

Ingo Diehl, Friederike Lampert (Eds.)

DANCE TECHNIQUES 2010 TANZPLAN GERMANY

WITH 2 DVDS

HENSCHEL

Ingo Diehl, Friederike Lampert (Eds.)

DANCE TECHNIQUES 2010 TANZPLAN GERMANY

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Ingo Diehl, Friederike Lampert (Eds.)

DANCE TECHNIQUES 2010
TANZPLAN GERMANY

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Hortensia Völckers

FOREWORD

What do we know when we dance? When we asked this question at the first Dance Congress Germany *(Tanzkongress Deutschland)* in 2006, 1700 people came to Berlin in search of answers. The next time we ran the conference (concurrently with the *Tanzplan Deutschland* initiative), the number of participating dancers, choreographers, teachers, critics, scholars, producers, and cultural politicians doubled. The Dance Congress Germany was established as an international platform for professional exchange.

When launching Tanzplan Deutschland in 2005, our goals at the German Federal Cultural Foundation (*Kulturstiftung des Bundes*) were to make dance more visible to the public and to increase its cultural–political recognition. With a 12.5 million Euro budget, this five–year funding program provided a national platform for dance practitioners to network; it gave them space and ensured that (cultural) politicians would listen to them.

Tanzplan local offered nine cities an opportunity to access equal shares of funding based upon plans submitted for improving dance in their region. Since then, more than four-hundred artists have taken advantage of a residency in Potsdam where they conduct research prior to staging a production; over the past years, several thousand young people and children were introduced to the aesthetics and various contemporary dance techniques in cooperation with partners from education and culture in Düsseldorf; and, there is now a dance center in Hamburg where up–and–coming choreographers can test themselves in a residency program. The city of Hamburg's budget for independent dance projects has finally been decoupled from the theater sector, and increased. Pioneering structures have been created everywhere—in Essen, Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin, Bremen, and Dresden.

Another main thrust of the initiative was *Tanzplan Deutschland's Educational Program*, which aimed to integrate the next generation of dancers, choreographers, and scholars. Ideas came, again, from various cities and thus the original plan for a mobile academy took a different direction: universities founded study programs that innovatively coupled artistic–scholarly research with professional vocational training. In cooperation with the independent

dance scene (*Freie Tanzszene*), which started the Inter–University Center for Dance (*Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz*), Berlin's University of the Arts and Ernst Busch Academy for the Dramatic Arts established three choreography–oriented study programs. Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts created Germany's first masters program for contemporary dance teaching. The nearby University of Giessen created a master's program for choreography and performance. Colleges and universities offering dance programs in Germany have taken up Tanzplan Deutschland's invitation to roundtable discussions, and now act jointly, as the Dance Educational Conference, to further their interests. In 2012, students, teachers, and directors will be able to attend what will be the Third Dance Education Biennale, presenting the public with dance of the future.

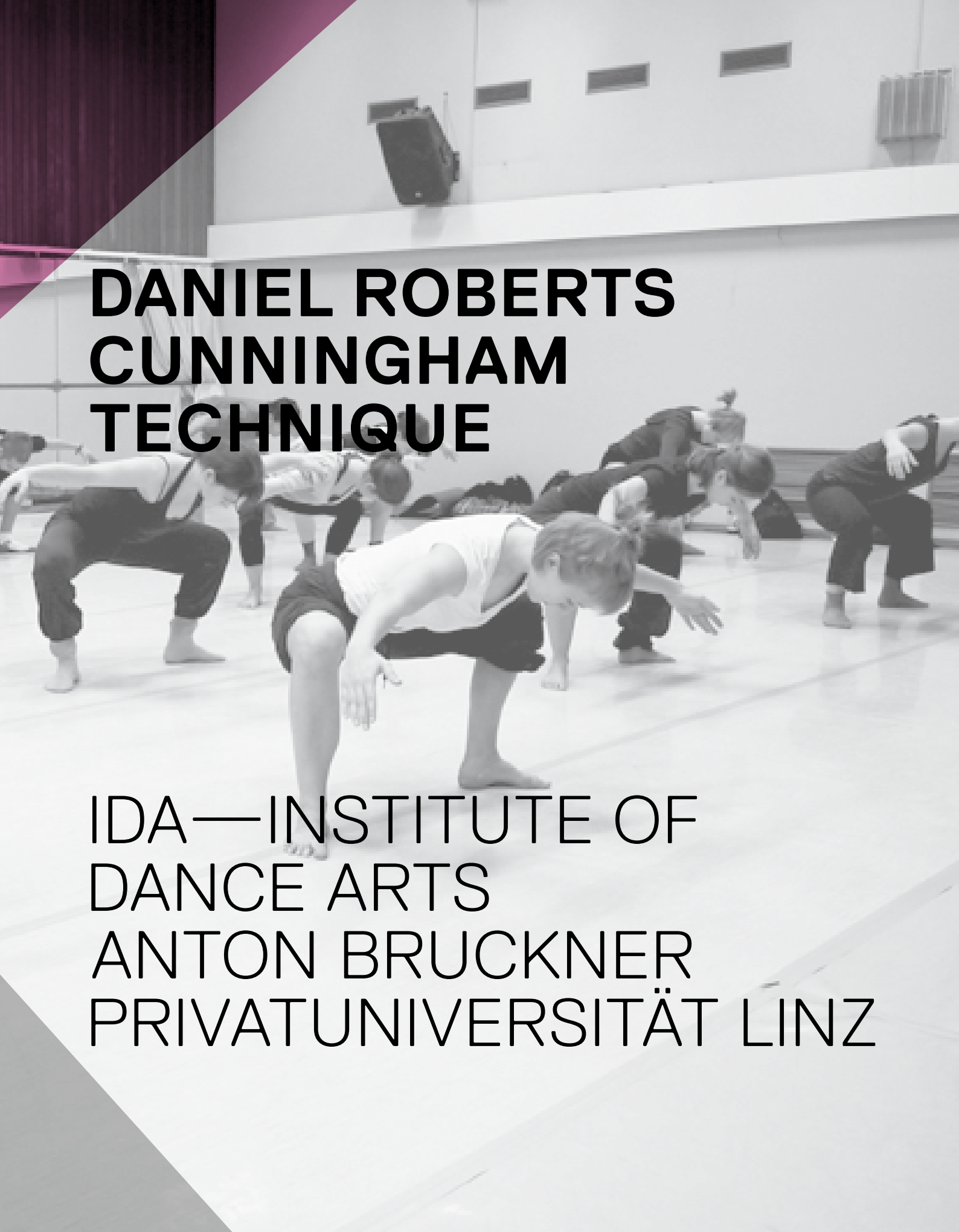
What knowledge do contemporary dancers harbor? How do they teach it? And where are their actions positioned within society and history? By establishing the teaching practices of contemporary dance as new areas of scholarly study, this book fills a gap. It presents the results of a multi-year research project that has been developed in close cooperation with national and international universities that have provision for dance.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people on location who have helped make dance more visible in this part of the world over the past five years. Thanks go to the team at Tanzplan Deutschland, who coordinated this plan with vigor and farsightedness—especially Ingo Diehl, who tirelessly and knowledgeably coordinated a variety of educational initiatives. Through longstanding and close contact with the various universities, he not only developed the vision for the research project and helped achieve its results—which we have in front of us in this book—but he also ensured, together with Dr. Friederike Lampert and a team of advisors, that the project was realized despite numerous complex stages.

Where will our movements take us? Answering this question, dear readers, is now up to you. I hope reading brings you much joy and inspiration.

Hortensia Völckers, Artistic Director of the German Federal Cultural Foundation, Halle, October 2010





DANIEL ROBERTS CUNNINGHAM TECHNIQUE

IDA—INSTITUTE OF DANCE ARTS
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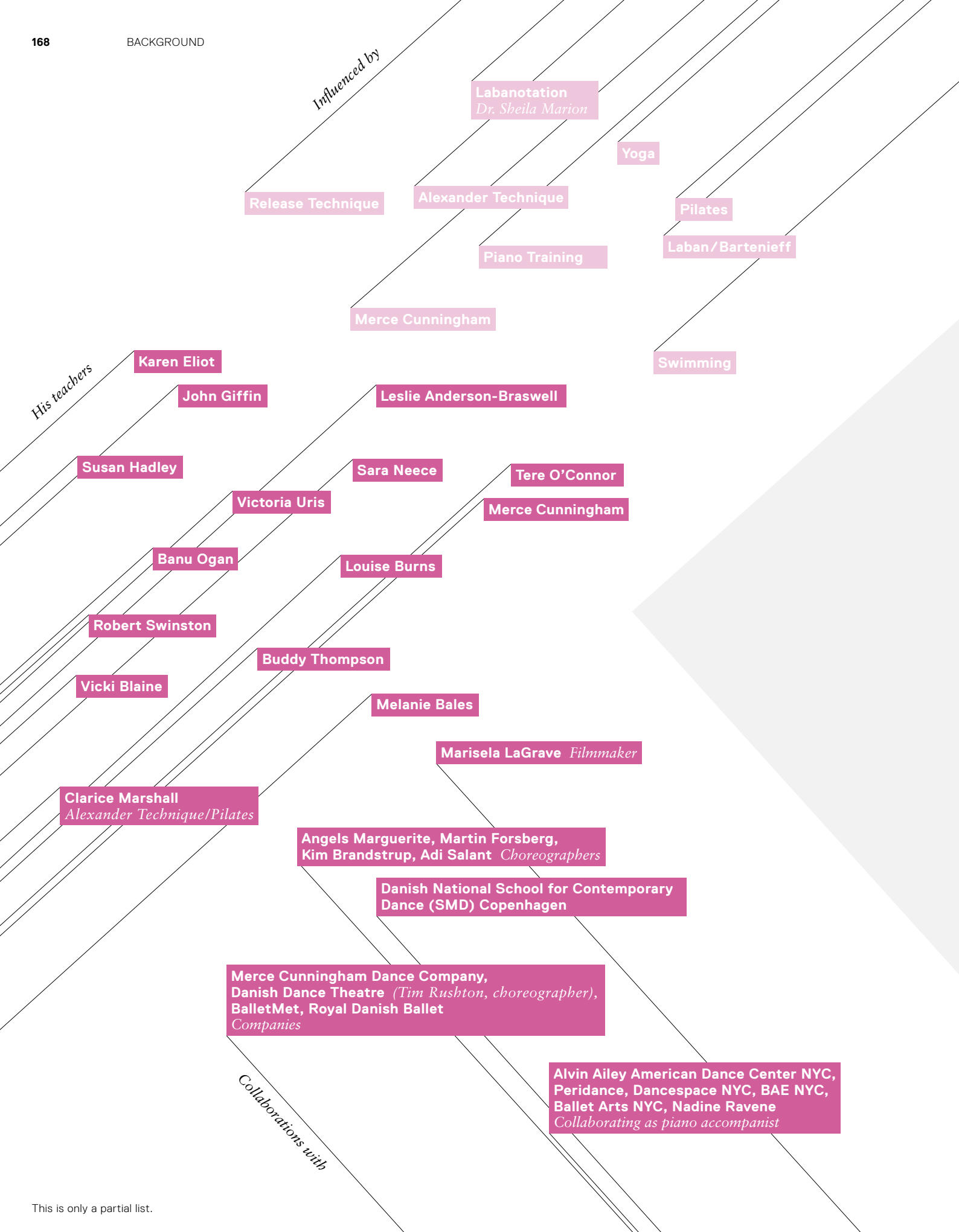

This is only a partial list.

