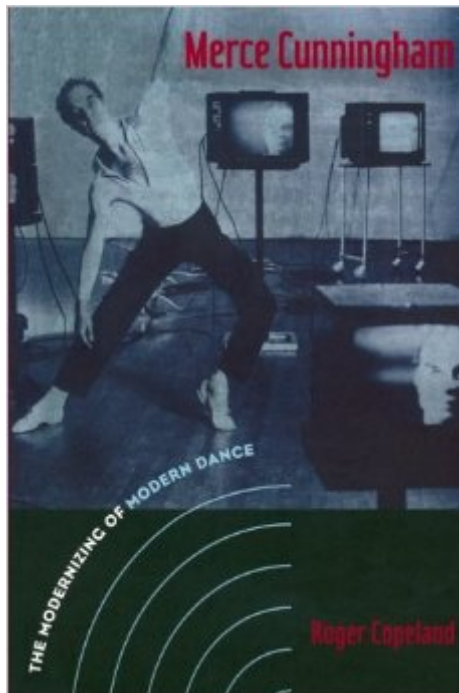


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Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing Of Modern Dance



Synopsis

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Customer Reviews

I read this as part of mfa (dance) research and was surprised by it in several ways. As someone else noted, it's very repetitive and doesn't need to be 300 pages. For example, Copeland writes over and over again about the aesthetics of cool indifference, but that point was clearly made in the introduction. Another issue is how biased it is. I love Cunningham's work but it has its artistic problems. Instead of actually spelling out the details of arguments about those problems, however, Copeland simplifies any criticism and then concludes that the critics just don't get it. For example, Cunningham was a control freak who set up rigorous systems for chance decisions. But as Steve Paxton pointed out, if Cunningham REALLY was into change as a way of taking himself out of the decision making process, then his movement vocabularies (and dance aesthetics) would change from piece to piece. Instead of really digging into the issue of rigorous control and chance and the consistency of Cunningham's aesthetic, Copeland just emphasizes again and again how impersonal and freeing Cunningham's methods and work can be. But it isn't that simple. Copeland similarly quickly dismisses any approach to dance movement that is anti-intellectual in nature by going back to early modern-dance's emphasis on emotions and the unconscious. But that's just not the complete story; why should we believe that there are only two options: "cool intellectualism" or "hot emotionalism"? Again, Copeland simplifies not only by presenting only two options but also by basing them in Cunningham's early career (e.g. as a reaction to Graham). But Cunningham's career

spanned decades and many approaches to dance movement arose that go beyond that facile dichotomy.

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