



Palatine conference: 'Dancing in the now'
Keynote speech by Karl Anderson: 'Propagating Maturity'
Liverpool John Moores University, I. M. Marsh campus, England
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Good afternoon, my name is Karl Anderson. I am a dancer, choreographer, and Skinner Releasing Technique instructor based in NYC. I believe that integrating and propagating somatic techniques, specifically Skinner Releasing Technique, within the context of academia creates smarter and more mature dancers.

Quite by accident, I began dancing at the age of 19. After 2 years of fumbling about at a junior college, I attended the California Institute of the Arts and received a BFA in Dance. CalArts had a fairly well-rounded dance program but the emphasis was still primarily on instruction as opposed to discovery. Since graduation, I have had the pleasure of dancing for a bevy of talented choreographers. I have also been making my own performance events for more than 20 years now and Skinner has become perhaps my most valuable technical and creative tool.

I was introduced to Skinner in 1987, while dancing with Stephanie Skura. In 1989, I sustained a severe impact injury to my knee and taking Skinner classes allowed me to dance for several more years without pain. From 1990 to 1998, I took a hiatus from dance while I returned to school to study architecture. When I started dancing again my muscles had atrophied and my movement skills were rusty but I unwittingly pursued performing again as if no time lapse had occurred. Eventually, I did have to have knee surgery and once again Skinner was the keystone of my healing and rebuilding process. I decided to become a Skinner instructor so that I might share the many benefits that this discipline has to offer.

Joan Skinner was a principle dancer in the Martha Graham Dance Company and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. As a result of a severe back injury, Joan began experiments in 1963 that evolved into the Skinner Releasing Technique. For many years she was the Dean of Dance at the University of Washington and Joan is now constantly redefining, teaching, and disseminating her technique around the globe.

The Skinner Releasing Technique is a movement-based and imagery-based process of discovery. Skinner classes have five basic components: Partner Graphics, Movement Studies, Checklists, Image actions, and Totalities. The Partner Graphics are hands-on tactile suggestions of how our alignments might be in a releasing state. Movement Studies are focused on experiencing certain awarenesses and qualities while one is still in a fairly rational state of mind. Checklists are preparations for either Image Actions or Totalities, they can be sequential and directional or wholelistically spontaneous and they focus on allowing the self to let go of tension and habitual holding patterns. Image actions are deep states where the possibility of embodying an image usually leads to movement. And Totalities are deep states where the possibility of embodying and image usually does not lead to movement so the student can relate to an image as more of a meditation.

Skinner is a technique class and as such the skills-set given in Skinner can cross pollinate with other technique classes and allow the dancer to refine their overall technical base. For example: Ballet can tend to be springy and fast, a Partner Graphic on opening the shoulders and dropping the ribs and a Movement Study on streams of energy suspending the skull could add to efficiency; Graham is grounded and sturdy, Partner Graphics which focus on suspending the torso and floating the skull would broaden an awareness of opposites, as a source of mutual enhancement; Cunningham is segmented and positional, Movement Studies focusing on dynamic multi-directional focuses could improve alignment and a deeper understanding of the old adage 'less is more'; Limon emphasizes large movements with a focus on the breath, Partner Graphics that give assisted deep squats and gliding exercises and the various breath related aspects of Skinner could build a broader awareness the Limon approach; and Ailey is virtuosic and precise, Movement Studies focusing on dynamic stillness and on simultaneous autonomy of various parts of the physical self would be most beneficial.

The images used in Skinner act as metaphors for a feeling state. A student is invited to participate in the qualities imbued within an image. For example: a cool white mist swirling through our vast cavernous inner-spaces. At first, one might move the white mist; then, the white mist might move them; and finally, perhaps the self and the white mist might become one. The feeling state is therefore not merely a dramatic interpretation of an image but rather an experience of immersion or complete identification with the imagery. The primary goal is an improved ease of movement so that one can increase their range of motion while becoming more available for making aesthetic choices.

