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## **Creative Choice – On Whose Authority**

### **Abstract**

*This essay considers issues of legacy and tradition alongside the impact of choice on the choreographic processes involved in restaging modern/contemporary works by Merce Cunningham, Jose Limón and Doris Humphrey. The work of these three choreographers represents a cross-section of staging practices that have evolved over time as a response to the absence of the choreographer. The relevance of these practices in a broader context is that they demonstrate possibilities for choreographers working today whose work is significant to our cultural heritage.*

The restaging of dance works is becoming increasingly commonplace and illustrates the appetite for revivals amongst modern/contemporary dance audiences. Choreographers and long-term exponents are proactive in tackling issues of legacy, tradition, and sustainability. A variety of strategies and models are emerging and are being tested, in both legal and artistic contexts. Conflicts that arise in relation to the work of one individual serve as useful markers for others, notably the well-documented trials, legal and otherwise, experienced by the dance descendents of Martha Graham.

As an exponent and director of Doris Humphrey's choreography, the driver in restaging is to create a work that is a vibrant memorable dance experience that makes sense now, that resonates now. The term 'create' is not accidental but is also not intended to be inflammatory. I will argue that a creative response to staging the work of another is an essential element of a directorial process. In my own practice the imperative is to direct Humphrey's work through a process of creative choice that is rooted firmly within the choreographer's intention, or at least the identifiable traces of that intention. The element of choice can operate in more than one context depending

on the work and the degree of intervention that is required. Choices are made in relation to the evidence base of a work, using R.G. Collingwood's notion of the historian's viewing position in relation to evidence, detailed in his seminal work, *The Idea of History*. Briefly, Collingwood suggests that evidence can be constituted as 'actual' – referring to all available documentary evidence in whatever form that may be, and 'potential' – which he defines as those aspects of the evidence that we choose to accept (Collingwood, 1993: 280). The 'actual/potential' model is especially useful when dealing with dance works because the body of evidence, inevitably, is not fixed or finite and requires interpretive engagement.<sup>1</sup>

Muriel Topaz, former director of the Dance Notation Bureau, reminds us of our responsibilities when staging the work of others, emphasising that the needs of the choreography should not be compromised to meet the stylistic limitations of today's dancers. Rather, dancers must rise to the technical and dynamic challenges of a given work (Topaz, 2000: 101). Topaz's position parallels my own in relation to Humphrey's work but is equally relevant across the field. Dances have to be translated back on to bodies by a director who understands and can articulate the stylistic nuances of a particular movement philosophy, otherwise the danger of superficial facsimile is ever present.<sup>2</sup>

This essay focuses on the work of Merce Cunningham, Jose Limón and Doris Humphrey, choreographers of international repute who are no longer with us. Staging practices, therefore, have had to evolve in order that the works can continue to be seen. There are choreographers today whose work forms a significant part of our collective cultural heritage and it is worth considering how the seminal works of contemporary artists can be successfully captured in fifty years time. The examples of established practice relating to Cunningham, Limón and Humphrey offer possibilities that are worthy at least of consideration by current artists and their long standing exponents.

### **The Cunningham Legacy Plan**

The staging 'traditions' of Cunningham's work that have been emerging since his death in 2009 are of particular interest to my own research into directorial interpretation and the restaging of Doris Humphrey's choreography.<sup>3</sup> Cunningham made his wishes regarding his legacy clear and public prior to his death. The Legacy Plan, devised by Cunningham himself, has been carefully overseen by the Merce

Cunningham Trust, a body that has been in existence since 2001 and with former company dancers on the board.<sup>4</sup> The Plan's transitional period comprised the 2-year farewell international Legacy Tour by the company and, subsequently, the establishing of long-term strategies for enabling Cunningham works to continue being staged. Indeed, the Trust's Executive Director, Lynn Wichern, reported recently (21/12/12) that licensing requests for his works were at an all time high, which bodes well for the immediate future.<sup>5</sup>

