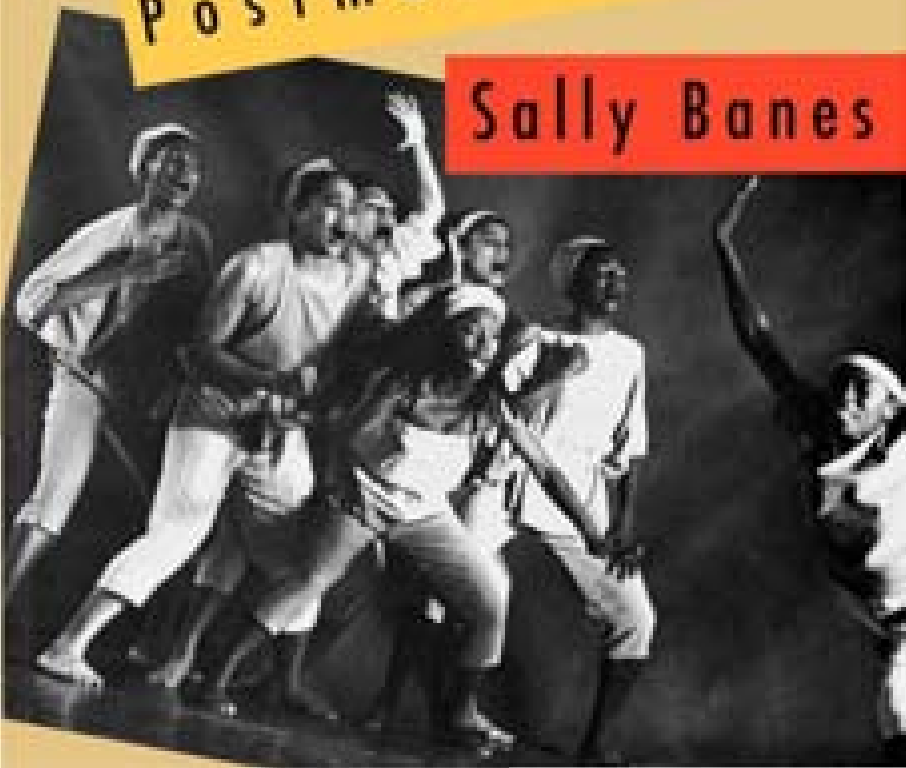
Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism

Sally Banes



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To my editors

Contents

Introduction

This book is a collection of my published and unpublished essays and talks on dance since the 1970s. I began writing about dance twenty years ago, in 1973. Suddenly, I found myself in possession of a contract with Chicago Review Press to write a book on contemporary dance. (That book became *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, a history and critical study of postmodern dance that was eventually published by Houghton Mifflin.) Although I had both danced and written since childhood, and although I worked for the Chicago *Reader* as a professional, free-lance journalist, I hadn't yet written about dancing. I mainly wrote restaurant reviews, sometimes theater reviews, and occasionally articles that pertained to feminism and culture. But a friend had a friend who was starting a press and wanted a book on contemporary dance. My friend couldn't bring himself to write it, since he had a number of phobias that prevented him from traveling to New York or watching dance concerts in enclosed spaces. Besides, he had a novel to write. I inherited the dance book assignment.

I realized that I had to become an instant expert on dance to write the book. I therefore wrote myself into existence as a dance historian and critic, training myself in public to look at and think about dance, in the dance column my *Reader* editor, Bob Roth, readily provided on my request. I asked him to name me the paper's dance editor so I would have some credentials when I, a recent college graduate, visited New York to interview the dancers and choreographers I planned to write about. He said OK. Things were that easy and informal then. A few years later, I had moved to New York and found three more permissive editors, Robb Baker (at the *Soho Weekly News*), Burt Supree (at the *Village Voice*), and Tobi Tobias (at *Dance Magazine*), who were equally willing to let me regularly trot out my research on postmodern dance in public. And over the years, there were more supportive editors: Joan Acocella, Mindy Aloff, Jack Anderson and George Dorris, Tom Borek, Thulani Davis, Lise Friedman, Michael Kirby, Alan Jabbour, Francis Mason, Erika Munk, M Mark, Wendy Perron, Robert Pierce, David Vaughan, Ross Wetzsteon.

When I look back on those beginnings, it seems to me I entered the field of dance scholarship by the back door. It was the alternative papers and

presses (and one unusual editor at *Dance*) that first gave me space in which to write about dance. Perhaps that is why mainstream dance has never been my bailiwick. Then, too, I grew up in the sixties and was formed by the oppositional culture that swept youth, art, performance, and politics all up into a compelling, vital, interdisciplinary brew. When I first turned to writing dancing, it was Jill Johnston, the *Village Voice* dance critic in the sixties, whose outrageous style and heterodox subject matter most influenced and inspired me. The postmodern dance, art, and performance I discovered in 1973 when I read her book *Marmalade Me* have preoccupied me ever since.

However much I admired Johnston, I soon opted for a more sedate style, and I have discovered additional historical obsessions — most notably, the European and Soviet avant-garde of the 1920s, and various facets of the African-American dance tradition. These research areas are not as unconnected as they might at first seem, as I hope this collection shows. All three repertoires mix forms, treating dance as inseparable from music, visual art, and theater. But more importantly, all three occupy an uneasy space in our own society, circulating between "high" and "low" art and between the acceptable (even desirable) and the margins. These, of course, are some of the terms in which we have come to define postmodernism and its roots in modernism.

If in 1973, when I began writing dancing, postmodernism was a relatively new term that meant something different for each art form (according to its own history and its own definitions of modernism), in 1993 the term postmodernism has come to define an era. Since I explore the meaning of the term in both dance and culture in Chapter 36, "Terpsichore in Sneakers, High Heels, Jazz Shoes, and on Pointe: Postmodern Dance Revisited," I won't rehearse it at length here. But it is worth noting here that writing dancing in the age of postmodernism not only encompasses what has come to be known as "postmodern dance" — the post-Cunningham, post-Balanchine, post-Halprin, post-Waring American avant-garde of the sixties through the nineties. It also includes the other emblematic dance genres of our era and contemporary ways of looking at and thinking about dancing. That is, postmodernism refers simultaneously to a historical movement in dance, the present moment in dance, and a method of analyzing dance. What is officially labeled as postmodern dance itself has changed since I began writing about it in the early seventies; it has become less formalist, more concerned with content — in particular with the politics of identity — and, demographically speaking, its practitioners have become more multicultural.

And those of us who write about dancing have changed since then, too. Influenced not only by Johnston's experiments in critical writing but also by Susan Sontag's essay "Against Interpretation" — a sacred text for my generation — as a critic and historian I initially staked out an aggressively

descriptive, anti-interpretive stance. I was also an enthusiast, a missionary for the kind of dancing I found moving, both intellectually and kinesthetically. When I began graduate school at New York University in 1977 to study with Michael Kirby, he reinforced the documentary approach. But by the early 1980s, like many of my generation, I found myself gravitating toward other, more analytical, interpretive, and contextual approaches to writing culture.

Perhaps this was in part an Oedipal gesture that let me differentiate myself from my teacher. But certainly the dancing I was writing about in some measure catalyzed this shift. A new generation of choreographers was injecting postmodern dance with manifest content of all sorts that seemed to demand interpretation. Around the same time, I began looking at breakdancing. It was an easy, even attractive critical and historical move to make, since I had long been interested in African-American dance and had studied aspects of it in graduate school; now the postmodern dance I followed was, simultaneously, breaking barriers between cultural strata by alluding to vernacular and popular dancing. Searching for a way to make sense of breakdancing forced me to take cultural context into account and led me into conversations with folklorists and anthropologists who turned my thinking in new directions. Further, a feedback loop between the two worlds of dance was soon established, not simply by critics and historians, but more importantly by choreographers and curators. A potent transfer of the imagery of popular culture and issues of political identity from one genre to another seemed to symbolize the emergence of a multiplex but shared postmodern aesthetic across class, gender, ethnic, and cultural lines.

The discourses of semiotics, poststructuralism, and cultural studies molded me to some degree even when I was engaged in criticizing them. Three key theorists of the body, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault, and Mikhail Bakhtin, have continually provided insights for finding ways to think about bodies, their social meanings, and their political forces. The analytic precision of semiotics exerts a continuing attraction, although my own approach is neither orthodox nor explicit. (Chapter 26, on Steve Paxton's *Flat*, is an exception in that it was a conscious exercise in performing a semiotic analysis of a dance, and it was first written for a course in theatrical semiotics taught by Paul Bouissac.)

The first section of this book, "Writing Criticism/History," is concerned with metacriticism and metahistory. It maps out certain options for methodologies of dance writing, and it attempts to raise questions about the political and social position of the critic and historian. At the same time, it is obliquely autobiographical, in that the arrangement of the articles tracks my own development as a dance writer, beginning with my tribute to Jill Johnston's criticism and ending with my most recent thoughts about how to write dance history in terms of the political negotiation of moving bodies.

The second and third sections cover components of the backdrop to

postmodern dancing. In "The Euro-American Avant-garde," I trace two types of modernist dancing: the first is experimental ballet of several kinds, from an anticanonical aspect of Balanchine's choreography, to alternative companies to the Diaghilev Ballets Russes in Paris in the 1920s, to the work of Kasyan Goleizovsky, a leading Soviet innovator; the second is the formalism of Merce Cunningham's modern dancing. Although we often think of Balanchine as a mainstream American ballet choreographer, in this section I examine the ways in which his interest in African-American dancing led him to expand and alter the ballet canon. This topic is related to the third section, "The African-American Connection," which traces African retentions as well as transformations in African-American dancing, primarily but not exclusively in the arena of breakdancing. Breakdancing is perhaps the quintessential form of popular dancing in the age of postmodernism, incorporating mixed allusions to the mass media and to high culture, and creating ironic narratives of personal and political identity. Thus the third section includes information on both the background and the expression of the postmodern in dance.

The fourth section investigates politics and popular dancing. Again, although the popular Hollywood film dancing by Fred Astaire and social dancing of the kind done at John Allen's dance house in one sense may be considered mainstream, the consideration of the underbelly of these forms prompted these essays. Astaire's drunk dances are subversive antidances, undermining the very canons of grace and agility he establishes in his main repertory. Allen's place specialized in the kind of dancing rejected by high society, catering to the seamiest sectors of society and introducing, through its sailor clientele, an international mixture of bodily moves. Finally, the Workers' Dance League of the 1930s was an overtly subversive movement. A left-wing cultural formation, it sponsored the making of dances with progressive political content—antiracist, antifascist, antiwar, and anticapitalist.

All these aspects of dancing contribute to the material discussed in the fifth section, "Postmodern Dance: From the Sixties to the Nineties." Postmodern dance has changed in many ways over the last thirty years, and these essays are arranged in an order that charts those changes. Once a predominantly Euro-American avant-garde movement, by the nineties postmodern dance has become multicultural in every sense. It is multiethnic; it advocates diversity of gender, sexual choice, age, and physical ability; and it includes within its vocabulary every available genre of dance, gleaned from the entire hierarchy of cultural levels. Further, it restores the speaking voice to the dancer's body. And it is a historically conscious movement that reproduces, recycles, and renews dances from different eras.

Perhaps to some readers this collection simply will appear to be a mélange. But I am convinced that it is emblematic of postmodernism, in a

number of ways. It is, first of all, concerned with crossovers between "high" and "low" dance cultures—the avant-garde, the popular, the commercial, and the vernacular. Moreover, it analyzes relationships between mainstream dance and its counterstreams, which contest, challenge, subvert, and undermine the mainstream traditions. In terms of methodology, my approach is postmodernist in that it has a tendency toward the contextual, historical, and ethnographic. It is also concerned with bringing the margins to the center.

This book not only reflects but also participates in the production of the postmodern moment. It is for this reason that in the title I speak of writing dancing, because it is partly through writing and talking about dancing that we, as a culture, collaborate in producing it.

I

Writing Criticism / History

1

Jill Johnston: Signaling Through the Flames

Jill Johnston is important to modern dance history not only because her writings afford us a vivid glimpse of avant-garde New York dance in the 1960s (much of which disappeared with little documentation elsewhere), but also because of the kind of writer she was. A champion of the avant-garde — not only in dance but in all the arts — from her first essay published in *Dance Observer* in 1955, Johnston chose subject matter, language, and structure that have profoundly influenced a subsequent generation of critics and choreographers who have learned much about dance through her writings.

Johnston's passions as an art critic (she worked for *Art News* as a reviewer from 1960–66) and dance critic often led her to see parallels between fine art and dance, or to use metaphors from the visual arts to describe choreography. She also wrote at a time when boundaries between various art forms were beginning to blur; and it seems only logical that her two volatile interests should have combined explosively to produce a cultural "cryptic."[1] Writing about theater, dance, music, happenings, environments, and art panels in the pages of the *Village Voice*, she both noted the intermedia connections (the sculptor Robert Morris's dances; the writings and influence of composer John Cage, Merce Cunningham's music director; Yoko Ono's performances; Fluxus and poetry performances, et al.), and made her own. In her critical writing she began, in the midsixties, to use forms and strategies analogous to those she wrote about: the found phrase paralleled the found objects of pop art and neodada, or the found movements of postmodern dance; stream-of-consciousness correlated to assemblage and improvisatory dance composition.

Johnston is often remembered as the dance critic who created a precedent for personalized, descriptive criticism.[2] That aspect of her writing, as I have suggested, suited the temper of her times. Yet I think a careful reading of Johnston's early reviews and essays (1957–65 — after the 1955

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essay she did not write regularly on dance until 1957) show another valuable contribution: a rigorous, analytical, yet generous approach to the avant-garde that still found room to acknowledge the contributions of the old guard.

Johnston's first dance essay, "Thoughts on the Present and Future Directions of Modern Dance" (1955), sets forth themes that will recur throughout her career as a dance critic. While vague (it mentions no names), often pedantic, and embracing an oceanic, organic-idealist notion of art — proposing that art has life cycles, like living creatures, and that those cycles are an evolving progression — the essay hints that a "rebel group" will revitalize choreography, and calls for a constructive criticism to meet the challenge recent dance experiments have raised. "Here and there in this boiling pot of arm waving, choreography by chance, egos in vacuums, and styles of all descriptions may be detected snatches of original inspiration, and an occasional work of breadth," it notes optimistically.[3]

Two years later, in "The Modern Dance — Directions and Criticism," Johnston's language has relaxed and her thesis is more specific. She names José Limón and Merce Cunningham as the leading exponents of two opposing tendencies in modern dance. In Limón's camp she puts Anna Sokolow, Pearl Lang, Ruth Currier, Sophie Maslow, and Natanya Neuman. These are the choreographers who will consolidate and extend the traditions of the modern dance pioneers of the 1930s. The other group consists of rebels — besides Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Sybil Shearer, and Katherine Litz. Though Johnston generalizes that this group is engaged in depersonalizing movement, excluding emotional subject matter, and breaking with the past, she finds that they have little in common apart from their strong individualism, and concludes by calling again for a new criticism, an objective criticism that will no longer judge artists by predetermined standards, but rather will "[penetrate] the style, method and content of its subject, *in the interests of the public it serves*" (italics Johnston's).[4]

It was the rebel choreographers, including also James Waring, Paul Taylor, Merle Marsicano, Aileen Passloff, and after 1962 Yvonne Rainer and other members of the Judson Dance Theater, to whom Johnston chiefly directed her own attention and criticism, both at *Dance Observer* and the *Village Voice*. However, until around 1963, even while delivering polemics against the old modern dance, she continued, in print, to appreciate the accomplishments of a Limón or a Sokolow in extending an honorable tradition.

A third essay, "Abstraction in Dance," written in 1957, further clarifies Johnston's sympathies by invoking abstract expressionism in painting and arguing that any discussion of the abstraction process in dance must account for the fact that it is not movement that is abstracted — "Movement is what it is" — but choreography. Through the organization of movement, the gestures become divorced from dramatic content. This notion of ab-

straction has historical precedents, from Petipa's ballet divertissements to Limón's "stylized decoration." Johnston hopes that her essay has made the term less mysterious and threatening.[5]

Besides these three essays, Johnston wrote seven reviews for *Dance Observer* between March 1957 and October 1959. Her first review for the *Village Voice*, published February 3, 1960, was of Alwin Nikolais's *Totem*. Her tone is still somewhat pompous. But here she has the space for discursive argument, rather than a paragraph or so for each dance, as she had at *Dance Observer*. The leisurely, logical, and analytical style she would use for the next five years is already evident in the *Totem* review. It opens with a paragraph setting forth its premise that Nikolais creates a science fiction of the dance. It then talks about the choreographer's style in general, giving only short descriptions to support a point in its argument. These descriptions summarize the action, rather than dissect the movements in detail; for example, "In *Reliquary* Murray Louis looks like a harlequin-skeleton-monkey in the role of a relic. He cavorts amiably on a bar (which must be his reliquary) supported by two impassive bearers." The last third of the review analyzes the impact of the dance; in this case, Johnston concludes that Nikolais sacrifices choreography for special effects. In this, her first review of Nikolais, Johnston is forebearing. Yet her patience with his work soon runs short. The following year she complains about his "shenanigans" and the "indignity suffered by the dancer in the role of prop for the props," the deadening effect of his predictably symmetrical shapes. By 1964, she has dismissed Nikolais's work summarily, conceding, however, the talent of some of his dancers. "*Sanctum* is a bombastic bag of noise and color. . . . The manipulation of props and costumes is as predictably naive as ever."[6]

After an initial enthusiasm for Paul Taylor, especially for his use of stillness, Johnston soon finds his style gimmicky and habit-bound. By the end of 1962, she pronounces the passing of Taylor's experimentalism, judging his distinctive style a trap. "Now it seems proper to stop thinking about Taylor as the man with the golden heel. He did what he did; . . . he continues to be an interesting dancer with interesting ideas; there is no longer a need to anticipate what is not a probability," i.e., that Taylor's future works will be as astonishing or important as, for example, his *Epic* (1957) or *Three Epitaphs* (1960). Johnston does not write about Taylor again until 1967, in a review that declares, "Paul Taylor is like one of those great-looking animals with a low I.Q. . . . Since [1958] it's been all downhill for Taylor. . . . [He] remains a terrific dancer . . . but he needs a choreographer."[7] Johnston's passion for Merce Cunningham's works never flags, from her first review, of the premieres of *Rune*, *Summerspace*, and *Antic Meet* (1960), to her comments on the first performance of *Winterbranch* (1964). (That advocacy continues in her writings, of course, beyond 1965.) Her commitment to Cunningham stems in part from his commitment to pure

dancing, a step both revolutionary and radical, in the literal sense. "He has *brought us back* to the reality that dancing concerns dancing" (italics mine). Yet she does not deny that his movements are expressive; rather, she celebrates the expressive intensity of abstraction, which "implies much more than a simple defined emotion. Which, in the end, is more powerful, more human and exacting, than the sledgehammer technique of a doubled-over grief or a chest-expanded joy."[8]

Because of the nature of Cunningham's choreography, in which the structures seem to disappear to set forth the dancing, Johnston is content to describe the works, rather than to analyze their workings, although generally she introduces the reviews with ruminations on how to look at the dances. At first she has difficulty evoking the movements; discussing *Rune* (1959) and *Summerspace* (1958) she can only analogize them to paintings seen as one passes through a room, to which one would like to return for a closer look: "*Rune* . . . contains some typically swift and dazzling passages, but the dominant tone is a rich, slow brown. By contrast, *Summerspace* is light and resilient . . . it has the quality of the speckled backdrop and costumes — something like the dappled play of light and shadow caused by the sun when it glints through leaves."[9] (Johnston's later renderings of the qualities of Cunningham's movement are among her finest, most concise images: "I have a vivid recollection of an 'incident' originating as a vibration in [his] thighs, transferred to the stomach, travelling upward to the arms and shoulders and exploding like a geyser at the top," she would say of Cunningham's dancing in *Aeon*. And of *Winterbranch* she would write, "The dancers move through the sound like hunters going calmly about their business in the animal kingdom of a jungle night. The sound is wild. The action is spare and remote. It takes a long time for a dancer to push himself the length of the stage on his back, the beam of a flashlight raking from under his shirt. Mostly I recall a beautiful tumble as they all clasp arms and make a slow, massive rise and fall of liquid branches following after a long stretch of flotsam burlap drifting across the bleak stage."[10])

By 1962 Johnston's writing style is informal, personal, still authoritative but in an appealing, if brash manner. With a review of works by Fred Herko and Yvonne Rainer in March of that year, Johnston prophetically announces that "fresh winds" are blowing from the direction of Robert Dunn's composition course, taught from 1960 to 1962 at Merce Cunningham's studio. (Herko and Rainer, along with Ruth Emerson and Trisha Brown, whom Johnston here singles out as interesting dancers in the concert, had been among the active members of the Judson Dance Theater from its beginnings in July 1962.) She identifies Herko's *Edge*, a piece for dancers and actors, as a "combine-dance," correlating his style to Robert Rauschenberg's in painting, and writes, "The movement of the dancers was large, lyric, unassumingly original. The actors thrashed, snarled, wrestled, and in general made themselves bigger than life in a barroom brawl. When

the dancers and actors were on together, the tension . . . made a charming uproar. . . . Mr. Herko kept switching tactics and if you think about it, which I am doing, it really was a mismash of styles, events, media, and it all made excellent sense." Rainer's static method of repeating movement fragments without climax or development—in *The Bells* (1961), *Satie for Two* (1962), and *Three Seascapes* (1962)—moves Johnston to quote Gertrude Stein on repetition: "From this time on familiarity began and I like familiarity. It does not in me breed contempt it just breeds familiarity. And the more familiar a thing is the more there is to be familiar with. And so my familiarity began and kept on being." This comparison was quite a compliment to Rainer, in view of the fact that Johnston herself was emulating Stein's writing style with increasing frequency around this time.[11]

With her review of the first Concert of Dance (1962) given by Judson Dance Theater, which presented works by fourteen choreographers in one evening, Johnston announces the arrival on the scene of a group of choreographers "who could make the present of modern dance more exciting than it's been for twenty years." It is this group, including Rainer, Herko, Emerson, Brown, David Gordon, Judith Dunn, Steve Paxton, Lucinda Childs, Elaine Summers, Carolee Schneemann, Robert Morris, Deborah Hay, and Alex Hay, as well as the older choreographers showing work at the Judson (Waring, Litz, Marsicano, Passloff), to whom Johnston is to devote the majority of her writing for the next several years.[12]

Johnston's stylistic innovations are present in embryonic form almost from her first articles for the *Voice*. There is a casualness and abruptness in her diction that easily segues into the later experiments with cliché, sentence fragments, and fractured paragraphs. She introduces the pronoun "I" into the first *Voice* review, and within a few months would be using it often, in a direct and conversational tone. By June 1960, she has already introduced a review with a long anecdote about her dealings with press agents—a reworking of Kafka—that prefigures the picaresque columns of the later sixties, in which her adventures before, after, and in between dance concerts are as important as the dancing itself. "Fluxus Fuxus," her inspired treatise on events by the neo-dadaist music group Fluxus, published July 2, 1964, is an early and nearly complete model of Johnston's later modus operandi. A single paragraph nearly a thousand words long, it begins:

> Fluxus flapdoodle. Fluxus concert, 1964. Donald Duck meets the Flying Tigers. Why should anyone notice the shape of a watch at the moment of looking at the time? Should we formulate the law of the fall of a body toward a center, or the law of the ascension of a vacuum towards a periphery? The exposition became a double bloody mary. Some Fluxus experts went to the Carnegie Tavern also. Fluxus moved into the street and onto my typewriter. Polyethylene and people everywhere and some of them have all these voices. Soren Agonoux said (that). The voice of being kind to your fine feathered friends. Put your favorite sounds in a

> tube and see how they come out at the other end. Be kind to Your Fine Feathered Friends was never so palatable. Take a loaf of tip top bread and try constructing a staircase. What did George Macunias mean by saying that "all other pieces have been performed whether you notice them or not?"[13]

Johnston's participation in the aesthetic revolution of the sixties was so direct that her style and method of writing changed drastically; she passed from writing about events passively observed to writing about her own activities at dance concerts as well as on art panels, in lecture events, at artworld parties, and on her journeys to and from these incidents. Ironically, her attempts to be true to the material she wrote about led her directly back to her self. A fragmented, visionary, yet matter-of-fact style, studded with clichés and puns, became Johnston's hallmark after 1965. It was that year, after her first breakdown, that she decided "[to explain] myself to the universe . . . [to] exonerate and redeem myself and hopefully plead the case for a visionary life . . . to shatter and reorganize the language for myself."[14] For this enormous goal, the field of dance alone was clearly too narrow; for someone whose writings about dance had helped to widen dance to include more of life, the only territory left was all of life. Her structures became fluid, open-ended, dense, full of compound words, montage sentences without paragraph breaks, and autobiographical revelations. Dance was sometimes still the content, but usually only secondarily so. Through 1968, "Dance Journal," as Johnston's column in the *Voice* was titled after mid-1965, was primarily about the daily adventures and mental processes of the critic-as-artist. "The artists were never pleased that I began to find their lives more interesting than their work," she wrote later.[15]

In January 1969 her third schizophrenic break began. Perhaps significantly, for the first time she was not hospitalized, pursuing instead a self-prescribed Laingian therapy, and continuing for the first time to write her column throughout the episode.[16] The "dance of life" absorbed her then and thereafter. She never again wrote arts criticism.[17] Finally, in 1971, acknowledging what had in fact become the subject of her column, she changed its title to "Jill Johnston." After she came out in print as a radical lesbian July 2, 1970, the columns became a soapbox for her evolving political ideology.

What Johnston respected in the choreography of Rainer and other postmodern dancemakers was a theme that in the sixties had preoccupied the work of avant-garde artists in a range of media: the matter-of-fact, the everyday, the objective. Just as pop art and, later, minimalism can be understood as rebellions against the subjective excesses of abstract expressionism, the revolution fomented by the Judson choreographers, which Johnston applauded and explicated in her columns, can be understood as a rejection of the theatricalization by modern dance of emotion, character,

and finally, human movement. It is interesting to note how Johnston's interests and loyalties gravitate toward the Judson group, paralleling her activities as an art critic. Like Rainer, Paxton, and others, Johnston celebrated "the heroism of the ordinary," as she wrote of Rainer's *We Shall Run*. "No plots or pretensions. People running. Hurray for people." It is this directness, this immediacy in vividly presenting the kinesthetic facts of life that informs Johnston's writing as well as the dances and other events she wrote about.[18]

Yet her criteria for modernity and progress in both art and dance emerge, throughout these early writings, as a curious blend of factualism and romanticism. Her advocacy of coolness, of paring down emotional affect, her attacks on the pretentiousness of "meaningful" modern dances and social passion, and her attention to the ordinary seem to signal a conception of art that values detachment and abstraction. Yet Johnston is not a formalist critic. She glories in, even mythologizes, the direct experience of "reality"—chaotic, messy, raw vitality of movement and materials unmediated by deadening forms. The trouble she finds with the ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*, for instance, is that it is too far removed from its roots in mythic fertility rites.[19] The *Weltansicht* Johnston sets forth in her columns implies a set of values for art and society of which form for its own sake is not a member: freedom, democracy, pluralism, modernity, attacks on logic and legitimacy, participation, moral engagement, honesty, the presentation of self as center of perception. From this perspective, she rejects ballet and old modern dance as tokens of a set that unites royalty, hierarchy, masterpieces, European aesthetics, museums, and even stylized symbol systems. "The aristocracy is dead and cornflakes are profound for breakfast," she writes in a review of Limón and Cunningham.[20] In hindsight, we have come to see that cornflakes and soup cans are expressive symbols too. Yet Johnston goes farther, calling for an art that "signals through the flames"—as she frequently quoted from Artaud, evoking the image of the artist as an ecstatic martyr[21] and projecting a romantic vision of nature and reality, and of the innocent grace of artists who can make life yield its secrets. That is a view as freighted with political and social meaning—albeit an alternative meaning—as the art of the academy.

Writing about Surplus Dance Theater in 1964, Johnston concludes, "This review is about process and reality, which reminds me of Whitehead, who said someplace that philosophy—and I'll substitute criticism—is the analysis of the obvious."[22] In order to effect that analysis, Johnston staked out for herself a new criticism both in terms of the breadth of her subject matter and the openness of her writing style. "As I see it now," she wrote in "Critics' Critics" in 1965,

> The land looks level enough to be a wide open field and I'm ready to run or walk on it without encountering a boogie man. . . . I'll take a plot of

level territory and stake out a claim to lie down on it and criticize the constellations if that's what I happen to be looking at. I also stake out a claim to be an artist, a writer, if that's what I'm doing when I get to the typewriter and decide that I liked something well enough to say what I think it's all about. . . . The future is upon us and the Art of Criticism has already come into its own in those public places where the critic is lying down on a soft piece of ground to enjoy a bit of blue and yellow scenery. . . .[23]

2

Working and Dancing: A Response to Monroe Beardsley's "What Is Going on in a Dance?"

With Noël Carroll

Professor Beardsley's paper is distinguished by his customary clarity. Many of the distinctions he draws will undoubtedly be useful, not only for dance theoreticians, but for dance critics as well. Nevertheless, the way that these distinctions are placed in the service of a putative characterization of what constitutes a dance "moving" seems to us problematic. This brief note will be devoted to exploring the adequacy of Professor Beardsley's proposal.

Beardsley appears to conclude his paper by stating a condition requisite for a motion to be counted as a dance "moving." He writes, "If, in other words, there is more zest, vigor, fluency, expansiveness, or stateliness than appears necessary for its practical purposes, there is an overflow or superfluity of expressiveness to mark it as belonging to its own domain of dance."[1]

We interpret Beardsley's basic point here as the claim that a superfluity of expressiveness (above the requirements of practical exigencies) is a defining feature of a dance "moving." However, in our opinion, this attribute represents neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of dance.

First of all, "superfluity of expressiveness" is not exclusive enough to define a dance moving. We often hear of the fervor of socialist volunteers, urbanites, who travel to rural areas to help with a harvest and boost produc-

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tivity. Imagine a truckload of such patriotic workers arriving at a cane field somewhere in Cuba. Some of them may even be professional dancers. They raise their machetes much higher than necessary, use more force than is required by their task, and perhaps their swinging becomes rhythmic. Their activity is expressive of patriotic zest and revolutionary zeal, but it is not dance. Here we have an overflow of expressiveness, and it is not related to the practical purpose of the event, which is aimed at increasing productivity, not at displaying class solidarity. Of course, a journalist might describe the harvest as a dance, but we would have to understand this as poetic shorthand, meaning "dancelike." To take the term "dance" literally in referring to such an event would commit us to such unlikely ballets as some sweeping infantry maneuvers and the dramatic tantrums of an adolescent. If a dance critic were to review these events, we would be very surprised.

Undoubtedly, a choreographer could take our truckload of harvesters, place them on a proscenium stage, and transform their enthusiasm into a dance. But in such a case, it seems to us that it is the choreographer's act of framing, or recontextualizing, rather than an intrinsic quality of the movement, that is decisive. In general, whether one is speaking about art dance or social dance, the context of the event in which the movement is situated is more salient than the nature of the movement itself in determining whether the action is dance.

Professor Beardsley's definition not only fails to be exclusive enough, but also falters in inclusiveness. There are, we believe, incontestable examples of dance in which there is no superfluity of expressiveness in the movement. One example is *Room Service* by Yvonne Rainer, which was first performed at the Judson Church in 1963 and again the next year at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Rainer describes it as "a big sprawling piece with three teams of people playing follow-the-leader thru an assortment of paraphernalia which is arranged and rearranged by a guy and his two assistants."[2] Part of the dance includes climbing up a ladder to a platform and jumping off. A central segment of the Philadelphia performance (and of particular interest for this paper) was the activity of two dancers carrying a mattress up an aisle in the theater, out one exit, and back in through another.

Although *Room Service* may appear similar to a dance Beardsley discusses—Anna Sokolow's *Rooms*—it differs from it in important ways. The ordinary movement in *Room Service* is not marked by "the intensified way"[3] in which it is carried out. The point of the dance is to make ordinary movement qua ordinary movement perceptible. The audience observes the performers navigating a cumbersome object, noting how the working bodies adjust their muscles, weights, and angles. If the dance is performed correctly, there can be no question of superfluity of expression over the requirements of practical purposes, because the raison d'être of the piece is

to display the practical intelligence of the body in pursuit of a mundane, goal-oriented type of action — moving a mattress. That is, the subject of the dance is the functional economy of a movement in the performance of bodies involved in what Beardsley calls a working. *Room Service* is not a representation of a working: it *is* a working. But it is also a dance — partially because through its aesthetic context it transforms an ordinary working (the sort of thing whose kinetic intricacies usually go unnoticed or ignored) into an object for close scrutiny. Rainer immediately went on to make another dance, *Parts of Some Sextets*, comprising a variety of activities involving ten dancers, twelve mattresses, and gears, string, rope, and buffers. Again, the emphasis in the dance is on the working human body.

Room Service is not an atypical dance. It is an example of a genre of avant-garde performance that might loosely be referred to as task dances, which have been made continuously since the sixties. The roster of task dances includes other works by Rainer, Trisha Brown's Equipment Pieces and her *Rulegame 5* (1964), and Simone Forti's "dance construction" *Slant Board* (1961), in which three or four people move constantly across a wooden ramp slanted against a wall at a forty-five-degree-angle to the floor, by means of knotted ropes.[4] The existence of this genre is an important motive in writing this reply to Professor Beardsley, because we fear that his definition is unwittingly conservative, operating to exclude prescriptively some of the most exciting work of contemporary choreographers.

Of course, Beardsley may wish to defend his definition by arguing that *Room Service*, and works like it, are not dances. This seems ill-advised for several reasons. First, the dance shares a set of recognized aesthetic preoccupations with contemporary fine art. For example, it is what has been called "anti-illusionist." That is, it attempts to close the conceptual gap between artworks and real things — a major theme of modernist sculpture and painting. In this vein, Jasper Johns reportedly has said that "people should be able to look at a painting 'the same way you look at a radiator.' "[5] Johns's flag paintings, especially *Flag* (1955, Museum of Modern Art), ingeniously implement this "demystifying" attitude toward artworks, since in certain pertinent respects the painting is a flag (or one side of one), rather than a representation (or "illusion") of one; schoolchildren could pledge to it with no loss of allegiance. Johns's bronzed beer cans or his Savarin can with paint brushes are sculptures that likewise attempt to narrow the categorical distinction between mundane objects and works of art.

The choice of ordinary working movement as the subject of *Room Service* is on a par with the "demythologizing" tendency toward fine art that one finds in many of Jasper Johns's pieces. Stated formulaically, we might say that "ordinary object" in art is equivalent to "ordinary movement" in dance. Now, Johns's work is (rightfully, we believe) considered among the major accomplishments of the art of the fifties, sixties, and early seventies. There can be little doubt that it is art or that his patterned canvases are

paintings. Why? One answer is that his works are the intelligible products of a century of animated interplay between art making and art theorizing. Since the rise of photography, anti-illusionist arguments for the role and destiny of painting abound. Part of the rhetoric of this theorizing is that a painting is essentially an object (a "real" object), like any other (for example, a radiator or beer can), rather than a cypher (a virtual object) standing for real objects. The Johns examples, as well as Warhol's Brillo boxes, attempt to literalize this type of theory by proposing masterpieces that in terms of certain relevant features are indistinguishable from everyday objects. *Room Service* bears a *strict genetic resemblance* to the above cases of modernist painting and sculpture. If they are full-blooded examples of painting and sculpture, as we believe their position in the history of twentieth-century art establishes, then *Room Service* is a dance.

