

Anouk van Dijk's toolbox

Countertechnique

Light, tough and analytical is how you'd describe the Countertechnique of choreographer and dance educationalist Anouk van Dijk. This way of moving – still young but gaining in international influence – gives professional dancers more independence in their professional practice. What exactly is Countertechnique? Van Dijk explains: "That pelvis – just let it be a pelvis".

Anouk van Dijk developed Countertechnique in order to survive as a dancer, so that she wouldn't die of exhaustion in the merry-go-round of training, rehearsals and performances night after night. So about twenty years ago she started searching for a more efficient way of moving, which would enable her to continue to excel as a dancer. It resulted in a method that teaches you not only to conserve your energy, but also to give your movements more space, speed and agility. "Countertechnique makes it easier to move", says Van Dijk. "It feels like you're doing less. And that feels strange for a dancer. Although you do less, it looks better and is less painful for your body. As a dancer, you learn that pain is all part of it; that pain is good. Once you've mastered Countertechnique – which takes a few years – you find a new relationship to your body; a new way of thinking about how you warm up and how things should feel".

So what makes this Countertechnique so fundamentally different? Put simply, it is based on the principle of *direction / counter-direction*, i.e. for each direction you give your body, you give it a counter-direction as well. For instance, if you move your arm forwards, your ribs move backwards. If you move your head and torso upwards, you move them away from your legs. By giving your moving body counter-directions, you find new control of the movement: a *dynamic balance*. Unlike many other contemporary techniques, your balance does not originate by moving from one central point of your body, like the pelvis.

"Many dancers are obsessed with the position of their pelvis", says Van Dijk. "It has to be just so, otherwise you get an injury or it doesn't look right. Dancers can become so obsessed with their pelvis that in fact they no longer know how to use it. They block their emotions and can't move properly anymore. If dancers ask me 'What's the position of

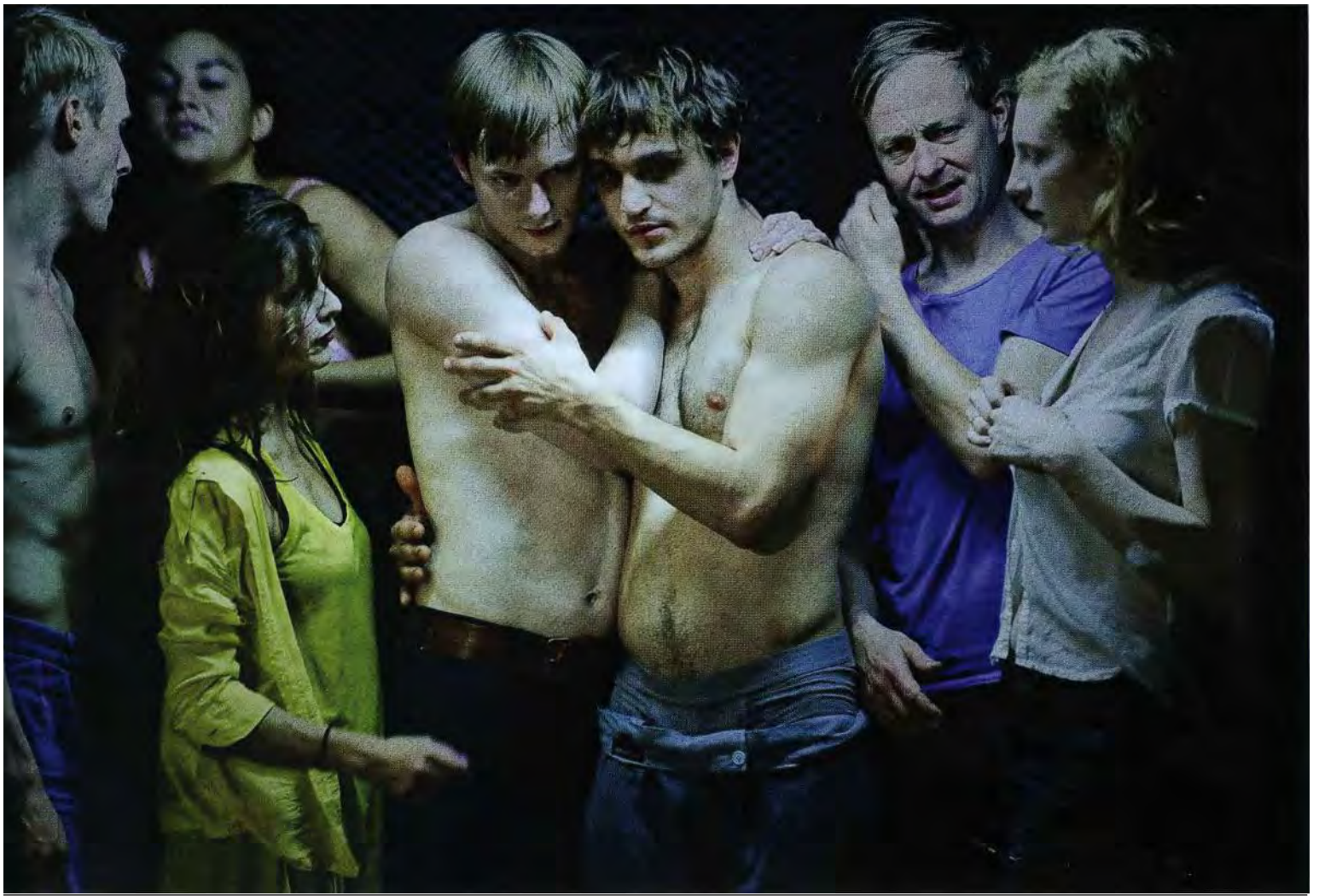
'Energy and rhythm: that's dance!'

my pelvis in this exercise? Should I keep my hips square?' I don't answer the question but say 'I've talked about these principles in the class already. Focus on them first. And that pelvis – just let it be a pelvis for the moment'.