DANIEL ROBERTS — CUNNINGHAM TECHNIQUE

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DANIEL ROBERTS (*1977)
grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and started playing the piano at the age of seven. He was piano accompanist at various ballet schools. He studied ballet and modern jazz at the CLO Academy in Pittsburgh then took a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance at the Ohio State University, with a specialization in performance and Labanotation. Roberts received a scholarship to the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York and apprenticed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC). He joined the company in 2000 and danced in a vast amount of repertory, including films about Cunningham (for example, in *Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance* in the reconstruction of *Totem Ancestor*). He left the MCDC in 2005 and taught Cunningham Technique at the Danish National School of Contemporary Dance in Copenhagen. He is currently rehearsal director for Danish Dance Theater. Daniel Roberts has taught the Cunningham Technique at The Place (London Contemporary Dance School), at the Royal Academy of Dance in London, at the National University of Arts in Korea, and at various companies, dance schools and festivals in Europe, Russia, the U.S., and Asia.

Daniel Roberts Interviewed by Edith Boxberger

LIVING INSIDE THE INSTRUMENT

/What was your education in dance? What techniques did you learn, and in which context? I grew up in Pittsburgh where I first studied in a school with two very inspiring teachers. One of them, Leslie Anderson, was a former dancer with the Dance Theatre of Harlem who had come back to Pittsburgh to teach ballet. The other, Buddy Thompson, had studied at the Alvin Ailey School and also with Luigi—he taught Luigi jazz. In 1995 I went to Ohio State University in Columbus, which has a wonderful dance faculty. I had a wide range of teachers—someone from Cunningham, from Mark Morris, from Paul Taylor, Pina Bausch, etc. I just fell in love with the class of Karen Eliot, a member of Merce's company in the 1980s. There was grace and clarity—as John Cage would say—in the way she presented the technique, of her interpretation and understanding of it. There were some things so pure but open at the same time.

At university I studied also with a lot of New York Release–based teachers. Choreographers came in for residencies who would teach for a period of time—for instance Tere O'Connor taught a Release Technique–based class. He had a wonderful way of using time—maybe it was influenced by the way Merce Cunningham used time in choreography, but Tere was using it with a different movement vocabulary.

I also studied Labanotation at Ohio State, and discovered a solo of Merce's called *Totem Ancestor*—the only notated Cunningham score. I reconstructed it for a research project and the head of the notation department, Dr. Sheila Marion, wanted me to make it into a big performance project. Eventually I went to Merce's studio and worked with Merce one–on–one. When Charles Atlas was making his documentary on Merce, I was asked by Robert Swinston (Merce's assistant at the time) to dance *Totem Ancestor*, and in return they gave me a scholarship for a half–year at the school.

/So it was a direct way into the Cunningham studio? Yes, and I worked with many different teachers there, people who danced with Merce. At the end of that half–year I was made an apprentice for the company. Being an apprentice is a way of learning the material, and if someone gets injured, then you step into the company. The Cunningham studio developed a little group called the 'rugs': Repertory Understudy Group. During the day we learned the repertory and did small performances—it is the most demanding job you could ever have. Robert Swinston oversaw the group; he was my main teacher. He handled the finer details of the work. It was like: What is this? Why isn't it working? He was very tough, very demanding.

I got a lot of corrections from him. Maybe because he thought I was talented, maybe because he thought I was stubborn, maybe because...whatever. But then I realized it was because he wanted something to come out in me. And he wanted enthusiasm for the work and the training, and the discipline. I think that is so important now, and I really want to convey that as a teacher: Passion and discipline has to be there because our world as dancers does not get any easier. You never get to a point really, like, 'Okay, that's it, now I have made it, now I can relax.' It just keeps intensifying, so you need a little voice inside of you to be, like, 'What was that? How can I make that better? What is the meaning of that?'...to keep questioning.

In New York mostly I took ballet classes with Jocelyn Lorenz and Sara Neece, a ballet mistress for William Forsythe—both supported what I was training at Cunningham. From time to time I took a jazz class to get out of the Cunningham and ballet studios, to open up a little bit. I was not inspired to take other contemporary classes in New York at that time; it just was not physically stimulating to me. I really wanted to dance for Merce.

/What attracted you so strongly to Cunningham's work? Before I started dancing, I was trained as a pianist. I came to dance as an accompanist for dance classes. For me, most important thing in Cunningham Technique is musicality, rhythmic and music awareness, virtuosity, and efficiency and passion. I feel there is a tremendous inherent passion in the technique and in the work. The technique is hard. The class is hard. You have to have a desire to do it—otherwise it turns into shapes in space. For me it is really important to have had the experience of dancing the choreography, dancing the repertory, to inform how I teach the technique. Otherwise it becomes somewhat two–dimensional: shape, position, shape, position. Having danced the repertory, I see much more of a three–dimensional view of how things flow, how to problem–solve, of how dynamics and the individual dynamics are involved.

Dancing Merce's work taught me a lot about phrasing and musicality. Former teachers said, 'Why would you not choose to work with more musical choreographers, like Mark Morris, who works with music visualization and counterpoint?' For me, Merce's is the

most musical work alive because *you* are an orchestra. The legs are doing a seven, the torso is doing a three, and you are travelling on a diagonal, and then it changes to a 4/4, and then you are not dancing to the music and have to rely on your sense of time and other people.

What the body goes through to make that happen, to make those changes clear, is fascinating. You are not on autopilot, you are always going deeper and deeper and deeper. What is it? How can it be different? Now I am injured, so how do I make this work in this way? Now I am feeling bad, how do I bring myself up to make it happen or get through it? It is that wonderful thing of living inside the instrument.

／What do you like, and what do you not like, in technique training? I don't like vagueness in training, I like a clear approach: This is the outline of the class, these are some learning outcomes from the technique, this is what we will study in the class. I like a clear use and clear description of the body. So I don't like a 'whatever' approach to training dancers—whatever happens. I think the more you can bring dancers in touch with their bodies and with what they are doing every second, and enable them to call upon that, the stronger they become. I like to develop their awareness of themselves and of other people, and keep their eyes going, which is the most important thing for a dancer. The eyes: what you pick up, what you see, what stimulates you.

I love to see the dancers come in the next morning and they are tired, and they start working again, going to that motivational place where they are training for themselves. When there are people who are more adult, who have more training—like in this class here—they can give themselves to the complexities more quickly. I can see they are interested in their process, and that invites me to bring in what I can because they are ready to listen.

It is not just me at the front of the classroom barking out orders—we are trying to learn, also, how to take class. Closer to the professional level, I love seeing how people problem–solve, how they bring their unique musicality and sense of phrasing to what they do. I am never bored because there is not one way to solve a problem, and it is beautiful to see that.

／What is important for you when teaching a technique class? For me as a teacher, musical support is very important. When I came here I said I had to have musicians or I would not come. That is a requirement. I think it is very important for dancers to have live music for class; it challenges their ideas of phrasing. When a musician is present and involved in their personal sense of time, it brings a live element to the physicality and the energy for the class is much stronger. People listen differently with live music than recorded music, and it facilitates my teaching. There are tons of exercises in the class; to play around with an iPod or a CD would be futile, I would spend the whole time at my iPod, not looking at the dancers.

I like percussion, in all the variations between African instruments and Indonesian instruments. There is a direct rhythmic clarity, and one doesn't get involved melodically. With piano music, I am a bit more specific because it is not enough to just play ballet music for the contemporary class. On my own time, I play a lot of romantic music from the late 19th century. If musicians can use this type of music in the right way, then it can work. I also like musicians who have a clear touch to the piano—perhaps confidence is the right word.

／Is there anything you learned from Merce Cunningham about teaching? I did not teach very much then. When I left the company I asked Merce's permission to teach the technique. He said, 'Yes, and I am glad that you asked me.' He gave me some tips for teaching—clarity is very important, and you have to be able to inspire people to want to do the work. Good points—very simple, very direct.

／What is required to teach this technique? You have to be honest, and to be able to create an environment where we can look at what is functioning for our bodies and what is not, and at what functions for further advancement. If we look at placement and alignment in a way that is functional and not representational, there has to be an openness in the classroom. I am demanding, but I also have to be able to let students open up and experiment. Being honest with my corrections, my approach, about what I want, and what I expect will create ground for them to navigate. If I was ambiguous and said nothing, just gave the exercise, I think it might put people into a sometimes too–questioning place in their head. There has to be a point where we can reflect and criticize—criticize as in: This is working, this may work better, this might not work, whatever…let's try.

／What qualifications does one need to teach this technique? I think it is important to have danced the repertory. I know people will disagree with me, and there are lots of people in the world teaching this technique without having had that experience, but that's my gut reaction. It informs how you teach the technique differently, for one thing. The second thing would have to be a desire to see the individuality of the students. The technique is not a form that we follow, it is how the information comes to the students—it teaches them how to use the directions given and turn it into dancing, make it into movement. To be an inspiring dancer and person is also vital to teaching; there has to be some visual or verbal inspiration.

／How do you define the relationship between yourself and the student? I do believe that someone needs to be in charge and make decisions, and say, 'This is what we are going to do.' But it's not a one–way system; it is me being in there with them, moving and figuring out how the movement could go deeper, or how it could be more analyzed, or what movement difficulties might come about from physically figuring it out. When I'm going through it, I have that same appetite. So I feel we are doing the work together, that I am actively looking at where everybody is in this process.

I try to make myself very available. At the school in Denmark, I try to make an open–door policy to come and talk about things because there is not always time in the classroom. I try to learn from my experience and use the demanding passion I got from studying with Robert, and then take the caring, listening, looking at it in a different way from Karen, who taught me from the beginning and was very supportive and very communicative about what was working or what was not working. I try to wear both of these hats because it is very important to have a dialogue with people about where they are in their training.

I make the students at the conservatory in Copenhagen keep journals about their training, and I collect the journals a few times during the semester. The students write about their corrections, ideas about movement, philosophies, etc. It is another way for them to cognitively tune in. Sometimes I read something and am surprised; I would never guess this student was having this thought process when I see the work in class. And when I meet with them, I say, 'I read this and now that I see you, maybe you could think about it and make it more visible.'

In work that is physically as well as mentally demanding, that sort of dialogue is needed, especially for education. Professionals, they go a bit their own route, but young dancers need that reflective view—that three–dimensional view of themselves to be able to be inside the body. And they need to have the critique as well as their own perception about their development.

／How do you prepare for class? I come with a program to class. Sometimes I have elaborate ideas before I come in and then I see where the dancers are—and that what they need is not necessarily what I'd planned, so I modify and that is fine. If I see their relevé work is a little bit weak, and I really wanted to focus on more extensions, then I adapt or I combine. The exercises, though, are sort of codified. There is a structure one can play off. I have done so much that I can go in and do theme and variation. For the bigger phrases across the floor, slow movement, big jumps, or fast jumps, I put a little bit more 'how I want this to be done' because I want to explain it efficiently and quickly, and be ready for the questions that will come at me.

What I have learned from Merce directly…he used imagery at times to convey what he wanted from movement, and he used a lot of animal references. I use a lot of ballet terms, like Robert did, which is sort of taboo in some branches of the Cunningham family. Merce was looking at it in a different way. He took the elements, of course, from his studies in ballet and Balanchine, but in Cunningham Technique they were not tendus but leg brushes or foot brushes on the floor—basically the same thing using a different language. For the sake of time and getting people to quickly recognize something they may already know, I use ballet terms.