Specifically, it is an art dance, since the tradition it directly emerges from is that of the artworld rather than custom, ritual, or popular culture. Indeed, it is an art dance in a triple sense. First, it is presented to the spectator as an object of aesthetic contemplation and not as a social or ritual activity. Second, and more importantly, it mimes (or, less metaphorically, transposes) the theoretical *données* of fine art in the medium of dance. And third, in doing this it is also in the domain of art dancing proper, since both the balletic and modern traditions of dance have always made a practice of exploring other arts for inspiration and invention.

In making this argument, we hasten to add that we do not believe that it is necessary for the anti-illusionist theories that form the conceptual background of Johns, of Warhol, or of Rainer to be true or even compelling philosophically in order that the putative paintings, sculptures, and dances be classified as paintings, sculptures, and dances. It is enough that the theories have currency in their appropriate communities of discourse and that the works in question can be seen as their consequences. We are assuming this on the grounds that a genetic link between an evolving artistic tradition (including theory, practice, and the cross-fertilization between the two) and a candidate for inclusion in that tradition is a prima facie reason for classifying the candidate as part of the tradition. *Room Service* is both art and art dance because of such genetic links. Indeed, insofar as it is even less ambiguously an ordinary working than painting the design of the Stars and Stripes is a flag, it is perhaps a more effective implementation of modernist concerns than the Johns example. In terms of our use of *Room Service*, and dances like it, as counterexamples to Beardsley's characterization of dance, it is important to iterate that these dances are able to articulate the modernist theme of anti-illusionism precisely because their movements are completely practical—a literal performance of a task—with no superfluity of expressiveness.

A related, though less persuasive, reason to believe that *Room Service* is a dance (specifically, an art dance) is that it performs a major (though not

essential) function of art in general and art dancing in particular. Namely, it symbolically reflects major values and preoccupations of the culture from which it emerged. In other words, it behaves the way we expect dances to behave. Its anti-illusionist stance and its disavowal of representation, formal decorativeness, and the kinds of expressiveness found in most modern dance (for example, Graham, Humphrey, and Limón) evince a reductive bias, a quest to get down to basics, to eschew the layers of convention, coded symbolism, and elaborate structure that "obstruct" the spectator's perception of movement. This search for fundamentals is in many respects utopian. Nevertheless, it does reflect a particular postwar mood—a positivist search for the hard facts of dance, bereft of illusionist "nonsense." Again, whether there are such hard facts is beside the point; it is the quest implied by this dance that reflects the temper of the times. And, to return to Beardsley's definition, *Room Service* reflects the values and prejudices of its cultural context because of the sheer practicality of its movement. (Interestingly, a Labananalysis of Rainer's nontask dances of this period shows a striking similarity between the efficient motions used in work and those used in the dances: a somewhat narrow and medium-level stance, an even flow of energy, and sagittal gestures—in two planes, forward and backward plus up and down—rather than the three-dimensional shaping, gathering, and scattering movements of much modern dance.)[6]

Admittedly, *Room Service* is an extremely complex dance, with several levels of symbolic import. It is not our intention to argue that it is not expressive. For example, it communicates a conception of dance, albeit a reductive one, and, as the previous paragraph argues, it espouses identifiable values. However, this sense of expression is different from Beardsley's. It is not a matter of the movement having intensified, nonpractical qualities, but of the movement implying certain polemical commitments, easily statable in propositions, resulting from the art-historical and cultural contexts in which the dance was produced. Here the propositional import of the dance hinges on the practicality of the movement; this level of expression, in other words, cannot be mapped in terms of an overflow of intensified qualities, above and beyond the functional. Though *Room Service* has propositional meaning, it is not what Beardsley calls a saying, nor is it a representation of a saying. Professor Beardsley's sayings are highly conventionalized signals; for example, a wave of the hand is regularly associated with "hello." However, we do not "read" the significance of the movement in *Room Service*, but infer it as the best explanation of Rainer's choreographic choices within a specific historical context.

Room Service might also be called expressive in the sense that the choreography metaphorically possesses certain anthropomorphic qualities; we have already called it "positivist." It might also be called factual or objective. But each of these labels fits the dance specifically because of the theoretically "hard-minded," anti-illusionist position it promotes. That the

subject is work in the context of a culture that often identifies art and dance with play also has expressive repercussions: the choreography is "serious" rather than "sentimental" or "frivolous" (in the idiom of the Protestant ethic). Again, it is the choice of unadorned workings as its subject that is the basis of its expressive effect as well as the basis, as previously argued, of its being recognizable as an art dance. Given this, Professor Beardsley's stipulation, identifying dance with a superfluity of expressiveness above practical purposes, does not seem to fit the facts of a major work of postmodern dance and, by extension, a genre of which it is a primary example.

Professor Beardsley's paper also raises issues relevant to postmodern choreography in the section where he argues that the basic constituents of dance are not bodily motions as such. Instead, Beardsley holds that dances are composed of actions that he calls "movings" and "posings." It is interesting to note that in certain postmodern dances and dance theorizing it is presupposed that dance is fundamentally bodily motion and that the function of a dance is to make the spectator see bodily motions as such. The motive behind this enterprise derives from the modernist bias outlined earlier. In brief, in contemporary theoretical discussions of fine art, the conception of a painting as an *ordinary* object easily becomes associated with the idea that it is an object as such. It is a surface. Thus, the role of an artist like Jules Olitski is seen as acknowledging the flat surface of the painting. Painters are cast in a role akin to nuclear physicists, exploring the basic physical constituents of their medium, as if plumbing the mysteries of the atom. The result is paintings "about" paint or, to change media, films "about" celluloid. This anti-illusionist move is also in evidence in postmodern dance. Dances like Trisha Brown's *Accumulation* identify dance as a concatenation of physical motions without any ostensible formal, conventional, expressive, or representational unity. *Accumulation* is a list of abstract gestures—simple rotations, bends, and swings of the joints and limbs—that are accumulated by repeating the first gesture several times, adding the second gesture and repeating gestures one and two several times, and so on. There are no transitions between gestures. *Accumulation* suggests a position about the nature of the basic elements of dance, a position which holds that dance consists of bodily motions.

The philosophical problems raised by dances like *Accumulation* can be quite vexing.[7] But in our opinion, such dances are not counterexamples to Beardsley's claim that dances are made up of actions and never mere bodily motions. Our reasons for believing this are, for the most part, contained in our gloss of *Room Service*. We have admitted that the search for the fundamentals of dance by postmodern choreographers is utopian. Making dances like *Accumulation*, which are designed to *imply* that dance essentially consists of bodily motions, requires that the basic movements chosen for the dance be purposively made so that (a) they are not straightforwardly classifiable in terms of traditional categories of dance actions (for

example, Beardsley's "suggestings") and (b) they are intelligible, owing to their historical context, as rejections of the traditional categories. In meeting the first requirement, each movement is a type of action—namely, a *refraining*. Specifically, each movement is a *studied omission* of the movement qualities found in ballet and modern dance.[8] In the context of the sixties, this sort of refraining implied a commitment to the idea that dance consists primarily of bodily motions. However, the movements used to articulate that position were actually anything but mere bodily motions. They were actions, refrainings whose implicit disavowal of the traditional qualities of dance movements enabled them to be understood as polemical. Thus, though we feel that certain developments in postmodern dance, specifically task dances, threaten Professor Beardsley's concept of dance, we do not believe that the existence of dances like *Accumulation* challenge Beardsley's point that dances consist of actions rather than mere bodily motions.

3

Criticism as Ethnography

About a month ago, I told a philosopher friend the topic of my talk for today. "I can immediately think of two important differences between dance critics and ethnographers," he said. Now this friend, the son of an African statesman and an upper-class British woman, grew up in Ghana, was educated at Oxford, and teaches at Cornell. Not only does he literally embody cross-cultural experience; he is also one of the leading contemporary philosophers of mind. "This is great," I thought. "I'm about to get a brilliantly insightful theoretical groundwork for a complicated topic. The talk is as good as written." "So . . . ?" I asked, taking out a mental notebook, and gearing up for some subtle philosophical discourse. "It's this," he replied: "Ethnographers get a lot more grants to go to *much* more interesting places." Well, here we are in San Francisco, as we know, the site of the first DCA annual conference outside of New York. That's already a more

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interesting place for many of us, but I doubt that any of us is here on a hefty National Science Foundation grant.

Ironic and lighthearted as my friend's comment was, one thing about it seemed to me a valuable starting point. And that is the hidden antitopic in the title of my talk. That is, if we are going to think about critics as ethnographers, I want to begin by looking at the differences between the two, differences that, as I will address, have become complicated in the last decade or so, when both ethnography and dance criticism have undergone changes in method and substance. I would next like to ask why this has become a topic—that is, why we are now interested in thinking about ourselves as a particular type of social scientist. And finally, I want to suggest where this comparison might (or might not) prove useful in conceptualizing in our own field.

In order to mark some of the differences between ethnography and criticism historically but briefly, I'd like to divide both practices into two stages: the modern and the postmodern, or, if those labels seem too problematic, the "traditional" (in quotes because for ethnographers this is, of course, a loaded term; I mean it here in its common usage) and the current; or, roughly speaking, presixties and postsixties twentieth-century practice. Of course, within those two large stages one could trace much more detailed processes of change, and I will talk about some of those changes, although in broad strokes. But it is still important to divide those two stages, for in the first the distinctions between criticism and ethnography are much more salient, while the second stage is perhaps closer to raising the kinds of questions we are here today to address.[1]

Both ethnographers and dance critics share a certain intellectual task: our role is that of a translator of sorts, one who translates, not between two languages, but between experience and language, between experience and (by and large) the page. In looking at the work of each discipline, then, we might divide it into two steps: the experience that is to be cast into writing, and the writing itself, or the event and its representation. For the ethnographer, the experience or event is fieldwork; for the critic, going to the theater. (Here it should be understood that I am referring to "traditional" ethnography and dance criticism.) This aspect of the work involves a number of components. What exactly is the nature of the experience? Who undergoes it? When and where does the experience take place?

For ethnographers like Bronislaw Malinowski, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, and Margaret Mead—those who, among others, defined and shaped the discipline in the 1920s and 1930s—*who* did the traveling, witnessing, and writing was as key to professionalizing the discipline as what they did: that is, data-gathering through intensive fieldwork, which became the distinctive method of social and cultural anthropology. Establishing the method of participant observation and naming the players (university-trained social scientists) marked ethnography off from nineteenth-century armchair

anthropological speculation by scholars like Sir E. B. Tylor and Sir James Frazer, on the one hand, and reports by travelers, missionaries, colonial administrators, and other such "men on the spot," on the other hand.

In dance criticism, there is an early parallel between some of the nineteenth-century amateur anthropologists—writers, artists, and adventurers—who wrote about their encounters with exotic cultures, and the balletomane critic. In fact, Théophile Gautier and his ilk not only reported on an alien world of bare legs and human flight for their readers, but were also close to anthropologists in writing about a genre of ballet that prized exotic, often Orientalist locales. But while we, too, have a generation of the twenties and thirties—John Martin, Louis Horst, Edwin Denby—who, in a sense, tried to impart more analytic rigor to our field, not until the present generation has dance criticism begun to professionalize itself as an academic discipline. Many of us work completely outside academia as journalists. But, over the past decade and a half, many of us have joined the academy, teaching both history and criticism, even establishing graduate training programs, and this trend has had the double effect of historicizing present criticism (more on that later) and institutionalizing dance criticism as an academic discipline. As well, the past twenty years have seen the rise of smaller-scale critics' institutes—sponsored by the American Dance Festival, the DCA itself, and local critics' groups—which, while not exactly turning working critics into graduate students, do have the effect of institutionalizing training and creating "family trees" of influence; one might even go so far as to speak of "schools." Perhaps our own field's long-standing nonprofessionalism—attracting poets, novelists, sports writers, philosophers, art critics, musicians, and even dancers themselves—has been salutary, as Edwin Denby once suggested.

Of course, one major difference between ethnography and dance criticism has been the locale in which the research is carried out. Ethnographers have been distinguished by their study of the Other—usually in what used to be called primitive cultures, in what we now call colonial or postcolonial, third-world cultures. Part of the point, as George Marcus and Michael Fischer argue in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, was the intrinsically comparative process that allowed the ethnographer to make sense of the strange by contrasting it to Western culture, and at the same time to suggest critiques of our culture by locating it in a field of relative values. This liberal project was explicit, for example, in Mead's studies of childhood and child-rearing in Samoa and other cultures.[2]

There is another, perhaps more conceptual, locale that has traditionally preoccupied the ethnographer, and that is the space of everyday life. To be sure, many ethnographers have described rituals and other extraordinary, even theatrical events, and some have specialized in one or another layer of cultural life—dance or music or economic processes. And yet, even those specialists would probably agree that ethnography is above

all a holistic science, that sense can only be made of those special activities or aspects of culture by rooting them firmly in the context of daily life.

Both of these spaces are quite far from those of the dance critic, who for the most part is an observer staunchly grounded inside her own culture, except that her own daily life is completely taken up with what for most people is an extraordinary activity—going to the theater. Even when she writes about exotic dance, traditionally it has been the dance imported to the theaters of her own city. When we read Carl Van Vechten on African dance, we are still reading about the New York dance world.

And, of course, this difference in conceptual spaces leads to another important distinction—that of one's research method. As I noted earlier, intensive fieldwork, characterized by participant observation, is the distinctive method of ethnography. What this means in practical terms is that the ethnographer learns a foreign language, travels to a different and distant culture, and spends one or two years living in difficult circumstances learning about that alien culture from the ground up. Going through this initial rite of passage is part of how the ethnographer establishes her scientific authority. She finds native informants who help interpret the strange practices of the Other. She lives the other culture, so to speak, like a child being educated in its conventions—eating its food, speaking its language, dancing its dances, and perennially asking, "Why?" And while she might not participate in every single event she studies, her observations from the outside are confirmed and validated by her intensive (but always limited) experiences of participation from the inside.

How different is the experience of the dance critic, who might interview the choreographer or attend rehearsals, even take a dance class, but whose skill and authority finally depend on observing the finished product across the footlights. A distant observer of her own culture, she is the exact opposite of the ethnographer who works hard to become intimate with a culture not her own. An ethnographer spends years with her subjects, and usually returns, in subsequent years, for follow-up studies; we may spend a season with a company—or we may even return season after season, studying its conventions closely—but many of our encounters are one-night stands and most of us cover a broad range of different artists and ensembles.

Once the fieldwork or performance is over, the next step for both ethnographer and critic is writing. Here, too, the differences loom large. For the ethnographer's genre conventions demand, above all, descriptive detail as a basis for interpretation. In the traditional genre of ethnographic realism, the analysis includes not only the interpretation of a culture's practices, beliefs, and values, but also a representation of the conditions of fieldwork, a novelistic sense of the conditions of everyday life, a holistic functionalist account, and a feeling of translation across both conceptual and linguistic borders. For the dance critic, a key element is missing here.

Like the ethnographer, we are also interested in contextualization, description, and interpretation. But for us those elements are but a first step toward criticism's raison d'être — evaluation. And while we might contextualize our artworks in terms of other artworks or more broadly in a social milieu, for the most part we turn our attention to Culture with a capital C; even more specifically, to fragments of Culture — single works or groups of works.

Since the sixties, both ethnography and dance criticism have changed. The realist ethnography of the functionalist anthropologists who dominated the first half of the twentieth century was challenged, in the sixties, by a shift to structuralist and linguistic models. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, looked for an underlying universal grammar shaping all cultural systems, and posited culture as a system of differences in which the meaning of any particular unit emerged in contrast to other units. Clifford Geertz's symbolic analysis concentrated on deciphering a complex network of meanings made of actions, words, and other symbolic forms. In the work of these and other anthropologists, the study of mental and cultural systems — of meaning — replaced the study of behavior and social systems. Linguistic models were attractive, not only because language is the central medium of culture, but also because linguistics seemed to offer more scientifically rigorous ways of studying cultural patterns.

The seventies and eighties, however, have seen new shifts in anthropology that are both outgrowths of and responses to sixties structuralism. Influenced by phenomenology and deconstruction, hermeneutics, Marxism, semiotics, and the various other forms of poststructuralism, what is now known as interpretive anthropology conceives of ethnography as a dialogue across cultural codes. A renewed and revised relativism stresses multicultural awareness tempered by a more modest view of the diminished global status of the Western perspective. Interpretive, or postmodern, anthropology not only moves the emphasis in ethnography from description to interpretation, but also, given the current "crisis of representation," engages in a critique of ethnography, from fieldwork (including what kinds of sites are appropriate or possible to study) to writing (including the use of political and historical perspectives).

Given a shrinking world, the complex influence of the West on non-Western nations, and the shifting global power relations since the sixties, the whole issue of the ethnographic Other is in question, leading some American anthropologists to study cultural diversity right here at home. For instance, in "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," Michael Fischer analyzes autobiographies by members of North American minorities.[3] As well, those shifting political dynamics and an acute awareness of the ahistorical nature of much previous anthropology have raised the related question of how to represent cultural difference, leading some anthropologists to conceptualize — even to write — ethnography as a poly-

phonic, reciprocal dialogue between scholar and informants, a dialogue that ranges over cross-cultural aesthetics, psychology, and epistemology. Such works range from Kevin Dwyer's *Moroccan Dialogues*, which represents barely edited field interviews, to *Piman Shamanism and Staying Sickness*, collectively produced by Donald Bahr, anthropologist, Juan Gregorio, shaman, David Lopez, interpreter, and Albert Alvarez, editor — three of whom are Papago Indians.[4]

A related question that also affects ethnographic writing is the question of how to represent experience itself, in the past more the domain of artists than of social scientists. To this end, postmodern ethnologists have experimented with stretching the boundaries of their genre, not only studying poetry, fiction, autobiography, and film, but also producing it. John O. Stewart, for instance, presents life in his native Trinidad in short story and poetic form as well as in standard ethnographic essays in *Drinkers, Drummers, and Decent Folk*, and Ákos Östör has made a trilogy of films on Hindu ritual.[5]

Both of these issues — how to represent experience and cultural difference — tie into ways that dance criticism has also changed since the sixties. Guided at first by the New Journalism and by *Village Voice* critics like Jill Johnston and John Perrault, a whole generation of dance critics in the late sixties and early seventies plunged into description and prose experiments of all kinds. In retrospect, it seems to me that Susan Sontag's call for a descriptive criticism in "Against Interpretation," which influenced so many of us, might have been an urge fueled by her interest in French anthropology; one of the essays in the collection titled *Against Interpretation* — "The Anthropologist as Hero" — celebrates Lévi-Strauss.[6]

Description was a technique that fit well with the formalist dance of the period, especially in the avant-garde. Now, partly in response to a decade of description, and partly in response to new dance in which content has triumphed over form, dance critics in the eighties, like their contemporaries in other fields, have turned back to interpretation. We, too, have been influenced by poststructuralist and feminist inquiries, although probably at a slower rate than critics in other humanities disciplines, such as film and literature. We have also been influenced by inquiries in our own field, such as Labananalysis.

As well, partly as a result of the temper of the times (with its refined sense of historical consciousness), but also partly because (as I noted earlier) we have sometimes made our living teaching dance history — while writing criticism "on the side" — our writing has willy-nilly become more historically inclined. Deborah Jowitt's *Time and the Dancing Image*, an iconographic history, and Marcia Siegel's critical biography of Doris Humphrey, *Days on Earth*, are two exemplary instances of this trend.[7]

Since the sixties, our genre of critical writing has been stretched by paratheatrical events, deriving both from avant-garde challenges to the

borders of theater and from a multicultural awareness. That is, our beat includes the ballet, postmodern dance, recent hybrids of the two, modern dance, tap dance, jazz dance, and musicals; it also includes breakdancing, capoeira, flamenco, wayang, kathak, ballroom dancing, parades, ice skating, possessions. And when we cover an event like this week's Ethnic Dance Festival, we're expected to write about a panoply of traditions at a glance. There's no hope of our becoming instant experts, the way we might if only one esoteric tradition turned up, a sore thumb in a familiar landscape. We turn to ethnographers, whose work it is to study the products of alien cultures, for some answers.

No wonder we are attracted to ethnography. As the boundaries between genres of criticism as well as art blur, and as a diversity of cultures presents its dances to us, we are tempted to view ourselves as ethnographers of sorts. For one thing, in an era of slippery meanings, anthropology is attractive because social science seems more rigorous than humanistic inquiry. (This, of course, overlooks the fact that social scientists consider anthropology the softest of the social sciences, and that anthropology itself, in quest of more rigor, turned to linguistics in the sixties.) Anthropology (at least, in its popularly known, modern version) seems to offer techniques more solid, more objective, more credible than our own highly personalized, rarely articulated systems.

Secondly, in the wake of sixties political consciousness, anthropology seems more capable of conceptualizing and embracing social context, especially the present challenge of American multiculturalism. Ethnography, like history, provides a bigger context for discussing a single event, even the kind of Euro-American event with which we are familiar. But, at the same time, it goes beyond history by seeming to promise tools for the more practical problem of having to write about dance from a culture not our own — a task that has challenged us since the turn of the century but that, in a postcolonial world, we feel a diminishing authority to undertake. So many dance and music critics find themselves opting simply to describe a performance from another culture — or at best to provide a kind of program note's worth of background along with the description — that the anthropological paradigm seems to offer a shot of confidence, if not real methods, to get beyond pure description. (And this, of course, overlooks the fact that anthropologists are also suffering a crisis of confidence and are trying to free themselves from authoritative paradigms.)

I can think of a third appeal anthropology holds for us, as well. In a cultural moment when the avant-garde seems to be dying, if not already dead, when the tradition of the new has been replaced by a postmodern pastiche of the old, ethnography (again, as popularly conceived) seems an answer from another direction for our quest for novelty. And I think this actually gets us back, in a more serious way, to my friend's joke. How can we get to more exotic places? If the avant-garde can no longer provide us with

originality and novel aesthetic experiences, where will we find aesthetic adventure? Perhaps in the dance of other cultures, even those that are subcultures at home. Perhaps even through the defamiliarization of Euro-American dance, as Joann Kealiinohomoku suggested in her article, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance," in which, as the title implies, she took the stance of an anthropologist from another culture, looking at our dance as a mysterious phenomenon.[8] Ethnography, as the science that uncovers and explains other cultures, seems to offer an inroad to unfamiliar or defamiliarized terrains, even though its method, participant observation, may be rejected. If this route seems to have an historic precedent in the ethnographic experiments of the cubists, the dadaists, and the German expressionists, perhaps we, too, are on the brink of an artistic and critical experiment, one that will, however, undoubtedly use ethnographic materials in different ways.

There is an enormous temptation, then, to view criticism as ethnography. But we should keep in mind that, as we veer toward social science, ethnographers are equally tempted to view themselves as critics. Ironically enough, we want to be traditional anthropologists, while they want to be traditional critics. But neither discipline is standing still. The rigor, the confidence, the authority, the paradigms, the access to and deciphering of the exotic Other that we would like to borrow from ethnographers are no longer there. But just because there are increasing correspondences and parallels between the two activities, just because it is sometimes useful to unite them metaphorically (as Victor Turner linked theater and anthropology), they should not be mistaken as equivalent. Sometimes dance critics depart from the usual role to write about the daily lives of dance companies, as Joseph Mazo did when he covered the New York City Ballet in *Dance Is a Contact Sport*.[9] Sometimes anthropologists study institutions of Euro-American dance, as Cynthia Novack did in her dissertation on contact improvisation.[10] But that doesn't make Mazo an anthropologist, nor Novack a critic.

I would be the first to admit ethnography's attractiveness, and I was trained in a graduate program that has been moving closer and closer to anthropology. In fact, when I first began to write about breakdancing in 1980, before the form had been theatricalized, there seemed no other way to even get to see it than to hang out in the Bronx, and an ethnographic approach seemed to offer certain advantages to interpreting an art form so inextricably rooted in its subculture. I may not have asked all the questions a trained anthropologist would have, nor was I even interested in recording all the microprocesses of these kids' lives. But I did feel that a cultural context had to be limned in order to capture the sense of the dancing.

But I would also be the first to admit that that situation was unusual, that as critics we mostly see dance made for the theater or uprooted from its context and theatricalized. And that is an important distinction. The differ-

ences between the two kinds of inquiries are simply greater than the similarities. Interpretive anthropologists are engaged in making critiques of their own interpretations; dance criticism is not nearly so reflexive. Ethnographers are moving toward a dialogic construction of cultural texts, but as critics we remain—and, I would argue, *should* remain—distant observers. Who wants to coauthor their review with the choreographer? But we are distant observers at home. Anthropologists work outside their culture, or as outsiders to subcultures within their culture; we work, for the most part, right inside the mainstream of our culture, and we write about events for other people inside our culture who share our expectations and values. Shouldn't there be room in the world for both kinds of discourse?

Above all, as I suggested earlier—and this, I believe, is connected to our writing as insiders, for insiders—we bring to bear on our object of study an evaluative purpose that ethnographers have historically shied away from. If ethnographers, operating from cultural relativism, refuse to make judgments—whether aesthetic or moral—but, rather, look for evaluative criteria outside their own experience, inside the other culture, our job as critics is constantly to internalize, refine, create, and apply our culture's criteria to our culture's products. We are less like the ethnographer and more like the ethnographer's native informants, who do the evaluation for her, using emic judgments, who lead the anthropologist to the best artwork or the master artisan, who act as messengers from deep inside the culture.

4

On Your Fingertips: Writing Dance Criticism

Paraphrasing Goethe on theater criticism, Edwin Denby once wrote that "a writer is interesting if he can tell what the dancers did, what they communicated, and how remarkable that was."[1] This statement sounds almost banal, if not obvious. But in fact it sums up several different, often

This material is taken from the forthcoming book *Anthology on Dance Criticism*, Lynne Blom and Susan Lee, eds. Used by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

complex operations that a critic can perform. These are: description (what the dancers did—what does the work look and feel like?); interpretation (what they communicated—what does the dance mean?); and evaluation (how remarkable it was—is the work good?). To Denby's list I would add another critical operation: contextual explanation (where does the work come from aesthetically and/or historically?). For the critic's job is to complete the work in the reader's understanding, to unfold the work in an extended time and space after the performance, and to enrich the experience of the work. This may be done, of course, even for those who have not seen the work.

Not all critics perform all these operations, for reasons ranging from ideological commitments to the practical constraints of their jobs. It goes without saying that these are not *the* explicit rules of our profession; many critics perform some or all of these operations intuitively. The purpose of this essay is to bring these critical activities to light and to begin an analysis of their role in dance criticism.

Evaluation pure and simple is the function often forced on the daily critic. This is criticism at its crudest—the critic as consumer guide. Here, for instance, is Théophile Gautier's review of *Le Lutin de la Vallée*. Gautier explains that what is key to this ballet is the dancing. "The work," Gautier writes, "does not exist by itself and could be described in four lines; but it furnishes the dance with an auspicious frame and that is all that is necessary." He does give a plot summary (more than four lines long), but adds that he considers this information quite perfunctory: "Now that we've done away with the plot, and we must give it this credit that it is neither long nor complicated, let us immediately get to what is important—to the dance." And then he goes on to treat the dance, in terms that are primarily evaluative:

> Mme Guy-Stéphan exhibits as natural talent an extraordinary lightness; she bounds up like a rubber ball and comes down like a feather or a snowflake. Her foot strikes the floor noiselessly, like the foot of a shadow or a sylphide, and each jump is not echoed by a dull sound of the dancer landing which recalls the marble heels of the statue of the Commander [in Molière's *Don Juan*]. Study has given her a cleanness, a precision, a finish that are rare nowadays when real dancing is neglected for voluptuous attitudes and precarious poses for which the partner is the pivot or the springboard. Her *jettés-battus* are extremely clean; her *pointes*, which are rigid and clear, never waver; and she has remarkable elevation.
>
> The *pas* that she dances in the moonlight with the elf of the valley, who skips on the silvery spray of the waterfall, is delightfully poetic. No one could imagine anything lighter, fresher, nor more nocturnally vaporous, nor more endearingly chaste.

Absolute terms like "extraordinary," "remarkable," and "delightfully" signal Gautier's approval of Mme Guy-Stéphan's dancing. So, too, for those

who know the style of the Romantic ballet, do words like "lightness," "feather," "snowflake," "noiselessly," and "vaporous." But also Gautier uses comparison and contrast to make clear his judgment that this was an excellent performance. The dancer's foot is compared to that of a shadow or a sylphide (the template for the Romantic ballet ideal); her cleanness and precision are praised as qualities "rare nowadays when real dancing is neglected for voluptuous attitudes and precarious poses."

About the choreography, Gautier gives us only this much description, then quickly returns to his evaluative mode:

> While the girl balances in a pose of innocence and love, the elf bounds about, hovers, and traces around her circles of benevolent magic. It is charming. To be able to compose such a dance and to execute it, one has to be Saint-Léon, an exquisite intelligence served by hamstrings of steel; one has to have both mind and legs, rare attributes, even when separated.[2]

To be sure, Gautier couches his evaluation of Guy-Stéphan's dancing in metaphors that supply some description—at least of the feeling qualities, energy, and texture of the dancing. It is light, resilient, and delicate. But of the choreography—the movements, phrasing, floor patterns, and overall structure of the ballet—we learn very little.

It may be that ballet—because it is founded on a conservative, academic tradition that foregrounds the dancer over movement invention—prompts an evaluation of the performance and the performer herself. After all, the choreography of classical ballet no longer needs to be described, interpreted, or evaluated in our day, since both the ballets in the repertory and the general vocabulary of steps are so familiar. It is presumed that the choreography is a known (and perhaps already evaluated) quantity—even if it isn't. So what seems to remain to be evaluated is the performance—which usually comes down to the dancers' dancing. Even in Gautier's day, as he notes, the plot of the ballet—and, he implies, even the choreography itself—was just an excuse for pure dancing. That was what the interested spectator came to see and the critic to judge. But, in fact, dance history, criticism, and theory have suffered from this propensity—carried to an extreme by balletomane critics—to render verdicts simply on the dancer's performance.

Clearly, evaluation may be applied to choreography as well as to performance. Historically, the emergence of modern dance and modern ballet raised new issues to be approached in evaluating choreography, bringing dance criticism into the twentieth century. Yet even choreographic evaluation may become too exclusive a preoccupation. Here, for instance, is an even more radical example of pure evaluation in Clive Barnes's rave review of Paul Taylor's *Arden Court*:

> Someone once described a critic as [a] person who stood in front of a work of genius and made noises. Last night at the City Center I myself

had the privilege of standing — in fairness they gave me a seat — in front of a work of genius. . . .

My one problem is how I'm going to take dance all that seriously after Paul Taylor's *Arden Court*. I am convinced that this is one of the seminal works of our time.

Dancers leap — and my God how they leap — twirl, and oddly enough coquette, before your very eyes. Taylor has created many good, even great ballets, but *Arden Court* represents something new, not simply in Taylor's career, but something extraordinary in the history of dance.[3]

The superlatives are piled on: "a work of genius," "one of the seminal works of our time," surpassing Taylor's previous "great ballets," "something extraordinary in the history of dance." In fact, the critic himself is moved to remark on his inability to express himself adequately, giving the reader the impression that even these superlatives are not lavish enough. (By contrast, but in the same vein, Louis Horst's notorious "blank" review of Paul Taylor's 1957 minimalist concert seemed to carry a purely negative evaluative message.) In terms of the four critical operations, both Gautier and Barnes exemplify an extreme position. Both these reviews are primarily evaluative. They are so meager in the way of description, interpretation, and contextualization that I believe they may be counted as purely evaluative reviews.

Now evaluation — making judgments — is a crucial responsibility of any critic. But if that is all there is, a review is bound to fail. What's wrong with pure evaluation? It doesn't contribute to an understanding of the work because it supplies no grounds to support the evaluative argument. Unless the reader has already seen the dance, she must rely on the critic's pronouncement. She never *sees* the work in the review, and therefore has no way of knowing whether or not she agrees with the critic's judgment. While this method is often employed by the daily critic, it in fact conflicts with one of the basic functions of a daily paper. For most of the paper's readers will not have seen the dance performance in question and will find pure evaluation simply incomprehensible. Moreover, dance — unlike theater with its long runs — usually has a short box-office life. A particular work has either a one-night or a one- or two-weekend run, or it is shown only a few times during a season. Since dance disappears relatively quickly in the culture business, on the most practical level the aspiration to serve as a consumer guide is thus rarely the most fruitful one for dance criticism.

Let us turn now to a "pure" example of another critical operation: *interpretation*. By this process the critic tells what she thinks the dance means, performing a hermeneutic procedure that plumbs the connotations and denotations of the movements and their designs. In the following review of several new ballets, Jack Anderson seems above all concerned to allot the short space he has for each piece to a reading of the dance's significance:

> Jennifer Banks, of the New Jersey Ballet, and Albert Evans, of the New York City Ballet, seldom touched during much of their pas de deux. When they did, they soon broke apart, as if happy to be free. Even when complex lifts and balances required them to cooperate closely, they still appeared ready to assert their independence. . . .
>
> Patrick Corbin, of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, surely had serious ideas in mind when he created "Psychedelic Six Pack," to recordings by the Beatles, Jefferson Airplane, Donovan, Pink Floyd and Jimi Hendrix. A scrapbook of images of the 1960's, the choreography included intentionally disconnected movements that presumably symbolized the effects of drugs. A scene in which a chained figure was freed may have referred to civil rights struggles and an all-male sequence was a reminder that the 60's saw the beginning of the gay liberation movement. But these vignettes remained snapshots in an old scrapbook, for Mr. Corbin never revealed what personal significance they had for him today.[4]

Interpretation is often difficult in dance, since movements, unlike words, have few combinatory rules that guarantee a clear, unambiguous communication of ideas. Dance is unlike verbal language, for it usually creates meaning only vaguely. When it becomes more specific, it tends to move into the realm of pantomime or sign language, or even to introduce verbal language. Therefore the hermeneutic task the critic fulfills is an important one. One can see, as well, why in a concert by young choreographers a sympathetic critic might be more concerned with understanding the dances than with passing judgment on them. However, interpretation alone is as baffling as evaluation alone. In Anderson's review, description only comes as part of a decoding operation. We know, for instance, that the dancers in the pas de deux broke apart, lifted and were lifted, and balanced. But we don't know exactly what movements they did or what movement qualities they used—in other words, how they did these general things differently than in any other pas de deux. Context here, too, is kept to a minimum, primarily surfacing in the identification of dancers and choreographers according to the dance companies they work for. As well, Anderson avoids evaluation. Except for the opening paragraph, in which he notes that "whereas the evening's ballets always had polished surfaces, they sometimes lacked choreographic depth," and the very last sentence quoted above, we know very little about his opinion of these dances and dancers.

An opposite approach to both pure evaluation and pure interpretation in criticism is pure *description*. In arts criticism generally, description was often used in the 1960s as an antidote to what was seen as an overemphasis by previous generations on evaluation and literary interpretation. In dance, this approach to criticism fit well with certain dominant and emerging choreographic practices. For instance, although they were unlike in other respects, both Cunningham and the generation of early postmodern dancers that followed and rebelled against Cunningham refused to

pinpoint meaning in their dances. Yvonne Rainer, for instance, aimed at making dance that was factual, "objective," nonstylized, and nonillusionistic.[5] The postmodern dancers deliberately undercut evaluation—of dancers, for instance, by using untrained performers. And, faced with new aesthetic ground that broke previous standards of taste, critics were willing to suspend judgment. This approach in criticism was akin to the artistic practice in film of *cinema verité*—the notion of a noninterpretive, nonevaluative, objective camera that simply records reality without imposing a point of view. And this domestic approach to culture, so to speak, also fit with a post-World War II, relativistic, anthropological approach to comparative cultures that eschewed judgment regarding alien cultural practices. For the most part, artists were not literally likened to the makers of cultural artifacts in distant cultures, but the same values of nonintervention and nonjudgmental appreciation of the world's variety of art held forth in the avant-garde and its critical discourse.[6]

Susan Sontag dispatched her famous rallying cry for descriptive criticism in her 1964 essay "Against Interpretation."