Sit bones
'Inspect your toes', says Van Dijk. 'Have you taken good care of them, or not? Are they clean? There's the sound of laughter.

Anouk van Dijk
foto Annaleen Louwes





It's almost three o'clock on a grey January day. The second-year Dance Performance students at Codarts have their noses on their toes in a stretching exercise. Their hands rest on the floor, palms down. "And your armpits", continues Van Dijk. "What do they smell like? Yes, that's all part of dance too". The students keep chuckling – relaxed yet focused on the exercise. "Bring your weight forwards a bit. Make your back longer".

Asja, a tall Slovenian girl with bright red hair and a greenish-black outfit leans so far onto her hands that her heels leave the ground a bit. Van Dijk gives feedback. "You're thinking too much about bringing your weight forwards. Think more of making space in your ankles and hips, and making your legs longer". Asja tries. "Heels on the ground. Move your sit bones away from your heels". Now Asja's position changes. It looks lighter. As she puts her heels on the ground, her bottom points straight upwards. Her legs are nice and straight, and her upper body and arms form a slight arc from her hips to the ground.

The exercises Van Dijk gives the students in this class are relatively straightforward. It's not about teaching them steps, but rather about letting them experience this fundamentally different approach to moving. At Codarts, Anouk van Dijk is investigating the didactic component of Countertechnique. Every year, for the whole month of January, Van Dijk teaches all the year groups on the Dance Performance course. She does so in conjunction with the dancers of her company

anoukvandijk dc, who have already mastered Countertechnique. "Countertechnique was developed on good dancers and quick thinkers. At Codarts, we are looking at what happens if you teach it to students from the first year onwards. Is it possible or not? Is there a way of developing exercises and methods to help them learn the principles quicker?"

The beginning of February saw the publication of the book *Dance Techniques 2010*, which is a comparative study of influential modern dance techniques like Cunningham, release technique, Muller and Humphrey/Limon. The contemporary Dutch Countertechnique is described in detail alongside these renowned techniques, including its historical context and relationship to other dance techniques.

Superballerinas

In the late eighties, Van Dijk danced with the Rotterdamse Dansgroep, now known as Dance Works Rotterdam. There, she learnt the principles of Alexander technique from Tom Koch, which changed her way of thinking. She learned to manage her energy more efficiently in her movements. A few years later, when Van Dijk toured the US with Amanda Miller's Pretty Ugly Dance Company, she went even further in investigating her way of moving. "Amanda had assembled a colourful group of people, with ex-dancers from William Forsythe and

Protect me
by Falk Richter
Anouk van Dijk
photo Arno (Jeclair)



•
Protect me
photo Arno
Dedair

and the former Rotterdamse Dansgroep, including myself. While one stood on pointe yawning, another did ten pirouettes out of sheer boredom, and yet another could do handstands like a gymnast. Every morning, we did a classical class. Although I was used to classical training, these classes didn't give me the suppleness I needed for Amanda's choreography. And I must say I was rather intimidated by all those Forsythe superballerinas. So I developed my own warming-up. Every morning, I investigated which exercises from all the ones I'd learnt were best for my body. I looked into why that was and whether they were still good for me if I did them in another way. And so I developed my own exercises".

"Then I started to choreograph, which required me to analyse my way of moving and train others in it. It was during this period that I discovered the importance of counter-directions. When working with Michael Schumacher, for instance, I put weight on his shoulders with my hands. I wanted to a promenade in pli e and he said, "You have to push your hips back while your hands go forwards". I realised that this made it so much easier to bend my legs and turn out. I realised a couple of other things as well, such as when I choreographed for Gaby Allard, who is now director of ArtEZ in Arnhem. We

danced together for years with the Rotterdamse Dansgroep and I choreographed my first pieces for her. We discovered how we could get more length in her arms, by making the arm go in one direction, while the opposite shoulder went the other way. Or by the arm going forwards while the spine went backwards. She was also a very analytical dancer and said, 'That's such a different sensation. There's so much more freedom in my arm joint. Hey, so that's what people mean by extending!'"

Fuck it!

Crucial to the Countertechnique is the 'toolbox' Van Dijk made a couple of years ago. It is a plan of the various elements of Countertechnique, which are divided into six main categories. If you have mastered Countertechnique, then you carry this plan around in your head, as it were. The problems you come up against in training, rehearsals or performances can be solved by using one of the many tools. If movements feel stiff, for example, you can use 'popping' to reduce the tension in your joints. Or if you've worked for ages on a problem in a particular movement phrase and you just can't get it right, you can decide to work on something else for a while and return to the problem later. This tool is called 'fuck it', in line with Van Dijk's characteristic humour.

"'Fuck it' is often the thing that dancers remember most from their first course with us. That's because it's very difficult for a dancer to accept that something's not working and that they should leave it for a while. Dancers are usually eager. It's not possible to be a dancer without perseverance, but the problem is that they can get their teeth into something so much that it becomes an obsession. As soon as you want to perform a movement

'Hey, so that's what people mean by extending!'

perfectly, there's a big risk you'll literally block it. And then you can never really let your movement fly in space. This is what we work on in Countertechnique: how to accelerate your weight in space so that you achieve enormous speed and agility. You can only do so by letting go – both mentally and physically".