At times, Skinner classes might seem vague because anatomical terms are strictly avoided; many specific words, such as up, down, work, body, and style are never used; certain Newtonian-based concepts of cause and affect or gravity are disregarded, and the methodology is unrelentingly indirect and oblique. This seemingly passive pedagogy allows the student to be enveloped within and an associative experience so that the cognitive mind can take a break while the intuitive self flourishes. There are three main things to consider while taking a Skinner class. Firstly, there is no right or wrong: the teacher is not a model, other students are not models, and in the absence of judgment Skinner attempts to generate empathy which in turn can lead toward compassion. Secondly, Skinner is experiential and not analytical: the 'why' questions can be put aside for a while so that a sense of mystery can prevail. And lastly, Skinner is about process and not product.

Unfortunately, many of the standard movement techniques focus on muscling through routines so as to attain a properly codified example of an aesthetic correctness. The resulting accumulated tension and blocked energy leads to injuries and a distorted sense-of-self. The medium of dance has simply become too intelligent for this. Somatic techniques enable one to discover their own human idiosyncrasies: their own specific mechanical logic, the intuitive awareness of their own neuromuscular system, and the existence of their own imagistic realities.

Choreographers have so many tools available to them: compositional and formulaic structures such as theme & variation, duration, and kinetic fluctuation; movement techniques functioning as stylistic signatures; literalism and abstraction; mood, tone, and feel to name just a few. And yet, while in school, we are often taught that these external roadmaps, used for the process of crafting and shaping choreography, can actually pass for choreography itself. However, without methods of discovering how to create from within, choreography tends to lack depth.

For me, dance that overtly represents compositional integrity or delineates aesthetic taste is impersonal and uninteresting. Intuition and inspiration are the catalysts for my various processes. The participants in my creations and the audience are invited into a more personal and perhaps multi-faceted world. When I use Skinner as part of my creation process, the performers can fully embody and perfect their own corporeal intelligence and idiosyncratic expressions with more efficiency and ease. I believe that this results in a more sophisticated foundation which can withstand the rigors of choreographic discovery and expression.

When we are young, we are more likely to be open-minded and able to experience those realizations and epiphanies which define our character and level of awareness. As we participate in the often-times difficult 'lessons of life', realize our limitations, and accumulate concessions to our ideals; we can tend to become more conservative and reactionary. As we age, we must continuously strive to remain supple, available, and spontaneous. For the young adult; however, this receptivity is fairly immediate.

In the United States, most academic institutions tend to languish in their own inertia. Changes and developments occur at a much quicker rate in the professional world. As a result, recent graduates present themselves to the dance community; with archaic notions of 'Dancing in the Now'. Most become disillusioned and stop dancing after a few brief years while a small minority is able to unlearn their formalized perspective and embrace the actual realities of the current dance situation.

In order for academia to avoid becoming irrelevant to the profession and life-choice of dance it must reduce its emphasis on traditional skills and training and balance their curriculum by integrating more of the learning options available from working dancers and working choreographers. It is an issue of proportionality. If you take a look at the 'idealized curricula' chart, you will see that the 'skills and training' columns are significantly scaled back where as the 'learning from within' columns include disciplines that are rarely found in higher education. Typically in the United States, dancers would receive four years of Ballet, four years of Modern, some Pilates, and perhaps a few electives like world dance or improvisation. In this chart, however... [Elucidate and discuss]

Skinner can be offered within an academic setting as long as certain ideological and procedural conflicts are addressed. If you take a look at the 'compatibility' chart, you will notice that there are six primary disconnects. In all of these cases, the solution relies on the academic institution being flexible, so that the Skinner experience can maintain its integrity. [Elucidate and discuss]

The very nature of somatic techniques is such that a student may or may not fully integrate the various concepts within a given time frame. By contrast, academia serves to educate students within fairly rigid parameters. In both cases; however, the intended result is a mature artist who is a self-motivated and self-propelled critical thinker.

It is time for academia to become more inclusive. By offering a full component of somatic techniques, including the Skinner Releasing Technique, an environment can be created where in dancers are nurtured and taught how to be self nurturing.