> Like the fumes of the automobile and of heavy industry which befoul the urban atmosphere, the effusion of interpretations of art today poisons our sensibilities.
>
> . . . Interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art [at the expense of energy and sensual capability].
>
> Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect upon the world.[7]

Sontag calls for descriptive criticism in order to "reveal the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it." Critics must stop searching for content in art, she argues, in order to be able to see the work at all. Indeed, she complains, the critic's search for content perpetuates the myth that artworks have content. Both interpretation and evaluation, it was felt during this period, were hierarchical and authoritarian, closing off alternative meanings and values, but above all, as Sontag suggests, denying the physical, sensory pleasures of art. Description was meant to recreate the work by representing it in all its physical detail.

In the 1970s, *The Drama Review* under the editorship of Michael Kirby was particularly active in promoting this "objective" type of descriptive criticism. It also vigorously documented the analytic, gallery-connected phase of postmodern dance.[8] Burt Barr's 1979 review of David Gordon's dance *What Happened* is an exemplary piece of the type of descriptive dance criticism *TDR* offered. I quote this review at length to give the reader a sense of how full and fine-grained Barr's description is:

> David Gordon's dance piece, *What Happened*, opened at the American Theatre Lab, in September, 1978.
>
> The stage is well-lighted when seven women enter. Some of the women are wearing white walking shorts with kneesocks, others are in

white pants, and all are wearing white tops. Across the width and depth of the stage dancers take random positions, paces away from one another. They face the audience, looking straight ahead, arms at their sides—a group of women simply being themselves.

A car being started is heard; the car moves away, then there is a crash, followed by police and ambulance sirens. When the sound of sirens dies in the distance, the women begin speaking and moving, the stage is awash in words and gestures.

Over the sweeping view of the stage the dancers turn and pivot, some take steps, all of them talk, gesture, but none leave the given spheres in which they began. Each dancer is performing full-out, the movements crisp and short, the words loud and distinct. Singling out one performer, then others, certain words are heard: an old man . . . a baby . . . an old friend . . . not an old man but a grandfather.

What Happened is composed of seven different but similar stories. In each story there are words and passages common to all of them, thus certain words are heard many times and the same movements, dependent on the words, are seen repeatedly. When a dancer utters the words "the old man," she bends forward, places her hands on the small of her back, then points to herself. For the word "baby," another common word, a dancer links her arms together as if cradling a baby and rocks them back and forth. The word "friend" is shown by a performer who extends her arm as if to drape it around someone's shoulder, then her hand droops and swoops downward into the gesture for a handshake. Also there are movements related to the sound of a word and not its meaning. "Avail" is depicted by a dancer drawing her hands downward over her face. The word "way" is shown by two cupped hands, palms up, going up and down as if weighing something. The word "would" is shown by a dancer touching the wood floor.[9]

Again, this review is helpful as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough. What's wrong with pure description? It doesn't provide a structure for thinking about the work or for understanding it. Certainly it is useful to future dance historians or reconstructors to pile on the descriptive detail. But, in terms of helping the contemporary reader understand the work, it leaves one in suspense. What do we do with the work after we are able, thanks to a detailed description, to see it clearly? In fact, contra Sontag, it seems to me that often, the more description, the harder it becomes actually to see the work. That is, the more trees, the more elusive the shape of the forest becomes.[10] It's useful—indeed, I would argue necessary—to have *some* description. But a description needs to be shaped by conceptual categories in order to have meaning. It needs to be hooked at least to interpretive machinery, if not to evaluative and contextual frameworks as well.

As with evaluation, there are different aspects of a performance that may be described. And again, these aspects seem to be distributed logically

according to genre. In modern and postmodern dance, the critic must often describe not only the design of the choreography, but the movements themselves, since the vocabulary may not be a given. Ballet critics use description, too. But often they focus on the dancers, and even on the dancers' bodies, since ballet is built on a bodily canon that demands homogeneous standards of perfection. This review by Arlene Croce of the Bolshoi Ballet certainly includes the other critical operations. In this excerpt her description is interwoven with interpretation and evaluation. But her characterization of Nadezhda Pavlova's dancing is particularly interesting here because of the close attention she pays to the dancer's body—and to how the ballerina's body itself creates meaning. Her description is extremely rich, and, like Barr, she has the space to go into full detail:

> Physically, Pavlova is a well-shaped, small girl with abnormal leg extensions and feet. Maybe it's the abnormality that gives her stage personality its "dark" intonation; even when the steps are light and zestful, she almost terrifies you. Like many phenomenal dancers when they first appear, she exaggerates elements of the classical style, so that they appear to carry new meanings, but nothing in the exaggeration violates the implicit sense of the style. Her leg in full extension is precisely that series of subtle S curves which is drawn in dotted lines in the dancing manuals. Although the leg is held perfectly straight, the eye can follow one large S (from the back of the knee along the high arch of the foot to its point). This is how all ballet legs look in theory, but it is strange to see the principle enunciated so fully on the stage, and it is doubly strange to see these paradigmatic legs sweeping the air in their high-voltage arcs. The energy of the gesture seems to pulsate from hip to point as steadily as a beam from a lighthouse. The hip joint operates so freely that in the leg's release no part of the force that belongs to the leg is kept back. In the *Nutcracker* pas de deux, she completes each of a series of supported pirouettes by opening smoothly to the highest of high développés—a hundred and eighty degrees—and without tipping from the vertical axis to do it. That leg just seems to go home by itself.[11]

Croce assumes the reader knows ballet movements like pirouette and développé, and the choreography for a standard pas de deux like *The Nutcracker*. Similarly, Gus Solomons assumes that readers know basic ballroom steps like the waltz when he reviews the American Ballroom Theater. So in his description he concentrates, not on the choreography, nor on the bodies themselves (for the ballroom dancing genre doesn't enforce canons of body shape and structure as rigorously as ballet), but on the distinctive performance style:

> To open *Two Hearts in ¾ Time,* the finale tribute to that grandest of ballroom dances, the waltz, noted authority on nineteenth-century social dances Elizabeth Aldrich has staged *Salon Waltzes*. The dancers' mincing, stiff-backed tiptoeing to the staccato strains of a brass ensemble adds a

> refreshing bit of historical authenticity to ABRT's otherwise frothy entertainment. . . .
>
> Then, who could resist the ultimate waltzing extravaganza: six lovely ladies in miles of swirling white chiffon in the arms of handsome swains in white tie and tails, gliding around the floor to the three-quarter lilt of "The Blue Danube"? Champagne![12]

The fourth critical category is *contextualization*. It is possible to find reviews that focus almost entirely on explaining the dance or the choreographer's work, either in biographical, historical, political, or artistic terms. Take this example, a review by Allen Robertson of Lucinda Childs's *Dance*, presented at the New Dance Festival in Minneapolis in 1981:

> Boos and shouts of disapproval boomed in Northrop Auditorium Saturday as many people in the audience viewing the Lucinda Childs Dance Company's performance of the highly repetitive "Dance" stamped out of the hall in disgust.
>
> Choreographed by Childs in 1979, enhanced with visual design and film by Sol LeWitt and performed to a commissioned score by Philip Glass, "Dance" is a milestone in minimalist art. . . .
>
> Granted, "Dance" may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it is not a hoax.
>
> No one is compelled to like minimalist art, but to deny there is either deep thought or the most stringent craft involved in its creation is unfair. . . .
>
> The dance boom of the last decade has weighed down dance with an overriding burden of glamour. It has become, like rock, one of the 20th century's instant-gratification art forms. Most audiences want their dance hot, and this performance doesn't allow that kind of response. Childs' work is cool, controlled, yes, even contrived art—but it *is* art.
>
> In fact, it is art older than Western civilization, it is art whose roots can be clearly seen and heard in Bali, Java, Korea, Africa—almost in any culture where time is allowed to exist on more than our own moment-to-moment level.
>
> Childs and Glass compress their art, like angels, onto the head of a pin. The concentrated result is either something so tiny it can't be seen or it is a microcosm capable of expanding to the edges of the universe. Take your pick.[13]

As with interpretation, this focus on contextualization can serve to explain the dance to the reader. In Robertson's case, it seems that the audience's negative reaction prompted him to defend the dance by setting it in an aesthetic context that is centered on the minimalist art movement of the 1970s but that has a relationship to world dance and music. Admittedly, Robertson makes clear his positive evaluation of the piece in the vigor of his defense. But nearly all the work of the review is devoted to explicating the dance, not in terms of its meaning but in regard to the situation of its making. Neither description nor interpretation plays a role here.

I have been citing critical writing that focuses on only one critical activity, in order to isolate the four operations. But most critics mix several of these key critical operations. I would like now to analyze a few different approaches that use these activities in combination. Here, for example, is an excerpt from a long essay by John Mueller on Doris Humphrey's *Passacaglia*:

> The lead man moves to the top of the risers for the tenth entrance. As with the ninth, all other movement suddenly stops, and he is given the entire burden of expressing the powerful fugal entrance with a development of the teetering pose of Figure 6 [a "five-point star" balancing on one leg with the other leg and arms outstretched]. He moves again among the seated dancers and, in a most beautiful sequence, seems to rouse them, group by group, into canonic waves of rises and falls.[14]

This very useful and detailed formal description of the tenth entrance in the Fugue section of the dance includes evaluative terms like "beautiful." The description-cum-evaluation follows a section of the essay in which the dance is contextualized, partly in terms of Humphrey's own shifting interpretations of the work. Yet Mueller himself never essays his own interpretation, nor does he choose to favor one of Humphrey's. Thus his essay combines contextualization, description, and evaluation, but shies away from interpretation.

Here, in contrast, are some excerpts from a review, by Jean Nuchtern, of an Antony Tudor ballet. The review is long on interpretation. Yet it also includes strong evaluations and quite a bit of contextualization:

> While Antony Tudor's *The Tiller in the Fields* (New York City premiere) will never be my favorite Tudor ballet, it's a sweet and simple fantasy in which a gawky, ugly duckling (Gelsey Kirkland — if you can believe she's awkward) wins the object of her affections, Patrick Bissell. . . .
>
> Cinderella/Kirkland never takes her eyes off Bissell. From the intensity of her looks, it's obvious that this waif has been hankering after her hero for a long time. When Kirkland approaches him, it's apparent that he doesn't know her and isn't interested in such a pathetic girl. Out of shyness, Kirkland rushes off like the sylph in *La Sylphide*. The three couples resume their dance, which reminds me of the grape harvest peasant dances from *Giselle*. . . .
>
> I like the way Tudor delineates characters' emotions as well as the stages of their love relationship through movement. I know Kirkland's shy because she steps with pigeon-toed feet. I also know that she's transformed and becomes direct in Bissell's presence: To communicate her adoration she kneels at his feet. . . .
>
> The ballet lacks density and depends not upon interesting choreographic ideas — as well as a good story — but only upon identifying with the shy girl's predicament through the ballerina's performance. . . .
>
> Bissell is exceptionally appealing as the farmer/lover. His dancing and

> his personality gain dimension as he begins to fall in love. Kirkland's role is not a new one for her. In several ballets she excels as the shy adolescent experiencing love for the first time. In *Tiller*, she's not only a technical whiz-kid but is soft and vulnerable. I'd compare her dancing with a Chopin composition. The content and feelings are romantic, but the composition and performing techniques are classical.[15]

In terms of context, we are told how this role compares with Kirkland's other roles, and in a section not quoted we learn something about how this ballet fits into Tudor's oeuvre. There is a great deal of interpretation, for every movement is assigned its codified meaning. And terms like "exceptionally appealing," "a technical whiz-kid," and "lacks density . . . and . . . interesting choreographic ideas" supply artistic evaluation, both for the dancing and for the choreography. The one operation that is missing here is description. Of course, in order to decode some of the poses and gestures, a minimal amount of description is introduced. But often comparisons or similes—"Kirkland rushes off like the sylph in *La Sylphide*"—substitute for movement description. Perhaps Nuchtern's refusal to describe the choreography stems from her judgment that it is inadequate. That is, her lack of description may itself be a form of evaluation.

A different combination of critical functions appears in Noël Carroll's review of a dance by Kenneth King. Carroll's review stresses interpretation as well, but it also includes contextualization and description:

> In much post-Cunningham dance, for example Yvonne Rainer's classic *Trio A*, the idea that dance is essentially movement is taken quite literally, producing strings of ceaseless changing bursts of movement without reference to a pre-existing system of gestures or to an easily discernible choreographic design. But in Kenneth King's latest piece, a work-in-progress called *Wor(l)d (T)raid*, the emphasis is less on movement as such and more on gesture and choreography. He handles these equally basic aspects of dance in a very painterly way, stressing gesture in terms of line and shape, and choreography as composition in space. . . .
>
> The conclusion includes the trio walking as a group at a hearty pace. They are virtually marching. They set out in one direction and then suddenly make sharp, forty-five-degree turns along another vector of movement. With each turn, two of the dancers will exchange positions in the group. The spectacle is engrossing; its emphasis is less on the movements of the individuals and more on the qualities of the movement of the whole group. At times it appears as a machine; with some turns, it reminds you of a snake. But above all, its stress is on directionality. The space around the trio seems to disappear and an exhilarating feeling of propulsion evolves. Whereas the previous dancing underscored space as such, this phrasing promotes an intensified experience of a trajectory through space. Corresponding with the earlier sections, King's preoccupation is still with the formal qualities of choreography. He enables the spectator to papably feel the dancing as a veritable *line* of movement.

> Whereas many contemporary performers strive to make the audience aware of the concrete dimensions of dance, King wants us to *feel* its abstract qualities.[16]

Carroll's review sets King's work into the context of the work of other postmodern dancers of his generation. Although he doesn't try to describe every movement in the dance, he balances enough selected movement descriptions, together with structural and stylistic descriptions, to give the reader a strong sense of the look and feel of the dance. And even though this is an abstract dance that has no story line to tease out of the movement, Carroll is always concerned with interpretation. He seems to see as his primary task the explication of what King is doing in the dance and what this means, in dance terms. The one critical operation that Carroll refuses to perform here, however, is evaluation. There are two words in the above excerpt that seem at first to be evaluative: "engrossing" and "exhilarating." However, in this context, both these words are used as descriptive indicators, not as matters of opinion or aesthetic judgment.

There are various combinations and permutations of these critical operations—fifteen, to be exact! For instance, Mueller's essay is contextual, descriptive, noninterpretive, and evaluative. Nuchtern's review is contextual, nondescriptive, interpretive, and evaluative. Carroll's review is contextual, descriptive, interpretive, and nonevaluative.

The grid showing the fifteen possibilities of combining these four operations is as follows:

1. contextual, descriptive, interpretive, evaluative
2. contextual, nondescriptive, interpretive, evaluative
3. contextual, descriptive, noninterpretive, evaluative
4. contextual, descriptive, interpretive, nonevaluative
5. contextual, nondescriptive, noninterpretive, evaluative
6. contextual, descriptive, noninterpretive, nonevaluative
7. contextual, nondescriptive, interpretive, nonevaluative
8. contextual, nondescriptive, noninterpretive, nonevaluative
9. noncontextual, descriptive, interpretive, evaluative
10. noncontextual, descriptive, noninterpretive, evaluative
11. noncontextual, descriptive, interpretive, nonevaluative
12. noncontextual, descriptive, noninterpretive, nonevaluative
13. noncontextual, nondescriptive, interpretive, evaluative
14. noncontextual, nondescriptive, interpretive, nonevaluative
15. noncontextual, nondescriptive, noninterpretive, evaluative

It would undoubtedly be too tiresome to demonstrate the entire gamut of possibilities. Rather, having demonstrated seven already (2, 3, 4, 8, 12, 14, and 15), I will now give several examples of what seems to me to be the fullest kind of dance criticism—number 1, the rich balance of all four operations—and then return to the subject of critical evaluation.

Here is the conclusion of Marcia B. Siegel's essay on Kurt Jooss's ballet *The Green Table*:

> The opening and closing scenes, with the Gentlemen in Black around the Green Table, have a tremendous pictorial and pantomimic effect, but even here the movement qualities contribute to the overall atmosphere. The diplomats, in their rusty black tailcoats, spats, white gloves, and senile masks, palaver back and forth in a continual discord that ranges from amiable to tense. They are devious, with weaving heads and wagging fingers, or aggressive, as they lean forward across the table. Their groupings are constantly shifting; one side of the table will work in a unit against the other, they scatter off into huddles, relax and shake hands with their opposite numbers, return to the table to argue as individuals in stiff, angular postures. The only time the ten men do anything in unison is when they line up facing the audience, draw their pistols, and fire into the air, thus by common consent precipitating the next war.
>
> *The Green Table* works as a profound human statement because Kurt Jooss consistently selected the particular dynamic and spatial qualities that would best strengthen his narrative. I think most ballet and modern dance has become bottled up in its own movement conventions; it has nowhere to go but to repeat itself. Choreographers who use movement more fluently, for what it is, may have found one way out, and *The Green Table*, as a pioneer work in this genre, not only survives but surpasses a lot of later choreography in its vitality.[17]

Siegel gives a visual sense of what is seen on the stage, in her description of the politicians' costumes, as well as a kinetic sense, in her movement descriptions that incorporate postures, gestures, groupings, specific movements and movement sequences, and the deployment of varied energies. Other descriptions (not quoted here) also treat the ordering of time and space in the dance, and at one point she gives a summary of the dance's overall choreographic structure. Earlier in the essay Siegel has contextualized the dance in several ways: the situation leading to its revival by the Joffrey Ballet (the occasion for the present essay); the genre—antiwar dance—of which she sees it as an outstanding example; the larger genre—expressive dance-theater, specifically of the Central European variety—within which Jooss made the dance. She returns to the contextual mode in the last two sentences of her review, when she contrasts *The Green Table* with current ballet and modern dance. Since the explicit point of her essay is to show *how* Jooss's movements create narrative and symbolic meaning, Siegel interweaves interpretation throughout. One example in the extract above is the sentence describing the motions she interprets on two levels: not only may they be read pantomimically as a pistol shot, but also the group pistol shot itself has symbolic long-range implications, signaling the beginning of the next war. Finally, that Siegel finds this work excellent is clear, starting with the essay's title—"*The Green Table*: Movement

Masterpiece" — continuing with such words (before the section quoted here) as "stunning," "radiant," and "immortal." The ending reffirms Siegel's view of the dance's excellence: "a profound human statement . . . surpasses a lot of later choreography in its vitality."

Another good example of dance-critical writing that interweaves all four operations is Deborah Jowitt's review of Merce Cunningham's *Sounddance* (two paragraphs in a long review of the choreographer's season):

> *Sounddance*, too, acknowledges the fact — without paying special attention to it — that Cunningham is no longer working with a company of near peers, that he is a man in his late fifties surrounded by the splendid young dancers he has trained. (Meg Harper has been with him since 1967, but the rest from between five years and a matter of months.) *Sounddance*, like *Rebus*, begins with a solo for Cunningham. I can't remember it clearly, except that I found no peace in it either. The other dancers enter with great vigor — not all at once — from behind a fold in the heavy, poured-looking white curtain that Mark Lancaster has draped over a partially lowered light pipe. Lancaster's costumes are pale cream and beige; his lighting dazzlingly white. David Tudor's brilliant score, *Toneburst*, shakes and quivers from speaker to speaker — over our heads, behind us, back to the stage speakers. The highest vibrations sound like a gaggle of raucous birds. Sometimes, in the distance, you hear the quiet echo or afterimage of a pattern; but most of the time the volume and the energy made me feel like a cat in an electric storm — frightened and exhilarated.
>
> Maybe the music causes the dance to seem wilder than it is. And the lights. I see the dancers as playing with fierce energy on an empty shore at high noon. Here's the moment I remember seeing in Cunningham Events when Morgan Ensminger parallels his body to the ceiling, holding his weight on hands and feet (a backward crab-walk, would you say?), and two of the other men swing Ellen Cornfield into the air over him and let her down on her knees on his groin, while he folds up under her weight. Something reckless-looking about a game like that no matter how much the dancers smile. *Sounddance* has a lot of couple work — men and women fastening onto each other, falling under each others' weight. Cunningham with Meg Harper sometimes makes me think of a sentinel. Does he see things they don't? They dash off the way they came, and after a moment in which we have time to wonder, Merce spins after them and disappears through the flap in the curtain.[18]

Appropriately for a review of a major choreographer's season, the contextualization of this particular dance is brief and is mainly concerned with relating this dance to other works in the choreographer's oeuvre. Jowitt uses occasional, specific movement description together with atmospheric metaphors to flesh out a concise, vivid picture of the work. Her descriptions are very complete, not in the sense of a moment-by-moment reckoning, but in that they include the various theatrical elements that surround the

dancing as well: music, lighting, costumes, decor. Jowitt's interpretations, too, often take the form of metaphors and, again, appropriately enough for a choreographer who shrinks from overinterpretation, are offered most unaggressively, couched as personal opinions with which the reader might or might not concur. "I see the dancers as playing with fierce energy on an empty shore at high noon." Or "Cunningham . . . sometimes makes me think of a sentinel." Similarly, Jowitt's evaluation is understated but explicit. A word here and there—"splendid . . . brilliant . . . exhilarated . . . wonder"—together with the pronouncement of Cunningham's "persistent genius" in the final sentence of the entire review make clear her commitment.

Excerpts from Joan Acocella's long essay on Mark Morris's 1990 season in New York show a different style that still combines all four elements. First she supplies a contextual introduction, which begins:

> When Mark Morris, won over by a generous offer from Belgium's national opera house, moved his modern-dance company from New York to Brussels in 1988, he left behind him a reputation as a dark-souled character full of "edge" and irony. . . . The other main aspect of his reputation—that he was the world's most musical choreographer . . . in no way offset his angry-young-man image.

Even within her long contextual introduction, Acocella supplies descriptions and interpretations of Morris's early work to point up the basis for the American controversy over his work. She fills the reader in on the circumstances of Morris's return to tour the U.S. and the transformation of his image—"the artist who was formerly a bad boy is now being taken very seriously"—then moves on to analyze—through description and interpretation—and to evaluate the work she credits with changing the choreographer's reputation.

> *L'Allegro*[, *il Penseroso ed il Moderato*] (1988) was the first piece Morris created in Brussels, and he made it to match the scale of his new opera-house home and the hopes that had brought him there. Everything about it is expansive—big, burgeoning, bursting. . . . Not only did Morris embrace [Handel's and Milton's] Renaissance-like program, he fulfilled it with amazing, unstrained inventiveness. For two hours his stage bloomed with nymphs and goddesses, birds and bees, shepherds and plowmen, variously moving in line dances, circle dances, arcs and Xs and wedges and rosettes, solos and duets and full-cast, 24-person ensembles. . . .
>
> In [Morris's] conjunction of classicism and grief there is no paradox. . . . To the classical mind, nothing is singular, and everything is knowable; it is just that not everything is bearable.
>
> Mark Morris has such a mind. That, in fact, is probably what allowed him to imagine the golden world of *L'Allegro* and at the same time the dark terror of his other recent work. To envision each takes nerves of steel, for each carries the other buried in its heart.[19]

I want to return now to the question of evaluation. In performing the evaluative function, the critic asks whether the work is good according to certain standards. However, there are several different dimensions along which these standards might be applied.[20] One is the moral dimension. Surely, for instance, part (but not all) of Siegel's positive assessment of *The Green Table* comes from her appreciation of the antiwar sentiment of the dance. The moral dimension includes political judgment. In the following review of a work presented in New York by the Ballet Nacional de Cuba, written by Rob Baker, the political aspects of the dance include class, race, and gender, and are, the critic argues, crucial elements in the work:

> [Alberto Mendez's] *Dolls* . . . takes the rather hackneyed ballet staple of dancing dolls and puts it into a sociopolitical context that is rather astounding for such a short, simple work. The male doll is a typical prerevolutionary aristocrat and soldier. He takes a decidedly sexist and elitist attitude toward his homespun partner, and this is apparent from every stiff-jointed move he makes, as well as from his stuffy, old-fashioned uniform. Besides that, in the New York casting . . . the partnering is notably (and I think intentionally) interracial. Her rag doll was black to his white, tatterdemalion to his fastidious, naughty to his proper, sexy to his stuffy, civilian to his military, womanly to his macho, populist to his elitist. And nowhere is this more apparent than in the way she moves, her flexibility contrasting perfectly with his jerky stiffness.

Indeed, Baker insists, even the apparently "apolitical" works in the Cuban company's repertory — like *Giselle* — may be read as political. Baker takes issue with the "liberal" New York critics who "were all too quick (as usual) to praise the company for what they considered the apolitical nature of its repertory."

> Putting art above politics is a typical ploy of well-meaning liberals, but in this case somebody's missing the boat. . . . Cuban dance exists at least partly (if not primarily) as an arm for spreading the prorevolutionary message — the party line, if you will. This doesn't make it bad dance . . . and it doesn't necessarily make it all that different from the kind of probourgeois, procapitalist dance . . . that we've been reared on and, in our own way, brainwashed with here in the United States.
>
> Curiously enough, [Alicia] Alonso's *Giselle* in a way remains the consummate statement of the company, both in terms of its brilliantly precise dancing style and its revolutionary message. . . . Surely no classic ballet contains a clearer statement about the temptations of bourgeois corruption than does *Giselle*. Albrecht's deception of Giselle; the way the peasants bow and curtsy to the aristocracy, putting on a little show for them; Bathilde's condescending liberal gesture to Giselle in offering the cute little peasant dancer a doodad.
>
> And, after Giselle's death, Albrecht, for all his money and social prestige, cannot right the wrongs that he and his class have committed

> while Giselle, ironically, is able to dance until dawn to keep him alive — a true, forgiving populist heroine.
>
> The fact that Alonso has made *Giselle* relevant to Cuba today is proof positive that art has "survived" the revolution. . . .[21]

Baker not only finds a political interpretation in the dance, but also judges the dance good on the basis of its political message.

In her essay "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers," Ann Daly takes a feminist stance, criticizing what she sees as the sexism underpinning Balanchine's choreography — as well as the silence with which dance history has treated this bias. She writes:

> When people say that "Balanchine glorified Woman," it is generally considered a laudable accomplishment. But in an age of backlash against feminism, when women's efforts toward progressive social change are losing ground to blithe conservatism, "glorification" smacks of regressive sexual politics. . . .
>
> If the ballerina has been only a passing subject of critical feminist thinking, the Balanchine ballerina has been strictly off-limits. During his life, Balanchine was enveloped by a mythology that ascribed to him near-mystical inspiration, and now, four years after his death, Balanchine's legacy is generally considered sacrosanct. Yet Balanchine's statements about his idealized "Woman" openly declared their patriarchal foundations. . . .

Daly supports her assertions with specific examples from *The Four Temperaments*, analyzing the movement in terms of gender-specific qualities in our culture. For instance:

> The erotic undercurrent in the [third] theme surfaces when the ballerina's arabesques shoot between her partner's legs. In another sequence, the ballerina ends up in an elegant sitting position, with bent knees properly together and on her toes. Before repeating the phrase, she briefly looks at him, then coyly lowers her gaze and cocks her head as she frames the sinuous curve of her face with an open palm. Like the Romantic image of the female and the image of a geisha girl in Japanese prints, she is revealing her feminine charms in a demure yet provocative way.[22]

Thus Daly evaluates Balanchine's choreography negatively on the moral/political dimension, for dichotomizing genders and subordinating women.

I predict that, for two reasons, political evaluation will come increasingly to the fore (as it has already begun to do, most noticeably, in American and British academic dance criticism). One reason for this is that, as Daly suggests about her own feminist project, a generation of younger critics is responding to a world ever more sharply polarized along dimensions of political identity: "race," ethnicity, class, gender, sexual preference, religion, age, disability, and others. The other reason is that younger choreographers themselves tend to opt now for political or cultural-political themes.

Thus even those critics who may not bring politics to their criticism find themselves willy-nilly confronting more political issues in the theater.

A second dimension that may serve as an evaluative standard is the cognitive. The philosopher Susanne Langer supplies an underpinning for this approach when she writes that dance can display the ethos of a culture and gives objective shape to the subjective "inner life."[23] More recently, writers on dance who have been influenced by or trained in ethnographic methods have turned to analyzing and judging dance in these terms. The folklorist Elizabeth C. Fine, for instance, writes about African-American stepdancing in terms of the form's cultural meaning. Step dancing, or stepping, is a form of competitive exhibition dancing, derived from African-American folk traditions, performed by black college fraternities and sororities. Fine writes about this form as a "social drama" and is concerned with its links to the African-American tradition; the "vitality" of the dance form as a signifier of identity is the evaluative term that she stresses in her essay:

> Fundamentally, stepping is a ritual performance of group identity. It expresses an organization's spirit, style, icons, and unity.
>
> One can't hope to comprehend the complexity and richness of the stepping tradition by surveying only a few groups or routines. . . . All . . . draw on such African-American folk traditions and communication patterns as call-response, rapping, the dozens, signifying, marking, spirituals, handclap games, and military jodies. . . .
>
> Stepping performances have become a key venue for displaying and asserting group identity, as well as for negotiating the status of each group within the social order. . . .
>
> [The] agonistic nature of step shows makes them a performance tradition charged with high energy and life.[24]

In her analysis, Fine emphasizes the cognitive dimension of stepdancing. She finds the stepdancing performances to be good because they teach us about African-American culture. They have cognitive value as a key to African-American identity, and therein lies their vitality. The cognitive contribution is linked to a positive evaluation.

Similarly, Sondra Fraleigh, writing from a phenomenological perspective, often evaluates dances and choreographers in terms of what we learn from them:

> Martha Graham's dramatic works, for instance, speak their psychic truth through sharp angular movement. . . . Her works take on a fuller meaning when we understand that they reveal familiar inner landscapes through archetypal figures. Likewise, Merce Cunningham's works reveal truths beyond their cleanly etched motion, as they engage us in mystical world views and meditation on the accidental moment. Twyla Tharp's dance . . . sheds light on our tensional body-of-action, allowing us to see and experience the dancing body in new terms.[25]

Thus Fraleigh judges as "good" dances with cognitive value—dances that provide knowledge, not only about the "outside" material world and the inner life of the psychic landscape, but also about the dancing body itself.

The third dimension along which a work may be evaluated is the aesthetic. This is the arena that Jill Johnston works in when she writes about Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*:

> I've seen *Trio A* a number of times and still think I haven't really seen it. . . . The trio is actually one solo. The three dancers perform the solo simultaneously but are almost never in unison since each performer moves at his own speed. The solo seems to consist of innumerable discrete parts or phrases. The intricacy lies in the sheer quantity of diverse material presented in a short space of time. Yet all this detail is assimilated by a smooth unaccented continuity rendering some illusion of sameness to the whole thing. . . . Here's the crux of a departure from conventional phrasing . . . [undermining] the whole hierarchical structure of traditional dance.[26]

Johnston argues that Rainer's dance, though it may to some seem boring by virtue of its overall consistency, nevertheless pleases because of its intricacy and condensed quality. Here Johnston seems to agree with the philosopher Monroe Beardsley, who claims that there are objective standards—general canons, as he calls them—by which we can judge the aesthetic value of an artwork. They are unity, complexity, and intensity. Thus Rainer's *Trio A*, while refusing one of the canons—unity—supplies plenty of complexity and intensity.

The aesthetic dimension seems to be both the most important and the most difficult to judge. After all, the feminist or Afrocentric critic, for example, will have a ready-made set of standards by which to judge any work, and in the case of writing about explicitly political art even those critics who have no particular political program will usually be able to decode the political commitments of the artist. But even if we agree—or disagree—with the artist's political message, we will still want to say whether the work is good or not. We may be pleased with the antiracist message or the celebration of gay life or the prochoice commitment of a dance and still find it boring or lacking organization. Or we may find ourselves disagreeing strongly with the hierarchical, imperial politics of a dance—say *The Sleeping Beauty*—and nevertheless find it brilliant. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* is a case in point.

Yet this is not to say that the moral or cognitive dimensions of the work are outside of the critic's domain of judgment. Nor is it to insist that these three realms are entirely separable. Both artists and critics bring to their work aesthetic values that are culturally specific. To ignore or avoid what some might see as the extra-aesthetic dimensions of the work—especially where those elements are evident in the work—is to be ahistori-

cal and amoral. It fragments and diminishes the experience of the work, for artworks are made and judged in a world that is moral, social, and cognitive.

We are witnessing a shift in critical values during the present period. An "anxiety of evaluation" has manifested itself in American criticism in many ways over the past thirty years or so—from an insistence on pure description to debates about cultural relativism. Even the growing emphasis on the political dimension of evaluation noted above is linked to an anxiety of aesthetic evaluation when artists and critics themselves challenge the "right" of the critic to judge a work created by someone outside of her "race"/ethnicity/class/gender/etc. This anxiety now deserves to be put to rest. Although evaluation should not be the only function the critic performs, it is a valuable and crucial aspect of the critic's work. If evaluation causes anxiety, it is, nevertheless, unavoidable.

5

Power and the Dancing Body

Dancing Bodies Change the World

Dance historians often start from the premise that dance *reflects* society. For instance, in *Time and the Dancing Image*, Deborah Jowitt writes:

> Western theatrical dancing . . . has always been *responsive* to current trends. At its most profound, like the other arts, it *reflects* aspects of the current world picture; at its most superficial, it acknowledges the current fashions. . . . The dancer's image has been subject to many alterations since the beginning of the nineteenth century *in response to* the immense social, political, scientific, and technological upheavals that have characterized the period. . . . Trying to view the dancers of the past as *products* of their age . . . is a challenge [italics added].[1]

For Jowitt, dancing and dancers do not produce culture, but are products of it. Dancing and dancers reflect intellectual and material trends in other spheres of human activity; they do not catalyze trends.

Choreographing History Conference, Riverside, California, 1992.

Similarly, on a panel on American bodies and American culture in the mid-1980s, I insisted that the physical body reflects the social/political body. I used a binary model—influenced by the anthropologist Mary Douglas—that contrasted smooth versus shaggy body styles as symptoms of tightly versus loosely controlled cultural styles. And I argued that the smooth, controlled, virtuosic bodily images purveyed through various strata of both black and white dance cultures in the eighties (from the heroine and the breakdancers in *Flashdance* to Michael Jackson to the avant-garde choreographer Molissa Fenley) were metaphors for a "greed and glitter" era that stood in direct contrast to the hot effervescence and improvisation of sixties and early seventies dance styles (from James Brown to the twist to the postmodern group the Grand Union).[2]

The presupposition assumed by reflection-theory dance historians is that, whether on stage or in social life, dance is a mirror or a microcosm where the workings of culture, everyday life, and even government are actively registered from above on passive bodies below. In a variation of this notion of cultural modeling, Sally Peters writes that "the roots of [exhibition] ballroom dance are popular and mirror views of male/female relations specific to period or culture," even though she sees this as "ironic since performance requires artistic collaboration, not mere submission as may occur in social dance."[3] Thus, for Peters, a double reflection takes place in the theatricalized arena of exhibition ballroom dancing, for the gendered roles that society has inscribed on bodies on the mass level "trickle up" to the level of artistic choreography.

