

## **Embodying Unpredictability.**

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## **Embodying Unpredictability.**

This article examines the senses of messiness and unpredictability which I have found within the Cunningham dance technique. It will do this by explicating my lived experience of learning and teaching aspects of a Cunningham-based approach to dance practice. A central question of my research is how a sense of messiness contributes to enable ‘kinaesthetic unpredictability’ in the lived experience of performing Cunningham’s precise and predetermined dance phrases. To define my ‘sense of messiness’ I will use choreological methods and improvisational frames to argue that a somatic sensation of messiness arises in various ways in the body/mind, produced in the act of dancing multiple and fragmented relationalities. The article will question the value of exploring a lived experience of Cunningham’s fixed forms and examine how messiness and unpredictability can free up dancers to find individual innovations. The discussion draws on voices of Cunningham dancers and teachers. I will share my own pedagogic approach to expanding a lived experience, encouraging different ways of knowing and experimentation with potential relationalities. The article aims to extend debates about dance training today including the use of codified forms and somatic approaches, principles of legacy techniques, and synthesising and innovating ways of knowing.

Keywords: unpredictability; messiness; dance training; Cunningham technique.

### **Introduction**

As a student of dance at Merce Cunningham’s Westbeth Dance Studio, learning to embody the rigorously detached patterning of his dance, I discovered a peculiar paradox. I discovered that as my performance of complex patterns and forms gradually increased in energised clarity and confident accuracy, a sense of messiness about me also grew. The experience of messiness in parts of my embodied movement experience was in stark contrast to my perception of the materials and to my dominant intention of

achieving precision. Initially I understood that messiness was to be resisted but my understanding has since evolved to comprehend that an experiential combination of messiness as well as precision might in fact be valuable in the pursuit of dancing's 'iridescent and life-quality', by being more fully present in its 'process' (Cunningham 1951: 60). An interplay between precision and messiness created what I will describe as a kinaesthetic sense of unpredictability. For me, experiencing the boisterous kinaesthetic freedom of unpredictability within the strict conditions of dance materials has become an intensely rewarding source of individual creativity and innovation in my dance practice and performance.

My thesis proposes that a sensation of messiness, which arises in the body and in the attention when dancing Cunningham's fiercely clear dance technique, can be used to encourage greater individuality in performance. The individual lived experience is not commonly explored in codified technique training or in the literature about Cunningham's work. It is more often assumed that '[d]ancers' capacity for interpretation and personalisation of the material is out of place' (Preston-Dunlop 2002: 266). Cunningham however has revealed more interest, saying 'you can... break these action in different ways, to allow the passion, and it is passion, to appear for each person in his own way' (Cunningham in Harris, ed. 1997: 10). In this way individuation is arguably an essential aspect of his legacy for dancers. In innovating the term 'messiness' to describe a lived experience and sensation, rather than evaluatively, my intention is to convey the multi-layered scattered-ness which I have experienced. In some ways this notion is indicative of Cunningham's interest in assembling dance by chance methods, but more particularly it aims to capture the nature of a lived experience of sudden, bound and yet loosely connected re-distributions of energy, focus and form.

Experiencing a messy sensation of scattered bound-ness in my precise movement, my intention and my energies has led me to explore how I know what is happening and to innovate relations in my body, in my materials and in my self. This has been vital in developing my choreographic and pedagogic work as an independent dance practitioner and teacher.

I have been teaching dance technique and creative practice in UK HE since 2001. My dance technique classes adapt exercise structures of Cunningham's coded dance technique. I use a problem-based approach to help students to discover unresolved sites for messiness and unpredictability. My classes honour the way Cunningham's technique challenges the dancer to consider all parts and aspects of movement to be accurate, separable and of equal importance. However, in my classes students must shift their attention away from accurate forms and towards their potential relationalities, multiple ways of knowing them, and to their own lived experience. While teaching in UK HE however, I have become increasingly aware that a central aim of correct rather than investigative approaches (Dyer 2010: 2) can be dominant for young dancers in technical training classes. This problem is not entirely new in regard to dance's signature pedagogies which have endeavoured to build technical skills through repetition in a range of dance forms. However, it has become a problematic aspect of dance students' broader expectations of learning and teaching in a current climate which demands increased testing, has low regard for the role of creative subjects within the curricula and in which a Google mind-set often seeks out answers rather than questions. My aim, in encouraging dancers to discover, risk and create new relations, sensations and points of view within Cunningham's detached forms, is to help

them to build a sense of individual freedom within their technical comprehension in order to better serve their creative enterprises.

