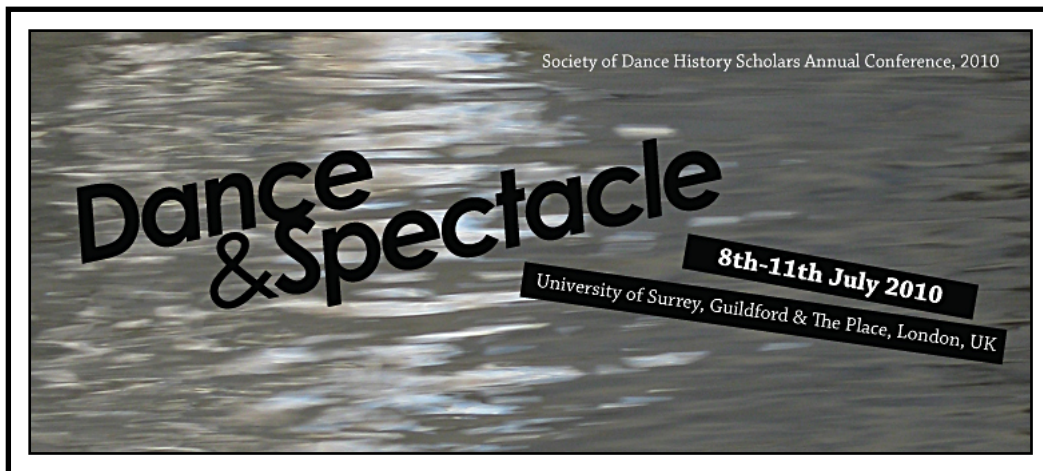




# Proceedings



## Dance & Spectacle

Thirty-third Annual International Conference  
University of Surrey, Guildford and The Place, London, UK  
July 8–11, 2010

Society of Dance History Scholars  
Proceedings

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The 2010 SDHS conference, “Dance & Spectacle”, was held July 9–11, 2010, at the University of Surrey, U.K. Each presenter at the conference was invited to contribute to the Proceedings. Those who chose to contribute did so by submitting pdf files, which are assembled here. There was minimal editorial intervention — little more than the addition of page numbers and headers. Authors undertook to adhere to a standard format for fonts, margins, titles, figures or illustrations, order of sections, and so on, but there may be minor differences in format from one paper to another.

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## **‘Within Between’ – engaging communities and refusing spectacle in contemporary dance practice in East Africa**

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### **Abstract**

*Western perspectives of dance in Africa frequently focus on spectacle and ritual. The newly emerging art form of contemporary dance in East Africa challenges such perceptions. This paper argues that the dance practices being established, specifically in Kenya, offer new insights into contemporary dance in relation to dance training, dance communities and gender. Lailah Masiga from Kenya is one of the few female dancers in an art form which is dominated by men and after dancing and training with Opiyo Okach, director of the first contemporary dance company in Kenya, she began making her own work. Many works are either solos or duets as resources are limited and such works are easier to rehearse and to tour. This paper discusses her solo ‘Within Between’ which addresses issues of female genital mutilation and is performed by Masiga. The discussion will consider the issue of spectacle in relation to the subject of the work and the explicit video which demonstrates the practice of female circumcision and is part of this solo. Masiga secured funding to tour the work to three rural areas in Kenya after premiering the work at The Solos and Duets Dance Festival at the Go Down Arts Centre, Nairobi, 2007. She received very different responses from communities ranging from gratitude that she was addressing such a controversial issue to extreme hostility. To some extent Masiga’s work, together with other Kenyan artists practice dance as a refusal of spectacle through their approaches to dance and their engagement with communities. The work also draws on a strong dance tradition in which dance practice has been embedded in communities but often read as spectacle by western audiences.*

### **Introduction**

Western perspectives of dance in Africa frequently focus on spectacle and ritual. Contemporary dance in East Africa challenges such perceptions. This paper discusses the emerging dance practices, specifically in Kenya, which offer insights into the art form. Many contemporary dance works in Nairobi exemplify dance engaging communities without spectacle. Lailah Masiga, one of the few female performers in an art form dominated by men in East Africa, created a solo, *Within Between*, which addresses issues of female genital mutilation (FGM). Masiga performed the work in Nairobi, Kenya and Canberra, Australia receiving very different responses to the solo in each location. She also toured the work to rural areas in Kenya where it was met with both gratitude and hostility. This paper locates *Within Between* in the specific contexts for contemporary dance in East Africa and the wider context of dance studies.

## Dance as spectacle

For western audiences and dance students notions of dance in Africa are formulated through a range of sources including watching national dance companies, participating in classes and written texts. Within both dance scholarship and in critical responses to African dance, there has been a tendency to equate artistic practices from the continent with spectacle. The focus of such writing often discusses traditional dance practices.

The contexts in which African dance are practiced in Europe and the States are significantly different to that of the African continent. The images of spectacle which are often associated with African dance come from the touring national dance companies from Africa such as Senegal, Les Ballets Africains de Guinée and the Ghana National Dance Ensemble and to some extent companies such as Adizido Pan African Dance Company, based in London until its demise in 2005. Such works celebrate traditional dance forms which would have been performed often in rural settings for particular events.

‘Historically, dance is embedded in the ritual activities of specific communities ... arts are not specialist pursuits set aside from everyday life’ (Nicholls in Asante, 1994: 53). In western countries, however, when African dance is practiced it is separate from the contexts from which it emerged.

## African Dance/ Contexts/Performances

As Asante points out,

In Africa, dance is part of a process that is ongoing and connected in such a way that it is inseparable from other phenomena in society. Therefore, one means something entirely different when describing dance in Africa (Asante, 2000:7) ... it must always be viewed as an integral part of a larger system rather than as a self-standing, independent entity (Asante, 2000: 13/14).

Another aspect of dance viewed as spectacle is the dance work offered for visitors to African countries.

Tourists want to see the dance of Africa; governments want to use the power of the African dance as goodwill ambassadors, continentally and internationally; and the traditionalists encourage its preservation even as concrete and urban rhythms threatens its existence (Asante, 2000: 25).

Indeed as Fleming points out, ‘most international art exchanges are political and economic investments’ (Fleming in Gere 1995:37). Certainly, touring companies from Africa play both a political and economic role as Edmondson (2007) writing about Tanzania and Castaldi (2006) writing about Senegal make clear. Such company performances also reaffirm audience’s expectation of dance from Africa providing a



spectacle for their entertainment as does the recent show Afrika! Afrika! which toured in Europe.

Such commercial shows and the dance provided for tourists contribute to the images of spectacle which have entered the popular imagination. Both contexts are driven by economics rather than aesthetic development. Nicholls suggests that,

...under the corrosive effect of tourism, the culture of the host country is commercially exploited and becomes devalued, and consequently the local inhabitants lose dignity performing for the benefit of giggling strangers (R. W. Nicholls in Asante, 1994: 52).

Nonetheless, dance plays an important role within the tourist industry specifically in East Africa. As Lange points out, within the tourist industry, dance is used as 'a symbol to the outside world' (Lange in Edmondson, 2007: 74). Further she suggests, when discussing Tanzania, that,

The need for a symbol to the outside world has markedly increased since the state prioritized tourism in an attempt to compete with neighbouring Kenya, which has long dominated East African tourism (Lange in Edmondson, 2007:74).

Despite the limitations of the provisions for popular audiences, such performances also offer the opportunity for viewers to gain some insights and information about specific aesthetic qualities found in African dance.

Asante reports that, 'some characteristics are: polyrhythms, polycentrism, angularity, asymmetry, soft knee...and isolations' (Asante. 2000: 11).

Such characteristics can also be identified in the work of some contemporary dancers. For such dancers, the focus on traditional dance, particularly in Kenya, can be problematic. Contemporary dance receives very little coverage in the national press and when it does writers are frequently ill-informed about the art form (Daily Nation February 12, 2010: 18), accusing artists of making work which is not authentic or relevant to African culture.

There is another perspective to consider, however, which is articulated by Thiong'o.

Writers, artists, musicians, intellectuals, and workers in ideas are the keepers of memory of a community (Thiong'o 2009:114).

Whilst Thiong'o is arguing against the restrictions of linguistic practices after colonisation, his comment is relevant to consider in relation to Masiga's work. Memories are not static and evolve in relation to time and location. FGM is a practice which is viewed by certain communities as being an important cultural practice which affirms the community and women's identities within it. It could be argued that Masiga is resisting rather than keeping such memories and current practices. At the same time she is also embodying traces of traditional dance which is stepped in memories from specific communities.

## Communities

The significance of the roles of communities in relation to African dance is frequently mentioned in dance texts. A distinctive feature, which is noted, of much performance throughout the African continent, is the role of participation of the audience.

David Kerr draws attention to an instance of an audience in which there was ‘active and sometimes acrimonious participation’ and where the vigorous input of ‘the traders’ and villagers’ viewpoints [were] being debated with a frankness unimaginable outside the context of theatrical role-play (Harding, 2002: 4).

It is such animated debate which was evident in the response to Lailah Masiga’s performance of *Within Between*. Whilst her intention is that her work will have political impact, as yet there has not been resistance to it from those in power. Harding suggests that there is a ‘safety valve’ system which operates which may have influenced the response to *Within Between*. She states,

It is possible to go further and state that it is because of the opportunities *permitted* by authorities and *tolerated* by them for populist expression that the social order favouring the politically and economically dominant group is sustained. This is the ‘safety valve’ syndrome in action (Harding, 2002: 10).

Whilst *Within Between* cannot be categorised as populist expression, it was tolerated, and to some extent supported by the authorities, particularly when the work was being toured as will be discussed later.

### ***Within Between* (2007)**

*Within Between* premiered in Nairobi as part of the Solos and Duets festival 2007 (I attended 2009 festival). The work was toured in rural Kenya and also performed twice for Africa Day in Canberra, Australia where Masiga now lives.

The work is significant for a number of reasons:

- ❖ the political content of *Within Between* is highly contentious in a country in which women’s rights are frequently denied and where corruption is endemic
- ❖ women are in the minority in dance both as dancers and as choreographers
- ❖ the work was taken to rural communities where people were invited to discuss the issues which it raised.

Masiga has chosen to play a film from the UN and UNICEF for the duration of the performance which shows the preparation and event of a female circumcision in graphic detail together with scenes from everyday life. The projection is screened at the side of the performance space and engages the viewers in consideration of the politics of this practice. As Masiga says, the projection allows the audience to engage with the dance and she works with images which enhance the content of the film. She said that she made a

specific choice not to edit the film as most of the time there is a taboo about showing what actually happens. For example, men know that women are circumcised but they don't necessarily know about the whole process and she thought that it was interesting to see some of the reactions to the performance and the projection. Women appreciated what she was doing as they acknowledged that they did not have a forum to discuss the issue (Masiga, 2009).

Wearing a long white dress with loose long sleeves and a hood, Masiga powerfully draws the audience into reflecting on her chosen topic. Her choice to have a hood was to represent the way in which women are cocooned and not allowed to speak freely but audiences often assumed that she was trying to attack Islam because of the white gown and hood. Music from Kenyan musicians, Idi Aziz, Shutu and The Neck accompanies her dance and was chosen specifically in order to relate to a range of communities who were likely to respond to such music and to 'give more substance to the work' (Masiga, 2009).

The movement vocabulary is drawn from both traditional and contemporary dance. The percussive foot stamps and vigorous whole body vibrations echo movements from her traditional dance background. Masiga works with images drawn directly from the practice of FGM as for example, when she crosses and re-crosses her legs referencing the way in which girls legs are tied together after the operation. She draws attention to both the process of FGM and the vulnerability, pain and shock of those undergoing what is frequently termed 'the cut'. There is also a stitching motif which Masiga creates. The most invasive form of FGM entails the genitalia being stitched together after being cut.

She received funding for the piece to go to various communities who practice FGM. There was a recognition that dance could be a powerful medium through which to relay a message to those in Northern/ Central Kenyan communities who use traditional dance. It was also an opportunity to introduce contemporary dance and other mediums including projection and song to specific rural communities.

Her starting point for this work was her mother's best friend who is a Kenyan Somali. In such communities FGM is a common practice and the friend would say 'it is painful' and termed it the 'difficult fashion of FGM'. Masiga says, 'I don't understand what it feels like to go through this' (2009) but recognised that through other female experiences such as menstruation or giving birth it is possible for women to identify with the pain of FGM. As a dancer she wanted to engage a wide community of audiences in consideration of this topic. Her choice of the title, *Within Between* was an acknowledgement that whilst she did not accept the practice she didn't feel she had the right to condemn it as communities have their own reasons for FGM. She felt, however, that it is a political issue which she wanted to communicate through her dance work. When she was touring the work she was clear that the issue was not about censoring communities which practice FGM but to offer a forum where it was acknowledged and could be discussed. She also thought that the term female circumcision suggests that the practice can be equated with male circumcision when in fact both the physical and psychological damage is not comparable. Her approach is in line with the most successful models for elimination of the process

which focus on education and the recognition that ultimately it is the communities themselves that make the decision to stop FGM rather than legislation which is difficult to implement (Estabrooks, accessed 3 June 2010).

The tour of *Within Between* was to three distinct communities and areas. Masiga and the technicians, who also acted as security, chose a suitable performance space when they arrived in each location and began to set up. They were offering, from the audience's point of view, an impromptu performance with no pre-advertising or booking.

### ***ISIOLO***

Isiolo is in the pastoral North East of Kenya where cattle rustling and violence has been an issue. Community policing projects have had some impact on security in the region. Islamic culture is dominant and many of the men in the audience watching *Within Between* were booing and attempting to intimidate the performer and her crew. They asked her who gave permission for the performance.

At the end of each performance Masiga explained that she was presenting a dance project and that the costume was not intended to represent Islam. She suggested that white symbolises that women need peace of mind and freedom to speak about the practice of FGM. She stated that she persisted with audiences and refused to acknowledge negative reactions. Eventually people who were resistant calmed down. She asked the audience about their perceptions of the performance and its content and noted that women said that they felt aided by it and that men seemed to deny the issue.

### ***NYERI***

In Nyeri, a bustling town in fertile Central Province, people thought that the performance was like a political stunt and that a political party supported Masiga. She had to explain that she was not with the government but self-funded. Initially, men found the issue of women's reproductive organs funny but then discovered the images and changed their attitudes. Masiga said that she appreciated the offer of help from the local police but that there was no trouble as people were interested in the dance and treated the event 'like a day out' (Masiga, 2009).

### ***KAJIADO***

When Masiga performed in Kajiado, a small town south of Nairobi, populated mostly by Maasai pastoralists, she said that people went quiet and stood in the middle of the road watching and concentrating. After the event one man said that he thought that it was right for people to speak about the issue and reported that his sister had died through FGM. The topic of death through FGM has featured in a number of novels including, Thiong'o's novel *The River Between* (1965) and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). After Masiga's performance one woman asked which side Masiga was on and she said, 'I am on the side of women' (Masiga, 2009).

In speaking about her views Masiga said that for many older women the practice of FGM was all they knew but many younger educated women have the information now to resist the practice. She was surprised to be asked to return to Kajiado by the District Commissioner. He wanted to take the performance to the interior to the Maasi where FGM is a common practice and said that she would be escorted by police. Clearly, he could see the potential of dance as a powerful tool for communication and education.

Masiga contrasted the open, positive response she received in Kajiado to the one she received when she performed in Canberra for African dignitaries. She said that she felt sad that some people asked her why she was projecting a negative image of Africa. She thought that there was a sense of denial in their response (Masiga, 2009).

### **Current Work**

Clearly, Masiga is providing a forum for discussion about FGM with her solo. She drew on the many stories and images she found in newscuttings, books and DVDs as well as personal testimonies for source material for the choreography. She tends to work on social issues, frequently collaborating with other artists and is interested in both developing dance as an art and its potential as an effective means to communicate.

### **Conclusion**

Lailah Masiga and other women dancers are working within a context in Kenya, in which quite restrictive views of women's roles are the norm. There is a view that women should not 'throw themselves about' (Masiga, 2009) unless it is for a particular ceremonial occasion when they are expected to perform. Generally, dance and movement is considered a male province and for females participation can be linked to sexual promiscuity and prostitution much as it was in Europe in the nineteenth century. Masiga came from an athletic family with liberal views which did not specify women's roles. Masiga says that, 'Having worked a lot with men in Kenya I feel very comfortable and very challenged/inspired with men making a mark and believe woman can also do this' (2009).

Masiga's work, as does the practice of other contemporary dancers in East Africa, offers dance which resists spectacle and the popular notion of dance in Africa as exotic entertainment. The work engages communities and addresses current issues within an emerging dance practice.

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## Shifting notions of spectacle in Maurice Ravel's *La Valse*

Veronica Alzalde

### *Abstract*

*The concept of "spectacle" has high and low cultural connotations; Ravel's choreographic poem La Valse challenges both meanings. Ravel composed La Valse in 1920 and intended it to be a ballet about nothing but the waltz itself. Unfortunately many productions of the ballet have had issues with choreography and reception, particularly regarding its dramatic ending. This presentation will uncover how La Valse disrupted established conventions of waltz and ballet as they relate to notions of both high and low culture. Ravel created a new kind of spectacle, which proved confusing for 20<sup>th</sup> century French audiences.*

Maurice Ravel's choreographic poem, *La Valse* occupies a unique position within the composer's body of work because it had, as Stephen Zank stated, an "exceedingly long gestation."<sup>1</sup> From Ravel's correspondence, we know he began planning the composition by 1906 and that he intended it to be an homage to the memory of Johann Strauss Jr.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Ravel did not complete the piece until fourteen years later following his service in World War I. Like Ravel's other choreographic poem *Daphnis et Chloe*, Sergei Diaghilev commissioned *La Valse* for the Ballet Russes. Due to tensions arising from their collaboration on *Daphnis*, Ravel and Diaghilev were not on the best of terms.<sup>3</sup> In 1920 Ravel previewed *La Valse* as a piano duo with Marcelle Meyer at the salon of Misia Sert, a good friend to both Ravel and Diaghilev. After the performance, Diaghilev rejected it claiming it was a portrait or a painting of a ballet, but not a ballet.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Ravel was undeterred in his conviction that this work was meant as musical accompaniment to ballet.

Several ballet companies that have produced the work have had issues with reception, particularly regarding the choreographic treatment of the dramatic ending to the music. And I believe there is much to be discovered about the work by examining the reasons behind its failed productions. This paper is thus one strand of my longer musicology Master's thesis in which I compare Ravel's *La Valse* to Richard Strauss's *Schlagobers*—both of which were post-World War I balletic failures. In order to understand *La Valse* as a failure, I will examine the work through two spectacles: the waltz and ballet. The concept of "spectacle" has both high and low class connotations: to sophisticated, artful, and socially accepted, versus amateur, corrupt, and immoral. Depending on time and space, both the waltz and the ballet shift between these two spectacular spaces of high and low. I will show that Ravel's interpretation of the waltz as ballet removes the traditional 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural notions of the waltz and ballet that it conjures, and adds something new, which contributed to its failure for 20<sup>th</sup>-century French audiences.

Even though Ravel titled the work "Waltz" in the French language, the preface to the score reflects the work's close association to Vienna. The preface states,

Through breaks in the swirling clouds, waltzing couples may be glimpsed. Little by little they disperse; one makes out (A) an immense hall filled with a whirling crowd. The stage

is illuminated gradually. The light of the chandeliers peak at the *fortissimo* (B). An Imperial Court, about 1855.<sup>5</sup>

At that time and since, many have claimed that Ravel must have been commenting politically on the troubled Franco-German relationship, or the recent fall of the Hapsburg Empire and the destruction caused by the Great War.<sup>6</sup> Ravel strongly refuted this, and in an interview from 1922 he stated,

It doesn't have anything to do with the present situation in Vienna, and it also doesn't have any symbolic meaning in that regard. In the course of *La Valse*, I did not envision a dance of death or a struggle between life and death...It is a dancing, whirling, almost hallucinatory ecstasy, an increasingly passionate and exhausting whirlwind of dancers, who are overcome and exhilarated by nothing but "the waltz."<sup>7</sup>

Yet given the political climate of the time, Ravel could not help but realize that his choice of the Viennese waltz would bring excess baggage. Although Ravel denied a direct political message in the music, his statements are contradictory. First of all, although he may not have been expressly commenting on the political situation in Austria, his preface implies a pre-War Viennese context—a time when Vienna was considered a major cultural center and ballroom dancing was a popular social function. Second, while he claims *La Valse* is not a "dance of death" he also calls it an "exhausting whirlwind." According to his statements Ravel intended the ending to be euphoric—the dancers are strangely mesmerized by their own spiraling annihilation, alienated from reality. Rather than stop their twirling, they willingly and joyfully welcome their own ruin. He claimed that his goal was to demonstrate the abstract splendor of the waltz, and its glorious demise, but with Ravel's ambiguous claims, *La Valse* turns into a paradoxical statement.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the waltz as a genre became distinguished from other popular social dances, such as the mazurka or the polka due to its growth in popularity and expanded musical repertory. Johann Strauss Jr., Ravel's inspiration for *La Valse*, composed over a hundred waltzes during this time. His typical ballroom waltz form involved a short introduction with the body consisting of four or five waltzes, each with two sections, performed either AB or ABA. Although Strauss's waltzes had formulaic tendencies, his dance melodies and transitions still added diversity to the work's form and triple beat repetition. He also added variety by varying rhythm, dynamics, and altering the instrumentation of the melody.<sup>8</sup>

In France, waltzing became connected with the low-class due to the way in which partners clung to one another. Unlike other popular social dances of this time, such as the contredanse, the waltz was danced in pairs rather than in a group. According to Elizabeth Aldrich, waltzing did not necessitate a viewing audience and therefore did not require the formal rules of social interaction that regulated the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ballroom.<sup>9</sup> Mme. Celnart's French monograph, *The Gentleman and the Ladies Book of Politeness*, from 1833 advised young, unmarried ladies to completely abstain from waltzing except at private balls with persons of their acquaintance.<sup>10</sup> Not only could waltzing potentially damage a young woman's reputation, but it was also alleged to be physically harmful, particularly for weak



women. Although the waltz was gradually accepted in French society, it maintained its association as a low-class spectacle.<sup>11</sup>

The ballerina, not unlike the waltz, shifted between both low and high-class representations and meanings. In the introduction to *Rethinking the Sylph*, Lynn Garafola discusses the wide spread circulation of lithographs in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century containing images of the ballerina. She notes that these lithographs offer a variety of poses, scenes, costumes, caricatures, ensemble scenes and more. One could find these lithographs almost anywhere, including the walls of lower-middle-class homes.<sup>12</sup> **Figure 1** is one such lithograph of Giselle. She appears to float above the ground, with an ethereal glow and facial expression. These kinds of images helped establish the idea of the ballerina as sexual, delicate, otherworldly, and abstract. Marian Smith describes the problematic side of the ballerina in her article “About the House,” noting the male journalists who lasciviously described the ballerina’s physical actions and sexually revealing costumes. A man’s wandering eye was not the only threat to real ballerinas—sexual exploitation, including prostitution, was a tempting option to supplement meager salaries.<sup>13</sup> Nineteenth-century lithographs and newspaper articles show how the ballerina became a consumable object that embodied feminine perfection. The ballerina became an idealized non-human entity, devoid of time and space. She could neither be classified as dancer nor woman, because she existed in two spheres of representation—a high-class spectacle of elegance and a low-class sexual commodity.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 1: Lithograph of Carlotta Grisi as Giselle. Paris, 1841

The Romantic ballet brought the ballerina and waltz together. The waltz was used quite extensively in French Romantic ballet for a variety of purposes, including signifying German heritage. According to Marian Smith, dance music was typically used during a pause in the stage action as a *divertissement*.<sup>15</sup> One example of a Romantic ballet that makes use of the waltz is *Giselle*, Adolphe Adam’s iconic ballet of 1841. Giselle’s entrance music is a waltz and later she leads other peasants in a waltz. In Act II, during the “fantastic ball scene,” the spirit maidens dance their own native dance, one of which is a waltz.<sup>16</sup> The way in which Adam’s ballet uses the waltz in several scenes demonstrates how dance music contributed to the narrative by describing a female character in regards to her personality, nationality, and class status.

French ballet changed dramatically preceding the start of the Great War when Diaghilev's Ballet Russes as well as other foreign companies and soloists dominated the Paris Opera.<sup>17</sup> The popularity of these foreign ballet companies and soloists demonstrates France's interest in consuming other cultures, places, and times. Ballets such as Stravinsky's 1913 *The Rite of Spring*, with Nijinsky as choreographer, shook France's expectations of the ballerina by altering her costume, movements, and as a result, her cultural role. While French audiences were interested in exploring the "Other" and the primitive within the space of ballet, they still upheld the 19<sup>th</sup>-century's idyllic conception of the ballerina. Despite periodic shifts and trends within the balletic world, the image of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century ballerina clearly persisted during Ravel's time, as it does even today.

Regardless of what Diaghilev meant when he claimed that the musical score was not a ballet, there appears to be some kind of disconnect with the music and dance in numerous ballet productions of *La Valse*. I will discuss just two to demonstrate the range of issues surrounding the choreographing of this piece. Ida Rubinstein's company produced *La Valse*'s Parisian premiere in May 1929. Bronislava Nijinska, former choreographer for Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, choreographed the performance;<sup>18</sup> and Alexandre Benois, a Russian set designer who had also worked for Diaghilev's ballet company, designed the set and costumes.<sup>19</sup> Despite Ravel's notable collaborators, the reception was mostly negative. Critics asserted that Nijinska's choreography and Benois's costumes did not suit Ravel's music.<sup>20</sup> French critic Émile Vuillermoz wrote that Nijinska's work mistranslated the music, causing it to resemble Claude Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*, rather than a ballroom scene.<sup>21</sup> Deborah Mawer suggests that Nijinska's goal was to distance her choreography from the music in order to "raise the status of dance as a more self-sufficient discipline."<sup>22</sup> Nijinska's and Ravel's production essentially created two separate and incompatible works—Nijinska's version was an abstract and frivolous *divertissement* that apparently lacked any waltzing.

The second production by Fredrick Ashton occurred more than twenty years following Ravel's death. Ashton's production took place at La Scala in Milan in 1958 and later at Covent Garden in 1959. In fact you can view this production on a videocassette entitled, *An Evening With the Royal Ballet*.<sup>23</sup> It was described as, "an ultra-chic swirl of waltzing couples in elegant costumes."<sup>24</sup> The ballerinas wear full-length dresses with black detail at the base of the bodice, symbolizing the imminent ending. Ashton's choreography was classical in terms of gestures and it followed the music much more closely than Nijinska's. However, as the work comes to its climatic ending, the smiling dancers continue waltzing, almost as if they are intentionally ignoring the music.<sup>25</sup> Mawer wonders if Ashton would have thought that allowing the dancers to collapse to the floor would have undermined the beauty he achieved through his classical choreography.

When attempting to interpret Ravel's intention with *La Valse*, it is important to remember the composer's interest in machines, or automata. He was inspired by the work of his father and brother, both engineers. In fact, he had hoped to become a pilot in the war, but he was refused due to health reasons.<sup>26</sup> Edouard, Ravel's brother noted that Ravel admired anything that was mechanical in nature including factories and expositions of machinery.<sup>27</sup> His interest in automata is apparent in his music, particularly in his ballets. In Mawer's article, "Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance," she claims that all three of Ravel's ballets, *Daphnis et Chloe*, *La Valse*, and *Bolero* incorporate a "balletic 'dance-machine' trajectory, founded on creation, apotheosis, and destruction."<sup>28</sup> The concept of automata gradually became more

popular within 19<sup>th</sup>-century culture, but it was not until post-World War I that it became a common neoclassical aesthetic.

Analyzing *La Valse* in terms of its musical and visual components along with Ravel's intention and interest in automata helps to better understand why the work failed. Functional waltz or ballet music, like Adam's *Giselle*, is light, amusing, and repetitive, with simple melodic and harmonic lines. Music that accompanies ballroom dancing or ballet could be considered submissive to dance because the music sacrifices its artistry in order to accompany the movement of the bodies and to allow the audience to grasp the ballet's plot. While Strauss Jr. is notable for adding variety to his waltzes, he still had to compose them so that they could be easily danced to. According to Marian Smith, critics appreciated music that was simple, lighter than opera music, amusing, danceable, and suitable for the setting and story.<sup>29</sup>

Ravel challenges the music's typical submission to the dance through repetitive rhythmic motives, melodies that take unexpected detours, and piercing harmonies. Yet the musical form of *La Valse* resembles the ABA form of Strauss Jr.'s ballroom waltzes. The second A section starts similarly to the first A, but the melody and its harmony gradually become more distorted to the point at which it destroys itself. One example of Ravel's rhythmic repetition is at rehearsal number 83 (**Music Example 1**). In the first four measures, each measure's downbeat is heavily accented, but in the next four (**Music Example 2**), the beats are accented

Music Example 1: Emphasis on the downbeat of each measure

Music Example 2: Emphasis on every two beats

in a way that creates a feeling of 2/4 rather than 3/4 time. Ravel plays with the audience's expectations by acknowledging the familiar aspect of rhythmic repetition, but then alters it so that it no longer feels like a recognizable waltz. The complete destruction is symbolized by the final full measure, in which he switches to a grouping of four (**Music Example 3**).

The image displays a page of a musical score for an orchestral piece. The score is arranged in two systems of staves. The top system includes parts for Flute I, Flute II, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in B, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, Cor Anglais, Trumpet, Trombone (1st and 2nd), Trombone (3rd), Tuba, Timpani, Triangle, Snare Drum, Cymbals, and Gong. The bottom system includes parts for Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score is in 3/4 time and is marked "Sans ralentir". The final measure is a grouping of four, as indicated by the caption. The score features various musical notations, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Music Example 3: Final measure is a grouping of four

Therefore, Ravel takes the waltz to its limits before tearing it apart to the point where it loses all connection with its ontological nature of three beats per measure. Perhaps Ravel was striving to shift the traditional ballroom waltz away from one in which the music is simplistic to one in which the music dominates. The music, like a factory, is unapologetic and unforgiving in its use of harmony and rhythms. Ravel gives the music the power to control the dancers.

For a Viennese waltz to be properly executed, the partners need to hold each other in a firm embrace. Sources claim that they also need to maintain a firm eye contact to prevent dizziness and to help maintain the impression of standing still.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, for waltzing to be successful, the dancers must maintain complete control of their bodies as they move about the room. Essentially, Ravel exploits the waltz's trait of control to deconstruct not just the waltz step, but also the dancer's body. As the dance slowly deconstructs, the dancers can no longer be graceful, sexual, and delicate, but cold, distant, and terminal. Through his dominating, machine-like music, the ballerinas are forced to become a part of the factory as robots that go haywire—turning *La Valse* into a mechanical spectacle.<sup>31</sup> There is no visual setting, except for clouds; there is no plot except for the inevitable destruction; there is no emotion except for an accelerated feeling of ecstasy. Therefore, *La Valse* strips away the usual functions of waltz and ballet and turns the ballet into nothing but the waltz itself. There is no way to successfully sustain either the waltz's nor the ballerina's high or low class notions while everything is gradually careening out of control.

In a review of the revised 1931 Ida Rubinstein production of *La Valse*, Raoul Brunel emphasizes its failure again when he states, “the question arises again of knowing whether Ravel's score gains in being used in the presentation of a ballet. I really think that no simultaneous visual image can ever be worth as much as those which are born spontaneously in the listener's head.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, was Diaghilev correct? Is *La Valse* a depiction of a ballet? It could be argued that the aural aspect is too much of a spectacle that the visual aspect takes away from our ability to fully appreciate the piece with our imagination. Spectacular failures like *La Valse* are just as important to investigate as the successes. Ravel's purpose may have been to take the ballet to a mechanical space, which exists without the established cultural expectations of high and low class, but it appears his timing was off both in terms of musical time, groups of three versus groups of two, and historical time of post-war France.

### Acknowledgments

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Zank, *Maurice Ravel: A Guide to Research* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Ravel, *A Ravel Reader: Correspondence, Articles, Interviews*, ed. Arbie Orenstein (NY: Columbia University Press, 1990), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Mawer, “Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 81-83.

- <sup>4</sup> Deborah Mawer, *The Ballets of Maurice Ravel: Creation and Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Aldershot, 2006), 152.
- <sup>5</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 151.
- <sup>6</sup> Deborah Mawer, "Musical Objects and Machines," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. by Deborah Mawer (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 52.
- <sup>7</sup> Ravel, *Ravel Reader*, 423.
- <sup>8</sup> Camille Crittenden, *Johann Strauss and Vienna: Operetta and the Politics of Popular Culture* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110-111.
- <sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Aldrich, *From the Ballroom to Hell: Grace and Folly in Nineteenth-Century Dance* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 18.
- <sup>10</sup> Aldrich, *From the Ballroom to Hell*, 20.
- <sup>11</sup> Sevin Yaraman, *Revolving Embrace: The Waltz as Sex, Steps, and Sound* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 13.
- <sup>12</sup> Lynn Garafola, "Introduction," in *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, ed. by Lynn Garafola (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 2.
- <sup>13</sup> Marian Smith, "About the House," in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 215-217.
- <sup>14</sup> Tamar Garb, *The Body in Time: Figures of Femininity in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Lawrence, KS: University of Washington Press in association with University of Washington Press, 2008), 30.
- <sup>15</sup> Marian Smith, "The Orchestra as Translator: French Nineteenth-Century Ballet," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, ed. Marion Kant (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141-144.
- <sup>16</sup> Lisa C. Arkin and Marian Smith, "National Dance in the Romantic Ballet," in *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet*, ed. by Lynn Garafola (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 50-51.
- <sup>17</sup> Marie-Françoise Christout, et. al., "France," in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://www.oxford-dance.com/entry?entry=t171.e0646.s0004> (accessed 14 May 2009).
- <sup>18</sup> Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Nijinska, Bronislava," in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://www.oxford-dance.com/entry?entry=t171.e1258> (accessed 27 February 2010).
- <sup>19</sup> John E. Bowlt, "Benois, Alexandre," in *The International Encyclopedia of Dance*, ed. Selma Jean Cohen (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), <http://www.oxford-dance.com/entry?entry=t171.e0199> (accessed 27 February 2010).
- <sup>20</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 160.
- <sup>21</sup> Zank, *Maurice Ravel*, 286.
- <sup>22</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 159.
- <sup>23</sup> Rudolf Nureyev, et. al., *An Evening with the Royal Ballet* (West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2001).
- <sup>24</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 166.
- <sup>25</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 171.
- <sup>26</sup> Barbara L. Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52145> (accessed 27 February 2010).
- <sup>27</sup> Ravel, *Ravel Reader*, 328-329.
- <sup>28</sup> Deborah Mawer, "Ballet and the Apotheosis of the Dance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ravel*, ed. Deborah Mawer (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, "The Orchestra as Translator," 144.

<sup>30</sup> Sevin Yaraman, *Revolving Embrace: The Waltz as Sex, Steps, and Sound* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Mawer, "Apotheosis of Dance," 150-151.

<sup>32</sup> Mawer, *Ballets of Maurice Ravel*, 165.

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## ***Chronotopia – Bangalore Contemporary Dance and the Embodiment of Historical Memory***

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### ***Abstract***

*Chronotopia had its world premiere in February 2009 in Bangalore, India's Information Technology Capital. Choreographed by Jayachandran Palazhy of Attakkalari Repertory Company, this multi-media adaptation of the ancient Tamil epic, Chilapathikkaram, offers the city's spectators a chance to draw upon individuated negotiations of time and space that collapse "classical," "folk" and "traditional" into categories of modern, cosmopolitan and global. In this paper, I argue that a new mode of dance spectatorial practice is emerging in urban India -- catalyzed by the liberalization of India's private sector in 1991 and precipitated by the subsequent sociocultural effects caused by Bangalore's IT revolution. These negotiations, I suggest, draw upon embodied historical memory, visions of the technological future, and a dynamic integration of local mythologies, reshaping India post-colonial contours with global significations.*

### **Invocation**

The crash of a brass cymbal slashes the silence of the performance hall. A bamboo flute's gentle raga caresses the space like smoke curling from the tip of an incense stick during a ceremonial rite. Rushing forth in an overwhelming crescendo, the distorted and digitized sound of wind suggests that the tale to be told is unstoppable -- travelling a far distance, burdened by memory, history and gesture.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 2009, Attakkalari Repertory Company premiered *Chronotopia* at the Fourth International Attakkalari Dance Biennial in Bangalore. Attakkalari is known for its choreographic explorations of myth, transnational cultures, and technologically-driven performance aesthetics. For me, it was one of my first experiences of watching non-classical Indian dance in this South Indian capital of arts, science, industry and culture.

The opening scene of *Chronotopia* begins with a dimly lit stage. Singular fluorescent lights – held upright like candles by dancers in the shadows -- flicker and illumine sections of the stage briefly, to reveal two mesh screens hanging from the rafters, dividing the stage into upstage, centre and down stage sections. Dim sidelights introduce three dancers -- two men costumed in red and a woman in purple. Backs facing the audience, they raise the tube lights in a gesture of offering above their heads, with left legs extended behind them, their weight on their right. They place their tubes on the floor in the middle of the stage, creating a trinity of lights in a long straight line. This opening of *Chronotopia* is reminiscent of an invocation traditionally performed at the start of a classical Indian repertoire, beseeching blessings from God, the guru and the audience. The three dancers' movements initially seem heavy, as if laden by grief and tragedy. Recorded incantations delivered by a male overtone singer, anchor the melancholy of their gestures. The dance picks up from slow to quicker spins, citing versions of the *vattachuvatu* in kalaripayattu and *brahamaris* in bharata natyam. The two men engage in a sequence of contact improvisation, as the female dancer exits the stage in a series of turns, on the ground and upright, shifting between a relaxed back and an erect spine.

The male dancers dissolve into darkness. Motion-captured projections of their tube lights -- flipped horizontally -- create an image of ladders across the stage's screens, connecting the ground to the heavens, linking the future to the past, re-telling the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Tamil epic of *Chilapathikkaram* – a story of love, betrayal, revenge and martyrdom that narrates the episodic journey of the protagonist, Kannagi. Jayachandran Palazhhy, the Artistic Director of Attakkalari, chose *Chilapathikkaram* for “Chronotopia”



Figure 1: A scene from the opening of *Chronotopia*. (Photo courtesy of Attakkalari)

because the text “lives within us, it is a story that is told to us from the time of being children, it is a living story.”<sup>1</sup>

Choreographed by Jayachandran and Attakkalari’s dancers with state-of-the-art motion-capture technology and real-time animation, this work combines a matrix of movement styles, from bharata natyam to kuchipudi, the martial arts of kalaripayattu and capoeira, the popular styles of jazz and street dance, and positions gleaned from yoga and tai chi. Release-based techniques learned by Jayachandran at the London Contemporary Dance School in the 1990s, and developed in dialogue with kalaripayattu and bharata natyam at his Bangalore-based Centre for Movement Arts and Research over the last decade, complicate negotiations of nationhood, language and global culture on the

proscenium of Ranga Shankara, one of India's most experimental venues for theatre, located in Bangalore, India's Information Technology Capital.

Named Chronotopia after Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the Chronotope, the heteroglossia of multiple voices in the work is apparent. Part of Jayachandra's process in creating this work was to access the memory of the body, the living history of multiple movement languages in the body, and the civilizational history and future of India's rich dance expressions. By investigating the dancers' experiences of childhood, their pedestrian motions through urban and village spaces, their relation to a living text like *Chillapatikaram*, and the limits and potentialities embedded in classical or martial arts training, Jayachandran approached the concept of the chronotope to reinforce how space and time cannot necessarily be separated into a false dichotomy. Tantric philosophy, he argues, doesn't allow for this kind of duality, and Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope underpins Jayachandra's approach towards thinking of the unity of body, time and space.<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin writes,

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to movements of time, plot and history. (84)

Jayachandran uses quite spectacular technology to motion capture the traces of flesh as they leave their legacies in space. Cameras film the motion of the dancers' bodies, 3-D software processes these images, and projectors beam large scale live video onto the



Figure 2: Motion captured legacies of movement. (Photo credit: Chris Salter)

scrim that resemble fading spectral shadows of the dancers' movements onstage. As we see the journey of multiple dance forms and languages travelling in dialogue between and on individual dancers in the company, we also experience the legacy of that dialogue dissolving into thin air.

### **The Complexities of Categorization**

I want to argue that a new mode of spectatorial practice is emerging in urban India that allows the viewer to not only locate multiple citations of Indian classical, martial and other global techniques on the contemporary dancing body. The cosmopolitan spectator also draws upon individuated negotiations of time and space, collapses the "classical,"

“folk” and “traditional” into the modern and global, and redefines India’s modernity from a post-colonial condition into a globalized potentiality. These negotiations, I suggest, particularly in regard to the consumption of Indian contemporary dance in Bangalore, are shaped by historical changes in India’s local/global economy, guided by the liberalization of India’s private sector in 1984 and 1991, and precipitated by the subsequent sociocultural effects caused by Bangalore’s IT revolution.

Though the periodizations of “contemporary,” modern or “postmodern” dance in India demand problematization -- which I’ll briefly address in a moment -- “modern” dance in India, per se, is hardly a recent phenomenon. Chandralekha, extolled as the mother of Indian “modern” dance, staged *Angika* in 1985. Ananya Chatterjea suggests this work marked the beginnings of Chandra’s career as a contemporary choreographer and paved the way for many dancers to begin critiquing the politics of forms named classical or traditional (193). Decades before Chandralekha performed her deconstructions of the “classical” body through the movement lexicons of Bharata Natyam, kalarripayattu and yoga, Narendra Sharma of Bhoomika Dance Company in Delhi and a senior disciple of Uday Shankar, created what his son, Bharat, calls “modern,” anti-colonial dances. Other choreographers who have been challenging the parameters of classical forms over the past two decades in very distinct individual styles include Padmini Chettur, Tripura Kashyap, Mallika Sarabhai, Astad Deboo and Daksha Sheth. Sheth, for instance, trained in the North Indian Lucknow school of kathak during the 70s and 80s, and proceeded to explore other movement forms including hatha yoga, Mayurbhanj chauu and pole mallakhamb to invent an athletic, circus-like style. Also trained in kathak, Astad Deboo, went abroad to the London Contemporary Dance School

in the 70s, then to New York for further training in Graham technique, and later studied with Pina Bausch. Often gaining recognition in India after touring abroad, and in turn, attaining a currency of “export quality” in their creations, these artists continue to create work with international support from the British Council, the Dutch agency HIVOS, the Alliance Française, the Ford Foundation and the Goethe Institute. Local funding comes from the Ratan Tata Charitable Trust, India Foundation for the Arts and various private sector departments of Corporate Social Responsibility. Unfortunately, though the Indian Government offers miniscule grants, a scarcity of funding for the arts is available, and many artists find themselves conducting workshops and performing at multinational corporate events to make ends meet.

It is not my task to offer a historical survey on the development of contemporary dance in India, nor is it to discuss competition for resources in Indian arts. What I do want to move towards is an analysis of how recent developments, particularly over the past ten years in Bangalore reflect a significant shift in political economy, consumer citizenship and nationalism in the city’s dance sector, and in turn, has changed ways of viewing the contemporary body on stage. There’s been a great deal of work done on the nationalist agendas, gendered morality, and classical fictions inscribed onto the twentieth century transformation of *sadhir* into bharata natyam particularly, as well as onto the revivals of odissi, kathak and kuchipudi. Avanthi Medhuri, Matthew Allen, Priya Srinivasan, Janet O’Shea, Uttara Coorlawala, Ketu Katrak and Pallabhi Chakravorty have contributed significantly to these issues in Indian dance discourse. And indeed, there has been some key work on the contemporary South Asian choreography of Shobana Jeyasingh, Akram Khan, Parijat Desai and Post-Natyam, but mostly within a non-resident

Indian diasporic context, Ananya Chatterjea and Rustom Bharucha's work on Chandralekha notwithstanding.

As many of us already know, these categories, whether classical, neoclassical, folk, popular, modern, postmodern and "contemporary," are problematic, particularly in an Indian context, wherein the country's modernity was contingent upon the complex absorption and denial of Enlightenment-based values that British colonialism delivered. Propagated as ancient and pure as the civilization itself, Indian classical dance – particularly in the case of bharata natyam – grew out of a modern 1930s revival of a regional dance form, practiced by a caste of women dedicated to the temple at a young age, patroned by the local prince, and as the history books tell us, were highly educated courtesans in dance, music, and literature. The modern 1930s re-construction of this courtesan temple dance, known as *sadir* or *dasi attam* in bharata natyam relied, in classic modernist fashion, on the subaltern figure of the *deva dasi* to create an evolved, yet ancient, and pure but restyled, classical dance form that bourgeois audiences could appreciate and moral young women could practice. This reshaping of a regional form into a national and "World" dance form occurred as the advent of modern western dance developed in the United States and western Europe. So how do we get around not calling an Indian classical dance form like bharata natyam modern or contemporary? Many dancers including those performing in a classical context articulate the problematics of the divide between classical and contemporary. For instance, following a performance during this 2009 Biennial by the world-renowned odissi troupe, Nritya Gram, whose dance centre is located in a village outside of Bangalore, a male audience member asked the artistic director, Surupa Sen, whether her company ever intended to perform



contemporary or modern fusion work. With a twinkle in her eye, and after asking him to re-formulate his question at least two to three times, Ms. Sen replied, “I’m not sure what exactly you mean by contemporary, but whether you label a dance classical, modern, or folk, contemporary is a sensibility.”

And it appears that Bangalore audiences are searching for that kind of sensibility, as was the case for the audience member above who hoped for the company to fuse odissi with something legibly “modern.” Nritya Gram was one of twenty companies performing at the festival, half of which were from all over India, the other half from South America, West Africa, Western and Northern Europe, South Korea and Canada. India’s Ministry of Culture along with corporations and multinational companies partly financed the Festival. This array of international dance available to audiences in a cosmopolitan centre like Bangalore, coincides, I think, with the array of international goods available to Indian consumers after the initial economic policies of Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 loosened import regulations, and later in 1991, when Chandrababu Naidu’s economic reforms welcomed multinational corporate investment and promoted the production and export of consumer-oriented commodities. The private sector flourished, and whereas in the 80s and before, Nikes, Levis, and Nutella were hard to come by, and if so, dreadfully expensive, anything from an iPod to a pair of Ray Bans or MAC lipstick to Stella McCartney, now require a trip to your local mall, and, of course, the socioeconomic means to enter with a middle-to upper class salary. Any one of India’s 450 million citizens living below the poverty line, hardly benefiting from the economic prosperity globalization has delivered to the middle and upper classes, would be barred from these malls’ doors.

### **Glocal Spaces/Glocal Marketplaces**

By one advertising executive's accounts, "abroad is now in India," writes Leela Fernandes of a Mumbai-based manager in her important work on India's middle class (41). After 1965, the "brain drain" sucked some of India's best talent from the country and shipped it to Britain and the United States, creating white-collar classes in industry, science and education in each country. However, that small, but substantial minority of Indian students who go abroad now to study in top universities around the world, don't necessarily settle into non-resident Indian (NRI) life so immediately. They often return knowing that India's persistent economic growth will promise good jobs with competitive salaries and the likely potential to be leaders in their fields while First World countries in the Northern and Western worlds suffer from the economic downturn. Indeed, they possess a global cultural currency, which is covetable. But what is ironic, is that many young members of the Indian middle class need not leave to attain that kind of globality; the global or "glocal" is at their doorsteps, as seen in the malls, cineplexes, and international festivals like the Attakkalari Biennial or the Hay Literary Festival that will be taking place in Trivandrum this November.

Citizens of cities like Bangalore see their city and nation as a global centre, and a new type of citizenship is emerging that revolves not only around the consumption of commodities, but also around the consumption of contemporary cultural production, whether it is Bollywood movies, made by Indian producers for Indians at home and abroad; Indian literature written in India about India by Booker Prize nominees and winners, and of course, contemporary dance like Attakkalari's wherein Jayachandran's

collaborations with new media artists from around the world, reveals a hyperfuturistic vision of Hindu mythology and regional folklore that is quintessentially Indian, in which the company uses (as Jayachandran says) “Technology [that] allows us to transcend the ordinary, allowing us to imagine something new.”<sup>3</sup>

Ritty Lukose writes,

For members of societies that are actively being transformed by globalization, consumer practices and discourses become an increasingly important axis of belonging for negotiating citizenship, in other words, for the politics of social membership, for negotiations of public life, and for an understanding of politics within the nation. (7)

Communities of choreographers in Bangalore, including Abhilash Ningappa of Bangalore Dance Collective, Mayuri Upadhyaya of Nritya Utya and Madhu Natarajan of Natya STEM, are actively positioning themselves as contemporary artists -- nourishing and consuming from the marketplace of Indian and non-Indian techniques that include ballet, jazz, hip-hop, salsa, feldenkrais, yoga, kalari, kathak, bharata natyam, kuchipudi, contact improvisation and release-based movement to name just a few in Bangalore alone.

I want to suggest that this kind of local/global, or glocal sensibility in their choreography is furthering a kind of citizenship that is much different from the generations that preceded them. The previous generation of dance consumers and practitioners, the children born after the 1947 moment of Independence, were burdened

by the anti-colonial ideals of the nationalist movement, the glorification of India's classical past, and the romanticization and upliftment of the rural poor. These were the Midnight's Children of Salman Rushdie's imagination. The new practitioners and audiences of contemporary dance, are "Liberalization's Children," a term that Ritty Lukose uses to describe those children who've grown up with rapid economic growth, free market capitalism, satellite TV, mass media, Hinglish in Bollywood films, and of course, the internet. Also called zippies, for their fast paced life, ambition and ascension into income brackets that are 3-4 times the amount their parents made (Lukose 5), the citizenship these youth perform through the consumption of goods, and various forms of artistic production, points to a cosmopolitanism where the world has also come to India, as India goes out into the world.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, I want to suggest that new idioms of Indian contemporary or modern dance are developing, as burdened as it is to use these terms in an Indian context. Eager to see new work, as shown by the large attendance at the Attakkalari Biennale in 2009, and contemporary dance events that regularly occur around the city, audiences are learning to decode contemporary movement language, instead of piecing together stories recognized from the Hindu pantheon by classical soloist bodies. This is happening in Bangalore, in particular, which is considered a mecca for contemporary Indian dance, largely due to Jayachandran's Attakkalari Centre for Movement and Research, and because of the surplus of classical dance institutes across the city. However, in my conversations with young contemporary choreographers and dancers, they claim that this contemporary

development is still in its nascent form partially because there is such a rich tradition of dance to negotiate. Choreographers practice their citizenship through a desire to create something in India from the resources available there rather than re-inscribe a model where one has to go West to learn skills to innovate at home. Connecting the global to the local, and performing a new kind of glocal identity through contemporary dance, choreographers and dancers continue to deconstruct the legacies of nationalism, morality and the politics of classicism embedded in their bodies. However, their investigations, as the dance marketplace grows in diversity, point to a level of citizenship driven by an internationalism grown at home.

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### **Notes**

- 1 Jayachandran Palazhy, Personal interview, October 9, 2009.
- 2 Ibid.
3. Ibid.

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**Interplays between Politics and Amateurism : Ritual and Spectacle in  
ancient Greece and some Post-modern Experiments (Castelluci,  
Bagouet, Duboc, Halprin)**

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**Abstract**

*In ancient Greek choral melic poetry, from Sappho to the theatre of the 5th century b. c., the performers did not differ from the audience. They were not professionals, but members of the ritual community. The efficiency of the spectacle was first assessed on an anthropological level. In some post-modern experiments (Castelluci's Inferno, transmissions of works of Bagouet or Duboc, Anne Collod's reshaping of Halprin's Parades and Changes), amateurs still neither perform as citizens nor as professionals, but they participate in a new rituality which may affect contemporary re-definitions of performance, spectacle, and politics.*

**Some ancient and (post-)modern issues.**

In this paper, I intend to ask some transhistorical questions, in a comparative perspective which might help deconstructing and / or reasserting some of our common ideas about the intricate relations of dance with spectacle :

What was « spectacle » in ancient Greek performances of archaic and classical times ? what were the relations between audience and performers ? on pragmatic, ritual, sociological, political level ? what were the relations between the (melic, tragic or comic) *khorodidaskalos* (the writer - composer - choreographer as « master of the chorus ») and the performers<sup>i</sup> ?

What is « spectacle » in contemporary performances presented by amateurs<sup>ii</sup> ? what are the relations between audience and these performers ? on pragmatic, ritual, sociological, political level ? what are the relations between the choreographer and the amateur performers ?

And finally, what are the relations between the archaic and (post-)post-modern situations<sup>iii</sup> ? At first sight, this point of view might seem quite theoretical, but it will be based on precise instances, first from ancient Greek cultural artefacts, as we now may figure them, and then from a specific project of contemporary dance.

**Ancient Greek melic *mousikê***

Ancient Greeks could neither understand nor react to Yvonne Rainer's *No manifesto*, especially to the « No to Spectacle » motto, since this is mostly a modern

concept, and to the « No to moving or being moved » one, since the ritual, that is social and religious, effects of a performance were first based on the strong emotions it provoked. Before the fourth century, the notion of spectacle, as a performance offered by professionals, could not be understood. Nor did the notion of spectator, as a purely aesthetical (and rather passive) audience.

In ancient Greek choral *mousikê* (a performative association of music, dance, song, poetry)<sup>iv</sup>, from Sappho to Pindar or to tragic and comic theatre of the 5th century b. c., the performers did not essentially differ from the audience. They were not professionals, but members of the community they were representing and building up, through a religious and social ritual (Miller : 1986, Lonsdale : 1993). The spectacle was first and foremost aimed at the gods and the civic group and its efficiency is better assessed on an ethical and anthropological than on an (modern) aesthetic level, like in the so-called traditional or popular performances ethno-anthropologists use to examine (Grau & Wierre-Gore : 2005)<sup>v</sup>.

This kind of performance was participating to collective constructions of identities and rituals of passage (Briand : to be publ. 2010,2<sup>vi</sup>). For example, Alcman's and Sappho's maiden choruses (*partheneiai*) were performed by girls preparing themselves to marriage (Calame : 1997), Pindar's victory odes (*epiniciai*) by young men glorifying the excellence of the best of them at sports games, especially at the Olympics (Mullen : 1982), and the participation of young Athenians in tragic choruses, under the conduct of a *chorodidaskalos* like Aeschyles, Sophocles or Euripides, was a compulsory part of the *ephebeia*, the process of youth as becoming a grown-up citizen and soldier : the capacity to perform efficient *mousikê*, that is to dance and sing according to ritual rules, both aesthetic and ethical, and to obtain the audience's sympathy and recognition, is an important feature in becoming part of the social group, whether the family or the city, i. e. the *polis* (Wiles : 2000, and Heinrich : 1996)<sup>vii</sup>. In this way, artistic performance is *political* action.

The best Greek word for « spectacle » could be *theôria*, as I defined it in SDHS 2007 Conference Proceedings (Briand : 2007, and Franko : 1993). *Theôria* does not mean « theory » before Plato and Aristotle, and it is intrinsically connected with *theatron* « theatre », as a place where an audience can contemplate a ritual and feel its most sensorial and affective effects. This definition of spectacle is not just visual, nor spectacular in the modern meaning, but also religious, cognitive, and, above all, kinesthetical, as the aristotelician use of the word *catharsis* implies it<sup>viii</sup>. The reception of the choreography is both physical and psychological, based upon the identification of the human audience with the dancers and the sensorial efficiency of the ritual on the spectators, human and divine.

This conception of dance is interactional : the rites produce collective signs and values and the art of dancing and singing choruses is part of the Athenian identity and politics. And all the dancers and audiences are amateurs, since the notion of professionalism, in these matters, does not exist yet. At least in the ideal aristocratic or democratic cities and cultures the moderns like to imagine, especially about dance



(Briand : to be publ. 2010,3), which dominated the VIth and Vth century and progressively reduced, from the IVth to the Hellenistic and Roman times. This superiority of presentation to re-presentation might be typical of performances which still ignore the aristotelician theories about tragedy as *mimesis* of a *muthos*, that is a representation of a plot (actions and discourses of characters).

This idea of spectacle differs too from the first kinds of professionalism, as it appears with, for instance (Easterling & Hall : 2002) :

- the new dithyramb, a new kind of virtuoso solo performances, invented at the end of the Vth c. b. c., violently criticized by Aristophanes and Plato, as immoral, and by Nietzsche, in *The birth of tragedy*, as anti-dionysian, that is anti-tragic and anti-choral (Heinrichs : 1996, Rousier : 2003, Pouillaude : 2009), since tragedy originates in old dithyramb.

- and the greco-roman pantomime, as Lucian of Samosate presents it, in his partly satirical dialogue *On Dance*, II d c. a. c., performed by virtuoso solists, that is sophisticated professionals, who narrated mythology, not with words but with their bodies (Garelli : 2007, and Webb : 2008).

On one side, we have (warm) cultural practices, where choral dance / music / song, as performed by average members of the community, is a ritual ; on the other side, (cold) cultural artefacts, where solo dance (or song), as performed by a specialist, is a spectacle. But in between, we may find a variegated scale of situations, as in several genres, like ancient tragedy (for the individual actors, hired professionals, unlike the chorus) and ancient comedy, with choral and solo carnival rituals, that is originally political / religious performances, mostly, at their highest classical development, performed by professionals (as morally degrading for free Athenians, especially young ones). In some ways, every time and culture has its typical dichotomies, warm / cold and low / high culture, amateur / professional and simple / virtuoso practices, ritual / spectacular performances, energetic / formal aesthetics, utopian - subversive / conformist positions, presentation / representation, and of course, life / art. But in each period and culture, scholars and historians might notice the one more than the other part of these conceptual divisions, which are no parallel structures.

Four figurative examples, from ancient Greek vases, might help identifying this fluid though contrasted evolution :

- the first instance (Figure 1)<sup>ix</sup> shows funeral rites (a *prothesis* or exposition of the corpse). There is no difference between audience and performers, except maybe that some are standing and others sitting : they all lament, with the same positions and movements of the arms. From a plastic point of view, we may notice that the so-called geometric style, here exemplified, expresses a remarkable *horror vacui* (fear of emptiness) and that, in this system, the formal, energetical and religious correspondance of the dance ritual with the (geometrical) harmony of the world (*kosmos* means « order ») essentially contributes to the efficiency of the whole performance (Miller : 1986, and Briand : to be publ. 2010,1).



Figure 1 : Funeral rites.

- the second instance (Figure 2)<sup>x</sup>, shows a tragic chorus of youth (in military outfits, with masks, and in square disposition) : this ritual dancing is typical of the epebic rites of passage, with funerary and political purposes, connecting younger and older citizens, among them the soldiers who died for the city. We can see here one of the origins of the tragic spectacle, as performed by non-professionals, yet skilfull, dancers and singers. This is more or less what some modern or contemporary thinkers and artists dream of reviving, though our « société du spectacle », as Guy Debord named it (Debord : 1995), is based on completely different conceptions of what is work and spectacle, or private and public (Arendt : 1958).



Figure 2 : Epebic chorus.

- the third and fourth instances have to do with comic dances. The vase representing the *dance of the riders* (Figure 3)<sup>xi</sup> shows how the comic theatre originated in the carnival festival (the *kômos* or revel), and this example of Aristophanian paratragedy (here the piece called « The Riders ») illustrates Bakhtinian « carnivalesque », with typical animal / human hybridations, and sexual connotations. And, in the last instance (Figure 4)<sup>xii</sup>, one can see a typical *phlyax* (comic actor), dancing in a burlesque and grotesque way, wearing huge leather hips and phallus. Other comic actors are painted here, all parodic, the old man, the woman, and, above all, the tragically acting young man : none of them could decently be played by amateur dancers / actors, neither grown up citizens or free women, nor ephebs. In the ancient comedy, the ethical and aesthetic representation and performance effects, as Plato describe it in the *Laws*, for instance, would be too negative for the amateurs, both performers and audience, and it is probably in this kind of theatre that we can look at the first completely professional distribution. Comic dancers, especially solists, should be professional (often slaves or foreigners), for political and artistic reasons : to preserve the integrity of the political body, that is of the city and of the bodies and minds of the citizens and sons of citizens.



Figure 3 : The Dance of the Riders



Figure 4 : Paratragic Solos

### **(Post-)post-modern experiments**

In some (post-)post-modern dance and theatre experiments, the place of amateurs becomes crucial again. In the instances I am now presenting, the amateurs still neither perform as citizens nor as professionals, but their presence and involvement in the spectacle have pragmatic effects on the reception of the performances. And this new kind of post-modern rituality might have a significant impact on contemporary re-definitions of artistic action, audience, and spectacle (and choreographic work of art, Pouillaude : 2009).

This general introduction specially refers to real dance performances I participated in, since, as a professional, I present myself as an ancient Greek scholar, but I might define myself as an amateur dancer. Thus this paper, both academic and personal, is about a collective of 15-18 persons who, for five years, have been developing several dance group experiments, under the guidance of Claire Servant, dancer - teacher and choreographer, in the small town of Chauvigny, near the city of Poitiers : the dance company is named *Alice de Lux* and the amateur group *L'atelier des douze heures*. The variety of the group makes it a special « community of differences where adjustments and negotiations are essential » (Anne Collod)<sup>xiii</sup> : age (from 17 to 55), social status (high-school students, goat-shepherd, real-estate agent, sport-educators ...), sexual and

political orientations, personal life-stories, body-types, (dis-)abilities, interests in dance history and aesthetics, etc. What makes these performers amateurs is that they are not professionals, i. e. « they do not live (earn their living) from their work » (Claire Servant)<sup>xiv</sup>, as individual dancers or actors. They present / participate in performances, which might be viewed both as spectacles and experiences, that is as scenes they show (off) and as activities they practice. The same occurs to professionals, of course, but in different ways, and with different effects on the audience and the performers themselves. These different projects, about Bagouet, Duboc, and Halprin, were supported by the *Ministère de la Culture*, as some 20-30 others in France every year, and they are part of a planned policy, in favour of dance patrimony and history (especially modern and contemporary) and of amateur dance activities. On a local scale, in Poitiers, it is related to a recurrent project called *Entrez dans la danse*<sup>xv</sup>, which involves schools, university, cultural town authorities, public theatres, cinemas, dance companies, and so on, and makes Poitiers (and Chauvigny) a town where people dance a lot, and love it, as in Guildford and London ...

Four examples, developed since 2006, might be of special interest in this study of the notions of amateurism and professionalism in dance spectacle. The first example was not a part of the planned policy just described, but it might be meaningful, in theoretical terms, and had a special impact on the group : it was in connection with R. Castellucci's use of choral performance in *Inferno*, the first part of a trilogy, inspired, with the two other pieces *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, from Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. The whole trilogy was presented in Avignon, in 2008, and *Inferno* was played in 2009 in Poitiers (like in Dijon, Strasbourg, Brussels, Athens, Tokyo or in London, at the Barbican ...). In Poitiers, as in Avignon, Castellucci recruited around 40 amateur dancers and actors, and reconstructed the whole piece, in accordance with the scenical possibilities of the *TAP (Théâtre Auditorium de Poitiers)*, his own changing inspirations, and his relations with this special group of performers, both male and female, of different origins and ages (from 4 years old children to retired seniors). Castellucci uses to say that he likes employing non professional (that is non acting) actors for their real presence, since neither animals, nor children, nor « ordinary people », on a scene, pretend they are living something, since they really are living it. The productions of Castellucci, as staging experiences worked out in the *Societàs Raffaello Sanzio*, are mostly presenting (and not re-presenting) tragic rituals which first intend to provoke stupor and shock in the audience's minds and bodies, an archaic / post-modern resurgence, in some ways, of Artaud's *théâtre de la cruauté*, that is of a pre/post-aristotelician *catharsis*, not based on the interpretation of plot and words but upon the encountering of enigmatic images and sounds (Castellucci : 2001, and Lehmann : 2006). And in this matter the huge groups of amateur chorists Castellucci like to present are very efficient<sup>xvi</sup>.

The first transmission experienced by *L'atelier des douze heures*, in 2006-7, was about Dominique Bagouet's last piece *So schnell*, 1992 (before he died of AIDS), by Matthieu Doze, former dancer of Bagouet's company, now choreographer and member of *Les Carnets Bagouet*, an archivistic institution which intends to protect and transmit the works of one of the most important French contemporary choreographer (Ginot : 1999, Launay : 2007, and Louppe : 1997). The title of the piece (« so swift ») is

from a cantata of Bach, bwv 26, « ach wie flüchtig, ach wie nichtig », which celebrates and deplores the passing of time and the emptiness of human condition, while most of the scenes are full of humor, jubilant colours, precise movements (especially in hands, arms and heads), graphic attitudes, happy or comic situations<sup>xvii</sup>. During one year, the group was initiated to the specific language and *Weltanschauung* of Bagouet, which means best-liked gestures, attitudes and dynamics, and characteristic body conditions and dramatizations, all aesthetic criteria which make critics call this choreographer a « contemporary baroque », whatever that means. And, after having observed exercises and workshops, Matthieu Doze built up a new 20 minutes piece, with elements from the one hour long original, of course staging other kinds of virtuosity and involvement he and other members of *Les Cahiers Bagouet* had observed, while transmitting the whole *So schnell* to the dancers of the Operas in Paris (Figure 5)<sup>xviii</sup> or Genève ... The different audiences of the « spectacle » expressed that the pleasure and joy of the dancers were utmost communicative : *catharsis* too can be happy, though finally melancholic.



Figure 5 : Bagouet, *So Schnell* (transmission, Opéra de Paris, 1998)

In 2007-2008, the group worked with Odile Duboc (who died last spring), about adapted sequences from compositions like *Trois boléros* (created in 1996, Figure 6)<sup>xix</sup> and *Projet de la matière* (created in 1993, and re-created in 2006), two pieces which are now part of the historical repertoire of French contemporary dance (Perrin : 2007, and Louppe : 1997). Like with Matthieu Doze for Bagouet, but this time directly from the choreographer, the group discovered a particular language and specific conceptions of the dancing (and living) body. The group dance from the third *Bolero*, rhythmically precise and intricate, but fluid and steady, continues some features of an

older piece called *Insurrection* (1989, with all the political connotations of this title), while the micro-performances inspired by *Projet de la matière*, more individual or shaped in small groups, were totally influenced by Duboc's reflections on breathing, weight, release, or control, and her work about the elements of nature, especially water (like in *Rien ne laisse présager de l'état de l'eau*, 2005). The piece created for the group of amateurs was integrated in a longer professional spectacle, in Chauvigny, where the audience could watch solos or duos by professionals from Duboc's company, and a solo by Duboc herself : in a way, the right word might not be integration, since the pieces by professionals and amateurs were different ones, but they all had received a similar training and the warming up was collective. The whole project was completed by other transmission and creation activities in schools and at the university of Poitiers.

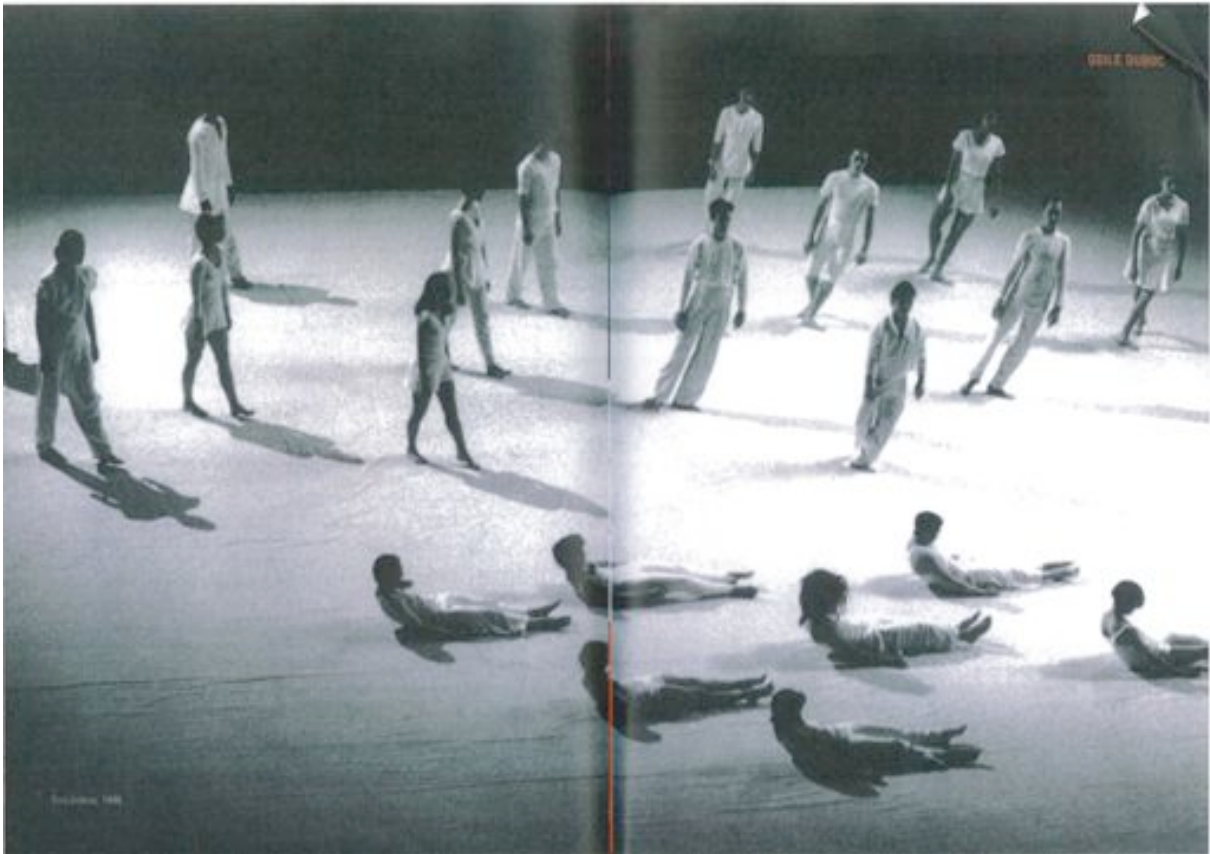


Figure 6 : Duboc, *Trois Boléros*, 1996.

In 2008-2009, Claire Servant and *L'atelier des douze heures* concentrated on their own group project, still working with Matthieu Doze (for instance on Yvonne Rainer's *Continuous project - Altered daily*) and dancers from the companies of Odile Duboc and Régine Chopinot, and created a piece called *Rubato*, choreographed by C. Servant, partly from what the dancers themselves had produced in supervised improvisations<sup>xx</sup>. The influence of the experiences with Bagouet / Doze and Duboc was obvious, though integrated in something new and autonomous, which prepared the next

project : this episode helped the group to integrate and clarify its practices, methods, and regulations.

In 2009-2010, the group experienced some of Anne Collod's reshapings of Anna Halprin's *Parades and Changes*. This piece operates like « a literal democracy-in-action », as Janice Ross put it in her introduction to Collod's *Replays* (« Parades and Changes : The Art of Revolution in the 1960s »), for the Festival d'Automne, in Paris, 2008 (see also Ross : 2007, Halprin & Kaplan : 1995, and Louppe : 1997 and 2007). The dance historian says also that « the task of theatre thus becomes the *creation* rather the *depiction* of a life situation », which is quite similar to what we noticed in the pre-aristotelician Greek choral dance, especially melic or tragic. This jonction of « art and politics », which characterizes both Halprin's « discrete act of civil disobedience » and Greek tragic negotiations of collective values and identities, is also, at post-modern times, a way to erase the limits between life and art, and to re-invent what dance can be, as in ancient and traditional societies, but with an historical and critical distance that changes the whole situation<sup>xxi</sup>. The *Atelier des douze heures* worked only two scores, in a performance called *Expansion des Parades*, and not the ones which implied nudity and could have been inconvenient or embarassing for non-professionals : « stump », a rythmical sequence on noisy and colourfull plywood-platforms (Figure 7)<sup>xxii</sup>, and « embraces », a longer and more flowing play with look exchanges, body encounters and skin contacts (Figure 8)<sup>xxiii</sup>.



Figure 7 : « Stump » (*L'atelier des douze Heures*, 2010)





Figure 8 : « Embrace » (*L'atelier des douze heures*, 2010)

The most important element of the project was the working process, and the emotions and changes it produced for the dancers, in their personal life as in their dancing, more than the final presentation (the « spectacle »)<sup>xxiv</sup>. Most dancers in the group thought so, especially about the « embrace » score : these duos, trios and other kinds of moving group structures, are ritualized modes of presenting and sharing sensations and feelings, with the other dancers, and with the audience, when there is one. A group of amateurs then stands somewhere between usual audience and performers, like the dream of a political community, which of course does not exist anymore like this, if it ever did (Rousier : 2003, Louppe : 2007, and Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009, section 3 *Communities*)<sup>xxv</sup>. But something similar might be experienced during the regular workshops, by the amateur dancers, and watched (and physically felt), during the spectacles, both by the audience of the spectacle and the performers, so connected and sympathizing. This piece was presented three times, to very different audiences, once in Chauvigny, like the former projects, once in Poitiers, at the beginning of a university dance festival<sup>xxvi</sup>, *À corps*, in the *Maison des étudiants*, at the end of a day devoted to Anna Halprin (conferences, films, discussions ...), and lastly in Reims, *Le manège*, for a national meeting, where some 20 pieces were performed by amateurs, during two days of *Danse en amateur et répertoire* : so, rural and suburban average public, students and academics, other amateur performers, etc, all primarily aware of different aspects of the presentation.

But, in 2006 in Paris, the performers of Collod's re-creation (*Parades and Changes - Replays*) were all professional, with high technical skills, like the dancers in the 1965 original version: the purpose, then, was to de-construct virtuosity, with dancers who could have been spectacular artists, not to present average dancers who could not perform a « high-level spectacle », after modern (show) criteria. But, in the work with *L'atelier des douze heures*, especially in the « embrace » score, A. Halprin indirectly (via A. Collod and C. Servant) promoted the same kind of therapeutic life experience she was used to arrange for people with Aids or older persons (*Seniors Rocking*, 2005), after having fought herself against cancer. The amateur dancers of the group experienced this special impact of collective dancing at most in the preparation of the « embrace » score, but also in many exercises like « active - passive » or « physical - emotional - imaginary » (Halprin & Kaplan : 1995).

### **Amateurs performing and negotiating the history of dance : last questions.**

The notions of dance and spectacle are context-dependent. The *No to spectacle* motto confronts neo-classical and modern theories and practices of our times but, then, without returning to an ancient golden age, which could not be anything else than utopia, the post-modern performances this motto justifies, share some similarities with what a Foucauldian archeology (like in Foucault's *History of Sexuality*)<sup>xxvii</sup> may investigate in archaic and classical Greek antiquity (Briand : to be publ. 2011) : those two extremely distant times, anthropologies and *epistemai* may help us question some supposedly self-evident concepts of dance, spectacle, and, subsidiarily, amateurism and professionalism.

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<sup>i</sup> I use the word « melic » instead of « lyric », too often related to the (romantic) selfexpression, to denote a ritual kind of poetry (especially choral), as distinguished from the narrative epic poetry, and connecting dance, music, and song in one only performance, like *dirgê* (funeral song), *dithyrambos* (hymn to Dionysos), *paian* (hymn to Apollo), *epithalamos* (marriage song), etc.

<sup>ii</sup> On the notion of « spectacle » in post-moderne cultures, the bibliographical references are of course numerous. See *Cahiers philosophiques*, n° 106, juin 2006, Dossier "La danse" (F. Pouillaude, "Le spectacle et l'absence d'oeuvre", 9-25, L. Férec, "Une archéologie des crises du spectacle de danse", 26-36, C. Schenck, "Les intermittences du spectacle", 37-54, P. Zaoui, "La métaphysique, matrice de la danse moderne ?", 55-69).

<sup>iii</sup> This gap is historically important, but not so much culturally. Beyond the so-called modern times, pre- and post-modernity are connected, as the conclusion of this article states it too.

<sup>iv</sup> The most important questions about sources, reconstruction and cultural / aesthetic interpretation of ancient Greek dance are well summarized in Naerebout, 1997.

<sup>v</sup> This rather schechnerian point of view is now accepted by most of the classicists (Schechner : 2003, especially chap. 4 « From ritual to theatre and back », and 5 « Towards a poetics of performance »), like it was by most of the ancient critics themselves, after Aristotle (Briand : 2009).

<sup>vi</sup> See Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1981, transl. 1986), *The Black Hunter : forms of thought and forms of society in the Greek world*, transl. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak, Johns Hopkins UP.

<sup>vii</sup> Wiles, 2000 provides one of the best introductions in English language to ancient Greek tragedy and comedy, since he addresses both to theatre specialists and classicists. See especially chap. 2 « Myth », 3 « Politics », and 6 « The performer ».

<sup>viii</sup> It would be possible to interpret the classical *catharsis* in kinesthetical terms, see Susan Leigh Foster, « Movement's contagion : the kinesthetic impact of performance » (Davis : 2008, 46-59), and, in Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009, section 1 *Conceptual and philosophical concerns* and 5 *Changing aesthetics*.

<sup>ix</sup> Geometric attic krater (mixing-bowl), 760-750 b.c., Musée du Louvre, Paris.

<sup>x</sup> Athenian red-figure column-crater (mixing-bowl), ca. 480 b. c., Antikenmuseum, Basel.

<sup>xi</sup> Athenian black-figure amphora, 540-530 b. c., Antikensammlung, Berlin.

<sup>xii</sup> Apulian red-figure calyx-crater, 400-390 b. c., Metropolitan Museum of Art, New-York.

<sup>xiii</sup> I translate it from Anne Collod's depiction of her work with amateurs.

<sup>xiv</sup> I translate it from Claire Servant's definition of amateurs. The following remarks, in the article, owe very much to the conversations I benefited from these two transmitters, but any inexactness is mine.

<sup>xv</sup> The 2009-2010 programme can be found on websites like [centredebeaulieu.fr](http://centredebeaulieu.fr) and [tap-poitiers.com](http://tap-poitiers.com)

<sup>xvi</sup> See especially the entrance, fall and crawling of the chorus in the infernal regions, which happened earlier in the piece in Poitiers than in Avignon (DVD Arte-éditions).

<sup>xvii</sup> The other musical accompaniment (« jack art song » by Laurent Gachet) is an electro-acoustic distortion of the Jacquard knitting machines Bagouet's father was using in his factory.

<sup>xviii</sup> The picture was taken from Christine Le Moigne, *Parcours croisés avec Dominique Bagouet : de 1967 à 1992*, Montpellier, Presses du Languedoc, 2002.

<sup>xix</sup> The picture was taken from Rosita Boisseau, *Panorama de la danse contemporaine. 90 chorégraphes*, Paris, Textuel, 2006.

<sup>xx</sup> See *Rubato* 1, 2 and 3, on [youtube.com/watch?v=SptlQgpAw1U](http://youtube.com/watch?v=SptlQgpAw1U), [youtube.com/watch?v=ow1E115WRQ](http://youtube.com/watch?v=ow1E115WRQ), and [youtube.com/watch?v=zIbfgzhdkUw](http://youtube.com/watch?v=zIbfgzhdkUw)

<sup>xxi</sup> Here, aesthetics and politics are well two faces of the same object, mostly related by the pragmatic effects of reception, see, in Davis, 2008, part II *Body Politics : the Individual in History*.

<sup>xxii</sup> Picture by Andrée Cammal, member of *Alice de Lux*, in Chauvigny, april 17th 2010.

<sup>xxiii</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>xxiv</sup> See Fontaine, 2004, especially the first three chapters *Art et permanence : et si la danse (n')était (pas) un art ?*, *Pour en finir avec l'éternité*, and *La danse en ses moments*.

<sup>xxv</sup> In Louppe, 2007, I refer especially to the last chapter *Modes de production 7. « Your body is a battleground »* (*Le travail politique de la danse*), where the Foucauldian references are not abstract, as sometimes in recent cultural studies, but improved by real dance practices.

<sup>xxvi</sup> <http://www.festivalacorps.asso.univ-poitiers.fr>

<sup>xxvii</sup> As it is well known, Michel Foucault in the last two volumes of his *History of Sexuality*, II *The Use of pleasure* and III *The Care of the Self*, (in French, *Histoire de la sexualité, II L'usage des plaisirs, III Le souci de soi*, publ. in 1984, transl. 1985 and 1986) intended to study the epistemological (that is cultural, ethical, social ...) turn which in the late Roman and Greek antiquity radically created new conceptions of sex, flesh, conscience and morality. The first volume, *The Will to Knowledge* (in French, *La volonté de savoir*, publ. 1976, transl. 1977), was more traditionally dealing with modernity, especially since the 19th century. All this exemplifies, I

think, the necessary dialogue of post-modernity with antiquity, relayed by some intermediate stages like the baroque « belle danse » or Laban's choral utopias.

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## Claiming Their Space: Virtuosity in British Jazz Dance

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### *Abstract*

*They were not copying black America but minting something new ...*

Robert Farris Thompson[1]

*The paper discusses forms of jazz dance that developed in British clubs in the 1970s and '80s, situating them in their social and cultural context to examine how a complex of artistic and social attitudes made it difficult for these dance forms to be more widely appreciated within the UK.*

### **Introduction**

What follows is, for me, a new step. Working in the field of theatre dance I was inspired by Clare Parfitt's consideration of the relationship between the dance viewed as art and that thought of as part of popular culture.[2] In this context I will be considering forms of jazz practised in British clubs in the late '70s and into the '80s[3] which, before the advent of b boys and girls, were used in challenges every bit as competitive as today's break dance battles. Rather than offering a detailed analysis of its forms, traditions and histories (something that warrants further investigation) my aim is to focus on how the dancers' accounts provide an additional perspective from which to view a recent era of British dance history. I will thus begin by setting this dance within a wider context before exploring, in more detail, some issues the dancers' experiences raise about how, in Britain at this time, their dancing was understood.

### **Britain 1979-89**

The turn of the '70s in Britain is popularly remembered in relation to the 'the winter of discontent' followed by the beginnings of 'Thatcherism'[4]. During the 1980s a more aggressive capitalism was given a boost by deregulation of the financial sector ('Big Bang' 1986) that sought to bring a new entrepreneurship and competitiveness to the City, a previous bastion of class and privilege. The new rich lifestyles embodied in the 'yuppie'[5] provided a contrast to those of the unemployed, the numbers of whom topped 3 million in 1982, and comprised over 10% of the workforce for the next five years[6]. The period was marked by social unrest as those not benefiting from the far reaching economic and social changes struggled for their rights. The miners' strikes (1984-85)

became the rallying point for resistance to the ‘Tories’ while increasing unemployment did nothing to ease levels of ‘racial’ tension which erupted in rioting in Brixton (1981), Handsworth (1985) and Tottenham (1985). The demand for ‘gay rights’ grew in response to Clause 28 of the Local Government Act (1988) and by 1990, unrest among many different groups would culminate in the poll tax riots.<sup>[7]</sup> These latter disturbances finally hastened the end of Margaret Thatcher’s premiership, but the changes to British society during her term as Prime Minister would have lasting repercussions.

### **British Theatre Dance 1979-1989**

The precise relationships between this wider social context and changes in British theatre dance of the period may be difficult to ascertain, in part because so much of the discourse of the time upheld a formalist distinction between society and the autonomous work of art<sup>[8]</sup>. Nevertheless, certain ways in which social change affected dance seem evident. The post war regal standing of the Royal Ballet had already been challenged from within by Sir Kenneth McMillan, whose pushing at the boundaries of classicism, seemed to annoy elements of the critical establishment<sup>[9]</sup>. Yet from without, British ballet retained an aura of class and privilege that might be sought after by the upwardly mobile.<sup>[10]</sup> While ‘Loadsamoney’ <sup>[11]</sup> began to venture into the opera house, ‘Contemporary’ dance had come of age with British born graduates of London Contemporary Dance School challenging the traditional bastions of dance.<sup>[12]</sup> A largely middle class audience for Contemporary dance <sup>[13]</sup> was bolstered by the development of new dance degrees <sup>[14]</sup> which were founded on the principles of American and European Modern dance that fostered a predominantly Modernist aesthetic. Britain had inherited American experiments after the event so that in ‘60s and ‘70s Britain, American innovations of the 1930s and ‘40s seemed ‘new’. The sense of an adherence to a Modernist aesthetic was also prolonged due to the issue of it being possible (if arguably erroneous) to appreciate many of the radical experiments of American Postmodern dance in the 1960s and 70s from a Modernist perspective.<sup>[15]</sup> It was these experiments that influenced many emerging British artist of the '70s who became influential in the 1980s. Elsewhere in postmodernity the divisions between high and popular culture were becoming blurred as both became orientated towards mass consumption.<sup>[16]</sup> However, this blurring of boundaries was less common in much British dance activity. While in the mid ‘80s artists such as Michael Clarke, Lloyd Newson and the young Lea Anderson and Matthew Bourne did their best to start breaking down various boundaries between dance, art and life, more widely ballet and contemporary dance were positioned as ‘high’ culture. From a sociological viewpoint following Bourdieu’s analysis of the relationships between class and artistic preferences,<sup>[17]</sup> it is possible to view the retaining of strong boundaries, both between dance forms and between dance as art as opposed to social activity or entertainment, as a manifestation of class divisions. Notwithstanding the media focus on



upwards mobility, class was still an important feature of British culture.[18] Certainly a recent survey of theatre attendance suggests that in Britain while those who in Bourdieu's terms enjoy either cultural or economic capital might enjoy theatre, film and television, those limited in terms of both financial status and level of education will usually enjoy film and television but rarely venture into the theatre. [19] From this sociological viewpoint, if certain kinds of ballet, such as lesser known full length ballets and more abstract works, and the more esoteric experiments in Contemporary dance were difficult for the general public they may have served to reinforce the 'discerning' taste or 'habitus' of an elite group. In Contemporary dance such attitudes would mesh with the retaining of the values of (high) Modernist aesthetics well into the last quarter of the twentieth century.

### **Attitudes to Jazz Dance in Britain**

Meanwhile, if dance as a theatre art was a minority, largely middle class interest, *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) heralded a boom in commercial disco in the late 70s.[20] Dance continued as a popular subject for films such as *Fame* (1980), *Flash Dance* (1983) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) and also influenced the emerging genres of exercise video[21] whilst becoming an important element within the development of the pop video.[22] It is likely that while many working class audiences would have enjoyed dancing in clubs and watching dance on film, video and MTV, fewer (perhaps only the upwardly mobile) would have ventured to theatre performances especially in the less commercially orientated theatres. Ironically it could be argued that the success of dance in the media may have served to reinforce the divide between dance viewed as art and that thought of as popular. An important element in the influential Modernist aesthetic was a concern with the negative effects of the mass media in turning culture into a commodity. This attitude is perhaps summed up by the sociologist Theodor Adorno who specifically related what he viewed as problematic to jazz:

Mass culture has finally rewritten the whole of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit in accordance with the principle of competition. The sensuous moment of art transforms itself under the eyes of mass culture into the measurement, comparison and assessment of physical phenomena. This is most clearly to be seen in the case of jazz which is directly indebted to the sport of competitive dancing.[23]

An element in jazz dancing that would further distinguish it from British Contemporary dance of the time was the emphasis on virtuosic elements. Interestingly, Adorno's view of the detrimental effects of mass culture included a view that virtuosity had become empty and mechanical. [24] Such an attitude was echoed in theatre dance circles where it coincided with an older ambivalence to virtuosic display.[25] In Britain this may have also fed into more specific class based predilections for refined movement as opposed to what

was perhaps seen as the more crude physicality of the 'lower' classes. Beyond dance, brute physical skills were now less in demand by British industry and this, together with the legacy of colonial attitudes to labouring bodies, may also have contributed to a bourgeois antipathy to the display of physical strength through, for example, powerful jumps and multiple turns. This did not mean however that left wing artists were inclined to champion virtuosity since those set against the old elites, as exemplified in ballet, focused on the ways in which virtuosic dance excluded all but the most physically able.

Whatever their reasons, the result was a palpable horror in some dance circles of overt physical 'showiness'. So much so that as a student of Contemporary dance in the mid 1980s I remember the verdict 'It's a bit *Flash Dance*' as a very negative form of feedback. In such a context while emerging Postmodern choreographers might play on the boundaries with mass culture, in Britain at this point perhaps it was prudent for emerging artists to retain a distance from the more overtly virtuosic, spectacular aspects of the latter in order to preserve a work's status as art. In America by the mid '70s Twyla Tharp was already choreographing Postmodern works that more readily incorporated virtuosity, the gloss of show business and references to a broad range of dance.<sup>[26]</sup> However in Britain the acceptance of a virtuosic, spectacular and genre breaking Postmodern dance seems to have taken longer to have been generally accepted.<sup>[27]</sup> This would have implications for those jazz dancers interested in crossing over into theatre and in other ways traversing the boundaries between different dance styles and contexts.

### **Jazz Dance in Clubs**

During the late 1970s and early '80s, it was in the club scene in the UK that a form of virtuosic dancing emerged that developed its own synthesis of influences ranging from popular dance to ballet, drawing on the cultures of the Caribbean, America and Europe. To a large extent the stimulus was a generation of Black British youths who were the result of the wave of post Second World War immigration to the UK. There is general consensus that those members of the British population whose families came from Britain's previous colonies faced extensive racism and a not unrelated poverty. One result of this was that their entertainment centred on house parties or events at local community centres which drew strongly on their own cultural traditions. The children, creeping downstairs to watch their parents party, or dancing alongside them, had thus grown up with the rhythms of ska. However, via television they were also introduced to a variety of music and dance so that for at least one of these young people, the choreographer Irvn Lewis, his earliest memories of dance were not only of his local Chapel Town community but also of the musicals shown on television on a Saturday afternoon, while programmes such as *Soul Train* and the broadcasting of ballet further widened his dance experience.<sup>[28]</sup>

Growing up predominantly in the poorer parts of Britain's cities, the cultural focus of

many young men and women of African Caribbean parentage became the clubs in which they danced alongside other, generally less affluent, youths. Initially funk and soul had been the main styles but a form of jazz became popular in the late 1970s, which by the '80s had a specialist following and dedicated club sessions. Musically the scene was inspired by jazz fusion groups (e.g. Weather Report), jazz funk (e.g. Donald Byrd) and samba fusion (e.g. Chick Corea). There were different dance styles and inspiration for moves might come from anywhere, not only from ska, disco and funk but from musicals and ballet. The film of *West Side Story* seems to have been particularly influential<sup>[29]</sup> engendering a rage for knee spins when shown on television. While more than one dancer has admitted to wearing a hole in their bedroom carpet practicing spinning in an adapted ballet pirouette.<sup>[30]</sup> The style danced in many jazz clubs in the late '70s, and that continued into the mid '80s in the north was sometimes even called 'ballet style', presumably in tribute to the moves incorporated. By the '80s in London however a new style had emerged out of funk and jazz with an emphasis on fast footwork rather than balletic turns or leaps. IDJ exemplified this 'fusion' style and they in turn inspired Brothers in Jazz, three dancers from the north<sup>[31]</sup> who developed what they called Be Bop by incorporating the faster footwork of fusion with mambo, northern (ballet style) jazz, funk and soul even mixing in the balletic beats that the dancers were now learning in dance school.<sup>[32]</sup>

Dancers in groups like IDJ and the Brothers in Jazz were able to capitalize on their success with opportunities to perform in music and fashion shows, on TV and in film. Where dance had previously been a route to a form of social and cultural capital within a specific community, for some, it became a route to both economic and a more widely recognised cultural capital highlighted in such appearances.<sup>[33]</sup> But for most of the jazz dancers their success as performers was short lived. For some there was a genuine preference for the club context that meant perhaps they were not committed to careers as dancers in the more conventional sense.<sup>[34]</sup> However this was not the case for all the jazz dancers. Dance being ephemeral in nature and dependent on physical skills many dancers have short careers, but there also may have been other factors linked to the particular social dynamics of the time. Given the high proportion of dancers who were Black that racism played its part seems self evident. Certainly even those organizations working within the more established arts sector to support the dances and dancers of African Caribbean heritage struggled with the attitudes of the time, <sup>[35]</sup> while racism in its most overt forms affected the club dancers. <sup>[36]</sup> However exploring this issue reveals a complex interplay of the social dynamics of race, class and gender that are not only pertinent to the experiences of these dancers.