However, I want now to advance another view of the role of dance in society. I do not want to deny that dancing bodies may at times reflect the way things are, but I want to emphasize that they *also* have the potential to effect change.[4] While we might easily acknowledge that ritual dancing in traditional societies alters reality (or at least is believed to by the faithful), we tend to diminish the efficaciousness of both theatrical and social dancing in modern Western culture. Yet even the standard dance history books supply proof that Western theatrical dancing has the capacity to change the world.

For instance, Catherine de Medici's court spectacles were not merely the expression or reflection, but the very medium of political negotiations. Queen Catherine's ballets were part of political life, and they were usually conciliatory, uniting opposing political and/or religious factions. But Lincoln Kirstein suggests that the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the civil war in France that ensued from it were, in part, the results of some bad casting choices in *The Defense of Paradise*. In other words, a political error in arranging the ballet led to massive bloodshed. The reconciliation backfired. The event in question was an allegorical combat ballet staged for the Navarre-Valois wedding magnificences, in which Catherine's son Charles IX, the Catholic king of France and brother to the bride, defended Heaven,

aided by his royal brothers, while the Protestant bridegroom, Henry of Navarre, guarded Hell and led his forces in an attack—doomed to fail, of course—on Heaven. Kirstein asserts that the tenuous peace between Catholics and Protestants was shattered by their symbolic combat in this ballet when violence erupted a few days later in the form of an assassination attempt on Admiral Coligny, the leader of the Huguenots, by a retainer of the Duc de Guise. The St. Bartholomew's massacre was the royal response to the panic.[5]

Jowitt herself points out that both *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* were cautionary tales for the nineteenth-century Russian imperial court. Like the literary genre of eighteenth-century French fairy tales that included *The Sleeping Beauty*, these ballets didn't merely reflect, but actually formed—through ethical instruction—a class of courtiers in proper behavior. "The story," Jowitt writes of Petipa's masterpiece, "has a moral: a breach in royal courtesy, even to such nasty adversaries as wicked fairies, can allow chaos to upset the orderly flow of events."[6]

Numerous dance historians have pointed out the deleterious effect of nineteenth-century minstrelsy on the moral fiber of American life. Vicious racist stereotypes of African-Americans took the form of both verbal and physical "humor" on both the white and the black minstrel stage, in ways that still pervade popular culture, not only in the United States but in Europe and Japan as well. In this case, too, it seems that dancing not only reflected racist attitudes already present in the culture, but actually helped to form prejudice, with images of shuffling, lazy clowns and overdressed, shifty dandies.[7]

In an example from our own century, Natalia Roslavleva writes that the dance practices of Isadora Duncan as taught in the Soviet Union in the 1920s eventually entered the public school curriculum in the form of "artistic gymnastics" sports events. The system as it was developed in the Soviet Union after 1947 was based on Duncan "plastique," and Roslavleva attributes the expressive style of Soviet champion gymnasts, like Olga Korbut, to the influence of Duncan's technique.[8] In other words, Duncan's way of dancing formed the everyday practices—indeed, the bodies—of recent generations of Soviet youth.

"Your Body Is a Battleground"

The contemporary body has become a battleground not only in the struggle in the public sphere over abortion rights but also in scholarly debates on cultural theory.[9] Cultural historians working from a feminist Foucauldian perspective arrive at a similar position to that of the reflection-theory dance historians when they argue that culture wreaks utter tyranny on individual bodies. Bodies, they claim, are disciplined, molded, and rearranged by dominant powers, which simultaneously promote the illusion that people

are "free" to construct their own bodies—in the matter of shape, say—as they wish. For instance, Susan Bordo writes that:

> Popular culture does not apply any brakes to these fantasies of rearrangement and self-transformation. . . . Of course, the rhetoric of choice and self-determination and the breezy analogies comparing cosmetic surgery to fashion accessorizing are deeply mystifying. . . . The general tyranny of fashion—perpetual, elusive, and instructing the female body in a pedagogy of personal inadequacy and lack—is a powerful discipline for the normalization of *all* women in this culture.[10]

Now, Bordo insists on the power of culture over the body not because she subscribes to a view of the arts as imitative. Rather, she has entered into a dialectical relationship with two other current theories of the body in contemporary culture. The first is that of postmodern theorists, like Susan Rubin Suleiman, who celebrate the body as protean, capable of slipping out of any fixed role or "voice," entering instead into a flux of "endless complication and creative movement."[11] The second is that of cultural studies theorists, like John Fiske, who celebrate the body as a "site of resistance" where ordinary people—those who have no political power—become empowered, creating their own social identities by manipulating and reworking the oppressive body images produced by the dominant ideology. Writing about Madonna, for instance, Fiske states that the star is not "an agent of patriarchal hegemony," as her stereotyped gender role-playing (especially in terms of her subordination to male sexual fantasy) might suggest. Rather, she empowers her primary audience, young girls, supplying "gaps or spaces in her image [of physical and sexual pleasure] that escape ideological control and allow her audiences to make meanings that connect with *their* social experience."[12] Bordo challenges Fiske's claim, pointing out that Madonna once seemed to embrace the unruliness of her own rounded physique, but now, thinner and more muscular as the result of an exacting exercise regimen, has simply traded a fifties ideal of voluptuousness for an eighties/nineties ideal of taut control.[13]

Are we, as material persons, thoroughly victimized by or thoroughly resistant to our culture? It seems to me that both positions are too extreme. To deny agency altogether doesn't square with the range of choices people *do* seem to exercise (even within certain strictures of "race," class, gender, age, and so on).[14] After all, to take only one example, transvestites, the exemplary corporeal chameleons, come in all colors, ages, and income brackets (not to mention genders). But at the same time there *are*, undeniably, limits to agency regarding our bodies. These are stringently, if not forcibly, imposed on our bodies by a range of rules: laws, medical regimes, moral codes, etiquette, fashion, and local community or family ethos. In the United States, for instance, our national policy is that smoking is unhealthy. In certain places it is illegal, and in other places it is as morally repugnant as

spitting in public was to our grandparents. To take another example, unless one is Michael Jackson, with no ceiling on one's cosmetic surgery and bleach budget, it is very unlikely that one can easily change from looking black to looking white. In fact, for some, like Jackson's brother Jermaine, to make that change might be physically possible, but morally reprehensible. It seems that the relationship between bodies and culture, like that between bodies and nature, occupies a middle ground between discipline and creative expression. That is, we *can* make our own bodies, but only to a limited extent.[15]

Bodies Are Ensembles of Social Meaning

To study dance history in a way that breaks out of our field's often myopic condition means to study not only the bundle of arts that enter into an artistic dance production — music, scene and costume design, lighting, and so on — but also an interdisciplinary ensemble of social practices. And here the debates in cultural studies on the body should be instructive. We should be asking questions about bodies and power. And that requires taking into account the various powers that restrict or release physicality.

Can we do research on either social dancing or ballet without taking into account the kinds of bodily codes Norbert Elias traces in his *History of Manners: The Civilizing Process*?[16] For dancing is part and parcel of everyday social life and, if not usually highly regulated by society in our own day, has in past times figured prominently in the basic training of manners, especially at court (and the court's equivalent in democratic societies, like Washington society). Ballet emerged in the courts of Europe in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, not only as a symbolic theatrical enactment of royal power, but as part of a package of physical discipline in daily life for the noble classes. To this day it remains the upper-middle-class method for training daughters in proper carriage and deportment. To study the history of manners, then, is to learn what has been both acceptable and possible in dancing events — in regard to, for instance, proximity of partners' bodies, individual posture, positions of the limbs, eating, drinking, clothing, odors, sexual expression, and so on. As well, dancing has begun to be studied as one of the *channels* for, not just the repository of, the pedagogy of etiquette.[17] Did the waltz, for instance, reflect or actually *alter* the acceptable distance between male and female bodies in public? Did Elvis Presley's hip swivels (derived from black dance) change the way white youth in the fifties and early sixties stood and carried themselves? Even more than in the macropolitics of states and governments, dance plays an active role in the micropolitics of how persons interact as bodies.

Medical studies shed light on dance events. Elizabeth Aldrich's compilation of texts on nineteenth-century ballroom dancing includes advice on avoiding wearing poisonous lead-based makeup to social events.[18] What

is considered safe or unsafe in terms of contemporary ballet dancers' body weight has already entered the discourse of the dance field, although dance historians have not rushed to find such information for earlier periods.[19] In studies of the effect of breakdancing spins on the head and spinal cord or of aerobic dancing on heart rates, the dancing body is the subject, not just the reflection, of medical discourse that reaches beyond dance itself. In lore about the physical dangers of dancing, the cultural struggle over the way bodies erupt out of control becomes clear.

We need to study legal codes when issues of licensing affect dance performances, whether in legitimate theaters, burlesque houses, or in shopping malls. How much of the dancing body must be covered in public, whether in the theater or at a social dance gathering is sometimes simply an issue of fashion but at times becomes a legal issue—as in the case of the New York law that until the late 1960s forbade total nudity for moving, but not still, bodies onstage. Where and when are certain kinds of dancing criminalized? Religious codes, like those of the Puritans, shape and are shaped by the dancing body. For the dancing body's energy is dangerously sexual and uncontrollable.

Practices of everyday life, like fashion, furniture, and even architecture affect and are affected by dancers' bodies and dance designs. We know that Marie Taglioni's hairstyle was imitated all over Europe in the 1830s and that the fashion designer Paul Poiret dressed Paris society in colors and patterns borrowed from Bakst's costumes for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Loïe Fuller's wavelike draperies gave organic shape to all sorts of art nouveau craft items, as well as to the building in which she performed at the Paris Exhibition of 1900. In the 1980s, the torn off-the-shoulder sweatshirt Jennifer Beals wore as an aspiring ballerina in *Flashdance* became de rigueur attire for American girls and young women.

Social Bodies Are Dancing Bodies

This paper, then, is a call for dance historians to note and analyze how dance not only reproduces, but actually produces cultural practices outside of the dance world itself. It is also a call for cultural historians to acknowledge dance as a vital, active element of society when they write their histories of bodies. Perhaps the Choreographing History conference is a step in that direction.

A recent article by Tim Armstrong in the journal *Textual Practice* serves as an example of how dance's role in forming the culture is often overlooked. Armstrong's fascinating article is entitled "The electrification of the body at the turn of the century." In it, he considers the complex cultural attitudes toward the uses, at the end of the nineteenth century, of this new resource in relation to the body: its repressive role in state executions as well as its productive energy for technology that promoted scientific

research and increased the production and consumption of goods. Electricity began to serve as a rich store of metaphoric language for representing the body, in particular the nervous system and sexual desire. In his analysis of images of electricity and the body in Theodore Dreiser's novels, Armstrong even shows how in *Sister Carrie* the new language of electrification was used metaphorically in the theater (Carrie "electrifies" her audience, and her name goes up "in lights").[20]

Armstrong is interested primarily in what literature has to say about these aspects of electricity and the body, but to a dance historian there is a notable gap in his cultural survey. For dance participated conspicuously in that cultural obsession with electrification, from Loïe Fuller's patented lighting designs (some created in collaboration with the Curies) to Isadora Duncan's and Genevieve Stebbins's theories of human movement as analogous to electrical currents.[21]

I would like to close with a final, more extended example of the role dance plays in producing culture by considering the wedding dance. Of course, the wedding dance plays an important role in European theatrical dancing; it is a theme that deserves an analysis too lengthy to take on here.[22] Also, the differences between wedding dances in different ethnic cultures would be useful to analyze but impossible to do here. Rather, I want to talk about the implicit and explicit normative rules of dancing in mainstream Euro-American culture.

According to Emily Post, the set order in which the dancing partners at the reception pair off is as follows: first the bride and groom dance together. Next the bride dances with her father-in-law and the groom with his mother-in-law, while the remaining parents (the groom's mother and the bride's father) dance together. Finally each dances with his or her own parent (of the opposite sex, of course), while the other two parents — the groom's father and the bride's mother — pair up.

The structure of this choreography is as finely tuned in terms of hierarchy and social relations as a court or military ball. The bride and groom are king and queen, leading out the assembly. And although they are more likely to dance a version of the foxtrot or two-step than a cotillion step, in fact the choreographed switching of partners in the foursome closely resembles a cotillion or quadrille. There is a narrative here of political unification, the incorporation of two opposing groups — two families — into a harmonious social body. Generations are joined, split up, and re-allied in the literal performance of kinship structures. The dance doesn't stand for or reflect these relations, but enacts, encodes, and ratifies them in a legal and often religious context.

At many American weddings, not just Jewish ones, after a period of couple dancing by the majority of those assembled, the pairs dissolve into a large group hora. Thus the narrative has a second chapter: the nesting of the individual in the nuclear family is itself nested in the larger community.

The ecstatic line of dancers pulls in stragglers, swallows up those who can't dance—not because it is particularly tolerant, but because it brooks no bystanders. These dances may be symbolic, but they are also meant to do real work—to join families and to enfold the new family into the community.

For dance history to take its place on the stage as a branch of cultural history, dance historians need to show that dancing bodies have not simply created divertissements. Perhaps then cultural historians will be convinced to take seriously the centrality of dance in our culture.

II

The Euro-American Avant-Garde

6

Balanchine and Black Dance

In 1967, at the peak of his career and at the very beginning of the dance boom, George Balanchine choreographed *Jewels*, an enormously popular evening-length ballet. Its three sections constituted a sampler of ballet styles: *Emeralds*, to music by Gabriel Fauré, danced by women in long tutus, evoked the perfumed elegance of late nineteenth-century Paris; *Diamonds*, to Tchaikovsky, was a glittering celebration of Petipa's Imperial Russian ballet. However, the middle section, *Rubies*, set to music by Stravinsky, Balanchine's closest collaborator, was a primer of a distinctive Balanchinian style. Critics saw it as the American section of the triptych, and it encapsulated a style Balanchine had invented. *Rubies* set forth his canon of modern neoclassical ballet, with its speed, broken lines, off-center weight placement, intertwining bodies, and syncopated accents. Both the critics and the dancers also saw this section as a near relative of black jazz dancing. Deborah Jowitt has described Balanchine's typical " 'Stravinsky' steps" in *Rubies* in terms that invoke black style: "the jutting hips, the legs that swing down and up like scythes, the paw-hands, the prances, the big, quick lunges, the flexed feet, the heel-walks."[1] Robert Garis wrote that "[Marnee] Morris's provocative poses in the opening section are like sexy show-dancing of the twenties and thirties" and noted "the powerful thrust down toward the floor."[2] Dancer Suki Schorer reported that *Rubies* was "tricky . . . half jazz, half elegant."[3] Another dancer, Edward Villella, also noted the jazz connection.[4] A French critic, observing Balanchine's way of "stopping movements abruptly and letting his dancers freeze," unwittingly described a typical African-American dance movement.[5] And Clive Barnes noticed a number of black dance features, such as flat-footed stepping and the Charleston, when he wrote, "The dancing is sharply accented, with a quirky yet quite unforced kind of invention. Legs fly out at high and unexpected angles, feet that you expected pointed are made flat, and flirtation is given an edge of delicate and even urbane malice. . . . At one moment a girl with India-rubber legs is diverting the attention of four suitors. . . ."[6] More recently, Joseph Mazo has written that *Rubies* "suggests

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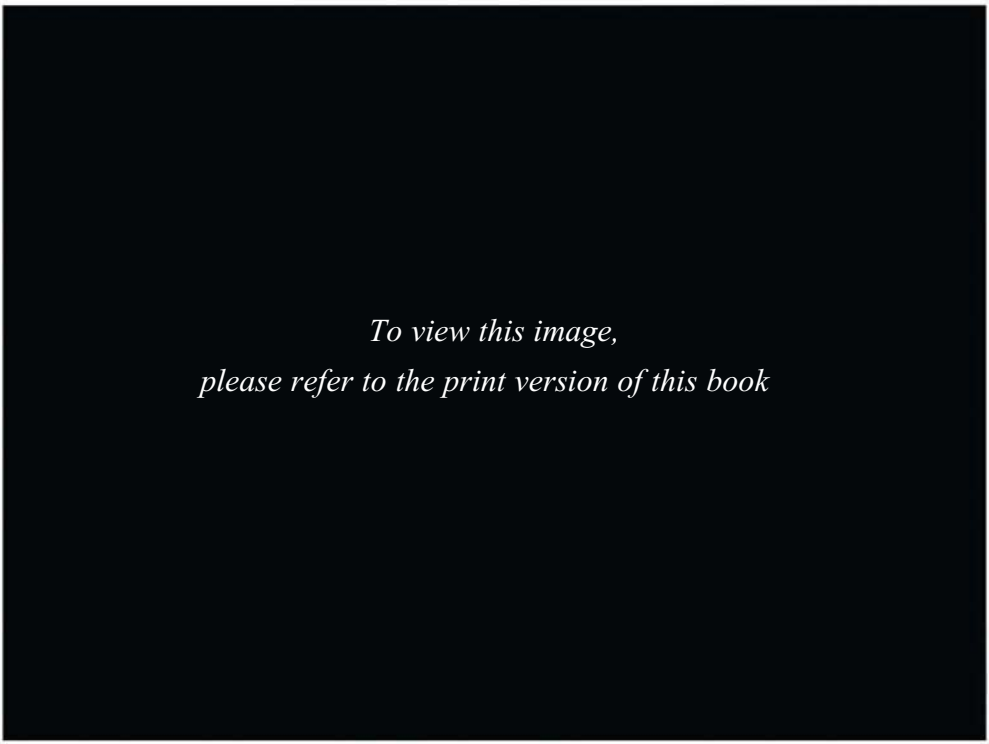
jazz dancing with its brisk attack and sharp changes; its changing accents; its turned-in legs and thrust-out hips; its joyously outrageous show-dancer sexiness; and—very importantly—its humor."[7]

So little attention has been paid to the influence of African-American dance on Balanchine's work that, taking these remarks together, one has no context in which to interpret them. One might ask first whether these dancers and commentators noticed the black dance connection because the late sixties was also a time when the dramatic struggle for civil rights and black power took center stage in American culture. Or one might ask whether Balanchine included these elements of African-American popular dancing because it was timely to do so and because he came, at the height of his choreographic powers, to appreciate a different genre of dance enough to quote it in his own work. One might even wonder whether he embraced black culture then as a political gesture.[8]

But obviously, if this ballet set forth a Balanchinian canon, these elements were not new, nor does anything in Balanchine's biography lead us to think that they were suddenly produced as agit-prop for civil rights. Indeed, these borrowings from black dance were long-standing cor-

Helene Alexopoulos and Kipling Houston in George Balanchine's *Four Temperaments*. (Photo: Paul Kolnik.)



nerstones of the modernist strand of his choreography and had been noticed by critics previously.[9] This strand had a very important impact on the technique in which his dancers were trained. And yet while this aspect of his work has been noted frequently in passing, it has never been closely examined. The purpose of this essay is to initiate such an examination.

It is well known that Balanchine loved things American, from Western movies to jazz music. Even before he moved to the United States he was inspired by black dance styles, to which he was probably exposed even in his youth in Russia, and which he must have seen in Paris during the jazz-era twenties. In the first few years after he arrived in New York, he worked closely with several dancers and choreographers whose work in the black idiom inspired him. Moreover, several modernist composers whose music he choreographed were deeply influenced by black jazz. Balanchine's interest in black dance and black music—whether performed by whites or African Americans—is evident not only in his various works for the popular musical stage; aspects of the black dance tradition also thread through Balanchine's concert choreography, like *Rubies* and other ballets.

I want to argue here not that Balanchine appropriated African or African-American dance wholesale or singled out black dance as his sole inspiration. For Balanchine's initiation into choreography took place during the height of the modernist era, characterized by its mixture of forms. Rather, his interest and participation in American popular entertainment fed back into his ballet choreography. His connoisseurship of dance in popular culture inevitably led him to experiment with one of the crucial forms and styles that have shaped American twentieth-century social and popular dancing—viz., the venerable tradition of African-American dance.[10] (I am defining "black dance" here as the group of social and popular [theatrical] dance genres that originated and were passed down in the African-American community, evincing survivals and transformations of West African practices. It should be understood that black dance has had a complex history, involving a syncretic fusion of European and African elements, and that it has sometimes passed back and forth between African-American and Euro-American performers.[11])

As I have noted, the black dance influence is an aspect of Balanchine's work that has long been sporadically commented on by critics. For instance, Edwin Denby wrote in 1953 that "as folk and ballroom steps have been classicized in the past in many ways, so Balanchine has been classicizing movements from our Negro and show steps."[12] It may even be, as Elizabeth Kendall has suggested, that Balanchine's love for tapdancing shaped his choreographic style in the most fundamental way, generating a consistent emphasis on multiple, complex steps and intricate, syncopated rhythms, with a relatively understated port de bras that at the same time allowed for a flexible torso.[13]

To be sure, African-American dance was not the only source of the rich technical and choreographic style Balanchine developed. He was fascinated with African-American dancing; he was also fascinated with popular images of the "Wild West," with white square dancing, with baroque European rhythms and postures, with romantic style, with the waltz, with both the classical ballet idiom and the stylized representation of folkdancing in Russian nineteenth-century ballet, with Shakespeare, with parades and military drills, and with much else besides. He worked in cabarets, opera houses, the circus, on the variety stage, in Hollywood, on Broadway, and of course in his own theater at Lincoln Center. From the beginning Balanchine's work smudged the boundaries between high and low culture. Moreover, the ballet tradition in which he was reared had deep roots in social dancing and popular entertainments and continually borrowed back new forms. So it should not surprise us that, in creating a distinctively American ballet, he threaded it through and through with African-American popular dancing—not only the exhibition and "showbusiness" genres, but also the social dances of his time. Although this essay focuses on Balanchine's use of black dance and argues that it had a fundamental influence on his work, it should in no way be construed as asserting that this was the only or even the primary focus of an oeuvre that ranged over many styles and developed in many different directions.

Although genuine African-American jazz dancing arrived with a splash in the Soviet Union only in 1926, two years after Balanchine emigrated to Europe, ragtime (an earlier form of African-American music) and its associated social dances—the cakewalk, the one-step, the Boston, and the foxtrot—had already spread throughout Russia between 1910 and 1917. According to Bronislava Nijinska, as early as the 1890s the black tapdancers Jackson and Johnson toured Russia.[14] However, popular black ballroom and exhibition forms had largely been mediated through white Euro-American culture. A Russo-French brand of jazz arrived in 1922, when the poet, dancer, and jazz enthusiast Valentin Parnakh returned home from Paris to organize, in Moscow, the first Soviet jazz band. He gave a concert, demonstrated his version of the latest Parisian jazz dances, and published articles in the Russian émigré Berlin journal *Veshch* on "The New Dances" and "The Jazz Band."[15]

Parnakh's efforts were part of an influx of Western culture into Russia during the years of the New Economic Policy, when limited capitalism was in place, Western culture was imported, and the borders of the Soviet Union were relatively permeable. The influence of American films, a free-flowing cultural exchange between Russian cosmopolites and European capitals (in particular Paris and Berlin), a market economy, and the lifting of liquor prohibition laws made cabarets and jazz clubs a familiar item in Moscow and Petrograd. In 1924, Parnakh's jazz band appeared in Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of *D.E.* (Give Us Europe), in a scene ostensibly

showing the decadence of American culture. (The Soviet audience loved it.) Thus even before the first visit of American jazz musicians and dancers in 1926, the jazz age had already penetrated Russia.[16]

Several of Balanchine's early pieces from the Russian years testify to his au courant interest in jazz and black dance. In 1921, he choreographed a foxtrot for the guests at a party celebrating the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement signed on March 16.[17] In 1922 he choreographed a ballet to Stravinsky's *Ragtime* (1918). And in 1924, the same year *D.E.* toured to Petrograd, the Young Ballet presented another Balanchine foxtrot, presumably a solo for Nicholas Efimov. Working in the Maly Opera Theater in 1923, Balanchine staged the dances for a modernized version of Shaw's *Caesar and Cleopatra*, which included a prologue in a bar. The humorist Alexander Flit described the production thus:

> To show the queen in a bar
> They struggled with all their might
> Egyptian vignettes and foxtrots
> Academically to unite.

During that season, the same theater presented Ernst Toller's *Eugen the Unfortunate*, again with choreography by Balanchine; the literary critic Boris Eikhenbaum commented that the audience saw "shadowy dances in the latest fashion." Also in the year before he left the Soviet Union, Balanchine worked as a pianist and dancer in cabarets and cinemas. He was, as well, connected to the Factory of the Experimental Actor (FEKS), an avant-garde theater group that tried to "Americanize" their work by quoting jazz, sports, and films.

Finally, Balanchine rehearsed, but never finally staged, Darius Milhaud and Jean Cocteau's 1920 music-hall ballet, *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, which featured two black characters in a Prohibition-era American bar. Thus even before leaving Russia Balanchine had already demonstrated his interest in American black dance forms, worked in popular venues, and choreographed dances to music by two composers—Stravinsky and Milhaud—whose modernism (or at least, certain aspects of it) was directly inspired by the polyrhythms and syncopated accents of American jazz.[18]

By the time Balanchine left Petrograd in 1924, later that year joining Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, two important avant-garde ballets on African and African-American themes had recently been given in Paris. Les Ballets Suédois had presented in 1923 both *La Création du monde* and *Within the Quota*. The first was a "ballet nègre" based on Blaise Cendrars's renderings of African creation myths, choreographed by Jean Börlin to jazz-inspired music composed by Darius Milhaud for a Harlem-style jazz orchestra. Milhaud recounts in his autobiography how he had long been interested in experimenting with the forms of jazz he had heard in Harlem nightclubs,

and also how the collaborators on the ballet (Börlin, Milhaud, and Fernand Léger, who designed the sets and costumes) planned it during visits to popular dance halls in Paris.[19] The second was a "ballet américain" about immigrants, the American dream, and Hollywood myths. Although it did not focus on African-American characters, it was set to a jazz score by the as-yet-unknown Cole Porter, it featured black-based social dance forms like the shimmy and the foxtrot, and it included in its cast of characters "A Coloured Gentleman" (danced by Kaj Smith in blackface).[20] Balanchine missed these ballets, but surely he had access to the same popular dance halls Börlin had visited with Milhaud and Léger. And he would easily have had the opportunity to see performances by black jazz dancers and musicians, including (after 1925) the legendary Josephine Baker. According to Phyllis Rose, Baker's biographer, in the 1920s "all the nightclubs in the area of Pigalle had at least a few blacks in their orchestras. At the Casino de Paris, a leading music hall, the orchestra was entirely black."[21] According to Patrick O'Connor, Balanchine gave Baker private ballet lessons in Paris in the early 1930s, and Lincoln Kirstein remembers that "he was a great friend and admirer of Josephine Baker, and . . . may have staged some small numbers for her in Paris."[22]

It may be that Balanchine's ballets for Diaghilev's troupe were flavored with jazz dancing. There are suggestions of this direction in photographs of *Le Chant du rossignol* and *La Chatte*, at least. He never went so far as to make a "ballet nègre" for Diaghilev, and, even if he had wanted to, it is not clear that Diaghilev would have allowed it. But two characters he created in 1926 brought black dancing onto the Ballets Russes stage. One was The Black Dancer, played by Alexandra Danilova, in *Jack in the Box*. The other was Snowball, "a Blackman," danced in blackface by Balanchine himself in *The Triumph of Neptune*. This ballet, with a book by Sacheverell Sitwell and music by Lord Berners, was based on nineteenth-century English pantomimes. Snowball was modeled after a lame black man who sold flowers on the Scarborough streets during Sitwell's childhood. Of course, black men in nineteenth-century England — whether in real life or as represented by whites on the pantomime stage — did not dance twenties-style jazz steps. But Cyril Beaumont's description of Balanchine's depiction of this character suggests that historical authenticity was not what he had in mind. It was, Beaumont wrote, "a dance full of subtly contrasted rhythms, strutting walks, mincing steps and surging backwards bendings of the body, borrowed from the cake-walk, the whole invested with a delicious humour derived from the mood of the dance, a paradoxical blend of pretended nervous apprehension and blustering confidence."[23]

Soon after he joined Diaghilev's company, Balanchine became friendly with the composer Vladimir Dukelsky. Under the name Vernon Duke, Dukelsky later composed jazz-based film and musical comedy scores. And, after Balanchine moved to the U.S., he renewed his acquain-

tance with Duke and worked with him on several projects, including the Ziegfeld Follies, the film *The Goldwyn Follies*, and the Broadway musical *Cabin in the Sky*.

Between 1929 and Balanchine's arrival in the United States in 1933, several of the choreographer's activities indicate the presence of the jazz thread in his artistic production as well as his professional associations. One was his work on the variety stage. This included his uncredited choreography for *Wake Up and Dream!* (the 1929 Charles B. Cochran London revue, with music and lyrics by Cole Porter); a jazz number for four women (to recorded music by Jack Hylton and his Orchestra) in Sir Oswald Stoll's variety shows at the London Coliseum in 1931; and collaboration with Buddy Bradley on *Charles B. Cochran's 1931 Revue* (to music by Noel Coward and others).[24]

The collaboration with Buddy Bradley is a crucial one, for Bradley, an African-American tapdancer, teacher, choreographer, and coach, put his stamp on numerous Broadway musicals in the late twenties and early thirties, before moving to London where he opened a school. Not only did he devise group numbers, but he also coached and designed dance routines for various white solo and duo performers, including Mae West, Ann Pennington, Adele and Fred Astaire, Ruby Keeler, Eleanor Powell, Paul Draper, and especially Jessie Matthews, whose stage shows and films he choreographed. What Bradley gave Broadway was a fresh combination of tap-dance steps combined with body movements taken from African-American vernacular dances, set to the rhythms of jazz improvisations in music. His ideas permeated Harlem clubs as well as black and white Broadway and helped shape popular theatrical dance as we know it today.[25]

Another jazz thread during this period was Balanchine's work with Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill on *Les Sept Pechés capitaux* (The Seven Deadly Sins) for Les Ballets 1933. This was a refraction of American bourgeois materialist culture through German 1920s cabaret performance style, set in the form of a morality play. Anna-Anna's tour of America's cities and vices thematically motivated a jazz ballet style that anticipated Balanchine's *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*.

It was in 1933 that Kirstein, visiting Europe, invited Balanchine to come to America. Balanchine was already thinking of the U.S. as a blessedly racially mixed country, and he looked forward, according to Kirstein at the time, to establishing a ballet school and company that would feature an equal number of black and white dancers. "For the first he would take 4 white girls and 4 white boys, about sixteen yrs. old and 8 of the same, *negros* [sic]. . . . As time went on he would get younger children from 8 yrs. on. He thinks the negro part of it would be amazingly supple, the combination of suppleness and sense of time superb," Kirstein wrote to the director of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford. He went on to describe some of the ballets he himself planned for the company's repertory, including *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin, a "ballet au grand serieux avec apothéose: by E. E. *Cummings*. . . . Music by Stephen Foster."[26] The totally racially integrated ballet company described here — whether indeed it was Balanchine's own idea or Kirstein's — never, of course, materialized. Yet some plans for including black dancers may have been discussed from time to time, for Denby wrote, in 1952, that the New York City Ballet "is as likely to be as Negro as white in another decade or so."[27] Again, whether this was Denby's interest or a plan of Balanchine's is unclear. In any case, it was not until 1955, when Arthur Mitchell joined New York City Ballet, that the company had even one African-American member.[28]

However, Balanchine began to work with a number of African-American dancers on the popular musical stage shortly after he arrived in the U.S. Beginning in the fall of 1935, he devised the dances for the 1936 edition of the Ziegfeld Follies (with music by Vernon Duke), where part of his job was to choreograph numbers for Josephine Baker, who was making her triumphant return to New York after ten years in Paris. Although he did not compose their dances, he met the acrobatic tapdancers Fayard and Harold Nicholas (the Nicholas Brothers), who were also part of the revue.[29] In 1936, Balanchine choreographed his well-known jazz-tap ballet "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue" for the Rodgers and Hart musical *On Your Toes*. Although the leading dancers — Ray Bolger and Tamara Geva — were white, the black tapdancer Herbert Harper, who also served as the assistant to the choreographer, must have taught Balanchine a great deal. Probably it was Harper who choreographed the tap sections. According to Fred Danieli, "In *On Your Toes* he was tremendously taken with the black tap dancer Herby Harper, who was also his assistant on the show. Balanchine was fascinated with American rhythms. Absolutely loved tap. Tried to learn it."[30] Balanchine worked with the Nicholas Brothers again in the Rodgers and Hart musical *Babes in Arms* (1937), for which he choreographed a surrealistic dream ballet — "Peter's Journey," in which one of the lead characters takes a fantasy trip to Hollywood, Europe, and Africa. The piece presaged the vogue for dream ballets in Broadway shows whose origins are usually attributed to Agnes de Mille. Fayard Nicholas describes how in *Babes* Balanchine combined the Nicholas Brothers' acrobatic stunts with the actions of the chorus girls: "There were eight chorus girls bending over, and I started out running, doing cartwheels and flips and leaping over one, then two, and finally all eight girls and landing in a split. Then the girls lined up with their legs apart, and Harold slid into a split beneath all of them from the rear and snapped back up as he came out in front."[31]

Balanchine's first Hollywood musical, *Goldwyn Follies*, was released in 1938. Although no African-American dancers appear in it, tapdance plays a crucial role, for in the Romeo and Juliet Ballet, the conflict between the ballet-dancing Montagues and the tapdancing Capulets is symbolized in the clash of opposing dance styles.[32] In retrospect, this ballet prefigures

not only *West Side Story*—in that Jerome Robbins made a jazz version of the Romeo and Juliet legend—but also the various breakdancing films of the 1980s, beginning with *Flashdance*, in which breakdancing itself does battle with other dance forms, from ballet to whitewashed contemporary Broadway jazz. Indeed, the precedent had been set as early as *On Your Toes*, in which there had also been a "competition ballet" between ballet dancers and jazz dancers, and in which the entire plot revolves around the "feud" between classical and popular music.[33]

In 1940 Balanchine directed the Vernon Duke-Lynn Root musical *Cabin in the Sky*, collaborating with Katherine Dunham on the choreography for the all-black cast, which featured Dunham's company in the dance numbers. The choreographic style was a mix of classical ballet and the technique Dunham had synthesized from ballet, modern dance, and Afro-Caribbean ritual and folkdance. Dunham recalls that Balanchine had intended to choreograph the production himself, "but watching us in our own classes and training and the company's use of their bodies, he finally felt that we should work together. . . . He felt the rhythms, you know. . . . We worked together with no problem. . . . He really seemed to love our style. . . . the rhythm and the percussion of our dances." Dunham muses that "He had no prejudices that I know of. . . . He picked us out, remember. It was an ideal collaboration."[34] He worked with Dunham again when they both choreographed numbers (along with Donald Dare) for the all-star wartime film musical *Star-Spangled Rhythm* (1942).

