance leftovers,” however, these references to Early Modern Dance can, again, be identified as knowing and self-reflexive and, therefore, postmodern. There are Radical Juxtapositions aplenty with the formal, restrained precision of the limited number of movements with the fan being set against the flexible timing and lack of repetition in the travelling phrase; the refined, accurately detailed performance contrasting with deliberately awkward movements (with each dancer having to hold the fan in his or her teeth in the travelling phrase) and, (in later versions of the piece) the fact that the men as well as the women are wearing stiff, strapless, high leg leotards. Even the fact that we are, in effect, seeing the same dance twice and yet it is also a completely different piece to exactly the same music might well lead to a self-reflexivity on the nature and outcome of music-setting.

*Mosaic and United (1993)*

Morris’s second dance to Cowell’s music was *Mosaic and United* made for five dancers in 1993 to Cowell’s Quartet No. 3 *Mosaic* (1935) and Quartet No. 4 *United* (1936). The *Mosaic Quartet* is an example of one version of Cowell’s “elastic form” in that it has five movements which performers can play in any order, repeating movements if they choose to do so. Morris decided on a movement order of I-II-III-IV-V-III-I and then set that, as he

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*I am not using the term “postmodern” here as it is so often, misleadingly, applied to dance of the Judson Church Group in the 1960s and other choreographers working in Release Technique or Contact Improvisation. I am instead using it in the way it has been applied to the work of architects such as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Charles Moore and Philip Johnson after he moved on from the International Style.*
said, “in order for us to know how to do it every night.”

Steven Johnson identifies the first movement of the *Mosaic Quartet* as presenting “ten phrases, the last five of which repeat the first five in the same order with some variation.” This means that Morris’s decision to repeat the whole movement at the end of the *Mosaic* half of the dance is a brave one. He matches the internal repetition of the music in his choreography, so the same pattern of five phrases (one for each of the five dancers) is seen four times in all. Each time, however, it has a different facing and travels in a different direction and there is about it that quality, so often found in Morris’s movement, which Acocella describes as “slightly awkward … [and] very deliberate. Even when the dancers are doing something beautifully you can still see their intention, their effort. You can see the exact thing they are doing: it doesn’t elide into a nice smear of dancing.”

There is just such a moment in the first, and therefore also the last, section of *Mosaic* over the fifth (and tenth) phrase of Movement I. A straight line of dancers, all holding very specific and quite awkward positions, is broken away from in a run by one dancer. The other four simply shuffle up, holding the line and their crouched-over positions until they can slot the errant dancer back into the pattern.

The *United Quartet* is an example of Cowell’s favoured micro-macro or “nesting-box” structure, which he may well have learned from his studies of Indonesian music in Berlin. In this form, the structure of a movement of music is the same as the structure of subsections of that movement, which is also the structure of each measure of that subsection. The first of the five movements of *United* is in five-beat measures, of which the first, second and fourth beats are always accented. The measures are grouped into five-measure phrases, of which the first, second and fourth measures are a little louder than the third and fifth. The first, second and fourth time these five-measure phrases are repeated they have a strong solo

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*This is similar to the structure of many traditional gamelan pieces in which the balungan (the central “skeleton” melody from which everything else derives) is often made up of four groups of four beats, or sometimes four lines of four groups of four beats. It is also an example of a fractal, found so often in nature, as Cowell would, of course, have recognized.*
part in counterpoint to the phrase which makes the music louder, while the third and fifth repetitions are *piano* to *pianissimo*. Thus not only the beats and measures, but also the five-measure phrases and the twenty-five-measure sections follow the strong-strong-weak-strong-weak structure. The whole Movement is rounded off with a five-measure coda.

Morris follows this structure exactly on all its levels, with the five dancers each having a five-measure phrase, full of five-beat rhythms, all reflecting the strong-strong-weak-strong-weak structure of each level of the music. Similarly, he reflects the three beats to a measure, three measures to a phrase, structure of the second movement, although he cuts across this “conformance” by having each dancer enter in canon one measure behind the other. The music for the third movement is written in two simultaneous time signatures with threes working against twos on the levels of eighth-notes, quarter-notes and whole measures. Morris echoes this with fluid shifts between two and three dancers. Two dancers of the five work their way through a slow sustained phrase while the other three alternate between lifting one of the two and leading the other into new places on the stage. Since the lifters are also changing partners and leading each other, there is a constant flux of twos and threes in a gently shifting pattern that precisely and yet fluidly matches the polyrhythms of the music.

