moving history / dancing cultures

A DANCE HISTORY READER

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It's important to think about the diverse perspectives and interests of authors because reading should be a critical enterprise, performed with attention to the information and ideas included in the writing and to the critical stance of the writer. The author is an interpreter of ideas and experience and creator of texts. She's not writing all there is to know about a subject, but rather her particular take on that subject. It's useful to keep an eye on the kinds of experiences and interpretive and critical perspectives that shape the writings. This helps you understand the information presented, think about what other perspectives might be valuable to your understanding of a subject, and to make connections between these articles and reading you might be doing in other fields.

Dancers theorize about dancing as a way of knowing, a way of perceiving the world around us. As an expressive bodily discourse, dance can be analyzed not only in terms of the characters or images portrayed within the performance or choreography, but also in terms of how we approach the act of seeing. What is it about dancing bodies that encourages certain ways of looking? How do those ways of seeing change across time and different cultures? In addition to the material experience of dancers (which includes the physical conditions of working and performing, economic situations, etc.), dance is a form of cultural representation. This means that many of the articles presented here also engage with theories of visual appreciation derived for the most part from art, film, and media studies. Yet as a moving, most often live, performing art, dance refuses and confuses many of these theories of representation imported from other disciplines. This reader reflects efforts among scholars to create specifically dance theory, stretching cross-disciplinary discussions through a focus on dance's unique role in most cultures. For many authors, the practice of writing history is seen not only as the production of knowledge but also as an opportunity for self-reflection.

Finally, populate your dance history landscape with the dancers, choreographers, audience members, patrons, and impresarios we represent through our writings. They come from all over the globe and from vastly varied time periods. You will, through your reading, form different kinds of relationships with and understandings of these people, envisioning some of them in good detail while others are partially or dimly present. At times, dancer and author are one and the same, and you will be treated to the dancer's thinking, as well as a description of her dancing. At other times, you may see the dancer only as a nameless representative of a dance form or as an illustration or example for some argument made by an author. You may also notice (and mentally fill in) absent dancers. These may be the dancers closest to your heart: Irish step dancers; Flamenco dancers; cloggers; swing dancers; breakers; the stars of MTV, BET, and VH1; jazz dancers; Chinese opera performers; and the stars of movie musicals such as Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly.

Because many of you are heirs to a Western concert dance tradition, we hope that you will enjoy learning about the histories of the choreographers and performers who have worked and continue to work in this genre. Given both the global influences on American dance and the usefulness of cross-cultural comparisons, we have also included many writings about dance in different traditions. For some dancers, studying history is a way of finding a historical legacy, giving them a feeling of being brought into the fold—a way of building a spiritual home and identity within the dance world. For others, like Mark Dendy, it opens a fascinating world of choreographic inspiration. Among the dancers who populate these historical landscapes, you will find fierce individualists, believers in community and group process, those attracted to the spiritual nature of dance, and others struggling with perceptions of their skin colors, fitness, gender, or sexuality. We hope that their movement experiences, as well as the intellectual methodologies that frame the discussions of those experiences, will inspire you to continue your studies of dance.

PART ONE /

Thinking about Dance History: Theories and Practices

The Pleasures of Studying Dance History

After seeing Mark Dendy's concert, you're restless with the images and ideas set dancing in your head and body by his *I'm Going to My Room. . . .* You want to share what the dance means to you, that special insight you have about the work. How do you get that down on paper in a way that enlivens and enriches the dance, rather than trapping its energy in lines of type?

You open an envelope from a family friend containing treasures he found in cleaning out his grandparents' home. The envelope contains some old, hand-tinted images of Ruth St. Denis, and a letter from "Harry" postmarked April 12, 1914. In the letter, Harry told your friend's grandmother about his new job managing Ruth St. Denis, a "remarkable dancer," and detailing her performances in Paducah, Kentucky. The image of this sari-clad beauty, lifting her tray of incense, stepping out on stage in 1914 in what must have been a very Christian, very conservative town is intriguing. How might you capture that moment and uncover how St. Denis's audience experienced her dancing?

Issues related to your latest computer-mediated dance keep playing in your mind. The work includes a video of you dancing, but you've digitally altered the image: sometimes you're ten feet tall, sometimes only the outer contours of your body are apparent, and sometimes you float upward, undisturbed by gravity. There's something very playful and yet very sad about this virtual self. Even though you get to see yourself moving in new ways, the image strikes you as curiously lifeless, limited by your editing and animation skills and subject to the uncertainties of power outages and equipment failure. What, you wonder, is lost between the physical desire to move and the virtual traces of movement? There is a generational gap in people's reactions to your work, and you realize how much dance is related to the way people learn to see movement and digital images. How might you use your own experiences with this dance to critique your daily reliance on and embrace of technology?

Experiences like these are launching points for dance history, for asking questions about the role of dance within our culture. They are questions that push the process of historical, cultural, aesthetic, and philosophical inquiry forward, keeping historians visiting libraries and writing books, and students engrossed in dance history classes. Curiosity is but one of the very real pleasures of intellectual study. Authors in this part, "Thinking about Dance History: Theories and Practices," explore or illustrate many of these pleasures, including the joy of witnessing a dance as it unfolds and the rewards of reconstructing dance from historical evidence. Implicit in all the pleasures of dance study are the various meanings of the title of this volume—*Moving History/Dancing Cultures.* In studying moving bodies, we are ourselves moved and, potentially, as the conceptual body accommodates our actions and takes on the imprints of our dancing, we can move history.

You will notice in this introduction and throughout the volume that we broadly define dance scholarship as the physical and intellectual investigation of dance. We see it as both a cultural product (written descriptions of dancing) and a practice (the act of learning to see, learning to move). This hybrid field of inquiry is often called dance history, but may also include writings that could be labeled ethnography, anthropology, or arts criticism. In reflecting the blurring of these boundaries within dance studies, we hope to emphasize—as the authors whose works are collected in this volume richly illustrate—the interconnectedness of history in all its social, cultural, aesthetic, and intellectual dimensions.

Writers engage with culture as they explore the questions sparked by their piqued curiosities, examining the relationships between various images of the female dancer, say, or discussing the relationships between dancing and the representation of race or class. Other writers might critique their own practice, investigating how writing dance history relates to the colonialist legacy of Western epistemology (cataloguing the "other") or global economics. Theories are the fruits of thinking deeply about movement cultures. A theory is an explanation of how some cultural force or process operates and often involves exposing the constructed (nonnatural) character of our attitudes, habits of thought, or perceptions. Sometimes we dancers can get caught up in a dualistic mindset that sees analysis as opposed to creativity and separates theory from practice. Beginning to understand the myriad ways in which female dancers have been positioned historically as objects of the (presumably male) gaze can help young women dancers make strategic decisions about how they choose to represent themselves choreographically. Because theories and examples from other cultures allow us to pay attention to aspects of the moving world that we might have previously ignored, they help us become better dancers.

To witness a dance is to attend to it in a special way. To witness dancing is to make a commitment to meet the action with our senses sharpened—the stored, embodied fruits of our daily lives and academic studies at the ready. It also suggests a willingness to respond with our own personality and insights. The authors of the first two articles in this section, Deborah Jowitt in "Beyond Description" and Joan Acocella in "Imagining Dance," articulate this process of witnessing and inspire us to observe and to write about dancing more vividly. Jowitt conceptualizes movement description as a way of documenting the embodied, sensual nature of dance, as well as a mode of intellectual analysis. Good description preserves the lived motional sensation of dance. This is particularly important because most dances don't have the same permanence as literature or visual art. Yet, she argues, good description can also convey very pointed ideas: what the dance means, how it operates artistically, and how it refers to the world. Through a selection of examples, Jowitt illuminates how description can both pull apart and preserve the layered ways in which dance communicates. In her description of Graham's *Night Journey,* for example, she unpacks how a single moment of the dance is made rich with multiple meanings through Graham's use of a timing device. Because we know that the central character, Jocasta, is remembering past events, we simultaneously see the terror of living through a horrific event and the distanced quality of remembered action.

Joan Acocella thinks we understand dance through a special kind of intelligence, one different from the intelligences we use to dream or to understand math, poetry, or music. Part of the way we understand dance has to do with a "biochemical" affinity with patterns and relationships formed in space and time. We respond innately, she argues, to the steady flow of dancers moving rapidly down a diagonal path or to a small shape shooting through a larger, slower mass. Although Acocella says some aspects of dancing appeal to us in an immediate, visceral (what she describes as a "premoral") manner, her writing underscores the reciprocal relationships between our facility with language and our facility with apprehending (seeing/feeling) movement. Creating beautiful, nuanced descriptions both sharpens and depends upon our capacities to feel and to see movement.

Walking into the past, in search of some long-ago

dancer or lost dance event, is another pleasure of studying dance history. Studying history is always a current enterprise and dependent on the availability of resources, the needs of particular projects, and the lenses of current scholarship. Still, the possibility of finding yourself—however speculatively—in a different age, becoming familiar with dancers from another historical moment, or beginning to understand the experiences of movement in another culture, is a powerful lure. Part of this fascination lies in being exposed to differences, and part of it is the synthetic process that history necessitates, the act of building a world out of bits and pieces of the past using the force of your own imagination.

In "Searching for Nijinsky's *Sacre*," Millicent Hodson shares part of the research journey that led to her celebrated reconstruction of Vaslav Nijinsky's 1913 *Le Sacre du Printemps* for the Joffrey Ballet. Hodson lets us peek over her shoulder as she accumulates information from Nijinsky's diaries, sketchbooks, and costumes housed in London archives, and from the insights of scholars in various fields. She allows us to sit in on her conversations with Nijinsky's relatives and with dancers and musicians who had some connection with the ballet. She also lets us experience her thinking and, through her words and her sketches, the beginnings of the imaginative enterprise that was her reconstruction of Nijinsky's work. Hodson's sketches are especially evocative. As Hodson draws bodies with angled heads and turned in feet, and sketches dancers moving in taut lines or huddled in groups, we see her weave bits of evidence into the tapestry of the total dance event.

The pleasure of reenvisioning the present by placing the moving body at the center of historical study is the same pleasure a child experiences in running through a flock of pigeons, then watching them resettle, or that teachers experience when a previously quiet student comes up with something brilliant. The established order is interrupted, new patterns and relationships become apparent, and these cause us to adjust our perceptions and reassess our assumptions. The authors of the next two articles, Deidre Sklar and Joann Kealiinohomoku, launch convincing and cogent arguments for body-centered cultural inquiry. Sklar, in her "Five Premises for a Culturally Sensitive Approach to Dance," points out that movement is its own experience, a kind of knowledge not replicated by other life experiences. She believes that because moving calls up emotions and memories, it commits us to our ideals on a visceral level: "The concrete and sensory, in other words bodily, aspects of social life provide the glue that holds world views and cosmologies, values and political convictions, together."

Joann Kealiinohomoku's "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," first published in 1970, is a seminal piece of dance ethnology. In her detailed critique of the Western categorization of non-Western dance, Kealiinohomoku attempts to reverse our assumptions about differences between the dance forms of ballet and modern dance and ethnic dance forms, by making the familiar strange—by thinking of ballet as "ethnic" dance. She accomplishes this, in part, by carefully analyzing her experience of Hopi dances in the face of the often inadequate, generalized discussions of the nature of "primitive" dance. She counters a 1939 statement by John Martin, in which he says "in simpler cultures than ours we find a mass of art actually treated and practiced by the people as a whole" with her experience of the Hopi Bean Dances. These dances vary from village to village, both in an expected stylistic way and as a result of individual innovation. Hopi dancers recognize and critique these innovations, with "their 'own' [changes] usually (but not always) coming out as being aesthetically more satisfying."

The authors of the final articles in this section are all engaged in cultural critique. In "The Trouble with the Male Dancer," Ramsay Burt investigates past and current attitudes about men in dance. Burt analyzes the gender dynamic implicit in looking at dancers' bodies and argues that as the nineteenth century progressed, men became increasingly uncomfortable with looking at other men onstage. Class-consciousness was a critical element in this discomfort, as middle-class men increasingly came to disdain both the aristocratic foppishness of dance costuming and gesture, and what was perceived as crude (and therefore lower-class) displays of muscular strength. Burt shows how the solidification of bourgeois culture in Europe came at the expense of male dancing. *Real* men no longer made spectacles of themselves.

In "Strategic Abilities: Negotiating the Disabled Body in Dance," Ann Cooper Albright brings together her own temporary experience of disability, insights into the dance works and press materials of the company Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels, and her experiences in contact improvisation workshops for mixed-ability dancers. Through these, she theorizes that we see disability as binary—one is either disabled or nondisabled—and that our definition of who is a dancer follows this split. She deconstructs the exclusionary ideology of our culture which allows only tall, thin, beautiful, and able-bodied young women to be seen as dancers, reconceptualizing ways of watching movement that resist this ablist gaze. For Albright, "ability" can be reframed so that it is no longer simply an issue of defining standards of fitness, technical accomplishment, or beauty, but one of recognizing a variety of gifts and facilities—learning to reinvent dance to suit personal needs and to realize pleasure in many kinds of movement.

In "Dancing in the Field: Notes from Memory," Sally Ann Ness discusses dance lessons she took in Bali and the Philippines. Ness provides us with an analysis of what she learned, discussing movement as embodying cultural patterns of partnering, hand contact, energy usage, balance, and stepping. She theorizes that because dancing is physically exposing, allowing others to see both our talents and our nervousness, it creates an immediate rapport with relative strangers. She also critiques the nature of the ethnographic text by calling into question its refinement, its distance from the field experience, and the safety of its academic anonymity. Her fieldnotes (her written-downs) appear without being written up into a polished text; this she contrasts with the sophisticated "performed" quality of the rest of her writing. Ness produces a sense of restlessness and flux in the text by describing her movement from home office to field site to home office, and finally through the streets of Davao City, Philippines.

Albright's and Ness's approaches to scholarship are persuasive because of the generosity—the self exposure—involved in their writing. The pleasures of cultural critique and of theorizing come, increasingly, with a responsibility to position oneself inside the research. Albright and Ness are so clear in doing this that their writings sit somewhere between memoir, ethnography, and dance history. This is not just a matter of inserting a personal story, but of continually making clear one's negotiation of the intellectual and personal material throughout the text. Albright exposes her changing relationship to issues of disability by interweaving her life experiences throughout a critical discussion of cultural representation. Ness positions herself in her text as a cultural outsider who looks to expert dancers within the culture for "authentic" insights. Yet at the same time, she also critiques this outsider position, recognizing the complexities and lived realities of a colonial legacy. The ending of her essay is especially moving, letting us understand her misgivings about the "war" of anthropological contact and her personal, physical sensations of intrusion and aggression.

Making your relationship to your research clear is especially important in a world where questions of positionality are increasingly complex. Writers have the same kinds of complicated personal and educational histories that mark, and enrich, the work of contemporary choreographers. We need to both take advantage of and explicate the issues involved in hybridity. What, for example, are the ramifications of studying a Nigerian dance form using a Western analysis system such as Laban-based movement analysis? Or those of using French or American feminist theory to talk about the

work of a Korean choreographer? What "gaze" do we use to evaluate Goth club dancing or the works of gay choreographers? When you position yourself within your writing rather than presenting yourself as an authority on the subject at hand, you create an opening for the use of a broad number of scholarly tools. You also invite others to think along with you, allowing them to experience some of the pleasures of historical study.

Beyond Description: Writing beneath the Surface

DEBORAH JOWITT

In a 1990 review of Susan Marshall's *Articles of Faith*, Joan Acocella noted the references one might draw from the dance—tall Eileen Thomas as a shaman or priest, Jews pushing through the desert, a community struggling to fight the ugliness within, and so on. However, she went on to say that the power of the piece does not lie in our ability to connect Marshall's work with social meanings or to deduce "archetypal dramatic" action: "It is the qualities that belong specifically to the movement—its shape in the air, its weight, speed, attack—that speak to us secretly. That is why a would-be profound dance may seem frivolous, a happy dance seem sad, or vice versa; because the movement has told us the secret truth behind the narrative."

And that is one reason why it has always seemed so important to me that we who write about the famously evanescent art of dance ground our responses in the work itself, providing enough of a sense of what happened to support formal analogies, considerations of meaning, style, social significance, historical connections, opinionated response—whatever criticism can legitimately take up. The point is, in searching for what a dance may mean, not to lose sight of what it is, or appears to be. The other reason that description figures more importantly in criticism of dance than in criticism of any other art form is dance's (let us not forget it for a minute) ephemerality. It doesn't hang about on walls to be revisited or wait by your bed with a bookmark in it or spill out of your glove compartment ready to be popped into a car's cassette deck.

Descriptive writing—a certain kind of it—is the best way I know to assert the interdependence of content and form, of narration and movement's "secret truths." Suzanne Langer, or perhaps one of her exegetes (from whom I once took a course at the New School), offered the example of the whirlpool made by water flowing down a drain. We can explain the phenomenon in terms of impetus, gravity, and the shape of the basin, but the whirlpool itself is a created thing and vanishes when the faucet is turned off. We can attempt to dissect the mutual wizardry that form and content in art exercise upon each other, but the impact of the whole may slip away in the process. It is that created illusion that I yearn to evoke through words.

Martha Graham's *Night Journey* can't be reduced to a synopsis claiming it as the tragedy of Oedipus told from Jocasta's point of view, any more than it can be explained only by an analysis of the huge, angular, percussive moves that wrench the dancers' bodies and psyches around the stage. Ceremonious processions give it immense formality; like a Noh actor, the protagonist moves from remembering action to re-entering it. So her hobbled advance—hands lifting to frame silent calls for help, while Oedipus reaches from behind to touch her breasts, her belly—affects us in a complex way: we see a woman fleeing impending rape *and* a woman in the act of remembering that moment, her gestures polished and restrained by the passage of time (in itself an artistic illusion). *And* we see a creature stalked by an intruder (we feel the disruption in our

own senses), her every step forward blocked by a new impediment hooking around her, invisible until it touches her. In recent years, there has been grumbling about the attention some American dance critics (me certainly among them) give to descriptive writing. Complaints link it to now suspect "formalism." In 1993, an article by Roger Copeland entitled "Dance Criticism and the Descriptive Bias" appeared in Britain's *Dance Theatre Journal.* Copeland laments dance's failure to produce a Clement Greenberg, a Charles Rosen, a Lionel Trilling. True, he praises dance writers' ability to capture in words the quality of dancing. Nor is he pushing for theorizing unmoored to the art in question ("I for one am not anxious to see the sensuous surface of the dancer's body vaporized beneath the blowtorch of deconstruction").

However, Copeland sets up a (to me) disturbing polarity between "description" and "ideas," which he finds descriptive writing essentially devoid of (although he fails to clarify what he means by "ideas" and how they differ from "theory"). He blames the supposed "bias for description" on a semi-conscious collusion among choreographers, spectators, and writers to preserve the ineffableness of dance—a desire he considers a kind of willful primitivism, related to dance's power to induce kinaesthesia, and to the allure its ritual roots and its semblance of wholeness have for a fractured contemporary society. It's as if the anti-intellectual stance legendarily attributed to dancers and choreographers is now presumed to have infected critics as well, and that the "describer's" responses are too intuitive, too close to the work, or demand too little brain power to count as intellectual. In other words, we dive in and come up dripping.

Interestingly, judging by their remarks, some choreographers agree with Copeland. They want their work dignified by the intellectual display and distanced tone they see in some film criticism and art criticism. They want to be linked to trends in art and popular culture and *fin de siècle* malaise (as indeed I'm eager to do—if not on a weekly basis).

The casting of description in an adversarial role to "ideas" troubles me—as if the more description a review contains, the lighter it becomes. This is a new wrinkle in the mind-body split. Before I attempt to argue further, or to analyze "description," I'd like to examine it as an aspect of critical theories that stress focusing on the work itself. The "new" literary criticism that emerged in America in the 1920s and became prominent in the 1940s and 1950s concerned itself less with what a text meant than with how it revealed that meaning. To T. S. Eliot, reducing a poem to its "prose core" indeed reduced it; instead, the task of the critic was to exhibit the "differential, residue, or tissue which keeps the object poetical or entire." Such a view was certainly once shared by artists (Picasso dismissed some art critics with "People who try to *explain* pictures are usually barking up the wrong tree").

It was a critical bias toward content (narrative, artistic biography, social ramifications, etc.) that Susan Sontag reacted to in her influential 1960s essays in *Against Interpretation.* She was not, remember, against interpretation in its broadest sense; brilliant analysis, as in her examination of Alain Resnais's film *Muriel,* gave the lie to that. I for one gladly latched on to Sontag's ideas as vindication of my goals. She put it enticingly: "The best criticism dissolves considerations of content into those of form." And: "Equally valuable would be acts of criticism which would supply a really accurate, sharp, loving description of the appearance of a work of art." I believed that for many years, and, to some extent, still believe it.

If I have slightly altered my view of critical writing, it is in part because dance has changed; so have the contexts in which we can view it. Although dance videos are not as common or as numerous as CDs on store shelves, the critic of the nineties has access to enough of them (and affordable home equipment to play them on) to make comparing and tracing bloodlines a process you can fall right into, entranced. (Coincidence handed me, juxtaposed on one tape, Shirley Clarke's 1957 film of Anna Sokolow's solo *Bullfight* and Madonna's recent video *Say Goodbye.* Guess which woman ends up on satin sheets with the matador.)

Also, much of the art that we were writing about in the 1960s and early 1970s seemed designed to thwart attempts to psychoanalyze it. Choreographers like Trisha Brown and Twyla Tharp shunned fiction and drew our attention to structure and process (and profoundly luscious movement). For some time, Merce Cunningham and George Balanchine had been telling us in maddeningly, charmingly elliptical statements that the movement was the meaning. The "sensuous surfaces" Sontag referred to had almost nothing to do with superficiality, and writing about them—describing them—could be an intoxicatingly deep experience.

Since the mid-eighties, however, dance has fallen in love with narrative, drama, text, social and political commentary, and the heady postmodern welter of eclecticism, historical reference, and deconstruction of previous works of art. Art critic Suzy Gablik writes, "In the multi-dimensional and slippery world of postmodern art, anything goes with anything, like a game without rules. Floating images such as those we see in the painting of David Salle maintain no relationship with anything at all, and meaning becomes detachable like keys on a keyring."

If this is true, today's art and structuralist critique are made for one another. Digging into the work to extract allusions and archetypal elements can become a seductive brain game.

I resist this to a degree. Certainly the dance of today and my own studies in history have made me more aware that, individual creativity notwithstanding, art is indeed a cultural artifact, and as anthropologist Clifford Geertz points out, so are our responses to it. But because of that we need to keep grounding speculation in the created worlds before us. Performance artist Diane Torr disguises herself as a man to perform wildly stereotypical male "numbers." She gives cross-dressing workshops. Amid the critical discourse on empowerment of women and how a woman feels in drag, surely it is important to confront (although I didn't until the act of writing this) the conflicts within the image itself: an "imperfect" or ersatz male masquerading as a self-defined quintessential male. Surely the contrast between round, smooth cheeks and assertive moustache, the loud, depthless voice, and the big, gruff gestures that make us laugh—*because* we know that this is a woman—need to be attended to, to be "described." In them reside truths about contemporary gender styles and essential gender differences.

Description at its best is not simply about surface. It hints at what lurks within a work. It links images through imaginative wordplay. The patterns of language can echo the rhythms and the impetus of dancing, as well as the responses of the spectator. I am not plumping for reportage or for reviews that are 80 percent description. Certainly facts are useful, as in Edwin Denby's squaring off, early in his great review of Balanchine's *Agon* in 1957, "The curtain rises on a stage bare and silent. Upstage four boys are seen with their backs to the public and motionless. They wear the company's dance uniform. Lightly they stand in an intent stillness. They whirl, four at once, to face you. The soundless whirl is a downbeat that starts the action."

This is an elegant and necessary laying of the framework within which other less linear forms of description will bloom. But blow-by-blow accounts of physical actions are useful only in small, skilled doses. To say, "She slowly extends her right arm diagonally forward, at the some time stretching one leg to the rear. Then she bends the leg on which she is standing and inclines her ribcage slightly toward her hipbone . . . " is not only singularly unentrancing to read, its pacing may actually violate the truth of an image that the eye and mind have grasped in a second or two as a fluid entity. Denby could get away with following a vivid, forthright image of Tamara Toumanova ("the force with which she rams her squared-off toe shoe into the floor") with a questionably fancy one ("her free leg deploys its mass from the leg she stands on"). A leg deploying its mass is hard enough to countenance in Denby. Those influenced by Denby (as indeed we all were) can flounder quite dreadfully attempting similar exercises.

Criticism can't provide a print analogue for a dance. Why should it? For one thing, criticism is irrevocably

subjective, however fair-minded it may be; description can only offer some accurate facts, a pinpointing of style, and an evocation of a work's essential nature—a vision filtered through particular eyes and a particular sensibility.