The overarching question of my research is what is the potential value of a kinaesthetic sense of messiness and unpredictability in technical dance training? Questions explored through this research are: How do the unique relationalities and sensations of Cunningham's detached dance offer ways to enliven performance? How can the use of different intelligences inspire innovation within the confines of set dance phrases? To what extent does distinguishing a sense of movement and a sense of self assist dance students in finding greater individuality when dancing codified forms? The article will begin by arguing that the potential for messiness and unpredictability in Cunningham's work can be found in an experience of: detached relationalities; multiple juxtaposed intelligences; and a self/ movement duality. In the second part of the article I will analyse how the sense of messiness which arises is experienced in: a particular treatment of the body; in multiple intentions; and in a fragmented use of energy. Finally, I will explicate how a sense of messiness and unpredictability, drawn out through relations in the body and the experience of precise detachment might be used to encourage students to enjoy greater freedom in performing fixed forms.

## **Rationale – Analysing the Context for Messiness in Cunningham-based Technique**

### ***An experience of detached relationalities***

Cunningham's artistic vision has been intrinsically bound up in re-imagining how to work through the body in dance. Yet the relational effects of his use of detachment are more commonly attributed to chance processes in choreography, and to his collage-like

treatment of the medium and the stage. For example, in the flow of patterns, phrases and forms. However, a relational quality of interruption within the lived experience of his detached dance also exists. For example, as dancers execute complex co-ordinations achieved by separating body parts, directions and rhythmic patterns of movement. This is under examined within the vast body of analytical discourse about his work, and warrants further exploration. While dance writers have widely acknowledged the un-earthly status of Cunningham's dancers as they expertly navigate unforeseeable space/time relations, examination of the effect of new relations on the lived experience, for example in liberating dancers from entrenched perceptions of relationalities, has been more limited. For me, the lived experience of Cunningham's re-imagined dance – as part of a postmodernist detached, indeterminate and disjointed urban world – is vital. In the UK today Cunningham-based dance technique classes are often impacted by British influences and 'codified' for aspiring students. Here a classical approach tends to focus on technical precision and a predictable flow of complex time/space patterning. In this approach the effect of Cunningham's unique uses of detachment and the particular experiential relationalities which can arise therein are typically less explored. I have developed a pedagogical approach to teaching which recalls Kathy Kerr's anecdotes of the 'bloody noses' which were suffered by his first troupes as each discovered for themselves how to implement his un-synthesised movement patterns. In my approach I have returned a focus to discovering new relationalities within the body in the potentially messy moment of moving. I am interested in their capacity for enlivening dancers' performance.

### *Multiple intelligences*

Detachment and its relational means of ‘separation’ creates unusual relationalities in the body. This can lead to a messy sense of overlapping, catching up, interrupting or cutting across for the dancer. However, in MCDC performances the evidential ‘separability’ of body parts and patterns has more often been linked with clarity and intelligence (Banes 1994: 110). Indeed, ‘[b]raininess’ was offered by Roger Copeland (2004: 206) as a description of how the movement of the body in Cunningham’s dance might indicate the workings of the mind. While a dancer’s experience can be impacted by Cunningham’s use of detachment in ways that foreground traditional concepts of intelligence, (i.e. ‘braininess’ overcoming the body for physicalizing unconventional relations), the particular kinaesthetic intelligence required for manifesting the effects of radical discontinuity is, I propose, also valuable. By attending to unanticipated and potentially messy relations through a kinaesthetic perception of moves, a richer dance experience can emerge. It is more complex than that which Susan Foster has explained as ‘The mind tells the body what to do and then watches attentively during the execution of the movement’ (1986: 35). I have found that, freed from the mechanical habits of perception and intention that Foster describes, I have been able to acknowledge different aspects of my lived experience, i.e. sensations of messiness, as I tackle the detached relationalities within my dancing. Such somatically-led interweaving of cognitive and felt experiences are more common in today’s holistic approaches to dance practice and less dominant in reified dance techniques. Yet Cunningham himself claimed that freedom could be found in a ‘complete awareness of the world and at the same time a detachment from it’ (1952: 86). It is in this balance that my proposal lies – for an adoption of Cunningham’s calculated detachment from