Poppoppop!

Van Dijk's Countertechnique is the driving force behind her choreography. The power of her dance idiom is expressed in supple, capricious movements and rapidly switching jumps and turns. A few years ago, Anouk van Dijk renewed her collaboration with the German director Falk Richter. At the beginning of their creative career together,

they made *Nothing Hurts* (1999), for dancers and actors. The latest product of their collaboration is *Protect me* (2010), in which the stage is populated by disillusioned figures. The warm timbres of their voices contrast with the emptiness and despair of the lives they are talking about. They meander their way through their existence. "We both realised that we wanted to enter into relationship with the other art form in our work. In my choreography, for instance, I sometimes missed text as an element for conveying meaning. And Falk thought that physicality was important. He directs scripts more on the basis of energy and rhythm than on the meaning of the words. And energy and rhythm: that's dance".

In *Protect me*, as well as in her previous production with Richter, *Trust* (2009), Van Dijk is dancing again herself. "I improvise a lot on stage, within a certain framework; on musicality, for example, or maybe on a theme of alienation or trust. While improvising, I'm in a very alert state of being, with an openness to the here and now. And that openness creates the emotional charge in my movements. But during that emotional process, I'm also operating on another level; that of Countertechnique. I'm forty-five, so I have to think very smartly about my body if I want to survive my own explosions of movement. So I think 'Popopopop: loosen your joints, keep open, think big, gently, gently!' Dancers Nina Wollny and Philipp Fricke also work on these two levels simultaneously. While the first level inspires the choreography, the Countertechnique level ensures we can cope physically".

For the moment, Van Dijk is continuing her collaboration with Richter. And along with other dancers and dance teachers, she will keep on researching and refining her Countertechnique. Eventually, that will lead to the publication of two handbooks: one for dancers and one for teachers. Besides the workshops Van Dijk and her dancers give to companies and schools in the Netherlands and abroad, there will probably also be a Countertechnique Summer School in Amsterdam. "The ten-day Summer Intensive that we give at the moment is really



Dance training
Anouk van Dijk
photo Klaas-Ian
van der Weij

much too short", says Van Dijk. "However, we won't be offering it all year round. Then there's the danger that everyone gets too obsessed with it, which is counter-productive. And we'd have to shout 'fuck it' really loudly!"

Dance Techniques 2010 — Tanzplan Germany, edited by Ingo Diehl and Friederike Lampert, was published by Henschel Verlag at the beginning of February. It can be ordered in English or German for €19.90 via the website of [anoukvandijk dc](http://anoukvandijk.dc).

In the coming period, *Protect Me*, *Trust* and *STAU* will be performed in Germany, among other places. Anoukvandijk dc will also be performing at the Oerol and Over 't IJ festivals this summer.

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COUNTERTECHNIQUE

April 1, 2013

Anouk van Dijk is a Dutch choreographer; graduated from Rotterdam Dance Academy in 1985, she danced for Rotterdam Dance Company and Amanda Miller's Pretty Ugly Dance Company as a soloist for 10 years. In 1998 she formed anoukvandijk dc, her own company, based in Amsterdam.

Over the years, she developed her own mouvement system and training method : the countertechnique.

The main focus of Countertechnique is the use of counter directions in all movements. Dancers are working with a dynamic balance; when the weight goes outside the central axis, you find stability by sending a body part the other direction. This dynamic balance is ever changing and allows dancer to move freely.

« Countertechnique stems from an interest in helping dancers to have a less strenuous daily practice. It is a really hard profession, and we have a lot of things that work against us. The aim in Countertechnique is to give dancers tools to make it lighter, easier ».

Anouk Van Dijk has introduced her technique to a multitude of dancers all around the world, beginning with the dancers from her first company, anoukvandijk dc. In between choreographing, she has been teaching countertechnique to other

companies such as Dansgroep Krisztina De Châtel, Galili Dance, NDT, Pretty Ugly Dance Company.

She is now the artistic director of Chunky Move in Melbourne.

Anouk van Dijk discusses the creation of 247 Days for Chunky Move, watch below...



Nina Wollny has been working with anoukvandijk dc for 10 years and is now a freelance dancer based in Amsterdam.

During her teens in Germany Nina Wollny followed an intense ballet education. In the Netherlands she continued her studies at the Rotterdam Dance Academy, where she changed her focus to modern and contemporary dance. After her graduation in 2002 she joined the company anoukvandijk dc and stayed there ever since. She was starring in all of the companies works, with the exception of 2010's Wowwowwonders in me - where she was involved as a rehearsal director. Besides her work as a dancer and rehearsal director, Nina Wollny is the primary teacher of Anouk van Dijk's Countertechnique and is at the moment involved in preparing the first official publication on this movement system. She has also been since 2007 Anouk Van Dijk's artistic assistant.





Nina Wollny and Phillip Fricke- anoukvandijk dc

A few questions to Nina:

-When did you start dancing and what techniques were important for you to study I started dancing when I was 4, mainly ballet and some jazz until I was 19. Then I started to study at the Rotterdam Dance academy where I first got in contact with modern and contemporary technique classes. The modern class I was influenced most by was the Limon class, mainly because of our special and passionate teacher Louise Frank. I also learned a lot from and really enjoyed the floor work classes by different guest teachers. We had several guest teachers already during the first year of our studies. Anouk van Dijk was also one of them. This was during the time her class wasn't called Countertechnique, yet.