The announcement of Cunningham's plan to close the company generated much genuine regret from dance audiences and commentators, at the prospect of being denied the pleasure of witnessing the breathtaking dancing we had become used to for decades. My first encounter came in a sports hall in Edinburgh, during the company's visit to the Edinburgh Festival in 1979. Having grown up with Rambert, led by the exceptional dancing of Lucy Burge, and London Contemporary Dance Theatre with Siobhan Davies et al, my generation had experience of first-rate modern dance. Cunningham's dances and dancers offered a fresh form of exhilaration, however. This encounter blended extraordinarily original movement vocabulary with a speed of execution and clarity of line that I had not witnessed before, coupled with the 'sensory' experience of John Cage positioned underneath the seating bank, banging it with a hammer throughout the performance. Many of us share similar recollections of Cunningham's company/s and a collective sadness that we will see them no more. That was his choice however, and his prerogative. Cunningham's propensity for inhabiting 'the moment' could, arguably, have contributed to his decision. However, given the number of experienced former dancers capable of leading the company, one wonders if the variant trials that have befallen the Martha Graham Dance Company since Graham's death in 1991, swayed Cunningham's decision to close.

Robert Swinston, the highly regarded Cunningham exponent and current board member, outlined the future for Cunningham's legacy in a recent interview (Schwaub, 2012: 18). He identified three principle strategies. The first relates to technique and comprises the setting up of a daily programme of classes led by former Cunningham dancers at New York City Center, Dance New Amsterdam (DNA) and Mark Morris Dance Center. The second is the introduction of an annual Fellowship programme for former Cunningham dancers to stage a work of their choosing. The third is the works themselves being staged for professional companies by former

dancers, the staging of *Sounddance* (1980) for Rambert in 2012 by Jeannie Steele being one such example. Steele's history as a long term Cunningham dancer and stager of his work legitimises her position and underlines the point about the importance of works being staged by dancers who can simultaneously inhabit style and choreography. The Merce Cunningham Trust stipulates that any restaging is undertaken by a former company member and the new Fellowship programme will ensure that the current group of experienced exponents grows alongside increasing the opportunities for the works themselves to be performed, thus the body of available work can be successfully extended.

### **Whose legacy and on whose authority?**

In broader terms, the managing of Cunningham's legacy is a key marker within the debate on restaging dance works because of the explicit instructions left by the choreographer and also because he prepared for this eventuality in some detail so that there would be no ambiguity regarding ownership of the works, unlike some of his predecessors including Charles Weidman and, more notably, Martha Graham.

The protracted legal proceedings that took place over who should hold the rights to Graham's works served as an important test case for the dance community. In her later years, Graham came to rely heavily on a photographer friend named Ronald Protas, who many felt had an unduly negative influence over her (see Acocella, 2001, Van Camp, 2007, Yeoh, 2012). The actions he subsequently took in the 1990s, that included preventing the Martha Graham Dance Company from performing the works at all, was a significant detriment to the company being able to establish strong traditions immediately following her death in 1991.<sup>6</sup> As Graham's legally appointed heir, however, he seemingly controlled the rights to her works and due process had to be followed to reverse this position, despite the moral and cultural imperatives.

Van Camp cites an argument from the litigation case in 2002 that was to determine who held the rights to Graham's works, made by Eliot Spitzer, representing the District Attorney's office on behalf of the State of New York. His view was that "the public should be able to see the works performed appropriately by people who understand her technique and intentions in choreographing" (Van Camp, 2007: 89). First of all, he is saying that the public ought to have the right to see the works. Following this point through, one can then argue that the work/s of all artists who a

society deems to be of significance to its cultural heritage should continue to be made available ‘appropriately’. Secondly, there is Spritzer’s caveat - that only those who understand the choreographer’s technique and intentions should be involved in staging the works, which in one sense provides a fail-safe for the choreographer’s legacy. The difficulty comes in determining who has the appropriate understanding and authority. This hugely complex case resulted in Protas losing the rights to all but two works, *Seraphic Dialogue* (1955) and *Acrobats of God* (1960), in part because the prosecution was able to demonstrate that he was not able to stage the works ‘appropriately’ because he did not possess intrinsic knowledge of the technique or the dances.<sup>7</sup> Protas’ situation aside, the ruling on the rights of ownership was not universally welcomed by all in the dance community, including choreographer Eliot Feld, who feared a loss of control for the artist if he/she is associated with and contracted to one particular company. It will become evident in time how other prominent choreographers have dealt with the issues this case drew into the public domain.