assumptions and habits of patterning and flow, alongside a deeper somatic awareness of the nature of relations. My messiness thesis and approach has developed as a counter narrative to the more objective precision commonly associated with this technique.

*A self/ movement duality.*

The experience of embodying detached relationalities can have a particular effect on dancers, such as in distinguishing a sense of movement from a sense of self. This duality is reiterated by dancer Daniel Squire in his description of how Cunningham's 'choreography does it to you, rather than you doing it to it' (in Reynolds 2007: 203). A phenomenological awareness of such distinctions is common for dancers who are often shifting between: an enquiring point of view about what we are feeling or sensing as a result of embodying materials; an intentional position towards a reified body to actualise them; or a phenomenological experience - 'a whipping of the mind and body into an action that is so intense... the mind and body are one' (Cunningham 1952: 86). Shifts in consciousness between movement and self are less prevalent in Cunningham's dance in which dancers are described as 'just doing something'. However, the inorganic materials can themselves reiterate an experience of duality. Sandra Fraleigh has articulated how 'I come to know myself in various ways through the unique situations and processes of dancing' (1987:25) and the value of combining such knowing has been explored by Paula Salosaari (2002) for ballet training. Salosaari claims that ownership of movement is found in both an accurate replication of the fixed forms *and* in a subjective experience of their becoming. Distinguishing the two, Salosaari has offered approaches to encourage 'multiple embodiments' of the dance, as the dancer's 'whole self' (2002:235) is brought to the materials to enable a unique



interpretation of them. Building upon Salosaari's thesis, I am interested in the potential for a messy lived experience to be discovered through 'accurately' embodying precise fragmented patterns. I propose that by encouraging a kinaesthetic perception of the evolving conditions of both movement and self greater ownership can be found by remaining in an experientially messy process which is 'free and discovered not bound and remembered' (Charlip in Copeland 2004: 154). This is an invaluable aspect of Cunningham's legacy of perceptual freedom.

To summarise, in this research I've been exploring how my experience of: detached relationalities; multiple intelligences; and a self/ movement duality in Cunningham's precise detached dance gives rise to messiness and how this can be useful. Choreological methodologies and improvisational frames have been used to analyse what is happening in my experience of messiness.

### **Analysing a Sense of Messiness in Cunningham-based Technique.**

To examine my lived experience of messiness I will first use a choreological analysis to articulate what is happening in the held-togetherness of my body. My body's congruency can feel scattered because of the separability of parts and structures of movement. Second, I will use improvisational frames to focus on the flow of intention and energy use over time. My attention often seems divided by multiple demands of the complex forms.

### ***An analysis of messiness in terms of Body.***

Messiness is sensed within the congruency of my body as detached and fragmented movement patterns produce unusual relations. A sense of turbulent discord arises in

feelings of awkwardness or heavy-ness through the inter-relations of movement structures in my Body. 'Body', as a choreological term, refers to its use and connectedness in movement. It derives from Laban's work which showed that the movement of the body has an innate, simultaneous and sequential 'choreological order' (2011: viii). The Structural Model (1979), developed by Preston-Dunlop from Laban's notation work, offers a useful analytical method for examining how movements' intrinsically connected features impact upon each other to produce a sense of messiness. Laban proposed that natural affinities between the features can make our movement 'penetrable, meaningful and understandable', summed up by Rosemary Brandt as which 'hold[s] our movement together' (in Preston-Dunlop 1995: 222). In Cunningham's dance the detached actions (A), each with direct spatialities (S) and fragmented and dynamic rhythmic structures (D), juxtapose or offset the body's intra-personal relationships (R) and impact upon the overall congruency of Body (B). A sense of messiness arises because Cunningham, renowned for deconstructing the spatio-temporal somatic structures which have traditionally 'held' movement together, challenges the notion of this natural order to attain 'freedom from my own feelings, directly, or my memory of continuities and ideas about how movement ought to follow one from another' (Cunningham 1957: 101). Cunningham's interruptive language impacts upon the nature of the held-togetherness of Body by interrupting and re-co-ordinating movement affiliations - for me, meaning messiness. The relational effects within 'Body' may be what Reynolds refers to as seeing an 'invisible layer of movement within movement' (2007: 171) in her analysis of its punctuated rhythms and energies. The fragmented movement relations create a quality of interruption within the body and a potential meaning of messiness for the dancer. Cunningham has referred to the effect