-What happened after you graduated? In my third year I auditioned to be apprentice in a project of Anouk van Dijk and got the apprenticeship. After the first series of shows I was offered a contract for the tour of the piece later that year. I decided to take the offer and leave school one year early even though the contract was only for two months and I had no idea what I would do afterwards. One month after I made this decision Anouk asked me, if I wanted to be in her next project. So it all worked out fine and I then worked with Anouk for more than 10 years in a row.

-What did Countertechnique and working with Anouk Van Dijk change in your approach of movement? I have always been analyzing how to do things and been interested in the possibilities of the human body and anatomy. This fascination is something that has always been there and works really well together with the things I learned in Countertechnique. When I started dancing I saw movement as a bunch of positions and poses. That has changed significantly since I started to work with Countertechnique regularly. I now see movement. I also used to strive for the impossible perfection like many dancers and that is what most of my energy was going to. Then I started to realize that setting myself a task that can only fail and spending a lot of energy on it is kind of a waste. I started to just move, with everything I have instead of everything I don't have yet. It is not a matter of in shape out of shape wrong shape. This is my

shape and I use it the best I can and every time I do that I am the best dancer I can be. This is something that has become more and more clear to me during the past years and especially since I am also teaching Counter technique. I have seen people do the most amazing things when they started to just move with everything they have and stopped thinking about the things they don't have.

-An experience you will always remember in your career? The only time I ever fainted in my life was on stage during my solo in the premiere of a piece called SHOT. When I woke up again they hadn't stopped the show, yet. I first thought it was one of those dreams where I dream of performing and being late or unable to move. Then I realized it was actually real and I tried to just continue kind of in the right place of my solo in relationship to the music. I had never before completely lost control like that and it was very strange to have that happen in front of an audience. When I continued I still felt like I had no control and the floor felt like it was moving. In the end some people hadn't even noticed. Somehow this took away my fear of letting go of control in front of an audience. After making it through this I feel like anything could happen on stage like anything could happen in life and maybe that is okay and I don't have to be afraid of it. By the way it had happened, because I started the show with a long scream (breathing out) and then I started to move fast and forgot to breathe in again before I started to move.

-What do you do before you get on stage? I don't like to practice steps over and over before the show or feel like I need to keep moving. I'm usually just standing or walking very calm opening myself up to anything that will happen. I also really like to have a moment with all the performers before that. Just to be together for a moment, look each other in the eyes and start the journey together.

- What are you up to these days? I am working in Hamburg right now at Kampnagel. Dancing in the piece ALL from my very good friend Jenny Beyer. We studied together and lived together for about 6 years. It's a very special situation for me to work with a good friend like that. It is also special for me because it is the first project I do after I worked with Anouk for such a long time. Next to that I am still regularly performing Trust and Protect me at the Schaubühne Berlin. **Rausch** is also still being performed regularly at the Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf and this Summer at the **Festival D'Avignon**.

-Anything to say to young freelance dancers? Probably I could actually learn things from them. All my work with Anouk was actually project based, but still after a while it was kind of clear that we would continue working together and I never had to look for work next to that, work out a complicated schedule with different projects from different choreographers and often discuss new contracts

and working conditions. This all just started now for me and I'm still learning. It is definitely different and still foreign to me. Luckily I did build up some connections during all those years, which really helps to not have to start from zero. I think it is really important to have a good network, stay in contact with all the people you meet around the world. Help each other out, have ideas together, support the ideas of each other and then soon the network is strong enough to carry you and others and suddenly you are the experienced one. Oh and this ... after breathing out for a long time don't forget to breath in again before you move.

Nina performing in Borrowed Landscape with anoukvandijk dc

Anouk Van Dijk est une chorégraphe Néerlandaise diplômée de la Rotterdam Dance Academy en 1985. Elle a dansé pour Rotterdam Dance Company et Pretty Ugly Dance en tant que soliste pendant 10 ans. En 1998, elle forme sa propre compagnie "anoukvandijkdc" basée à Amsterdam .

Au cours de sa carrière, elle a développé son système de mouvement et méthode de travail ; la countertechnique..

Une de règle clé de la Countertechnique est l'utilisation de contre-sens dans le mouvement. Les danseurs travaillent avec un équilibre dynamique; en d'autres mots; lorsque le poids est en dehors de l'axe central, vous trouverez la stabilité en envoyant une partie du corps dans l'autre direction. Cet équilibre dynamique est en constante évolution et permet aux danseurs de se déplacer librement.

« La Countertechnique est l'aboutissement d'une recherche pour aider les danseurs à avoir une pratique quotidienne moins pénible. C'est un métier très dur, et nous avons beaucoup de choses qui fonctionnent contre nous. L'objectif de la Countertechnique est de donner des outils aux danseurs pour rendre le

travail plus léger, plus facile".

Anouk Van Dijk a enseigné sa technique à une multitude de danseurs à travers le monde, à commencer par les danseurs de sa première compagnie, anoukvandijk dc. Mais également d'autres compagnies telles que Dansgroep Krisztina De Châtel, Galili Dance, Nederlands Dans Theater, Pretty Ugly Dance Company. Elle est aujourd'hui le directeur artistique de Chunky Move à Melbourne.

Nina Wollny a travaillé avec anoukvandijkdc pendant 10 ans, elle est maintenant danseuse en freelance et continue d'enseigner des workshops et des classes de countertechnique dans le monde entier.

Au cours de son adolescence en Allemagne Nina Wollny a suivi une formation classique intense. Aux Pays-Bas, elle a poursuivi ses études à la Rotterdam Dance Academy, où elle s'est dirigée vers la danse moderne et contemporaine. Après avoir obtenu son diplôme en 2002, elle a rejoint la compagnie anoukvandijk dc et y est resté depuis. Elle a été à l'affiche de toutes les pièces de la compagnie à l'exception de Wowwowwonders in me en 2010 - où elle a tenu le rôle de répétitrice. Elle a également été assistante artistique d'Anouk Van Dijk depuis 2007.