In 1954, Balanchine choreographed Peter Brook's production of *House of Flowers*, a musical by Truman Capote and Harold Arlen. The all-black cast included Pearl Bailey, Diahann Carroll, Geoffrey Holder (who choreographed his own Banda dance), Walter Nicks, and Arthur Mitchell, and, later, Alvin Ailey.[35]

In all these musicals, as well as in those such as *I Married an Angel* (1938), *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), *Keep Off the Grass* (1940), *Louisiana Purchase* (1940), and *The Lady Comes Across* (1942), Balanchine borrowed heavily from black tap and jazz dancing, the reigning dance styles of both white and black Broadway musicals since the smash all-black musicals of the early 1920s. Like many white dancers and choreographers of the period, he learned the nuances of these dance styles directly from African Americans, whether from collaborators who were credited in programs (like Buddy Bradley and Herbert Harper), dancers whose choreographic contributions remained relatively anonymous (as dancers' contributions often do), or nonprofessional dancers he observed on social occasions at dance halls and nightclubs. He also learned something from the white tapdancers he admired, in particular Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Edward Villella remembers that Balanchine hoped to give Astaire a role in the 1961 jazz ballet *Modern Jazz: Variants*.[36]

That Balanchine respected and was respected by the black commu-

nity becomes clear in perusing his list of works. For instance, for a 1953 Negro Debutante Ball in Harlem sponsored by the *Amsterdam News* he arranged a Cotillion Promenade for five hundred couples, led by two New York City Ballet stars—Tanaquil Le Clercq and Jacques d'Amboise. On the occasion of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, death in 1968, the company officially mourned with the performance of *Requiem Canticles*, to Stravinsky's 1966 composition of the same name. More a memorial procession than a ballet, it featured Arthur Mitchell as the figure of King. Soon after, Mitchell founded the Dance Theater of Harlem. Balanchine became a board member and a vice president of the company. The year of the new company's debut, Mitchell and Balanchine, with dancers from both companies, collaborated on *Concerto for Jazz Band and Orchestra* (1971) for a New York City Ballet gala benefit evening at the New York State Theater. The ballet, to music by Rolf Liebermann (performed by the Tonight Show orchestra, conducted by "Doc" Severinsen), included sections called "Blues" and "Boogie-Woogie," and concluded with a "Mambo" danced by the entire integrated cast. All the sections were collaboratively choreographed, and dancers from the different companies partnered one another.[37] It was the only time Balanchine's vision of a totally integrated ballet company was ever realized.[38]

Jazz and other African-American dance themes (sometimes in the form of Latin American dances) appear overtly and consistently in the titles, subjects, and musical choices of Balanchine's American ballets, from *Alma Mater* (1935; music by Kay Swift), a ballet on college life in which the heroine is a flapper and the final number a "Salvation Rhumba," to *Tango* (1982; music by Stravinsky). These obvious references include: *Pas de Deux—Blues* (1940), to music by Vernon Duke (performed at the Winter Garden in an *All Star Dance Gala* for British War Relief), and *Fantasia Brasiliera* (1941), to music by Francisco Mignone, with choreography based on Brazilian folkdances, especially the samba. The list also contains the Blackamoors' Dance in *Night Shadow* (1946), which was originally performed (by Ruthanna Boris and Leon Danielian) in blackface, and *Bayou* (1952), with music by Virgil Thomson, a ballet that Denby describes as "a sort of Dunham number." And the list includes: *Ragtime (I)* (1960), to Stravinsky's 1918 composition (with scenery from Lew Christensen's 1947 ballet *Blackface*), which had cabaret-style, jazz-based choreography (*Ragtime [II]*, a different pas de deux to the Stravinsky piece, for Suzanne Farrell and Arthur Mitchell, was done in 1966); and the above-mentioned *Modern Jazz: Variants* (1961; music by Gunther Schuller), which featured the Modern Jazz Quartet playing onstage, an orchestra in the pit, and choreography that mixed ballet and jazz. (Denby, reporting in detail the choreographic process of this ballet, describes a "stylized Lindy-kick figure" in 5/8 time, and notes that the entire ballet, with its "very rapid, unexpectedly complex, quite confined . . . figures, sharply contrasted, [that] kept chang-

ing direction," had the feel of "a Lindy-type couple dance." He also notes that Balanchine "wanted half the cast—two solo boys and eight ensemble girls—to be Negroes, but the girls weren't found." Arthur Mitchell was one of the men, and John Jones, appearing as a guest with the company, was the other.) This category of work also includes *Clarinade* (1964), to music by Morton Gould, featuring Benny Goodman playing solo jazz clarinet with the City Ballet orchestra—the first ballet Balanchine choreographed for the New York State Theater stage. And it includes *Who Cares?* (1970), the well-known suite of solo and group numbers to George Gershwin's songs from Broadway musicals.[39]

But there are African-American influences that subtly pervade even the modernist pieces in Balanchine's oeuvre. Indeed, given the African and African-American influence on modernism in the other arts, from Picasso's cubism to Stravinsky's polyrhythmy to dada's fascination with "the big drum," it should not surprise us that Balanchine's modernism is also tinged with the black dance heritage. In cubism, what was seen as pure abstraction in fact came from a different aesthetic tradition, one that among other things used stylized forms, rather than the "illusionistic" representation of the West. In the same way, some of Balanchine's "anticlassical" innovations were created simply by injecting African-American elements into the classical vocabulary. These elements include characteristic positions of the arms and hands, for instance the arms held akimbo and "jazz hands"—palms presented, with the wrists flexed.[40] They also appear in frequent pelvic thrusts, crouches, bent legs, flexed ankles, and flat feet, and in rhythmic features like syncopation (suspended beats or freezes). (Obviously such elements as bent legs or suspended beats, per se, do not constitute Africanisms. However, the more these elements appear in clusters, the more they resemble African-American dancing.) Denby refers to the "Negro dynamics of the jazz style (such as an overslow follow-through, a razor-sharp finesse in the rhythmic attack, an exaggerated variety of weight in playing with the beat)," and he even notes that the dancers in the 1952 company "all have shagged from way back."[41] African-American elements in Balanchine's work also include recognizable steps, like the soft shoe in the second theme of *The Four Temperaments* (1946), the shag in *Symphony in Three Movements* (1972), or the Charleston in *Stravinsky Violin Concerto* (1972).

According to Arthur Mitchell, "Jazz elements show up in all his ballets. And that's why his style is called *neo*-classical." Mitchell explains,

> One of the bases of his technique is what we call jazz, because everything is off the hip rather than being on the leg. And that's why when you see his ballets danced by a regular classical ballet company, something is missing. Because he says, "Dancing is movement through time and space." He does not want you to stand on one leg and balance. He wants a sense of movement. So the hip thrust, which we consider jazz, is very important. And that is the premise of the neo-classical technique.

> This is why when Dance Theater of Harlem dances his ballets, because of [the dancers'] awareness [of African-American vernacular style] it looks like it's been created on them. It's the same thing as when you listen to Stravinsky's music. Whenever I work with an orchestra conductor or a pianist, I tell them, "To get the syncopation, think of jazz." Then all of a sudden it makes sense.
>
> And to take it a step further, this is what Dance Theater of Harlem is doing by bringing a feline quality [to the dance] — which is also one of the things he talked about, landing like a cat. But we use the base of the spine and the fluidity of the back that comes from what we call ethnic dance [or African-American vernacular dance]. That's what Dance Theater of Harlem is bringing to the neo-classical dance. There's no word for it yet. And that's why when you see Dance Theater of Harlem dance Balanchine it's so vibrant, so alive. Because it comes from a core or a center that's not being placed or being rigid.[42]

Arlene Croce seems to concur with Mitchell when she notes how his company stresses the African-American dance features in the "abstract" Balanchine ballets they perform. "*Agon* contains an element of New York Afro-Latin rhythm to which the [Dance Theater of Harlem] dancers respond excitingly, just as they respond to the syncopation and jazzlike counterpoint of *Concerto Barocco*," she writes.[43]

African-American elements may be seen in Balanchine's avant-garde ballets as early as *Apollo* (1928). Although this dance has often been flagged (even by Balanchine himself) as the choreographer's reaffirmation of classicism, it was, as Nancy Reynolds has pointed out, "classicism with a difference." The difference resulted from such "distorting" African-American elements as a multi-unit torso, thrusting hips, flexed feet, crouches, shuffles, and jazz hands. Some of these elements, and of course the complex rhythms of the dancing, including suspended beats, were inspired by the structure of Stravinsky's music. Croce has written that certainly Stravinsky, in writing the music, had in mind not only ancient Greece and the French seventeenth-century neoclassical ideal, but also "contemporary Paris of *le jazz hot*." Villella has commented that Terpsichore's entrance in the coda, especially her hip gestures, are "pure show-biz — pure jazz." And Patricia McBride has stated, "The Terpsichore role is very jazzy, the variation especially. The rhythm is interesting — it's delay, then you change the rhythm in it." The role of Apollo, too, incorporated jazz style (see, for instance, the photo of Jacques d'Amboise on page 47 of *Repertory in Review*). According to André Eglevsky, "In the Coda, you come out with a big jump, then twist in the air, then there's a slide and stop; slide and stop. You don't know where you are. Mr. B. said, 'You have no bones in your back. Slide like rubber.' "[44]

Balanchine was deeply immersed in his Broadway work when he choreographed *Concerto Barocco*. Indeed, *Cabin in the Sky* opened only

seven months before the ballet was first given in New York at an open dress rehearsal in May 1941 (its premiere took place in Rio de Janeiro the following month during American Ballet Caravan's South American tour). Given his interests and influences at the time, Balanchine's lacing of classical ballet with black jazz dance seems an appropriate, if anachronistic, response to the intricate rhythms of Bach's Double Violin Concerto in D minor. One reviewer wrote that the ballet "captures the soul of polyphony." Denby invoked tapdancing when he wrote, "Here the sound of the dancers' toe steps is part of the effect." And he noted that "the syncopations of the first and third movements are wonderfully apt and American."[45]

Even more revealing are Suki Schorer's remarks about Balanchine's instructions to her in the soloist's role: "More difficult than precision in technique is exactitude in timing—the syncopation. . . . For all its refinement, he likes it 'jazzy.' There's one place where the corps almost does the Charleston on pointe. In some of my most brisk and classical movements, he kept saying, 'Make it jazzy. Lead with the hip.' " Danieli also specifies an African-American influence: "He always took from American dancing. In *Concerto Barocco,* the corps does a walking step in the adagio, snapping their fingers. That gesture was from a popular social dance in 1941. He danced everything and he made us dance it too." The dancers recognize the African-American influence in Balanchine's work because Balanchine spoke to them about it, as when, rehearsing *Symphony in Three Movements* (1972), he gave Villella this correction: "You know, dear, it's the shag—the *Boston* shag."[46]

Like *Apollo, The Four Temperaments* (1946) is often seen as a turning point in Balanchine's choreography, one that expanded his technical vocabulary in avant-garde directions. Both the musical score and the dance were conceived on a medieval theme—the four bodily humors—yet at the time it was created the overall look of the ballet was deemed modernist in its distortions. At the time, critics spoke of what Balanchine might have borrowed from modern dance. However, here Balanchine's modernism seems to be created partly by juxtaposing to the familiar classical vocabulary jazz and vernacular movements and energies, taken from the black dance material he had so recently worked with. The evidence shows that the angular, oblique, distorted lines and syncopated rhythms owe as much to Balanchine's stint on Broadway and in Hollywood—and to Hindemith's own jazz inspiration—as to the idea of "angular archaisms" generated by the medieval theme. Denby refers to "dragged steps . . . and easy syncopated stepping." And Arthur Mitchell, who found his part difficult to learn, recalls, "It was the rhythm, not the steps [that presented difficulties to the dancers]. Several things were going on at once. The actual steps were just kind of like a tricky tap dance."[47]

From the very beginning of the dance, African-American elements appear. In the first theme, early on the foot flexes quite deliberately; the

dancers crouch facing away from one another in a "get-down" posture; the woman crouches even while doing attitudes and arabesques. Both lean back in the cakewalk pose that Beaumont had seen in Snowball's dance in *The Triumph of Neptune*. (This, like the other movements in the theme, is a characteristic posture that recurs throughout the ballet). Croce writes: "The image created by the third girl as she is spun is blithe, even comical; could Balanchine have been thinking of the bass fiddle the forties jazz player spins after a chorus of hot licks?" The same turn in fact appears even earlier, in the second theme, along with a sprightly soft-shoe dance, hip thrusts, and a boxlike position of the arms with palms facing forward, very similar to the ecstatic arm gestures associated with religious possession in African-American culture. In the third theme, the action of jazz hands "pushing through" as the torso twists against lunging legs is introduced, while the cakewalk pose appears even more strongly as the woman does slow kicks while her supporting leg bends and she leans back against the man's chest.[48]

Perhaps there were intimations of a flash act[49] or the virtuosic breaks of the lindy in William Dollar's especially acrobatic version, no longer performed, of the Melancholic Variation. In any case, in its most recent incarnation, Melancholic is striking for its use — by both the man and the women — of the typical above-mentioned jazz movement that places the legs in a wide fourth position lunge and twists the torso, setting the shoulders against the plane of the hips, while the hands push their way into an overextended straight-arm fourth position with jazz hands, reaching out in opposition to the legs. It is notable, too, for the way the four women advance leaning back, thrusting their hips, and stretching out their arms to the sides, palms forward. Sanguinic, too, emphasizes the off-hip use of weight, the hip counterposed to the shoulders in profile, jazz hands "pushing through" and the cakewalk posture of the couple.

According to Mitchell, "throughout Phlegmatic, you had to keep the rhythmic thing going with your feet, while the body is supposed to be loose, boneless. . . . To get the accents with the feet and retain fluidity in the body — that was the challenge." Indeed, as Phlegmatic leans over, one hand on hip, one is reminded of the conventional rhyme in black songs: "Put your hand on your hip; let your backbone slip." Croce refers to tap in describing this variation: "[Phlegmatic's] little dance with the corps includes cabalistic gestures toward 'his' floor, and he hovers close to the ground, repeating his mumbo-jumbo (a syncopated time-step) as if he expected the ground to answer him." Phlegmatic postures, left hand on his hip and the other held out, in an iconic black gesture that Robert Thompson has traced through African-American and Haitian usage to Kongo origins and that John Szwed sees in the African-derived baton-twirling pose of majorettes. The women, too, take up this gesture. As the music takes a jazzy turn, the man lines up with the corps to form a chorus

line, complete with kicks, and the whole group "steps it down." Finally, the way Phlegmatic's torso hunkers over his footwork at the end of his variation is reminiscent of a typical tapdancer's posture in performing the step Over the Top.[50]

Choleric stresses the asymmetrical placement of the weight over one hip in several stances, including one (threading through the entire ballet) in which one leg is placed, turned-in, in front of the other. It's the stance of a fashion model or a showgirl, and it is one of Balanchine's favorite poses for presenting women, but it can eventually be traced back to the African-American dance practice of treating the body as an assemblage of shifting planes that move in multiple, at times perpendicular, relationships to one another.[51] Moreover, the movement in and out of that stance — the rotation of one or both legs by twisting the foot — is a characteristic jazz move.[52] The quick épaulements, enlarged for a moment into a full-scale shimmy, add to this impression of shifting planes. Choleric, too, strikes the majorette posture. When the corps enters for the Finale, the ballet is crowned with all the African-derived movements that had been set out in the theme and developed in the variations, and more: the slow cakewalk, crouching steps and lunges, outstretched arms with jazz hands, a prancing step with hands flopping forward, ecstatic arms, and a plunging reach by one hand to the opposite foot.

As in *The Four Temperaments*, in *Agon* (1957) Balanchine's modernism seems based in the unpredictable rhythmic complexities and cool performance demeanor of African-American style, even though the ostensible model is a palimpsest of Greek athletic contests overlaid with seventeenth-century French social dances. Again, Denby in particular was attuned to the borrowings from black jazz dancing in Balanchine's work. For instance, he describes Melissa Hayden's solo, *Bransle gay*, during the second pas de trois, in jazz terms: "As she dances, she keeps calmly 'on top of' two conflicting rhythms (or beats) that coincide once or twice and join on the last note." (In a different article, written the same year, he notes that " 'on top of the beat' is a jazz expression.") Moreover, he writes that "The dancers [in *Agon*] have been 'cool' in the jazz sense — no buildup, inventions that did not try to get anywhere, right after a climax an inconsequence like the archness of high comedy. . . . At the end, the imaginary contestant froze, toughly confident. The company seems to have figured jointly as the offbeat hero." Four years after the ballet was made, Denby contrasted the subtle infusion of jazz steps and dynamics in *Agon* with Balanchine's unsuccessful attempt to make a "real" jazz ballet in *Modern Jazz: Variants*. Denby concluded that "*Agon* . . . in some unliteral way came closer to the image of jazz than any jazz ballet yet has." Indeed, by the early sixties, although Balanchine was still interested in jazz music, apparently he was no longer in touch with "authentic" jazz dancing, which had so influenced him twenty years before. Denby reported that "the dance fans" objected, in

Variants, "to the thirties-type jive steps, to the show biz-type gesture, to the sour night-club look of the staging." Moreover, he complained, "the partners couldn't let each other alone for a moment, the dances couldn't leave out a beat, nobody could dance except on top of the beat." And he pointed out that "current jazz dancing separates partners, omits beats, lets the beat pull away, anticipates it, and that elasticity of attack characterizes the gesture, and varies it."[53]

In his abstract works, Balanchine was by no means trying to create jazz ballets, as he had, for instance, in *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* or *Modern Jazz: Variants*. Rather, he was transforming and adapting material that undoubtedly attracted him for many reasons. Perhaps most important to him as a transplanted European was the iconic "American-ness" of black vernacular dancing; it was, after all, the basis for most American social dancing by the 1930s, when he arrived in the U.S. But surely he was attracted to black dance for other reasons as well. In terms of structure, its virtuosic rhythmic play was deeply compelling to this most musical of choreographers, just as jazz music had been a "revelation" to the European composers of his generation.[54] And it offered an equally attractive bodily aesthetic that created contrast and variety when juxtaposed to the classical ballet lexicon.

Balanchine was not looking for an alternative genre of choreography, the way Dunham was, for instance, when she began to incorporate Haitian folkdances into her spectacles; rather, he imagined an academic ballet genre expanded, enlivened, and enriched by references to the popular dancing of the culture he and his dancers inhabited. According to Mitchell, "He would say, 'I am using the kinetic energy and the rhythms and the bodies of Americans. If I were in another country, I would probably choreograph totally differently.' " Villella describes Balanchine's use of black vernacular dance as typical of his approach to the balletic incorporation of other folkdance motifs, as in *Tarantella*, for example. "The form would be intact but it would be perfectly classical. He had a unique ability to adhere to the original rhythm and step of the folk dance, while still making constant reference to the classical tradition as well. Also, he could see something once and completely understand it—he was a phenomenal jazz dancer. And when you see social dancing in his works it's so networked that it's stuff you've seen before but you don't know you've seen it before; you're comfortable with it and yet it's new and fresh."[55]

Of course, Balanchine was not the only Euro-American ballet choreographer to use black dance or African-American dancers. Both Jerome Robbins and Agnes de Mille worked on Broadway; de Mille choreographed *Black Ritual* for American Ballet Theater in 1940, using Dunham's dancers, to Milhaud's *Creation of the World*, and Robbins's ballets in the fifties, like *New York Export: Op. Jazz*, as well as his *West Side Story*, were

heavily informed by jazz style. In Chicago, Ruth Page choreographed the jazz-based *Frankie and Johnny* (1938) for the Federal Theater Project and worked with Dunham, Talley Beatty, and several other African-American dancers on *La Guiablesse*. Yet Balanchine is the one choreographer who seems to have taken this interest further than a passing fancy for Americana; he incorporated his deep and abiding love for African-American dancing into the very heart of his technique and choreography. And his modernist incorporation of black dance into his ballets, like his blurring of the boundaries between corps and soloist in *Serenade*, seems to be an expression of his liberal view of modern American society.[56]

At the same time, this liberal aspect of Balanchine's work has its problematic facets, confined and limited as it was by the nature of American race relations. His initial dream of a racially integrated American ballet company never materialized, for reasons that remain unknown. Strikingly, although he used jazz music, it was almost never by an African-American composer.[57] Often the black dancers in his company, like Mitchell and Mel Tomlinson, although cast in many different types of roles, also played stereotyped roles, either exotic or nonhuman, like the African Oni of Ife in *The Figure in the Carpet*, Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Pluto in *Persephone*, and Hot Chocolate in *The Nutcracker*.[58]

Yet this aspect of Balanchine's choreography was also exemplary in many ways. To cast a black man in a leading role and as an intimate partner for a white woman in the fifties and sixties, as Balanchine did many times with Mitchell, was a radical political statement on the ballet stage. Moreover, as Mitchell pointed out, since Balanchine's was a technique that used jazz principles, it fit well on a company of African-American classical ballet dancers. In an era when people still debated whether blacks had the "wrong bodies" for ballet, Balanchine's choreography saluted black dance and the black body on the New York City Ballet stage and also provided a vital core for the Dance Theater of Harlem's initial repertory.[59] It may be that if Mitchell had not formed an all-black ballet company, more African-American dancers would have gravitated to the New York City Ballet. But since the critical mass of black dancers Denby predicted would belong to the company by 1962 never appeared, one has to conclude that the company's priorities did not include minority recruitment.[60] It took an African-American leader to form a ballet company composed entirely of African-Americans. But Balanchine had already altered the face of American ballet by incorporating within it the African-American dance tradition.[61]

7

An Introduction to the Ballets Suédois

The year 1920, in which the Ballets Suédois made its début in Paris, was not a good year for Sergei Diaghilev and his Ballets Russes. His tours were not successful, and his financial situation was complicated by theft and lawsuits. The following year, Diaghilev's choreographer and lead dancer, Léonide Massine, quit the company precipitously because he wanted more independence. *Chout (Le Bouffon)*, the impresario's newest modernist ballet, with choreography hastily conceived by the painter Mikhail Larionov, was badly received in Paris. It seemed as though Diaghilev's influence was losing ground. He began a strategy of retrenchment, for example producing (in 1921 in London) a lavish revival of *The Sleeping Princess*, the Russian Imperial Theater's greatest classic ballet. That production was a commercial failure that nearly brought about Diaghilev's bankruptcy. It was several years before the company would recover from the problems it faced in the first two years of the decade.[1]

Another impresario and another avant-garde ballet company had arrived in Paris in 1920. This company had been instituted directly as a result of the prodigious impact the Ballets Russes had made on the European stage. Rolf de Maré and his Ballets Suédois would, for the next five years, produce modern theater works incorporating dance, mime, painting, and music that would rival anything Diaghilev had created in terms of their avant-garde aspirations. It was perhaps partly due to Diaghilev's reaction to the success of the Ballets Suédois that the Ballets Russes began to turn away from Russian painters and composers and instead employ the newest French artists as collaborators.

Both de Maré and his choreographer and lead dancer, Jean Börlin, were influenced profoundly by the Ballets Russes. De Maré, a wealthy Swedish landowner who had studied agriculture and managed his own estates, was also an amateur ethnographer who collected folk art and lore not only in Sweden but also in other parts of Europe and in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. When Mikhail and Vera Fokine left Diaghilev and came to northern Europe to perform and teach, they became friendly with de Maré

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and often stayed at his estate at Hildesborg in southern Sweden. It was there that they spoke of forming a new ballet company, which would present the folk art of Sweden as translated into theater by modern artists, just as Diaghilev had brought Russian culture onto the stages of Europe with his ballets beginning in 1909.[2]

Fokine and de Maré agreed that Jean Börlin, a young Swedish dancer who had left the company of the Stockholm Royal Opera to study with Fokine in Copenhagen, should be engaged as the "animator" of the new troupe. Börlin was born in 1893, the son of a sea captain, in Haernoesand in northern Sweden. Raised by an aunt and uncle, he was encouraged to follow his rhythmic inclinations and given piano lessons at an early age. At nine he was sent to Stockholm to study ballet with Gunhild Rosén at the ballet school attached to the Royal Theater. There he learned both the Danish Bournonville technique and the virtuosic Italian academic method. In 1905 Börlin joined the corps de ballet at the Opera, and five years later he was promoted to deuxième sujet. In 1913, the year Börlin was further promoted one rank to second dancer, Mikhail Fokine arrived with his wife to stage several ballets at the Royal Theater.[3] Fokine had recently left Diaghilev's company, angry that Vaslav Nijinsky had been appointed second choreographer. From the Russian choreographer, Börlin learned parts in several of Fokine's ballets, including *Cléopâtre, Schéhérazade,* and *Le Dieu Bleu*. Börlin danced the role of a faun in *Cléopâtre*, and years later Fokine remembered his impressions of the young man:

> He skimmed the stage with immense jumps, dropped with all his weight, and glided over the floor, among the groups of bacchantes. What a nature! What ecstasy! The fanatical sacrifice of a bruised body in order to create the maximum choreographic expression. It was a revelation for me. . . . These Scandinavians. . . . A northern people, cold and stony. Where did this fervor come from? From where did this ardent flame burst forth?[4]

The mixed strains of dance traditions in the Opera school—the Bournonville technique, which preserved the mid-nineteenth-century French romantic ballet idiom, and the Italian school, which stressed technical virtuosity above all—had produced in Sweden an academic, gymnastic style. It was a similar academic rigidity, along with the gradual degeneration of the artistic possibilities for ballet within this style, that had led Fokine, while still working in the Imperial Theater in Russia, to call for reform. Börlin was losing interest in the ballet, preferring to study singing and, when his voice broke, practicing piano and harmony. To him the daily "monotonous gymnastic" was overly fastidious and could not possibly lead to dancing.[5] But with Fokine's arrival his interest was rekindled and his talents were inspired. Perhaps Börlin had also seen in Stockholm Isadora Duncan's recital in 1906 and Anna Pavlova's first dance performance outside of Russia in 1908.[6]

In 1918 Börlin was proposed as first dancer at the Royal Theater. But he chose instead to leave the Opera ballet in order to study with Fokine, who was teaching in Copenhagen. According to Pierre Tugal,

> the technique of Jean Börlin was already very assured; he was flexible, elegant, and gracious. Nevertheless, the vivacity and nervous elasticity of the dancers born under the midday sun and the completely oriental frenzy of the Russians were still foreign to us. At this time Börlin, to [use] the image of Nietzsche, was solely under the influence of Apollo. But in the studio of Fokine, the impetuous god [Dionysus] was awakened in him. The art of Börlin—sober, intellectual, pure-bred—came from audacious pursuit and at times attained sublime stylizations which delighted Fokine.[7]

Fokine had radically reformed the Russian academic style in accordance with five principles, which he summarized in a letter to the London *Times* in 1914. He believed that in each ballet the movement should correspond to the subject matter, period, and musical style, instead of being simply another combination of preordained steps; that dance and gesture should advance dramatic action; that the entire body, not just the hands and feet, should be used in gesture; that the rôle of the corps de ballet should be expressive rather than merely ornamental; and, finally, that dance must be allied with the best in the other arts but still maintain its own independence.[8] These principles were formulated directly in opposition to the rigid codes and formulas of the Imperial Russian ballet as it developed under Marius Petipa during the second half of the nineteenth century, reaching its apogee in the symphonic *Sleeping Beauty* of 1890. Fokine's reforms, carried out primarily in Western Europe under the aegis of Diaghilev, revitalized ballet through radical transformation, creating a modern ballet in much the same way, and with many of the same goals, as Isadora Duncan had done with modern dance. Fokine's ballets were one act instead of three. They were concise, too, in terms of their expressive action, for, instead of alternating passages of pure dance with pantomime gesture, he made the dancing itself dramatic. The dramatic requirements led to an expansion of the ballet vocabulary.

De Maré and Börlin, who was in total agreement with his teacher's theoretical goals, put together a troupe of dancers culled, for the most part, from the ballet company of the Stockholm Royal Opera. Jenny Hasselquist, Carina Ari, and Ebon Strandin were their leading danseuses. But because the Opera was short of good male dancers, they went to Denmark to find men. "I did not have a single scruple about demolishing the corps de ballet at the Stockholm Opera," de Maré wrote, "considering that I had decided to present it as a magnificent troupe dedicated to performing abroad."[9]

In March 1920 Börlin gave a solo concert in Paris at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. He performed two harlequin studies, to music by Chopin;

Derviche, a reenactment of a dervish dance, to music by Alexander Glazounov (this piece was in the Ballets Suédois repertory during the first season); a series of Swedish airs; and *Negro Sculpture*, to a Scriabin nocturne.[10]

De Maré had taken over the lease of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, and it was there that the Ballets Suédois gave its first performance on October 25, 1920. The first program consisted of *Jeux*, *Iberia*, and *La Nuit de Saint-Jean*. Later in the season, several more ballets were added: *Maison de fous*, *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, *El Greco*, *Derviche*, *Les Vierges Folles*, and *La Boîte à Joujoux*. All of the works were choreographed by Börlin.

The twenty-four ballets produced by the Ballets Suédois during its five-year life span fall into three basic categories: ballets derivative of the Diaghilev style and themes; dances based on Swedish folklore; and original, avant-garde productions. Some of the works, of course, fall into more than one category. To present Swedish folklore in a modernist theater setting was an act that had a precedent in the Ballets Russes productions that artfully recast Russian images and legends. *Within the Quota* (1923), a Swedish fantasy about an immigrant who encounters typical American stereotypes, danced to a score by Cole Porter and with décor by the American artist Gerald Murphy, must certainly have been partially inspired by the success of the Massine-Cocteau-Satie-Picasso *Parade* (1917), created for Diaghilev. And yet *Within the Quota* also claimed certain avant-garde distinctions. It was the first authentic jazz ballet, and the first ballet score written for a European company by an American composer.

Not surprisingly, the first season's ballets are the most suggestive of Diaghilev's predecessors. De Maré admitted that "despite [his] desire for innovations, [he] called on musicians and painters who were advanced, but also well-known," to create a series of "sensible ballets" for the first season.[11] *Jeux*, to music by Debussy and with décor by Pierre Bonnard, had already been choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky. According to Bengt Häger, Börlin rechoreographed the piece as a "polite gesture to Nijinsky."[12] Apparently (judging from photographs) the new version had none of the curled-in, fetal awkwardness and abruptness of gesture that characterized the Ballets Russes ballet of a modern love triangle. Börlin's version was "an amiable sportive ballet," in contrast to Nijinsky's, which had been "a little brusque."[13] The later Ballets Suédois *Skating Rink* (1922) was also based on the use of sports as a microcosm of more generic social relations. Its cubist décor and costumes by Fernand Léger, its "dance poem" by Riciotto Canudo (the publisher of the prewar journal *Montjoie*), and its modernist score by Arthur Honegger gave the later ballet an original, machine-inspired vision of the monotony of the modern world. Apparently, during that first season dances from Fokine's *Chopiniana* (*Les Sylphides*), performed by the Ballets Russes during its first season, were reconstructed by

Börlin. *Iberia*—with music by Isaac Albeniz, orchestrated by D. E. Ingelbrecht (a pupil of Debussy's and the conductor of the orchestra that accompanied the Ballets Suédois, and later the husband of Carina Ari), and with décor and costumes by T. A. Steinlen—even though it was based on Börlin's observations of Spanish and North African dances while touring those areas, must have reminded Paris audiences of the Spanish atmosphere of *Le Tricorne*, the Massine-Picasso ballet given the previous year. And *La Boîte à Joujoux*, to another Debussy score (orchestrated by André Caplet), with décor and costumes by André Hellé, had nearly the same plot as Massine's *La Boutique Fantasque* of 1919—the activities of toys in a toy shop.

When de Maré and Börlin decided to set a ballet to Maurice Ravel's 1919 piano suite "Le Tombeau de Couperin," Ravel orchestrated it (1920). This suite has since become a popular concert piece, and from it three sections—Forlane, Menuet, and Rigaudon—were choreographed and danced in the setting of an eighteenth-century fête galante. Highly successful, Börlin's *Tombeau*, a delicately tinted recreation of period dances, was performed 167 times by the Ballets Suédois; at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, Ravel conducted the one-hundredth performance in 1923.[14]

Yet already during the first season the ballets *Maison de fous* and *El Greco* created controversies. *Maison de fous* (music by Viking Dahl, décor and costumes by Nils von Dardel) had a sinister feeling, very different from the divertissements offered by ballets like *Jeux* and *La Boîte à Joujoux*. The scenery depicted a gigantic man in anguish, and the story—of a young woman who wanders into a madhouse and is strangled by one of the inmates after having gone mad herself—was told through odd rhythms and gestures. Börlin created different dance motifs for each inmate, symbolizing human follies. Each dancer repeated and varied the motif monomaniacally. Börlin was accused of using gestures that were overly pictorial, of making a ballet that was not really a ballet.[15] *El Greco* (music by D. E. Ingelbrecht, scenery by Georges Mouveau after paintings by El Greco, and costumes by Börlin) was a dramatic recreation of tableaux from works by the painter, again attesting to Börlin's expressive use of gesture rather than combinations of dance steps. Especially important to the style of the dance-drama was the use of the crowd. In a storm, as the crowd in the market square become fearful of violent nature, a young man watches the funeral procession of his brother, who has been struck by lightning. A Christian girl comforts him and restores his faith. The skies clear and light returns to the square.[16]

These works contrasted strongly with the ballets deriving from Swedish folk art and traditional dances, whose bright, naïve décor and homely peasant mood had a direct, unsophisticated appeal for the spectator. *La Nuit de Saint-Jean* (1920)—with décor and costumes by Nils von Dardel and music by Hugo Alfven—and *Dansgille* (1921)—with music arranged

by Eugene Bigot from Swedish folk songs, scenery taken from folk paintings, and traditional costumes—both used the theatrical framework of a scanty plot involving a folk festival to support scenes of pure folkdance. It was these works, and *Les Vierges Folles* (1920)—with music by Kurt Atterberg, scenery and costumes by Einar Nerman, based on a Swedish folksong that tells the parable of the wise and foolish virgins—that most pleased the American critics during the company's tour of the United States in 1923–24. The avant-garde offerings were confusing and often puzzling, but the hearty folk spirit of *Les Vierges Folles*, for instance, was "full of delightful forthright humor of a homely sort. . . . It is not 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,' nor the more vivid streaks of morbidity."[17] The contrast, apparently, is with the other three works on that evening's program: *Skating Rink*, *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, and *L 'Homme et son Désir*. The critic compared *Les Vierges Folles* favorably with the White Russian revue *Chauve-Souris*.

A Boston critic, reporting from Europe, described *Les Vierges Folles*:

> The set consists merely of a gray drop, in the centre of which is painted a quaint church-façade broken by a doorway hung with black curtains. The virgins are all dressed in bobbing, bouncing, hoop skirted dresses, with little tight basques, and high, black, stovepipe hats; the wise ones in green and the foolish ones in orange; each carrying her lamp in hand. The bride's dream of her groom, while the virgins sleep with drooping heads like wilted flowers; the difficult waking of the virgins; the discovery that the frivolous ones are out of oil, and their pleas for the loan of a few drops from their righteous and unyielding sisters; the inimitable bridal parade led by the proud fiddler; and the exclusion of the poor foolish virgins by two yellow angels with swords of yellow flame that look like sticks of candy—the whole action of the piece is presented with deliciously and delicately nonsensical steps to the most charming and danceable of tunes.[18]

Les Vierges Folles was the most popular ballet in the repertory of the Ballets Suédois, and it was performed a total of 375 times.[19]

The least popular work, however, was also based on a Swedish folk theme. *Offerlunden* (1923) was billed as a ballet-pantomime, with music by Algot Haquinius and décor and costumes by Gunnar Hallström. The plot was reminiscent of the Stravinsky-Nijinsky *Rite of Spring* produced by the Ballets Russes: "In a prehistoric forest, the holy fires have died out. In spite of incantations, rites, and magic dances, the flames will not rise up again, unless the king voluntarily gives himself up as an offering."[20] *Offerlunden* (the Swedish title translates as *The Sacrificial Grove*) was performed only five times and then dropped from the repertory.[21]

Le Porcher (1924), based on a tale by Hans Christian Andersen, also used music from old Swedish folk tunes to tell of a prince who disguises

himself as the swineherd at the emperor's palace to win the love of the emperor's daughter.