of fragmentation in the relations between movement and mover. He said of founder company member Viola Farber's performance 'the angular way that she had of moving, one part arriving after another. You were never quite sure, watching her, if they would make it' (in Slayton 2006). The use of detachment within the movement structures of Cunningham's dance produces an alert-ness and an intelligent bodied-ness, indicating that the independent aspects operate in isolation. Dance writer Jill Johnson described Farber (in Slayton 2006: 55) as 'not tightly screwed together' articulating a vision of the Body's precise nature juxtaposed with its loose held-togetherness. As a student I found the near impossible materials of Farber's classes reflected her own capacity to separate, isolate and scatter body parts and patterns unpredictably. For me, within the incongruent relations of loose isolations a sense of messy detachment arises. While MCDC dancers have commonly been referred to as mechanistic or animalistic in their alert attentive-ness, it is also noted that dancers' movement commonly seems to be drawn out and fragmented by discrete and imperceptible motivations as the multiple separable parts operate independently in instantaneous, fragmented patterning. Mark Franko (1995: 81) has suggested that Cunningham's early dances/dancers 'cope with' the effects of detachment. For me, coping with a kinaesthetic sense of messiness created by separability within the body can be meaningful in engaging with Cunningham's principles. However, my experience of messiness is further bound up in the lived experience of Cunningham's use of patterning.

*Articulating a sense of messiness in intentions.*

Messiness is experienced in the radical multi-tasking caused by multiple simultaneous and fragmented intentions within phrases. Multiple and often differing intentions and

intelligences towards particular body parts or actions, or towards rhythms or spatiality, occur simultaneously and instantaneously. While it is widely acknowledged that the materials demand ‘an unprecedented degree of alertness and mental agility’ (Copeland 2004: 216), it is useful to examine this experience further, in pursuing messiness. Improviser Kent De Spain, examining levels of consciousness towards multiple intentions during improvisation, has noted that different types of intentions co-exist, apparently led by the body and by the mind - indicating also a ‘separable’ physical body (2003: 34) awareness. In researching this, De Spain has identified an interplay in allowing intentions toward: the physical body; the movement; indirect actions which result in movement; and toward aesthetic choices. While De Spain’s focus is on awareness of potential movement choices and intentions in a spontaneously emerging stream of movement through time, a similar awareness of multiple intentions and features happening at once can be found in Cunningham’s predetermined dance. De Spain has described dancing as ‘an inherently complex and downright messy somatic experience’ (De Spain 2007 in Roche 2015: 68). In a similar way Cunningham, mindful of nature’s ‘manner of operation’, insists that we work out for ourselves where and when to attend amidst a busy body/ sequence/ stage moment by moment. I have found messiness here as I seek to synthesise multiple overlapping intentions towards incongruent movement aspects, for example, in sudden fragmented changes of direction led by the back before the legs catch up. The quality of hyper-alertness produced through a ‘heightened proprioceptive attention’ (Paxton 2010) to relations can feel like a kind of over-taking within and by me, or as if parts of my body/ features of the movement are dancing me as my attention shifts. The divergent separable aspects produce a kinaesthetic experience of messiness because of their simultaneous nature.

As movement and/or dancer ‘controls’ (Squire) or ‘allows’ (De Spain) the dance experience, the presence of messiness can challenge a dual sense of movement and self. Detaching myself from various experiences and intentions within the complex patterns in different ways to allow and control more or less dominant foci can feel like messy multi-tasking.