### **Competition and Dance in a Post Industrial/Post colonial society**

One element that distinguishes this dancing from much other dancing at the time was the

overt intensity of the competitive element. For the children of the ‘Windrush’ immigrants, some element of rivalry seems to have been part of the culture of music and dance from the start. Lewis remembers competitions between the sound systems, ‘toasters’ and dancers from different areas as part of the social environment in which he and his peers grew up. By the 1980s, as if to capture the spirit of the new harsh economics, this competitive element intensified. The desire to ‘out dance’ one another would lead to a heightened level of challenge and an intense atmosphere which Lewis described like a football pitch or rather, ‘like 1000’s of pitches in one club’ in which the competition was approached very seriously with an acknowledged hierarchy of dancers and planned battles:

...if you knew you were going to battle somebody – [You knew] they had a certain move-You’d know their best move and you’d go away and do their best move better than them....You’d wait for them to do their best move and then do their best move up against them after they’d dropped it.

Also if that dancer could dance in a big space, you’d wait for your moment and get him into a really small corner: dance in a corner with him and he couldn’t move....

...if you lost a battle you’d wait a year, six months, just wait....So it was all strategic. It wasn’t luck it was calculated.[\[37\]](#)

This competitive element is similarly evident through many other accounts. As Lewis explains many of these jazz dancers were battling to ‘have something’ when there was ‘nothing to have’. The combination of high unemployment and racism meant jobs were scarce and good ones rare.[\[38\]](#) For many dancers, the chance to prove themselves was an important part of what drove them to dance:

Challenging was what it was all about. Like in the martial arts. In order to be the best you have to fight the best. Simple. [\[39\]](#)

However there were various attitudes to this intense battling. David Okonofua (Oki) for instance, inspired many a younger dancer but tired of people who would ‘get in your face when you’re just trying to get lost in a track’.[\[40\]](#) Steve Edwards of IDJ was much more interested in performance than fellow group member Gary Nurse, and similarly uninspired by battling were Edward Lynch, a founding member of Phoenix and de Napoli who founded RJC.

That the initial members of Phoenix also experienced dance at school was noted by Lewis:

They were different because someone had come along and trained them at school.... They had to do Modern. That was the reason why [they were different]. They were getting trained and we weren’t trained. We were more street

dancers I guess.[\[41\]](#)

It might be argued that the Phoenix dancers' education had inculcated something of a Modernist aesthetic that, even though they would draw on the moves they learned in the clubs, would be at odds with the competitive nature of that arena.[\[42\]](#) The contrast Lewis makes also suggests the club dancers may have been suspicious of those external agencies attempting to organize cultural activity. In this context the club dancers' appropriation of ways of dancing from ballet and musicals and even LCDT on their own terms have significance in relation to controversies prevalent at the time in the established arts sector about how to define (and fund) those dances that drew on traditions from Africa and the Caribbean. These were not unrelated to wider concerns with the impact of immigration on British culture and how to view British identity in a visibly culturally diverse, postcolonial society.[\[43\]](#) Writing about racism in Britain in the 1970s Paul Gilroy outlines the many ways in which the legacy of colonialism affected attitudes towards 'race' in this period.[\[44\]](#) Given the politics of race relations of the time and the fact that Black ballet dancers were almost unheard of in the UK, [\[45\]](#) the alacrity with which young Black dancers would appropriate aspects of this erstwhile 'dominant' culture is notable. Their actions do not fit neatly into the accepted narratives of multiculturalism promoted at the time or to the Africanist resistance that surrounded reggae subculture[\[46\]](#) or to the kind of dancing promoted in education.

Unlike their counterparts in more conventional theatre, the arena within which these dancers established their style of dancing meant their activities, rather than being celebrated as culture, could be perceived as a threat to society. Issues of race, class and gender coalesced in a manner that meant youths, and especially Black, male, working class ones, were often viewed as essentially problematic. A perception of them as the cause of trouble would have only been exacerbated when bruised egos could mean dance challenges might erupt into outright fighting. In addition, a contingent who travelled to the 'all dayers' to protect area pride added to the violence and the authorities made little attempt to distinguish those whose primary focus was dancing rather than fighting. This is made apparent in an account from a dancer from Birmingham, a city rather notorious for the violence wreaked on other cities:

People say we're rough but it was the people who rode with us....It got to the stage where the police knew our nicknames and knew where we'd travel to....  
A policeman would say: I know you Stretch. I know you go to the Electric Ballroom in London... we know about you and lot and your all-dayers. We've been watching....[\[47\]](#)

With such a reputation this dance scene was unlikely to gain a widespread acceptance in mainstream media or dance studios. Moreover the combination of young, predominantly Black males involved in a competitive activity made it perhaps difficult for some people

to see anything more in their dancing than a testosterone fuelled display, that those beyond the scene might enjoy as spectacle but be at a loss to identify its artistic values.

Consider two different videos of Brothers In Jazz. One filmed in Britain in 1986 features the dancers battling an offshoot of IDJ, the Backstreet Kids[48]. Here, area pride (the North v London) had become tinged with a more economic imperative since the Wag Club, where the dancers regularly battled, was popular with media professionals. To make sure, in this representation of their challenges, that the competitive element was emphasised the dancers were placed in a boxing ring. The dancing that had been born of the intensity of their struggles was turned into ‘spectacle’ and the dance groups responded with out and out ‘show’. The second, three years later was filmed in Japan.[49] The slowed down camera work suggests a whole different attitude to Black male identity that there is too little space to delve into here save to suggest that it allows for the appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the dancers’ moves. The emphasis is on *how* they dance, revealing subtleties in their movements and the close, positive relationships between the dancers. This attention to the more subtle aspects of style was also important to the Fusion dancers. Here is the inveterate challenger Gary Nurse, of IDJ recently discussing what he recognises as important to him:

There is beauty in all expression in terms of dance ...We are always trying to explore new ways of dancing. Today power seems to be setting the tone for most dance forms, but I feel that style, finesse and connecting the music through the movement is something that is quickly becoming obsolete. [50]

Viewed in their terms it seems as if these dancers worked towards values that were as much concerned with the ‘sensuous moment of art’ as their counterparts in Contemporary dance studios. However the social and cultural contexts within which the competitive traditions of their dancing developed made it difficult for this to be appreciated.

### **Battling under Britannia’s Shadow**

The jazz dancers in British clubs battled for a space in which, however briefly, they could create new dance forms through a unique synthesis of different cultural traditions in which overt virtuosity was celebrated rather than viewed with suspicion. The combined effects of racism and high levels of unemployment resulted in a lack of opportunity elsewhere and this intensified the competitive atmosphere of the dance floor. The occasional violence connected to this arena meant the dancers were unlikely to be positively represented in the mainstream media. Where the dancing itself was the subject of positive media attention the danger was that it would be solely for the more obviously spectacular aspects of their dancing. Where they crossed over into a performance rather than club context, this spectacular element made it difficult for the artistic qualities of their dancing to be appreciated within the discourses of (high) Modernism. In contrast, much of the Contemporary dance at that time drew on predominantly American and European traditions. Further a marked reticence in relation to ‘showy’ moves may have

had roots in a complex of attitudes to art, class and cultural identity that, in Britain, still carried the legacies of nineteenth century divisions of ‘class’ and ‘race’.

Today the next generation of club, or street , dancers have succeeded not only in gaining widespread media coverage for their break dance battling but, in the new spirit of postmodernism, are taking a more central place in the culture of British theatre dance. Whether this marks the final absorption of all dance into mass consumption or suggests audiences have become better at valuing artistic subtleties in a broader range of dance forms are questions for future consideration.

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[1] Cited in Cotgrove (2009)

[2] Parfitt (2010)

[3] A theatrical presentation of this dance can be seen in Irvn Lewis’ *Ignite* (2001-)

[4] Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, following the strikes of the preceding winter.

[5] ‘Yuppie’ :Young upwardly mobile professional

[6] <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/Analysis.pdf>.

[7] These were in response to the local government finance act of 1988.

[8] For example see Adshead (1983)

[9] Parry (2009)

[10] My experiences of studying at ballet school in the ‘70s and teaching ballet in a stage school in the East end of London in the 80s, suggested to me that for many people ballet carried a sense of aspiration.

[11] ‘Loadsamoney was a comedy character played by Harry Enfield in the late 1980s. An East End ‘lad ‘ who had made his ‘wad’, he liked to show his money around and was a fan of Pavarotti ‘ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/ilove/years/1988/tv3.shtml>

[12] For example, Richard Alston, perhaps significantly also an arts trained old Etonian, was director of Rambert from 1986 -1992..

[13] Recent audience participation data seems to support the correlation between ballet and financial status and contemporary dance and educational attainment. Chan, Goldthorpe, Keaney and Oskala, (2008).

[14] For example the degree programme at Laban was validated in 1977 and the Place 1982 while ones in ballet did not start until the ‘90s.

[15] See Connor (1997) for discussion of postmodernism in relation to American dance in 1960s and 1970s.

- [16] Jameson (1991).
- [17] Bordieu (1984/1979).
- [18] Goldthorpe and Llewellyn (1977).
- [19] Chan, (2005). Chan, Goldthorpe, Keaney and Oskala (2008).
- [20] In 1979 the disco industry was worth an estimated \$4bn - more than movies, television or professional sport - and accounted for up to 40% of the singles chart.
- [21] For example compare the participants in Jane Fonda workout video (1982) with those in jazz dance classes.
- [22] Buckland (1998/1993).
- [23] Adorno (1991/1981) p. 75
- [24] Adorno (1991/1981) p.55
- [25] Noverre,. (1975/1760) p.19. Fokine M,(1981/1916) p.142 .
- [26] *Deuce Coupe* (1973) *Push Comes to Shove* (1976). *The Catherine Wheel* (1983).
- [27] For example, Matthew Bourne's choreographic career started in the mid 1980s but his *Swan Lake* was produced in 1995 which perhaps marks the weakening in the UK of boundaries between mass culture and dance as a theatre art.
- [28] While there were emerging organisations and companies that worked to support dances and dancers from Africa and the Caribbean, their influence seems to have been limited, presumably due to their not being well enough established to be seen on TV.
- [29] Cotgrove (2009). Lewis (2010).
- [30] Cotgrove (2009). Lewis (2010).
- [31] The 'Brothers' were Irven Lewis, Wayne James and Trevor Miller.
- [32] They all attended Urdang but after they had become well regarded battlers in the Jazz scene
- [33] Trevor Miller (cited in Cosgrove 2009) p.269) suggests they could receive £100 per minute per dancer.
- [34] See Nurse in Cotgrove (2009) p. 259.
- [35] While some companies such as Irie, which has been presenting work since 1985, survive other companies such as Ekome and Maas movers were short lived. Even Adzido the largest company of its kind that from 1984 presented large scale productions of African people's dance lost its funding in 2005.
- [36] Lewis remembers confrontations with the National Front on his way home from clubs and Cotgrove (2009, pp 29 and 262) reveals how to start with Black dancers in the clubs contended with racist door policies
- [37] Lewis (2010)
- [38] Lewis (2010) remembered his peers as being on YTS (youth training scheme) or having a manual job, or being in prison.



- [39] Gary Nurse from IDJ Cited in Cotgrove (2009) p. 259
- [40] Cited in Cotgrove, (2009) p.110.
- [41] Lewis (2010)
- [42] There are issues here about some of the tensions regarding the identity of Phoenix..
- [43] Gilroy (1982)
- [44] Gilroy (1982)
- [45] The first Black ballet dancer to be employed by a British company was Brenda Edwards in 1987 at LFB but few followed. Some dancers noted the distinction between ballet companies and LCDT in this regard (131).
- [46] See Hebbidge (1976) and Cosgrove (2009 p. 42) who notes the difficulties for young Blacks who lived in 'black areas' who were into jazz rather than reggae.
- [47] Cited in Cotgrove (2009) p. 137
- [48] *Jazz Fusion Battle Part One*
- [49] *Northern Jazz, Be Bop, Fusion*
- [50] Nurse cited in Lewis (2010b )

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## TO HELLAS, IN HYDE PARK Revived Greek Dance in London, 1926 – 1935

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### **Abstract**

*From 1926 – 1935 Ruby Ginner presented annual concerts in Hyde Park and Regent Park, London. These brought her own conception of Revived Greek Dance to large audiences. Like others of the period, she turned to the Hellenic Greeks as exemplars of harmony within the individual and between individuals and their society. Unlike her immediate forbears in dance, however, Ginner also devised a systematic technical training. Despite such a heritage and technical rigour, however, her company performances were transformed by the location and the critics from the popular but misconceived perception of Greek theatre to domestic public display.*

The writer J.G. Farrell, discussing his fictional works set in the past, says ‘history leaves out so much. . . everything to do with the senses for instance. It leaves out the most important things: the detail of what being alive is like’ (Farrell in Hartvelt 1993). This paper has two aims. First, to situate the work of the British artist, Ruby Ginner, within the international trend for neo-classical dance in the early twentieth century; second, I attempt to evoke what it was like to be alive, dancing and watching dance, in one of London’s central parks, in the summers of the 1920s and 1930s.

Between 1926 – 1935, Ruby Ginner (1886 – 1978) and mime artist Irene Mawer, together with past and current students of their School, presented a series of open air performances of dance and mime in a ‘natural amphitheatre, north of the Serpentine’ in London’s Hyde Park (*The Stage*, 1929).<sup>1</sup> It was Ginner’s mission to promote the culture of 5thc BCE Hellenic Greece through her practice of Revived Greek Dance. The term ‘Revived’ (later changed to ‘Classical’) is misleading, for she was fully aware of the impossibility of recreating movement for which no kinetic evidence existed. Inspired by the ‘literature and visual arts of Greece’ it was her intent ‘to evolve a form of movement that would be suitable to the modern theatre and to the classical music of our own century’ (Ginner 1960: 19). She was fully aware of the performance context of Greek dance: its ritual, festivals and processions and the sophisticated chorus of Greek drama, performed in the open spaces of venues such as Epidaurus and the Parthenon. She could never recreate that context, not even having access to the large stadia as used by the movement choirs in 1920s-1930s Central Europe, though her company’s performance in Athens in 1930 was geographically exact.<sup>2</sup> Although most of her work took place in smaller, conventional theatre and community spaces, it was the Hyde Park performances which came closest to the open-air spectacle of the Greek theatre from which her work evolved.

The fascination with ancient Greece informed many cultural beliefs and activities in the early 20thc. This in itself was not a new phenomenon, but a reprise of a fashion also seen in the early/mid- 18thc. However, these trends embraced a selective and idealised view of Greek culture. In dance, Kendall writes that the two revolutions of the period, one in the field of American ‘free’ dance and the other in the work of Diaghilev’s collaborators, shared ‘a collective hallucination of precivilized ancient Greece, of nymphs and fauns and satyrs and dancing deities that seemed to crop up everywhere in Western art’ (Kendall 1999: 82). (It is an oft over-looked

paradox that the women dancers who performed their own liberation in the various forms of classical dancing were actually paying tribute to a culture wherein women were socially and politically deeply oppressed.) Isadora Duncan is the best known of the practitioners who acknowledged her debt to the classical world in her espousal of the qualities of grace, harmony and a return to the (deeply problematic) notion of ‘the natural’, but the British dance artist Ruby Ginner more fully embraced not just the ideals but also the myths and stories of ancient Greece.

Ginner’s work also exemplifies another dominant trend of the first third of the 20thc: a belief in the benefits of exercise in the open air. A variety of conditions conspired to produce this phenomenon, which was made manifest in art, leisure and education. These conditions included the poor health of the male population revealed in the Boer War and the First World War; the search for a harmonious relationship with nature; the moral dimension of exercise seen as not just ‘improving’ the individual but society as a whole, and the recognition of the importance of physical culture in classical Greek civilisation.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, without the constraints of small indoor venues or the expense of large theatres, dance artists could disseminate their work to the public in the perfect union of movement and nature. The movement choirs created by Rudolf Laban were an example of how amateurs could engage in mass movement demonstrations depicting social harmony in large stadia spaces.

During her early research on Greek drama, Ginner was intrigued by the chorus who interpreted the poems and stories in speech and movement. She wanted ‘to find out what quality of movement the ancient Greeks used when they danced in their vast theatres’ (Ginner 1960: 18). Although cognizant of this spectacle, Ginner returned to the minutiae of movement and choreographic construction. She developed a systematic approach, clustering movement vocabulary in to dances which embodied distinct functions, styles and qualities: the Gymnopaedic, Pyrrhic, Lyric and Bacchic, all uniting in the choric mode.<sup>4</sup> These she presented in a wide variety of venues from 1913 through to the 1930s, in mixed programmes which also included historical and national dances, and the mime/mime plays of her professional partner Irene Mawer.<sup>5</sup> From the late 1920s, Ginner’s theatre work was sufficiently renowned for her to be invited to present in the aforementioned summer seasons in Hyde Park and, in 1933, in the Open Air Theatre at Regents Park.

A printed programme from 1929 serves as an example of the kind of work she and Mawer were presenting in these seasons.<sup>6</sup> It billed the Studio Players of the Ginner-Mawer School and although there was no special designation of ‘Greek dances’, pieces such as a Bacchanale to Rachmaninoff; a Garland Dance to Chopin and a Cymbal Dance to Massenet typify this marriage of Greek themes to 19thc classical music. The following year, a narrative work *On Mount Lycaes*, to Mussorgsky, was performed by a cast of twenty-five. This number of performers had grown to fifty-five by 1932 and in 1933, presented 12 dance schools, 4 secondary and elementary schools, 8 institutes and organisations and 5 individual performers. (An aside - the programme also notes that the orchestra was under the direction of Kathleen Simpson, piano played by Mary Starling and the Stage Manager was Joyce Roscoe, which reveals an interesting and under-researched phenomenon of a community of women in creative roles in theatre during this period.)

The ten annual seasons that Ginner-Mawer presented in Hyde Park demonstrate the growing popularity of their work for both participants and audiences. Cast sizes increased, as did audiences, and by 1933 the press reported ‘nearly 3000 people’ (*Observer*, n.d.) and ‘before a record audience of 4000’ (*Morning Post* 1933). These increases in performers and watchers are obviously connected, as each of the dancers would have drawn family and friends to the event.

There was also general appeal, however; in 1932 a programme listing just thirty-two names drew ‘a huge crowd’ (*Music Lover*, 1932).

In her scrapbooks (in the Bice Bellairs collection at the NRCDC) Ginner carefully collated a large number of press cuttings on her work. In these sources, publicity for the Hyde Park seasons grew from two brief mentions in 1926, to written reports in at least nine newspapers, plus captioned illustrations in others, in 1933. These included a report in the *Children’s Newspaper* and in *Week*, a Brisbane paper, thus further demonstrating the broad, and by now international, appeal of the work. This is fully exemplified by a cartoon which appeared in the *Daily Express*, 1933, captioned ‘When Greek Meets Greek: Greek Dancing takes place in Hyde Park today’.<sup>7</sup> Here, a group of politicians, including Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George, are dancing in the park in chiton-style tunics. This is testimony indeed to the high consciousness of the Greek dance seasons in the public mind.

It is this press coverage that I wish to explore, for it makes an interesting contrast to the seriousness of Ginner’s endeavours as articulated in her own writing, and the response to her work in more specialist publications, primarily the *Dancing Times*. As Hammergren (in Carter 2004) convincingly argues, the mode of presentation of scrapbooks and collected press cuttings is as eloquent of person, time and place as their content. However, it is the latter I focus on here. As the examples I use demonstrate, Ginner did not collect the cuttings in the scrapbooks because they were all complimentary. Although taken from the one source, they do seem to reveal a general tone of response in the popular press. It can be assumed that experts did not write them; they were for a mass readership and had a light touch. As such, these reviews which present the journalistic view for/of the ‘man in the street’ add a new dimension to research not only in Revived Greek Dance, but also to other dance forms, and other artists, who attempted to disseminate their work in the spectacle of public display. Recourse to the popular press also challenges a sometimes myopic deference or veneration manifest by many dance historians to our artistic heritage.

It was the outdoor context of the park itself which proved troublesome for some commentators. Whilst one thought that there was ‘a good deal to admire’, s/he (probably he) observed ‘as on former occasions one has noted the unhappy effect of grease-paint in the open air, so on Saturday afternoon (when the sun was shining at its best) one deplored the use of “wet paint” or powder (or whatever it was) on so many shapely limbs’ (H.H. 1928). Although it must not be assumed that it was the dancers who wore this paint/powder when it was as likely to be the Mawer mime, the observation of its effect on ‘so many shapely limbs’ suggests it was the former. Implicitly, the observation of ‘shapely limbs’ indicates an aspect of audience motivation for watching these performances. What appears to be the same writer, or one with the same initials, also notes the following year of the dramatic license of the dances:

Any one strolling casually by the north side of the Serpentine on Saturday afternoon might have been excused for wondering if he had for the moment strayed into Arcady. For there a group of fair maidens were at play, attired in the fashion of Ancient Greece. Some with bows and arrows shot at each other; but it seemed that no one fell, that no one was wounded.

H.H. 1929

The same year, a reporter for the *Daily News* shared his very personal, felt response, providing an evocative anecdote which truly ‘grounds’ these performances in the park. Coming across ‘figures dancing in the sunlight’,

I lay on the grass and watched them for a while . . . I thought how it must feel wondrous pleasant to be leaping through the wind, clad in the flimsiest of little robes . . . Two portly men must have been thinking the same thing for when they were coming away they began to give what they considered a fair imitation of what they had seen.

*Daily News*, 1929

One can imagine the efforts of these ‘portly men’; the writer goes on to advise that they had best attend more to the football and cricket seasons.

In 1930, a ‘vast crowd’ (*Daily Telegraph* 1930) watched the Studio Players of the Ginner-Mawer School in their, by now, annual Hyde Park event. Any attempt, however, to recreate the nuances of ancient Greek performance was futile. As one critic neatly summarised,

Modern England is not ancient Greece, and to recreate the classical atmosphere is by no means an easy task. The excellent musicians who provided the music, for instance, sheltering under a tree, recalled happy scenes on a village green rather than the theatre. A huge air-liner sailing majestically over our heads also served to remind us that men now know something that Icarus never knew.<sup>8</sup> All this, however, did not detract in the slightest from our pleasure.

‘F.B’. 1930

Despite the risk of these extraneous interventions, a reviewer in 1932 found that

The trees and green sward are undoubtedly the proper setting for classical bare-foot dancing. Draperies attain a new grace when fluttered by the wind as well as by the motion of the dancers, and these performances bring the art of dance and mime to an audience many of whom would never think of entering a theatre to witness a more considered demonstration.

Whitworth, G. 1932

However, a less sympathetic commentator found the following year that the authentically natural surroundings were not conducive to an appropriate atmosphere. He was distracted by

trees, birds and sometimes beasts; there is the beautiful, mysterious sky, and the cool wind which is so seductive to sleep; and at the Ruby Ginner - Irene Mawer recital there was the added distraction of aeroplanes overhead. But in spite of all this . . . I enjoyed myself.

R.B.M. 1933

As I’ve hinted, in some of the reviews there is what we might think today an inappropriate attention to the dancers’ bodies. This is further exemplified in a comment, surprisingly from the *Church Times* in 1933, that the observer enjoyed the sight of ‘young women, with bare arms and legs, who pranced around with some idea of telling a story’. The dancers in the Revived Greek

works wore knee or full-length chiton-style tunics, which left arms and legs bare and, though not translucent, covered an uncorsetted body.<sup>9</sup> The spectacle of dance itself, in a comparatively natural environment, was compounded by the sight of groups of lightly-clad female bodies, in movement.

This image is endorsed in the photographs in the national press. What is often striking is the contrast between these dancers and the audience itself. Several pictures show audience members, largely be-hatted, as was the fashion for both men and women in the 1920s and 1930s, with a coat or jacket covering their arms and shoulders (various photographs in BB/N/6). They sit in temporary chairs, or stand – perhaps the passers-by who have paused in their perambulations.

In conclusion, Ginner's work afforded spectacle in the very act of dancing in public, in the display of the female body in movement, in large casts in a wide expanse of open-air space. Despite the ancient Greek theatre being Ginner's source and inspiration, however, care must be taken in making any comparisons and finding the London park performances lacking in a serious and considered reception. There was no pristine purity of attention from audiences in the Greek amphitheatres. Audiences there were 'massive in size . . . talkative and unruly . . . there are numerous stories of audiences disrupting performances by shouting, jeering, throwing fruit and worse'.<sup>10</sup> By comparison, Ginner's dance provided a domestic spectacle and, encapsulated in the newspaper reports, a good-mannered, often gently teasing but, it would seem, engaged sensory response of English audiences to Greece dance in the twentieth century.

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#### NOTES

1. These events were hosted by the League of Arts, an organisation which was founded on Armistice Day 1918 to promote 'good music, poetry, dance and pageantry' (prog. 5.7.30).
2. In 1930, Ginner presented over thirty of her dancers in the Delphic Festival in Athens; a photograph which appeared in the British national paper the *Morning Post* captured her 'rehearsing among the ruins of the Parthenon' (1930).
3. In 1929, a collage of seven photographs appeared in *The Sphere* which depicted eurhythmic dances from England, Germany and Austria, all of which are taking place in the open air.
4. In Ginner's own words, the 'Gymnopaedic and Pyrrhic produce physical elasticity, strength, control and stability, Lyric dances give grace and beauty of movement, and the tragic, ritual and Bacchic dances develop the power of using the body as a means of dramatic and emotional expression' (Ginner 1960: 169-70)).
5. Mawer also published on the art of mime. She was married to Edward Perugini. This might account for his fulsome support of Revived Greek Dance in his dance writings ([1935], 1946).
6. The programmes and press cutting used in this paper are drawn primarily from the Bice Bellairs collection at the National Resource Centre from Dance, University of Surrey. The work of preservation, cataloguing and dissemination of this, and other archives from the early/mid twentieth century, was facilitated by an award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, 2008 – 2010.)
7. The full proverb to which this refers is 'when Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war', which indicates any conflict between two sides of equal strength. The reference in the cartoon to War Debts and the date are clues that this cartoon might be referencing the world Monetary and Economic conference held in London in June 1933. The main aim was to escape world recession and there was hope by many nations including the UK, that the US would cancel the (First World) War Debts. However, Roosevelt signalled that this would not happen and the plan was aborted. Or, the cartoon might simply refer to the Little Ma (Strube's 'man in the street') bearing the burden of war debts whilst the politicians dance around him.

8. Icarus was making his escape from a labyrinth in Crete, wearing wings made by his father, He was warned not to fly too close to the sun for the wax would melt. Exhilarated by his flying potential, Icarus neglected this warning and fell, with molten wings, into the sea and drowned.
9. Ginner herself, of more mature age and much more solidly built, tended to wear full-length costume.
10. See Arnott 1989 for a description of how the plays often opened with attention-catching dramatic devices to engage the restless audience.

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## Archive As Cultural Heritage: The Digital Monument

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(contribution to the panel German Dance Studies Now, SDHS Annual conference 2010, University of Surrey at Guildford, 11 July 2010)

### *Abstract*

The archive has become a privileged point of interest in scholarly activities as well as artistic creation. The widespread activities in digitizing archival material related to dance gives the problematic a new turn. For what has been immaterial in its appearance had been translated into material sources which, currently, are being re-inscribed in an immaterial medium. The digital resources enable instant access, but at the same time turn down the archival claim of prolonged presence. German collections of dance are working on these implications for defining a “cultural heritage of dance”.

‘Digital Culture’ – this term has come to stand today for free and unlimited access to all possible kinds of content from any place in the world via the Internet. ‘The Analogue’ had been marked by its direct linkage to places and times: Only at a specific moment could one be at a specific geographical point and read, watch, speak. This element of ‘origo’ has in fact been stated to be language’s very form of organisation, by positioning the individual and their speaking (see Bühler 1965; Mead 1992).

This neat state of the art in communicational reference has changed dramatically throughout the various periods of the so-called Media revolution during the last 150 years (Kittler 1987, MacLuhan 2001, Ernst 2009). Culture, in its digital phase, has been ontologically liquefied, as it were.

In the case of dance, the situation is even more complex. Because dance does not produce material objects as part of its realisation, but only exists in and as an event, the passing on of dance’s works has always been of particular importance, but at the same time been particularly difficult, maybe even impossible. A house, a manuscript, a painting may be preserved over the centuries without changing in their essence, or

substance. Choreographies, dance recitals, performances can only be transferred (or translated) in other media and formats. These media of transfer comprise bodies, notations, scores, photographs, concepts, costumes, interviews. Since about 100 years, there also is film, since about 30 years we have video.

So contrasting to architecture, literature, or painting, dance does not offer an authorised object containing IN ITSELF the history, the materiality, the meaning and the form which would distinguish it as an ‘art work’.

It is this difficult status of the art work in dance that calls for special attention and has become a subject of scholarly and philosophical investigation (see Fabbri 2008, Pouillaude 2009, *Ce qui fait danse* 2010)

In view of this difficulty, and reacting to the increased interest in performative visions of culture and social interaction, the preservation and conservation of dance, performance and choreography in the Archive has become a pivotal issue.

Within the field of performing arts, and especially so in the field of Dance, the Archive stands for a wide range of issues, concerns, and practices: for the presentational thrust of museum-like conservation (see Boris Charmatz and his project to turn the National Choreographic Centre of Rennes into a “Dancing Museum”, cf. <http://www.ccnrb.org/lemusee/manifeste>); for a resource and inspiration for artistic work; for a complex model of thought (*Denkmodell*) concerning the interrelatedness of history and present tense; for a pure locus of potentiality; and, not least, as a working context of cultural and educational activity in the field of preservation of immaterial products resulting from social intercourse in a wide sense.

Dance, as it seems has once more proven to be avant-garde, at least in theory. For its very materialisation and appearance (*Erscheinung*) is linked to movement events that can happen only at a certain moment in time and in a certain configuration in space. In trying to materialise and make endure this synchronous event, techniques of the archive as collecting point and techniques of the creative archive, the Archive-building seem to collide more often than not (Sebillotte 2010). And in any way they are not necessarily complementary to each other. So the current (and also the contemporary) challenge would be to combine dance heritage in its manifold appearances and forms with the

concerns of dance making. It is here that archives of and as performance might find their contour and their genuine task.<sup>i</sup>

Therefore, aspects of knowledge about dance as well as of creating new contexts of knowledge, and, finally, the production of documents containing such knowledge under the sign and condition of the digital, they all meet in a tripartite constellation in what I would like to call the DIGITAL MONUMENT OF THE ARCHIVE.

### **Cultural Heritage**

Before going further in explaining this term, I would like to analyse, for my purposes, the concept of Cultural Heritage:

Cultural Heritage is seen to be a complex interaction of cultural and societal production, ways of remembrance and memory-making, and transmission of past facts (both material and immaterial) to coming societies and individuals.

Thus, we seem to be confronted to an essentially retrospective action in trying to preserve whatever is considered worth preserving. The value of that what is being transmitted is attributed via the symbolic or historiographic significance of a given artefact. We are confronted with the auratic impact, the notion of authenticity, originality, testimony. Categories can be geographical, national, monumental, traditional etc.

What is preserved, then, is essentially a vision of the past, articulated from the present, pretending to aim at the future. (Unesco)

However, the aspect of preservation is becoming more and more problematic as any notion of authenticity is troubled by historical, social, and ideological imprints on any artefact. Preserving authentic states of an artefact is, in a way, inventing the artefact and its being.<sup>ii</sup>

This ambivalent process of ‘rendering’ or ‘transmitting’, thereby also manipulating the object in question (as the artefact) is even more directly involved in the realm of the immaterial: in dance as well as in digital environments. Just as dance inscribes itself in the performative mode, understood here as eternal self-generation, digital environments call for eternal re-transmission of algorithmic data in material visibility. (Ernst 2008)

The cultural heritage of dance (in the large scope we have to assume it to happen in) lends itself to digital notation, mainly because it is brought into being – a “new” being maybe – by this very means of notation.

At the same time, dance as cultural heritage is opposed to the tendency of dematerialisation, because it is immaterial in and of itself, creating monumentality only by materialising itself in a mode that may create traces, or even symbolic presence, but not “real presence” (as George Steiner said in his melancholic essay [Steiner 1989]).

This is the point of entry for juxtaposing the regimes of dematerialisation and monumentality which are active in any Cultural heritage building, and most prominently so in dance history.

### **Works of dance on the internet?**

This becomes particularly acute when it comes to making accessible, via the internet, works of art in their preserved form of film or video capturing. This means that dance is to be re-presented in, with, and by its movement quality. While this is happening already on a large scale on platforms such as Youtube, the heritage aspect, i. e. the ‘legacy value’, that is to say the use for educational and analytical purposes, is more or less nil, given the poor quality, the non-referenced presentation, and the completely uncleared question of copy rights.

But also the professional institutions for preservation of dance heritage are largely lacking in contemporary practice and thus fail to meet the demands of the Digital Culture. It often is a matter of chance or haphazard (and sometimes of the mood of the archivist) whether the interested dance viewer will know of the existence of a particular dance work on film. Rights owners often are reluctant to grant permission for public viewing. Or the authors prefer to be themselves the organisers and control mechanisms of digital presence (the case of William Forsythe, of Siobhan Davies, of Merce Cunningham, of the Pina Bausch trust ...)

It seems that in the field of dance, a specific and paradoxical concept of work (as artefact) combines with the tendency to liquefying of the material, and the call for preserving a cultural heritage in a particularly acute way.

The very object of archival description and treatment turns out – or at least would claim so – to be the model of its intelligent / insightful transmission. For in dance, the immaterial substance of performance (as *Aufführung*) becomes the object that, however, can gain prolonged presence only via its secondary trace, in the topic discussed here this would mean its digital rendering. This prolonged presence was substantially denied to the dance piece (in its state of *dance piece*). It might be due to this fundamental change of the nature of the work in the digital environment that many choreographers are afraid of seeing their work disseminate freely on digital data support. It is, on the other hand, the big hope of younger, emerging choreographers to be visible, as their opportunity to tour and show work extensively in live situations is dramatically limited compared to the big names of the contemporary landscape.

### **Archive as site**

The Digital Monument, for being immaterial in essence, does not have a point in space it could claim its own. But even then, it needs to be hosted somewhere – be it electronically. Which is why even the immaterial needs its archival shroud (its user surface, its design, its institutional IT department, its steady storage capacity ...), its place of appearance, of manifesting itself – its epiphany.

So just as any archive is first of all a locus, it is there where the documents – as monuments – are being stored and conserved. It is a place to go when one wants to consult, to dialogue, to work with the archival monument. At the same time, this spatial coordination (*Bindung* or *Gebundenheit*) which might, in the case of dance, mirror the spatial constraints of dance, is a hindrance. In a life world (*Lebenswelt*) that is increasingly marked by and enthralled with the concepts and necessities of mobility, fluidity and immateriality it seems somehow old-fashioned to have to go towards a specific, unique point in space in order to consult, watch, appreciate, manipulate, and investigate material things.

Dance is conceptually immaterial, but nonetheless phenomenologically concrete. The archive, in turn, offers material traces, but no concrete facts (not “the real thing”). In this sense, the archive’s prodigy (and prophecies) are ambiguous: Under the sign of the

Immaterial the archive is asked / supposed / expected to question its materiality and make circulate algorithms and data files instead of documents.

The current craze for programmes aiming to translate information and sources of knowledge in electronic bits so as to provide them to anyone at any time via the internet would transform the site of collecting and conservation into a mere warehouse of primary matter (*Rohstofflager*). The Archive of the future, so it would seem, is bound to become, according to late capitalist logics of transformation of intellectual substance in virtual (*Tauschware*), a trading place / a stock exchange for electronic data. Whereas the dimensional, material object would become something of the second order, would be *verzichtbar*. This is without doubt the dark side of current nostalgia for spontaneous and unlimited / unrestricted omni-accessibility as promised by the ideologies of the Digital. And which the Archive at all times contests in the name of Eternity – that very eternity as is a great shop of horrors to the digital world and its perpetual now-ness.

Pressurized by changing demands of a global public and strangled by the unprecedented and unpredictable costs for developing and sustaining the digital environment, major institutions such as museums, public and university libraries, scientific bodies go towards digitization in order to fulfil their broad-band, if not universal, mission of cataloguing. Acting as a new kind of Saviour, Google immaterialises intellectual outcomes and entire libraries, claiming to bring them into a global make-belief economy of total presence. So it might be high time by now to ask whether the utopia of the Archive really consists in its electronic evaporation. For who would safeguard the Archive's other functions in the realms of institutional and intellectual support of creativity, insisting on its primary materiality?<sup>iii</sup>

### **Digital Dance / Erection of Monuments**

All these doubts expressed, it seems no less true that Dance's reality as the history of its works and the conditions under which they could come about, be created and appreciated needs to gain broader visibility. What is needed is a pictorial trace so as to integrate dance in memory and also to make use of them to instigate further movement events. Which is why in many countries around the globe activities soar high to propose moving dance images to the public viewer.<sup>iv</sup>



It is in reaction to this kind of initiatives that Tanzplan Deutschland has tried to give impulses to create similar programmes in the German context. Many problems need to be solved, starting from copy right issues and reaching to individual profiles of collections and the fears of centralisation within a context of regional autonomy. All of these activities are necessary and try to stir up political and public conscience for the difficult status of the dance monument and its possible preservation in a digital dimension. So if we want to create monuments of dance, we need the process of digitalisation. But we also need the process of accepting responsibilities.

For dance is doubly fragile: the complex ontological status of a dance spectacle is yet more weakened by its transfer into the electronic milieu of file servers. The utopia of (dance) archive thus would be turned around twofold: as an imaginary place of completion / completeness and duration (*Ort der Vollständigkeit und der Dauer*) – both of which are qualities substantially foreign to dance. The second turnover (or deflection ...) would be the Archive's re-interpretation as the site of de-reality, as a non-site, a site that does not actually exist anywhere: a Utopia.

If we may presume that memories produce themselves and that memories uncontrolled will create archive as a kind of parasitic remembering, then the chore of remembering and the vertiginous speed with which memories pile up already announce the limits of the archive. In this sense, Archive and the monument it creates is not so much an accumulation, but much rather a means of reduction. Because that which makes its way in the archive and what therefore can be remembered, is but a reduction of the whole. It is therefore that Archives play a vital function in reducing complexity, in abstraction.

The creation of digital monuments so as to preserve certain parts of memory and remembering at the detriment of the totality of the object's truth (which would have been its live presentation) therefore can also be seen as a help. Just as musicians can talk about their immaterial work by basing themselves on the sheet music, dancers will be able to talk about their immaterial work of performance by basing themselves on a film. The monuments, therefore, obtain the consubstantiality of artistic reality as we could observe in architecture or visual art.

### Archive as Heritage

It is clear that the lacunae, the missing links, the non-documented elements always call for re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*). The gaps in the traces will be closed by that what one knows and brings. At this point and in this role, archives are sites of desire and of fantasies, not only sites of objectivity and preservation.

The loss of substance and the run towards a global data stream mark the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will have to be determined, or at least observed, in how far the dance and its archives, its monuments (be they digital or empirical) want to be carried away by this large movement, or whether they will resist this race. The outcome of this battle will most likely not depend on the Archives' wish and will. The complex interactions between claiming a specific value of the immaterial, of trying to render it and make it monumental for political use, then re-transmitting it into archival sources of the first kind, subject now to a demand of re-dematerialising them, are part of a larger (social, epistemic, taxonomic) sphere.

It is by bringing to the fore such spectacular paradoxes that the Dance Archive will impose itself as heritage site. The spectacle of dance's disappearance can become its monument in the name of the digital.

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- i Pouillaude 2009, pp. 174 to 186, analyses the spectacular impact of Performance as opposed to the work performed and thus the objectified aspect in a poetological sense, based on Aristotle's definition of theatre.
- ii André Lepecki has given quite an insightful lecture on the question of authenticity, archive, and performance (Lepecki 2009), distinguishing among others, the concepts of reconstruction and re-enactment as specific ways of dealing with the 'objecthood' of dance.
- iii The case of the Leipzig Dance Archive is a sad example. Because the responsible administration wants to close it down as a working body, the only possibility to keep a visible trace of the collection would seem to be a digital appearance ...
- iv Numéridanse in Lyon; the Forsythe Archives; the CND's audio-visual archives published in cooperation with the French national library; the Siobhan Davies archive; Dance on demand / Singapore; the Khmerarts network of Cambodia; the open source initiative Everybody's; various Brazilian initiatives; the National Resource Centre for Dance's recent digital dance project ...



## Spectacle or Spectacular? The Orientalist Imaginary in Indian Dance Performance in Britain from 1900-1950

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### *Abstract*

*This paper addresses the notion of spectacle and the spectacular through a close examination of the dance concerts of Indian dancer Ram Gopal during the late 1930s to the 1950s, as well as briefly the performances of Uday Shankar who appeared in Britain in the early 1930s. What was the reception to these two very different dancers? What was the frame of reference through which they were viewed? How did the performances of the vaudeville, interpretive dancers of the earlier period who presented imagined dances of the East compare? Evidence from programmes and contemporary accounts reveal that the concerts by Indian dancers such as Gopal and Shankar who were trained in more detailed, precise movement language displaced performances by European and North American 'Oriental' interpretive dancers who fed the colonial appetite for the exotic and the mystical 'other'. I argue that Gopal's performances and their welcome reception in Britain not only challenged Orientalist views of the spectacle of Eastern dance, but also paved the way for an increase in the arrival of classical Indian dancers to Britain in the post-war period.*



Figure 1: Gopal's famous head-dress for 'Dance of the Setting Sun' (now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London) 1948  
[photographer unknown]

### *Introduction: Gopal's early performances*

Indian dancer Ram Gopal's spectacular British performances in the late 1930s, late 1940s and early 1950s drew superlative praise from critics and audience members alike. His exquisite body, half-Indian, half-Burmese, described as 'glamorous, beautiful and charismatic' by fellow dancer, Barbara Vernon of Harlequin Ballet<sup>1</sup>, was scrutinised by the gaze of admiring males and females and by an Orientalist and somewhat colonial-thinking public. Yet his box-office sell-out shows at main London theatres both pre and post-war, I argue, began to transform the British perception of dance from 'the Orient'. I will begin this historical investigation by examining Gopal's performances of the late 1930s when he first appeared in London. It is clear from the programme at the Vaudeville Theatre<sup>2</sup>, in the Strand, in London on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1939 (a show that was scheduled for two weeks and extended to three), that the eleven items making up the first half of the evening reveal a variety of styles and techniques (see Figure 1 below). The company showed items from the classical Indian dance techniques of Kathakali, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and included Gopal's own creative choreography as well as two instrumental solos. The ten items of the second half included a north Indian folk dance, a Kathakali ballet, one musical interlude, two further Kathak and Kathakali items and one dance demonstrating gesture. Gopal had already taken intensive training in Kathakali with Guru Kunju Kurup in Malabar, south India as well as some Kathak under Guru Jai Lal, and a little Bharatanatyam with local gurus. Other members of the company had also undergone training in specific classical styles<sup>3</sup>. Gopal did not complete his further Bharatanatyam training under the famous Guru Meenakshisundaram Pillai until he was back in India during the war years. This specificity of training enabled the troupe to give performances that were particular and distinct, showing Indian dance styles that had rarely been seen in the UK. They were also accompanied by classically trained Indian musicians playing the sarod, veena, flute, tabla and mridangam amongst other instruments.

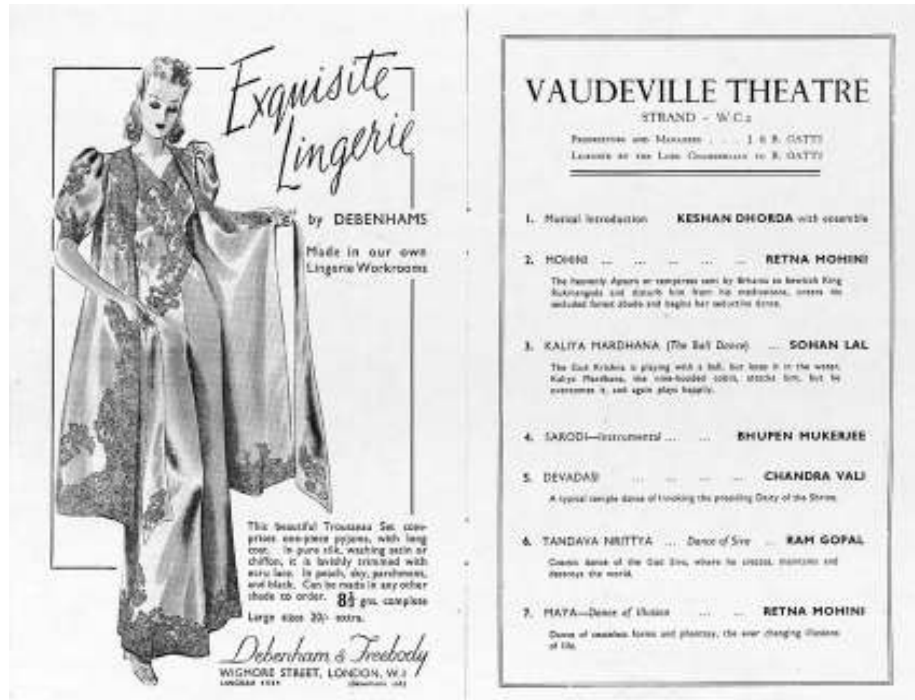


Figure 2: Page from programme at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, November 13th, 1939  
[Author's own collection]

Gopal tailor-made his programmes for the western audience, producing short and varied numbers that had vocal introductions explaining the story or the background. This has now become common praxis in Indian dance performances. He also utilised the conventions of a western programme - two halves and an interval – to make sure his audiences did not get bored, and he gave very specific attention to costuming, basing his designs on carved sculptures, bronzes and paintings, in order, as he put it ‘to capture the fine and brilliantly coloured robes, ornaments and jewellery depicted in these most authentic references’ (1957:55). The live musicians playing on stage added another element of new fascination. Male critics of the period spoke of Gopal being ‘one of the most resplendent figures who have ever appeared on the London stage, and one of the loveliest of dancers’, (*Daily Telegraph* 1939: n.p.) and of ‘the perfect eloquence of his body’, (*Cavalcade*, 5 August 1939) and they described the group as ‘dancers and musicians ... of uncommon ability’ (*Sunday Times*, 30 July 1939).

Gopal did not return to Britain until after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War in 1947 where again he played to packed theatres. In the next decade he was to tour successfully in Britain, Europe and in the USA. More Bharatanatyam items were included in these post-war performances and one audience member of the early 1950s commented to me in an interview that ‘Gopal performed to packed audiences that were spellbound as he whirled to unfamiliar rhythms, or made the finest gesture with hand, eye, or just a ripple of muscle’ (Turner, 2000). Of his famous Kathakali golden eagle dance, *Garuda*<sup>4</sup>, another audience member later said to me, ‘The costume was spectacular and had been fashioned with great beauty and artistry; the dance itself had enormous power and evoked the majesty of the bird in flight’ (White, 2000). His extraordinary costume, (now in London’s

Theatre Museum, part of the Victoria & Albert Museum), was made in gold leather, with huge wings that strapped onto his arms and a gold leather helmet with an eagle's head, creating a spectacular impression as he leapt from the wings at the beginning of the dance.



Figure 3: Gopal as *Garuda*, the golden eagle  
[Programme 1965, author's own collection]

### *Uday Shankar*

To understand the impact of Gopal's work it is necessary to contextualise the time particularly in the West, but also in India. Between the years 1931 and 1938, prior to Gopal's performances, Uday Shankar and his own company of dancers and musicians toured in Europe and the USA, appearing in London in 1933. He had famously appeared at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with Pavlova in 1923 and then had gone on to spend another seven years dancing in vaudeville clubs and experimenting with his own created Indian style. An examination of sources of the time (reviews, photos and personal accounts), appears to reveal Shankar's style at this time as an amalgam of the folk dances he had seen when young plus artistic iconographic influences from his earlier artistic training. A trip back to India in 1930 enabled him to take some formal training in Kathakali from Guru Shankaran Nambodiri and his early 1930s appearances with his group by all accounts were as spell-binding as Gopal's. Although in watching a short clip of a 1932 performance, it is obvious at this time, it was his own creative, folk vocabulary combined with other influences that was being performed. A few years later, Gopal



clearly brought a specificity and detail of classical style that superseded Shankar's more imaginative, creative vocabulary, yet Gopal always acknowledged his debt to Shankar. Uday's younger brother, the famous Ravi Shankar, toured with Shankar when a young boy and stated that 'in the 30s and maybe even at the beginning of the 40s, 'Shankar' was actually the best-known Indian after Gandhi and Tagore. He was like a super-star in the West' (1997:53).



Figure 4: Uday Shankar and Simkie, 1931 in *Ras Leela*  
[photographer unknown]

It is important to note at this point what was occurring in India during the same period with regard to classical dance. The dance form of Bharatanatyam was in the process of being revived and reconfigured (about which much has been written by other scholars<sup>5</sup>). Not only was the repertoire changed and reinvented, but as dancer and scholar Hari Krishnan puts it, 'gender was reimagined under colonial and upper-caste nationalist frameworks that invented the male dancer as a hypermasculine, spiritual and patriotic icon for the emergent nation' (2009:378). Gopal was appearing as a dancer in this period and was keen to show, through his training in Bharatanatyam and in Kathakali, that he was, as dancer VP Dhananjayan was later to put it, 'dancing like a man' (2009:394). In terms of repertory, Gopal was proud of his masculine-type dances, the Garuda dance, and particularly the two Siva items – the first, *The Dance of the Setting Sun*, performed in Kathakali style, and the second, the *Natanam Adinar*, the god Shiva's energetic, cosmic dance of creation, choreographed by his Bharatanatyam guru Meenakshisundaram and

which lasted six minutes. Gopal said of it, ‘I was the first to perform it...It should be danced by a man’, (cited in Gaston 1996:103) although later it was to become part of female repertoire as well. Dances such as this formed part of the new nationalistic masculine identity for male performers, and such an identity was strongly promoted too by Rukmini Devi at her dance school Kalakshetra. Devi’s male dancers, trained in the strongly male form of Kathakali as well as Bharatanatyam, took on the masculine roles in her new dance dramas. Dancer Krishnan argues that ‘from the period between 1940 and 1955, this new hybrid dance technique came to be seen as the normative movement vocabulary for the male performer of *bharata natyam*’ (2009:385). Yet despite the strongly virile dances as mentioned above, Gopal’s ability to depict a tender, lyrical side in addition to a powerful, vigorous aspect was a compelling factor for his audiences. He was also known for his androgynous appearance, echoes of which reappear in comments relating to the Royal Ballet’s famous male soloist, Anthony Dowell.<sup>6</sup> Gopal too had to fight against the fact he was an outsider, both in terms of caste (as an upper-caste male his dancing was frowned upon) and as a non-Tamil, he was seen as an outsider to the tradition of south Indian dance. The famous Madras Music Academy festivals record no male solo performers during the 1930s and only one male dancer, Gopinath, (partner of American-born Ragini Devi) presented a programme of Oriental Dances in the 1940s.



Figure 5: Gopal as *Siva*, Lord of the dance [1965 programme in author’s collection]

### ***Orientalist tropes***

Both Shankar and Gopal performed to audiences in the West raised on imagined interpretations of the East, where the word ‘Hindoo’ meant all things Indian, or even more generally, Eastern. Joan Erdman (1987:77) gives the example of how Shankar’s company was billed as *Uday Shankar and his Hindu Dancer and Musicians* – no interest was paid to the fact that his leading dancer was French and his director of music, Muslim. Specificity had no value, and conflation of religion, geographical place and background was common. Oriental dance, Eastern dance, or Hindu dancing were the terms used by the vaudeville dancers of European and American heritage. There are many examples to examine here – some are well known such as Ruthie Denis, or Ruth St Denis as she glamorously renamed herself, and La Meri, and others who simply appeared on playbills of the time. Nyota Inyoka, of mixed French and Indian parentage, performed in Paris and London in the 1920s and 1930s in scanty costumes, in her show *Dances of Ancient and Modern India and Egypt* to music played on Western instruments. She was popular, and clearly a dancer of some quality and ability, but it is necessary to question what was she appealing to in her audiences? Was it to their imagined, fantasised notions of the East, to their fascination with realms unknown and mysterious? Or was it, as Jacqueline Robinson has noted, a ‘type of innocence with respect to content and possible meanings of dance that contemporary sophistication would consider naïve, even kitsch...?’ (1997:43)

Other examples of Oriental dancers in the earlier period of 1900-1920s include Roshanara (born Olive Craddock in 1894) who danced in shows such as *Kismet* (1911) and toured her own concert of *Indian dances*. (see David, 2001). Her photos are sometimes captioned, ‘Roshanara, the Burmese dancer’. Roshanara and other performers were part of the fashionable interest in the Orient that extended back over a long period but that re-emerged in Europe more particularly at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes performing productions with orientalist themes, the expansion of the Great Exhibitions in Britain and France portraying and exhibiting the colonies, the fashion in clothing and design for eastern artefacts indicated an appetite for exotica and orientalia that swept across Europe at this time. In this surge of interest, we find a complexity of Western approaches to the East – some, as famously articulated by Said (1978) and others, that created a negative construct supported by notions of power and hegemony and that interpreted the East through an imagined gaze and maintained a binary view of superiority and difference – and other approaches that were more sympathetic, as historian John MacKenzie puts it, were the ‘product of scholarly admiration for diverse and exotic cultures’ (1995:xii).

### ***Concluding comments***

I would argue that the first fifty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal through dance performance a marked change in the Western perceptions of the Orient. Gopal specifically, and Shankar before him, through their dance performances, played key roles in this transition from somewhat monolithic Orientalist views to a new growth in transcultural discourse, where residual Orientalism was declining and new interest in world culture, not as inferior but as paradigms to engage with and to learn from was beginning. Gopal’s post-war concerts offered a fresh discourse on Indian culture and led the way to a surge of genuine attraction in Indian cultural and artistic expression shown

through the musical performances of Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, and through the dance performances by Mrinalini Sarabhai, Shanta Rao, Sivaram, U.S. Krishna Rao and Chandrabhaga Devi, to name a few. Significantly, there is no evidence of any Oriental, interpretive dance in this period whilst classical Indian dance was on the increase. The classical dancers revealed embodied knowledge of their dance forms through concentrated, lengthy and particular training, resulting in a depth of knowledge and an authority that was conveyed to their audiences.

The present climate of South Asian, or Indian dance, in the new millennium, with its conflation of old and new traditions, owes a great debt to the dedicated work of Ram Gopal in the early and middle years of the last century. More than sixty years on, his role within the Indian classical dance scene has proved to be an innovative and influential one in challenging the tenets of colonialism and Orientalism as they appeared in dance performance. Gopal played as a key figure on the world stage of dance during a period of substantial international and social change and there is no doubt that his influence can still be seen today.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication with Barbara Vernon (Gregory) in June, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> This was Gopal's second visit to London. He had already had sell-out shows in July 1939 at the Aldwych Theatre, London.

<sup>3</sup> Retna Mohini, of Javanese birth, appeared with Gopal in these early performances in London. She had studied Kathakali, as well as Javanese and Balinese classical styles. Two other members of the company, Chandra Vali and Sohan Lal were trained in the classical style of Kathak.

<sup>4</sup> This dance came from a Kathakali dance-drama that Gopal had learned and which he then recreated as a solo item.

<sup>5</sup> See for example work by Avanthi Meduri (2005), Janet O'Shea (2007) and Amrit Srinivasan (1985) amongst others.

<sup>6</sup> See Jenny Gilbert's review in *The Independent* (2001).

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## The perfect courtier: how spectacular was his dance?

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### *Abstract*

*The argument of Castiglione's 'The Book of the Courtier' is the necessity for grace in all actions. When dancing comes under review the perfect grace and nonchalance of the courtier is considered superior to the imperfect virtuosity of the professional performer in service to a court. Yet the galliard demands the fast footwork and astounding leaps we consider typical of a professional dancer. By relating the conduct books with the dance treatises, alongside information on the galliard at the Jacobean court, ideas of perfection and spectacle will be negotiated.*

‘If I remember rightly, my dear Count, it seems that you have repeated several times this evening that the courtier has to imbue with grace his movements, his gestures, his way of doing things and in short, his every action. And it appears to me that you require this in everything as the seasoning without which all other attributes and good qualities would be almost worthless’<sup>1</sup>.

This statement summarises the central idea of Baldesar Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1528), the most influential book of conduct for the Renaissance courtier. When dancing enters the conversation of Castiglione's imagined circle at the Gonzaga court of Urbino, the perfect grace of the courtier is considered superior to the imperfect displays of the professional. In dance histories, this non-professional dimension is equated with amateurism, typified by the following comment: court dancers were ‘not the highly skilled professionals of today [being] very earthbound, for the steps and movements they executed were derived from the social dances of the time, which emphasized decorum, grace and elegance rather than feats of agility and strength’<sup>2</sup>. Yet the most popular of these social dances was the galliard, requiring exactly those physically challenging feats associated with today's professionals.

This paper aims to reconcile the notions of grace and non-professional performance found in the conduct books with the evidence for the virtuosic, indeed spectacular, dance of the galliard found in the dance texts. Dancing at the Jacobean court by male courtiers will exemplify the currency of the galliard in elite society. I hope to produce a more accurate picture of the dancing of a perfect courtier, with the general dance historian and their readership in mind.

Evidence for the execution of the galliard is plentiful. Six Italian dancing masters published treatises between 1560 and 1614 with instruction on the principal steps and variants for dancing the galliard (Compasso 1560, Caroso 1581 and 1600, Lutii 1589, Lupi 1600, Negri 1602/4 and Santucci 1614) and these, with one French cleric (Arbeau 1588), provide a consistent picture<sup>3</sup>. The scope of the information can be gauged by noting that Negri devotes the first section of his book to 55 ‘rules’ for galliard variations, each rule comprising several variants on a theme, covering 71 folio pages of closely

printed instructions, whilst Lupi uses 104 pages to recount innumerable basic and advanced variations. Most of the information they contain remains locked away between the pages, as apart from the basic step and a selection of modest variations, no dancers of today, as far as I know, have undertaken a systematic reconstruction of this material. It is not hard to see why, but this failure to explore the true galliard diminishes its presence in our imaginations.

The fundamental composite step is well understood: four springing kicks in four beats followed by a high jump on two feet in beats five and six, forming the *cadenza* or *cadence*<sup>4</sup>. It is composed, therefore, of five steps, also known as the *cinque passi*, *cinq pas* or *sinkapace*. The dance proceeds as an exchange of improvisations between the man and woman on the core step. Within the six-count measure, other steps of the repertoire can be substituted before the concluding jump. *Compasso* offers 32 suggestions for one measure of music (*le mutanze scempie*). He describes 53 variations for two galliard measures (*mutanze doppie*) and 81 variations for 4, 5 and 6 galliard measures. This latter group is called ‘*piu difficile e piu belle*’ (more difficult and more beautiful). *Compasso* specialises in fairly modest hops, jumps and turns alongside familiar steps from the common dances of the day, either matching each beat or subdividing it. However, he rounds off his book with the more challenging jumps: single turns in the air, *capriole* of two to four changes of the feet, and split jumps. Here again he matches difficulty with beauty.

*Caroso* and *Arbeau* offer a similar range of modest variations. *Caroso* identifies his as suitable for dancing *terra terra* (close to the ground), but nevertheless adds two *capriole* at the end of one sequence. *Arbeau* devotes 45 pages to the galliard, the fullest treatment of any dance in his book, and offers 16 examples of variations, demonstrating the manner of subdividing the counts, and extending the variation across two measures, or even three and four measures. His steps are not challenging in themselves, although the combinations and the need to fit them to the beat raise the level of execution. He only mentions the *capriole* as a decoration of the cadential jump.

A more challenging picture emerges with the work of *Negri*, *Lutii* and *Lupi*. *Lutii* commences by describing the *capriola diritto* and *capriola in crociata* calling the more difficult one ‘most beautiful’. Even within the basic *cinquepassi*, *Negri* introduces challenges: a *capriola* passing the feet four times in the first two counts of the six; a trembling of the foot to decorate the kick; rapid strings of steps demanding dexterous and speedy movements of the feet. *Negri*’s central concern is with virtuosic jumps: the *salto tondo*, turning once or twice, reverse turns, split jumps, jumps with the legs bent, straight *capriole* and crossing *capriole* (*capriole trecciate*)<sup>5</sup> changing the feet up to six times, also whilst turning, the *capriola spezzata* resembling a beaten *jeté*, the *sottosbalzo*, beating the legs in front, like a *pistolet*, the *salto del fiocco*, leaping over one leg while turning, like a *révoltade*<sup>6</sup>, turns on one foot making three or four gyrations. From *Lupi*’s treatise we can understand more readily how these virtuosic steps were put together. For example, three major jumps in six beats: *capriole intricciata*, *salto tondo*, e *capriole*, or, offering a different challenge, a pirouette of many revolutions sustained during four counts. Such formidable jumps and turns are embedded in sequences of steps danced on the spot, so the galliarding dancer did not have the impetus gained through a running preparation, as in ballet’s *grand allegro*.



Were these galliard steps really intended for noble and gentlemen rather than professional dancers? Emphatically, yes, they were. Compasso, for example, dedicates his book to Francesco Medici, prince of Florence, stressing the importance of the galliard to each gentleman. While Lupi talks of ‘this noble recreation’ of the galliard and its appeal to excellent minds. All the Italian masters reiterate the need for grace and elegance, while presenting a beautiful image for the onlookers. They indicate some features of grace as they see it: maintaining an upright body without ugly signs of effort; to turn the body a little from side to side; to hold the head erect, eyes lowered and mouths closed, while keeping the arms near the body, moving them a little; to jump with well-stretched legs then land softly on the toes with a little turnout, bending the knees slightly, for airy lightness..

There are no such informative dance texts for England, but plenty of evidence that the same concept of the galliard prevailed. A manuscript linked to dancing at the Inns of Court, the law colleges that acted as finishing schools for young gentlemen, contains brief clues. *Robertoes Galliard* ‘is performed with ye cinque pace & 4 or 5 severall trickes’; a trick being an impressive variation. *The French Galliarde* ‘is performed with ye cinquepace, halfe capers, traverses, ye round turns & such like, learned onely by practise’. Here we have the capriola spezzata, dancing from side to side and the salto tondo, alongside an emphasis on training in the physically challenging dance<sup>7</sup>. A humorous writer indicates the need for virtuosity in English galliards: ‘Our galliards are so curious that they are not for my dancing, for they are so full of tricks and turns that he which hath no more but the plain cinquepace is no better accounted of than a very bungler, and for my part, they might as soon teach me to make a capricornus as a caper in the right kind it should be’<sup>8</sup>.

Was the galliard an exceptional dance, executed by a few gifted dancers to impress the company? Once again the evidence is unequivocal in revealing that the galliard was the core dance of the English social repertoire, as couple after couple displayed a mastery of energetic improvisation before their peers. The practice of dancing a sequence of galliards in a non-stop cycle drawing in each member of the company to perform two galliards in turn was known in England<sup>9</sup>. The basic step, sufficiently taxing for today’s dancers, was used by the whole company to dance around the room in opening or closing a ball<sup>10</sup>.

We can also observe that the dance, spectacular in itself, was performed in a spectacular setting at court. The preferred space for a dancing<sup>11</sup> at Whitehall was the Great Chamber, which was prepared by the erection of the throne for the monarch at the upper end, and tiered seating for courtiers around the other three sides. Tapestries clothed the walls, and bright lighting was achieved by stringing candelabra across the room. The scene was embellished by the splendour of the company: an eyewitness of 1604 was delighted with ‘more than fifty ladies of honour very richly and elegantly dressed and extremely beautiful’<sup>12</sup>. The social dancing within a masque, called the revels, offered the more daunting arena of the Banqueting House. An eyewitness for the masque of 1618 noted the gilded columns of the hall with carved garlands and angels ornamenting the roof, and two rows of lights waiting to be lit. Even his short-sighted eyes could discern the crowd of ‘richly dressed ladies... whose diamonds and other jewels were so brilliant that they appeared so many stars’<sup>13</sup>. Rich and costly garments reflected status, although it was important not to be encumbered by clothing. An indicative comment for the revels of a masque in 1603/4 is that the men’s masquing robes were ‘rich, but somewhat too heavy

and cumbersome for dancers, which put them beside in their galliards<sup>14</sup>. A portrait of Richard Sackville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Dorset depicts him in the sumptuous clothes he wore at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth in 1613, and no doubt for the accompanying dancing<sup>15</sup>. Each couple took the floor in turn, according to precedent, to execute their dance under the scrutiny of equally skilled and knowledgeable peers. The sense of being part of a highly wrought occasion and having to deliver a dance both graceful and virtuosic matches with the Italian dancing masters' insistence on appearing elegant to the onlookers.

English records show that execution of the galliard was a touchstone for merit. The dancing of Prince Henry aged 9, the new heir to the English throne, was offered for scrutiny in June 1603 at Worksop Manor on the Queen's journey south. He was followed by William Cecil aged 12 dancing a galliard with Princess Elizabeth aged 6. While too young to be a master of the galliard, Cecil was commended for the 'excellence of his spirit and grace'<sup>16</sup>. Henry's own prowess in the galliard was confidently displayed a year later, to the approval of the distinguished Spanish ambassador honoured by the occasion. He noted that the prince danced the galliard with several *cabriolas* in a light yet modest manner<sup>17</sup>. At age 17, Henry made his debut in the masque *Oberon* again giving pleasure in leading the galliards in the revels<sup>18</sup>. Prince Charles was less competent in his own debut of 1618: 'Because of his youth, he does not yet have much breath; nevertheless he cut some capers with considerable grace'. This was in contrast to the older Marquis of Buckingham who 'danced a number of high and very tiny capers with such grace and lightness that he made everyone admire and love him' inspiring other noblemen to 'display their powers one after another... concluding with capers... We counted 34 capers in succession cut by one knight'<sup>19</sup>. Here we have a sense of competition in demonstrating prowess and the charismatic attraction of the virile dancer. It is also abundantly clear that the masque entries themselves included galliard passages, so that the geometrical figures were not achieved solely through simple travelling steps. This is evident in the extant masque music, and confirmed by eye-witness accounts. In *Oberon* 1611: 'they entered dancing two ballets intermingled with varied figures and many leaps, extremely well done by most of them'. Again in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* 1618: 'they began to dance in tempo and with a variety of steps, keeping the same figure for awhile, and then changing places with each other in divers ways, always ending their leaps together'<sup>20</sup>.

Had the ideal of the perfect courtier changed since the days of Castiglione? After all, he was writing just as the galliard was beginning to become current<sup>21</sup>, while Jacobean England was distant in time and place from the Italy of his day. We know that *Il Cortegiano* was well-known in England, both in Italian and in the translation into English by Sir Thomas Hoby, and shaped thinking in education and the arts<sup>22</sup>. Significantly for this discussion, James VI (later I of England) was given *Il Cortegiano* and 'the courtier in english' for his library as a young king<sup>23</sup>, and Castiglione's ideals shape the advice he gave to his son Henry in *Basilikon Doron* (1599): 'I debar...such tumbling tricks as only serve for comedians and baladins to win their bread with' ('baladin' was the French word for a professional dancer)<sup>24</sup>.

No matter how well danced, could the spectacular tricks of the galliard be performed without the taint of professionalism? Close reading of *Il Cortegiano* can unpick the nuances of the matter. While the courtier is advised against using the fast footwork and rapid beats of the baladin Barletta (*quelle prestezze de' piedi e duplicati*

*rebattimenti*)<sup>25</sup>, he is allowed to try them in private. Abhorrence for public display was well understood in England, and the court dancing and masques were considered private occasions, with no open access to the public. Knowing when and where to dance was part of the good judgement of the courtier, including the social function with a partner, rather than as a soloist. For the English, a further problem of the professional dancer was any pantomimic or gestural performance, so that the grace of the feet was stressed, rather than noticeable movement of the arms<sup>26</sup>.

The problem of the professional was that he tried too hard to impress. Castiglione introduced a word for the appearance of uncontrived performance that a courtier should achieve: '*sprezzatura*'. This word has caused problems in translation. Hoby used 'recklessness' which has the wrong connotation today, while Bull used 'nonchalance', a word that did not enter English until the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and sounds rather languid. The term 'cool' has something of the same quality but with the non-courtly element of street-wise style. A phrase, such as 'effortless style' might be a better equivalent<sup>27</sup>. For Castiglione, too much effort, even striving too hard to be nonchalant, was affectation.

Knowledge was also part of the grace of the perfect courtier, resulting from study with the best masters and models of excellence. Another influential conduct book, the *Galateo* of Giovanni della Casa elaborates on the topic of grace as 'the aptness of things set in good order and well disposed, one with another: and perfectly knit and united together. Without which proportion and measure, even that which is good is not faire: and the fairenes itself, is not pleasant'<sup>28</sup>. The rules of the galliard are implicit in all the dance texts, but Arbeau clarifies them, indicating how proportion and measure can be observed. A key matter is marking the conclusion of a variation, whether taking one measure or more, with the two beat cadential jump, observing the symmetry of alternating between one foot and another. In his improvisations, the galliarder should make a play on the hemiola pattern of the six beat measure, varying two threes with three twos. He also advises the gentleman to dance quietly *terre à terre* at first, to introduce more elevated steps later, and to keep the longer variations until the close of his dance. Also, that the trainee dancer should learn tried and tested variations to develop an idea of what is pleasing. Above all, Arbeau is painstaking in guiding his imaginary student Capriole to understand how to dance intelligently, through a knowledge of the theory as well as the practice. This matter is referred to over and over again in the treatises: listen to the music, grasp the tempo and make your variations fit justly and with measure.

Dancing a galliard comprising individual and impressive variations, the perfect courtier revealed his physical and mental quality. But what about his spirit or soul? Castiglione's discussion is founded on Platonic ideals of decorum for the ruling classes, in line with Renaissance humanism. According to Neo-Platonic theory, man was a microcosm whose harmonious actions were in tune with the macrocosm, the universe designed according to divine order. By perfecting his earthly condition, man could come closer to the perfection of the heavens<sup>29</sup>. That graceful dancing related to a state of inner grace is acknowledged by Caroso, in the dedicatory address of an otherwise pragmatic treatise. To paraphrase his Italian, he observes that as our souls are composed of proportion and harmonious numbers so in dancing we reveal the degree of our soul's perfection to the onlookers. Poetry provides a better insight into how the galliard fitted into this Neo-Platonic vision than instruction books. In the long poem *Orchestra*, John Davies characterises the galliard as both 'fiery and divine' and having musical proportion. The sun itself is personified as 'a reveller in rich array' dancing a galliard for

his mistress the moon to such perfection that ‘His gallant grace doth so the gods amaze/That all stand still and at his beauty gaze’<sup>30</sup>. I propose that Davies’ imagery shows that the galliard could transcend the quieter measures in perfection by combining the life-forces of virility, spontaneity and soaring aspiration with proportion and harmony.

The perfect courtier had skills in dancing that we associate today with the professional dancer, yet distanced himself from those who earned their living from dancing by being aware of the right time and place for revealing his expertise and maintaining the correct decorum in execution. This non-professional attitude is interpreted today as amateur performance, leading to false associations of elementary skill and a dilettante approach. Translation can foster inaccuracy: for example, Bull translates *che sua professione non sia* into ‘not as an amateur’. In fact, the concept of amateur performance as we understand it did not become current until the late eighteenth century. For the Renaissance courtier, perfection in dancing comprised physical virtuosity, intelligent understanding, harmony of spirit and noble decorum.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bull 1976, p.65

<sup>2</sup> Au 1988, p. 11. Only a few general dance histories give sufficient detail on Renaissance court dance for an accurate picture, Clarke and Crisp 1981 being one. Readers then make assumptions about non-professional dancing being amateur. This is reinforced by seeing modern amateur and unskilled performance of a limited repertoire of the period.

<sup>3</sup> Sparti 1995, pp.20 – 21.

<sup>4</sup> By 1614 this springing step had become smoother and more grounded, later evolving across the seventeenth century into the *pas de gaillarde* of the eighteenth century technique.

<sup>5</sup> The precursor of the entrechat.

<sup>6</sup> Kersley & Sinclair 1997 pp. 92, 100.

<sup>7</sup> Wilson 1986, pp. 7 - 8.

<sup>8</sup> Beecher 1992 p.124

<sup>9</sup> Rye 1865 p.123; usages of the galliard also recorded by Caroso and Negri as *ballo del piantone* and by Arbeau as *gaillarde a la Lyonnaise*.

<sup>10</sup> Orrell 1977, p.304; Wilson 1986, p.11; Sparti 1995.

<sup>11</sup> The French term ‘ball’ did not become current until the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>12</sup> Rye 1865 p.23.

<sup>13</sup> Orazio Busino cited in Orgel & Strong 1973, p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> Lee 1972, p.54.

<sup>15</sup> Hearn 1995, pp.198 – 199.

<sup>16</sup> HMC Salisbury 1930 p. 143.

<sup>17</sup> *Relacion* f. 15r

<sup>18</sup> Anonymous account cited in Orgel & Strong 1973, p. 206.

<sup>19</sup> Orazio Busino cited in Orgel & Strong 1973, p. 283.

<sup>20</sup> Orgel & Strong 1973, pp. 206, 283.

<sup>21</sup> Sparti 1995, pp. 6 - 9.

<sup>22</sup> Bull 1976, pp. 13 – 14.

<sup>23</sup> Warner 1893, pp. lii, lvii

<sup>24</sup> Fischlin & Fortier 1996, p.166 – 167.

<sup>25</sup> Quondam & Longo 1981, p.134.

<sup>26</sup> Quick 1888, p.75

<sup>27</sup> *Sprezzatura* in Quondam & Longo 1981, pp.59 – 60; ‘recklessness’ in Hoby 1561; ‘nonchalance’ in Bull 1976, 67 and OED; ‘cool’ in OED; ‘effortless style’ from an obituary of Wednesday, June 30 2010 *The Times*, p. 55

<sup>28</sup> Peterson 1576, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Copenhaver & Schmitt 1992, pp. 127 – 163; see also Pont 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Tillyard 1945, stanzas 39 & 67 - 68.

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## **Struggling to be heard above the sound of the vuvuzela:<sup>1</sup> Assessing the impact of the tourist gaze on the voice of South African contemporary dance**

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### ***Abstract***

*Since the late 1980s, a theatrical, contemporary South African concert dance has developed which, although often informed by indigenous roots, utilises a variety of contemporary dance techniques to express current concerns. However, at the same time, a popular form of 'African' dance has developed which is defined by the tourist gaze. This paper questions the extent to which this pervasive perception of 'African' dance as a tourist curiosity impacts on the continued development of contemporary African theatrical dance that may prefer to be recognised as the unique South African contribution to serious concert dance globally.*

### **Background**

The arts in South Africa have emerged from, and been shaped by, a history of colonialism and apartheid. Both the colonial and apartheid regimes devalued indigenous African culture reducing it to ethnic curiosity. In dance in particular, the apartheid government, freed from the bonds of colonialism, chose to value and fund British ballet as a high art form above all forms of dance – testimony indeed to the success of the colonial masters. Yet in the field of contemporary dance, despite a lack of government funding (at least till the early 1990s), attempts were being made to move beyond the simplistic replication of the mostly American modern dance techniques which were being taught extensively by the late 1970s.

The 1980s saw the use of the arts, including dance, used as a protest medium. A major issue became a search for commonality. Although fusion of dance styles is nothing new and often occurs unconsciously, deliberate experiments were now being made. Much of the work produced was original and exciting and seemed for many to be part of the debate at the time around South African dance needing a 'melting pot' approach. The hybridity should not have come as a surprise, and in fact had been happening, particularly in music, for some time. As Enocent Msinda points out, although colonisers brought with them assumptions about African traditions and culture, imposed ideologies were not always completely successful. There were times when 'Africans incorporated some of those ideologies into their own with the result that the product was a hybrid identity – which is not purely African or purely Western' (Msinda 2009:1). According to Jay Pather (2006:13), 'African assimilation of Western techniques, materials, ideas and forms has been creative, selective and highly original. The result is a continuous recreation of forms and styles'.

It is possible that it was more difficult for this to happen in classical ballet. According to Hayley Kodesh (2006:42): 'In ballet, what is valued is the ability to perform to a particular model. In contemporary dance, the model is being recreated all the time'. Certainly classical ballet in South Africa has been minimally successful in imagining itself beyond the colonial model and as yet no choreographer has emerged to make ballet 'South African' in the manner in which, e.g., Balanchine achieved in America.

Yet questions about the actual achievement of this so-called fusion were already being asked. Liane Loots (interview, 2010) points out that many critical dance makers started to make work that questioned not just the assumed cultural harmony after the end of apartheid rule, but also began to question political processes and, indeed, notions of nation. The late 1990s therefore heralded work in which the attention shifted to that of identity. What is an African, what is a South African, what should South African dance look like? This search was a contentious and earnest one particularly in the light of Stuart Hall's assertion (cited in Opondo 2006:62) that identity is not fixed to an essentialist past, but subject to continuous plays of history, culture, and power and are the names given by us to the different ways in which we are both positioned by, and position ourselves within historical narratives. Gregory Maqoma describes the particular anomalies of the South African context as follows:

I am quite aware that I cannot be the sole representative of that indigenous tradition since it is different from what I regard as my current identity [...] other cultural forms and traditions have in fact affected my outlook as much as that I consistently explore the aesthetic forms and ethical values in a personal and stylistic manner or approach. I also still refer to certain aesthetical traditions, community norms and societal issues. These complex explorations continue to develop my tradition just like everybody else (Maqoma 2001:76).

Ten years into the new millennium, the focus of South African contemporary dance has shifted to include a considerable canon of work that is creating, in the words of Gregory Maqoma (2004:27) 'a domain of reality in which social and emotional conflicts can be brought out into the open and made available for public discussion'. But, as Pather (2006:14) notes, 'we might ultimately not have a set, neat body of African Aesthetics because we are in flux'.

This represents a very brief summary of what is in itself a minefield of assertions, opinions and discourses which are fervently debated in conferences and debate forums. The conversation opens up the conflicts, politics and tensions between modernity and tradition and the demand to reflect community. While this is both fascinating and integral to the development of contemporary dance in South Africa, it falls beyond the scope of this paper.

From the 1990s and particularly after 1994, South Africans became the 'darlings of the "free" world and so some form of our art was bound to be exported and sold as authentic' (Loots interview, 2010). A popular form of 'African' dance developed which was defined by the tourist gaze. Dance groups from Africa were invited to festivals and competitions and well funded, the implicit brief being to fulfil the European notion of exotic African dance.<sup>2</sup> So, while many critical artists carried on making serious work that looked at the clashes between, and imminent political concerns of, 'the rainbow nation',<sup>3</sup>



a whole host of artists began to exploit the saleability of South Africa and a more mediated and culturally tamed version of our *imagined* art. This dance, this imagined dance, makes reference to a cultural tradition that many foreign-based audiences believe is authentic and thus will pay to consume it (Loots interview, 2010).

Not only was this imagined art exported, within South Africa ‘authentic’ African experiences were constructed and directed at both international tourists and South Africans alike. According to Witz et al. (2001:278):

...in this dazzling array of cultural villages, culture and history are brought together in a timeless zone as a kaleidoscope of frozen ethnic stereotypes that correspond to the dominant tourist images of Africa.

This context opens a number of contentious issues which could be explored in a number of papers, not least of which is the tendency for the West to assume a monolithic Africa, a united continent with a common set of cultural practices and traditions instead of a complex of 54 countries and hundreds of languages cultures, traditions and religions. It raises the debate around the appropriation of heritage and ritual for theatrical purposes without necessarily the appreciation and respect that should be accorded, and it also problematises the manner in which heritage and even contemporary images may be manufactured for the tourist gaze. My intention here is to draw attention to the complexity of the subject without exploring it, since to do that would be going beyond the brief of this paper.

### **Context of this paper**

The conversations around all the above, both in academic discourse and in the South African dance community generally, have been ringing in my ears for a while. It was the brief of this conference that made me begin to focus on the possibility of writing about the irritation with which young choreographers view the highly successful African dance spectacles, both in South Africa and internationally, which, to quote Lliane Loots (interview, 2001), ‘...are based on a concept of imaging a nation; they lack critical insight but offer a rather warm and fuzzy sense of acceptable Africa’ (Loots interview, 2010).

The defining moment for me came with a request in November 2009 from a funding body in South Africa which claims to represent both business and arts. The request was for a 20-minute performance by the students of the University of Cape Town (UCT) School of Dance for ‘an unnamed corporate client’, a request for a ‘window into Africa’ which refused offers of anything that represented serious contemporary comment. In declining the invitation after consultation with the Director of the School, and in an attempt to take a firm stance on what it is that we, as a university department, represent, a central question began to take shape: To what extent does the perception of South African dance both nationally and internationally as presented by African dance spectacles impact on the critical work that local contemporary choreographers are making? Does it impact on the international perception of contemporary dance in South Africa? And, finally, does it matter?

### Our bodies, our stories

Although as indicated, debate and discourse around the ‘minefields’ referred to above is happening in conference forums and the few South African arts journals, this particular topic has not been documented. In an attempt to find possible answers, I embarked on a research journey which included talking to choreographers about their work, interviewing dance academics (some of whom are also choreographers), interviewing art and dance critics, and sending out a large number of questionnaires. I also drew on my own experiences in both the professional dance community as a choreographer, and as a senior lecturer in contemporary dance, dance history and teaching methodology in the UCT dance department. It is not possible to briefly summarise all the work that has been written and performed since 2000. I have therefore chosen to mention very briefly a sample of dance works written by critical artists which do not fit the tourist gaze and which represent the range of voices telling very personal stories.

Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe, a founder member of the Moving into Dance, is an international dance artist who draws from culturally specific dance aesthetics found in Europe, Asia and Africa. His work is informed by his background, his family in which his mother and grandmother are *sangomas* (traditional healers), as well as the dance he encountered growing up in Soweto.

It is this overlap of worlds, the present day to day encounters impacting recollections and explorations with past and present dance-making practices that makes Mantsoe’s aesthetic an intertextual event’ (Barnes 2004).

In 2000, in the work *Barena (Chiefs)*, Mantsoe’s dramatic portrayal was of a chief who wars with himself, ancestors and an assortment of imaginary peoples who assail him as much as they revere him.

Maxwell Xolani Rani grew up in Cape Town and spent his formative years between Nyanga township where his grandparents lived and the home of the late David Poole (director of what was then the Cape Performing Arts Ballet Company). His own training included classical ballet, contemporary dance and a cocktail of African dance from different parts of the continent. As a result of these influences, he developed a contemporary African dance syllabus which he teaches to students of the UCT School of Dance and out of which has come a range of interesting choreography, both by him, and by his students. Having dealt with a number of pertinent issues over the last eight years, in 2009, he wrote *Coal Train* for a student performance. *Coal Train* explored tensions around the migrant labour system for those who chose to remain in the villages and not succumb to the pull of wage labour in the gold fields and urbanisation. Although set in the 1880s and 90s when families were left to fend for themselves as family members set off on the steam train to look for work on the mines, the subject is still relevant. For these students who have grown up in an urban environment, it is still the story of many of their families.

Sifiso Kweyama began his training with the Durban-based Phenduka Dance Theatre in 1989. In 1993, he joined Jazzart Dance Theatre. As a member of this company, he developed into an extremely accomplished performer, teacher and choreographer. Performing, teaching and choreography has taken Sifiso to many parts of the world

including Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Germany, Angola, Namibia, USA and Morocco. Currently he lives in Johannesburg, passing on the skills he has learnt over the years training young performers. Since 2005, he has taught his own brand of African dance at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria, while continuing to be a guest choreographer. In 2010, he wrote *Circle* for the young dancers of the Flatfoot Dance Company in Durban.

Flatfoot Dance Company is a professional dance company established in January 2003 and directed by Lliane Loots. The company is a performance platform for dancers and choreographers and is also a training ground for upcoming dance practitioners in South Africa. Over its seven-year history, Flatfoot has aimed primarily at addressing the lack of qualified black dance practitioners (choreographers, dance teachers/ educators and dancers) and has been responsible for training and employing a large number of young dancers, mostly based in KwaZulu-Natal province. Performing and working within Africa is one of the company's priorities. In creating *Circle* for Flatfoot, Kweyama worked from the African tradition of storytelling. He used the method of the dancers exploring their own life stories and journeys to create often painful insights for the young cast which shatters 'African dancer' stereotypes for present-day multicultural audiences.

Mamela Nyamza, currently one of South Africa's most acclaimed dancers and choreographers, is an individual artist whose work deals with issues and stories that relate to the people of her South Africa. Trained initially in classical ballet in Cape Town, she is a graduate of the dance department of the Tshwane University of Technology. She studied at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center in New York as well as Buto in Vienna and has worked with internationally acclaimed choreographer and mentor Suzanne Linke. Nyamza is one of the black South African choreographers who insists that, although she has worked in African dance spectacles in the past, she will no longer compromise her work. Invited on a regular basis to perform internationally, including the Super Stars of Dance in the USA, she refuses to pander to what she feels the audiences expect of an 'African dancer'. Written in 2008, *Hatch* tells the story of Mamela's life, tackling the pertinent challenging issues of custom, tradition and sexuality amongst modern day Xhosa married women and their navigation within and outside the institution of marriage. It is about a journey of a woman in the new South Africa. Making up to date and very relevant comment in 2010, *Shift* draws attention to the struggle of women in sport and to girl children who experience discrimination in their own country, such as currently is the case with athlete Caster Semenya.<sup>4</sup> Mixed media link the drama and the dance.

Drawing on a completely different experience, *Scars*, written in 2010, tells stories of the coloured community. In the South African context, 'coloured' refers to people of mixed racial descent. Under apartheid, these people were treated as a racial group distinct from the 'white', 'black' and 'Indian' groups. In the 1950s coloureds were removed from the voters' roll, meaning that, from that point on, only whites had a vote. Historically many coloured people identified themselves more strongly with the white population than black Africans, something which was reflected in fashion and lifestyle. Celeste Botha and Megan Erasmus who have both written the piece and perform it, reflect on the stories that these young dancers/ choreographers have gleaned from their personal family histories.

According to Botha, 'with *Scars* we want to embrace our identity and our connection to both our black and white ancestors' (Mitchell 2009). By doing so, they hope to shift

myths and misperceptions about what being 'coloured' means in South Africa and want to challenge the notion that 'white' ancestry is more important and therefore deserving of more recognition.

With this production we want people to see that our strengths as a people are derived from the incredible diversity that our heritage comprises and that we should take pride in that (ibid.).

Choreography is, above all else, the writing of stories on the body. It is not only what stories are being written that is important, but who is reading and interpreting these stories. The above, very small, sample of contemporary dance works in South Africa gives some idea of the stories that serious concert dance choreographers are currently concerned with. This by no means reflects anywhere near the volume and diversity of the work which ranges from the narrative to the abstract, from the conventional theatre stage to performance art. Some acrimonious debate continues as to whether the mingling of styles has been successful or even ideologically defensible. This is another minefield that can be explored extensively, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

### **Spectacular dancing or ethnic spectacle?**

The epitome of the African dance spectacles currently running in South Africa as well as extensively touring abroad, are African Footprint and Umoja. Umoja brings a specific indigenous dance to the theatre stage and presents it as spectacle. Highly successful and attracting huge audiences locally and abroad, the production is not without the ideological problems referred to above (appropriation without appreciation), associated with reimagining, and recreating, heritage. It is arguable that one cannot preserve heritage in any form, but only attempt to conserve it and, as Patricia Opondo (2006:64) points out, many similar presentations 'could be characterised as influenced by a past that was imagined and creatively recreated with the strong underlying objective to present entertaining and eye-catching performance'.

African Footprint hits the stage running. With a mix of traditional gumboot, tap, contemporary ballet and hip-hop pantsula, those 32 dancers entranced the audience on the opening night of the show on Wednesday, 9 July 2009. It was 90 minutes of non-stop raw African energy and polished song and dance. The show has everything we associate with Africa: the pennywhistle, the San bow, drums and bongos, gumboots, spears and shields, mbiras, the vuvuzela and ankle rattles. Often the music is produced by simply beating on old tins, or banging two sticks together or whacking the stage (Davie 2008).

What the company is presenting is indeed a spectacle, but one which arguably creates a perception or expectation of what local dance should look like. According to dance critic Andrew Gilder (2003:12):

From the choreographic perspective African Footprint is simply an excitingly-packaged summation of what has gone before. It does not offer new perspectives on South African dance or choreography, it relies heavily on ‘curio’ elements, and it does not require of the dancers anything beyond hugely energetic performances – which they deliver in sleek, muscle-rippling abundance.

Claire Craighead (interview, 2010) argues that neither African Footprint nor Umoja pose any challenges to cultural ownership or any of the debates that many local ‘serious’ choreographers involve themselves in. Rather they offer a kind of *simunye*<sup>5</sup> dance culture that does not challenge high/ low art perceptions – one in which various versions of local (and Western) dance forms exist alongside one another but where historical racial and cultural (and indeed gendered) divisions of ownership are still very much present in the presentations. However, she does acknowledge that this is not necessarily the intention behind these productions, and so should not necessarily be seen as a shortcoming of the works. The problem then lies not with what they do, but what they *claim* to do. Video footage of African Footprint, for example, opens with a male voice announcing ‘I am Africa!’<sup>6</sup>

Gilder (2003:12) ends his review like this: ‘So, does a show like African Footprint have a place in the broad spectrum of South African theatre? Definitely it does. Should you go and see this show? That depends on what you’re looking for’.

So, does it matter at all? Does it really matter if tourists both local and from abroad flock to be beguiled by this ‘warm, fuzzy’ representation of Africa? It may be irritating only because these shows are able to fill houses to capacity for weeks while the serious concert dance battles to find audiences for a mere handful of performances.

### Posing the critical question

To return to the central question of this paper: to what extent does the pervasive perception of ‘African’ dance impact on the continued development of contemporary theatrical dance that may prefer to be recognised as the unique South African contribution to serious concert dance globally? A variety of responses emerged in questionnaires and personal interviews with the people who make the dance as well as to the dance writers and academics (some of whom are also choreographers).