### **Cunningham’s legacy in action**

It is perhaps no coincidence that Cunningham began formulating his detailed legacy plan around the time of the resolution of the Graham case. Whatever feelings there might be about the company closing, he made sure that the rights to his works were protected and that clear strategies were in place to allow the works to continue being performed. In the same interview from 2012, Swinston commented: “What’s exciting is that we have former dancers who pre-date my time with Merce, so we can see his work in a different light” (Schwaub, 2012, 18), an observation worth considering in more detail. Swinston’s association with Cunningham, as dancer, trustee and stager of his work, spans over 30 years, thus he comments from a position of considerable knowledge and experience. My reading of his remark is that Swinston is suggesting that dancers from a previous era can add important facets to a work and, as a consequence, there can be more to discover about a work, thus inferring that the work itself should not be regarded as a ‘fixed’ entity. I have argued this position in relation to Humphrey’s choreography in terms of the evidence base of a work having the potential for further exploration and, in turn, interpretation, and it is also evident in the restaging practice of Sarah Stackhouse for Limón’s work, as will be discussed shortly. The fact that a leading Cunningham exponent is already expressing such a

view is a healthy sign for an on-going vibrant tradition. Cunningham's propensity for dancing 'in the moment' necessarily precluded his works becoming 'fixed' in his own lifetime and one would hope that his descendents will be sufficiently bold to avoid any attempts at reverential mummification/suffocation as time goes on. Patricia Lent, Director of Licensing for the Merce Cunningham Trust, affirmed this position in a recent correspondence, commenting that, "a large part of the venture is experiencing the work in a new context, rather than trying to replicate the exact conditions of the original work. In my opinion, differences are inevitable, and should be not only tolerated but honored and enjoyed" (Lent, 2013).

The new Fellowship programme provides an important vehicle for the choreography to remain fresh. Support for directors includes studio space and pre-professional dancers auditioned by the Trust. During the summer of 2012, Rashaun Mitchell staged *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* (1965) and Sandra Neels, *Place* (1966) amongst others. *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* is a useful example to consider because of its periodic performance history and popularity. The work was performed on a regular basis, from 1965 – 72 and again from 2002 - 04, and by variant casts for Cunningham's company. The original cast of 8 included Cunningham, Carolyn Brown and Valda Setterfield. The parallel sound score comprised John Cage, seated at a table on stage, apparently drinking champagne whilst relating minute-long anecdotes from his work *Indeterminacy* to the audience throughout the dance. Commentary on the dance provides an interesting overview on its reception as a work and the dancing of the choreography. Mark Franko offers an illuminating insight in relation to the changing nature of the 'Cunningham dancer' over time, having first seen the work in 1966 (Franko, 1995: 82). The 1966 cast, being the original group of dancers from the premiere, inhabited the movement from an intrinsically personal perspective and, because of this, with a degree of expressivity that Franko argues is lost to future casts, not just in this work but in Cunningham's dances generally. Expressivity is not a state commonly associated with Cunningham's work, quite the opposite in fact, but Franko and other respected dance commentators including Deborah Jowitt (1988) and Marcia Siegel (1971) agree that prominent dancers from that period – Brown, Setterfield, Viola Farber and Cunningham himself - were hard to follow in later revivals because they had imbued so much of themselves within the material that it could be termed expressive. Franko suggests

that the loss of this individual expressivity was a consequence of the passage of time and produced, ‘a loss of the human factor in the equation’ (Franko, 1995: 83), with Jowitt surmising that the increasing age gap between Cunningham and his dancers over time created a natural emotional separation that precluded the ‘individual’ emerging in the same way as the early generation of dancers (Jowitt, 1988: 297).