***A mutual impact of messiness and energy.***

As the physiological aspects and experiences of my movement cause fragmentation in the flow of energy, I experience messiness as set patterns are cut abruptly. This can lead to a messy feeling of hesitancy or rushing. In examining this it seems that while the bound flow of energy enables his particular treatment of Body and the recognisable controlled upright poise, sudden changes and uninflected articulation, it also limits a dancer’s ability to be reflexive to pattern change. This is due to its effects of containment. As a result, there can be a feeling of being rushed or unready which is caused by a messy catapulting or dropping of energetic intentions. For me flux in energetic abandon and control was a dominant focus in the class work of Louise Burns, producing a sense of being driven by or driving the movement. Contact Improvisation (CI), described by Bill T. Jones as messy in terms of its ‘natural, free-wheeling raw look’ (in Novack 2010:178), can produce a similar experience of ‘multiply directed energy’ (Novack 2010:178). Distinctively of course there is an ‘and’ relationship (Dey & Sarco Thomas 2014: 121) with another person, action, impulse or intent in CI through which movement is often indirectly intended. In Cunningham’s dance the experience of multiply directed energy happens as rhythmic patterns are continuously cut and energies are absorbed or redirected rather than resolved or dissolved through

transitions or synthesis. Thus the indeterminate ‘and’ relationship here can be said to be physicalized between the fragmented energies of dancer and patterning. This results in me feeling over-full with multiple in/directly intended and conflicting energies.

Preston-Dunlop explicitly blames Cunningham’s material for such effects, affirming that the dancers ‘add... sheer stamina and grit, but the material itself makes them land heavily and sometimes appear clumsy’ (2002: 266). While writer Sally Banes reiterates that energy is ‘liquid and resilient inside the dancer, but it stops at the boundary of the body... it does not rush... or spill’ (1994:110), dancer Valda Setterfield has remembered the feeling of urgency. She recalls ‘[t]he audience may not have heard anything, but the rhythms were pounding in our blood’ (Kostelanetz 1998: 107). The conflicting effects caused by separation between dancer and patterning is a result of energy cuts, evident in observing as well as performing the dance. In examining this, I propose that the particular ‘and’ relationship between dancer and patterning drives the need for objective and fierce precision *and* enables messiness to arise. Determined energetic intentions, cut abruptly as they meet inorganic unsynthesised patterns of fragmented material produce a turbulent messiness in terms of energy use.

To summarise, messiness is manifested in a combination of Body separation, multiple intentions and divided energies. In this way my sense of messiness arises from the particularities determined by Cunningham’s detached and complex materials - and their demands and effects. In embracing messiness as I dance, it can seem as if I have a playfully obstructive partner - as my sense of self and movement seek new relational solutions. The unusual, turbulent ‘and’ relationship experienced between myself and the inorganic and fragmented patterning allows an experience of precision *and* messiness in becoming. As I am drawn, pressed and driven, a feeling of hurried-ness,

distractedness or unsteady change often seems to be afoot. I arrive scattered-ly with determined precision as I ride the tumultuous waves of energy, intention and coordination. Cunningham dancer and teacher Mary Lisa Burns has summarised that ‘[l]ike no-one else Merce can make it feel unfamiliar simply by changing the rhythm’ (in Solomons 2007: 98). The unfamiliar ‘it’ can be the material, the body, self or the kinaesthetic sense as relationalities in time change, and messiness in my determined somatic knowing arises. In this way it is the practice of precise fragmented detachment, different ways of knowing and dualisms that makes space for messiness in the dance experience. Messiness, feeling like an obstructive partner, or like unfamiliarity within known materials, or scattered arrivals can lead to a holistic dance experience of unpredictability. As I intend precision determinedly the messy aspects are, in this way, purposeful and productive in embodying a kind of unpredictability.

In teaching about this work I am interested in messiness as a means of introducing a wider perspective on the effects, particularities and benefits of Cunningham’s approach to dancing. In my classes, I have drawn attention to the experience of potential messiness and unpredictability through precise materials to help students to build new relations in the body and increase their awareness of detached relationalities, multiple intelligences and dualisms. In particular I have developed three problem-based approaches: segmentation; transitions; and attention shifts.