En plus de son travail en tant que danseuse et répétitrice, Nina Wollny enseigne la Countertechnique et prépare actuellement sa première publication officielle sur ce système de mouvement.

Quelques questions à Nina Wollny :

- Quand as tu commencé à danser et quelles techniques ont été importantes pour toi dans ta formation ? *J'ai commencé à danser à l'âge de 4 ans, du classique et du jazz principalement jusqu'à mes 19 ans. Puis j'ai commencé à étudier à l'Académie de Danse de Rotterdam où j'ai approché les techniques modernes et contemporaines. La technique moderne qui m'a le plus influencé est Limon, surtout grâce à l'enseignement passionné de Louise Frank, notre professeur, et j'ai aussi beaucoup appris du travail au sol grâce à différents professeurs invités. Nous avons eu la chance d'avoir plusieurs professeurs invités en première année déjà. Anouk van Dijk a été l'un d'eux, à l'époque sa classe ne s'appelait pas encore Coutertechnique.*

-Que s'est il passé après avoir obtenu ton diplôme ? *Pendant ma troisième année j'ai auditionné pour être apprenti dans un projet d'Anouk van Dijk et j'ai obtenu l'apprentissage. Après la première série de spectacles, on m'a offert un contrat pour tourner la pièce au cours de l'année. J'ai décidé de prendre*

l'offre et de quitter l'école un an plus tôt, même si le contrat n'était que pour deux mois et que je n'avais aucune idée de ce que j'allais faire par la suite. Un mois après avoir pris cette décision Anouk m'a demandé si je voulais faire partie de son prochain projet. Donc tout s'est bien passé et j'ai ensuite travaillé avec Anouk pendant plus de dix ans.

-Qu'est-ce que la Countertechnique et le travail d'Anouk Van Dijk a changé dans ton approche de mouvement? J'ai toujours été en train d'analyser comment faire les choses et intéressée par l'anatomie et les possibilités du corps humain. Cette fascination est quelque chose qui a toujours été la et correspond bien aux choses que j'ai apprises dans la Countertechnique. Quand j'ai commencé à danser, j'ai vu le mouvement comme un tas de positions et de poses. Cela a beaucoup changé depuis que j'ai commencé à travailler la Countertechnique régulièrement. Je vois maintenant le mouvement. J'avais tendance à faire tout mon possible pour atteindre la perfection impossible, comme de nombreux danseurs et c'est ce que la plupart de mon énergie allait. Puis j'ai commencé à réaliser que de m'attribuer une tâche qui ne peut qu'échouer et de dépenser autant d'énergie pour y parvenir est inutile. J'ai commencé à bouger simplement, avec tout ce que j'ai, au lieu de tout ce que je n'ai pas encore. Ce n'est pas une question de bonne ou de mauvaise forme. C'est ma forme et je l'utilise du mieux que je peux et chaque fois que je le fais, je donne le meilleur de moi-même. C'est quelque chose qui est devenu très clair pour moi au cours de ces dernières années et surtout depuis que j'enseigne la Countertechnique. Je vois des gens faire des choses étonnantes quand ils commencent simplement à bouger avec tout ce qu'ils ont, et arrêtent de réfléchir aux choses qu'ils n'ont pas.

-Une expérience que vous n'oublierez jamais dans votre carrière? La seule fois où j'ai perdu connaissance dans ma vie était sur scène lors de mon solo dans la première d'une pièce intitulée SHOT. Lorsque je me suis réveillée, ils n'avaient pas encore arrêté le spectacle. J'ai d'abord pensé que c'était un de ces rêves où je dois être sur scène et je suis en retard ou incapable de bouger. Puis j'ai réalisé que c'était bien réel et j'ai essayé de continuer un peu à l'endroit de mon solo, de suivre la musique. Je n'avais jamais complètement perdu le contrôle comme ça et c'était très étrange que cela se produise devant un public. En continuant, je sentais le plancher bouger, j'étais totalement en perte de contrôle. Au final, certaines personnes n'avaient même pas remarqué. D'une certaine manière cela a enlevé ma peur de perdre le contrôle en face d'un public. Après avoir vécu ça j'ai l'impression que tout peut arriver sur scène comme tout peut arriver dans la vie et c'est peut-être pas plus mal, il ne fait pas en avoir peur.. Au fait, c'est arrivé parce que j'ai commencé le spectacle par un cri (expiration) et j'ai oublié de respirer à nouveau avant de commencer à bouger.

-Qu'est-ce que vous faites avant de monter sur scène? Je n'aime pas m'agiter, faire et refaire les pas sans cesse avant le spectacle. D'habitude je marche ou je reste debout calmement, pour m'ouvrir à tout ce qui va se passer. J'aime avoir un moment avec tous les artistes avant que ça commence. Juste être ensemble pendant un moment, se regarder dans les yeux et commencer le voyage ensemble.

- Que faites-vous en ce moment? Je travaille à Hambourg en ce moment. Je danse «ALL» la pièce de mon ami Jenny Beyer . Nous avons étudié ensemble et vécu ensemble pendant environ 6 ans. C'est une situation particulière pour moi de travailler avec un ami proche comme ça. C'est aussi spécial car c'est mon premier projet après avoir travaillé avec Anouk si longtemps. À côté de cela je danse toujours Trust et Protect me (de Anouk Van Dijk) à la Schaubühne de Berlin. Rausch est également toujours au programme au Schauspielhaus de Düsseldorf et cet été au Festival d'Avignon.