／Are there other experiences you use for teaching? I call upon my own studies in Alexander Technique and Pilates. In Pilates, I can make connections between exercises I learned in this technique to the motions I do. Merce's technique focuses on the spine—a lot of coordination of the spine—and this refers clearly to Alexander Technique. I studied regularly with a wonderful woman in New York, Clarice Marshall, a Pilates and also an Alexander teacher. She combined the two brilliantly. She was an accomplished dancer as well as pedagogue, so she was very informed.

Alexander Technique and Pilates helped me understand my body and to counteract some harsh effects of Merce's technique. Like, given an extreme position, how do I get there without such a muscular reaction, or what is the skeletal approach to solving an extreme position and then coming back to a neutral place. I had a nice base to draw upon, from a deeper perspective of the spine. I did yoga also. I find some references to yoga in Merce's material with the stretches. And I use my music training all the time. I talk about musical terms, Italian musical terms, and musical forms—and I talk about them a lot. I think you have to use whatever is there to inspire you, what is coming from the music.

／Music and dance are deeply connected for you? I can be very picky about what I want musically because it intrigues me. I am very stimulated by music and sound as a source of either making up my material or of enhancing what I am doing. I think all dance students should study piano because a physical and mental relationship is developed. It is not just listening; a dancer is active and making something happen to the body, and then recognizes—*physically* recognizes—tone. That is wonderful.

I can tell the people who are musicians, the dancers who have trained in music—they come easily to understanding rhythmic structure in my class. Nine out of ten people who have studied piano, singing, or something like that have an idea of structure and space and know how to play with it.

／Did your teaching change, and how? When I moved to Copenhagen in 2006, coming from New York, I had that New York attitude, 'Get through it, get through it, go, go, go!' And people either went with it or they were afraid. I think, over time, I have found a way to keep a healthy amount of aggressiveness for the purpose of pushing people, and to be a little bit more sensitive to my environment—a reflective view that the way I was taught is not the only method. I take more time to think, 'What are ways of inspiring myself to go deeper in my work? How do we go further? How do we evolve? How can we get better at conveying information and executing directions?'

／Are there new influences on your work? I am always influenced. I watch a lot of other people's classes, which I recommend for teachers to do all the time. Something always comes to me, 'Oh, I like that! And how could I incorporate that into what I do?' I watch anything— but I don't like gurus, like, 'I have *the* way and I have all the secrets for you, and you follow me!' We are much more multilateral in training now. We have to look at each other, take many different things, and go in—and not just be 'one way'. I don't train people just to go to the Cunningham studio—that would be futile now. I want them to be able to take the wonderful things Merce has laid out, and take these things to their work, to whatever level they go to next.

We now have a lot of somatic influences on how we look at the body and how we work. We are sometimes going in to go out, rather than taking the outside form and putting it onto the dancer. At this stage, with a highly developed intellect looking at the body, any extreme is dangerous. We have to go forward with the ideas, taking both the somatic and the technical into question.

／What do you see as the future for this work? I hope the Cunningham studio continues in New York. The principles of clarity and movement awareness for the dancer should stay. A dancer is raw in that class: you come in and there is no barre, there is nowhere to hide, and you have to address this. This element builds a lot of strength, mentally and physically. I think Cunningham Technique is wonderful for conservatory educations, universities. There can be some value in it for companies—depending upon the company, what they have done before, and whether it is applicable for their repertory. For workshops, I think it is too complicated.

／What do you want to deliver to students today? I want them to find that elements like musicality, virtuosity, alignment, and consciousness of body and space will add to whatever work they choose to do. And to say, 'Wow! This technique really made me aware of all of those ideas!' And to understand that the technique builds a strong dancer, mentally and physically.

Sabine Huschka

INTRODUCTION

/"The training of a dancer is important, and this training will hopefully benefit the dancer's ability to learn and adapt to various movement challenges. It will challenge dancers to function and be creative within a form such as the one I teach…When people come to my class, I want their priority to be to organize themselves in time and space."[1]/

The research project in Linz was carried out in two phases, from 19–23 October 2009 and from 30 November–4 December 2009, under the motto of discovering something new. In practice, this afforded students a new and fresh perspective on their own movement repertoires. At the same time, new collaborative possibilities were established between departments inside the institute. During both sessions, practice and theory nurtured each other in a lively fashion: Daniel Roberts's workshops were rife with serious student discussion and the time between discussions was filled with theory and in–depth debates about Tanzplan Deutschland's catalog of questions. The 'journey' was taken up in the spirit of Cunningham's creative credo: something new can be discovered when its intrinsic possibility *is realized*.[2] Daniel Roberts (a longtime Cunningham dancer) achieved precisely this as IDA dancers (second–year bachelor's in contemporary stage dance and third–year master's program students) used the intensive two-week workshops and master classes to explore their own kinesthetic spectrum. The project gave students an opportunity to confront, in a concentrated situation, key issues about the meaning and purpose of dance technique, and it provided a rich learning experience for all involved.

A supplementary seminar given by Henner Drewes provided productive theoretical stimuli by enabling students a more in–depth look at the principles behind Merce Cunningham's movement organization and compositional

1 Daniel Roberts in discussion with Sabine Huschka in December 2009. Unless otherwise stated, all other quotes from Roberts in this text come from the discussions the author had with him during this research project.

2 Sabine Huschka: *Merce Cunningham und der Moderne Tanz. Körperkonzepte, Choreographie und Tanzästhetik*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000, p. 378.

technique. This was made possible by *DanceForms—Software for Visualizing and Chronicling Choreography* program, which students were able to access and use to design movement. Sabine Huschka was on–site in Linz to discuss, with the students and research team, key issues about the technique, its principles, and in situ teaching. The participants were thus able to reflect on their personal experiences with the technique as well as to discuss their personal encounters with the Merce Cunningham Technique during classes.

The drummers who accompanied Roberts's classes (musicians from the *Institut JIM für Jazz* (Jazz Institute) at the Anton Bruckner Privatuniversität Linz) must also be mentioned. They responded to complex rhythmic needs—including drawn–out notes and irregular time signatures—with spirited and dedicated improvisations.

Dancing, thinking, and writing were all utilized to facilitate the creation of new movement and the exploration of a contemporary dance technique that, in its approach to movement and the body, was considered by all participants to be a state–of–the–art contemporary technique. In practice, this meant that those involved in the project (Daniel Roberts, Rose Breuss, the students, Johannes Randolf, Henner Drewes, and Sabine Huschka) discussed each item on the Tanzplan catalogue of questions that applied to working phases and formats; the writing tasks were divided according to knowledge and interest. In addition to the intensive preparatory phase with Rose Breuss (supported by Sabine Huschka), in–depth and open discussions between Daniel Roberts, Rose Breuss, and Sabine Huschka provided particularly rich source material, and many students contributed detailed reflections.

What follows are impressions and insights from the research process. Texts that evolved from this process—answers, comments, experience reports, and reflections—were consolidated and edited by Sabine Huschka.

Sabine Huschka

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

TIME, PLACE, AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

Similar to other modern dance techniques, the Cunningham Technique was developed as an individual training regiment with the goal of creating an aesthetic spectrum of movement for the body. Created by Merce Cunningham (1919–2009), the technique is based on a functional and physiological understanding about the interplay between joints and muscles, and on notions about subjecting divergent positions of the limbs to changing tempos, rhythms, and spatial directions. While training in tap, modern dance, and ballet, as well as during his first engagement with the Martha Graham Company (1939–1945), Cunningham doggedly pursued questions about performing radically different styles of movement. With his logical and functional approach, Cunningham—despite ideological and aesthetic barriers that typified American dance–theater in the 1940s and 50s—wove the opposing principles of modern dance and ballet into a movement complex. The goal was, within a structured time–space continuum, to establish a complex of coordinates between divergent movements that could be physically explored.



The Cunningham Technique was, initially, created as a personal exercise and training program, and used by Cunningham's dancers, as of the early 1950s, as a systematic training format that should help them learn his choreographic material. At Black Mountain College during the 1952 summer session, backed by his first influx of financial support, Cunningham established the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC)—with Carolyn Brown, Anita Dencks, Viola Farber, Joanne Melsher, Marianne Preger, Remy Charlip, and Paul Taylor. A pedagogical format was developed within the context of his choreographic work.[1] Teaching the technique became increasingly important for Cunningham in subsequent years in his studio in New York (established in 1959), because, among other reasons, it provided him with personal income.

The technique remains in a transformative state until today; this being a process that happens from the inside–out, and by which the technique has become more and more differentiated with time. Principles and exercise sequences emerged from Cunningham's choreographic work, which, determined by the aleatoric composition process[2] (i.e., a composition process based on chance operations as practiced by the composer John Cage and others), confronted dancers with technical challenges that bordered on the impossible. Cunningham's entire body of work was influenced by innovations in film, as film recording techniques enabled Cunningham to modify spatial–temporal concepts in respect to the phenomenon of motion. In the early 1990s, Cunningham began using *DanceForms*—a software program using animation to generate choreography—as a supplement to aleatorics.[3]

Cunningham taught twice–weekly in his New York studio until shortly before his death at the age of ninety. Extracts from his technique classes, which can be seen at www.merce.org, give insight into his teaching style and

1 Vincent Katz: *Black Mountain College.* Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2002.

2 From the early 1950s, Cunningham choreographed movement motifs, phrases, and sequences, as well as the shape of his pieces, using elaborate random processes. These transformed the role of the choreographer by employing a self–perpetuating and playful logic. Chance operations overrode decision–making and the personal taste of the choreographer. This compositional process treats movement as an abstract dimension and confronts the body with the 'impossible'. For details, see Huschka 2000.

philosophy on the body and movement. The combinations and rhythms have, without doubt, become ever quicker and physically more demanding since its beginnings and the establishment of his company. The Cunningham Technique is characterized by a clearly recognizable and virtuoso movement style, one that can—as it is based on complicated coordinations, mental and physical concentration, and spatial and rhythmic elasticity—be described as 'intelligent' and 'transparent to the mind'.[4]

Thus at the core of the technique, evidenced both historically and conceptually, lies the notion of constant change—indeed, eminent changeability. Changeability is the technique's quintessence, its motive, and its impetus (also referenced in the title of Cunningham's notation book, *Changes*[5]). Cunningham Technique does not set mastery as a goal; it fosters a mental and physical willingness to change. Accordingly, one can understand why Daniel Roberts—even after five years as a member of the MCDC (2000–2005), and since the beginning of his professional teaching career at the Danish National School of Contemporary Dance in Copenhagen—returned regularly to the studio in New York, taking classes with Cunningham until his death. Roberts was eager to broaden his knowledge and stay up on changes and developments—i.e., be informed about Cunningham's new movement material, compositional options, and about new timing and rhythms. Only by attending classes in the New York studio could Daniel Roberts experience and understand the on–going developments being made to existing sequences and movement principles, and follow refinements in coordination as well as in temporal nuances. Changeability is the rule in Cunningham classes and presupposes that dancers, teachers, and students be mentally prepared to embody change. In this context, Cunningham Technique constitutes a sophisticated and lively body of knowledge.