There was a general agreement that the money that is being made available for international viewers is for ‘window into Africa’ work for the tourist gaze. And this is happening at a time when there appears to be less funding for performance in South Africa, which then leads to even less money for serious concert dance. Much money is available for ‘African’ craft work. Department of Arts and Culture funding in 2010 has focused on FIFA World Cup soccer tournament-related events. Exacerbating this bad situation is the apparent lack of an integrated arts policy in South Africa. Decision-making bodies are not co-ordinated, and office bearers tend to be political appointments rather than people with the necessary expertise to assist with developing the arts. However, Jay Pather points out that the funding situation in South Africa is no different from that in many countries. He says part of the problem is the perception of arts

practitioners that, after the advent of democracy in 1994, endless money would become available for their work.

Although they conceded that funding is a problem, a number of choreographers staunchly maintained that even work which may seem to be compromised by, e.g., being based on a contract to produce ‘window’ work for corporate clients or festivals (or the World Cup), are accepted because it is the way to actually make a living, and that this work is being undertaken intelligently and with artistic integrity. As David April (interview, 2010) says ‘we all know what we are doing and why, and it has no impact at all as they are different audiences’. The African dance spectacles may be problematic in their simplifications and generalisations, providing a simplistic and uncritical understanding of what ‘African’. However, they are valuable in providing a lot of dancers with an avenue for performing and earning an income. According to Craighead (interview, 2010), many contemporary dancers and choreographers who refer to themselves as such are engaging with the discipline and their history far more discursively and intellectually and many view large scale ‘African’ musicals as a financial means to an end rather than a critically important step in their careers. Many companies find themselves in this position – often ‘spectacle’ does eventually form part of any company’s repertoire because it is a necessity for survival.

Creating for spectacle, and creating for consciousness and critical engagement are not only two different practices, but are aesthetically very different. Choreographies for spectacle are often ‘trick’-oriented – made to physically provide an audience with visual spectacle, but little critical substance. ‘Serious’ dance works may include ‘spectacle’, though not as a means to an end. The audience as receivers are definitely bound to make aesthetic judgments. There is an expectation around what dance is/ should look like, and what dancers should do and be capable of. Such standards are often created and maintained in relation to the more ‘spectacle’-oriented works like African Footprint and Umoja.

Yet there is also a choice. Mamela Nyamza (interview, 2010) says that she insists when she goes abroad that she does not compromise on what she does, although it is often what is not expected of her as a representation of ‘Africa’,<sup>7</sup> but admits that she is going to have to sell her work abroad more frequently as there is neither sufficient funding nor audience in South Africa. There are undoubtedly, as April points out, different audiences. As Adrienne Sichel (interview, 2010) notes, at present one cannot survive without the other. Pather (interview, 2010) says the situation will always be the more esoteric the work, the smaller the audience.

## Conclusion

While all the above may be true, cogent and articulate, it still does not answer the question about whether it matters. Is it possible, as Lliane Loots (interview, 2010) puts it, that ‘perhaps two images of who we are can exist – one is the media hype of *simunye* (we are one) and the other is the darker more critical look at the self?’ Maybe so, but as Pather points out (interview, 2010), there is a difference here because our sensibilities, moving out of a colonial and then an apartheid experience, are more acute and that maybe then this does all matter. The idea of *simunye* is largely one that has been imposed to

create the idea of unity. But we are not one, in fact we are one of the most heterogeneous societies in the world and what does matter is *all* of our stories. We are all trying to make sense of our journeys in and on the way to this ‘new’ South Africa. My own story as a white, middle-class Jewish woman whose family were immigrants from Europe is completely different to that of a young black dancer whose family were not immigrants and who is trying to tell the story of the journey to full citizenship in her own country. And if choreography is the writing of stories on the body, then all our stories deserve to be told.

In the international arena, South Africa tends to be seen through a set of lenses, i.e. the ‘Nelson Mandela’ lens, the ‘happy dancing darkies’ lens, the ‘HIV’ lens, and the ‘Soccer World Cup’ lens. If African dance spectacles are seen as the dance which epitomises South Africa, then they contribute to the ‘happy dancing darkies’ frame of reference. The problem with frames is that they create stereotypes. And the core problem with stereotypes is that they draw attention away from the very personal stories of contemporary South African choreographers and dancers, illustrated by the small sample of current works referred to above.

As Gilder (2003:12) points out, ‘One of the challenges for the growing band of internationally recognised South African choreographers is to break through foreign preconceptions about the styles and purposes of dance that emerge from this country’.

In my view, if the international perception of dancing South Africa is African Footprint with its claim ‘I am Africa’, then, however spectacular the dancing, the personal stories will continue to be lost. And yes, there are different audiences. But would it not have been grand if together with the hype and the ‘indigenous’ dance, at least one South African city was given enough funding during the 2010 Soccer World Cup to mount a contemporary dance festival which would have at least attempted to be heard above the vuvuzelas?

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The vuvuzela is the ubiquitous plastic horn that emits up to 150 decibels that has come, during the course of the 2010 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament, to be synonymous with South Africans.

<sup>2</sup> This was not only a North American or Western European gaze, as can be seen in a story told by choreographer Sifiso Kweyama. Invited in 1998 to present the work *TuBlack White* at an international competition in Angola, he was told that the piece was not African enough as ‘toes were pointed and lines too classical’ (Kweyama interview, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> A term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu shortly after the first democratic election in 1994, and widely adopted in public discourse about South Africa after the end of apartheid.

<sup>4</sup> Semenya won a gold medal in the women’s 800m race at the 2009 World Championships. Following her victory, questions were raised about whether she really was a woman. She withdrew from international competition until July 2010 when the International Association of Athletics Federations cleared her to return to competition.

<sup>5</sup> *Simunye* means ‘we are one’ in the Nguni group of indigenous languages, and was used as the slogan in an advertising campaign for one of the (SABC) South African Broadcasting Corporation television channels.

<sup>6</sup> [www.africanfootprint.com/media.html#vidder](http://www.africanfootprint.com/media.html#vidder), accessed 28 July 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Invited to perform in *Super Stars of Dance* in the USA, Nyamza strongly resisted the voiced expectation of what was considered to be appropriate for an ‘African’ by performing her version of *The Dying Swan*.



## **Non Actualised ‘Spectacles’: Dance among the Tiwi of Northern Australia**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper queries the statement made in the conference’s publicity material that ‘the moving body exhibits meaning through choreographies of the visual’ and argues that for the Tiwi of Northern Australia dance is neither primarily visual, nor spectacular. Body parts moving are the enactment of identifiable kinship ties in the ‘Kinship dances’, whilst Tiwi cosmology is embodied in the ‘Dreaming dances’. In this way the ‘spectacle’ is more virtual than spectacularly actualised and is directly related to what one may think of a ‘Tiwi cognitive map’ (of kinship, landscape, the Dreaming etc). The paper takes into account both ‘traditional’ contexts and the presentation of Tiwi dancing as part of touristic activities.*

### **Introduction**

In his introduction to the third edition of his 1967 book *La Société du Spectacle* (*Society of the Spectacle*), Guy Debord reminded the reader that the book was consciously written to damage spectacular society. The book was ‘sciemment écrit dans l’intention de nuire à la société spectaculaire’ (Debord 1992[1967],11), as for him spectacle was the negation of the lived experience. In this presentation, through the examination of dance among the Tiwi of northern Australia, I would like to question the notion that dance is either spectacular or indeed primarily visual. My focus instead will be on how dance, for the Tiwi, is primarily about establishing a network of relations between people and between people and land. This is not to say that Tiwi dance is not visual, it is and at times it can be quite spectacular too, but the comment in the conference’s publicity material that ‘the moving body exhibits meaning through choreographies of the visual’ is not really applicable for an understanding of Tiwi dance as I will argue that we are dealing with a completely different sphere of experience. Dance among the Tiwi can only acquire its meaning as lived through experience.

(As a way of allowing the audience to enter into the world of Tiwi dance, two short clips, respectively from the early 1900s and from the 1980s from the author’s collection were presented to give a sense of what the people and their dances look like within the environment of mortuary rituals which is where most of the dancing takes place. Readers may want to access [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_vtfUgeZIo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_vtfUgeZIo) a clip showing part of a mortuary ritual held on Melville Island probably in the 1980s)

### **Tiwi dance and lived through experience**

The Tiwi, like all Australian Aborigines were traditionally hunters and gatherers. They had, and still have, a mixed economy in that they exploit the resources of both the land

and the sea, though today they also engage in other activities such as tourism and the production of art and crafts for an international market and both activities have become important for the local economy. Like other Aborigines living in remote Australia they have high rates of mortality, cardiovascular diseases and renal failure being the largest cause of death (Hoy et al 2003, S66). Like other Aborigines they live in a world where grief is part of daily life even though in contrast to many others, they largely control their ancestral territories.

Tiwi sensibilities are shaped by saltwater just as much as by the land. In this way, the expression 'Saltwater people' used by anthropologist Nonie Sharp (2002) when discussing Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines from the Cape York Peninsula can be applied to them too. For most if not all Australian Aboriginal coastal people, the sea just as the land is part of their blood and body and this is no different for the Tiwi. Like all Aborigines they see the earth as a living entity and I have written how through dance the landscape becomes flesh (Grau 2003, 2005, see also Glowczewski 1992 for a similar discussion among another group of Aborigines). Land and sea are where the ancestors, as well as the spirit of the unborn, live so that the landscape can in part be seen as a live mythical topographical map with sacred sites linked to the actions of ancestral beings, as well as a moveable grid of tracks that ties individuals to specific areas of the land. As artist and philosopher Erin Manning put it

In Aboriginal culture, the landscape [...] always experiential. The landscape is never observed from outside its eventness, nor is it painted as though it had stopped moving. (2010)

Inheriting a 'country' from one's father among the Tiwi is therefore not so much a question of land ownership in a property sense, but rather it is about engaging with a network of kins, who are co-owners of the land, because, as anthropologist Fred Myers contends: 'places always bear the imprint of persons' (Myer 1990, 65). When Tiwi people engage with the land and talk about 'looking after' it, it is much more than about exploiting and enjoying its resources. It is about engaging with the Dreaming, the mythological past when the world was created, as well as a parallel world reached through rituals. As anthropologist Diane Bell argues, discussing central Australian Aborigines, but much applies to the Tiwi situation too:

To the living, who trace direct relationship to these Dreamings, falls the responsibility to give form and substance to this heritage in their daily routines and their ceremonial practices. It is they who must keep the Law, visit and protect the sites, and it is they who may use the country and enjoy its bounty. Relationships to the land and the founding dramas of ancestral activity are traced in many ways. It may be through the lineage of any of one's four grandparents, or to one's place of birth or burial of a parent. This networked of structured relationships is further extended by celebration of sites of sentimental significance and economic advantage. (2002, 97)

In a way one could argue that the Dreaming is a matrix of virtual possibilities, which need to become embodied through the actions of human beings, dance being a significant sphere of such actions. Dances keep the Dreaming alive.

Among the Tiwi, just as among other Aborigines, the social world is organized around kinship relationships. I have written elsewhere (Grau 1995, 1998) how the group of dances which one can label the Kinship dances because their movements establish the relationship between the dancer and the person for whom the dance is being performed, is the area of Tiwi life where their kinship system is presented explicitly. In ritual Tiwi individuals, act out kinship associations through dance. One can therefore interpret the body parts moving in the dance as the enactment of identifiable kinship ties, but this enactment is not just visual, it is aural and more importantly relational. The dances create webs of relationships between those presents, between the group and the dead, and between all and the land. Focusing on these relationships gives a deeper understanding of the lived-through experiences that lets the Dreaming unfold. They are at the heart of Tiwi ritual practices.

I also want to use the term relationship as a way of linking ideas through different networks of understanding. Anthropologist Tim Ingold, in his book *The perception of the environment* (2000) has argued that:

The identities and characteristics of persons are not bestowed upon them in advance of their involvement with others but are the condensation of histories of growth and maturation within fields of social relationships. Thus every person emerges as a locus of development within such a field, which is in turn carried forward and transformed through their own actions. Understanding persons in this way, however, calls for a kind of ‘relational thinking’. (2000: 3)

Ingold also proposed that:

The landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves. (2000: 189)

It is important to stress here that when Aboriginal people talk about their attachment to the land they are not using images or making metaphorical statements. When writing about the work of Aboriginal artists Manning coined the term ‘relationscape’ to discuss the rhythm of the land she sees in the paintings. For her:

To look at the desert paintings produced in the era of acrylic dot painting is to have a sense of *survol*, of seeing the landscape from above. In Aboriginal terms, this reflects not a passive observation of a landscape below but a way of life where above and below fold into one-another. To see the landscape is to experience it, to live it. (2007: 118)

In this way space and landscape cannot be disassociated from the experience of acting human beings engaged in it. To see the landscape is to come into the presence of the Dreaming and of the ancestral beings. Embodying them is nurturing them. As Manning puts it ‘The Dreaming has no ultimate identity: it is that out of which relationscapes are born’ (2009: 203); ‘The land is not an extension of the Aborigines—it is them. To be the land is to *become* in relation to it, in relation not to space itself, but to the living coordinates of a topological relationscape’ (Manning 2010).

It is through relationships of reciprocity expressed in the dance that the land is made flesh, is shared, and becomes known. Sharing, whether of resources, or of knowledge, however is part of a very complex system. As visual anthropologist Eric Michaels put it:

From a communication standpoint, Aboriginal social structures both embody and elaborate the constraints on who can say what to whom. This system allows speech (or design or other information) to accrue particular high value. Indeed to become capital of a particular sort that individuals, and communities in ceremonial exchanges, can manipulate to social and economic advantages. [...] Aboriginal orality depends upon exploiting and controlling information, by segmenting each step of the communication process: sender/message/receiver. This control is realized in economic terms as difference of value associated with the right to speak, the right to know, and the right to hear. (1985: 506-7)

In Tiwi ritual dancing therefore, the part of the human sensorium that deals with relationships is exacerbated, creating an environment where social networks and access to knowledge are negotiated and established. Whilst the visual is a part of this process it is only a very small one.

### **Tiwi tourist dance performances**

If Tiwi dance is more virtual than spectacularly actualised then what are the implications in relation to the creation of Tiwi tourist dance performances? In the 1980s, at the times of my first period of fieldwork, the Tiwi Land Council started the tourist venture Tiwi Tour. Since then the business has been leased to a number of holiday companies who manage it and pay a fee to what is now the Tiwi Islands Shire Council.

*Aussie Adventures, for example, offered in July 2010 a one Day Tiwi Islands Cultural Tour for A\$465. Its highlights were*

- ≡ Learn about the culture of the Tiwi Aboriginal people
- ≡ Meet some Tiwi Ladies at morning tea
- ≡ Witness a smoking ceremony and traditional dancing
- ≡ Local arts and crafts
- ≡ Detailed and informative commentary
- ≡ Bushtucker Walk

([http://www.aussieadventures.com.au/index.php?brochure\\_code=AAHTW](http://www.aussieadventures.com.au/index.php?brochure_code=AAHTW) accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010)

Part of the content of the tour may at first seem somewhat at odd with traditional practices. The majority of Tiwi dances are performed for someone, dead in the context of mortuary ritual, alive in the modern contexts of birthday, graduation, wedding or other celebrations. Most of the dances performed at such events belong to the Kinship dances and demonstrate specific kinship relationships between the dancer and the person for

whom the dance is being performed. None of these dances could therefore be performed meaningfully at a tourist event. Interspersed among the Kinship dances during rituals, however, dancers may also perform Dreaming dances manifesting the animals, geographical features, or natural phenomena they belong to. This is the dances that would generally be used when inviting outsiders to share in a Tiwi celebration. For example when officials from Darwin came to attend the inauguration of the school of Pirlingimpi in 1980, all the dances performed were Dreaming dances. Smoking ceremonies usually take place when an area had been polluted by death and they need to be cleansed to return to the world of the living. What does the smoking ceremony mean in the new context? What is being cleansed and for whom? Have the dances become solely spectacular? Are the tourists aware that the dancers are making the Dreaming manifest in their presence?

I need to point out here that I have never witnessed a tourist performance, since the Tiwi had not incorporated them into tourist events during my different periods of fieldwork. Journalist Diana Balham's account of such an event was therefore interesting to me. She wrote in the online version of the *New Zealand Herald* on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010, about a trip she had taken to Bathurst Island:

Ironwood leaves are placed over a small fire and the smouldering twigs are waved over each one of us in turn to chase away bad spirits - with Christian prayers. "May the Lord bless you," Marcella murmurs to me and I find myself brushing away tears. This is not quite the "culture from the bus window" response I was expecting to feel. Then the women and some of the men perform their totem dances: shark, buffalo and crocodile, which are slightly intimidating animal action songs, and I regain my composure.

Whilst I tend to concur with social scientist John MacAloon when he argued that:

Spectacle has destructive effects on [...] rituals [...] genres that reduce in their various ways the distance between actors and audiences, that demand that all take active roles in the performance, and that all agree at some level on the typification and transcendental ground of their actions (1984, 268).

I would also want to contend that ritual actions have powerful effect even on unsuspecting tourists or young anthropologists entering the field.

(A short clip of Grau dancing during a mortuary ritual in the 1980s was shown to end the presentation)

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## **"But it's still just step dancing!": The Genealogical Confluence of Spectacle and the Spectacular as Practiced in Irish Dance**

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### ***Abstract***

*In multiple Irish dance traditions, it is the solo step dancer who creates spectacle. These traditions focus on the soloist who cultivates virtuosity that, in turn, emerges spectacular technique within the spectacle of each performance. This paper asserts that the transmissions and transformations of virtuosity serve to revise how critics and viewers see the spectacular within Irish dance performances today. Contemporary Irish step dancers utilize both spectacular technique and spectacle in their choreography. Specific dance enactments are discussed as contiguous contributions to an existing tradition that, historically, can be identified specifically through a play on virtuosity as both/and spectacular and spectacle.*

As I sat in my seat at Boston's Institute for Contemporary Art and prepared for a CRASHarts presentation of Celtic Tap: An Evening with James Devine, I was excited. In the program, Debra Cash quoted Devine who suggested that his show was, "an antidote to 'Riverdance' overkill," but as the show progressed, I grew increasingly unable to see the antidote promised (2008). I was reminded of a conversation I read about in which an older hooper commented on a younger dancer saying, "Yeah, he sure does a lot of talking, but you know, he's not saying anything." Talking, in this context meant "tapping," and Devine did a lot of it in non-stop, jam packed, trades with one or the other musician on stage. What was Devine "saying" that I was not able to "hear"? This paper is a reflection on Devine's performance and focuses on how spectacular virtuosity and spectacle are not only part of Irish dance technique, but have also been a part of the rhetoric that buoys the dance form along its course over time, so much so as to become embedded in the dance form itself.



*Figure 1: James Devine in TAPEIRE*

Stepping traditions are common throughout the world, yet it is Irish step dance, or should I say *Riverdancing*, that has had a large and profitable appeal to audiences across the globe. Riverdance's choruses and solo dancers have created a spectacle of astounding economic proportions. For example, more than 11 million people purchased tickets to a Riverdance show by mid-2002, and the show is still running (Casey). What is so spectacular about the dancing to cause such popularity?

Fierce individual expression and solo performance, which may be labeled as both virtuosity and spectacle, drive step dance in the Irish tradition alongside a keen sense of one-up-man's-ship or showmanship. These characteristics exist in multiple kinds of practice and, over time, have led to different emphases within different practices. Genealogically, we can chart these various practices from solo movers into ensemble performances.

The dancing master of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was the first spectacular figure in Irish dance. This itinerant artist claimed a parish as his own (most were men) and earned his wages by teaching area families a few local Irish dances of popularity along with the *do's* and *don'ts* of social dance of the era. To put the dancing master's importance into a social and political context, Ireland was at this time under duress by foreign domination and its people ridiculed as unable to manage civil home rule. Images in the popular press in Brittan, and later the U.S., simianized the Irish. Attention to deportment, the carriage of the body, was seen perhaps as a way to confront such derogatory propaganda. In this way, the dancing master taught by example. Breathnach, citing Arthur Young's travel accounts, stresses how dancing was an important system of education so complete that even the poor of Ireland learned to dance (51). He describes the dancing master as:

a somewhat whimsical figure, pretentious in dress and affecting a grandiloquence not sustained by his schooling. Caroline hat, swallow-tail coat and tight knee-breeches, white stockings and turn-pumps, cane with a silver head and silk tassel-- thus accoutered the dancing master was obviously a cut above the wandering piper or fiddler (Breathnach 51).

Such a spectacle doubled when two dancing masters met at fairs or markets. They would engage in friendly rivalry attempting to out dance one another on the soaped tops of a barrels, for example. The spectacle, and spectacular dancing, might be used to defend well-defined teaching territory, but was sure to increase the number of pupils attending the next class. While the dancing master considered himself a professional, his exhibitions, more often than not, occurred in social settings, such as fairs or markets.

Similarly, *sean-nós* dancing, still in practice today also includes friendly rivalries in which the competitive impulse is one of flattery or respect for those engaged in the social event. *Sean-nós* is a label applied to traditions of song and dance within *Gaeilge* culture, most tenacious in the west of Ireland where Irish language is still spoken. The term literally means, "in the old way," yet this old way is an ever-changing new way of expression in each dance enactment. *Sean-nós* stresses individual expression, playful, often humorous, rhythmic movements of, but not limited to, the feet. Each participant is respected for a deep sense of personal style and expected to produce a signature step, a



Figure 2: Devine dancing *sean-nós* 2008

unique contribution to the musical moment in both visual and audible ways. Listening deeply to live music and the particular nuances of the tune, instrument, and player, the *sean-nós* dancer is inspired to discover his/her own unique interpretation leading to a virtuosic/spectacular performance that emerges dancer as spectacle and virtuoso performer.

When queried, *sean-nós* dancers interviewed for this research described how they have sought out dancers whom they admire, watched them, and stolen from them. To achieve "correctness" in the form, the *sean-nós* dancer goes where the music takes him/her, tell jokes with his/her feet, and continually improvises. Traditionally, the form is transmitted orally/physically, is non-codified, variable, and individually interpreted and expressed. *Sean-nós* dancers are typically relaxed, their upper bodies responding sympathetically to

foot rhythms, and their stepping remains close to the floor. In many ways, one becomes a *sean-nós* dancer by doing *sean-nós* dance. The current resurgence in *sean-nós* step dancing adds formal study (ongoing classes and workshops) to existing modes of oral transmission; however, the goal of this practice remains a spontaneous personal interpretation of Irish music reflective of the individual experience. *Sean-nós* is about “saying something” while “talking.” For most *sean-nós* dancers, the practice is social and avocational, not professional. What *sean-nós* performance brings into question is a definition of *traditional* Irish dance, more specifically, the need to differentiate the constitutive dance practices that collectively form the panoptic reference, “traditional Irish dance.”

***“There is a sense in which we do not own our culture, we are only trustees. The treasure is only on loan and we must take it, refurbish it in the light of our experience and hand it on.”***

Fr. Pat Ahern, founder of *Siamsa Tíre*  
(www.siamsatire.com)

While *sean-nós* dance enactments reflect the musical moment, other Irish dance is choreographed and structured via loose dramaturgy. The narrative tendency in current concert Irish dance projects, including the virtuosic spectacles of solo step dancers, are related to three other tributaries in the genealogical confluence of spectacle and the spectacular in Irish dance. These tributaries include *Siamsa Tíre*, cabaret shows, and Dance Drama competitions. These dance practices highlight context and thematic content for performance. *Siamsa Tíre* was established in 1957 as a means of preserving traditional Irish ways of life. Early performances featured dance, such as Jeremiah Molyneaux’s “Munnix” style of step dance from North Kerry, and work songs (*Amhráin Saothar*) that often accompanied rural



Figure 3: *Siamsa Tíre*  
*Clann Lir* (2010)

occupations such as scything or churning from times past. Old Irish celebrations such as *Bealtaine* and *Lughnasa* became themes that unified narrative performances representative of Irish culture (www.siamsatire.com). By 1974 the organization became the National Folk Theatre and its mission today serves to “to protect, explore and develop traditional art” in Ireland (www.siamsatire.com). Programs explore themes in an interdisciplinary process of drama, dance, song and music, not unlike themes in *Riverdance* and subsequent productions. Because of its extensive outreach and free educational programs, *Siamsa Tíre* spread throughout Ireland and many small towns developed local programs. These programs became part of Ireland’s tourism industry throughout the last four decades. Key to *Siamsa Tíre*’s success is its mission to “develop” art practices such as dance and encourage those practices to be re-made, re-invented, or at least, re-interpreted, given an individual practitioners’ experience in the form.

Alongside the development of *Siamsa Tíre*, step dancing in hotel cabarets or cocktail lounges developed as a performance practice. Tourists on holiday can still be treated to local talent in such shows where performers interpret Irish traditional music and dance

through the lens of entertainment. Here a wide variety of programs feature everything and anything from Country and Western covers to “Danny Boy” on electric bass, guitar, and standard trap set. These small, eclectic performances often feature a step dancer in spectacular virtuoso performance. Cabaret dancing has often provided local and celebrity dancers the opportunity to perform outside of the competitive circuit. The presence of a solo dancer also helped to “sell” the show.

The last narrative practice is a relatively new category of competitive dance that is enormously popular at *feisanna*, or dance competitions. Here 8-20 dancers perform a narrative dance as a drama, or story related to Irish culture or history, including Irish people, events, legends and myths. Only Irish traditional music may be used and no spoken word is allowed. Lighting and props are limited, but costuming and choreography are not, other than they remain family-friendly. Choreography is limited to six minutes and is timed electronically. Production space is limited to 28’ by 28’. All competition entrants must submit a short description of the dance drama for competition committee approval prior to the event ([www.mid-atlanticregion.com](http://www.mid-atlanticregion.com)). This competition draws spectators, encourages spectacle, and features spectacular interpretations and creative development of Irish dance. The performances range from serious to humorous and are very entertaining, inspiring new creative expression within this otherwise highly regulated practice. Both *Siamsa Tire* and Dance Drama competitions existed pre-Riverdance and continue post-Riverdance. The difference in these examples of narratively organized productions and Riverdance is perhaps the level of commercialization. Why is Riverdance valued as such an important change in the tradition when it too is simply another practice in the stream of Irish dance practice? Was it the confluence of these practices that emerged the phenomenon of *Riverdancing*, that is to say new creative interpretations within various traditions of practice?

Each of the practices mentioned here create spectacles, productions that are crafted to entertain and/or educate through combined drama and dance; each features thematic, often fantastic stories, spectacular, virtuoso performances of individual cast members, and unified chorus or ensemble work of highly skilled movers. Differences may only be slight and may point to the choreographer’s motivation and intent be it to educate, entertain, and/or win competitions.

The source of Irish dance practice for Riverdance can, in part, be traced to the Muenster (southern regional) style of *sean-nós* dance which became codified and perpetuated through the establishment of dance competitions developed by the Irish Dance Commission beginning in 1929-30. Modern competitive Irish step dance has been and remains the dominant Irish dance form as a result. Through regulation and control, the competitive tradition achieved stability and became the appropriate representation of Irish dance, termed modern—new—as opposed to *sean-nós*—old. The authenticity of Irish dance is perpetuated through a system of competition that, according to Hall, allows the dancing to act as symbol of the Irish nation, national duty, and cultural sport. What is appropriate and essential are clearly delimited in rules for dress, conduct, the execution of the form and its style, music choice and speed, the certification of teachers and adjudicators, and the value of the awards they bestow. According to Hall, winning competitors are not just the best dancers, but the best *Irish* dancers, even if they are not Irish nationals (Hall, 1997, 138; 1996).

Winners transmit innovation throughout competitive Irish dance. The profusion and replication of new standards for how Irish dance is supposed to look, and what spectators are encouraged to look for, is fortified by competitive dance practice. Creative, new moves are demonstrated by a winner and then quickly imitated by others. In this way competition allows for both mobility (change) and stability (standards) of creative expression. The stability of competitive practice extended easily to shows such as Riverdance. In this practice the goal is to perfect standards of the form, hence flawless unison is easily achieved. Images of its stars, Jean Butler and Michael Flatley, operate as much as symbols for virtuosity in the form as they are emblematic of virtuoso performance in Irish dance. Each achieved high competitive rankings, but Riverdance performances and performers were and are also deemed appropriate “Irish dance” by ticket sales and the number of imitative productions such as Lord of the Dance, Spirit of the Dance, Gael Force, Dancing on Dangerous Ground, Ragús, Celtic Tap, and many more that have followed since 1994.

For some scholars, like Hall, dancers from this source of the tradition act out a semiotic, prescriptive enactment of Irish dance in which the Self of the performer is subsumed by the sign of the performing (1996; 1997). Creativity and improvisation however, do not disappear, rather remain a part of the choreographic/performance process in competitive dance practice, but in most cases, become less a part of the performance itself, generally speaking. Competitive standards create boundaries that shift the dancers’ attention toward technique, spectacular technique, and the ability to extend the rigors of competitive training into flawless, virtuoso performance. By contrast, *sean-nós* dancing spontaneously erupts in any space and dancers dance when they feel moved or are cajoled by other musicians or friends present. It would seem that there exists two forms of virtuosity as achieved within Irish dance practices discussed so far: 1) the individually improvised *sean-nós* dance of the moment in which unique, personal, non-reproducible signature moves, styling or sense of humor emerge and 2) the precise execution of dance material demonstrating timing (speed and rhythm), lift (height), fluidity, interesting floor patterns, and creativity are executed as prescribed by competitive standards within the limits of Irish traditional music.

Personal style, interpretation, and expression flood each of these practices but each showcases a very different form of virtuosity. *Sean-nós* engenders a virtuosity of spontaneous wit and risk for the sake of discovering the perfect response to music and moment. Competitive Irish dance, and by extension theatrical concert dancing, engenders a virtuosity of pyrotechnical brilliance, perfection of the dance form by each individual in performance, so that together, as in the choruses of Riverdance, the show becomes a paragon of Irish dance and the soloist its avatar. Far from being subsumed in semiotic nomenclature, Irish dancers today become celebrities in as short a time as it takes to load a video on Youtube.com.

Like competitive practice, Riverdance has created a certain eddy in the flow of Irish dance practices by establishing standards and conventions for current Irish step dance performance. First, more and more performances happen in concert/theatrical settings, or other “stage” oriented positions, where audience is focused from a particular vantage point that is crafted and distant. This includes the real-time, television network and online coverage of various *Oireachtas na Gaeilge* events and new competitions, including those for *sean-nós* dancing. Second, the dancers’ entrances and exits are used

to heighten the impact of the dancing itself, increasing celebrity and virtuosity of the form and performer. Dancers enter at the change of tunes, suddenly from the side, or trade-off, battle-like, with a musician or another dancer. Exits are either after musicians and dancer end together or function to signify the end of that musical section of the performance. No matter how it happens, it is often a “wow” moment.

Today, it is indeed a fierce sense of self-expression that pushes Irish dance toward individual production and global consumption, but the rhetoric is such that each new show/event is promoted or spun as new, innovative, different, or the first. It is this rhetoric that exists as part of multiple Irish dance traditions, for when dancers/artists attempt to be different, to proclaim newness, to create or re-create either a spectacle or spectacular movement they are re-interpreting and developing their experience of any number of sources/practices of Irish dance. It is this development via experience that arguably renders current performances still just step dancing!

Back to Celtic Tap. . . When I watched James Devine in his trio of grunge-costumed, casually presented works, I witnessed an Irish dance artist in the process of discovering his own style, his own choreographic ideas, and a sense of self in performance. I witnessed him doing this by way of a series of choreographed and improvised moments that re-interpreted past and present expressions of Irish dance across competitive, *sean-nós*, concert, cabaret, and dance-drama practices with a splash of high tech to augment visual and audio impact. I watched Mr. Devine play with how he has been caught in a hyphenated world of pre- and post- Riverdance. Yet, I am left to wonder if Devine’s particular celebrity and virtuosity, along with his success, might become the new template for performance of Irish dance, and therefore impede the flow of



Figure 4: Devine  
Celtic Tap (2008)

creative possibilities from other, lesser-known yet creative Irish dance artists. What Devine was “saying” in Celtic Tap may not have been exactly clear to me, but his “talking” was spectacular. In the end, does it matter if I fully understood what Devine was “saying” as long as he keeps “talking”? After all, just step dancing is still spectacular dancing.

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## **Protest for Viewing, Protest for Doing: How *freedom of information* Makes the Performer a Site Twice Over**

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### **Abstract**

*freedom of information is a 24-hour score during which the solo performer moves continuously, wears a blindfold and earplugs, and refrains from eating. Its intention is to recognize the impact of the U.S.'s continued occupation in war zones. The project's designer, Miguel Gutierrez, identifies it as a performance/protest/ritual. Emphasis on the performer's experience might seem to diminish foi's function as performance or spectacle, but it actually increases its performative complexity. My experiential research as a participant in foi2008 discovers that the performer is both the visual site in terms of performance, and the practical site in terms of protest.*

### **Introduction**

It's New Year's Eve. I'm wearing two blindfolds, a pair of earplugs, and a few layers of dance clothes. I'm in a public art space, a relatively small room, with its entrance on the main street downtown. There are several wooden chairs, a couch, a Christmas tree. I navigate my way around the room with these as landmarks, as well as the sink where I have a jug of water, and the table where I'm keeping a notebook. I get sore, confronted by myself, and tired of how I move, but I basically keep moving how I move. This is a bit of the scene at ArtHaus in Decorah, Iowa, as I carry out *freedom of information 2008*.

Thirty other representatives, in their own states, simultaneously enacted *foi2008*, creating events and having experiences that both had things in common with and differed from mine. This was all designed and organized by dance artist Miguel Gutierrez, who performed the first version of *freedom of information* in his apartment studio in Brooklyn in 2001. The task, or improvisation score, is to remain in one space for 24 hours, move continuously, wear a blindfold and earplugs, and refrain from eating. The intention of *foi2008* was to "create solidarity with people displaced by armed conflict" and "with the community of people who still resist and reject the U.S.'s interventionist tactics abroad," expressly with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, he aimed to "highlight and enforce both the disorientation that constant movement creates as well as the self-examination that happens when [one's] basic senses are taken away."<sup>2</sup> In 2008 Gutierrez expanded the performance/protest/ritual, as he calls it in the event's press release, in order for the contemplative act to take place nationwide, be more accessible, and enjoy various expressions by multiple artists.<sup>3</sup>

### **Performance**

As a visual performance, *foi* challenges notions of what is spectacular, what is virtuosic, or even what is worth watching. But the piece is meant to be seen, and Claudia La Rocco's *New York Times* article covering the event indicates that the look of it has an impact. She depicts moments from a recording of Gutierrez's 2001 solo version, recognizing distinctions between dance conventions and basic or functional human movements. The vocabulary and the qualities of motion, as illustrated in her description, "[s]mall blooms of movement, like the flick of a beautifully pointed foot morphing into a shuffling walk with arms extended," show the toilsomeness of the physical task, and suggest the complexity of its intention.<sup>4</sup> While doing the 24-hour piece myself, I felt

these distinctions: a difference between dancing and moving-in-order-to-stay-awake. But with either choice, I was conscious of viewers and what they were seeing.

Though Gutierrez is explicit that performers of *foi* and their actions do not represent people displaced by war or their experiences,<sup>5</sup> an attempt to make sense of the scene is expected. Randy Martin's "Dance as a Social Movement," illustrates how dance making is a political as well as creative process, and many artists before and since the publication of his essay have made myriad dances that are aimed toward representing, critiquing, or elucidating sociopolitical dilemmas. In light of *foi*'s title, and George W. Bush's restriction and control of information, showing covered eyes probes viewers' awareness of what is happening politically and practically with the wars. As symbols, the blindfold and earplugs cast doubt on how much information is actually visible and available to us. The blindfolded performer, though not meant to represent war-displaced people, does reflect victims' physicality. Also, toward fulfilling the piece's aim of creating solidarity, the blindfold and earplugs signal to viewers that materiality is a commonality between ourselves and others, and that all human experiences, of ourselves and the world, are corporeal.

The blindfold and earplugs are evocative symbols for viewers, but their primary function in the piece is to deprive sensory awareness for the performer. Emphasis on the performer's experience might seem to diminish *foi*'s facility as visual performance, but it actually provides for the piece's political intensity, and layers its performative complexity. *foi* is indeed a performance, and what the viewer sees is symbolic, not real. But I want to highlight that enactment of the symbolic does give the enactor a sense of reality. The performer does undergo sensory deprivation. Over the course of 24 hours, this heightens other sensations and perceptions, and introduces new sensory, intellectual and emotional occurrences.<sup>6</sup> Neurologically, for the doer, these occurrences are real.

Dancers, and long-term practitioners of any physical technique, readily claim that what they do effects and shapes them – physically and otherwise. The work of neuroscientists in the past few decades shows that our brain's body maps are plastic, changeable. The classic experiment is Michael Merzenich's, in which he sewed a monkey's fingers together and observed its brain's sensory and motor remapping of the monkey's hand.<sup>7</sup> He concluded that our brains, structures that they are, continue to change throughout our lives. Our body maps, which neuroscientists Sandra Blakeslee and Matthew Blakeslee argue to be the basis of human intelligence and ability, are in a state of flux. These two articulate that "[n]europlasticity continually reshapes your brain in response to experience."<sup>8</sup> I'll return to the experience of *foi* later. Let's first consider this piece in the context of other protest efforts.

## Protest

*foi2008* differs from model protests, such as the 1960 Greensboro sit-ins, the ACT-UP die-ins in New York the late 1980's, and Direct Action Network's interference with the 1999 WTO meetings in Seattle, all treated in earlier articles by Rebekah Kowal and Susan Leigh Foster.<sup>9</sup> Most noticeably, *foi* doesn't directly confront an individual, challenge an organization, or interfere with the system it opposes. It doesn't attempt to change the administration's actions, and rather than confront people or occupy others' spaces unwelcomed, *foi* invites people to enter, view, and contemplate.

There is much analysis to be expressed about *foi* as a protest in relation to these examples. For the sake of this paper, I'm going to touch on a few of the main points. First, the group that comprises *foi2008*, thirty-one individuals dispersed throughout the U.S., differs from the Greensboro Four and their fellow sit-inners, and from the affinity groups employed by ACT-UP and DAN. We do not occupy a single public space, nor do we intrude on a social or political setting. Much of our presence as a group exists online: in news sources, in a blog created for the event, and on Ustream.tv channels set up by

some of the participants. As a group, the space we occupy is cyberspace. The group's presence is widespread and, on account of the Internet, relatively easily accessible.

But, and secondly, most of us inhabited studio, art or private spaces, and this provokes questions about access and privilege. The Greensboro Four inhabited space that was socially and legally denied to them, which exhibits their exclusion and oppression. Though some *foi2008* participants met resistance when seeking space for the event, for the most part we had access to safe places with supportive personnel. This, in contrast to the sit-inners, evidences our privilege. Thirdly, and also on the subject of privilege, the *foi* protesters' bodies aren't actually displaced, and we're remarkably distanced from what we're raising awareness about. This is starkly different from the civil rights movement in the U.S. in which black people enacted protests against oppressors with their own bodies, and at tremendous physical risk. There is arguably always some risk in engaging in oppositional acts, but Foster acknowledges the privilege of the typically white and middle-class bodies that enacted the die-ins,<sup>10</sup> and those of us carrying out *foi2008* had relatively little at physical or sociopolitical stake.

Despite their privilege, and this gets to the crux of *foi* as a protest, Foster regards the ACT-UP protesters' physical engagement as important. Her essay on the whole gives primacy to the body as a tool in protest. Ultimately, she proposes that an individual acquires "personal agency" through a physical process in which "bodies read what is happening and articulate their imaginative rebuttal," and "[i]n doing so they demonstrate to themselves and all those watching that something can be done."<sup>11</sup> With this, it is arguably appropriate for anybody, the privileged body included, to take up the responsibility of protesting oppressive systems, of engaging physically in efforts to make social and political change. Still, I entered the 24-hour action questioning both my connection to those affected by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and my right to be acting in attempt to create solidarity with them. So strong was the distinction between my choice and their coercion. This quandary persisted for most of the event, but I agree with Foster that the body has a significant role in protest, because it was through my body and physicality that I started to gain insight about the matter.

## Ritual

The doing of *foi* is the heart of its effectiveness. Gutierrez relates performing *foi* to ritual, but it isn't a traditional rite. Its movement isn't codified. It doesn't aim to formally change the performer's cultural condition or social status. But performers do undergo change. The intensity of the 24-hour contemplative physical task is a form of Arnold van Gennep's liminal phase.<sup>12</sup> Victor Turner calls individuals in this phase "liminal entities," and characterizes them as being in an ambiguous state. Thus, they experience a "profound immersion in humility," as well as a lack of differentiation between themselves, and a sense of "communitas" among themselves.<sup>13</sup> An excerpt from my own reflective writing, following my completion of *foi*, illustrates this:

The desire [to finish] became more and more about the people who were there with me, and the other participants. It wasn't selfless. It was more that "I" was bigger, included more people. This wasn't an idea; it is how I experienced the last part. I would feel the fatigue or pain in my body, be barely moving, then strength would renew, and I'd be dancing. I thought: this isn't my strength. "My" and "I" meant "us" and "we." I was so amazingly humbled. I felt the oneness with the other participants and the people in the room. It was us. We were us.<sup>14</sup>

The submersion of myself into the group was a significant stage in how the experience developed into a transformative one.

The ongoingness of *foi* permits its efficacy. Stanley Tambiah identifies several formal elements on which effective ritual relies. Among them is “redundancy,” or, repetition used to ensure clear communication of a message.<sup>15</sup> Redundancy is key in *foi*: the repetitious quality of continuous movement, coupled with the duration of the act. Tambiah proposes that redundancy plays a role in “making certain kinds of impacts on the officiants and participants as both senders and receivers of the message.”<sup>16</sup> It intensifies both communication and the participant’s experience. He explains that this intensification produces, as reported by ritual participants, various altered states.<sup>17</sup> *foi* performers report the same,<sup>18</sup> and another excerpt from my reflection exemplifies this:

I’m glad when it’s nighttime again because I know I’m in the last third of these 24 hours, but it’s getting hard in a different way. I have the choice to stop, but I submit again and again to moving continuously, to completing this. I write, “This does itself, I don’t, I can’t. This does itself. I surrender. I ride.” So for the next four hours there’s some dancing, a little singing, a moment of crying, an attempt to rest my hand on a chair I’m hallucinating is in the middle of the room, more *tonglen* meditation with the other participants, and some more moving around.<sup>19</sup>

The duration of the continuous movement intensified the contemplative action for me, and produced a state in which I related differently with the intention of creating solidarity.

### **Experience, Empathy and Political Efficacy**

I’d like to reflect for a moment on my experience, which led me to an idea. In the closing hours of *foi* it became very effortful to stay conscious. To some extent, I was suffering. Though I had a choice and the freedom to stop at any time, I had submitted myself to the commitment, so I had some sense of being subjected to the suffering. It was under these conditions that I began to empathize differently with those displaced by war. Gutierrez intuited that displacement, the constant movement it entails, is a form of imprisonment.<sup>20</sup> My physical experience of *foi* is that it does simulate aspects of prison. I began to relate more experientially with people who are subjected to displacement, torture and confinement. And, recalling our brain’s plasticity in response to experience, as I was being changed by the action, I understood that people are being changed, without their consent, by the various forms of violence and suffering they’re being subjected to. Thus, the *foi* score calls the physical self into action that brings about what I call experiential empathy.

With this idea in mind, I’d like to return to *foi* as protest. Foster observes that individual agency comes about through the central role of the body, but asserts that it’s not through a “heightened sense of physicality,” nor does agency “manifest as the product of a transcendent state.”<sup>21</sup> But based in my experience of *foi*, I contend that heightened physicality and altered states are ways of developing individual agency that is dynamic. As much as I practiced and developed my abilities through performing *foi*, my difficulty and struggle in doing so informed me equally of my vulnerability and my potential to fail. This tension between power and fragility is vital. It gives protesters, gives we humans, the sense that we must engage and take action. I think it is also the source or condition for accessing or producing new information, for gaining understanding. *foi* can’t recreate the conditions and experience of displacement, and experiential empathy isn’t capable of accuracy or exactness in understanding another’s experience. But, as described above, the kind of empathy and sense of solidarity that resulted from my physical experience went beyond what my thoughts could previously conjure. Due to this, I argue that the ways *foi* promotes experiential empathy in the doer may be useful information for designing and enacting protest. Why? Why is it important to engage our empathy?

Hannah Arendt, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and Errol Morris, in his 2008 film, *Standard Operating Procedure*, set forth two examples of, not just what's at stake when we lack empathy or fail to enact it, but of how easily we are at risk of allowing our empathetic capacity to be overpowered by myopic self-interest. Their subjects, respectively, are Adolf Eichmann, who was convicted of and hanged for the deportation many people to concentration and death camps during the Holocaust, and Lynndie England, who is among the group of U.S. Army Military Police convicted of abusing detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Eichmann and England each demonstrate how a self-centered focus affects one's perception and understanding of reality.

Morris frames his interview footage of England in a way that suggests that her romantic ties to Specialist Charles Graner, regarded as the instigator for the abuse scandal, and her inferior position to him, both officially and as a female in the military, were powerful drives for her. Here is an abbreviated explanation she gives about her position:

[. . .] when you join the military, no matter what anybody says, it's a man's world. You have to either equal a man, or be controlled by a man. [. . .] You need to step up, and tell 'em, [. . .] I'm not gonna let you have power over me, you know, control me, because I'm a woman and you're a man. It's not gonna happen. [. . .] But I was blinded by bein' in love with a man.<sup>22</sup>

Her personal experience as a woman in the military, and in love, seemed to be stronger motivators for her behavior than were established legal or moral codes, or even the safety or lives of the prisoners.

Eichmann was also in the throes of a corrupt government-military system and the resulting disturbed system of morality. Arendt determines from her analysis of Eichmann's 1961 trial that his narrow focus on his own professional status in the Nazi administration kept him from being able to understand what his actions meant. She studies the language he uses throughout his trial, and concludes that "his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*."<sup>23</sup> By this she does not mean that he is stupid, but that he does not examine the broader circumstances, nor his operative relation to them. Along with his apparent "inability to think," she specifies, importantly, his inability "to think from the standpoint of somebody else."<sup>24</sup> Like England, he is too driven by his own survival and success to effectually consider, imagine or feel the devastating consequences his behavior has on others.

So, let's delve a bit further into empathy. The ability to think about and reflect on the common ground between oneself and another human is called cognitive empathy by Kathleen Taylor, a neuroscientist who recently published a book on humans' cruel behavior with respect to their brains' functions. She identifies two other modes of empathy: motor empathy, which is "mediated by 'mirror neurons' (brain cells which are activated, for instance, not only when you move your hand but when you watch someone else move theirs)," and "[e]mpathy for emotions and the bodily sensations which ground them."<sup>25</sup> We might understand from this that we can empathize with our intellectual, physical, and emotional selves. We should also understand from Taylor that our capacity for empathy is limited. Throughout her book she articulates the significant role the process of "otherization" plays in cruelty, and her chapter on callousness describes various ways otherization suppresses and decreases empathy.<sup>26</sup> When she explores the question of whether or not we can stop being cruel, she asserts that "empathy has inescapable limits."<sup>27</sup> She reflects, "I can never feel your agony as severely as you do," but she acknowledges, "What I can do is understand that you are suffering and that your suffering is real and meaningful."<sup>28</sup> She seems resigned to humans' limited capacity for empathy, and doesn't say much about a reverse process to otherization. This sets up my closing idea.

I'd like to suggest a process of "similarization," and remind us again about the Blakeslees' and other neuroscientists' findings about plasticity, our brain's ability to change in response to experience. I hear Taylor's recognition that she can understand the reality and meaning of another's suffering as a call to consciously practice and develop our empathetic capacity. She explains that "[a]ll three forms of empathy rely on the [. . .] correlations which ensure that similar events, on the whole, produce similar neural patterns. By imitating another person's 'events' (e.g. their gestures and facial expressions), you make your own patterns more similar to theirs."<sup>29</sup> The parameters of *freedom of information* – continuous movement, restricted sight, limited hearing, food restraint, and 24-hour duration – create in the performer not the same experiences of those in various war and prison conditions, but an experience that makes one's "own patterns more similar to theirs," thus enacting empathy. Due to plasticity, this experience changes the performer's body maps. It makes the performer a site for change.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, "Statement on *freedom of information 2008*" (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Miguel Gutierrez, "Artists Across the Nation Perform *freedom of information 2008*: A Performance/Protest/Ritual in Response to the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq" (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Claudia La Rocco, "Across the Country, Dancing in Solidarity for 24 Grueling Hours." *New York Times*. 30 Dec. 2008: C6.

<sup>5</sup> La Rocco.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Ferrier, Amanda Hamp and Rhea Speights, panel discussion, Movement Intensive for Compositional Improvisation, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA, June 2009. MO, IA, and AL representatives for *foi2008* reported experiences including increased awareness of internal physiological or kinesthetic sensations, new thoughts or thought patterns, hallucinations, and new emotional states.

<sup>7</sup> Sandra Blakeslee and Matthew Blakeslee, *The Body Has a Mind of its Own: How Body Maps in Your Brain Help You Do (Almost) Everything Better* (New York: Random House, 2007) 85-87.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>9</sup> Rebekah J. Kowal, "Staging the Greensboro Sit-ins," *The Drama Review* 48.4 (2004): 135-154.

Susan Leigh Foster, "Choreographies of Protest," *Theatre Journal* 55.3 (2003): 395-412.

<sup>10</sup> Foster 404.

<sup>11</sup> Foster 412.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 1969) 94-105.

<sup>14</sup> Amanda Hamp, "On *freedom of information 2008*" (2009).

<sup>15</sup> Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Culture, Thought, and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1985) 137-138.

<sup>16</sup> Tambiah 145.

<sup>17</sup> Tambiah 145.

<sup>18</sup> Ferrier, Hamp and Speights.

<sup>19</sup> Hamp.

<sup>20</sup> Gutierrez, "Statement."

<sup>21</sup> Foster 412.

<sup>22</sup> Errol Morris, dir. and prod. *Standard Operating Procedure*, prod. Julie Bilson Ahlberg, DVD, Sony Pictures Classics and Participant Productions, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963) 49.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 49.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Taylor, *Cruelty: Human Evil and the Human Brain* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009) 179-180.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 188-193.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 262.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 180.

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## Josephine Baker and the Performance of Diasporic Memory

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the climactic performance of an Afro-Cuban conga in *Princesse Tam Tam*, a popular 1935 French film starring the African-American dancer Josephine Baker. The spectacle of Baker's dancing in this scene represents a peculiar pooling or gathering of black diasporic experiences past and present, and, by extension, calls attention to the traffic in specters and violence that were so integral to the formation of black diasporic cultures. Relying on the filmed dance sequence, Baker's memoir and secondary, critical sources, this paper demonstrates the capacity of dance to destabilize the constructions of historical time.*

My paper today is a part of my larger dissertation project, which is entitled *Rituals of Return: Remembrance and the Sacred in African American Women's Twentieth Century Dance, Performance, Literature*. In it, I wrestle with understanding memory and remembering as very sacred and very hard work in black women's cultural production. This paper is an excerpt from a chapter on the African-American performer Josephine Baker, in which I use one of her French films to identify and theorize the lurking presence of violence as a pivotal player in black women's cultural production, and also in our constructions of memory, history and diaspora. (It is still in its formative stages, so I do thank you for your patience and for your help in thinking through these ideas.)

I would like to begin with a quote that both inspires and challenges me as I work on this chapter. It comes from an essay by dance critic Andre Lepecki, found in his book *Exhausting Dance*. In his own inquiry about the linkages between the work of contemporary performer Vera Montera and Josephine Baker, he asks: "*Where does history rest, if at all? And how is history reawakened and put into motion? How is it that it finds its grounding, its pacing, its anatomy?*"<sup>1</sup>

This quote has been important as I work with Josephine Baker's 1935 French film, entitled *Princess Tam Tam*. She is cast as the North African shepherdess Aouina who becomes the toast of Paris as the pretend Indian Princess Tam Tam. The film tells the story of Aouina's interactions with a French writer, Max, who has traveled to "Africa," laden with the hope that the simple "African" life will allay his insistent writer's block, and offer relief from his troubled marriage. Aouina's rambunctious, cheery personality, not to mention her doe-eyed affection, offers Max just enough female presence to fill the void left by his estranged wife. Caught between her wanting for this sophisticated Frenchman, and the Frenchman's desire to produce the next best seller, Aouina finds herself in a "civilizing experiment," amid a Pygmalion-like process in which she is transformed from a street-savvy urchin into a chic, civilized young woman. Several months later, Max whisks a newly civilized Aouina to Paris, where, to his obvious delight, and according to his plan to make his wife jealous, Aouina—or, rather, Princess

Tam Tam—quickly becomes the sweetheart of Parisian high society. Max’s estranged wife Lucie learns of the farce and plans a party where she will expose Princess Tam Tam for the savage that she is.

This string of events climaxes in—of all things—a conga performance, in which Baker’s character dances to the onlooker’s delight, wrecklessly and sensually undoing all of Max’s attempts at civilization. The rigid, contained elegance of lamé, high heels and jewelry that Princess Tam Tam arrives in are impulsively thrown off and, in response to the pounding rhythms, she, as Robert Farris Thompson would say, “gets down,” and gives Parisian high society a performance that they will never forget.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars of various disciplines and interdisciplines over the past two decades have offered multiple readings of this scene, often calling attention to the way her dancing body becomes the place where the preoccupations of colonialism, modernism, capitalism, racial and gender agency collide. But as scholars like Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, Walter Kalaidjian, Margo Jefferson, and others have argued elsewhere, Baker’s dance performances take on new and special meanings if we realign her with Africanist dance traditions.<sup>3</sup> (I’m borrowing “Africanist” here from dance critic and historian Brenda Dixon Gottschild, which she uses to mean African-derived or diasporic dance.)<sup>4</sup> These critics charge us to read Ms. Baker’s work through the lens of diaspora, rather than colonialism—and with a sensitivity to and compassion for the trauma, dislocation, loss and survival that her diasporic sampling communicates. Baker’s clever melding of Africanist dance vernaculars in this conga scene presents such an opportunity to take on this charge. It urges us to summon the ghostly—or what I’m thinking presently as the diasporic impulse, or the peculiar circulation and pooling of black cultures, histories, bodies, and stories that lurk beneath the spectacle of her dancing body.

Ms. Baker herself offers comment on this very idea in her memoir *Josephine*. She writes:

One of the things I particularly enjoyed about filming Princess Tam Tam was the chance to introduce the conga to France. Not that the conga had anything to do with Tunisia [which is where they filmed the movie]; it was a dance enjoyed by the slaves after their work was done. We were all convinced that it would be the rage in Paris that winter. What better way to keep warm?<sup>5</sup>

Ms. Baker signals toward the power and the force with which black cultures circulated the globe during this period. This could, of course, be attributable—at least in part—to the modern, early 20th century advances in travel, transportation, and the changing nature of the entertainment industry. It could be equally attributable to the rise of modernist-primitivist art in France, and the resulting demand for all things “primitive.” The reason why seems less important here than the fact that she situates the conga within a global scope. Although Ms. Baker does not approximate the conga with a particular country or community, her use of the word “slaves” becomes the shorthand for the innumerable black people who came to be where they were outside of Africa by means of the violence of severance from a homeland, the violent rite of the Middle Passage, and the violence of enslavement in the New World.

Reading Baker’s comments with the same eye as I read her dance performance, it is not a far stretch to think that some of her understanding of the roots, evolution and

circulation of the conga seeps into her performance in Princess Tam Tam. The irony that Baker would choose to do this dance outside the context of its creation—and that she wanted to be the first to do so—leaves readers to wonder if there might be just a hint of sarcasm if not disgust that this dance would be all the rage in Paris that winter.<sup>6</sup>

Regardless of how we choose to read her final statement, her explanation that the conga was a dance enjoyed by the slaves after their work was done is one that I want to return to, for it offers a comment on the role and function and possibilities of diasporic dance. She clearly recognized the conga as an integral part of enslaved life, but she also recognized its redeeming qualities, or its capacity to offer something of use—comfort, community, a measure of rootedness—after a day of toil and forced labor. She suggests that dance brings with it a measure of reflection, and serves as a means of untangling the events of our lives, or simply of making sense of or giving meaning to them. Dance has the power of narrative, and engages with the complexities of meaning itself.

Ms. Baker encourages us, then, to—in the words of Margo Jefferson—“watch and listen for all the ways she [used] her body, voice, imagination; history, geography, [and] culture to speak.” And, as we return to the clip of her conga performance, we find that her dancing—like history, like diaspora, like performance—becomes a locus of meaning-making.

It “becomes ‘a mobile army of metaphors’ calling up Africa, the Caribbean, America, and Europe.”<sup>7</sup> It becomes, as Joseph Roach purports about dance generally, a way of thinking through the “otherwise unthinkable,” perhaps much like the slaves she mentioned who danced the conga after a day of work.<sup>8</sup> And, it becomes, something that Diana Taylor refers to as an “act of transfer,” a transmission of diasporic knowledge, memory and identity.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, her conga performance elucidates diaspora as a moving, evolving condition.<sup>10</sup> Dance and diaspora, then, stand in a tenuous though mutually informative relationship. Each works toward and knows itself through the other, a knowing that is renewed, reawakened in each repetition. Given the prevalence of violence in the construction of diaspora, each iteration or repeated act returns the dancer to the axis of violence. It is by means of this repetitive return to a prior, originary, always already state of woundedness that we can read the conga sequence as a practice and ongoing negotiation of disappearance and remains—that which refuses expression and that which stubbornly stays.<sup>11</sup>

*This* is the obscenity dance; it is also its redemption. It is in this performative state of contestation and contemplation that the torment and violation that produce diaspora become clear, as well as the anxieties and worries that are produced by it. Here, amid the throes of the conga, the body becomes the space of refuge, and the place of battle. The dancer becomes the warrior, and her dance becomes the terms of engagement.

There is weaponry in the dance. For it is in this contested kinesthetic space of excess and disappearance that Ms. Baker dramatizes or choreographs a story that is, as author Toni Morrison might say, too terrible to pass on. Recall how Max and his sidekick turn in shame, hide their faces, certainly from Tam Tam’s wreckless antics, but perhaps, from the history that is too terrible to behold, too awful and heavy to pass on. The various chapters of the story—from forceful capture and the Middle Passage, through the forced labor in the New World—pool, gather, and create tension in Ms. Baker’s conga performance. Whereas a story is in its telling, dance—as Ms. Baker’s comments have

taught us already—is the vocabulary, the harmonizing force that threads these disparate stories, histories together, across time and space. Dance, then, allows us into the uncanny, yet oddly cohesive, clamor of diaspora. Dance sheds light onto the unspeakable secrets of diaspora, and also onto its explicatory promise and power.

Ms. Baker’s dancing body was the corporeal, fleshy, sensing and sensual site upon which and through which diasporic memory was vortexed, conjured. It is through the medium of dance, then, that the intensity and the heavy, saturating quality of history—and the specific history of diasporic memory—is passed on, awakened, that it finds its grounding, its pacing, its anatomy.

Coypright 2010, Tayana L. Hardin

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Andre Lepecki, “The Melancholic Dance of the Postcolonial Spectral: Vera Mantero Summoning Josephine Baker” in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York: Routledge, 2006, p.104.

<sup>2</sup> Conga Scene from Josephine Baker’s *Princess Tam Tam* may be found online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ag-yGpGpkOI>

<sup>3</sup> See Walter Kalaidjian. “Josephine Baker, Performance, and the Traumatic Real.” I am inspired here by Kalaidjian’s observation on the uniquely suited quality of dance to reach back and connect with the past in ways that verbal language cannot. In *S&F Online*, no. 6.1-2 (Fall 2007-Spring 2008), <http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/index.htm> Retrieved on 23 October 2008.

See also Mae Gwendolyn Henderson. “Colonial, Postcolonial, and Diasporic Readings of Josephine Baker as Dancer and Performance Artist.” *S&F Online*, no. 6.1-2 (Fall 2007-Spring 2008), [http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print\\_henderson.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print_henderson.htm) Retrieved on 23 October 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the Africanist aesthetic in American dance and performance, see Brenda Dixon Gottschild. *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts*. Wesport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996.

<sup>5</sup> From Josephine Baker and Jo Bouillon. *Josephine*. New York: Paragon House, 1988, p. 84. Although Baker does not approximate the conga with any particular country, my own research has shown that the composer of the conga song in the clip (“Ahe, La Conga!”) was actually written by Eliseo Grenet, an exiled Cuban musician who, after leaving Cuba, worked in the entertainment industry in Spain and later in Paris. Interestingly we wouldn’t necessarily know this, for Eliseo’s name was listed incorrectly on the film credit. Ms. Baker does not suggest in her memoir that she ever met Eliseo, or that they discussed the conga. In fact, aside from this quote, there is relatively little about her work in *Princess Tam Tam*.

<sup>6</sup> Baker also shares the following in her memoir: “Again and again we rehearsed a flamboyant number about the French colonies, which included Algerian drums, Indian bells, tom-toms from Madagascar, coconuts from the Congo, cha-chas from Guadeloupe, a number laid in Martinique

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during which I distributed sugar cane to the audience, Indochinese gongs, Arab dances, camels and finally my appearance as the Empress of Jazz” (Baker and Bouillon, 84).

<sup>7</sup> See Margo Jefferson. “Josephine Baker: An Intelligent Body, An Erotic Soul, A Kinetic Mind.” *The Scholar and Feminist Online*, 6.1-6.2 (Fall 2007-Spring 2008). [http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print\\_kalaidjian.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/baker/print_kalaidjian.htm) Retrieved online on 23 October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See Joseph Roach. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. See p. 27

<sup>9</sup> See Diana Taylor. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> I take inspiration here from Jennifer Rahim, who theorizes culture as “an embodied phenomenon. This implies that one's cultural location is not fixed to any one geographical space. Cultures, in other words, are not inherently provincial by nature. They move and evolve with the bodies that create and live them.” See Jennifer Rahim. “(Not) Knowing the Difference: Calypso Overseas and the Sound of Belonging in Selected Narratives of Migration,” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* Vol. 3, No. 2 (Fall 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Schneider’s article “Archives: Performance Remains” has been useful in thinking more about performance as both a condition of surplus and deficit, of disappearance and the remaining. See *Performance Research*, 6.1, 2001.

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## Forget sexuality – Desire differently!

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**Abstract:**

*In her piece To come from 2005 Danish choreographer Mette Ingvartsen rises the question how bodies might connect differently and find new territories for desire in a world oversaturated by the pleasure of sexuality which is exhibited in various media. In his heavy polemic against Michel Foucault's "The Will to Knowledge" Jean Baudrillard had asserted in 1976: "And what if sex itself is no longer sex?" Nevertheless there is something else than pleasure in the Foucaultian sense: How can bodies get into the position to invent new desires? What kinds of affects might connect bodies differently?*

*I know that already. I've seen that already. That already has been done. Maybe I haven't experienced it myself, but I heard reports on it, I read articles about it, it already has been communicated. This is not something new, this is just a remake.* Those statements seem to fit not only to discussions being led at conferences like the one we are participating in now or to the dance world in general, they can even be considered symptoms of an oversaturated time in general and societies which nevertheless still use the slogan *Just do it!* as their main motto. I do not know whether therefore we shall speak of a *Society of Spectacle* or if Guy Debord's observations may rather not fit anymore to what we are in right now. In regard to what has been happening in many fields of dance, especially since the booming 1980ies, Susan Foster suggests the term "hired body"<sup>1</sup> to describe a tendency which leads to an increasing claim for people working here to offer flexibility and a plurality of styles they should be able to incorporate, switching between and mixing them without too much disfigurement. If we take the field of sexuality as a classic and often given example of oversaturation, the observations we make here can easily be translated into symptoms we find in vast amounts of the dominating dance world as well: In the public sphere and through diverse media sexuality has been rendered into an arena where, not only in regard to stereotypes of *gender*, rather prepared and rehashed images of the body are dealt with than bodily attempts may unfold in an unrestricted way. While the former are dealing with role models, the latter are never determined, always on the way, not framed but framing themselves unpredictable connections between bodies. If we look at the way how a commonplace sexuality more and more explicitly is part of the bodily displays and decorums smiling at us from placards, seducing us in quizz shows, and cultivating our labor, we soon will recognize that the revolutions of our time will not be about an unleashing of sexuality again but rather about ways to think and live it differently. Sexuality has become part of power, not its potential counterpart. The same goes, I would like to suggest, for the explosion and wild mixture of dance styles: The "hired body" is a commodity of, not an instrument for resistance toward what Bojana Cvejic calls *GWDD – Global World-Wide Dance Diversity*<sup>2</sup>. As Michel Foucault proclaimed in his *The Will to Knowledge* from 1976, there are less restraints but rather obligations today to express oneself freely. Jean Baudrillard already in the same year of

the publication of Foucault's book writes an answer entitled *Forget Foucault*. He accuses his colleague to be too late with his analysis and suggests to rather think about an universal and immediate realization of desire as it detaches power *and* sexuality in his eyes to become the new paradigm of the post-68 era:

“Ours is a culture of premature ejaculation. More and more, all seduction, all manner of seduction (which is itself a highly *ritualized* process), disappears behind the *naturalized* sexual imperative calling for the immediate realization of a desire. Our center of gravity has indeed shifted toward an unconscious and libidinal economy which only leaves room for the total naturalization of a desire bound either to fateful drives or to pure and simple mechanical operation, but above all to the imaginary order of repression and liberation.”<sup>3</sup>

Something that already has been done cannot come to something else, it cannot become anymore. Something that has taken place already will not produce something new. Is Baudrillard therefore right and the universal seduction of “immediate realization” the only thing remaining? I would say not necessarily, especially if we think about certain strategies of choreography to escape the so-called “hired bodies” and still invent new ones, new and different desires, and to separate sexuality from power: In her piece *To come* from 2005 Danish choreographer Mette Ingvarsten rises the question how bodies might connect differently and find new territories for desire in a world oversaturated by the banality of sexuality exhibited in different media, an environment where sexuality is everywhere and nowhere at the same time somehow. Is a spectacular sexuality – that is discussed and made explicit spectacularly as the “inner truth” (Foucault) of bodies - in danger to disappear? Baudrillard in his response to Foucault asserted in 1976: “And what if sex itself is no longer sex? We are no doubt witnessing, with sexual liberation, pornography, etc., the agony of sexual reason. And Foucault will only have given us the key to it when it no longer means anything.”<sup>4</sup> Ingvarsten's piece relates to this statement not in an affirmative way, but rather, as I want to show now, tries to find ways out of a situation where only obviously “pleasure is a must”, as we can read on her homepage<sup>5</sup>.

The piece consists of three different and (material-wise) various sequences: One dealing with one-dimensional bodily connections and sexual positions, where the bodies are wrapped up in bluish costumes rendering their contours into opaque surfaces, the second one with a complex score of rhythmical moaning and groaning, a chorus of pleasure and enjoyment, and the third one with a typical ballroom dance which sounds like a swing-like *Jitterbug* and which may remind us on Angelo Badalamenti's soundtrack for David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive*. Although the three sequences are very diverse in regard to the materials they are building upon, they have one topic in common, mainly the question about what happens between bodies beyond their sexual fulfillment, what lies beyond the displays and decorums their sexual expressions consist of, and what exceeds any kind of decorum and display.

Right in the first scene we see five faceless bodies entirely covered by their costumes. Although we still recognize their shapes, we do not know for sure to which gender they belong. Especially since their faces do not have significant features such as eyes or mouths and are rendered into smooth, impenetrable planes, it is very difficult to suppose where their desires are aiming at and from where they draw their pleasure, albeit for the



coming half an hour they will enter into sexually explicit images, connoting a series of poses and positions which connect them in the frame of *tableaux vivants* reminding us on group sex and polygamic enjoyment. Interestingly enough there is no image in which we are able to identify with anyone specifically, neither with the passive, nor with the active, neither with the strong, nor with the weak, neither with the above, nor with the below, neither with the dominant, nor with the dominated, neither with the satisfied, nor with the satisfying. We are rather concentrated on the assemblages en bloc, observing how the way an individual body is relating to another one influences the whole group of bodies, restricts and affects further possibilities and every body's potential to change place and move into another position.

Quite soon a very comical quality of the whole concinnity becomes more and more central: The bodies, although they themselves seem to enjoy what they are doing, seem stuck. They are stuck not only in their single positions, but also the relations between them are stuck. This impression is strongly supported by the fact that none of them has any feature distinguishing a particular style. From the perspective of us as the spectators, there are no transitions our desire might pass through, no faces we could find ourselves in, there is just rebounds from unreadable bodily tops which, notwithstanding, are penetrating each other without end; sometimes as one group, sometimes observing each other as well, sometimes in smaller groups or couples, next to each other or even adjacent. One question gets more and more urgent throughout the first part of the piece: How can opaque objects connect? Do they connect at all? Or is there something else which, only inbetween them, although enjoyed by nobody, exceeds every given connection, which exceeds their pleasure and keeps a potential in itself, a potential which cannot be rendered into images, positions, and amounts of the bodily whole which is constituted by what everybody participates in: A joyful masturbation of surfaces.

The second part of *To come* therefore turns affairs upside down. After a swing music has been played-back as a transition and the five performers changed clothes – they are now dressed up in street wear and are identifiable as individuals for the first time – they come together as one chorus, one of them even holding a music book. Everybody has plugged in in-ear headphones and together they start a rhythmic song consisting of sensual groaning and moaning. Each single groaning and each moaning is expressed synchronously with the others, so that it seems the five experience exactly the same journey through a landscape of pleasure. It seems even that, although their libidinous clamor sounds quite believable, what they express is pre-recorded and just played-back, as if they would copy what they hear through their headphones and what is written down in the music book, too. Although their groaning and moaning is now allocatable to individual and clearly gendered bodies, it is an a-personal and pre-individual desire that seems to express through them and that is captured in the assemblage they are building now. As the visual configurations of the bodies in the first part, now also the acoustic image of them is first of all a display and a decorum of a desire that in contrast is much more difficult to grasp and point at than what we can see and hear in front of us, than what we can more or less find ourselves in and identify with. There seems to come something else, beyond the given comings.

The infinitive *To come* in this context can be understood by various means: Besides its rather orgasmic connotation “to come“ also points at a process that has not yet reached its fulfillment or that can never be accomplished even. This might mean that the coming

is an always deferred moment of time, a future to come, calling upon us from a moment which has not yet taken place. It also might mean that there is something lacking in the very present, that the presence of what we experience still has to come *now*; or “to come“ just frames a full present which is always on its way toward another one - without end. All these definitions have one thing in common with the initially mentioned understanding in regard to orgasmic connotations, all of them consider the infinitive to be finite somewhere somehow, be it in a lost past, a full present, or a future that has not yet started. All of them refer to a very strong imaginary at the heart of how we still too often observe dance as well, as the coming of a displayed moment in time, as the coming of the all-embracing and uniting pose within a continuous movement of loose and disparate instants.

Nevertheless “to come“ also refers to a very different question, one asking for what is done by it and one that aims at the productivity of coming and becoming rather than what is produced by them. What does that have to do with topics such as dance, spectacle, and spectatorship? Recently Carrie Lambert-Beatty has reminded us on an important moment within a certain imaginary of choreography structuring dance and the way we observe it at its very center: In her book *Being watched: Yvonne Rainer and the 1960ies* she calls *photographic pleasure* those patterns of perception, apparatuses, and medial environments which try to frame movement in general and the moving body in particular. Asking in how far dance is photographic, Lambert-Beatty concludes that there is a certain pleasure that is rather interested in the body as it shows when its movements are undone, when it is frozen “in attractive or sexually solicitous poses. Bodies act like images“<sup>6</sup>, paradoxically as being pinned up and as an interruption of their coming. This tendency not only has been resulting in a heavy tradition of the dance field consisting of huge amounts of paintings, photographs, and other media aiming at the fulfilled coming, but also has been structuring a certain pleasure in the body as display and decorum, a pleasure considering the body rather as an image than a productive agent of becoming in itself - in many different respects. The whole understanding of traditional dance phrases builds upon the same *motif* as well since still in many choreographic practices a block of movement is split into three phases: A maximal output or ‘attack‘ at the beginning, a recovery at the end, and – most importantly – a sustained moment of arrested energy in the middle, as Lambert-Beatty paraphrases from Yvonne Rainer’s *A Quasi Survey of some ‘Minimalist‘ Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A*<sup>7</sup>. From the perspective of the spectator this motif, which is quite a sexual one, expresses the wish to freeze and photograph a movement which itself paradoxically exceeds its own coming all the time. Ingvarsen’s piece *To come* from 2005 goes exactly into the opposite direction, although right in the first sequence of her piece she plays with these stereotypes of the relation between pleasure, gaze, and sexual penetration.

Quite contrary to what has happened until now the third and last part of the piece looks like this: Until now all the bodies have looked quite lonesome, although they virtuously have been repeating their individual pleasures, there was no real collective desire inbetween them able to affect them differently. Now and for almost 20 minutes a wild and excessive *Jitterbug* is played and everybody dances around seemingly in a ballroom of the 1950ies. Sometimes it looks as if the five performers would execute their movements uniformly, as they did before in regard to the sexual positions and the

libidinous chorus, but the image is deceptive. Indeed most of the time the connection between the bodies is an open one and the spectators, at least after a few minutes of music, can feel their own desire to move and spend their energy as well. Everybody is continuously changing direction, changing partner, changing between step patterns, circulations, and joyful throws of the arms. Something is coming again, although it is much more difficult than before to grasp what it is since the coming seems to point at a desire of the coming itself which is aimed nowhere specifically and which does not enable us to draw pleasure from somewhere concretely or somebody in particular. It therefore seems that this kind of desire is not just the expression of a pre-existing sexuality entering the dance floor, but rather a stepping away from sexuality into not yet defined territories, unknown territories. The whole third part of the piece, in contrast to the other ones, is not aimed at a frontal view, it seems that it does not include a spectator's perspective in that sense. As well there are no highlighted moments or images, the music as well as the excessive swing of the performers goes on without too special accents. Maybe because of this we as the spectators soon start to also feel the desire to join them and start moving, too, because there is an affect now circulating between everybody and coming to a halt nowhere, an undefined, excessive affect acting beyond every given relation of bodies it actualizes.

Can't it therefore, to come back to Baudrillard's statement from 1976, also be a chance rather than a problem at the end that "sex is no longer sex"? How might affect be a concept connecting bodies differently? We can recognize in the 20 minutes of swing that pleasure is a must only very apparently in our times. There still is something else. Gilles Deleuze in a short essay entitled *Pleasure and Desire* which was published 1994 in *magazin littéraire* and dedicated to his old friend Michel Foucault tries to reflect back on two terms both of them had been understanding in different ways. While for Foucault there are only formations of power and knowledge which – on their edges – allow pleasure to appear simultaneously as affirmation of and resistance against power, for Deleuze the term desire is much more important since power can only be an effect, not the cause of desire which for him is never related to subjects but to affective states within collectives and between subjects. Deleuze writes in regard to some misunderstandings between the two:

"I cannot give any positive value to pleasure, because pleasure seems to me to interrupt the immanent process of desire; pleasure seems to me to be on the side of strata and organisation; and it is in the same movement that desire is presented as internally submitted to law and externally interrupted by pleasures; in the two cases, there is negation of a field of immanence proper to desire."<sup>8</sup>

For Deleuze the term desire comes before the terms pleasure and sexuality since he considers a deterritorializing potential inherent in desire, whilst pleasure and sexuality for him are always already a restriction and assessment of desire's potential. In Deleuze desire always only comes and becomes, whilst pleasure comes to a point, aims at a quiescence, and fixes and photographs desire to given and contoured objects. Pleasure is "the only means for a person or a subject to 'find themselves again'",<sup>9</sup> although desire itself rather corresponds to assemblages of bodies which always flee and produce lines of flight in themselves. Therefore Deleuze asks:

“Which permits me to respond to the question which is necessary for me, not necessary for Michel: how can power be desired? The first difference would thus be that, for me, power is an affection of desire (having said that desire is never "natural reality"). All of this is very approximate: the relations being more complicated between the two movements of deterritorialisation and re-territorialisation than I have put it here. But it is in this sense that desire seems to me to be primary, and to be the element of a micro-analysis.”<sup>10</sup>

In regard to what Lambert-Beautty calls the *photographic pleasure* in dance we might say that through poses and the spectacle of an available and allocatable body, the body as sexual display, bodily potentials and the desire to become something else and to connect differently are captured and rendered into pleasure or (in regard to the spectator) into the consumption of bodily images rather than bodily becomings. Exactly with this problem, I would like to suggest, Mette Ingvartse’s *To come* is playing. *I know that already. I’ve seen that already. That already has been done. Maybe I haven’t experienced it myself, but I heard reports on it, I read articles about it, it already has been communicated. This is not something new, this is just a remake.* We might say that about every pleasure we can imagine, also about every photographic moment in dance and all the different poses surrounding us and the images about which we are discussing, but desire is something entirely different. In *The Logic of Sense* Deleuze writes:

“There is nothing the sense of which is not *also* sexual, in accordance with the law of the double surface. But it is still necessary to await this result which never ends, this other surface, for sexuality to be made the concomitant, and the co-sense of sense, so that one might say ‘everywhere’, ‘for all times’, and ‘eternal truth’.”<sup>11</sup>

So sexuality might be there already, but desiring bodies desire something which is not there yet, they desire their coming as a becoming. Desire is a potential much bigger than every intimate contact with another body or every sexual act we are able to imagine and consume as a photograph. Desire takes place inbetween and produces the difference between bodies, a difference also choreography needs to be able to continue nowadays, in the age of displays and decorums. While we can take pleasure out of a display and a decorum, we cannot enjoy desire. We have to do it. Again and again.

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- 1 Susan Foster, *Dancing Bodies*, in: Jonathan Crary (Ed.), „Incorporations“, NY: Zone Books, 1992.
- 2 Bojana Cvèjic, *Theory, Police, Disagreement*, in: Ulrike Melzig, Mårten Spångberg, Nina Thielicke (Ed.), REVERSE ENGINEERING EDUCATION, Berlin: b\_books, 2007, p. 44.
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, *Forget Foucault*, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 39.
- 4 Dito, p. 34.
- 5 <http://www.aisikl.net/mette/html/tc.html> – Access: 6-28-2010.
- 6 Carrie Lambert-Beatty, *Being watched – Yvonne Rainer and the 1960ies*, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008, p. 155.
- 7 Dito, p. 133.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze, *Pleasure and Desire*, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/11320926/Deleuze-Desire-and-Pleasure>, Access: 6-29-2010.
- 9 Dito.
- 10 Dito.
- 11 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, London: The Athlone Press, 1990, p. 233.



## Looking for the Outsider: The *Olympic Youth Festspiel* (1936)

*Carole Kew*

### *Abstract*

*The focus in this presentation is on showing how the Olympische Jugend (Olympic Youth) Festspiel, staged as part of the 1936 Olympic Games, suppressed the individuality of the dancer. By consciously remembering what has been excluded from this spectacle, other ways of seeing come into focus.*

### **Introduction**

The full title of my presentation in ‘Looking for the Outsider: The *Olympic Youth Festspiel* (1936) as a Spectacle of Suppression’.

The *Olympic Youth Festspiel* was staged as part of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, commonly known as the ‘Nazi Olympics’. My presentation discusses how the spectacle suppressed the individuality of the dancer and enacted instead a geometric design in which soloists felt annihilated or superfluous. The conquering of the geographical space of the Olympic arena by the mass becomes a metaphor for the conquering of the ideological space for National Socialism. By consciously remembering who and what has been excluded from this spectacle, other ways of seeing come into focus.

For ease of presentation I’ve divided the paper into two parts: the insider and the outsider.

### **First Section: The Insider**

Picture this. 10,000 participants dancing in an Olympic stadium watched by 100,000 spectators seated in 71 tiers rising high above the arena below. No giant screens, of course, to highlight particular movements. Just rows and circles of dancers on an oval expanse of green grass, framed by an asphalt running track. For Mary Wigman, one of several choreographers engaged to create this spectacle, the setting for the *Festspiel* resembled a landscape seen from above, the performance arena appearing to her like a natural phenomenon, ‘like an island or a crater lake’, she wrote.<sup>1</sup> Seated in the stadium, the audience would have a ‘bird’s eye view’ of the performance, as the *Festspiel*’s director Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard realised.<sup>2</sup> His choreographic principles for the *Festspiel* concerned the visual design of this space: controlling how it was used through light and through the use of simple geometric forms such as circles and ovals mixed with squares and diagonals. To keep the configuration intact, simple, clear steps and arm movements would be required so that the audience could see the whole form, with spacing between performers created to avoid what he viewed as an ‘unsightly bundle’.<sup>3</sup>

How can a soloist perform in a spectacle conceived on such a scale? Yet this is what three famous dancers, Mary Wigman, Harald Kreutzberg and Gret Palucca, attempted in

this *Festspiel*. As established stars of *Ausdruckstanz*, their presence was designed to add kudos to the performance. In reminiscing on their experiences, all three recounted problems with the spatial dimensions of the site. Palucca expresses her difficulty:

And above everything lay the space, pouring out in all directions. At this moment I realised that I could only create expressive dance in the broadest sense with big movements, the simplest of expressive gestures and pathways in space that could be seen from a distance. [...] But what was left that could be called dance movement?<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Mary Wigman talked of her ‘intense grappling [...] to conquer the space for dance’ and concluded that ‘a chorus of people moving together to the same theme is the only way in which dance can be performed in this expanse’.<sup>5</sup>

In this stadium, soloists struggled to overcome the space instead of working with it. As Palucca and Wigman realised, the individual dancer became subject to the requirements of a visual design, deployed in a spectacle that resembled what the Weimar cultural commentator Siegfried Kracauer termed in his prescient essay from nine years earlier a ‘mass ornament’.<sup>6</sup> Instead of the autonomous expression of the individual the ornament relies on geometric formations made up of ‘lines and circles’, a compositional framing that reduces performers to co-ordinated parts of a mass.<sup>7</sup> The culminating result of this alienation from the human element is, as Kracauer observes, that the individual as an ‘organic being has disappeared from these ornaments.’<sup>8</sup> This contravened the overarching idea of *Ausdruckstanz* which was predicated on the dancer’s capacity to express their own unique inner world rather than simply to perform an action dictated by the spatial configuration of a design. In an echo of Mary Wigman, Kracauer reflects how: ‘The ornament resembles aerial photographs of landscapes and cities in that it does not emerge out of the interior of the given conditions, but rather appears above them’.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, the choreography of *Olympic Youth* was an imposition both on the space and on the subjective bodily expression of its temporary inhabitants.

Germany had been awarded the Olympic Games in 1932 whilst still a democracy. The National Socialist state which came to power in 1933 took the opportunity to present itself to other nations as a modern, efficient, and welcoming power. The Games were a public relations exercise, a media event designed as a showcase for the regime with *Olympic Youth* planned as a prestigious entertainment for the opening night. It was a state-of-the-art project, the opening performance broadcast on radio with records produced of the music.<sup>10</sup> An extensive programme was published. This contained contributions from the key players together with a copy of the text that accompanied the actual performance. This text was a prime constituent in conveying the underlying meaning of the spectacle.<sup>11</sup>

The choreographic outline of *Olympic Youth* has been analysed by several commentators, in a dance context most prominently by Susan Manning, Hedwig Müller and Patricia Stöckemann.<sup>12</sup> Its outline can be simply told. Against the flickering backdrop of the Olympic flame, five tableaux unfold over the 90 minutes of the twilight performance. First scene: boys and girls flood the arena, the boys forming five interlocking Olympic rings and the girls an encircling surround. The spoken text stresses the innocence of children: ‘As yet they know nothing of the ruling of fate and the



seriousness of life'. The ominous words set the tone for the paradoxical duality evident throughout the whole event: an apparently joyous celebration of life and friendship between nations is juxtaposed with a macabre focus on the inevitability and desirability of death through combat. Second scene: A searchlight picks out 2,300 adolescent girls who sit in wide circles, several rows deep. A central core space is left open for the soloist, Gret Palucca, to emerge from the mass. She dances alone for two minutes, to the music of a waltz, a speck flickering against the seated throng. The scene ends with a display of rhythmic gymnastics. Third scene: The girls encircle 2,300 adolescent boys who set up camp in the centre of the stadium. Tents appear, fires are lit, folksongs sung, national flags waved, whilst the speaker stresses that these games, whilst play, are a training ground for 'manly will and deeds'. Fourth scene: A spoken text introduces a weapon dance for 60 men, according to Carl Diem, the producer of the *Festspiel*, the words 'calling to mind the spiritual significance of all games, the supreme sacrifice for one's native land'.<sup>13</sup> Two soloists, Harald Kreutzberg and Werner Stammer, step out from the two groups of dancers and engage in a sword fight. Both die. The speaker intones a eulogy to games as a prelude to sacrificial death for the nation. The audience is then asked to reflect on those who have given their lives for this cause. As the dead warriors are carried out Mary Wigman leads 80 women in a lament for the dead. Moving in long rows and circles they end lying on the ground.<sup>14</sup> Fifth scene: The sound of Beethoven's 9th Symphony is the signal for grief to be replaced by the *Ode to Joy*. As all 10,000 participants stream into the stadium in a climactic euphoria, their arms spread wide in a literal interpretation of Schiller's text 'Embrace, you millions', the spectacle ends with searchlights beamed across the stadium, challenging spectators to remain apart from this experience of mass cultic celebration, an aspect reinforced by the programme's request that spectators only leave their seats after the ringing of the Olympic Bell.

*Olympic Youth* propagated an ambiguous message. On the surface it celebrated a friendly Olympic rivalry amongst nations yet the underlying theme encoded in the text celebrated the sacrificial death of the individual on behalf of the nation-state.<sup>15</sup> This ulterior intention was reinforced by the architectural design of the Olympic complex. The Olympic Bell that sounded at the end of the performance was housed in a tower at the far end of an open space beyond the stadium. Spectators could look westwards out of the arena across to the Bell Tower. Directly below this was the Langemarck Hall, the site of a memorial to the young men slain in an incident from the First World War, an event that National Socialist ideology elevated into a symbol of sacrificial death.<sup>16</sup> A journalist from *The Manchester Guardian* reporting from Berlin in June 1936 endorses how 'not even the Olympic Games, which are the pivot of all activity, can disturb the pre-occupation with the last war or the next war [...]'.<sup>17</sup>

In this spectacle expressive movement, autonomously created from within, is subservient to the political movement, in other words, to the performance of an ideological construct, a framing that necessarily places limits on the freedom of individual expression. This suppression indicated a reversal of the ideological foundations of *Ausdruckstanz* whose tenets have been crystallised by Hedwig Müller:

'Individuality' had been the slogan of the 1920's, with choreographers creating dances based on their subjective emotional experiences and on philosophical,

aesthetic or political questions. [...] The artistic power of *Ausdruckstanz* stemmed from the freedom of the individual and the diversity of its personalities.<sup>18</sup>

In *Olympic Youth* conformity replaced diversity. The individual functioned as part of a whole, their body dedicated to the embodiment of an ideology. Autonomous expression was subject to the communal expression of the nation-state, a tendency again anticipated by Kracauer: ‘Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure’.<sup>19</sup> Following his appearance in *Olympic Youth* Harald Kreutzberg realised that a recital dancer like himself was effectively ‘lost’ within a mass choreography.<sup>20</sup> When asked to take part in another spectacle the following year, he declined. Kreutzberg’s response underlines how *Olympic Youth* became a dynamic transmitter of mass motion and mass emotion rather than the expression of an individual. His disclosure asserts how the space was commandeered and occupied by the ideology of the mass. Emotion was constituted not by compassion for the individual dancer as a sentient human being but through an objectification of the body as a mass ornament. Any empathic connection is depleted or suppressed. The aerial perspective of *Olympic Youth* offered spectators a kaleidoscopic pattern that annihilated empathy and compassion for one another along with the autonomy of the individual. Like pixellated figures on a display-screen far below, the images of Kreutzberg, Palucca, and Wigman were remote animations, de-humanised, almost irritants that simply dramatised the overall grand design.

By actively remembering who and what has been excluded from *Olympic Youth*, other ways of seeing come into focus.

## Second Section: The Outsider

The Olympic Games were conceived as a ‘total work of art’ (*Gesamtkunstwerk Olympia Berlin*) with cultural events programmed as an integral part of the Olympic schedule. These took place not just over the two weeks of the Games but also in pre-Olympic activities. The whole nation was encouraged to take part. Individuals living far from Berlin were actively involved through radio broadcasts, cinema newsreels, exhibitions and other events.<sup>21</sup>

All these activities were a gloss that cloaked or masked an even vaster spectacle of suppression than that danced out in *Olympic Youth*. Although a racial state grounded in anti-Semitism, displays of overt Jewish persecution were minimised during the Games. Yet at the same time that anti-Semitic signs were removed from public view, construction on a new concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, less than ½ hour’s journey from the Games complex, was started almost concurrently with the Games.<sup>22</sup> In fact repressive measures increased during the Games to ensure that events continued without disruption. The street scene was controlled by the detention of beggars, prostitutes, gypsy travellers, and other people considered ‘asocial’.<sup>23</sup> This ordering of the public space mirrored the ordered choreography of the *Festspiel* and Niedecken-Gebhard’s rejection of the ‘unsightly bundle’. In this environment of suppression and concealment it takes a conscious effort to go looking for the outsider. *The Manchester Guardian’s* person-centred journalism in the run-up to the Olympic Games gives voice to the excluded. One

correspondent writes of the barriers to participation experienced by the Jewish population as an unseen spatial restriction, as 'invisible walls' that gradually enclose and limit movement.<sup>24</sup> Another account makes this more explicit. A young Jewish girl found sitting alone in a park explains the threats to her way of life. Her one hope is to escape.<sup>25</sup>

Valeska Gert was one dancer from Berlin who was an outsider to *Olympic Youth* and to its ideological perspective. Not only was she Jewish but she was a renegade soloist. She was called a grotesque dancer, a name she was happy to adopt. She danced confrontational subjects such as the street-walker; she deconstructed familiar topics such as traffic and sport. Her dance was a provocation. She was a dissident dancer, a non-conformist, an outsider. Valeska Gert drew attention to herself both as an outsider to National Socialist racial ideology and as an individualist. As early as 1930 she was attacked as a dancer of Jewish origin by the National Socialist ideologue Alfred Rosenberg. Later, the propagandist Josef Goebbels pictures her as an undesirable artist in his 1934 book 'Awakening Berlin'.<sup>26</sup> From 1933, the year that the National Socialists came to power, Jewish dancers were excluded from performing. Increasingly Valeska Gert looked to other countries in order to continue with her career. In 1934 she came to London to perform where the actor/producer Robin Anderson saw her dance and became her promoter. Reluctant to leave her home city of Berlin, in April 1936, a few months before the Olympic Games, she eventually returned to London and married Robin Anderson. With marriage came the freedom to travel through possession of a British passport. She was able to escape the 'invisible walls' set up by the National Socialist regime. In 1938 Valeska Gert migrated to the United States for the duration of the coming war.