What stops the movement from being nothing but a straightforward Music Visualization is, again, the incongruity between the formal precision of the dance and the movements that go to make up the phrases. On one level the whole dance can be viewed as having developed from the opening five phrases that are repeated four times in the first section of *Mosaic*. Distinctive movements recur throughout the dance such as the pulling over of the head from one side to another by reaching over the top of it with a hand, straight leg-swings in parallel from side to side with the arms held straight out to the sides from the shoulders, reminiscent of the shaman figure in Martha Graham’s *El Penitente* (1940), and a slow stride forward with straight legs lifted high and arms coming to parallel in front of the
body. These relatively awkward movements are juxtaposed with technically-difficult high lifts, Cunningham-esque turning *attitudes*, beautiful, balanced compositions of single and multiple dancers and sinuous reaches high above the head. Then it becomes apparent that the graceful phrase danced in canon in the second movement of *United* is a version of the awkward straight-leg walk forward and that a lilting, jumping, hopping, stepping pattern in a quiet moment of *Mosaic* is a perfect match for the complicated rhythm of the fourth movement of *United*. At the end of the whole dance, in the fifth and final section of the *United Quartet*, movements from the original solo phrases of the first section of the dance reappear as the dancers tread through a finely-worked out canon over the passacaglia of the music. In another moment of “contest” Morris sets one of these movements in a unison repetition of three counts against the four-square reiterated quarter-notes of the music. He then has the dancers run backwards over the rests of the penultimate measure of music and run forward, arms outstretched towards the audience, on the final note of the piece. The lights go to black out before the dancers finish running so that they appear to have launched into space out of the conformity of their line.

The whole twenty-eight-minute dance is full of emotional resonances as dancers lift and support, or stand facing away from, each other, to music evoking very different moods from serene to martial and from cheerful to mysterious. A recurring image is of taut limbs held, half-reaching out, with trembling hands and feet. This is seen performed while the dancer is being lifted, standing on one leg or lying on the floor. This and other distinctive movements, including a jump landing deliberately on the beat in parallel attitude with one arm raised in front, are all reminiscent of both Indian and Indonesian dance. Morris is clearly not only echoing Cowell’s structure but also his “trans-ethnic” borrowing from other cultures by feeling free to draw on movement shapes and qualities from Asian dance and incorporate them into his own, eclectic, movement language.
The Mark Morris Dance group has kept *Mosaic* and *United* in repertory and is performing it this year (2013) alongside a new work to Cowell’s Suite for Violin and Piano (1925) called *Jenn and Spencer* after the first names of the two dancers on whom it was made. Morris has also choreographed Cowell’s *Anger Dance* (1914) for himself and three puppets for Sesame Street. *Anger Dance*, for solo piano, begins with two measures repeated eight times, followed by the same pattern slightly higher up the keyboard repeated another eight times. There is some disagreement between different sources as to whether the number of repetitions is up to the pianist and “how angry he is able to feel” or whether it is set. Either way, the piece, with a short middle section that is very similar to the music either side, and then a repetition of the opening double set of repetitions, definitely falls into the cyclical category of much of the music being considered here. Morris sets the music as a series of canons for himself and the three puppets which, consisting as they do of relatively simple gestural movements such as nodding and shaking the head, jumping up and down and jolting the next dancer’s shoulder, play out a short narrative of disagreement turning into agreement.

In writing a review of the *United Quartet* back in 1968, Henry Clarke could have been talking about Cowell’s music as a whole, describing it as “uniting … elements from other continents, other centuries, and other disciplines (notably mathematics)” and suggesting that it revealed Henry Cowell to be “more than his contemporaries, a prophet and an individual.” Clarke also noted that, in *United*, “Harmonic variety is not gained through progression – there is no progression – but by a kaleidoscopic interplay of degrees of tension all too rare in experimental music.” The dance Morris has made to Cowell’s music similarly combines a kaleidoscopic – or mosaic – patterning of shapes, colours, movement and “degrees of tension,” with a unifying thread both internal (in the dance movements) and external in that, like the music, it draws together elements from different times, places, moods and genres. While, as we have seen, Morris often works in ‘complementarity’, even
fleetricly in ‘contest’ with the music, these moments allow him to be ironic and knowing in his general conformance with the music. Thus, although he is clearly drawing on the same range of retrospective and extraspective sources as Cowell, we can see that he is doing so in a different context, lending the process a double-coding.