It is not unusual for a particular dancer or group of dancers to become synonymous with the work of a choreographer. One thinks of Yuriko and Peggy Lyman with Graham; Lila York, Christopher Gillis and David Parsons with Paul Taylor and, indeed Cathy Kerr with Cunningham from the mid 1970s. Groups of dancers leave their imprint on the repertory of a particular period and those coming after are required to find their own way through it, not to copy but to embody in their own terms. I think this notion is equally applicable whether the choreographer is present or not. The original cast of *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run* performed the work as themselves effectively and each cast that followed would necessarily be different because the individuals were different.

The reception of the work is a further noteworthy factor. Franko recounts that the audience in 1965/6 seemed to respond more to Cage’s storytelling than to the choreography (Franko, 1995: 81) to the point of being distracted from the choreography because they were watching Cage’s ‘performance’. In later performances David Vaughn, the company archivist, joined Cage on stage. When the work was revived in 2002, Cunningham himself took the place of Cage, again with Vaughn. Reviews indicate that Cunningham’s presence was similarly engaging/distracting but there is more sense of the power of the choreography in this later instance of the work (see Mackrell, 2002; Sweeney, 2002; Cassandra, 2002; Dunning, 2004). Current performance notes for the work stipulate that the sound score be performed live.<sup>8</sup> Lent confirmed that the Cage score was indeed narrated live in Mitchell’s workshop staging with dancers from Juilliard and again for his full production for Repertory Dance Theatre, both in 2012 (Lent. 2013). Personas with the presence of Cage and Cunningham are unlikely to be replicated, thus one can imagine a shift in the balance within this work, with the sound running parallel to the choreography, as is the norm with Cunningham’s dances.

First reviews for all the Fellowship performance workshops in 2012 indicate a successful start for the new venture, with young dancers from Juilliard, North Carolina School of the Arts and SUNY Purchase producing performances that

“looked like Cunningham”, and eliciting the observation from one reviewer, “with such efforts the spirit of Cunningham lives on” (Harss, 2012: 31). The notion of ‘looking like Cunningham’ is pertinent, one could argue, because dance audiences do know how these dances should ‘look’. The test will come in a decade or so, when memories of the farewell tour are less vibrant. Equally important is the idea of the spirit of Cunningham living on, so that the philosophy that underpins the movement is transmitted through clearly articulated ideas as much as through physical means.

Swinston’s recent appointment as Artistic Director of the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine d’Angers adds a further dimension in that he plans to set up a professional company as part of his remit and this company will perform Cunningham works alongside his own and other new choreography.<sup>9</sup> Whilst his proposal did not meet with universal approval, he has the strong support of Angers City Council, who appointed him, and the agreement of the Merce Cunningham Trust to stage the works gratis. In responding to voices that claimed he was not honouring Cunningham’s wishes, Swinston replied, “There seems to be a perception in the world that Merce just wanted this whole thing to end. I didn’t have that understanding from my conversations with Merce. And he left it open. People are saying, “How can he (Swinston) do that? Merce wanted it all to end.” Those kinds of statements are in the air, and people are saying that I want to start a new Cunningham company. That’s not true. It’s also not true that it had to just completely die” (Schwaub, 2012, 18). The first Cunningham work undertaken by CNDC will be *Rebus* (1975), staged in April 2013 by Swinston with Melissa Toogood, former company dancer who is participating in the 2013 Fellowship programme.