-Quelque chose à dire aux jeunes danseurs en freelance? Ils ont probablement des choses à m'apprendre en fait. Mon travail avec Anouk était en fait établi en tant que projet, mais à un moment donné il a été clair que nous allions continuer à travailler ensemble et je n'ai jamais eu à chercher du travail à côté, à établir un calendrier compliqué avec les différents projets ou à discuter de nouveaux contrats et conditions de travail. Tout cela commence maintenant pour moi et j'ai encore beaucoup à apprendre. Heureusement, j'ai pu me faire des contacts pendant toutes ces années, ce qui permet de ne pas avoir à repartir de zéro. Je pense qu'il est vraiment important d'avoir un bon réseau, de rester en contact avec tous les gens que vous rencontrez dans le monde entier. S'entraider, avoir des idées ensemble, soutenir les idées des autres, et dès que le réseau est suffisamment solide pour vous entraîner, vous et les autres, tout à coup vous êtes celui qui a l'expérience. Oh ... et aussi, après une longue expiration n'oubliez pas de respirer à nouveau avant de vous bouger.

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Dance melts through fingers like ice. Writing about dance pins down the intangible so it can last and continue traveling.

Countertechnique: A Practice, a Process, a Pleasure

NOVEMBER 5, 2012



tags: Anouk van Dijk, Charles Slender, Countertechnique
By Charles Slender

About a month ago, Emmaly Wiederholt asked if I would be interested in contributing something to Stance on Dance about my recent experiences studying, practicing, and becoming certified to teach Anouk van Dijk's Countertechnique. What an opportunity – I said yes!

I shortly realized though...that I had no idea what to write. I couldn't say how truly amazing Countertechnique has been for my own dancing without sounding like I was evangelizing (like a crazy person), I couldn't highlight its significance as a great alternative

to other forms of training without criticizing some of my greatest teachers (I don't value irreverence), and I was worried that it would sound only like I was pimping my class, preaching my gospel, and impossibly promising all dancers the holy grail of dancing: everlasting motion with no more gripping!

Alas, I was doomed from the start. I suppose, then, that I have nothing to lose! I will begin with the most important bit of information: **I encourage you to come take class.**

(<http://www.factsf.org/home/classes/>) It is the best way to do/learn/see/hear what Countertechnique really is – a practice, an activity. It's also a smiling good time. More information is located below.

In the meantime, you're here already, right? You're generously reading along, and you want to know more!

Facts

I first met Anouk and learned about Countertechnique in 2005 at the American Dance Festival. I took one Countertechnique class then and a few more in the winter of 2006. In the following four years I finished university, had a short career in Russia, and started my own little dance company here in San Francisco, **FACT/SF** (<http://www.factsf.org/home/>). In 2010, I was able to attend Anouk's *One Body, One Career* workshop. It was amazing. I spent the following eighteen months experimenting with Countertechnique and, in late 2011, I applied for the Countertechnique Teacher Training Program (CTTT) that Anouk would be hosting in summer 2012. I applied; I was accepted. WHAT!? Yes, indeed – I was thrilled, flattered, and anxious. So, back to Amsterdam I went to learn more about Countertechnique. After an intense month, Anouk granted me the privilege of teaching. We will reconvene in 2014 to learn more, share our experiences, and contribute to the ongoing development of the technique. Currently, the FACT/SF company members are being trained in Countertechnique, I taught classes at Project Bandaloop in September (thanks to Bianca Cabrera), and I will be teaching open classes Monday mornings in November at the SF Conservatory of Dance.

Feelings



(<http://stanceondance.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/factsf-in-countertechnique-class.jpg>)

Countertechnique has changed my dancing. Dancing has become fun again. Dancing has become a pleasurable thrill. I

have more confidence and I am no longer afraid of failure. Dancing now feels more honest, more risky, and more manageable. Dancing has become a new and exuberant challenge. It feels great to be focused without being obsessed, and to make observations without making severe judgments. It sounds like some hippy-dippy nonsense (and I think that's why I was so suspicious at first), but it actually does relieve so much tension while promoting productivity, legibility, strengthening, stretching, and stamina-building. It's not about aesthetics, shape, or style, and we dance without mirrors when possible. Countertechnique disrupts the shame spiral, and clears the way for fun. It helps brainy dancers get out of their heads, and physical dancers gain more mental awareness. I always look forward to sharing Countertechnique with my company, students, and community-at-large. It is a deep passion, and a smart, healthy, dynamic way forward.

Thoughts

There is a framework, methodology, and disposition within Countertechnique that provokes and satisfies both the mind and body. It accounts for, develops, and encourages both the physical and mental acts of dancing, and allows dancers to be aware of their thoughts, movements, and feelings all at the same time. For me, it is a post-postmodern technique for a post-postmodern world in which information is amalgamated and distilled, and where humans are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Whereas the postmodern might be

similarly de-centered and referential, Countertechnique takes an important step past simple pastiche and towards new discoveries by providing useful tools within a practical structure. In order to make sense of an increasingly dizzying amount of information and possibilities, it provides a method and system for organizing that information and informing choices.