**Dances to music by Lou Harrison**

In January 1984, just as the Mark Morris Dance Group was becoming firmly established in the New York Dance scene and Arlene Croce devoted an entire article in *The New Yorker* to Morris, identifying him as “a serious choreographer… a dancemaker and a spellbinder”, with “talent…self-awareness and…self-possession,” Morris decided to move back home to Seattle. In newspaper interviews at the time, Morris talked of his need to get away from New York and the pressure “to keep doing the same sort of things” and also expressed a longing to be within sight of water and mountains, going so far as to say, “if I couldn’t see water from my kitchen window I’d die.” Morris also talked about his friends (he was living with Erin Matthiessen at the time) and the usefulness of preparing and trying out new pieces in Seattle before taking them to New York, but he clearly felt, as did each of the three composers at different stages in their lives, a strong pull back to the beauty and grandeur of the West Coast. Acocella has suggested that “the West Coast, particularly the Northwest, with its astonishing natural beauty, tends to breed a sort of pantheistic religiosity” and that “Morris felt this tug” which, as she puts it, “found expression in Strict Songs.”

**Strict Songs (1987)**

*Strict Songs* (1987) was the first dance Morris made to the music of Lou Harrison which he first heard, and immediately thought was “wonderful”, in the 1980s. Harrison had composed *Four Strict Songs* in 1955 for eight baritone singers, two trombones, piano, harp, percussion and strings and it was Morris who suggested that the eight singers be replaced by
the 100-strong Seattle Men’s Chorus. Harrison tuned the fixed-note instruments to just intonation and asked the voices, strings and trombones to tune to the same low-integer ratio pitches. Then, like a composer working in pélog, he selected a different pentatonic mode for each of the four songs. They are called Strict songs because the tuning remains fixed, in what Harrison called “Strict Style.” This separates it from his later experiments in “Free Style” which meant “abandoning a fixed tonal center altogether by relating each pitch only to the ones preceding and following it.”

Harrison wrote his own text for the songs “inspired by Navajo ritual songs … [and] extolling the wonders of nature.” (See Appendix 2 for the complete words of the Four Strict Songs, which are read out before the dance and music begin and which reflect some of the associations with the number four in Navajo Indian culture.)

Marc Perlman identifies a strong link in Harrison’s mind, and that of many other composers and musicologists, between the beauty and purity of nature and the perceived beauty and purity of just intonation. As he says, “this identification of just intonation with nature, and of equal temperament with the corruptions of civilization, takes various forms.” Perlman notes that, for Partch, “the keyboard of the equal-tempered piano was civilization’s musical jail, “twelve black and white bars in front of musical freedom”. Perlman also suggests that the further (mistaken) link between gamelan tunings and just intonation means that “it could be argued that both non-Western musics and non-tempered tunings (as opposed to Western art music played in equal temperament) have come to represent nature.”

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† A Navajo Indian website (Discover Navajo.com) tells us that “the number four permeates traditional Navajo philosophy. In the Navajo culture there are four directions, four seasons, the first four clans and four colors that are associated with the four sacred mountains. In most Navajo rituals there are four songs and multiples thereof, as well as many other symbolic uses of four. The four directions are represented by four colors: White Shell represents the east, Turqouise the south, Yellow Abalone the west, and Jet Black the north.” [http://discovernavajo.com/a01.html](http://discovernavajo.com/a01.html) last accessed on 14th October 2013.
certainly the case that reviews of Harrison’s music in general, and *Four Strict Songs* in particular, often refer to natural peace and beauty. Mellers writes of “the causes Harrison’s music espouses – peace, the rights of all creatures and forms of Nature to respectful coexistence, the need simultaneously to foster life and to accept death.”

Miller and Lieberman cite a review of *Strict Songs* which suggests that Harrison’s “daring is the gift to be simple…He succeeds…in building a carpet of sounds that is serenely active … [with] a mood of quiet rejoicing.”