### **Staging with authority**

A counter example to the turbulent years the Graham Company had to endure is the Limón Dance Company that has continued to thrive under Carla Maxwell’s astute directorship in the four decades since Limón’s death in 1972. Like many artistic organisations, the Limón company has had its share of financial crises periodically but has been able to overcome its more challenging times and remains one of America’s established repertory companies, staging Humphrey and Limón works alongside new choreography. As with Cunningham’s legacy, Limón’s dances are generally staged by former dancers with a longstanding association either with him directly and/or the company. Notable individuals include Roxane D’Orleans Juste,



Nina Watt and Sarah Stackhouse, whose staging practice is examined here. A further prominent figure, in relation to Limón's work and the preservation of modern/contemporary dance in general, is Norton Owen. Formerly Director of the Limón Institute, Owen has been associated with Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival since 1976 and its Director of Preservation since 1990.

In 2001, Owen approached Stackhouse about restaging a Limón solo for a special commemorative performance by the company that was to open that year's festival. He decided on a little seen work, *Sonata for Two Cellos* (1961), that was performed only twice by Limón but had been filmed during a rehearsal before the first performance. The existence of the film, which was well shot and clear, provided sufficient evidence for Stackhouse to undertake the project. Stackhouse and Owen had a further opportunity to present and discuss the work at Jacob's Pillow in 2008 in a panel discussion chaired by Pamela Bloom. In discussing the value of film/video footage, Owen observed that whatever form documentary evidence takes it is only one aspect of a staging process and one that is 'imperfect' (Bloom, 2008: 62). The inference, therefore, is that we as re-stagers and directors have to intervene. I would argue that such intervention has to be creative because we are dealing with works of art that are conveyed by human response and that human response will necessarily change from one iteration of a work to another. Here I refer to responses between the director and the evidence base that constitutes the work and, subsequently, the set of relationships that form a production process - director and creative team, director and performers, and performers with performers in the instance of performance.

The degree of creativity and intervention will also vary from work to work because the needs are different in each instance, depending on the quality and scale of available documentation and other forms of evidence. I have argued in other publications (Main, 2012; 2011; 2005) about the significance of choice within a directorial/interpretive process. Whilst my focus then was on Humphrey's choreography, it is clear that the notion of 'choice' as part of the staging process can operate across the field. When one is dealing with documentary evidence of any form, inevitably the element of choice will be involved. The impact of choices made on the performance of a work will be similarly fluid, which is a healthy state for an organic, vibrant tradition. The key, however, is that the process is underpinned by engagement with the choreographer's intention.

With regard to *Sonata for Two Cellos*, Stackhouse was a member of the Limón Company in 1961 and had seen Limón rehearse the work prior to its performances. She was Limón's close associate for many years, and had a deep knowledge of how he worked, what his creative responses were, how he might approach or extend choreographic ideas. She brought this informed experience into the staging process in 2001 and again when she re-worked part of the dance in 2008 for a panel discussion at Jacob's Pillow. In her presentation, she reveals how her knowledge of Limón's methods of working provided a route into developing a new understanding of this solo. His practice was to rework material from a completed dance in his classes in order to refine the choreography. It was clear to her that this had not happened in the case of *Sonata for Two Cellos* (Bloom, 2008: 72).

There are two particular points of interest here. Firstly, Stackhouse is suggesting that the *Sonata* solo was not allowed the developmental time Limón normally gave to new choreography beyond the first performances and, because of that, there was no opportunity for the work to organically mature and reach its fully developed Dionysian state. Secondly, and in a broader context, she makes reference to aspects such as 'possibility', 'unearthing' and 'discovery', all of which suggest active, creative participation in this further realisation of the work. Creative intervention in this context took the form of Stackhouse using her innate knowledge of Limón's style and working practices to invigorate the movement material with her two solo performers, Desmond Richardson in 2001 and Paul Dennis in 2008. She makes a point in her presentation of referring to how distinctive the three films of the dance are, by Limón, Richardson and Dennis respectively (Bloom, 2008: 77), indicating that a work will inevitably change from performer to performer as much as from one performance to the next. This is not uncommon with solo dances, because there is room for individual expression within such a framework. Stackhouse indicates that she and Dennis moved the choreography on between them during their rehearsal process: "the second movement...has a kind of quirky, jazzy quality to it that we've been trying to play with and pick up on. I think we've been able to liven it up a lot" (Bloom, 2008: 80). This description indicates creative engagement with Limón's material. Does Stackhouse have the authority to do this? I would say she does on a number of fronts, not least because of her history with the choreographer and his company. In fact, I would go further and suggest that because of her history, she had a moral obligation to Limón's legacy to do so. As she observes, "It (*Sonata*) had no