### **Exploring a Pedagogic Approach to Messiness in Cunningham-based Technique**

In my practice as a UK HE teacher of undergraduate students I have found breaking up materials in different ways, attending to transitional experiences, and allowing attention to shift to be useful in encouraging space for messiness and unpredictability. My

pedagogic proposal is not that messiness is itself to be cultivated through these approaches, but that in teaching about Cunningham's work it can be a useful process to both *intend* precision and *allow* messiness in order to maximise a lived experience of this work. A slower, reflective and structured approach is necessary to allow such discoveries of nuance through precise and virtuosic forms. I have developed some constructive approaches to support this which adhere to Cunningham's guidance that 'Rather than show the movement, if you explain it, the students have to think it through differently' (in Solomons 2007: 98). I have developed the following tools to encourage students to discover potential body/mind messiness when performing detachment. The tools aim to encourage students to find greater unpredictability and freedom through the set materials:

1. Segmentation to analyse movement aspects.
2. Transitional slips through chance and choice.
3. Shifting attention.

### ***Segmenting.***

Messiness is experienced within complex co-ordinations and pattern changes. To harness it productively I encourage students to initiate new relationalities through 'segmenting' aspects of patterns in their body, attention, energy or material. Props can be useful (i.e. floor or clothing items). These can reveal and enhance sites of resistance - where a messy separation within the body might be initiated. Students focus on sensation they've discovered and explore the disjuncture itself, and its potential incongruences. These investigations might give rise to divergent energetic affinities or oppositional relations and thus potential messy experiences. Another approach is found



in re-combining segments or parts of exercises at different speeds in order to explore the messy feeling of re-coordinated segment-able aspects. Students experience a change in dynamic affinities and a sense of unpredictable flow. In this way it can also be useful to build phrases in segmented blocks to best highlight the potential for problem solving the radical discontinuities through somatic as well as cognate intention.

***Transitional slips through chance & choice.***

To make space for a marriage of messiness and precision, tasks involving chance methods and choice interpretations can be useful. Such tasks encourage students to focus on the assembly of parts. In these tasks we explore unexpected sensations and kinaesthetic experiences provoked by assembling in-congruent parts with various intentions and manners. I have found that messy transitional ‘slips’ which are evoked in negotiating chance/ choice transitions, despite firm intentions for precision, can be productive. Here, dancers are encouraged to linger into experiential processes of putting things together and remain longer in the unknown to find new ways of managing relationships and fierce commitments to manifesting organisation. Dancers can discover a kinaesthetic gap between what they intend and what appears as they balance themselves and the materials and as new relational feelings are produced from the inside of the forms they have prescribed.

***Shifting attention.***

I encourage attention shifts between messy multiple simultaneous and interruptive features of the materials for students to practice applying different degrees of attention. For example, to shake up tensions associated with static or locomotive points of view, I

intermix centre exercises with travelling sequences. Another approach is to use a space hold in the body to release away from a particular focal point, helping with holding on and letting go simultaneously. I have adapted an exercise from the wonderfully intuitive artist and teacher Liz Lerman that requires peer to peer analytical observations of improvised impressions (2012). Students write down what is made visible and, vitally, what is *not*. In discussion they can highlight different kinds of intention towards habitual, visual and felt aspects of moving and the indication of attention shifting between them rapidly or gradually.

These approaches of segmenting, transitional slips and shifting attention are underpinned by a focus on the varied nature of relating detached and separable aspects. They are designed to enable students to embrace and work within rather than resolve potential messiness. The approaches encourage problem-based learning by experimenting with prior knowledge to increase students' awareness of potential relationships within complex movement patterns, recognise different ways of knowing and becoming, and build a sense of individual choice within set materials. The individual solutions to transitions and coordinations are best supported by valuing 'productive failure' (Kapur 2008) in embodying precision while exploring the manifestations of structure. The discovery-based approaches have been beneficial in terms of promoting experimentation in the following ways:

1. Encouraging moment to moment shifts in the perception of fixed, messy and unpredictable aspects can, as Foster has said of improvisation, 'give live performance its special brilliance' by allowing a moment of 'brief contemplation' (2003: 4). While Foster refers to improvisational attention shifting between parts and features of movement, it has been similarly found in

performing predetermined phrases with shifting awareness of attention, construction and connection. This has created a strong sense of presentness in performing fixed forms.