BACKGROUND: BIOGRAPHIES AND ENVIRONMENT

In a technique with such a unique history, a good teacher should have many years' experience with source material, as only through embodiment can skills appropriate to the principles and the details be acquired. Daniel Roberts's training and career as a member of the MCDC is a good example: He became enthused about Cunningham Technique while studying dance at Ohio State University, impressed by the clarity and grace he saw in his teacher and former Cunningham dancer, Karen Eliot. Here, Roberts discovered the passion for movement that is key to the Cunningham Technique's aesthetic and philosophy.

Simply being a dancer in one of the most important modern dance companies in recent history, however, does not mean a person is predestined to become a teacher—regardless of how much repertory and refined knowledge has been acquired. A teacher needs more: He or she must have interest and curiosity in the technique's details, as well as in the underlying philosophy and material that will and would be danced.

Beginning with a scholarship at the Merce Cunningham Studio, and later as an apprentice with the company, Roberts was able to explore the technique's options and principles in–depth. Roberts is an enthusiastic and dedicated teacher, and says becoming a teacher was something he had always envisaged. In both spontaneous and structured time with students, Roberts especially enjoys teaching movement phrases and exercises in new ways, and in finding new approaches. His teaching is accompanied by an insatiable 'appetite for movement',[6] something that could have been said about Cunningham as well.

RELATION TO OTHER ART FORMS

Although Roberts's teaching concentrates on the physical experience and the all–important role of the functional body, it is characterized by a subtle musicality. The Cunningham Technique is structured by (and remains lively due to) complex and constantly changing rhythms as well as by the variability of movement material. The nature of the movement lends itself to temporal structuring, and a dancer's intrinsic musicality will influence how the movement is performed—all variables in Roberts's teaching. He only uses live music for class; Roberts, a trained pianist, accompanied dance classes for many years. He creates and teaches combinations that encourage students to find their own dynamic motivation for tempo changes and rhythms, as well as to learn how to embody movement. Live music, either percussion or piano, first clarifies and illustrates the rhythm, i.e., it fosters a kinesthetic sensibility for the movement sequence. The entire class is accompanied by various styles of music with many changes in rhythm, which helps the dancer coordinate and perform the movement with more energy.

From a historical viewpoint, John Cage's composition methods, philosophy of music, and general influence were crucial to Cunningham's handling of movement material as well as to how he formed his aesthetic for the stage.

3 See: Vaughan, David (Moderation): "Cunningham and his Dancers. Transcript of a Discussion with Carolyn Brown, Douglas Dunn, Viola Farber, Steve Paxton, Marianne Preger–Simon, Valda Setterfield, and Gus Solomon." In: *Ballett Review*, 3/1987; Vaughan, David: *Merce Cunningham Fifty Years*. New York: Aperture, 1997.

4 See: Noel Carroll/Sally Banes: "Cunningham and Duchamps." In: *Ballett Review*, 2/1983, p. 73.

5 Merce Cunningham: *Changes. Notes on Choreography*. Published by Frances Starr. New York: Something Else Press, 1968.

6 Susan Leigh Foster: *Reading Dancing. Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986, p. 32.

The long–term partnership between Cunningham and Cage, who were committed to dance and music as both performance and 'temporal' arts, resulted in the radical notion of treating time as an autonomous and structural element in which movement was intrinsically a part. Time became an independent variable that could be used freely in composition.

Cunningham's work with Cage is also central for Daniel Roberts.[7] Roberts, without limiting himself to twentieth century music, shares Cunningham's appreciation of Erik Satie. Depending on how the movement is structured, Roberts makes use of jazzy pieces or waltzes, something by Prokofiev, or even romantic music in class.

RELEVANT THEORETICAL DISCOURSES

Zen philosophy directly influenced Cunningham's philosophy of movement and physicality, and his dance aesthetic.[8] Early members of the company, like Marianne Simon,[9] have emphasized the mental training involved in the technique: A dancer concentrates solely on how the movement is being done, which requires full attention being given, in the Buddhistic sense, to the body at every moment in time.

Unlike Cage, Cunningham did not talk about Buddhism, nor did he follow Daisetsu T. Suzuki's lectures in New York in the 1950s with Cage's enthusiasm. The influence of Eastern philosophy can only be clearly found in Cunningham's compositions: When drafting movement sequences, he explored choices by using dice[10] and the *I Ching*, the oracular Chinese book of 'changes'[11] with its sixty-four hexameters.

CURRENT PRACTICE

Teaching Cunningham Technique, or any technique that a dancer has learned intimately, is only one career option after leaving the professional stage. Other possibilities, like choreographing one's own work or supporting the administration and organization of a dance company, are also valuable options. There are few MCDC dancers who have chosen Roberts's route, i.e., teaching Cunningham Technique outside of the New York studio context. Among these are Jeanne Steele, who teaches at The Place in London, Cheryl Therrien, who teaches at the *Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse* in Paris, Banu Ogan, who teaches at the Juilliard School in New York, and Tom Caley, who teaches at Stockholm University. No Cunningham dancers are teaching in Germany, as far as we know, at least not in the professional training sector. (We have no information about private studios or other areas of amateur dance.)

Cunningham Technique is employed intensively and effectively by various choreographers and dance companies, including Richard Alston in London, Ton Simmons in Holland, and by the Rambert Dance Company, which has integrated parts of the technique into its training program.

INDIVIDUAL APPROACH

Roberts has taught Cunningham Technique to dance companies throughout Europe in Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, and Holland, as well as in Russia and Asia. For companies whose members are ballet trained, the technique is easier to learn and particularly effective.

For Roberts personally, training in Cunningham Technique is valuable time spent increasing awareness of his own body and exploring functional movement principles; it opens him physically and mentally as well as helping to expand his own range of movement. This attitude impacts his understanding of himself as a teacher: Alongside learning technical skills, students are confronted with mentally, emotionally, and sensually constructed learning processes (whereby clear and disciplined expectations are indicated), requiring that the dancer not shy away from unfamiliar territory or the seemingly impossible, but rather face it.

7 John Cage: *Silence. Lectures and Writings*. Middletown (CT): Wesleyan University Press, 1973.

8 Sabine Huschka: "Subjekt-Körper-Leere: Diamanten. Merce Cunningham zum 90. Geburtstag". In: *corpus*, 12/2008, www.corpusweb.net (accessed on 08/27/2010).

9 Comment from Simon in: Vaughan 1987, p. 29.

10 Huschka 2000, pp. 358–422.

11 Frank Fiedeler: *Die Monde des I Ging. Symbolschöpfung und Evolution*. Munich: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1988; Daniel Charles: "Au-delà de l'aléa. Jenseits der Aleatorik." In: Barck, Karlheinz/Gente, Peter (Ed.): *Aisthesis. Wahrnehmung heute oder Perspektiven einer anderen Ästhetik*. Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1991, pp. 322–331.

RELATION TO OTHER DANCE AND MOVEMENT TECHNIQUES

Cunningham Technique is practiced daily, much like a ritual, in order to prepare the body for learning choreography—as is common with other modern dance techniques and in other companies. A daily class in Cunningham Technique, however, contains constant differentiation and continually changing nuances. Cunningham Technique has aesthetic links to ballet and elements from Graham Technique. Complicated ballet–based and differentiated leg–work is paired with a large range of movement options in the upper body. This is characteristic in that organizational principles found in leg–work are carried over to the torso's movement potential. The directional variations of the torso—upright, curve, tilt, arch, and twist—operate as the five ballet positions. These five positions are both combined in sophisticated ways and contrasted temporally and spatially. Although clear spatial structures are suggested, a classical geometric division of space is not employed. In Cunningham Technique, use of directional vectors involves segmented mobilization of the entire spinal column. The spinal column can be mobilized in three areas (and each can be activated independently) to achieve spatial diversity as well as a general increased flexibility of the entire spinal column. Compared to ballet and Graham Technique, the Cunningham body becomes more supple and stabilized through a strong center within a relaxed body alignment. In contrast to other modern dance techniques, the body is always trained in standing and there is no floorwork.

Sabine Huschka

CONCEPT AND IDEOLOGY

IMAGINING THE BODY

The Cunningham Technique was revolutionary; the first to concentrate on and train 'movement articulation' as something not intended for expression or emotion. As the technique is free from all psychological or spiritual motivation, it excludes any aesthetic and philosophical principle that aims for a 'natural' moment in movement—i.e., it excludes any principle that modern dance and its theoretical constructions in their different forms might turn into an aesthetic role model.[12] For Cunningham, the extent of the body's energy is outside any symbolic framework or topology. To evoke energized moments, one must conceptually go beyond existing models of the body.

The technique's distinctive style supports the complex and intricate spatial–temporal spectrum of articulation (which is moderated by strength). This constitutes the central tenet—a secular concept—of working "with the possibilities of the human body in movement" and "nature in its fields of application, if you like,"[13] as Cunningham said in his 1986 interview with Jacqueline Lesschaeve. The focus is on exploring a kinesthetic radius and movement configuration. This approach couches a utopian view of the body—and its inexhaustible potential for new movement.

Daniel Roberts's teaching is based on yet another premise: He teaches material that students can grasp immediately while simultaneously leading dancers into situations that are 'not yet possible'. Each dancer must first pick up the material, and then form it with some fluidity. Dancers learn to take their own physique into account, knowing that limits are to be pushed; this encourages them to move differently as well as to attempt more complex coordinations. The decisive factor is philosophical; a dancer's awareness is boosted through physical means, by use of foreign or imposed input—as opposed to 'going into oneself'.

To support this process, unfamiliar aspects are intentionally included in training as modifications to the routine. Roberts uses changes in nuance and modifies rhythm each time to confront students with challenges and gaps in his or her movement knowledge. It is therefore relevant for dancers to ask, "How can you do a movement that you've done over and over again and think you have it perfect, or whatever—and do it in a way so it becomes awkward again, to discover it anew?"[14] The technique's objective is not mastery of the body in the sense of being able to use the body as an instrument, or even to demonstrate knowledge of movement; rather, mastery emerges in accepting changeability and is evidenced in the performing body's spatial and temporal structuring of movement.

In Cunningham Technique, the body alone stimulates perception and awareness. Habitual and personal experience, emotional and psychological memories, or emotional articulation are not starting points for working on technique. The body is better viewed as a utopian and individual world, filled with potential and capable of learning how to constantly perform new, unfamiliar, constructed, and sometimes inorganically created movement. The body becomes an agent for the embodiment of an aesthetic.

Roberts's workshops demand a high level of concentration from students, as well as discipline, an ability to focus on the matter at hand, and a constant orienting of thoughts toward the possible. Students at the dance institute in Linz reflected on Roberts's classes in more precise terms. Dorota Lecka said: "In the Cunningham class, the body needs to be very well trained, while the technique itself requires dancers to have a high level of self–awareness about their own bodies. Self–awareness is important not only for executing the technique, but also in order to have a conscious presence while performing, to be able to become a medium, a channel through which certain information is being transferred. To emphasize it again, 'I am not my body.'" And within this paradoxical movement experience, she sees "an image of calm un-calmness" at work.

Gender–specific connotations in the movement or a gender–specific classification of certain movement sequences do not figure into the Cunningham Technique. As the body is a neutral instrument that can achieve any movement possibilities, it is consequently viewed as gender–neutral.