In descriptive passages I admire, the self-reflection that Copeland misses in dance criticism has sometimes occurred (perhaps even half-consciously) *before* the description is written, and is embedded in it. Back in 1981, I followed a not especially memorable description of a Senegalese dance troupe (the polyrhythmic display of softly thudding feet, the nodding heads, rolling shoulders, and churning hips) by this sentence: "I imagine the dancers take their bodies apart at night before sleeping and put a pat of butter in every joint." I was startled then to see this sentence appear, typed, apparently, by my fingers. It surprises me now. Where did it come from? It says something, it seems to me, about the secret aura that surrounds ritual, about my own awe in the face of admired "otherness," about the bedrock of African tradition still informing this modern theatrical company, and about my (and by implication, possibly other spectators') connection to the whole thing on some intuitive level. Perhaps I'm making one frail sentence bear too much weight. The burden may not be theories, but I *think* they are ideas.

Years ago, Laura Shapiro produced a dead-on image of Murray Louis showing off his impishly flexible body "like a housewife with a new kitchen, every dial and switch activating something sudden and impressive. Quick shifts of weight, spontaneous rebounds from one extremity to the next, the twitch of a shoulder or a knee, these charge him with a recurrent flow of power."

Not only do I find this a supremely accurate picture of Louis's personal style, but the simile situates him in a playful, possibly lightweight world in which the body is separated from its controlling agent—a gadget for its owner's endlessly delighted manipulating. Puppet and puppeteer rolled into one. Shapiro *could* have gone on to discuss the relation between Louis and his mentor Alwin Nikolais, who was once a puppeteer, to lay out Nikolais's reaction against the ego-centered dramas of modern dance, and theories about the puppet by Heinrich Kleist and Gordon Craig. But the ideas gleaming in her description are provocative in themselves.

Marcia Siegel's account of Douglas Dunn in Graz in 1976 creates print structures that evoke Dunn's casualness, bluntness, and eccentricity: "Later, arriving downstage in a corner, he found some stairs and a door in a wall. There he did a set of variations on whether to continue or make his escape. He'd lunge determinedly at the stairs, panic, whirl down them again, put a hand out the door, reconsider—till he was weaving and feinting in an ecstasy of indecision."

How telling that "he found some stairs . . . "

When we write about something as informal as Douglas Dunn moseying around in Graz, our choice of words and the length and shape of sentences may—with luck—differ from those used to evoke Balanchine's ripe, dreamily romantic *Liebeslieder Waltzes* or Molissa Fenley's amazonian solo *Rite of Spring.* Often, in great criticism, the prose style mirrors something of the dance style.

Joan Acocella fixes her eye and heart on Mark Morris's *Strict Songs:* "Five couples (the full cast) are onstage. In each couple, one person lies down on the floor on his back, and the other person, placing the first person's feet against his stomach, launches himself into the air, where he levitates, balanced atop the first person's legs, as the curtain comes down.

This is a hellishly difficult maneuver. For the second person—the 'flier'—not to fall, the feet must be placed exactly right on the abdomen, and the takeoff into the air must be done with exactly the right thrust. We watch the dancers going through all this with immense care and deliberation. But then once fliers are launched, we are shown an amazing sight: five people floating in the air. They have died and gone to heaven. At the same time, in the effort they have gone through—some of them are still trembling as they float there—we see how hard it is to die, how hard to get to heaven. Or rather, we feel it, in the body, because it is the body's struggle that we have witnessed."

As in Morris's dance, the meticulous, factual setting

up of the situation not only anchors the last burst of poetry, it engenders it, just as the actions of the dancers produce an image that goes beyond the placement of foot and the girding of muscles.

Sometimes the insights that emerge through the descriptive mode can literally bring tears to my eyes. When Arlene Croce says of Balanchine's *Ivesiana,* "[It] is about that American distance, that equalizing yet comfortless space that separates Americans from Americans under the neutral American sky. It is about the lack of perimeters and journeys pressing onward despite that lack. It is about situations, not destinations, and in it the stage is a box with no sides. Dancers come and go and seem to fall off the edges into eternity."

Analogy is rooted in observation—as fluid as the transactions between pond water and fish. In such an ecosystem, everything nourishes everything else. And ideas spring like water lilies.

Imagining Dance

JOAN ACOCELLA

Periodically, one or another dance organization, to promote mutual understanding, will stage a choreographers-meet-the-critics symposium, and at such gatherings someone always asks the critics whether, when they set out to review something, they bother to find out what the artist is trying to do, what his or her intention is. I take this to be a very naive question, and very demeaning to choreographers, as if their work were so obscure and incomplete that it needed to carry a statement of intent. Worse, it implies that the truth of a dance lies somewhere other than in the dance, that the dance is a sort of side-effect, whereas the real event is the intellectual process that supposedly underlies it.

To all appearances, intellect does not *under*lie the kinetic imagination, but instead is hooked up to it in an oblique, sidelong manner, perhaps something like the hookup between the eye and the ear. There is no question that the eye and the ear are connected, and affect each other's functioning, yet each lives its own life, has its own neurology, its own range of sensations, and if one dies, the other cannot make it live again. Likewise, Balanchine might have said to himself, "I think I'll make a *Midsummer Night's Dream* ballet." He might also have said, "I think I'll end it with a pas de deux that, after all those lovers' quarrels, will show love's harmony restored."[1] But then the kinetic imagination would have taken over, with its own logic, its own world of gesture and meaning.

Consider that pas de deux, for example, the Act II pas de deux from *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* created in 1962 for Violette Verdy and Conrad Ludlow. There are things in it—little bows, entwinings of the arms, an ecstatic backbend at the end—of which, if they were described to you in words, you might say, "Ah yes, love's harmony restored," for they are related to the mimodrama of real life. But there are hundreds of other things in here that have no clear relation to life. What does it mean, for instance, when the woman stands in front of the man in second position on point, and he lifts her, turns her 180 degrees—while in the air, she performs one soft beat with her feet—and then places her down again in second position on point? What are we to make of this fastidious little action? I could say a lot of things—about the intimacy of so small an adjustment, about how the little entrechat seems tucked in like a secret, about how the man, moving the woman this way twice, turns her 360 degrees, thus drawing a perfect circle around them, which seems to shut them off and enclose them. In other words, I could try to make connections between the ballet and the facts of our normal life, and that is what I would do if I were reviewing it. But do we fool ourselves that because we can make these connections, the ballet is really like life and moves with a parallel, translatable logic? If so, what are we to make of the fact that the woman has those peculiar shoes on, and the man is wearing tights instead of trousers, and they are doing all this in a lighted box while we sit in the dark and watch it, and pay money to do so?

No, dance is not a portrayal of the way we live, and to think that it is seems to me to betray an excessive attachment to the way we live, or the way we explain our lives to ourselves, in the language of reason and morals. As everyone knows, the mind can operate in completely different languages—dream, music, higher mathematics—and dance is one of those languages. Its logic is not discursive but lyric. Like music, it is a force field, an orchestration of lines of force, lines of energy, and that is the only way to start understanding it. Dance is not a story; it is a song.

By this I don't mean that dance is devoid of psychology. As Merce Cunningham has repeatedly protested, anything done by the human body is "expressive." I would guess that anything originating in the human brain is probably expressive—that is, marked by intention and emotion—and if it weren't, we wouldn't bother with it. Even a dance that aims to be emotionless is filled with emotion. When I watch Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A,* which Rainer created with the intent of making a dance devoid of all hierarchy, repetition, accent, or any other form of emphasis that might create a human drama, what holds my attention is the human drama of that intent: its sheer futility and the touching, upright, girls-college seriousness with which it is pursued. I like Rainer for trying to do this; the world needs these anti-sentimental campaigns. She fails nobly, and this makes an interesting dance.

But when we look at dance not as moral fable but as an orchestration of energies, I think we reach a psychology that lies entirely apart from morality—something deep in our experience, something that may correspond to actual biochemical processes. Who knows? I am talking about very basic facts of dance, patterns of energy flow that we see repeatedly, such as:

- somebody suddenly hopping in out of nowhere
- a lateral line of dancers moving downstage simultaneously, in a ground sweep
- a line of dancers (often a line of couples) flowing out of an upstage wing and moving downstage on the diagonal, as in a polonaise
- displacement, where something small (a solo dancer or a couple) is replaced by something large (a mass of dancers), or vice versa
- cutting through, where something small and sharp (such as one dancer, moving fast) flies through something large and "soft" (a mass of dancers)

These are only a few. They are the choreographer's stock in trade, the things dance drama is made of. But I think they are also reflections of deep habits of human consciousness. Take displacement. In Mark Morris's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* there is a moment when a dancer representing the lark hops around the stage all alone, in a picky, birdlike little way. Then, as he exits, a great mass of dancers flies onto the stage behind him—the whole flock. This is a thrilling moment, just in theatrical terms. It is also a pretty exact representation of what is happening in the score (vocal solo followed by big sweep of orchestral forces). But it is more than this. I think it reflects all experience that our brains know and love, the experience of being overwhelmed by a huge rush of something. The sudden constriction or dilation of the blood vessels, the neurotransmitters flooding the synapses of the neural pathways, terror, wonder, illness: many things happen to us not evenly, but in a big flood, and dangerous though this is, we love it, like the hero of Poe's "A Descent into the Maelstrom," who stares down into the screaming vortex and then, with something like joy, descends. When Morris's little bird is replaced by the huge, cascading flock, our very bones answer, "Yes, we know."

Now take an example of cutting through. In Balanchine's *Square Dance* there is a moment when the ballerina, having been off the stage for a minute or so, suddenly comes tearing back in an arc of coupés jetés, cutting a path through the mass of dancers on the stage. This is approximately the opposite of the bird maneuver. There, something big and massy followed something small and sharp. Here, something small and sharp slices through something masslike. Again, it is very thrilling, in a psychological but premoral sense. Like shot through a goose, I always think when I see it.

2. Merrill Ashley dancing *Square Dance.* Choreography by George Balanchine, copyright © The George Balanchine Trust, photograph by Steven Caras, copyright © Steven Caras.

And it has all the innocently brutal pleasure that we get from that phrase, before we remember that the goose dies from the shot. (This is what I mean by premoral. These pleasures have nothing to do with the way we feel the world should be.) We love to see small things cut through big things: the bicyclist cut through the tangle of traffic, a sharp argument cut through a lot of nonsense. Again, I would bet there is a biochemical basis for this pattern. In any case, it is a pattern that repeats and repeats itself in our thoughts and our art. And it is full of psychological meaning, from the most elementary (the pleasure of being small and fast as opposed to big and slow) to the most advanced (love of ingenuity, respect for the "little guy," pride in hearing a different drummer). These are the chimes that ring in us when Merrill Ashley flies onstage in those coupés jetés.

I will take one more example, though this one is more complicated and not premoral. Again and again in nineteenth-century ballets there is a moment when the hero walks onstage, finds a large number of women who look alike and are dressed alike (the corps de ballet), and seeks among them for the one woman who is his. (The trope is repeated in the Astaire-Rogers movie *Shall We Dance?* and in a rather surreal fashion, for the women not only all look like Ginger Rogers, they are all wearing Ginger Rogers masks, including Ginger Rogers. Fred Astaire has a hard job here.) The psychoanalysts would say this is an extrapolation from the childhood experience of separation from the mother. Siegfried seeking Odette among the swan maidens is only our third-grade self, coming out of school, scanning the group of mothers for the one who is *our* mother. But I would say that that too is only one facet of a more comprehensive and generalized experience, that of matching.

In Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes tells the story that once upon a time all human creatures were spherical, and they were so powerful and happy, rolling around, that the gods, in order to protect themselves, split the humans in half. So that is what we are—halves of former wholes—and we spend our lives seeking our lost half. For Plato, as for psychoanalysts, this is a theory of love, but I would guess there is a vast range of mental and biological experience that is governed by the same effort: to make things fit together, to have part answer part. From the duplication of our cells, with the DNA strands separating and then manufacturing new partners for themselves, to the most complex intellectual action, such as understanding a difficult argument or making one's own argument understood, this matching process occupies our lives. In fact, one could say that with its dialectical opposite, the process of forging into the unknown, it *is* our lives. In any case, our whole selves recognize it onstage, and not just when Siegfried finds Odette, but in much more elementary pairings: spatial, dynamic, rhythmic. When the circle of dancers at stage right matches the one at stage left, when the ballerina's staccato phrasing matches that of the violin accompanying her—whenever something calls and something answers—we rejoice. (And sometimes when things don't match we rejoice. Indeed, we feel a thrill of vicarious disobedience. And then we wait for things to match in the end.)

Going back now to the Act II pas de deux of Balanchine's *Midsummer Night's Dream,* where is the meaning in that dance? Not in the backbend, but again, in an elementary pattern of energies: here, the deployment of huge forces in small gestures. Nothing could be fuller, more round and rich and brimming, than the flow of dance energy in this piece. It never quickens, it never halts; it flows and flows, like honey from the vine. Yet it is dispensed, for the most part, in small, polite, fastidious gestures. We have already looked at one of them. Another, its match, is the supported cabriole, which occurs again and again in the piece. The man lifts the woman; she taps her feet together; he puts her down. Rhythmically, it is like the beating of a heart in a body at rest. Pictorially, it is like a beautiful confinement: she is running, he is catching her. Dynamically, it is gentle and precise, like an action they both know how to do, have done a hundred times. So this is the feeling of great power in a quiet state, the calm of having plenty and not having to use it up. There are many things that fit such a pattern—a full stomach, a trust fund—but one of the most obvious things is married love, and that, of course, is why this dance is the way it is: because it is being given at a wedding, the wedding of the lovers from Act I, and it is intended to show the peaceful ways of a *lived* love after the storms of love's discovery. Nothing in the dance actually represents married love; nothing in the dance represents anything. What is happening is that the dance is drawing on patterns of energy that we associate with certain habits—habits that, in turn, further down the road, we associate with marriage. The dance wasn't caused by, can't be explained by, didn't grow out of the idea of marriage. Rather, marriage and this dance are two branches growing out of the same trunk, both equally real.

As I have said, I think the imaginative process by which this dance is made may have a strong biological basis. And that may be the thing that has enabled dance, unlike almost every other modern art form in the West, to be passed down by memory. We remember it easily (and also adapt it easily) because it so deeply belongs to us. I don't mean by this that dance is more natural than language, or more true. I see dance that is untrue every day of the week: dance that is full of clichés and ballast and nonsense. As for language, I think it is a heroic endeavor. No, each is as true and false as the other. People who say that movement does not lie generally assume that language is a doctored or at least indirect version of truths that dance expresses directly. This is the reverse of the position of those who want us, before we review a dance, to determine the choreographer's intent: they think that dance is an in-

direct version of truths that language can speak directly. Neither view is correct. And this should come as a comfort, at least to dance-watchers. So much of life is spent in the difficult task of trying to understand things, to see *through* them to what's on the other side. But the truths of dance are not on the other side. They are in the very bones of the dance, which our bones know how to read, if we let them.

Note

1. I offer this only for the sake of argument. The truth is certainly that Balanchine's kinetic imagination was set in motion, by love of Mendelssohn's music, long before he framed the intention of making the ballet.

Searching for Nijinsky's *Sacre*

MILLICENT HODSON

When Seiji Ozawa recently conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Carnegie Hall, December 13, 1979), the audience saw something of the legendary premiere of 1913. Ozawa looked like a Nijinsky dancer—knees bent, toes turned in, his body leaning into the ostinati that shape the music, his arms swinging out from the core of the rhythm until they seemed to touch the tympani. He was conducting, of course, not dancing; but for some members of the audience his movements suddenly evoked photographs, sketches, and written accounts that survive from the original production.

Nijinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* is a mystery. The few remaining documents connected with the ballet are considered relics of a lost masterpiece. *Le Sacre* is celebrated as the harbinger of modern dance, the work that broke the ground of twentieth-century choreography. The ballet released tremendous energy; then it disappeared. Five performances at the Champs-Elysées in Paris beginning May 29, 1913, three at the Drury Lane in London beginning July 11 in the same year, and that was all. For decades dancers and scholars have assumed that reconstruction of the ballet was impossible. A year ago I realized that the last possible moment to recover it had come. Participants from the original production still survive. While crucial documents may surface in the future, nothing can bring back the experience of the artists who lived the event.

Le Sacre climaxed the pre-war period of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. It was an innovation the company itself could hardly bear. Stravinsky's polyrhythmic music with constant time changes and dissonant chords was difficult enough. But Nijinsky's choreography caused mutiny in the corps. The dancers did not abandon their ballet technique for Nijinsky's "primitive" steps without a struggle. Such verbal descriptions of the dance as do exist reveal in Nijinsky a remarkable sense of design. He seems to have liberated the energy inherent in rhythm, color, and line. Imagine, for example, the end of Part I—women in scarlet dresses, their dark braids flying, "run wildly round the stage in a great circle," racing "to the notes of the main theme."[1] Inside and against their fiery circle run men in white robes "ceaselessly splitting up into tiny groups," their smaller circles swinging "in threefold counterpoint."[2] "The people dance passionately on the earth," the libretto says, "sanctifying it and becoming one with it."[3] To see these swirling circles of red and white against the vibrant green décor, and the dancers pulling at the polyrhythms to release their force—an audience today would *still* be astonished.

The premiere of the ballet was a *succès de scandale*. Parisians were incited to riot by the strange tension of the dancing and the stark contrasts of the décor and music. Stravinsky's score came as a shock, and even still it has power to excite, amaze, and break old habits of hearing. *Le Sacre du Printemps* brought people to their feet, hissing or hushing, fighting for or against the event on the stage. One elegant lady, armed with a hat pin, went straight for the throat of Jean Cocteau,

24. Ibid., n. 4.

25. Jewsiewicki, "Painting in Zaire," 131.

26. Ibid., 130.

27. Ibid., 134.

28. I am not arguing that Central Pende masqueraders "influence" painters, or vice versa, but that both practices emerge from a shared cultural matrix. Susan Vogel has come to a similar conclusion: "Like nineteenth-century traditional art, virtually all strains of twentieth-century African art are client or market driven. . . . Today, the interaction between African artist and patron in general continues the traditional relationship between artist and client, and between the artist and the work." Susan Vogel, "Introduction: Digesting the West," in Vogel, *Africa Explores,* 20–21.

29. Jewsiewicki, "Painting in Zaire," 130.

30. Bogumil Jewsiewicki, "Collective Memory and the Stakes of Power: A Reading of Popular Zairian Historical Discourses," *History in Africa* 13 (1986): 211.

31. Ibid., 219.

32. Fabian, "Popular Culture in Africa," 1.

33. Ibid., 4.

34. Siegfried Kracauer, *Orpheus in Paris: Offenbach and the Paris of His Time,* trans. Gwenda David and Eric Mosbacher (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1938).

35. T. O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890–1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

36. Mary Jo Arnoldi, "Rethinking Definitions of African Traditional and Popular Arts," *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 80.

37. Lawrence Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People," in *Rethinking Popular Culture,* ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 188; and Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow, Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 234.

38. Lawrence Levine, "William Shakespeare and the American People," in Mukerji and Schudson, *Rethinking Popular Culture,* 189.

39. Ibid., 187–188.

40. See Kracauer, *Orpheus in Paris;* Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa;* Karin Barber, "Popular Arts in Africa," *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987); and George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

Headspin: Capoeira's Ironic Inversions

BARBARA BROWNING

Capoeira is a game, a fight, and a dance, composed of kicks, acrobatics, and traditional Kongo dance movements. One doesn't speak of "dancing" or "fighting" capoeira but rather of "playing": *jogar capoeira.*[1] Or one can eliminate the substantive and use the simple verb *vadiar:* to bum around. And yet capoeiristas universally take the game very seriously. Most, when asked to define it in a word, call it an art.[2] In New York I once saw a capoeirista wearing a button that said "Doing strange things in the name of art." And it's true, they will go to extremes.

While some people will tell you there are two basic styles of capoeira,[3] there are in fact as many as there are great capoeiristas. But certain generalizations apply. Capoeira is always played in a *roda*—the same circle formation that delimits all traditional Afro-Brazilian dance. Two players enter the roda at a time, and their focus remains on each other, while they may pivot either clockwise or counterclockwise throughout the game. Motion is generally circular. Kicks and sweeps are more often than not arched or spinning, and they loop together in a series of near misses. The ideal is to keep one's eyes fixed on one's opponent. At times this necessitates having eyes in the back of one's head. But the relative placement of body parts or facial features seems to be constantly ridiculed anyway. The capoeirista spends a good deal of time inverted, with hands planted firmly like feet on the ground, feet slapping happily like palms in the air. The upside-down face, like those magical cartoons from our childhood where the hair became a beard and the creased forehead a smirking, lipless mouth, grins at your attempts to fix it. And still, those eyes are on you.

How do I reconcile this silly picture with what I want to communicate of capoeira's elegance and even gravity? The game can be humorous, but it is not self-ridiculing—at least not simply so. This is partly because of the obvious physical prowess involved, but even more because of the understanding of the role of capoeira in popular histories.

As usual, a linear history of capoeira is far from satisfactory. The popular histories which circulate most commonly seem to pit forces of influence against each other in a struggle for control of the game: African versus European or Asian values and gestural vocabularies, ruffianism versus links to the military police, tradition versus corruption, chaos versus discipline. Depending on one's perspective, these influences may seem to be playing out a struggle between good and evil. But capoeira, whatever one's style or perspective, always ironizes the notion of Manichean extremes. Just when you think you've determined who are the good and the bad, it all suddenly strikes you rather as an aesthetic issue, excepting that you can't tell anymore what is ugly and what is beautiful. And an upside-down mug is grinning at you, pug-ugly, gorgeous.

Nobody generally "wins" a game of capoeira—although in recent years there have sprung up various tournaments and other events—but that's all part of the story. There are takedowns, and certainly the abil-

ity to apply them effectively adds to one's prestige as a capoeirista. But gratuitous, unprovoked violence or even humorless humiliation of one's opponent (or partner?) is never admired. The question is at what point provocation occurs. In a tight, "inside" game (*jogo de dentro*) when the players are interweaving spinning kicks, the agility and precision of one opens a precise space for the elegant partnering of the other. But there may be a moment imperceptible to a spectator when somehow synchronicity shatters and there are in fact two opposing forces. Someone provoked. Someone sprung malice, which was always inherent in the moves.

However they have developed, the question of where these moves originated is one that inspires impassioned arguments from most capoeiristas. Capoeira is decidedly an Afro-Brazilian art, but which half of this term should be weighted? The simplest little narrative in circulation is something like this: prior to their captivity and enslavement in Brazil, the people of the Kongo-Angola region practiced certain kicking games for sport and recreation. In Brazil, the games were prohibited for all too obvious reasons. But the Kongo people continued practicing their games in seclusion. The roda was formed as a protective circle, and the choreographic elements—as well as music—were added to disguise a fight as a dance. Repression of the practice continued even after abolition. The players invented a special rhythm, *cavalaria*, an imitation of the sound of approaching horses' hooves, to warn each other of police surveillance, and on that cue the capoeira became an "innocent" samba. In other words, capoeiristas generally acknowledge that a martial arts technique and choreographic and rhythmic vocabularies were brought from Africa. But the strategic blending of fight and dance occurred in Brazil, under specific pressures. And while this strategy appears to have been directed against forces outside the roda de capoeira, it became the fundamental strategy *within* the game. Dance—as seduction, illusion, deception—became dangerous, and kicks became elements of choreography. The Portuguese tolerated the roda de capoeira because it was merely dance—perceived as motion without purpose or effect, other than aesthetic. And within the circles, Africans in Brazil trained like fighters in the art of dissimulation—how to grin upside down.

This story is typical of those recounted in the capoeira community—although there are variations placing greater and lesser emphasis on tradition or change, on Africanness or Brazilianness. Ethnographic narratives of origin also vary, although the most powerful arguments come from scholars who view themselves as advocates of African diasporic culture. Righteously countering centuries of European dismissal of sophisticated African traditions, scholars like Robert Farris Thompson, Kenneth Dossar, and Gerhard Kubik,[4] have given a strong case for the ever-fresh inscription of Kongo cosmology in capoeira's designs. I find these arguments powerful not simply because of their convincing "evidence" but because of their commitment to the principles of resistance which are at the heart of capoeira.

More politicized capoeiristas in Brazil also tend to emphasize African sources. If the seeds of the game existed in Angola but the intention or strategy developed in Brazil, then it would appear that capoeira must be acknowledged as an authentically Afro-Brazilian form. But when black nationalist Brazilians regard capoeira as an African form, their argument is strong. If one recognizes that Bahia, the capital of capoeira and Afro-Brazilian culture generally, resembles a West African port city much more than it does any city in Latin America, the gap of the Atlantic begins to seem quite incidental. The historical fact of forced migration is not forgettable, but the racial and cultural constituency of Bahia is overwhelmingly African. The dance forms which developed there were influenced by Europeans and indigenous Brazilians, but they developed in a culturally African metropolis.

Gestural vocabularies, as I noted, are difficult to trace, so arguments regarding the history of capoeira frequently rest on linguistic etymologies. The etymological debate has been characterized by one historian as "a linguistic version of antiquarian disputes over empirical details in history."[5] There is something oddly literal-minded about this line of research, considering that capoeira's own strategy is founded on irony: saying one thing and meaning another. Capoeira, like samba, is an alternative language to the dominant one. Gerhard Kubik[6] suggests a Bantu derivation of the term, and given the general acceptance of the largely Kongo-Angolan roots of the game, it's surprising this argument hasn't gained greater currency. But etymological hypotheses are also narratives, and they have political significances.