Thank you.

Idealized Curricula				
Skills and Training	Learning from Within	Departmental Academics		
Required	Elective	Required		
Year One Ballet	Modern (orthodox) Modern(contemporary) Partnering Gymnastics Plates Tap Weightlifting	Music and Rhythm for Dance (M,A,R,F,D.) Yoga	African Dance Contact Improvisation Improvisation Alexander Body Mind Centering Feldenkrais Laban-Bartenieff Skinner Releasing	Composition 1 Dance Showings Fundamental Skills of Theatrical Presentation Dance History
Year Two Modern (orthodox)	Ballet Modern(contemporary) Partnering Gymnastics Plates Tap Weightlifting	African Dance	(M,A,R,F,D.) Yoga Contact Improvisation Improvisation Alexander Body Mind Centering Feldenkrais Laban-Bartenieff Skinner Releasing	Composition 2 Dance Showings Dance Criticism
Year Three Modern (contemporary) Partnering	Ballet Modern (orthodox) Gymnastics Plates Tap Weightlifting	Contact Improvisation	(M,A,R,F,D.) Yoga African Dance Improvisation Alexander Body Mind Centering Feldenkrais Laban-Bartenieff Skinner Releasing	Composition 3 Dance Showings Anatomy of Movement
Year Four Modern (contemporary)	ballet Modern (orthodox) Partnering Gymnastics Plates Tap Weightlifting	Improvisation	(M,A,R,F,D.) Yoga African Dance Contact Improvisation Alexander Body Mind Centering Feldenkrais Laban-Bartenieff Skinner Releasing	Composition 4 Dance Showings Post-College Strategies Video for Dance Digital Dance

In addition to the Dance Department's core-curriculum, the student will be required to take certain college or university wide requirements such as: language, math and science, political studies, cultural studies, social studies, history philosophy, etc. Each student will be assigned a faculty member who will function as that student's mentor. The student may change their mentor if they wish. The mentor and the student should meet at least once per semester to access how the student is doing. In order to graduate, each student should create at least two solos and one group work and they should perform technical work for one show per semester and/or eight shows total. The Dance Showings class should meet once a week for two hours. The entire department must attend. Students can show work and receive feedback and weekly announcements can be made. The Fundamental Skills of Theatrical Presentation class should encompass: make up fundamentals, construction of one costume, running the sound board for one show, and lighting one piece during a performance. The post-college strategies class should encompass: creating a biography, a resume, a press release, and a press kit; exploring practical exercises in fundraising, grant writing, and advertising strategies, and tutorials on how to have a successful schedule and mailing process.

Compatibility: Skinner Releasing Technique and academia			
	Skinner Releasing Technique	Academic requirements	Solution
Participation	Voluntary.	Compulsory.	SRT should be an elective and not a required course.
Attendance	Perfect attendance is necessary.	Partial attendance is acceptable but may affect a student's grade.	Injured or sick persons should take class to the most of their capacities. Only the most dire circumstance can result in an excused absence.
Outside observation	Class must feel safe so that students can take risks.	On occasion; faculty, deans, creditors, etcetera want to observe class so as to evaluate the integrity of the instructor or subject matter being taught.	All potential observers must fully participate in the entire class.
Outcomes	SRT is a personal journey. The seeds of awareness are spread but the growth arc can not necessarily be discerned by the instructor.	Clearly delineated learning expectations elucidated in writing are required and used to assign \pm 50% of the student's grade.	Classes could be evaluated on a credit / no credit basis.
Assessment	The experiences, discoveries, and epiphanies of the student are not judged. The in-class writing may or may not be turned-in as it may at times be too personal. Outside readings are available but not required.	Class work, home work, and tests are required and used to assign \pm 50% of the student's grade.	Classes could be evaluated on a credit / no credit basis.
Evaluation	SRT explicitly avoids the ranking system.	Grades are given to all students.	A base grade of A could be given to all students with perfect attendance then the grade could be incrementally lowered by one full letter grade based on each unexcused absence.