Valeska Gert was a dancer unafraid to make a spectacle of herself on stage. On the street the phrase, 'You're making a spectacle of yourself' suggests how an individual draws attention to themselves, perhaps through exaggerated movement, or outrageous clothing, or other non-conformist behaviour. The implication is that this is someone who stands out from the crowd. Usually, it's said in a tone of disapproval, the implied 'Stop it' not far behind. This small-scale spectacle of rupture, or rebellious intervention in the presentation of everyday life, plays out as an impromptu performance in a public domain where passers-by are present as observers. In this sudden moment of unexpected intimacy there is a one-to-one empathic connection between spectator and performer. A large-scale spectacle, such as *Olympic Youth*, is different. Its intention to privilege a mass emotional engagement, one that engulfs or overwhelms the subject and inhibits a self-reflexive response.

Ultimately, *Olympic Youth* acted as a deterrent to thinking. In this it reflected National Socialist ideology which was profoundly anti-intellectual. The *Festspiel* was a bombardment, an assault on the senses, an invasion, a barrage of sound and light. An overload of sensation. It was a saying 'yes' to spectacle, 'yes' to grand seduction, 'yes' to the cultic-symbolic. With its appeal to emotional symbolism rather than to rational thought, it enacted a spectacle of suppression by saying 'no' to individual expression, and 'no' to the spectator as an independent-minded human being. Where the mass ornament of *Olympic Youth* suppressed the autonomy of the dancer, Valeska Gert celebrated the individual performer who makes a spectacle of themselves by drawing attention to their uniqueness and their difference. With her distorted portrayals of everyday life, her dance made people stop, react and question. Ultimately this is how I read Yvonne Rainer's

saying ‘no’ to spectacle: as a declaration of the autonomy of the human being and of their sovereign subjectivity.<sup>27</sup>

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## Notes

All translations from German texts by myself.

- <sup>1</sup> Mary Wigman, “‘Totenklage’ im Festspiel ‘Olympische Jugend’”, in *Olympische Jugend Festspiel*, programme for performance at the Olympia Stadium, Berlin (1 August 1936), 41-42.
- <sup>2</sup> Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, “Die Gesamtgestaltung des Festspiels ‘Olympische Jugend’”, in *Olympische Jugend Festspiel*, programme (1 August 1936), 31-32.
- <sup>3</sup> ‘ein unübersichtbares Knäul’. The phrase indicates a scene impossible to survey. Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, “Tanz- und Festspielgestaltung”, in *Jahrbuch Deutscher Tanz*, edited by Rolf Cunz and Gustav Fischer-Klamt (Berlin: Dorn Verlag, 1937), 68-70.
- <sup>4</sup> Gret Palucca, “Eine Tänzerin trainiert für das Olympia-Festspiel”, *Berliner Tageblatt* (15 July 1936), cited in Hedwig Müller and Patricia Stöckemann, “...jeder Mensch ist ein Tänzer” (Gießen: Anabas-Verlag, 1993), 173-174.
- <sup>5</sup> Mary Wigman, “Meine Olympia-Tänze”, newspaper article, no further source, cited in Müller and Stöckemann (1993), 173.
- <sup>6</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, “The Mass Ornament”, in *The Mass Ornament. Weimar Essays*, translated by and with an introduction by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75-86.
- <sup>7</sup> Kracauer (1995).
- <sup>8</sup> Kracauer (1995).
- <sup>9</sup> Kracauer (1995).
- <sup>10</sup> *Olympic Youth* was performed four times. There was a further scheduled performance on 3 August but due to its success, two further performances were staged on 18/19 August. It was seen by 330,000 people. For further background and analysis see Thomas Alkemeyer, *Körper, Kult und Politik: von der “Muskelreligion” Pierre de Courbetins zur Inszenierung von Macht in der Olympischen Spielen von 1936* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 1996), 402-445.
- <sup>11</sup> *Olympische Jugend Festspiel*, programme (1 August 1936), 5-13.
- <sup>12</sup> Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 194-201; Patricia Stöckemann, “Das Festspiel ‘Olympische Jugend’”, in Müller and Stöckemann (1993), 171-184. See also Alkemeyer (1996).
- <sup>13</sup> Carl Diem, “Entstehung und Inhalt”, in *Olympische Jugend Festspiel*, programme (1 August 1936), 27-30.
- <sup>14</sup> Mary Wigman’s dance was a re-working of *Totenklage* (*Lament for the Dead*) from her 1934 *Frauentänze* (*Women’s Dances*).
- <sup>15</sup> Alkemeyer (1996), 428 suggests that this sacrifice for the nation-state represented an elevation of the *Gemeinschaft* (community) above the individual.

- <sup>16</sup> Reinhard Rürup, ed. *1936: The Olympic Games and National Socialism. A Documentation*. Bilingual German/English text (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1996), 69. See also Alkemeyer (1996), 331-337.
- <sup>17</sup> Anon. "Anti-Semitism in Germany. To be Kept Out of Sight during Olympic Games", in *The Manchester Guardian* (12 June 1936), 17. Proquest Historical Newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Observer* (1791-2003).
- <sup>18</sup> Hedwig Müller in Müller and Stöckemann (1993), 126.
- <sup>19</sup> Kracauer (1995).
- <sup>20</sup> Undated letter from Harald Kreutzberg to Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung Universität von Köln, cited in Müller and Stöckemann (1993), 148.
- <sup>21</sup> Rürup (1996), 121-29 and 169-177.
- <sup>22</sup> Construction began on 12 July 1936. By September the camp held around 1,000 prisoners, Rürup (1996), 131.
- <sup>23</sup> Official Games Report (1937), cited in Rürup (1996), 133.
- <sup>24</sup> Anon. "Anti-Semitism in Germany" (12 June 1936).
- <sup>25</sup> Olive Heseltine "In a Prussian Spa. Women under Nazi rule", in *The Manchester Guardian* (21 July 1936), 8. Proquest Historical Newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Observer* (1791-2003).
- <sup>26</sup> 'Das erwachende Berlin', see Frank-Manuel Peter, *Valeska Gert* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1987), 71-76. For more on Valeska Gert, including fragments of her in performance on CD, see Susan Foellmer, *Valeska Gert* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2006).
- <sup>27</sup> This deserves a more in-depth commentary than is possible in a 20 minute presentation. In the context discussed here I am referring in particular to Yvonne Rainer's call to 'eliminate or minimize' the scale of 'monumentality' and to 'substitute' the 'human scale', see Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A", in *What is Dance?*, edited by Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 325-332. For Rainer's 'No' manifesto and subsequent reflections, see Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts. A Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 263-264.



## Choreographing the social: Movement and space in urban life

*Gabriele Klein*

### *Abstract*

*Like the visual arts dance and performance look back on a development of arts production in public space for decades. Unlike the visual arts, the choreographic projects most notably question the relationship between body, movement and space, spatial planning and the arrangement of movement, structure and accident, the public perception and the specific communication of dance. Furthermore and starting from the moving body, these projects discuss the public space, its materiality in architecture, symbolic and imaginations.*

*The lecture aims to put the characteristics of this choreographic works up for discussion in dealing with everyday choreographies in the public sphere. Based on empiric results, a theoretical draft of the relationship between dance, choreography and public space will be presented.*

### **Introduction**

In the short amount of time we have today, I would like to outline some ideas of the project, on which I'm currently working with the working title "social choreography":

1. By giving two examples from performance art and choreography, I will demonstrate how contemporary choreography creates experimental social and political experience and
2. by giving some examples of "social movements", I want to illustrate how the social is already inscribed into the public sphere as a choreographic order.

### ***I. Contemporary Dance and Performance Art***

My first example:

On the first floor of a modern office complex beside a busy intersection, people are sitting – the audience of the piece – in front of a line of windows looking down on a patch of grass on the opposite side of the street where two women have planted deck chairs and – are either trying to sunbath or play theater. Their spoken lines are broadcast into the office building; but they're not speaking "live", in fact they are merely simulating speech on the grass, while the text is playback.

Cars stop at the intersection; the occupants of the cars recognize the theatrical action on the grass via the gaze of the spectators in the office complex.

Are they just watching by coincidence? Do they work there or are they theatergoers? Pedestrians walk past, stop, and observe the events on the grass and in doing so also become actors in this urban drama.

What we have here is a performance in an urban space. Everyone involved is both audience and performer; all are acting something out for the others. This piece by the Austrian performance group “Theater im Bahnhof” is an example of performance projects in public spaces, which are by now quite common in many cities. The public realm becomes the stage; the city is brought into focus as urban theater. It is an artistic reflection of the theatricalized society of the spectacle.

But not only public art, happenings and pop art produce social choreographies, also pop culture – like punk, hip-hop and techno – can be described as an aesthetic expression of the urban experience of social change. Woodstock, Love Parades, Street Battles are examples thereof. They deal with urban experience – and here especially with the experience of diversity - in their cultural performances and produce through their soundscapes, dances, texts and signs (graffiti; urban fashion in punk), images of local urbanity.

The artistic and cultural preoccupation with the city becomes more important in a phase of urban history in which a radical shift into the post-industrial age is occurring: suburbanization, peripherisation, deindustrialization, shrinking cities, segregation and new forms of exclusion are at the center of the current social-economical discourse on the post-Fordian city; eventisation, musealisation, festivalisation, Disneyfication and McDonaldization are the keywords propelling neo-liberal, communal, cultural politics in the global rat race. In the context of this shift in the city structure to a city of the spectacle, the interventions of art are not only of aesthetic, but of particular social and political relevance.

„Mnemonic nonstop“ is the title of a piece by the German choreographers Jochen Roller and Martin Nachbar. On the one hand, the piece questions the relationship of body and movement and on the other, the relationship of body and city. It examines these questions via choreography – that is the new and unusual aspect of this piece. The choreographers played with the idea of superimposing anatomical and choreographic maps onto each other and combining these with maps of cities. They wandered through various European cities: with the map of Kinshasa through Brussels, with an anatomical drawing of the body through Berlin, with a choreographic spatial concept through Paris. Their method was the *dérive*, developed in the 1960's by the French Situationists around Guy Debord and often applied in numerous previous art projects. In this urban drifting, this wandering about the cities, the choreographic spatial concepts, the choreographers' bodies and the maps of the city overlapped. The result was an urban organism that was neither purely subjectively nor panoptically structured.

Artists are the aesthetic bricoleurs of urban space. Mapping is for them both an aesthetic motif and a research method for site-specific artistic work. The aesthetic mapping of the urban is a performative practice. The map that is created via the action, the roaming through space, itself creates, produces a city: an imaginary city, which – in confrontation with the existing city system – overcomes hegemonic territorial codification and produce alternatives systems of urban space.



The city thus created through movement is a spatial inscription of physical movements, generated through the superscription of the body by the space that it has traveled through.

In this politics of the imaginary lies the social explosive power of those artistic practices that dissolve boundaries by resurveying spaces and producing new ones, symbolically occupying and reinterpreting existing sites. They produce new spatial concepts which, obtained through subjective and subversive strategies and charged with memory and experience, create a cultural testimony of urban space that is inevitably political.

Unlike performance artists from the fine arts field, body and movement are for choreography not just the means of exploring space, but simultaneously also their artistic tools; the surveying, traversing and exploitation of space is here much more than just a performative method. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann<sup>1</sup> describes the art system as the only system in which perception is not only a requirement, but also the object of communication and this is especially the case for choreography in dance: body and movement are here not just the means, but simultaneously the subject of communication. Here the performative happening is joined by the artistic dance transformation and its aesthetic reflection in the medium of the body. Choreography therefore becomes a corporeal-aesthetic inscription in the urban space. Social choreography here appears as the dissolution of the boundaries of the urban, as a “kinaesthetic politics” of an imaginary urban space.

From this perspective choreography and politics can not be described as two separate worlds, as autopoietic systems with their own rules, norms and values, but with reference to the philosopher Jacques Rancière to see them as two forms of the “division of the sensual”. According to this, dance and politics would be interwoven strategies of a “politics of the kinaesthetic” and a “kinaesthetic policy”. Accordingly, politics is less to be understood as a form of power or institutional strategy and dance not as a field subsidised by politics or as a pure aesthetic practice.

Rather, the political is here formulated normatively and focused on one aspect: political activity, according to Rancière is “something that removes a body from its natural place or the place that is naturally assigned to it, which makes visible what should not have been seen, and which makes comprehensible as speech something that would normally be considered noise”.<sup>2</sup>

Related to the concept of the political to specific practices, aesthetics is then not to be described as art theory and the aesthetic not as a form of perception. Rather the aesthetic is inscribed in political practices – and indeed because these practices themselves with their norms, rules and habits, already guide sensual perception inasmuch as they locate people socially and ascribe social and political room for manoeuvre to them and in this way regulate social perception. And precisely here are also the political dimensions of the physical-sensual, of the movement perceptions, that is the dimensions of “kinaesthetic politics”: as political activity is understood as the sensual practice of making visible and shifting cultural and social codes especially in the public sphere – and indeed in a way that they contradict the “police order” as Rancière calls it.

V.

Intervention in the “police order” of art, cultural and urban policy is an important and indispensable step. From this perspective choreography is not political per se, because it is a physical-sensual medium. For the same reason it is also not non-political per se. It is rather, in my argument, political when the aesthetic practice grates against the orderings, the norms, habits and conventions – and not only grates against them but also changes them.

Since the 1990s contemporary choreography and performance art banked on collectives, on collaborations, on networks. These forms are described as a *field of experiment* of the social, a reality *model* for citizenship. But: They *are* social, they are not just a model, but as such they are not political. In my understanding they also are political when they attack the societal division of the sensual, i.e. transform norms and conventions, namely those that are always also distinctive and which include and exclude. And they are political when they produce a critical difference to the, what the German philosopher Sloterdijk calls the “kinaesthetic reality of the modern age”<sup>3</sup>; this also takes place through a critical theory and practice of gender, of the body (and the cultural and gendered body concepts), of classes and of post-colonial politics. And finally they are political when they exist not as functional networks but develop a community sense. It is a sense of community that does not declare community as an objective but assumes it is a precondition in the practices themselves. Because politics as concrete sensuous activity requires the creation of collective identities – and these cannot be created solely through transient and non-binding networks and their policies.

## II. “Choreographing the Social”: Everyday Cultural Performances

Choreography is not just an artistic practice, but also an integral element of new urban politics: whether Olympic Games or Football World Championships, runners marathon or skaters meeting, techno parades or break-dance battles, Christopher Street Day or Carnival of Cultures, pop concert or Church Day – the public sphere knows a multitude of staged social choreographies.

The public sphere has always been characterized by those social choreographies that were simultaneously demonstrations of power, for instance military parades, the water cannons and street riots of the leftist fringe, carnival parades or church processions. In the theatricalized public spaces of the post-industrial cities, movement cultures that correspond to the adapted subject of modernity - yes, even almost promote it - have invaded the public sphere. These everyday cultural performances are the physical embodiment of the theatricalized subject of neo-liberalism, which is forced not only to act but also to always perform its actions: joggers, skateboarders, inline skaters, beach volleyball players, cross-country skiers, mountain bikers, sport climbers, snowboarders, skiers or bungee jumpers, all have left their traditional realms of movement and have turned away from their natural habitats to the cities, once the epitome of technology, functionality and civilization.

In the post-industrial city, natural habitats are created as event locations and produce new forms of social choreography: whether artificial climbing walls or ski slopes, whether cross-country ski-tracks or city beach clubs with beach volleyball fields, outdoor sports have become transformed into everyday after-work city leisure activities, in which nature itself is simulated: sports culture in the simulated natural environment of the urban theater.

When cultural performances are staged as media events, conceived as profit oriented entertainment and designed as show; thus when interventions in urban space are already big business and even artistic happenings in the cityscape have become part and parcel of local image politics, then art in the public space must face new demands. In comparison with the 1960's, performative interventions are today confronted with the social-spatial ubiquity of the theatrical; the dis-placement and dis-settlement of social order, cultural conventions and signs, the political and aesthetic provocation, the search for utopias, for heterotopic spaces. From whatever perspective one should wish to illuminate the motives, methods and effects of performance art, it is today clearly called upon to find an aesthetic strategy that reveals the ever more subtle boundaries between play and gravity, illusion and reality, the imaginary and the real and to show itself as the other, the un-settling in the theatrical space of the post-industrial city.

By defining aesthetic practice in and as social process, by dispensing with scripts and character roles, by not just playing, but staging a 'serious game', which doesn't act 'as if', but is instead real, non-recurrent, and immanent, performance art, this reference to the body and movement based on the personal experience and participation of the audience, is a different vehicle of knowledge production – also about urban space.

In contrast to post-traditional communities, which, like in football matches or pop concerts, are also created as momentary communities in and as events, artistic performances create a sensual-worldly framework in which the instrumentalization of the theatrical in the city can be reflected on. This is where the political potential of artistic performance lies: by utilizing a methodological and processual approach, integrating experts of the everyday (like the German performance group Rimini Protokoll) and applying the theatricality of presence and live performance, they create a space in which the 'city' is not only imagined and presented, but alternative urban life can also be tested and experienced.

Consensus is a favourite word of present-day politics, of the left as well as the right, or better all those coming from right or left who want to occupy the centre. But politics, as political theoreticians from Carl Schmitt to Karl Marx, i.e. right as well as left, can agree, emerges in dissent. It emerges where sensual perception and experience rub up against the traditional order. Many social movements – the women's, peace, gay, black people's movements – have proved this in their mostly urban practices. Because the political activity of these social movements – and this, too, is so little noted by political theory – were and are above all grounded in physical practices. The chaining onto radioactive container transporters, remaining seated on a seat in the bus where an Afro-American woman was not allowed, the kissing of homosexual couples in public, but also the choreo(graphic) politics of demonstrations, sit-ins or flash mobs and smart mobs – these and many other examples show that political practice, above all as physical-sensual activity, can change orders and perceptions of these "police orders".

Choreographic learning – as part of an implicit learning and a special, corporeal form of scenic learning - can be a medium for training physical-sensual perception. But it is much more: it is a core field of the political where, with the questioning of its central categories, such as rhythm, force, space, time, energy, dynamics and flow, it sheds light on the kinetic foundations of the societies of the spectacle.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (dt. *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*), Stanford University Press 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Die Aufteilung des Sinnlichen*, foreword by Maria Muhle. Berlin, 2006, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Eurotaoismus. Zur Kritik der politischen Kinetik*, Frankfurt am Main 1989, p. 25

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## **Turning the Tide and Reconstructing the Spectacle - A New Perspective on Martha Graham's Tours to Britain and the Response to Their Artistic and Political Complexity**

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***Abstract.** Martha Graham and her Company's tours to Britain during the fifties had all the ingredients of a unique spectacle: artistry, innovation, drama, suspense, mixed feelings and reviews. Taking place during the sensitive times of the Cold War, the show on stage was complemented by another carefully directed one backstage, of art and politics combined.*

*Focusing on Graham's presence on the London stages, my paper shows that the famous artist and the State Department started their collaboration before 1955, which was considered until now the moment when the artist officially began her role as a cultural ambassador of the US overseas. It was in 1950 when the State Department gave Graham's tour to Europe "its blessing" and helped Graham and her Company prepare and organize the tour, an endeavor continued during Graham's presence in Europe in 1954, when the State Department's involvement in her role as a cultural diplomat was even more refined and determined.*

*Using primary sources found in important archives and collections, and demonstrating the involvement in Graham's trips to Europe of the top diplomatic British offices, including the British Embassy, the British Foreign Office, the British Information Service and, on the American side, the State Department, my paper re-writes a page of Graham's story and history from a new perspective and angle, while also changing the chronology of the involvement of the State Department in Graham's international tours, demonstrating that its "first notice" of Graham happened already in 1950 and not only during the European tour in 1954, as considered so far.*

"London was hard," Martha Graham wrote from Europe in the spring of 1954 to her long time friend, the musician Louis Horst. "It was mixed but a critic turned the tide for me. The houses were small at first but then we finished with filled houses and bravos. It seems that the thing most amazing is that we as Americans have a culture other than the movies or Russian ballet transplanted,"<sup>1</sup> concluded the American artist.

Martha Graham's tours to Europe during the fifties are perceived by dance lovers and historians as mostly a failure, falling through the cracks of Graham's life and career, namely between her national phase, started during the twenties when she created her own company, her major works and established her fame, and the international one, considered to have started officially only in 1955, with the State Department tour to Asia. With an emphasis on her presence on the British stages, my paper rescues the 1950s tours to Europe from an undeserved minimization of their place and importance in Graham's story, showing that Graham's role as a cultural ambassador started before the Asian tour of 1955, usually considered its inception, and that "with the blessing of the State

Department,”<sup>2</sup> Martha Graham was supposed to begin, even if unofficially, her mission as a cultural diplomat in Europe already in 1950.

Having a special significance in the trajectory of the long life and career of Martha Graham, and in the light of newly discovered documents, her presence on the London stage incites the re-writing of this moment of her story and history, asking for a closer attention and a fresh approach to what happened on and behind the stage on that occasion. The reasons for this are complex and nuanced, as the tours expanded and enriched Graham’s own personal frontiers and those of the American modern dance itself, being the moment when Graham became a cultural ambassador of her country, during a time when, under the auspices of the Cold War, dance was not choreographed only for the artistic spectacle anymore, but was staged for the political and diplomatic spectacle as well. Graham’s relationship with the State Department also redefined the idea of patronage in art, due to the fact that, during her European tours, the dancer and her company were not only under the gaze of the audience and of their private sponsor, but also, from behind the curtain, of the State Department, which although not openly, became a protective, influential, but also demanding supporter of Martha Graham.

Martha Graham’s relationship with Europe was from the beginning not to be an easy one. She had briefly toured the continent when she was a member of the Ruth St. Denis Company during the twenties, but her own company received its first invitation to Europe in 1936 from Hitler, who asked Graham to dance at the opening ceremonies of the Berlin Olympic Games, which the dancer refused. In 1938 Dorothy Elmhirst of Dartington invited Graham to London, but she did not want to travel because of the European political situation.<sup>3</sup>

She first toured Europe in 1950, when she and her company planned to dance in Paris and London. After a few unsuccessful evenings in Paris, Graham traveled to London, but the tour was cancelled.<sup>4</sup> Her absence was noticed and regretted by dance lovers and by British professional dancers, culminating with an invitation from Dame Ninette de Valois, who, out of solidarity or curiosity (or maybe both), asked Martha Graham to attend a party organized by her in California at the end of the summer of 1950 (but the invitation was not honored).<sup>5</sup> The years after Graham’s first European tour were a challenging time for the artist on a professional and personal level, but a new tour to Europe was organized a few years after and in February 1954 Graham, a company of fourteen dancers, and the musical director Simon Sadoff sailed from New York on the *Queen Elizabeth*. If in 1950 the initiative to go to Europe was considered to have belonged more to Erick Hawkins and Bethsabée de Rothschild,<sup>6</sup> than to Graham herself, during the mid fifties the artist was more interested in Europe compared to the years before, as shown by the fact that when Martha Hill and Walter Terry were charged by the dance panel of ANTA with persuading Graham to go to Asia as a cultural ambassador, she declared to them that at that point she was not so much interested in the Orient, but that she was “wishing to return to Europe.”<sup>7</sup> Still, the dancer was aware that a tour could not have been done by relying on the very modest means of her school and company; the costs of traveling with a company were very high, and because cultural diplomacy in the Europe of the fifties was complicated by the very powerful and carefully organized Russian cultural offensive, Graham needed strong financial and logistical support overseas.

Deciphering who staged the presentation of Graham's art before the European audience or, using Frances Saunders's metaphor, finding out "Who paid the piper,"<sup>8</sup> is an essential step one has to take when analyzing the complex and intricate relationship Martha Graham had with the European audience and politics. Pearl Lang, the soloist of Graham's company, who premiered *Ardent Song* on the London stage in the spring of 1954, suggested that, regarding her European tours, "she was little interested in who helped her art as long as it could be promoted",<sup>9</sup> a statement which proved that, indeed, there were more sources from which she could receive support for her tours.

Graham's European tours during the fifties were on one hand a very interesting *mélange* of private and state patronage, a situation which did not lack dramas and complications, but in the end was beneficial to the internationalization of American modern dance, Graham's own career, and American cultural diplomacy. The Baroness Bethsabée de Rothschild's contribution to the success of Graham's Company and School, as well as of her tours to Europe and afterwards to the rest of the world is a reality which was never contested but also has not been extensively explored.<sup>10</sup> Bethsabée de Rothschild sponsored the 1950 tour and told Graham after its lack of success: "Whenever you are ready - if you are ever ready - do come back and try again. I will have the means to see that you do. Don't ever worry about that."<sup>11</sup> Therefore it was not a surprise when the Baroness with her family's help,<sup>12</sup> became involved in the 1954 tour to Europe. In a photograph from that time, one can see the Baroness on the deck of RMS *Queen Elizabeth* ready to leave New York harbor on a hazy morning, posing next to Graham and the dancers Paul Taylor, Linda Hodes and Helen McGehee.<sup>13</sup> With her tiny but neat handwriting, the Baroness noted under the picture: "to Europe, 1954."<sup>14</sup> That the Baroness was to not only a sponsor of the tour but also that she was a key factor in the decisions related to it is shown an exchange of letters between the European impresarios and Graham's New York "headquarters" prior to the tour. They reflect the fact that the benefactor was positive that the tour was to start in Britain, but also that France had to be included on the list of the company's appearances; otherwise "Miss de Rothschild would not be interested in this venture at all without Paris".<sup>15</sup> A year after the tour in a letter from Bennet & Pleasant (Graham's press representatives), Bethsabée de Rothschild was informed about bills from the tour, which were expected to be paid by her.<sup>16</sup>

But, beside the private sponsorship, already before the Asian tour in 1955, during the 1950 and 1954 tours Graham received the attention and support of the State Department. Even if not at the level she will experience later as a cultural ambassador, already since the first European tours Graham's role exited the private and artistic sphere, and one can say that the European tours, and especially the 1954 one, were the avant-premiere of Graham's role as a cultural diplomat, and of the State Department's involvement in her international exposure, a time when both the artist and the State Department "rehearsed" the future spectacle of dance and politics on the world stage. It is true that during the European tours of the fifties the support of the State Department manifested mostly, if not entirely, not through financial means but through logistic ones.

What explains the partial involvement in these tours compared with the later full involvement is that when the dancer first attempted Europe, the very young cultural diplomacy of the Americans, "newcomers in the battle for people's minds",<sup>17</sup> was a subject of debate in their own country and in the process of finding its own voice and organizing itself. As Walter Terry put it, if a Soviet ballerina or a premier dancer carried

travel permits equal to those of an army general, in the United States arts were seen as a luxury, at least in the official circles.<sup>18</sup> There were voices in Congress who considered that sending dance groups or art exhibitions abroad was only self-satisfying, with no particular relevance,<sup>19</sup> and that the true Americanness was shown through landscapes, social realism and “serious topics”, and not by any means through modern dance. Or, as a senator expressed even more blatantly: “Good God. If my constituents thought that I approved legislation to use their tax money for pink toe shoes, I’d never be reelected!”<sup>20</sup> It is true that other legislators did not deny the importance of cultural export, but the way they envisioned it was not very imaginative, as the senator Homer Capehart believed that the task of the cultural diplomacy was, “to sell US to the world just as a sales manager’s job is to sell a Buick or a Cadillac or a radio or a TV set.”<sup>21</sup>

But, even if limited, there were a number of “visionary” officials who understood the importance of the cultural diplomacy in the competition for world supremacy. The full bloom of Graham’s role as a cultural diplomat happened not by coincidence only after they convinced the rest about the importance of the cultural offensive, and shaped and organized it. The biggest success of this campaign was the coming to life of the USIA and the establishment of the Cultural Exchange Program. Less hesitant than Harry Truman, President Eisenhower, who strongly believed that the Americans could win the competition over “the human soul, heart, and mind,”<sup>22</sup> helped it with special funds derived from Congress, and sent philharmonic orchestras and performing artists overseas. Martha Graham was one of them.

Official correspondence between top diplomatic offices of the British and the Americans shows that Graham and her company were in the mind of the State Department already since she started touring Europe, and they put at her disposal a network of connections meant to ease her access on the European stages, including London. The first exchange of official letters related to Martha Graham’s trip to London happened in March 1950, when, in a letter sent by Gertrude Macy, the general manager of Graham’s Company, to the British consul general in New York, Sir Francis Evans, the latter was informed about Martha Graham’s intention to tour London, and inquired about any “official interest” of Britain in the American artist, praised by Macy as “one of the greatest-if not the greatest – of our artists in any field.”<sup>23</sup> What makes the letter even more interesting and revelatory in answering the question of who orchestrated Graham’s presence on the London stage and for demonstrating the State’s involvement in Graham’s first European tour, is that Macy did not hesitate to inform the British consul that “Miss Graham will be going under private auspices but with the official blessing and the well wishes of our State Department.”<sup>24</sup> Macy’s acknowledgment that the State Department knew about Graham’s tour in 1950, and the use of this information in a letter to a British official not only demonstrate that Graham’s tours were not limited to an artistic message, but also bring a new element in the chronology of the State’s involvement in her tours. So far, an April 1954 intervention for Graham’s tour by the American Ambassador in Brussels<sup>25</sup> was considered “the first formal notice the U. S. State Department had ever taken of her,” but it is obvious that the encounter between Martha Graham and the State Department happened already since 1950.

That Graham’s trip to London was not just an artistic enterprise but a mission with diplomatic aims is also reflected by the fact that, in the same letter, in words sounding less than those of a manager trying to find contracts for its client, but more as of a



cultural diplomat aware of the goal of his mission, Macy hoped that “sending her would combat the current misleading propaganda that the Americans’ productivity is limited to commercial and material fields,” and that “the artist’s presence would be a compliment to the countries that have sent us (some) of their best.”<sup>26</sup> It confirmed that, on one hand, Martha Graham’s presence on the London stage was expected to counteract the anti-American propaganda and, on the other hand, that the artists and her manager were aware of the fact that a first step the American cultural diplomacy had to take in Europe was to deconstruct the assumption that they were just a nation of “Chevy-drivers and gum chewers,”<sup>27</sup> little able to compete with the sophisticated and rooted cultural traditions of the Europeans, including those of their principal opponents, the Russians. Namely to show Europe that, as Graham put it, “that the Americans have more than the movies and Russian ballet transplanted.”<sup>28</sup>

Concomitantly with Macy’s letter, the Cultural Relations Department of the Foreign Office in London received two other very important letters from the US. The first was from the British Information Services in New York, which informed the office that Martha Graham “would like some engagements in Britain,” and asked the Cultural Relations Department to support Graham and to inform the British Arts Council about the American artist’s “availability,” as “she was a really outstanding performer.”<sup>29</sup> The second letter, received by the same office in London is the most relevant in demonstrating the State Department’s involvement already since Graham’s first European tour, and it came also to from the British Embassy in Washington. It informed that the British Embassy received a visit from Mr. Craig Barton, an important member of Graham’s entourage, and that he was interviewed at “the request of the Department of State, anxious to secure the help of the Art Council for Martha Graham’s tour to London.”<sup>30</sup> It would be hard to believe that in the midst of the Cold War, when the Russian offensive was also well organized and determined, the State Department intervened and requested that one of Graham’s staff be interviewed by the British Embassy only as a sign of courtesy towards the famous dancer, with no relationship to the emerging American cultural diplomacy on and behind the European stages!

After these letters were received, a third letter related to Graham’s planned presence in London followed, in which the British Arts Council in London was contacted by the Foreign Office directly, for “assistance” related to Graham’s tour to Britain.<sup>31</sup> If in the first reply, the Council’s secretary general, Ms. Glasgow, said that the Arts Council could not help Graham’s tour because the negotiations for engagements came too late,<sup>32</sup> in a second letter, apparently after a flurry of official correspondence, rather dryly Ms. Glasgow stated that she received “a visit from Mr. Green, acting as a manager of Ms. Graham,” who, “out of sheer personal persuasiveness has apparently clinched arrangements for presenting the company for three weeks in London. He also got Mr. David Webster, the General Administrator of Covent Garden to organize the visit for him.”<sup>33</sup> One can say that it was big success for Martha Graham and for the American cultural diplomacy to obtain a presence on Covent Garden’s stage in 1950, even if in reality this accomplishment will materialize only later, in 1976. Such an accomplishment was even more staggering as, by the time Graham planned her tour to Britain, the cultural relationship between Britain and the US was often considered to be “a fragile reed,”<sup>34</sup> less developed than was to be expected between the two countries which had, as often was claimed, “a special relationship;” last, but not least, during that time the British

Council was not represented in America,<sup>35</sup> which explains the “detour” the official correspondence took through the British Embassy and the Foreign Office representatives in the United States.

That the artist’s tour to London was considered by the American officials a trip with diplomatic parameters, is shown by the letter of the officer of Public Affairs of the American Embassy in London, Mallory Brown, sent to Graham shortly after the cancellation of the tour. After calling her presence on the London stage “an outstanding occasion of the year whereby American dancing could be presented to our British friends,”<sup>36</sup> the American diplomat also conveyed to Graham the huge disappointment the tour’s cancellation had created among the embassy’s members, ready to applaud Graham the dancer but also Graham the cultural ambassador of her country. As it is known, because of the complications of the tour, they had to wait for another four years.

The official involvement in the tour to Europe in 1954 is no less documented and the participation in its organization of important offices and people, no less impressive. A confirmation of the official involvement of the State Department in the tour is the letter sent by Bennett and Pleasant, Graham’s press representatives, to her and her staff while she was in Europe. Letting them know how proud they were of their success (“thrilled with the wonderful reports”), Bennett office also reported that “The Voice of America” had reprinted 70,000 copies of an article about Martha Graham and distributed them throughout Europe, demonstrating that Graham’s trip overseas was by no means just an artistic venture with no diplomatic parameters.<sup>37</sup> While in London, Graham also received a letter regarding the publicity with which the company and its leader were assisted by the State Department and USIA in Germany, prior to their appearance there. The explanation lies in the fact that Baroness de Rothschild, who promised her father that she would never spend a dime on German soil, was unable to help the company;<sup>38</sup> therefore the State Department and USIA took over the task.

Most interesting and revelatory is a letter which Ms. Mary Stewart Frances, the chief of the International Exchange Program in the Department of State, received from an unidentified member of the dancer’s entourage; it is dated February 22, 1955, a few months after the tour to Europe ended. The sender thanked Stewart Frances for “all the help while we were there,” while also cautioned her that a next tour, which looked at that point a serious possibility, “will have to be without the Foundation underwriting”<sup>39</sup> (one can easily understand that it was referring to de Rothschild Foundation). Stewart Frances was also asked to indicate to Graham and her company which locations would be the best and most safe to try again, and to provide them with comments and reports of the various embassies to the State Department, on Graham’s “appearance there,” which could be helpful “for planning the next tour.”<sup>40</sup>

Most fascinating is that this letter closes a full circle in demonstrating the State Department’s involvement in the “prior to Asia” tours, ending and beginning at the same time two stages of Graham’s relationship with the State Department. On one hand it ended the “behind the curtain” stage, started with the first European tour, when the State Department gave its blessing to Martha Graham; on the other hand this letter, which proves that Graham’s tour in 1954 was followed closely, monitored and helped in Europe through the American Embassies, demonstrates that the State Department’s relationship with Martha Graham was entering a new stage, when they were ready to support openly

Graham's exposure and role as a cultural diplomat, a role which Graham was also ready to expand and enrich.

Re-writing episodes of dance history is undoubtedly a risky path, especially when the historian has to face personalities whose special status, almost taboo, reflects upon the stories and histories of their lives and careers. But when the documents ask for a reevaluation of this past, reshaping the memory is more than an intellectual enterprise, and becomes an act of intellectual accuracy. Rescuing the European tours from an undeserved minimization of their place and importance in Graham's story, my work shows that the State Department became involved earlier than 1955 in her and her company's international tours, as she became already since then a cultural diplomat of her country. The exchange of letters between Graham's entourage and the top diplomatic British offices, including the British Embassy, the British Foreign Office, the British Information Service and, on the American side, the State Department, confirm the official diplomatic quality of the European tours. Offering its "official blessing and well wishes", "requesting" that Graham's members of the staff be interviewed by British officials, and "helping while they were there" demonstrates that, even without public acknowledgement, Graham's prospective appearances in Europe, including London, were considered by Washington to be serving American cultural diplomacy. Taking into consideration the success of the immediately following tours, it is clear that the European avant-premiere was a fortunate beginning of the relationship between the State Department and the famous Martha Graham, and later on between them and the whole world

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Don McDonough, *Martha Graham: a biography* ( New York: Praeger, 1973), p.232

<sup>2</sup> Letter of Gertrude Macy to Sir Francis Evans, date unknown, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/5, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey

<sup>3</sup> Lorraine Nicholas, *Dancing in Utopia: Dartington Hall and Its Dancers* (London: Dance Books Ltd, 2007), p.46

<sup>4</sup> Agnes De Mille, *Martha. The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p.335

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Arthur Todd to Martha Graham, unknown date, Martha Graham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, box 229

<sup>6</sup> Pearl Lang, Interview with the author, October 2008, tape recording

<sup>7</sup> Naima Prevots, *Dance for Export*( Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p.44

<sup>8</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War* (New York: The New Press, 2000)

<sup>9</sup> Pearl Lang, Interview with the author, October 2008, Tape Recording

<sup>10</sup> Camelia Lenart, "Martha Graham and Bethsabée de Rothschild—An Artistic Friendship in the Service of Modern Dance"( Paper presented in NYSAEH Conference, Brockport , October 2009)

<sup>11</sup> Agnes De Mille, *Martha. The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p.300

<sup>12</sup> London, Private Collection

<sup>13</sup> London, Private Collection

<sup>14</sup> London, Private Collection

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- <sup>15</sup> Letter of unknown sender, Gertrude Macy Papers, July 20 1953, 1953-1976, New York Public Library, Box 1
- <sup>16</sup> Letter from Benett & Pleasant Office to Bethsabée de Rothschild, date unknown, 1955, Martha Graham Center of Dance Records, 1944-1955, New York Public Library, Library, Box 1
- <sup>17</sup> John W. Henderson, *The United States Information Agency* ( New York: Praeger Publishers Inc, 1969), p.45
- <sup>18</sup> Walter Terry, *Frontiers of Dance. The Life of Martha Graham* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1975), p.117
- <sup>19</sup> Leo Bogart, *Cool Words, Cold War, Premises of Propaganda: Reassessing the USIA's Operating Assumptions in the Cold War* (University Press of America; 2nd Revised edition, 1995), p.xxxv
- <sup>20</sup> Walter Terry, *Frontiers of Dance. The Life of Martha Graham* (New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1975), p.117
- <sup>21</sup> Haigh, *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe* (New York: Manhattan Pub. Co, 1974), p.77
- <sup>22</sup> Ibidem
- <sup>23</sup> Letter of Gertrude Macy to Sir Francis Evans, date unknown, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/5, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>24</sup> Ibidem
- <sup>25</sup> De Mille, *Martha*, p.316
- <sup>26</sup> Letter of Gertrude Macy to Sir Francis Evans, date unknown, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/5, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>27</sup> Richard Pells, *Not like us: how European have loved, hated and transformed American culture since World War II*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, p.67
- <sup>28</sup> Don McDonough, *Martha Graham: a biography* ( New York: Praeger, 1973), p.232
- <sup>29</sup> Letter from the Office of British Information Services to the Cultural Relations Department of the Foreign Office in London, March 24, 1950, FO 924, CR/L 48/5, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>30</sup> Letter of the Education Office in Washington to the Cultural Relations Department at of the Foreign Office in London, April 12, 1950, FO 924, CR/L 48/8, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>31</sup> Letter from A. L. Mayall to Miss Glasgow, April 24, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/8, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>32</sup> Letter of Miss Glasgow to A.L. Mayall, April 29, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/9, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>33</sup> Letter of Miss Glasgow to A.L. Mayall, May 17, 1950, FO 924, CRL 48/10, The British Archives, Kew, Richmond, Surrey
- <sup>34</sup> Ted R. Bromund, "This Somewhat Embarrassing Ship: The British Foreign Office and the Mayflower II; 1954-1957", *The New England Quarterly*, vol.72, March 1999, p.42-60
- <sup>35</sup> Anthony Haig, *Cultural Diplomacy in Europe*, p.119
- <sup>36</sup> Letter of Mallory Brown to Martha Graham, August 15, 1950, Martha Graham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, box 229
- <sup>37</sup> Letter of Isabella Bennett to Young Woodely, May 21, 1954, Martha Graham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, box 230
- <sup>38</sup> Agnes De Mille, *Martha. The Life and Work of Martha Graham* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p.316
- <sup>39</sup> Letter of unknown sender to Mary Frances Stewart, February 22, 1955, Martha Graham Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, box 230
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## The Spectacle of Silence and Stillness

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explores the interconnecting themes of ‘silence’ and ‘stillness’ as they relate to notions of ‘spectacle’. The discussion will be illustrated with examples from Doris Humphrey’s choreographic works along side contemporary reference points. The paper considers the meaning/s and occurrence of spectacle and will discuss the implications of definitions such as ‘wonderment’, ‘breathhtaking’, ‘mesmerising’ and ‘escapist’ in relation to the viewer’s response. A further premise is that the appeal of ‘silence’ and ‘stillness’ is a growing phenomenon in a contemporary society besieged by visual and aural stimulation, and that our notions of what constitutes ‘spectacle’ are shifting accordingly.*

This paper explores the interconnecting themes of ‘silence’ and ‘stillness’ as they relate to notions of ‘spectacle’. Spectacle might arguably be characterised by elements or combinations of elements such as ‘wonderment’, ‘breathhtaking’, ‘mesmerising’ and ‘escapist’. The paper considers the meaning/s and occurrence of spectacle and will discuss the implications of those definitions in relation to the viewer’s response. To contextualise the discussion, a diversity of contemporary spectacle in relation to movement is explored through a cross-section of examples from popular culture and theatre alongside two of Doris Humphrey’s choreographic works. A question addressed throughout this conference is what constitutes spectacle? For the purposes of this paper, spectacle is considered in two respects. First, as an event in itself that creates a multi-sensory experience for the viewer; then, there is the ‘element of spectacle’, meaning that a production or event can contain moments or specific aspects that stand out as spectacle without the whole work necessarily being considered so.

Spectacle is usually conceived in terms of the impact of mass effects – of bodies in movement, often in unison; of scale; of sound; of structural strategies which produce ‘rises’ or ‘increases’ to series of climaxes; utilising the technology of the age: all of which produce an onslaught of the senses. A work or event could be defined as ‘spectacular’ because of its scale, because of the unexpected nature of the unfolding action and, ultimately, because it is successful, it works. I will explore examples of these but alongside, argue that spectacle can be presented and experienced by the opposite of the large scale: the small scale; the seemingly intimate; the still.

In a recent article on spectacle and excess, film historian Erlend Lavik acknowledges the difficulty in defining what constitutes spectacle due to the term’s subjectivity and historicity. He suggests that the notion of spectacle be understood pragmatically, “since what is extraordinary depends on what is ordinary at any given moment in time.”<sup>1</sup> His observation, therefore, implies a continuing temporal shift. Also from the area of film studies, Andrew Darley asks “is an aesthetic without depth necessarily an impoverished aesthetic, or is it rather, another kind of aesthetic – misunderstood as such?”<sup>2</sup> Darley’s position is an example of the ‘not inferior, just different’ argument in film studies, countering an opposing view that “spectacle connotes surface aesthetics, lack of intellectual

rigour and cultural decay.”<sup>3</sup> As Darley and Lavik both intimate, however, what is wrong with ‘different’?

In relation to experiencing spectacle, Lavik refers to a cyclical relationship between astonishment and familiarity,<sup>4</sup> inferring that once something becomes familiar, its prior astonishing properties cease to exist – a temporal shift this time between the known and unknown. I would define a first viewing as the ‘moment of impact’; the ‘eyes wide/oh my gosh/how did they do that’ moment. Further encounters with the same event or artefact may be equally compelling but not quite in the same way. A return visit brings different expectations but not necessarily a lesser experience. Pleasure, enjoyment and exhilaration can remain undiminished in a familiar surround as appreciation and understanding deepen with subsequent viewings. After the ‘how did they do that?’ moment, one can luxuriate in the immediacy of the sensory response alone.

When I first began thinking through possible approaches to this paper, two primary aspects became apparent. The first is the rich variety of movement-based events in recent times that could be defined as spectacle. The opening and closing ceremonies of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 are perhaps the most overt examples. Alongside, however, can sit performances by Cloud Gate Dance Theatre; Mark Morris; Deborah Warner’s production of Samuel Beckett’s *Happy Days* and the Phillip Glass opera, *Satyagraha*. All of these, arguably, could be considered either as spectacles in themselves or containing elements of spectacle. In some, the aspects of silence and stillness are present to varying degrees. The second primary aspect is the emotive response to such events. I am conscious of two different states. One involves an immediate response – the ‘moment of impact’ in the moment of performance. The other is more cumulative, with the breathtaking wonderment described above arriving as an event or performance unfolds, reaching the ‘oh my gosh’ state almost by stealth.

Before considering the occurrence of silence and stillness in more detail, I would first like to look at a range of these movement-based events. ‘Spectacle’ as generated by massed bodies is a familiar occurrence. The opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics was possibly the apex of this form of spectacle, with its basis in mass unison movement. Such phenomena are not new – for example the equestrian ballets in the Italian renaissance courts; the ballet de cours in 16<sup>th</sup> c. France; Laban’s movement choirs in 1930s central Europe – all of which, like Beijing, have a political and ideological dimension. That is, audiences are seduced by spectacle for a political purpose. The live action of the ceremony itself, to borrow Lavik’s descriptor, is astonishing and quite beautiful to watch because of the scale, the unexpected and the unfolding structure. Contrasts are created within the uniform symmetry as colour and light enhance the visual experience even further. One example is the outside border of a drum, hundreds of which light up simultaneously as the stadium is plunged into darkness. In another instance, dancers’ costumes collectively become the focal point as bodies merge into spreading fabric on the ground. For a short time, aesthetics and visual pleasure replace the reality of the human cost of producing this visual extravaganza. The very precision that thrills us, as it unfolds in our comfort strewn living rooms, is made possible only through months, years and, indeed, generations of militaristic regimen.

The firework spectacular in this same ceremony, directed by visual artist Cai Guo Qiang, goes beyond the human sphere but is choreographed ‘movement’ nevertheless. Cai’s celebrated ‘Footprints of History’ created some controversy at the time. ‘Footprints’



for each of the 29 Olympiads exploded in succession over the Beijing skyline, leading to the Olympic stadium. The simultaneous telecast showed a pre-recorded edit of the dress rehearsal rather than the live action. When criticised for using the recording, Cai countered by claiming the work can exist in two separate realms – in a ‘material realm’ as experienced by those physically present at the ceremony and in the streets of Beijing, and in a separate realm, as “a creative digital rendering of the artwork in the medium of video.”<sup>5</sup> He felt it necessary to take the ‘Footprints’ into this second realm because “the very best vantage point is not necessarily the human one.”<sup>6</sup> Those who saw the entire ceremony from the perspective of the TV screen would have had a different and perhaps even better experience than those on the ground because we were able to view the action from an aerial perspective that captured the full landscape and thus, could take in the complete form unfolding.

A further instance of Cai Guo Qiang’s ‘spectacular’ work is found in his collaboration with Liu Hwai-Min and Cloud Gate Dance Theatre. *Wind Shadow* was performed in the UK at the Barbican Theatre in October 2009. The work, described as ‘moving installation art’, takes the audience through a series of interconnecting images and scenarios created by animate and inanimate contributors. Reviewer John Thaxter bemoaned the presence of ‘spectacle’ at the expense of the hitherto exquisite movement of the Cloud Gate dancers. “Where is the dance?” he asks, and continues, “I suspect the contemporary dance crowd felt cheated by spectacle in place of choreographed emotion.”<sup>7</sup> I can see why he would ask the question, given Cloud Gate’s previous offerings. One might argue whether it *is* actually dancing, if inanimate objects execute the action through manipulation of some sort. However, I did not feel cheated and would observe that exquisite movement is present and dominates the work but is embodied by ‘dancing’ artefacts and shadows via the human performers.

A dancing spectacle that Thaxter could not take issue with is Mark Morris’s *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato* (1988) that returned to the London Coliseum earlier this year. I attended the first performance of this work in the UK at the Edinburgh Festival in 1994. The impact and response from the audience, was due to the elements identified above - its scale, the unexpected nature of the unfolding action and its success as a complete work, embracing as it does an extraordinary array of contributing influences including Handel’s music and Milton’s poetry. The resplendent colours of the setting and costumes add to the aural colour of the music and the choreography. One critic observes: “Morris’s dancers sang the music through their bodies.”<sup>8</sup> From my human perspective in the audience, *L’Allegro* was spectacular because it was astonishing and extraordinary – we had seen nothing like it in modern dance. It occurred to me, as I reviewed the work’s chronology, that we’ve seen nothing like it since. Morris commented in a recent interview: “I try to ignore everything I’ve done before. If *L’Allegro* is a piece that is never to be topped then I should quit now, but I haven’t.”<sup>9</sup> He is implying, perhaps, that the scale of *L’Allegro* was so great, that he made a conscious decision to keep his distance.

Turning now to consider the perhaps incongruous notion of silence and stillness alongside the examples we have just looked at, I would argue that a different form of spectacle is created through the presence of one or both of these aspects. A single figure, for example, can be as eye catching as massed ranks because that one figure can be representative of humanity pared down to the bone. Such paring down creates a stillness that can be *as*

mesmeric as a thousand whirling forms. An inherent silence can accompany a still form that, in turn, intensifies the viewing experience.

An example of the impact created by a single figure was evident in Deborah Warner's production of Beckett's *Happy Days*, with Fiona Shaw playing the central character 'Winnie'. The play was staged at the Royal National Theatre in 2007 and subsequently transferred to New York in 2008. Warner did not explicitly set out to create a spectacle with this play. It is not a spectacular play. That she has done so, however, is worth noting because of how she achieved it. Beckett's original production in 1975 took place in an intimate studio theatre setting, with the character of 'Winnie' encased in a mound of earth throughout. Warner transposed this setting to a vast apocalyptic landscape that evokes utter devastation of the character's physical environment and personal situation. The juxtaposition of the still, immobile figure against this immense terrain throughout the duration of the play leads the viewer through a spectrum of emotion. There is an initial gasp of wonder at the scale of the environment on first sight. Then, as the play progresses, there is increasing awareness of a different scale – the complete hopelessness of the character's reality. The counter to this visual horror is the play's text, which is extremely witty and funny in places, that only serves to magnify Winnie's unending predicament even further.

An alternative example of stillness embodied through a single figure is seen in Phillip Glass's opera, *Satyagraha*, revived at the London Coliseum in April this year. One could define this performance as having elements of spectacle because of the set, which was dramatically impressive. More so, however, was the performance of the leading tenor, Alan Oke in the role of Ghandi, through the dual aspect of his singing extraordinarily taxing music without pause throughout a first act of 50 minutes, and doing so whilst still. The stillness was not that of an oratorio or concert setting when singers can be stationary for some time. This stillness seemed to come from within and was almost visible. British choreographer, Emilyn Claid identifies the "physical practice of cultivating stillness,"<sup>10</sup> of which this is a clear example. The enormity or scale of the musical feat was one thing but the spectacle was created more through the quality of sound and stillness embodied by and through this single figure that in turn created a captivating and mesmeric experience for the viewer.

Common aspects that can be identified in all the examples discussed here include scale, the unexpected and unfolding structure. I suggest that these same aspects exist in Humphrey works such as *Water Study* (1928) and *With My Red Fires* (1936), with the sense of 'spectacle' created by the additional elements of silence and/or stillness. An example from *With My Red Fires* is 'The Matriarch' figure. In a recent staging of the dance, I considered whether the psychological drama induced by this character could be better conveyed for a contemporary context in a more subtle internalised manner than the exaggerated and pantomimic portrayal of the role as notated and performed in the 1978 film of the dance. A new interpretation was explored by extrapolating particular qualities and ideas derived from Humphrey herself. One such example is a photograph of Humphrey in the role. She is captured in profile, standing tall on top of a column that represents the Matriarch's 'house'. The hemline of her dress falls at least a foot below the top of the box, with the overlap creating the illusion of an elongated and superhuman force. The movement quality caught in the image is strong, bound and direct. In addition, the juxtaposition of set, costume and movement further emphasises the power of this character. The combination of qualities induces a sense of 'suspended stillness'.

By applying the idea of presence through stillness, the outwardly twisted, pantomimic emphasis was replaced with more understated expression, using such devices as the ‘gaze’ and the ‘stance’. Humphrey drew on lines from William Blake in her choreographic process including “Such is the way of the Devouring Power”, that conjures up the idea of an all-pervading dominating presence. One can interpret this idea as Humphrey did, through exaggerated gesture and expressive melodrama. Alternatively, the idea can be interpreted through more subtle means by capturing the sense of ‘suspended stillness’ as identified in the photographs to produce an effect that is equally chilling. A further idea from Humphrey’s notes on the dance is that of ‘emotional movement in body - no hands.’<sup>11</sup> Humphrey’s meaning could imply that the movement is generated from the body’s centre rather than the extremities, and is in keeping with her broader stylistic principles. The ‘emotional movement’, however, can also be generated through a process of internalisation. The resulting action becomes less explicit but perhaps more meaningful in a contemporary context.

The ‘spectacular’ effect of Humphrey’s work became apparent during a performance of *Water Study* that I staged for Arke Compagnie D’Arte in Turin, Italy in 2007. Prior to this experience, I might have considered a Humphrey work such as *Passacaglia* as ‘spectacle’ for similar reasons to Morris’s *L’Allegro*, with its collective infusion of scale and unfolding structure alongside an array of visual, aural and emotional stimuli. *Water Study* is an ensemble dance performed in silence. The dancers move throughout on breath rhythms that have no formalised constructs such as counts or musical phrases. Aspects of ‘scale’ and ‘unfolding structure’ interlink through the progression of the choreography. In the opening sequences of the dance there is no movement across space to amplify the silence. The viewer is drawn in, not knowing initially where to look; where the action will begin, and therein is the element of the ‘unexpected’. The dance builds continuously, ever growing in terms of expanse, speed, height and volume before a climax unleashes a descent into the still and silent place of the opening phrases. During the performance in 2007 I was struck by the stillness and silence in the audience as the dance progressed. There was, literally, not a movement or sound other than that unfolding on the stage, which is unusual in a theatre of 800.

Humphrey observed, “The dance without music has a contrary effect to that which might be expected. It does not seem empty or as though the bottom has dropped out, but increases concentration and attention to movement to an astonishing degree.”<sup>12</sup> In 2007, the audience continued to remain still and silent at the conclusion of the dance for quite some time, perhaps unwilling to leave what they had found in that still silent place. Eventually, considerable appreciation was shown, indicating possibly that they had indeed witnessed something astonishing. The silence – the absence of music and its associated structures – contributing to the ‘how did they do that’ mystique of the work alongside the evolving though inherently still form.

It was pleasing to observe the impact of a dance work from 1928 on an audience nearly eighty years on. I’d have settled for the work being appreciated but this kind of response indicates the capacity of the work to offer something more to a contemporary audience beyond aesthetic or historical experience. *Water Study* and other works with similar properties offer momentary release from the perpetual ‘fractured noise’ society has become. This theme is reiterated frequently in Constance Kreemer’s recently published collection of interviews with choreographers discussing their creative and performative practices. Gus

Solomons Junior, for example, says of his mature performance group, “we do no tricks at all, but we know how to stand still. That presence is something young dancers need to see.”<sup>13</sup> Rosalind Newman observes that her work “is more reflective now. It realises the power of pause and simplicity as well as the power of movement.”<sup>14</sup> Nancy Meehan comments, “I am using more stillness at a time when so much in the world is speeding up.”<sup>15</sup>

My initial proposition suggested that ‘spectacle’ connotes an event that creates a multi-sensory experience, producing sensations such as wonderment’, ‘breathtaking’, ‘mesmerising’ and ‘escapism’ for the viewer. Traditional grandiose, fantastical happenings induce such sensations. My contention is that these same sensations can be elicited from events and works not normally associated with the spectacular but that qualify as such because of the emotive impact on the viewer. I further suggest that the appeal of ‘silence’ and ‘stillness’ is a growing phenomenon in a contemporary society besieged by visual and aural stimulation, and that our notions of what constitutes ‘spectacle’, therefore, are shifting accordingly.

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#### Notes

1. Lavik, 2008: 172
2. Darley, 2000: 6
3. Lavik, 2008: 180
4. Lavik, 2008: 172
5. Cai Guo Qiang in Trong Gia Nguyen, 2008
6. Ibid
7. Thaxter, 2009
8. Thom, 2001: 61
9. Cates, 2010: 16
10. Claid, 2010: 218
11. Humphrey, 1935: Notebook, Doris Humphrey Collection, New York Public Library Folder M28
12. Humphrey, 1959: 142
13. Kreemer, 2008: 166
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## The Spectacle of the Stuttgart Ballet Miracle

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### *Abstract*

*In the year 1969 provincial Germany entered onto the world's stage: the "Ballett des Württembergischen Staatstheaters" was named best ballet company of Western Europe by New York critic Clive Barnes. Documentation of the international reception of the company, the so-called "Stuttgart Ballet Miracle", is here supplemented by a look at the ability of the hero pattern, fan culture, star cult and historical spectacles to launch and stabilize new identities. These concepts underlie an analysis of interview transcripts done with members of the Stuttgart audience, as well as an iconological analysis of the visual culture offered by the Stuttgart Ballet.*

### **The "sensibilities" of binding audiences**

This morning we want to talk about ideology, spectacle and dance. What does this mean? What is ideology? According to Lawrence Grossberg, Professor of Speech Communication and Communications Research at the University of Illinois at Urbana, *ideology* is one mode of operation of binding audiences to specific cultural forms. Grossberg terms these modes of operation *sensibilities* which is another word for consciousness. He does speak of other sensibilities as well, for example of *pleasure* or *hyperconsumerism*, but let us remain with that of ideology.

### *Binding as a continually changing, contextual relationship*

This binding between audiences and cultural forms founds the popularity of said cultural forms, yet this binding is an ever changing *relationship* whatever the current mode of operation, sensibility or consciousness may be — including that of ideology. Such relations occur, of course, within different **contexts**:

"Audiences never deal with single cultural texts, or even with single genres or media. Culture 'communicates' only in particular contexts in which a range of texts, practices and languages are brought together. The same text can and often will be located in a number of different contexts; in each, it will function as a different text and it will likely have different relations to and effects on its audience." (1992, p. 54)

### *Affect: the feeling of life*

And at the same time, these relations are modulated by the predominant mode of operation he terms *affect*.

"Affect is closely tied to what we often describe as the feeling of life. You can understand another person's life: you can share the same meanings and pleasures, but you cannot know how it feels. But feeling, as it functions here, is not a subjective experience. It is a socially constructed domain of cultural effects. Some things feel different from others, some matter more, or in different ways, than others. The same experience will change drastically as our mood or feeling changes. The same object, with the same meaning, giving the same pleasure, is very different as our affective relationship to it changes." (1992, p. 56)

### *Examples*

Let us imagine three sensational events to better understand Grossberg's ideas, all examples of massive gatherings of people expressing collective adoration of an idol through primeval screaming:

1. "Sieg! Heil!" being loudly chanted or cried out by a predominantly male group dressed predominantly in militaristic clothing with their right arms stretched upwards towards their idol Adolf Hitler,
2. "I love you John!" being screamed hysterically by predominantly young females crying and eventually collapsing for love of the Beatles, or
3. "Bravo!" being yelled for over an hour by groups of upper-class theater-goers furiously clapping, stomping their feet and throwing aerodynamically bound bouquets of flowers at their idols the Stuttgart Ballet.

### *Popular culture: an excess of difference*

Grossberg speaks of the *excess of difference* experienced by such audiences, guaranteeing the popularity of these cultural phenomena. The *authenticity* of this experience for the audience, this excess of difference is the predominant ideology of popular culture, as it enables whatever form of culture to matter personally to the audience members. Grossberg writes

"[...] it is the excess of the difference — its authenticity — that enables rock to matter. Every fan — of whatever forms of popular culture — exists within a comparable **ideology of authenticity** [...]." (62)

Let us return to our examples of massive gatherings of people expressing collective adoration of an idol through primeval screaming. Why should we have taken these as examples? The historian Modris Eksteins called in 1989 such "sensational event[s], through which art and life both become a matter of energy and are fused as one" the modernist cultural form par excellence. (Eksteins 1989, p. 16)



### The “Stuttgart Ballet Miracle”

Whereas I assume that all of us present in this room today have seen the pictures of horrifyingly chanting Nazis and of hysterically fainting girls of Beatlemania, the last example of the wildly exuberant Stuttgart Ballet viewers may be unknown even to a group of dance scholars. So let me tell you something about this phenomenon.

The *Stuttgart Ballet Miracle* had its discursive birth in the year 1969. Stuttgart, a provincial city in Germany, entered onto the world’s stage when the “Ballett des Württembergischen Staatstheaters” was named best ballet company of Western Europe by the New York critic Clive Barnes. Following their first performance in New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, he spontaneously renamed the unknown company to the “Stuttgart Ballet”, and wrote exuberantly about the “Stuttgart Ballet Miracle”. Today the company enjoys excellent public and private funding, and a specifically positive image in local, regional and national frameworks.

The symbolics and significance of dance in Germany, however, is fraught with strife and controversy. The well-publicized, positive view of the *Stuttgart Ballet Miracle* is counterbalanced by the thoroughly ambiguous position of this form of expressive culture within German society. Although situated within the prestigious national theater system of Germany and understood by the majority of outsiders to be a form of upper-class culture, ballet is neither a lucrative, prestigious or official occupation, nor has ballet been designated to be a necessary, desirable or even optional subject of study at any level of the German educational system, except within the few professional dance academies the country has. Worse: dance itself is neither a school subject, nor is it fundable as a part of continuing education programs and it is not a profession as far as labor and unemployment laws are concerned. Traditionally, dance within the German university has been subsumed into sport science and taught as a type of sport in combination with rhythmic gymnastics. Only in the most recent history has this begun to change.

### *The meaning of the miracle*

What meaning or meanings, then, is/are ascribed to dance in Germany? What meaning is delineated in the so-called Stuttgart Ballet Miracle? How did this develop in Germany one generation after World War II? Grossberg would definitely talk about the authentic feelings experienced by the Stuttgart audience. Eksteins would underline the importance of the sensational event. Martin Scharfe, a German folklorist, would discuss the relevance of a functional analysis along the lines of the sociology of religion. Miracles, for us, the Stuttgart Ballet Miracle, function to integrate groups: miracles only happen to groups who are in a pathetic situation — in all other situations, the word of God suffices. Scharfe cites Deacon Bahnmaier of Sulz:

“Wenn Visionen göttlich sind, ist es ein Zeichen, daß es mit dem Empfänger elend steht, weil sonst Gott durch das Wort wirken würde.” (Scharfe 1968/69, p. 198)

The school of thought applying Norbert Elias' thoughts on the body to dance, including Rudolf zur Lippe, Gabriele Klein and Dorion Weickmann, would perhaps say that Cranko's ballets are the missing link between the modern disciplining of the body, and the pre-modern expression of naturalness — as I argued in 1997 in a chapter on Creolization of Swabia in a catalog accompanying a museum exhibition of Swabian stereotypes. The Folklorist Alan Dundes would draw parallels between ballet in Germany and the hero pattern, finding many aspects of the European hero pattern in the history of German ballet. Dance historian Marion Kant would describe ballet as democratic as compared with the German dance heralded by the Nazis, making it predestined to be adored by the 60s generation which first questioned the role of the generations before in the development of non-democratic, fascist structures in Germany. The group of thinkers centered around feminist film scholar Lisa Lewis would talk about the femininity of male stars in the era. Historian Hanna Schissler would talk about the deeply conflicting attitudes toward modernity in German thinking, with one side (e.g. Dahrendorf) claiming National Socialism midwifed modernity, and the other side (Frankfurter School of Critical Theory) claiming that modernity had birthed National Socialism. Schissler would point out that ballet developed in a pre-modern context, relieving the receiving audience of deciding about modernity.

And last but not least, we could try to answer the following question: How could it come that a people known for being pedantic, narrow-minded, no-nonsense and particularly thrifty — the Stuttgart audience — would regularly buy out all 1100 tickets for performances of their ballet company since 1962 and regularly spend an hour applauding these performances frenetically when the Stuttgart opera-goers during the season 1950/51 had explicitly negated any desire to see ballet? Historian Volker Berghahn would point out here the antipathy of of German bourgeoisie to the culture of the allied forced occupying their country explains their rejection of the ballet in 1950/51. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would point out the attractiveness for the 1960s Stuttgart audience to be the proud owner of this new version of cultural capital.

### *Meaning and its affect*

In the last four weeks, I have interviewed 20 members of the Stuttgart ballet audience which had attended the performances of the company from 1961-1973 about their relationship to the ballet. Here are some of the most often repeated and/or revealing statements. Most of the interview partners:

- refer to John Cranko as a genius,
- talk about Marcia Haydée's overwhelming dramatic qualities,
- tell how special the performances were: either of the other wildly applauding audience members, or of how moving the dancers were,
- mention personal relations to members of the ensemble or to Cranko himself, or chance meetings with them, e.g. at the supermarket, in an airplane, as neighbors
- were new to Stuttgart, having landed there in the aftermath of WWII; and most had, therefore, very little money

Interesting are also:

- that women and men had to team up to get tickets, as one had to wait all night and day in the park to be in the front of the line; this was too dangerous for women alone, and yet too exhausting for the men alone, so they took turns: the women during the daylight, the men at night,
- that many audience members had to walk long ways to see the ballet, as they could not afford to take the tram and to buy tickets, and
- Cranko's choreography made "modern music" understandable for many for the first time.

### *Affect generated by viewing the Stuttgart Ballet*

The scene I would now like to view together a scene from John Cranko's breakthrough ballet "Romeo and Juliet" which premiered in December 1962 in Stuttgart. The bedroom scene, named frequently by my interview partners as their favorite, is danced here by the cast which made the piece famous: Marcia Haydée and Richard Cragun.

#### *A thick description of the scene*

A couple is seen lying in a bed together behind a transparent curtain. As the curtains are drawn back, one sees how she is lying asleep in his arms; he is holding her and playing with her hair very lovingly, yet completely lost in his thoughts. He has dark hair and is wearing light tights and a light-colored, draped, blouse-like shirt. She also has dark hair which is long and only tied back from her face allowing it to fall freely down her back; she is wearing a white, empire-style dress. The music is diffuse, the lighting cool, as in night time.

He lays her away onto the bed, kisses her and pauses sitting on the edge of the bed, obviously worried as he buries his face in his hand. At the sounding of a higher pitched violin, he suddenly looks up, sees the long curtains presumably covering french doors, walks towards them, opens them and then leans apprehensively on a pillar, looking at Juliet.

When the low-toned strings sound out, he walks suddenly to her, takes her cape into his hands, approaches the sleeping Juliet with the intention of putting the cape on her. She awakes with a jolt, sits up alarmed, scoots to the edge of the bed, takes the cape into her hands, drops it, and rushes off to the window curtains, which she hurriedly draws back over the windows. She then looks at Romeo walking pensively about, and runs towards him when the french horn sounds. She grabs him around the neck from behind, he clutches her hands and they swing their torsos together in an arc across the back, seeming utterly distraught. He turns, falls to his knees holding her with his head to her bosom, and she repeats the torso movement, ending by embracing his head at her bosom.

Then she begins a series of pique arabesques — the first moment displaying ballet vocabulary — with an allongé arm towards the windows, which he disrupts by taking her into his arms, and flipping her around once along the spinal axis (i.e. parallel to the floor), simulating somewhat an *entrelacé*. After repeating this, she collapses completely on his arm, letting everything fall in a modern dance manner.

He re-erects her, and walks away backwards, looking longingly at her. She runs toward him, jumps and he catches her with both hands at her back; she maintains an extremely arched back, with her limbs and head hanging freely; her breastbone is facing the ceiling, as if to be sacrificed in some ancient ceremony. He turns halfway around slowly and flips her halfway around, so she lands with her chest on his chest, her arms hanging behind him, his arms and face stretched beseechingly towards heaven, her legs in position *sur le cou-de-pied derrière* — another balletic moment.

He walks several steps, puts her down, withdrawing a bit, but she re-embraces him around the neck while standing in *soussus*. He stretches his arms to the side no longer touching her, yet with his cheek pressed on hers, and walks again slowly. She maintains her *soussus* clutching at his neck, but is drawn completely off-balance when he begins walking, being dragged along diagonally to the floor, still maintaining the *soussus* positioning. While walking, he embraces her, at which point she lets herself fall completely, arms dangling. He again lets go of her, she clutches again at his neck. Finally, he embraces her, and pulls her onto her feet.

She approaches him stormily with a *chassé* and *piqué* pirouettes with her working leg stretched *soulevé à la seconde*, ending in a low arabesque lift with her back pressed onto his front side, arms in a kind of side *allongé*. After being set down, she approaches him again with a very elegant *piqué arabesque* and then repeats the *chassé* phrase, ending in an embrace with both in fourth position *croisé tombé*, her back to his stomach, which they unfold to the famous pose with both dancers' arms stretched to the side, palms up. There now follows a more dynamic section with more standardized ballet vocabulary, mixed with some short moments of dropping the torso. Interesting is her lack of spotting in many of the turns, creating the effect of her being lost. Both also use *suivis* or tiny running steps letting them both seem to be children.

At the end of the scene they kiss passionately, he strokes her hair lovingly from behind, covers her face with her hands, and runs off through the french doors.

### Questions for discussion

Leading into a discussion, I would like to pose the following questions to this group of dance scholars:

1. How did this develop in Germany one generation after World War II?
2. How in Stuttgart, where the opera-goers during the season 1950/51 explicitly negated any desire to see ballet?
3. How did it come that a people known for being pedantic, narrow-minded, no-nonsense and particularly thrifty would regularly buy out all 1100 tickets for performances of their ballet company since 1962 and regularly spend an hour applauding these performances frenetically?
4. What meaning or meanings, then, is/are ascribed to dance in Germany?
5. What meaning is delineated in the so-called Stuttgart Ballet Miracle?

Thank you for sharing your thoughts with me on this subject!

### *Insight offered in the discussion*

One of the ideas of this group is the parallelism of Cranko's Romeo and Juliet and the concept of lost youth displayed in the Titanic which was adored by representatives of the Chinese cultural revolution.

Another point made is that Grossberg was most probably referring to the work "Is There a Text in the Class?" from Stanley Fish, a communications theorist.

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**Choreographing The Spectacle of Biopolitics:  
(Re)Staging National Abjection in Antony Tudor's *Echoing of Trumpets***

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***Abstract***

*This paper investigates the ways in which internment is represented and reperformed choreographically in Antony Tudor's 1963 ballet *Ekon Av Trumpeter (Echoing of Trumpets)*. In analyzing this dance work I explore Giorgio Agamben's theory of bare life and the spectacular political-juridical space of the concentration camp. Engaging with Agamben's concepts, I examine the performative potential of biopolitics and argue that the imposition of a state of exception creates a space in which biopolitics can be physicalized through acts of national abjection. I then investigate Julia Kristeva's discussion of the process of self-subjectification in relation to Arjun Appaduri's work on the performative nature of the predatory majority. In so doing I examine how the majoritarian power of the nation-state enacts process of abjection against minority bodies as a means of both defining and defending itself. Lastly, I turn to John Scanlan's work on garbage and an exploration of the ways in which the human body is stripped of signification in order to be systematically discarded. Applying these contrasting theories to a choreographic analysis of *Echoing of Trumpets*, I investigate the physical representations of both the process of abjection and the abject body itself as they appear within Tudor's theatrical interpretation of the state of exception. Mobilizing the performative potential of biopolitics as it appears within the space of the camp, Tudor's tragic ballet is a philosophical and political statement that spectacularizes theoretical discourses on the political-juridical processes of totalitarian rule and state-sponsored genocide.*

In his discussions on the practice of internment, Giorgio Agamben explores the political-juridical structures that lead to the development of concentration camps in modern democratic societies. Asserting that changing applications of law and governance can allow for the redefinition of national space, Agamben outlines the ways in which shifting constructions of legal organization work to create the unique form of sociopolitical space that is the camp. Through this investigation into the spatial nature of concentration camps, Agamben details the specific ways in which interned people are experienced, classified, and treated.

According to Agamben, the development of the camp depends on the imposition of a state of exception over an entire civilian population within a state-controlled territory.<sup>1</sup> Enacted during a period of national political crisis, the state of exception constitutes a temporary rejection of the nation-state's normally maintained democratic

structure in favor of the implementation of totalitarian rule. Seen as a necessary means of protecting the nation-state from what is perceived as an immediate threat to sociopolitical stability, the state of exception allows the nation-state to legally perform normally unjustifiable actions as a means of reinforcing its sovereignty over dissenting populations. In such a situation, citizenship and individual human rights are legally diminished, superseded, and rejected as deemed necessary to ensure the nation-state's survival.

Investigating totalitarian rule in such instances, Agamben asserts that the camp is the space that opens up when the state of exception becomes an integral and continuously realized part of a nation-state's legal and physical construction. In this configuration, "the state of exception, which was essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law."<sup>2</sup> While the camp is placed outside the normal judicial order, it cannot be considered a space that is external to the nation itself; in maintaining sovereignty over both the physical space of the camp and its inhabitants, the nation-state actively asserts the camp's inclusion in its domain of control.

The inhabitants of such a space straddle a position of simultaneous national inclusion and exclusion, occupying "a zone of indistinction between... the exception and the rule, the licit and the illicit, in which every juridical protection has disappeared."<sup>3</sup> While the biological life and physical presence of the interned people are actively affirmed and controlled by the nation-state, their social identities and human rights are simultaneously removed through the political-judicial structuring of the imposed state of exception. Agamben describes this characteristic liminality of the interned subject as naked life, the state in which the physical body is bare of social signification.<sup>4</sup> With interned persons stripped of their political statuses and indistinguishable as citizens, the space of the camp becomes a paradigm of biopolitics in which sovereign "power confronts nothing other than pure biological life without any mediation."<sup>5</sup>

In this paper I will further explore Agamben's concept of bare life through an inquiry into the performative potential of biopolitics. I argue that the imposition of a state of exception creates a space in which biopolitics can be physicalized through the performance of national abjection. To exemplify this, I will look at the ways in which internment is represented and reperformed choreographically in Antony Tudor's 1963 ballet *Ekon Av Trumpeter (Echoing of Trumpets)*.<sup>6</sup> In my analysis of this dance work I will first investigate Julia Kristeva's discussion of the process of self-subjectification in relation to Arjun Appaduri's work on the performative nature of the predatory majority. In so doing, I will explore how the majoritarian power of the nation-state enacts a process of abjection against minority populations as a means of both defining and defending itself. I then turn to John Scanlan's work on garbage and an exploration of the ways in which human beings are reduced to bare life in order to be systematically disposed. Applying these contrasting theories to a choreographic analysis of *Echoing of Trumpets*, I will investigate the physical representations of both the process of abjection and the abject body itself as they appear within Tudor's theatrical interpretation of the state of exception.

*Echoing of Trumpets* is hailed as one of Antony Tudor's most affective works and epitomizes his mastery of staging despair and tragedy through dance.<sup>7</sup> In creating this work, Tudor drew inspiration for both the ballet's narrative outline and his choice of



choreographic imagery from the story of the massacre of Lidice, Czechoslovakia, by Nazi forces during World War II.<sup>8</sup> On 27 May 1942 SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich was assassinated in his car while traveling to Prague, Czechoslovakia. Outraged by the assassination the German government retaliated against the Czech people by decimating the rural village of Lidice, killing every adult male and some fifty-two women. All surviving women and children were interned within the village for six days, when they were either transported to Prague for execution or moved into the concentration camp at Ravensbruck.<sup>9</sup>



Figures 1 and 2: Massacre and Destruction at Lidice, 10 June 1942.

With a scenic design of barbed wire fences flanking the back wall of the theatre and the rubble of decimated stone buildings encircling the area of the stage, *Echoing of Trumpets* recreates the physical space of a small village overtaken by totalitarian military force. Positioning the action of his ballet within this symbolic space, Tudor restages the interaction between a collection of interned women and the military men who enforce the location's occupation. Making the performance of this dynamic interpersonal relationship the focus of his ballet, Tudor visualizes the ways in which representatives of sovereign power interact with the bare life that is created through the imposition of the state of exception.



Figure 3: The Royal Swedish Ballet in *Ekön av Trumpeter*.

In her exploration into the nature of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva discusses the spatial distinctions that define the abject. According to Kristeva, abjection is a violent act of separation that serves to establish one's sense of self as a significantly independent being. In actively defining one's being through the delineation of a border between the self and the not-self, the abject is created when "a deject... places (himself), separates (himself), situates (himself)" as distinct and autonomous.<sup>10</sup> In creating this separation between the self and the abject, the deject defines the abject's existence as "that of being opposed to [the deject itself]."<sup>11</sup> According to Kristeva, this self-constructed border that separates one's being from its abject is neither finite nor impenetrable, but instead has the potential to be shifted and even collapsed. For an individual to avoid such a collapse of the abject back into the self, the performance of actively defining and physically resisting the abject must be continually reenacted.

Kristeva's explication of the process of abjection can be seen as applicable to a discussion on the formation and maintenance of both national identity and the independent nation-state. In *Fear of Small Numbers*, Arjun Appadurai discusses the relationship between majority populations and minority groups within the nation-state as a means of exploring the roots of contemporary genocidal practices. According to Appadurai, the demarcation of the minority group is not a preformed category but is the product of a specific set of circumstances within every nation and every nationalism. In order to create and maintain its own existence, the nation-state enacts a process of abjection through which it classifies itself as separate from other national territories and their respective identities. Following with Kristeva's assertion of the nature of abjection, this definition of national selfhood is always vulnerable to collapse, and the maintenance of the nation-state is dependant on the continued assertion of its separation from abjected others.

The continuous crossing of the physical borders of nation-states by non-nationals necessitates the continued assertion of the nation-state's separation from the abjected other. Thus, there develops a constant sense of national marginality and an ever-present fear of socio-political upheaval caused by the infiltration of abjected persons. Seen as possible threats to national being, "minorities are the major site for displacing the anxieties of many states about their own marginality (real or imagined)."<sup>12</sup> In such instances, minorities can be seen to trigger a realization of the failure of national homogeneity, which is deeply connected to a fear of the loss of national unity and a resultant collapse of sociopolitical structure. For Appadurai, it is this fear of national collapse and loss of the nationalized self that "underwrites the worldwide impulse to extrude or to eliminate minorities."<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between the interned women and the military men in *Echoing of Trumpets* demonstrates this fear. Throughout the ballet the minority group of the interned women is manhandled and dominated by larger numbers of military men. While the military men can assert their majoritarian power when joined together as a collective group, the women are able to combat this power when an individual soldier is separated from the protective power of his comrades. Straying from the group of exiting military men, a single soldier remains behind to assault and presumably rape a woman he notices standing alone. As she resists him, his assault becomes increasingly violent. Cowering behind the rubble of the decimated village, the group of interned women witnesses this

attack. Revolting against the majoritarian domination this man represents, the women stage a counter-assault by luring the attacker into a position in which they can pull their shawls over his face and around his neck, strangling him to death.

Soon returning to the stage, the other military men quickly find the dead body of their comrade. Incensed by his death, they stage a violent attack against the group of women, hauling each around by their necks, strangling two to death at the front of the stage, and dragging two others away. In this instance, the dominant majority of the camp officials can be seen to develop what Appadurai calls a predatory identity. While the imposition of the state of exception has stripped these interned women of their political rights and status as citizens, their biological life and potential to stage reciprocal acts of violence remains. Realizing that simply interning the women will not ensure the dominant majority's complete and sustained safety from minority groups, the men set out to predatorily exterminate the women with the hopes of eliminating all possible threat to their identity.



Figure 4: The Royal Swedish Ballet in *Ekon av Trumpeter*.

The only means by which a nation-state can ever assuage the fear of the threatening other is by annihilating all other national identities and minority populations, thus constructing a global purity of national identity. Hannah Arendt discusses this desire in her analysis of the nation-state. According to Arendt, the ultimate goal of all nation-states “is not only the freely admitted, long-ranging ambition to global rule, but also the never admitted and immediately realized attempt at total domination.”<sup>14</sup> Following Arendt’s argument that all nation-states strive to realize global domination through the eradication of differing national identities, Appadurai argues that “all majoritarianisms have in them the seeds of genocide, since they are invariably connected with ideas about singularity and completeness of the national ethos.”<sup>15</sup>

Similar to Arendt and Appadurai, Tudor also suggests that the state-sponsored practices of totalitarian rule and genocide are universal. This is expressed through both Tudor’s personal commentary on *Echoing of Trumpets* and his choice to abstract the events and location of his ballet. Although he drew choreographic themes from the

massacre of Lidice in creating *Echoing of Trumpets* and specifically dedicated his ballet to the memory of the village's women, Tudor specifies that the ballet is not meant to be seen as a literal visualization of this specific event.<sup>16</sup> At Tudor's behest, the ballet's program notes are to express that the events represented in *Echoing of Trumpets* "took place in any locale and at any time that civilization left its imprint."<sup>17</sup> In this characterization of the ballet, Tudor not only asserts that the Nazi destruction of Lidice is far from anomalous in the greater narrative of WWII, but also that every civilization has enacted a similar process of state-supported massacre and genocide. Distancing the ballet from the events of Lidice, Tudor's ballet serves as a political and philosophical statement on the nature of national sovereignty and human rights. *Echoing of Trumpets* exposes the recurring fact that "people always seem to want to dominate other people... They never stop torturing each other with a kind of mild viciousness."<sup>18</sup>

The universality of Tudor's theme became more apparent when the ballet was given its American premiere in 1966.<sup>19</sup> While the ballet would have been relevant to American audiences at the time of its Swedish premiere in 1963, by 1966 the ballet was seen as evocative of America's occupation of Vietnam. Serving as a metaphor for the United States' relationship with the Vietnamese population, the scenes presented in *Echoing of Trumpets* evoked the practice of "[American] soldiers behaving at times in a horrible way to the native populations" of Vietnam.<sup>20</sup>

Similar to this discussion on the nation-state's propensity toward totalitarian rule and desire for the eradication of abjected others, John Scanlan discusses the ways in which human beings are reduced to bare life in order to be systematically annihilated. In his book *On Garbage*, Scanlan investigates the ways in which contemporary society classifies and interacts with self-produced waste. According to Scanlan, garbage is the valueless matter that is left over when the useful aspects of a tangible object have been exhausted or deemed nonexistent. Void of value, these objects become formless and are positioned for removal from society. Scanlan asserts that such a process of consumption, redefinition, and rejection can be staged against human beings. This occurs when a sovereign power strips a population of social value and political rights, reducing such citizen to an "indistinguishable mass, a state that ensures their treatment as mere rubbish... stuff that can be pushed around, co-mingled with its similarly valueless and indistinguishable like."<sup>21</sup> Whereas Agamben describes naked life as the state in which one loses political status and is reduced to the purely biological, Scanlan's discussion on garbage suggests a further reduction of the interned person to a state of non-humanness. This process of dehumanization is also suggested by Appadurai, who argues that the "reduction of target populations to subhuman states facilitates the work of large-scale murder by... providing a self-fulfilling proof of the ideological argument that the victims are... garbage, and a cancerous part of the valued national body."<sup>22</sup>

This process of reducing human life to the status of sub-human garbage is seen in *Echoing on Trumpets*, where the soldiers who occupy the camp use the interned women as expendable objects. Seen as biologically human, biologically female, the women are considered physical objects useful for sexual pleasure. In the final choreographic scene of the ballet, the surviving group of women is accosted by the cast's entire collection of men. After encircling and encroaching upon the group, the men grab each of the women, lift them up from the floor, and fling them around. Splaying their legs open, lifting their skirts up, pulling their heads back, and hoisting them onto their shoulders, the men parade

the interned women around the stage in a display of physical and sexual abuse. Throughout this performance the femininity of the women is shown to be increasingly depleted- their outfits are torn apart, their hair is disheveled, and their ability to physically resist their attackers decreases. With the physical resistance of their victims lessened, the men are each able to wrap their respective woman's legs around their waist, creating an image of mass rape. With the women's humanity removed and the men's sexual desires fulfilled, the women's use-value is destroyed. Left in crumpled mounds and dragged along the floor, all but three of the interned women are killed by the end of this violent rape scene. Slowly piled into a heap on a set of stretchers, the women's once useful bodies are carried off as garbage while the survivors watch from the background.

Through a choreographic analysis of the representations of internment and bare life in Antony Tudor's *Echoing of Trumpets*, the imposition of a state of exception is shown to create a space in which national abjection is physicalized. Connecting Julia Kristeva's discussion on the process of abjection and Arjun Appaduri's work on the performative nature of the predatory majority, the nation-state can be seen to enact a process of abjection against minority populations as a means of both defining and defending its being. This process is visualized in *Echoing of Trumpets* through the uprising and subsequent violent suppression of the ballet's interned women. Exploring such acts of violent suppression through John Scanlan's discussion on the nature of garbage, it can be seen that human beings are stripped of their humanity in order to be legally annihilated. This process of reducing human life to a state of exhausted, formless matter in order to justify its extermination and removal from society is portrayed through Tudor's choreographed mass rape scene.

Mobilizing the performative potential of biopolitics as it appears within the space of the camp, Tudor's tragic ballet is a philosophical and political statement that confronts both the process of national abjection and the abject body itself. Considered in this way, *Echoing of Trumpets* can be seen to physicalize theoretical discourses on the political-judicial processes of totalitarian rule and state-sponsored genocide.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 37.

<sup>2</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 39-40.

<sup>4</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

<sup>5</sup> Agamben, *Means without End*, 40.

<sup>6</sup> I viewed a 1968 made for television video recording of the Royal Swedish Ballet performing this work. This video is held in the archives of the Antony Tudor Ballet Trust.

<sup>7</sup> *Ekon av Trumpeter* was created on and first performed by the Royal Swedish Ballet. The ballet premiered on September 28, 1963 at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm, Sweden. See: Chazin-Bennahum, Judith.

<sup>8</sup> On June 10, 1942, the German government announced that it had decimated the rural village of Lidice, Czechoslovakia, killing every adult male and some fifty-two women. All surviving women and children were interned within the village until June 16<sup>th</sup>, when they were either transported to Prague for execution or moved into the concentration camp at Ravensbruck. See: Ceslav and Lisciotto.

<sup>9</sup> Ceslav and Lisciotto.

<sup>10</sup> Kristeva, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Kristeva, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Appadurai, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Appadurai, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Arendt, 240.

<sup>15</sup> Appadurai, 57.

<sup>16</sup> Perlmutter.

<sup>17</sup> Topaz, 221.

<sup>18</sup> Tudor, Antony qtd. in Chazin-Bennahum, 204.

<sup>19</sup> The American premiere of *Echoing of Trumpets* was staged by the Metropolitan Opera Ballet Company at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City on March 27, 1966. see: Chazin-Bennahum, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Chazin-Bennahum, 204.

<sup>21</sup> Scanlan, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Appadurai, 56.

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## **Tito and I - Dancing in the Spectacle of Tito's Birthday in the former Yugoslavia Reframing it through a different gaze**

*Dr Vesna Milanovic*

*For forty-five years from 1945 to 1987, President Josip Broz Tito's birthday was celebrated each year with a specific dance spectacle called 'slet'. May 25th had a special place in Yugoslav history: it was a spectacle, a mass celebration of Tito's birthday, culminating in a Youth Relay baton being handed over to Tito himself. The grand finale was also known as a 'slet' and was performed as a mass spectacle in Belgrade, in the stadium of the Yugoslav National Army, in front of the President. The last 'slet' in President Tito's presence was performed in 1979. The purpose was to demonstrate public adoration for him and so thousands of local 'slets' across Yugoslavia were simultaneously performed prior to the main stage spectacle in Belgrade. As a girl, I took part in many local 'slets' prepared by my mother as a PE teacher, specifically training for this event, and then later on as a dancer on the public stage. Many choreographers, my Yugoslav colleagues, were 'privileged' to choreograph the main stage slet.*

*The idea in this paper is to demonstrate the way 'slet' as dance spectacle played an important role, and reflects the last bit of brotherhood and unity which was the main concept in shaping what was called Tito's Yugoslavia. In 1956 Tito decided that this birthday celebrated on May 25th would become the main jubilee to celebrate youth. In this way from 1956-1987 each 25th May was celebrated throughout the country with the main dance spectacle in Belgrade in the presence of Tito.*

Vesna Mikic in *Music as a means of construction and reconstruction of the revolutionary myth: Youth's Day in SFRY* points out 'The music for the 'slet' (jamboree) consisted partly of the combination of traditional, partisan and folk songs, often in different arrangements which enabled the 'following', triggering and musical 'painting' of different important phenomena in connection with Yugoslavia's/Tito's history. Some examples include: marking the anniversaries of famous battles of the Second World War, jubilees of the Communist Party, praising the fraternity and unity of Yugoslav's peoples and the strength of the country and its army. At the same time that meant praising Tito as the leader of the socialist revolution partisan movement, Communist Party, 'father of the nation' and Commander of Yugoslav Peoples Army. '

### **My experience: Dancing and looking**

In this paper I shall take a dual position, as a dancer and a spectator, as an on looker and the looked at, in order to reveal my gaze.



Figure 1 Slet 1979, Belgrade



Figure 2, Slet 1979, Belgrade



Figure 3 Youth Relay baton



Figure 4 Youth Relay baton

As a girl I took a part in a number of local 'slets' as it was a compulsory activity in PE classes in primary and secondary schools, but not in the major spectacle until 1979. My mother, a PE teacher and one of the first educated women in this domain after the second world war was

involved in the team who developed the notation and scripts for the 'slet' on a national level. The script was circulated to all PE teachers nationally in order to exercise the unified performance. The sequences were described and then practised throughout the whole country in the same way. Unified movements, unified sequences, repeated and practised from pose to pose, dot to dot. Exhausting practice of days and months, in a very hot Balkan May. We would start practising it in January and the last month was devoted to integration of various fragments and sequences, integrating and making a unified performance among thousand of participants.

It was a different choreography for the main Belgrade's spectacle, as 'slet' was staged by a number of choreographers and sports experts from all over the country. Some of my colleagues choreographers, namely Dubravka Maletic, Jelena Katic, Damir Zlatar Frey choreographed the main stage spectacles or parts of it. The main concepts of choreographing changed over the years from rhythmic and gymnastic and collective, unified movements to more liberated dance movements in eighties. From rhythmic, gymnastic and collective to more relaxed dance sequences in 1987.

An example - In 1987 Sonja Vukicevic danced Bolero with a number of young dancers surrounded by 9000 young dancers. Ana Vujanovic explains ' (2008) 'Sonja Vukićević also appears as a symptomatic dance figure of a local paradigm shift from collectivism, characteristic for socialist countries (such as SFRY), toward an individualism, characteristic for capitalist countries (such as new countries, after the disintegration of SFRY). In fact, she was engaged/ in the last Youth Day 'slet', performed in 1987. And instead of the common slet, what we had that year was a modern performance (based on some parts of Damir Zlatar Fray's *Bolero*), where Vukićević performed as a solo dancer, (although) together with 9.000 youths. For the first time we could see an individual clearly singled out of an anonymous mass of dancing bodies, which was syntactic and symbolic collapse of the slets' ideology of "come together!"'