In contemporary usage, the word *capoeira* refers most often to the game, but there are two other meanings in standard Brazilian Portuguese: bush and chicken coop. The latter meaning derives from the Portuguese word *capão*, which means rooster and is related to the English word *capon*. Some suggest that the game resembled a chicken fight, the scrambling of two birds in a cage. Whether the term would have been applied in this case by Portuguese observing the practice or ironically by capoeiristas themselves is not clear. Another suggestion is that the chicken coop label was attached metonymically rather than metaphorically: it was the Africans taking fowl to sell at the markets who practiced the game in public plazas, transferring the name of their merchandise to their pastime.

Capoeira as "bush," or wild space, is said to derive from Tupi roots (*caá*: forest, *puêra*: extinct). Again, the etymology may be "true" or "false"—although its accuracy is less interesting than the association of a term for wildness with the indigenous Brazilian. The figure of the "Indian" or *caboclo* absorbs wilderness from both Portuguese and African imaginations in Brazil. While no explicit connection is indicated between indigenous games or dances and capoeira, the caboclo figure bears certain similarities to the capoeirista. The caboclo is an emblem in Afro-Brazilian culture of the refusal to be or remain a captive. One popular conception of capoeira is that it was developed as a means of self-defense for slaves hoping to escape to independent black communities in the backlands of the agricultural states. These communities, *quilombos*, have been documented as remarkably developed urban centers with organized political and market systems.[7] The best known was called Palmares, in the interior of the state of Alagoas. Capoeiristas insist that it was the art of capoeira which defended Palmares against repeated attempts to dismantle it and return its residents to captivity.

The efficiency of capoeira in defending a community against mounted, armed invasions is questionable, and this part of the story may well have been inflated over the years.[8] Brazilian director Carlos Diegues's 1984 film, *Quilombo*, showed highly romanticized scenes of young boys practicing cartwheels in training for the defense of their society. But to return to the etymological significance of the bush, the wild place, the caboclo's terrain—one thing should be mentioned. Capoeira is an urban phenomenon. It has always flourished in high-density areas: Salvador, Bahia; possibly Palmares; New York City. The urban bush. The notion of its wildness, even the animality of its motion, doesn't mean it came organically from an uncivilized, un-Europeanized space. It was constructed specifically to counter European pressures.

Most capoeiristas and historians are in agreement on most of the details of this account of capoeira's origin. But its consequent developments are contested. The roda de capoeira ostensibly began as a protective circle enclosing the capoeiristas who were in training—in the process—of an organized transmission of techniques of resistance. But capoeira's bright image as a system of righteous defense becomes confused in the eighteenth century with boundless, undirected, or uncontrolled violence. In the major cities, gangs known as *maltas*, largely composed of mixed-race, impoverished free men, we are told,[9] used capoeira technique in general looting and gang fighting. Under such circumstances, they dispensed with the roda, as well as the dance.

This is the beginning of capoeira's association with ruffianism—an association which continued to have currency, to varying degrees, over the years. But the idea of breaking out of boundaries, of getting out of control, is not only figured in the broken circle, the

shattered roda where dance explodes into class unrest and violence. Ostensibly, racial borders as well were being broken. The so-called *mulato* capoeirista is a figure moving between categories. He exists at the anxious point of contact between blacks and whites. And while that point of contact was sexualized in the body of the *mulata* sambista, it is made violent in that of the capoeirista. In fact (as is the case with the crack sambistas as well), while they may be narrated as embodying the mixture of races, capoeiristas are in the majority black. But in the period immediately preceding and following slavery's abolition in 1888, they absorbed some of the racial fears of a society in transition.

The music stopped—at least on the soundtrack of the romanticized, cinematic version of the story. But there is something suspect in the suggestion that the intention of capoeira had essentially changed. Was it a black dance when contained within the roda, when it expressed self-irony, restricted to black-on-black aggression? Even on the quilombos, the roda de capoeira as a training ground for defense seems ultimately unthreatening to white authority, because it is isolated. The quilombos were remarkably successful, but basically self-contained. That may be what allows for their romanticization in retrospect: Palmares has come to represent a never-never land where racial injustice didn't have to be dealt with as long as there was minimal contact with white society.

During the "ruffian" stage, it's said that capoeira was still occasionally played in the "old style"—as a dance, a game, a diversion. But this qualitative difference may not have been so much a change in style or form as a change in perspective and context. Capoeira, however dissimulating, has always held violent potential. It has also long maintained an ambiguous relationship to white authority. In the early nineteenth century, at the start of Dom João VI's monarchy, the first official police force was instituted in Brazil, and the head of the Royal Guard, a Major Vidigal, is supposed to have been a powerful capoeirista. He is also supposed to have been charged with keeping the ruffian capoeira contingent in line.

Capoeiristas were absorbed into the order during the brief war with Paraguay in 1865. They were forcibly recruited and are said to have fought valiantly. A number of traditional capoeira song lyrics refer to this event. The capoeiristas returned to the cities of Salvador and Rio with renewed prestige, although the situation was short-lived. When the roda, the circle of control, could not be maintained, capoeira was again perceived as a threat. The Penal Code of 1890 legislated corporal punishment or forced exile for the practitioners of capoeira. Even early in this century, according to the great fighter Master Bimba,

> the police persecuted a capoeirista like you chase after a damn dog. Just imagine, one of the punishments they gave capoeiristas that were caught playing was to tie one wrist to a horse's tail, and the other to another horse. The two horses were sent running toward the police station. We even used to make a joke, that it was better to play near the police station, because there were many cases of death. The individual couldn't support being pulled at high velocity along the ground and died before arriving at his destination.[10]

But it was Bimba, in fact, who initiated certain changes so that, in time, capoeira began to be tolerated as a game—under certain circumstances. It was more or less institutionalized. And you still find in Brazil the popular conception that street capoeira is for troublemakers, and the only respectable place for the game is in the capoeira "academies."

If the joke was that it was better to play near the police station, the academicization of capoeira in some ways realized such an approximation. The academy became the controlled space. It was a structure of containment, not a protective circle like the roda. And yet ostensibly the academy serves the function of an educational space. Politicized black parents today send their children to capoeira academies to learn about their cultural heritage.

As an initiate in the U.S. "academy," I am always particularly interested in notions of pedagogy in the

Afro-Brazilian context. The "alternative" pedagogical institution may appear to be a simple ironic response to dominant, repressive, or exclusionary institutions: the capoeira academy in opposition to the police academy, or the samba school in opposition to an educational system which denies the cultural validity of one's African heritage. But it isn't that simple. The phrase *escola de samba* is popularly held to derive from the schoolyard location of the first group's early rehearsals. That metonymic explanation doesn't preclude irony, but the Rio samba schools can't really be held up as shining examples of antihegemonic, popular education.[11] The twitching white soap-opera star who crowns a Rio carnaval float is the same schoolmarm as that of the national broadcast which portrays whiteness as desirability. The lesson is the same. The capoeira academies also reiterate, sometimes, rigid, linear pedagogical technique which seems bought wholesale from the police academy. Still, there are valuable lessons of African history and aesthetics. I take all this to heart as an educator who attempts to transmit non-Western culture through historically Eurocentric institutions.[12] Certainly the *way* we read, teach, and write about culture is as important as the particular manifestations we're considering. The capoeira academies demand that we rethink inclusion and exclusion, cultural containment and liberational pedagogy.

In a world of ironic inversions, which way is up? Perhaps the most beautiful *ladainha,* or extended, plaintive solo lyric of capoeira, was sung by Mestre Pastinha:

> Already I'm fed up
> of life here on the earth.
> Oh mama, I'm going to the moon,
> I talked to my wife about it.
> She answered me,
> we'll go if God wills it.
> We'll make a little ranch there,
> all full of greens.
> Tomorrow at seven o'clock,
> we'll have our breakfast.
> I really can't abide
> people who tell unbelievable stories.
> Eh, the moon comes to the earth.
> Eh, the earth goes to the moon.
> All this is just talk,
> now let's get to work. . . .[13]

Upside down, the sky is the ground beneath your feet, and the only heaven is the earth to which you are bound. It's an unbelievable story, but true. The plaintiveness of the ladainha is that that upside-down world is a better one than this one. It is a world where there will always be food to put on the table. But the song stops itself: all this lyricism is just talk. And the call to get to "work" is a call to action—a call to begin the game, to come back *through* the game to the ground of significance, of political reality, and of the fight.

That doesn't mean the music has to stop, nor the dance. The fight is in the dance, and the music itself, even this kind of lyricism, can be a weapon, and can be pointedly, politically significant. The *berimbau* is a hauntingly beautiful instrument. It consists of a curved wooden bow strung with a single wire cord, and with a resonating gourd attached at the base. The gourd pressed against his belly, the player strikes the cord with a small stick while simultaneously varying the pitch by manipulating a small stone or coin near the base of the instrument. Effectively two notes are achieved, although variations in pressure allow for a much wider spectrum of sounds. The sound emitted is an eerie twang. There is something deeply sad and mysterious about berimbau music. It is said to be an instrument of communication with the dead. There are various rhythms played for capoeira, and in this century they have been classified and categorized ad infinitum by different masters.[14] But unlike most of the highly sophisticated rhythmic patterns of African Brazil, capoeira music doesn't dictate stepping on a certain beat. Rather, the music dictates the emotional tenor of the game and its intent. The moves themselves move in and out of synchrony with the berimbau.

The rhythm isn't the only thing hard to pin down

about the berimbau's sound. Pitch, too, is neither here nor there. Lewis describes this accurately:

> For some time I assumed that the interval between stopped and unstopped strings on the *berimbau* was in fact a whole tone, but upon closer listening, and comparing several bows, I realized that the interval was usually somewhat less than a whole step but more than a half-step. In Western musical terms this kind of pitch is sometimes called a "quarter tone" or (more generally) a "micro-tone," and the effect in this case is that the interval can be heard (by Western ears) either as a major second (whole step) or a minor second (half-step). In practice this means that *berimbau* music can be used to accompany songs in various modes or scales, with either a major or minor feel, but always with a slight dissonance.[15]

Lewis suggests that this indeterminacy might be a way of explaining the "call" of the berimbau—that quality which seems to summon a listener to participate in its musicality. As in my own earlier discussion of "bent" rhythms in the samba, the "micro-tone" explanation—enlightening as it is—is probably not quite as satisfying as the acknowledgment of *axé*, or spiritual energy.

A capoeira song says, "the berimbau is an instrument / that plays on just one string. / It plays angola in C-major. / But I've come to believe, old pal, / berimbau is the greatest / comrade." The simplicity of the berimbau is misleading. Pastinha said:

> A lot of people say that it's an instrument—berimbau berimbau berimbau, it's music, it's an instrument. Berimbau, then, is music, it's a musical instrument—it's also an offensive instrument. Because on the occasion of happiness, it's an instrument—we use it as an instrument. And in the hour of pain, it stops being an instrument and becomes a hand weapon.[16]

The use of the thick wooden bow as a weapon is not taught in capoeira academies. But if the wood is in hand and the occasion for violence arises, it is not difficult to imagine that uses other than musical might be made of the berimbau.

In capoeira, apparent musicality always contains violent potential, and all aggression is transformed into dance. That is why the simple opposition of categories seems to me clearly unsatisfactory. Regional and angola styles strike me rather as in dialogue with one another, and speaking, finally, the same double-talk, whether or not you call it "up-to-date." And while most scholars of the art have come down on one side of the fence (with Lewis an exception), the majority of capoeiristas, at least until very recently, did not necessarily ally themselves with one camp—including "atual." How do you make rigid alliances in a world where you must trust everyone but can't trust anyone?

How could you classify capoeira as a dance or a fight? One seldom strikes a blow to hit—more often to demonstrate the beauty of the movement, and to harmonize it with the movements of the other. And the most powerful players are those who incapacitate their opponents by doing some stunning trick of pure gorgeousness: a flip, a slow, twisting cartwheel, a headspin, or just a graceful *ginga,* the swaying dance step that comes between blows. A capoeirista can have such a pretty ginga, arms twisting in impossible beautiful waves, that it *confuses.*

It was my first master who taught me the philosophical implications of the beauty and illusion of capoeira. That's why I came to syncretize, in my mind, Boa Gente with Nietzsche—and, of course, Exú. In the Catholic context, Exú has defied syncretism. His pairing with the devil is misleading. Exú is more playful than evil. Jorge Amado says he is "just a deity in constant motion, friend of fracas, of confusion, but, in his heart of hearts, an excellent person. In a way he is the No where only Yes exists."[17]

Exú, Boa, Friedrich: they make up a trinity. They are the No in the Yes, the Falsehood in Truth, the big mixup, the good laugh. It's an inverted trinity, just as the sign of the cross is inverted in the roda.

Many of capoeira's maneuvers are inversions, whether literal or ironic, physical or linguistic. One of the most basic blows is called the *benção* (blessing or benediction).[18] But instead of giving a good word or extending a pious hand, the capoeirista "blesses" with the sole of his foot, shooting it forward toward the other player's chest. The move is at least physically perfectly straightforward. But the response to it is usually an exaggerated pantomime of getting clobbered: part of the defense actually might be to fake getting hit, although that rarely happens. The one receiving the blow may even issue an ear-piercing shriek, snapping back his head in mock deflection of the kick. Sometimes this kind of defense is more dramatic, more satisfying than the blow itself.

Capoeira defensive moves are not so much blocks or even counterattacks as they are ironic negations of the offense.[19] The basic defensive position is called, in fact, the *negativa.* The player squats, one crooked leg extended, and leans forward and across this leg, pressing the side of his head toward the ground. To the uninitiated, it feels like an almost impossibly uncomfortable, impractical, and vulnerable position. But it is the ground zero from which a vast number of deep maneuvers can be deployed.

The low-to-the-ground moves are the ones most often used in capoeira angola. They don't look efficient—who would think to bend over and look through his legs in order to fight? But they are wily and sly. Many moves are named after animals, such as the stingray-tail, an unexpected backlash, or the monkey, a lopsided back flip. The apparent impracticality of these acts has to be understood within the context of creating irony. To regard the animal references as evidence of the "natural" origins of capoeira seems to me a limited idea. Rather, these references seem to be in part ironic responses to projections on black culture in Brazil of stereotypes of innocence. A 1980 ethnography[20] cited an Angolan informant who suggested that capoeira had developed from an ancient Angolan ritual called "the dance of the zebra," in which young men imitated a mating ritual of zebras, fighting to win first choice of the young marriageable women. This document was quickly absorbed by some members of the capoeira angola contingent who began circulating the story. It is not unreasonable to suggest that some of the maneuvers of capoeira were inspired by animal motion. But I have also heard of a dubious older *angoleiro* who, on hearing this story, shook his head: "The only 'dance of the zebra' I ever saw was in the zoo, and it was two zebras fucking."

That kind of cynicism isn't a self-wounding rejection of Africa. And maybe a romanticized version of Africa has to exist on a certain level in capoeira history. But when it is ridiculed, it is also an affirmation of the developments of black culture in urban Brazil. Regional moves are self-ironizing as well. Bimba himself had a trick of "modernizing" capoeira while simultaneously making fun of modern technologies and of Western influences. He developed a sock to the head which set the ears ringing and called it the "telefone." That joke strikes me as remarkably reminiscent of the Nigerian "naive" (ironic!) novelist Amos Tutuola who introduces a character with a "voice like a telephone" in the middle of the wildest, deepest, most "African" bush, residence of ancestral spirits.[21] Another of Bimba's head-banging techniques was a knockout punch called "godême," his phonetic transcription of the "God damn it" gasped by a U.S. marine who got busted in his challenge to the master. If people complained he was incorporating boxing techniques, he Brazilianized those blows and made them capoeira.

A friend sighed to me recently, watching a rapid-fire, exquisitely executed regional game, "capoeira has really developed into a sophisticated art over the last twenty years." It's true that some regionalistas are remarkable athletes. Their speed, flexibility, precision, and strength seem in perfect harmony. But for all that I will defend the validity of their modifications on the game—they continue cannibalizing gymnastics, kickboxing, ballet, and, in the '80s, break dancing (a form that some have speculated was at least partly derived from or inspired by capoeira)[22]—it is still an old-fashioned, flatfooted, earthbound game of angola that brings tears to my eyes. Capoeira angola's wit is defter and more stunning than any feat of athleticism. I'm certainly not alone. Perhaps the most sought-after master in

New York today is João Grande—Big John—an old-guard angoleiro of Bahia, former student of Pastinha.

It isn't just a question of wit. Nor is it just that an angoleiro's play is funky with wisdom that's been fermenting for centuries. Young, politicized angoleiros have a point. It is important to reaffirm constantly the history of capoeira as an art of resistance. Hot dog regionalistas can spin so fast they sometimes lose sight of the past, and the present. The postmodern cultural critic must acknowledge that she, too, is a product of the times. We're sometimes giddy with the new language available to us for expressing our enthusiasms for cultural cross-fertilization. But in rejecting a restrictive, static notion of cultural authenticity, we risk losing some of the political potential of rootedness, of respect for deep funk, of the eloquence of an old man's body in motion.

Beyond the issue of tradition and modification, capoeira also raises the more general problem of "playing" politics. The black consciousness movement in Brazil has been hampered by conflicting strategies. But both traditionalist and syncretic enclaves might appear, to North American eyes, to fall prey to an overly aestheticized idea of activism. It's true of the class struggle as well. Every political rally in Brazil degenerates (explodes?) into music minutes after its inception. Everybody is in motion—but is it progressive motion or simply a circular dance which expends energy without changing the world? That's the familiar question asked of carnaval.[23] To an outsider, capoeira may appear particularly ineffective as a martial art, since so much of its energy is expended on dance—on motion for the sake of pleasure.

But the capoeiristas say that in life, as in capoeira, you have to keep doing the ginga, dancing between the blows. Maybe it's true. The political and economic situation in Brazil has been so bad for so long, sometimes it seems inevitable that these people will get disheartened. What hope would be left if there weren't that distant, exciting rumble, of the samba and the scratchy voice of Boa Gente on the air? I wish, in fact, his voice could carry across the water and make us feel watched over here in New York. I miss Loremil terribly. I feel like when he went sky-rocketing out of here, he burst a hole in the electrified firmament. It's 3 A.M. in another city that is part war zone, part ecstatic celebration.

I imagine Boa Gente could be on the air now, live from the Valley of Pebbles. And he could be saying the words of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*:

> Lift up your hearts, my brethren, high, higher! And do not forget your legs! Lift up also your legs, ye good dancers—and better still if ye stand also on your heads!

Notes

1. The English verb *to play* can be translated three ways in Portuguese: *brincar* (intransitive) = to play freely, like a child; *jogar* (transitive) = to play a sport or game; or *tocar* (transitive) = to play a musical instrument. Capoeira may appear to be a physical game or sport, but, as John Lowell Lewis has pointed out, all three kinds of play are demanded of the capoeirista, who must be an athlete, a musician in his own accompaniment, and—at the highest levels—a master of childish imagination. See Lewis, *Ring of Liberation: Deceptive Discourse in Brazilian Capoeira* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.

2. See, for example, Bira Almeida, *Capoeira, a Brazilian Art Form* (Palo Alto: Sun Wave, 1981).

3. I discuss later in this chapter the distinction between *angola* and *regional* styles, as well as the counterarguments to their division.

4. See Robert F. Thompson, "Capoeira," New York, Capoeira Foundation, 1988; Kenneth Dossar, "Capoeira Angola: Dancing between Two Worlds," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 11, nos. 1–3 (1992): 5–10; and Gerhard Kubik, "Angolan Traits in Black Music. Games and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas," *Estudos de Antropologia Cultural,* no. 10 (Lisbon, 1979): 7–55.

5. Thomas H. Holloway, "'A Healthy Terror': Police Repression of *Capoeiras* in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69 (1989):

643. Waldeloir Rego, *Capoeira Angola, ensaio socio-etnográfico* (Salvador: Editora Itapuã, 1968), 17–29, gives a fairly extensive account of the debate, which is summarized and modified in Lewis, *Ring of Liberation,* 42–44. See also Almeida, *Capoeira,* 17–20.

6. Kubik, "Angolan Traits," 29.

7. See Décio Freitas, *Palmares, a guerra dos escravos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982).

8. Lewis, *Ring of Liberation,* 38, expresses skepticism about this historical narrative while acknowledging its cultural significance.

9. See Almeida, *Capoeira,* and Rego, *Capoeira Angola.*

10. Quoted in Raimundo Cesar Alves de Almeida, *Bimba: Perfil do mestre* (Salvador: UFBA, 1982), 13–14.

11. Alma Guillermoprieto recounts a disturbing history of political and financial manipulation and corruption at the leadership level of the samba schools in Rio. See her *Samba* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

12. John Guillory's considerations of multiculturalism and canon formation are most instructive on this point. He warns that limiting the discussion to what is included in or excluded from the canon can obfuscate the greater question of pedagogy: "To have drawn up a new syllabus is not yet to have begun teaching, nor is it yet to have begun reflection upon the institutional form of the school." Guillory, "Canon, Syllabus, List: A Note on the Pedagogic Imaginary," *Transition* 52 (1992): 54.

13. Pastinha, LP recording.

14. For a sample of the wide variety, see Almeida, *Capoeira.*

15. Lewis, *Ring of Liberation,* 159.

16. Pastinha, LP recording.

17. Jorge Amado, *Bahia de Todos os Santos* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1980).

18. See Barbara Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), chap. 1.

19. Lewis writes that the taxonomy of "attacks" and "defense moves" is never clear. Many moves "can function *either* as attacks or defenses, or even as *both* at the same time!" Lewis, *Ring of Liberation,* 98.

20. Jaír Moura, "Capoeiragem—Arte e malandragem," *Cadernos de Cultura,* no. 2 (Salvador, 1980): 15–16.

21. Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 35.

22. Kenneth Dossar, "Capoeira Angola: An Ancestral Connection?" *American Visions* 3, no. 4 (1988): 38–42.

23. See Browning, *Samba: Resistance in Motion,* chap. 4.

The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet

LYNN GARAFOLA

More than any other era in the history of ballet, the nineteenth century belongs to the ballerina. She haunts its lithographs and paintings, an ethereal creature touched with the charm of another age. Yet even when she turned into the fast, leggy ballerina of modern times, her ideology survived. If today the art of ballet celebrates the *danseur* nearly as often as the *danseuse*, it has yet to rid its aesthetic of yesterday's cult of the eternal feminine. Like her nineteenth-century forebear, today's ballerina, an icon of teen youth, athleticism, and anorexic vulnerability, incarnates a feminine ideal defined overwhelmingly by men.

The nineteenth century did indeed create the mystique of the ballerina. But it also gave birth to one of the more curious phenomena of history. Beginning with romanticism, a twenty-year golden age stretching from the July Revolution to about 1850, the *danseuse en travesti* usurped the position of the male *danseur* in the *corps de ballet* and as a partner to the ballerina. Stepping into roles previously filled by men, women now impersonated the sailor boys, hussars, and toreadors who made up "masculine" contingents of the *corps de ballet*, even as they displaced real men as romantic leads. Until well into the twentieth century, the female dancer who donned the mufti of a cavalier was a commonplace of European ballet.

In real life, donning men's clothing meant assuming the power and prerogatives that went with male identity. Cross-dressing on the stage, however, had quite different implications. Coming into vogue at a time of major social, economic, and aesthetic changes, it reflected the shift of ballet from a courtly, aristocratic art to an entertainment marketplace and the tastes of a new bourgeois public.

Thus the *danseur* did not vanish in Copenhagen, where August Bournonville guided the destiny of the Royal Theater for nearly five decades, or at the Maryinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, where Marius Petipa ruled the Imperial Ballet for a similar tenure. On these courtly stages the male remained, even if eclipsed by the ballerina.

Where he fought a losing battle was in those metropolitan centers that stood at the forefront of the new aesthetic—Paris and London. At the prestigious cradles of ballet romanticism in these cities, the Paris Opéra and King's Theatre, he was edged gradually but firmly from the limelight by a transformation in the social relations of ballet as thoroughgoing as the revolution taking place in its art.

Unlike the theaters of the periphery, where government control of arts organization remained intact, those of the European core operated, or began to operate, as private enterprises.[1] Entrepreneurs stood at the helm, with subscribers paying all or a substantial share of the costs—even at the Paris Opéra which continued to receive partial subsidy from the government after losing its royal license in 1830. This change in the economic structure of ballet placed the audience—particularly the key group of monied subscribers—in a new and powerful position. It led to a new kind of star system, one based on drawing power rather than rank, while eliminating, for purposes of economy, the pensions and other benefits traditionally accruing to artists in government employ. The disappearance of the male dancer coincided with the triumph of romanticism and marketplace economics.

The ban on male talent was not, strictly speaking, absolute. Even in the second half of the century in England and on the Continent, men continued to appear in character roles such as Dr. Coppélius, the doddering, lovestruck Pygmalion of *Coppélia*, parts that demanded of dancers skill as actors and mimes and could be performed by those long past their prime. Men on the ballet stage were fine, it seemed, so long as they left its youthful, beardless heroes to the ladies and so long as they were elderly and, presumably, unattractive.

Initially, then, the "travesty" problem defines itself as one of roles, specifically, that of the romantic hero, who incarnated, along with his ballerina counterpart, the idealized poetic of nineteenth-century ballet. In the new era opened by the July Revolution, this aesthetic and the styles of masculine dancing associated with its expression became gradually "feminized." Scorned by audiences as unmanly, they became the property of the *danseuse en travesti*, that curious androgyne who invoked both the high poetic and the bordello underside of romantic and post-romantic ballet.