chance to grow and find itself until Norton pulled it off the shelf and, thanks to him, it's now alive and kicking. And we're really happy to have this chance to set it on its feet and see what we make out of it" (Bloom, 2008: 82). Stackhouse's emphases on intention, interpretation and producing a 'new' work demonstrate her assurance in working with Limón's choreography, but, importantly, that she is seeking to produce this new work by way of a creative exploration of the choreographer's intentions.

The approaches described by Stackhouse have parallels with my own in relation to Humphrey's work in that she is finding something new in the work by approaching it creatively. Stackhouse alludes to the response of performers within a new interpretive framework for a dance. There is a distinction, perhaps, between the parameters for exploration available to the solo performer in contrast with large ensemble dances. That said, the performers' collective response to a new set of ideas is crucial to any new interpretation making sense, for them as an ensemble and for the audience.

To revisit Swinston's remark regarding 'seeing work in a different light', I would suggest that the choreographer has a role to play, even after death, through the re-interpretation of ideas that may have stemmed initially from the choreographer but can be incorporated into a new interpretive process and, thus, reveal facets of a work that may hitherto not have been evident. An example from the Humphrey repertory is *Passacaglia* (1938), an ensemble dance for upward of 14 including 2 soloists and generally considered her most mature and celebrated work. Part of the evidence base for this work is a letter Humphrey wrote in 1943 to dance critic John Martin detailing her reasons for choosing Bach's composition: "I picked Bach for music because I still think he has the greatest of all genius for these very qualities of variety held in unity, of grandeur of the human spirit, of grace for fallen man; not only this, but I sincerely believe the music has movement in it, based on dances of forgotten men and women who are the authors of much of the music of this or any other age".<sup>10</sup> The ideas Humphrey expresses here provide insights into her choreographic intention for the modern day director. Additionally, and by way of a process of creative choice, these ideas can form the basis for fresh approaches to the work.

When considering Humphrey's statement in detail within three separate production processes, 1995 for the Humphrey Centennial in the UK, 2005 for Arke Compagnia D'Arte in Turin, Italy and 2007 for MOMENTA Dance Company in Chicago, I identified six discrete ideas - [1] *variety held in unity*; [2] *grandeur of the*

*human spirit*; [3] *grace for fallen man*; [4] *the music has movement in it*; [5] *dances of forgotten men and women*; [6] *authors of much of the music of this or any other age*. All of these ideas can be taken collectively of course, but I chose to privilege [1] and [4] as part of an interpretive process that focused predominantly on the musical sound created by a particular orchestral arrangement by Leopold Stokowski.<sup>11</sup>

In order to move my own engagement with the work on, I have shifted the focus, and thus, the creative imperative that drives any new production. My current production is based on [5] *dances of forgotten men and women*, and the dancers are working through what that could mean. ‘The forgotten’ is a powerful image and offers much scope for interpretation – who are these forgotten souls; why are they forgotten; how are they to be represented – through the ensemble? by inference?; is it a requiem, a celebration? Resolving such questions becomes an integral part of the interpretive process. The importance of engaging with ideas in this manner brings the work into the present for the dancers. The opening remarks of this article stated that a key driver in restaging is to create a work that is a vibrant memorable dance experience that makes sense in the present, and to do this the work as an entity must first make sense for the dancers. Humphrey’s ideas as much as her choreography fuel what the work is about for the dancers. My job as director is to frame Humphrey’s ideas in such a way that allows the dancers to make connections that in turn make sense of the work. In this context, therefore, the idea of ‘seeing the work in a different light’ is essentially concerned with directorial interpretation and how that is conveyed to the dancers. I would argue that this aspect of a rehearsal process is fundamental to successfully restaging someone else’s work and, further, that a staging process has to be underpinned by something more than just the movement, something that tangibly creates a connection back to the choreographer, hence the significance of the evidence base a director can draw upon.