Cunningham Technique teaches space–time skills—and therewith, the transformation of a movement's energy. In this sense, Roberts's teaching, like Cunningham's, demands virtuoso craft through an ever–fluctuating stasis. The spinal column does not function as a fixed axis, rather it actively and dynamically creates a metastable balance in the body. This makes it possible to change vectors by directing limbs into space. The body learns how to work with the greatest possible movement spectrum, in both a kinesthetic and sculptural sense. This results in a transformation and increased experiential depth that only reveals

12 See, among others, Rodger Copeland: *Merce Cunningham. The Modernizing of Modern Dance.* New York/London: Routledge, 2004.
13 Merce Cunningham: *Der Tänzer und der Tanz*. Ed.: Jacqueline Lesschaeve. Frankfurt a. M.: Dieter Fricke Verlag, 1986, p. 168.
14 Merce Cunningham in *The John Tusa Interview*. [Transcript] 2008, www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/cunningham_transcript.shtml (accessed on 12/10/2009).
15 Merce Cunningham: "The Function of a Technique for Dance." In: *Contact Quarterly. A Vehicle for moving Ideas*, 7/1982, pp. 7-9.
16 Cunningham, loc. cit., p. 6.

itself in a concept in which the space is open and available—in accordance with Einstein's perception that "there are no fixed points in space"—a spatial concept that is shaped by time. The Cunningham Technique, in fact, intensifies how time and space are combined in movement. Dancers change quickly from one place in space to the next, changes often being carried out simultaneously by several body parts or rhythmic modulation.

The second key movement principle in Cunningham Technique is an isolation technique; the legs, upper body, pelvis, arms, hands, head, and feet are moved independently of each other, in different directions and different time phrases. Movement sequences taught by Roberts—fast, sometimes abrupt, but occasionally with some drawn–out changes of position—demand a high level of concentration. Students must constantly reorient themselves in both the room and inside their personal kinesthetic body space, and they must be able to find their balance amidst continual changes of tension in the body. This requires special attention to the spatial design of the movement, which, according to several students in Linz, is achieved by sight as well as by focusing on all other parts of the body. Students learn to coordinate the body in multifarious ways and, in doing so, always use the space as a directional framework.



Roberts teaches isolation by means of specific movement sequences, and talks about specific body parts involved in a movement sequence. For example, Roberts might ask students to turn with a relaxed upper body, the arms deviating outwards on either side (away from each other) and to let the leg accent the movement. The movement sequence therefore involves body parts moving simultaneously in different directions; each body part should move as if it has its own pair of eyes.

One general observation is that the relationship to space is always established and formed from an upright position. Cunningham Technique includes no floor exercises, referencing an anthropological perspective that the human body is identified by its upright position.[15] Some students had the impression they were embodying dignity.

Each combination—and some are very complex—is characterized by a sculpting of the body. Shapes are created by precise spatial positioning of various body parts. In order to do this, accurate placement is trained, which requires an awareness about appropriate amounts of tension, as well as about position and alignment of individual limbs in space. Upper and lower body movements are considered two separate spatial zones; separating them enables a free and fluid space for the upper body, 'above' the rhythmically driven leg–work and step combinations.

A space–time relationship in the dancing is visible to an observer. It is key that dancers understand the "correct, vertical position of the body"[16]—based on kinesthetic energy principles—as well as understanding the biomechanical principles that the technique is grounded in. Only with this understanding can one realize a movement repertoire that is directionally and spatially differentiated. Dancers work intensively on maintaining a controlled stability, using body weight to manage balance. Other exercises require directional and spatial expansion, demanding a great deal of muscular strength. Moving the body with clear directional orientation through space, and along equally clear pathways, yields a feeling for the volume of a body in motion. Space is thus structured by continuous movement, rather than by fixed positions in space. Each shape should be a living and breathing shape. In his classes, Roberts speaks of a dialogue between the body and the space that is continually reinventing itself.

Daniel Roberts's training defines the musical shape of the movement; an intrinsic sense of body rhythm is developed, trained, and promoted by rhythmic changes in movement sequences. A clear and virtuosic elegance was recognizable in the dancers' bodies. This elegance concords with another fundamental principle of the Cunningham Technique: Referencing the dance scholar José Gil, musicality, as expressed by the body, represents the 'float' in Cunningham's movements, endowing them with a flowing yet easily recognizable temporal gestalt.

Training awareness for temporal gestalt was often done in silence. The students worked either alone or with others in these phases. Interestingly, Roberts also prepares his classes, for the most part, in silence; he first sets movement phrases to music during class, with live accompaniment. Timing is adapted to suit the movement. Roberts gives the musicians a time signature before each phrase, and determines a combination's meter and rhythm in the moment. It is essential, for him, that exercises have a clear musical and temporal structure. Roberts uses about thirty movement exercises in a ninety–minute class, which also explains why he cannot use prerecorded music. He talks to the musicians during the entire class and appreciates the creativity, interpretation, and improvisational skills that are reflected in their music when observing the students. Roberts understands a technique class supported by musicians to be a joint artistic process. The students in Linz appreciated the live music; they emphasized the positive influence it had on their movement execution as well as on their personal comprehension of the logic behind the exercises, and said the music aroused emotional, mental, and even visual impressions.

Roberts's experiences of working with different musicians and musical styles explain this strong connection. He describes a musical accompanist in Denmark who had a wonderfully sharp sense of timing:

/"He was a very odd man and brought electronic music into the class that he had made on his computer. He played guitar, piano, and anything that was sitting around. He had a real mind for what sound is and what is interesting to listen to and how that affects the body. So he had a real connection to the work that I taught. He was my favorite because he was investigating his own compositions within the ideas of the dance class."/

Most of the musicians that accompany Roberts's dance classes come from a jazz background and have well–honed instincts for improvisation. A pure jazz accompaniment is not perfect for the classes, as Roberts feels too much swing is imposed upon the movement phrases. He also almost avoids using classical music (as in traditional ballet classes), although, for some parts of the lesson, it does help students establish a stronger emotional connection with the movement. A mix of styles is best.

INTENT

The art of the Cunningham Technique lies in dancers being able to use personal dynamics to move fluidly through a complex framework of directions and time signatures while remaining engrossed in the act of performing. In Cunningham Technique, the moving body needs—and is promised—a specific type of awareness. For Linz student Dorota Lecka, this showed up from time to time as follows: "What I particularly admire about the experience is a certain distance toward one's own body and emotions, while, at the same time, the ability to access information, wisdom, and beauty, which enriches everyone, even if it is beyond our conscious understanding." As a consequence, dancers are aware and alert at any given movement when performing. Skills, therefore, are found in a wide spectrum of movement that, in accordance with an understanding of dance as art, embraces all forms of movement.

As Anne Seymour writes in *Dancers on a Plane*, Cunningham Technique is about "a process of personal discovery, and the ideal is to work with movements as if becoming aware of them for the first time."[17] This way of recognizing and becoming aware of one's own movement, whereby a specific presence is generally identified in movement performance, is regarded, from a philosophical point of view, as both a path to be walked and a hike. Becoming aware of one's own movement always leaves, in its wake, processes of distancing oneself from oneself and becoming a stranger to oneself. It is in these processes that something first reveals itself. Dorota Lecka describes her experience as follows:

/"Movement sequences are complicated and fast, and, to be able to perform them with exact musical timing, one's mind needs to be prepared and trained to stay calm. The only way to learn and afterward perform all of those sequences is with a deep awareness of mind and body, often because changes in directions, speed, and levels require you to be awake and aware both inside and outside. I often experienced myself 'observing myself while moving,' witnessing my own performance where I could literally see myself as if observing myself through somebody else's eyes, as if my eyes would double up and my focus would divide itself in two. One pair of eyes would remain a part of the moving body, looking outward, while another pair would be looking more inward. It is about the absence of mental and emotional identification with the body, which creates a time shift between awareness and memory of the movement sequence, and the actual body performing it."/

This awareness of movement, intensified by a conscientious attitude in training—i.e., keeping one's attention focused on the body—gives rise to a specific performative quality. This quality assures vital and lively dancing; and an unlimited, essential, potential for temporal–spatial design.

17 Anne Seymour: "Foreword", in Anthony d'Offay: *Dancers on a Plane: Cage–Cunningham–Johns*. New York: A. A. Knopf in association with Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1990, p. 11.



Sabine Huschka

UNDERSTANDING THE BODY/MOVEMENT

PREREQUISITES

Any form of previous dance or physical training is a plus when learning Cunningham Technique. Some ballet or other modern dance background can be particularly helpful, as is experience in techniques that train coordination and stamina, like yoga or Pilates.

Students Handler, Kronheim, Rys, and Bobadilla stress that a ballet background is helpful to understand placement, i.e., the biomechanical organization of the body, positioning of limbs (and their constant repositioning), as well as shifts in body weight during directional changes. Previous modern dance experience will assist the dancer in combining upper body and leg movements common to the Cunningham Technique, particularly in regards to torso mobility and the multifarious specified zones.

Good stamina makes it easier for dancers to master the physical demands of the technique—although this is true for all types of dance. The Linz–based physiotherapist Johannes Randolf[18] believes there is too little stamina training in most techniques, although stamina in particular is indispensable for an injury–free dance career. Without stamina, the body cannot compensate for the physiological demands of the Cunningham Technique, thereby leaving dancers at greater risk of small injuries or irritations.

As to the most basic motor and coordination skills, experience in gymnastics or martial arts can be helpful as these disciplines teach both eye–body coordination, stretching, and precise movement execution—all of which are of particular importance for Daniel Roberts's Cunningham classes.

Roberts consciously avoids making any statements as to the ideal physique for Cunningham Technique. As to the physical or movement prerequisites for a dancer, in Roberts's opinion, the issue is how interested and open students are for 'problem solving' (as described above). Students in Linz also supported this; they emphasized that it is precisely an 'alert mind' that helped them perform their best when the pace of learning new exercises accelerated. The better one can recall exercise material, the better one can concentrate on mastering rhythms and movement qualities. Having well–developed leg and foot muscles, a strong back, good turnout, extensions, and flexibility is beneficial. From a physiological viewpoint, it helps to have flexible connective tissue, i.e., ligaments, tendons, and muscles; natural elasticity means that an individual need not go beyond physical limits.

Basic motor skills especially relevant to the Cunningham Technique are strength, stamina, and speed—in equal measure—and coordination in particular. Roberts's training requires the dancer to have enough physical strength to perform constant repetitions. Having good coordination skills makes it easier to mentally incorporate continual rhythmic and direction changes. If dancers do not have these skills, then, in certain circumstances, visualization exercises can help to compensate. These, when 'looped', spark a correlation between the image and the movements to be performed. Stamina training—such as running, Nordic walking, or swimming—is well suited to provide an appropriate break from the interval training outlined above, and for allowing the body to recover from the substantial physical demands. Other techniques such as Pilates, Gyrotonic, or Gyrokinesis are equally suitable in this respect, as all of them train muscular strength that underpins demands made by intricate and difficult coordinations. Musculature should maintain a balance between tension and relaxation, and elasticity.

Training in Feldenkrais, Body–Mind Centering, or yoga will help the body to recover, releasing both mind and muscles from the high degree of concentration and tension. Linz students also felt that meditation or visualization techniques were helpful for learning the Cunningham Technique, as these methods refresh the mind and foster a visual understanding for movement detail.