Although travesty roles were not unknown before 1789, they were rare, especially in the so-called *genre noble*, the most elevated of the eighteenth century's three balletic styles.[2] Indeed, its most distinguished exponents were men, dancers like Auguste Vestris, who brought a supreme elegance and beauty of person to the stage and majestic perfection to the adagios regarded as the touchstone of their art. No one embodied more than the *danseur noble* the courtly origins of ballet, its aristocratic manner, and the masculinity of a refined, leisured society.

Already by 1820, the *danseur noble* appealed to a very limited public—connoisseurs and men of refined tastes. To the increasing numbers from the middle classes who began to frequent the Paris Opéra in the later years of the Restoration, his measured dignity and old-fashioned dress betrayed, like the *genre noble* itself, the aristocratic manner and frippery of the Ancien Régime.

In the changing social climate of the 1820s, then, a new kind of gendering was under way. The men about town who formed the backbone of the growing bourgeois public saw little to admire in the stately refinements of the *danseur noble*. Their taste, instead, ran to the energized virtuosity of a *danseur de demi-caractère* like Antoine Paul whose acrobatic leaps and multiple spins offered an analogue of their own active, helter-skelter lives. The high poetic of ballet, the loftiness of feeling embodied by the *danseur noble*, came to be seen as not merely obsolete, but also unmanly. With the triumph of romanticism and the new, ethereal style of Marie Taglioni in the early 1830s, poetry, expressiveness, and grace became the exclusive domain of the ballerina. At the same time, advances in technique, especially the refining of *pointe* work, gave her a second victory over the male: she now added to her arsenal of tricks the virtuosity of the *danseur de demi-caractère*. By 1840 a critic could write, "If male dancing no longer charms and attracts today, it is because there is no Sylphide, no magic-winged fairy capable of performing such a miracle and doing something that is endurable in a male dancer."[3]

In appropriating the aesthetic idealism and virtuoso technique associated with the older genres of male dancing, the ballerina unmanned the *danseur*, reducing him to comic character and occasional "lifter." But her gain had another effect, more lasting even than the banishment of the male from the dance stage. Beginning with romanticism and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, femininity itself became the ideology of ballet, indeed, the very definition of the art. Ideology, however, turned out to be a false friend. Even as nineteenth-century ballet exalted the feminine, setting it on a pedestal to be worshipped, its social reality debased the *danseuse* as a worker, a woman, and an artist.

From the romantic era with its triumphant bourgeoisie and market ethos came the dual stigma of

working-class origins and sexual impropriety that branded the woman dancer well into the twentieth century. The great ballerinas continued, by and large, to emerge from the theatrical clans that had survived from the eighteenth century, a kind of caste that trained, promoted, and protected its daughters. (Taglioni, for instance, arrived in Paris in 1827 with a brother to partner her and a father who coached her, choreographed for her, and acted as her personal manager.) The rest, however, belonged to the urban slums. "Most of the dancers," wrote Albéric Second in 1844, "first saw the light of day in a concierge's lodge."[4] Bournonville summed up the lot of the majority succinctly—humble origins, little education, and wretched salaries.[5]

Poverty, naturally, invites sexual exploitation, especially in a profession of flexible morals. (Liaisons sweeten almost every ballerina biography.)[6] In the 1830s, however, the backstage of the Paris Opéra became a privileged venue of sexual assignation, officially countenanced and abetted. Eliminating older forms of "caste" separation, the theater's enterprising management dangled before the elect of its paying public a commodity of indisputable rarity and cachet—its female corps of dancers.

Imagine for a moment the inside of the old Paris Opéra. Descending tier by tier from the gods, we move up the social scale, until, finally, we stand at the golden horseshoe of wealth, privilege, and power where, in boxes three-deep on either side of the proscenium, sit the pleasure-minded sportsmen of the Jockey Club.

As the Opéra's most influential *abonnés*, the occupants of these *loges infernales*—all male, of course—enjoyed certain privileges: the run of the *coulisses*, for example, and entry to the Foyer de la Danse, a large room lined with barres and mirrors just behind the stage. Before 1930, lackeys in royal livery had warded prying eyes from this warm-up studio. When the new regime turned the Opéra over to private management, the Foyer de la Danse acquired a different function.[7] No longer off limits to men of wealth and fashion, before and after performances it became an exclusive *maison close*, with madams in the shape of mothers arranging terms. Nowhere was the clash, evoked time and again in lithographs and paintings, between the idealized femininity of balletic ideology and the reality of female exploitation so striking as in the Opéra's backstage corridors.

The commerce in dancers' bodies was not peculiar to Paris. In London, remarked Bournonville, it lacked even the pretension of gallantry that accompanied such exchanges across the Channel. To be sure, some dancers did eventually marry their "protectors." Many more bore children out of wedlock, sending them in secrecy to distant relations or country families to be reared. Nor did marriages between dancers fare well in this atmosphere of libertinage: one thinks of the choreographer Arthur Saint-Léon, Fanny Cerrito's on and off-stage partner, who, jealous of the gifts showered on his beautiful and brilliant wife (which he could neither duplicate nor reciprocate), left the field of battle to his competitors.[8] The association of ballet and prostitution was so pervasive that Ivor Guest in his history of ballet under the Second Empire makes a special point of noting the Opéra's good girls—model wives, midnight poets, authors of books of religious reflections. But such cases were only exceptions. For pleasure-loving Paris, dancers were the cream of the *demi-monde*.

Aesthetics today stresses the dancer's symbolic function: it views physical presence as the form of dance itself. In the nineteenth century, however, the *danseuse* was first and foremost a woman. Like her audience, she saw the task of ballet as one of charming the sensibility, not elevating the mind. Tilting her face to the *loges infernales*, flashing the brilliants of her latest protector, making up with coquetry the shortcomings of technique, she presented herself as a physical synecdoche, a dancer without the dance. For the nineteenth-century public, ballet offered a staged replay of the class and bordello politics that ruled the theater corridors.

Conventional wisdom has it that there were two sorts of romantic ballerinas: "Christians" who evoked romanticism's spiritual yearnings and supernal kingdoms, and "pagans" who impersonated its obsession with exotic, carnal, and material themes.[9] But this paradigm, invented by Théophile Gautier to describe the contrasting styles of Marie Taglioni and Fanny Elssler, is at best misleading. For no matter how patly the virgin/whore scheme seems to fit the ideology of romanticism, it ignores both the dancer's totemic reality—her position within the social order of ballet—and that troubling third who articulated the common ground of the period's balletic avatars of Eve. As an emblem of wanton sexuality, feminized masculinity, and amazon unviolability, the *danseuse en travesti* symbolized in her complex persona the many shades of lust projected by the audience on the nineteenth-century dancer.

Unlike the older genre distinctions based on body type, movement, and style, romanticism's female tryptich aligned balletic image with a hierarchy of class and sexual practice. If Taglioni's "aerial, virginal grace" evoked romanticism's quest for the ideal it also summoned to the stage the marriageable *démoiselle*, chaste, demure, and genteel. So, too, Elssler's "swooning, voluptuous arms," like her satin, laces, and gems, linked the concept of materialism with a particular material reality—the enticing, high-priced pleasures of a *grande horizontale*.

The travesty dancer practised none of these symbolic feminine concealments. As shipboys and sailors, hussars and toreadors, the proletarians of the Opéra's *corps de ballet* donned breeches and skin-tight trousers that displayed to advantage the shapely legs, slim corseted waists, and rounded hips, thighs, and buttocks of the era's ideal figure. Like the prostitutes in fancy dress in Manet's "Ball at the Opera," the *danseuse en travesti* brazenly advertised her sexuality. She was the hussy of the boulevards on theatrical parade.

The masquerade of transvestism fooled no one, nor was it meant to. The *danseuse en travesti* was always a woman, and a highly desirable one (a splendid figure was one of the role's prerequisites). She may have aped the steps and motions of the male performer, but she never impersonated his nature. What audiences wanted was a masculine image deprived of maleness, an idealized adolescent, a beardless she-man. Gautier, in particular, was repelled by the rugged physicality of the *danseur*, that "species of monstrosity," as he called him.[10] "Nothing," he wrote, "is more distasteful than a man who shows his red neck, his big muscular arms, his legs with the calves of a parish beadle, and all his strong massive frame shaken by leaps and *pirouettes*."[11]

His critical colleague, Jules Janin, shared Gautier's prejudices: even the greatest of *danseurs* paled against the delicate figure, shapely leg, and facial beauty of the travesty dancer. Janin, however, added another element to Gautier's list of characteristics unbecoming in a male dancer—power. No real man, that is, no upstanding member of the new bourgeois order, could impersonate the poetic idealism of the ballet hero without ungendering himself, without, in short, becoming a woman in male drag. Janin's remarks, published in the *Journal des Débats*, are worth quoting at length:

> Speak to us of a pretty dancing girl who displays the grace of her figure, who reveals so fleetingly all the treasures of her beauty. Thank God, I understand that perfectly, I know what this lovely creature wishes us, and I would willingly follow her wherever she wishes in the sweet land of love. But a man, as ugly as you and I, a wretched fellow who leaps about without knowing why, a creature specially made to carry a musket and a sword and to wear a uniform. That this fellow should dance as a woman does—impossible! That this bewhiskered individual who is a pillar of the community, an elector, a municipal councillor, a man whose business it is to make and unmake laws, should come before us in a tunic of sky-blue satin, his head covered with a hat with a waving plume amorously caressing his cheek, a frightful *danseuse* of the male sex . . . this was surely impossible and intolerable, and we have done well to remove such . . . artists from our pleasures. Today, thanks to this revolution we have effected, woman is the queen of ballet . . . no longer forced to cut off half her silk petticoat to

dress her partner in it. Today the dancing man is no longer tolerated except as a useful accessory.[12]

As the concept of masculinity aligned itself with productivity, the effeminate sterility of the *danseur* became unacceptable to ballet's large male public.

But in defining power as male, Janin implicitly defined powerlessness as female. In photographs of the *danseuse en travesti* posed with her female counterpart, the modern eye notes a curtailment of scale, a reduction not only in the height and girth of the masculine figure, but in the physical contrast of the imagined sexes. What is missing, above all, is the suggestion of dominance, that intimation of power that even the most self-effacing *danseur* communicates to his audience. In appropriating the male role, the travesty dancer stripped that role of power.

In eliminating the *danseur*, ballet turned out the remaining in-house obstacle to sexual license. With the decline of the clan, only his lust, that last bastion of power, stood between the *danseuse* and the scheme so artfully contrived by the entrepreneurs of ballet for the millionaire libertines of the audience. For what was the Opéra if not their private seraglio? Thanks to the travesty dancer, no male now could destroy the peace of their private harem or their enjoyment of performance as foreplay to possession.

In appearance, the feminine androgyne laid claim to another erotic nexus. Tall, imposing, and majestic, she added to the charm of wantonness the challenge of the amazon, that untamed Diana who so fascinated the nineteenth-century imagination. In Gautier's description of Eugénie Fiocre as Cupid in *Néméa*, note the sapphic allusions.

> Certainly Love was never personified in a more graceful, or more charming body. Mlle. Fiocre has managed to compound the perfection both of the young girl and of the youth, and to make of them a sexless beauty, which is beauty itself. She might have been hewn from a block of Paros marble by a Greek sculptor, and animated by a miracle such as that of Galatea. To the purity of marble, she adds the suppleness of life. Her movements are developed and balanced in a sovereign harmony. . . . What admirable legs! Diana the huntress would envy them! What an easy, proud and tranquil grace! What modest, measured gestures! . . . So correct, rhythmical and noble is her miming that, like that of the mimes of old, it might be accompanied by two unseen fluteplayers. If Psyche saw this Cupid she might forget the original.[13]

Fiocre, an exceptionally beautiful woman who created the role of Frantz in *Coppélia*, was one of the most famous travesty heroes of the 1860s and 1870s. Like a number of Opéra dancers, she shared the boards with a sister, whose shapely limbs commanded nearly as much admiration as her sibling's. By far, the most fascinating sister pair of the century were the Elsslers—Fanny, the romantic temptress with the body of a "hermaphrodite of antiquity,"[14] and Thérèse, her partner and faithful cavalier. For over ten years they danced together, lived together, and traveled together. On stage they communicated a veiled eroticism, while offstage their relationship suggested a feminized relic of the older clan system.

A giraffe of a dancer at five foot six inches, the "majestic" Thérèse served her diminutive sister in the multiple roles reserved in an older era for the ballerina's next of kin. She handled all of Fanny's business affairs, decided where and what she should dance, and staged, without credit, many of the ballets and numbers in which they appeared. As a woman, however, Thérèse lacked the clan's patriarchal authority, while as a dancer, she would always be without the wealth and power of the "protectors" who increasingly materialized behind the scenes—promoting favorites, dispensing funds as well as maintaining dancers and their impoverished families. Indeed, one such protector, the self-styled Marquis de La Valette, who became Fanny's lover in 1837, eventually destroyed the sororial ménage: his scorn for the ex-dancer who shared her bed forced Thérèse to leave.

One expects that the likes of the Marquis de La Valette relished the sight of his Elssler girls charming confreres of the *loges infernales*. But one also suspects that the travesty *pas de deux* was not so completely unsexed as the household he ruled. Certainly, it had been neutered by the substitution of a woman for the man, but that hardly means it was devoid of erotic content. Might not audiences have perceived in the choreographic play of female bodies, something other than two women competing to whet the jaded appetites of libertines? Consider Gautier's account of a duet performed by the two Elsslers:

> The *pas* executed by Mlle. T. Elssler and her sister is charmingly arranged; there is one figure in particular where the two sisters run from the backcloth hand in hand, throwing forward their legs at the same time, which surpasses everything that can be imagined in the way of homogeneity, accuracy, and precision. One might almost be said to be the reflection of the other, and that each comes forward with a mirror held beside her, which follows her and repeats all her movements.
>
> Nothing is more soothing and more harmonious to the gaze than this dance at once so refined and so precise.
>
> Fanny, to whom Theresa has given as ever the more important part, displayed a child-like grace, an artless agility, and an adorable roguishness; her Creole costume made her look ravishing, or rather she made the costume look ravishing.[15]

Thérèse had choreographed *La Volière* ("The Aviary" in English), which like her other ballets and dances made no use of men: she cast herself in the masculine role. Yet despite the differences in their attire, what struck Gautier was the oneness of the pair: he saw them as refracted images of a single self, perfect and complete. In evoking an Arcadia of perpetual adolescence untroubled and untouched by man, the travesty duet hinted at an ideal attainable only in the realms of art and the imagination—not the real world of stockbrokers and municipal councillors.

But dancing by its very nature is a physical as much as symbolic activity. In the formalized mating game of the travesty *pas de deux*, two women touching and moving in harmony conveyed an eroticism perhaps even more compelling than their individual physical charms. The fantasy of females at play for the male eye is a staple of erotic literature, a kind of travesty performance enacted in the privacy of the imagination. Ballet's travesty *pas de deux* gave public form to this private fantasy, whetting audience desire, while keeping safely within the bounds of decorum. For ultimately, sapphic love interfered with the smooth functioning of the seraglio as much as the obstreperous male. In the case of the Elsslers, where Thérèse seems to have animated her choreography with something akin to personal feeling, the incest taboo coded as sisterly devotion what might otherwise have been construed as love. And one cannot help thinking that the buxom travesty heroes of the Second Empire and subsequent decades flaunted an outrageous femininity to ward off the sapphism immanent in their roles. In so doing, however, ballet robbed the *danseuse* of erotic mystery.

Today, thanks to the example of the Ballets Trocadero, we are apt to think that travesty in dance inherently offers a critique of sexual role playing. But the travesty dancers of nineteenth-century ballet offered no meditation on the usages of gender, no critical perspective on the sexual politics that ruled their lives, no revelation of the ways masculine and feminine were imaged on the ballet stage. What they exemplified was the triumph of bordello politics ideologized as the feminine mystique—a politics and an ideology imposed by men who remained in full control of ballet throughout the century as teachers, critics, choreographers, spectators, and artistic directors.

The advent in 1909 of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes with its dynamic new aesthetic shattered the travesty paradigm. Seeing real men on the stage in choreography that exploited the strength, athleticism, and scale of the male body simply electrified audiences, causing them to look anew at the travesty dancer. But the au-

dience itself had changed dramatically. The new following for ballet came from the highly sophisticated milieu of *le tout Paris*. The great connoisseurs, collectors, musical patrons, and salonnières of the French capital—many of whom were women—replaced the sportsmen and roués of the *loges infernales*. At the same time a new androgynous thematic and iconography, particularly evident in works created for Nijinsky where images of sexual heterodoxy transgressed rigid categories of masculinity and femininity, regendered the ideology of ballet, ending the reign of the feminine mystique. The era of the *danseuse en travesti* had come to an end.

Notes

1. For the dramatic changes in the organization of the Paris Opéra after the Revolution of 1830, see Ivor Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris,* forewords by Ninette de Valois and Lillian Moore, 2d ed. rev. (London: Dance Books, 1980), 22–25. In England, nineteenth-century ballet appeared exclusively in a commercial setting. John Ebers, a former ticket agent, assumed the management of the King's Theatre in 1820, an association that ended in bankruptcy in 1827. He was succeeded in 1828 by Pierre Laporte, who, with the exception of the 1832 season, controlled the opera house until his death in 1841, whereupon Benjamin Lumley, in charge of finances since 1836, assumed the theater's management. In the hands of this solicitor/impresario, Her Majesty's (as the King's Theatre had been renamed) entered upon an era of glory. In the 1830s and 1840s, under the management of Alfred Bunn, the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane became another important venue for ballet. During the latter part of the nineteenth century up to the eve of World War I, ballet lived on in the music-halls, above all, the Empire and Alhambra. Ivor Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in England: Its Development, Fulfilment and Decline* (London: Phoenix House, 1954), 33, 46, 83–87, 128–131; *The Empire Ballet* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1962); "The Alhambra Ballet," *Dance Perspectives* (autumn 1959).

In France, it should be noted, the commercial boulevard stage was the breeding ground for theatrical romanticism. Long before the Paris Opéra's *Robert le Diable,* usually considered the official point of departure for romantic ballet, spectacular techniques and supernatural effects were commonplace in the melodramas and vaudevilles of the popular theater. Ballet was an important component of these spectacles. Indeed, it was at theaters like the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin, which maintained a resident troupe and regularly presented new ballets and revivals, that the aerial style of dancing associated with romanticism began to crystallize early in the 1820s. Among the talents associated with the flowering of romantic ballet at the Paris Opéra who gained early experience on the boulevard stage was Jean Coralli, who produced several ballets at the Théâtre de la Gaîté. Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris,* 4–5, 13–14, 16, Appendix D, 272–274; Marian Hannah Winter, *The Pre-Romantic Ballet* (London: Pitman, 1974), 178–179, 193–197.

2. Some instances of gender swapping prior to the nineteenth century are Marie Sallé's appearance as Amour in Handel's *Alcina* (which Sallé choreographed herself) and the three graces impersonated by men in *Plathée,* Jean-Philippe Rameau's spoof of his own operatic style. The lover in disguise à la Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was a popular conceit that called for cross-dressing. I am grateful to Catherine Turocy for this information. For the response of the London audience to Sallé's performance, see Parmenia Migel, *The Ballerinas from the Court of Louis XIV to Pavlova* (1972; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1980), 25.

3. *Le Constitutionnel,* quoted in Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris,* 1.

4. *Les Petits Mystères de l'Opéra,* quoted in Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris,* 25.

5. August Bournonville, *My Theatre Life,* trans. Patricia N. McAndrew (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 52.

6. Fanny Cerrito's liaison with the Marqués de Bedmar, Carlotta Grisi's with Prince Radziwill, Fanny Elssler's with the Marquis de La Valette, Pauline Duvernay's with (among others) Valette and Lyne Stephens, and Elisa Scheffer's with the Earl of Pembroke are a few of the romances that dot the ballet chronicle of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.

7. For the changes introduced by Dr. Louis Véron at the Paris Opéra after the Revolution of 1830, see Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris,* 28. Under Ebers, the Green Room built at the King's Theatre performed a similar function as the Foyer de la Danse, while at Drury Lane, Bunn allowed the more influential patrons the run of the *coulisses.* Procuresses "of the worst type" circulated backstage at Drury Lane, among them the blackmailing beauty specialist known as Madame Rachel. Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in England,* 36–37, 113.

8. Migel, *The Ballerinas,* 218. Married in 1845 (to the chagrin of Cerrito's parents, who had hoped for a son-in-law with a fortune or at least a title), the couple broke up in 1851. Shortly thereafter, her liaison with the Marqués de Bedar became public knowledge. When rumors began to circulate in 1844 about Cerrito's impending marriage to Saint-Léon, the ballerina's London admirers, headed by Lord MacDonald, created a public disturbance when Saint-Léon appeared onstage. During one performance, the dancer stopped before their box and with a "sarcastic grin" and an "indescribable gesture" hissed menacingly at Lord MacDonald. The word *cochon* was heard to leave Saint-Léon's mouth, a gross impertinence coming from a dancer. Saint-Léon's written apology appeared in the *Times* a few days later. Ivor Guest, *Fanny Cerrito: The Life of a Romantic Ballerina,* 2d ed. rev. (London: Dance Books, 1974), 85.

9. "Fanny Elssler in 'La Tempete,'" in *The Romantic Ballet as Seen by Theophile Gautier,* trans. Cyril W. Beaumont (London, 1932; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1980), 16.

10. "Perrot and Carlotta Grisi in 'Le Zingaro,'" in ibid., 44.

11. "The Elsslers in 'La Volière,'" in ibid., 24.

12. March 2, 1840, quoted in Guest, *Romantic Ballet,* 21.

13. Quoted in Ivor Guest, *The Ballet of the Second Empire* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 200.

14. "Fanny Elssler," in *The Romantic Ballet as Seen by Theophile Gautier,* 22.

15. "The Elsslers in 'La Volière,'" 24.

Interrupted Continuities: Modern Dance in Germany

SUSAN ALLENE MANNING AND MELISSA BENSON

Editor's Note: This photo essay was originally an exhibition displayed in the Brooklyn Academy of Music lobby lounge from 1 October to 8 December 1985 as part of the Next Wave Festival humanities program. Dance historian Susan Manning curated the exhibition with the technical assistance of Melissa Benson.

The roots of today's modern dance first appeared in Germany and America. In the decade preceding World War I, American and German dancers independently evolved new dance forms that opposed the tradition of narrative and spectacular ballet. Yet the new forms probably would not have developed if the two traditions had not come into contact. When American dancers Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis appeared in Germany after 1900 they became immediate sensations and catalysts for German dancers. In the twenties, the movement known as *Ausdruckstanz* (literally "dance of expression") came to dominate the German concert stage and opera house.

Under the Third Reich, ausdruckstanz lost its artistic vigor, and the direction of influence reversed. Many German dancers emigrated to America in the thirties and contributed to the establishment of American modern dance. After World War II ausdruckstanz nearly disappeared in divided Germany, while American modern dance achieved a worldwide reputation.

Beginning in the late sixties, modern dance reappeared in Germany as *Tanztheater* (literally "dance theater"). Taking ausdruckstanz as precedent, the choreographers of tanztheater elevate expression over form and view dance as a mode of social engagement. Their aesthetic opposes the formalism of both classical ballet and postmodern dance. Last season's appearances by Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffmann, and Susanne Linke at the Brooklyn Academy of Music continued the encounter between German and American modern dance.

The Solo Form: New Roles for the Sexes

> *The dancer of the future . . . will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts. . . . She will dance the freedom of woman.*
>
> —Isadora Duncan, *Der Tanz der Zukunft* ("The Dance of the Future"), 1903

The new dance that appeared at the turn of the century involved a new sociology of the dance scene. While the narrative and spectacular ballet of the nineteenth century required large, expensive companies and authoritarian company managers, the new form required little more than a dancer, an accompanist, and an empty stage. In the nineteenth century the dancer was rarely presented alone but rather served as the focal point of spectacle. The dancer was almost always female, who had come to embody the Victorian conception of woman: either an ethereal ballerina—woman as angel—or an overstuffed chorus girl—woman as whore. She did not choreograph her own movement; rather, she executed the steps arranged for her by the ballet master, who was, without exception, a man.

In the twentieth century dancers rejected this institutional setup. The male dancer made a comeback. Whether male or female, dancers turned toward solo forms. The dancer became at once choreographer, performer, and manager; dance became an intensely personal expression of the self. The new dance freed men and women to experiment with the wider range of sexual roles then possible after the demise of Victorianism. Female soloists such as Isadora Duncan and the Wiesenthal sisters appeared as images of the new woman—independent of a male partner and free to create her own identity. Male soloists such as Alexander Sacharoff appeared in a variety of androgynous roles, no longer limited to the role of partner to the ballerina.

Physical Culture and the Avant-Garde

> *I want to raise rhythm to the status of a social institution, and prepare the way for a new style . . . that may become the basis for a new society.*
>
> —Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, letter to philanthropist Wolf Dohrn, 1909

The new dance paralleled the popular physical culture movement. Women especially took to exercise as a means to physical and psychological health. Many dancers opened schools geared toward laymen that emphasized the artistic potential of physical culture.

