Anna Halprin: Dance, Process, Form details the life and work of dancer and artist Anna Halprin. Halprin was an early innovator in dance therapy, using the medium as a form of personal exploration through artistic and physical expression. Her work with groups of people, either for specific art pieces or in experimental workshops, was highly influential for the development of both dance therapy and avant-garde expressionism. Notable particularly amongst psychotherapists who incorporate bodywork and bioenergetics into their work, the principles behind Halprin’s artistic perspective and undertakings remain highly relevant to those fields. Focusing on the cultural and historical influences that characterized her early development as an artist, the authors also discuss the underlying concepts that made her approach to dance unique and therapeutic. For professionals who already incorporate similar dance-related therapies in their work, the analysis for bolstering treatment outcomes may be helpful. The book also gives some detailed background information for those interested in Halprin—her work, expressionism, and dance therapy in general.

The book is composed of five chapters, three of which are followed by closing “dialogues,” or critical interviews that discuss the broader scope, issues, and applications of Halprin’s work as they relate to preceding chapters. The book opens with an examination of the life and work of Anna Halprin, discussing it generally and in the context of the
Readers will find that Anna Halprin: Dance, Process, Form is a detailed, well-researched, and objective examination of the life, work, and artistic mindset of Anna Halprin. It is also an interesting profile and examination of someone who used expressionism in a way that can assist in tapping into and harnessing the human experience, either for therapeutic gains, or simply as a means of materializing otherwise hidden internal states. The inclusion of images of some of the pieces she conducted or influenced also gives readers a more direct sense of how her work materialized in groups and within individual projects and performances. This speaks to the very physical, present side of the dance medium it was implemented in. Also highly critical of the limitations of human expression and of the reception of Halprin herself, the book is an interesting foray into where the process of expression in dance and therapy stands today, and also what it might mean for practitioners and performers going forward.

Gabriele Wittmann is an assistant lecturer in dance criticism, history, and creative scientific writing at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts who studied with Anna Halprin.

Ursula Schorn is a gestalt therapist, independent practitioner, and director of advanced training in art education and therapy.

Ronit Land also trained with Halprin and is director of the dance department at the Remscheid Academy in Germany.