The dance Morris made to *Four Strict Songs*, in Seattle in 1987, reflects both the mood and the references to nature in Harrison’s music. There are many movements that can be seen as animal-like and/or bird-like such as a little two-footed jump with arms outstretched like wings and the body “dipping” in a sideways curve. There are “stag leaps” across the stage although these are alternated with straight-legged skips or hops with both arms sweeping down to one side of the body interspersed with small straight-legged leaps with the body arching above. Dancers also take the “El Penitente” side-to-side swing of alternate legs with the arms held out horizontally from the shoulders seen also in *Mosaic and United*. This time, though, the hands are alternately turned to face the palm up or down, giving the movement a strangely non-human look, more like ruffling wings, or even representing leaves turning over in the wind.

At one point all the dancers follow each other in a canon, slowing down through a phrase to end standing downstage-right. There they hover on one leg, the other lifted in parallel with foot to knee and both arms raised and bent in front, hand-to-shoulder, all facing in exactly the same direction, as groups of animals do at a water’s edge or facing into sunshine or wind. The gradual slowing down of the whole group to stillness matches the way the music is narrowing down to one pedal note as the men sing “unscented faun.” The first woman breaks away from the group (even before the last man has finished the previous
canon and joined the group) as the music expands in pitches again. She is followed by the other dancers one at a time, all running gently into a sideways leap that seems to hover in the air for a second as though in lazy flight, before running to upstage-left. It is impossible to articulate just what the movements might “mean” but they are performed with the same feeling of inevitability as the rest of the dance, a feeling that this is what these creatures do, this is how they move.

**Polka (1992) and Grand Duo (1993)**

Just one year after *Strict Songs*, Morris and his company signed a three-year contract to become the resident company at the Theatre de la Monnaie, Brussels with opportunities to double the company size, work with a full orchestra, and make evening-length productions in large spaces. The company’s reception in Belgium has been well-documented elsewhere and some of the dances made there are still glories of the MMDG repertory, but it was only after their return to America that Morris next made a piece to music by one of the west-coast American composers. This was *Polka* (1992), a highly-successful short piece to the final section of Harrison’s *Grand Duo for violin and piano* (1988) that ended many an MMDG dance programme. In the following year (1993, the same year that he made *Mosaic and United*) Morris decided to add three of the four previous movements of Harrison’s music to make *Grand Duo*.

Morris talks about how he made the dance “retroactively fit” by incorporating movements from *Polka* into the first three sections of the dance. For example the slapping of palms against hips in cross-rhythm to the stepping pattern in *Polka* is the opening, static position of *Grand Duo*. Standing in the dark, reaching up into a horizontal shaft of light, the dancers, in plain shifts for the women and short skirts for the men in a “wheel of colours” (dark green, brown, red, purple, blue, and green again) have resonances of Plato’s cave dwellers watching the flickering shadows on the walls.
The dance to the Estampie of Harrison’s 2nd movement features a confrontation of two rival tribes with the dancers allowed to choose which aggressive gesture to make from a pre-set selection, exactly timed to the tone clusters played with Harrison’s “octave banger.” This is at least a nod in the direction of Cowell’s desired flexibility in performance and is about as far as Morris is prepared to go towards improvisation. As Miller and Lieberman point out, “Morris taught his dancers to memorize the score to achieve aural-visual coordination. The score contains a varied repeat: a thirty-measure passage expands to thirty-three on its return. The dancers learned to sing the score during rehearsals to precisely coordinate their timing and spacing.”

The Air is in an ABA form with A being a serene steady-state canon in both music and dance. The canon phrase begins with a finger pointing upwards as the dancer balances on one leg and includes measured shifts of weight with one arm (finger still pointing) reaching carefully over the other. Judith Mackrell describes the effect as being like “a flock of hieratic birds, their legs like storks, their arms signalling strange semaphore.” To the running eighth-notes of the middle section Morris has dancers running through circular and spiral pathways that are reminiscent of folk-dance patterns with one dancer leading a line that turns about itself and resolves suddenly into a new pattern of two circles. All the while a single woman dancer is sitting cross-legged, down-stage right, shaking her head from side to side. In the Polka, the entire cast sits in a circle cross-legged, alternately shaking and nodding their heads as just one of the movements they determinedly work their way through in some kind of urgent, joyous, ritual.