(<http://stanceondance.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/ctech-class-at-project-bandaloop.jpg>) In many ways, Countertechnique exists within a series of logical paradoxes, revealing itself to be simple through complication and practical through theory. In its specificity it provides liberation, and with its nuance, a general usability. It standardizes by providing tools instead of archetypes and paradigms. It utilizes concrete elements in the often-abstract realm of dance. It is a serious endeavor that requires the dancer to not take themselves too seriously. It proposes that hard work doesn't have to be painful, stressful, or damaging, and it helps the dancer accomplish a lot while encouraging them to not worry about accomplishing anything at all. In these ways (and many more), Countertechnique provides something actually new and relevant for the current and future generations of dancers. Also, it feels great and is like, super tons of fun.

Learn more:

'Like' the **Countertechnique Page** (<https://www.facebook.com/Countertechnique>) on Facebook

Read about the **History of Countertechnique** (<http://www.anoukvandijk.nl/en/what-countertechnique/introduction-countertechnique>)

Check out an awesome **Countertechnique explanation video!**
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJ1_jQq8M1o&feature=youtu.be)

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Interview with Joy Davis on Countertechnique®
By Amy Wolfberg, Conduit Dance, on February 8, 2013

What sets Countertechnique® apart from other forms of dance training?

The Countertechnique® differs most obviously in approach. I remember one of the first classes I ever took with Anouk Van Dijk at the American Dance Festival in 2005. She had smiley faces hanging all over the studio. These decorations emphasized her mission to retain and even deepen the joy of dancing while training, performing, and dancing professionally. It is so easy to take oneself too seriously in dance. This pressure can stifle the learning process and can even limit the range of motion in a joint. Countertechnique® presents a way to spark dialogue between the mind and body, while dancing, that is task and process oriented (as opposed to achieving an end-goal, position, or outcome). The dancer is able to busy themselves with these tasks ("tools" from the Countertechnique® Toolbox) instead of worrying that their leg isn't high enough, etc.

The approach encourages the dancer to be a bit more objective and work towards solutions through the Countertechnique ® Toolbox.

Another way the Countertechnique ® differs from other techniques is the way the dancer relates to his/her own body and the space around it. Acknowledging the weight of the limbs and sending that weight into space while counterdirecting another body part away from it really changes the way a dancer can interact with space. I remember Anouk reminding us that we never really have to dance alone—that the space around us is always there as a partner, so we should use it.

Can you explain how Countertechnique ® has changed the way you dance? Has it affected or influenced other practices in your life (yoga, dance making, etc.)?

Countertechnique ® has profoundly and irreversibly changed the way I dance. Through it, I have awakened more intelligence in my mind and my body. With this has come an increased range of motion and less fear to “go for it.” I know very quickly when I am not utilizing the tool of directing and counterdirecting because fear creeps in. When I fully commit to engaging with the tools, I am able to take risks and enjoy dancing big. I studied Graham in college quite seriously and while I loved it, my body did not. Same with ballet; I love the order of class and how it warms the body to jump (which Countertechnique ® does as well), but it was always difficult for me to relate to the aesthetic of lightness while desperately attempting to hoist my leg up or "knot" my ribs together. It all felt quite binding. As someone who isn't naturally super flexible, I was struggling with figuring out how to dance as big and as freely as I wanted to. The Countertechnique ® values widening: widening in order to lengthen, to go into the space, and leave something behind. It gives the dancer a framework in which to figure out how to dance really big without over exerting. This was huge for me. I tend to be enthusiastic, both in my personality and in my dancing, so I usually use too much energy. The Countertechnique ® has taught me (and I am continuing to learn) how to be efficient with my energy. Now, I have more range of motion than I ever thought I did, because I now know how to access it.

What was it about Countertechnique ® that inspired you to seek out intensive training and earn a teaching certification?

I was very changed after taking classes with Anouk all summer at the American Dance Festival. I felt totally compelled to keep up with Countertechnique ® and deepen my understanding of it. There was never really an option in my mind, something just clicked and I knew I'd be dancing with the Countertechnique ® in my body for a very long time. The way that I make dance changed as well, with newfound freedom in my joints and a fresh way of relating to space.

Please tell us about your experiences in Amsterdam working with Anouk van Dijk.

Working with Anouk, watching the technique progress and clarify, watching how it influences dancers, and seeing how it is growing in the world of dance has been a

delightful privilege to witness. The summer of 2006 was the first One Body One Career Summer Intensive (SI) offered by Anouk and her colleagues. It was wonderful to be a part of what is now an annual event that draws dancers from all over the world. SI offered several opportunities to take classes in the Alexander Technique with Tom Koch, improvisation with Michael Schumacher, Ballet with Daniela Graça, and yoga with Anat Geiger. Each one of these master teachers has a connection to the development of the Countertechnique ®. Participants had the opportunity to apply the principles of the technique to other forms and to hear how each teacher transmitted and applied the information. One or two SI sessions offered repertory class participants the opportunity to experience how the technique is functional and necessary in Anouk's choreography.

Anouk is a deeply thoughtful person and is passionate about teaching. She brings an intensity into the studio that elicits a dancer's full attention. And yet through the philosophy of the technique, her approach to teaching is completely gracious and encouraging. Her presence makes a dancer want to dance well and soak up the liveliness of the class. I have a notebook from each intensive, and of course teacher training, in which I compiled every SI handout she gave to the dancers. This notebook compilation is a tangible way to see how the technique has developed and clarified over the past seven years. It's like a living eye into the evolution of how she and her artistic assistant, Nina Wollny (who is one of the most gorgeous dancers I have ever seen), chose to edit, expand, add to or embellish the subject matter of this technique. I think that as they and the growing teaching staff discover new ways to approach or express the technique, it will evolve and grow too.

Is Countertechnique ® work easily accessible to all types of movers?