The adagio combinations in which the students, standing on one leg, repeatedly work the gesture leg through different positions from passé into développé before guiding it downward to repeat the movement, require a great deal of physical strength. Added upper body actions like curve, arch, and tilt increase the level of coordination required. As the students Handler, Kronheim, Rys, and Bobadilla state, good contact with the floor is necessary in order to perform these exercises well; the foot must be rooted and the standing leg connected to a strong center. A strong center is key to understanding the gestalt of a moment, to giving it life and form, and enables the dancer to perform in–the–moment.

The high level of precision demanded by the Cunningham Technique quickly exposes weaknesses, whether they be rhythmic, coordination, or physical uncertainties—or even mental blocks that prevent dancers from remembering

18 Johannes Randolf teaches contemporary dance at the IDA and also works as a physiotherapist.

exercises. This explains why some students say there are few ways, in this technique, to compensate for uncertainties. Injuries can occur because of excessive cognitive as well as physical expectations. Inadequately trained ankles increase the risk of injury, as extensive jumping exercises require a high level of stability. This is exacerbated by the fact that all exercises are done, on principle, in standing (i.e., no floorwork), meaning there is potential for knee and leg–joint injuries. Daniel Roberts occasionally compensates by including floor exercises.

MOVEMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND PHYSICALITY

Cunningham Technique, as taught by Daniel Roberts, involves whole–body activity in which all parts are mobilized. However, in terms of dexterity, fine motor skills for the torso, legs, arms, and feet are trained more intensively than those of the hands. Therefore, an ability to mobilize and coordinate individual body parts efficiently, and in accordance with one's own strength, is essential. At the start of class, the entire body is warmed up using torso swings and turns to activate the center; other body parts are gradually engaged.

The wide range of exercises used at the beginning of class serves to activate the spinal column and as a basis for flexibility and coordination skills. A comprehensive mobilization of the spinal column, as well as increasing its range of motion, is important. The spinal column not only keeps the body upright, it also determines the amount of mobility—which, in turn, determines the body's range of directional and spatial options. This is successively expanded in training. As all body parts can initiate movement and a stable center is crucial. The lower pelvic region must be able to adjust to constant weight shifts found in off–axis shapes. Having total and segmented mobilization of the spinal column (in the chest, abdominal, and lumbar regions) allows dancers to guide the torso through different levels and axes like a kaleidoscope.

Dancers must thus learn to activate the body segmentally during movements that simultaneously contract, lightly pulsate, and rotate. Muscular flexibility and strength is required for stretching, bending, and elongating torso movements performed to both fast and slow rhythms. This also emphasizes the significance of Roberts's exercises at the start of class, which are primarily leg exercises, as these teach students how to support and stabilize the body.

Roberts pays particular attention to foot articulation. As training primarily involves stabilizing, mobilizing, and locomotion using both legs—including walking and lots of jumps—positioning and strength in the feet are extremely important. Given the speed of the exercises, which involve constantly changing directions and rhythms, it is helpful to root and locate the body by means of a conscious awareness of the relationship between the feet and the floor. The foot is usually the first body part engaged in a clear shift of weight.

But as Handler, Kronheim, Rys and Bobadilla note, the head can also initiate movement and, thanks to a flexible axis/spinal column, send the body into the space. A whole–body approach thus dominates when performing exercises, even when it appears as if individual movements (like curving the lower back) are only initiated locally. Of course, all body parts are connected, meaning an impulse from one will engage others.

The high level of coordination demanded by the technique presented a real challenge for some Linz students as they had to master the underlying principle of isolation during a whole–body activity. Particular attention was paid to isolating body parts and moving them in different directions while, at the same time, stabilizing them. To achieve this, Roberts drew on his dance training at Ohio State University and incorporated visualization exercises that imaged bones, muscles, and joints. So, for example, movement was initiated by placing awareness on the bones and skeleton. Other visualizations focus on muscle tone and shape: Are the muscles tense or relaxed? Are the muscles close to the bones or do they create a cushion to rest upon?

As already emphasized, Cunningham Technique demands copious amounts and constant use of **strength**, in particular when slow, directed, and expansive movements in space need to be stabilized, slowed down, or stopped by muscular strength. Support here comes from well–developed muscles in the back, ankle joints, feet, and legs.

How the **center** is perceived is important to Roberts, although he assumes that each student must discover and experience the exact location and sensation for her- or himself. Drawing on his experience, Roberts sees this as something that changes over time, as the body develops. Now in his thirties, Roberts perceives his own center as being lower in the pelvic region, whereas before his perception was of it being more in the abdominal area. Students in Linz also perceived varying locations: For some, it was in the abdominal region close to the chest, others imagined and felt it around the navel. This has consequences for a dancer's movement organization. Linz students remarked: "The center can always shift a bit, depending on the movements being done, and the center used for arch can be different from the center used for curve or for leg–work. In Cunningham Technique, the center seems to shift a little when jumping, when it transfers from the belly to the chest area."

Roberts emphasizes that perceived body center(s) are not explicitly discussed or even trained in traditional teaching of Cunningham Technique. The focus of attention is on the whole body and logic of relationships and spatial disposition—for example, how the body carries

itself forward or backward—as the relationship to other dancers also plays a constant role. Combinations are always activated and structured using a balanced body center. Roberts thus speaks explicitly about the body center in his classes when teaching lifts, i.e., both interacting bodies can control their positions to avoid going off–balance. He teaches dancers how to economically position the center for optimal use of strength. The body center is generally treated as the center of movement, and less as an imaginary zone.

Body weight and gravity, in Roberts's technique classes, are principally treated as forces to be resisted; while moving, one tries to use body weight (meaning the gravitational pull exerted on any natural object) as something to be countered. Body weight must be physically controlled; stabilization when falling or leaning must be learned. Momentum must be formed, in a manner similar to the Humphrey/Limón use of swing and oppositional 'fall and recovery'. But Cunningham Technique does work with body weight; it is a strengthening factor as the weight falls along a vertical axis (the spinal column) when aligning the body. Roberts understands body weight, similar to Zen philosophy, as force that impacts the earth and, with it, also the body; this strength, however, does not have an inevitable limiting effect on movement. Rather, it is about garnering this force, as an active element, for movement.

Roberts refers to energy differently for each exercise and movement phrase. The energy varies depending upon the movement being performed, and in accordance with the individual. Roberts encourages students to experiment with their own energies. This relates also to weight shifts, depending on where the shift takes place—and where the movement is headed.

Cunningham Technique pays special attention to space as a complex for kinetic design. In this aspect of training, Roberts sees a great opportunity for students to develop both better body awareness and sensitivity to the space. In the first two phases of Roberts's classes, students focus on their bodies 'in place'; in the following phase, they use the information to concentrate on filling movement with greater volume, giving them a sense of the surrounding space.[19] Linz students Petit, Swietlicka, and Herrlein emphasize that a relationship to the space is central to Cunningham Technique. This applies both to the kinesphere, wherein one learns about spatial correlations within the body space, as well as to a constant orientation in the room. Students find this concept (i.e., awareness of their kinetic and kinesthetic space) presents an opportunity to see both the body and space as malleable, free space, because movement shapes emerge from the interplay between body and space. Muscle groups and configurations, and the joints' coordination potential are all recognized as malleable free space. A comment Roberts often makes is: "Feel both sides of your back as they support your verticality."

In Roberts's teaching, all movements address the space, almost with a sense of "spatial responsibility," as he emphasizes. Dancers can and should develop an awareness of where they are in the room and what they are currently doing, "for the sake of him- or herself, the choreography, and others in the space." Directive and formative awareness for the room, as well as for the spatiality of movement, enables a conscious perception of one's own body.

Cunningham Technique understands space as an open network, in which joints are given a flexible place for physical articulation. Putting that to use in the physical body means employing constant presence and agility in the limbs and joints.

Awareness of the environment also influences Roberts's teaching; for example, awareness of sunlight shining into the room. The student Katja Bablick described one exercise wherein she was asked to execute an upper body circle and, to help her, imagine sunlight streaming onto her chest. The visualization helped Bablick perform the biggest possible movement.

Combinations used in technique classes are oriented in all directions and use all available space; directions are often changed mid-movement. The preferred spatial level is the middle level. The lower level is used for pliés, whose movement radius both marks and delimits this level, while numerous jump combinations constitute the use of the upper level.

Roberts finds it essential for dancers in his class to be conscious of exterior rhythms, but also to be aware of how the inner rhythm works with the outer one. In his classes, he teaches students how to tap into both equally by placing great importance on rhythmic detail and investigating musicality, i.e., using music to design movement. Roberts wants to share his knowledge about the complexity of time, a feature of Cunningham's work, in order to highlight time's endless possibilities for shaping movement. He says:

/"Merce used to say to Pat Richter, the piano accompanist for his class, that it did not matter to him what she decided to play, as long as the rhythm was clear. She loved that! She said it opened up a world of possibilities to her, that she could think melody, but that it was not tied to eight phrases of 4/4. I believe the same has to be true in the work of a dancer, that we are not predestined to function on counts of eight—we could also think of it as a phrase of five, and a phrase of three. How do we subdivide a musical structure, in regards to phrasing and breath, while still holding true to the described amount of time and space?"/

19 See Teaching: Principles and Methodology.

Students enjoyed the distinct differences between rhythmic structures in Roberts's class to those in other classes, even when counts of nine, ten, or twelve were unusual for some. New phrasings were very difficult for those dancers who were used to training in 3/4 or 4/4, as the movement initially felt arhythmic and forced. Roberts helped by giving clear musical directions and counting aloud. Dancers gained confidence by counting quietly to themselves. Live music strongly supported the rhythmic development of the combinations. Katja Bablick pointed out how live music created a balanced atmosphere and energy in the room, and made the class flow. Roberts adjusted the tempo constantly and explained meter and rhythm in detail to both musicians and dancers. Structuring time is therefore an essential aspect of Roberts's teaching; he develops it cumulatively, yet organically and spontaneously.

There are no special instructions regarding the use of breath, nor are there specific exercises for breath–awareness. Each student should, instead, discover his or her own breath rhythm, and this can vary greatly. Therefore, Roberts does not use breath to phrase or rhythmically structure movement. He wants each dancer to work out phrasing with their own breath. As he adjusted class pace to the respective level of the students, depending upon the group, similar exercises were taught with different tempos. Roberts did consistently accelerate the tempo so students had to cope with unfamiliar circumstances, creating both a physical and mental challenge and possibly helping them break through self–imposed limits.



When asked about fundamental movement principles, Roberts's interesting answer was that he wanted to reflect further, with care and clear referencing to the philosophical dimensions implied by the question. Physically speaking, principles of isolation, centering of energy in the body, as well as rhythmic coordination skills are certainly among these fundamental principles. The types of movement have already been described above. Roberts mentions steps, jumps, turns, extensions, and balance as components. These are used in the second phase of class, preceded by phase–one warm–up swings as well as leg–work with pliés, foot exercises, tendus, and jetés, which, similar to ballet training, are followed by ronds de jambe for balance and rotation, as well as Cunningham's characteristic 'bounces', i.e., soft seesaw (expanding and relaxing) movements with a curved chest performed in different directions (but always in standing). In the third phase, steps, jumps, turns, extension, and balance are practiced in combinations.

An incisive comment from Dorota Lecka cited the Cunningham Technique's principles (in reference to movement style and physicality), insofar as these could be placed in a character–building sense: "There is always a choice about how one feels and presents oneself to the outside world. This attitude can relate to body structure, to muscle tone, to a sense of drama that one can carry through a dance class, and to a certain parameter or objective you focus on. All this appears as a personal flavor of a movement."



THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL INSIGHTS INTO *DANCEFORMS*

Henner Drewes

In addition to technique classes with Daniel Roberts, students in Linz also participated in a workshop with Henner Drewes, who familiarized them with the animation software *DanceForms*. It seemed logical to investigate the relationship between this computer visualization for dance and the students' reflections on Cunningham's dance technique. As with other analytical movement representation systems, *DanceForms* software can only handle selected aspects of movement—thus it utilizes a limited amount of movement information. The fact that Cunningham worked effectively with this software points to a clear correlation between the movement aspects the software offers and Cunningham's perception of movement. Cunningham was a member of the program's development team and made a substantial contribution to its design. This means that the presence of—as well as the absence of—certain movement possibilities and concepts gives us some indication of Cunningham's preferences.

The type of movement and image of the body found in *DanceForms* is based on the following scheme: The figure of a dancer, the model, has body parts that connect to each other via a network of joints, corresponding, in simplified form, to human anatomy. Every joint of the virtual model can perform all geometrically imaginable positions, even when these are anatomically impossible. For Cunningham, there was a utopian aspect to this virtual body; it can explore movement through segmentation and coordination as well as being able to overcome physical and movement limits—*to an extent*. There is a tree–like hierarchical system, whose roots are always in the pelvis (the 'root limb'). Movement by a body part near the root limb (i.e., near the pelvis) will affect the position of a body part further away from the 'trunk', even if the angle between these two body parts remains constant and the root limb does not change its position.

In order to represent human movement fully, the software would have to include dynamic, changing root limb(s)—meaning that any body part could take over the pelvis's role for the duration of contact with the floor. Without this ability, de facto connections between the body and floor are incorrect, and a realistic representation of locomotion and weight shifts is impossible.

The program requires that body shapes, or poses, be placed into 'keyframes'; only key images need to be created as they serve as cornerstones for the animation. Keyframes are superimposed over a timeline. The computer generates (interpolates) the images necessary to create a fluid movement sequence between keyframes. Such interpolation, however, can only be manifested directly, i.e., via the shortest possible movement path between keyframes. Therefore, the program's movement solutions are a limited subset of the body's true capabilities.

Movement phrases (which might be created in a myriad of ways) can be developed further by copying and pasting, or repeating and re-combining. This makes provision for designing group choreographies as well as for choreographing typical Cunningham 'coordinated' combinations wherein the upper body is choreographed separately from the legs. This process reaches its limits in complex scenarios involving differentiated, 'coordinated' rhythms and the interplay of various body parts. If a position is pasted onto the timeline at an automatically interpolated interim frame rather than at an existing keyframe, a new keyframe is generated. With additional keyframes and repeated edits, the data quickly becomes indecipherable. Efficient processing of the material becomes increasingly difficult and, ultimately, impossible.

Despite the substantial limitations, Cunningham was able to work with the program successfully. What are the parallels between the software's scope and Cunningham's movement concepts? In fact, direct movement paths predominate in Cunningham's work: his movement coordinations and constructions reveal a relatively simple time structure for individual components, and movements by unrelated body parts generally begin and end at the same time. In contrast, there are no 'coordinated' sequences in which individual body parts are used successively, or in which more complex temporal structures follow. Almost without exception, weight shifts occur from a standing position. As the software cannot account for weight bearing, it is unable to model weight shifts realistically. However, representation of the arms, upper body, and working leg (available body parts that are not root limbs) is not restricted by the program's limitations. Had Cunningham needed to incorporate more floorwork, such as rolls and weight changes from one body part to another, then *DanceForms*, in its current format, would not have served him as well.

Sabine Huschka

TEACHING: PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGY

"What fascinates and inspires me so much about Daniel's class is the mix of clear structure and space for freedom."

Dorota Lecka, student

CONCEPTUAL BASIS

It is also possible to look at Cunningham Technique from a social and aesthetic perspective. Classes take place in a sensitive environment in which social interaction happens, an environment characterized by pedagogical instructions and different degrees of physical contact, as well as by clearly stated or subliminal behavioral, physical, and clothing codes.

For Daniel Roberts, there is no question that the physical, mental, and social aspects play a large role in Cunningham Technique; they implicitly promote a personal and mature relationship to the material. Students must have a certain level of maturity[20] to handle the movement principles, to embody these principles, and for these principles to emerge as dance. As mentioned, Roberts describes his aesthetic objective as follows: Education and training in Cunningham Technique are geared towards performance, i.e., ultimately at presenting the moving body. However, the aesthetic aim of the training is to understand movement as a physical–mental, spatial–temporal, and as an individual discovery and developmental process—and to avoid differentiating between a physical (exercise) movement and a dance movement. Dancers should be taught to transform movement into something in and of itself, to be able to perform with great confidence. Roberts considers this to reflect the debate that a student must have with him- or herself—a debate that demands personal responsibility and takes time. Therefore, one learning goal is maturity.

From a social perspective, teaching Cunningham Technique means establishing a network of relationships between dancers who share a space and who need to be aware of spatial configurations. Although this may also apply to many other dance techniques, Roberts sees Cunningham Technique as unique in its awareness of the space–time relationship and movement design skills. A relationship between these two factors is established by working consciously and intensively, and gathering experience (i.e., in class)—and not by means of physical contact or through emotionally expressive moments.

As to the communicative structure of the class, the corrections Roberts makes—even those made by touch—provide students with feedback intended to enhance execution and further student reflection. Linz students found this to be quite positive, as corrections made 'hands–on' enabled them to better sense physical mechanisms and processes. Here, Roberts's teaching style differs from Merce Cunningham's: Cunningham's teaching, as with many other teachers at the Cunningham studio, was characterized by sparse commentary and few corrections.

Roberts mostly teaches in settings like Linz, where continuous and professional work is best achieved, and where he finds a basic amount of knowledge is coupled with the desire to understand (something that is particularly relevant considering the movement complexity). In Roberts's experience, youth or very young students find it rather difficult to keep up. Cunningham Technique is also unsuitable for children, according to Roberts, because it is simply not a technique for beginners. Roberts prefers working in institutional training contexts or with professional dancers. He admits to being able to work with such dancers in a more essential and less structural way than was the case in Linz. Regardless of the context, technique classes are always group classes. The speed and thoroughness with which fundamental principles are learned may differ depending upon students' skill level and willingness to learn, as well as upon how deeply dancers get involved with the material.

As mentioned, previous movement and dance experience are decidedly helpful when learning the Cunningham Technique. These provide a basis for appreciation, to varying degrees, of Cunningham movement—whereby, in Roberts's opinion, the technique in which a dancer has already trained, or that he or she is still learning, is of secondary importance. He finds it a problem when students want to learn Cunningham Technique on the spot, or if they attempt to jump between other techniques and a Cunningham class without an ability to differentiate between principles. Despite, or indeed precisely because of, the myriad of offers in the contemporary teaching and training sector, it is crucial that students understand the differences between various techniques, and be able to analyze (and differentiate) on a conceptual level.

20 Simone Forti: *Handbook in Motion. An Account of an Ongoing Personal Discourse and its Manifestation in Dance.* New York: New York University Press, 1974, p. 34. Forti assesses Cunningham Technique as particularly mature, specifically because of its complexity and the concentration needed to fluidly coordinate movement.

One clear difference between Cunningham Technique and various Release Techniques (as well as other somatic work) lies in the fact that the former requires muscular control. As Roberts explains, a relevé balancé cannot be executed without consciously engaging muscles. Without strength, the body would simply fall over. Movement characteristics that define Cunningham Technique and Release Techniques are clearly different, therefore a dancer should be clear which direction he or she would like to take—although that does not necessarily mean pinning oneself down to a single technique.

Even if classes are not taken daily, results can be achieved in Cunningham Technique—as was the case during the two weeks in Linz—when two one–week sessions were held in different months. That said, exact results from Linz cannot be ascertained as too many factors involving individual students would have to be taken into account.

More significant is the approach to the work, which calls on students to develop self–confidence and social skills. Priorities here include a willingness to work in a disciplined fashion, to stay focused on the matter at hand, and, if there are difficulties with the material, to stick with it. Students must also learn, for example, how to prepare for class, how to perceive movement, how to observe and listen, how to know when to be ready to perform the movement combinations, etc.

It is important to note here that there are many methods at a Cunningham teacher's disposal, depending on the situation and context. Sometimes it is important to give lots of demonstrations or explanations, sometimes it is important to say little, and sometimes it is important to leave plenty of room for experimentation. Some students need to see a movement often, some need to hear a lot about it, some go home and understand the movement by reflecting on it, and for others it is important to see their fellow dancers make mistakes in order to better understand the logic behind the movement. In practice, it is crucial to learn by recognizing errors, and allowing oneself to make mistakes.

Roberts's teaching is therefore open–ended in terms of results, although he employs results–oriented structures. Roberts orients his teaching goals toward the institutional and situational context: Specific movement standards must be reached in professional training situations and at institutions of higher learning, while in other contexts, i.e., in Linz, students should be able to grasp the individual exercises and basic principles about coordination that underpin the technique. Regardless of the situation, the guiding principle remains the same, i.e., to activate each individual's skills.

PEDAGOGICAL METHODS

A lesson is structured into three phases that have been described above. Using whole–body swings, the first phase warms up the body, followed by traditional Cunningham bounces. Back twists are followed by intensive ballet–based leg– and foot–work (pliés, tendus, jetés, and ronds de jambe) for balance. There is no barre work in Cunningham Technique. Students stand center floor for the duration of class and thus, according to the student Arnulfo Pardo Ravagli, must find their own center for good placement.

After the first exercises are executed to well–defined rhythms, like the 'exercise on 6' and 'exercise on 8', comes the second phase with more exercises on place, which activates and assists the body to sense space. Accelerating combinations and adding larger movements, like développés, battements, rapid foot articulation, and jumps train strength, coordination, and stamina.

Using exercises learned thus far, phase three expands upon spatial volume by including jumps and combinations through the room (*triplets*) that are varied and accelerated with different tempos and rhythms. The final part of class includes fast and slow combinations, turn combinations, and big jumps through the space. All exercises happen in the middle and upper levels of the space (referencing Laban's spatial theory).

Every class is thus structured, although exercises vary slightly in rhythm, tempo, and spatial directions. Training takes place in intervals; phases of activity alternate with phases of recovery. Each exercise is only practiced once per class and is not repeated. Combinations found in the last section of phase three might be repeated in successive classes, depending on the students' skill level, and if needed. In Linz, Roberts presented students with new material each day so as to present them with the greatest possible spectrum of movement; the goal was not to execute a polished movement combination at the end of class, i.e., exercises were not result–oriented.

For Dorota Lecka, one effect of a technique class without exercise repetition was that she learned to perform movement immediately and straightforwardly, and did not concentrate on the right or wrong way to do it. Arnulfo Pardo Ravagli also pointed out a 'just do it' attitude towards the exercises. Lecka found this aspect to be particularly worthwhile because in class—and not only during rehearsals or performance—the focus was on 'doing' and not just trying out movement according to Roberts's verbal instructions. This means that a student is always performing in class, learning movement with passion and dedication, and working to attain a clear focus, clear start, and the clear knowledge necessary for performing.

Movement execution focuses on the embodiment of clear shapes, lines, and rhythms so as to give them kinesthetic life. Exercises run the gamut from easy to complicated, include no improvisation, and are learned by imitation

(mimetic function). As Lecka says, "it is learning by doing." A lesson works though the entire body, including various muscle groups and coordination capabilities.