The most important works given by the company, in terms of their historical and avant-garde importance, were the collaborations with French modern composers and painters. The first of these was *L 'Homme et son Désir,* the result of a three-way collaboration between Paul Claudel, who conceived the scenario, Darius Milhaud, who wrote the music, and Andrée Parr, who designed the scenery and costumes. The ballet had been planned in 1917 in Rio de Janeiro, where the three friends had seen Nijinsky perform. Claudel wrote of that inspiration:

> He is the greatest human creation, lyricism incarnate, standing like a god among the jerking puppets that we are. He paints our passions on the canvas of Eternity, he takes our most misused gestures, as Virgil took our words and images, and transports them into the blissful realm of all that is intelligent, powerful, and ethereal. . . . He walked as tigers walk; it was not the shifting of a dead weight from one foot to the other, but all the complex of muscles and nerves moving buoyantly, as a wing moves in the air, in a body which was not a mere trunk or a statue, but the perfect organ of power and movement. Every tiny gesture, as for example when he turned his face toward us and his small head swung round suddenly on his long neck, was accomplished gloriously, with a vivacity both fierce and sweet, and at the same time an overwhelming authority.[22]

From these impressions, Claudel conceived the theatrical image of a man caught in the Brazilian forest both by the overpowering night and by his own obsession. The man was to be played by Nijinsky. However, at this time Nijinsky's sanity began to disintegrate. And when Milhaud played the music for Diaghilev, he rejected it. Milhaud—who felt that Diaghilev did not like his music because, unlike that of his colleagues Auric and Poulenc, it was not pleasant and direct—thought that *L 'Homme et son Désir* was too symbolic and dramatic for Diaghilev's present needs. Milhaud went then to de Maré, whose "dancers did not have the virtuosity of the Russians, but their sincerity and their love of the art made them very attractive."[23]

Claudel's notions of gesture as it related rhythmically to speech, the plastic expression of the poetic image, correlated to Börlin's ideas of translating forms in painting into dynamism. Claudel had already worked on these ideas with Milhaud; for instance, he had asked the musician to write a score for his play *L 'Annonce faite à Marie* that would be "muffled, like countryside breathing," and serve as a commentary on the action of the play.[24]

L 'Homme et son Désir was first performed June 6, 1921, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Claudel wrote an introduction to the ballet in the magazine *La Danse*:

This little drama in movement had its birth in the atmosphere of the Brazilian forest which, in its vast uniformity, seemed like an element in which we were immersed. It is most strange at night, when it begins to be filled with movement, cries, and gleams of light; and it is one such night that we are trying to show in our poem. We have not tried to reproduce its inextricable tangle with photographic accuracy. We have simply spread it like a carpet—violet, green, and blue—around the central blackness on the four tiers of our stage. This stage appears vertical to the eye, like a picture, or a book being read. It is, if you like, a page of music in which each action is written on a different stave. The Hours of Night, all in black with gilded headdresses, move one by one along the topmost ridge. Below, the Moon, led across the sky by a cloud, like a servant walking before a great lady. At the very bottom, in the waters of the vast primeval swamp, the Reflection of the Moon and her Servant follows the measured walk of the celestial pair. The drama proper takes place on the platform halfway between heaven and earth. And the principal character is the Man in the grip of primeval powers, robbed by Night and Sleep of both face and name. He enters led by two women, identical in their veils, who confuse him by turning him round and round like a child blindfolded for a game. One is Image and the other Desire, one is Memory and the other Illusion. Both mock him for a while, then disappear.

He remains there, standing with outstretched arms, sleeping in the brilliance of the tropical moon, like a man drowned in deep waters. And all the animals, all the noises of the eternal forest come out of the orchestra to watch him and din in his ears: the Bells and the Panpipes, the Strings and the Cymbals.

The man begins to move in his dream, and to dance. And his dance is the age old dance of nostalgia, Desire and Exile, the dance of captives and deserted lovers, of those insomniacs who pace in a fever from one end to the other of their verandah, of caged beasts that fling themselves and fling themselves again—and again, and again—upon the impassable bars. Sometimes a hand from behind pulls him back, sometimes a fragrance which saps all vitality. The theme of obsession becomes more and more violent and frenzied, and then, at the darkest of the dark hours before the dawn, one of the women returns, and circles round the man as though fascinated. Is this a dead woman? or a live one? The sleeper grasps the corner of her veil; she whirls round him and her veil unwinds until he is wrapped around like a chrysalis, and she is almost naked—and then, joined by the last wisp of stuff, very like that of our dreams, the woman puts her hand on his face and both move away to the side of the stage.

Of the Moon and her attendant all we see is the reflection, down below.

The black Hours have ceased to file past, and the first white Hours appear.[25]

Less than two weeks later, on June 18, the company performed in Cocteau's play *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*. Jean Hugo, the grandson of the writer Victor Hugo, designed the masks and costumes that gave the perfor-

mance a cartoon appearance. Irène Lagut designed the scenery, a bird's-eye view from the Eiffel Tower. Music by the group known as Les Six (minus Louis Durey) used popular French tunes as source material. The action takes place on July 14. A bourgeois wedding party arrives on the first platform of the Eiffel Tower for a nuptial lunch. The photographer's "birdie" — which, it seems, is an ostrich — has escaped from his camera, and in the course of the play other unlikely characters emerge from it: a bathing beauty from Trouville, who poses as if for postcards; a lion which eats the general who gave the wedding toast; and the couple's future child, who massacres the wedding party. Finally, after a cyclist passes through, five telegrams do a dance, the birdie returns to the camera, and the whole wedding party is sold to an art collector. The general comes back to life by emerging from the camera, into which the entire party shortly disappears. The narrative was spoken by two announcers inside booths representing phonograph loudspeakers.

Cocteau himself was quite pleased with the Ballets Suédois production of *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* — his first work, he believed, that was not at all derivative of other works.[26] In a 1922 preface to the text, he enthusiastically extended his appreciations to his collaborators:

> Thanks to Jean Hugo, my characters, instead of being, as so often happens in the theatre, too tiny, too true to life to justify the extent of the lighting and décor, were constructed, corrected, built up, enlarged by every device of artifice to a resemblance of epic proportions. I rediscovered in Jean Hugo a certain atavism of monstrous reality. Thanks to Irène Lagut, our Eiffel Tower suggests forget-me-nots and flowering compliments.
>
> George Auric's Overture, "The Fourteenth of July," marching bands whose music blares out at a street corner and moves on, also evokes the potent enchantments of the sidewalk, of popular fairs, of red-festooned grandstands like guillotines, around which drums and trumpets start stenographers dancing with sailors and clerks. And his *ritournelles* accompany the pantomime just as a circus band repeats a certain motif during an acrobatic act.
>
> The same atmosphere pervades in Milhaud's "Wedding March," in Germaine Tailleferre's "Quadrille" and "Waltz of the Telegrams," in Poulenc's "The General's Speech" and "The Trouville Bathing Beauty." Arthur Honegger amused himself, in the "Funeral March," by making fun of what our musicologists gravely call Music. Needless to say that they all fell into our trap. Hardly had the first notes of the "March" sounded when all those long ears were lifted. No one noticed that this march was as beautiful as a sarcasm, written with great taste, with an extraordinary appositeness. Not one of the critics, all of whom praised this piece, recognized the waltz from *Faust* which served as its basis.
>
> How can I express my gratitude to MM. Rolf de Maré and Börlin? The former by his clairvoyance and generosity, the latter by his modesty, made

> it possible for me to crystallize a formula I had been experimenting with in *Parade* and *Le Boeuf sur le toit*.[27]

Apparently, however, the production hampered the efforts of the choreographer. Because the dancers could hear neither the music nor the voices of the announcers through the masks, they had enormous cuing problems, and all the movements had to be planned with great care and utter precision.[28]

On October 25, 1923, de Maré presented *La Création du monde*, a "Negro-jazz ballet" inspired by the current vogue for black art from Africa and America. Blaise Cendrars, who had recently compiled an anthology of black folklore that included a section on cosmogonic legends, wrote the scenario. Darius Milhaud, who had long been interested in the forms of jazz he had heard in Harlem clubs, composed the music for a jazz orchestra, and Fernand Léger designed the curtain, scenery, and costumes. At first, Milhaud recalled, Léger had imagined using skins to represent flowers, trees, and various animals. At the moment of their creation, they would be inflated with gas and fly away like balloons. But since the complicated installations for blowing up the skins would clutter the stage and interfere with the music, Léger had to abandon his plan, settling for animal disguises like those worn by African dancers during ritual ceremonies. Milhaud also remembered that the three collaborators planned the ballet during visits to popular dance halls.[29]

At Léger's suggestion that an "American" ballet be the curtain raiser for the much anticipated *Création*, Gerald Murphy and Cole Porter (not yet a popular success) devised *Within the Quota*. Murphy's libretto, like his décor, satirized American life and the instant-success myth. A Swedish immigrant meets American types (part myth, part real) whom he knows from the movies, but his joy is horned-in on by a puritan type who poses successively as social reformer, revenue agent, uplifter, and sheriff. Eventually, the immigrant meets "Mary Pickford," who makes him a film star—as movie cameras click away. Börlin used popular dance forms such as the shimmy and the foxtrot in choreographing Porter's satiric, eighteen-minute, ragtime- and jazz-influenced piano score, which was orchestrated by Charles Koechlin. Before the première Léger—sensitive that the lively "curtain raiser" might overpower the principal work—had de Maré reverse the order of performance. (Both ballets triumphed in Paris; on the American tour immediately following, New York gave *Within the Quota* mixed notices while it found favor in Chicago.)[30]

In *La Création du monde*, at first the stage is dark; one perceives a tangled mass of bodies. Three enormous creation gods, Nzame, Medere, and N'kva, move around it slowly, reciting incantations. The mass begins to move, a tree grows, drops a seed, and another tree grows. As leaves of the trees touch the ground, they tremble and swell and turn into animals. The

stage grows lighter with each birth. During a round dance of the creatures, a man and a woman are born, execute a dance of desire, and couple. All the creatures, including the shamans and sorcerers, join the dance, which reaches a frenzy. Finally it dies down, and the couple remains isolated in their kiss.[31]

After giving a ballet on Persian themes (*Le Roseau*, with music by Daniel Lazarus and scenery and costumes from Persian miniatures); a modern erotic debate-as-ballet, *Le Tournoi singulier* (music by Roland Manuel, scenery and costumes by Foujita, based on a poem by Louise Labé); and a realist tale of an impoverished Italian village, *La Giarra*, based on a story by Luigi Pirandello (music by Alfredo Casella, scenery and costumes by Giorgio de Chirico), all in 1924, the Ballets Suédois created its final work, *Relâche*. Called "An Instantaneous Ballet in Two Acts and a Cinematographic Entr'acte, and a Dog's Tail," it was conceived by Francis Picabia, the film made by René Clair, the music composed by Erik Satie, and the choreography by Börlin. *Relâche* means "no performance," and the title already suggested a dadaist inspiration. The opening scene of the film shows Satie and Picabia firing a cannon from a Paris rooftop (this was perhaps among the projected scenes that preceded the ballet). As Noël Carroll suggests, the image is hostile and destructive toward bourgeois culture. "They fire a volley, literally a moral salvo, that is echoed throughout the film [and the ballet], articulated through pejorative metaphors of Parisian society and aggressive renunciations of bourgeois aesthetic, ethical and social values."[32] The advertisement for the performance describes the work as "a ballet which is not a ballet, nor an anti-ballet," and warns, "above all, don't forget your dark glasses and some cotton to stop up your ears."[33]

Ironically, Jean Börlin had fallen ill, and on the proposed opening night, November 20, the theater actually was closed, much to the confusion and dismay of the audience. The ballet finally opened on November 27, 1924 (according to some accounts, December 4, 1924).[34] One critic recalled that "many believed it all another prank of Satie's, and when, a week later, the orchestra sounded the prelude to *Relâche* based on the student song 'The Turnip Vendor,' the audience howled. They roared out the scandalous chorus, heckling and laughter interrupted the performance."[35] The curtain rose on an inner curtain decorated with graffiti, including the names of the collaborating artists, the legend "Vive Relâche," and "Erik Satie is the greatest musician in the world." The designs were transparent on a black background; and, lit from behind by a flickering light, they gave the impression of neon signs. The curtain was soon replaced by a screen, on which several logically connected cinematic images were projected. Finally, the stage decoration — several enormous arches covered with reflective discs — was revealed. A fireman entered, smoking. A woman in evening dress walked onto the stage from the auditorium and smoked a cigarette. She danced, without music, and when her dance ended the music re-

sumed. Several men from the audience went up on the stage and danced with the woman, and one of them carried her off the stage.

The curtain fell; and the cinematic entr'acte, accompanied by repetitive music structured as a montage, was projected. There were shots of a dancer from below (through a transparent floor); of Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp playing a game of chess; of an egg resting on a jet of water, which, shot by a hunter, released a bird. A funeral rushed headlong toward the ridiculous, speeding through Paris and metaphorically suggesting the moral disintegration of the city. Finally, the coffin toppled from the hearse; and the dead man, now a smiling magician, emerged and made everyone disappear.

In the second scene of the ballet, the décor showed broken lines and posters on which one could see sentences like "Those who are dissatisfied can go to the devil!" The dancers returned, took off their evening clothes, and — in flesh-colored tights decorated with colored spots — resumed dancing. The woman entered with a wheelbarrow, the fireman poured water from one container to another. For the curtain call, Satie drove onstage in a small Citroën and "ironically greeted the worthy audience whom he had just ridiculed magnificently."[36]

Relâche, Picabia wrote, is "as much alcohol and opium as sports, strength, and health; it is baccarat or mathematics. . . . You will see a beautiful woman, a handsome man, many handsome men, blazing lights, everything turning in a movement as rapid and agreeable as that which we can get at 300 HP on the best route bordered by trees tilted for a speed-producing illusion."[37]

After *Relâche*, de Maré and Börlin decided that they could go no further. Neither was it possible to retreat from the vanguard position they had staked out for the Ballets Suédois. De Maré dissolved the troupe, Carina Ari remained in Paris, later becoming the head of the ballet company at the Opéra Comique in Paris and première danseuse étoile at the Opéra, where in the 1930s she choreographed three ballets.[38] Börlin toured South America, contracted jaundice in Brazil, gave two more dance concerts in Paris in 1929, and, with a concert planned for Carnegie Hall in December 1930, went to New York. He died there on December 6. De Maré continued to produce theatrical performances at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées — most notably the first appearance of Josephine Baker in musical revues — and in 1931 established in Paris the Archives Internationales de la Danse, with material not only from the Ballets Suédois performances but from his dance researches around the world. In 1932 the Archives held a choreographic competition in Börlin's memory, at which Kurt Jooss won first prize with his ballet *The Green Table*. In 1950 the Archives was dissolved, and many of its contents moved to the Dansmuseet in Stockholm.

8

Soirée de Paris

Soirée de Paris was a month-long season of ballet and theater organized by Count Étienne de Beaumont at the Théâtre de la Cigale in May and June 1924.[1] According to the souvenir program and the poster, the season was a charity benefit for the Society for Relief for the War Widows and the Committee to Help Russian Refugees, under the patronage of the President of the Republic and Mme Millerand; the President of the Council and Mme Poincaré; Marshal and Mme Foch; and the Princess Sixte de Bourbon; its committee of honor and roster of patrons include diplomats, political and military officials, and minor royalty.[2] In his biography of Cocteau, Francis Steegmuller suggests that the season was organized to "refloat" Léonide Massine, who had been dismissed by Diaghilev in 1921, had organized his own, unsuccessful companies, and had asked to be readmitted to the Ballets Russes in 1922, but was refused.[3] Massine reports modestly that "I was very surprised and flattered when [Beaumont] asked me to collaborate in a new venture he was planning, . . . a charitable venture for the assistance of French war widows and Russian refugees. . . . He asked me to choreograph five productions for him."[4] In his preface to the souvenir program, Beaumont states as his goal to combine all the arts—dance, painting, music, and poetry—which in their own ways reveal the new spirit and the youngest countenance of France.[5]

Perhaps Beaumont, who was an avid ballet fan and friendly with Misia Sert, Valentine and Jean Hugo, Jean Cocteau, and others in Diaghilev's circle, aspired to become as active an impresario as the producer of the beloved Ballets Russes. He directed his social life with all the care of a metteur-en-scène, and the borderline between private life and theater in his social set was not always clear. In their biography of Misia Sert, Fizdale and Gold call Beaumont "the Diaghilev of costume balls."[6] They describe one party in which "Max Jacob appeared as a monk, Jean Hugo as an Imperial Guard, and Lucien Daudet . . . as the Spectre de la Rose."[7] Reginald Bridgeman, a secretary to the British ambassador in Paris, reported that each Beaumont ball had a theme—the French colonies, the court of Louis XIV—and that at the first of these parties, in 1919, the guests were requested to arrive "leaving exposed that part of one's body that one consid-

Unpublished.

ered the most interesting."[8] At Beaumont's Bal des Jeux in 1922, Raymond Radiguet came disguised as a shooting gallery, carrying clay pipes and wearing a cardboard target over his evening dress; Valentine Hugo appeared as a merry-go-round, Jean Hugo represented a game of billiards, and Misia Sert's nephew Jean Godebski was a house of cards.[9] At the Bal de Mer, Jean Hugo was one of four men disguised as waiters from Prunier's who carried the Maharanee of Kapurthala, as caviar, on a tray.[10] And in 1923 at the Bal Louis XIV, the Countess de Castries, as "La Malade Imaginaire," was carried in on a chair; Raymond Radiguet was in attendance as "a patient, made up with spots, meaning measles."[11] The Duchess de Gramont, in mourning, appeared as an executioner bearing the head of John the Baptist on a platter, attended by Jean Hugo as Herodias and the Prince de Chimay as Salomé.[12]

Despite its caché—besides its list of dignitaries, the program announces that the lighting was designed by Mme Loïe Fuller—the Soirée season was somewhat haphazardly organized. Programs were changed or substituted at the last minute, and announcements in the newspapers often conflict, even in the same publication. The souvenir program and poster give 17 May 1924–30 June 1924 as the dates of the season, as does Massine in his autobiography, but the listings in *Le Figaro* indicate that performances were given every night between 18 May and 18 June, but not before or after. Because *Le Figaro* gives last-minute details on *répétitions generales* and changes of program, and upcoming events, I have used its listings in compiling the following classification of the Soirée de Paris season.[13]

The opening program, listed as playing 18 May–23 May, was listed under "Spectacles and Concerts" daily in *Le Figaro* as follows:

> À La Cigale (Nord 07–60), à 9 heures, "Soirées de Paris," organisées par le Comte E. de Beaumont. *Vogue, Mouchoir de Nuages, le Beau Danube, Salade.* Projections lumineuses de miss Loë Fueller.[14]

Vogue, according to the souvenir program, was "three danced pages," conceived and designed by Valentine Hugo, and produced in collaboration with *Vogue* magazine. Costumes were made by Jeanne Lanvin, with additional men's costumes by Hermes and Lus and Befve, and boots by Perugia. In the first "page," "Les Filles Mal Gardées," two girls escape from a boring picnic, find a four-leaf clover while walking in the garden, and fight over it. In "Le Favori," two young women talk to a jockey in the paddock just before a race, making him forget the time, until a bell rings to remind him to mount the favorite. "Le Bain de Minuit," to a poem by Paul Morand, tells of a couple who go bathing in a river after a ball. The man falls asleep, a young man dances with the woman, and after the sleeper awakes, angry, he joins them in their dance. The first scene was danced by Mlle Zaria and Jane Hawitt; the second by Mlle Allan, Joyce Meyrs (sic), and Harry Wills. In "Le Bain de Minuit," Mlle Pietruckewitz played the woman, Mme Mik-

laschewskaja the young man, and Rupert Doone the sleeping escort.[15] In its review of the second season, *Le Monde Musical* calls *Vogue* "an agreeable ad for the magazine of the same name."[16]

Mouchoir de Nuages was a "tragedy in fifteen acts" by Tristan Tzara, directed by Marcel Herrand, with costumes by Lanvin and projections by Fuller, and Andrée Pascal's shoes by Perugia.[17] The "tragedy" is a comic romance, based on a triangle involving a banker, his wife, and a poet, and a number of chorus members who comment on their actions. Each tiny act takes place in a different locale and involves a different theatrical style, ranging from classic Greek theater, to Shakespeare, to French symbolism, to detective films. The staging was anti-illusionist:

> The action takes place in a closed space, like a box, from which the actors cannot leave. All five sets are the same color. In the back, at a certain height, there is a screen that indicates where the action occurs, by means of reproductions blown up from illustrated post cards. These are rolled up on two rollers by a stagehand, who is visible at all times to the audience.
>
> In the middle of the playing area there is a platform. To the right and the left are chairs, makeup tables, properties and the actors' costumes. The actors are on the set for the duration of the play. When they are not performing, they turn their backs to the audience, change costumes, or talk among themselves. . . .
>
> All the actors in the play keep their own names. . . . The Poet, the Wife of the Banker and the Banker are the principal characters. A, B, C, D and E are the Commentators, who also play all the secondary roles.[18]

One scene, a flashback, is played behind a scrim. Three scenes from *Hamlet* are combined into one scene, which functions as a play within the play and leads to the banker's murder. Throughout, the commentary, which is structured as the final part of every act, offers a discourse on conflicting levels of reality:

> C: . . . Even though we are the Commentators, that is to say, the subconscious of the drama, the playwright never even let us know why the Poet does not love Andrea.
>
> E: Yet she is pretty and intelligent; you are aware that I know her very well myself.
>
> B: The fact that you act the role of Andrea's friend on stage does not give you the right to believe that you are her friend in real life.
>
> A: But she could easily be his friend outside this dramatic action, this play, in real life, in her own life—how would you know?
>
> C: Oh! There is nothing so tedious as these endless discussions on the difference between theatre and reality![19]

The poet was played by Marcel Herrand, the wife of the banker by Andrée Pascal, and the banker by Dapoigny.[20]

G. Allix, reviewing *Mouchoir de Nuages* in *Le Monde Musical*, remarked that the play was "not at all my cup of tea," but that, nevertheless, a person "would not be bored by it for an instant," with its uproarious style and its successful parodies of Maeterlinck, Victor Hugo, and Shakespeare. He thought the use of the chorus ingenious, and complimented the young cast, especially Pascal and Herrand, but wondered why the title of the play was so nonsensical.[21]

Le Beau Danube, "a character ballet in two acts," was choreographed by Léonide Massine to music by Johann Strauss, orchestrated by Roger Desormière, who conducted the music for Soirée de Paris. The décor by Vladimir and Elizabeth Polunin was based on a painting by Constantin Guys, as suggested by Étienne de Beaumont.[22] In the first act, a painter (Ladré) works on a painting in a square, surrounded by rubbernecks, milliners, and salesmen. It is a holiday. The king of the dandies (Stanislas Idzikowski) and the other dandies dance a waltz with the "cocodettes." A hussar enters, flirts with two girls, and dances a mazurka with the prettiest. A troupe of comedians arrives: an athlete, a dancer, and a comic actor. The dancer (Lydia Lopokova) recognizes the hussar (Massine) as her former lover and faints. The girl (Eleanor Marra) also faints. The dancer revives and dances the "Blue Danube" with the hussar, and the girl also revives, vanquishing the dancer and dancing a mazurka with the hussar. The girl's parents give the young couple their blessing. In the second act, the wedding of the girl and the hussar is celebrated. Young people dance quadrilles, and the dancer arrives with a new friend to hide her chagrin.[23]

Gilson MacCormack, reviewing the first performance, wrote in *The Dancing Times*:

> Either this is the most banal and puerile ballet ever composed, or else Massine is pulling the leg of the Parisian public and foisting on them as a work of the modern school a ballet of the mid-Victorian epoch of the feeblest and most sentimental kind. Even if meant as a burlesque, it fails because it lacks sufficient humorous exaggeration to warrant the assumption that such is the case.
>
> Not even the excellent dancing of Massine, Idzikowski, and that irrepressible "gamine," Lopokova, could redeem such an effort. It was a pity to see Idzikowski's superb technique wasted on so poor a show. His dazzling cabrioles and entrechats caused gasps of delight from those who love grace and perfect finish in an artist.
>
> The corps de ballet was, without exception, the worst I have ever seen.[24]

The first program concluded with *Salade*, choreography by Massine to music by Darius Milhaud, with a scenario by Albert Flament, décor and costumes by Georges Braque. The "choreographic counterpoint" was

danced by Massine (Polichinelle), Marra (Isabelle), Allan, Witzansky, Baikow, Streletsky, Ignatow, Sergieff, Domansky, Ochimonsky, Plier, Ladré, and Zmarlik. It was a typical commedia dell'arte plot. Milhaud writes that he incorporated music given to him by Massine, as well as certain themes from serenades he himself had heard in Sardinia.[25] Four voices sang a rhythmic accompaniment to the orchestral music and the dancing.[26] The rhythmic libretto, which Massine describes as a mixture of singing and recitation,

> exactly caught the flavour of Naples, as did Braque's setting, with its sober greys and maroons suggesting the raw, hard-working side of Neapolitan life with its street vendors and artisan families living in one room and ceaselessly struggling for survival. The melodies I had chosen for it were orchestrated by Darius Milhaud, . . . who completely transformed them, producing harsh, aggressive, broken rhythms which exactly suited my conception of the ballet. To bring the audience into direct contact with the action, I made the dancers carry lanterns, which they placed along the front of the stage before each scene. These threw a wavering light over the sculptural choreographic tableaux. My inspiration for this came from my desire to emulate the sculptural effect of the works of Donatello and other Renaissance masters, and also from the cubists' use of layer-upon-layer of colour surfaces, particularly apparent in Picasso's larger still-lifes.[27]

Paul Collaer describes Massine's choreography as "very interesting and at times thrilling," a gestural counterpoint in which no group was ever completely at rest, "creating a simultaneism to which our eyes were barely accustomed," and remembers that as Polichinelle Massine danced subtly and perfectly.[28] MacCormack thought *Salade* similar in epoch and spirit to *The Good Humoured Ladies*, and called the score one of the best Milhaud had written, though wholly modern and far removed from "the quaint archaic beauty of Pergolesi."

> The choreography is virile, as is everything undertaken by Massine. The gestures and poses are stark and angular, relieved by none of the grace and beauty that Fokine gave us, but this choreography is an integral whole with the music. . . . Massine's dancing is full of individuality and vigour, but the quick, stiff, nervous movements of the arms to which he is addicted becomes [sic] rather wearisome when repeated continuously. One French critic went so far as to say that he "gave the finest display of physical agony that had been seen for many a day."[29]

And Allix wrote that the "hectic choreography exhausted the eyes and the spirit," and that the dancers seemed like marionettes hung from imaginary strings.[30]

The second program in the Soirée de Paris season opened on Saturday, May 24, with *Gigue* and several divertissements. On the same night an

exhibition of art by late nineteenth-century impressionist masters opened in the foyer and ground floor of the theater. These works on themes from the music hall, theater, and circus included drawings, paintings, and lithographs by Cézanne, Daumier, Dégàs, Delacroix, Constantin-Guys, Manet, Seurat, and Toulouse-Lautrec.[31] On the following night *Le Beau Danube* was added to the program, which ran through Monday, June 2.[32]

Massine describes *Gigue* as:

> an elegant trifle set in a corner of the garden at Versailles, designed by Derain. As the Prince I wore a shimmering gold costume. Idzikowski made an elegant courtier and Nina Nemchinova a lovely princess in a deep blue robe embroidered with flowers. For the overture we used music by Scarlatti, and for the ballet itself music by Bach and Handel played by the pianist Marcel Meyer.[33]

The *Figaro* theater columnist Maxime Girard wrote in a preview of *Gigue* that Massine was an erudite as well as virtuoso dancer, since he had scrupulously reconstructed all the variations prescribed by Beauchamps.[34] The divertissements on the program are not named in any reviews or previews, but perhaps they comprised an unnamed dance by Massine, set to a waltz by Lanner and with décor and costumes by Étienne de Beaumont, which he describes as light and romantic,[35] and two other dances listed in the souvenir program: *Ballet Espagnol*, by José-Maria Sert, danced by Ida Rubenstein, and *Danses Actuelles*, by Harry Wills.[36]

The next program to be given at the Cigale was Jean Cocteau's *Romeo et Juliette*, which had its *répétition générale* either on June 2 or June 4.[37] Cocteau had been friendly with the Beaumonts since before World War I. He served in Beaumont's volunteer ambulance unit, corresponded with him about his work on *Parade*, went with him and others of their circle to the circus, the ballet, masquerade balls. Steegmuller suggests that Beaumont served as a model not only for Raymond Radiguet, Cocteau's lover, in his novel *Le Bal du Comte d'Orgel*, but also for Cocteau in life. According to Steegmuller, Beaumont invited Cocteau to contribute something to the Soirée de Paris season that did not include Massine at all, in order to cover up the real purpose of the program.[38] During the war Cocteau had wanted to produce a version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Fratellini clowns and with music by Satie. After Beaumont asked for a contribution, Cocteau planned to produce a five-act verse play at first named *Bajazet*, later *L'Impromptu de Montmartre*. It had characters, including a dog, named after those in Racine's tragedy *Bajazet*, as well as a sea horse and a glazier who carried his equipment on his back. Sketches for the glazier were realized in the character Heurtebise in Cocteau's *Orphée*, written in 1925 and first performed in 1927.[39] Cocteau abandoned his plan for *L'Impromptu* and decided to use instead an adaptation he had made of *Romeo and Juliet*, drastically paring down Shakespeare's poetry in order to

substitute a poetry of mise-en-scène. As Neal Oxenhandler points out, Cocteau reduced Romeo's lines on seeing Juliet in Act I scene 5 —

> O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!
> It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
> Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;
> Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!
> So shines a snow-white swan trooping with crows,
> As this fair lady o'er her fellows shows.
> The measure done, I'll watch her place of stand,
> And, touching hers, make blessed my rude hand.
> Did my heart love till now? forswear it, sight!
> I never saw true beauty till this night.

— to the following three sentences: "Je n'avais jamais aimé. Un seul diamant orne l'oreille de la nuit, c'est elle. A quoi servent ces lustres ridicules?"[40]

Inspired by Miss Aerogyne, the Flying Woman whom he had seen in a sideshow in 1920 with the Hugos and Paul Morand, Cocteau planned a prologue in which the speaker "flew" in an acrobatic posture. Miss Aerogyne's setting had been all black, against which she stood out in white tights and rhinestone accessories. For *Romeo et Juliette*, "With Jean and Valentine Hugo I had invented an entirely black set, in which only the colors of certain arabesques, costumes and props were visible. Red lights framing the stage kept the audience from seeing anything else."[41] The costumes were black dresses, doublets, and hose, and black tights, painted to look embroidered and framed by white cuffs and collars. All the men of Verona had a stylized way of walking, aggressively and with a hand on the hilts of their swords, which contrasted with Romeo's sleepwalker's pace. The actors rehearsed to music that was suppressed during the performance, in which a medley of Elizabethan airs, orchestrated by Roger Desormière, accompanied the action. Cocteau directed the production and acted the role of Mercutio; depressed by Radiguet's death the previous December, from typhoid, Cocteau wrote to Jacques Maritain that he always hoped during the duel scene "that my pantomime would deceive Death and induce it to take me."[42] Marcel Herrand played Romeo, Andrée Pascal Juliet, and Yvonne George the Nurse.[43] There was also, according to Jean Hugo, a miniature ballet danced by two English women.[44]

The reviewer for *Le Théâtre* approved of the simplicity of the setting, likening it to the scenery of Shakespeare's time. The costumes, he thought, were exactly the opposite of the décor — sumptuous yet original, combining Renaissance style with an extreme modernism. "Finally, the characters, instead of walking naturally, perform a sort of rhythmic dance, at first disconcerting, which makes them resemble marionettes, but which allows

for certain peculiar attitudes, in the manner of the Ballets Russes." Contrasting with the pruning of the poetry in the text, the reviewer noted a contrasting conservation of the comic passages, newly rendered in familiar argot. "In this astonishing *Romeo et Juliette*, the dominant character is neither Romeo nor Juliet, but the Nurse."[45]

Romeo et Juliette was performed at the Cigale through June 8, interrupted on June 9 and 10 by a program comprising *Salade*, *Gigue*, and divertissements, then performed again from June 11 through 13. On Saturday, June 14, *Mercure* and *Les Roses* were danced at a gala subscription performance; on June 15 their *répétition générale* was held. These two ballets were given, with *Premier Amour*, a duet by Idzikowski and Lopokova to Satie's *Morceaux en forme de Poire*, and *Vogue*.[46]

Premier Amour is not listed in the souvenir program, but is mentioned by two reviewers. Gilson MacCormack simply calls it a "mimed playlet" and states that "in both *Premier Amour* and *Les Roses* M. Idzikowski danced with his usual extraordinary skill."[47] Maurice Boucher, writing for *Le Monde Musical*, calls it "a ballet scene in which Mme Lopokova and M. Idzikowski are comic and charming."[48]

Les Roses is listed as a divertissement conceived and choreographed by Massine, to music by Henri Sauguet, with décor and costumes by N.[49] N is immediately recognizable as Marie Laurencin, from the designs reproduced in the program.[50] Boucher calls this ballet "a pretty play of colors," but wonders wryly whether the music has been substituted, since it "resembles exactly the celebrated waltz which has nothing to do with 'the youngest countenance of our France.' "[51] Perhaps this was the divertissement Massine mentions having made to a waltz by Lanner, but with décor and costumes by Beaumont. MacCormack reports that, "In *Les Roses* an amazing series of grands jetés en tournant caused tumultuous applause, whilst the technical precision of Mlle. Lopokova's grands jetés portés en diagonale was also appreciated by the enthusiastic ballet lovers present. The *corps de ballet* had greatly improved since the beginning of the season."[52] Later that year Idzikowski performed *Les Roses* at the London Coliseum, with Vera Savina. Described as a "classical poem," the dance was, according to "The Sitter Out," inconsistent but "vastly better than any of the arrangements shown by Pavlova at Covent Garden." Only Idzikowski's perfect technique "saves the piece from being merely a mediocrity," however.[53]

Perhaps the most eagerly awaited event of the season was *Mercure*, "poses plastiques," a collaboration among Massine, Erik Satie, and Pablo Picasso. For three days before its premiere *Le Figaro* reminded its readers of the event, promising that the ballet would "disconcert, amaze, surprise," and that "inanimate objects would play preponderant roles,"[54] and remarking that only in Paris could such a fantastic event happen.[55] In an interview in *Paris-Journal* before the ballet opened, Satie explained:

> Though the ballet has a subject, it has no plot, It is a purely decorative spectacle and you can imagine the marvellous contribution of Picasso which I have attempted to interpret musically. My aim has been to make my music an integral part, so to speak, with the actions and gestures of the people who move in this simple exercise. You can see poses exactly like them on any fairground. The spectacle is related quite simply to the music-hall. There's no stylization, and no attempt to relate it in any sense to things artistic.[56]

The action in the ballet, in three tableaux, was meant to illustrate the aspects of Mercury's mythological personae as a god of fertility, a thief, a magician, a messenger, and the henchman of the underworld.[57] Ornella Volta suggests that the dance was also replete with alchemical symbols, an interpretation in light of Satie's Rosicrucian ideas.[58] In the first tableau Mercury finds Apollo and Venus in an embrace, surrounded by the Signs of the Zodiac. Mercury kills Apollo and then revives him. In the second tableau, the three Graces bathe, Mercury steals their pearls, and is chased by Cerberus. In the third tableau Mercury, at a feast given by Bacchus, invents the alphabet and dances, and Proserpine is carried off by Pluto and Chaos.[59] Massine danced Mercury; Vera Pietro, Venus; Cywinsky, Apollo; Plier, Ladré, and Baikow (men in wigs and red-painted false breasts) played the three Graces; Ignatow, the Philosopher; Vuorisola, Polichinel; and Wysnansky, Domansky, Zmarzlik, Ochimovski, and Streletzki danced Chaos.[60]