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Harrison formalised Cowell’s fist and fore-arm tone clusters by inventing a tool (a slightly-curved and felt-covered piece of wood) that would play all the piano keys within an octave. Harrison tells us that the octave bar was immediately dubbed a “piano banger” by Dennis Russell Davies and Mark Morris in interview with the author called it an octave banger. Lou Harrison, “Lou Harrison talking about Grand Duo (1988)” on the Rethbun-Rivera Duo website: http://www.rrduo.com/default.asp?pg=m last accessed on April 27th 2013.
The combination of Harrison’s arcane mixture of medieval musical forms with “hyper-modern” harmonies, including tone clusters, and Morris’s iconoclastic and yet strangely familiar gestures and movements, adds up to a dance described as looking “as if it’s been hewn from stone” with a “use of ritual formation and primal energies lend[ing] the work an almost mystical imperative that makes its mystery as beguiling as its might.” Harrison described Morris’s Grand Duo as a “massively powerful ballet” while Alastair Macaulay wrote that “its uncanny force comes from the way the tribal meets the neurological. It’s formally fascinating – the fourteen dancers sometimes subdivide into five, six or seven sections, with different movements – and it’s dramatically riveting. What is possessing these people? They’re driven; we seem to be seeing primitive anthropology in rapid motion.”

**World Power (1995)**

Just two years later, Morris again returned to Harrison’s music to make another dance, World Power (1995), for fourteen members of his company. Morris took “In honor of the divine Mr Handel” (Harrison’s favourite composer and also one of Morris’s) and “In honor of Mr Mark Twain” from Harrison’s Homage to Pacifica (1992) and also his Bubaran Robert (in the 1981 version with an added trumpet solo). Bubaran Robert is the piece that Harrison wrote in response to a suggestion from Pak Cokro in 1976 that he compose a piece for a Javanese gamelan. Homage to Pacifica was written later and, from the beginning, it incorporated a harp, bassoon, extra percussion instruments and a chorus as well as the female voice that might normally be expected to join a gamelan. All these voices and instruments are of course tuned to the same tuning as the gamelan, which was originally one that Harrison made with Colvig: Gamelan Si Betty. Harrison had chosen to tune Gamelan Si Betty to pure ratio intervals feeling that this incorporation of just intonation was “not only possible but also potentially appropriate culturally.”
The choreomusical relationships of World Power have been analysed elsewhere revealing a high level of conformance between dance and music. Morris has clearly researched gamelan music well enough to understand both the “normal” structure of a piece and the ways in which Harrison diverted from it. He reflects both in his dance, sometimes including a movement motif that marks the end of a balungan, even if the musical marker (the striking of the largest gong) has been removed, and at other times matching a highly-unusual three-beat gatra with a little three-beat flick of an arm or a leg.

“In honor of Mr Mark Twain” includes Twain’s ironic speech about the war in the Philippines (see Appendix 3 for the complete text as it appears in the dance) which Morris sets with a literal, pictorial gesture for each word. While this might seem to be crude word-painting, and to some extent it is, thereby reflecting the crude brutality and self-satisfaction of the Imperialism it describes, it also allows Morris to make subtle points, just as he did in Dido and Aeneas. For example, we see not only the twirling moustaches of “our business partners” but also their phones. This stepping outside of history doesn’t just remind us of present-day imperialism and subjugation but also allows space for the ironic self-awareness that suffuses Mark Twain’s text. Within this context (combined again with the wide-ranging sources of the movement) it becomes clear that the dropping of a dancer’s body to the floor on every heavy crash in Harrison’s music is knowingly naïve and self-aware.