The institute founded by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze at Hellerau in 1910 mingled the influences of physical culture and art. Dalcroze, a musician by training and an educator by inclination, set out to develop a method of teaching musical concepts through movement. His method, today called eurhythmics, drew on the principles of physical culture. He also devised a new performance form based on a closer integration of movement and music. To demonstrate his ideas he collaborated with Adolphe Appia to stage Gluck's *Orpheus* in 1912 and 1913. The demonstrations struck a responsive chord among visual and theatrical artists, who heralded *Orpheus* as the sign of a new union of the arts. At Hellerau ideas drawn from popular culture and the avant-garde intersected and pointed the way toward ausdruckstanz.

Ausdruckstanz in the Weimar Republic: Rudolph Laban and Mary Wigman

> *The dancer in a movement choir discovers an awakened sense of movement in his inner being by representing himself not as an individual but as part of a greater living group.*
>
> —Rudolf Laban, "Vom Sinne der Bewegungschöre" ("On the Meaning of Movement Choirs"), *Schriftranz*, June 1930

> *My group does not dance feelings. Feelings are far too precise, too distinct. We dance the change and transformation of spiritual states as variously manifested in each individual.*
>
> —Mary Wigman, "Tanzerische Wege und Ziele" ("The Ways and Goals of the Dancer"), *Neue Rundschau*, November 1923

Rudolf Laban opened a school in Munich in the same year that Dalcroze founded Hellerau. A prolific writer, Laban gave theoretical definition to ausdruckstanz. He believed that modern industrial society divided man against himself and that dance could restore man's original harmony with the cosmos, hence restoring the natural bonds of community. To facilitate this process he innovated a form suitable for large groups of amateurs, the "movement choir." He saw the movement choir as a means of promoting a sense of community among members of a fragmented society.

Laban also established the formal basis for ausdruckstanz with his concept of "free dance." This concept emphasized the spatial dimension of movement and was performed without music or to a simple rhythmic accompaniment. Laban's formulation was shaped by his work with dancers at the Monte Verita

18a and b. The *Visions* cycle (1925–28) marked the high point of Mary Wigman's solo choreography. Pictured are (a) *Dream Figure* (1927) and (b) *Space Shape* (1928). Her costumes became masks as the persona of a transformed self eclipsed her everyday self. Her solos were neither autobiographical nor overtly feminine, as were Isadora Duncan's; rather, she projected an image of gender that escaped and confounded the conventional distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Photos by Charlotte Rudolph, © 2000 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.

artists' colony in the Swiss Alps. An exceptional group of dancers gathered there, including Mary Wigman. She was a former student of Dalcroze who became Laban's closest collaborator during World War I.

After the war Wigman toured Germany and gained an immediate following. Her dances embodied the spirit of expressionism, its pervasive angst, and escape into ecstasy. For Wigman, the soloist's projection of the spontaneous self no longer sufficed. She required a form that transcended the individual, a requirement fulfilled by her use of masks, and by her all-female group. Her dances revolved around the relationship of the leader and the group.

Laban's ideology and Wigman's example dominated German dance in the twenties. Laban founded more than twenty-five schools across Germany while Wigman established a Central Institute in Dresden and several branch schools. As a term, ausdruckstanz signified the styles and forms of dance propagated by their many students and followers. Their followers, fiercely partisan, debated the merits of one approach over the other. Laban advocated egalitarianism and the desire to make dance accessible and integral to everyday life. Wigman espoused elitism and the belief that only a chosen few could communicate the spirit of the time through dance. Their aesthetics defined the end points of the ausdruckstanz continuum.

Alternate Visions: Valeska Gert, Oskar Schlemmer, Jean Weidt, and Kurt Jooss

Because the average German has no self-confidence, he considers great art only that which he does not understand and which bores him. Mary Wigman fulfills these expectations of the educated middle class and therefore has acquired a national reputation.

—Valeska Gert, "Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert," *Der Querschnitt*, May 1926

The dance entitled The Worker involved hard work. I was myself a worker, a gardener who plied his trade eight to ten hours a day, and my limbs sensed the fatigue. But I did not want to represent the worker as he toiled, rather the worker as he made life more beautiful.

—Jean Weidt, *Der Rote Tänzer*, 1968

Only a few dancers stood apart from the dominant aesthetics of Wigman and Laban. One was Valeska Gert, a Berlin cabaret dancer who also appeared in films and on the stage. Gert knew Bertolt Brecht, and her theory of the social function of dance in many ways paralleled his theory of theater. Once she asked Brecht to define epic theater. He replied, "What you do."

Gert employed stereotyped roles and forms drawn from popular entertainment—*Tango, Charleston, Variety, Circus, Sport, Clown.* Her deadpan expression distanced her self from her performance; in this way she mocked and commented on the forms she used. Gert called the dancer a transition between the old theater and the new and believed that new forms could arise only from the breakdown of old forms. She considered the movement choir a false path toward the theater of the future because it posited a sense of community where none existed.

Oskar Schlemmer presented another alternative. He organized a stage workshop at the Bauhaus in which students experimented with a new form of abstract theater. Like Gert, Schlemmer parodied pre-existing dance forms, but his satire was mixed with an exploration of form for its own sake. He masked his dancers in body-distorting costumes as a way of exploring the body's spatial configurations. In Schlemmer's works the dancer functioned like a puppet or puppeteer; the performer's expressive self disappeared.

Dancers by and large remained aloof from national political issues, for their conception of dance's social function derived from the utopian humanism of Dalcroze and Laban. As political factionalism intensified during the closing years of the Weimar Republic, however, a few dancers finally felt compelled to take sides.

Jean Weidt dedicated his career to furthering the proletarian cause through dance. First in Hamburg and

19. Like Mary Wigman, Valeska Gert confounded the conventional image of femininity projected by Isadora Duncan and other female soloists, but she did so in the spirit of satire and parody rather than as a means for transcending everyday reality. Photo courtesy of the Dance Division, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

later in Berlin, he organized dance troupes of young workers that performed both on the concert stage and at Communist Party rallies. Known as the Red Dancer, Weidt went into exile when Hitler came to power.

Kurt Jooss was another dancer who took sides, although he never explicitly supported any one party. Originally a student of Laban, Jooss employed sharply-observed social caricature in his works beginning in the mid-twenties. Not until the early thirties did he create an explicitly political work: *The Green Table* was an anti-war ballet. Like Weidt, Jooss went into exile once Hitler rose to power.

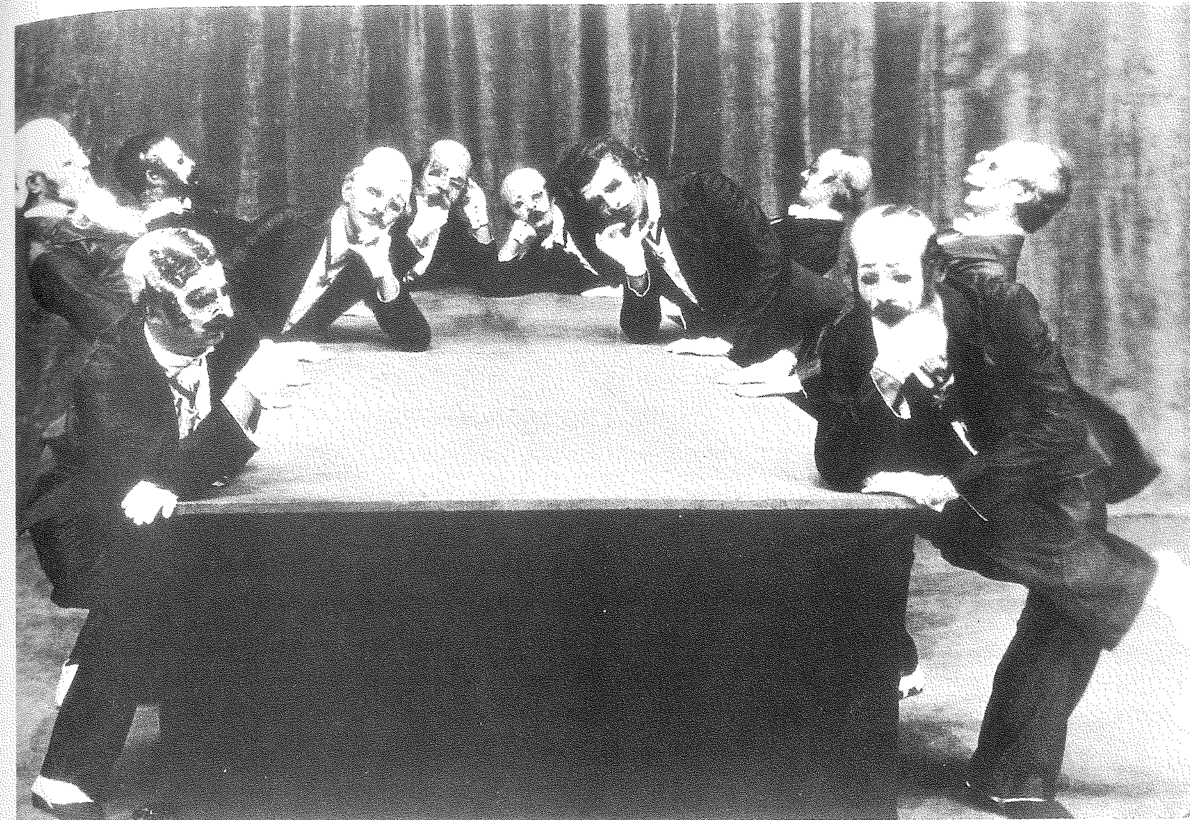
1930 Dancers Congress

The chief opposing camps are headed, respectively, by Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban, but there are innumerable lesser divisions and alliances. In fact, there is apparently a great game of politics being played which is at least as absorbing as the business of making and performing dances.

—John Martin, "A Futile Congress," *New York Times*, 20 July 1930

Dancers began to organize themselves in the late twenties. The 1930 Third Dancers Congress drew fourteen hundred participants, including dance critic John Martin. The Congress marked the high point of the German modern dance movement as well as its demise, for strident debate threatened the unity the Congress intended to create. At issue were the relations between professional and lay dance, the role of dance within the theater and opera house, and the social function of the dancer.

In collaboration with poet Albert Talhoff, Wigman staged *Totenmal* at the Congress. Wigman and Talhoff intended the work, a memorial to the fallen of World War I, to point the way toward a new form of dance



20. *The Green Table* (1932) is a dance of death led by a martial figure personifying war. The masked diplomats who frame the scenes are exempted from death, suggesting their culpability in the perpetuation of war. Photo courtesy of the Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

theater above politics. In the end, however, the work became mired in political ambiguity. As one critic said, it "affected both sides, both pro-war and anti-war."

Nationalist and socialist factions polarized the Weimar Republic. The ambivalence of Germans caught in the middle rendered them politically ineffectual. The Dancers Congress mirrored the factionalism of Weimar politics and *Totenmal* its ambiguity.

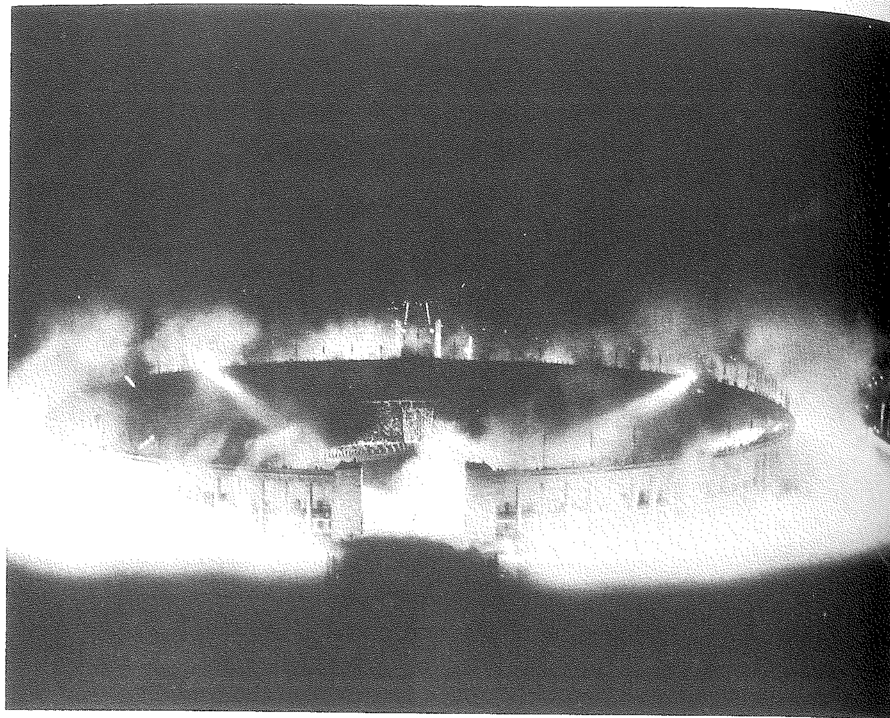
The Third Reich

State certification is required for all dancers. . . . Candidates of Aryan origin are eligible to take the state examination upon reaching age 18. In addition to possessing a middle school certificate, they must present a certificate of good health signed by a state doctor, a certificate of good conduct issued by the police, a written biographical statement, and proof of at least one year's study at a dance school certified for the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.

—Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda directive, No. 26, 29 July 1934

In the Third Reich dance came under the authority of Josef Goebbels' Ministry of Culture, which issued a stream of directives setting standards for prospective dancers, including proof of Aryan origin. The Ministry sponsored large-scale dance festivals in Berlin in 1934, 1935, and 1936. In addition, the Ministry established a Central Institute for Dance in Berlin, which dictated a

21a and b. (a) Aerial shot of the Olympic stadium, Berlin, and (b) view of dancers on the field. *Olympic Youth* (1936) worked on two levels. On one level, the spectacles glorified athletics and youth by presenting the familiar motifs of the Olympic Games—the interlocking circles, the flags, the torch's flame. But on another level, the spectacle glorified the offstage presence of Hitler, who became the focal point for the discipline and devotion exhibited by the unison ranks of dancers. Photos from *The XIth Olympic Games in Berlin 1936: Official Report*, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.



standardized curriculum of ballet, folk dance, and "German Dance," as ausdruckstanz was now called. Never before had dance received such recognition or subsidy on the national level. While the National Socialists branded modernist movements in the other arts as degenerate, they appropriated ausdruckstanz with the dancers' passive support.

The Nazis staged immense spectacles by enlarging the scale of the movement choir, as in *Olympic Youth*, the opening night presentation of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg, Gret Palucca, and other modern dancers participated along with thousands of Berlin schoolchildren, who executed precision patterns on the field of the Olympic stadium. Moving in unison ranks, the boys and girls glorified the presence of the Führer, who reviewed them from the stands. The movement choir had become the basis for mass propaganda.

The Survival of Ausdruckstanz and the Emergence of Tanztheater: Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffmann, and Susanne Linke

The question I ask myself is how this "nation of poets and thinkers" could have started two world wars. These are the problems I am constantly exploring on the stage and in the work with my dancers.

—Johann Kresnik, "Politician of Dance Theatre," *Ballett International*, May 1985

I am not so much interested in how people move as in what moves them.

—Pina Bausch, quoted in *Pina Bausch Wuppertal Dance Theater, or the Art of Training a Goldfish*

Its association with National Socialism drained ausdruckstanz of artistic vigor. Hence it is not surprising that ballet came to dominate both East and West Germany after World War II. Ironically enough, it was the Nazi promotion of ballet as light entertainment that made the ballet boom possible.

As West Germany turned toward reviving the classics and rebuilding the network of municipal repertory theaters, modern dancers received less and less recognition. Without fanfare Wigman opened a studio in West Berlin, and Jooss resumed his teaching position at the Folkwang School in Essen. For the few young dancers desiring an alternative to ballet, the Folkwang School provided the only opportunity for formalized training. One of the few was tanztheater choreographer Pina Bausch, who entered the Folkwang School in 1955 at age fifteen.

Ausdruckstanz fared somewhat better in East Germany than in West Germany, for dance pedagogy integrated modern dance techniques with Soviet methods for ballet training. Weidt returned from exile to East Berlin and worked to establish an amateur dance movement. Palucca, originally a student of Wigman, reopened her school in Dresden under government sponsorship and trained a generation of choreographers.

Stirred by the student movement of the sixties, young dancers in West Germany became dissatisfied with the orthodoxies of ballet technique and the hierarchies of ballet companies. Fusing techniques drawn from experimental theater and American modern dance with ballet, they called their work tanztheater to differentiate it from *opernballett.*

Johann Kresnik, a dancer with the Cologne Opera Ballet, was one of the first to assert choreographic rebellion by creating dances as political agit-prop. His career represents one extreme of the sociology of the current dance scene: as director of the Bremen Ballet until 1980 and of the Heidelberg Ballet today, he works within the system of well-subsidized municipal ballet companies established during the fifties. Yet the fundamental premises of his work agitate against the world view of the traditional ballet audience. In his tanztheater, the subversion of the system becomes content and form.

Another early tanztheater choreographer was Gerhard Bohner, a ballet dancer who had also studied with Wigman. In contrast to Kresnik, his career reflects the other extreme of the current scene, the situation of the "free dancers" who find their vision unrealizable within

22. Pina Bausch's *He Takes Her by the Hand and Leads Her into the Castle, the Others Follow* (1978). Like Kresnik, Bausch interweaves the political and the psychological. The spectator never knows if the images are intended as psychological projection or exaggerated realism. Photo by Gert Weigelt.

the municipal repertory system. Bohner's agitation for reform with the Berlin Ballet in the sixties led to his dismissal. Since then he has worked as a freelance choreographer. Because West Germany provides almost no patronage for dancers outside the repertory system, Bohner is one of the few dancers who manage to survive on their own.

Like Kresnik, Pina Bausch directs one of the few municipal repertory companies receptive to tanztheater. Her Wuppertal Dance Theater is unique among German troupes in that it performs twice as much abroad as at home. Hence it is not limited by the demands of a local repertory theater audience, and in this way recalls the touring soloists and companies of the ausdruckstanz era.

In contrast to the "poor theater" of ausdruckstanz, Bausch's dances employ a visually rich production style. And yet, like dance in the twenties, her work elevates expression over form. Her association with the Folkwang School directly connects her to the tradition of ausdruckstanz, and her work continues Jooss's vision of a socially critical dance theater. Whereas Jooss focused on the public issue of the corruption of power, Bausch turns to the more private issue of relations between men and women. However, she does not ignore the sociological dimension of the psychology of gender. Indeed, the feminist subtexts of her works call attention to the politics of the personal.

Reinhild Hoffmann and Susanne Linke share Bausch's concern with feminist issues and the female perspective. Significantly, they too have worked at the Folkwang School. Their work also exhibits similarities to the ausdruckstanz tradition: the revival of the solo form, the use of the costume as mask, and the emphasis on expressive abstraction.

Dance is the only West German art today in which female artists play a leading role. Why this is so remains a provocative question.

Moving Contexts

For a long time American dance departments contrasted traditional or indigenous forms of dance (seen as the study of dance anthropology) with the study of Western theatrical dance, including key modern and postmodern choreographers (seen as dance history or dance composition). Structured by an ethnocentric mindset that saw creativity as the inspired work of an individual artist (the genius archetype), this way of thinking implicitly set up an evolutionary model of history in which dance developed from communal or tribal dancing to professional and technically virtuosic theatrical performances. This model implicitly suggests that sophistication in dance can be measured by the increasing separation (both physical and psychic) of performer from the audience.

Contemporary dance disrupts this tidy paradigm in a number of ways. Nowadays, not only have many indigenous cultures reclaimed lost traditions by creating professional dance troupes which stage ritual, folk, and court dances as elaborate and colorful spectacles, but many choreographers are searching for ways to connect in an immediate and visceral manner to their audiences. Indeed, a number of contemporary experimental choreographers have been working within intimate and diverse venues, staging dances in warehouses and lofts, on piers, by the sea, in gardens, and on city streets. Once-clear geographic distinctions between East and West, or established cultural differentiations between Asian, European, and African modes of behavior, have frayed in the midst of increasingly rapid human and cultural migrations. The readings in this final part of the book help us to see how contemporary dance is negotiating—at times resisting, and at other times stimulating—an increasingly global world view.

Although some government institutions and private foundations would like to believe that the artistic interface of cultures in contemporary societies is a benign example of neighborly sharing (now that the global has become the local), the current venues for the presentation of different traditions can reproduce a number of complex and discomforting colonial dynamics. Like the global capitalist structures that have generated much of the discourse on multiculturalism over the past decade, these institutional frames can gloss over real political and economic differences. Despite these suspect foundations, however, several international festivals of contemporary dance have staged intriguing intersections of cultural bodies and their movements. To further understand the ethical and creative issues at stake in these interactions, let us look at two international performance festivals that took place during the final decade of the twentieth century.

Inspired by a multicultural evangelistic fervor, Peter Sellars organized the L.A. 1990 Festival under the rubric "Peoples of the Pacific." The festival began with an elaborate opening ceremony, an outdoor event billed as an "international sacred ritual featuring Korean shamans, Hawaiian dancers, Australian Aborigines, Native Americans from the Southwest, Eskimos, and dancers from Wallis and Futuna." These dancers

were all dressed in traditional outfits, and the sight of so many world dance forms on the horizon with the Pacific Ocean gleaming in the sun behind them was certainly breathtaking. In addition, audiences could see events such as the Javanese Court Music and Dance Company perform traditional works in a nontraditional setting, a collaborative performance of the *Mahabharata* by both *kathak* and *bharata natyam* dancers (many of whom were trained within Indian American communities in the United States), and John Malpede's L.A.P.D. (Los Angeles Poverty Department, a multiracial theater group of homeless people)—all in the space of one weekend. With the notable exception of the American group L.A.P.D., however, most of the performances were restagings of traditional indigenous dance experiences. The audience was treated to a cross-cultural array of dances without needing to interrogate or see beyond the *National Geographic*–like frames in which the dances were often situated.

Moving through representations faster than either MTV or the fashion industry, the performing bodies at the L.A. Festival piled re-representations on top of representations in a virtual tornado of cultural signification. Clearly, many of the performances were meant to celebrate and give visibility to "ethnic" or "traditional" forms of dance. But unfortunately, the overarching frame of the L.A. Festival tended to reinscribe these terms in such a way as to preserve a static notion of interesting yet exoticized "otherness" which would remain safely marginalized within American culture. Although there were many opportunities for master classes and short workshops in which to share the physical experience of these different forms, the L.A. Festival never found a way to address the more complicated issues of aesthetic values, the politics of differing performance contexts, the questions of reconstruction and revolution within tradition, the differences between ritual, communal, folk, and theatrical forms of performance, and the complexity of audience-performer relationships in cross-cultural exchange. Despite extensive program notes and educational opportunities, there was clearly no way one could possibly pin down an "appropriate"—much less an "authentic"—perspective on these performances. We have to ask if, having traveled across the Pacific to this monster of late capitalist art engineering, these "traditional" forms would ever again carry the same meanings, even in their original contexts.

In this moment of global intersection, cultural contexts are rarely stable or knowable containers, and many contemporary dancers are choosing to play with both the formal, more abstract, elements of choreography and the personal sources of their dance training and heritage. This slippage between the lived body and its cultural representation, between what we might call a somatic identity (the experience of one's physicality) and a cultural one (how one's body—skin, gender, ability, age, etc.—renders meaning in society) is the basis for some of the most interesting explorations of cultural identity in dance. Much contemporary choreography takes up and challenges which cultures belong to which bodies. The fluidity of these exchanges can be either wonderfully liberating, or it can work to reaffirm colonialist dynamics often embedded in first world–third world interactions. Although it is of the body, dance is not just about the body, it is also about subjectivity—about how that body is positioned in the world as well as the ways in which that particular body responds to the world.

Festivals such as the Peoples of the Pacific force us to rethink our notions of context, specifically cultural context. Often we think of cultural context as a sort of nest or a home, all warm and cozy and reassuring, from which one launches oneself, like a fledgling bird, into an existential freefall, hoping some kind of "essential nature" will miraculously kick in to save one's cultural identity at the last minute. Rather than thinking of context as a stable object or static (albeit often romanticized) cultural position, we might reconceive the word in terms of its etymology. *Context* comes from the Latin verb *contexere*, which means to join or weave together. The point of this elaborate textual metaphor is to deconstruct our notion of cultural context as simply a colorful ethnic backdrop against which to look at the movements of a dance, and to take up instead a

concept of cultural location as an interactive and constantly changing dynamic.

Because it carries the intriguing possibility of being both very abstract and very literal, dancing can frame the dancer's cultural identity differently. Some contemporary choreography focuses the audience's attention on the highly kinetic physicality of dancing bodies, minimizing the cultural differences between dancers by highlighting their common physical technique and ability to complete the often strenuous movement tasks. Other dances foreground the social markings of identity on the body, using movement and text to comment on (indeed, often subvert) the cultural meanings of those bodily markers. Tracing the layers of kinesthetic, aural, spatial, visual, and symbolic meanings in dance can help us to fathom the complex interconnectedness of personal experience and cultural representation so critical to understanding contemporary dance.