In 1979, when the last performance was organised in Marshall Tito's presence, I was already a dancer in Belgrade's Contemporary dance theatre group, and a member of the Music youth organisation. It was unusual for contemporary dancers to take part in this event, but it was seen more as a gesture of 'good will' and to represent the Music Youth organisation. The experience was completely different from any other dancing on stage experience. My recollection of the event was as enormous energy, unity, brotherhood, collectiveness, bodies shaped in one collective body. The energy from the audience and participants was overwhelming.

Looking back at video clips I thought that I would find my feminist gaze, but this is not what happened, and I haven't achieved what I promised to do in the paper. Looking back at these video clips and photographs, I felt nostalgia for my former country, for peace, happiness, my youth, Unity, brotherhood, collectiveness, humanity that has disappeared through the ten years of political troubles. I felt some nostalgia for the promised fantasy that Tito set up for us. I cannot say any more what was the reality or what was the fantasy. My generation believed in this fantasy that was promised to us, an ideal world with equality, humanity, collective feelings the concepts of socialism promoted even through dance and at the same time in the seventies and eighties it still felt like that. None could predict that this fantasy would be destroyed so quickly in ten years of war and the disappearance of Yugoslavia.

### Gaze/ Fantasy/Reality

In order to explain and take some theoretical perspective on my gaze, themes such as ideology, fantasy, reality I refer to Lacan and Slavoj Žižek; Lacan's concepts of 'gaze'<sup>i</sup> as he develops these ideas in *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (1979) and in *Écrits: A Selection* (1977). I then consider his explanation of other/Other, which enabled me to discuss the gaze in general and to position the subject in relation to the Other. The intention of this paper is to position myself as the spectator/witness of the historical/cultural and political subject, in relation to the socio/political/cultural Balkan Other.

In the *Spectre of Ideology* (1994), philosopher and psychoanalyst, Slavoj Žižek writes of the ideological mystification: The wars of the Yugoslav succession had unpredictable consequences for the majority of people of the former Yugoslavia- impacts that crossed ethnic and national lines as they destroyed homes and lives, all in a process of establishing the new 'order' of the Balkans. Žižek applies the concept of the Lacanian Other<sup>ii</sup>, which becomes the focus of my argument for purposes of this paper. I take that starting point and then develop it further, to take the personal framework for this paper into play.

In *The Plague of fantasies* Žižek (1997) writes that 'Every belonging to a society involves a paradoxical point at which the subject is ordered to embrace freely as the result of his choice what is anyway imposed on him ( we must love our country, our parents) ' Žižek 1997, p. 36. He continues that 'This paradox of willing (choosing freely) what is in any case necessary of pretending (maintaining the appearance) that there is a free choice although in fact there isn't, is strictly co-dependent with the notion of an empty symbolic, a gesture- an offer –which is meant to be rejected: what the empty Gesture offers is the opportunity to choose the impossible, that which inevitable will not happen.' Žižek, 1997, p. 36

Žižek speaks of Althusserian notion in *The seven veils of fantasy of Ideological State Apparatuses* – of the 'external ritual which materializes ideology: the subject who maintains his distance towards the ritual is unaware of the fact that the ritual already dominates him from within. This is also what Marxian 'commodity fetishism, is about; In his explicit self-awareness a capitalist is a common-sense nominalist, but the 'purely material sincerity' of his deeds displays the 'theological whimsies' of the commodity universe. This purely 'material sincerity' of the external ideological ritual, not the depth of the subject's inner convictions and desires, is the true locus of the fantasy which sustains an ideological edifice.' Žižek 1997 p. 5

Žižek takes up the Lacanian argument that 'Reality is a fantasy-construction which enables us to mask the Real of our desire.' (1979: 5, 6) In the former Yugoslavia, under President Tito (1945-1981) and latterly under Milosevic (1989- 2000), we have witnessed the construction of ideological, but different frameworks that operates as a fantasy to support reality. Using a Lacanian argument in order to explain the construction of fantasy to support the reality, Žižek explains that: 'the subject constructs a dream, a story which enables him to prolong the sleep, to avoid awakening into reality.' I contend, following Žižek and building on personal experience as well, that the majority of people in the former Yugoslavia can be seen to have behaved as dreamers who wanted to prolong the dream, in order not to face cruel reality, I was one of them. (Žižek 1994, p.323) Talking about different theories on ideology Žižek, 1994

compares Marxist and Lacanian approach 'In the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a partial gaze overlooking totality of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology, rather designates totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility.'

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel .... The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality, but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel.

Zizek, S.1994,p. 323

Zizek continues that 'Tito's official ideology continually exhorted people to take control of their lives outside of the structures of Party and State; the authorised media criticised personal indifference and the escape into privacy. However, it was precisely an authentic, self-managed articulation and organisation of common interests which the regime feared most. Between the lines of its propaganda, the Government suggested that its official solicitations were not to be taken too literally, that a cynical attitude towards its ideology was what was actually wanted. The greatest catastrophe for the regime would have been for its own ideology to be taken seriously and acted on by its subjects.' Zizek, 1994,p. 323 In Zizek terms a 'belief, far from being 'intimate' purely mental state, is always materialized in our effective social activity: belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality.' Zizek 1994, p.317

### **Slet as a fantasy**

So my beliefs as many others and I claim, from the majority of people in my generation, were beliefs that supported 'the fantasy which regulates social reality'. The part of our social reality was built from our own dreams on my ideal world. So what was the ideological, dancing dream and fantasy represented in 'slet' offering here? external ritual which materialized communist and Tito's ideology . Fantasy reflecting Youth, happiness, ideal world, power, unity, collectiveness, and socialist aesthetics? For me, it reflects my beliefs, fantasy about nostalgic socialist and idealist dream of brotherhood, humanity unity, peace, wholeness, unified country, concepts that we had or believed in, embodied fantasy and do not now any more. I was looking for something else, but I have realised that my gaze reflects my own fantasy or reality about my ideal country that has been destroyed at the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>i</sup> Gaze: In our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it- that is what we call the gaze, Lacan,1979:73

<sup>ii</sup> What is being unfolded there is articulated like a discourse ( the unconscious is the discourse of the Other), whose syntax Freud first sought to define for those bits that come to us in certain privileged moments, in dreams, in slips of the tongue or pen, in flashes of wit. Lacan,1977:193

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druze tito mi ti se kunemo

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sy4bEvKqjgI&NR=1>

Balasevic

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2N-WUeHwRo&feature=related>

Slet 1982

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I6itsSnIkMk>

Slet 1979

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYiEoxVNryY&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0UvKkzqo9Q>

Predaja stafete

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig6fuoDL\\_Lw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ig6fuoDL_Lw)

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## The Tango de Negros in Spain's Romantic Age: Lost in Translation

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### **Abstract**

*While the Spanish gypsy is generally associated with the ethnic identity of flamenco dance, other evidence strongly points to an imprint of a sub-Saharan Africanist aesthetic. This influence can be attributed to a long-term cross-cultural contact resulting from the diaspora of black Africans in Spain and circulations of populations across the Atlantic beginning in the fifteenth century. This paper focuses on the tango, which was introduced in Spain in the nineteenth century as the tango de negros and the tango de americas from Cuba. Notably, for marketing purposes, this dance was re-named within decades as el tango gitano and the flamenco tango which essentially denied the Africanist tradition. I argue that due to the proclivities of Romantic Age writers who elevated the iconic image of the Spanish gypsy and the manipulations inherent in the development of a national identity, the memory of Africanist aesthetics was subsequently denied and eventually erased.*

### **Introduction**

The flamenco tango is a recognized *palo* or form widely practiced in today's repertoire. Yet it had the misfortune of being brought to Spain during the Romantic Age when writers and artists were searching for their idealistic image of a fiery Spanish dancer and nationalist agendas were transforming dances into icons of national identity. Within a few decades, the tango, which was introduced from Cuba as the tango de negros and tangos de Americas, was renamed as the tango de gitanos and the tango flamenco. In this paper, I will follow its history from Cuba to Spain where it was stylistically appropriated and subsumed into the Spanish dance repertoire examining how personal proclivities and political manipulations had the capacity to change narratives and reshape identity which contributed to its disassociation from its black African roots.

### **The History of the Tango de Negros**

The history of the tango is a convoluted affair as illustrated by Marta Savigliano's concise synopsis:

The story goes like this: In Cuba, the African slaves developed new music and dances intermingling their traditional rhythmic sounds with a variant of the French *contre-dances* already appropriated by the Spaniards; the resulting habanera (from Havana) made its way into Europe local styles. The *tango andaluz* (Andalusian tango), the Brazilian *maxixe*, and the tango rioplatense (from the Río de la Plata region in Argentina and Uruguay) were the offsprings of this process; the last in particular was nurtured by the milonga, a local product itself of

a certain Spanish troubadour style. When the milonga, carried by the gauchos, moved to the developing urban harbors . . . , it collided with the tangos de negros (tangos of the African slaves) and the tango andaluz that was performed by the Spanish theater companies touring South America.<sup>1</sup>

As Savigliano points out, the tango moved through many transformations and had several different meanings in Spain before becoming solidified as a flamenco form. An early reference found in an 1818 news article cited a tango in 3/8 time<sup>2</sup> which suggests something other than the binary form we know now. In an 1836 Cuban dictionary, “tango” was defined as a “gathering of [Bozales] African-race Negros to dance to the sound of Tambores [congas] and other instruments.”<sup>3</sup> Not a dance, not a music, but a gathering. This is an important distinction because it offers an explanation for the way the tango has frequently been employed in the *juergas* or flamenco jam sessions. It suggests that Africanist aesthetics could have infiltrated both movements and practices in flamenco art.

Various incarnations of tangos were recorded in Spanish and Cuban newspapers throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. However, in 1850, a performance in Seville drew enough attention for it to assume a definitive form. “La Negra” María Martínez, a singer from Havana, caused a furor with her rendition of the American song, “el tango.” According to the press, she was showered with claps, bravos, flowers—“finally everything that can be done to fill the hands of such an eminent artist.”<sup>4</sup> Her positive reception ensured that the tango would continue to be received well in Spain for years. Indeed, tangos de negros were quickly incorporated into several Spanish-penned zarzuelas (light operas) throughout the 1850s.<sup>5</sup>

These zarzuelas featured white dancers donning black faces,<sup>6</sup> a practice in Spain that has been recorded since the 1500s and is the subject of another paper. The tango, however, was not relegated solely to such interpretations in this era. It seems that its popularity cut across all class and racial barriers. In Cuba it was danced by a range of participants as was noted by an 1863 Cuban newspaper:

In one of the principal ports of the capital, on Bernaza Street, between Obispo and Lamparilla, every night and all feast days, a happy multitude of sailors, soldiers and blacks unite to happily adore the joyful women who occupy the localities of the neighborhoods and little houses, executing, as is natural, out of the ordinary and indistinguishable movements, impeding traffic and hurting the ears of the most susceptible people.<sup>7</sup>

This phenomenon was not relegated to Cuba. An 1848 Madrid article mentions an event that spontaneously occurred in the Café del Correo in Cádiz. Upon hearing a tango, some sailors and others who knew it jumped up and performed two dances to wild applause.<sup>8</sup> Paul Gilroy rightfully warns against underestimating travel in the process of mediation and movement.<sup>9</sup> The easy familiarity with this dance highlights its circulation across the Atlantic.

The speed in which the tango in Spain was adopted is astonishing. Also in 1850, a well-respected dance academy in Seville presented a public rehearsal of national dances featuring the best female bolero dancers of the city who, among other pieces, danced the



“tango de los negros.”<sup>10</sup> This suggests that the most highly trained dancers in Seville were publicly performing a dance that was clearly associated with black Afro-Cuban dance at this time. Making foreign things Spanish is an acknowledged mechanism in Spanish culture. My flamenco teacher for many years, Mariquita Flores, used to sincerely avow that the Spanish took what they liked from other people and made it better. Estébanez Calderón, a Spanish Romantic writer who published in 1847, noted that Seville was a workshop where dances were tweaked and modified. He considered it a depository for dance, the workshop, the university where one learns the inimitable grace and salt of baile andaluz.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the Spanish press in 1886 remarked that the “tangos, which were born on American soil, here have been given their naturalization letter.”<sup>12</sup>

### The Tango and the Romantic Age

Allusions to Cuba and Africa could not persist for long against the biases of the Romantic writers who preferred to elevate the gypsy as the epitome of Spanish exoticism. Their proclivities helped to shape the myth of Spain as an exotic land, firmly planting it as such in the imagination of the Western literati. Spain was particularly amenable to such a portrayal because it was often considered as being outside of Europe. This concept—succinctly expressed by Alexandre Dumas who remarked that Africa began at the Pyrenees<sup>13</sup>--essentially removed Spain from the rest of Europe and increased its appeal as an exotic travel destination. And Europeans did flock to Spain and as evidenced by Timothy Mitchell’s observation that over 800 travel narratives were written about Spain by foreign authors.<sup>14</sup> This increase in print-capitalism, as noted by Benedict Anderson, “made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”<sup>15</sup> But the new ways of thinking were vulnerable to manipulation through subsequent acts of translation.

Dance critic Théophile Gautier was appalled when he arrived in Spain in 1853 because the dancing he witnessed there was considerably less in quality than that of the professional touring groups he had seen in Paris. He was dismayed when the first dancers he saw were “more used-up, more worn-out, more toothless, more bleer-eyed, more bald, and more dilapidated”<sup>16</sup> which quickly made the Spain of the “Romancero, of the ballads of Victor Hugo [and] the tales of Merimée . . . fade before me [him].”<sup>17</sup> He bemoaned that the only Spanish costume left was the mantilla and all of the dresses in Madrid were French.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, if Merimée’s Carmen did not really exist, she needed to be invented. The shaping of the Spanish dancer as an exotic entity needed a stronger frame of reference upon which to build flights of fancy than what reality suggested. This was accomplished by creating a mythology for the dancers of Andalusia, particularly the women, by recalling the Roman interpretations of the dancing girls of Gades, present-day Cádiz. These *puellae Gaditanae* were mentioned by several Roman authors who both adored and denounced them, especially the famous dancer Telethusa who could reputedly “have roused passion in palsied Pelias, and have stirred Hecuba’s spouse even by Hector’s pyre.”<sup>19</sup> Alluding to these dancers was not a new phenomenon in the Romantic Age.<sup>20</sup> Padre Mariana, who had written a treatise against dancing in 1609, denounced the zarabanda of Spain and declared it was the same shameful dance of the Roman *Gaditanae*. As a frame of reference he inserted quotes from Roman poets, including

Martial, to illustrate the evils of its lascivious movements.<sup>21</sup> Padre Mariana could very well be blamed for putting this myth in print for this was the first reference I could find in the early Modern Age relating to this subject.

According to Allen Josephs in his work on Andalusian myths, however, it was Richard Ford, who, “with his own mixture of salt and gall, turned Telethusa into the most interesting *andaluza* of antiquity.”<sup>22</sup> Ford wrote his Hand-book for Travellers in Spain based on his travels in the 1830s. He is important in flamenco literature because he is frequently quoted by writers who favor the exclusivity of a gypsy trope in regards to flamenco history. Ford found his fantasies of Spain embodied in Cádiz:

This is the spot for the modern philosopher to study the descendants of those “*Gaditanae*,” who turned more ancient heads than even the sun. The “ladies of Cadíz,” the theme of our old ballads, have retained all their former celebrity; they have cared neither for time nor tide. Observe, particularly . . . the Gaditanian walk, *El Piafar*, about which everyone has heard so much. . . .

The Gaditana has no idea of *not* being admired. . . . Her “pace” is her boast. . . . Her *meneo* [’wiggle’] is considered by grave antiquarians to be the unchanged *crissatura* of Martial.<sup>23</sup>

And of course Merimée’s *Carmen*<sup>24</sup> strongly contributed to the construction of the flamenco dancer’s image. The character of *Carmen* is arguably the most appealing and exotic female figure in Western literature. According to Evlyn Gould in The Fate of *Carmen*, the novella was so appealing because its readers were pulled between the allure of Bohemia and the “and the rules, comfort, order, or formal coherence of narrated realities.”<sup>25</sup> Once *Carmen* was invented and contained in a controlled alluring narrative, thousands of Europeans went to Spain to find her. Yet again not every traveler was so enthralled. Mrs. Villiers-Wardell, in her 1909 travelogue, stated that: “I think Bizet’s delicious ‘*Carmen*’ has a great deal to answer for when travelers rail at the shortcomings of Spain.”<sup>26</sup> She considered that most people were disappointed to not find what they expected in Spain<sup>27</sup> which implies that much of the Romantic literature was based more in fantasy than reality.

Nevertheless, *Carmen* and Telethusa placed the Spanish dancer squarely within the realm of Orientalism and the ideals of Romanticism. Edward Said observed how Orientalism was conceptually associated with unlimited sensuality which seems to suggest “sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, and deep generative energies.”<sup>28</sup>

Figure 1 is sketch by Gustave Doré from the 1850s depicts an academic dancer and is most likely a bolera because of her balletic costume, squared hips, and fourth position. But this sketch speaks most eloquently of the proclivities of the male gaze and desire during the Romantic Age. It is very difficult for an audience to decipher choreography when they are sitting so close to the performer and indeed no eyes are looking downwards to the dancer’s feet. It appears that the men were more infatuated with her hourglass figure than with her castanet work because of their lascivious leers and their visual mutterings. Orientalism, according to Said, held its subject in a grip—like a butterfly collection.<sup>29</sup> This dancer is examined as if she were in a collection and not on a

stage. Once such concepts of the exotic female Spanish dancer were created, they remained fixated in most of the literature.



Figure 1. A Dancing Academy, Seville.

Yet this is not to say that black Africans were not in Romantic Age Spain. There are records of black Africans performing in Spain as noted in historical accounts of the tango, but most references to “negro” in the nineteenth century are derogatory. One of many examples of the era’s prevailing attitudes is found in an 1859 article in the Sevillian press that contained a sarcastic commentary about dancers seen on the streets of Seville. The anonymous author writes that if the female dancer were any more lascivious in her movements, she would be as black as the male black dancer who preceded her who was described as being so grotesque, the audience had to turn their heads away.<sup>30</sup> This statement reveals that in 1859 at least one black male dancer was performing on the public streets in Seville, but the author’s words convey a strong sense of disgust. Not only does he consider the movements to be very distasteful and appalling, but he positioned the black man as a device with which to measure the ugliest of aesthetics.

Condescending attitudes of the black African could not be reconciled with the tantalizing images of Carmen and Telethusa in the views of the Romantic Oriental. While the tango continued to rise in popularity, its associations with Cuba and black performers declined. The female Spanish dancer, in order to be alluring, could not have black skin. She could be seen as sensual, deceitful, fiery, and amoral, but she was not a black woman.

The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century also contributed to the subsequent denial of a Cuban and ultimately African heritage in the tango. According to sociologist Gerhard Steingress, the fall of the Bourbon regime in the early 1800s left the bourgeoisie without a culture of their own<sup>31</sup> which left Spain particularly amenable to a reshaping of its own narrative of identity. The result was that Andalusian culture was utilized as a symbolic representation of Spanish nationalism. Steingress avers that, in essence, Romanticism converted a developing cultural movement into a genuine national id.<sup>32</sup> It can be argued that Africanist aesthetics inherent in the tango de negros appear in the image of the Spanish flamenco dancer which became vital to Andalusians regionally and ultimately to Madrid nationally.

This action essentially occurred in what Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture called the Third Space, or a gap, through which cultures are “appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, the tango, which was introduced as a black dance from Cuba, was granted a new meaning as it passed into mainstream culture and was thus translated, rehistoricized and read anew through a translation that needed to correspond with the emerging narrative of identity.

A collective identity, according to Steingress, contains conscious feelings, symbols, and rituals that serve to help individuals understand each other with a similar base.<sup>34</sup> Generalized local ethnicities such as the Andalusian are present in Spain’s inherent fabric, but there is no nationalism without exploiting specific characteristics that form the basis of collective identity. Deliberately selected characteristics, such as are exemplified by the Romanticized gypsy, made Andalusian, and ultimately Spanish identity different. Other traits, such as acknowledged Africanist aesthetics are discarded.

Steingress goes even further in his analysis of Spanish national identity and avers that Spanish converted themselves to more fully become the image constructed by Romantic writers.<sup>35</sup> That is, they began to imagine themselves as they had been presented in the Romantic literature. Literature, according to Anderson, does have the capacity to give credence to a people’s nationalist identity.<sup>36</sup> And Savigliano considers that “Western imperialist discourses and technologies of exoticism had already mapped the world so thoroughly that the very exotics themselves could hardly find ways to identify themselves or other exotics outside of that discourse and those practices.”<sup>37</sup> The nineteenth-century marketplace during the development of flamenco as a commercial commodity offered its practitioners, particularly Spanish gypsies, a lucrative image. Many performers and writers capitalized on this by embellishing the story of flamenco with the fantastical mythology that was desired by the public. If travelers came seeking Carmen or Telethusa, then that is who these performers metaphorically became.

Thus, the new collective identity that was deemed crucial for Spain’s self worth, needed to be exemplified by what was thought to have value. Ironically, in spite of the abject poverty that was often the norm for Spanish gypsies, their perceived image better suited the ideals of the Romantic movement so they became the symbol of Spanish purity, freedom, daring, and soul. Black Africans were not held in the same esteem and were eventually erased from the historical narratives.

The tango de negros was a victim of its time. In 1905 it crossed a threshold when flamenco star, Pastora Imperio, performed a dance that the press called the tango de gitano<sup>38</sup> which permanently transformed the tango de negros into a mainstay of today’s flamenco repertoire. Yet if one analyzes today’s tango flamenco through the lens of

Africanist aesthetics as delineated by Robert Ferris Thompson, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Ivonne Daniel, Kofi Agawu, and Jacqui Malone, identifiable characteristic movements and practices still appear prevalent.

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## How to Take Field Notes While Receiving a Lap Dance: Or the Multiple Interpellations of the Ethnographer

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### **Abstract**

*The discipline of performance ethnography incites fragmented identities, which require the ethnographer to negotiate familiar binaries: participant and observer, performer and spectator, and activist and scholar, to name a few. This paper explores the fragmentation of the ethnographer's identity once interpellated by the co-researchers, and how these interpellations impact ethnographic methods, writing, and publishing; research in sexually charged performance spaces further complicates this "hailing."*

*From 2002 to 2006 I conducted research on Oakland, California's Punany Poets. In their live and televised performances, the Poets riff erotic poetry, dance, and song that reflect hip-hop, blues, and the aesthetics of the Black Power Movement to incite a much-needed dialogue on gender and sexuality in urban black communities. This paper then interrogates the documentation of sexually charged performance spaces and audience responses to both the performance and the ethnographer, particularly once the latter is "hailed" as "expert" and used to validate the performances as viable public health interventions, or once sexualized after receiving a lap dance, or dismissing/entertaining sexual advances.*

"I knew a girl name Nikki I guess you could say she was a sex fiend. I met her in a hotel lobby masturbating with a magazine." (sing)

I note that Slam, the erotic male dancer/poet, lip-synchs the words to Prince's naughty mellow groove, which seductively fills the theatre. Punany's Pearl, the female erotic dancer, performs as the "Darling Nikki," sitting and reading a magazine. Slams bare-chest and dark brown body glistens under the stage lights, and his penis is tightly stuffed inside of a denim g-string. Black cuffs with spikes adorn both wrists and he holds a black rod in his right hand. A white g-string and bikini top clad Punany's Pearl, tight, petite body. The eager audience shifts their weight and they all lean forward to watch the machinations of the duet (and I mean machinations). All lean forward that is, except this ethnographer.

My typical ethnographer posture, erect back, shoulders moving in and down, head tilted slightly, right or left, usually nodding with understanding, eyes wide gazing intently, mouth neutral leaning towards and upward curve, so that I can appear friendly and welcoming, is replaced by rounded shoulders, curved back, a definitive slouch in my seat. I want to drop my head back so that my eyes can fully roll to the back of my skull and shout, "Are you kidding me? You think this shit could actually happen in real sex? And you would like it? Come on. Give me a break."

In the meantime Slam swings the little dancer so that that their pelvises touch. She wraps her legs tightly around his waist and her arms around his neck. He then flips her upside down so that her crotch is in his face and her in his. She laughs to herself. Not a seductive laugh for the audience, but the laugh of a dancer who can't believe she is being manhandled so easily, and probably enjoying it. She's broken character, but the audience doesn't care. They are all invested in the fantasy. The straight women shout "Oh Lord!"

whenever Slam performs some fantastical feat or, walks on stage. The lesbians' flash their cameras whenever Slam does not obstruct a good shot of Punany's Pearl. The men are quietly engaged, as is the custom for straight men in strip clubs.

But we are not at a strip club. It's the first act of the Punany Poets performance of the "Second Sin," and I'm in the Pantheon theatre in New York, or maybe the jazz club in Philadelphia, or perhaps the hotel in Washington D.C, or the storefront museum in Oakland, or the comedy club in Los Angeles. It doesn't matter, the shows start to blend together after awhile. The audiences change from predominately black to surprisingly mixed. Or heterosexual to lesbian, never gay men, as punany is not typically a taste they have acquired, and the show purposefully does not cater to this particular demographic of the black community, as it's target audience is black women. Regardless if the audience members are undergraduate students, social workers, police officers or, accountants—(I have to say everyone in DC was an accountant). They are all here to experience the antics of the Punany Poets. Most of them were seduced by the Poets appearance on HBO's *Real Sex* in 2001 and naively expect to have the same intimate viewing experience in the theatre that tight camera shots provided on television.

Not me. I wanted to see what these Punany Poets' performances by and about black women, and the pleasures and pains of sexual intimacy do and how the Poets go about doing it? How are the Punany Poets representing black female sexualities, their idea of "black love" and HIV/AIDS in what the founder, Jessica Holter, calls her sexedutainment theatre? Furthermore, I was interested in how diverse audiences experience this mixture of explicit sexual performances and sometimes clever, sometimes preachy safe sex messages?

When I was in the field, I wasn't really thinking about they type of ethnography I was doing, so naming my methodology is tricky. I am attracted to Kamala Visweswaran's notion of feminist ethnography and Soyini Madison's via Dwight Conquergood's performance ethnography. Both suggest that the embodied experience of the ethnographer, the multiple voices in the field, and the object of study is interpreted and recognized within a field of power differentials. Together they articulate Savigliano's notion of corporeality, which goes beyond mere identity recognition and the ethnographer's reflexivity to assert as Cindy Garcia surmises "bodies are relational moving within networks of power." This power dynamic is obviously lost during the writing process, as ultimately the writer controls the representation of her "subjects" and to pretend otherwise is naive. The interventions of feminist, performance, and experimental ethnographies to compensate for what Madison calls "scriptocentrism" ask that we diversify our texts with multiple voices, fictions, poetry, and even staged fieldwork. These interventions succeed at accounting for voices but the bodies remain outside their grasp. In this presentation I attempt to demonstrate how a series of interpellations centralize this ethnographers corporeality by turning me into both hypersexualized object and subject, thus illustrating the dynamism of power.

Ethnography in and of itself requires a bodily discipline not expected in our daily practices. The body is launched into and unfamiliar space, if it is a familiar space, the ethnographer approaches it as new, and then is expected to be "in it, but not of it , yet of it" at the same time. That is, the ethnographer must be in the space with a heightened awareness of the space, which automatically partially prohibits complete absorption in the present moment. This is true of all ethnography, but even more so in hypersexualized spaces where secret indulgences are encouraged. Rigid bodies turn fluid, crossed legs open, linear hips sway, eye contact and accidental brushes linger, and hidden juices flow. In this space, the ethnographer labors to keep her body inviting but not encouraging, approachable, yet not available. With lovers "boo-hugging" in the corner, and groups of girlfriends laughing and swapping fantasies, I navigate Dionysus tricky terrain.

Spectators come to a Punany performance to escape the dredges of their daily life and explore the pleasures of the flesh. Many are willing to discuss their experiences of

the show, excited for the opportunity to share that they are conservative professionals by day and swingers by night, and many invite me to join them after the show. I never say yes or no. I maintain my erect back, shoulders moving in and down, head tilted, eyes wide gazing intently, mouth neutral leaning towards and upward curve, to encourage the disclosure.

Ultimately I am an ear hustler. I listen in on conversations, and interpret the relevance of every sigh, gasp, shout, smile, smirk, laugh and shift in posture. In this orgiastic performance, where everyone is searching for or offering up some “punany” my corporeality serves me well. When I disclose that I am a researcher, rather than turned off or fearful that I might judge them and write some untruth, or worse, the truth, most are pleased and willing to “help a sistah out.” They recognize the paucity of black bodies in academia, and/or research on and about black people conducted by and for black folks. According to Yolanda, the Punany Poets business manager, the \$65 tickets per couple are not intimidating because “our fans are professionals who like to pay for their entertainment.”

My appearance further assuages notions of power differentials. White colleagues or students often tell me that initially they found me intimidating. I chalk it up to being a dark skinned black woman, with locks, and a deep voice. But here my dark skin, natural hair, and alto/tenor phone sex voice are not intimidating amongst other middle class, mainly black, pleasure seekers. I look like everyone else here. I could be a cousin, sister, aunite, or potential lover. If I were light-skinned, with long straight-ish hair, or not easily identified as straight up “black” I’m not sure I would be received as well, as colorism might rear it’s ugly head. I’m not particularly striking in anyway and my working-middle class upbringing allows me to code switch when needed. I know the vernacular and when to use it. I know when to smile and when to avert my gaze so as not to encourage or discourage flirting.

My body is engaged, but ultimately I am bitter. If conducting performance ethnography requires a bit of reflexiveness, I know that my eye rolling, my smirks, and my teeth sucking is my bitterness. I’ve seen this performance about five times now and every night I go home alone. Unlike the rest of this Manhattan, Philadelphia, D.C. audience, I did not come with someone and I will not leave with someone. I will return to my friend’s studio apartment, my cousin’s house, or my hotel room, and type up my field notes at 2:00am. I’m not invested in the fantasy like the black men and women around me.

I agree with Conquergood, “Experience is known through embodied performance. (. . .) we know experience through the body.” And my body gives me away; fortunately no one is paying attention to me because the dancers are humping each other like Prince does the floor.

“Come back Nikki, come back! Your dirty little Prince wants to grind, grind, grind, grind!”

My slouchy posture is perhaps the most authentic I’ve been as an ethnographer. I’m not “of it” or “in it” tonight, just tired of it. As the dance concludes, the lights fade and a woman in the audience says to an assumed partner—“You ready to go?” The audience bursts into laughter recognizing the innuendo in her voice. I laugh too. Like everyone else I’m jolted back into reality. And my hater-aid is my little secret.

It’s the end of the show now and Holter is performing as “The Head Doctor” the dancers, Punany’s Pearl and Slam, are on stage. They each will pull a willing victim from the audience, sit them in chairs and gyrate in their laps. Two men and one woman, at times Holter might choose a woman for herself if she knows her audience well. I typically watch and laugh like everyone else, noting the demographics of the folks on stage. Like everyone else now I lean forward in my chair, look around to see who’s raised his or her hand. Who volunteered, and who was coerced, pushed, convinced.

And then I hear, “Raquel! Raquel? Where is she? Bring yo ass down here? This is Raquel Monroe everyone, she’s a researcher writing about us.”

All eyes are on me. “Oh my God” I think to myself. I can no longer observe and passively participate. I smile. Briefly wonder what’s going to happen to my notes. “And did she have to put me on blast like that? I mean I tell everyone who I am, but damn!”

The bitterness suddenly fades as Slam’s rock hard black body moves before me. The Cartesean split manifests as my body awakens and starts to respond to his movement, I feel a big cheesy grin on my face, but my mind is working contra-tempo. Suddenly I’m the one who has broken character. I’m no longer just the ethnographer, now I’m the woman buying into the fantasy as soon as I had the opportunity to lay hands on him. Lord have mercy!

*“Okay, this is cool. I can totally see why people get into this. I can’t believe how fine he really is when I get to touch him. Sooo is this part of my research?”*

*Transgression. Boundary crossing. Being made/participating in the spectacle. Is my validity compromised? Does my body pollute my research? I guess this is the ultimate idea of embodiment, but I can’t see what’s happening to everyone else!*

The dance ends. I return to my seat, no longer incognegress, feeling completely exposed. The woman I intend to interview after the show as I did during the intermission, turns to me, beaming, “How was it?” she asks gleefully. We both laugh. I am speechless and now her equal. The tables have turned and both subjects are interviewer/interviewee.

This is one of many interpellations that happen throughout my work with the Poets, which is ongoing. Later in Los Angeles, Holter announced my presence to the audience before I had a chance to sit down. The audience turns around and smiles at me. Giving me “the go ‘head sistah” nod. Proud of their “own” and equally proud to witness something that my presence has now made important. My presence also causes Holter to explicitly discuss HIV/AIDS and the black community. Well, I can’t be sure this is why she chooses to do so, but it certainly feels like it, all notions of observing an “authentic” performance exits with my entrance.

Similarly her metaphorical presence interpellates my writing. I carefully craft or omit criticisms and consider journals that would benefit both of our careers. Adhering to the idea that ethnographic “subjects” are your co-researchers I sent Holter an un-edited chapter for her review which, she posted on the Punany Poets website for several months before I stumbled across it and asked her to remove it, and ensured her I would give her something to post later, which I did.

Holter and I are collaborative partners, each needing one another; she and her Punany Poets are my subject for publication, and I am hers for validation. Holter is a successful journalist, published novelist, and sought after performer, but my status and power as an academic buttresses her work as an artist and AIDS activist. In spite of my belief that their AIDS work is novice at best, her audience views her as expert as she views me, both are misguided. Our relationship interrogates notions of influence, power, and the on-going relationship between ethnographers and their subjects/co-researchers in the field. I am certain that it doesn’t take lap dances to expose our corporeality in the field, but of all of the interpellations, I enjoyed this one the most.

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## Solving the Chinese Puzzle: Pointing Fingers at Dance Iconographic Research Design

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### **Abstract**

*A contextual analysis of J.B. Martin's 1779 engraving, La Chinoise, a colourful costume design from Rameau's Les Indes Galantes, demonstrates how the application of Panofsky's art historical iconographical methodology, with its rigidly structured hierarchy of research tasks, is inadequate for performing-arts iconographical analysis. For example, description devoid of contextualization may lead to the misinterpretation of historical visual documents and has produced the stereotypical movement motif of pointed index fingers in the Chinese Dance of the Nutcracker; whereas, an integrated analysis of this image permits a clear understanding of how such ethnic stereotypes arose and why they are perpetuated.*

We are, most of us, familiar with the Chinese Dance from the *Nutcracker*. Since it premiered in 1892, many versions have been staged worldwide. This image shows the Royal Ballet in 2006. It includes many of the characteristics we associate with the Chinese Dance: pointed Chinese hats, the Fu Manchu moustache, Chinese parasols and fans. Other common characteristics seen here in a Kansas City Ballet version are: brightly coloured Chinese tunics, and men performing athletic scissor jumps. The one defining gesture that these versions share is the vertical index finger held up beside the head, 'à la Chinoise.' This gesture is possibly the most instantly recognizable movement motif in any classical ballet. However, despite dance historians pointing out the obvious, that no Chinese ever danced with their fingers like this, few theories have been proposed which explain what the upright fingers represent, and why they were included in the first place. This paper attempts to solve this Chinese puzzle by looking at the dance iconography, beginning with the earliest image in Western theatrical dance of a Chinese dancer with vertical pointed index fingers. By placing this image within the cultural and artistic contexts of the 'Chinoiserie' movement and Baroque theatrical dance practices, we can better understand the origin, development and meaning of the pointed index fingers.

This image, entitled *La Chinoise*, was created by Jean Baptiste Martin and published in 1779. It depicts the costume design for a female Chinese character from Rameau's opera-ballet, *Les Indes Galantes*. Martin's design blends contemporary French court fashion with ethnic additions, a typical practice in the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the wide, ankle length skirt and corseted bodice are accented by a Chinese coolie hat. The hat is Martin's only concession to sartorial authenticity. The dancer's index fingers are held up beside her head, 'à la Chinoise,' a further indication of her character's ethnicity.



Figure 1: *La Chinoise*

The question is: how did this pointed index finger gesture from the 18<sup>th</sup> century end up in the *Nutcracker*? The *Nutcracker* debuted in 1892, in St. Petersburg, over 100 years after Martin created *La Chinoise*. Whether the upright finger gesture appeared in the original Chinese Dance is unknown. For example, the reviews written after the *Nutcracker's* debut make no direct reference to the choreography of the Chinese Dance, merely referring to it as being characteristically Chinese, and to Ivanov's choreography as being performed "in the Chinese manner." In addition, the notation score for the *Nutcracker* provides a detailed record of the steps, but not the positions of the hands and fingers.

The first conclusive evidence of the index finger gesture in the Chinese Dance appears, strangely enough, not in a version of the *Nutcracker*, but in an excerpt from the *Nutcracker*, in Diaghilev's *Sleeping Princess*. Before the first full length version of the *Nutcracker* was performed outside Russia, in 1939, various extracts from the ballet appeared in the repertory of the Ballet Russes. In 1921, London audiences were given their first glimpse of the Chinese Dance from the *Nutcracker*, when Diaghilev inserted it into the final act of his *Sleeping Princess*, a revival of *Sleeping Beauty*. Arnold Haskell tells us that, for this production, Diaghilev commissioned Nijinska to create new choreography for the Chinese Dance,<sup>1</sup> which he renamed the 'Porcelain Princesses.' This 1920's photograph of the Porcelain Princesses duet provides the first evidence of the raised index finger gesture in the Chinese Dance.





Figure 2: The 'Porcelain Princesses'

We are now going to see a significant link between *La Chinoise* and the vertical digits in the Chinese Dance. The costumes for Diaghilev's *Sleeping Princess* were designed by Bakst, who drew his inspiration from 18<sup>th</sup> century costume designs, in particular, those of J.B. Martin. A few years previously, Martin's costume design, *La Chinoise*, had been reproduced in a 1914 Paris publication. Clearly, Bakst copied Martin's *La Chinoise* for his Porcelain Princesses costume design. Other than the dancer's position, and the inclusion of a closed fan, this design is virtually identical to that of J.B. Martin.



Figure 3: Martin's *La Chinoise* and Bakst's 'Porcelain Princesses' costume design

Whether Nijinska was inspired by this costume design by Bakst and choreographed the pointed finger gesture into the Chinese Dance as a result, or whether she was reproducing Ivanov's original choreography, we do not know. What we can establish from the iconography, however, is a direct link from the pointed finger gesture in Nijinska's 1921 version of the Chinese Dance back to Martin's *La Chinoise*, via the Porcelain Princesses costume design, by Bakst. Of course, we have still to determine from whence the pointed finger arose and what it represents.

Despite the ubiquity of the pointed index finger in contemporary versions of the *Nutcracker* Chinese Dance, only a couple of theories have been proposed which attempt to explain its origins. In 1959, Yury Slonimsky, a Soviet dance historian and critic, stated that the Chinese Dance is a copy of 18th century statuettes of Chinamen, thrusting out their arms with pointing index fingers.<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Fisher, in her 2003 book *Nutcracker Nation*, offers a different theory. She proposes that the single raised digits represent chopsticks, and cites as evidence an image of a traditional Mongolian Chopstick Dance in which the dancers hold up a bunch of chopsticks in each hand as they dance.<sup>3</sup> The main problem with Slonimsky and Fisher's interpretations, however, is that they lack sufficient historical context. Slonimsky's proposal is simply unverifiable. The record of 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese artefacts in Europe reveals no statuettes such as Slonimsky describes. Fisher's theory, on the other hand, is historically unsound because she has neglected to properly contextualise the images that form the foundation of her hypothesis. Significantly, chopsticks had not yet become popular in Mongolia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, cultural dissemination from Mongolia to France would have been almost non-existent in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, Mongolia was under the dominion of the Han Chinese, who did not permit foreigners to wander about their territories. It is highly unlikely that any European travellers would have witnessed a Mongolian folk dance, and brought it back to Europe for 18<sup>th</sup> century Baroque choreographers to copy. Fisher's analysis provides an excellent example of why, in order to avoid this kind of misinterpretation of images, a holistic approach to dance iconographic research should be employed. Allow me to explain.

Dance iconography is the study and interpretation of historical images. Although it has developed into an independent academic discipline, it still draws heavily on traditional art-historical methodology. Traditional art-historical iconographic methodology, as devised by Panofsky in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, involves three successive stages of research. First, the work of art is described. This primary step represents the most basic reading of an image and occurs at a level devoid of interpretation or cultural context. Second, the work of art is interpreted and meaning is ascribed. In the third and last step of Panofsky's system, the work of art is located within an artistic and cultural context.

Many performing arts iconographers have embraced this step by step approach. Although the tasks of description, interpretation and contextualization are not necessarily completed in exactly the same order as in Panofsky's method, the concept of dissecting the work of art by moving through a sequential hierarchy of research tasks has been widely embraced. One of the problems, however, with treating each aspect of the image separately, stems from the basic dissimilarity between the aims of art history iconography and those of performing arts iconography. Performing arts iconographers value images

for their ability to provide historical evidence and factual data. By contrast, art historians research images primarily for the sake of the image's own inherent aesthetic

Precisely because dance historical images are valued for their historical evidence, rather than as autonomous works of art, assessing the accuracy of visual representation is central to dance iconographic research. The mere description of an image, as prescribed in step one of Panofsky's method, is inadequate to establishing whether the image represents objective reality. This is a complex undertaking, which requires detailed analysis at the outset. Locating the visual document in a historical context, interpreting the image, and ascribing meaning to the visual content, need to occur, not as sequential steps in a hierarchy of research tasks, but as an integrated, holistic process.

The following example illustrates what can happen when an image is described and interpreted without being contextualized. 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch paintings often depict a painted cloth in the upper third of the picture, as shown in this image.



Figure 4: *The Life of Man* by Jan Steen

As a result of inadequate historical context, the cloth has occasionally been misinterpreted as being a theatrical curtain, which implies, if not an actual stage, a theatrical context of some kind. However, draping dust cloths over fine paintings was common practice in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; these cloths were pulled up only when the owner wished to show or view the work. Many Dutch artists began to paint these dust cloths onto their canvases as a show of painterly skill, because it's hard to paint cloth convincingly. As a result, many 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch paintings had gathered cloths painted at their top edge. In order to understand this fabric as painted dust cloths and not as theatrical curtains, accurate context analysis is necessary, so that the interpretation placed on objects in the painting will be correct, and misinterpretation will be avoided.

We can observe a similar misanalysis in Fisher's theory of origin. In the same way that the dust cloths in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch paintings have been interpreted as being

theatrical curtains, because they look like theatrical curtains, the pointed fingers of *La Chinoise* have been interpreted as being chopsticks, by Fisher, because they look like chopsticks. Fisher's interpretation ascribes meaning to the visual content without the benefit of contextual analysis; the result is an unsupportable theory. By contrast, when Martin's *La Chinoise* is located in an informed theatrical, artistic, and cultural context, the origin and meaning of the gesture become clear.

To begin with the theatrical context, *La Chinoise* was created in an era when Noverre's ideas on ballet reform were current. In 1760, Noverre published his *Letters on Dancing and Ballets*, in which he argued that one of the hallmarks of a skilfully choreographed ballet was the ability of the dance to faithfully imitate the social and natural world. In order to do this, the choreographer had to observe the manners and customs of all nationalities. Based on these observations, the choreographer then selected certain key gestures which were, as Susan Foster explains, "the most concise and telling gestures of a people, such as the pointed index finger "à la Chinoise" of the female dancer."<sup>4</sup>

Although we can only speculate on when this gesture "à la Chinoise" was first choreographed in a ballet, the iconographic record demonstrates that by the time Martin created *La Chinoise*, pointy fingers were already a familiar sight in the pictorial landscape. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, images of Chinese people dancing with pointed index fingers were appearing in the popular, non-theatrical art of the time.

This image, published in 1754, in book of British Chinoiserie prints, depicts a Chinese family watching two young children dancing with their index fingers pointed.



Figure 5: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Chinoiserie Print

Here is yet another print from the same book, once again depicting a Chinese child dancing with pointed fingers.



Figure 6: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Chinoiserie Print

And this image, a Chinoiserie decorative tile made in Liverpool between 1760 and 1775, shows a Chinese man using the same gesture as he dances.



Figure 7: 18<sup>th</sup> Century Chinoiserie Tile

Evidently, when J.B. Martin created *La Chinoise*, he was continuing a familiar tradition of representing Chinese characters as dancing with their index fingers pointed.

If, as Susan Foster suggests, the index finger gesture was an attempt to faithfully imitate Chinese manners and customs on the Baroque stage, we now need to investigate which Chinese manners and customs, in particular, the gesture was attempting to depict. 18<sup>th</sup> century Baroque theatrical practices suggest that it was intended to portray something concrete, not abstract. During this era, due to the influence of Italian *commedia dell'arte*, choreographers were using the gestures of pantomime to represent real life activities. The pointed finger gesture would have been recognised and understood by 18<sup>th</sup> century audiences as denoting a specific, Chinese custom, which clearly identified the ethnicity of the character on stage. In order to ascribe meaning to

this gesture, however, we must look beyond the theatrical and artistic context, to the social and cultural context. We must look at Europe's ongoing fascination with China, and the Chinoiserie movement.

A firm definition of Chinoiserie is rather difficult to pin down. For some scholars, the term can only be applied to European made artefacts, which are based on Oriental designs – Delft ware, for instance. Other scholars argue that Chinoiserie only applies to the 18<sup>th</sup> century rococo style, with its serene Chinese sages and immense gold frames.

These definitions are rather limiting, so, for the purposes of this presentation Chinoiserie shall refer, more generally, to Europe's fashionable obsession with China; thereby including all artefacts, both Chinese and European, which were imported or created to fuel this style-mania of the upper classes. The Chinoiserie craze, roughly began in the late 1500s, and experienced a number of revivals throughout the following centuries. Chinoiserie was particularly prevalent in France, England, Germany, and Holland, at various moments in history.

France was first truly gripped by the Chinoiserie craze during the reign of Louis XIV. Elaborate Chinese style buildings were constructed in his pleasure gardens and his courtiers lounged about in Chinese inspired garments. The palaces gradually filled with furniture and bric-a-brac that either mimicked Oriental styles, or were genuinely Oriental in origin. Later, in the 1750s, Chinoiserie was, once again, *en vogue* – thus setting the immediate cultural context for *La Chinoise*.

Chinoiserie is the greater cultural context surrounding *La Chinoise* – but the origins behind the pointy fingers, are obviously more particular. In order to elaborate, we must first touch briefly upon the methods of cultural dissemination that existed between China and Europe, so that we might better understand how the inclusion of this specific gesture occurred.

Throughout history, the two great sources responsible for filtering information from the Orient, back to Europe, were missionaries and merchant adventurers. They were responsible for producing the fabulous travellers' tales that the *beau monde* of Europe adored for centuries. Some travellers even assembled sketches of their observations, often to accompany their manuscript. In addition to these writings and illustrations, artefacts also began to find their way back to Europe. Merchants returned with all sorts of trinkets, to the increasing delight of the European public. Lacquer cabinets, porcelain, embroidered silk and small ornaments were in high demand. Many fashionable Europeans owned Curio Cabinets, where they placed small, exotic items, such as a small fan, or gold filigree. Travellers' tales, illustrations and pretty trinkets: these were the sources responsible for forming the European understanding of China – and these are the sources we must look to, in order to unravel the meaning behind the pointy finger gesture.

A survey of the available literature reveals, unsurprisingly, no hint of a reported Chinese predisposition to finger pointing. The gesture of *La Chinoise*, and eventually the Nutcracker, is obviously meant to represent a characteristic that the Europeans would have understood to be Chinese. What we are looking for then, is a commonly reported characteristic, disseminated through travellers' tales and trinkets, which served as inspiration for this theatrical gesture. And if this is our framework for enquiry, there is really only one logical conclusion: the pointy finger gesture of the European stage was meant to symbolize the tremendously long fingernails cultivated by the Chinese upper classes.

This explanation is tenable because reports of the long fingernails are a recurring theme in a number of influential travellers' tales. One of the earliest instances appears in the work of Friar Odoric, whose journals were published in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> Century. Odoric's tales were extraordinarily popular, and second only to those of Marco Polo. In his journal, Odoric writes that "it is accounted a great grace for the men of that country to have long nails upon their fingers."<sup>5</sup> In the following centuries, a number of Jesuit missionaries would produce reports corroborating this statement. A book published in 1615, for instance, entitled *The History of the Christian Expedition to China*, was based on the papers of Matteo Ricci, who reported that Chinese Mandarins were in the habit of growing their nails very long. In 1677, Athanasius Kircher published the wildly popular *China Illustrata*, which contained the first images of China, including this one of a nobleman.



Figure 8: 17<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese Nobleman with Long Fingernails

You can see how long his nails are. Kircher's work was particularly important, because not only was it widely read; it also served as inspiration for a number of European artists, such as Francois Boucher, who helped to popularize the long fingernail image.



Figure 9: *Paisane Chinoise* by Boucher

All of these examples date before the creation of *La Chinoise*, and undoubtedly there are others besides. Certainly there are later accounts, such as the illustrations of George Henry Mason, which date after 1779, but still serve to reinforce the notion that long fingernails were understood by the Europeans, to be a thoroughly Chinese characteristic. In addition to these printed sources, artefacts likely also played a role in disseminating the knowledge of China's long fingernails. To protect their nails, Chinese women often wore jewelled nail guards, which looked like this.





Figure 10: Chinese Nail Guards

These nail guards, which were highly decorative, would have made a fashionable addition to the Curio Cabinets that so many Europeans carefully cultivated. These cabinets often contained pieces of jewellery, and items from China were in high demand over the centuries. It seems almost inconceivable to suppose that there weren't a number of nail guards, housed in Chinoiserie collections throughout Europe. Sadly, because of the paucity of records, this remains difficult to verify. Regardless, even without artefact confirmation, there is a clear trail of information about long fingernails, found in popular European travellers' tales.

Naturally, we must ask ourselves why this particular characteristic became a fixation for the Europeans. Certainly, long fingernails were a reported trait of the Chinese, but why harness this in the theatre? In all probability, this specific trait was utilized, because 18<sup>th</sup> century rococo – the dominant style when *La Chinoise* was created – was obsessed around novelty, hyperbole and exoticism. The sartorial style of this period for instance, serves as a poignant demonstration of the indulgent exaggeration of this era. The wide skirts that women wore at court during this period extended so far from the hips, they were forced to turn sideways to move in and out of doorways. With this in mind, it hardly seems surprising that the long fingernails of the Chinese would have appealed, as a fantastic sort of oddity, which reflected the rococo world view of frivolity and excess.

At some stage in the evolving history of the pointed finger gesture, it became devoid of its original context; so that for contemporary audiences it no longer carries the specific meaning that it would have had for audiences in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, for *Nutcracker* audiences of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the raised index finger has been rendered utterly meaningless. It has become a trite cliché, and has been described as a "disturbingly Orientalist"<sup>6</sup> stereotype that we see in virtually every *Nutcracker* Chinese Dance. Its authentic cultural origins forgotten, the gesture has been wholly assimilated into the theatrical culture of the *Nutcracker*. Fisher argues that it has become "*the* balletic emblem of "Chineseness";<sup>7</sup> however, more accurately, it has become the emblem of *Nutcracker* 'Chineseness', one that has not been assimilated into ballet in general. The athletic kicks, leaps and spins of the *Nutcracker* Russian Dance, or the slinky, sensuous backbends of the Arabian Dance, for example, although common to many versions of these Act II divertissements, are movements that can also be found in numerous other

choreographed works. By contrast, the proverbial pointed index finger gesture of the Chinese Dance carries a marker of identity that does not allow for assimilation into other ballets without immediate reference to its well-established *Nutcracker* location. In truth, it has become the most easily identifiable gesture in the *Nutcracker*, precisely because it has no cultural identity outside the ballet itself.

Perhaps this research will help restore some cultural meaning to the pointed index finger gesture, and will allow us to see it as a curious relic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century theatre, rather than as a trite, iconic cliché of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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### Notes

1. Haskell p38
2. Slonimsky p19
3. Fisher p97
4. Foster p127
5. Odoric p245
6. <http://artsplace.blogspot.com/2008/12/adventures-in-nutcracker-2009-edition.html>
7. Fisher p97

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## [Re]presenting the Black Masculine: Reggie Wilson's "Big Brick- a man's piece"

*Carl Paris*

### **Abstract**

*New York-based, African American modern dance choreographer Reggie Wilson created "Big Brick—a man's piece" specifically with four black males in mind (from interview, June 28, 2007). Combining black spirituals, folk songs, and black cultural physicality, Wilson invites the spectator to ponder an open-ended and potentially dialectical notion of black maleness. This paper engages the notion of spectacle to examine ways in which Big Brick's poli-situational [re]presentation of the black masculine implicates issues of class, sexuality, and camaraderie. Choreography, the dancing body, performance venue, and critical reviews provide the semiotic and pragmatic texts for examining contexts of meaning around the black masculine.*

### **Introduction**

This paper is part of a larger project that looks at ways the black male dancing body represents the black masculine, including ways black male identities are imagined, expressed, and circulated in 21<sup>st</sup>-century culture and performance. The term "the black masculine" (or "new black masculine") is not intended as a singular construction, but rather as an articulation of a pluralistic and inclusive discourse on black male identity (see Wallace 2002; Neal 2005).

In this paper, I explore representation of the black masculine through Reggie Wilson's modern dance work *Big Brick-a man's piece* [sic.]. By engaging the notion of spectacle as display and performance (Mulvey 1975; Neale 1983) and representation as meaning making, my aim is to theorize how *Big Brick's* abstract conceptualist presentation of black cultural elements and the black male dancing body invites the spectator to an open-ended and, therefore, inclusive construction of the black masculine.

A key proposition driving this discussion is that, as spectacle, the black masculine interacts with the identifications spectators make through, what Ramsey Burt (2007) calls "networks of gazes," including from the simple pleasure of watching to socio-politically inflected responses to gendered, sexual, and cultural identities (see Ramsey Burt on representations of masculinity in theater dance [31-36]). Further, Thomas DeFrantz (2000) reminds us that the black dancing body operates within the "modernist," "Europeanist space" of concert dance. In addition, citing Paul Gilroy (1993), DeFrantz argues that the black [male] dancing body makes explicit the hidden links between blacks and, thus, helps to ground an oppositional aesthetic constituted around phenotypical difference from "white" ideals of beauty and concepts of the body in motion, which are the residue of African cultures (DeFrantz, 2).

Grounded in these perspectives, then, I view *Big Brick* as a dialogic text in which I propose to “read” the black masculine through a descriptive analysis of three interrelated areas: (a) the choreographer’s intent; (b) display and representation of the racial, cultural, and gendered dancing body in performance; and (c) my position as a spectator who is African American. I begin by talking briefly about Reggie Wilson. All quotes that I attribute to Wilson are from three interviews between July 1, 2006 and May 15, 2010.

### **Reggie Wilson, the choreographer**

Reggie Wilson is a New York-based African American choreographer and director of his predominantly black Fist and Heel Performance Group. He began to draw critical attention in the early 1990s at a time when emerging postmodern dancers were combining experimental strategies with aesthetic and cultural fusions and representations of gender and sexuality. Wilson describes his work as “Neo-hoodoo post-African modern dance,” a way he says, to explicate his anthropological approach to combining traditional African and African Diaspora movements and cultural practices with a conceptual postmodernism. Talking about his creative process, Wilson states, “I use an experimental theory of practice where I try to find choreographic devices by mapping out concepts and phrases that show my interests or intentions” (interview July 1, 2006).

Although very successful in the downtown scene, Wilson’s emphasis on the postmodern can be somewhat puzzling for some audiences in terms of how it seems to go against conventional modes of presenting black cultural material. Writing about Wilson’s *Black Burlesque* (1995), Julinda Lewis states: “Wilson imbues familiar themes with a sense of mystery that is at once as exhilarating as it is unsettling . . .” (a review of *Black Burlesque* in *Dance Magazine* July 1995, 67). Similarly, reviewer Michael Wade Simpson writes about a program that included *Big Brick*: “Those who came expecting Alvin-Ailey style theatrics probably went away perplexed and disappointed . . . This was an evening where theory and representation were explored” (*Culturevulture.net dance* April 30, 2007). Aware of such responses, particularly in terms of the politics surrounding modern vs. postmodern dance since the 1960s, Wilson claims that he is not interested in meaning or narrative in the traditional modern dance or black dance sense, nor in making political statements, but rather in posing new questions about how people experience culture and social interaction (interview July 1, 2006). As I shall demonstrate, these issues are critical to how we might read the black masculine in *Big Brick*.

### **Big Brick—a man’s piece**

*Big Brick—a man’s piece* is a twenty two-minute work that premiered at the Danspace Project at St. Marks Church in New York City in 2002 as part of Wilson’s full-length program “The Tie-Tongued Goat and The Lightning Bug Who Tried to Put Her Foot Down.” I saw a showing of *Big Brick* during this time and another performance of it in 2004 at the “Fall for Dance” festival at City Center, New York. According to Wilson, *Big Brick* was created as a counterbalance to his female trio, *Rise Sally Rise* (2001), which explored the energy and essence of women he knew in his community and church

upbringing in Wisconsin. The music for both pieces consists of southern field hollers, spirituals, and black folk songs, sung live in a cappella.

(At this point I showed a 1 min. video excerpt of “*Big Brick*.”)

Wilson affirms that he specifically created *Big Brick* with “four good-sized black men in mind” (interview May 15, 2010). This choice, he says, was meant to represent working class black men and also a certain sensuality that he wanted to explore. When asked why he styles “*Big Brick*” in initial caps and “*a man’s piece*” in lower case, Wilson states simply that “the double entendre is intended.” This answer, like the title, is an example of Wilson’s propensity toward humor in many of his dances. However, its brevity also speaks to his general dislike for talking about meaning in detail, since he prefers that the audience get its own meaning (ibid.).

Still, he has been more expansive when necessary. When he presented *Big Brick* at the more mainstream City Center dance festival, he wrote the following:

*Big Brick-a man’s piece* moves beyond conventional associations of masculinity and toward possibilities for struggle and intimacy. The work goes from tension to resolution and back again as it confronts social projections of power and control. (Program note, City Center Fall for Dance Festival, October 28, 2004)

Wilson wrote this program note because he knew that, standing alone *Big Brick* would be perceived differently at the City Center performance (interview May 15, 2010). Indeed, as a spectator, I can attest that the gala-like context and the larger traditional proscenium space at City Center did make *Big Brick* a radically different experience compared to the more intimate Dancespace venue for which it was created. But more important to my purpose, here, I use Wilson’s program note as the authorial backdrop from which I extrapolate my own reading of representation, which I base on the video of the Dancespace performance. First, I shall stake out my position as the spectator.

### “the man’s piece” and I

I had only a vague knowledge of Wilson’s body of work when I first saw *Big Brick*; and I did not have the benefit of the program note. Moreover, I had gone to Dancespace largely because of its postmodern programming, not as a researcher or critic. Although at first, the abstract fragmented structuring seemed to conspire against my own sense of cultural representation (and politics, admittedly), I was soon able to appreciate suggestive and provocative qualities in the dance that allowed me to draw interesting inferences from the imagery and action. It is in this context that I describe key moments in *Big Brick*.

The dance begins with a live quartet, singing a Trinidadian spiritual called a “trumpet” while the four dancers enter rolling on the floor like tumbleweed in a gentle wind, pushing up their buttocks as they roll. (It turns out that the behind [or butt] plays a prevalent role in this dance.) I also take note of their clothes. One dancer reminds me of a gas station attendant in his grey jumpsuit, another is a delivery man in his blue pants and UPS shirt, the third a repairman in his dark blue jumpsuit with the front zipper open to

expose most of his torso, and the fourth suggests a field hand in his green pants and frayed red shirt.

One by one, the men jump to their feet, facing to the back. They do long striding and running movements that make them seem as if they are not sure where to go. At one point, Wilson adds large and small projected shadows, adding ominous emphasis to the bodies and creating the illusion that there are more than four dancers.

After a while, the men stop running and face the audience. They perform slow abstract modern dance movements, characterized by a vertical attitude of the body and the use of direct and relatively inexpressive articulations of the limbs. This moment serves as a visual and kinesthetic contrast to the more vigorous pedestrian and emotional movements that went before. But also from a semiotic perspective, it complicates cultural and aesthetic reading in that the bodies and technical skills of these dancers do not wholly reflect the downtown modern dance aesthetic. Therefore, the soulful and raw black spiritual music and the working-class physicality simultaneously subvert the traditional white avant-garde aesthetic of Danspace while potentially rendering the black male body exotic in that particular space and time. As if to flip this dialectic the other way, the dancers suddenly burst into an energetic African-based dance, interspersing walking, running, and sports-like and work-like gestures. Here, they seem to affirm their masculinity and their blackness through a more direct representation, although not a hyper-macho one.

Using playful, pedestrian, and weight-bearing relationships, the choreography portrays fleeting moments of intimacy, conflict, sexuality, and male camaraderie. These moments are repeated and fragmented in ways that also convey competition, humor or silliness, for example when the men lope around the stage or waltz together in twos and threes, butt to crotch. These images never express an explicit narrative, but rather interesting scenarios that dissolve as quickly as they appear.

Male-to-male sexuality emerges as well, for example, when a dancer falls to the floor face down and his partner makes a quick forward movement with his legs and pelvis and then momentarily lies down on top of him. Also dancers repeatedly fly into the arms of their partners with their heads back in ways that suggest trust, pleasure, or vulnerability. In one notable section, three of the men are seen at the back of the stage, facing away from the audience. With the way they have their hands down in front of them and look from side to side, it seems as if they are in a public restroom peeing while furtively checking each other out. To my surprise, Wilson confirms that this pee line is intentional (interview May 15, 2010). During this scene, the fourth dancer performs a solo further downstage to a rhythmic children's play song called "Rosie in the Morning," which the quartet sings in sultry tones: "*Hmm Rosie, Rosie, Rosie in the morning. Ah Rosie . . .*" The dancer (Paul Hamilton) performs part of the solo with a decidedly effeminate air, with his hands behind him, his butt rolling as he prances forward, and a coquettish smile on his face. I suggest that, although Wilson says the explicit queer display is not intentional on his part, this moment is important because he does not use the other men to comment on it. This suggests a kind of "integration" of gay sexuality within that black masculine. I also give importance to this moment because Wilson has deployed similar relational imagery in other works.

The dance comes to a climax when the four dancers perform exuberant Zimbabwean-based movements with rhythmic high kicks and stomps to the spiritual "God is Real."

Once again, the mixture of play, work, and modern and warrior dance movements reads like a celebration of maleness, despite the dance's overall non-hyper masculine stance.

### Some musings and conclusions

In watching *Big Brick*, I find myself thinking that, indeed, like its title, the dance reads like one big double entendre, at once commenting on the fetishized black male body and making meaning through the deliberate display of the black cultural and gendered body and yet demystifying and disrupting that reading in a way that, to borrow from Burt (2007), “makes the audience members aware of their own involvement” (55). For me, this raises interesting dialectical issues, which I shall explore through the question: What cultural and semiotic inferences might we draw from seeing four “good-sized black men” touch, lie on, dance and play with each other? Of course, each audience member will have his or her answer, but I shall speak here for a hypothetical “we” as a way of intertwining my musings with a few tentative conclusions.

Through Wilson's postmodern structuring, the black masculine emerges, but not through literal narrative, radical defiance, or hyper-masculine display. Rather it is *suggested* discursively and stealthily as performative and kinesthetic presence informed by its received cultural and gendered expressivity. In a similar way, although Wilson does not create specific theatrical characters, subjectivity and individuality also surface through the combination of the dancers' respective physicalities and interpretations made explicit by the clothes they wear and the way they interact with each other.

From a scopophilic perspective—scopophilia, being a fundamental drive according to Freud (Mulvey 1975; Neale 1983)—the black masculine can be seen as a site of contemplation and inscription on which the spectator's pleasure of watching dance may interact with responses to the black male body's incitement of social identifications and connections to desire, prejudice, fear, expectation, and so forth (see also Burt 2007, 54). In this context, the black male body is dialectical. In its working-class persona, the black male body is sensual, energetic, and, funky yet alluring. It is also familiar yet exotic, marked yet unmarked, a symbol of suspicion yet rendered safe and non-threatening by venue and context.

At the same time, from a black performance perspective, *Big Brick* presents a self-affirming and generative black masculine. It embodies a sense of history and survival while also expanding modes of representation and perception. When the men embrace and dance in camaraderie, we might see sensitivity and community as indicators of new relational possibilities. Indeed, we might also see queer sexuality, which, whether we approve or disapprove, read not as a threat or replacement to heterosexuality, but as both a counterbalance and a contributing “category of social production” (see DeFrantz on “Blacking Queer Dance” 2002, 102).

In sum, *Big Brick* offers no direct answers about the black masculine. Intertwining postmodern structuring with explicit representation of the black cultural and racial body (including through music and movement), *Big Brick* disrupts normative associations between display and spectatorship, and in doing so, invites us to re-examine how we look at black male interaction, masculinity, and sexuality. I contend that, as black male subjecthood and sexuality become increasingly important issues in 21<sup>st</sup>-century

theoretical and performance discourses, dance that focuses on self-reflective and deconstructed representations of black male identity can contribute to a newly constituted and inclusive black masculine.

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## Spectacle and experiential theory

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### **Abstract**

*Dubord claims that 'spectacle' is parasitic on its own reduction of "concrete life to a universe of speculation" (Dubord, 1983, 11). While this angle on 'sight' can be argued to dominate western thought, other resonances of the word 'spectacle' deserve consideration. Seeing also encompasses mind pictures and imagination, vision and bodily sensations by way of kinetic engagement. The eye may be the aperture of 'spectacular' reception but, as Barthes' concept of punctum suggests, visual experience is not confined to eye 'sight.' Rather with the interconnectivity arising in phenomenological perspectives, the external and internal, the projection and its receptor are irrevocably enmeshed (Barthes, 1993). A spectacle played out on a stage is somehow transported to become a visceral re-performance within the body of the viewer/spectator. This continuum, tenuously operating between a spectacle and its incorporation within a spectator, is another way of acknowledging experience which, turn, is knowledge or, at least, its beginnings.*

*Spectation thus extends beyond a simple eye operation. The challenge is to place this thought within an argument for doctoral theses reliant on artistic practices. Thus, I am not concerned with opulent spectacle but rather with the potential of purposeful enactment to operate within the described experiential continuum as a knowledge agent which is conceived and registered corporeally. The idea stems from involvement in a recent research project, **Dancing between diversity and consistency: Refining assessment in postgraduate studies in dance**, in juxtaposition with readings on Edith Turner's anthropological work in which the specificity of experience "is not opposed to theory; it enacts and embodies theory" (Kondo in Dubisch, 2008, 326).*

### **Introduction: words, movement and sight**

If the artist or poet has the inner force of the creative intuition, the spectator is the man of cultivated emotion in whom lie dormant the different states of being, and when he sees them manifested, revealed on the stage, through movement, sound and decor, he is lifted to the ultimate state of bliss known as Ananda (Kapila Vatasayan in Ghosh, 2009, 123).

I begin with printed words as medium and focus to explore another word, 'spectacle,' and its place in the repertoire of things seen and perceived, apprehended and experienced. Words, including the particular identifier under attention, 'spectacle,' reverberate with life forces and finely-graded internal contradictions. Words are seen by reader/spectators as fixed entities but their semantic substance, the meanings they bear, partake of a dance. As Italo Calvino has suggested, lines on the page represent "the many colored spectacle of the world on a surface that is always the same and always different, like dunes shifted by the desert wind" (Calvino, 1988,

99). Of course, I am deliberately pointing to a slippage in language where twists and turns of wordsmiths like Calvino, also an adroit mathematical scientist, can transform ostensibly un-moving phenomena into unpredictable spirals of movement. But poets are not the only people who play games with the spectacle of words.

So I commence with my own demise, using words, interrogative words, reliant on their very authority, while the curtain falls and the light goes out on a danced thought that I wish to explore or at least suggest. I am caught in a Derridean bind, seeking explanatory powers while acknowledging that explication is trapped in endless deferrals, in the spidery web of immanent meanings, like twisting and shivering dancers.

This textual dance requires examination within the thematic frame of ‘spectacle.’ If words exhibit a muscularity of presence before vanishing, then words are not likely to be reliable in factual terms even as they sit in their indelible print in the spectation of reading. How do we know that the word of a god or of a mere human is more or less accurate than a movement described by a body or a sound pattern discerned by the ear, the sensation of touch or the frissons of taste? Culture, particularly academic culture, born of a long history of scriptural superiority inculcates trust in the pronouncement and, by extension, in the credibility of lines and squiggles on the parchment. But if those historical traditions of the ‘Book/s’ are questioned and situated in eye sight---which printed words must be---then there might be another story to tell? The whole tradition of the word is reliant on the message, the giving of ‘truth’ through messages conveyed aurally or more often through ‘visions.’

### Visions and knowledge

On a parallel track, I’m particularly interested in the proximity of metaphysical visions to spectacles, not so much in how the seeing beyond might have occurred psychologically or neurologically, but in how visions, once given predominance in knowledge, have been impoverished and reduced over time. To narrow the scope a little, Schechner refers to etymological origins of the word theatre (as well as theory, theorem) to originate from the Greek *theatron*, itself derived from *thea*, ‘a sight,’ *theasthai*, ‘to view,’ and *thauma*, ‘a thing compelling the gaze, a wonder.’ Spectacle and speculation likewise emerge from these roots (Schechner, 2007, 13). Arguably, enactments and oral pronouncements for the ancient Greeks were conflated into a single entity (vision?) of communication which is not confined to what actually occurred within the amphitheatres but which interconnected with what they knew of the gods, fates and furies. Once conveyers of ‘truth,’ visions, whether conceived metaphysically or in combination with material actuality, have been stripped of academic credibility or have they?

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dubord claims that ‘spectacle’ is parasitic on its own reduction of “concrete life to a universe of *speculation*” (Dubord, 1983, 11). His concern is not the inextricable complicity of speculation in any knowledge recognition nor in degrees of metaphysical intervention, but (ironically) is focussed on the virtual reproduction capacity of technologies directed at sight. While this angle on ‘sight’ can be argued in its various manipulations of visual opulence to dominate western thought from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other resonances of the word ‘spectacle’ deserve consideration. Seeing also encompasses mind pictures, imagination, visions and bodily sensations by way of kinetic engagement. The eye may be the aperture of ‘spectacular’ reception but, as Barthes’ concept of *punctum* suggests, visual experience is not confined to eye ‘sight.’ Rather with the interconnectivity arising in

phenomenological perspectives, the external and internal, the projection and its receptor are irrevocably enmeshed. A spectacle played out on a stage is somehow transported to become a visceral re-performance within the body of the viewer/spectator. This continuum, tenuously operating between a spectacle and its incorporation into a spectator, is another way of acknowledging experience which, turn, is knowledge or, at least, its beginnings. Loosely, Barthes' *punctum* follows the lineage of Martins' (1939) concept of metakinesis which he coined to champion the reception effects of the modern dance phenomenon as expressed by figures such as Graham and Wigman. Such variations of kinaesthetic empathy appear to be confirmed by recent findings in neuroscience wherein the behaviour of mirror neurons suggest that in watching dance the observer virtually dances with the observed (Hagendoorn, *The Watching Project*). Science and art, in this instance, generate a productive interplay---one intuits while the other adopts the responsibility of proof.

### Registering knowledge

My challenge is to place this thought within an argument for doctoral theses reliant on artistic practices. Thus, I am not concerned with opulent spectacle, as is most commonly understood in the cultural studies literature surrounding this term, but rather with the potential of enactments to operate within an experiential continuum as a knowledge agent which is conceived and registered corporeally. To this end, the focus is honed to assessment or examination processes of the doctoral journey. The idea stems from involvement in a recent research project, *Dancing between diversity and consistency: Refining assessment in postgraduate studies in dance*, in juxtaposition with readings on Edith Turner's anthropological work in which the specificity of experience "is not opposed to theory; it *enacts and embodies* theory" (Kondo in Dubisch, 2008, 326).

Perception presupposes the viability of consciousness, an entity or attribute of humanness which remains in disputed territory in academic terms. Consciousness' mysteriousness and its transparent subjectivity troubles the well-meaning, rigorous and positivistic-inculcated gate-keepers who 'manage' most universities. When bodies, as opposed to words, enter these corporatized establishments that profess to be indelibly marked by ideological freedom, disturbances are bound to occur. And when those bodies hold artistic objectives, disarray is exacerbated. Edith Turner describes a similar struggle of acceptance of experiential anthropology within the entrenched protocols of the anthropological discipline.

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, anthropology, as the emergent science of human behaviour, was constrained by a heavy reliance on structuralist principles whereby experiences, especially those considered aberrant, were required to be explained in alignment with a scientific worldview. Emphasis lay in objectivity and structures which were assumed to give clarity to people's mis-apprehensions of their own actions. As Ezzy observes, anthropological practice "does entail beliefs *about* the supernatural" which to all intents and purposes exposes methodological atheism as "a form of cultural imperialism that has resulted in the systematic misinterpretation of religious practice. Victor Turner [-] makes the thrust of this argument: 'We must not dismiss what cannot be framed within our cognitive traditions as *non-sense*'" (Ezzy, 2008, 310). This view is not far removed from a dancer's or a choreographer's perspective on experience/knowing. The crucial term here is 'in' experience, rather than 'about' experience.

Words and movement can create spectacles, taken here to mean special or extraordinary events in which manifestations of meaning are apprehended, at least in the first instance, by sight. This definition is deliberately loose and inclusive because the third factor, the artistic framing of those words and movement, is hard to pinpoint. Art is something other than ordinary everyday behaviour, though art can well represent the ordinary or everyday. Art contains fictional or imaginary infusion; it evokes stories if only of a single shape, mood or sensation. In its investigative processes and products, art tends to be ‘singular’ (Nevanlinna) and selected out from normal life flows rather than being constrained by scientific or social laws. Finnish writer Nevanlinna claims that artistic research is “knowledge about *the singular*. It cannot be generalized into laws in itself, and it applies only to the unique, but it is knowledge nevertheless and makes truth ‘happen’ in a singular way” (Nevanlinna, 2004, 84). Art’s extraordinariness, singularity and representational status are invariably caught in indeterminacy and the riskiness of play, sometimes with savoured intent, at other times veiled under the spectacular impact of highly technical productions.

This proposition lies at variance with that posited by Gary Palmer and William Jankowiak (1996) where ‘performance theory’ and ‘experiential theory’ are wedded together in an anthropological perspective. They argue that imagery lies at the bedrock of culture through enactments (the performing of culture) that may derive from external provocations as much as from internal (emotional) or imaginary (novel) provocations and applies equally to spectacular (meaning extraordinary) or mundane human actions. While I find their perspective compelling in the wide anthropological arena, the question remains as to why humans might value and devote intensified effort to some activities (the extra-ordinary) above others that occur at an everyday commonsensical level. Value, effort, investment and engagement by actors and audiences alike seem to have some bearing on the answer, though not necessarily in a straightforward manner. However, in tilting the lens just slightly on the Palmer and Jankowiak perspective, the ‘imagery’ and ‘emotion’ at the source of this inquiry comes into focus. The frame is now academia, a social organising institution that privileges certain activities over others and, at least in rhetorical and management protocols, edits out the emotional and imaginary layers of cognition that reputable academics like Palmer and Jankowiak have just enlisted.

There are many word and sight dances operating at this point, perhaps, too many to apprehend in a single of generalised thought---they are not reducible but rather perform in the same time and space that artists like Cunningham and Cage have celebrated in their own pragmatic versions of co-existence. Words dance in spectation; images form structures and patterns of thought; emotion transforms ordinary perception into larger-than-life views and vision discovers other dynamics in imagination/visions. There is a kind of orchestration present but, according to the Cage/Cunningham perspective, relations remain in the ‘eye’ of the beholder or, in Merleau-Ponty terms, in ‘being in the world.’

This elision of many ‘meanings’ resonates, again from a different perspective, with Michel Foucault’s proposition that ‘knowing’ is constrained by frames of visibility imposed by complex sets of historical and cultural factors. These factors delimit what we are able to see/know unless, as John Rajchman points out of Foucault’s endeavours, the investigator ventures into the unthought and the unseen or in current parlance ‘outside the square.’ Rajchman notes that in several interviews, Foucault describes his histories (or excavations) as in fiction.

It is not that these histories lack the validity that would distinguish them from fiction.  
It is rather that they share an aim with fiction: the aim not of explanation, or of

showing how our ways of seeing and doing are historically necessitated, but, on the contrary, of showing how things might be otherwise, beyond our self-evidences ... To "see" is to open history to new domains and new questions (Rajchman, 1988, 20).

Foucault's use of the term, 'histories,' can be seen as 'epistemologies' since he is fundamentally concerned less with what has occurred than in how the occurrence is seen to have occurred. The rigour of his excavations point to point to the potency of imagination not in an all encompassing way but that this facility, every once in a while, generates insight or ways of knowing that could not be accessed through conventional academic parameters of a particular time.

### Doctoral theses as spectacles for examination

Thus my danced thought involves the notion that the submission of a doctoral artistic package is ideally a spectacle of extraordinary proportions according to epistemological contexts which requires an evaluation of:

- practice and words through spectation and some variant of kinaesthetic empathy;
- experiential apprehension which may include spiritual/emotional dimensions (visions as message carriers, Barthes' *punctum* and Turnerian anthropology) in the pursuit of new knowledge (Foucault's unthought ways of 'seeing');
- a probable, singular expression of knowledge;
- a relationship of words and embodiment as credible knowledge bearers.

The conjunction of words, spectacle and visions became evident when Cheryl Stock (Queensland University of Technology), Kim Vincs (Deakin University) and I asked supervisors, examiners and research deans in our collaborative research project, *Dancing Between Diversity and Consistency* (funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, ALTC) how 'doctorateness' is discerned and determined. Given the relatively conservative and regulated academic research environment, responses to our equally conservative questions revealed that 'engagement' featured as a considerable if difficult to articulate factor in the assessment processes of 'doctorateness.'

*When art actually reveals something or takes the viewer somewhere else, it changes the consciousness in a way that might also be an aesthetic thing – that to me is when all those things – the critical and aesthetic come together in a way that gives you the artistic aesthetic experience but also more than that (VDe07).*

Such responses, exhibiting engagement, within a worded exercise like an interview, suggest a chink in the general armour of conventional academic discourse. Critical and aesthetic appraisal strain against one another to go beyond known space, indicating an apprehension (spectation) which is markedly distinct from the dispassionate role accorded to doctoral examiners. Other responses raised expected signifiers like depth, nuance, complexity, texture and scale of investigation, professionalism, conceptual articulation, deep methodological and theoretical connections, discipline mastery, hard work and clarity. Even with this listing, traces of transformation surface and bear resemblance with an apprehension that is not wholly

dispassionate and objective. Further attributes such as originality, insight; critical engagement, courageousness and transformative imagination reinforce this tendency. One by one, these observations might suggest the high level of judgement but compounded, a completely different picture (spectacle) of assessment begins to emerge.

The following comments push further into this sensual or experiential territory.

*I think a Masters is taking one step into the unknown whereas the doctorate is taking a dance into the unknown. (22.02.07)*

*I see doctorate [theses] as having this step – not a step – a run – a dash – a dance, embracing the unknown and using the unknown. I don't know if that's enough. (3.03.07)*

*a combination of the craft and mastery of the craft, plus evidence of inventiveness, plus evidence of having explored deeply – I'm not saying widely but deeply – because I think particular people do get deeply involved in one area without necessarily covering a breadth of anything. (6.08.07)*

These individual remarks (and the now invisible manner of their delivery) suggest a delight that is hardly distinguishable from responses to a stimulating work of art, arguably to a spectacle or a visionary experience. Is delight or one of its synonyms, awe, thus a common reaction to any form of excellence or is there a greater alignment than is generally understood between intellectual and artistic revelations that perhaps harks back to times when value rested in the material infused with, rather than distanced from the spiritual? Does this emotional register provide evidence that artistic consciousness subtly punctuates knowledge and its conventions? And can, doctoral theses be perceived as spectacles not merely meshing intellectual and artistic virtuosity but as endeavours which interrogate corporeal and metaphysical states beyond our understanding and, at the same time, within the genetic imaginings of our ancestry? The conjunction of words, spectacle and visions may be unscientific, unclassifiable and totally subject to archaic complexity and, yet, such a conjunction is not wholly dismissible even in an academic environment. And that presents a puzzle.

### **Postscript**

And I would like to add one final impression to complicate the unanswered questions of this paper. This involves witnessing a dance study in progress, one that evoked a concentrated sense of seeing, which on reflection, provoked words, bodily shivers and an unexpected deflection of perception. The study in question concerned Sandra Parker's investigations into minute everyday habits, into the twitches and unconscious tiny actions which an individual may consider to be invisible. As I recall it in retrospect, Parker asked her dancer, Phoebe Robinson, to demonstrate the tiny actions under investigation, blinks, slight lip sucking, finger scratching and fiddling derived from close observation of individuals waiting for something to happen. As individual actions, Robinson's demonstrations were recognisable as mundane movements but selected and arranged into a 5-10 minute dance, the same tiny actions were transformed into what I would like to suggest became a small, highly focussed spectacle of quite exquisite and troubling beauty. Something changed, from one moment to the next, in Robinson's actualisation:

the mundane became extra-ordinary. The odd thing about this experience is that nothing appeared to have changed from the individual demonstrations of those tiny movements to their arrangement as a dance except for Robinson's delivery of the delicate and vulnerable components in a sequence. Something about her knowledge of performance and the exactitude of its delivery provoked awe. It was, in a sense, spectacular, and sensorially rich, in its proclaimed impoverishment.

The experience also suggests that engagement is a mutable characteristic, less dependent on magnitude than on a kind of gravity of enactment. This is one sort of spectacle which should be subjected to the experience of expert examiners who may respond with "not a step – a run – a dash – a dance, embracing the unknown and using the unknown; being an expert in the field" (NSy02). And so continues the puzzle of thought intertwined with words, embodiment and the experience of spectacle.

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## The Spectacular Dance – 2009 World Games in Taiwan

By Ping, Heng

As the Chief Producer for production team, I intend to use a documented process through this 11-months project to discuss the making of this production. It was the first production designed for such a large audience in Taiwan. The mission was to make the show the most “spectacular” one ever in the history. No story-line was applied after much discussion rather the crucial assignment was to find meaningful transitions throughout the production. It was a work of art that each artist involved need to support each other as a group rather than be individualized. This paper will share the process and its difficulties and limitation.

Because of change of personnel in the office, the project of opening ceremony was announced to the public in July of 2008, only one year in advance. Whoever was interested needs to submit a proposal within three weeks. President Michael C.K. Tu from Uniplan, an international multi-media agent based in Germany and is the biggest one of its kind in Taiwan approached President Tzong-Ching Ju of Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) to provide the artistic input and the organization of the performance for opening ceremony. It was a tough decision to make for such a huge scale with such limited time and budget. But the promise was made within 40 minutes because everybody knows this is a project that can not be waited and missed.

TNUA immediately formed the artistic team including the Show Director Li Hsiao-ping<sup>1</sup>, Visual Designer Akibo Lee<sup>2</sup>, Technical Director Lin Chia-wen<sup>3</sup>, Production Director Chen Chin-chen<sup>4</sup> and myself as the Chief Producer. At first, the team tried to settle the structure, and hold the decision of the issue of the budget, type of performance and number of performers. When proposal was accepted in August, we spent almost five months to make the detailed plan for the performance.

After viewing all the opening ceremonies of Olympics and World Games, we

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, Hsiao-ping, Peking opera director of Guoguang Opera Company, well-known not only for direction of tradition repertoire, but with new production every year. Mr. Lee was chosen for his rich experience in both traditional and contemporary theater.

<sup>2</sup> Akibo Lee, MFA of College of Fine Arts, TNUA, artist with distinctive style in digital art, installation, sculpture and design. Works can be seen in <http://www.akibo.com.tw/home/chinese.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Lin Chia-wen, trained in Maryland and Yale University, senior technical director in Taiwan.

<sup>4</sup> Chen, Chin-chen, was senior staff of National Culture and Arts Foundation, now assistant professor of Graduate Institute of Arts Administration and Management, TNUA, who has great knowledge about performing arts companies and resources.

concluded the following decision and made those as principles for the show:

**1. Large scale of stage or set is required to attract attention.**

The opening ceremony happened in a new stadium with 400 meter runway. The center is cover with lawn and all the other area is covered with PU fields (Figure -1). Due to the weight restriction on PU fields and protection of lawn in performing space, we have to give up the idea of building any traditional stage set. With the help from German Technical Consultant in Uniplan, we found a white plastic floor bricks with holes on the surface which could be used to cover the lawn and to protect performers' feet from possible injury. The huge white floor of 4500 m<sup>2</sup> in the center of stadium became a perfect screen for projection.

The Visual Director Akibo Lee just finished a project to light up the building of the city government's building in Chinese New Year. With his background, he was chosen in designing the images for media projection.

**2. Every piece should not be longer than 3 minutes.**

We decided to make the show 45 minutes total in length, with three sections of 15 minutes each. Each section was consisted of at least 3 parts, and each group formation need to be shift within 2 minutes. In order to share same understanding, we used the floor plan theory of Labanotation to check with each other and made sure the variation were designed. (Figure -2)

**3. Transition should be quick and clean.**

Shortening time for entrance and exit is the key for quick and clean transition. We first timed the space between the entrance door to the runway as well as the runway to the center spot, and then carefully designed standby positions for each piece.

We framed the performance space as a rectangular shape and have small squares on the edge(Figure -1), similar to a photo negative, which can go along with the design of projection, and could also work as signals for all performers' starting positions. In such a performance, all performers need to be on and off stage as quickly as possible. Such efficiency comes from many rehearsals and proper guidance. The 'traffic' of four entrance doors is led by four executive stage managers, controlled by the general stage manager located on the second floor. During show time, transitional works included packing and shipping out the props for clearing the space to welcome the 1,500 athletes' entries after the opening performances.

**4. Air show can help to build climax.**

In such an arena space, audience usually looks ‘down’ from above to see the show. If the performance can be displayed at eye level or sometimes high above, it will be a nice change of angles for viewing which can give the audience constant new stimulation. We tried very hard to figure out the way to put something in the air in addition to those on the main ground. Airships, surrounding screen, a moving ‘giant’ athlete statue etc. were all discussed, but were forced to give up at the end because of budget and technical difficulties.

At the end, the only design of airy objects was five giant kites in the first section of the show, and five acrobatic performers on the roof on the second section of the show.

### **5. Right and good music is a plus to the program**

In this kind of mega event, composition music is necessary to accompany the performance. Shall we have just one or several composers? Mr. Chien Nan-chang<sup>5</sup> was the first composer we approached. He simply and directly told us his interest in composing only for the first section, and his inability for the other sections. We then invited Mr. Chung Yiu-kwong<sup>6</sup> to compose the second section and Mr. Koji Sakurai<sup>7</sup> for the third one. As the result, having three composers really help to lower the risk of only using one kind of composition; and surely brought a variety in music styles.

Early on, it was decide that our program should be accompanied with live music, so to give enough time for choreography and rehearsal, composition was scheduled to be done and to have its first recording by January, 2009, six months before the show.

Once we settle down the plan for the whole show in January, technical team would provide a very detailed schedule for all the rehearsals:

- Choreography and creation had to be done and approved by the end of March.
- Rehearsals start in different locations in north and south of Taiwan by April.
- Finish rehearsals with approval by directors, and the costume try-out by May.
- Run-through in sections in the stadium by June.
- Lighting and audio set up one month before the Opening night.
- Technical and dress rehearsals in the last ten days before the show

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<sup>5</sup> Chien Nan-chang, studied with W. Killmayer in Munich, is a renowned composer in Taiwan and has won many awards.

<sup>6</sup> Chung Yiu-kwong,, General Director of Taipei Chinese Orchestra, has written for every conceivable type of music ranging from the grandest orchestral work, Chinese opera and musicals to the most intimate piece in New Age style.

<sup>7</sup> Koji Sakurai, Japanese musician, graduate from Berkley College of Music, former Music Director of NHK Orchestra in Japan, and now lives in Taiwan.

The logistic of the production were not that difficult to plan, but to pinpoint the themes of the production took most of the time. It was developed based on finding the most representative elements about Taiwan. Looking back in the culture and the performing arts of Taiwan for the past twenty years, we decided to focus on two main elements after many debates:

The first is to recognize **the value of multi cultural Society**. Taiwan has rich indigenous cultures. Indigenous people make up about 2% of Taiwan's population, around 350,000 people, has the inclusion of at least 14 different tribes. Each tribe has its own language and many of them still maintain their strong culture heritage. During festival period, people gather together to celebrate, sing and dance together to keep the tribe united. With such in mind, we decided to develop a story about how indigenous people start off the civilization. A plan to having indigenous dance in the beginning of opening ceremony was designed. Chinese people and Hakka<sup>8</sup> would be included into the show as well.

Therefore, in **Section one – Beautiful Island**, we designed the theme was about imagery of “creation” related to Taiwan. Eighty-three-year-old well-known choreographer Mrs. Lee Tsai-er<sup>9</sup> played as the role of the Mother Earth who brought in water, rain, ocean, plants and then fish and butterflies. Then indigenous people from Orchard Island<sup>10</sup> entered with their ship and prayers to expel the evil spirit, then two hundred young men and women, wearing traditional clothing from Kiwi Village of Ami tribe<sup>11</sup>, hold hands, singing and dancing to celebrate the festival.

**Localization sense under globalization trends** is a main theme believed by the Core Creative Team. Indigenous people believe in the spirits of ancestor while the majority of Chinese in Taiwan, believe Buddha and Taoism. In most major religious events, traditional arts parade is often part of the celebration. Parade formation usually consists of groups of different gods, acrobatics and traditional musicians. It is a significant memory and ritual for local people. So, the Core Artistic Team believed that these should be included in the second part of the program.

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<sup>8</sup> Hakka: The Hakka are a subgroup of the Han Chinese people who live predominantly in the provinces of Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Fujian in China. The earliest significant immigration to Taiwan by Hakka was subordinates of Liu Guoxuan, who hailed from Ding Zhou of Fujian Province.

<sup>9</sup> Lee Tsai-er, studied in Japan in the 1930, and started her own studio in 1949. She is one of the pioneers of modern dance in Taiwan.

<sup>10</sup> Orchard Island, located in east southern part of Taiwan. Yami people who live there have the smallest population among indigenous people in Taiwan, keeps impressive ceremony for new boat and new house.

<sup>11</sup> Ami tribe, with largest population among indigenous people in Taiwan. Kiwi village located in east part of Taiwan is well-known for its dance especially for age group of 20 year's old.

In **Section two – The prayer of the people**, the parades of deities appeared in groups by orders, 40 young gods named ‘San Tai Tze’ (meaning the third son) took the lead<sup>12</sup>, riding in motorcycle and danced a cheerful number; walking along side was the enlarged statures with costumes of 2.5 meter tall came next, then the goddess in the rides carrying by men followed after. A transition is added here to bring tradition art parade with contemporary look.

The popular puppet theater-Pili International Multimedia<sup>13</sup> was also invited to joined the program. Famous in Taiwan, Pili successfully transforms the traditional Taiwan puppet theater into a big creative industry. To bring its Kung-fu and multimedia puppet theater from TV to live performance is a challenge and yet it could be a major attraction for the audience. It was believed by the team that this will be a wonderful opportunity too to highlight the creation based on tradition.