A further example of directorial choice relates to the alternate variations choreographed by Limón for the male soloist in Humphrey’s *Passacaglia* (1938) As director, I choose his choreography over Charles Weidman’s (from the 1938 version) because the movement seems to flow more with Humphrey’s choreography in the variations that come before and after. In contrast, I choose not to incorporate the distinctive images of ‘the gift’ and ‘bells tolling’ that Limón ascribes to his interpretation of the work<sup>12</sup> because these images do not mesh with my interpretation, based on the ideas taken from Humphrey’s own writing about the work. This is but a

small example of the nature of choice that is available within a staging process and the kinds of decision-making a director must work through.

Stackhouse's notion of taking a work and seeing 'what can be made out of it' can open up new avenues of exploration for the contemporary director. Creative intervention can operate in a variety of contexts. In my own practice I employ devices that cross over from theatre to dance production. More radical interventions include cutting and reshaping material, and creating new material to make sense of transitions. One example is an adaptation of Humphrey's *With My Red Fires* (1936) that I undertook in 2010. I re-interpreted the work some years earlier to give it contemporised meaning, and did so by bringing Humphrey's underlying themes of intolerance and bigotry to the forefront and by cutting literal elements of the narrative. In 2010, I had the opportunity to present a shortened version – the full work being 40 minutes in length and I had a time slot that was half that. I retained the thematic parameters of the earlier production but to make sense of the piece as a 'whole', I had to go further and intervene choreographically. This intervention took the form of reshaping Humphrey's material into a different choreographic structure in a section leading up to the conclusion, which I retained. A question might be why I would even consider shortening a work to this degree. My response is that the opportunities to show these great modern dance works are rare and it is perhaps more important to see a glimpse of Humphrey's work than not at all, as long as 'the work' itself makes choreographic sense for an audience and performative sense for the dancers.

### **Conclusions**

My sense is that creative engagement has not entered into the Cunningham tradition of restaging as yet because the tradition itself has barely emerged and the concerns, rightly, are of establishing a rich artistic legacy that is as close to the choreographer as can be achieved. Limón and Humphrey are much further advanced beyond the point of the choreographer no longer being available and exponents of both traditions have naturally evolved strategies to deal with incomplete evidence but more importantly, of keeping works fresh and alive in a meaningful way for contemporary audiences. One can envisage that Cunningham's international appeal will see his work continue to be restaged by prominent companies. Cunningham holds a significant place in British dance theatre, his company having made frequent visits to the UK over the years. Given the popularity of his work, it is likely that the desire to continue seeing his

dances will remain - *Sounddance* is the third of his works to be staged by Rambert, following *Pond Way* in 2005 and *RainForest* in 2010. In time, audiences may well follow the work as much as the company dancing it. In researching for this essay, I was tantalised by the list of dances made available for licence by the Merce Cunningham Trust and will surely go to the first reputable company who offers *Beach Birds* or *Duets* or *RainForest*, amongst many others. A tangential but relevant point is the impact of licensing on an artist's corpus. Through her work with Paul Taylor, Angela Kane observed that whilst other companies regularly licensed his 'lyrical' dances such as *Airs*, *Arden Court*, *Mercuric Tidings* and *Esplanade*, Taylor's darker works were rarely requested (Kane, 2000: 77). The implication for the future is that market forces may determine the extent to which a choreographer's legacy is kept intact.