2. Using these principles to encourage innovation, a focus on discovery over mimicry and attention over attainment, perhaps unusual in a formal technique class, has led to a greater sense of freedom achieved by students. I have found that students are more able to remain present in interrupting the physical tensions within what might be perceived as ‘risky’ or difficult materials to find innovations.

3. To encourage individuality it has been vital to offer ways to work together on disrupting expectations and surprising ourselves. While problem-based rather than iterative approaches to learning are useful there is a perceived risk for students in acknowledging messiness when seeking to reconstruct forms accurately. The use of different approaches, knowledges and sensations has allowed me space to teach in a class ‘how to do something.. instead of how to move like the teacher’ (Solomons 2007: 97). In terms of promoting individuality this has been valuable. Within the classes a greater sense of individual ownership when performing the fixed forms has become evident.

For students to practice being present in the movement taking personal risks and adjusting assumptions in order to work differently is beneficial in allowing them perceptual freedom which technical training can often overlook. Jean Freebury has recalled the importance of ‘living in the moment’ and ‘taking risks’ and ‘bringing something of *themselves* to what they are doing’ (in Fleming 1996: 24) to

Cunningham's work. In my classes dancers' work has often seemed more distinctly 'iridescent' as they solve and resolve movement and self in a process of becoming. Permission to be in the messy in-betweens values experimentation - 'If you can do it one way, there must be another way' (in Solomons 2007: 98). By practising holistic approaches students become more familiar with remaining longer in uncertainty, letting go, listening deeply to multi-sensory systems and discovery-based learning but in codified forms it has rarer to take time, to adopt a softer focus and set more open-ended goals. Reflecting on the evolution of effective training strategies in Dance in UK Higher Education, Emilyn Claid (2016: 143) has proposed that a distinction in practice and performance between being 'ethical and spectacular' (2017:126) might necessitate a separation of technical and somatic approaches. For me, while attempting deep kinaesthetic attention in the act of complex dancing can indeed lead to relativism in performance, it is, importantly, the consistent intention towards detached precision that enables rich discoveries about messiness and unpredictability. In this way, the particular processes of Cunningham's dance can help us to disrupt the boundary between the fixed objects of 'spectacle' and the more 'ethical' approaches of embodying experience. Perhaps these are the resources 'far greater... much more universally human than my own' (1952: 86) which Cunningham discovered in and through his dance.

### **Summing up.**

In this article I have argued that a somatic sensation of messiness arises from within the determined precision that is required to embody Cunningham's detached dance. I have attempted to show how in negotiating a place for messiness alongside precision dancers

might discover new relations and sense the freedom of kinaesthetic unpredictability in moment to moment dancing. Acknowledging that messiness and unpredictability are an important part of the dance experience seems to be intensely valuable in preparing dance artists of tomorrow by building confidence to risk, pursue and create new experiences, and be present in dance as it manifests an inclusive politics. An aim of my research has been to consider how these principles might be effectively used to develop greater individual freedom in young dancers for whom fixed forms offer superficial assurances about the dance skills to be acquired for today's dance world. The need for innovation, risk and uncertainty in developing new dance practices is often in conflict with the need to engage accurately with dance legacies rooted in the past. An aim in this article has been to show how I have addressed this challenge with undergraduate dance students. Here, my own pedagogic approach, exploring relationalities within the detached structures and approaches of this particular dance technique, considers different ways of knowing movement phrases. It has aimed to free up possibilities to experience forms differently. I have sought to articulate the value of somatic awareness in wrestling with predetermined forms by bringing together choreological and improvisational thinking towards practical performance scholarship. This research has intended to contribute an original perspective to debates about the tensions between facilitating somatic dance awareness and rehearsing codified forms. It is my hope that these reflections might be of use to others in provoking further discussion on the topic of synthesising historic training approaches within the current concerns and foci of dance practice, research and recruitment.

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