This five-minute beginning sector was led by two singers wearing flashy costume singing the most familiar Taiwanese puppet theater tunes, and then two hundred students came out dancing with puppet at their hands dancing. Six platforms accompanied with forty-eight puppet masters appeared. Here, six platforms formed battlefield, fireworks and special effects of laser lights highlight the fighting scene, and suddenly, five heroes flied into the roof from nowhere, the finalized with the hero won at the end of the battle.

In **Section three- Energetic Kaohsiung**, atmosphere changed dramatically form the loud and colorful 2<sup>nd</sup> section to tranquil beginning in section three. Lights were dimmed down for the image of a globe placed in the center of the auditorium. 40 bikers with LED lights on their helmets entered. Acting like a Xerox machine, the image changed from the earth to the island of Taiwan.

Five big iron truss cars made of iron were pulled in by 200 performers dressed as workers, symbolized of chimneys and factories in Kaohsiung; then 800 young people wearing colorful Polo-shirts ran in and performed street dance together, symbolizing new life of the city.

The truss cars are executed rise from horizontal to vertical stances and turn into sailing boats. Seventeen pairs of dancers in white formal gown and tuxedo danced a romantic duet of the song entitled “Kaohsiung, Love Canal”. Three hundred roller

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<sup>12</sup> San Tai Tz, was a young naughty boy from Chinese fiction, when he was praised to be God, he still has playful character, so can be transformed with different costume, even with LED lights decoration.

<sup>13</sup>Pili International Multimedia, transforms traditional puppet theater into international multimedia company. Owns a TV channel, produces many series of heroic stories and creates many well-known characters.

skaters glided in like stars from the milk way, just at the most peaceful moment, skaters bring in colorful big balloons, and released 10,000 small balloons flying to the sky, ending the opening show.

In addition to the main performance, we were also responsible for many other matters:

### **Athlete Parade**

In most of Athlete Parade, athletes enter the stadium by alphabetic orders and circling in whole 400-meter runway. In order so save time, I made a bold suggestion to change the route and to make parade finish in 40 minutes. The plan was to have the athletes enter from either exit 1 or 2, walking to centerline and then toward VIP balcony, forming a semi-circle at the end. (Figure -3)

### **Working with 2,500 performers**

In order to save the budget for transportation, we tried to find performers live close to Kaohsiung, and quite a few of them are students. We have to design rehearsals very carefully to cope with the limited time frame that we had with the students. A good coordinator from each school who could organize students was needed. In addition to finding the way to have the well-organized rehearsals, we also worked on how to move students from school to performance space safely. Late rehearsal, especially for the last few technical rehearsals together with projection at night needed to be given more thought. We realized that the late night snacks and contact number for parents are also very helpful to release the tension.

Facing rainy day and the unpredictable natures such as typhoons were the problem to us but we could only pray to the gods for a smooth performance in the final day. It is interesting that some people from the Core Creative Team even became a vegetarian as an act of devotion. On July 16, the opening day, Kaohsiung rained badly in the afternoon, but just at 10 minutes before the show, it stopped. We were lucky not only to finish the show, but most importantly to prevent 2,500 performers on stage from injury.

### **Lawn Problem**

We designed all program with projections on the stage ground that was in milky white color and was also function as the lawn protection covers. The floor was supposed to protect the lawn and keep them alive. Just after the first few days of try-outs in stadium, we found out the lawn turned yellow because of the heat. Without the proper length of grass, the space was useless for Rugby competition. So during the last twenty days of

rehearsal period, a ‘war’ between the lawn and production became the major issue.

The final decision from organizing committee was to cover the lawn only after sunset, every day around 5 pm and take them off by 4 am. The decision meant that rehearsal can only happen after 9pm., lighting can only be set even later around 12am, and we just had 3 hours to rehearse every day. This was beyond our control and was the disaster for all performers at that time.

### **Dealing with Media**

The last ten days were crucial for getting ready for program, but it was also the ‘peak’ time for media to schedule interviews for publicity. The media was dying to know more about the Opening Night show. Therefore, we decided to ‘feed’ the media rather than let them ‘dig’ out the news. We scheduled show program every day, but not in full scale, just to release a small section which is enough for photographers and TV camera men of the news media. Although the production team were not to be responsible for publicity, it was important to help. After all, the attention from the media was the reward for the efforts and hard works that all team and performers did.

### **Conclusion**

Ron Froehlich, President of International World Games Association (IWGA) wrote a letter of congratulations to the organizing committee after the opening ceremony and claimed that this is “the best World Games ever!” The event also created some interesting records:

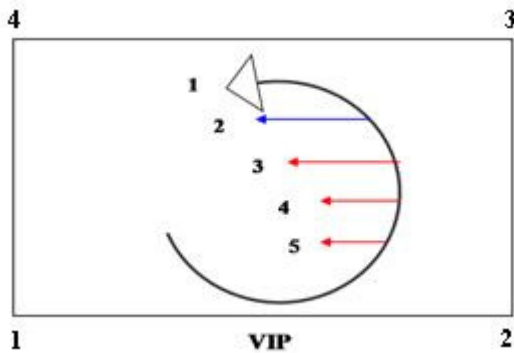
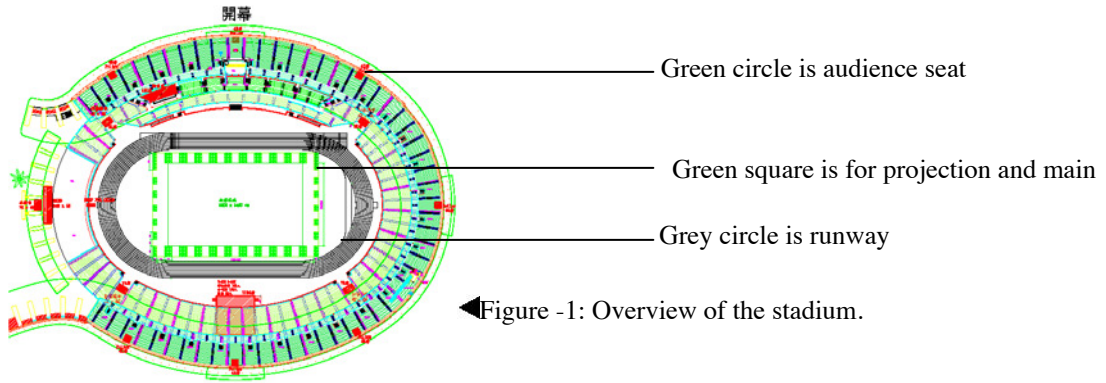
- The box office income of opening ceremony was UK£ 224,000.
- 8 million people (1/3) in Taiwan watched the showed on TV.
- 270,000 tickets were sold in World Games, 60% of those was after the Opening Ceremony showing how the effective resulting from the Opening Night.

The process of organizing this mega event was a big breakthrough in many facets. For Uniplan, collaborated with such strong artistic team enlarged their business and raised the possibilities in their future. For all the artists involve, a lot of us have known each other for more than twenty years, and to have the chance to work as a team was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. The job could not be done without a team effort. This is a creation from all involved. It was friendship, communication, ambition for perfection and courage that all were willing to accommodate made the whole experience unique.

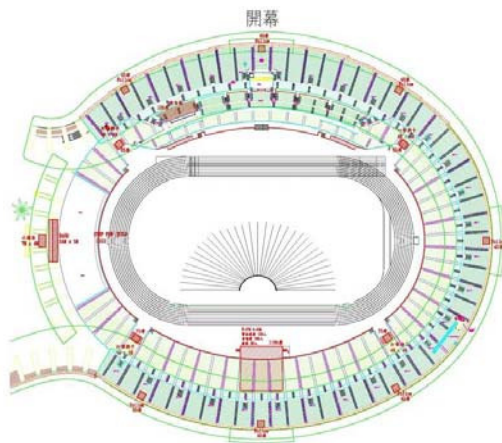
The slogan of 2009 Kaohsiung World Games is “A Chance to Lead Change!” We

are not sure if single event has that much power, but it did help to bring performing arts to the center stage. The challenge of spectacular dance is not just about what you see, more importantly, is about how to make a change of impression from people not in the art world. I truly believe, at the end, “Arts won them all! “

**Figures:**



▲ Figure -2: Exit of aboriginal dance



▲ Figure -3: Ending position for athletes



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**Website link:**

Atlanta Opening

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh6eyA9MuTs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAFhNobJABU&feature=related>

Torino Winter Olympics opening

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJbFRwCMAr0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFkICUk3KjU&feature=related>

Europe 2004 opening

<http://flickr.com/photos/mobreporter/158312730/in/photostream/>

EXPO 2000 parade

<http://www.luszczy.de/expo2000/thparada.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQbTMEupTpk>

## Trading Taps: Spectacle and Meaning in the Percussive Dance Challenge

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Independent Researcher

### *Abstract*

*Combining structural and historical modes of analysis, this paper will examine how Trading Taps, a show-stopping “challenge” in the Riverdance repertoire, facilitates the juxtaposition of two diverse percussive dance traditions, tap and Irish step dance. Choreographed in 1996 by Colin Dunne and Tarik Winston, Trading Taps questions the representation of cultural identities through the use of Broadway-style production values and intertextual references. Upon exploring how these questions are raised, I propose that the combination of structural and historical perspectives allows for the analysis of two dance genres that scholars rarely endow with the capacity to convey meaning.*

### **Introduction**

In 1997, *Riverdance* Producer Moya Doherty spoke of “a duel challenge between Irish dancers and the American tap dancers” (*Riverdance- A Journey*, 1997). The result was *Trading Taps*, a show-stopping percussive dance “challenge” in the *Riverdance* repertoire that utilizes Broadway-style production values to present a narrative of cultural exchange. Choreographed by Colin Dunne and Tarik Winston in 1996, *Trading Taps* originally featured three Irish dancers (including Dunne), two American tap dancers (including Winston), and two onstage musicians.

Rejecting the perfected rigidity of competitive Irish dance and presenting a theatricalised version of the street-corner hooper, the dancers vie for territory, “jam” with the musicians and challenge each other with one virtuosic “trick” after another. As the six-minute “explosive contest of skill” (*Riverdance*, 2008 [online]) draws to a conclusion, the tap dancers join the Irish dancers in a straight line, as if to proclaim, “We have reconciled our differences.” The audience, for their part, is content to note the common roots of tap and Irish dance and the dancers prove they can maintain an allegiance to their cultural traditions while dancing— and making music— together.

But what lies beneath the surface? Is there more to *Trading Taps* than the “confused importation of other dance forms” (Daly, 1998, 21)? Furthermore, how are we to analyze a piece comprised of tap and Irish step dance, two forms rarely endowed with the capacity to convey meaning? In this essay, I will utilize structural and historical modes of analysis to examine how elements of spectacle employed in *Trading Taps* facilitate the juxtaposition of two diverse percussive dance traditions and draw into question the representation of cultural identities.

## Structural Analysis

While dance scholars Susan Foster (1986) and Janet Adshead-Landsale (1988, 1999) have prescribed very specific methods for structural analysis, I will first turn my focus to the designation of the dancers and the dance space, and the movement of their bodies through this space.

The tap dancers are presented in sleeveless black tops and baggy trousers, suggestive of Gregory Hines who, “recast the image of the black male tap-dancer [as] sexy, muscled, new-school and macho” (Sommer, 2003). In contrast to this urban or even “ghetto” image, the Irish dancers are costumed in romantic white dress shirts and fitted black trousers that suggest a “traditional” Irish ruggedness and a sleek, European sophistication. Are these authentic portrayals of African American and Irish dancers? The theatrical appropriation of the black tank tops could be seen as an effort to “classicize” urban dress but is perhaps more accurately read as the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha argues that stereotypes rely on repetition (Bhabha, 111); as such, *Trading Taps* could be read as contributing to the codification and polarization of two diverse dance forms.

Turning our attention to the movement of the dancers’ bodies through space, the following diagrams represent the set and several of the key formations used throughout *Trading Taps*.

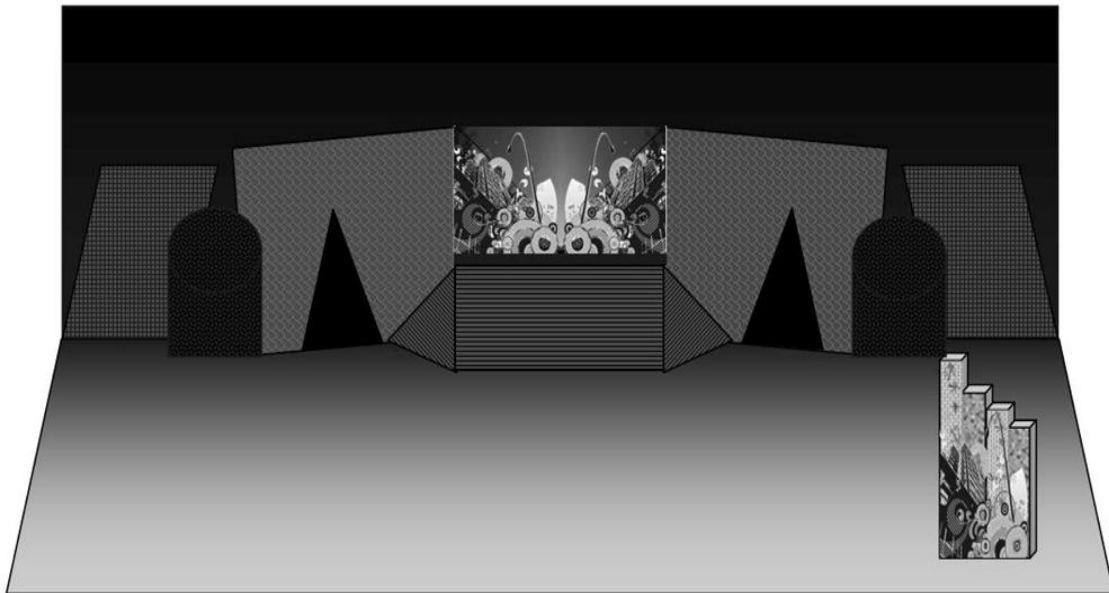


Figure 1: *Trading Taps* Set

The rectangular structure (upstage centre) represents a set of stairs. The black triangles indicate entrances from the wings and the architectural structure (downstage left) depicts a graffiti-covered wall.

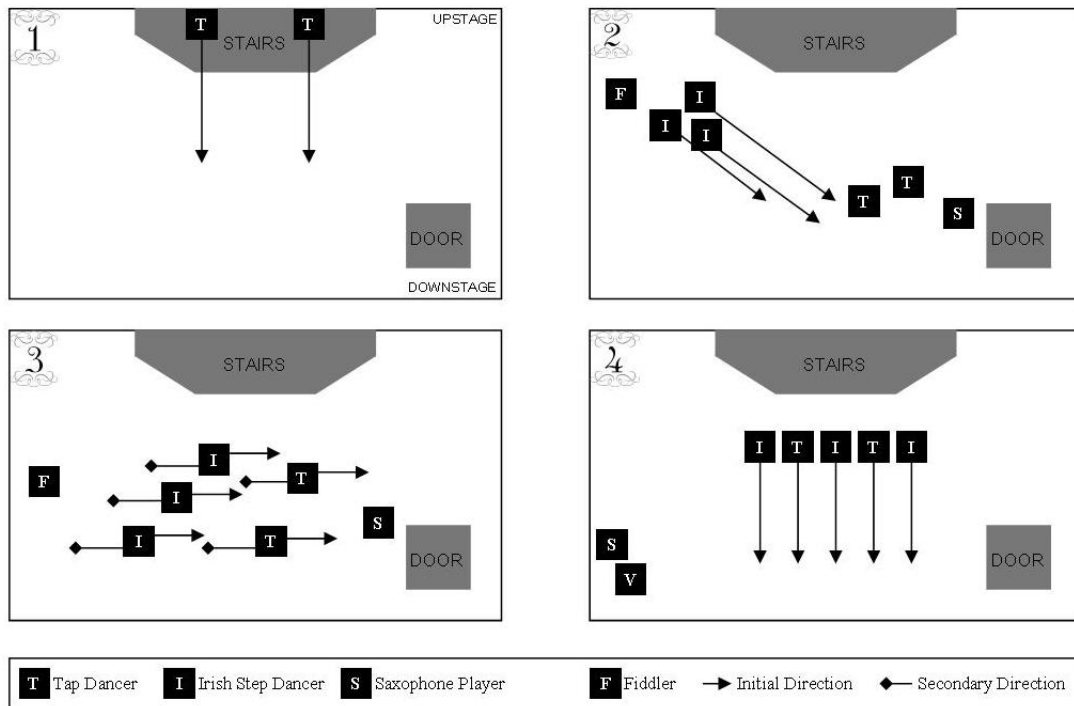


Figure 2: Selected Formations from *Trading Taps*

As illustrated in the first and second floor plans in Figure II., both groups of dancers make strong entrances ending center stage. The pattern of horizontal movement across the stage illustrated in the third floor plan reoccurs several times throughout the work, suggesting a sense of territorial negotiation amongst the dancers. The final floor plan represents the conclusion of *Trading Taps* at which point the dancers have been isolated from the other member(s) of their dance genre and reconfigured in a straight line. They perform a "hybrid" section of choreography derived from both genres and travel together downstage, conveying a sense of unity and reconciliation. This "reconciliation," however, relies upon the articulation of difference; each group of dancers constructs its identity in opposition to the "other," relying on costumes, spatial proximity and synchronized movements to express two distinct identities.

### Musical Analysis

Just as an analysis of the dance's structure through space reveals how the dancers construct their identities, an analysis of the dance's structure through time reveals how the score and the choreography facilitate the juxtaposition of two diverse percussive dance traditions. As noted by Stephanie Jordan, "musicology provides one very useful methodological model for this formalist area of analysis," especially when considering a plotless dance (Jordan, 1996, 15). While *Trading Taps* is hardly plotless, the following diagram illustrates the "division" of the dance between the two dance genres and the two musicians.

The relationship between empty and occupied boxes reveals how the score and the choreography allow both groups of dancers and musicians relatively equal time in the limelight. Furthermore, the diagram illustrates opportunities for sharing between musicians, between dancers (both internally and externally in regard to their respective genres) and between dancers and musicians. Finally, the identification of *a cappella* sections, "jams," and changes in tempo reveals how Bill Whelan's score furthers the narrative development of *Trading Taps*.







the same count in the Tap Duet. On count seven, they snap their heads defiantly towards the Irish dancers as if to say, "There, we did it."

The Irish response, although not notated in such detail, utilizes a similar technique. In their mockery of the tap dancers, the Irish dancers perform a step that *looks* and *sounds* like a traditional tap time step. Because of stylistic variations between the two forms, they too resort to an inaudible conclusion and rely on a gesture to signal the end of the duet.

In this case, the use of physical humor serves to both convey and to occlude meaning. The tap dancers, for example, suck in their cheeks to imitate the rigid posture of the Irish dancers. The Irish dancers respond with flailing arms and an almost drunken sense of imbalance. If we consider the "performative" nature of social fictions such as gender and cultural identity (Butler, 1990, 140) and Bhabha's suggestion that "terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively," (Bhabha, 3), the dancers' antics may be read as a challenge to the reification of vernacular entertainment through subversive mimesis. In mocking one another, the dancers simultaneously perpetuate and subvert racial stereotypes. As such, the invocation humor serves to neutralize the negative effects of cultural stereotypes.

### Historical Context and Intertextual References

As a dance work, *Trading Taps* warrants analyses in its own right but it must also be considered as a cultural product of the 1990s. The last decade of the twentieth century saw a surge in tap through the success of shows such as Savion Glover's *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk* and Dein Perry's *Tap Dogs*. Each presented tap in a very different light. As a result, *Riverdance- The New Show* may be viewed as, "an inadvertently instructive counterpoint to *Noise*" (Daly, 1998, 21). While a comprehensive analysis of the socio-political implications of *Trading Taps* lies beyond the scope of this essay, it is useful to consider the treatment of intertextual references, including how specific movements and steps within *Trading Taps* refer to earlier icons of tap.

The tap dancers begin atop a set of stairs, bringing to mind the iconic Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who, along with child-star Shirley Temple, danced up numerous flights of stairs throughout his career. By choosing to begin at the *top* of the stairs, Winston inverts the traditional stair dance, identifies with the sophisticated, primarily white, Hollywood film stars of the 1930s and 40s and, in doing so, claims the space as his own. By contrast, Glover's treatment of Bojangles in *Noise/Funk* relied upon a cheekier, racially charged depiction of "selling out."

In addition, the dancers of *Trading Taps* invoke several "trick steps" suggestive of Donald O'Conner and the Nicholas Brothers. These include a wall flip, performed as part of a comic routine by O'Conner in *Singin' in the Rain* (1951), and a jump in which the first dancer leaps over the head of the second and lands in a full split. Though famous their jumps, the Nicholas Brothers played to white audiences who probably appreciated their comic and acrobatic abilities almost as much as, if not more than, their tap. By contrast, the "trick" steps in *Trading Taps* have been stripped of their comedic associations and reclaimed for a new generation of African American tap dancers. When

performed in this context they exude masculinity, agility and even sex appeal, suggesting that a deeper meaning lies beneath the spectacular elements of *Trading Taps*.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated, structural analysis reveals how the dance provides a democratic forum for cultural exchange through an even division of time and space. Historical analysis and the consideration of the work as a product of the 1990s reveals how the dancers construct their identities with regards to intertextual references and the changing interpretations and performance contexts of specific “trick” steps over time.

It is useful to ask whether *Trading Taps* is a dance about cultural representation, reconciliation or retention. Within the work, cultural retention is expressed through polyrhythmic footwork and stylistic variations between the two dance forms. Cultural reconciliation, by contrast, is expressed both visually, through gestures and the formations discussed in this paper, and aurally, through the rhythms danced in unison at the conclusion of the piece. The use of humorous gestures and gentle mocking establishes a sense of unity between the two groups of dancers but also serves to mask the less-easily reconciled issues of race, identity and stereotypes that underscore *Trading Taps*. According to Ania Loomba, however, “stereotyping involves a reduction of images to simple and manageable form; rather than simple ignorance or lack of real knowledge, it a method of processing information” (Loomba, 2005 [1998], 55). Perhaps it was with this view that Dunne and Winston crafted their percussive dance challenge.

Historical and structural modes of analysis are not without their limitations: the historical approach can eclipse the intrinsic value of the dance and the structural approach can easily reduce a work of art to a subject of scientific investigation. Nonetheless, the careful combination of these two perspectives allows for the analysis of two dance genres generally denied the ability to express complex themes.

In the case of Dunne and Winston’s “dual challenge,” a combined approach of this nature allows the researcher to grasp the choreographic and cultural intricacies that lie behind the phenomenon of *Riverdance-The New Show*. With its fast paced polyrhythmic footwork, a stunning set and explosive energy, *Trading Taps* has all the makings of a spectacle but, as revealed through structural and historical analyses, it is a spectacle filled with meaning.

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## **Critical junctures in spectator/performer interactions in *Tetris* by Noah Dar**

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### ***Abstract***

*In Tetris (2006) choreographer Noah Dar and plastic artist Nati Shamia-Ofer collaborate in a dialogue with viewers through a unique performance space. Viewers observe the performance by sticking their heads through holes ruptures in the dance floor, in close proximity to where the dancers' feet meet the floor. This penetration of the performance space exposes the dancers to the viewers' penetrating looks while utilizing the great vicinity to seduce or threaten them. This paper will examine how the intimacy imposed on spectator-performer's relationships affects the tension created between closeness and distance, alienation and involvement in the common experience.*

The Israeli choreographer Noah Dar and the plastic artist Nati Shamia-Ofer collaborate in *Tetris*, a dance that was ordered in 2006 by the Akko Festival of Alternative Theatre in Israel (The dance was awarded for its innovation). The dialogue between the artists generates a unique performance space in which the viewers observe the occurrence from the place where the dancers' feet meet the dancing floor. Shamia-Ofer created for this dance a special structure – a raised wooden floor, in which openings were made. The viewers stand under that surface, insert their heads through the openings and watch the dance.

*Tetris* deals with "a renewed examination of the viewer/performance/space relationship" (quoted from the programme). The manipulation of the holed stage enables Dar to break the traditional safe and familiar distance between performer and viewer and its accompanying conventions. The location, an unfamiliar territory, enables the performers and viewers a different dance experience. In other words, the viewers' penetration of the performance space exposes the dancers to their invasive gaze. They can see from a close distance the dancers' skin surface and sweat, at times only body parts, or witness their emotional exposure. At the same time the performers can utilize the great vicinity to seduce, manipulate or threaten the viewers trapped in the performance space.

The intimacy imposed on the spectator/performer's relationships in *Tetris*, the tension created between proximity and distance, alienation and involvement in the common experience, all draw attention to the affect the stage shape has on ways of seeing (Rottenberg, 2009). The affinity between the stage shape and the viewing experience has developed in the West since the Renaissance spectacle. The proscenium stage (invented in Italy in 1580 by Andrea Palladio) has its imprint on the development of theatrical dance and is marked to date. The new visual perspective in the auditorium shaped hall, has requested specific type of art works and artists. Hence, it emphasized the strengthening of the professional dancer's status, the frame and the picturesque illusion of the stage, and brought about the separation and social alienation between viewer and performer.

Comprehending the human gaze or the human perspective in western culture is considered a fundamental concept, and since the 20<sup>th</sup> century its stature has intensified

(see for example Berger, 1972; Mulvey, 1996). Criticism on institutional dance in the West has led to radical changes in the way performance space is perceived by artists, and to the abandoning of the concept of performance as being neutral and autonomic, unaware of being looked at. One of the prominent examples is the multimedia event at Black Mountain College in 1952 at Black Mountain College, organized by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, generated a new paradigm (Connor, 1997). In it the viewers were seated in a square arena demarcated by diagonal passages into four triangles seeing Cunningham improvising in the aisles, a movie screened on the ceiling, Cage reading a text, and David Tudor playing a tuned piano (Goldberg, 1996).

These radical ideas had a distinct affect on Judson Dance Theatre experiments and inquiries in the 60's that challenged problems of defining dancing, among them 'ways of looking' (Banes, 1987; Connor, 1997). Yvonne Rainer deserted the viewer's voyeuristic gaze in her work *Trio A* (1962), in which she focused the viewers' attention on movements based on carrying out an assignment. Trisha Brown undermined the position of the narcissist performer in *Insider* (1966), in which she challenged the viewers, looking straight at them while moving to and fro on the edge of the stage. These works, performed in unconventional sites, had real effect on concepts of choreography as well as on the viewers' observation experience.

Philosophy and cinema in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have inspired considerably the discourse on the look concept, demonstrating new possibilities of thought about the human being in various contexts. This paper combines two approaches towards the way of looking, when reading *Tetris*. One is based on *The Look* (2007) by Jean-Paul Sartre, and the other on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema by Laura Mulvey (1996). These will serve to discuss how affluent activities in the dance indicate visual power, sometimes conceptualizing it as paralyzing and violent.

Looking with Sartre (2007) is perceived as a visual structure in the framework of a model based on power. Sartre focuses on looking in order to re-formulate that phenomenon as an inter-personal action in the visibility field. In it, the subject can see the other person and thus encounter him/her as an object, or alternatively put himself as the object of the other person's look and thus encounter the other person as a subject. With Sartre (2007), only one of the two is possible, since by the mere visual affinity to the other person, one is necessarily either the subject or the object. Since in the inter-personal encounter looks cannot meet nor be mutual, an entire synthesis between the two forms is impossible.

This conflict shows how via the look, while I aspire to subjugate the other person, the latter aspires to subjugate me. Sartre's look dialect is not only formulating it as power, but the conceptualization of the visual power as an aggressive one, which necessarily turns its object to a victim. This occurs by the mere decrease of his human presence to the presence of an object.

Laura Mulvey (1996) relates to the gaze as power operator in the context of visual pleasure and narrative cinema. She uses psychoanalysis as a political weapon to demonstrate the way the unconsciousness of patriarchal society has structured film form. She argues, among other things, that there are "circumstances in which looking in itself is a source of pleasure" (1996: 113), as well as the pleasure to be looked at. Both arise from the pleasure of using another person as object of sexual stimulation through sight.

Mulvey (1996) argues that the shared experience between the subject's gaze directed at the performing object and the object awareness of the gaze's intensity, all demonstrate how various aspects – the performance space, the viewing experience,



and the total involvement of the action participants – all draw attention to the links between the act of looking and the total involvement demanded from creators, performers and spectators.

### **The boundaries of intimacy**

The audience in *Tetris* (a game-performance) faces the viewing experience upon entering the theatre. As in a secular ritual, each one of the viewers – all together 69 – passes through a narrow gate where they are required to take off their shoes, their height is measured and respectively they receive stools in various sizes. The viewers, led by 7 dancers (Adaya Fershkovsky, Coralli Ladam, Lilly Ladin, Irad Matzliach, Shira Rinot, Nahshon Stein and Oren Tishler), are seated on their stools in front of the raised stage. This way, already upon entering the dance site Dar breaks the solidarity of the way of looking by actually drawing the viewers' attention to the extraordinary stage and focusing their attention on the notion of the new intimate physical and mental distance created between viewer and performer. Thus, she demonstrates the power of staging upon way of thinking.

After all the viewers have gathered, a voice asks them to get under the raised stage and place the stools in the marked places. The voice continues instructing them to cautiously mount the stools and push their heads through the open holes in the raised dance floor. Not only is the audience surprised not to be seated in the traditional darkness of an auditorium, but the revealed scenery places them in a "decapitated" field of heads. Pairs of eyes look with embarrassment at each other and mouths laugh with uneasiness.

The audience's presence is part of the dialectics of that occurrence, since their embarrassment - emotional as intellectual - turns out to be an essential drive in such a performance. This embarrassment is caused by their inability to discern between ordinary and artistic action, to figure out the artistic form or to identify the difference between performer and spectator. Furthermore, the detachment of heads from bodies left under the raised stage intensifies their self-alienation. When the dancers crawl and move between and over the viewers' heads, protected by a metal lattice around them, their vulnerability builds up. The various manifestations of intimacy imposed on the viewers by the dancers threaten their existence as subjects, and as Sartre (2007) asserts it exposes them to the subjugation of the Other.

The close physical and emotional proximity, the encroachment of the personal space and the blurring of the safe distance boundaries between dancers and viewers, all generate excitement and evoke temptation. The tension is created by twisting bodies touching each other with passion, thighs wiggle in sensual movements, or dancers try to undress each other. Thus, the penetration into the performance exposes the viewers to the manipulating power of the moving bodies associated with erotic pleasure. But, unlike the pleasure of looking generated in film (Mulvey, 1996), the bodies in the dance are not there only to be seen or to play on the spectators' voyeuristic fantasy. When reaching the peak of creating the fantasy, it falls apart with the threatening sounds of stamping feet on the wooden floor, bodies jump high up in the air almost touching the ceiling, or hover over the astound heads. The expectations from the pleasure of voyeurism and subjecting the Other, the performers, to the controlling and curious gaze, as Mulvey (1996) claims, are all shattered.

The increased self-alienation and the threatened existence of the riveted spectators to their places demonstrate the dancers' power, enabling them to turn from objects to subjects. They invite the viewers to take part in the illusion of voyeurism into the

private world, yet simultaneously they destroy the illusion by publically exposing the personal and the intimate. The emotional stripping of a dancer, pouring upon herself water that mixes with her tears, for example, is a violent manipulation on the viewers that turns them into objects. As Sartre (2007) asserts, the look through which the other is revealed to me is the one that threatens my existence as a subject and aspires to subjugate me, turning me into a victim via the violent power of his look.

Dar and Shamia-Ofer trap the viewers in a unique space, but also enable them to get away. However, the viewers, who decide to slide down beneath the stage surface for a short break from the intensity of the performance, face a no less surprising surrealistic scenery – a world bustling with passive movement of "decapitated" bodies (Yodilevitch, 2006). If previously the viewers and the dancers tackled with heads separated from bodies, now the spectator tackle headless bodies. The dance critic Eshel (2007) describes it as: "The passive bodies which remained under the ceiling/stage recalled meat suspended on hangers at the butcher's". The separation between the "thinking" head and the "feeling" body, exhibited as a peel, intensifies due to the passivity of the viewers' as opposed to the active and moving dancers.

Watching a video, filmed during the performance and screened on a huge screen marks the second part of the dance. It empowers the complex network of looks: the seated viewers that look at themselves watching the dancers and the other viewers, and the dancers look at the other dancers and their awareness of the viewers. Dar conducts them all by operating the camera and directing the lens. At the same time, observing the performance through the video film emphasizes the common experience to both the viewers and the dancers, but also enables the viewers to observe the occurrence from a distance.

The last section of the performance is apparently of a traditional nature. The viewers leave their places under the stage and watch the dance while seated on stools facing the stage. Back to their traditional safe and secure place they watch the dancers squeeze through the openings, through which the viewers' heads have previously emerged, and move between the two spaces – above and underneath the stage floor. Like bats hanging on the tree's branches they dance in an upside-down world.

To sum up, in *Tetris*, Dar engages in extending the dance boundaries when she investigates the issue of the performance space and its viewing experience. She rejects the voyeurism act as key part of the viewing experience in a dance performance and demands total involvement of all the action participants. Dar uses the look manipulation both as a visual pleasure and as a mechanism of power in order to present a new order in the theatre. It is no longer the viewer's threatening gaze at the dancer in her work. Her mere use of a different dancing space, creating a physical separation between head and body and breaking traditional distance between spectator/performer empowers the performer as a violent and paralyzing force upon the viewer riveted to his/her place.

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**Romanticism versus Realism or choosing how things should be over  
how they are: the historical use of spectacle  
to subvert the effects of social crisis**

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***Abstract***

*Spectacular entertainment has long been associated with American musical theatre, which evolved from both large and small scale entertainments. While intimate revues were associated with having a social conscience, more lavishly produced productions, such as early Broadway and film musicals, though seemingly mindless, helped Americans mentally and emotionally survive hardships present in their lives. Did they only provide a temporary escape or did these entertainments serve a deeper purpose? An examination of recent findings regarding a person's response to mental diversion through entertainment and a close reading of Depression era entertainment hopes to uncover a relationship between content and effect.*

Some of my most vivid recollections from my childhood have to do with sitting in my parents' living room watching old Hollywood film musicals, very often with my father. Dad is a retired steelworker, first generation Italian with Archie Bunker leanings, but he loved and still loves—even as he spiritedly slips into his 90<sup>th</sup> year—the song and dance men and women of the 30s and 40s. He can name them all and still calls me into the living room if Gene or Fred is dancing or when he needs someone to watch *42<sup>nd</sup> Street* with him for the one hundred and forty-second time.

Since these films were made, the work of film artist Busby Berkeley has been dissected and closely scrutinized to expose the subconscious motivations, personal perversions and cultural influences of that choreographer in ways that expose his dance spectacles as symbols of misogynistic leanings or subliminal propaganda hyping the advantages of technology and the virtues of a capitalistic society. But at nine years of age, I only saw something that made me feel good, as they did for the people of their time who flocked to movie theatres to see them. The Warner Brother musicals of the 1930s, says film critic Martin Rubin became “pinnacles of the backstage form.”<sup>1</sup> Berkeley *spectacularized* the camera, he claims, bringing the musical film industry out of an economic slump with *Forty-Second Street* and leading Warner Brothers back to solvency. According to Michelle Paultz in her study of weekly cinema attendance, the *U.S. Statistical Abstract* shows that approximately 65% of Americans attended the cinema weekly in 1930 compared to only 9.7% of the population in the year 2000 when our nation enjoyed greater economic prosperity.<sup>2</sup> Despite the economic struggles of Americans during the years of the Great Depression, audiences still went to the movies for comfort and escape and, most importantly, to sustain a feeling of hope. In recovering from any kind of personal devastation, according to the Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health, “the overarching concern is that hope and restoration of a meaningful life

are possible”.<sup>3</sup> Hope gives people the courage and vitality to work for changes in their physical lives and escapist entertainment helped audiences navigate hard times by providing a sense of hope and a forward looking vision of a better life. As film critic Richard Dyer asserted in his 1992 article “Entertainment and Utopia,” “Entertainment does not present models of utopian worlds....Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies....It presents...what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized.”<sup>4</sup> I believe an aspect of the book musical structure that enables it to act as escapist entertainment is the way in which it negotiates inherent contradictions of structural stylistic elements such as romanticism and realism, which work in tandem in musicals. Dyer also believes, and I agree, that film analysis should be concerned with the cultural and social history behind these signs. Hence, my analyses of the song and dance numbers “We’re in the Money” and “Remember My Forgotten Man” from *Gold Diggers of 1933* are heavily influenced by the historical realities of that time. Although men and women were becoming emancipated and worldly, among the middle class and working class, as least, certain conventions still existed that continued to guide the patriarchal structure of family life, the work place, sexual relationships, and other such mores. Dyer suggests that in this film many of these conventional attitudes are held up on a representational level, but can be broken down for different meanings on a deeper structural level. Correspondingly, German philosopher Ernst Bloch provides a model of ideology critique in *The Principle of Hope* that he suggests be applied to such cultural artifacts as this film to examine both its negative, limiting and faulty characteristics, as well as its potential for utopia. For instance, while film historian Patricia Mellencamp’s psychoanalytic framing of the Busby Berkeley spectacles in her article “Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*” presents an important and useful perspective, utilizing the theories of both Dyer and Bloch I suggest alternative ways to view these musical numbers.<sup>5</sup>

The thirties was a time not only of social and political unrest in America, but of upheaval within the arts, as well. Based on a new realistic approach to acting called The Method, introduced in America by Russian actor Richard Boleslavsky, The Group Theatre’s Lee Strasberg began training actors to meet The Group’s mission: to transform American theatre into one that was socially conscious and invested in the events of its time. With the advent of the talkies in 1927, film seemed like a perfect medium to extend this effort and at first, between about 1929 and July of 1934 before the film code of ethics was enforced, films were better meeting this objective. Pre-code films are more authentically representative of the sentiments and attitudes of that time and as a result, states film critic Mick LaSalle, “tend to be racier, sexier, more adult, more cynical, more socially critical, more honest and more politically strident than the films produced by Hollywood on up through the early 1960s.”<sup>6</sup> Films during this time re-evaluated traditional ideas about such things as morality, relationships, family, and politics in realistic plotlines and uninhibited portrayals.

So, how does a musical film about real life situations operate to produce hope? I believe it may be through the recognition of and identification with the realistic elements in a musical coupled with the hope and strong emotional connection that is derived from its romantic, or non-realistic elements. Although the operetta form has always been associated with romance, musical theater historian Richard Kislán has written that really “all musical theater embodies the spirit and philosophy of the *theater of romance*. Life is

the stuff of all drama,” he claims, “but while the theater of realism presents life unadorned, the *theater of romance* presents life as it should be.”<sup>7</sup> Realism presents life as it is, romanticism presents an idealized existence; when realism shows objectivity, romanticism exaggerates. Realism presents ordinary people with complex and evolving personalities in mundane situations and romanticism presents the unusual or exotic characters whose static personalities are dominated by their passions. Musical as operetta is *strictly* the theatre of romance, but the book musical comedy evolved beyond that to tell stories about real people in real life situations, albeit without entirely real behavior. (After all, ordinary people do not break out in song.) And so, the musical is in a constant state of contradiction between many of its elements: such as the lyrical abstraction of music paired with the literal meaning of lyrics, acting realistically within a presentational framework, or skipping back and forth between narrative and musical number, singing and talking, dancing and walking. In his analysis of *Gold Diggers of 1933*, Dyer discusses the musical’s representational and non-representational signs, which coincide to some degree with what I put forth as realistic and romantic modes of presentation. The easily recognizable representational signs, (seen primarily in the narrative, which also carries the realistic storyline), resemble what they appear to be. The musical *numbers* carry abstract and often ambiguous non-representational signs, (seen through the romantic qualities of music, over-the-top story lines, exotic costuming, song and dance), wherein, Dyer adds, “we more readily recognize *qualities*, such as “colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork.”<sup>8</sup> Rather than seeing resemblance of appearance between the signifier and the signified, as we do in representational signs, non-representational signs can also generate *feelings* and are always open for interpretation. Scenes and musical numbers can be viewed then with less emphasis on detailed representational signals and more holistically for affective and nuanced meanings. In turn, this qualitative data is lent credence by the widespread pervasiveness of shared *feelings*, such as the immense historical popularity of Berkeley’s escapist spectacles.

Dyer states that the widely believed ideas of entertainment as “escape” and “wish-fulfillment” point to utopianism. In his essay “Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique,” Philosophy of Education Chair at UCLA Douglas Kellner refers to Bloch’s three volume text *The Principle of Hope* as a “magnificent magnum opus.”<sup>9</sup> In this work, Bloch states his belief that humans are constantly evolving and are motivated to action by “dreams of a better life,” and he examines in depth how daydreams, myths, all forms of art, philosophy, religion, and many other such pursuits –“are functions that project visions of a better life, which put in question, the organization and structure of life under capitalism.”<sup>10</sup> Although his Marxist philosophy is reflected in that statement, Bloch believes that any ideology or ideological artifact is fundamentally two-sided, containing emancipatory-utopian potential on one hand, and on the other “errors, mystifications, and techniques of manipulation and domination,” however, it is from its emancipatory potential that “a utopian residue or surplus” can be garnered and used for social critique and to advance progressive politics.<sup>11</sup> Bloch’s “dreaming forward” is a technique through which people can project a future based on what was, is and might be by what they make of it. Also, such artifacts as the Berkeley spectacles provide a cultural inheritance and pre-conscious elements, which he calls the “Not-Yet Conscious” that “point to real possibilities for social development and real potentials for human

liberation.”<sup>12</sup> Dreaming, daydreaming, imagining; these are all ways of envisioning but because they are seemingly passive activities are customarily considered a waste of time. In Bloch’s estimation, however, these endeavors are active and motivating. The theatre and the cinema are similar endeavors to daydreaming that can help us assess and change our world by imagining and dreaming of what it might be. “Escapism,” a term used often to describe the kind of entertainment that was popular during the 1930s, provided a mechanism through which a desperate population could look toward Bloch’s vision of a utopian future. Dyer offers five “categories of the utopian sensibility” (or what utopia might look like) and how these categories are related to specific inadequacies in society. Instead of scarcity, we long for abundance; exhaustion needs energy, monotony longs for intensity, manipulation/transparency; fragmentation/community. Besides relating to the real experiences of the audience, “what musicals have to do, then,” he says, “is to work through these contradictions at all levels in such a way as to ‘manage’ them, to make them seem to disappear.”<sup>13</sup>

Because ideology provides ways that help us organize and manage everyday life, Bloch believes that ideology critique should deal with operations that permeate everyday life, such as films, television, and other forms of mass-media culture. “Genuine enlightenment,” he claims, “criticizes any distortions in an ideological product, but then goes on to take it more seriously, to read it closely for any critical or emancipatory potential.”<sup>14</sup> For instance, Mellencamp aptly describes the opening of *Gold Diggers* as an “erotic spectacle of women as interchangeable with money in “We’re in the Money,” a song celebrating the return of the dollar’s value and an end to the Great Depression. In response to Bloch’s call to look for the artifact’s progressive and emancipatory content, I find that while the song does posit women as objects and suggests male gratification as its targeted goal, it actually functions in a much more complex fashion than that. “We’re in the Money” serves first to establish the premise of a show within a show, it then lays the groundwork for the economic plight of country at the time, (which coincidentally is the same as the overriding obstacle of the drama we’re about to see), by doing so infers to the ineffectuality of the government or corporate officials and charges them to end economic hardship, and at the same time it introduces us to Berkeley’s use of spectacle in a paradoxically intimate way. The close up on Ginger Rogers conversationally singing the song’s verse to the viewer is friendly and relatable.<sup>15</sup> This sense of intimacy continues, as Berkeley does not pull the camera out for a long shot, but instead goes in closer, panning down the faces of the chorus girls to our right of Rogers who one by one turn to the camera and flip open a huge coin that reveals a smiling face. Randy Skinner describes this Berkeley tradition as “the parade of faces,”<sup>16</sup> which I maintain encourages us to see the chorus also as individuals, an empathy building device. Critic Martin Rubin compares Berkeley’s style of creating spectacle to what was happening in the country at that time: “What Roosevelt was trying to do [with the New Deal] was balance the traditional American idea of rugged individualism with new ideas that were based more on collectivism and communalism,” which he points out is akin to the Berkeley aesthetic of blending together the individual and the mass.<sup>17</sup> The message of economic prosperity is delivered by the women in a flippant, ironical way so that even though the costumes make a statement regarding women’s complicity as coinage and currency within a patriarchal society, the sarcasm of their delivery suggests that the women are not functioning so much as woman, object of the patriarchal gaze, but as a group of people



symbolic of the working class. This is reinforced by the staging, much of which suggests that these women are not only integral to the functioning of the corporate machinery, but that they *are* the corporate machinery. However, if the number's job is to "manage" the problems of the narrative, Dyer's response to "We're in the Money" is that it does not. While it should suggest capitalist solutions to the characters' poverty and low spirits, "the representational aspects of the non-representational' in the number, claims Dyer, such as "women as sexual coinage, women and men as expressions of the male producer," only reinforce it,"<sup>18</sup> but in my estimation, the non-representational does not necessarily contradict the narrative in this number. Its tongue-in-cheek delivery, particularly with the addition of Ginger Rogers' verse sung in nonsensical pig-latin, is a non-representational factor that parodies and thereby exposes the problems present in the women's "real" lives, i.e. poverty and objectification, as does the non-representational satire present in the obviously false lyrics. "I think the pig latin ties in with the tongue in cheek tone of this number," stated Rubin. "It's all very hokey and jokey in a way that laid it on a bit too thick. The number I think is undercutting itself."<sup>19</sup> In addition, the perkiness and fun of the music and cheerful vitality of the performers are indicative of Dyer's assertion that musicals offer not *images* of utopia, but what utopia would feel like.

In the film's finale "Remember My Forgotten Man," the song lyrics imagine women in their historical role as keeper of the home and a dependent of her husband: "*And once he used to love me. We were happy then. He used to take care of me. Won't you bring him back again*?"<sup>20</sup> In Mellencamp's modern interpretation, the song and the staging have few redeeming qualities. "There is a moral for women in the last sequence," Mellencamp asserts. That is "without men (or capitalism) women (the working class), including a black woman singing the blues, will be old, haggard, alone and poor. For women, being without a man is indeed a barren fate, worse than death or high-contrast German expressionist lighting. For women, 'alone' means living without men. Female friendship doesn't count."<sup>21</sup> In reality, the historically based message of this song had to do the government's treatment of a troop of 15,000 World War I veterans, known as the bonus army, who marched on Washington demanding jobs; to be acknowledged and appreciated for their role in the defense of the country. Martin Rubin recounts, "They were saying, 'Don't forget about us. Don't make us forgotten men.'"<sup>22</sup> Instead of finding a way to help them, however, the Hoover administration detached a cavalry commanded by Douglas MacArthur, to tear down their camps and send them away. "This was one of the ugliest and most controversial actions of the Hoover administration," claims Rubin, "veterans without jobs being attacked by troops literally within the shadow of the nation's capital."<sup>23</sup> As a former lieutenant in the army, Berkeley's empathy for these men coupled with Warner Brothers' staunch support for FDR's policies motivated them to use this song first as a chastisement to the Hoover administration for its treatment of war veterans, but also as a direct emotional appeal for a better future. Historian John Kenrick explains that by the time this number was filmed, the country was in desperate straits and "damned angry" with the government for allowing the worst to happen, and emphasizes the impossibility for us now to fully comprehend the fear and sense of hopelessness that many people suffered at that time.<sup>24</sup>

To read this film only for its negative, anti-feminist or anti-capitalist messages, neither recognizes nor tries to empathize with the historical realities of the time. Demonizing relationships that privileged the patriarchal model and the importance of

family to women at that time ignores the authenticity of the pain of standing in breadlines, losing companionship, a lover, or in the worst cases, starving and watching your children slowly starve to death. Director Mervyn LeRoy's and the studio heads' decision to place this number as the film's finale was a radical one because instead of functioning as a utopian solution, the spectacle seemingly just reminds audiences of the enormity of the problem, but on an astonishingly personal level. But while the camera miniaturizes the individual, it projects him everywhere. Rendered indiscernible by the multitude, the close ups of the individual (Berkeley's parade of faces) distinguished and personalized their pain, highlighting the common bonds uniting Americans and giving agency to their concerns. In this case, Rubin states: Here the men and the women are kept apart in that final grand tableau and what is being said is that the economic disaster of the Depression has inhibited sexual relationships between men and women, and that's important. It's as important as anything else."<sup>25</sup> Utilizing Bloch's idea of a three dimensional temporality, this final spectacle acts as a vision of utopia in that it perceives the unrealized emancipatory potential of the past and recognizes the latent possibilities of the present. Its presence in the film is a call to audiences to also make their voices heard. According to film critic Matthew Kennedy, this spectacle "remains a startling moment in American movies, one that enshrines *Gold Diggers of 1933* not only as art but as sociology."<sup>26</sup>

At the time when this film came out, my father graduated from eighth grade and went into the work force selling newspapers, which he bought for 2 cents and sold for 1 cent, and clerking in my grandfather's candy store. The family kept working as did many other Americans, and things eventually got better, at least well enough to support a family and retire with a pension. So I prefer to view the Berkeley escapist spectacles as reminders of what utopia might *feel* like and a way of "dreaming forward" to a better time.

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## Notes

1. Martin Rubin, "Busby Berkeley and the Backstage Musical," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, edited by Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 56.
2. Michelle Pautz, "The Decline in Average Weekly Cinema Attendance: 1930-2000," in *Issues in Political Economy*, 11. (2002).
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General—Executive Summary*.
4. Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, edited by Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 20.
5. Patricia Mellencamp, "Sexual Economics: *Gold Diggers of 1933*." In *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, edited by Steven Cohan. (London: Routledge, 2002), 65-76. Mellencamp's psychoanalytic framing of this film is a well-founded and convincing argument that is not contested here but used only to illustrate alternative ideas of Berkeley's influence.
6. Mick LaSalle, "Pre-Code Hollywood." *GreenCine*. 2005.  
<http://www.greencine.com/static/primers/precode.jsp>.
7. Richard Kislán, *The Musical: A Look at the American Musical Theatre*. (New York: Applause, 1995), 2.
8. Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," 20.
9. Douglas Kellner, "Ernst Bloch, Utopia and Ideology Critique." 2010.  
<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/kellner.html>), 1, para. 2.
10. Kellner, "Ernst Bloch," 2, para. 1.
11. *ibid.*, 3, para. 2.
12. *ibid.* 4, para. 5.
13. Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," 26.
14. Kellner, "Ernst Bloch," 3, para. 1.
15. *Gold Diggers of 1933*. DVD. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy. (1933; Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures and The Vitaphone Corporation, 2006).
16. Randy Skinner, *Busby Berkeley's Kaleidoscopic Eyes*. DVD. Directed by Eric Clawson, Karen Hillhouse and Eric Sanford. (2006; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).
17. Martin Rubin, *Busby Berkeley's Kaleidoscopic Eyes*. DVD. Directed by Eric Clawson, Karen Hillhouse and Eric Sanford. (2006; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).
18. Dyer, "Utopia," 27.
19. Rubin, *Kaleidoscopic Eyes*.
20. Al Dubin and Harry Warren. "Remember My Forgotten Man," in *Gold Diggers of 1933*. (Warner Brothers, 1933).
21. Mellencamp, "Sexual Politics," 67.
22. Rubin, *Kaleidoscopic Eyes*.
23. Rubin, *ibid.*

24. Kenrick, *Kaleidoscopic Eyes*.  
 25. Rubin, *ibid*.  
 26. Matthew Kennedy, "The Hip Hooray and Ballyhoo." *Bright Lights Film Journal*, Issue 52. 2006. <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/52/berkeley.htm>).

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## 1967 and the Situation of the Spectacle

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### Abstract

1967 saw two vehement attacks on spectacle: Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood' with its call to 'defeat or suspend theater', and Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*. During the same period, Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966-8) and Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* (German 1966, English 1970) appeared to reject spectacle. But Rainer and Handke's relationship to spectacle is more complicated than simple refutation, and their influence is still felt in contemporary theatre and dance. The legacy of these two works reflects an ongoing interest in what might be called, in a twist on Debord, 'the situation of the spectacle'.



Figure 1: Promotional postcard for *Dance and Spectacle*

My talk is inspired by the postcards for this conference (Figure 1), which juxtaposed Yvonne Rainer's 1965 declaration 'NO to spectacle' with the title of Guy Debord's 1967 *Society of the Spectacle*. This is an interesting juxtaposition, and one way of interpreting the legacy of the minimalist artistic movements of the 1960s, of which Rainer was a part, is to take Rainer's declaration at its word: that she was genuinely opposed to spectacle, that this opposition had political ramifications, and that the opposition to spectacle is a form of resistance to the mediatisation and commoditisation of everyday life under

media-capitalism. The work of Rainer and her contemporaries continues to have a strong influence on experimental theatre and dance today, in the so-called conceptual dance of Jérôme Bel, Xavier le Roy, or Ivana Müller, or in the self-reflexive theatricality of Forced Entertainment or Tim Crouch. In the reading in which we take Rainer at her word, we might interpret this contemporary work as being a continuation of the kind of work that Rainer initiated, and therefore deriving its political agency from its ability to refuse, subvert, or transcend spectacle. As an example of this kind of reading, we might consider the way that RoseLee Goldberg, in a review in *Artforum* from 2005, celebrates the premiere in New York of Jérôme Bel's *The Show Must Go On*. Goldberg begins her review by writing that Bel 'takes as a given' Rainer's refutation of spectacle and seduction in her 'No manifesto'.<sup>1</sup>

At a more theoretical level, theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann has introduced the idea of post-dramatic theatre to suggest a kind of theatre experience which is not primarily interested in representation but rather in what the event makes present – its liveness, the real relationship between performers and audience, and so on. This is a crude characterisation of his argument, but one which highlights the similarity between his argument and similar arguments made within the field of Performance Studies when it was emerging in the 1980s and 1990s. This period saw an opposition of the idea of 'performance' with that of 'theatre' – Peggy Phelan is exemplary in this regard, as is Chantal Pontbriand's claim (in 1982) that 'performance presents; it does not re-present'.<sup>2</sup> For Lehmann, 'the task of theatre must be to create *situations* rather than spectacles, experience of real time process, instead of merely representing time.'<sup>3</sup> Lehmann describes the political potential of postdramatic theatre in terms of its capacity 'to suspend the fundamental law of the spectacle itself';<sup>4</sup> if it can happen in the theatre, then perhaps this would be a model for undoing, as Debord put it, the society of the spectacle.

But the problem with this kind of analysis is that Rainer, and Bel, and the other practitioners to whom these theorists refer, have persisted in the production of theatre-events. That is, they are makers of spectacle. Carl Lavery writes,

Although laudable, Lehmann appears to overlook the point of Debord's critique, which problematizes the very notion of separation upon which most forms of theatre still reside (the divide that exists between actors and spectators, and creators and producers). Irrespective of the attempts of theatre practitioners to overcome this divide, the notion of a non-spectacular theatre remains problematic, to say the least.<sup>5</sup>

Lehmann's argument is more subtle than the account that I, and Lavery, are giving of it, but I think it shares similarities with a larger trend within theatre and performance studies. This trend is one which seeks to defend the political or ethical value of performance, but which seems to have difficulty doing so in a way that doesn't require the transcendence or suspension of theatricality. That is, that the value of theatre only arises when it stops being theatre but starts being an event, a situation, something *real* rather than a *representation*. These kinds of claims open up a question that is interesting for me, which is what value – political or ethical – might arise from embracing rather



than disavowing theatricality? Though it may appear counterintuitive, such an embrace of theatricality could be modelled on Rainer herself.

I want to explore this idea by returning to the 1960s moment suggested by this conference's postcard, and introducing a third figure into the mix, that of art critic Michael Fried. In 1967, *Artforum* published his influential essay 'Art and Objecthood', in which Fried condemned what he described as an emerging theatricality in minimalist sculpture. Fried describes the confrontation with which minimalist work presents its viewers as 'basically a theatrical effect or quality – a kind of *stage* presence.' Drawing on sculptor Robert Morris's own descriptions of his intentions, Fried notes how this effect requires control over "the entire situation" [...] including, it seems, the beholder's *body*.<sup>6</sup> In a characteristically strongly-worded phrase, and one that has been often quoted, Fried denounced this trend by saying: 'Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theater'.<sup>7</sup> In Fried's writing, the idea of theatre stands in for representationality in general, and for the idea that the kind of presence that these sculptures enable is only *stage* presence – a simulation of presence based on cheap theatrics. His essay concludes by declaring his desire 'to call attention to the utter pervasiveness – the virtual universality – of the sensibility or mode of being that I have characterized as corrupted or perverted by theater.' Fried continues, 'We are all literalists most or all of our lives. Presentness is grace.'<sup>8</sup> Now, I'll admit that this is an unlikely triangulation to make, but Fried's abhorrence of these simulations has a resonance with Debord's critique of spectacle, particularly in this diagnosis of a fallen, alienated condition of modern society; the first declaration of *The Society of the Spectacle*, which was published the same year as Fried's essay (although in France), includes the claim 'All that once was directly lived has become mere representation.'<sup>9</sup>

Returning to Yvonne Rainer, we might locate her somewhere at the middle of this triangle: in her 'No Manifesto' and in other writings, she expresses a similar sentiment to Debord, positioning her work as opposed to spectacle-driven media culture. For example, in her writing about her work she describes the way that within traditional choreography, the energy is distributed so that 'one part of the phrase – usually the part that is the most still – becomes the focus of attention, registering like a photograph or a suspended moment of climax.'<sup>10</sup> These moments of climax are the spectacular moments which Rainer wants to avoid, linked explicitly to ideas of spectacle through the emphasis on photographic image. In Rainer's analysis, traditional dance operates in the field of the production of images, which, as with Debord, is a field of alienation from which Rainer wishes to withdraw. For Rainer, the challenge to avoid this spectacular dance was, as with her 'No Manifesto', one of negation: how do you create a dance that is without climax?

But on the other hand, Rainer compares her approach to exactly the kind of minimalist sculpture that disgusted Fried. She sets this out in her 1968 essay 'A Quasi Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or An Analysis of Trio A'; this essay, coincidentally, was published in the same collection that brought Fried's essay to a wider audience, Gregory Battcock's *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (1968). The overall conceit of Rainer's essay is an extended analogy between minimalist sculpture and her dance work; Rainer opens with a chart

depicting the correlation between trends in minimalist sculpture and her own practice. For example, if minimalist sculpture sought to ‘eliminate or minimize’ ‘texture’, ‘figure reference’, and ‘illusionism’, then in her dance Rainer sought to eliminate, respectively, ‘variation and dynamics’, ‘character’, and ‘performance’. Where minimal sculpture emphasises ‘nonreferential forms’ and ‘literalness’, Rainer would substitute ‘neutral performance’ and ‘task or tasklike activity’.<sup>11</sup> In the body of her analysis, she explains her interest in ‘task’ as oriented toward the achievement of ‘movement-as-object’, and her use of repetition is intended to ‘objectify’ movement, to ‘make it more objectlike’.<sup>12</sup> In explicit terms, then, Rainer is working through exactly the move which Fried attacks: a movement which opposes art and non-art, and in which the condition of non-art is attained through a ‘literalist espousal of objecthood’.<sup>13</sup> Rainer does not use any term like ‘non-art’ or ‘non-dance’ to describe her work, but the ‘No Manifesto’ might be read, above all else, as a kind of ‘no’ to art.

The problem of the spectacle, as Debord poses it, is its representational quality, the fact that it stands in for (and thereby prevents the emergence of) the absent real thing. What is aimed for with Rainer’s use of objecthood or literalness is a state of non-representationality, of non-art. The piece she was working on at the time of her manifesto, and to which the essay refers, is *Trio A*. In this piece, the quality of literalness is produced through tasklike activity, which foregrounds the literal bodiness of the body. ‘My body remains the enduring reality,’ Rainer declares in the last line of her programme notes for her 1968 performance, *The Mind is a Muscle*, of which *Trio A* was a part.<sup>14</sup> She does not want to present images of the body, but the body itself: a ‘worklike rather than exhibitionlike presentation’, as she puts it in the quotation above. However, the work being done is a very particular kind of labour: dance. It is already-behaved behaviour, already doubled, already re-presented. *Trio A* is recognisably dance, and in that recognition a spectatorial *dédoublement* has already occurred: what is being presented, as ordinary as it may appear, has been selected to be presented. And, as a famous instance of choreography, it has been regularly re-presented: the kind of object it is is *dance*.

*Trio A* moves away from abstract symbolism toward objecthood, but it is nonetheless representational. Describing *Trio A* in relation to dance photography, Carrie Lambert insightfully describes the representational quality of *Trio A* as being indexical rather than symbolic. Her analysis describes the work’s intended effect of the ‘compelling experience of immediate physicality and presence in time.’ However, Lambert continues,

[...] the performance of this unmediated bodily activity was something of an illusion. For one thing, the movement of *Trio A*, however inventive and unusual, is haunted by images of dances past. Here, the ghost of an arabesque or a *rond-de-jambe*, there something that looks suspiciously like a Graham contraction or a Cunningham quirk of the leg. As Rainer herself has suggested, she inscribed *Trio A* with the traces of the very dance conventions she was working to displace.<sup>15</sup>

The tracelike quality of *Trio A* works against, or at least alongside, the experience of presence which it seeks to create. Lambert writes, ‘the body’s pure presence slides instantly and insistently into the past tense: there is never a moment of presence here that is not also a trace.’<sup>16</sup> Lambert, referring to Roland Barthes and Rosalind Krauss, likens

this quality to that of the photograph, which asserts its direct relationship to the presence of its subject, but simultaneously displaces that presence such that what is left is only a trace, an index. In the same way, Lambert writes, Rainer's work 'responds to the mechanics of the moving body *at the same time as it replaces them with their own image*'.<sup>17</sup>

On the one hand, Rainer moves away from representation by embracing the objecthood of the dance-event. But, inevitably, the objecthood of a representation is still a representation; it will always be *task-like*, *life-like*. As in her manifesto, it says no to illusion; but the illusion that it says no to is the illusion that this is not an illusion. Whatever *Trio A* is, it is not non-representational: as another critic suggests, its performers are absorbed in the act of representation.<sup>18</sup> And while it may be a complicated, self-doubled image, it is not non-spectacular. Lambert concludes, 'while only a few privileged instants of an ordinary dance look graceful and dramatic when captured in still images, *Trio A* might now be understood as one continuous photogenic moment.'<sup>19</sup> Despite her apparent alignment with Debord, Rainer's work participates in the production of spectacle; what differentiates it from the spectacular dance which Rainer sought to avoid is not any non-participation in the production of spectacle, but rather that what it represents is the act of production itself.

By self-reflexively transposing ideas from minimalist art to the idea of the performance-event, Rainer's work reveals that, in the case of performance, its objecthood is its spectacularity. The irreducible object of an event framed as performance is its quality of spectacle: its existence for, with, and because of a spectator. For this reason, Fried's label of 'theatre' is as appropriate for Rainer as for Judd or Morris, but rather than using the term to imply a condition of exhaustion, depletion, and cheapness, as Fried intends it to, I would argue that Rainer's work begins to foreground the productive doubling of theatricality. What begins to emerge here is theatricality as simultaneous double-existence: real and image, literal and representational, present-as-body and present-as-image. But this doubling is inherent in the idea of spectacle itself, which requires a revision of the conception of spectacle as 'mere representation'. In 2008 as part of the Serpentine's Manifesto Marathon, Rainer herself performed this revision (Figure 2), revisiting and rewriting her 1965 'No Manifesto'. Where there once were clear demarcations between illusion and reality, between literalness and spectacle, these lines are no longer clear and are mutually implicating:

<b>Yvonne Rainer</b>	
<b>1965</b>	<b>2008</b>
<b>No to spectacle.</b>	<b>Avoid if at all possible.</b>
<b>No to virtuosity.</b>	<b>Acceptable in limited quantity.</b>
<b>No to transformations and magic and make-believe.</b>	<b>Magic is out; the other two are sometimes tolerable.</b>
<b>No to the glamour and transcendency of the star image.</b>	<b>Acceptable only as quotation.</b>
<b>No to the heroic.</b>	<b>Dancers are ipso facto heroic.</b>
<b>No to the anti-heroic.</b>	<b>Don't agree with that one.</b>
<b>No to trash imagery.</b>	<b>Don't understand that one.</b>
<b>No to involvement of performer or spectator.</b>	<b>Stay in your seats.</b>
<b>No to style.</b>	<b>Style is unavoidable.</b>
<b>No to camp.</b>	<b>A little goes a long way.</b>
<b>No to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer.</b>	<b>Unavoidable.</b>
<b>No to eccentricity.</b>	<b>If you mean "unpredictable," that's the name of the game.</b>
<b>No to moving or being moved.</b>	<b>Unavoidable.</b>

Figure 2: Yvonne Rainer contribution to *A Pamphlet for the Serpentine Gallery Manifesto Marathon 2008*, ed. by Nicola Lees (London: Serpentine Gallery, 2008)

So I think Rainer's example is one in which theatricality is embraced, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, but in a way that yields a productive and provocative new dynamic area to be explored by performance. I think Rainer's move has a counterpart in that of one of her contemporaries (though they probably wouldn't have been aware of each other), Peter Handke, and in particular his play *Offending the Audience*, first performed in Frankfurt in 1966 and in London in 1970.

Rather than *avoiding* direct confrontation with its spectators, *Offending the Audience* famously confronts its spectators, and its status as spectacle, head-on. Handke's stage directions indicate that 'The usual theatre atmosphere should prevail,' or should be even more demonstrably theatrical: 'The ushers should be more assiduous than usual, even more formal and ceremonious, should subdue their usual whispering with even more style, so that their behaviour becomes infectious.' The opening of the curtain reveals four speakers walking slowly toward the audience. Handke directs the actors to be at first absorbed in their speaking, not addressing their words to the audience: 'Under no circumstance should the audience get the impression that the words are directed at

them.<sup>20</sup> But after some time, they look at the public, and begin to speak. Among their opening lines, they say:

You will hear what you usually see.

You will hear what you usually don't see.

You will see no spectacle.

Your curiosity will not be satisfied.

You will see no play.

There will be no playing here tonight.

You will see a spectacle without pictures.<sup>21</sup>

The remainder of the play consists essentially of statements about the situation of the theatre, insisting upon the extent to which no fiction or illusion is being portrayed here.

We don't represent except what we are. We don't represent ourselves in a state other than the one we are in now and here. This is no manoeuvre. We are not playing ourselves in different situations. [...] We are not acting as if. We are not acting as if we could repeat time or as if we could anticipate time. This is neither make-believe nor a manoeuvre.

However, they continue.

On the other hand we do act as if. We act as if we could repeat words. We appear to repeat ourselves. Here is the world of appearances. Here appearance is appearance. Appearance is here appearance.<sup>22</sup>

In a subsequent note on *Offending the Audience*, Handke reiterates his intention of a non-illusory theatre:

Offending the Audience is not a play against theatre. It's a play against the theatre as it is. It's not even a play against the theatre as it is, it's just a play. [...] It's a play against the theatre as it is, only insofar as it requires no story as an excuse for making theatre. It doesn't make use of the mediation of a story in order to create theatre, it is unmediated theatre. The spectator doesn't need to get into a story first, he doesn't need to have pre-histories or post-histories related to him: on stage there is only now, and this is the spectator's now too.<sup>23</sup>

Handke's idea of 'unmediated theatre' begins from a fundamental situation which is the condition of spectacle: some people are presenting in front of some other people. But whereas Fried found this condition to be depleted of interest, and Debord warned against all of life taking on this self-alienation, Handke's 1966 work announces a new possibility: that the doublings and ambiguities of the theatrical condition might not be standing in the way of a politicised community, but might themselves be a form of thinking that community. Debord and other members of the Situationist International would advocate 'the construction of situations, that is to say, the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality.' Debord's technique emphasised 'a systematic intervention based on the complex factors of two

components in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the behaviors which it gives rise to and which radically transform it', and with regard to the experience of time he writes that 'the situationist attitude consists in going with the flow of time'.<sup>24</sup> But if these were techniques to overcome or transcend spectacle, then both *Trio A* and *Offending the Audience* inaugurate techniques for inhabiting that spectacle and for intervening in the flow of time. Rather than choosing between reality and representation, the theatricality of these two works presents each as being side-by-side, intertwined with each other and indiscernible from each other. Is dance a representation of movement or is it really movement? Is this a representation of the theatre or really theatre? These kinds of questions have been continued by dance and theatre makers such as Jérôme Bel, Forced Entertainment, Tim Crouch, and others. These are not works that say no to spectacle; I am reminded of Handke's statement that 'This is not a play against theatre' when I read Jérôme Bel's vehement and indignant refutation of the label 'anti-dance'.<sup>25</sup> These performances might avoid spectacle in the sense of an over-the-top, all-consuming sensory overload, but they certainly have a primary interest in spectatorship – not as a condition to be overcome in order to achieve some political empowerment with regard to life outside the theatre, but as itself a politically charged encounter.

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## Notes

1. RoseLee Goldberg, 'Jérôme Bel: Dance Theatre Workshop', review, *Artforum* (1 July 2005), p. 329.
2. Chantal Pontbriand, "'The Eye Finds No Fixed Point on Which to Rest ...'", trans. by C. R. Parsons, *Modern Drama*, 25.1 (1982), 154-162, p. 155.
3. Hans-Thies Lehmann, 'The Political in the Post-Dramatic', *Maska*, 17.74-75 (2002), 74-76, p. 76, original emphasis.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
5. Carl Lavery, 'Spectacle', *Performance Research*, 11.3 ('Lexicon') (2006), 118-121, pp. 118, 121.
6. Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' [1967], in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), pp. 148-172, p. 155. Emphasis in the original.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
9. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle [La Société du spectacle, 1967]*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), p. 12.
10. Yvonne Rainer, 'A Quasi Survey of Some "Minimalist" Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or An Analysis of Trio A', in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 263-273, p. 266.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 269, 271.
13. Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', p. 152.
14. Quoted in Catherine Wood, *Yvonne Rainer: The Mind is a Muscle* (London: Afterall Books, 2007), p. 41.

15. Carrie Lambert, 'Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A"', *October*, 89 (1999), 87-112, p. 106.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 107, original emphasis.
18. Jonathan Walley, 'From Objecthood to Subject Matter: Yvonne Rainer's Transition from Dance to Film', *Senses of Cinema*, 18 (January-February 2002) <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/01/18/rainer.html>> [accessed 12 July 2010].
19. Lambert, 'Moving Still', p. 110.
20. Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience* [*Publikumsbeschimpfung*, 1966], trans. by Michael Roloff, in *Plays: 1: Offending the Audience, Self-accusation, Kaspar, My Foot My Tutor, The Ride Across Lake Constance, They Are Dying Out* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), pp. 1-32, pp. 4-6.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
23. Peter Handke, 'Note on *Offending the Audience*' [1972], trans. by Tom Kuhn, in *Plays: 1: Offending the Audience, Self-accusation, Kaspar, My Foot My Tutor, The Ride Across Lake Constance, They Are Dying Out* (London: Methuen Drama, 1997), p. 309.
24. Guy Debord, 'Report on the Construction of Situations and on the International Situationist Tendency's Conditions of Organization and Action' (1957) <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/report.html>> [accessed 12 July 2010].
25. 'I categorically refuse to accept the qualifier "anti-dance". It's totally absurd. It's something a lazy uncultured journalist has come up with. My work is not anti anything at all, or rather, it is. My work is anti-prostitution and anti-ideological! It simply proposes another way of looking at dance, but it's not against it.' Jérôme Bel, 'Interview (*Véronique Doisneau*, Paris National Opera)' (2004) <<http://82.238.77.78/jeromebel/eng/jeromebel.asp?m=4&t=16>> [accessed 12 July 2010].

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## Dance Spectacles and Spectacular Dances Between the July Monarchy and Second French Empire

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### *Abstract*

*My ongoing project on Dance Cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century explores the constant dialogue between social and theatrical dance, as well as between dance and music against the backdrop of socio-political contexts by the example of Paris as one of the leading dance centres of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Paris, under these preconditions effectively becomes a stage. In this paper I will demonstrate the central place of spectacle in urban social dance events, which seem to combine elements from theatre and concert performances to promote an optical, kinetic and acoustic spectacularity.*

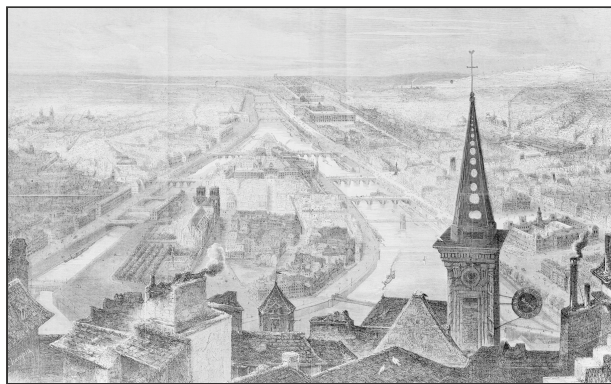
### **Introduction**

The central importance of ‘spectacularity’ in French art and culture turned out to be evident early on in the research for my project *Music in Movement: Dance Cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, which embeds Parisian music and dance theatre productions performed between 1830 and 1870 in the context of urban dance (music) cultures and thus aims to present different kinds of listening and watching dance in its historical dimensions.<sup>1</sup> Whereas in German the same term has slightly pejorative overtones tending towards cheap showmanship, the French ‘spectacle’ is used to describe rather neutrally a theatrical performance that is broad and covers a spectrum of different performing arts, at the same time claiming to be especially impressive and effective, that is ‘spectacular’ in its truest sense. The in France particularly distinctive tendency towards optically overwhelming artistic productions is already shown in the baroque music-dance theatre of French provenance, which served above all to present an overwhelming ‘spectacle’, the dramatic conflict of which—beyond dramaturgic logic—was often resolved through a particularly spectacular (‘merveilleux’) moment. Without doubt this French predilection for ‘spectacularity’ is a far-reaching topic, which corresponds with the fundamental political upheavals during the course of the centuries. Based on this premise, I will examine the ‘spectacularity’ of the Parisian dance cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by focusing at first on the dance localities/spaces and performances in the urban context, in order to roughly reach across to the theatre or rather stage dance later on, while also mentioning some musical aspects. Thus I will differentiate between an optical, kinetic and acoustic spectacularity, in which it seems to be useful, apart from contemporary monographs and music supplies, to fall back on literally ‘spectacular’ iconographics, which require a specific dance-historical ‘reading’ in order to get onto the aforementioned ‘spectacularity’ in a narrower and a broader sense.

## Dance Spectacles: Localities and Spaces

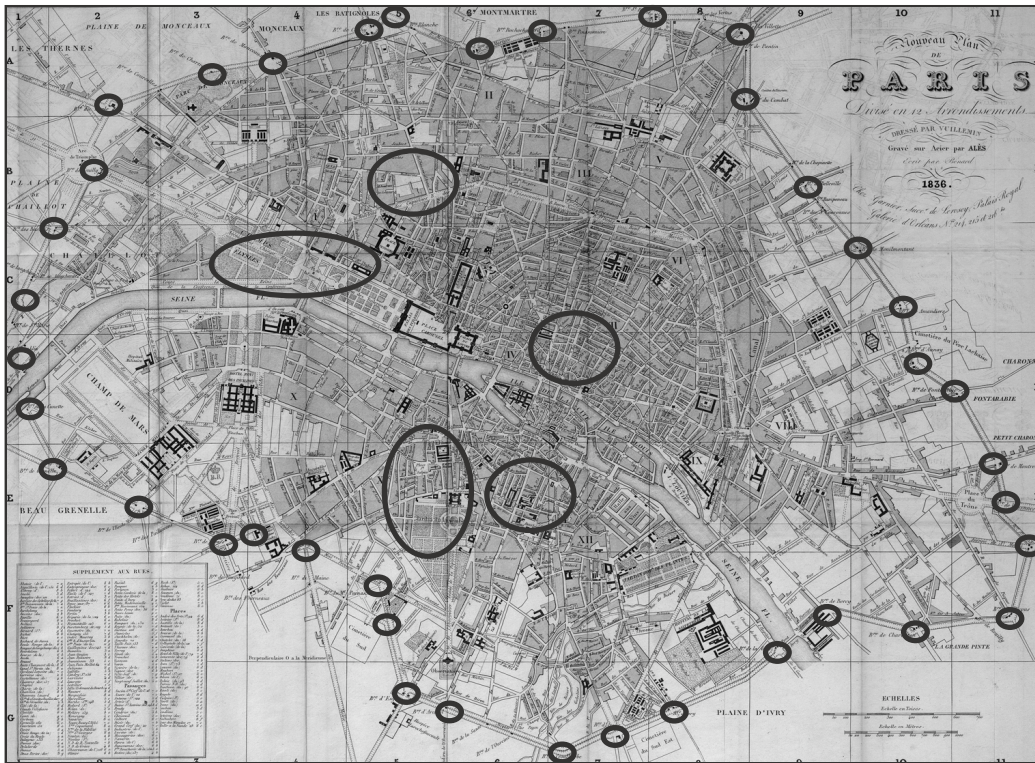
Among the host of city guides—that semi-literary genre which was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and immediately started to boom, guiding its readers in the form of extensive promenades to spectacular places or rather monuments of cultural activity and attractiveness—the *Guide pratique et illustré: Les plaisirs de Paris* by Alfred Delvau (Paris 1867) stands out, beginning right away with the discussion of a central issue of the flourishing Parisian entertainment culture, which after all is the intrinsic basis of the rich spectacularity of the urban life: “Qu’est-ce que le plaisir? [...] On peut tout dire de Paris, excepté que c’est une ville ennuyeuse. C’est, au contraire, la ville du plaisir et des plaisirs par excellence [...]” (p. 3). (“What is pleasure? One could say anything about Paris but not that it is boring. Quite the opposite: it is the epitome of a city of enjoyment and of pleasures [...]”)

Paris itself—as city—advances here to a ‘spectacle’, the examination of which is already tremendously pleasurable (“plaisir”), at the same time offering the observer diverse possibilities to directly participate in this ‘spectacle’ in order to intensify his “plaisir.” Thus it seems to be obvious that Alfred Delvau guides his imaginary reader after his fundamental explanations of “plaisir” across the boulevards of Paris, which do not only offer an “infinie variété des spectacles” (p. 19), but are already a spectacle in themselves (“le spectacle des boulevards”, p. 21), immediately to the prominent ballrooms: first and foremost the ones situated at the Champs-Élysées, the Bal Mabille and the Château des Fleurs. Three years earlier (1864) his *Les Cythères Parisiennes* was published, a *Histoire anecdotique des Bals de Paris*, in which he already concerned himself in depth with the abundance of facets in the Paris ballroom culture and had thus presented a “physiologie” (not explicitly but rather implicitly), which distinguishes itself from other comparable caricaturing literature<sup>2</sup> by an extraordinary precision in the description of the respective ‘spectacles’. I will refer to the latter and to several other contemporary monographs of urban dance cultures in the following explanations, by approaching the numerous Paris dance localities from a bird’s eye view – a “vol d’oiseau” which opens up a panoramic perspective on the dance ‘spectacularities’.



“Paris à vol d’oiseau”

(Edmond Auguste Texier, *Tableau de Paris, Paris 1852–1853*).

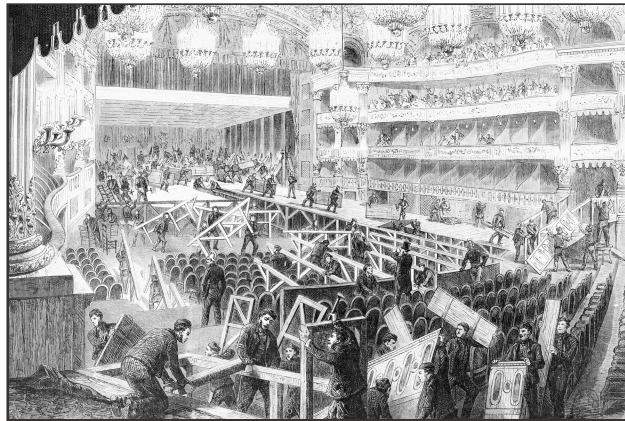


“Nouveau Plan de Paris divisé en 12 Arrondissements. [...] Gravé sur Acier par Alès [...] [Paris] 1836.”

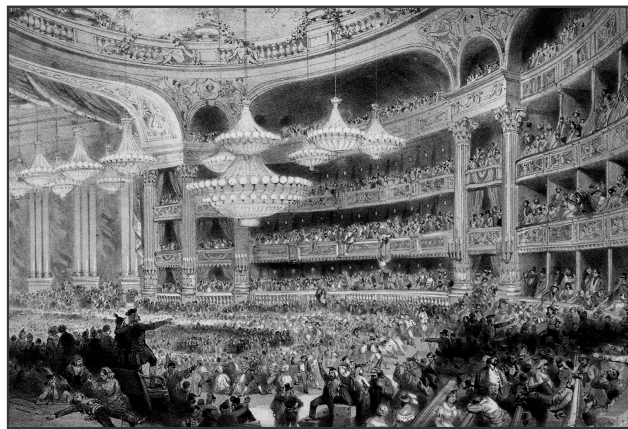
*In Paris with its innumerable dance localities there developed certain dance or rather ballroom centres, which had their own respective style with regard to how their events were arranged, as a consequence attracting their own specific audiences. These balls did not only offer an insight into the socio-cultural ambience of the respective part of town, but also decisively left their mark on the latter. As main centres downtown one has to mention first of all the surrounding area of the Jardin des Tuileries, the Champs Elysées and the Opéra/Salle de la rue Le Peletier as well as the Quartier Latin and the neighbouring Jardin du Luxembourg. In addition to this, an extremely lively dance culture developed in the environs of the ‘barrières’, comparable to the dance sub-cultures of today’s ‘banlieues’.*

The Paris *Opéra* was without doubt the beating heart of the Paris ballroom scene, annually mutating into a glamorous ballroom during the carnival when the stage and the auditorium were transformed through lavish remodelling—especially since this was a social ‘spectacle’ of theatrical calibre, which did not only change architecturally between stage and ballroom but also in terms of content and arrangement.

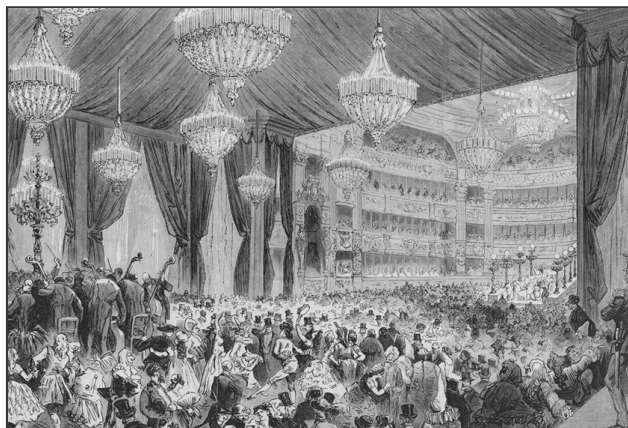
Here in particular social conflicts were taken up theatrically and arranged artistically, exerting vice versa a direct influence on society life. Thus opera balls for instance put music and theatre productions by means of costumes, choreographies and musical arrangements into a social context, this way they were not only widely received via representations but also immediately imitated and presented, i.e. turned into an individual experience. Musically this social reception of theatre events finds expression in numerous arrangements of operas and ballets, through which above all Philippe Musard had made a name for himself since 1834.



“Transformation du théâtre du Grand-Opéra en salle de bal  
après la représentation du mardi-gras”  
(Dessin de M. Gaildrau).



“Paris et ses Environs: Bal de l’Opéra”  
(A. Provost del. et lith.).



“Le Carnaval à Paris”  
(Dessin de M. Lix, d’après le croquis de M. Paul Renouard).



*Music, especially opera and ballet arrangements for the ballroom written by Philippe Musard.*

### **Ballet-Arrangements for the Ballroom by Philippe und Alfred (fils) Musard**

#### ***Giselle, ou Les Willis* – Ballet fantastique (1841)**

Composer: Adam / Choreographer: Coralli, Perrot

Musard: 2 *Quadrilles pour piano et violon, flûte, cornet, flageolet*, Paris: Meissonnier [1841]

#### ***La Jolie fille de Gand* – Ballet pantomime (1842)**

Composer: Adam / Choreographer: Albert

Musard: 2 *Quadrilles pour orchestre*, Paris: Meissonnier [1842]

Musard [Alfred (fils)]: 2 *Quadrilles arrangés pour piano avec accompt. de violon, flûte, flagelet et cornet à pistons*, Paris: Meissonnier [1842]

#### ***Lady Henriette ou La Servante de Greenwich* – Ballet pantomime (1844)**

Composer: Flotow, Burgmüller, Deldevez / Choreographer: Mazilier

Musard [Alfred (fils)]: *Suite de Valses pour piano*, Paris: Bernard-Latte [1844]

Musard / Carl Merz: *Quadrille pour piano par Musard, pour piano à 4 mains par Merz*, Paris: Bernard-Latte [1844]

Musard: *Quadrille pour piano avec accompt. de violon, flûte, cornet à piston, flageolet*, Paris: Bernard-Latte [1844]

Musard: *Quadrille pour orchestre*, Paris: Bernard-Latte [1844]

Musard: *Quadrille pour grand orchestre ou Quintette*, Paris: Bernard-Latte [1844]

#### ***Paquita* – Ballet pantomime (1846)**

Composer: Deldevez / Choreographer: Mazilier

Musard [Alfred (fils)]: 2 *Quadrilles pour piano avec accompt. de violon, flûte, (cornets à) pistons, basse*, Paris: Bureau central de musique [1846]

#### ***La Fille de marbre* – Ballet-pantomime (1847)**

Composer: Pagni / Choreographer: Saint-Léon

Musard: 2 **Quadrilles** pour piano avec accompagnement de violon, flûte, flageolet et cornet à pistons,  
Paris: Bureau central de musique [1847]

***Le Violon du diable*** – Ballet fantastique (1849)

Composer: Pugno / Choreographer: Saint-Léon

Musard [Alfred (fils)]: ***Quadrille pour piano avec accompt. de violon, flûte, basse et cornet,***  
Paris: Troupenas [1849]

Musard: *Californie. Polka pour piano*, Paris: Troupenas [1849]

Musard: *Suite de Valses pour piano avec accompt. de violon, flûte, basse et cornets à pistons,*  
Paris: Troupenas [1849]

***La Filleule des fées*** – Grand Ballet féerie (1849)

Composer: Adam, Saint-Julien / Choreographer: Perrot

Musard: ***Polka pour piano***, Paris: Le Bel [1849]

Musard: ***Suite de Valses pour piano avec accompt. de violon, basse, flûte, cornets à pistons***, Paris: Le Bel [1849]

***Stella ou Les Contrebandiers*** – Ballet-pantomime (1850)

Composer: Pugno / Choreographer: Saint-Léon

Musard: ***Quadrille pour piano***, Paris: Boieldieu [1850]

Thus these balls gave those audiences that were during the year mostly ‘just’ viewers the opportunity to advance to actors in a theatrical event – and vice versa: here professional dancers could mix with the audience to reduce the distance between stage and auditorium, thus evening out the dividing line between theatre and society, if not even removing it. These markedly pompous and at the same time extremely turbulent ball events must have served as an example for many urban dance localities which emulated them with more modest means.

Due to his special spectacularity the *Bal Mabilille* stands out among the ball events in the immediate surroundings of the Opéra: originating from the “soirées dansante” by a respected ballroom dance instructor named Mabilille, this ball entertainment, which draped around an ornately decorated garden pavilion, developed into one of the most successful dance events in Paris. Initially there was an additional fee on top of the fifty centimes to be paid for the quadrilles. Only in a later development stage, after Mabilille’s sons had taken over the management of these balls, there was a general entrance fee for all dances of two francs on Saturdays (later on also on Tuesdays). Even more public appeal though brought the introduction of gas light, which was immediately followed by the innovation of their own poster campaign.

Supported by the flourishing journalism, which discovered in the 30s the Paris ball scene as a welcome topic of conversation, the balls soon began to compete with the (no less spectacular) theatre performances and concert series. In addition to this, the balls offered a symbiotic interconnection between theatre and concert, as Victor Rozier’s commentary on the *Bal Mabilille* (*Les Bal publics à Paris*, Paris 1855) points out:

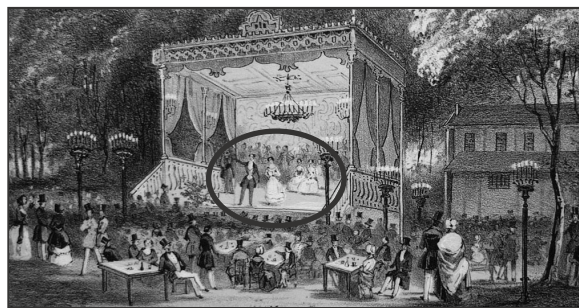


Bal Mabille at the Champs-Élysées: entrance and garden with pavillon.