Almost a decade after the Peoples of the Pacific L.A. Festival, the Festival Internationale de Nouvelle Danse (FIND) in Montreal dedicated its biannual event to exploring contemporary African dance. Publicized under the rubric "Afrique, Aller/Retour" (oddly translated into English as "Africa, In and Out"), the festival highlighted several creative collaborations between European choreographers and African dancers, as well as a number of North American premieres by contemporary African choreographers. FIND also sponsored a symposium exploring the theme of cultural hybridity that featured talks by dance critics, cultural theorists, and choreographers. The performances in this festival staged two different perspectives on intercultural exchange. In some pieces there was a desire to explore what we might term a cross-cultural pastiche, where two movement cultures inhabit the same stage environment, and yet the traditions co-exist without merging or changing in any fundamental way. In contrast to this collage paradigm, there were other performances in which the dancing was both culturally grounded and an intriguing hybrid at the same time.

For example, *Antigone*, by Mathilde Monnier, a French choreographer, placed five African dancers on the stage with five European dancers. Monnier had visited Burkina Faso in the early nineties and had been inspired to create a dance based on this myth about grieving and the conflict between individual needs and civic responsibility. Interestingly enough, Monnier found that the African dancers were much more comfortable expressing grief publicly than the European dancers, who tended to see intense grief as a private emotion. The effect of this evening-length movement interface was less one of a meeting and exchange than one of channel flipping. Much of the dancing was performed in small groups of two or three, with some extended solos, and the dancers rarely communicated across their own movement traditions. Indeed, eventually the European dancers seemed almost entrapped by their own abstract, angst-ridden movement for movement's sake, especially given the joy with which some of the African dancers moved.

Ironically, it was a collaboration between two of Monnier's dancers that provided one of the most moving examples of a contemporary hybrid of African and European dancing. *Figninto, ou L'Oeil Troué* was created for three male dancers and two musicians by Seydou Boro and Salia Sanon. The performers' dancing encompassed both African-based movements and the idiosyncratic gestures and stillnesses which punctuate a European postmodern dance aesthetic. There were exceptional moments of choreographic beauty when a barrage of fast, tumbling movements would suddenly arrive at an epic stillness, or when the awesome speed of the dancing would shift into a slower, more timeless quality. During his talk at the symposium, Salia Sanon elaborated on his experience working with Monnier. At first, he reported, he didn't like working in silence, or devising his own gestural sequences. Trained in Africa, he automatically thought of dancing in terms of the music. But, he added, sometimes dancers in Africa can feel as if they are only visual accompaniment to the "real" art of music. Eventually, he found a certain expressive freedom in being able to leave the music and explore the possibility of rhythmic and physical stillness.

This kind of global exposure to many cultural forms of dance as well as the emerging interconnectedness of hybrid traditions marks much contemporary dance at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The essays in the following section chart only a few of the many interesting pathways taken by choreographers across this ever-changing landscape of global influence. We have tried to select readings that present analyses of dance from both the outside and the inside, from a perspective that charts issues of cultural representation as well as one that takes into account the experience of somatic reverberation within dance.

Perhaps it is the conscious acknowledgment and manipulation of the points of intersection between multiple (and contradictory) cultural influences in butoh that has made this dance form so compelling to American audiences. One of the first butoh groups to be presented in the United States was Akaji Marao's company Dai Rakuda-kan, whose performances at the American Dance Festival in 1982 heralded a new genre of contemporary spectacle. *Sea-Dappled Horse* began in the midst of a dark theater. At first the audience was bombarded with obnoxiously loud static. All of a sudden, there was dead silence and then a flash of bright white lights revealed twelve figures standing, arms spread-eagled, in a semicircle onstage. Naked and arranged in crucifix poses, they were covered from head to toe in a white chalky substance. The men's heads were shaved and the women's long, dark hair was frizzed out in unruly manes that framed their gruesome faces. A rope looped from mouth to mouth, held in place by teeth clenched around red cloth. In another sequence, a man on stilts, wearing a stunning, floor-length, and richly embossed kimono, slowly made his way downstage maintaining a deeply solemn focus, while a live rooster, whose feet were tied to his hat, was frantically beating his wings and calling out in a desperate effort to free himself. Teeming with grotesque sexual temptresses and demented authority figures, this dark world cycled through contradictory moments of hopefulness and hopelessness until suddenly the frenzied action was gone, the stage was bare, and the audience was left in stunned silence.

Influenced by both German expressive modern dance and the traditional Japanese theater arts, butoh appropriates performance techniques from these traditions, but radically alters their theatrical contexts to create a constant sense of cultural fragmentation. Even though the resulting images are often dissonant, grotesque, or even violent, however, the performers maintain a deliberate presence and physical integrity—a bodily commitment to the act of performing which practically borders on the religious. Bonnie Sue Stein's article on butoh traces the legacies of early butoh artists Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, whose diverse styles influenced many subsequent groups. Because she is aware of both the rigorous physical training as well as the performative excesses in butoh, Stein demonstrates how butoh artists negotiate the minefield of split cultural subjectivities, building their own worlds out of the cultural rubbish of the Eastern and Western superpowers. Predicated on a deep physical engagement with the unknown, butoh carries its own kind of inner logic and offers us a view into the moving reality of cross-cultural survival.

Another article that deals with the reality of surviving within a multicultural, multinational, and multicorporate world is Kathleen Foreman's "Dancing on the Endangered List: Aesthetics and Politics of Indigenous Dance in the Philippines." In her essay, Foreman demonstrates the way that Filipino dancing has become a mode of resistance to the massive ecological destruction of forests and mountainous lands within the Philippines by Western-backed industry. One of the central issues is the disputes over sacred lands and the property rights of indigenous peoples. Coming to Manila in order to lobby for their rights, these tribes gather for a final celebration on an outdoor basketball court within the city to share food, dancing, and political strategies. Yet while their dancing can help galvanize a sense of community and support, there are also government and foreign pressures to stage indigenous dancing for tourists as well. Tracing the development of the Philippine Educational Theatre Association, Foreman details how dance becomes a venue for collective action.

Social activism can take on many different guises within the world of contemporary dance and performance. Understanding the social mores that structure much of the gender politics in India makes Ananya Chatterjea's and Uttara Coorlawala's different responses to Chandralekha's choreographic oeuvre all the more telling. Chandralekha is a radical Indian choreographer whose work draws attention to the oppression of women within India. Creating her own hybrid dance style from the mixture of bharata natyam, yoga, and martial forms such as *chhau* and *kalarippayattu,* Chandralekha choreographs dances in which women both embody and overcome the physical victimization so common for women. Both Chatterjea and Coorlawala agree that Chandralekha's work raises consciousness about women's lives in contemporary India. However, they disagree about how to "read" Chandralekha's relationship to historical texts and Indian nationalism. We have included their separate discussions in order to place their readings in dialogue with one another, recognizing that the complexity of meanings available within any one artist's work will inevitably evoke multiple analyses of its artistic, cultural, and political significance.

The next cluster of readings introduces the historical and cultural contexts in which contact improvisation took root and flourished in North America. Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull's essay "Looking at Movement as Culture" traces the shifting cultural landscape which influenced the development of contact improvisation. She connects the casual, released physicality, the use of touch, and the play with momentum and the physics of weight to a cultural ethos of egalitarianism and new trends in social as well as experimental dance in the early seventies. Peter Ryan's case study of contact improvisation in Canada 1974–95 picks up where Bull leaves off, documenting the evolution of the form and its impact on the development of a distinct style within contemporary Canadian dance companies. He likens contact to the Internet, a vast network of possibilities and uses, always in flux. Steve Paxton's short article, "Improvisation Is a Word for Something That Can't Keep a Name," provides a meditation (by someone who has been affectionately called the grandfather of contact improvisation) on the physical and psychic space of getting "lost" in order to find alternative ways of sensing and relating to the music, movement, or one's own body. Connecting philosophy with dancing and art history, Paxton provides a master's perspective on improvisation as the act of cultural composting.

As we have seen, history plays an important role in contemporary dance. The next two selections address the work of choreographers Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Bill T. Jones, and the late Arnie Zane. Susan Leigh Foster's "Simply(?) the Doing of It, Like Two Arms Going Round and Round" analyzes several early collaborations between partners Jones and Zane. She looks at their work in light of Zane's passion for photography and the resultant conscious juxtaposition of bodily images. Placing their work within a lineage of modern African American choreographers, Foster documents how their dancing wove different expressive idioms into a new multidimensional physicality. Interestingly enough, while their joint choreography centered on innovative partnering (clearly influenced by contact improvisation) as well as their cultural legacies as a black man and a Jewish man, it never made their sexuality explicit within their dancing.

Arnie Zane's untimely death in 1988 brought Bill T. Jones into another kind of relationship with his work and his identity. In "Embodying History: Epic Narrative and Cultural Identity in African American Dance," Ann Cooper Albright discusses Jones's 1990 epic work *Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* as a reworking of Harriet Beecher Stowe's nineteenth-century novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Developing an idea of history as a dialectic retelling, Albright shows how Jones reiterates racist images from American minstrel traditions in order to assert his own historical agency. She then turns to another contemporary African American epic dance, *Bones and Ash: A Gilda Story,* performed in the mid-nineties by Urban Bush Women. In this piece, choreographer Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and writer Jewelle Gomez construct a mythic retelling of slavery's painful legacies in order to recast its history from a powerful feminist perspective.

The final selections in "Contemporary Dance: Global Contexts" comprise a trio of writings on dance and technology. Lisa Marie Naugle's and Richard Povall's short articles both focus on the creative aspects of working with video, computer image processing, and sound technologies that interact with dancers' moving bodies. Rather than seeing machines as effacing the lived body, these artists see technological advances as interactive tools that allow dancers to see movement in a new light. Ann Dils's essay looks at *Ghostcatching,* a specific collaboration between choreographer Bill T. Jones and designers Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar. Dils analyzes our notions of representational mimesis (what do we want a picture of?) and critiques the nostalgia for the "real" thing implied within the *Ghostcatching* opening exhibit and installation at the Cooper Union Gallery in New York City. She asks whether technologies such as *Ghostcatching* have any responsibility to capture the cultural identity or the material realities of the dancing body, or whether it might be useful to transcend those bodily markers completely, creating a hybrid physicality unbound by historical references.

The contemporary dancing documented here is based on multiple fields of exchange—of both movements and ideas. These articles attempt to map out the importance of dancing that is still vital, that captures the imaginations of bodies training and watching, writing and dancing today. We believe that contemporary dance can both recognize and move across cultural, geographic, and aesthetic boundaries, causing categories such as self/other, nature/culture, body/mind, and personal/political to become more fluid. This interconnectedness of dancing bodies within the world can create a transformative model for living in the twenty-first century. Let's make the most of it.

Butoh: "Twenty Years Ago We Were Crazy, Dirty, and Mad"

BONNIE SUE STEIN

The spotlight settles on a flamboyant figure perched on the edge of an orchestra seat. A seventy-nine-year-old man—face and hands painted white, lips bright red—wears an old-fashioned black velvet dress, a crumpled pink hat, and high-heeled shoes. He adjusts his hat, dabs his face, lowers his eyes, and flutters his eyelids. With mincing arms, he becomes the grotesque shadow of a young coquette. He drapes himself across the edge of the stage in the serpentine curves of traditional femininity, then kicks his foot high like a carefree young lover. To the slow koto music, he skips, flutters, and poses. Finally he smiles, drops one shoulder and tilts his chin like a scared and puzzled child, curtseys, and tiptoes away.

Pierrot at the big top? An old 42nd Street transvestite? No. To the audience at New York's Joyce Theater he is a revelation. To Japan he is a pioneer of contemporary dance. To the world he is Kazuo Ohno, one of the founders of butoh.

Kazuo Ohno, Sankai Juku, Dai Rakuda-kan, Muteki-sha, Min Tanaka, Tatsumi Hijikata, Yoko Ashikawa, Eiko and Koma, Ariadon, and at least forty other soloists and companies comprise *butoh,* the dance genre that emerged during the late 1950s and early sixties from Japan's contemporary dance scene.

Butoh is:
shocking
provocative
physical
spiritual
erotic
grotesque
violent
cosmic
nihilistic
cathartic
mysterious

In the 1860s, "butoh" was used to define dance in general; later it applied exclusively to "ancient dance." The term was also used to describe Western-style ballroom dancing. Butoh was first used in its current sense in the early sixties by Tatsumi Hijikata to describe his rebellious, syncretic performance style. Hijikata first called the style *ankoku butoh,* or "dance of darkness or gloom."[1] The word "butoh" is comprised of two Japanese characters—"bu," meaning dance, and "to," which literally means step. Today, butoh is used to describe both solo and group dances that seem to be taking very different but parallel directions.

There are many elements of butoh that link it to *noh* and *kabuki,* as well as to the other traditional arts of Japan. Most of these links, however, are superficial. Butoh is an anti-traditional tradition seeking to erase the heavy imprint of Japan's strict society and offering unprecedented freedom of artistic expression. After World War II, Japanese artists turned away from the traditional forms—as well as from the West—and asked, "What is contemporary Japanese dance?" There are some visible similarities to noh and kabuki—the white body paint, also used in kabuki, and the extremely slow noh-like movement. But these traditional forms were viewed as archaic, their codified choreography useless to the early butoh improvisers. Zeami, the great noh master, said that facial expression was cheap. Butoh artists disagreed, emphasizing their faces.

Nakajima said, "We found that we were making the same discoveries as noh actors made, using some of the same terminology, but we had never learned those forms."[2] New York–based dancers Eiko and Koma have said that often they are incorrectly compared to noh and kabuki dancers by Western critics, even though they never studied either form. Their most revered teacher is the German Manja Chmiel, a student of Mary Wigman, who Eiko and Koma studied with in the mid-1970s.

Since Dai Rakuda-kan's 1982 appearance in Durham, N.C., Tanaka's 1981 New York performances and workshops, and the inclusion of Sankai Juku in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Arts Festival, butoh has become popular with American art world audiences. Butoh's success can be explained partly by understanding trends in postmodern American dance and by appreciating the general "Asian boom" in the West. Japan has long been a great influence on the experimental dance and theater of the West. From Robert Wilson, Peter Brook, and Mabou Mines to Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Laura Dean, and Lucinda Childs, Japanese elements have been used in sets, mise-en-scenes, staging, movement, and vocalization. In the marketplace, department stores like Bloomingdales build extravagant ad campaigns around their "exotic" imports from the East. In the performing arts, American audiences have begun to show an interest in the Japanese forms of kabuki, noh, *kyogen, bugaku,* and now butoh.

There is great variety in the imagery of the butoh dancers, but it is always haunting, and of a lasting impression. One does not generally go away from a butoh performance with an ambiguous feeling—you either love it or hate it. Susan Sontag attended Min Tanaka's *Form of the Sky* (1985) at La Mama E.T.C. in December 1985. In Tokyo, she had been very excited about his *Emotion* (1985) but was confused by *Form of the Sky.* According to Tanaka, "she was thinking of my last performance, keeping it in her head. She couldn't throw that one away." Sontag returned to see *Form of the Sky* again. Afterward, she spoke to Tanaka at length. "I think she understands it now," he said. What is this butoh imagery about, and why does it have such an impact on Western audiences of the eighties?

The work of these Japanese artists is so thorough and so "Japanese" that Westerners sense a searing honesty. People rarely question the validity of butoh: they accept both the grotesque and the lyrical images. Because butoh is so obviously demanding, spectators who may not like it—who may even feel uncomfortable confronting such intensity—still respect the experimentation and the performance skills required.

Artists who devote their lives to butoh are not unlike noh performers: their lives are rooted in their art. And it is this passionate, focused attention that Westerners respond to. Audiences are drawn in by the direct and raw emotions. I have seen spectators staring with wide eyes, and I have seen them sleeping—which I consider an escape from the spectacle rather than boredom. In Japan, especially at noh drama, a hypnogogic "dozing" is an acceptable way of taking in the performance. This state is a version of "attention" usually not found in the West.

Awake or not, prior to the Tokyo Butoh Festival of February 1985, relatively few Japanese had seen butoh. In Japan, the form suffers from what is called *gyakuyunyu,* or "go out and come back." Until an artist gains recognition abroad, s/he is unlikely to win approval in Japan.

Kazuko Kuniyoshi says of the Western reaction to butoh:

> Western theater and dance has not reached beyond technique and expression as means of communication. The cosmic elements of butoh, its violence and nonsense, eroticism and metamorphic quali-

ties, are welcomed by Western artists because they are forced to use their imaginations when confronted with mystery. Butoh acts as a kind of code to something deeper, something beyond themselves. What is crucial to this code is its nonverbal nature.[3]

The *New York Times*'s chief dance critic, Anna Kisselgoff, compared American and butoh choreographers:

> Whether they acknowledge it or not, American dancers and choreographers are still using Martha Graham, George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, the Judson Dance Theater of the 1960s and other major figures as reference points. They may extend the ideas or idioms of these choreographers, or rebel against them. But they are still working in their shadow. . . . Movement for movement's sake has been the overriding principle for choreographers seeking new directions. . . . They have increasingly borrowed ideas from the minimalist esthetic in the visual arts and in music. . . . Postmodern dance is actually an extension of a general formalist esthetic. Form was content in American dance.[4]

In contrast, she said butoh uses "natural movement and stylized gestures to convey emotional content or human relationships." In other words, butoh's emphasis is on emotional expression. But a swing toward overt content and representation is in the air and part of the reason is butoh.

In the workshop given by Nakajima at the Asia Society in September 1985, the instructor said that "in America dance became too abstract, so now dancers want to add daily activity. I can understand why. They want to recover what dance is." She felt that most of the dance she had seen in America was mechanical and, therefore, not interesting. Butoh is a "bridge between action and narrative with dance movement or choreography."

Tatsumi Hijikata

Lizzie Slater, a historian who recently lectured in Oxford, England on ankoku butoh, has written:

> After Hiroshima the young generation of Japan, mauled by the War and the shattering of the past, needed to shriek out. Okamoto Taro returned from Manchuria and urged his fellow visual artists in 1948 "to destroy everything with monstrous energy like Picasso's in order to reconstruct the Japanese art world" and Okamoto went on to state that art must not be beautiful, technically skillful, or "comfortable." Instead, it should be "disagreeable," disregarding easy beauty and known forms of art. The post-war period in Japan was based on the destruction of old values.[5]

In the art world, the rebellion was made manifest in the work of people like author Yukio Mishima, theatrical experimenters like Shuji Terayama, and dancer/choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata. They explored the dark truths that hid beneath the Japanese social mask. Hijikata wanted to uncover the ignored aspects of Japanese society such as deformity and insanity. These were difficult subjects for performance and led to a great deal of controversy regarding the work he presented:

> The aim of Hijikata was a direct assault on the nervous system. The Japanese features in art ceased to be reticent and understated and became arrogant and antagonistic. Hijikata began collaborating with Kazuo Ohno in the mid-50's, but the most significant performance Hijikata staged was *Kinjiki* ("Forbidden Colors," 1959) based on a work by Mishima. This piece was presented as part of a series of performances organized by the All-Japan Art Dance Association in 1959. It was a violent spasm of anti-dance: a young man clutches a live chicken between his thighs, in the midst of a brutalizing act of buggery. In the darkness the audience perceives the advancing footsteps of another man, Hijikata advances on the younger man (Yoshito Ohno, the son of Kazuo). There was no music, the effect was shattering. Several members of the Association were so appalled that they threatened to resign. Instead, Hijikata left, followed by others, including Kazuo Ohno. This represented the break from the modern dance world.[6]

Another famous Hijikata production was the 1968 *Nikutai no Hanran* ("Rebellion of the Flesh"). In this performance Hijikata killed chickens on stage. Dancer Ko Murobushi saw this work and decided at once to join Hijikata's studio.

> "I went to the hall alone, in a bit of a rush. I came across a horse in front of the entrance, then a number of objects in the foyer by Takigushi [the surrealist who was a very influential avant-garde figure, organizing many exhibitions at the time], Kano, and by Nakanishi [the primary designer for ankoku butoh in 1965, still an important butoh collaborator]. The performance began with a flying model aircraft which crashed into a huge metal sheet at the back of the stage after circling over the audience, screeching with noise. Hijikata appeared, making slow progress through the audience from the back of the hall, as if he were to be crowned. He was muttering, groaning, singing—in some way dancing. In a later scene, he was suspended from the ceiling like a moth, as if trapped in a spider's web. This was not elegant or aesthetic, but wild, vivid, delicate, the intensity overwhelmed me. No one can show, be NOW, as radically as Hijikata. He became dance itself, the Poet of Darkness."[7]

Mishima is said to have wept at this performance, saying, "It's terrifying, this is time dancing."

Postwar Japan was a time for breeding a new code of ethics. To rebel against a failed society was not surprising. The atmosphere was exciting: very unorganized and messy, the kind of confusion that tends to breed either more confusion or acute creativity. Like surrealism, early butoh used distortions of nature, and like dada, it used chance as a principle of composition. In another early work which Hijikata called *Dance Experience* (1960), he provoked the audience, often creating a dialog with them, confronting them directly from the stage. Improvisation was used by Hijikata, Ohno, Kasai Akira, and others of this early avant-garde. Chance and improvisation contrasted with Japan's balance and order.

Emotional expressionism entered the dances as well. A people humiliated by losing the war, Japanese artists searched for a way to express themselves. If the rest of life were full of hiding, at least the dance should be free. And so the chaos grew. Every convention was dropped. They danced naked, provoked the audience, played deafeningly loud music. Among others, Takaya Eguchi, Ohno's teacher from 1936 until 1947, had traveled to Germany in 1922 to study with Mary Wigman. He and some of his peers later used elements of this German *neue Tanz* such as loud music and dramatic emotional expressions. Ohno and Hijikata followed suit. Other German dancers such as Harald Kreutzberg had visited Japan around 1939 and left their expressionistic mark. Hijikata integrated eroticism, nudity, provocation, and social criticism with other elements of Japanese culture: classical dance, Japanese body postures, pre-war vulgar entertainment, medieval grotesque paintings. From European culture he took inspiration from the paintings of Bosch, Breugel, and Goya, from surrealism, dada, and later, 1960s pop art.

Most Japanese art forms require a sensitivity to the action continued beyond its limits, to the state of the artist as s/he overcomes self-imposed boundaries. Working beyond one's threshold of endurance increases human potential, thereby increasing emotional and physical strength and reaching *satori*. Studying *kendo* (Japanese fencing) in Japan in 1975–76, I experienced this samurai attitude. In kendo, one is expected to participate in the practice long after the body has tired. To continue means to really "learn" something about kendo. The body and mind are exhausted, self-control is abandoned, and there is nothing to interfere

with spontaneous learning. I often felt this happening to me. I would become so involved in the practice that I did not notice my tired body. The room—and time—would disappear. There was a great deal of elation following this feeling, and somehow it seemed the only place for growth. This is a key to butoh: working beyond self-imposed boundaries, passing through the gates of limitation into undiscovered territory. Whether the gestures are slow and deliberate as with Muteki-sha, or wild and self-effacing as with Tanaka, the artists share a common driving dedication to the work. The strength of their commitment is an extension of the samurai/never-give-up spirit that has reasserted itself so powerfully in contemporary Japan, evident in the business world as well as the arts.

Hijikata did not perform in public for at least the last ten years of his life. He choreographed several works for Ohno and Yoko Ashikawa, a woman who is said to have had all her teeth pulled in the early days of butoh in order to create more varied and extreme facial expressions. Koma remembers seeing her dance around 1970. He was so moved by her performance that he decided to quit the university and study with Hijikata. When Hijikata, after years of improvising, began to choreograph for Ashikawa, three principles governed his work.[8] First, in contrast to Western dance, he emphasized discontinuity, imbalance, and entropy instead of rhythm, balance, and the flow of kinetic energy. Second, he used traditional Japanese sources for inspiration. Third, he developed the lower body; Japanese proportions are different from Westerners', and Hijikata wanted to create movement specifically for the Japanese body. This has been extremely liberating for Japanese dancers, whose bodies are not suited to Western modern dance.

In 1984, Hijikata choreographed a dance for Tanaka. Tanaka had always worked independently of both Hijikata and Ohno and, unlike most butoh dancers, had never studied with either of the founding fathers. The success of the collaboration weighed heavily on him. Tanaka and Hijikata worked continuously for two months preparing Tanaka's Tokyo performance. They called the dance *Ren-Ai Butoh-ha* ("Love Butoh Sect," 1984), a name which stood for any work they did together. In the program essay for the December 1985 performance of *Form of the Sky*, Tanaka wrote:

> Since Hijikata stung my eyes, I became his son. . . . Hijikata constantly whispers strategy into my ears, and I would like to introduce him to all of you, hardly standing on enfeebled legs.[9]

Hijikata continued to teach and choreograph in Tokyo until his death in January 1986. [At that time], he was planning his first tour abroad—he had always refused to get a passport because he felt that it was not necessary to leave Japan. He resisted any commercial development of butoh and opened his workshops to the public, training anyone who wanted to learn.