Recently, Owen referred to the 'great difference between pantheon and mausoleum' in celebration of the Limón Company's achievements in 'perpetuating and extending Limón's legacy through its vital presentations of new and classic works' (Owen, 2012: 2). This juxtaposition of 'new vs old' adds a further important dimension to a single choreographer's tradition. Staging work through a reconstruction or restaging process is a tested and conventional method. Seeking fresh insights into existing work by way of creative intervention is, equally, a vital endeavour because it allows for the possibility that the work has something more to say. Surrounding that body of existing work with new work perpetuates the legacy and tradition through the choreographer's influence.

An imperative with restaging is that the choreographer's intention, as far as that can be determined, should remain an integral part of any production process. The degree of creative intervention by the director, however, will almost certainly vary and be contingent on the selection and 'reading' of evidence. A question for longstanding exponents of a choreographer's work is whether there is a moral obligation to engage creatively with an artist's body of work so that it remains organic and relevant. The notion of choice and its resulting impact on a work, for example, sits well alongside Cunningham's own notion of 'chance'.

Ultimately, who has the authority to make the decisions that determine how our major dance artists are to be remembered? It is a collective responsibility in my view that starts with the artist but cannot stop there if we really want these bodies of work to remain as part of our cultural heritage. There is little to dispute that dance,

more than any other art form, is dependant on on-going human engagement because of its ephemeral nature. That being the case, there is a strong argument for harnessing the array of, albeit ‘imperfect’ methods of documentation so that there remain clear indicators of choreographic intent for exponents to draw upon in order to sustain the great dance works of our time.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See exposition of Collingwood’s model and my application of it in relation to dance works in Main, 2012, *Directing the Legacy of Doris Humphrey. The Creative Impulse of Reconstruction*: 26 – 27

<sup>2</sup> See discussion on style in Main, 2012: 16 – 21

<sup>3</sup> I use the term ‘tradition’ here in the same context as argued in Main, 2012: 3 - 12

<sup>4</sup> The Legacy Plan was published in full by the Merce Cunningham Trust in April 2013 as a model for other companies

<http://mercecunningham.org/mct/assets/File/The%20Legacy%20Plan%20-%20A%20Case%20Study%20FINAL.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mercecunningham.org/blog/seasons-greetings/>

<sup>6</sup> See Van Camp (2007) on Ron Protas’ much discredited tenure of the Graham Company and his claims regarding his inheritance and, therefore, ‘ownership’ of the rights to Graham’s works

<sup>7</sup> See Van Camp (2007) and Yeoh (2012) for detailed expositions of the legal proceedings of the Graham case

<sup>8</sup> The Merce Cunningham Trust has created a series of digital dance capsules on each of his dances containing a range of sources. A small number are open access, such as the performance notes for each work, but the sources of real substance (choreographic notes, full video recording, etc) are only made available for licensing purposes.

<http://dancecapsules.mercecunningham.org/overview.cfm?capid=46043>

<sup>9</sup> See Kourlas, Gia 2012, ‘Cunningham Legacy to Continue in France?’ in *New York Times*, March 13. See also <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCzZOUGk30>

Interview with Robert Swinston, futur directeur du CNDC d'Angers, Oct 25, 2012

<sup>10</sup> Reprinted in Cohen, 1995: 256

<sup>11</sup> This production and the connection between Stokowski’s arrangement and Humphrey’s choreography are discussed in detail in Main, 2012, Part Two, *Passacaglia*, 87 – 98. Humphrey’s choreography for the work was influenced by conductor Leopold Stokowski’s arrangement of Bach’s *Passacaglia and Fugue in C Minor* that he recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Humphrey listened to this recording whilst creating the movement, although she was never financially able to have the work performed with orchestral accompaniment.

<sup>12</sup> Susannah Payton-Newman refers to Limón’s images in Fraleigh, 1996: 213. During my rehearsal period with Momenta Dance Company in 2007, former Limón dancer Jim May also referred to ‘the gift’ image, indicating that Limón retained this idea over time.

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