The knowingness and self-awareness we have seen in all Morris’s choreography to music by the West-Coast Avant-Garde composers clearly takes his work into the realms of postmodernism. In Morris’s work we see time and again a Radical Juxtaposition of genres and styles and a playful manipulation of narrative devices that make all his quotations of past and “trans-ethnic” movements knowing and self-reflexive in very much the same way as Robert Venturi played with notions of a child’s drawing of a house in the house he designed for his mother (1962-4) and Philip Johnson added a broken pediment on top of a skyscraper.
for the AT&T building in 1984. Indeed Damsholt suggests that even Morris’s frequent and detailed matching of the dance to the music, is such an overt conformance that it too is knowing and therefore postmodern.\footnote{134}

Morris’s choreography does, though, employ the kind of postmodernism that has “modernism under its belt,” to use Gilbert Adair’s phrase.\footnote{135} Drawing on historic practices such as Musical Visualization, making references to, and even quoting from, early twentieth-century modern dance, mixing in folk-dance and classical dance steps and formations from different cultures along with vernacular movement and even images from the natural world around him, Morris has created a wholly new choreographic voice with a startlingly new combination of dance images. David Nicholls suggests that “so radical was Cowell’s use of retrospective and extraspective materials in the 1930s and 1940s, that to his contemporaries his work must have appeared regressive” while adding that “in fact it set an important precedent for much that has happened since 1960.”\footnote{136} Morris in his typically independently-minded, self-assured way is, like Cowell, Partch and Harrison, happy to “push the boundaries … backwards … into apparent conservatism” but he does so in such a way that he also moves from ultra-modernism to postmodernism.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item[2] Ibid.
  \item[6] Hicks, Henry Cowell, 28.
  \item[7] Hicks, Henry Cowell, 23.
  \item[8] Ibid.
  \item[9] Hicks, Henry Cowell, 29.
  \item[10] Hicks, Henry Cowell.
  \item[11] Hicks, Henry Cowell, 35.
  \item[12] Hicks, Henry Cowell, 44.
\end{itemize}
Ibid.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.


23. Ibid.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 296.


36. Mark Morris, Interview with Gigi Yellen as part of “Seattle On the Boards” (2007/8 – Morris is 51) available at [http://markmorrisdancegroup.org/resources/media/3-interviews](http://markmorrisdancegroup.org/resources/media/3-interviews) accessed on 4 May 2010.

37. Ibid.

38. Mark Morris, Interview with the Author, Mark Morris Dance Center, Brooklyn, March 2011.


41. Ibid.


43. Ibid., xvii–xviii.

44. Ibid., xviii.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
49 Partch, *Genesis*, 201.
51 Ibid.
54 Harry Partch, “No Barriers” in *Harry Partch, Bitter Music*, 182.
55 Partch, *Genesis*, x.
60 Ibid.
64 Harrison, *Primer*, 1.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 17.
67 Ibid., 16–17.
68 Ibid., 1.
69 Miller and Lieberman, *Composing a World*, 17.
70 Ibid., 130.
71 Ibid., 45.
72 Ibid., 44.
74 Harrison, *Primer*, 45.
75 Ibid.
76 Miller and Lieberman, *Composing a World*, 229.
77 Harrison, *Primer*, 23.
79 Gilmore, *Harry Partch*, 64.
80 Ibid., 80.


Morris, interview with the author.


Duerden, “Predictably and Inevitability.”

Damsholt, “Mark Morris, Mickey Mouse and Choreo-musical polemic,” 11.


Partch, *Genesis*, 325.

Ibid.

Mark Morris, “Music I want you to hear” on WNYC available as a download at wnyc.org@itunes 2007, n.p.

Partch, *Genesis*, 326.


Acocella, *Mark Morris*, 34.


David Gordon, interview on “Making Dances; Seven Post-modern Choreographers,” Michael Blackwood productions, 1980.
Originally the piece was made for inclusion in a White Oak Project programme and there were two sets of five dancers, one from the Mark Morris Dance Group and one from the White Oak Project dancing alternate movements.

Morris, interview with the author.


Acocella, Mark Morris, 10.

Liner notes for the Folkways 1963 record Henry Cowell: Piano Music


Acocella, Mark Morris, 127.

Morris, interview with the author.

Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison,75.

Miller and Lieberman, Lou Harrison, 74.


Ibid.

Ibid., 542.


Dwight Anderson quoted in Miller and Lieberman, Composing a World, 54-55.

Morris, interview with the author.

Miller and Lieberman, Composing a world, 76.


Miller and Lieberman, Composing a world, 76.


See Preston “Iconography and Intertextuality” and “Echoes and Pre-echoes.”

Damsholt, “Choreomusical Discourse.”


Nicholls, Henry Cowell, 8.

Nicholls, Henry Cowell, 8.