Kazuo Ohno

Ohno lifts his skirts slightly above his shapely calf. He takes a small leap forward and lands in a "new world." Arms outstretched, wrists limp, he tilts his head and pliés like a child in ballet class. Later he returns to the stage in a purple fringed scarf and white bloomers. A Cabbage Patch doll is pinned to the scarf, and a large flower is in his hair. He goes into the audience and offers candy to a man, then tosses candies into the air. He exits, and his son enters, looking like a monk in a long, white high-collared silk robe. In contrast to his father, Yoshito Ohno's movements are extremely slow. I am certain that I saw his ears move as he approached the soft blue light.

Ohno has an immense wardrobe boasting an array of gowns for all occasions. During a recent trip to New York, he purchased an exquisite off-white satin beauty, circa 1890, with puffed sleeves, a high collar, and a four-foot train. At home, he tried on the dress and immediately began to dance. He looked like an old bride whose groom left her waiting at the altar.

Ohno's peers and former students refer to him as a god. He exists for his dance and constant research.

35a and b. Kazuo Ohno, in his tribute to the dancer La Argentina, *Admiring La Argentina* (1977), performed at the Joyce Theatre in November 1985. Photo 35a copyright © Linda Vartoogian; photo 35b copyright © Jack Vartoogian, 1985.

Ohno is a philosopher and loves to talk about dance and his past and to describe his previous performances, both analytically and physically. He writes every day, composing essays with such titles as "What Is a Lesson," "A Rehearsal Scene," "The Encounter with Argentina," and "The Will."

At home, Ohno teaches two days a week in his Yokohama studio. But most of the time he is on tour, dancing and distributing his essays. *Admiring La Argentina* (1977), his most famous work, has been performed in Europe, Israel, North and South America, and Asia. When performing this dance, Ohno feels that he is La Argentina, the famous Spanish dancer he first saw in 1929. In *My Mother* (1981), he becomes his mother, the other great woman who has influenced his work. Other major influences cited by Ohno are his teacher Takaya Eguchi, collaborations with Hijikata, the Japanese avant-garde experimentation of the 1960s, and his deep Christian beliefs.

In *My Mother,* Ohno skips, jumps, lies down. His

metamorphic face and body display a multitude of emotional expressions. There is a lyrical yet pitiful quality to his "mother," as he dances the dance of a tragic clown. Marcia B. Siegel described her reaction to his 1985 appearance at New York's Joyce Theater:

> The 79-year-old performer is waging an intense physical competition, a wrestling match where he gets so intimate with death that he sometimes acquires his adversary's face.[10]

Ohno's performances are structured improvisations. Although he never does exactly the same movements twice, he works from the same inspiration. He does not feel that there is a separation between life and dance. As Eiko said, Ohno "does not commute."

Ohno wrote about improvisation:

> The empty stage, the bare stage you appear on, without any preparation, does not mean that it contains nothing. . . . The vacant space is gradually being filled and in the end, something is realized there. . . . It may be the kind of thing that takes a lifetime to learn—in my case I instantaneously knew the fact that the empty space actually was filled and I danced in joy and excitement.[11]

Ohno feels that he is blessed, fortunate to be able to dance.

The first large butoh festival in Japan was held in February 1985. National Television (NHK) televised the two weeks of sold-out Tokyo performances. Among the performers were Ohno (directed by Hijikata), Kunishi Kamiryo, Tanaka with his group, Maijuku, Dai Rakuda-kan, Dance Love Machine, Teru Goi, and Biyakko-sha.

Hijikata's words of warning to Nakajima prior to her 1984 European tour appeared in her program notes:

> We are surrounded by a mass of tricky symbols and systems. . . . Modern people are aware of the dark uneasiness in front of their eyes . . . but we shake hands with the dead, who send us encouragement from beyond the body. This is the unlimited power of butoh. . . . In our body, history is hidden . . . and will appear in each detail of our expressions. In butoh we can find, touch, our hidden reality—something can be born, can appear, living and dying at the same moment. The character and basis of butoh is a hidden violence. It is a filthy child who has the special ability for butoh—because he knows how to create beautiful patterns. Butoh should be viewed as enigmatic as life itself. I am not sure in the end whether it is a trap or a secret correspondence with something.[12]

Butoh has progressed in a variety of directions since Hijikata and his peers began experimenting in the 1950s. At a September 1985 butoh workshop at the Asia Society, Nakajima said, "Twenty years ago we were described as crazy, dirty, and mad—and now we have a passport."

Tatsumi Hijikata (1929–1986)

On 21 January 1986 Tatsumi Hijikata died of liver cancer in Tokyo. He was fifty-seven years old. A founder of butoh, a term he began to use in 1963, Hijikata touched every butoh dancer/choreographer, in some way. He was the "charismatic center, the artistic force, the inspiration" for butoh, said historian Lizzie Slater.

"A big loss, big loss," said Ellen Stewart, who had planned to bring him to America for his first visit in 1986.

Among the dancers/choreographers who acknowledge Hijikata as Sensei (master/dancer) are Ushio Amagatsu of Sankai Juku, Akaji Maro of Dai Rakuda-kan, Natsu Nakajima of Muteki-sha, Min Tanaka, Yoko Ashikawa, and, although more than twenty years his senior, Kazuo Ohno, who depended on him to refine every work he created.

Hijikata provoked and manipulated his students, pushing them to be individuals and find their own personal expression. Tanaka said, "Kazuo Ohno is a god and Hijikata is the devil."

Notes

1. The source for much of my historical data is Kazuko Kuniyoshi, *An Overview of the Contemporary Japanese Dance Scene,* Orientation Seminars on Japan, no. 19 (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1985).
2. All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from interviews conducted by the author in 1985.
3. Kuniyoshi, *An Overview of the Contemporary Japanese Dance Scene,* 6.
4. Anna Kisselgoff, "Dance That Startles and Challenges Is Coming from Abroad," *New York Times,* October 13, 1985, H14.
5. Lizzie Slater, "Investigations into Ankoku Butoh," unpublished manuscript (1985), 1–2.
6. Ibid., 2.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Kuniyoshi, *An Overview of the Contemporary Japanese Dance Scene,* 3.
9. Min Tanaka, "I Am an Avant-Garde Who Crawls the Earth: Homage to Tatsumi Hijikata," from the program notes for *Form of the Sky,* trans. Kazue Kobata (1985).
10. Marcia Siegel, "Beating Back the White Noise," *Village Voice,* December 17, 1985, 114.
11. Kazuo Ohno, "A Rehearsal Scene," *Drama Review* 30, no. 2 (T110) (1986): 10.
12. Tatsumi Hijikata, "To My Comrade," from the program notes of *Niwa* by Natsu Nakajima, trans. Natsu Nakajima and Lizzie Slater (1985).

Looking at Movement as Culture: Contact Improvisation to Disco

CYNTHIA JEAN COHEN BULL

In a made-for-television movie shown in Fall 1986, a woman dies . . . or, at least, according to the doctors, she is "body dead." But somehow her brain remains alive, functioning normally. At the same time, a second woman is pronounced "brain dead," but her body continues to breathe and function perfectly. In a miracle operation, doctors place the living brain of the first woman into the living body of the second woman. The ensuing TV drama explores the question of this new person's identity.

The doctors have no problems whatsoever with the woman's identity. Gleeful over their accomplishment, they reassure her that she really is her brain and that her body is essentially irrelevant to who she is. Her husband, however, resists this new body and is disturbed by the fact that the woman looks, moves, and feels totally different; how can she be his wife? His rejection causes her to feel doubt and confusion as to her own identity. Further complications ensue: she is followed around by the husband of the woman whose body her brain now inhabits. She *looks* like his wife; she must *be* his wife, still alive somehow. Eventually, though, the miracle woman and her husband (that is, the husband of the woman whose brain survived) become reconciled to her new body as they both realize that, indeed, she is her brain, and they live, we assume, happily ever after.

This popular consideration of the mind/body split exemplifies some familiar attitudes toward movement. Like the doctors in the television movie, many cultural observers and researchers ignore the body and its actions, seeing them as irrelevant trappings for the mind. They scarcely notice movement and do not consider its role or significance in human events; such omissions are common in accounts of cultural history and anthropology.

If researchers do pay attention to movement and the body, it may be only in order to see the mind which lies behind it. If gestures, for instance, can be translated into verbal messages, then they have been "explained." Cultural observers with this orientation look for the cognitive components of movement systems ("what does the movement stand for?"—a common approach in popular nonverbal communication theory); and/or the social structural implications of the body ("how do concepts of the body duplicate the social order?"—the approach of social theorists such as Mary Douglas). These translations of movement into cognitive systems can be illuminating, but sometimes they subsume the reality of the body, as if people's experiences of themselves moving in the world were not an essential part of their consciousness and of the ways in which they understand and carry out their lives.

On the other hand, researchers who wish to redress the imbalance of mind over body may react by positing the body and movement as the primary reality. Like the husbands in the TV story, they maintain the dichotomy between mind and body by emphasizing the body alone. Some researchers tend to look only "at the movement itself" ("just describe what you see," they say) as if the body, movement, and mind were independent entities, scarcely connected to social and cultural ideas and institutions. Indeed, much writing in dance history tends toward a simplistic, descriptive approach to discussing movement.

The problem here is that the division of mind and body (and the various attitudes toward movement this division suggests) dichotomizes aspects of experience which are not only closely related but which also reflect and refract upon one another. To detach one aspect from another for analytical purposes can contribute valuable insights into the nature of movement, but if one aspect is taken as the whole, distortion results. For, in fact, as sociologist John O'Neill comments, *"Society is never a disembodied spectacle.* We engage in social interaction from the very start on the basis of sensory and aesthetic impressions."[1] The body and movement are social realities interacting with and interpreting other aspects of the culture. Structured movement systems[2] like social dance, theatre dance, sport, and ritual help to articulate and create images of who people are and what their lives are like, encoding and eliciting ideas and values; they are also part of experience, of performances and actions by which people know themselves.

Since movement and the body are often opposed to words and the mind, it is interesting to look at the resemblances between movement systems and language. Both are cultural activities which have biological aspects. Even apparently simple and "natural" actions such as walking or sitting are in part culturally constructed. Also, like language, movement is ubiquitous, a cultural given which people are constantly creating, participating in, interpreting, and reinterpreting on both conscious and unconscious levels.

However, movement is unique. It precedes language in individual development, forming a primary basis for both personal identity and social relationships. It is kinesthetic and visual, rather than aural, and in many instances, movement is less specific (and therefore often more inclusive and ambiguous) than language. But while movement does not usually have structures which are analogous to the grammar that characterizes every language,[3] it has observable patterns and qualities which can be identified with particular cultures and historical periods. Any traveler knows the reality of these patterns; the "natives" may walk with a different gait, may gesture more or less elaborately, may have a different rhythm and timing. The discomfort of being out of place and recognizable as a foreigner arises in part because of a difference in movement systems.

In order to observe and understand more about movement, one needs to ask what characterizes it in a given setting, how the characteristics form an overall impression, and what kinds of acceptable variations can exist. This requires careful analysis of the movement as it occurs. Understanding movement also involves asking what meanings and associations are embedded in and created by the experience of moving. Looking at movement alone, like examining any "text," can reveal details of the techniques and structures of a movement system; but it cannot tell us how movement is interwoven with other aspects of the culture or what its implications or associations might be in any given circumstance. If we are to read the ambiguity as well as the pattern embedded in movement, we must investigate not only what the movement is like but also what its import might be and how different participants, audiences, and outsiders might understand it. Thus the movement system needs to be viewed as part of the cultural reality. It is patterned, yet it shifts and changes—as does all of culture.

Contact improvisation, an American dance form, provides an example of a structured movement system whose features are part of a shifting cultural landscape.[4] Theatre dancer Steve Paxton and a group of colleagues and students first developed contact improvisation in 1972 by experimenting with partners giving and taking weight improvisationally. The practice of contact improvisation achieved a richly varied, yet defined and identifiable, movement style. It spread to many groups of people in the U.S. (and eventually in Canada and Europe), reaching its peak as a social and performance form in the mid- to late seventies, and is still practiced by hundreds of dancers today.

38. Contact improvisers warming up by engaging in spontaneous, free-flowing movement. Photo by Bill Arnold.

People doing contact improvisation create a dance through collaborative interaction, basing their improvisation on the physical forces of weight and momentum. The dancers are supposed to be absorbed in experiencing the movement and sensing (largely through touch) the experience of their partners; in order to allow momentum to develop, dancers have to keep their energy freely flowing, abandoning self-control in favor of mutual trust and interaction.[5]

Contact improvisation as it emerged in the early seventies was often learned in settings (jams) more akin to social dance situations than to theatre dance classes. Anyone could practice the form and, theoretically at least, perform it publicly. The experience of the movement style and improvisational process itself were thought to teach people how to live (to trust, to be spontaneous and "free," to "center" oneself, and to "go with the flow"), just as the mobile, communal living situations of the young, middle-class participants provided the setting and values which nourished this form. Dancers and audiences saw contact improvisation as, to use Clifford Geertz's phrase, a "model of" and a "model for" an egalitarian, spontaneous way of life.[6]

Contact improvisation has a history of development and change; it also has historical antecedents within both social dance and theatre dance forms. Rock-and-roll dance, a mass cultural form, was characterized by some of the same qualities in movement style and structure as contact improvisation (internal focus, ongoing energy flow, extemporariness) and the same values or concepts with which these qualities were associated (self-expression, freedom, egalitarianism, spontaneity). Theatre dance forms, practiced by relatively small groups of people, shared some of the concerns of contact improvisation, investigating physical forces in dance and "democratic" performance modes. As the contact improvisation movement arose and grew, it existed simultaneously with contrasting movement forms, such as disco dance; eventually, its style changed as technical developments ensued and as the circumstances of its practice and performance were altered.

Shifts and patterns can be perceived by tracing some of this history—noting the presence of some of contact improvisation's movement characteristics and ideas in prior American dance and performance forms, and looking at contact improvisation in conjunction with certain coexisting movement practices. This study illustrates some ways of looking at movement as culture, while at the same time it points to the complexity of the topic. Certain movement qualities appear through time, yet meanings suggested by these qualities subtly shift; contrasting movement styles exist simultaneously, sometimes embodying the same meanings and sometimes opposite meanings. Yet movement, which seems so elusive, can also be very concrete. Evoking the way a group of people move can call up the ambiance of a cultural time and place with clarity and immediacy.

The development of rock-and-roll in the late fifties marked a major, widespread incorporation of dance and music from black communities into the mainstream of American popular dance and music. The powerful influence of black dance and music in shaping American culture has a long history, and the emergence of rock-and-roll dance and music is a key moment in that history.[7] Central to this development were social changes, most notably the civil rights movement, which challenged former boundaries between blacks and whites. Also key, and historically unprecedented, was the postwar media explosion of television, which consolidated rock-and-roll as a mass phenomenon.

The borrowed/incorporated movement qualities and structures from black dance traditions included extensive use of shoulders, head, hips, and knees, often moving independently or in different directions at the same time. Emphasis tended to be on continuity of energy flow and on rhythmic impulses, rather than on the specific positioning of body parts, and on improvisation both by individual dancers and by couples.

By the mid-sixties, people in some communities had carried improvisational flexibility in rock-and-roll dancing to a point at which it was acceptable for dancers to go out onto the dance floor alone or with a group of people rather than a partner, and move in highly individual styles. But although the "steps" were not codified and most people felt they were being "free," the dancing was still typified by certain structural and movement characteristics. Dancers improvised within a specific movement range. They tended to move with a focus inward rather than outward to a partner or to the environment, absorbed by the music and the experience of moving. They frequently danced with a sense of energy freely sent in all directions, creating an impression of abandon and literally giving up control.

These movement qualities were important components of the cultural environment of that time. Engaging in these ways of moving shaped feelings not only about the "right" way to move and to dance, but also about the "right" way to live. The movement style seemed natural, contemporary, free, and not "uptight." Along with the rock music of the period, dancing both reinforced and crystallized an image of the self: independent yet communal, free, sensual, daring. This image of self would be central to contact improvisation.

The movement qualities of rock dancing were also associated with contemporary social movements and practices such as the civil rights movement, youth culture, and drug-taking, and with values such as rebellion, expressiveness, and individualism within a loving community of peers. Dancing encoded these ideas in a flexible and multilayered text, its kinesthetic and structural characteristics laden with social implications and associations. Depending on the circumstances and cultural backgrounds of the participants or observers, different aspects of the dancing would emerge as primary.

For instance, because of its pelvic movements and

open derivation from black culture, the twist (ca. 1961) was at once perceived by segments of the American public as overly sexual, as well as anti-social, because of the separation of one dancer from another. In 1962, one English journalist visiting New York wrote:

> I'm not easily shocked but the Twist shocked me . . . half Negroid, half Manhattan, and when you see it on its native heath, wholly frightening . . . the essence of the Twist, the curious perverted heart of it, is that you dance it alone.[8]

To opponents, the twist was shockingly autoerotic and unwholesome. To those who danced the twist or enjoyed watching it, the movement had similar but more sanguine meanings—it was sexy, exciting, wild. In any given social setting, certain meanings became more prominent than others. For instance, for those who danced it in New York City's Peppermint Lounge, the twist was a symbol of the latest and the newest in hip social circles. But for some teenagers, forbidden to do the dance in schools or community centers, it was an act of rebellion against staid and repressive authority.

Rock dancing throughout the sixties was given significance by dancers engaged in social action. For many members of the counterculture, the free-flowing, internally focused dancing was an integral part of giving up control and losing oneself in the drug experience. For more politically minded people, rock dance was a metaphor for political awareness. The extensive improvisation in rock dance enacted the rejection of explicit structures in New Left and feminist organizations. Being able to "do your own thing" on the dance floor carried out a commitment to individualism and egalitarian ideals frequently voiced in sixties politics. The development of new music and dance forms by black artists was part of an identification with and pride in black culture fostered in the civil rights and black liberation movements. And the lack of differentiation between male and female movement, abhorred by rock's critics, was a positive emblem for some people of a rebellion against American gender roles.

As explicit political phenomena, the student movement, the civil rights and the black liberation movements, the antiwar movement, and the women's movement found only tenuous moments of alliance with each other. But dancing, a multivocal and flexible sphere of social activity, could on occasion alleviate and even transcend political differences, emphasizing the shared ethos of these movements for social change.[9]

On the other hand, the experimental dance of the late fifties and the sixties was usually quite different from the social dance of the same time period. An obvious distinction is that rock-and-roll dance and music were large-scale social activities, while theatre dance was confined to a relatively small number of people clustered most noticeably in New York and other metropolitan and university centers. Most theatre dancers participated in social dance, but only a handful of social dancers performed theatre dance.

Movement contrasts were also evident. Rock dance tended to be exuberant and anarchically complex, while theatre dance was often pedestrian and minimal. The familiar joke summarized the situation: in the early sixties, people would go to a dance concert to watch people stand around, and then afterward everyone would go to a party and dance.

At the same time, a fusion of aesthetic and social ideas was occurring. Merce Cunningham's aesthetic dictum that any movement could be considered dance proved a powerful concept for younger dancers engaged by reemerging ideals of social equality and community. Those ideals were embedded in the experience of social dance, which required no formal training and was hence seen as "democratic," but which was also clearly "dancing." According to choreographers Douglas Dunn and Trisha Brown, social dance has played a key role in changing conceptions about movement. In a conversation recorded in the late seventies, Dunn commented, "Before the sixties there was no consciousness of certain things as being dance." Brown added, "I think the 'Twist' helped a lot in the sixties." And Dunn replied, "Rock dancing was a bridge between your daily life which was still unconscious perhaps, and part of your classroom dance life which was not making available that possibility [of all kinds of movement]."[10]

At first, the bridge between daily life and theatre dance was explored by experimental choreographers through the conscious inclusion of "pedestrian" and/or athletic movement. Like Cunningham, experimental choreographers in the sixties were acting in part in opposition to the symbolism and drama of the modern dance tradition: this contributed to the emphasis on the "purely physical"—the austere, the minimal in movement. Yet the ubiquitous rock music and dance, experienced by many young people as the quintessential expression of the times, affected these dancers as well, and the qualities experienced in rock dancing gradually began to appear more and more in theatre dance.

By the early seventies, free-flowing movement, focus on the inner experience of moving, and energy thrown in all directions became prevalent in American theatre dance. They appeared strongly in contact improvisation and in the dance of choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Laura Dean, and Twyla Tharp.

Tharp, for instance, who was consciously influenced by black dance and social dance traditions, developed a style which has been described by movement analyst Billie Frances Lepczyk as freely flowing and internally focused. These qualities, she suggests, are "least pronounced in ballet and in most previous major modern dance styles": they "create a loose, carefree, casual manner which makes the movement appear easy—as if anyone could do it."[11] The movement style of social dance shaped in the sixties and its implications—that it was loose, carefree, casual, easy—continued into the seventies in theatre dance.

Contact improvisers amalgamated the sensual, free-flowing, inwardly experienced movement of sixties rock dance with an "objective" stance toward the physical capacities of the body typical of sixties experimental dance. They borrowed movement exercises from aikido—the Japanese martial art—in order to create dancing that was not based on aesthetic choices. At the same time, a crucial new element was added: touch. If dancers doing the twist never touched, contact improvisers tried to maintain a constant "point of contact" between bodies. The technical investigation of the give and take of weight coincided with the interest in touch so prominent among the therapeutic psychology movements of the early seventies. Although contact improvisers were cautioned not to become involved in "the gland game," as Paxton called it, the sensuality of the form was a major feature for participants and audiences. In this respect contact improvisation can be seen as a culmination of opposition to postwar repression.

Early performances of contact improvisation in the mid-seventies have been described as being like "a hot basketball game," with the audiences gasping, laughing, clapping throughout. After performances, recalls Lisa Nelson, an early contact improviser,

> there would be a lot of dancing in the audience. People would be jumping all over one another. They would stick around and really want to start rolling around and want to jump on you. The feeling was of a real, shared experience among performers and audience, a tremendous feeling of physical accessibility between performers and audience.[12]

The movement in contact improvisation and the social structure of its practice and performance were mutually reinforced. At least through the mid-seventies, many of the participants lived in communal and/or transitory circumstances, organizing their dancing and their lives in the collective styles which had first emerged in the sixties. Participants and fans saw the movement qualities, the improvisational process, and the practice/performance style of contact improvisation as embodying central values arising from the sixties counterculture: egalitarianism, rejection of traditional sex roles, individualism within a group, and an opposition to authority.

However, the social structure of contact improvisation could not be maintained. By 1981, most participants had abandoned countercultural lifestyles and the institutions supporting dance had become less fa-

39. Disco dancers transformed rock dancing's focus on the self as an individual within the group into a display of the self with a partner. Unlike contact improvisers, disco dancers such as these at Studio 54 in the late seventies emphasized female/male pairing. Photo © Jack Vartoogian, 1978.

vorable toward informal performance. Nevertheless, participation in the dancing continued to foster countercultural values. Contact improvisation carried the meaningful aspects of "sixties" social dancing into the late seventies, even after the environment in which the movement originated had changed.

One of the clearest indicators of the changing environment can be seen in a popular dance form coinciding with contact improvisation—disco dance. Whereas contact dancers performed in any combination of male/male, female/male, or female/female, with both people free to give weight or support at any time, disco dancers returned to the traditional form of social dance partnering in which the male led and directed the female. Disco dance was much more controlled than contact improvisation. It emphasized relating to a partner through sight and one-way manipulation, instead of touch and mutual control.

Disco dancers transformed rock dancing's focus on the self as an individual within a group into a display of the self with a partner of the opposite sex. Their movement style was much more outwardly directed and presentational, posed, and controlled. Dancers tended to focus their energy in one direction at a time, often exclusively toward a partner.

The movement in disco dance encoded planning, control, and heterosexual activity to a much greater extent than did either rock dancing or contact improvisation. One has only to think of the dances and story of the film *Saturday Night Fever* for illustration: John Travolta's character uses his showy, aggressive dancing to create a sense of self which is strong, competitive, and sexy. He manipulates his partners physically and emotionally as he dances with them. He matures by realizing that he must exert some of that same control in his everyday life and make something of himself by leaving his working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn for the possibility of upward mobility in Manhattan. Disco dancing becomes a metaphor for life, but at the same time, it is a childish activity, best left behind. The aggressive "macho" image of the dance must be tamed, not so that he can become a liberated man, but so that he can succeed in the real world of money and fame.

Over the past ten years in America, the movement trends evident in disco dancing have become even more prominent. The relaxation prized in the sixties and through the seventies in some communities gave way to "stress management"; and "looseness" gave way to the achievement of "fitness." Dancers participated in and often articulated these changes. Perhaps the most popular "dance form" of the eighties, aerobics, cannot be considered either a social dance form or a theatre form, but a kind of sports training which purports to help a person (usually a woman) gain control over her body and look good. Aerobic dancing focuses on self-control and on the appearance rather than the experience of the body and movement.[13] The ever-growing popularity of sports also seems notable, for the movement qualities and structures utilized in sports activities, although varied from one game to another, inevitably involve control and competitiveness.

Contact improvisation has also changed over time. During the early years of its development, contact improvisation was practiced in slightly different ways by different people: some were more interested in performing, others in simply getting together to dance; some emphasized the aesthetic or athletic aspects of the form, others the therapeutic or interactive elements. In recent years, the unity of theatrical and social impulses embodied in the early years of the form has diminished greatly, a tendency created by changes in the technique of the dancing and, as mentioned earlier, by changes in the lives of the dancers and the circumstances of performing.