*C'est de l'enchantement. L'ensemble est splendide. Toutes ces femmes parées de leurs plus belles toilettes, caquetant, se remuant, se croissant, étalant leur luxe et leur visage, offrent un spectacle qui vaut bien la peine qu'on se dérange. Pour le visiteur, il y a la plus qu'une représentation théâtrale, plus qu'un concert, **il y a à la fois concert et représentation théâtrale.** (p. 32)*

*[This is true magic. The whole thing is magnificent. All these ladies in their most beautiful attire, chatting, mingling, displaying their luxury and their story, forming a play which one simply must have seen. The visitor finds here more than a theatre performance, more than a concert; **this is both, concert and theatre.**]*

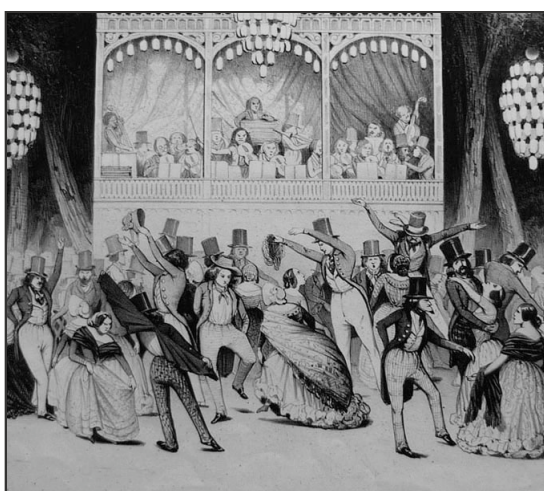
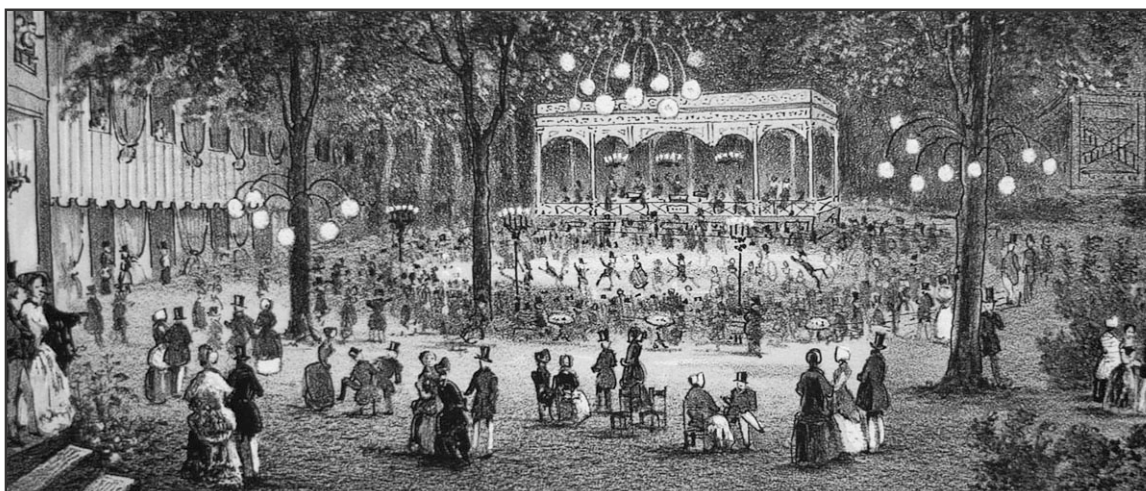
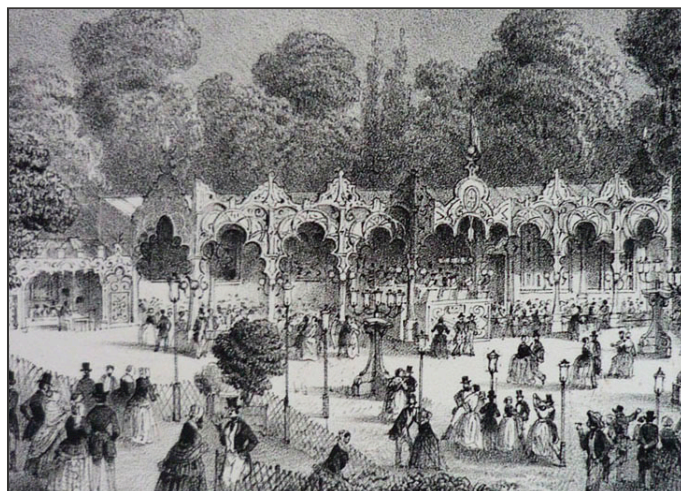
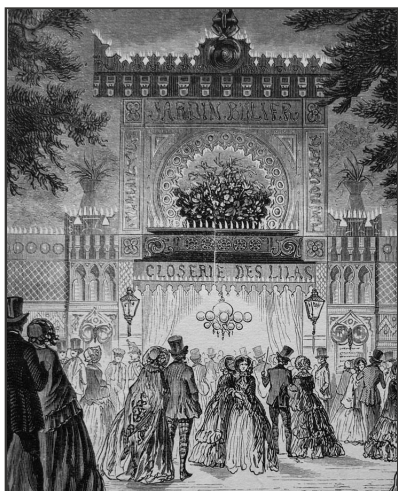
Either the conductor and his orchestra were placed in the pavilion, which protruded from the dance floor, or ballroom dances were theatricalized or rather performed theatrically—a comparable scene can be found at the café concerts, for instance at the *Café Ambassadeurs* which was also situated at the Champs-Élysées. Especially the entertainment sector did not know (and still does not know) a firm separation of music and dance ‘spectacles’ which was pushed ahead at the big theatres and concert halls.



Bal Mabille (*top*), Château des Fleurs (*middle*) and Café Ambassadeurs (*down*) at the Champs-Élysées.

The *Jardin Bullier/Closerie des Lilas* presents a spectacularity which is comparable to that of the Bal Mabille: Here too the visitor is attracted by a pompous entrance gate with an elaborate garden decoration and exotic looking pavilion. In comparison the *La Grande Chaumière* in the Quartier Latin, the student quarter, looks architecturally far more modest. Nonetheless the latter was one of the most attractive and popular Paris dance events during the summer, even though it was increasingly suffering considerable losses due to its close proximity to and competition with the *Prado*, which also offered dances during winter.

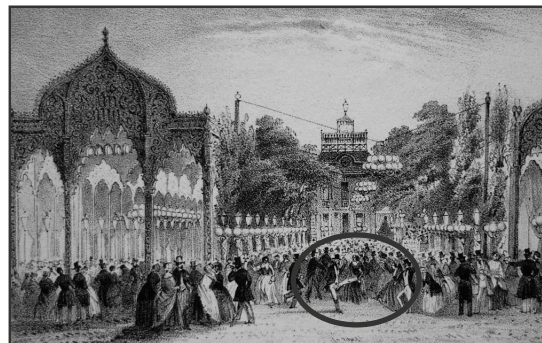
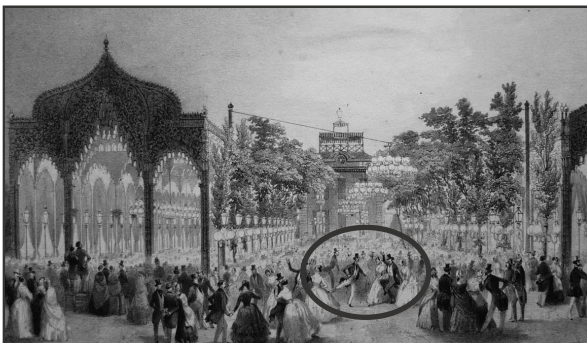
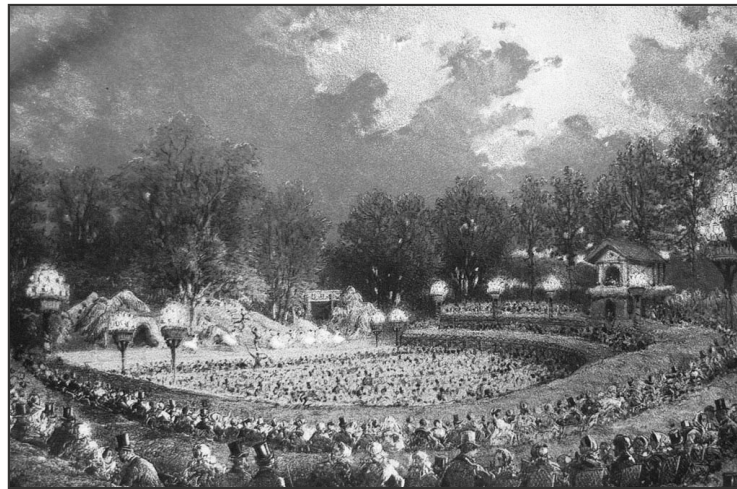
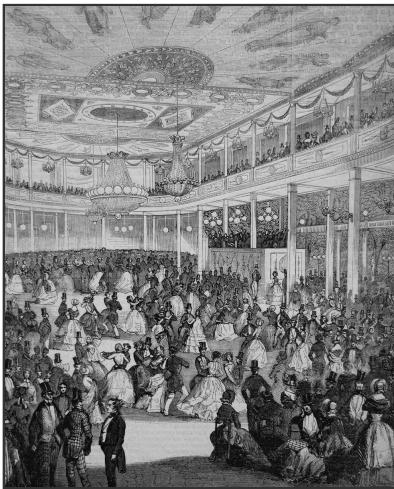




Jardin Bullier/Closierie des Lilas (top), Grande Chaumière (middle) and Prado (down).

Beside the popular dance locations near and in the Parisian forests, particularly the Bois de Boulogne with its *Ranelagh*, the design of which followed the English example, as well as the arena-like concept of the *Pre Catalan*, there also flourished a dance culture at the ‘banlieues’, the attractiveness of which was at some places able to match the renowned locations downtown.

Above all *Le Château Rouge* at the Barrière Rochechouart presented itself with a spectacular splendour that also lured the noble Parisian society to the outskirts of the city. Juxtaposing two engravings which show the area from the same perspective, one notices two different dance movements which are both characteristic and typical of the 30s and deserve special attention: one the one hand we have here a high flinging of the legs (in terms of ballroom dance) comparable with a battement thrown forwards, which creates associations with the cancan, on the other hand there is a dragging glissade-like movement that is characteristic of polka and mazurka – as well as of similar dances (redowa, varsoviennne etc.).



*Ranelagh (top left), Pre Catalan (top right) and  
Château Rouge with two different dance scene from the same perspective (down; details next page).*



*Two different, characteristic dance movements in the center of the dance place of Château Rouge.*

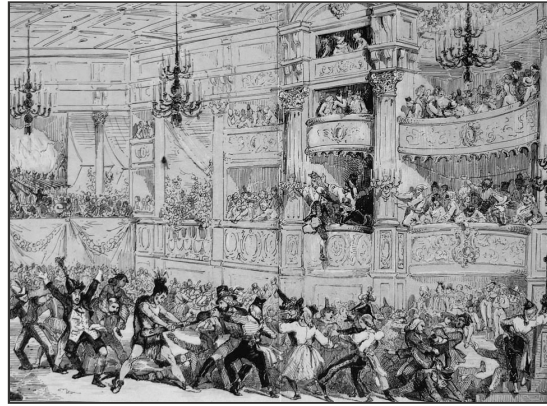
This shows that the different balls are not only characterized by a spectacular ambience but also by referring to specific dance fashions which stand out due to new, not less spectacular movements. In the following passages a first insight into iconographics illustrating this phenomenon will be presented, giving fascinating clues to dance cultures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, regarding the dance technique as well as choreographic aspects.

### **Spectacular Dances: Movements, Rhythms and Sounds**

Undoubtedly the opera balls are once again standing out due to their brilliant *Galoppades*, which will soon cause a sensation elsewhere too: What started out as rather disciplined in private salons or in the early evening hours of the public balls developed into an increasingly turbulent-ecstatic form around midnight and culminated in the early morning at the latest in a chaos of infernal dimensions.



*Galop as a couple dance – in a ‘civilized’ (left) and an exaggerated, excessive ‘fantastical’ version (“Galop fantastique”, right).*

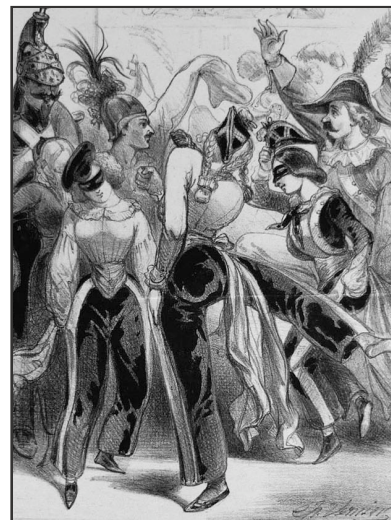
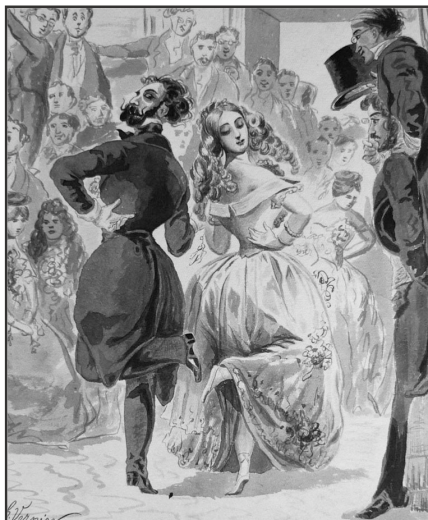
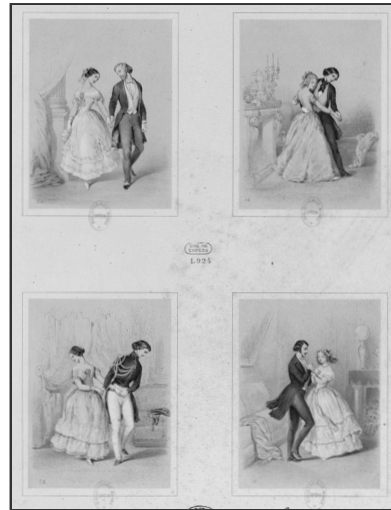
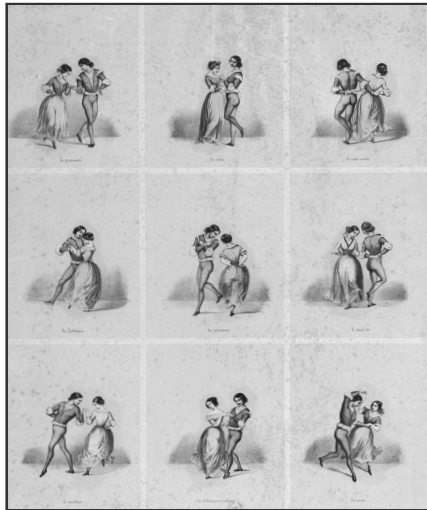


“Dernier Galop” at the Bal masqué de l’Opéra (left) and  
 “Galop infernal du jugement dernier!!!” at the Bal masqué of the Théâtre de la Renaissance (right).

The *Quadrilles* competed with the galoppades concerning their popularity and advanced due to their consisting of several parts to a dance form that was especially transformative, playfully rich in variations. Against this backdrop they also formed (amongst others) the choreographic breeding ground of the cancan. Here too exists a markedly socially acceptable type next to a lively and not least of all slightly subversive performance.



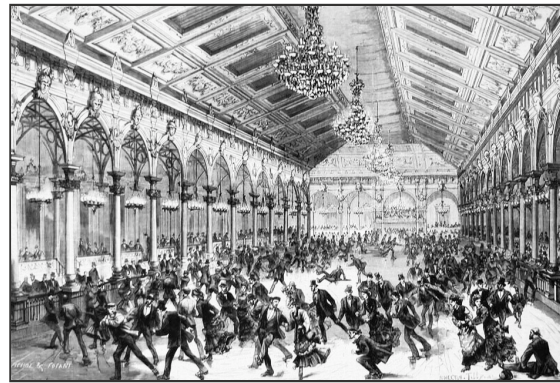
Likewise the *Polka* could be performed as stylized national dance (in Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, French variations) either in a more rural or in a socially more acceptable version for the private salons – with characteristic arm postures as well as a step vocabulary emphasizing the heels – or it could develop the Dionysian tendencies for the public balls like the galop and the quadrille: Starting from the Bal Mabille and the ‘Reine Pomare’, the first great ball queen of the Parisian demi-monde, a downright “polka-mania” spread during the 30s of the 19<sup>th</sup> century across all Parisian balls.



*Commentary to the caricature-like illustration down on the right side:*

“On déploie à cette Polka [sic] toutes les graces **Musardiennes**;  
le municipal s’attendrit, ferme les yeux et regarde avec le plus vif intérêt cette jeunesse studieuse.”

It seems to suggest itself that not only the stage dance was imitated by the social dance, but also the other way around: the Parisian ball life was received and stylized on stage in terms of content, choreography and dance technique—above all the ecstatic dance frenzy, which was rich in eccentric gestures made effective material for theatre dance. But it also seems reasonable that movements out of the urban everyday life and of other leisure-time cultures were processed in the theatre: Thus the choreographic ensemble arrangements can for instance be attributed to military formations, just as the skating fashion during winter inspired the markedly dragging movements of the glissés in the polka-redowa and mazurka step vocabulary. Against this backdrop the divertissement-like skating scene in Giacomo Meyerbeer's Grand opéra *Le Prophète* (1849), a “Quadrille des patineurs”, for instance regains a new understanding for us today. Stimuli for this can be found in the direct context of the dance localities like the *Bal Bullier* and *Bal de la Chaussée-d'Antin*, the dance-floor surface of which was turned into ice during winter.



“Le Skating-Rink à Bullier” (left) and “Le Skating-Rink de la Chaussée-d'Antin” (right).

Whereas the ballroom scenes of the Grands opéras present the audience above all opulent-spectacular movement spaces, supported by dance rhythms known from the ballrooms with nuanced sound arrangements, the social dances in the Opéras bouffes imitate especially the accelerating dynamics developed in the ballroom, supported by a powerful orchestra. This can not only be seen in the opera compositions themselves but also in their arrangements for the ballroom: Whereas the arrangements of Grands opéras mainly focused on the musical salon and support dance imaginations with more elaborate compositions, the arrangements of the Opéra bouffes with their spreading dance orchestras, which were dominated by the wind section, could hold out against the turbulences of big ballrooms. Stage- and ballroom dance or rather in more general terms: theatre and society interacted in a way that was not separable from the urban context, the spectacularity of which was optical, kinetic and acoustic, thus giving its inhabitants and visitors special “plaisir”.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This is a project subsidized by the DFG (German National Academic Foundation), which serves as the preparation for a publication planned for 2013, entitled *Paris qui danse. Bewegungs- und Klangräume einer Großstadt des 19. Jahrhunderts*.
- <sup>2</sup> Cf. anon., *Physiologie de l'opéra, du carnaval, du cancan et de la cachucha, par un vilain masque*, Paris 1842; anon., *Physiologie de la Chaumière, suivie de l'hymne sacré*, Paris 1841; Étienne-Junien de Champeaux, *Physiologie des bals de Paris et de ses environs: Bal Mabille*, Paris 1845; Étienne-Junien de Champeaux, *Physiologie des bals de Paris et de ses environs: Nouveau Tivoli (Chateau rouge)*, Paris 1845; Chicard et Balochard, *Physiologie des bals de Paris*, Paris 1841; Charles Marchal, *Physiologie du Chicard*, Paris 1842; Auguste Vitu and Jules Frey, *Physiologie du bal Mabille*, Paris 1844 etc.

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## Illustrations

Clichés BnF Paris.

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## Naked Came I/Eye: Lights, Camera and the Ultimate Spectacle

*Peter Sparling*

Thurnau Professor of Dance, University of Michigan



Figure 1: Peter Sparling in *DERRIÈRE*, 2009. Image from video.

### **Abstract**

*The naked body, though the most commonly shared ‘fact’ of existence, is also the most scripted, censored, and “performed” spectacle. Western concert dance has provided a certain protected space and esthetic rationale for the stripped-down body on stage. What kind of status is my naked body granted once it is performed, edited and produced as screendance? Does the translation allow for greater objectification and a fusion of corporeal and idealized aesthetic orientations—such that the naked dancing body aligns itself with Modernity and high art vs. porn, narcissism, exhibitionism and eroticism? Or am I merely making a spectacle of myself?*

### **Introduction**

The naked body, though the most commonly shared ‘fact’ of existence, is also the most scripted, inscribed, censored, and/or “performed” spectacle. Nakedness and degrees of nakedness occupy our attention in our private, everyday etiquettes and insinuate themselves into the worlds of media, fashion and performance. The body’s relative degrees of nakedness signify for the eye of the beholder a set of templates, traditions and acceptable or transgressive social norms. These templates evolve to provide each culture

with its (often voyeuristic) means of performing the body while defining boundaries of public/private. The traditions of western concert dance have offered a certain protected space and esthetic rationale for the stripped-down body on stage. What kind of status is this estheticized body granted once it is performed, edited and produced as screen art?

In tandem with screenings of my recent work as video artist in which I embody, videotape and edit my own improvisational dance performance- alternating anterior and posterior facings of my naked body—I hope to address this and other related questions. Do the camera and editing allow for greater objectification, and/or a fusion of corporeal and idealized aesthetic orientations with 20th century theories of opticality and traditions of Modern Dance... such that my naked dancing body aligns itself more with Modernity and a poetics of dance rather than coming off as an embarrassing display of narcissism, exhibitionism or soft porn? Do the esthetic and choreographic choices I make in the act of video self-portraiture--and in my relationship to the camera and to my imagined audience—re-claim the gaze as my own and guard me against accusations that I'm merely making a spectacle of myself? Or, upon further consideration after hearing so many interesting presentations at this conference, is the point to MAKE a spectacle of myself? Indeed, what IS spectacle and its relationship to the artist/creator's body?

I'll bookend today's presentation with two studies I entitle *DEVANT* and *DERRIÈRE*. The titles refer to the two facings –front and back—of my naked form, and I'll screen *DERRIÈRE* first, since its premise was the original motivation for my exploration of the nude dancing figure for video.

Here is the required description I provide when submitting *DERRIÈRE* to festivals:

*This mock-serious study of the backside of dance exposes to the camera the typically unseen facet of the dancer's body. By showing the flip side of the usual frontal facing of the performing body, DERRIÈRE celebrates the hidden mechanics of the dancer's instrument as it engages in modes ranging from lyrical or highly emotive to spasmodic and wildly disjointed.*



Figure 2. Peter Sparling in *DERRIÈRE*, 2009. Image from video.

Is this man making a spectacle of his buttocks, or is he making art? Do editing devices, formatting and effects tell us something either way? (Do the curators of international video festivals make the final call?) What about my own high intentions as a professor and working artist who embraces a certain poetics of modern dance? Considering the artist's intentionality is largely out of fashion among my more academic colleagues, except that, in this case, the body as spectacle on video has a very difficult time hiding its intentions. As the ghost of Martha Graham's physician father reminds us constantly, "Movement never lies." Perhaps with camera and editing—particularly when the naked dancer is subject-- this well-worn admonition is given new meaning for the realm of screendance and its potential for not only intimate exposure, revelation and truth-saying but for masterly disguise, deconstruction and re-contextualization.

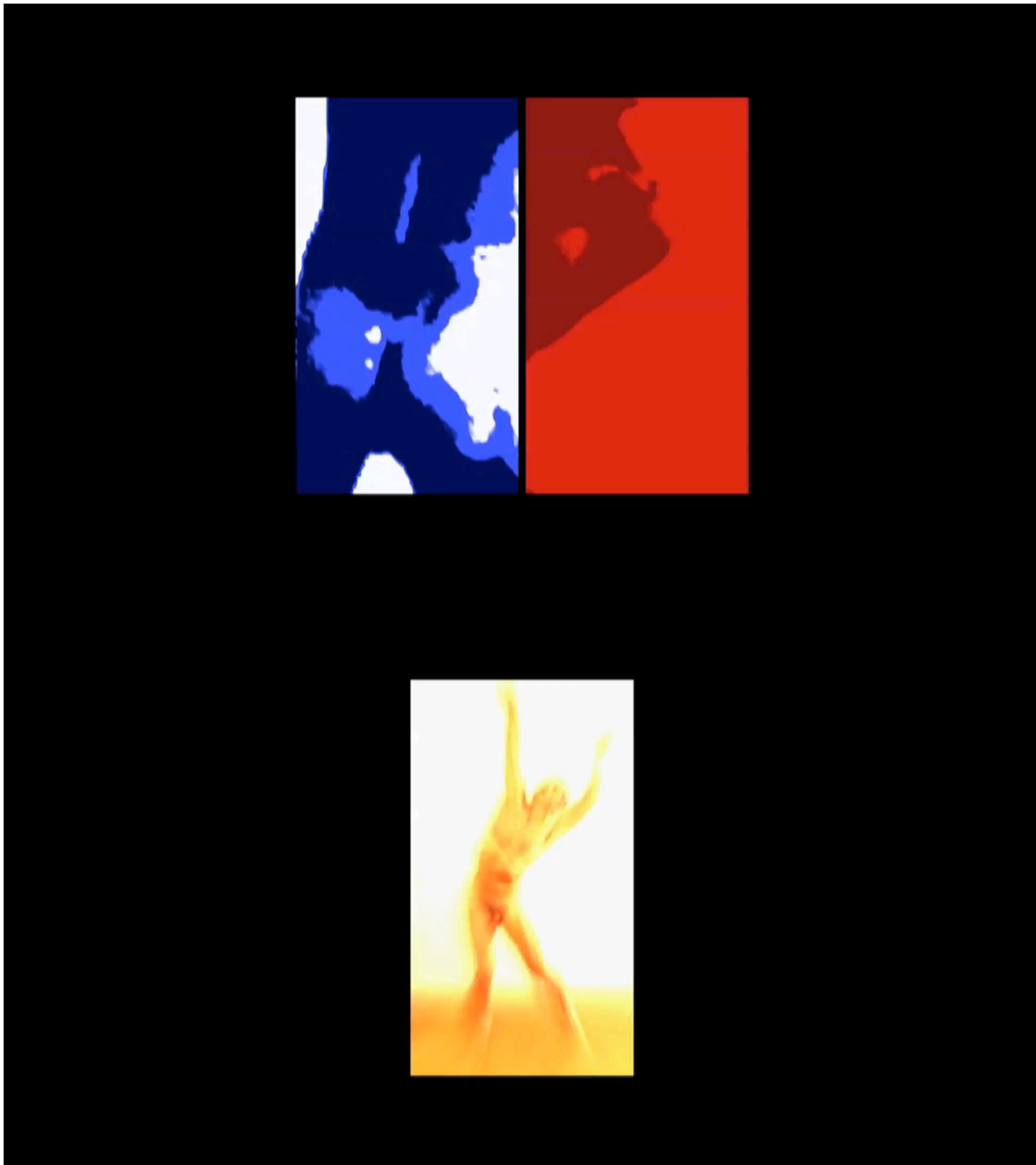
Adding, then, the variables of camera work and editing to those of the dancing itself, I contemplate a newly calibrated set of aesthetic considerations for the screendance as spectacle. It's less a matter of addition or translation from the stage and more one of intertextual or interdisciplinary alchemy for the screen. Isolating first the aspect of movement, the body is stripped of everything in the void of the video studio's black box, with no costume or ornamentation, no setting other than carefully designed artificial lighting, I'm left alone with a highly trained (albeit aging) dancer's naked body, groomed in a certain mode of movement presentation deemed "artistic". Laurence Louppe, in her treatise, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, identifies the "tools" of contemporary dance movement in terms of body, breath, weight, flow, space, time, invention, style and composition. Can this movement poetics override the fact of nakedness as a distraction to the making of art? I certainly expect that of my improvisational performance in *DERRIÈRE*, structured to embody the four different contrasting dynamic modes I assign myself. I aspire towards art as spectacle through a mature virtuosity--a skillful

modulation of my Humphrey-Limon roots in rhythm, design, dynamics, motivation, fall-rebound, with a generous dose of Grahamesque contraction-release and evocative contortions, spasms, and contourings---all within an overarching timespaceforce continuum, re-affirming movement for movement's sake.

To this groomed production of improvisational movement, I add the calculated play of light on muscle and flesh, captured and rendered so that the body is both the canvas and the generator of movement colorations, gestures and utterances that animate the frame. The camera frames and creates this movement picture, anticipating, through editing and projection, the rectangular plane of the screen. This plane, one step removed from the proscenium frame, framed photograph or painting-- gives me objective distance, a more remote positioning for viewing, and perhaps further license to artfully arrange and display our spectacle. I am also provided the opticality of the privileged camera eye's invasive intimacy and ability to define multiple points of view, to move towards, away from and around the subject. And finally, in editing, I apply to my footage a vast array of effects, transitions, and re-stagings, during which I digitally re-choreograph the moving picture, position it, multiply it, and alter its timing and its succession of images or episodes.

This distancing and objectification in the process of composition for the screen is the greatest difference I find between performing live and for the video screen. My decade-long foray into screendance has come as a welcome relief after a 40-year career on stage as solo artist. Becoming arbiter of my own moving image while sitting at my laptop, I am literally in the driver's seat...while my own "seat" dances before me.

In *Upon Viewing Picasso's Nude Self-Portraits*, from a set of a dozen or so daily studies I call "Videocartepostales" made while on sabbatical in Paris in 2007, I keep the camera static and use an in-camera slow motion effect that stretches a 12" improvisation to 48". I cast myself as a figure in various painterly, poster art or photographic templates, disguising and/or highlighting the nude moving figure in discreet rectangles. The music of Satie provides yet another frame.



Figures 3. & 4. Peter Sparling in *Upon Viewing Picasso's Nude Self-Portraits*, from *Videocartepostales de Paris/Aix 2007*. Images from video.

In *Photoformance I: Long Lie Down*, made earlier this year originally for projections onto an architectural installation, I blur the borders between the human figure, abstraction, and anthropomorphism in an amalgam of photographic imagery and editing. First connecting then overlaying photographer Ernestine Ruben's still sequences of my slowly moving naked figure with a series of images of reflected light that Ruben calls "Dancing Veils", I then treat or develop the results with various colorization effects. I

attempt to orchestrate a hallucinatory journey of the body in gradual recline-- hovering between worlds-- before coming to final rest.



Figure 5. Peter Sparling in *Photoformance I: Long Lie Down*, 2010. Image from video.

As we watch these excerpts on the screen, I'd like to posit that yes, these video self-portraits are more than narcissistic indulgences...that they, among similar works by other creators, aspire towards and extend a dream of Modernism in dance that is and has always been made problematic by the fact of the human body. My dancing image embodies the thorny tension between corporeality and the idealized in aesthetic appreciation. The body and its humanity, its idiosyncrasies, its genitalia, its emotive or mimetic tendencies, get in the way of the process of refining, abstracting, purifying down to what Clement Greenberg might argue were the essentials of the medium.

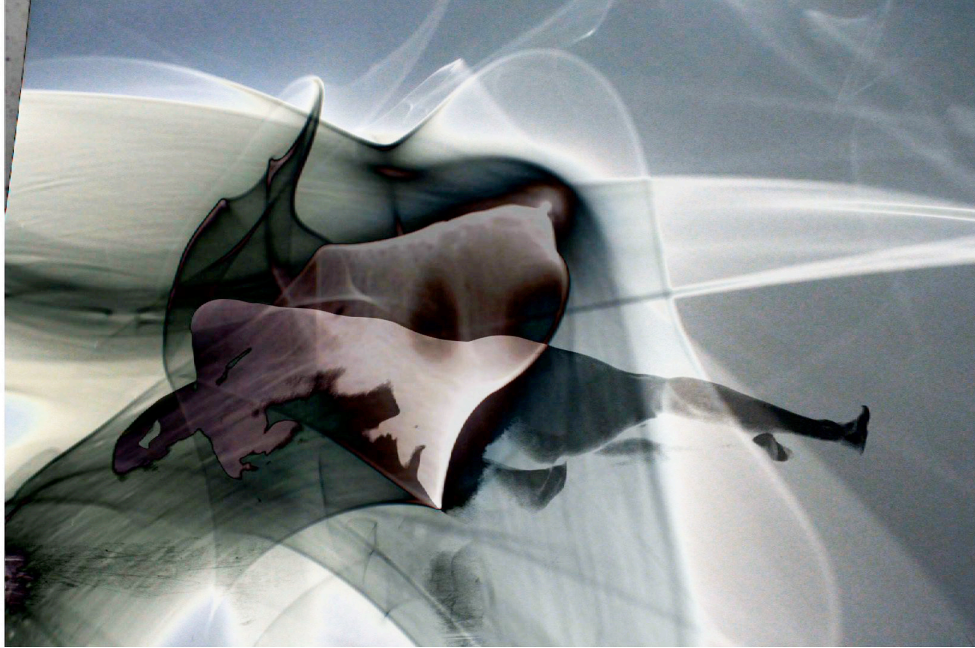


Figure 6: Peter Sparling in *Photoformance I: Long Lie Down*, 2010. Image from video.

This leads us to the argument for 20<sup>th</sup> century Modernism and the quest for the utopian abstract, freed from the burden of history-- or encountering it head-on, and then moving beyond. Beyond illusion, representation, sign, symbolism, narrative... Art theorist T. J. Clark, in his *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, traces this ill-starred quest through Cézanne's nudes, Cubism's distorted illusionism, Malevich's Suprematist purification rituals to Jackson Pollock's densely woven canvases. Referring specifically to Pollock's work between 1947-50, Clark describes the Modernist idea as containing "contraries of nature and anti-nature, skeleton and script, thicket and palimpsest, depiction and inscription, infinity and confinement, entanglement and paper-thinness, dissonance and totality".<sup>1</sup> These are qualities I endeavor to embody in the improvisational scrawls of *DEVANT/DERRIÈRE* or in the distortions of *Self-Portrait* or *Photoformance*.

To further explain the complex relationships involved in Modernism, Clark seeks an alternative to a doomed, Foucauldian loop in which he imagines the Modernist experiment as trapped in the futile search for an Other to bourgeois experience while constantly being re-absorbed into and re-created as a response to that same bourgeois world. In seeking Modernism's emergence to some kind of authentic dialogue, Clark cites Mikhail Bakhtin from his "Discourse in the Novel":

Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; and it is in relation to this overall movement of construction—this continual opening of discourse toward its objects, this effort to tie word to world, this wish for agreement and grounding—that the possibility of truth arises.<sup>2</sup>

This speaks to me of the reaching of my movement towards the camera, to engage the collective of all audiences I've ever danced for that I imagine contained in the camera's singular eye. Replacing the word "word" with "movement", in Bakhtin's text, it would continue as follows:

The (movement), breaking through to its own meaning and its own expression across an environment full of alien (movements) and variously evaluating accents, harmonizing with some of the elements in this environment and striking a dissonance with others, is able, in this dialogized process, to shape its own stylistic profile and tone. <sup>3</sup>

To set us up for *DEVANT*, the closing screendance excerpt, I will cite Clark's essay on "Freud's Cézanne" in which he contrasts the **naked** vs. the **nude**, and positions sexuality not as performance but as a kind of fate. He compares and contrasts the two large-scale Cézanne "Bathers", both found in museums in Philadelphia:

He sees the Barnes Bathers as archeological, more corporeal, moving back to "naked" bodies, to "sensations, sights, shocks, touches", <sup>4</sup> a materialization of (Freudian) fantasy, depicting transgressive acts, or "seeing the unspeakable and paying the price". <sup>5</sup>

In contrast, the "nude" Bathers in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, "stands on its esthetic dignity". <sup>6</sup> It is more discreetly posed in relationship to its setting, it is an idealized, highly symmetrical, cathedral-like arrangement.

I'll continue with this train of thought as we screen an excerpt from *DEVANT*: notice in particular the addition of close-up follow-shots, juxtapositions in scale of figure, and the opticality and presence of the camera's roving eye as it scans my moving body. Also, the overlay of the piano score by Ravel alters its register and tone.





Figure 7: Peter Sparling in *DEVANT*, 2009. Image from video.

Clark's words on Cézanne's nude solo bathers resonate particularly well with dance made for the screen and contained within its frame:

—no body, however singular and strongly bounded, occupies just one space. The parts of a body, and the movements and positions of those parts, generate different and incompatible imaginings of their surroundings—different scales, different degrees of empathy and identification, different intuitions of distance and proximity—which simply cannot (ever) be brought to the point of totalization. Because in the case of bodies, *we are* what fills, or reaches out to, the space another body occupies; and the space gets multiplied by our imagined acts, by the plurality of our own experience of our body getting beyond us.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 8: Peter Sparling in *DEVANT*, 2009. Image from video.

And finally, with particular relevance to the doubled-up overlays of full-figure frames and their own close-up follow shots that fill *DEVANT*, Clark attempts a rationale for the bizarre image of a bather whose buttocks appear receding upstage where her forward-facing slumped shoulders should be:

I take the double figure in the Philadelphia picture to sum up two basic conditions of knowledge and representation as Cézanne came to understand them. First, that our representation of bodies—our own and other people’s--just is some such process of interchange and duplication, of unstoppable weird empathy, of our somehow putting an internal sense of what being in the body feels like into our picture of how another body looks. (Of course, this empathy informs our looking at everything: it is just that looking specifically at the body makes the odd and uncontrollable nature of the process declare itself. The weirdness of the Bathers, to repeat my previous point, is what they most deeply have to say about what seeing the body is like. The double figure is the emblem of that.<sup>8</sup>

Am I performing the ultimate 21<sup>st</sup> century spectacle? One embodying its own history, “dressed” in it i.e. its movement templates, traditions, stylistic habits, yet free of them in an exalted state of mindful improvisation for the camera in the cloistered privacy of a black-box video studio? Am I asserting my own **empire of ecstasy**, to borrow the title from Karl Toepfer’s examination of German body culture 1910-1935. Toepfer seeks in photographic imagery of the time proof of an emerging “modern body” radiating freedom and power, and a transgressive energy, by:

situating the body within the pure white (black) zone that contains no contaminating sign of the past, no attachments to history. The modern body is, one might say, the context, the determining power of the space it chooses to inhabit: perception of the body determines the identity of the world, the reality external to the self. This decontextualization of the body implies that the more naked the body becomes, the more the body dominates perception, the more the body assumes an abstract identity.<sup>9</sup>

In closing, I propose that, in this ecstatic, exposed zone, the body becomes more visual, the eye more visceral. By way of video and screendance, audiences, practitioners and scholars in our field are primed to confront and celebrate the ultimate spectacle of the dancing body, whether naked, nude or costumed: one that re-engages us with every issue inherent in the Modernist idea in high art and moves us forward to a kinesthetically and aesthetically charged space—a space contained by the frame of camera and screen, and endowing new meaning to Walt Whitman’s vision for the body electric.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 314.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.314.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Toepfer, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935*; (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1<sup>10</sup>.

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## **The Spectacle of Globalization: Increasing Cultural Sensitivity in Order to Conserve Artistic Integrity**

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### ***Abstract***

*With the increased globalization of dance forms and touring productions, the presentation of the body and movement rest precariously between “dance” and “spectacle.” The high transfer of images and cultural knowledge risks misinterpretation, objectification, and exotification as it transforms into spectacle when presented outside its cultural context. Choreographers Faustin Linyekula, and Cynthia Oliver, among others, have maintained a heightened awareness to cultural specification and a sensitivity towards the presentation of images across cultural contexts so that the integrity of their art work is conserved.*

In this age of technology and social networking sites, the dissemination of images seems to flatten the world within seconds. It would appear as if the easy exchange of information could eliminate national and cultural boundaries; however, I would argue that the ubiquitous transfer of images and cultural knowledge is at an even greater risk of misinterpretation, objectification, and exotification.

A short video clip used by the Central District Forum of Arts and Ideas in Seattle to market choreographer Cynthia Oliver’s *Rigidigidim De Bamba De: Ruptured Calypso* illustrates this argument (Oliver, *YouTube*). This video footage is what I would define as spectacle, the intentional or unintentional objectification of the body and dance forms that becomes a presentation of the exotic and virtuosic skills. Jane Desmond writes, “spectacle, an emphasis on sights, sounds, and motion, replaces narrative and with it the possibility of historical reflection”(xvi). Erasure of this historical reflection draws a blindfold over the historically unequal positions of communities and individuals, neglecting the power dynamics both in politics and economics as well as viewing. Through the lens of dance and performance, the globalization of forms and touring productions can easily become spectacle.

On the continuum of spectacle, there is the possibility for performances to stay within the control of the author who carefully leads the viewer through the cultural specificity adhered to the body and the movement, so that the performances can be translated across cultural platforms. In stating that cultural specificity is adhered to the body, I want to emphasize that identity and cultural production are constructions not stagnant truths (Chatterjea xiv). Additionally, I want to highlight the immediacy of dance in this discussion of identity, because the focus on the body draws attention to physical traits that are perceived to mark identity. As a result, social and cultural differences are seen as marked on the body as “natural” truths and race becomes a signifier of culture rather than a socially constructed discourse (Desmond xiv-xv). This is particularly important in light of this discussion on spectacle, because identity is a process by which the individual’s

subjective experience is affected by discursive practices. This becomes problematic when the discursive practices are created by hegemonic structures that inscribe degrading views of identity on an individual's bodily markers, making race and other attributes a signifier of cultural traits.

Additionally, it is important to note the plurality of identity and cultural practices and to note that identity exists on the micro level as a process of becoming for the individual completely relational to their positionality. Problems arise with cultural identity when it is used as an indicator of universality (Hall, 2001 26). Spectacle frequently glosses over differences in order to create a uniform Other.

I want to draw attention to the works of two choreographers who strategically avoid spectacle: Faustin Linyekula and Cynthia Oliver. These two artists, among others, have maintained a heightened awareness to cultural specification and a sensitivity towards the presentation of images across cultural contexts so that the integrity of their artwork is conserved. Their works reveal identity's dance between how we are recognized and how we choose to "struggle, resist, negotiate, fashion, stylize, produce, or perform" the recognition (Hall, 1996 14).

While Linyekula and Oliver's histories are vastly different, the former from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the latter a Bronx born, Virgin Island reared performer, they share a similar history of coming from countries negotiating post-colonialism and movement informed by Africanist sensibilities as described by Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Kariamu Welsh, and Ananya Chatterjea. The Euro-American world has often fantasized black Africa, intrigued by the traditions and practices that it has perceived as primitive, uncivilized, and sexually promiscuous. As a result, Oliver and Linyekula's work faces a list of expectations and stereotypes when presented beyond the Congo or the Caribbean to Euro-American audiences that either falls prey to misinterpretation or trivialization.

According to Virginie Dupray, manager of Congolese artist Faustin Linyekula, Linyekula does not like the stereotyping and pigeonholing of African artists (Personal interview). Faustin says: "I am a dancer. I am an African. Yet I am not an African dancer" (van Reybrouck). He tries to avoid festivals, which specifically showcase African contemporary dance in order to avoid the instant comparison of African artists who come from different countries with different economic cultural, political, and religious backgrounds (Dupray). Linyekula is interested in the personal territory of an artist and how he constructs a universe based on personal history rather than being a voice for all Congolese or all Africans (Voisin 12; Gottschild, 2007). However, Linyekula has realized that if he chooses to present work on the proscenium stage, he must play with the expectations of being African in order for his voice to be heard. "I used to think that it was enough for me to just tell my story. Then I realized that I had also to bring into my story the question of how it is perceived—how am I perceived" (Gottschild, 2007).

In 2007, Faustin Linyekula and Studios Kabako performed *Festival of Lies* in the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival. *Festival of Lies* is a poignant exposé of Congo's troubled past of colonization and revolutions that has confounded Linyekula's national identity (Linyekula). The piece not only tackles critiquing Congo's political history, but also dispels some of the stereotypes associated with African contemporary dance and reconstructs the proscenium stage. The audience sits around small café tables that line the

stage, eliminating the division between the audience and the performer as on the typical proscenium stage. The set up is more inclusive so that the audience is at eye level with the performer and is not confined to their chair. To begin the night, Linyekula picks up the mike to introduce his performers and to encourage the audience to support the arts by helping themselves to the cuisine provided at the bar. He insists that everyone get up at any time during the performance to make sure they are fed. Like all good Euro-American audience goers, no one leaves their seat once the performance begins. Everyone is focused on the work unfolding, not wishing to interrupt the atmosphere by filling his or her plate. However, throughout the evening, the invitation to converse with fellow guests or partake in the feast during the performance remains open.

Additionally, Linyekula creatively avoids the stereotypes of the highly sexualized, muscular African male body. At times this stereotype is hard to avoid, especially when dance calls for a certain level of athleticism and control of the body in order to express one's self. Thus, the highly sexualized, muscular body is hard to escape as Linyekula and his dancers are well trained with toned bodies that define beauty. According to French dance journalist Gérard Mayen, the valorization of the body privileged in African dance, particularly the male body displaying a nude torso, falls prey to the white gaze, which is intrigued with the exotic, sexual vitality of the black body (Mayen 48, 170).

About halfway through the piece, the dancers begin to tear off each other's clothes in a violent, sexual manner. The carved muscles become visible as the three are stripped bare except for tight black biker shorts. At that point, however, Linyekula interrupts the possibility to consume the bodies by calling for a short break since none of the audience has gotten any food to eat. By disrupting consumption, Linyekula inhibits the passively viewing of performance. The short intermission provides the audience time and space to consciously process the visual information and recognize the associations, images, and stereotypes that it may perceive. Whether or not the audience takes this opportunity to reflect, the intermission refocuses the attention on filling one's plate and conversing rather than on the bodies of the performers.

According to cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Caribbean identity, like the Congolese identity, is a problematic one, because of the Caribbean's long history of colonization and enslavement. As stated earlier, one's identity is informed by discursive practices. The Caribbean identity has internalized colonial practices of objectification and misrecognition creating a necessity to redefine one's own identity (Hall, 2001 31). However, the search for one's origins becomes impossible when the indigenous population has been completely wiped out, and the majority of the population has been transplanted there (Hall, 2001 26).

Cynthia Oliver's *Rigidigidim De Bamba De: Ruptured Calypso*, which premiered in 2009 at the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia, features six women from the Caribbean diaspora (Oliver, Performance). From Hall's perspective, Oliver's cast presents a twice diasporized Caribbean identity, the first diaspora being the Caribbean itself. The women's stories intertwine to weave a complex interplay of text, movement, and sound that pays homage to Calypso. In her Choreographer's Note, Oliver describes Calypso as "a music of social commentary, of humor, and an indicator of physical, political, and intellectual prowess" (Oliver, Choreographer's Note). Oliver's community of women idolizes Calypso and the Caribbean carnival wishing to return to the Caribbean

where dancing is socially accepted and where they would not be constantly viewed as an outsider.

The marketing clip used by Central District Forum of Arts and Ideas to sell *Ruptured Calypso* glosses over the artistic integrity of the performance and instead focuses on the sexual energy. The press quotes too—"erotically charged rhythmic dance," "pumping, rotating, figure-eighting hips," and "controlled chaos"—depict a primitive, erotic spectacle (Oliver, *YouTube*). Additionally, the subversive power of the movement is completely lost in the frozen images that highlight the sweat and the curves and silence the voice. The video clip splits the dancers' mind/body vehicle by showing the feats of the body removed from the intellect. Brenda Dixon Gottschild surmises that whites have feared black bodies because "black bodies weren't dumb; they were extensions of black minds—intelligent minds—in a physical landscape where the Cartesian mind/body split refused to take hold" (Gottschild, 2003 44). However, due to the mind/body division in Euro-American culture, products of the mind are valued more than the labor produced by the body. As a result, in this video clip, *Ruptured Calypso's* message of resilience, self-love, and Caribbean pride is lost without the illumination of the geographical, historical and personal lineages of each dancer and their relationship to Calypso, a culturally constructed and ever changing form (Oliver, *Choreographer's Note*). Additionally, this video clip instantly flattens Calypso to one dimension and leaves the audience free to generalize the staged experiences as representing all Caribbeans and to interpret the movement and costuming as solely sexual rather than a complex dialogue of sexual, secular, and sacred as presented in the actual production.

The piece begins with six women center stage with their knees bent low, circling their hips in a slow motion. Their eyes are slightly gazed towards the floor catching the outer rim of their hip circle. Each are dressed in a slightly different color scheme, but with the same tight, thin fabric that clings to their bodies' curves. Nehassaiu deGannes coaxes the audience, "You're going to see a lot of *winin*, but its not always what you think it means"(Oliver, *Performance*). These hip circles called *winin* are "the cream of the crop," but like all the imagery presented in *Ruptured Calypso*, it has more meaning and baggage than its initial impression. So when deGannes asks the ensemble the cream of which crop, sugar cane or cotton, the silent hanging answer is neither crop, but the response is unanimously for sugar cane. As a metaphor for all the difficulties presented by the cast, sugar cane can be used as an antidote to the poisons of colonialism just like the women use *winin* to preserve their spirits when ruptured from the Caribbean.

Oliver's choreography and vocal direction dare the audience to interpret the movement as solely sexual. As deGannes mentions, *winin* can be interpreted either as hypersexual activity or the summoning of a spirit. Often misinterpreted is the extended use of the pelvis. According to Gottschild, the Africanist aesthetic privileges the "democratic autonomy" of body parts where as the Europeanist aesthetic wishes to erase what Gottschild terms the three "b's," buttocks, belly, and breasts (Gottschild, 2003 147). Since Euro-American societies perceive the pelvis as a sexual symbol, movement of that area is considered lewd and vulgar (Welsh Asante 209). However, unlike Euro-American societies that not only cover up "disgraceful" private parts, but also abstain from moving these areas, African dance does not require the pelvis to be stationary.

True to the spirit of carnival the women are dressed in colorful, shiny fabrics that demand attention. Most backs are bare and the clothes are so tight that there's no room



for anything other than the women's curvaceous bodies. However, Oliver empowers her cast and curbs the audience's consumption of their bodies by creating vocal counterpoint to the visual imagery. Each woman is fierce, defiant, and powerful. Their voices construct and control their image by offering multiple layers of imagery and meaning.

For example, the *wine* is always coupled with verbal descriptions that deconstruct the movement. The audience is never left to visually interpret the circling of the hips low to the ground without verbal cues. Almost like a dance class, the women are all present in a small circle or clump. One dancer acts like the instructor who informs the audience the subtle variation of the *wine*. She gives the audience a lens to read the movement, to analyze how low to the ground, how many hips are involved, how quickly the buttocks can circle, and whether the move is done solo or in a group formation. As a result, levels of virtuosity are created and the *wine* is understood as more nuanced than originally perceived.<sup>1</sup>

On the continuum of spectacle, Faustin Linyekula and Cynthia Oliver's works stay within their choreographic control, because their work offers complex histories and interrupts stereotypes before they are fully formed in their audiences' minds. They represent an important artistic role model in our global community, one that owns its craftsmanship and is aware of its audience's positionality. In creating work specific to their own cultural identity, these artists pay close attention to the deliverance and mise-en-scène of information, so that the integrity of their stories are maintained and heard when presented outside their cultural context.

Many of the topics addressed in this paper deserve more time and depth than I have allotted and my initial inquiry has opened new doors of study. Of particular interest are French choreographer Jérôme Bel, Cuban-American choreographer Marianela Boan, and the collaborations between African American choreographer of Urban Bush Women Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Senegalese choreographer Germaine Acogny. I would like to end with a quote from Charles Wiedman, "the performers and audience enter the house—although through different doors—from the same street" (Bull 270). In this current state of globalization with images easily manipulated and transferred, I would like to modify this quote by reminding us to be aware that our audience may enter through different doors, but also now from different streets.

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## Notes

1. Oliver's use of text to frame the choreography and provide context is not the sole device that inhibits spectacularizing the performance. The delivery of the movement and the intention and focus of the eyes of the performers avoid a sexual objectification of the female body. Frequently, the movement is performed for the performer rather than as a presentation for the viewer and when offered to the audience there is an equality established in the gaze of the eyes, which meets the audience, rather than being coy or gazing down, and deters one from simply consuming the sexual body. Additionally, the voices of the women are so integral to their movement and presence that it emphasizes the fused mind/body vehicle that is alive and fluid and not silent.

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## **Dance and Power: Political Ideologies and Aesthetic Preferences in Dance Spectacle for Cultural Diplomacy in Taiwan**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper examines the power of political ideologies and aesthetic preferences in dance spectacle for cultural diplomacy in Taiwan, particularly during the martial law period, by using the Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission (1974-2001), for students in higher education, as an example. Historical understanding and analyses were drawn from semi-structured interviews with five of the former participants. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence as the main analytical framework, this paper discusses how politics extends its power in dance spectacle and the mechanism of the shifting of power relations between choreographers, dancers, dance teachers and dance students in Taiwan in the process of manipulation and appropriation, particularly during the martial law period.*

### **Introduction**

During the martial law period in Taiwan (1949-1987), dance had become highly politicised, and a key example of how politics influenced the field of dance was the creation of the Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission (CYGM). Dance students who participated in the mission were exposed to covert and overt forms of political ideologies and aesthetic preferences from the mission. This research will examine the power of politics on the spectacle of the CYGM. By examining this, I plan to show how dance was manipulated as a political tool through cultural and students' activities.

Data collection for this research utilised semi-structured interviews in order to secure as much first-hand material as possible. A total of five former participants were interviewed. Other sources include newspaper clippings, unpublished doctoral and master's theses, programmes, and photos provided by the interviewees as well as information from electronic resources.

### **Explanation of key terms**

Three key terms will be explained in this section. These terms include, first, the martial law period in Taiwan and political ideologies and aesthetic preferences during that period; second, dance for cultural diplomacy in Taiwan, and third, the Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission.

### *The Martial law period*

The Nationalist government came to Taiwan in 1949 when the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949) ended and hence Taiwan, and its peripheral islands, became known as the Republic of China (ROC).<sup>1</sup> Not long after the Nationalist Party's arrival, martial law was announced and the Taiwanese society was constricted by various forms of political control until 1987 (TAHR, 2004).<sup>2</sup> Under this control, the new regime imposed Sino-nization ideology in order to persuade all Taiwanese to recognize China as the 'Motherland' and be prepared to take back China at any time. During the martial law period, anti-Communism, patriotism and Chinese identity were forcefully imposed and therefore Chinese culture, such as Chinese dance, music, painting, literature and calligraphy, was strongly promoted by the government as a tool of propaganda.

### *Dance for cultural diplomacy in Taiwan*

The idea of Dance for Cultural Diplomacy in Taiwan is believed to have its original inspiration from the United States. The US model of dance for international relations is explained in Naima Prevots' (1998) *Dance for Export: Cultural Diplomacy and the Cold War*, in which details of the origin, the plan and the process of dance for cultural diplomacy were provided. Following the diplomatic visits of the American dance companies led by Alvin Ailey in 1962, José Limón in 1963 and Paul Taylor in 1967, the Nationalist government began encouraging cultural diplomacy through dance in the 1970s. Dance began to be used as a medium by the government to initiate international contacts, activities and influence. One such example was the Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission, the CYGM.

### *Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission*

The CYGM was composed of students in higher education, and included both dance majors and non-dance majors. It began in 1974 under the Ministry of Education, but soon came under the Nationalist Party's China Youth Corps (Lin, 2001). Its mission was to visit the Chinese and Taiwanese diaspora in various countries and put on performances. The performances were mainly designed around dances mixed with songs, music and folk games. The CYGM was predominantly guided and fully supported financially by the Nationalist government's political party and its members. This being the case, the mission's main purpose was to serve the country and the political party supporting it. The CYGM lasted until the Nationalist government and its political party lost power in the presidential election in 2000 (Lo, 2005). The tour to New Zealand and Australia in 2001 was the last mission (Lin, 2001).

### **Profile of the mission**

In existence for almost three decades, the CYGM operated under a set structure with minor changes from year to year. The set structure included its selection process, training

organization, programme themes and touring itinerary.

### *The selection*

The CYGM recruited its members annually by holding auditions for students from all colleges and universities in Taiwan. The first step was an on-campus selection process in the autumn of each year. The audition process usually involved two stages once someone had been nominated. First, the nominees, around 300 to 500 students in total, gathered together during the winter break for a one-week training camp, and the first cut was made at the end of that week. Around 100 to 200 students were chosen to attend another one-week training camp during the spring break. The final list of participants for the mission would usually be made at the end of the spring audition week (Chang, personal communication, February 02, 2008; Cheng, personal communication, November 20, 2006; Hua, personal communication, February 04, 2008; Hung, personal communication, January 06, 2008; Ouyang, personal communication, November 20, 2006). People on the final list, usually around fifteen in each group with three to five who were majoring in dance, spent an entire summer in more intensive training and rehearsals.

### *The training*

The training sessions usually took place in Taipei city. The training included fitness exercises, English, international etiquette, elocution, dance techniques and performance skills. In each training session, work usually started at 5 o'clock in the morning with a national flag-raising ceremony and ended around mid-night.

The flag-raising ceremony was mandatory at most educational settings during the martial law period. In addition, there were rules and forms of punishment that gave the CYGM members more pressure than the physical challenges of the training. For example, if a single person lost concentration in any section, the whole group would be punished with press-ups or other exercises. Cheng, who participated in the CYGM in 1986, recalls,

We were under such a difficult challenge that we called it 'the training from hell'. With so much pressure I lost a lot of weight during the training period. My mother could not recognize me on the night of the performance before we departed for the US. (Cheng, personal communication, November 20, 2006)

Cheng's statement suggests that the training could be harmful to the trainees' bodies but at the time it was considered a way to develop one's potential and strength.

### *The programme*

The programme design for each concert tour had a uniform structure, implying patriotism and emphasizing Chinese traditional culture in content, although the choreography differed from year to year as artistic directors normally received

one-year postings.

According to Hung, versatility was emphasized in the early programme design,

For the first 6 years the ministry of education passed responsibility for programme design onto the television stations. The only three TV stations, Taiwan Television, China Television and Chinese Television, took turns working on the programme design. The early groups had more variety in their programmes compared to the later groups after the mid-1980s. In our programme, we had different people to perform dance, music, Kung Fu, Chinese opera, acrobatics and folk games. When Cloud Gate was asked to design the programme and train the members in 1980, dance performance was emphasized instead of the multi-talent shows that we had done previously. (Hung, personal communication, January 06, 2008)

Hung attended the mission tour in 1978, four years after the start of the CYGM. She experienced a changing of the programme design which resulted from changes in the directorship from television programme producers to dance choreographers. From the early 1980s, the mission's programmes were mostly dance-oriented although singing and traditional music were still included. C. S. Chang, recalls the 1983 programme that she joined,

Previous to 1980 and some years afterwards, the CYGM wasn't so dance-oriented. The year that I participated, the Ministry of Education gave the responsibility for preparing the programme to the director of the dance department at the National Taiwan Academy of Arts. He designed the dance-oriented programme and invited several dance instructors from his department to choreograph for us. (Chang, personal communication, February 02, 2008)

Chang indicated that working for the CYGM was viewed as an important task which at times could become the work of the entire department. Other than changing from a diverse programme to a dance-oriented design, the themes of patriotism and Chinese traditional culture remained almost unchanged throughout the years.

### *The tour*

The mission tour usually started in early September and finished at the end of October or early November. There were two leaders for each group, which made a total number of 16 touring members in the early years. After 1981, a secretary and a stage manager or technicians were sent to work with the groups. The number of people in each group increased from sixteen to nineteen in the 1980s to more than twenty in the 1990s (Lin, 2001). Also, there were only two groups each year until 1980, the USA-East and the USA-West groups. From the 1980s onwards, more groups were added and travel routes included countries in Europe, the Middle East, Central and South America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. The arrangement of countries for the tours was organized by the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its overseas offices but the students were not granted a choice of countries because they took orders from the supervisors.

The branches of the Bureau of Consular Affairs (BOCA) in the countries they visited helped to arrange the itineraries of each tour (W. L. Hung, personal communication, January 06, 2008). Volunteers were drawn from the local Taiwanese community in each region that the groups visited and officers of each branch usually hosted a press conference or sent out press releases. They always invited politicians, reporters, scholars, overseas Chinese and Taiwanese, artists and university students to come to the performances.

### **Political ideologies and aesthetic preferences in CYGM's dance spectacle**

With its sponsorship, initial purpose and historical background, I would suggest that the CYGM created a collective habitus in which implicit and explicit political influence was involved. Being sponsored by the Nationalist government for the purpose of cultural diplomacy, patriotism was the main characteristic of this habitus, one that consisted of an enduring, learned and unconscious repertoire of behaviours for supporting the Nationalist government's regime. Most interviewees disagreed that political influence was involved. Many of them express positive opinions about participating in the mission, and although coercive forces may not always be negative, it seems to be a sensitive issue. Many prefer to believe that the mission was a student activity sponsored by the government, which was free of politics. In this range of responses, their subjective experience reflects the "durable nature of the habitus" created by the CYGM (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 103-133). That is, to say the Nationalist government (the dominant power) created an opportunity, the CYGM, which combined performing and traveling abroad together for the participants (the dominated group). Many of the participants, however, took it as an honourable opportunity for them as individuals and therefore became blind, to a great extent, to the political forces inherent in this habitus. The political influence that was present in the CYGM's Dance Spectacle will be classified and explained as follows.

#### ***Patriotic gestures***

Patriotic themes were commonly found in the CYGM's dance spectacle during the martial law period. Take the 1985 programme as an example. The background of its cover page was the lyrics of the National Flag Song, an obvious patriotic gesture for the ruling regime (see Figure 1). Often unaware of social ideology in the choreography and programme design, some dance students ignored the influence of the Government whilst those interviewees who acknowledged that politics was involved express their views in different ways. Hung, who grew up in the patriotic atmosphere and joined the CYGM in the 1970s, does not find it inappropriate that political influence was present in the CYGM, and states,

We were working for the government to promote our international relations, and therefore we had to present the best of ourselves. I believe that even the

activities that are deemed 'cultural diplomacy' nowadays are also politically-oriented. The propaganda may not be the same, but it is still there. (Hung, personal communication, January 06, 2008)

Since the Nationalist government mainly consisted of the Chinese Nationalist Party, patriotism in this period could also imply a value preference for the political party. Therefore, symbols of the nation and the political party, such as the national flag and the emblem of the political party, were often incorporated into the programmes. A good example in the CYGM was one of the typical costumes, the National Flag Costume (see Figure 2). As Ouyang, a 1984 participant, states,

The costume that we wore for the finale was blue and white, a typical representation of the Nationalist party. The emblem of the party was also prominently printed on our red headband. The whole piece, with the blue, white and red colours, was called the 'National Flag Costume'. We danced to the *Chung Hua Min Kuo Sung* [*Ode to the Republic of China*] (中華民國頌), the most popular patriotic song back then.

The National Flag Costume was found in the programme in many years although with different designs, choreography, and accompanied by different songs. One of the 1985 members, Hua states, I remember we performed Chinese classical court dances, martial arts, a jazz dance, and sang *We Are the World*, oh, and we had the national-flag-suit as one of our costumes. (Hua, personal communication, February 04, 2008)

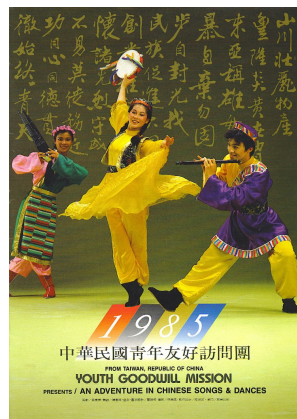


Figure 1: cover page of the 1985 programme<sup>3</sup>



Figure 2: The National Flag Costume<sup>4</sup>

### *Chinese culturalism*

A major part of the CYGM programmes consisted of Chinese court dances and minority dances, and even occasionally included Taiwanese songs. Examples can be found in the 1985 programme. "Folk dances, folk songs and musical instruments from all over China"



(emphasis on Chinese traditional culture) and praise for the soldiers (patriotism), composed a big part of the content. Under such circumstances, a CYGM habitus was created that culturally reflected the ideology of Taiwan during the martial law period. Also, in the cover page of the 1985 programme, the dancers in the photo wear the costumes of Xinjiang and Tibet but hold the instruments of the Han in their hands which represented a mixed image of Chinese traditional culture (see Figure 1).

Another example of the values implicit in the CYGM is the news clips taken from the tour of the 1978 USA Groups which show the CYGM addressed as a Chinese group instead of a Taiwanese group. The Nationalist government insisted that all representatives of its regime call themselves the Republic of China, although this title was no longer recognized by most in the international community from 1971 on, when the regime withdrew from the United Nations. Inculcated by the regime, however, most participants of the CYGM viewed themselves as representatives of the Republic of China and called themselves Chinese instead of Taiwanese.

### *Uniform smiles*

Besides performance skills, a positive manner and attitudes were emphasized in the training. Overall, the discipline instilled by the Nationalist government was intended to train CYGM members to present the best image of the country. In that respect, the participants of the CYGM were trained to be strong physically as well as mentally. In order to maintain a positive attitude, they were trained to wear uniform smiles in everyday life as well as during performance on stage, as can be seen in the photos of the programme shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

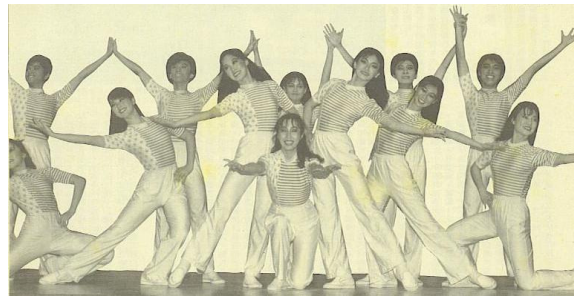


Figure 3: Uniform smiles<sup>5</sup>

### *De-politicised performance sites*

An archive of the 1985 USA-East Group shows that the performances all took place in educational settings. Potentially, there might have been another reason that they had to go to colleges, which was the lack of access to more mainstream venues given Taiwan's relatively minority status at that time. Nevertheless, by performing in educational settings, the CYGM de-politicised its image and created an impression of students' activities for

cultural exchanges. As Chang states,

I wouldn't say the CYGM was politically oriented, especially the group with which I participated. We performed mostly at the auditoriums of the universities that we visited. Our duty was to perform for the students and the overseas Chinese in the areas that we traveled. I am not sure about the groups before or after us but I am sure that political influence was not felt in the group that I toured with. (Chang, personal communication, February 02, 2008)

Although denying political influence in the mission, the voice reveals the existence of symbolic and political purposes in the performances. First, the performance for the overseas Chinese community partly served to bind the relationship between the Chinese diasporas and the Nationalist government. Second, their performance for the local American audience members served as a way to promote the regime's international reputation.

### **Mutual benefits between Politics and Dance**

The examples found in the CYGM illustrate how politics was involved in dance spectacle in Taiwan during the martial law period, overtly and covertly. Under the name of cultural diplomacy, dance fulfilled its function as a medium for cultural exchange and satisfied political purposes while opportunities in dance were created, such as performing abroad.

Most of the voices of the former CYGM participants express their loyal support for the government and the missions that they attended. This loyal support has become deposited in an individual habitus that was "appropriated by the group and attuned to the demands of the group" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 291). That is, as Bourdieu asserts, "the group's resulting tendency to persist in its being works at a much deeper level than that of 'family traditions', the permanence of which presupposes a consciously maintained loyalty" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 291). To reflect on Bourdieu's assertion, reinforced by incentive and reward structures, the mission was eventually a programme of socialization. The collective habitus that the mission created had a profound impact on these former CYGM participants and thus their loyalty to the ruling regime remains unchanged. So, once again, the durable nature of the collective habitus is found to be a product of these interviewees' habitus.

### **Conclusion**

This case study has attempted to show that the CYGM during its martial-law-period of operation exerted tacit influence on Taiwan's dance field. To some people, this influence seems minor; however, it seemed to penetrate in profound and various ways, as borne out by interviews with these dancers. Three points are presented in this research to explain the impact on the dance field from the CYGM.

First, the CYGM had a hand in securing its participants' support for the Nationalist

government. For most of the interviewed former CYGM participants, loyalty to the Nationalist government was drawn from their denial and/or supportive attitude towards the political influence present in the CYGM. In other words, the collective habitus of the CYGM successfully influenced the individual habitus of most of its members. Second, by providing opportunities such as performing abroad and visiting places to those it selected, the CYGM strengthened the power of the dominant students, thereby enlarging the gap between them and the dominated ones. The result was an unequal situation in the field of dance in higher education, favouring dominant ones and rejecting dominated ones. This is shown in the reproducibility of the interviewees' current higher social status, which leads to the third point, that despite the mission's disbanding almost one decade ago, its influence still lingers. The third point is supported by the situation that each of the former CYGM members interviewed has found a significant position in the field of dance.

In assessing political ideologies and aesthetic preferences in the CYGM, I argue that dance became a symbolic power when it was manipulated by the absolute power. Examples of the symbolic power that dance bestowed included the changing of the programme design, from multi-talent shows to dance-oriented shows, and also the change in the artistic directorship from television programme producers to dance choreographers. Thus, dance and politics in the case of the CYGM worked hand in hand in fulfilling their own purposes. Therefore, the performance of the Chinese Youth Goodwill Mission was essentially the spectacle of powers.

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## Notes

1. The Chinese Civil War had its flame ignited in 1926 when the Communist party, led by Mao, disagreed with the Nationalist party, led by Chiang. Officially the war broke out in 1945 at the end of World War II. The war ended temporarily in 1949 when Chiang fled to Taiwan, proclaimed Taipei as the temporary capital of China and Mao renamed Mainland China as the People's Republic of China on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 1949.
2. "In 1949, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime fled to Taiwan after being defeated by the Communist Party. On 20 May 1949, the Taiwan Military Garrison Command declared martial law on Taiwan. Although the imposition of martial law was justified on the basis of the civil war with the Communists and intended to be temporary, Taiwan remained under martial law for 38 years until 1987." - Original citation from 'Improper judgments, improper remedies: analysis of the 1998 martial law period compensation law' (TAHR, 2004).
3. The photo and more information can be found at: <http://www.cygm.idv.tw>.
4. Ibid.
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## **Monsieur L'Abbé and *Le Palais des Plaisirs*: a new source for a London spectacle**

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### ***Abstract***

*This little-known divertissement, given for King William III at Kensington Palace was, according to its livret, a ballet 'composed of different extracts from operas', with a cast of French singers, French and English dancers, and choreography 'by Monsieur L'Abbé, already famous in France'. Set in the Palace of Pleasure, the ballet consists of five entrées with the accent on visual spectacle as well as vocal music. Although clearly derivative in its sources and inspiration, it adds to our knowledge of Anthony L'Abbé's career in London, and to the nature of staged entertainments and spectacle at the late Stuart Court.*

### **Introduction**

In May 1698 a new dance phenomenon hit London, in the form of the Paris-trained dancer Anthony L'Abbé who came to dance at Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre and also at Kensington Palace for King William III. One London newspaper described that first court performance as follows: 'On Friday night last [13 May] there was fine Dancing at Kensington, where his Majesty was present, as also His Excellency the French Ambassador: The French-man, who is lately come over, and Dances now at the Play-house, was sent for to dance there, and performed his part very dextrously.'<sup>1</sup>

The performance consisted of an entertainment called *Le Palais des Plaisirs*, the livret of which still survives and reveals that all the choreography was by L'Abbé, who also danced in several of the scenes. The livret itself is not a new discovery, but until now little work has been done on it.<sup>2</sup> The Divertissement consisted of a ballet 'composed of different extracts from operas' and was given by a mixture of French and English performers.<sup>3</sup> As the embodiment of 'spectacle' it functions for me at three different levels: first, it is part of the bigger spectacle of royal and political authority within the context of international diplomacy. Second, it is a staged divertissement, and thus bears many of the traditional characteristics of French opera-ballets and the *ballet de cour*. Third, like any spectacle, it had a physical presence, a performing space, in this instance within a royal palace.

### **The Kensington Divertissement as a spectacle of international diplomacy**

By 1697 an enormous shift had taken place in European politics, thanks to some complicated dynastic rivalries surrounding the Spanish succession. Louis XIV's own claim to the succession was under threat from other Catholic leaders in Europe and so, astonishingly, he turned for help to the Protestant William III of Orange.<sup>4</sup> The result was

the Peace of Ryswick which brokered an unlikely alliance between France, Holland and England, and by which Louis recognised William III as King of England, and William came up with proposals for partitioning the Spanish possessions. The treaty which was to effect this partition was being negotiated throughout the first half of 1698, and the State Papers reveal that both Paris and London were awash with foreign envoys, all jockeying for favour.<sup>5</sup> The atmosphere however was sensitive, for, despite recognising William III, Louis still gave protection to the exiled court of King James II at St Germain-en-Laye, and Lord Portland, the English Ambassador to Paris, frequently found himself snubbed and outmanoeuvred by French Court officials. Among those officials was Camille Hostun, comte de Tallard, shortly to travel to London as the new French Ambassador. Portland warned King William about him in a letter sent from Paris in mid-March: ‘Your Majesty will find that he thinks himself clever and a good talker. He might be both if he were not so conceited’.<sup>6</sup> Tallard was also no doubt under instructions from Louis XIV to impress King William, and William had every intention of impressing the French.

The Kensington Divertissement must have been offered by Tallard as an entertainment for King William, and indeed the livret states that the opening scene has the Pleasures assembling to entertain his Majesty. Moreover, all the subsequent scenes were taken out of existing staged works by Lully and involved some of the best performers from the Paris Opéra travelling especially to London for the event (see Table 1).

Table 1: French performers in the Kensington Divertissement

Name in livret	Identity	Roles in the Entrées
Dumesnil	Louis Golard Du Mesny/Dumesnil, singer at Paris Opéra 1675-1699	I Un Plaisir II 2e Chevalier Italien IV Renaud V Pourceaugnac
Thevenar	Gabriel Vincent Thevenard (1669-1741), bass singer at the Paris Opéra 1690-1730	I Le Dieu Pan II Le Precepteur [Barbacola] & 1er Chevalier Italien IV Roland V 1er Avocat & 1er Apoticaire
L’Abbé (creator of all the dances)	Anthony L’Abbé (1666/7 – c.1753), dancer at the Paris Opéra 1688-1698, London career 1698-1739	I Un Plaisir dansant II Un Espagnol IV Le Marié V Matassin
Giller	Perhaps Gillet, singer at the Paris Opéra 1675-1680, and/or Jean-Claud Gilliers, composer for the Comédie-Française in 1705	III Arthemidore V 1er Avocat & 2e Apoticaire
de Bonnemere	Solo dancer [identity unknown]	III Plaisir [d’Armide] IV Berger dansant
Group of unnamed performers	Children or young adolescents, whether English or French is unknown.	I Quatre Faunes dansant II Quatre Enfants III Quatre Plaisirs d’Armide

They included the singer Louis Dumesnil, who sang four roles in the Divertissement before dashing back to Paris for rehearsals of Lully's *Thésée* (due to open in November). Six more roles in the Divertissement were taken by the equally famous bass singer, Gabriel Thevenar. Then there was the choreographer, Monsieur L'Abbé, acclaimed in the Divertissement livret as 'one of the best dancers in France, lately arrived in England'; he was thirty-one years old, having danced at the Paris Opéra since 1688, and now was about to launch on a career in England which would last for over thirty years. He danced four roles in the Divertissement as well as creating all the other dances.<sup>7</sup>

In response, William III provided a brand new stage for the performance at Kensington palace, and some outstanding English performers were drafted in to supplement the already glittering cast (see Table 2).

Table 2: English performers in the Kensington Divertissement

Name in livret	Identity	Roles in the Entrées
Le Prince	Joseph Prince (c.1657-1718), dancer at Dorset Garden 1693-4 and then at Lincolns Inn Fields	II Scaramouche V Matassin
De la Forest	Mr La Forest, dancer (often as a scaramouche) at Drury Lane 1702-1707	II Scaramouche V Matassin
Cressien	Possibly Mr Christian, a dancing-master who subscribed to Weaver's <i>Orchesography</i> in 1706	IV Berger
De la Roche	Possibly James Laroche (c.1688-1710), boy singer at Lincolns Inn Fields 1695-1710	IV Berger V Matassin
Dayer	Benjamin Dyer, danced in <i>Calisto</i> at Whitehall in 1675	II Arlequin IV Paysan V Matassin
Braye	Thomas Braye, dancer at Dorset Garden theatre, choreographer of parts of <i>Europe's Revels</i> 1697	II Arlequin IV Paysan V Matassin
Mlle le Cler	Possibly the Mrs Clark who partnered Joseph Prince after 1700	II Arlequine IV Paysanne
Mlle Evans	Susanna Evans, dancer at Lincolns Inn Fields 1695-1699	II Arlequine IV Paysanne
Mlle Lucas	Jane Lucas, actress-dancer at Dorset Garden & Drury Lane 1693-1707	IV La Mariée & Une Bergere
Mlle Championgt	Mary Anne Champion, singer-dancer in London c.1687-1706	III Un Plaisir chantant
Mlle La Croix	Letitia Cross (c.1683-1737), actress-singer-dancer in London & Dublin theatres 1694-1725	III Un Plaisir chantant IV Bergere

They are not all identified yet, and their names are often given French forms in the livret, but we already recognise the character dancers Joseph Prince, Benjamin Dyer (who had danced in the royal masque *Calisto* at Whitehall in 1675), and Thomas Braye (dancing-master to the Dorset Garden theatre company, and choreographer of some of the dances in *Europe's Revels*, recently performed at Dorset Garden to celebrate the Peace of Ryswick<sup>8</sup>); Susanna Evans, who was already the toast of London for her dancing at Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre, and would be universally mourned when she fell ill and died the following year; and the singer-dancers Mary Ann Campion and 'Mlle la Croix' who was almost certainly Letitia Cross.<sup>9</sup> The result was a spectacular international cast, guaranteed to impress all who watched them perform; in short, a diplomatic triumph for both the French and the English.

### **The Kensington Divertissement as a spectacle in the traditions of French court culture and opera**

My concern in this paper is only, and briefly, with the danced elements. Although no choreography survives, the livret tells us who danced what and what each scene represented.

The First Entrée is located in 'an agreeable place where the Pleasures have assembled to entertain his Majesty'. The Pleasures were singers led by Dumesnil and dancers led by L'Abbé, joined by Pan (the singer Thevenar) and four dancing Faunes (who are not named), and this whole scene had the traditional structure of a Lullian-style divertissement – a joyous celebration in an allegorical and mythological setting, with vocal solos, duets and trios, interspersed with dance. It culminates in a sequence of vocal solo ('The Pleasures have chosen') which is repeated by the chorus, followed by the Pleasures and Fauns dancing a passacaille, then by L'Abbé dancing a solo, and ending with another repeat of the vocal solo and chorus.

The Second Entrée is in marked contrast, and comprises two scenes taken from Lully's ballet, *Le Carnaval Mascarade* (1675).<sup>10</sup> The Kensington livret states that 'An elderly Italian master [Barbacola] comes to the Palace and finds it so agreeable that it inspires him to dance in the midst of his scholars'. Thevenar headed four unnamed children who sang in Italian and capered about in a humorous scene in which the master tries to control his wayward pupils before relenting and joining them in a dance. They are interrupted by the arrival of two Italian Knights, and then by an onslaught of dancing scaramouches and harlequins led by L'Abbé as a Spaniard,<sup>11</sup> who perform a Night Scene interspersed by singing from the two Knights. Most of the dancers in this scene, apart from L'Abbé, were English (messrs Prince, Dyer and Braye and misses Clark and Evans; Mr La Forest, like Mons. L'Abbé, was a French dancer who settled in London). As for the staging, the very simple nature of the first part of this entrée suggests that it may have been performed in front of a curtain or shutters while scene changes took place behind them.

The Third Entrée derives from Lully's *Armide* (1686), specifically the point where Renaud is enticed into Armide's palace garden. The livret contains Quinault's texts unaltered from Act II scenes 1, 3, and 4 (scene 2 was omitted because it involved Armide herself, who never appears in the Divertissement). Renaud falls asleep on a grassy bank, and four (again unnamed) Plaisirs, disguised as shepherds and shepherdesses, come to dance round him while others (including Miss Campion and Miss Cross) sing Quinault's



text for that scene; after that, all the Plaisirs ‘join together to raise up the sleeping Renaud’ and the entrée ends.<sup>12</sup>

The Fourth Entrée depicts another hero, Roland, coming to the palace to search for his lost love Angélique, and reading the inscriptions which tell him of her love for Médor. He is interrupted by the wedding celebrations of some local shepherds, but that drives him to madness and he chases the shepherds away before abandoning himself to despair. The sequence is an adaptation of scenes from Lully’s *Roland* (1685), specifically Act IV sc. 2, in which Roland reads the inscriptions, followed by the dances from scene 3 depicting the rustic wedding.<sup>13</sup> Then comes at least the opening of Lully’s scene 6 in which Roland realises he has lost Angélique, smashes the inscriptions, tears down the trees and hurls rocks about. If all that also happened at Kensington, it would have been an impressive sight.

The Fifth and final Entrée is again borrowed from *Le Carnaval Mascarade*, and concerns Monsieur de Pourceaugnac’s hapless quest for justice against accusations of polygamy. The dance element comprises a dance for six Matassins, led by l’Abbé, before the scene ends in lively uproar as Pourceaugnac escapes from two apothecaries determined to treat him with their quack remedies.

Thus, in dance terms, the Kensington Divertissement was a traditional blend of serious and comic entrées with strong dance and vocal elements, some powerful acting, and storylines that alluded to notions of authority, loyalty and duty, love and marriage, tragedy and farce. Even though so much of it was borrowed from existing works, some of it no doubt lent itself to making oblique references to the political frictions of the day, as many court ballets and masques had done earlier in the century. Spectacle in the seventeenth century was never just spectacle for its own sake.

### **The Kensington Divertissement as a staged spectacle: the palace theatre in 1698**

The ‘palace of pleasures’ and the ‘agreeable place’ of the livret was, of course, Kensington Palace and its gardens as they existed in 1698.<sup>14</sup> The original house, known as Coppins House and dating from the early seventeenth century, was purchased by William III in 1689 from the Earl of Nottingham. Although it was extensively enlarged by Christopher Wren, who added four corner pavilions and then two great galleries before 1695, the original building at its heart remained largely untouched until swept away in 1718.<sup>15</sup> It housed the Great Hall and, above it, the Great Chamber which William and Mary used as their Presence Chamber. In 1696 a new Presence Chamber was created for William III<sup>16</sup> and the following winter (1697/8) the old Presence Chamber was fitted up as a theatre.

Building accounts referred to the old Presence Chamber as having ‘compasse windows’ (semi-circular bay windows), and its northern window is clearly visible in Sutton Nicholls’ engraving of c.1689.<sup>17</sup> Reconstructions from surviving scaled plans indicate that the Hall was the middle chamber of three running north to south and measuring approximately 60 feet deep by 21 feet wide, and 12 feet 6 inches from floor to ceiling. If the Great Chamber above it also ran North/South and did not have any internal partitions, its overall dimensions would have been much the same.<sup>18</sup> In June 1698 John Churchill, carpenter, submitted a long bill for his work at Kensington Palace over the previous several months, and its very first entry is for ‘making a stage for ye players in ye old presence [chamber]’. It itemises a sizeable quantity of wood for joists and floorboards, a

long deal bench and desk, posts and a rail (probably for the musicians), battens from which curtains or scenery could be hung, and flights of wooden steps; Eleonore Boswell has surmised that it created a stage measuring approximately 24 foot 5 inches [deep] by 19 feet [wide].<sup>19</sup> Richard Bealing, upholsterer, had already submitted a bill late in 1697 ‘for the new theatre at Kensington’, by which he had supplied ‘117 yards of broad green bays to hang a stage and cover a floor of the same and to make traverse curtains and 7 setts of full valences cross the stage, and to cover a rail to separate the room for musicke and dancing before the King’. He also supplied ‘3 yards of crimson searge to cover a forme in that room’ with ‘gilt nails and tacks used about it’<sup>20</sup>; this was probably the Seating for the King and Ambassador’s entourage. Three days before the Divertissement was performed however, some additional last-minute work was authorised by the Lord Chamberlain ‘for fitting up a Stage for a performance of Musick before His Majesty at Kensington’. This ordered 76 yards of green baize, a yard and a half broad, for covering the Stage and for a Curtain, and also the hire of ‘four ordinary skreens of six leaves each ..., about six or seven feet high’, and that an upholsterer be sent immediately to fit them.<sup>21</sup> All this was over and above the materials already supplied by Bealing and it sounds as if alterations were made once the exact form of the Divertissement was known – most likely the addition of a forestage, to allow dancing in front of shutters or a curtain during scene changes.

There is still much more work to be done on all this, but it is already clear from the documentary evidence that Kensington Palace in 1698 had a stage and small theatre specially built for L’Abbé’s Divertissement and that it was still in use a year later<sup>22</sup>; thus it seems very likely that when L’Abbé and Balon danced their spectacular *Loure or Faune* duet ‘before the King at Kensington’<sup>23</sup> it was in 1699 and on this stage. If so, such a theatre would not only have enhanced the spectacle of performance within it, but would also have also given out to all present some clear messages about the political and cultural status of King William III within his favourite London palace.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *The Post Boy* no. 473 (week of 14 May 1698).

<sup>2</sup> It was mentioned in passing in Marsh (1991), x.

<sup>3</sup> The singers and dancers are named in the livret; research into the identity and nationalities of the musicians is still in progress.

<sup>4</sup> Five years earlier, Carlos II, King of Spain and its huge possessions in Europe and the New World, had fallen seriously ill; ignoring the existing agreement by which Louis XIV of France was next in line to the Spanish throne, Carlos willed the succession to the infant Elector of Bavaria.

<sup>5</sup> To little avail, as it turned out. In March 1698/9 the Elector of Bavaria died, necessitating a new partition treaty which favoured the Archduke of Austria, but the Papacy (fearing a strong Austria on its borders) put pressure on Carlos II to favour France, and when Carlos died in 1701 he bequeathed the Spanish throne and possessions to Louis XIV's grandson, Philippe duc d'Anjou. Relations between Louis XIV and William III soured further after James II died and Louis recognised James's son James Stuart as the rightful King of England. Ambassador Tallard was dismissed from London, took up a military post and was subsequently defeated at the Battle of Blenheim and imprisoned in England for several years.

<sup>6</sup> CSDP (1933), quoting SP 8/18. Portland's letter is dated 3<sup>rd</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> March 1698, the Old Style calendar still being used in Paris and ten or eleven days behind the New Style calendar in use in England.

<sup>7</sup> A noticeable absence from the names of French dancers is Claude Balon, who did not come to London until the following year.

<sup>8</sup> Lowerre (2007), 419-433.

<sup>9</sup> See *BDA* and *ODNB* for most of the English cast and for L'Abbé; for most of the French cast see Parfaict, Campardon, and Schmidt (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Lully's *Le Carnaval Mascarade représentée par l'Académie Royale de Musique* (Paris, 1675; Amsterdam, 1699). The music comprises material borrowed from *Le Bourgeois-Gentilhomme* (1670), *Le Divertissement de Chambord* (1669) and other early Lully works: see Schneider (1981) under LWV 52 and cross-references to relevant works. The scenes 'lifted' for the Kensington *Divertissement* in 1698 suggest minor alterations such as the redistribution of voice parts to suit the reduced cast available in London, or the placing of dances at a slightly different point in the *Entrée*.

<sup>11</sup> It is possible that the 'New Spanish Entrey and Sarabrand danced by Mounsieur L'Abbé before His Majesty at Kensington' published as an appendix to Playford's *The Dancing Master* in late May 1698, were two of the solos danced by L'Abbé in this *Entrée*: see Jennifer Thorp, 'Anthony L'Abbé and "Spanish" dances, 1690-1730' (forthcoming).

<sup>12</sup> This stage direction is intriguing: did they just lift him to his feet, or was the grassy bank a stage machine which lifted him out of the audience's sight high above the stage?

<sup>13</sup> Or possibly the interpolation of dances from *Les Noces de Village* (1663, see Schneider (1981) under LWV 19) from which those dances derive. One example survives, in a notation published for Pecour in 1700, as the duet *La Mariée* (LMC 5360, LWV 19/3). For a general discussion of the nature of, and sources for this and other village wedding dances, see Harris-Warrick (1989), 239-258.

<sup>14</sup> The complex building history of Nottingham House as transformed into Kensington Palace, based on building accounts and architectural plans by Thorpe, Wren, Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh, is summarised in *TWS* VII, 135-196 and plates XVII-XXI; Chettle & Faulkner (1951); Faulkner (1952); Summerson (1966), 71 and plate 43); Colvin (1976), 183-203 in particular, and Gerachty (2007), 152-9. None of them mention the theatre. Impey (2003), 32, makes brief reference to it but does not identify where in the palace it was located – which was roughly on the site of what is now part of Vanbrugh's Cupola Room.

<sup>15</sup> One wonders what L'Abbé thought of all this, when he returned to Kensington as dance teacher to George I's three eldest granddaughters at their own Court there from 1719 onwards.

<sup>16</sup> Out of the former Chapel beside Tijou's new great marble and wrought-iron staircase (both still there today).

<sup>17</sup> Pepys Library, Cambridge, reproduced in *TWS* VII, 24. The Kensington Palace Pay Book for 1690 indicates that the [Old] Presence Chamber was wainscotted, had ornate wooden mouldings and cornices carved with 'raking leaves and foliage' except around the compass windows where

the cornices were ‘carved with crowns and ciphers’: The National Archives (hereafter TNA): WORK 19/48/1 and TWS VII, 153, 155.

<sup>18</sup> The ceiling of the Great Chamber may have been higher than 12 ft 6 ins, or capable of being opened up into the attic space above it; the extant building accounts however say nothing on this subject. The exact size and orientation of the Old Presence Chamber however remains conjectural (did it fill the Great Chamber, or was it formed out of part of the Great Chamber?), and the surviving plans indicate varying insertions (proposed or actual) of internal partition walls during the period 1696-1706: Gerachty (2007), 154-158 in particular.

<sup>19</sup> TNA: WORK 5/50 fol. 382; Boswell (1932), 63. See also Holman (1993), 422, for descriptions of similar work at the Hall Theatre in Whitehall Palace in 1685.

<sup>20</sup> TNA: LC 11/5 fol. 127. Bealing’s bill was huge, totalling over £1100, for which he provided general furnishings at several royal residences and also fitted out the palace theatres at Kensington and Whitehall.

<sup>21</sup> TNA: LC5/152 p.83.

<sup>22</sup> The Lord Chamberlain authorised yet more money for completing ‘a stage for performing operas’ at Kensington Palace on 24 November 1698: TNA: LC5/152, p.137.

<sup>23</sup> The dance is preserved in notation in F. Le Roussau’s *A New Collection of Dances by Anthony L’Abbé* (London, c.1725) and reprinted in Marsh (1991).

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## Dance and Spectacle in Pina Bausch's *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo* in Pedro Almodóvar's Film

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### Abstract

*Spectacles are used in Pina Bausch's Das Tanztheater Wuppertal. For example, many chairs are put on stage before the stage designer move out some of the chairs to make a space for the dancers to dance in Café Müller. Not to mention the amazing beautiful spectacle of thousands of pink flowers on stage in the dance piece Nelken. Huge images of animal bodies are also employed as spectacles, such as an enormous hippopotamus in Arien and three crocodiles in Keuschheitslegende. Similar to Bausch's choreography expressing the feelings of men and women, Pedro Almodóvar's films also tell the story about human feelings. His film Talk to Her adopts the men's points of view, in "the male gaze," to talk about love, friendship, communication and solitude. His shooting methods are innovative, such as cross-cutting, close-up, and the mime film The Shrinking Lover inserted in Talk to Her. As Marcantonio said: "[Almodóvar] speaks both to and through the mute woman's body" (p.23). I argue that Bausch's delicate choreography portraying women's pain and suffering is represented by Almodóvar's unique shooting methods. Judith Butler's theory of "performativity," can be applied to exploring Bausch's Café Müller in Almodóvar's film Talk to Her. Through the spectacle such as the props, the abstract dance can have a concrete symbol for Bausch to express her ideas. Bausch's dance theatre is theatricalized by Almodóvar's fabulous cinematography in Talk to Her.*

**Keywords:** Dance, Spectacle, Pina Bausch, *Café Müller*, Pedro Almodóvar

### Literary Review about Spectacle in Dance

The term "spectacle" can be illustrated in different fields. In theater, spectacle can be explained in the perspective of visual culture. According to MacAloon, "Spectacles give primacy to visual sensory and symbolic codes; they are things to be seen. Hence we refer to circuses as 'spectacles' but not orchestral performances" (167:243). Spectacle can be viewed as the atmosphere of the drama. It usually refers to the situation and the atmosphere of the characters and the events. Aristotle's six elements of drama include spectacle, character, plot, diction, music, and theme. Among those elements, *opsis*, the Greek word for spectacle, indicates that the scenes of the performance also can be

regarded as the relationship between human activities and the atmosphere. Opsis is translated into 'spectacle' in English which means the scene, the design, and the devices of the stage. Though dance lacks the usage of words, the need of stage devices and music is the same as drama performance. With the popular of modern cultural and social trend, several post-modern dancers, combining the concept of cultural trend with the artistic elements from different areas, promote new ideas for dance elements or body language as well as realize those ideas in their dance. Take Pina Bausch's dance for example, we can view the spectacle of dance in her choreography used in Almodóvar's film *Talk to Her*.