The principles are accessible to everyone, yes. I totally incorporate some into my yoga classes. However, the way the information is structured in the technique class is for advanced and professional dancers. It takes a maturity of mind and lots of coordination to move in the way the Countertechnique ® offers. The class is built up gradually in the beginning and then takes a sharp turn upwards for the last 45 minutes or so. Because of this, it is important for a dancer to learn how to use their energy efficiently. I think this takes a lot of maturity as well. I can see in the future how the technique could grow to develop curriculum for either younger dancers or older dancers or even non-dancers. I often say, half jokingly but half seriously, that I predict that in 10 years NFL players will be taking Countertechnique ® instead of ballet to build coordination and speed.



Countertechnique® is not only exercise for the body; it is also a mind technique. Can you explain this element of the training?

The task-oriented approach requires the dancer to get out of the emotional, judging, comparing mind and into one that is ready and willing to find solutions. On the first page of a text on the technique that Anouk has published is a quotation from her Alexander teacher, Tom Koch. "Your problems don't make you special, rather your solutions," it reads. I think this is a very new way of approaching dance technique as a dancer.

Ultimately, the Countertechnique® will become your own and you will be your own teacher. The Toolbox is comprised of 6 categories: Why? What? and How? (How has 4 categories). One of the How? categories is "Mental Parameters" (one is, for example, smiling). Figuring out how to retain the joy of dancing, and how to not take oneself so seriously can really be found through the doorway of a smile. It changes things—it's like mental widening.

Describe how Countertechnique® can be used in a choreographic process, if at all. I gather that it is a training system designed to help the dancer cultivate a deep awareness of their body and is primarily used in training, rehearsal, and performance. Have you found that this training is solely useful when creating a "toolbox" for dancers, or can choreographers benefit from this work as well?

I think it is definitely useful to choreographers because of the approach. It opens new avenues of thinking about space and oneself in it, about directions and possibilities. I

could choreograph for hours using improvisational exploration of one tool. The potential is limitless because of how thorough the toolbox is.

As a new and growing technique, how do you see Countertechnique ® fitting into the world of modern and contemporary dance? Furthermore, how does Countertechnique ® relate to other movement theories and past trends in dance and/or movement?

I see Countertechnique ® as the next and obvious evolution in dance. Of course it draws from previous techniques—that's how the process of evolution works. But in my mind, Countertechnique ® is a little leap in the process. The beauty of it is that it is not a style; it is a way of training. Therefore, its principles can be applied to any form of dance. It is a framework that style can be built upon. When I watch hip-hop, I can see how a certain tool or parameter could be useful. I do think it is very important not to dilute the technique by fusing it with other styles. While I think it probably will be anyways, the pure form and "skeleton" of the way class is taught *is* Countertechnique ®.

How did Countertechnique ® emerge? What theories and practices contributed (and are perhaps still contributing) to the creation of this technique?

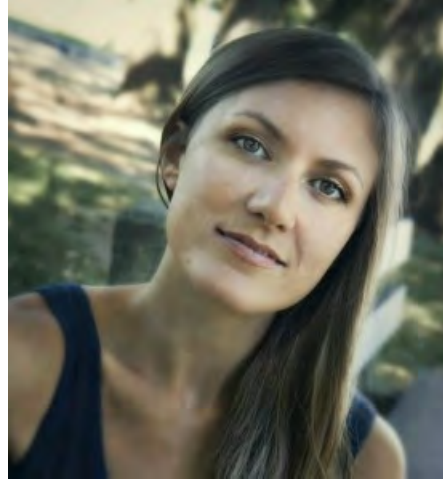
The Alexander technique foremost, in my understanding, but Anouk has had many teachers along the way that have influenced, inspired, or exasperated her (it is fruitful to learn from what doesn't work as well as what does!). Some people who have greatly influenced the technique are Nina Wiener, William Forsythe (primarily his continuation of the Laban cube), Amanda Miller, and Stephen Petronio.

What about doing this workshop in Portland is most exciting to you?

I am so excited to share the brilliance and the possibilities for opening and learning that Countertechnique ® brings. Rachel Slater, a local Portland dancer and choreographer, has studied with Anouk several times. After spending many summers together, she and I have become very excited about bringing Countertechnique ® out to Portland this year. The technique is spreading quite quickly and I think that Portland's mélange of dance, art, and culture has created a perfect environment for Countertechnique ® to continue to grow.

What do you hope dancers will take away from this workshop?

Firstly, I hope they have fun and remember how much they love to dance. Secondly, I hope they learn to ask new questions about how they move. Thirdly, I want to inspire them to keep discovering. Taking one or two classes in the Countertechnique ® is just the tip of the tip of the iceberg, and it will probably be a momentous experience for newcomers. Hopefully, all participants will come away wanting to learn more about this exciting new technique.



Joy Davis hails from Nashville, TN originally and has spent the last ten years making dance and learning about dance in Knoxville, Chicago, and Amsterdam. She was profoundly influenced by Anouk van Dijk and the Countertechnique while studying with her at the American Dance Festival in 2005. Since that summer, Joy has traveled to and lived in the Amsterdam four times to train and study Countertechnique. This past summer of 2012, she was one of four Americans and now 16 teachers worldwide to become certified to teach the technique by Anouk.

Conduit will be hosting a Countertechnique workshop with Joy Davis -- one of the few certified Countertechnique® teachers in the U.S.

Workshop Information:

February 23-24 & March 2-3, 2013 - Saturday & Sunday, 1-3 PM

\$60/one weekend; \$100/both weekends (pay at door)

Visit www.conduit-pdx.org for more information and registration.