According to Douglas Cooper even Massine has noted that the ballet was largely Picasso's. The sketches indicate that Picasso planned groupings as well as the décor, costumes, and *praticables*. The basic setting for each tableau was a set of white and grey canvas flats with either a white or black backdrop. In the first scene, Night was an outline figure of a reclining woman, made of black-painted rattan, with a moveable head and neck that rocked during the dance, surrounded by stars, also moveable. When in the bath, the Graces were played by men but, when out of the bath, they were cut-outs with heads that could move up and down, manipulated by dancers. Cerberus was a black praticable with three heads painted in white outline on a circle, and a rape of Proserpine was drawn on two white cut-outs.[61]

On the opening night there was a demonstration by some members of the Surrealist group, criticizing Picasso for working for the aristocracy. André Breton, Louis Aragon, Max Ernst, and others wrote a letter of apology, praising Picasso, to *Paris-Journal*.[62] Boucher, describing the ballet, remarks that, despite the little demonstration, there was not much to get angry about; the décor was so simple and its degree of invention so impoverished that it resembled the sort of thing everyone has made at some time in their lives, perhaps when a little drunk. The music he found exactly like "the ordinary pom-pom of the Music Hall," and only the dancers—Lopokova, Pietro, and Idzikowski and their partners—were "truly astonish-

ing."[63] According to MacCormack, "The ballet fully came up to our expectations. It is humorous in content; and the fantastic humour of Picasso's décor and costumes is quite equalled by the music . . . and the choreography. . . . The choreography of Massine was full of whimsicality. The fantasy was admirably danced by all concerned."[64] Cyril Beaumont, who saw *Mercure* when Diaghilev produced it in 1927, was less enthusiastic: "All I can remember of this production is that it contained some male dancers, crudely attired to represent women, who wore crude wigs with thick plaits dangling over their shoulders, and were provided with enormous imitation breasts. There were also strange contraptions in iron wire—designed by Picasso—which were carried on the stage. The whole thing appeared incredibly stupid, vulgar, and pointless."[65]

Serge Lifar saw Diaghilev either on the opening night of *Mercure* or at the closing performance on June 18 and noticed that Diaghilev was "pale, agitated, nervous," because he felt threatened by the success of his former collaborators.[66] Diaghilev had already tried unsuccessfully to dissuade Milhaud from creating *Salade*, and Braque had written to promise that his designs in *Salade* would not be seen before those in *Les Facheux*, though this turned out to be untrue. And Cocteau felt moved to defend his collaboration with Beaumont by writing to Diaghilev that "I am doing nothing that is in any way like your productions, and am confining myself to the theatre."[67]

Milhaud remembers the 1924 Paris ballet season, with the rival performances organized by Diaghilev and Beaumont, as "particularly brilliant,"[68] and Collaer remembers Soirée de Paris, too, as brilliant: "What talent, what beauty, and what charming ease! One drank, one smoked, one chatted. This light, music-hall ambiance, this air of spontaneity around works of art was very pleasant. . . . Were we at the Cigale, or at Count de Beaumont's home? The most aristocratic thought was joined to a powerful popular instinct, and out of this meeting a series of essentially French spectacles was born."[69]

The season was successful for Massine, not only in terms of the reviews, but for his career with Diaghilev. In London at the end of 1924, Massine met Diaghilev and heard his reactions to the Soirée de Paris. "Don't let's talk about *Le Beau Danube*—that's pure trash," he said, but he "had been intrigued by *Mercure* and thought the choreography and lighting of *Salade* had marked a definite step forward."[70] Diaghilev then commissioned two ballets from Massine, who rejoined the Ballets Russes in January 1925.[71]

9

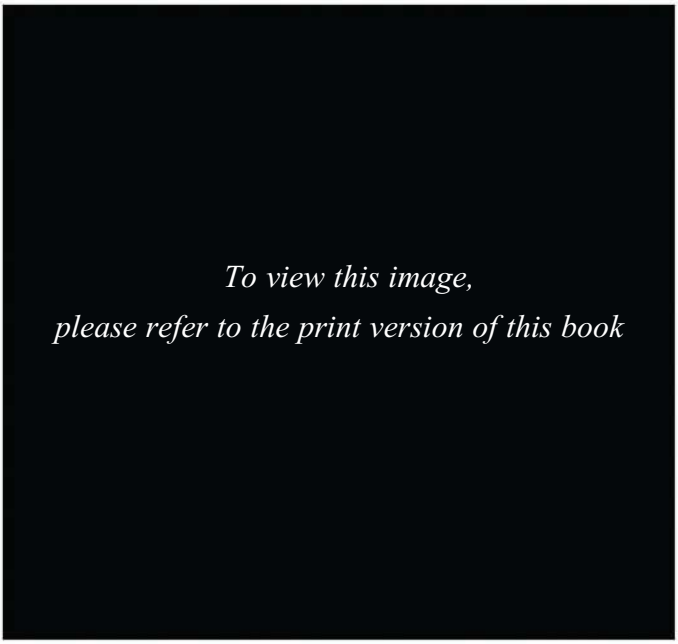
Kasyan Goleizovsky's Ballet Manifestos

Kasyan Yaroslavich Goleizovsky was born in Moscow in 1892. As a child he studied dance in Moscow, where his father was a soloist with the opera and his mother was a dancer. Beginning in 1906, he attended the Maryinsky Theater school in St. Petersburg. His teachers there included Mikhail Obukhov, the great mime Pavel Gerdt, and the young reformer Michel Fokine. In 1908, Goleizovsky danced in the graduation concert of Bronislava Nijinska and Lyubov Tchernicheva. In 1909, the year Serge Diaghilev produced the first season of Russian ballet in Paris, Goleizovsky graduated from the Imperial Ballet Academy; and, after a short term in the corps de ballet at the Maryinsky Theater, he transferred to the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow in 1910. There he studied production with the choreographer Alexander Gorsky, who installed a new dramatic realism in the ballet, and with Gorsky's assistant Mikhail Mordkin, an exponent of dramatic expressivity who later left Russia to tour with Anna Pavlova. (Mordkin eventually settled in the United States, where his Mordkin Ballet Company became the precursor of American Ballet Theatre.) Goleizovsky danced with the Bolshoi Ballet until 1918.[1]

During World War I, Goleizovsky choreographed ballet miniatures and grotesque dances, as well as directing plays and operettas, for Nikita Balieff's cabaret La Chauve-Souris. After the October Revolution, while still dancing at the Bolshoi, Goleizovsky opened his own experimental studio, where he choreographed ballets using students from the Bolshoi Ballet School. At the same time, he organized children's performances, using his youngest students in such works as *The Sandman, Max and Moritz*, and *Snow White*, until the group disbanded in 1920.[2]

Goleizovsky began work in 1919 on *The Masque of the Red Death*, inspired by Edgar Allen Poe, to music by Nikolai Tcherepnin. In this allegorical ballet, a feasting king was visited by death, symbolizing the destruction of the Russian monarchy by the revolution. According to the Soviet dance historian Elizabeth Souritz, both Gorsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (who was collaborating with Gorsky in an attempt

Ballet Review 11/3 (Fall 1983).



Scene drawing from Goleizovsky's *Faun*.

to bring the Stanislavsky approach to ballet) supported Goleizovsky in this project, which was planned for the Bolshoi Theater; but the company received it coldly, and it was never produced.[3]

The years 1921–25 saw intensive experimentation in Goleizovsky's choreography. He organized his Chamber (Kamerny) Ballet, which in 1921 performed three evenings of his work, including dances to music by Medtner and Scriabin. In 1922 he produced *White Mass* to Scriabin's Tenth Sonata, *Faun* to Debussy's "L'Après-midi d'un faune," and *Salome* to music from the opera by Strauss. *Faun* was performed on a set constructed of platforms and stairs. As proclaimed in the two manifestos by Goleizovsky that are reprinted following this introduction, he was interested in finding new movements generated by the exigencies of the stage surface, which changed by means of constructivist décor. In *Faun*, the Faun, stationed on the upper platform, flirted with the half-naked nymph Walenta, stationed on a lower platform. Other nymphs were arranged in ornate, angular poses along various levels of the stairs; two satyrs commented on the action with ironic postures. Like Nijinsky's startling *L'Après-midi d'un faune* of 1912, Goleizovsky's *Faun* made no attempt to reconstruct Greek mythology, but, rather, created an atmosphere through abstract movement. The critic Truvit (A. I. Abramov) wrote that in *Faun* there was no subject, no aesthetic complication, no mythological cliché, "just a magnificent play of movements. Just a wonderful mastery of composition. Just an effective combina-

tion of poses." The verticality of the action, the powerful rhythms of the design, and the bare bodies of the dancers all contributed to the originality of the new forms that Truvit praised in Goleizovsky's choreography.[4]

In the fall of 1922, Goleizovsky showed *Faun, Salome,* and his Medtner and Scriabin pieces in Petrograd. Yuri Slonimsky, the critic who during the early twenties was a member of George Balanchine's circle, later wrote in *Ballet Review* that Balanchine and his friends went to every one of the Kamerny Ballet's performances in Petrograd, and that they found the dances so astonishing and Goleizovsky himself "so talented that we at first thought he had answered the question 'How shall we proceed?' The resources of the human body, the wider range of colors and movements, could not leave an audience unmoved." Slonimsky notes that Balanchine's early works definitely show the influence of Goleizovsky's erotic, gymnastic style.[5]

In 1923, Goleizovsky choreographed a cycle of *Eccentric Dances,* with costumes commissioned from the Ukrainian constructivist designer Anatol Petrizky. In the same year he made a series of more classically based dances to Chopin études, a group of Spanish dances, and a cycle of Danube Slavic folkdances. This interest in folkdance redeemed Goleizovsky in the thirties, when his early productions were criticized as too erotic, individualistic, and New Economic Policy-Style (i.e., bourgeois). In 1924, he choreographed the Western dances (foxtrot and shimmy) in Meyerhold's *D. E.* (*Give Us Europe!*), which were performed by women in black mesh stockings to the accompaniment of a jazz band.[6]

Goleizovsky's best-known work of this period was *Joseph the Beautiful,* set to music by Sergei Vassilenko and designed by Boris Erdman. Erdman had acted with Tairov's Kamerny Theater in 1917–18, before he was twenty years old. Interested in constructivism, he soon turned to theatrical design; and by around 1920, close to the imagist writers, he began to illustrate and design their literary works. While working in the State Institute of Theatrical Art he collaborated with Meyerhold, Baratov, and others, and he designed costumes for dancers in the Moscow State Circus. Erdman believed that the dancer's body should be revealed in order to show the workings of the muscles and to unencumber the body's action.[7] Zakhary McLove described *Joseph the Beautiful* in the New York *Times Magazine*:

> The stage, contrary to ballet laws that demand clear floor space for dancing, was filled with stairs and platforms, on which the entire ballet was performed. There was not much dancing, in the traditional sense, but there was plenty of beautiful posing, magnificent grouping, and choice "plastics." To this the gorgeous, if scant, costumes of Erdman lent color. The performers' bodies, too, were colored from head to foot. There were orange Jews, red Egyptians, brown Ethiopians. Joseph was a lemon-yellow youth with feminine features; Taich, Potiphar's wife, was white as

> milk. Taich was danced by Miss [Lyubov] Bank. . . . She appeared upon the stage with only narrow silver strips over bust and hips. Her bobbed black hair was parted in the middle by a string of diamonds. The face was immovable, sardonic.[8]

In Act I, Joseph's entrance variation depicted his sensitive, poetic nature. His brothers entered and tried to kill him, and Joseph danced a second variation of dramatic confusion. Act II opened with a huge pyramid, with Potiphar at its center, surrounded by warriors holding round shields and other figures turned in flat, profile poses. Joseph's role was a passive, steadfast one as he struggled against the violence in Potiphar's court. Souritz points out that in Fokine's *Legend of Joseph* (choreographed to Strauss's music in 1914), an angel saved Joseph from execution and Potiphar's wife was killed by thunder, whereas Goleizovsky did not believe in magic endings and kept his Joseph imprisoned in a dungeon:

> The immovability of despotic power came into question. The pyramid crumbled. Joseph, squeezed between the columns, which moved toward the center of the stage, threw himself down. Taich and Potiphar gazed from the height of their power onto the earth, which had devoured the disobedient. There, where he recently stood, the servants danced. One had to grovel, to show one's devotion to the ruler, to delight in the destruction of the man who was not like all the rest. But he existed and did not submit. And these swarming, mingled figures, these groups broken into small particles, never again gathered into their former majestic bas-relief.[9]

In 1925, Goleizovsky showed his appreciation for the romantic ballet style evinced in his manifestos in his production of *Teolinda*, to music by Schubert, which was presented on the same program with *Joseph the Beautiful* at the Experimental (Bolshoi Filial) Theater.[10]

In his agitprop ballet *The Whirlwind* (1927), Goleizovsky made use of the same contrast between the "decadent" dances of the bourgeoisie and the healthy, upright dances of the proletariat that he had used in *D.E.* Lunacharsky suggested the graphic style for this work, choreographed to music by Boris Beer for the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, commissioned for the same program as *Heroic Action*, an allegorical opera: "I ask you to make a poster and only a poster," he told the choreographer. The ballet showed the class struggle between foxtrotting capitalists, royalty, clerics, and the stirring masses (led by a man in the first act and a woman in the second). Recalling both the stylistic contrasts of the exemplary ballet *The Red Poppy* (Lev Lashchilin and Vassily Tikhomirov, 1927) and *D.E.* and the themes of Goleizovsky's own aborted *The Masque of the Red Death*, the ballet *The Whirlwind* began with a king carousing in his castle and ended with the entrance of a death-bearing Spirit of the Revolution and an orgy. "The servants of tsarism, which is dying out and devoured by the

indignant people, hide in palaces that have been preserved here and there. Dreaded, red Death — the Red Whirlwind chases them and overtakes them everywhere," Goleizovsky wrote.[11]

Vladika, the fat king in *The Whirlwind*, was a caricature straight out of ROSTA* posters of "Capital," surrounded by noblemen in white gloves and shirtfronts, senators in ribbons, and diplomat buffoons. A soloist emerged from the funnel-shaped mass filling the stage, where the scene showed the silhouette of a ghostly city with a sky on which, lit up by raging fires, appeared the black crosses of gallows. The crowd led the Spirit of the Revolution to the castle, where the king rolled down the steps to his throne, losing his clothing along the way. "The abominable pile of flesh will wallow with a final spasm. All the courtiers, seeing him in such a state, will understand that there is no redemption. Without adornments, their god turned into dust," Goleizovsky wrote.

According to Souritz, the orgy was a fantasy of horror. A decadent violinist accompanied erotic dances; a bacchanalian frenzy that combined wild folkdances with foxtrots followed. "Monks of all creeds threw themselves into the dance, together with the half-dressed bacchantes. The black cowls of Orthodox monks and the tonsures of Catholics flashed by; shamans and Tibetan lamas raged. The monks turned into satyrs during the dance: their soutanes fell off, and antlers and tails appeared." The final apotheosis was the "pyramid of victory" over the fallen court. "Below, the motley harlequins and personages of the court lie, their writhing finished; above, the workers build a new life. The entire scene is covered with slogans," Goleizovsky wrote.[12]

Like Meyerhold in *D.E.*, Goleizovsky was accused in *The Whirlwind* of making the aristocracy attractive and exciting, while the proletarian heroes were boring and stilted. The critic V. Iving complained in *Pravda* that the ballet was an unhappy fusion of attenuated eroticism with bold propaganda, and that the agitprop itself seemed only an excuse for the eroticism. After its dress rehearsal at the Experimental Theater on 6 November 1927, when spectators walked out in the middle of the performance, *The Whirlwind* was withdrawn from the repertory.[13]

After the failure of *The Whirlwind* and the increasing repression of avant-garde art in the Soviet Union, especially after 1932, Goleizovsky worked independently in Moscow and in various other Soviet cities, staging ballets and sports festivals as well as ballets for the theater. He studied the folklore of various nationalities and based his 1941 ballet *Two Roses* on Tadjik folklore. In 1964 he wrote the book *Images of Russian Folk Choreography*. In the late 1950s, Goleizovsky again began to work at the Bolshoi Theater, on themes that recalled his earlier work. He choreographed a new

* ROSTA, the Russian Telegraph Agency, commissioned artists, including Vladimir Mayakovsky, to make propaganda posters that were put in store windows all over the USSR.

Scriabiniana, an abstract suite of dances, in 1962 (it has since been recorded on film) and *Leili and Mejnun* in 1964. At the time of his death in 1970, Goleizovsky was working on plans to restage *Faun* for television.[14]

As the following manifestos show, Goleizovsky joined with his mentors Fokine and Gorsky in bitterly criticizing the sterility of academic ballet conventions, still prevalent in the early twentieth century, that were inherited from Marius Petipa. "The Old and the New: Letters about Ballet" in many ways echoes Fokine's letter to the London *Times* of 1914. And perhaps Goleizovsky also refers to the eighteenth-century ballet reformer Noverre in the title as well as the concerns of these manifestos. Goleizovsky complains that, even after the revolution, the right wing in ballet still holds power.

As a "leftist" choreographer, always interested in innovations for the sake of greater expressivity, he invented two new positions of the feet: sixth position, in which the feet are close together with the legs held parallel; and seventh position, in which one foot is in front of the other, also in parallel (rather than turned-out) position. Goleizovsky makes reference to these new positions (and to criticisms of them) in "The Old and the New." He expanded the ballet vocabulary further with acrobatic movements, gymnastics, and arabesques either tilted forward, performed par terre, or in the air with the support of a partner's arm or knee. The legs of the ballerina were then free to gesture expressively. Goleizovsky's dances proceeded in a flow of intricate, changing poses and circular or spiral shapes. The parallel positions of the body, the unusual partnering arrangements, and the flowing chains of dancers are all elements of Goleizovsky's choreography that seem to have influenced not only George Balanchine but also later generations of Bolshoi choreographers.

These manifestos originally appeared in *Ekran* (*Screen*), a biweekly magazine published in Moscow that carried articles about and reviews of all the arts, as well as listings of film screenings and theatrical performances. The publication of "The Old and the New: Letters about Ballet" coincided with a season of performances by the Kamerny Ballet at the GOSET Yiddish Theater in April and May 1922.[15]

The Old and the New: Letters About Ballet

I.

"The works of the leftist ballet masters are too technical. They do not correspond to the music, they are erotic, and so on. Classical dance may evolve, but it is impossible to call the works of the present-day leftist ballet masters dance." Nowadays we hear such voices rather often.

But isn't dance really the expression of an idea by means of movements? Sometimes even the instinctive expression of a subconscious part of our imagination?

And a votary of the art of ballet who neglects any kind of movement is a bad one.

Every position of the body is beautiful and necessary. A new movement for a ballet master is the same thing as a new paint for a painter. The more there are of them, the more possibilities there are.

Can one and need one take into consideration the opinions of the pundits, who have become hardened on entrechats, bourrées, and so on, and who employ these few pas—where they are needed and where they are not needed? Pundits who have become exhausted in a useless struggle against their own imaginations? Those who force unhappy, moaning performers—who have bound their heads up with the traditional little ribbon and put on all the glittering goods, without considering whether the artistic point of view demands it or not—to perform these pas day in and day out, not only in a tunic and a tutu, but also in an ordinary skirt? Or must one consider the opinion of nonballet people, who at the time of their discourse on this art remind one of birds with clipped wings? I would say it is impossible to take their opinions into consideration, but also necessary. We are compelled to consider them, because all of the major stages on which a choreographer can now create anything are occupied by them.

The masses get used to the new more quickly than their leaders do. The masses unconsciously believe that everything created by nature is admissible. The masses are not a rival for the artist. The masses are more of an artist than the pundit, because they judge by first impressions.

It is possible to find ugliness in anything beautiful. In fact, aesthetics says that the essence of beauty does not lend itself to precise definition.

The pundits, the old ballet masters, even made the crowd come to believe that the second position of the so-called classical ballet was beautiful. Or it would be clear to people who look for "indecency" that the attitude position may remind one of a dog during its natural animal functions, and so on.

Even the nonrecognition of the leftist masters of ballet is no more than a misunderstanding, which is a result of the lack of imagination of the ballet pundits and their stagnation, their fanatic, blind faith in the precepts of old men.

We observe interesting phenomena—a new ballet master, M. M. Fokine, is born—in Russia he suffers ruin; Western Europe crowns him with laurels. In Paris the dancer V. Nijinsky conquers the audience in the ballet *Les Sylphides*—in Petersburg after this ballet (which grand dukes and so on attended), he receives an order to leave Russia immediately.[16]

Can there be two opinions about whether the dance of Taglioni, Elssler, Grisi, and so on was beautiful? The distinctive, naïve beauty of the dance of the [18]30s and 40s is so perfect, original, and logical that not only a specialist, but even a layman barely interested in the art of movement, will

feel it unconsciously. And an absence of that technical quality that presently prevails in every choreographic work is the most salient feature of this dance of the 30s, 40s, 50s. This type of dance elucidated an idea in original and uncomplicated movements. This dance has been preserved in only a few classical ballets.

The variation in the first act of *Coppélia* is still the closest of all to the old dance. There we see what the dancer wants to say with her movements. There the meaningful set of pas is a harmony of movements, which as a whole express a definite idea. And in the dance of Taglioni's time, as in ancient dance, an idea appears as movement.

In the old ballets of Marius Petipa, especially in his last works, we already see less meaning in the movements.

At the present time the art of that classical dance is experiencing its decadence. The stunt on which this dance is built, unpoeticized, is not illuminated by an idea, but, on the contrary, is bared, and the spectator goes into raptures chiefly over such combinations as thirty-two and more fouettés, six or eight turns à terre, etc.

And we observe a transition to technique, but a cautious transition, in which, besides the big, special, technical accomplishments and taste, a knowledge of the history and evolution of one's art is felt.

Really, isn't any significant ballet in Moscow a machine? Isn't it really naked, puzzling, tedious technique and nothing more? How inexpressive and monotonous the choreographic variations are! And, in the majority of cases, what terrible music accompanies the creation of the ballet master, at a time when serious, "genuine" composers lie in the library and bide their unknown time!

The stage on which a ballet performer arranges his movement is the keyboard of his art. It is not made use of at all by the fanatics of the old. But the creative work of a performer who has finished his technical training cannot be constrained by any kind of decorative or musical fracture. For him, every unexpected turn, bend, rise, step, and so on, should serve as an object of reflection, as a chance to amplify (intensify) his movement, as a possibility for some kind of new achievement.

The ballet dancer, like the ballet master himself, should rejoice at every unexpected obstacle on his keyboard, because such an obstacle is, in truth, not an obstacle but the possibility for some kind of new achievements. The interest of creative work lies in these possibilities.

The leftist ballet masters are accused of making combinations and poses to which the eye is unaccustomed. It is said that these are not dances but circus tricks.

But in the Bolshoi Theater, in the second act of *Vain Precautions*,[17] we ourselves see a real circus "splits" en l'air, which the ballerina performs supported by the premier danseur. I find that this circus trick does not in the least disturb the impression of high artistic value. It is as much a circus trick

as all the other movements in that dance — which those who err term "old" classical — are inherent in the circus.

I maintain that there is no position of the body in the art of ballet that could not be found in the movement not only of the circus but also of the dramatic or operatic performer. In all three cases, the movements have their own nuances and are complex in their own ways.

All movements are inherent in life. The art of ballet is an extract of all the arts in general.

The Bolshoi State Academic Theater, as the single museum of this art, should collect all movements inherent in life, without ignoring a single one.

And whether a given movement is pleasing or displeasing is really not so important. It pleases some people; displeases others.

One can superciliously not acknowledge the leftist trend, but it is impossible to forget that all progress in art is made by leftist artists.

If an artist-innovator is educated and technically accomplished, don't persecute him; lend an ear to what he says.

Really, it is only thanks to the innovators that we have now surpassed "abroad." Thanks to them we teach our former teachers. We have traveled to draw knowledge from Gordon Craig, Isadora Duncan, and so on.

And now both could learn a great deal from us, which, it seems, is in part being realized.[18]

II.

How can one explain that the revolution, which allowed leftist artists of all types of art to express themselves, did not give this opportunity to the leftist masters of ballet?

Funds for ballet were allocated only to the academic theaters, where they were sown and are sown to this day. The *Little Humpbacked Horses* and the *Bayaderkas* are the communal graves of Russian ballet dancers; for the breeding grounds of the future beggars — of smatterers — there are the ballet studios. True, there are ballet studios in which attempts to express something new are made, but these attempts remain attempts.

Thanks to this sort of circumstance, a new ballet art is born in the very writhings in which the old perishes.

We still have a school for those who devote themselves to ballet. There they train their bodies over the course of seven or eight years. In the last years of training, a student must master the technique of the ballet to perfection. Training mechanically and disciplining their bodies, they prepare themselves for their future creative work, where all the five famous positions should become only a means of achievement, for the creation of some kind of image.

But our ballet is situated in the hands of people who are chiefly occupied with the continual repetition of what was done before them, without creating anything new, and they have reduced this art to such a

state that, after looking in on a ballet class, you couldn't say what is going on. Is this a class or the rehearsal of some "old" ballet? But where is the creative work of the performer?

What is performed in class is now done exactly onstage. In every ballet you find the very same pas, the very same combinations. And these pas and combinations, as I have already said, are attached to any costume. Arabesque en l'air looks very pretty in tutus, for instance, in the ballet *Vain Precautions*, and was absolutely out of the blue in the ballet *Eunice*,[19] where this arabesque was set into a tunic. But, of course, a school should be just a means of achievement and nothing more.

One of the pundits of the Bolshoi State Academic Theater pointed out to me that in one of my works the dancer does a circus culbute (he somersaults over his head). "Is this really dance?"

But in the Bolshoi Theater, in the first act of the ballet *Swan Lake*, doesn't the dancer V. Efimov actually turn a somersault over his head several times, according to the instructions of the extreme right-wing artist A. A. Gorsky?[20] It is difficult and unnecessary to argue about which movement can be called dance and which cannot.

Princess Brambilla and *Phèdre* at the Kamerny Theater[21] are genuine, beautiful ballets; to reach them, *The Little Humpbacked Horse* and so on would need to grow for a long time.

And the monologue of Tseretelli in the play *King Harlequin*,[22] thoroughly saturated with dynamic movements . . . well, this is a beautiful, meaningful variation, which I am sure would never be accepted as dance by the fanatics of "the old classical dance."

The sixth position—when both a person's feet are on the floor, touching one another closely at the heels and the big toes—is absolutely not acknowledged by these very fanatics. Nor is the seventh position—that is, an amplified fifth.

I was accused of the indecency of several poses and pas, and the indecencies are attributed to "leftism" in general. But where is the indecency? Surely not in sixth position, which I propagate. In a position of modesty. In a position indigenous to the East and the ancients, where the naked dancing woman, who has no veil, covers up with her knees. But really, is the second position of the old classical dance—when a person stands with legs wide apart while the toes and knees are turned out—is this really more decent than my sixth position? And is the costume of our ballerina really decent, when the woman is undressed to the point where her nudity may be felt more strongly?

Maybe these guardians of chastity would also find Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe* indecent? It is the nature of the pathological person to find "indecency" in everything that excites his sensuality.

The judges say further that the dance of a leftist ballet master is in most cases vapid. It makes no difference to me whether or not these judges

let me abolish the traditional tutus and the glittering ribbon worn on the head. But I think that it scarcely ever happens that a spectator sees a dancer in my work turning for some unknown reason like an open pair of compasses, for a duration of two or three minutes to the music, which is written by either Medtner, Scriabin, Debussy, or Prokofiev, and so on. But in the interpretation of classical dance, which is aged, faded, and has now lost any meaning, such pirouettes are inalienable appurtenances and accompany any musical composition. The chaînés of the above-mentioned dance are yet more such hackneyed appurtenances. Almost every variation performed by a woman ends with them.

I have already said that the movements of the old classical dance are attached by the right-wing choreographers to any costume, thus depriving the movement of its style and expressiveness. A dance of pure fantasy, a dance outside of time, depends entirely on the imagination of the artist, and hence may not be constrained by any cliché. I want to speak here not only about costume but also about movement. For if a person is given four or five positions, tutus, a headband of sham diamonds, and is ordered to create — the fantasy flies away. This is no longer creative work but merely a job.

I heard from a certain right-wing ballet master that "every movement is international." I can agree with him when it is a case of a discussion of ethnographic dance. Even then he is not quite right, since the structure of the body of the person of the country in question has great significance. For example, among the Spanish the pelvis is pushed forward; among the Jews the curve of the waist is weakly outlined; among Negroes the feet are turned in; and so on. And all of this plays a very large role in the construction of a dance. Lately, the ethnographic dance of the right-wing masters has been reduced to such a state that it has become completely indistinguishable from a parody of ethnographic dances, performed by variety dancers, where all the movements are vulgar, hackneyed, calculated for thunder, crash, glitter, and sensation and, chiefly, to catch the ear of the spectator, to the detriment of the character and pithiness of the dance.

The so-called classical dance belongs to everyone and to no one; it is a dance of pure imagination and mood. It always evolves and it cannot die. The classical dance of the 1840s and 1850s is beautiful, aromatic, like an old, expensive perfume. Now, it's true, it has lost both beauty and form; now, for all intents and purposes, it temporarily does not exist.

We who love our art, "the left wing," are restoring it in due course and will show it, like an old, precious engraving. But the new — onward! Don't pay attention to the disdainful grimaces of the ballet academics. What can these decadents say? They have reduced our ballet to the point where it is barely noticed and is not considered an art.

If a spectator even attends ballet performances, it is only because there is nowhere else to go. If we also could only periodically show our

works, as these old masters do, then the public, which loves ballet, would have something to live by. Let us hope that someday our ballet will be given more consideration in Russia than it has been spared up to now. But for the time being—onward, innovators! For innovators are always the renascence.

10

Merce Cunningham's *Story*

Story, a dance Merce Cunningham choreographed in 1963, signaled a new phase of experimentation for the man who had moved in the radical vanguard of modern dance at least since 1951, when he first used chance methods in his choreography. Through the use of chance—employing charts, coin-tossing, dice-throwing, and clues from the *I Ching* to select elements in a predetermined gamut of movements, body parts, or stage spaces—Cunningham had developed a technical style characterized by unexpected juxtapositions of actions.

For Cunningham, chance had the salutary effect of loosening the choreographer's conscious control over the dance, a goal augmented by the well-known autonomy of his collaborative method with composers and designers. To a great extent, choreography by chance produced unexpected and unpremeditated results. However, the initial gamut of movement choices from which the chance combinations were made still came from Cunningham's personal inventions. Also, once the chance procedures were followed, the resulting movement combinations, phrasing, spacing, and other components would then be set in an unchanging choreographic pattern.

With *Story*, Cunningham introduced two elements that would further minimize his own control in the dance, by transferring choice from the choreographer to the dancers: spontaneous determination and improvisation. The choreographic structure allowed the dancers at points to make certain decisions regarding the given movements and in other sections to

Society of Dance History Scholars, Tempe, Arizona, 1989.

invent their own movements. But, for several reasons, *Story* was not a success. Hence it is useful to examine it precisely as a departure from Cunningham's usual methodology.

Story is also notable for other reasons. It established the basic ad hoc structure for the flexible Events, which Cunningham began to present during the world tour of 1964. In *Story* for the first time, Cunningham decided just before each performance which sections of the dance would be performed, in what order, and for what durations, posting the instructions backstage. The ironic title, further, serves as a paradigm for Cunningham's attitude toward the interpretation of his dances, since *Story* (obviously) implies that the dance will have a narrative structure, and yet, as with so many of his dances, Cunningham left any final exegesis up to the spectator.

Story marked a transition in Cunningham's working relationship with Robert Rauschenberg, the painter who since 1954 had designed sets and costumes for the company. In 1961, that role had intensified, when Rauschenberg became the lighting director and stage manager of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, traveling with the group on tour. Eventually, during versions of *Story* given on the company's world tour of 1964, Rauschenberg began to create "live décor." Inscribing his own and his assistant Alex Hay's performances in the décor of the dance was a decision that had deep repercussions, since ultimately it led to his leaving the company, in 1965.[1]

Story was first performed at Royce Hall at the University of California, Los Angeles, in July 1963. The company had recently undergone a change of personnel: Judith Dunn and Marilyn Wood had left, and Barbara Lloyd had recently joined. This necessitated a change in the repertory.[2] The group spent June and July in residency at UCLA, and Cunningham choreographed *Story* during that time. Seven dancers were in the first performance of the work: Merce Cunningham, Carolyn Brown, Viola Farber, Shareen Blair, William Davis, Barbara (Dilley) Lloyd, and Steve Paxton. The dance was open-ended in terms of the number of performers; Cunningham writes that it was "a dance for x-number of people."[3] In the nineteen performances of the dance in the United States, the number of dancers ranged from five to eight. For the performances in Europe and Asia during the world tour of 1964, the dancers for *Story* usually included the entire company: Cunningham, Brown, Farber, Blair (until she left the company during the tour), Davis, Deborah Hay, Lloyd, Sandra Neels, Paxton, and Albert Reid. Because the structure was so flexible, the duration of *Story* also ranged widely—from fifteen to forty minutes.[4]

Cunningham has written of *Story*:

> The title does not refer to any implicit or explicit narrative but to the fact that every spectator may see and hear the events in his own way. Within a

> section the movements given to a particular dancer could change in space and time and the order the dancer chose to do them in could come from the instant of doing them. Also the length of each section varied each time. The sections were given names for reasons of identification.
>
> The dance was made up of a series of sections, solos, duets, trios, and larger units, that could freely go from one to the other, so their order was changeable. . . .
>
> We played it a great many times as it could involve one or all of the dancers, and be given under any kind of extreme circumstance. Rehearsals consisted of each dancer doing all the parts of a given section.[5]

Thus *Story* was composed anew for each performance, from a series of eighteen sections. Their (identificatory) titles were: "Solo #1," "Solo #2," "Solo #3," "Floor," "Object," "Tag," "Space," "Exit," "Entrance," "Fall Trio," "Duet & Solo," "5-Part Trio," "Triangle," "Hopping," "CB & MC," "Arm-Trio," "SB & MC," and "VF & MC." In "Object," for instance, the dancers manipulated, moved, and carried an object that Rauschenberg made or found—a different one for every performance. In the film of *Story* that documents a performance in Helsinki, this is the most dramatic section of the dance—or at least the part most freighted with possible narrative import, for each dancer looks at, handles, carries, drops, or otherwise interrelates with the object in a way that imbues it with an almost totemic power. (This resulted from Cunningham's rules that the dancers could touch the object a specified number of times—though the manner of contact was unspecified.) In "Floor," Brown and Farber started at any point (either on- or off-stage) and then, according to Cunningham, "move[d] in a pronounced, slow tempo across the area, possibly separated, but more often together." In "5-Part Trio," three dancers executed five quick phrases.[6]

The dancers consulted lists posted in both wings to remind themselves which section came next, as well as how long it should last. Also in the wings were clocks provided for the dancers to synchronize their timing; while onstage, they tried to estimate the duration of a section.[7]

In terms of performance style and contact, Carolyn Brown remembers that overall the dancers "were free to relate to others on the stage or to ignore them." One option the dancers could also exercise was to stay offstage during a particular section. And further, she notes that where there was room for the dancers' invention of movement, the rules were tightly constructed, involving choices regarding direction, level, and duration. "This section was improvised, or should have been. Cunningham expected the dancers to choreograph spontaneously and not pre-set and rehearse and repeat. This proved to be more difficult for some than others."[8]

Albert Reid, for instance, found *Story* "a big nuisance. I hated it. There were so many insertions in your supposed improvisation that you were in knots. You couldn't do it as well as something that was set. And I have a terrible time remembering things, so I made something up and set it.