In general, class has a dynamic progression and requires a student's uninterrupted concentration. One exercise comes on the heels of the next without any clear–cut break during a (usually ninety–minute) class. This continuum demands a dancer be physically and mentally alert and ready to 'imbibe' movement and awareness, which, along with the accelerating tempo of the class, creates a strong sense of flow.

For Roberts, it is imperative that a student stay focused on the matter at hand and not 'lose the thread.' Roberts must do the same: use these **skills and abilities** as a teacher to deliver a class that is driven by ever–present energy and passion, and stay true to his own body of knowledge. The focus must remain on one's own physical body, using its capabilities to find new movement possibilities. These possibilities should also be realized, even on a proprioreceptive (intuitive) level. This goes hand–in–hand with Roberts's basic pedagogic and professional fundamental belief that students must assume personal responsibility in the work of becoming a dancer. It is self–understood that professionals not only need to train every day, but that they otherwise stay focused on the matter at hand with their attention, energy, passion, and discipline. According to Roberts, a dancer must learn to navigate this highly competitive professional field—a terrifying but also wonderful field. Not only must a dancer learn to work for and on her- or himself, the dancer must also learn *how* to train and know what he or she desires from the training. Technique classes are thus, in the broadest sense, preparing dancers for professional life by fostering emotional and mental skills, the same ones that shape Roberts as a teacher.

"It feels as if you are completely naked. It is all about this pure form and nothing else. No decoration."

Andrea Maria Handler, student

All in all, Roberts views teaching as an **artistic process**, a constant confrontation with his own, and others', movements and bodies. For Roberts, teaching is a on–going process in which he receives fresh input every time he encounters the creative potential of movement; in this way, dance remains alive as a spontaneous, communicative, and physical encounter.

To **prepare for teaching,** Roberts plans a class that he will vary, if necessary, in certain situations and specific contexts. Classes are carefully planned; moreover, Roberts outlines the structure for students at the start of class.[21] His movement tasks are tied to the plan, but he is also willing to react spontaneously to situations that arise during the course of classes or workshops. As class progresses, the plan might be affected by Roberts' assessment of the students, by his sense of exercise progression and which movements or phrases could be interesting, or by seeing aspects that need a more differentiated or clearer focus on detail. Combinations may highlight excerpts from Cunningham's choreographies, or can be drawn from other contexts. Roberts generally develops the phrases in silence, although there are exceptions.

Self–assessment and feedback takes various forms, and Roberts has not set any particular method for doing so in stone, but talking to the musicians is one way, as are individual discussions with students—if they choose to approach him.

Briefly returning to the **motor learning** process, which is closely related to how **rhythm** is embodied: Movement is learned primarily by putting it into units of time, enabling the individual to embody it by use of his or her own rhythmic sensibilities. Movement, as said, is precisely counted; execution is supported by live music that has a clear and definable meter. Rhythms and exercises vary from class to class, a principle that Roberts has taken directly from Cunningham's teaching. Motor learning is expedited by mentally counting movement material so as to aid memorization, thus a personal kinesthetic structure and embodied musicality can develop. An intrinsic musicality, one that is independent of the time signature, is nurtured step–for–step—a characteristic Cunningham aesthetic. Roberts says that Cunningham dancers have a strong sense of musicality, as the entire repertoire was created independent of, and often prior to, the music.

Mistakes are allowed in the open environment of Roberts's class. His goal is not one of a successful performance, but to train the dancers' movement intelligence. Students in Linz welcomed and responded positively to the open environment, to the opportunity to dance without having to think about judgment (other than their own). The students Ochvat, Prokopová, and Jasinski saw Roberts's role as the 'transformer' of Cunningham's movement style. Ravagli stressed that Roberts's good energy galvanized the class and motivated everyone to dedicate

21 See Class Plan on DVD 1.

themselves to the complexity and speed. Roberts demonstrates movement and uses his voice to energize the class, which, he admits, can sometimes be exhausting. Students felt that the discipline he demanded was useful for learning. Petit, Swietlicka, and Herrlein saw Roberts as a "constant orientation point for coordination, rhythm, and shape," and they described his as an "inductive teaching method."

A dominant means of **communicating** is mimetic function, i.e., learning by watching and imitating, in which the teacher demonstrates until students are able to execute the exercise or combination. As to verbalization, Roberts uses ballet terminology throughout class; he often teaches in places where ballet vocabulary is familiar and used daily. Many leg and foot exercises are clearly identified by ballet vocabulary. Roberts uses this to further expound upon particular aspects and aesthetics in Cunningham Technique. So, for example, the energy flow (as well as the centering of energy) is different than in ballet, and Roberts makes the differences clear using imagery (as mentioned above). Although various images are used to aid in movement execution, Roberts rarely uses imagery to explain a movements' mechanisms or aesthetic design. For the most part, communication takes place on a visual level as Roberts demonstrates exercises and combinations with precision, certainty, and perfect coordination. Rhythms and tempos are explained verbally.

"It is important to be attentive. If one manages to be attentive in class, learn things quickly, and coordinate them differently, you are well prepared for all tasks that you may encounter as a result of the artistic process."

Philine Herrlein, student

Sabine Huschka

CONCLUSION

In class, Roberts's objective is to teach and nurture the performance experience, and to impart a passion for spatial–temporal movement design. A constant engagement with the material and a 'readiness to learn more' characterizes not only Roberts as a teacher, but also what he demands from students. After all, Cunningham Technique, whether talking about the simple or the profound components, cannot be mastered. The only thing that can be mastered is an ever–open attitude towards change. Students are taught a paradox: The technique should teach them about movement, and, at the same time, about moving beyond the technique.

Two closing comments from the student Dorota Lecka explain this further:

/"What I find particularly exciting is experiencing dance in a totally different way. Even if the technique might initially feel stiff, strange, inorganic, or too rigid, after a while it becomes very organic, very clear, and the structural lines of the body become clearer from day–to–day. It makes you aware of each body part and joint. Dancers can do whatever they want after that because they have the freedom; their bodies are awake, ready, and well prepared for any kind of movement, even for Release movements."

"Students often get lost, lose direction, the rhythm, coordination, their perspective…then, most of the time, one more repetition of the exercise is required, or another 'attempt' is postponed for another day. What I find extremely interesting in this way of teaching is that students are constantly challenged. These challenges are linked to positive rather than negative encouragement. Even if one is not able to repeat the exercise, one can sense an atmosphere of 'new skills'. Even if everybody 'failed' because nobody could repeat and perform a certain exercise properly, Roberts's approach challenges students positively, encourages them, and makes them eager to tackle and overcome his or her own limitations."/

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LINKS

www.merce.org/mondayswithmerce.html
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TRAINING DVDS

Elementary Level
Directed by Merce Cunningham and Elliot Caplan
Commentary by Merce Cunningham
Instructors: Susan Alexander, Ruth Barnes, Merce Cunningham, June Finch, Susana Hayman–Chaffey, Chris Komar
Dancers: Allison Cutri, Jill Diamond, Nancy Langsner, Kate Troughton
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Intermediate Level
Directed by Merce Cunningham and Elliot Caplan
Commentary by Merce Cunningham
Instructors: Merce Cunningham, Diane Frank, Catherine Kerr, Chris Komar, Robert Kovich, Rob Remley
Dancers: Heidi Kreusch, David Kulick, Larissa McGoldrick, Dennis O'Connor, Yukie Okutama, Carol Teitelbaum
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EXTRA MATERIAL ON THE DVDS

DVD 2 extra material—Alan Danielson
Foreign Relations (extract)
Choreography: Alan Danielson
Text: Alan Danielson, Reneé E. D'Aoust
Actors: Melinda Haas, Andy Monroe
Dancers: Jennifer Chin, Alan Danielson
Video: Mark Robison / Character Generators, Inc.
Premiere: 2006, Danspace Project, New York

Scarlatti Sonatas (extract)
Choreography: Alan Danielson
Music: Domenico Scarlatti
Pianist: Melinda Haas
Dancers: Geraldine Cardiel, Jennifer Chin, Sadie Gilbertson, and Pam Wagner
Video: Mark Robison / Character Generators, Inc.
Premiere: 2006, Danspace Project, New York
The creation of *Scarlatti Sonatas* was made possible, in part, with funds from the Danspace Project's 2006–2007 commissioning initiative with support from the Jerome Foundation.

DVD 2 extra material—Anouk van Dijk
TRUST (extracts)
A project by Anouk van Dijk and Falk Richter
A co-production by the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, and anoukvandijk dc
Direction and choreography: Falk Richter and Anouk van Dijk
Text: Falk Richter
Original music: Malte Beckenbach
Dancers: Nina Wollny and Peter Cseri (duet 1)
Anouk van Dijk and Jack Gallagher (duet 2), together with Vincent Redetzki, Stefan Stern and Kay Bartholomäus Schulze
Video: Moritz Riesewieck
Premiere: 2009, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin
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DVD 2 extra material—Barbara Passow
Reconstruction of a sequence from *Dido and Aeneas*, rehearsal
Premiere: 1984, Tanztheater Bremen
Choreography: Reinhild Hoffmann
Dancers: second year students, bachelor's program, LABAN, London
Music: Henry Purcell
Performers: Anne Sofie von Otter, Stephen Varcoe, Lynne Dawson, Nigel Rogers, and others
The English Concert & Choir
Conductor: Trevor Pinnock
Title: *Shake the cloud from off your brow – Banish sorrow, banish care*
By kind permission of The English Concert and by kind permission of Universal Music Classics & Jazz – a division of Universal Music GmbH

DVDS 1+2 extra material—Gill Clarke
Musical extract in the training from Gill Clarke: *Nyama Kumambure* by David Gweshe;
Album: Mhuri Yekwanehoreka / Mhumhi Records
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Excerpt from a documentary on Gill Clarke's work by Becky Edmunds
Camera / interview: Becky Edmunds, Lucy Cash

DVD 2 extra material—Jennifer Muller
Island (extract)
Choreography: Jennifer Muller
Assistant to the choreographer: John Brooks
Original music: Marty Beller
Dancers: Gabriel Contreras, Elizabeth Disharoon, Courtney D. Jones, Rosie Lani Fiedelman, Gen Hashimoto, Anne Kochanski, Tracy R. Kofford, Pascal Rekoert, and Yumiko Yoshikawa
Costume design: Sonja Nuttall
Lighting design: Jeff Croiter
Wigs: Martin Duff, Elaine Mitchell
Projections: Paul Vershbow
Video: Video D / Dennis Diamond
Premiere: 2005, The Joyce Theater, New York City
By kind permisson of Marty Beller

The Spotted Owl (extract)
Choreography & text: Jennifer Muller
Assistant to the choreographer: John Brooks
Original music: Marty Beller
Dancers: Michael Jahoda, Leda Meredith, Maria Naidu, Marcelo Pereira, Amy Prensky, Ricardo Sarcos, Tomoko Sato, Terri Shipman, Leonardo Smith, and Yasushi Tanaka
Music played by: Marty Beller / percussion; Andrew Demos / bamboo flute, woodwind instruments, and percussion; and Tim Givens / cello
Costume design / décor design: Karen Small
Lighting design: Kristabelle Munson
Video: Video D / Dennis Diamond
Premiere: 1995, The Joyce Theater, New York City
By kind permisson of Marty Beller

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