### **Spectacles in Pina Bausch's Dance**

To be more concretely, the term "spectacle" in the dance includes visible objects such as the stage settings, large decorations, and brilliant images with the assistance of modern technology. Spectacle is one of the characters in Pina Bausch's dance and it can be viewed everywhere in Bausch's dance.

In several of Pina Bausch's dance, non-traditional design of the stage makes the dance more impressive. For example, *In Le Sacre de printemps*, the stage floor is covered with the turf; in *Komm, tanz mit mir*, the stage is built as a slide, which implies that life is just like a current of water and never turns around; in *Arien*, the stage is even filled with water; in *Viktor*, the deep hole becomes the setting of the event; in *Der Fensterputzer*, the dance created for the audience, the stage setting is a movable mountain composed of tree peony; in *Nelken*, a story about flower, human, dance, and heaven. The performance *Nelken* was shown in Taiwan in 1997, in which the stage was full of millions of carnation in the beginning of the dance, symbolizing the joy in the heaven. In the later scene, millions of carnation is tramped. The carnation left on the stage symbolizes the innocence and love has been hold in our childhood. In Bausch's dance, the stage design always offers the audience a feeling of something fresh and worthy of attention. The stage design imposed in the dance is also the reason which makes her dance attractive and internationally acclaimed.

In addition to the settings, the props used in the performance are distinctive. The stage is always decorated with large objects such as animal props. Just like the stage settings, those objects are not just for decorations. They are all meaningful in the dance and served as a kind of image. According to Martha Bremser, "Bausch has broken with traditions and conventions whatever she can" (1999: 26). Therefore, she does not use conventional decorations in her dance. Martha Bremser says that usually the whole stage is empty and the brick wall is visible in the beginning, then the empty space is crammed with other objects. For example, the space on stage is filled "with chairs and tables as in *Café*



*Müller*, with armchairs and realistic crocodiles in *KeuschheitsLegende*, or with a fairground booth, a piano, water-sprinkler in other productions” (1999: 26).

In Bausch’s dance, “animals” play important roles. In *Arien*, a hippo was appeared on the stage in an extramarital relation. In *KeuschheitsLegende*, three crocodiles, played by the actors, were dancing with the female dancer on the stage. Though the crocodiles appeared to be ferocious, but they were actually harmless. In this dance, the stage designer uses the movable armchair as the instrument, and the dancer is on the sofa and the sliding creates the atmosphere of speed. In this dance, issues such as the fragility of human beings, the myth of humanity, and the overcome of anxiety are displayed. In *1980 - Ein Stück von Pina Bausch*, there is a deer on the stage; *Masurca Fogo*, a walrus. The animals mentioned above in Bausch’s dance are artificial props or costumes played by the performers. In Bausch’s dance, real animals, often dogs, can be on the stage. For example, in *Viktor*, a man carries a Minipin who intends to sell that dog; in *Der Fensterputzer*, the male dancer walks two Beijing dogs on the stage; in *Nelken*, there are a German shepherd and the host guarding the carnation. According to Cody, the animals are not only as a surprise in spectacle but metaphor “a walrus in *Masurca Fogo*– has generally been interpreted as another surprise factor, possibly commenting on the human body’s entrapment” (Cody 116).

### **How “Dance” in Bausch**

According to Guse in “Talk to Her! Look at Her! Pina Bausch in Pedro Almodóvar’s *Hable Cornella*,” Guse has comment on Bausch’s dance, the dancers in Bausch’s choreography were not only “dancer” but also expressing other identities with their bodies, which changed the performance into art:

Her dancers are also simultaneously actors, singers, and comedians, and, by using different media at her disposal, she has transformed dance craft into a unique form of visually strong performance art. (427-428)

Bausch has changed the language of the body from modern dance, “no longer was it the ideal of dance to defy gravity and no longer was the ultimate goal the physical encapsulation of controlled emotions”(433). As the definition of Schechner “Performances mark identities, bend and remake time, adorn and reshape the body, tell stories and allow people to play with behavior” (10–11), she make it a nature behavior without intentionally:

Her point of departure is to work with the dancer as a whole person, ... The task or question challenges the dancer to use his or her body in a reflective and decontextualized, ... Associations of this sort as well as movements and gestures of everyday life produce material for the choreography that also may be inspired by places and cities. (432)

In Birringer's view, it's the "language games" (432) in Bausch's style, "deconstructing language", and "use the body in a metaphoric sense"(432). The metaphoric sense "is rooted in social practice, viewing the body as representation of gender, race, and class" (Birringer 86).

Chen Ya-Ping, a dance scholar, and Ni Shu-Lan, a drama scholar, explore Bausch's dance from the perspective of body language. Chen takes the discipline of body as the central issue to generalize the way how Pina Bausch in the Tanztheater Wuppertal applies the body language to their work from 1960 to 1980 and how those works influence Taiwan dancers. Under the consciousness of social movement, political thinking and gender issues, how do Taiwan dancers express the relationship between dance and society by the presentation of body language? Based on Chen, Bausch views body as the domain of power and narrating. Ni explores the implication of Feminism in Pina Bausch's work by Bertolt Brecht's "gestus" theory. She regards that Bausch takes the body as magnetism of the scene of dance. I think that Brecht's "The Epic Theatre" and "The Alienation Effect" can also be associated to this analysis. The implication is similar to Bertolt Brecht's theory of "gestus", that is, the social gesture. The difference is that Bertolt Brecht uses words to innovate the ways in theatre, asking the audience to keep a distance for creating an "Alienation effect" in Brecht's innovative "Epic Theatre," furthermore arousing the audience to have a critical thinking and do actions to improve the society. Instead, Bausch uses the gestus of body to express her criticisms on the society.

Based on Chao Yu-ling (1999: 178-179), the scholar in the dance field, many points of Bausch's work imbue with the idea of the modern German dancer, post-modern aesthetics, the tradition of German theaters, etc. The writers Huang Qi and Ye Rong (1994: 284) think that the artistic style created by Bausch is a kind of style which fuses dialogues, rhymes, chores, drama performances with different kinds of music, and different dance materials. Regardless of thinking from the body language, creator's techniques of editing and producing, motivation, and the presentation of artistic style, Wuppertal, headed by Bausch, gives rises to the German dancing trend in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the twentieth first century. In Almodóvar's film, Bausch's two pieces of choreography *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo* are transformed into another kind of spectacle. The aim of this

study, from the perspective of spectacle illustrated in *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo*, is to explore how to present the spectacle in dance by the media of dance and the techniques of film making.

### **Bausch's Two Dance Pieces**

Dance as spectacle can be said that “it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (Guy Debord 1987: Chapter 1). Through the imagination of the author, the creation of the dance, the dispatch of stage scene, the arrangement of body, music, and languages, the spectacle in dance expresses the aroma and representation. Bausch's creation is derived from the experiences of life, which can reflect the common feelings of human beings. *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo* also reveal Bausch's observation on the society and the interaction between men and women. Abrams comments on Bausch in “The Contemporary Moment of Dance Restaging Recent Classics” (2008) in which he thought in the past that *Café Müller* can only be viewed through the cinematic image of Almodóvar's film *Talk to her*. About this work, Almodovar thinks *Café Müller* describes the image of the adults' lives from children's perspective (2008:49). It is a kind of connection of pain and desire from the dancers' body language. This work bears with it all of Bausch's history of choreography as well as the dance field that she has created. She has redefined dance and produced the audience members for appreciating the contemporary boundary-crossing works. Abrams gives a favorable assessment on *Café Müller*. The arrangement of spectacle in dance includes Bausch's lifelong idea about dance.

*Café Müller* is written by Pina Bausch in 1978. This work was inspired from Bausch's childhood memory in the café where her parents ran and where she observed the guests under café tables. *Masurca Fogo* is created for LisbonExpo'98 and the material is derived from Masurca, a tribe of Cape Verde, which has been ruled by Portugal. *Masurca Fogo* has been invited to perform in Sydney Olympic Arts Festival as well as in the National Theater Concert Hall in Taiwan in March, 2007 and aroused the fans' exploration for the meanings in Bausch's works. However, the most interesting is that the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar inserted Bausch's these two dance pieces in his film *Talk to Her* and arranged the dance with spectacle to be a part of the film to reinforce the discourse narrative.

### **Bausch's Dance Spectacle Presented in Almodóvar's Film *Talk to Her***

Pedro Almodóvar's *Talk to Her* describes the love story of the two pairs of lovers. It is also about the dys-communication between the lovers. The theme of the story is

surrounded by the leading character Benigno's narration. It's interesting that in this film, the director adopts two pieces of dance, the contemporary dancer Pina Bausch's *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo*, as the prolog and the ending. Two pieces of dance respectively symbolize the beginning of the contact of the characters. As the stage curtain opens, the director Almodóvar employs Bausch's dance *Café Müller* in which the chairs and tables as spectacle to begin the film. The encounter of Benigno and Marco foreshadows the following plots. Near the end of the film, Almodóvar chooses to employ Bausch's *Masurca Fogo* to enclose the film with hope:

Now opens to reveal the Bausch spectacle *Cafe Muller*. In fact, Almodovar credits Bausch, who appears in the *Cafe Muller* excerpt, together with Malou Airaudó, an original dancer from the Tanztheater Wuppertal, as providing both a starting point and a conclusion to *Hable con ella* through her works *Cafe Muller* and *Masurca Fogo*. (434)

In the film, *Masurca Fogo* is renamed as *Trenches*, with the implication of rebirth explained by the dance teacher. The ballet dance teacher played by Geraldine Chaplin is the symbolic figure representing Bausch. Watching the dance performance *Trenches* coincidentally is the beginning for Alicia (who wakes up from her long-term coma after Benigno's "rape" to make her pregnant so as to let her body have radically change) to meet Marco. Though the film is drawing to a close, that the film ends with the shot in which Marco and Alicia smiling at each other, this seems to tell the audience the (love) story is continued. It maintains an expectation in the audience's mind.

Bausch's two pieces of dance with spectacle play a significant role in the film. According to Lin Yating (2007), *Café Müller* portrays Benigno's caring for Alicia; *Cucurrucucú Paloma* symbolizes Alicia's mind that she cannot respond to Benigno's love. The theme of *Trenches* "Death creates live; man creates woman; earth creates soul" means that Benigno creates Alicia's rebirth. In addition to the narratives with symbolic implication, the choreographer's combination of dance with spectacle also impresses the audience by another kind of spectacular visual images.

### **Analysis of Bausch's Dance**

In the scene of *Café Müller*, the camera moves with fluidity from the top of the stage which is with the orange curtain decorated with golden fringes. And then, the curtain rises. This is a metaphor. The camera focuses on the stage performance which symbolizes the mind of the female character. The first sight that greets the audience is the two female

dancers. They are the members of Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, a dance group headed by Pina Bausch. On the stages are tables, chairs, and French windows. The dancer in long robes surrounded by white windows expresses the feeling of pain through the body. In the scene of *Trenches*, in all places are rocky hills, cascades, and ferns. A group of male dancers hold high the female dancer, and the female dancer treads on the fallen male dancer. Later, the camera moves to a group of male and female dancers, trooping through from the left stage, and slowly walking to the back of the curtain by pairs. In the end, only a pair of dancers leaves on the stage. They walk to the cascade and smile at each other. The action of the two dancers just echoes the interaction between the characters Marco and Alicia in the film.

*Café Müller* is created based on Bausch's childhood memory. In the café there are the large French windows, tables and chairs lined up in well ordered ranks, and dimly lit. Though from the setting, the café seems to be in the rest, the incidents are still played out just like the day – an injured woman, like a walking corpse, strolls in the café; The man next to her, avoiding getting hurt, constantly moves his chair. The man suffering from a setback cannot control his emotion and desperately crashes chairs. Pairs of males and females play the scene of love, separation, and the trilateral relationship. Through the arrangement of scenes, the contrast of emotions, and the repetition of actions, Bausch's childhood memory can be displayed.<sup>1</sup> In *Talk to Her*, the placement of the two dances is meaningful for the film. In *Café Müller*, two female dancers, dressed in white and with their eyes closed, are running everywhere regardless of numbers of chairs setting on the stage. Being afraid that the two female dancers are obstructed, the male dancer hastily moves away the tables and chairs. This scene shows that someone may pursue his or her own love and ignores the obstacles.

Back to the main plot in *Talk to Her*, the two female leading characters, Alicia and Lydia, suffer from the pain just like the two female dancers in *Café Müller*. Bausch created *Masurca Fogo* through her impressions about the humanities and natural environment of Cape Verde. The dance shows the romance of foreign lands and the relationship between human and nature. In *Masurca Fogo*, the local atmosphere is expressed through singing, the arrangement of human body, and the folk dance.

In Almodóvar's *Talk to her*, the dance reflects the characters, and another kind of preface and ending. In "Whose Talk It Is? Almodóvar and the Fairy Tale in *Talk to Her*", Adriana interpreted the piece of *Café Müller* in *Talk to her*. She thinks that this dance is

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<sup>1</sup> The dance in this section is based on the following piece:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFkSr5LOyUk&feature=related>

with the symbolic meaning. The dance expresses solitude and isolation reflecting the characters of two males and their management of the relationship. The performance of the dance is a kind of amazing communication and it is one of the representations of intimacy and love. The dance does not develop independent of the film. The dance is vital in the film and it must be explained with the plot.

The first scene shows the conversation with the outsider and the disintegration of the promise. The prediction of Marco and Benigno is just like what we see afterwards. The second scene is about the World War I. *Trenches*, narrated by Katerina, predicts the relationship between Benigno and Alicia. The third scene listens to the relationship between Marco and Benigno and the good future of Alicia. The happy ending is in the fourth and the last scene. Two young people with warm heart fall in love just as the fairy tale. Katerina's narration is significant to the dance. The determination of the fairy tale is traditional in sexual terminology.

From Adriana's point of view, it can be observed that Pina Bausch's dance can be narrated just like the film. Each dance predicts the actions and interactions of the characters and reveals the arrangement of traditional gender roles (2005: 224-248). Concerning of the dance, it is not interpreted from Bausch's idea but from the film technique of Almodóvar under his camera and shot employment.

The corporation of the two artists in different areas unifies the idea in art. Marcantonio points out: "In the film, the stage and the hospital are viewed as the introduction of the film. The common point for the two is that they are the places for the arrangement of the body" (2007:19-36).

### **Innovation in Representation**

The difference between *Masurca Fogo* and *Talk to her* is the background of the spectacle. In *Masurca Fogo*, there is a volcano, barren, rough, and scraggy; on the contrary, in *Talk to Her*, there are a waterfall and a fountain, green, lively, and colorful. Almodóvar is also good at using colors in his film. I argue that in the movie-within-the-movie "The Shrinking Lover" the large female body is the most remarkable spectacle. It's his idea about cinematic spectacle mixing with Bausch's dance.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores Bausch's two pieces of dance in Almodóvar's *Talk to her* and the relationship between characters symbolized by *Café Müller* and *Masurca Fogo*. The two pieces of dance serve not only as the dances but the significant symbol through the whole film. The two distinctive dances respectively function as the prolog and the ending

and this arrangement corresponds to the plot in the film. Based on Almodóvar's film-making, Bausch's *Café Müller* served as a perfect way of communicating the place in which the story's leading characters live – the place between life and death. On the contrary, *Masurca Fogo* in the ending expresses the hope that follows loss. Through the arrangement of scenes, Bausch's childhood memory and the image of Cape Verde are projected to the characters in the film. In Almodóvar's film *Talk to Her*, the ending scene of Bausch's choreography combined with dance and singing supported by the spectacle of the waterfall, fountain, trees and flowers imbued with tropical liveness fosters the hope and links of human beings. Bausch's choreography with spectacle is theatricalized by Almodóvar's innovative cinematography in *Talk to Her*.

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## Extreme virtuosity: moments of disbelief

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### **Abstract**

*Virtuosity occupies a central place in the oeuvre of Belgian choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Hamera proposes an understanding of virtuosity beyond the conventional plot of heroism, mastery and talent towards a romance between the labouring bodies of monstrous performer and longing spectator.<sup>1</sup> This paper explores the labour of looking at extremely virtuosic bodies. I find myself doubting whether their movements are humanly possible. I argue that extreme virtuosity causes moments of disbelief, which is unsuspendable because in the intimate performance situation the human bodies moving in front of the eye are not fictional.*

### **Virtuosity and visuality**

Virtuosity occupies a central place in the choreographies of half-Flemish, half-Moroccan Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui. Unusually agile, strong, flexible, versatile and articulate bodies demonstrate their physical ability to the extreme. A characteristic of his movement aesthetic is its eclecticism and deliberate lack of loyalty to a single (Western) movement practice. For example, in *zero degrees* (2005) Kathak is juxtaposed to Kung Fu; in *Myth* (2007) tap dance is layered over Slovakian folk dance and Bollywood; *Rien de Rien* (2000) contains both ballet and Lambada. Increasingly globalised movement practices, such as yoga, martial arts, and circus techniques form part of the troupe's training regime and greatly inform movement creation. [Viewing of video clip from *zero degrees* (14'55"-18'05")<sup>2</sup>]

There are many movements that are difficult to come to terms with as a spectator, because they seem to defy what I have come to know as anatomically and humanly possible and safe. They seem to conquer gravity, or seem painful, or even unreal. Did I really just see that movement? Or is my eye playing tricks on me? I cannot believe he did that. These movements are not fictional, nor enhanced by technology; this is a human body performing movements in the shared time and space of the intimate performance situation. My disbelief is misplaced and as soon as I realise this it becomes uncomfortable. I am stuck with the implausibility of my disbelief.

In Maaïke Bleeker's analysis of visuality in the theatre, the seer is considered complicit in producing vision, a concept which in itself needs to be historicised and culturally located.<sup>3</sup> Bleeker regards the idea of a detached, disembodied eye/I that is 'just looking' as an illusion that can be either supported or challenged by different kinds of theatrical work.<sup>4</sup> It is her discussion of inner mimicry that will be of particular value when exploring the effects of extreme virtuosity on the spectator. Bleeker coins the writing of dance critic John Martin and film theorist Kaja Silverman's response to the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage to frame the implications of inner mimicry for visual theory.

Writing in the 1930s Martin introduced the concept of inner mimicry to refer to the necessary intertwining of proprioception and exteroception. ‘Through a reaction of bodily responsiveness [...] we become aware of how it feels to make movements seen without actually executing them’.<sup>5</sup> The spectator uses sense perceptions from previous experiences and the emotions and expectations connected to those experiences to actively mimic what is seen.

In Martin’s model there are two bodies: the one seeing and feeling in the auditorium, and the one seen as spectacle on stage. The gap separating them is bridged by an instantaneous mapping of one body onto the other within the act of looking.<sup>6</sup>

When I see Cherkaoui’s body tied up in knots, I become him; there is a momentary mixing up of my Self and what I see. Importantly, Bleeker decisively moves beyond an understanding of vision as disembodied by highlighting the Gibsonian approach to sensorial experience, understood as a range of perceptual systems, and not separate senses, engaging with each other. ‘The response of the seer is the product of a body as the place where these various perceptual systems intertwine; they probe the world around us’.<sup>7</sup> However, it seems that, more often than not, the spectator is unaware of this bodily involvement in the act of looking.

### **The dys-appearing spectating body**

In her essay ‘Passages in Post-Modern Theory’<sup>8</sup> Bleeker draws upon Drew Leder’s concept of dys-appearance, referring to the spectator’s disappearing and re-appearing body. The concept of dys-appearance arises out of Leder’s phenomenological investigation of the lived body. As ecstatic, or that from which we perceive and attend to the world around us, the body projects outside itself into the world. As recessive, due to the depth disappearance of the visceral, the body falls back from its own conscious perception. Leder argues that ‘as ecstatic/recessive being-in-the world, the lived body is necessarily self-effacing’.<sup>9</sup> Cartesian dualism stems from a misreading of the absence of the body in everyday experience. When the body comes to awareness, it is usually due to pain or illness. Dys-appearance then becomes ‘a mode through which explicit awareness of the body is awakened’.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the notion of immaterial reason is made possible by the structure of bodily disappearance, the sense of the body as threat is [...] suggested by the phenomenon of dys-appearance.<sup>11</sup>

I argue that Cherkaoui’s choreography of virtuosic movements, especially and perhaps ideally when they are framed as roughly three minute solos, cause a friction within in the spectator because of their problematised perception. They cause the spectator’s body to dys-appear to awareness. Despite a possibly uncomfortable viewing experience, seeing this kind of virtuosity contributes to bringing the body of the spectator to awareness, which is important in re-conceiving of looking as embodied experience and sheds new light on the role of spectatorship in visuality.

Some of Cherkaoui's other virtuosic choreography, for example in *Foi* (2003) and *Apocrifu* (2008), does not look contortionist or painful, but enjoyable and beautiful, to me. However, my initial reaction of disbelief remains. What I see performers Nicholas Vladyslav and Dimitri Jourde do, stretches my own bodily imagination and leaves me in admiration. This virtuosity brings the body back to awareness through something that is considered pleasant. This is very much in line with the concept of eu-appearance, recently coined by medical scientist Kristin Zeiler<sup>12</sup> in response to Leder's dys-appearance. Eu-appearance is an awareness of the body experienced as good through physical activity such as yoga or sports, or through wanted pregnancies. Interestingly, Zeiler notes that eu-appearance is more likely to take place in unusual situations. This can also be related to virtuosity. Spectators may get habituated to seeing virtuosic movements, and their spectating body is likely to disappear from awareness. On a train ride from Brussels to Antwerp Cherkaoui recognised that indeed spectators can become immune to being affected physically by virtuosity. This kind of numbness, Leder explains, is impossible in the case of dys-appearance. If the body is in acute pain, it is impossible to ignore. Similarly, if the spectator experiences his or her body as uncomfortable, the effect is perhaps more invasive than when it is experienced as pleasant.

### Overcoming sensory alienation

Bleeker draws attention to Susan Buck-Morss's re-reading of Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. They consider the implications of 'sensory alienation typical of modernity [...] as [...] the experience of the fragile body and the dangers of fragmentation'.<sup>13</sup>

In the great mirror of technology, the image that returns is displaced, reflected onto a different plane, where one sees oneself as a physical body divorced from sensorial vulnerability – a statistical body, the behaviour of which can be calculated; a performing body, actions of which can be measured up against the norm; a virtual body, one [that] can endure the shocks of modernity without pain.<sup>14</sup>

To protect itself against the constant bombardment of shocks, the ego employs consciousness as a shield, blocking the openness of the synaesthetic system of the body [...] [and] experience becomes impoverished. [...] [Buck-Morss] invites one [...] to undo the simultaneity of over-stimulation and numbness.<sup>15</sup>

The concept of sensory alienation opens scope to reinforce a previously argued alignment between Cherkaoui and Benjamin, where I conceived of the choreographer as a new kind of storyteller who foregrounds oral and embodied transmission of cultural knowledge. Like Benjamin, Cherkaoui seems to be lamenting something that is lost in human experience through modernity, and offers an alternative. This alternative seems to focus on liveness and the human, rather than mediation and the posthuman. Through Cherkaoui's particular framing of these unlikely virtuosic bodies, the re-appearing spectating body is brought into a state of hyper-awareness and enhanced experience, and is invited to momentarily overcome and undo sensory alienation. Extreme virtuosity may

prompt an awareness of looking as embodied and highlight the role of spectatorship in  
visuality.

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### Endnotes

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## Sound the Spectacle: Listening to two works by William Forsythe

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#### *Abstract*

*This paper turns away from a purely visual analysis of William Forsythe's choreographies by favoring consideration of their spectacular aurality. Focusing on Artifact (1984) and Decreation (2003), the first and last evening-length works created by Forsythe for the Ballett Frankfurt, it offers a comparison of sonic and visual aspects of these two works which illuminates – or more aptly, amplifies – perceptual mechanisms underlying the experience of spectacle, as well as ways in which the joining of sound and sight in contemporary dance taps the performativity of the spectacular.*

The etymology of the term “spectacle” specifies it as a visual experience. However, though no parallel sonic referent exists, many types of aural experience can also be considered as spectacular, for example monumental classical compositions, virtuoso musical performance, recording and reproduction technologies like Phil Spector’s “Wall of Sound” and Dolby Surround Sound, sound effects of science fiction and action films, and the sounds of natural or man-made disasters. By contrast, the language of the spectacular experience reveals a lack of visual terminology and a bias toward the visceral: it *captivates* (takes), *seduces* (leads away), *entrances* (takes across), *thrills* (penetrates).

For philosopher Michel Serres, the senses are deeply mingled with one another. He points out that touch and hearing are linked by our anatomical history: we hear not just with the ears, but with the skin and interior organs because we are submerged in sound, surrounded and responsive to its waves like fish are responsive to water.<sup>1</sup> Sound, quite literally, *moves* us. In what follows, I frame the power of the spectacular to *touch* us as a sonic effect, an *enchantment* (spell-binding through song) in which we fall under the control of an external, moving force. In terms of spectacular affect, sound seems in fact to have the upper hand over sight due to the different structures of the auditory and visual sensory apparati and the natures of visual and auditory attention. As Steven Connor aptly notes, “The space of hearing is not ungoverned in comparison to the space of the eye; but it is differently governed.”<sup>2</sup> Walter Ong further clarifies that “Sound situates man in the middle of actuality and in simultaneity, whereas vision situates man in front of things and in sequentiality.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, vision presents the perceiver with a perceptual field which, though precisely localizable, delivers only a segment of the field’s totality, and objects within the visual field are only individually accessible, competing for attention by virtue of factors like salience or occlusion. Sound, by contrast, surrounds and assails the perceiver, immersing them in a perceptual field whose physical contours are less clearly discernible. Further, though the eyes can be closed or the gaze averted, we cannot close our ears, unless of course we use our hands. This lends the viewer a stronger sense of control over what he or she sees. In audition’s watery, volatile field, co-present sound-objects impinge ceaselessly, blending with and altering each other in ways which are more or less beyond agentive control.

In this paper, I probe the perceptual experience of the spectacle by executing two simultaneous and complementary “turns” in my theoretical approach. With the first of

these , I follow the recent “auditory” or “acoustic turn” in scholarship, which, as Petra Maria Meyer maintains, is not simply the latest in a string of scholarly “turns” regularly announced since the 1960s, including the “linguistic,” “iconic,” “pictorial,” and “performative,” but has in fact been an implied dimension of all of these earlier refocusings.<sup>4</sup> However, rather than joining those who execute this turn in order to counteract the ocularcentrist bias in the arts and humanities by substituting an aural perspective for the visual, I follow others who interrogate the dichotomy between visual and auditory experience by focusing on the profound multi- and intermodality of our experience in the world.<sup>5</sup> My turn away from the visual is thus not a full one, but one which displaces it from the center of focus and allows audition to enter the picture.

The second turn I perform is, at least metaphorically, a downward one, executed by translating so-called “top-down” perspectives of the spectacle’s societal effects into what film theorist David Bordwell has termed “middle-level research”<sup>6</sup> into the ways that the structure of spectacular events addresses the perceiver. Noting theories of the power of spectacle to arrest, distract, and convince, I focus on Jaques Attali’s Marxist critique of music’s ideological work which construes noise as violence, a simulacrum of murder that has always been viewed as disorder, dirt, pollution.” Music, on the other hand, functions as a tool of power by channeling noise, simulating sacrifice and causing collective belief in harmonic order and forgetting of the possibility of a carnivalesque freedom.<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I translate Attali’s analysis of the music-noise relationship from a top-level social application into a query of the perceptual mechanisms that underlie the experience of the spectacular.

As such, my inquiry constitutes a *sounding*, not of spectacle with a capital S or “the” in front of it, but of spectacular perceptual events. By comparing and analyzing elements of both the visual and sonic scores of William Forsythe’s *Artifact* and *Decreation*, I seek to uncover cognitive processes which determine the experience of these events and the ways in which Forsythe taps into these processes to deploy spectacularity as a performative device. My move away from broad socio-political considerations in favor of what Noël Carroll refers to as “piecemeal” theorizing of specific instances<sup>8</sup> is intended to amplify awareness of dance performance as a visuo-sonic event rather than as a primarily visual phenomenon with sometimes spectacular sonic accompaniment. Due to the limitations of this format I focus primarily on one specific type of audio-visual spectacularity which occurs in these and other Forsythe works that I term *hypnotic sound scoring*, and on the role that sonic overlays play in the perception of these events.

Though *Artifact* and *Decreation* differ completely in terms of their structure, aesthetics, and thematics, the two works are linked by several elements in their complex sound scores. Both feature keyboard compositions which were produced in the studio during rehearsals: Eva Crossman-Hecht’s piano score for *Artifact*’s first and fourth acts is composed of variations on the Bach *Chaconne* that accompanies the work’s second act, while *Decreation* features a fragmented, arrhythmic score by David Morrow, who plays live onstage in performance. Both works also feature substantial amounts of spoken or sung text, both with and without mediating effects, that was compiled by Forsythe in collaboration with the dancers. Finally, both works include other sound elements produced by the performers, including *Artifact*’s rhythmic hand clapping patterns and *Decreation*’s loud percussive accents “played” with chairs and shoes.



The keyboard scores of both works contain scenes whose structures are reflective of music intended to support meditation or the induction of trance states. *Artifact*'s first act is comprised of fifteen mostly brief scenes, four of which are accompanied by repetitive *ostinato* motifs, while its fourth act contains five *ostinato* passages out of a total of nine distinct musical scenes. The *ostinato* scenes are the longest in the acts, ranging from just over one minute to almost seven minutes, and are marked by subtle melodic augmentations and slow *crescendi*. During four of the nine *ostinati*, repetitive interlocking clapping patterns provide an additional *ostinato* overlay.

Forsythe explains that the *ostinato* patterns figure in the work's engagement with ballet as a historical construct in that both *ostinato* musical structure and ballet have been present in numerous musical epochs, including Baroque, minimalism, jazz, and popular music.<sup>9</sup> During all of *Artifact*'s *ostinati*, large groups of dancers move through dim light or are silhouetted in stark backlighting as they perform dense, rhythmic, movement canons with occasional *unisono* dancing in formations reflecting the spatial patterns of *corps de ballet* dancing. Sharing the stage with the ensemble in these scenes are a silent, pale grey figure named in the program as "Other Person" who emerges from under the stage to provide a visual counterpoint to the ensemble's gestures, and two speaking characters, a "Person in Historical Costume" and a "Person with Megaphone," who, among other things, enjoin us to "forget the dust, forget the sand, forget the dirt, forget the rocks."

*Decreation*, in turn, contains two scenes which, though featuring a different musical structure than the scenes described above, share similar perceptual qualities with *Artifact*'s *ostinati*. In these, the ensemble blends their voices with the keyboard score to produce lush, hypnotic droning chords. The first of these, a relatively quiet chord which accompanies a circular argument between characters, can be considered a premonition of the climactic drone scene which soon follows. In the second scene, pianist Morrow and the combined voices of eleven singing dancers build a rich, resonant F major ninth chord which is sustained for over three and a half minutes. During the chord, the stage slowly darkens as five dancers pace lightly forward and backward and two pairs of dancers twine against one another, collapsing to the floor in extreme slow motion. At the chord's sustained height, soft spotlights pick out two additional female vocalists at microphones, the first twisting to produce a high, loonlike cry and the second writhing on the floor towards the front of the stage, silhouetted in the bright green light of a screen upstage.

Music's ability to heighten emotion and intensify affect is well documented within both performance and cognitive literature.<sup>10</sup> The latter has shown that specific types of sound, such as repetitive sound events, are one of several means of sensory "driving" by which autonomic or brainwave entrainment can be induced, leading to shifts of conscious state and perception.<sup>11</sup> Under receptive conditions, repetitive sound can also lead to an attentional shift, first theorized by musicologist and *musique concrète* pioneer Pierre Schaeffer, called reduced listening (*écoute réduite*).<sup>12</sup> Typically, we process emergent features of sound streams as perceptual cues, aiming to establish associations between the sounds heard and sounds stored in memory. Because repeating or static sound patterns offer little new information or cues to the aural perceptual system, the focus of listening shifts away from comparative, memory-based activity and towards the sound's intrinsic, molar aspects. In reduced listening, we thus essentially turn a new ear

on sound, one which brings its “background” qualities such as pitch, rhythm, timbre, and texture to the foreground of attention.

At the points described above in the two works, the tempo of both visual and sonic structuring undergoes an extreme slowing relative to other scenes. *Decreation*’s drone sustains an essentially static aural structure while the dance movement also simplifies, reducing to pacing and slow torquing. *Artifact*’s *ostinato* musical phrases and canons of repeating dance movement effect a similar reduction, with the notable exception of the movements of the “Other Person” figure. These reductions of visual and auditory dynamic reflect the reduced nature of meditative or hypnotic music. However, though such music relies for its effect on a slowing of the rate of occurrence of new perceptual cues in order to shift attention to the molar level, it is never completely monotonous or repetitive. Instead, hypnotic sound typically features minor structural alterations in the form of shifts of pattern, volume, and density. These small variances stand out as figures against the static or repetitive background, disrupting the stasis with occasional small sonic details which evoke brief returns of perception to associative processing of emergent figures before giving way to the phenomenal aspects of the background again.

The great majority of scenes in these two works that are accompanied by *ostinato* or drone motifs are marked by irregularly patterned disruptions onstage, in the form of events which, critically for my analysis, are sonic as well as visual. In all but three of the fourteen *ostinato* sections in *Artifact*’s first and fourth acts, the two speaking characters generate “noisy” interference by various means: the Person in Historical Costume claps counterpointed patterns with the ensemble, the Person with Megaphone wanders among the women’s *corps* periodically tapping the floor as if trying to locate the silent, ghostly Other Person beneath the stage, or both characters traverse the stage space while arguing with each other. *Decreation*’s second drone scene, in turn, is interrupted three times: the central male character first shouts off-mic to another character, then the first miked woman’s high ululating cry emerges above the chord, and, finally, a male performer’s echoing voice intones three lines of text.

Overlays of competing and distracting sound events such as these are pervasive not only in these works but also characterize much of Forsythe’s larger repertoire, to the displeasure of some. Reviews with titles such as “If Only They’d Shut Up and Dance”<sup>13</sup> reflect a quite widely voiced view of Forsythe’s inclusion of sounds, and of spoken text in particular, as irritating and detracting from the quality of his works. In a 1986 interview, critic Anna Kisselgoff complained that the inclusion of text actually reduces the amount of dancing. She offers high praise for the work’s textless second act, which she notes as “the passage that has the least interruptions” in spite of its loudly slamming fire curtain, and in conclusion recommends “Less screaming, more dancing.”<sup>14</sup> Though *Decreation*, which was made 19 years after *Artifact*, has fared somewhat better with critics with regard to its textual content, it still draws comments like Debra Craine’s 2009 remark that “While the dancers speak relentlessly...the choreography bubbles away on the sideline...David Morrow’s music barely registers.”<sup>15</sup>

I hold that what actually lies behind critiques such as these is displeasure at being extracted from a state of spectacular enchantment by Forsythe’s performative use of what Ross Brown calls sonic “design through annoyance.”<sup>16</sup> In both *Artifact* and *Decreation*, Forsythe intensifies the affect of these scenes’ hypnotic music as they proceed by

increasing volume and density, only to repeatedly disturb it through sounds made by performers. I propose that the overlaying of irregularly timed disruptions above smooth, lulling flows of music and visual action causes a cyclic process of shift between figure and ground, in which viewer-auditors, submersed in mesmerizing sounds and sights, are repeatedly pulled from the depths of the spectacular experience back up to the surface level of recognition and association, before being released to settle back down into the wash of spectacularity. *Artifact's* Other Person figure, who in the *ostinato* scenes performs complex, angular gestural sequences against the ensemble's rounded ballet port de bras, provides a similar visual disruption that points up the distinction between the concrete presence of the body in the visual field and the parallel ephemerality of both the visual trace of movement and sound phenomena.

In tandem, I hold that sounds generated by performers onstage in *Artifact* and *Decreation* not only draw attention away from the underlying music but also focus audience attention on the individuals producing them, at the expense of attention to the massed bodies in motion. Sonic disruptions, particularly when they take the form of spoken text, are a highly effective means of capturing attention from the dancing, due to our innate proclivity to visually localize the sources of sounds and to focus our vision as well as our audition on speech events.<sup>17</sup> The dancing, in essence, is alternately obscured and revealed by the presence and absence of disrupting noise, and particularly, speech. My view gains support from Forsythe's almost inevitable visual emphasis on sound and speech events through lighting, spatial placement, or the simplification or slowing of ensemble movement, which literally highlights or foregrounds vocalizers and others producing sounds and "upstages" the moving ensemble.

Another type of scene that occurs in these and other Forsythe works provides an informative contrasting perceptual dynamic to the scenes described above. In one chaotic scene from *Decreation*, the female protagonist, who remains relatively still, recites a text by French mystic Marguerite Porete against a backdrop of the keyboard score, periodically slammed chairs and shoes which cue extreme changes of lighting, two performers singing fragments of ballads, and eleven rapidly improvised dance solos. *Artifact's* nine-minute third act is an equally chaotic maelstrom of shouted text, rapid movement, crashing scenery flats, and abrupt lighting shifts, set against a soundtrack of construction site noise. Contrasting the relative paucity of new events in hypnotic scenes, these scenes of cacophonony and turbulent action are constituted in great extent of visual and sonic "noise," offering a different form of spectacle which provides no figure-to-ground shifts but instead figures in a broader scenic rhythm across the entire work.

In this analysis of Forsythe's hypnotic modalities, shaped as it is by two turns of theoretical perspective (another visually specified term that lacks a parallel sonic referent), I advance the claim that the choreographer says both yes and no to spectacle, alternating between its presentation and its rupture and emphasizing the sonic aspects of disruptions by several means. Shifts between visual or sonic "music" and "noise" – between spectacular transmission and occluding disturbance – engender multiple extractions from and resubmersions into the spectacular, offering the viewer-auditor a repeated engagement with its affect by re-versing the figure-ground relation of attention over and over again. The spectator's confrontation with disruptive sound is therefore simultaneously a confrontation with the desire to remain enchanted, swept away by spectacle without being reminded of the noisy disorder of the real – to be left, as the

Person with Megaphone says at *Artifact*'s outset, to forget the dust, forget the sand, forget the dirt, and forget the rocks.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Crowley (orig. *Les Cinq Sens*, Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1985), London & New York, Continuum, 2008, 141-2.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Binghamton, 2000, 128.

<sup>4</sup> Petra Maria Meyer, *Acoustic Turn*, Munich, Wilhelm Frink Verlag, 13-14.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Veit Erlmann, "But What of the Ethnographic Ear? Anthropology, Sound, and the Senses," in Veit Erlmann, ed., *Hearing Cultures: Essays on Sound, Listening, and Modernity* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004): 1-20; and Christopher Witmore, "Vision, Media, Noise, and the Percolation of Time: Symmetrical Approaches to the Mediation of the Material World," *Journal of Material Culture*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2006): 267-292.

<sup>6</sup> David Bordwell, "Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory," in David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, 26-30.

<sup>7</sup> Jaques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985 (orig. *Bruits: essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*, Presses Universitaire de France, 1977), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Noël Carroll, *Theorizing the moving image*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, xiii-xv.

<sup>9</sup> Discussion with the choreographer, March 16, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Patrik Justin and John Sloboda, eds., *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> See Charles Tart, ed., *Altered States of Consciousness*, New York, John Wiley, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Schaeffer, *Traite des objets musicaux*, Paris, Seuil, 1966. See also Michel Chion, *Guide des objets sonores: Pierre Schaeffer et la recherche musicale*, Paris, Buchet/Chastel, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Louise Levene, review of *Artifact* and *Eidos:Telos*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, Nov. 11 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, "The Sound and the Flurry of William Forsythe," *The New York Times*, July 19, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Debra Craine, review of *Decreation*, *The Times*, April 28, 2009, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Ross Brown, *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 137.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Elizabeth Spelke, "Infants' Intermodal Perception of Events," *Cognitive Psychology* 8 (1976), 553-560.

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## The Role of Dance in the World Games – What is Dance Spectacle? *Yunyu Wang*

### **Abstract**

*Choreographing and leading the dance team in 2009 World Games proved to be a great challenge in my dance career. The Opening Ceremony for the 16<sup>th</sup> World Games held in Kaohsiung, Taiwan was deemed as a success, yet many questions still deserve to be discussed. For example what is dance spectacle and how do we separate art from entertainment? How do the choreographers from Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) negotiate their artistic training to fit this specific need?*

*In addition to sharing the process of creating dance on such a spectacular scale, throughout the process choreographers encountered endless challenges, including crossing the fields within the arts and other disciplines; rehearsing with non-dancers from the community together with academically trained dancers; challenging academic institutional rules; shaping the artistic theme with technicians from the field of entertainment; and other political issues constantly raised during the rehearsals.*

*This presentation will include films and demonstrations of certain dance movements that illustrate the challenges the choreography team experienced. The purpose is to share the collective experience, so as to provide a comparative study for similar events in the future.*

### **Introduction**

The presentation is one of three papers under the panel of Spectacularizing International Ceremonies in “Localized” Styles, moderated by Yatin Lin for the 2010 Dance and Spectacle Conference held in London, England. It is sponsored by Society Dance History Scholars, an international organization in dance. The panelists includes Ms. Suling Chou, the head of Dance Division, Tsoying High School, Kaohsiung; Professor Heng Ping, the Dean of Dance College, Taipei National University of the Arts as well as the author, Yunyu Wang, Professor of Dance, Taipei National University of the Arts, Taiwan.

Those three writers were the team leaders of 2009 World Game held in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Professor Heng Ping was the Chief Producer of the opening ceremony and restager of the indigenous dance in the first section of the show. Ms. Suling Chou was the Director of third section, Heart Beat of Ocean City, and also contributed her artistic version and choreography in the part of Electric Prince (Dan-in-San-Tai-zer) in 2<sup>nd</sup> section, which won the heart of audience in the opening night. Prof. Yunyu Wang was the Chief Artistic Director in Dance of the Opening

Ceremony, whom overviewed the dances in the Ceremony and also choreographed Ocean Dance in the first section of the show. It is important that even with these panels that the World Game might still not be fully described, recorded and understood. This would be just a beginning stage starting from the corner of dance to approach the total planning of the World Game that draw 42,000 audience to the site in the heat summer of July, 2009.

### **Spectacle vs. Art**

What is dance spectacle? The question was asked over and over during the planning stage and again by the creative team till the performing night. In Wikipedia, it is stated as:

*“Spectacle refers to an event that is memorable for the appearance it creates. Derived in Middle English from c.1340 as "specially prepared or arranged display" it was borrowed from Old French spectacle, itself a reflection of the Latin spectaculum "a show" from spectare "to view, watch" frequentative form of specere "to look at".*

When the team starts, the goal, therefore, is aiming toward above knowledge of “an event that is memorable” as well as for fitting the huge auditorium with the size of 8800 X 5400 centimeter, and to welcome 42,000 audiences in such scale.

In researching into the other examples, in addition to the past World Games, all large-scale opening and closing ceremonies of international athletic events held in Asia was also used as the reference. Two of them were in Taiwan – World Games in Kaohsiung in July, 2009 and Deaflympics in Taipei in September, 2009, both are in planning stage with basic information. The third was in Sinophone cities of Beijing, the Summer Olympics in August, 2008. Although different in scale and emphasis, these three consecutive spectacles provide an interesting comparison in terms of their individual themes and agendas.

It was through a competition that the sponsorship was given to Uniplan, an international multi-media agent originated in Germany. The President Michael C.K. Tu of Uniplan approached President Tzong-Ching Ju in Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) to ask for the artistic input and the organizing of the performance of Opening Ceremony.

The hesitation was first aroused knowing that the graduates from TNUA College of Dance have successfully performed with renowned Taiwanese dance companies including Cloud Gate Dance Theater, Dance Forum Taipei, Taipei Crossover Dance Theatre, Ku Dance Company and others. In addition, several outstanding alumni have been prominent performers in American dance companies such as Fang-yi Sheu (Martha Graham Dance Company) and Wen-chun Lin (Bill T. Jones Dance Company), while others have excelled in Germany, Australia, England and other countries.

Their professional achievements prove TNUA to be the top-choice university among art institutions in Taiwan as well as in Asia at large. The hesitation was that if the event is a right choice for TNUA.

How does a conservatory school like TNUA was willing to take such project? The argument immediately rose - if it is an artistic project that the school should take and if it is against the principle of the goal in the university. As also the statement indicated that:

*“The TNUA College of Dance has risen to the pinnacle of the dance world and is instrumental in shaping dance into a unique and prominent art form in Taiwan. Grounded in the rigor of dance discipline and tradition, and invested in international exchange and creativity cultivation, the College of Dance is dedicated to the legacy and evolution of dance locally and globally.....”*

After a long discussion with dance faculty members and with the team from the Music College that were main two forces for the vent, it was decided that TNUA would accept the offer to run the Opening Performance. The committee believes that it is a new trend that the students and faculty would met and fulfill the meaning of cross-disciplinary. Although decided, it was not without struggle throughout the process in the next ten months of planning. The next question was how do the choreographers from Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) negotiate their artistic training to fit this specific need?

Just like other dance conservatory schools in the world that most of the dance performances are centered on presenting the choreography on a traditional stage or in an environment performance sitting. And similar to all dance performances, few people choice to present on an auditorium setting in such size. The dance team of seven choreographers (Chieh-hua Hsieh, Ya-ting Chang, Li-chuang Lin, Heng Ping, Li-ling Wang, Ming-Hsiu Lu, Tzu-yu Chang) and three thousand performers, lead by Yunyu Wang embarked for a journal of unknown.

### **Time Schedule and the Creative Challenges**

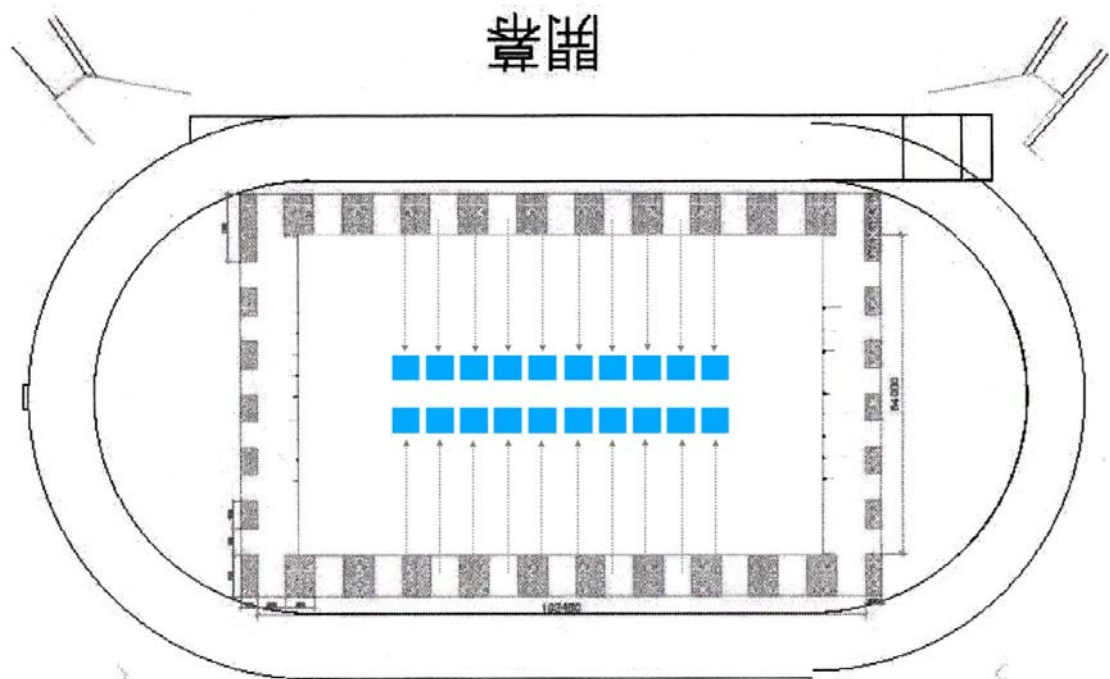
The preparation for the whole show took four months from September to December, 2008 to finalize. The choreography process was first set only on paper and screen with visualized graphic design in order to allow the core Creative Team in Taipei office to understand and be able to match in the total design for the show.

The core Creative Team has eventually informed all that the performance will not just to showcase the dance and music but to create a multi-media background on stage as well as brining as many and as huge as possible of the props. It was decided that the show could not be completely presented if it was done without specially created lighting, prop and costume design. “SPECTACLE” was the core concept for

all to aim toward. The past many spectacle events such as Atlanta Opening, Torino Winter Olympics Opening, Europe 2004 Opening, Europe 2004 Opening and EXPO 2000 Parade were studied and researched. In addition, 2008 Olympic Game in Beijing, China, which has the budget ten times more than Taiwanese team, was compared. Since it was impossible to challenge the budget to be spectacle, the Taiwan team decided to use man power, the artistic creative thoughts to conquer the assignment.

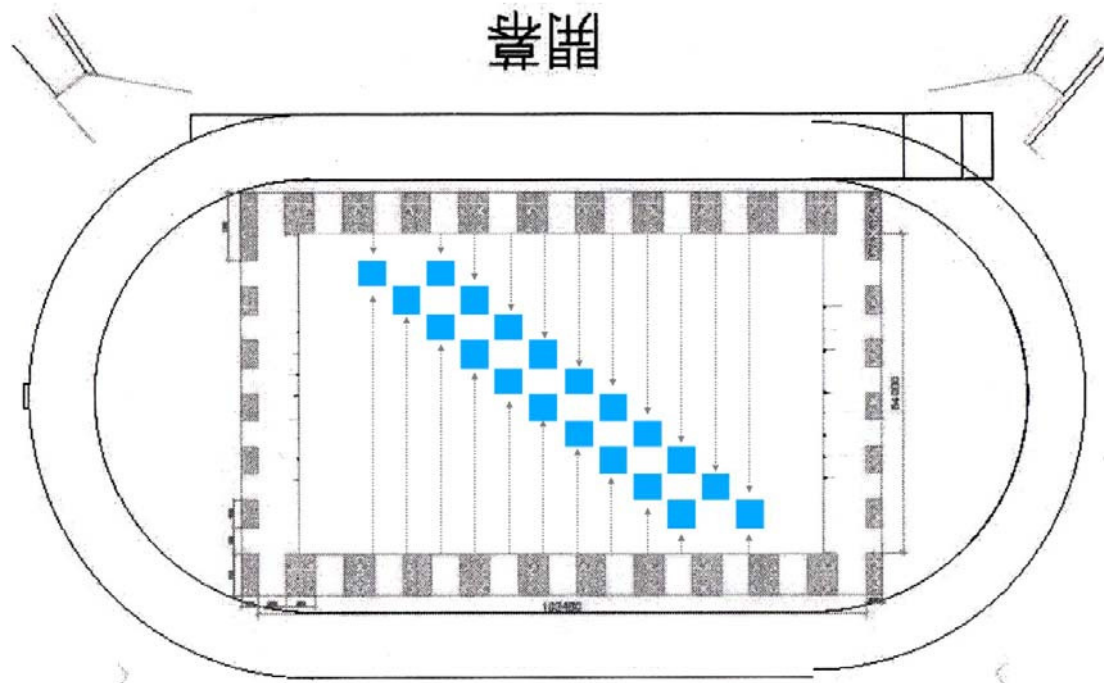
The Movement Choir concept borrowed from R. Laban was applied. Although the choreographers could not start his/her movement design until the floor plan was given and the number of dancers for certain section was assigned. The story line was clearly laid out and the notation of floor plan was provided before the dance can be choreographed. The music was not given by the set deadline from the composers in Japan and Taiwan in the end of December; the movement design had to hold later. The anxiety and tension were rising when the time became cut short.

The drawing of the pre-planning of the floor plan samples before designing the movements: (Drawing I, II, III)

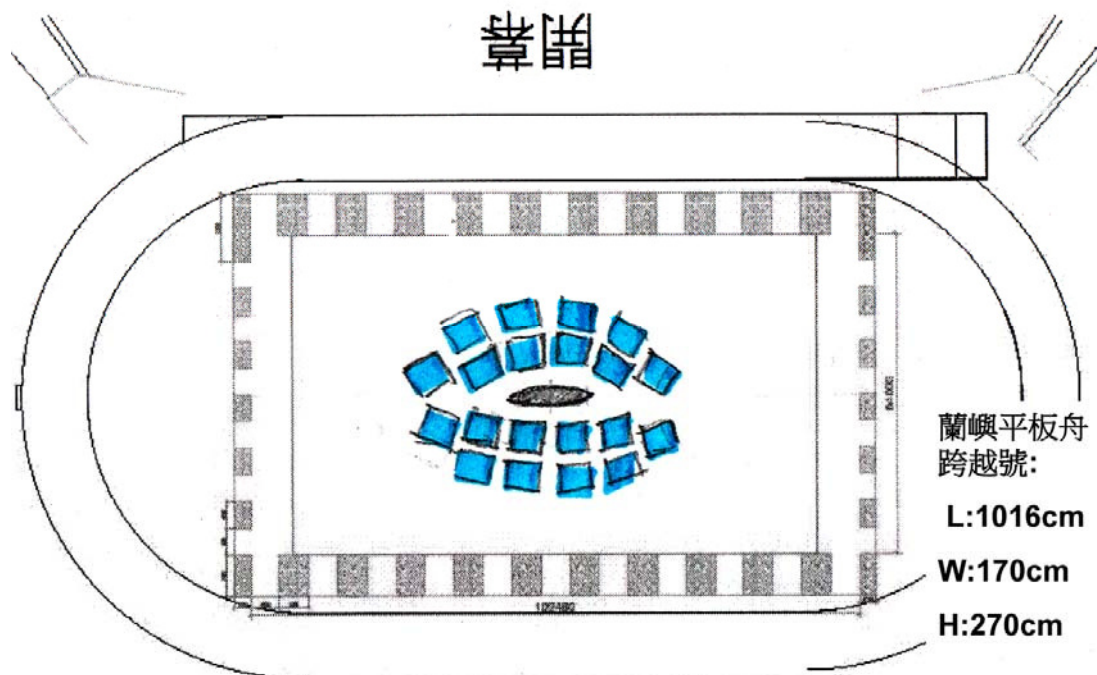


Ocean Dance floor plan (Drawing I)





Ocean Dance floor plan (Drawing II)



Ocean Dance and Aboriginal Boat Dancing in transition (Drawing III)

**Movement Choir and the Use of Notated Floor Plan**

It is not until after the Chinese New Year vacation is passed in the end of February 2009 that finally the dance team could move on but has to run with intensive

training sessions. To bring 1000 dancers in the same site rehearsing, it proved to be impossible. Using the concept of dance theorist, Laban's "Movement Choir" originated during War World I, the group was divided to five in five sites, trained by one choreographer with several rehearsing masters in each site. The concept of Movement Choir was given, although not necessary explained with its research background and its originality. The choreographers were able to follow with the understanding of the core concept of the total performance. They were sent to each site to work with selected performers including five universities in Kaohsiung. In setting the dance on dancers whom are mostly in Kaohsiung, it saved the transportation and housing spending in moving dancers from Taipei to Kaohsiung in the south later for the final rehearsal period and for the Opening night. The process of creative planning played vital part, not just for the art of choreography but also for practical reason in budgeting. Another strong reason for choosing dancers in the city of Kaohsiung, was because of the need to engaging the local power which will stimulate their own hometown. This again, a creative thought by the core team, proved to be very efficient and brought the audience to their high enthusiastic in the final show.

During the process, it is not without complaining. The questions including those - if those choreographers were doing so called "artistic" creative works and if they were the right fit for the project. Most of the selected choreographers are either the dance faculty members or the dance alumni of Taipei National University of the Arts, whom are already in the teaching field for several years. Others are from the professional dance companies such as choreographer, Mr. Li-chuang Lin from Atlanta Ballet Company and the dancer for the Final Love Duet; Ms. Li-ying Chen from Boston Ballet; and Ms. Peng-yu Chen from Atlanta Ballet. All were Taiwanese and are performing with those said ballet companies currently or left within a year.

Throughout the time, they had encountered questions to themselves, to the choreographer and to the creative team, and by the dance students especially those from the conservatory schools in the dance programs of those participating high school and the university. In the end, each of them felt fulfilled especially when they stood on the tower calling to their dancers asking for the perfection of the performance in the last three weeks before the Opening night. The challenge and the success were not without sacrifice and the respond from all joined, either creative team or the performers, was that dance is not just one way in presenting but as long as it has its own creative thought, commitment and discipline, then it is art. The choreographers and performers also commended that the project is challenging them in going beyond their comfortable zone in choreography and it has opened their views in seeing the contemporary dance in the future.

### Crossing the Other Disciplines

In addition to sharing the process of creating dance on such a spectacular scale, throughout the process choreographers encountered endless challenges, including crossing the fields within the arts and other disciplines. One of the tests was matching the music note that was specifically instructed by the design team to dance following the exact time period like the drawing indicated. The sample drawing includes the title of the program section; the music content; the final/ending time in second; the performance detail and even the time counting. (Drawing IV)

program	Kaohsiung Night, Star in the Air			Romantic, lovers		
Music second	0:00~0:34	0:34~1:13	1:13~2:24	2:24~2:54	2:54~3:27	3:27~3:58
Music content	prelude	1 <sup>st</sup> prelude	1 <sup>st</sup> main melody	2 <sup>nd</sup> prelude	2 <sup>nd</sup> main melody I	2 <sup>nd</sup> main melody II
Final second	34"	39"	71"	30"	33"	31"
Performance detail	sailing star shinning	Singer entering	In-line skater dancing	duets	duet	duet
Note	* Dancers in each said section should standby and be ready to enter and catch the first music note.					

Matching dance steps and music counts with the program description (drawing IV)

### Community vs. Academically Trained Dancers

Rehearsing with non-dancers from the community together with academically trained dancers is another aspect that involved problem solving and wisdom responding. Often the academically trained dancers would assume they have high proficiency in technique, should be given with such challenge. When not required, they overlooked the beauty of the simple movement, therefore unable to enjoy the process in the rehearsal.

After lecturing and explaining the meaning of spectacle dancing for the World Game in the history and its impact to the society, the professionally trained dancers in Taipei National University of the Arts were able to believe the mission and willing to work together the best of the presentation in such occasion. This result affected the total performance in both rehearsal process and in the night of the performance. The high school dancers in Tsoying High School had less trouble due to their age and the tradition of obedience that is the part of the Asia culture for youth. They were committed to the performance and held the believe of the honor of the citizenship of Kaohsiung where the World Game will be presented.

On the other hand, the community dancers, especially with large group, brought

chaotic which adding on the administration works more than the artistic need in setting the dance. The team had to communicate with their teachers and the schools, asking for the support in managing the group before each rehearsal. The time spent on both administration and on the creative process was a very demanding and was a special experience for the team. In such occasion, the dances designed were to avoid the complication and not with high technique demand. The movement was more on the unison side and was enjoyable to perform. In addition to choreography for those 1,000 young university students, a group of middle-age women that has been practicing weekly in the dance studio, called Mother's Dancing Society was gathered to prepare for the first dance for the Opening night. They are the most enthusiastic dance team in the whole performing groups throughout the whole process. Similar to Taichi in Asia or juggling in the west countries, people would exercise in the park, usually early in the morning or in the late afternoon. Besides Taichi and Chi-kung, the international trend brought many different forms of exercise such as ballroom dancing, hip-hop, fitness, international folk dance and any modern dance forms that are easy to execute for none-dance trained participants. The participation and the selection of 3<sup>rd</sup> section, therefore, are emphasized in having local people performing whatever the best for them. Hiding behind, the creative team was working on their wisdom in using whatever they could present with its power.

### **The artistic, the technicians and the politic**

In the past, lighting designer and theater technician are serving the dance and the need of the choreographer in the dance field. Occasionally, they work side by side sharing the design together. Since this event is in such scale, focusing on dance or just on music seems unable to fulfill the scale of "Spectacle", the focus has been switching from one to another by the core creative team in Taipei office for several months and the modification was done even in the late stage. The questions remain been asked after the show that if we had chance to try again for such event, would the focus be different from what we did in July, 2009. There will be no answer because the change from focusing on dance or music to spectacle lighting and enormous prop usage seems necessary and was requested by the sponsoring organization of city government of Kaohsiung. The Opening ceremony had to be enjoyed by those 42,000 audiences and understood by all viewers internationally. The artistic team, also part of the University, did not want to diminish the beauty of the artistic side; rather it is to present together the wholeness of the show. Still, the uneasy feeling of choices made for the final, remains after the performance.

The Opening night was a great success, the audience rise with their cheer every other second; the performance was broad casted live around the world; the YouTube

caught every detail moment of the show; and the endless commend were heard everywhere even till now and will be after the years. It is necessary to say that only with such combination of team works and the commitment by those three hundred team members from Taipei creative team, all performers and staffs that the World Game would be greatly accepted and appreciated.

The presentation will include films and demonstrations of certain dance movements that illustrate the challenges the choreography team experienced. The purpose is to share the collective experience, so as to provide a comparative study for similar events in the future.

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- Public Television Service Foundation, Producer. Behind the Scenes of the 2009 Kaoshiung World Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies DVD. Taipei: PTS, 2009.

### **Website link:**

Atlanta Opening

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sh6eyA9MuTs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAFhNobJABU&feature=related>

Torino Winter Olympics opening

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJbFRwCMAr0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFkICUk3KjU&feature=related>

Europe 2004 opening

<http://flickr.com/photos/mobreporter/158312730/in/photostream/>

EXPO 2000 parade

<http://www.luszc.de/expo2000/thparada.htm>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQbTMEupTpk>

<http://www.shademakers.de/>

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**BANAFSHEH SAYYAD'S *NAMAH*:  
Displaying/Displacing Feminist Identity and Politics**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper probes Banafsheh Sayyad's dances as displaying and displacing the tensions between politics and identity using the theories of nationalism and feminism. Born and raised in the Islamic Republic of Iran where public dancing by women continues to be banned, her family fled to London before moving to Los Angeles. In what ways does her dancing body displace and deposit sedimented residues of history, culture, identity, politics, religion, and feminism; and, ironically, how are these on display? I argue that Sayyad re-negotiates notions of politics and feminism through displaying embodied practices as spectacle, thus problematising their re-examination through these lenses.*

*I conducted an interview with Sayyad after a performance of her company, *Namah*, and Iranian-European musicians *Zarbang*. Through a close examination of her dances on DVD, Sayyad problematises identity/feminism and place/politics by weaving mystical Persian traditions and Islamic religion with American modern dance and performative improvisation. On display is the displaced female dancing body against the backdrop of displaced Iranian musicians. I draw upon the analyses of Susan Manning's (1993) and Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak's (2007) dance as feminism within the tensions of nationalism and dance as politics as a way to read Sayyad's works. The body-as-culture theories of Janet Adshead-Lansdale (2007) in which aesthetic and cultural moments are constructed and embodied in the act of performance are useful. Jane Desmond's (1997 and 2001) theories of the female body in motion further probe and problematise the value of this analysis; ie, the performative display and displacement of feminism, identity, and politics.*

**INTRODUCTION** *PLAY OPENING SECTION OF MIRRORS.*

Banafsheh Sayyad is dubbed by critics as “the ultimate Persian woman” (Baghbani in *Namah* 2008) who combines ancient Sufi traditions within contemporary dance improvisations. She was born in Iran during the Shah's rule. A few years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, she and her family fled to London as her parents are atheist and embrace Western ideas. Her father, an actor, theatre director, and writer, remains a noted filmmaker. Three years later, they relocated to Los Angeles where she took her first formal dance classes, even though she states she always has danced and always was interested in dance. Sayyad attended college and received her MFA in dance from UCLA. She tried her hand at filmmaking, performed in an ensemble and Flamenco work, and then finally formed her group *Namah* which is a pre-Sanskrit Avesta word meaning reverence and greeting, or more specifically the light within me and the light

within you (Sayyad 2008). I conducted an interview with Sayyad after a performance of *Namah* in Chicago with Iranian-European musicians *Zarbang*.

Susan Manning's ideological critique of nationalism and feminism can be a useful way to view Sayyad's dances as cultural identity and feminism rooted in religion and displayed through a nation's politics. Manning uses this method to look for "ways to conceptualize dance as a site of ideological contest, that is, as a cultural space" in which both "categories and judgments" of praxis and non-verbal ideas that connect us to dominant powers and structures are negotiated and transformed (Manning 1993:27). Her ideological critique is an approach to understanding dance as "social production" in which I use religion/politics as the ideological construct, and her definition of nationalism appropriated from Benedict Anderson as "imagined community" also is useful (1993:10-11). The body-as-culture theories of Jane Desmond (1997 and 2001) and Janet Lansdale (2007) further illuminate their usefulness in examining Sayyad's works. In what ways do her dances and her female dancing body display and displace tensions between politics and identity?

### **DISPLACEMENT: DANCING IDENTITY**

Sayyad's dancing identity is complex as it "challenges stereotypes about Iranian identity" (Ditmars in *Namah* 2008). Critics (Looseleaf 2003; and Segal 1999) have called Sayyad's work a "sensuous" fusion of traditional and modern Persian dance, Sufi spinning, Flamenco, tai chi, and American modern dance. Sayyad comments that since she is trained in these genres, it is only natural that these are evident in her body and expressed in her works. Although she is from Iran and is drawn to her historical and cultural roots, her journey since then encompasses a global cultural awareness:

"I feel I am more of the world. I belong to the earth, and so that a form of dance that speaks to that invites everyone. At the same time, it honors [my] roots to branch out and be a citizen of the world. So that's really the aim of why all of these are coming together. And on the other hand, this is what I really love. I love these forms and so they are going to come together because I am them, too."

Sayyad 2008

Derrida, in *Politics of Friendship*, calls this undoing of the connection between birth and citizenship the deconstruction of genealogy and questions cosmopolitan democracy (Butler and Spivak, 2007:91). In contemporary European society, Paul Gilroy extends this further to include the notion of a "cosmopolitan multiculturalism" that goes beyond differences in race and class (p 94). Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak (2007:33) suggest that the concept of "state" and/or "nation-state" can both bind and unbind to produce a certain vision, which is seen for example through displaced persons and immigrants such as Sayyad. Thus, thinking of a nation-state as a political formation is problematic since political control is unstable as exemplified by the current Iranian regime. These notions, along with Manning's 'imagined community,' are useful in understanding Sayyad and her works as she identifies collectively with her cultural roots



by performing works that speak of her Persian tradition. This is similar to German and American modern dancers such as Wigman, Graham, and Tamiris who danced both Woman and a connectedness to nation, “between individual bodies and the collective body of the nation” (Manning 1993:1). This further asserts Lansdale’s (2007) claim that aesthetic and cultural moments are constructed and embodied in the act of performance.

## DANCING RELIGION/DISPLAYING POLITICS

Although her parents did not approve, Sayyad states her early years and identity were influenced and shaped by her grandmother who was a devout Muslim. She brought a “form of Islam that was from the heart, and she lived that message . . . such purity” (Sayyad 2008). At a young age, Sayyad discerned that her grandmother’s practice of kindness, love, individual acceptance, and community contrasted with the harshness of the current government’s *shariah* Islam, and this drew her. The Islamic government’s open oppression of women, individuality, and differing viewpoints caused Sayyad to question true Islam and to reject this expression of it, both politically and religiously. Her interest in the history, ancient roots, and religion led her to embrace her 2,500-year-old Persian (not Iranian!) identity and Sufism, which she calls the “heart of Islam” (Sayyad 2008). Through Sufism, she found the freedom and expression through their practice of dance and music that was lacking in and is at odds with the government’s institutional religion with its external rules. This is similar to other women from Iran who have left or spoken out against their home country, such as *Persepolis* author Marjane Satrapi (2003) who emphatically identifies herself as Persian, not Iranian and resides in Paris; and formerly imprisoned human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi (1997) who was a judge and lawyer under the Shah but demoted to court clerk under the Ayatollahs and who chooses to live in Iran. I ask, in what ways does the relationship between politics and religion construct Sayyad’s identity and dances?

Sayyad’s spiritual forté comes from finding the 13<sup>th</sup> Century Sufi mystic Rumi, or as she puts it, when she opened herself to his writings he “let me come in . . . and is an amazing teacher” (Sayyad 2008). What are some of Rumi’s teachings and practices, and how are these displayed in her dances?

Shaykh Jilani, or Jalal-al-din Rumi (1207 – 1273 AD), was a Muslim who fused and compiled tales or “ancient wisdoms” from the Greeks, Jews, Hindus, Persians, and Chinese with a non-literal or spiritual interpretation of the Koran (Kritzeck in Williams 1973:155). The *Mesnevi* is considered his greatest work of “rhymed metaphysical knowledge” (Schwartz 2008:9). These tales, or parables or doctrines, consist of truths that are present in all religions as God is the source (Fadiman and Frager 1997). These are woven into a mystical, contemplative life called ‘Sufism’ centered in simplicity, love of God, humility, remembering, and meditation that sometimes included flesh piercing and drug taking (Kritzeck in Williams 1973). Today, Sufis’ acceptance within Islam is problematic. Sufism is regarded by some as “folk Islam” and backward, while others view it as cultivated, elite, and Islam’s heart (Schwartz 2008:7). For Sufis, a necessary part of prayer is the signature spinning in circles as it aids in centering themselves for meditation (Smith 1988) by inducing trance. Poetry, singing, dancing, and head-

whipping movements also are important as these are forms of embodied prayer. Symbolism is important as God is disguised in symbols to reveal Himself to those who believe. Whirling, as most commonly done by Dervishes, represents the planets revolving around the sun; and serves to remind one that Islam is a circle, God is its center, and the law is its circumference (Smith 1988).

Using Desmond's (1997) notion of the body as a primary text in uncovering cultural history, in repeated viewings of the concert DVD, Sayyad employs a lot of spinning in her works such as *Mirror*, *Axis of Love*, and *Prayer #7*. During the interview (Sayyad 2008), she expresses that she wants to make choreography that speaks to this internal connection and tension between physical and spiritual. She says that the whirling and head bobbing, what she terms 'reverential bowing,' in combination with the music helps her to go into a trance state. Something else emerges or just happens that is not of the habitual self but a connection to one's essence or source. Even hair "has a life of its own and it's not a limb that knows what it is doing" (2008). There is an order from chaos that occurs without volition, and dervishes do both of these movements for hours which itself is a sort of confirmation of Manning's (1993) 'community.'

Because Sayyad overtly rejects Iran's current religious and political ideology, her dances and dancing body can be seen as a site of cultural and political protest (Wolff in Desmond, 1997). Her dances are both implicitly and explicitly woven with Rumi's versus, such as *Prayer #7* and the opening section of *Mirror*. In *Axis of Love*, one of Sufism's core is a heart of love as opposed to the rules and practices of *shariah* law. She embodies this literally by working around and from her axis, her center which she states is "crucial" (Sayyad 2008). She confides that this dance is a prayer from the heart, and a spiral is happening internally which she takes into the body and structure of the dance, including the gobo projected onto the floor. This central spiral is also seen in *Prayer #7* in which the dances spin in and out of it (Sayyad 2008 and Concert Program 2008). She maintains a literal centeredness spatially within the work which parallels the centeredness occurring within the body.

#### PLAY CLIP OF AXIS OF LOVE

She states that the finish of *Axis of Love* in which she is turning and turning, then brings it into the center and down to low level is to show literally the midline of the body and her "feeling" of it, too. She further says that she is allowing the light in through the mid line and is trying to communicate that. All of her dances have that core which is "crucial" (Sayyad 2008).

### DANCING POLITICS/DISPLAYING FEMINISM

Sayyad is unapologetic for her expressions of feminism and femininity in her dances. My notions of her female body in motion come from Jane Desmond and Judith Butler. Desmond (2001) argues that the dancing body is not just physical but political, social, mental, thinking, feeling, and historical through the embodiment of space and time. The female body can be studied, as it is a plausible text (Desmond 1997). Butler (2004) suggests an embodied performance based on doing that involves improvisation. It is an incessant activity that unfolds without one's volition based on the agency of social and cultural norms that is actually "undoing gender." Using these two lenses, I argue that

Sayyad's feminism unfolds as a disruption or displacement of an American ideal of hegemonic feminism.

It is ironic and unconceivable that in April 2010 the United Nation's placed Iran on its panel on Women's Rights. During my interview, Sayyad (2008) remarked that the current Islamic Republic of Iran bans the public dancing of women. Dance does not have a high place in Iranian culture as it is deemed "lowly and cheap . . . a sexy display . . . what floozies do" – not unlike some Puritanical views in the US. There were ballerinas under the Shah but as she pointed out, this is a Western construct as her culture remains void of an acceptable dance tradition. Thus, her family was shocked and confused when she began dance training and pursued this as a career. Fighting against both personal and cultural associations, she projects a new kind of feminism not esteemed in the West, an image of the pure Sufi woman: strong and feminine with appropriate costuming and non-voyeuristic movements. Just as Manning (1993:xv) states that Wigman's dances displayed feminism because she "subverted the eroticization of the female performer," so does Sayyad. To Sayyad, displaying her dancing body as an object of desire is not her aim:

I don't want to appear like a sex object because that's a bad thing. Right now I feel so in touch in how I'm taking a step for women not only of Iran but of the Middle East and then of the world because we have limitations. In Iran of course the limitations are very obvious. Women have to cover, women can't express themselves freely, you know. In Saudi Arabia women can't drive cars, there are these veils that they wear that they have to be lifted in order to put a spoon up to eat food. Absolutely ridiculous. But I do understand that some women choose to do that . . . So now, cultural and social implications are huge and I feel I'm taking a step for women to really embrace their womanhood, to be the strong woman who is very sensual at the same time. But the sensuality isn't a weak one. Sometimes in belly dancing for example I feel that women are making themselves weak. The outfit being so revealing and then so much about pleasing someone . . . it leaves women weak and vulnerable.

Sayyad 2008

Sayyad subverts the eroticized body by displaying a dancing female body that is centered and strong, a "woman who's strong and beautiful and sensual and connected to a spirit and who's inviting you to connect with a spirit" (Sayyad 2008). She talks about Rumi's dictum to "unfold one's own myth," to find your passion, and particularly for women to express themselves and live freely. She states there was no model to follow in her country. Men have a tradition of whirling dervishes and of taking that onto the stage, which is a masculine construct. When she wore their hat during a spinning trance, she said she felt "bizarre" because she is a woman and that hat is worn by men. "I want to wear something feminine . . . [being feminine] is very important to me" and feels many Western women have appropriated masculinity, particularly in the work place, which she rejects as a woman. In her dances, she displays a feminism that is strong and percussive, centered, yet distinctly feminine with graceful "filigreed arm work" (Looseleaf 2003), "cascades of long, flowing hair" (Segal 1999), and sweeping gowns and veils "that would

make Salome jealous” (Looseleaf 2003). In general, it is a type of feminism that contrasts with Western hegemonic ideas of feminism -- that is, militant, abrasive, masculine -- and a feminist dancing body. This is similar to how Governor Sarah Palin has disrupted and problematized the notion of what constitutes feminism in the United States today.

## CONCLUSION

The value of this analysis is the performative display and displacement of feminism, identity, and politics. Like Manning’s (1993) Wigman, Sayyad embodies feminism and nationalism and creates a collective identity that is idealized. Her dancing body displaces and deposits sedimented residues of history, culture, identity, politics, religion, and feminism. Sayyad problematizes identity/feminism and place/politics by weaving mystical Persian traditions and Islamic religion with American modern dance and performative improvisation. She re-negotiates notions of politics and feminism through displaying embodied practices as spectacle. Sayyad is a pioneer in combing spirituality with strong-but-graceful movements within her cultural context, displaying femininity and thus problematising feminism.

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## The Spectacle of Mediated Dance; Making and Looking at Dance in New Spaces

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### *Abstract*

*Dance is confidently moving into different spaces, blurring the boundaries between dance and other art forms, venturing out of theatres to non-theatre sites and into gallery spaces. Dance is now increasingly transmitted and distributed via digital platforms through a web (screen) interface. In this new environment the previously passive viewer of dance becomes more active; able to choose what and when to view, to re-imagine and even mashup digital dance content. The traditional model of theatre dance being performed, watched and reviewed is challenged by a growing democratization and decentralization of dance. Our relationship with dance is changing. Does this mean that the spectacle of dance is also changing? This paper explores this question with reference to two related but in themselves unique dance projects. Each directs the spectator's attention to the object itself in new ways and to what the dance generates through its medium. The first, the Siobhan Davies digital archive, provides access to a vast body of work, mediated through the screen. Archive visitors navigate the archive; responsible for what they view, when and how viewing is organized. The second, Davies' gallery-based project *The Collection* (2009) reconfigures the audience's relationship to dance; projected and performed live. By considering how these projects alter our experience of dance as spectacle, this paper asks how these new spaces in which dance appears might challenge previous theories of spectatorship or generate new ones.*

### **Encounters**

Objects, screens, projections, floating tables, musical chairs, aural installations, mirrored spheres....making my way through the Victoria Miro Gallery, London, March 2009, I find myself wondering how this journey through static and moving objects offers a prelude to the living, breathing dance. What do these art works allude to? In their physical engagement with space, do these diverse exhibits provide a new context, a new frame for looking at the dance? I become aware of not only spatial but human relationships, histories of practices, transitions between states of mind and physical properties. Amongst the separate artefacts, which I know are here because they speak in some way to the intangible phenomenon of movement, I find Idris Khan and Sarah Warsop's three-screen video installation *Lying in Wait*; what are they waiting for? In an exploration of dance making mediated by film, Warsop dances alone in period dress within what appears to be a library of hundreds of books. Associations are unavoidable; of camera techniques, and of movement and archival practices.

As I climb the stairs and enter the large 'white cube' studio I become much more clearly aware of my own arrival. Others there before me briefly glance in my direction. Are they performing too, am I performing? Who is performing? Is this a performance at all? Dancers Deborah Saxon and Henry Montes are working through a gestural puzzle, not central, not quite peripheral. Handshakes and headshakes repeat over and over, everyday action made curiously

strange yet also touching. Though drawn to their insistence and particularity I begin to notice that I am unfamiliar with this mode of attention. I become self-conscious of my own presence. Do I sit, stand, move around, between? No chairs allow me to disappear into the mass of 'audience'. How close can, or dare I get? I try to notice who and what else is here, to tune in, sharpen my focus and my senses. A drum is on a stand towards one end of the studio. No one moves to play it. I am curious to see the choreographer, Siobhan Davies, seated not quite in but not quite outside the action. She softly utters numbers, voicing them to mark out a not-quite audible or visible structure, paying attention, partially absorbed in the moving; partially not.

The energy changes as Catherine Bennett and Matteo Fargion bounce into the first of several playful, rhythmically complex duets, some danced, some spoken or nearly sung, scores in hand, busy with not trying too hard to be in time, joking with the effort. Units of movement merge and collide in the space. I find myself smiling yet noticing my slight unease whilst standing. So I quietly sit on the floor and enjoy the new perspective on Matthias Sperling's languid, almost casual, movement monologue, arriving and leaving, arriving again, leaving again; a counterpoint to Davies' continual presence. Three couples, two partnerships, and one separation. Davies voices more numbers. I become more conscious of her self-consciousness in being really here. More visitors enter the studio and we, the watchers, silently greet them, our eyes momentarily diverted from the dance to notice their fleeting awkwardness, adjusting coats, bags, fidgeting. I settle in to a mode of looking that tries to honour this space, this unusual transaction, and the labour of the dancers as they continue to move through an episodic series of minute-long units (which I deduce from the title *Minutes*). None of us move very much, none of us cross into the space made live by the dancing. Otherwise neutral space, neutral air becomes replete with expectation and possibility. Some people leave and I enjoy a more intimate dance. I become more aware of my relationship to the dancers, now nearly equal in number to those of us watching - should I stay? If I leave will the numbers stop or run out? When it will end? I am nudged out of my unease by the dancers' departure. But where are they going? Where is the non-space? Can I follow? Do I clap? What are the codes for this experience? Before I have time to reflect on my thoughts about what I think of as a durational performance I am distracted by the soft vibrations of that lonely, errant drum, now playing itself. Those of us remaining cluster around it, happy to be drawn towards a single point of focus, united in our interest in working out what is going on. Who is the absent drummer? It is no arbitrary rhythm; the drum seems to be programmed to produce its own rhythm. I close my eyes to imagine this lonely sound as a response or epilogue to the dance. This is artist Anri Sala's *A Solo in the Doldrums*, described in the programme as based on an unseen dance performed by Siobhan Davies. Here is the immateriality of dance, the inevitable absence of the dance as its presence disappears into no more than the imagining of the body in time and space; the spectacle of bodies moving now transferred to a physical object. I need time to absorb, to think, to return again .....what do I take away with me, and what is it that the dance leaves behind?

#### Pause

I am looking at Siobhan Davies' work again, this time at home, in front of my computer screen. In simple clicks I can view hundreds of images, movies, rehearsal tapes, artist notes, sketches, diagrams, scholarly essays through the digital archive, *Siobhan Davies Replay*<sup>1</sup>. Nothing happens until I make my choices; navigating, selecting, collecting, game playing. I interrupt my viewing then return later; this is my own private space. What I notice is a screen choreography unfolding for me – not in the sense of screendance, dance for camera, or dance made for the screen - but a choreographic organisation of visual imagery, sound, text, memories and scores. Highly structured, the all important metadata underpins a complex dance lexicon. Fields become motifs; manipulated and transformed through my search operations and scrapbook building. I recall a recent conversation with Eiko of Butoh artists Eiko and Koma and her decision to speed up the



film of one much earlier work for their new archival website; explaining that in her view, 17 minutes of very minimal movement/stillness is ‘too long’ for the screen viewer<sup>2</sup>. By shrinking the viewing window and speeding up the movement, they were giving thought to this hybrid space of screen and choreography; they were, one might say, choreographing the screen.

I continue to navigate through the archive, making connections and inventing trajectories, much like Nicholas Bourriaud’s ‘semionaut’ who invents original pathways through signs, producing new cartographies of knowledge (2005, 18). I improvise to select, refine, discard and build. I am both witness to a digital choreographic essay whilst simultaneously active in my own choreographic choices. History appears to fold in on itself as I collect from works made in the early 1980s and from twenty years later; short sketches of dancers in rehearsal segway into carefully crafted ensemble sections from London Contemporary Dance Theatre’s early days of touring; telescoping past and present. Chance methods of discovery reveal unexpected connections to be saved, returned to or even shared with an online friend, now collectively choreographing my screen, her screen. This kaleidoscopic spectacle of digital code is at once really there and not there at all, much like the live performance, but it nonetheless seduces me into a new kind of relational encounter. I am reminded of Derrida’s claim about the ‘unknowable weight’ of the concept of the archive (1996, 29) and wonder whether the digital archive, existing only in symbolic space is therefore weightless. Can the archive ‘weigh more’ if more use it, do things with it<sup>3</sup>? My encounter with the archive is always to some extent interactive. It doesn’t act on its own; it needs to be entered, excavated, dug into and worked with. If I can cross from the monitor screen to studio, from the object to the body, from digital space to physical place then the archive might find its own gravity, its volume and weight, even if the familiar dichotomies associated with all archives remain (whether in digital or hard copy), those being the assumed stability and authority of the archive versus the ephemerality and intangibility of the embodied, lived experience. But it is the screen that determines, in Deleuzian terms, my bodily mode of engagement (1986) with the archive. Unlike Khan and Warsop’s much larger three-screen project in *The Collection*, in which dance is projected onto the screens, both front-side and back so I am surrounded by the image as I move in space, the archive projects outwards to me via the screen. Neither is cinema, which of course is the site for Deleuze’s consideration of cinema spectatorship, but following Michael Fried’s (1990) and more recently Richard Rushton’s (2009) critique of Deleuze’s theory, I am aware of the screen’s hold over me as I am immersed in, or absorbed by, the film/s of the dances.

My aim in selecting this textual strategy of writing in the first person is to find a way to foreground the importance of describing my own direct experience as witness, user, viewer and curator of dance to think more about how these environments might be changing our relationship with dance and might prompt thought about the ever changing spectacle of dance. In doing so I am attempting a move away from a visualist or to quote from Jay (1993), an ‘ocularcentric’ account of representation to draw attention to the various modes of participating as well as looking that are invoked by these two projects.

Taking dance into the gallery is of course not in itself new. Rachel Withers observes in her essay which accompanies *The Collection*, that ‘from the post-war period onward, visual art has comprised so many instances of works that sit between or combine cultural disciplines that one might, paradoxically, cite the deconstruction of disciplinary borders as the dominant characteristic of this era’s art’ (Withers, 2009). She goes on to examine how dance has entered the space of the gallery, citing work by Jackson Pollock and the more obvious early ‘dancerly’ interventions by Judson Dance Theatre and artists Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown. I might add to that list William Forsythe, Eva Karczag and leading contemporary British artists, such as Rosemary Butcher, Akram Khan, Michael Clark, Gabi Agis and Miranda Tufnell, amongst many others, who have also established a strong presence in the gallery, and in dialogue with works of visual art.

Viewing dance online is of course not new either. The current 'archival impulse' means that dance is now increasingly distributed via digital platforms through a web (screen) interface even if digital dance archives remain surprisingly rare. The efforts to preserve, retrieve, reconstruct, re-enact and recapture dance continue but those active in this work are now increasingly looking towards the digital world as a site for the preservation and transmission of dance, and as a method to assure the durability of dance.

A little background on Siobhan Davies; she has been at the forefront of British contemporary dance for nearly four decades. She has choreographed work for many of the leading companies in the UK including London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Rambert Dance Company, CandoCo, The Royal Ballet, English National Ballet— and since 1988 has led her own company, Siobhan Davies Dance. In 2006 she moved into her own building in south London which also houses Independent Dance as well as several other smaller arts organizations so has become a focus for the city's dance community. The same year, work began on the digital archive. Since that time she has moved further away from the proscenium arch theatre as a context for her work, experimenting with different forms and looking towards other discipline practices for collaborative projects. As arguably her boldest adventure to date, *The Collection* was taken to two UK galleries (Victoria and Miro Gallery; and the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham) during spring and summer of 2009. Davies' aim, according to the programme note, was to create a series of ambitious collaborations that looked at the interfaces of contemporary art and dance, where these worlds intersect and how they might inform one another; an exploration of the connections and disconnections between them. *Minutes*, the live dance work that sits within *The Collection*, is presented as a series of succinct pieces of movement, physical imagery and sound, performed continuously for six hours each day<sup>4</sup>. I would argue that this departure from her previous theatrical events both reinforces the specificities of both idioms (not least because of the ascent through the gallery to arrive at the live dance as central and unique spectacle) and at the same time offers the viewer a chance to contemplate each artefact in relation to one and the other. Launched around the same time as *The Collection*, the digital archive provides access (currently) to 36 dance works and another 6 related projects made since the early 1970s. Containing more than 5000 core assets, which generate more than 77,000 individual digital objects, visitors can view a huge range of moving and still image as well as text based materials.

*Minutes* enacts an unfolding, temporality. In marking its totality and individual minute-long units it retains a theatricalised formal structure of a beginning, middle and end - even if the viewer may choose to disrupt this temporal structure by leaving and/or rejoining. The dance continues, one might suppose, whether witnessed or not. The digital archive, as with all online resources, provides a quite different temporal experience. The user can select when to view, and for how long. Viewing can be interrupted; content can be rearranged, even mashed up (within limits). The dance has no continuance or closure, fluidly existing in digital code. But what happens to corporeality as real material in this environment of digital coding? As Johannes Birringer seems to be asking in relation to artists working in interactive performance modes (2006, 399), do we close the gap between the physical and the virtual in how we 'measure' the bodies of the dancers through the experience of our own bodies? When considered together, the difference between the analogue and digital modes of cultural transmission of dance as witnessed within these two projects prompts a reconfiguration of the viewer's relationship to dance, whether it is projected, performed live or distributed via the internet; and depending on whether the viewer/user is physically there in that place at that time, or not.

Over coming months, *The Collection* will be added to the archive and thereby augment or perhaps disrupt the screen choreography of the archive. It will then question again what it means to be a contemporary spectator of a work that is already in the past. Decisions will have to be made about what is archived from what has been recorded, potentially shifting the identity of the original event as it moves into the present, thereby acknowledging, as Auslander would argue, that 'if it speaks only of and to the past, it is of no current value' (2009, 89). Auslander's recent

reconsiderations of some of his earlier propositions as set out in his much cited work ‘*Liveness; Performance in a Mediatized Culture*’ (1999) looks to Benjamin’s notion of reactivation and Gadamer’s concept of the ‘fusion of horizons’, to argue that although we experience recorded performances as unfolding in the present, we nevertheless perceive them in relation to their origins, albeit always as understood from our present horizon’ (2009, 89). A digital archive could be seen as an assemblage of many originals, reproduced, as I have argued earlier, to create a new screen choreography. In technological terms, the process of digitisation makes redundant any notion of an original from which further versions are reproductions. Nonetheless, those of us who create digital archives have a responsibility to consider what ‘horizon’ might mean in a context where past, present and future effectively collapse within a digital environment and through the viewing choices of those who use them.

## Reflections

What I have attempted to do in this brief paper is to examine two very different environments in which dance takes place, and in this case dance made by British choreographer Siobhan Davies, to consider how they might reformulate, reconstruct or undermine the aesthetics of spectacle. Set within a gallery, I would argue that *Minutes*, as a focal point of *The Collection*, exists in a place between visual spectacle and no spectacle. On one hand dance’s arrival within the gallery space might be seen as exotic spectacle, offering the dance observer a new viewing experience because of the unfamiliar context; whilst simultaneously providing a different lens through which the whole collection of artefacts can be viewed. In a ‘white cube’ space, dance can act as a provocation; refusing to conform to either the values of fine art spectatorship or, as Withers proposes, holding the critical shibboleths of much fine art spectatorship at arm’s length (2009). *Minutes* is repeatable, highly structured yet open to the unpredictable by bringing the viewer up close to the action. The viewer is implicated in the performance, able to leave, return and ‘feel’ the physical presence, the corporeality of the dancers; thereby softening the boundary between performer and spectator in its removal of traditional conventions of the theatre.

The digital archive is not simply a library or catalogue of dance works but a curated ‘screen choreography’ which borrows from Davies’ own dance making strategies to produce a spectacle of mass content. But this spectacle exists only in the interaction between computer screen and user. The gallery may be a new physical space for Davies as she continues to experiment with new environments in which to make, show and distribute her work but the digital archive constructs a new kind of critical space which can be a catalyst for connection and interaction; providing new ways to read, analyze and interpret dance, particularly as it provides access to so much video material. Dance has for too long been regarded as an intangible art form, hard to capture in ways that can avoid being reductive. The value of the archive is that we have more tangible dance objects and traces, offering alternative modes of engagement with dance, offering new perspectives on the spectacle of dance.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See [www.siobhandaviesreplay.com](http://www.siobhandaviesreplay.com).

<sup>2</sup> In conversation, during a meeting with the Screendance Network (<http://artsresearch.brighton.ac.uk/research/projects/screendance-network>) at the American Dance Festival, Raleigh, North Carolina, June 2010.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Conan Lawrence for his thoughts on this subject, as contained within his unpublished conference paper, presented at the PALATINE theatre archives event in London, May 2010, *Performing the Archive: Reflections from an Archive-aware performance process*.

<sup>4</sup> Programme note; *The Collection* (2009).

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