As technical skills among contact improvisers increased and the form became more clearly delineated, divisions between skilled and unskilled dancers became more evident. As skilled dancers turned more to performing, difficulties developed over how to maintain a nonpresentational dance style as a theatrical form. This dilemma was both a technical problem—how to structure the dance without destroying its basic conception and ethos—and eventually a practical problem—how to compete in the increasingly competitive business of producing dance.

By 1983, many of the people who originally created and shaped contact improvisation reached a stage in their lives in which marginal living was no longer possible or desirable; as they stopped dancing or moved on to create professional careers, new contact communities could not form in the same way as they had in the early seventies, because economic circumstances were so different.[14] Other professional dancers wishing to add contact improvisation skills to their repertoire of movement could do so more easily, and contact improvisation was treated by many as simply another dance technique.

As a result of all these changes, contact improvisation performances in the past five years have been rare, although the influences of contact improvisation on movement styles and techniques are widespread throughout theatre dance. Those contact improvisation performances I have witnessed have been highly skilled, characterized more by friendly and playful adeptness than by passionate unpredictability. The baseline movement characteristics were the same, but the dancers tended to move with greater control over the movement flow and a greater degree of outward focus. The audiences, while warm, were sedate and reserved, a marked contrast to the audiences twelve years ago.

Other theatre dancers have also articulated changes in recent years, opting in many cases for greater control and flashiness. It is not only younger choreographers like Michael Clark or Molissa Fenley who create these images. Even Martha Graham's company, with its

Halston costumes and attention to body line and arabesques, seems more polished and visually spectacular. This is not to say that dancers conspicuously plan these changes; like all participants in a culture (to paraphrase Marx), they make their own dances, but within a set of rules they do not always personally create.

For example, in 1985, choreographer Bill T. Jones, who practiced contact improvisation early in his career (1974–76), discussed reviving a duet he had made in 1978 called *Shared Distance*. The dance had been created originally with Julie West, who had also trained extensively in contact improvisation and had very little other dance experience.

> Julie and I were both involved in this kind of natural, free-wheeling, raw look when I made the dance. Now I'm working with a different dancer with no contact background and trying to understand how to change or revise the dance. When I push her through space, we [Jones and Arnie Zane] keep saying, "Well, you should keep your legs together." Before, Julie would just come off flying. Why do we suddenly feel that that's not appropriate now, that when I push her away, she should look designed in the air? These things are very real. My past and my future meet in this piece, and I'm trying to understand it. "The messy look," "cleaning up the act"—contact was about messiness.[15]

The sentiments of this choreographer are about very real things. How we move constitutes a part of our past and our future. The "free-wheeling, raw look" is not a fixed definition for the movement characteristics of free flow and multiply-directed energy, but neither is "messiness" (certainly the Polynesians, whose dance contains free flow and multiply-directed energy, do not define the movement in these ways). "Free-wheeling," "raw," and "messy" are meanings which Americans fused with certain movement qualities in particular cultural and historical times. In 1978, Bill T. Jones saw free flow and indirectness as being natural and free-wheeling; in 1985, these same qualities seemed messy.

Structured movement systems can join meaning and movement for many years. But movement systems within any culture are not monolithic and static, nor is their relationship to social contexts always direct. Rock-and-roll dancers in the fifties seem, at least in hindsight, to have anticipated cultural change through movement qualities adapted from black dance traditions. Rock dancers in the sixties epitomized the counterculture and captured a range of social meanings in a variety of settings, while experimental dancers—a much smaller group of people within the same subculture—embodied some of the same social meanings within different movement styles and structures.

Contact improvisers in the early seventies amalgamated movement qualities and social ideas from rock dance and the martial arts with aesthetic conceptions from experimental dance and a fascination with touch among certain educated, middle-class people. Contact improvisers in the late seventies maintained movement qualities and social ideas in small communities after the supporting social bases for those ideas had disappeared, whereas some other theatre dancers adopted their techniques for use in choreography. Disco dance and aerobic dance seem to be more direct expressions of the mainstream social and cultural milieu of the late seventies and eighties, often crossing class boundaries and providing metaphors for the way many American men and women see themselves.

Like other cultural phenomena, establishing laws of cause and effect for movement is neither probable nor advisable. What is of interest in the study of structured movement systems is the description and interpretation of the cultures which they stimulate. By looking at different dance forms, sport, theatre, or everyday movement patterns as cultural realities whose kinesthetic and structural properties have meaning, possibilities emerge for articulating and clarifying our experiences of who we, and others, are.

Notes

1. John O'Neill, *Five Bodies, The Human Shape of Modern Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 22.

2. I take the term "structured movement systems" from anthropologist Adrienne L. Kaeppler, who advocates its use as a more inclusive and fruitful way of conceiving of movement when doing cross-cultural studies and comparisons. For a concise statement of her ideas, see Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Structured Movement Systems in Tonga," in *Society and the Dance*, ed. Paul Spencer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 92–118.

3. A major exception is American Sign Language, which has a complete grammar. Also, movement systems such as South Indian or Tongan dance contain linguistic structures.

4. A complete ethnographic analysis of contact improvisation is made in *Sharing the Dance* (Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull [Cynthia Novack], [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990]). The discussion of contact improvisation in this essay focuses on selected aspects of that analysis.

5. My discussion of movement characteristics throughout this article makes use of concepts drawn from Laban Movement Analysis (or Labanalysis) and choreographic techniques and devices.

6. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 93–94.

7. Marshall Stearns and Jean Stearns (*Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* [New York: Macmillan, 1968]) trace the development of black vernacular dance related to jazz music.

8. Beverly Nichols, quoted in Nik Cohn, *Rock from the Beginning* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), 105.

9. Dance does not always play a unifying role, of course. It can be used to distinguish one group from another, or to exert control by one group over another. See Paul Spencer, *Society and the Dance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), for an interesting discussion of this issue.

10. Jean Morrison Brown, ed., *The Vision of Modern Dance* (Princeton: Princeton Book Company, 1979), 170.

11. Billie Frances Lepczyk, "A Contrastive Study of Movement Style in Dance through the Laban Perspective" (Ed.D. diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1981), 129–131.

12. Lisa Nelson, interview with author, Middletown, Conn., July 4, 1983.

13. Sally Banes has suggested that the urge for control constitutes the central attitude toward the body in the eighties. (See Sally Banes, "Pointe of Departure," *Boston Review* 2, no. 5 [1986]: 12–13.)

14. Communities that practice contact improvisation exist, but their emphasis lies almost entirely on creating social interaction among members and on dancing as a means for interaction. The theatrical aspects of this form are absent.

15. Bill T. Jones, interview with author, New York, July 15, 1984.

both inside and outside the body. It strengthens the body rather than breaking it down, so it enables dancers to move at the limits of their potential. The result is someone who moves in internal and external synchrony, whatever their range, whatever their dynamic. Jennifer Mascall speaks fondly of Paxton's image of the long life of the dancer. "Contact is the only thing that I've discovered that can allow me to have that long life," she says. Peter Bingham feels it has to do with how one begins rather than ends a work session. "Traditionally we think it's how you come out of a class rather than how you go into it that determines how you feel the next day," says Bingham. "There's something about the slow, sensing process of getting warm, as opposed to a repetition of movement, that leaves you undamaged the next time around."

Contact improvisation is now like the Internet: it's a vast community, in a continuous state of flux, with interfaces to suit every need. Its publication, *Contact Quarterly*, currently lists over 250 contact individuals and groups, fourteen of them Canadian. The form is still under no one person's or group's aegis; thus it must monitor itself and rely upon the integrity of its content. The thinking has always been that the cream would rise, that those who taught well, performed well, would continue and those who didn't, wouldn't. With few exceptions, that thinking has been confirmed. Its exponents remain a varied group, some cherishing what they believe to be an original version, others more willing to experiment, still others happy simply enjoying the fruit. Contact improvisation, if anything, is a mirror reflecting individual beliefs, attitudes and aspirations.

Improvisation Is a Word for Something That Can't Keep a Name

STEVE PAXTON

The arts can be related to the senses, roughly speaking—music for the ears, painting for the eyes, dance for the body. But dance suggests an exception, because in the West it has become a spectator art, and it is through the eyes that the audience begins a kinetic response, or a physical empathy with the dancer.

The way the arts relate to the senses gets more and more complicated to describe when we consider the senses as interrelating. We notice that the muscles of the eyes move the visual apparatus to scan and focus. The neck and torso muscles move the head to expedite the eye movement. We move the whole body through space to look at sculpture. And we are able to dance on time to music by virtue of the fact that hearing, which is one of our fastest sensing systems, drives our kinetic response.

In their creation or execution, the arts are deeply connected to specially trained kinetic systems which, in a painting for instance, produce not only images, but characteristic strokes and lines. The "touch" of a musician is as characteristic.

These are ways of regarding the senses which are far from the "five senses" model, which is the way children are taught about the senses and their perceptions of the world. And it seems that little is added to this initial picture in the adult popular mind. I have read newspaper articles about "the five senses and the mysterious sixth sense" just this year. I am not right up to date on the current material analyzing the senses into all their component bits, but they were up to about twenty-five separate senses (each with identifiable independent nerves) in the late 1970s, which is a much more interesting number. If you are interested in other models, read J. J. Gibson's *The Senses Considered As Perceptual Systems,* read Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's work on Developmental Movement Systems (in past *CQs*), investigate the premises of yoga, acupuncture, or any of the Oriental physical systems which have been imported into the U.S., and read the provocative and heart-moving *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat,* by Oliver Sacks. I think we can't have too many models of the senses and their operation when considering a topic like improvisation.

It is a bit self-referential to say that the model I'm working on in this essay is about the effect of models upon the mind, but I can't see any way around it. I should mention in this regard that Buddhist thinking includes the mind as one of the senses. I am fond of that thought for the questions which arise for the analysts (how fast do we sense our thought?). If this is an amusing poser to throw at the sensoral analysts, it is because most of their work on the senses relates to those of the surface, disregarding questions about our sense of gravity, our feeling of the muscles of the body when they are quiet, or the sense of "being," if I may propose such a sense.

Yet the analysts' labor to discover the special nerves for each sensoral aspect is of interest, if only to explain the mechanism which allows us to dance to music, a most popular form of improvisation. If we can bop at a

party because our perception of sound is faster by four milliseconds than our perception of our limbs' relative positions, we may surmise something about how the brain interrelates the senses. We could also look at time itself as a thing modified by each of the senses, instead of being an objective measure of duration. In other words, in trying to describe the sensing of time, we must refer to the perception of *times*. These times then must be collated into how long we think an event took, which is a very complex computation involving which of the senses experienced the event.

For instance, if we drop an object from a known height, we have the math to calculate how fast it will be moving when it hits the floor. This formula indicates that, barring air resistance, any object increases its rate of falling constantly. With this mathematical tool, we feel satisfied that we comprehend the event. It is objectively clear.

However, if we drop a soapy dish and before it smashes on the floor, manage to catch it, we can appreciate the sensoral complexity and precision of another point of view—the subjective feeling of gravity's effect on the dish, which enables us to save it. We treasure this facility in sports—eye-hand-body coordination of time, space, and posture getting you there to snag the pop fly.

I was deeply impressed by seeing a blind woman drop and catch a plate she was washing. For once, the eyes didn't have it. It "makes sense," as the phrase goes, that our bodies are completely attuned to the gravitic effect—that the rate a body falls is abundantly obvious to our own bodies; that any discussion of subjective time should mention the gravitic factor in tuning the human time senses.

And we might as well put in right here yet another factor, the state of our endocrine system, which can speed up or retard our experience of these times—just to indicate how extraordinary a job the brain is doing and to get some glimpse of how quickly it does it.

"Quickly," compared to what? Ah, "quickly" compared to how long it would take for the conscious mind to do the job. (This is my conscious mind writing, and I just wish you knew how long it's taking me to describe the little I can deduce about what my unconscious mind is doing.)

Language, a medium in its own right, is deployed to analyze experiences. Language is either written or spoken. It is either for the eye or ear, but finally it is intended to be sensed by portions of the brain which decode sounds or symbols into meanings. We rely extensively upon it to communicate what we feel and think. We use it to qualify, quantify, and confirm and in general to hold our societies together. It is the major medium, I would estimate. Julian Jaynes has speculated (in *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*), that consciousness itself arose with the advent of the written word.

The link of language to consciousness suggests many avenues for speculation. (It might explain the relative slowness of conscious thought, for instance.) I think it is well understood that there is much we experience which language cannot touch and should not be used for, but it is such an extraordinary medium that we keep applying it to all sorts of things, in hopes, perhaps, of contriving a successful new formulation; bringing the unconscious, un-"knowable," or unspeakable into literate consciousness.

I would bet that no dancer ever reviewed, however positively, has ever felt their dance captured in print. Yet language, used to describe other arts, forms a very important part of what we think about a work of art. It can certainly influence our point of view and may even suggest what *can* be thought about—that is, limit our perception or experience to the forum encompassed by language. It does seem to me that if we spend much time communicating with others via language about a painting, music, or a dance, we accustom our minds to the language version of the experience.

There are sensible reasons for this. Human societies deeply appreciate evaluations which, like mining for gold, mean eliminating dirt and concentrating on what is considered valuable. Our actual experience of something can include much that is irrelevant to its evaluation. An apt evaluation of a work will likely be repeated by others to their friends. The further it goes from the source of the experience to a verbal or printed version, the less recourse we have to elaborations or answers to our questions. We put such a rendered experience into our own version of a context. It is an idea we flesh out with our own images. As such, it has become a fictionalized picture, it has become un-true, but we do it continually.

Much of what we know about ourselves is described to us via language. The very idea of the "imagination," for instance. How did you learn it existed? In many such respects, we "imagine" ourselves according to categories, descriptions, and names of aspects of whatever we are told (or read) it means to be a human being. I have a soul, in other words, because the Bible tells me so. I have an ego and an id thanks largely to the writings of Freud, and an anima and animus courtesy of Jung. Not to belabor the point, we (think we) are conditioned to a considerable degree by our language.

Not that the particular names, categories and descriptions we apply to ourselves have always been the same nor will they be used always. They reflect a consensus and will change or vanish as that consensus changes. Jaynes is fascinating as he tries to describe the state of the human mind prior to consciousness. But we don't have to reach into the past to grasp some idea of how arbitrary our notions about ourselves are, we can examine ideas of cultures paralleling our own and feel the disconcerting void of (our own) recognizable terms of existence.

Language is not only prominent, but it can be coercive. We may opt to disregard experiences which don't work in language.

Tom Wolfe wrote a scathing article called "The Painted Word," wherein he suggests that painters in the New York school of abstract expressionism were in fact led by the writings of a few prominent critics to paint as they did. He seemed to feel that this was a degenerate situation which devalued the art produced.

It could be said however that this was an exceptional case of painters and writers developing the ideas of a movement in concert—exceptional in that it was a very intimate scene with a mix of artists, musicians, dancers, and critics in close communication, and with regular forums for discussion. Language could then be developed to account for the paintings at the moment of their creation. What Wolfe and the rest of us are accustomed to is a five-to-ten-year lag, to give time for critical language to be invented to describe the work. When this has been accomplished it has the effect Wolfe was describing: people learn to imagine in and with the new concepts, and artists and student artists elsewhere paint in the described manner.

One medium may support another, rather like the sensoral model: one sense may support another. However, I have begun to think that one medium cannot accurately describe another. We are used to the attempt to make films of novels, and then read critiques in which, to no one's surprise, the film is found a more or (usually) less successful "adaptation." Films are now "novelized" to similar effect. Critiques do not adequately portray the art, either: it all seems to boil down to "you had to be there." There is nothing like the real things, whatever version of "real" we happen to start with.

Analysis of perceptions shows us the realms of "reality" we are able to tap with the senses. Seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, imagining are, to me, each so very different from each other, seen subjectively, that I am apt to think of them as sensoral dimensions. Again, we adapt one dimension to another; "loud" colors, for instance, is an "auralization" of a sight. But the point here is to notice how the sensoral dimensions are *different*, since we are so used to confirmations of events through their blending. Watch a carpenter drive nails at close range—eyes see and ears hear the hammer. Then, move into the distance—eyes see first . . . then ears hear. What we originally felt as one experience has been divided between the two senses. We are mildly bemused by the organic "analysis" we experience.

In the 1960s there arose an artistic movement called "mixed media" in which one saw dances, films, language, etc., used in the same work. Now that I understand the senses and the mind as "mixed media," I am

very surprised that the movement got this name. It seems to me that what was really going on was "unmixed media," since the words usually did not relate to the dance or film which did not relate to each other in familiar ways. The audience was challenged with an event occurring in several sensoral dimensions, and the effect was similar to that of the lag between the visual and aural hammer-at-a-distance. The mind's habit of synthesizing perceptions was confounded. This was for me an agreeable aesthetic experience, because it illuminated ordinary perceptions a bit. It served to train the mind to examine different modes of sensing, and created in the midst of life a new game to play.

As I recall, during that time no one mentioned that the theater, opera, and dance were already "mixed." No one noticed that film had been mixed. Perhaps that was because people were excited over the possibilities for further mixes. Sounds emanated from sculptures. Words emanated from dancers. New mixes occurred even within the same media: for instance, Bach and rock together within a dance performance. Paintings became three-dimensional, sculptures were made with new materials such as cloth or compressed cars. Painters made happenings which were a kind of theater loaded with colors and shapes and textures and people and costumes and props; in fact, they were paintings moving freely into the third and fourth dimensions, using "in reality" what before would have been the models for two-dimensional works.

It was a period of radical interface. We were confronted with unaccustomed juxtapositions, and of course came to see things that way.

It was rather different than our former way of seeing and from this contrast came little sparks of information. That is how I evaluate it anyway; or value it. When we have two things to contrast, it seems to cause one to notice, and to learn. It was difficult to appreciate exactly *what* we learned in the complex midst of a happening; I suppose it all got synthesized in the mind, and one began to notice things that had escaped notice previously. It led me to consider the process of learning, and I came to regard the overall experience as a rather powerful conceptual tool with which one could cause change in experienced reality.

The question arises, why did we not notice media mixed before? That is what is so interesting. John Cage had been doing it for decades, and Duchamp's work suggested it decades before that. The surrealists seemed to be concocting mixed media images, and Picabia and Picasso began to collage—to contrast painted images and real objects, to sculpt images from found materials.

Perhaps the answer lies in language. Most folk couldn't "get it" because they were still quite busy trying to "get" what had happened in impressionism and pointilism. Cubism caused folk further consternation. And who could include melting clocks or a urinal or a prepared piano or a bus ticket in the same conceptual frame? The critical thought and conceptual tools of the day were already busily employed elsewhere, and the media did not dispense images or rationales as quickly as they do now. The arts, in those days, had begun to change far more rapidly than our language could accommodate.

During this century it became clear that changes were occurring on every level more rapidly than before. But this experience needed time to be finally understood, and those early examples, such as the more radical examples of Duchamp, were put aside to accumulate a kind of critical mass. By 1960, with enough hindsight, the times' changing had provided us with the model for the mix, and many artists were at once ignited. By then the popular media and critical establishment were ready, and the mixed medium event was considered seriously and widely announced, after more than a half-century gestation period.

Apparently an object doesn't have a life of its own, an objective meaning, but is imbued with values by the way we, with our changing minds, evaluate it. For many people, an object such as Duchamp's birdcage filled with small white cubes of marble was not illuminating, but only absurd. The mix can appear quite empty and gratuitous unless the mind has some con-

text in which to work with it. So during the 1960s when so many artists began to mix images, terms were arrived at to convey the impressions. Then the Duchamp objects were re-evaluated and it was possible to see them, not as obscure Dada jokes, but as objects with a particular luminosity, which operate in some other dimensions of the mind than the linguistic one. They resolutely resist meaning anything; and as it turned out, this quality became highly prized in that period of intense critical and artistic interchange. The laughter changed from dismissal to delight, and the last laugh was probably Duchamp's.

The special gift of the mixed media was to provide a contrast to our conventional use of media and the senses. We had to admit that we did use conventions to convey our thoughts and feelings, and to run our society at large. The new mixes indicated that, once in place, conventions can dictate what the mind will allow itself to think. It seems to be the nature of the mind, the senses, the body, and of the society made up of these, to fall into habits, which are necessary for continuity, aids to individual survival and collective civilization. Individual habits and collective conventions prod us to adapt what we perceive into the most convenient shareable mental construct.

From the music we are accustomed to hearing, we form an idea of the intervals between notes. As our ears become more educated, we can become quite accurate in reproducing these intervals. Confronted with music in a different scale than usual, however, this aural education works against accurate reproduction. The unfamiliar intervals will be "adapted" to the nearest known intervals. This adjustment is so automatic and unconscious that the person attempting to reproduce the new intervals will probably not even realize their mistake.

Given another level of training in the logic of different musical scales, reproduction becomes possible, if difficult. For those who don't have such training, being confronted with an unfamiliar system can lead to confusion. Indian music, for instance, may remain opaque and possibly even disturbing; the intervals will seem wrong compared to the scale we are familiar with. In addition, it will be very difficult for the person to say why it seems wrong. The result may be a kind of unease and possible retreat from the unfamiliar system, a sensation of being lost. Not just lost, but without knowledge of *how* we are lost, for there are many dimensions in music where it is possible to go astray. Under these conditions, a little information about the nature of the systems is very useful for re-orientation.

However a very different sort of aid is an appreciation of the feeling of being lost.

Getting lost is possibly the first step toward finding new systems. Finding parts of new systems can be one of the rewards for getting lost. With a few new systems, we discover we are oriented again, and can begin to use the cross pollination of one system with another to construct ways to move on.

Getting lost is proceeding into the unknown. To reject the familiar, so rooted in our nervous system and minds, requires discipline. The difficulty is that we have to know so much to understand what it is we do and why we do it, in order to know what to avoid. We are not attempting to simply eliminate the known systems, but also to realize how we have adapted to those systems. It is the habits of adaptation which will keep us reproducing the system. The system itself is not the problem, but rather this human capacity to imprint unconsciously a new system upon our old system—or to embody the maps of our acquaintance, however tenuous.

We are close to improvisation here. When lost, we will have to relate appropriately to unknown and changing conditions. The dictionary explains that improvisation means "extemporare," or "out of the time." I suggest that we interpret "out of the time" in two contradictory ways. I suggest we discard all notions of clocks, and the half-life of cesium, or celestial mechanics, none of which are capable of improvisation, and equate time with human experience of duration, which is to say the experiences accumulated in life, so that "the time" will mean who we have become. "Out of

the time" will mean that, out of experience (conscious or not), there is material for making something.

Simultaneously, "out of" should be construed as "aside from." We have to use what we have become in such a way as to not be so controlled by it that it is automatically reproduced.

Improvisation is a word for something which can't keep a name; if it does stick around long enough to acquire a name, it has begun to move toward fixity. Improvisation tends in that direction.

Dance is the art of taking place. Improvisational dance finds the places.

—to be continually continued.

Simply(?) the Doing of It, Like Two Arms Going Round and Round

SUSAN LEIGH FOSTER

Here they are: two arms going round and round. What does their motion mean? And how do they mean what they do? Does it matter that one arm is white, the other black? that both are male? that one appears much shorter than the other? Does it matter where they are performing their circular motions? or what has come just prior to this action? or what might follow it? How might we examine their significance as both motion and meaning? What difference does it make that a choreographer has chosen this action over others? This essay endeavors to answer these questions through reference to the early work of Arnie Zane and Bill T. Jones. It addresses the ways in which Zane and Jones constructed identities for themselves in dance by analyzing the choreographic decisions that they made repeatedly in their early dances. It also connects these decisions to heritages of choreographic endeavor with which they were in dialogue during this formative period of their artistic investigation.

Between 1980 and 1984, Zane and Jones made six works for which video documentation exists: three co-choreographed duets, *Valley Cottage* (1980–81), *Blauvelt Mountain* (1980), and *Rotary Action* (1982); a co-choreographed work for six dancers, *Freedom of Information* (1984); Zane's solo version of a duet with Jones from 1974 entitled *Continuous Replay* (1982); and Jones's group work *Social Intercourse* (1982). None of these works is discussed here in detail, yet all of them contributed to this assessment of Zane/Jones's choreographic strategies. Aggressively casual, critically reflexive, abundant with sheer physical vitality and monumental energy expenditure, these dances embarked on an exuberant and exhaustive investigation of movement's possibilities. They also dramatized how the act of choreography is a theorization of identity, corporeal, individual, and social.

Every Little Movement

Both Zane and Jones came into dance at a moment when its parameters were at their most expansive for considering what dance is and what the dancing body might look like. Afro-American choreographers, expanding on Katherine Dunham's inquiries into African diasporic dance forms, cultivated connections between contemporary modern dance and a rich African aesthetic legacy. White choreographers challenged assumptions about the vocabulary, construction, and location of dance, opening up dance to include pedestrian and task-oriented activities, unorthodox and happenstance structuring principles, and even the possibility that dance might occur without the knowledge of the dancers who performed it or the viewers who witnessed it. Contact improvisation continued this experimental and open-ended investigation of human movement by charting a course between art, sport, and life. Challenging gendered assumptions about who could lift whom and hierarchical assumptions about who could dance with whom, it defied standard notions of virtuosity. It eschewed the formality and spec-