I pretty much did the same thing after the first attempts to do it extemporaneously."[9]

Much of the dancing—at least in the film documenting the Helsinki performance—remains recognizably Cunninghamesque. There are slow lunges, brisk leg extensions, quickly changing facings, repetitive jumps with arms moving or held in asymmetrical positions, a singular movement that flings the body open and closed, and—at the very end—a stunning trio partnering sequence in which Cunningham supports Brown, who leans off-balance in arabesque, with his left hand, while Farber repeatedly turns and flops over his outstretched right arm. All these postures and movements, as well as the extreme contrasts in dynamics, clearly bear the imprint of Cunningham's choreographic style.

Not only the dancing, but also all the other elements of the dance were indeterminate. In instructing Rauschenberg regarding the costumes and set, Cunningham notes that he told him only that "the piece would change its order from night to night." Cunningham had indicated that he wanted the costumes "to simply be picked up in the area where we were," and Rauschenberg translated this idea into an arrangement that left the costume design partly up to the dancers. They wore a basic outfit of yellow leotard and tights, and to this each dancer added items chosen from bags stationed—along with the scores and the clocks—in the wings. These items included dresses, shirts, pants, and sweaters from second-hand stores and Army-Navy surplus stores; a football player's shoulder padding; an old pair of longjohns; and a gas mask. Thus each dancer's costume varied, not only from evening to evening, but also during the course of a single performance. Often the garments were worn in unconventional ways: a dancer might extend one arm through the sleeve of a dress and the other through the neckline; a sweater might be tied around a dancer's neck. One evening, Brown remembers, "Barbara Lloyd [put] on all the costumes she could manage, leaving the rest of us with next to nothing, and making herself so large and encumbered she could barely move. What effect this had on the choreography was interesting indeed."[10] Lloyd experimented in the opposite direction with costumes in Tokyo, where she undressed completely, including her leotard and tights, and then matter-of-factly got dressed again in a new costume.[11]

The lighting, too, was indeterminate, ranging from quite light to dark. Rauschenberg used the lights at hand in a given theater, often using work lights or arranging the lighting instruments in the audience's field of vision as part of the set. On the world tour, especially, this extemporaneous system of lighting caused some technical problems with the theater crews. The technicians for the most part did not want Rauschenberg and his assistant, Alex Hay, to handle the instruments, and, Rauschenberg recalls, "They

couldn't understand the concept that we didn't know where the dancers were going to be, which was part of the dance. . . . And [the crews] couldn't understand that. They just kept saying, 'Bring me the light chart, your cue sheet, and we'll do it.' "[12]

The set was composed of objects and equipment found in and around each theater. Often Rauschenberg began by stripping the stage bare of wings and drops so that the back wall was visible — at the time, a radical treatment of the stage space. According to Rauschenberg, "I never repeated the set. A new one was made for each performance from materials gathered from different places. . . . I never knew where anyone was going to be; the space was not defined. The set had to be made out of what you could find, given the amount of time that you had in a particular locale, out of stuff that was there . . . out in the alley or any place you could get it."[13] At La Fenice, the theater in Venice where the company performed during the Biennale in 1964, the stage had platforms, which Rauschenberg raised and lowered; in Helsinki, part of the stage began to revolve near the end of the dance. In Augusta, Georgia, in a hall with two theaters back to back, the audience saw the empty theater behind the stage as the backdrop. At UCLA, the vista included the open doors, hallway, and scene shop behind the stage.[14]

Rauschenberg claims that the "live décor" began at Dartington, a British arts school in Totnes, Devon, where the theater was so tidy that nothing else could be found to decorate the stage. "I didn't know what to do. I couldn't find anything. And so finally, like five minutes before we had to be back at the theater, I asked Alex [Hay] if he had any white shirts that needed ironing. And he had one and I think I had one, and I told Merce that I had something to open the show, that Alex and I were going to be on stage." The company performed next in London, where Rauschenberg created a new performance that occurred simultaneously with the dancing. He began a painting, continued making it during the four-night run, and finished it on the final evening; meanwhile Alex Hay performed tasks such as reading a newspaper or drinking a cup of tea.[15]

The music for *Story* was Toshi Ichiyanagi's *Sapporo*, a composition with a number of variable elements. In terms of personnel, the score calls for a conductor and performers numbering up to fifteen. Ichiyanagi made sixteen different scores, notated with a limited set of symbols. These indicated sustained sounds, sliding sounds, and attacked sounds; in some cases, the players were to produce more than one sound simultaneously or to choose, out of a group of possibilities, only one or two symbols to interpret. Any instrument capable of producing sounds required by the score could be used. The players were meant to be as far apart as possible in the space.[16]

Obviously, like the set and the costumes, as well as the movement itself, the rules governing the music in *Story* generated different sounds at

each performance. A critic described the music in Warsaw as "harsh, shrill squeaks, rattles, and clacks." Among other musical events in that performance, John Cage played a mirror by rubbing it with a cut bottle. According to the critic, this produced "a genuine sensation," and "seven persons sensitive to squeaks left the hall."[17]

Story was performed in various United States cities (although never in New York) and throughout the company's world tour in 1964. On the company's return to the United States, the dance was taken out of the repertory. According to Rauschenberg, his steadily increasing participation in *Story* raised Cunningham's ire.[18] Certainly the dance could not be performed without Rauschenberg's participation. And in many ways, given what has remained in the memories of both critics and dancers, *Story* seems more indelibly stamped with Rauschenberg's signature than with Cunningham's.

Company member Albert Reid remembers that the dancers disliked the dance and that eventually Carolyn Brown wrote Cunningham a letter asking that the dance be removed from the repertory; as Reid recalls it, the dance was quietly dropped soon thereafter. According to Carolyn Brown, the dance was dropped because Cage "didn't trust us to do indeterminate dancing" and, furthermore, she asserts flatly, Cunningham "hated [*Story*], because he couldn't control it."[19]

Although it remained in the repertory only a short time and was a favorite neither with the choreographer nor with the dancers, as we have seen, *Story* is important for reasons both dance-political and dance-historical (as well as art-historical). It catalyzed Rauschenberg's departure from the collaborative relationship with Cunningham and from the company, enabling him to pursue his own more idiosyncratic performance path, but leaving the company without a resident designer. Its creation signaled Cunningham's interest in maintaining his own threatened position in the vanguard of modern dance, in the face of a rising generation of younger experimental choreographers. As I have noted, its structure prefigured that of the Event, a staple of Cunningham's activity since 1964. That *Story* was discontinued seems to indicate Cunningham's unwillingness to go beyond certain boundaries in choreography and in dance performance — setting him apart from the postmodernists, who reveled in improvisation and ordinary movement.

In looking at how *Story* contrasts both with the rest of Cunningham's oeuvre and with the more radical departures of the Judson group (and other postmodern choreographers), the differences between chance choreography and improvisation are clarified. And further, in understanding those differences, one can see clearly why Cunningham does not fit in the category of postmodernism.

In giving up control (via chance techniques) over such elements as timing, spacing, and sequencing, Cunningham needed to assert even more careful control in a different direction over his dancers. For one thing, if the dancers were not carefully coordinated, the varying speeds and complicated movement patterns might lead to accidents. For another, strict direction was necessary since the dancers could not rely on musical phrasing or other conventional methods to synchronize their movements. In other words, the creator's vast freedom in handling his compositional materials led to a richness of content but, simultaneously, to a tightening of the reins over his performers.

By contrast, improvisation allows for the spontaneity that was prized by the younger generation, but only through totally conscious control, residing anarchically in each individual performer—the exact opposite of the surrender to fate implied by using chance techniques. It also allows for movement content and performance style beyond any gamut of the choreographer's imagination. Improvisation democratizes the choreographic procedure by relocating it in the performers. But it also creates the risk of a "failed" performance.

Hence the conflict in *Story* goes much deeper than a power play in a dance company; it is the friction between two irreconcilable ways of making artistic choices.[20]

11

Cunningham and Duchamp

With Noël Carroll

Marcel Duchamp has suffered the fate of certain great artists: he has become an adjective, a handy category for puzzling, verbally playful, inaccessible, and "intellectual" painters, sculptors, composers, and performers. But applying the concept "Duchampian" on the basis of characteristics like puzzlement, inaccessibility, and word wit often seems too broad to be informative. One must exercise great care in examining the

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relation of Duchamp to current artists. Thus our first task is to consider not only the analogies that can be drawn between Merce Cunningham and Duchamp, but the disanalogies as well.

One very general area of congruence between the two is signaled by our willingness to attribute certain of the same qualities—for example, "intelligence"—to the oeuvres of both. In Duchamp, this "intelligence" derives from his spinning paradoxes, explorations of "the limit" of the concept of art, and hermeticism. In Cunningham, on the other hand, "intelligence" is a quality of the movements and bodies that his choreography comprises. We don't paraphrase his dances into propositions about the nature of art, as we do Duchamp's ready-mades, nor do we take them to be alchemical allegories, as many do regarding *The Large Glass*. Rather, "intelligence" pertains to the movement's most significant expressive quality in Cunningham's dance.

In opposition to the technique of the Graham style (from which he emerged), Cunningham's movement is light. It is directionally flexible and often rapier fast, covering space both quickly and hyperarticulately. At the same time, it is characterized by what followers of Laban call bound flow; the energy is liquid and resilient inside the dancer, but it stops at the boundary of the body. It is strictly defined and controlled. It does not rush vectorially or spill into the surrounding space. It has an air of exactitude and precision. In turn, these formal bodily properties—lightness, elasticity, speed, and precision—suggest a particular description of the mind as an agile, cool, lucid, analytic intelligence of the sort once referred to as Gallic or Cartesian, but also appropriate as an ideal of post-World War II America. Whereas the image of human thought in Graham was heavy, organic, brooding, and altogether nineteenth century, in Cunningham it is permutational, correlational, strategic, exact, rarefied, and airy. This is not to say that Cunningham presents a pantomime of the mind, but that he presents the body as intelligent in a specifically contemporary way. Indeed, the idea of bodily intelligence itself is contemporary, while the mode of that intelligence in Cunningham's work is clearly analogous to Duchamp's preferred style of thought.

Another increment of "intelligence" in Cunningham's work is a quality of clarity. Most often, this amounts to a principle of separability—that is, each element in a dance has its own autonomy and must be apprehended in isolation from the other elements of the spectacle. This is most evident in Cunningham's relation to his composers, most notably John Cage. Music and dance are presented as disjunct, unsynchronized events, each comprehended in its own right. They are not fused in a single Gesamtkunstwerk. This division of music and movement distinguishes Cunningham from George Balanchine, a choreographer who in many other respects shares some of Cunningham's ideals of bodily intelligence. Cunningham's sets also have an existence discrete from the dancing. For

example, Robert Morris's column of light moved inexorably across the proscenium stage in *Canfield*, and some of Robert Rauschenberg's actions that composed a live décor in *Story* (such as painting a painting onstage, or ironing shirts) at times upstaged the dancers. Moreover, this tendency toward separability extends into the choreography itself. In Cunningham's Events, phrases from different dances are lifted and spliced together to produce new works. This presupposes that the separate phrases in a dance are not unbreakably connected to their original context, but that they have a pristine individuality of their own. Of course, a similar point might be made about Cunningham's use of chance in certain dances, like *Untitled Solo* or *Torse*. To appreciate the individuality or integrity of a phrase, presented as such, demands a very focused, literally discriminating, variety of attention from a spectator, who must attend to each movement bundle separately and see each for what it alone is—that is, see clearly and distinctly. Again, Cunningham offers what can be thought of as an artistic interpretation of the Cartesian mentality.

Causality, or, rather, the absence of certain feelings of causality, provides another point of comparison between Duchamp and Cunningham. Duchamp, influenced by Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique*, specialized in a kind of fantastic causation that could only exist in words, but that because it was physically imponderable, seemed curiously insubstantial, ghostly, and perhaps nonexistent. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (*The Large Glass*) represents a machine, but we have no palpable intuition of its possible causal system apart from what we are told, and that not only is unbelievable but also evades the possibility of our constructing an inner, sensuously felt representation of it. How can an antique chocolate grinder, given its physical structure, be a functional part of the elaborate, sci-fi, chemical, electrical apparatus Duchamp outlines in *The Green Box* and *The White Box*? The problem here is not that of magical causation. We can imagine enchanted swords flying of their own power, and we can vicariously feel their impact as they plunge into imaginary dragons. But we cannot develop a bodily sense of the causal interactions and forces in *The Large Glass*. They exist only as words, imparting a sense of hollowness, bereft in feeling of what Hume called the cement of the universe.

Similarly, in Cunningham one feels the absence of causation in several respects. This is not to say that his dancers do not obey the same physics as balls on an inclined plane, but, instead, that his pieces lack many of the most typical and conventional representations of causation found in dance. The most conspicuous of these absences involves agency (which is, of course, at root a causal concept). Since Cunningham's dances are not dramatic, his dancers do not appear impelled by motivations. But, if they are not personal agents, neither are they social agents. They often seem unaware of each other as they dance different phrases juxtaposed at oppo-

site ends of the stage. Undoubtedly a large measure of this effect derives from their performance masks, which are generally free of every emotion save concentration. But there is also a sense of detachment that is related to Zen and Hindu philosophies; Cage has written of the tranquility that pervades each dance despite kaleidoscopic appearances of emotions, as in the Indian tradition. Thus, when the dancers perform a cooperative task — a lift, a pull, or a support — it does not seem expressive of conventional communality. The dancers are businesslike, alone even when joined in a coordinated feat. They are not so much persons driven by a common purpose as atoms that happen to lock into each other. Their mien, their detachment, supplies another qualitative link with Duchamp, as well as another factor in the principle of separability, denuding the choreography of an aura of continuous causal process.

The discontinuities of Cunningham's choreography divest it of a deep-seated, pervasive illusion of process that is typical of most dance and that led Susanne Langer to define dance as a realm of virtual powers. Cunningham's phrasings appear as discrete operations, intricate, planned, and self-contained; they do not engender the illusion of power — magnetic or propulsive — coursing through them and binding them to adjacent movements. It is the illusion of such power in pre-Cunningham dance styles that imbues much traditional choreography with a sense of coherence and interconnectedness — a sense of overarching intelligibility grounded in the illusion of causal linkage. Without such a framework, we have not merely a strong impression of the separateness of the phrases, but concomitant feelings of the presentness and presence of each movement unit. This quality of inexplicable *thereness*, achieved through radical juxtaposition and disorientation, is also something that confronts us in Duchamp's later work, attested to by the very title of his final masterpiece, *Given*.

Duchamp said, "The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act." Read as a brief for the participatory spectator, this statement not only correlates with some of Cunningham's most significant innovations as a choreographer, but has been echoed by both Cage and Cunningham. By placing several different actions onstage simultaneously (for instance, the L'Amour and the Bounce Dance section in *Gallopade*) in such a way that they make equal bids for the viewer's attention, Cunningham decenters the dance composition, democratizing the space so that any place on the set can be important. He pioneered an all-over, antiarchitectonic style of choreography. At the same time, this has invested the audience with the role of determining where to look and when. (Interestingly, Cunningham first arrived at this combination of audience freedom and responsibility roughly a decade after André Bazin and film realists enunciated a similar aesthetic in regard to the cinematic image. In

both film and dance, the viewer was now required to consciously interact with the imagery.) Yet for Cunningham, it is important to emphasize that what the spectator is free to choose is *which movement* to look at. In the preceding quotation, Duchamp is saying that the spectator brings his own meaning to the work of art. But meanings are precisely the sort of things that Cunningham's work is designed to deter and deflect.

With the distinction between movement and meaning, we reach the point of sharpest contrast between Duchamp and Cunningham. Duchamp strove for an art of ideas, an art that was discursive, an art that was allegorical. Duchamp opposed his ideal to art that was merely painting, merely "retinal." In this regard, his readymades can be glossed as the reductio ad absurdum of the proposition that art should seek objecthood. Cunningham, on the other hand, is a modernist in the reductive vein, creating an art based on what he conceives to be the essential material of his medium, viz., movement. And this movement is supposed to *be*, not mean—it is the functional equivalent of the paint in something like Jules Olitski's *Shake Out*. If Cunningham's movement is said to be emblematic of the philosophical system of Zen, we must remember that this is John Cage's position and not, primarily, Cunningham's. For Cunningham is concerned only with movement as such, what might be thought of as the animate counterpart of painterly objecthood. He uses chance methods to dispel the intrusion of his personality into certain dances, just as Duchamp experimented with various means of eliminating the painter's touch from his creations. But in the long run, in contradistinction to Cunningham, Duchamp mixes references to cosmology, philosophy, literature, psychosexual symbolism, puns, spoonerisms, and the like, which, though hermetic, nevertheless invite, rather than frustrate, interpretation.

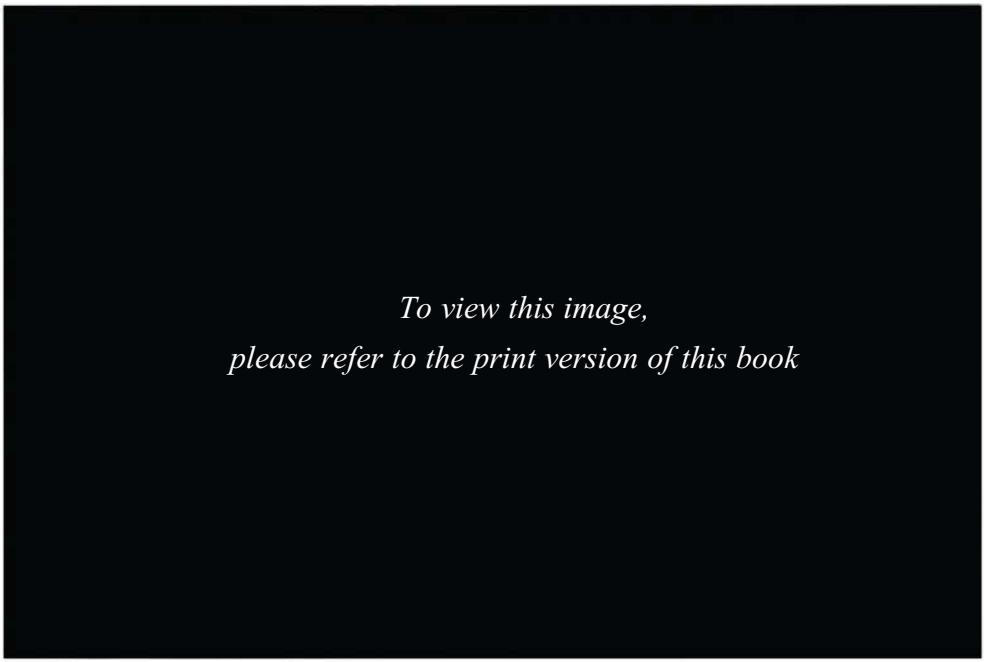
Psychologically, Duchamp's disdain for retinal art led him to curtail his output. He had a reputation as a painter who did not paint. He said he loathed paint. But Cunningham has no such reservations about his materials, as his endless stream of production confirms. In this Cunningham resembles Picasso—the artist of whom it is said Duchamp's silence reflects upon him as a bad conscience. Cunningham's abundance shows his utter confidence in his medium. He manipulates a stylistic vocabulary, readily recognizable as dance, with the ease, untroubled facility, and fecundity of a Bournonville. Indeed, it is Cunningham's very reliance on dance technique that led the succeeding generation of Judson Dance Theater choreographers to question his practice. Perhaps in this respect they were more Duchampian than their mentor.

Duchamp's distrust of the "retinal" art object increasingly prompted him to create works that went against the grain of certain classical modes of aesthetic attention. He created works (like the readymades, *The Large Glass*, and *Given*) that were first and foremost discursive—that is, that were pretexts for theoretical or hermeneutic discussion. They were not objects

that could be gazed at for hours in the rapt contemplation of the classic aesthetic attitude. In fact, Duchamp ridiculed this mode of aesthetic appreciation in his *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*. Duchamp's later works are intentionally not much to look at. Rather, they are occasions for puzzles and codes that the spectator could glean from a brief visit to the gallery and ruminate about at home. Cunningham's dances, however, are made for immediate, sensuous, total consumption. Aesthetic engagement at the moment of performance is paramount; residual meditation on the meanings of the work is secondary, if important at all. *Nowness*—that is, the committed aesthetic perception of the physical and formal properties of the dance as it unfolds—is the point of Cunningham's work.

At present, Duchamp's major contribution to twentieth-century art is dialectical (in the Platonic rather than the Hegelian sense). As befits the son of a notary, Duchamp was concerned with the question of what authorizes or authenticates something as a work of art. His readymades Socratically posed this embarrassing question, and suggested the unsettling answer that contextual factors surrounding the putative artwork, such as the reputation of the artist, were (rather than the work itself) the decisive factors in determining whether something was an artwork. Thus Duchamp's ready-

Merce Cunningham and Dance Company in *Walkaround Time*, 1968. (Photo: James Klosty.)



mades were not only reflexive (for example, about art) but revelatory (disclosing both something unexpected in itself and something with wildly unexpected ramifications about the concept of art). Cunningham, however, is not involved in revelatory reflexivity. His dances can be said to manifest (rather than reveal) a certain modernist conception of dance—that it is pure movement. And one can say that his dances are about dance if this means that they present the period-specific ideal of pure movement—that is, they are dances composed of what we regard as dancing and nothing else. But one cannot say that Cunningham's work explores and discloses the conditions of dance. Rather, it inhabits, manifests, and exercises them. One does not leave a Cunningham concert with the sense that one has garnered a new theoretical insight or question about the nature of dance; one leaves feeling one has just seen what is incontrovertibly dance.

For all the speculations about analogies and disanalogies between Duchamp and Cunningham, there is a concrete historical connection between the two artists. The dance *Walkaround Time* was choreographed by Cunningham in 1968, with décor by Jasper Johns based on *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* and with music by David Behrman titled . . . *for nearly an hour*. . . . The piece was Johns's idea; Duchamp approved it; and it was Duchamp's suggestion that during the dance the pieces of décor be moved into a relationship that emulated the painting. As with many of Cunningham's collaborations, Cunningham saw the set and Johns saw the dance for the first time the day before the premiere.

Walkaround Time is a dance in two parts, with an onstage intermission for the dancers, for a company of nine.* It lasts for nearly an hour, and much of the dancing takes place behind or among transparent plastic boxes of various heights on which were silkscreened designs from *The Large Glass*, including the Chocolate Grinder, the Oculist Witnesses, the Sieves or Parasols, the Nine Malic Molds, the Top Inscription or Milky Way, and the Bride. The dance opens with the entire company arrayed on the stage, surrounded by the décor, saluting the work in an open-armed knee bend. Several movement themes and qualities thread throughout the work. Cunningham twice runs in place, at first behind the Chocolate Grinder and then behind the Malic Molds. Various partnering structures for two or three dancers imitate the rolling, turning, and interlocking of machine parts and gears (echoed by the grinding, whirring, crunching sounds, interspersed with long silences, of the music). Valda Setterfield and Carolyn Brown each perform slow solos that involve intricate shiftings of body parts on a minute scale (a shoulder, a hip) and then a large scale, while standing in place. Setterfield, Brown, and Sandra Neels each traverse the stage in slow-motion runs at various points during the dance, sometimes to the counterpoint

* An excellent film of *Walkaround Time*, made by Charles Atlas, is available. For purposes of cross-reference, in describing the performance of the dance we refer to the dancers and actions recorded on the film.

motion of other dancers walking or swiftly running across the stage in separate zones. There are many entrances and exits, but this does not make the dance seem busy. On the contrary, the entire group is rarely onstage together, and the sparse look is accented by the stillnesses that often capture even those few dancers who populate the stage. Dancers turn in place, lift their limbs evenly and desultorily, take large steps, but then suddenly swoop circularly into new spaces or run off. During the intermission the dancers don robes, sit and converse, or saunter onto the stage, to the tune of cocktail music. In the second half of the dance, Cunningham changes from one set of clothes to another while running in place, Brown repeats and expands her solo, women are carried and lifted aloft and caught in leaps, a chorus of overlapping women's voices talks about *The Large Glass*, and finally the dancers pick up the plastic boxes to move them into their final arrangement center stage.

According to Cunningham and to several other company members, Duchamp was very much on the minds of all those who worked on creating this dance — both its designers and its performers. Cunningham has spoken of several direct references to Duchamp deliberately choreographed into the dance — the readymades, the entr'acte (recalling *Relâche*), and the awareness of time. In fact, there seem to be two different categories of references to Duchamp's works or ideas in *Walkaround Time* (aside from the décor and the music). First, there are direct allusions to Duchampian subjects. The most obvious of these is the solo in which Cunningham changes clothing while running in place — a direct reference to *Nude Descending a Staircase* that escapes few viewers. The solos for the women in the dance, especially Brown's solo, cast them squarely as aspects of the Bride. This is not a matter of obvious but vague correspondence; the three instances in which women move in "filmic" slow motion across the stage seem like analogies for the three cinematic blossomings the Bride is said to undergo in *The Large Glass*. Cunningham has said that the repetitions in the second half of sequences from the first half are his way of referring to the readymades. This interpretation seems to ignore the most obvious feature of readymades — their ordinariness. Yet there is a correspondence to readymades in the offstage behavior of the dancers made visible in the intermission.

Still other correspondences take the form not of allusions to Duchamp but, rather, of translations of Duchamp's ideas in *The Large Glass* and other works to the medium of dance. *The Large Glass* is, first and foremost, a complicated, fantastic machine. The overarching choreographic theme of *Walkaround Time* is mechanic, in terms of the style as well as the steps. It is not that the dancers mime robots or form themselves into machine parts à la Nikolai Foregger. The verticality of the spine in Cunningham's style here stiffens into a kind of rigidity. There is also a pronounced sense of mechanical action occurring in the dancers' bodies

and in their interactions. Legs and arms lift and lower sequentially like so many levers. Slow turns that revolve around a still axis give the impression of so many bolts being riveted into the floor. And, as in the moment when Cunningham does a sidestep that moves him while creating the illusion that he is walking in place, often the dancers seem to be moved by outside forces rather than by their own bodies. And, of course, underscoring this mechanical aura are the motor, creaking, and grinding sounds of the musical score.

But further, this dance makes machine references of a very specific sort. *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* is a special kind of machine—a mechanism for effecting sex through a series of convoluted, alchemical operations. That meaning is conveyed in *Walkaround Time* through the use of partnering, a traditional symbol in dance for sexual union. In this respect Cunningham's choreographic style is an appropriate medium for a translation of *The Large Glass*, for, not only does the machinelike grace of anatomical coordination and rhythmic repetition appear in many of his other works, but also his use of classical partnering techniques and subversions of such techniques is one of the hallmarks of his style. Cunningham's partnering is little remarked upon, perhaps because critics feel there is nothing unusual in partnering, while there *is* something unusual about the separation of dance from music or the decentralization of stage space. In Cunningham's dances instances of partnering become saturated with polyvalent meaning precisely because they are *not* lodged in a narrative, as in *The Sleeping Beauty*, or in some other poetic causal chain of events, as in many of Paul Taylor's ballets. In Cunningham's works the sexual meaning of the partnering act hovers in the dance, evoked by centuries of social iconography, but then dissolves, leaving a mysterious, vague feeling that resists categorization.

There are many moments of such fleeting but explicit contact in *Walkaround Time*. Cunningham carries Brown offstage. Brown leaps across the stage, led by a partner who holds her hand. Susana Hayman-Chaffey takes a flying leap, arms and legs outstretched to the sides, landing in a man's open arms in a moment that simultaneously signals coitus and the end of the dance's first half. The dancers coolly execute their maneuvers with machinelike detachment and precision; themes of passivity and of the quickening and slowing-down of action seem to act as both sexual and mechanical metaphors at the same time.

Yet another aspect of Cunningham's choreography is apparent here: his use of slowness and stillness. This quality makes him an appropriate choreographer for translating a painting or a sculpture, and it is especially apt here. Carolyn Brown seems to wax ecstatic in her steadily flowing turns; as she poises on demi-pointe for long moments, she seems to become the Bride exuding commands. In general, the frequent long stillnesses (and silences) in *Walkaround Time* seem to render it fixed, static, highly legible,

and transparent—qualities especially suited to a painting/sculpture on glass. Where there is motion in this dance, there are often drastically contrasting rates of speed, as when one dancer runs in slow motion while another passes her, running in (actual) rapid time.

Thus, in the most salient features of *Walkaround Time* one finds references to Duchamp that are not actual uses of the latter's methods or materials but, rather, translations of certain themes in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* into the dance terms of the vocabulary Cunningham has already evolved. These elements of Cunningham's style are unique and make *Walkaround Time* a work that, stripped of its décor, we would still recognize as a Cunningham work, although we might be hard pressed to identify it as a work devoted to Duchamp.

III

The African-American Connection

12

To the Beat Y'All: Breaking Is Hard to Do

Chico and Tee and their friends from 175th Street in the High Times crew were breaking in the subway and the cops busted them for fighting.

"We're not fighting. We're dancing!" they claimed. At the precinct station, one kid demonstrated certain moves: a head spin, ass spin, swipe, chin freeze, "the Helicopter," "the Baby."

An officer called in the other members of the crew, one by one. "Do a head spin," he would command as he consulted a clipboard full of notes. "Do 'the Baby.' " As each kid complied, performing on cue as unhesitatingly as a ballet dancer might toss off an enchainement, the cops scratched their heads in bewildered defeat.

Or so the story goes. But then, like ballet and like great battles (it shares elements of both), breaking is wreathed in legends. "This guy in Queens does a whole bunch of head spins in a row, more than ten, he spins, stops real quick, spins. . . ."

"Yeah, but he stops. Left just goes right into seven spins, he never stops."

"There's a ten-year-old kid on my block learned to break in three days."

"The best is Spy, Ronnie Ron, Drago, me [Crazy Legs], Freeze, Mongo, Mr. Freeze, Lace, Track Two, Weevil. . . ."

"Spy, he's called the man with the thousand moves, he had a girl and he taught her how to break. She did it good. She looked like a guy."

"Spy, man, in '78—he was breaking at Mom and Pop's on Crotona Avenue in the Bronx; he did his footwork so fast you could hardly see his feet."

"I saw Spy doing something wild in a garage where all the old-timers used to break. They had a priest judging a contest, and Spy was doing some kind of Indian dance. All of a sudden, he threw himself in the air, his hat

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Village Voice, April 10, 1981.

flew up, he spun on his back, and the hat landed right on his chest. And everyone said, 'That was luck.' So he did it once more for the priest, and the hat landed right on his chest. If I didn't see it, I would never have believed it."

The heroes of these legends are the Break Kids, the B-Boys, the Latino and black teenagers who invent and endlessly elaborate this exquisite, heady blend of dancing, acrobatics, and martial spectacle. Like other forms of ghetto street culture — graffiti, verbal dueling, rapping — breaking is a public arena for the flamboyant triumph of virility, wit, and skill. In short, of style. Breaking is a way of using your body to inscribe your identity on streets and trains, in parks and high school gyms. It is a physical version of two favorite modes of street rhetoric, the taunt and the boast. It is a celebration of the flexibility and budding sexuality of the gangly male adolescent body. It is a subjunctive expression of bodily states, testing things that might be or are not, contrasting masculine vitality with its range of opposites: women, babies, animals; illness and death. It is a way of claiming territory and status, for yourself and for your group, your crew. But most of all, breaking is a competitive display of physical and imaginative virtuosity, a codified dance form cum warfare that cracks open to flaunt personal inventiveness.

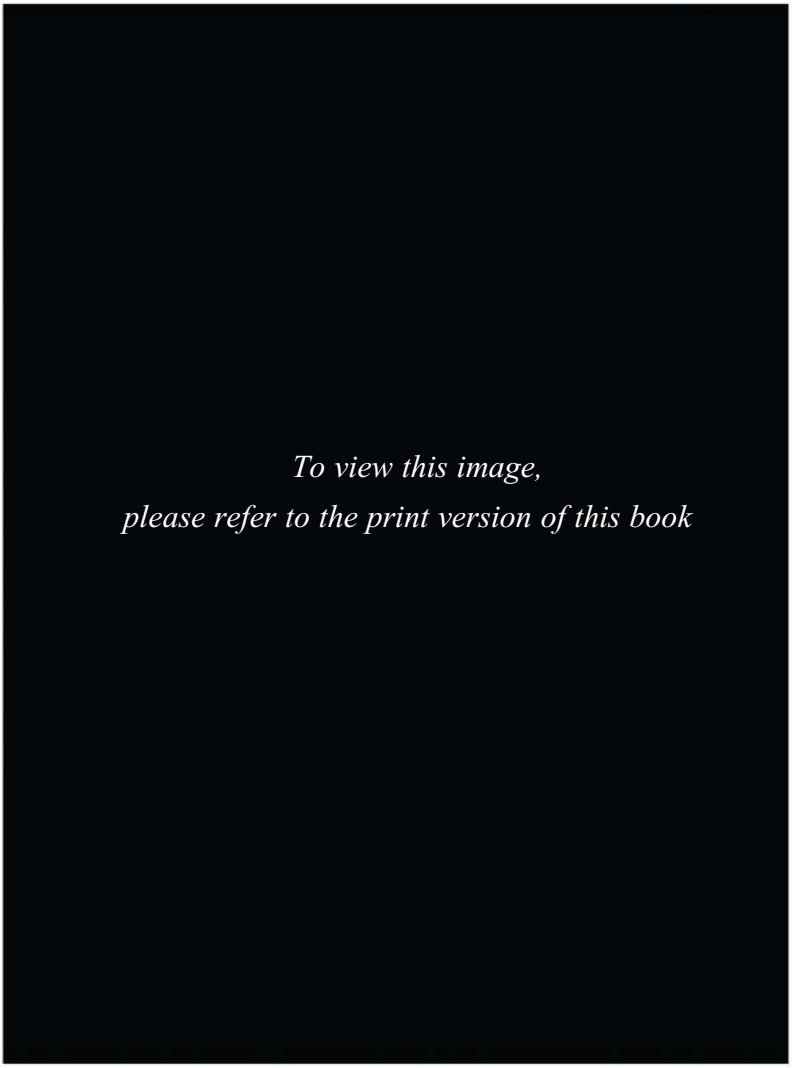
For the current generation of B-Boys, it doesn't really matter that the Breakdown is an old name in Afro-American dance for both rapid, complex footwork and a competitive format. Or that a break in jazz means a soloist's improvised bridge between melodies. For the B-Boys, the history of breaking started six or seven years ago, maybe in the Bronx, maybe in Harlem. It started with the Zulus. Or with Charlie Rock. Or with Joe, from the Casanovas, from the Bronx, who taught it to Charlie Rock. "Breaking means going crazy on the floor. It means making a style for yourself." In Manhattan, kids call it rocking. A dancer in the center of a ring of onlookers drops to the floor, circles around his own axis with a flurry of slashing steps, then spins, flips, gesticulates, and poses in a flood of rhythmic motion and fleeting imagery that prompts the next guy to top him. To burn him, as the B-Boys put it.

Fab Five Freddy Love, a graffiti-based artist and rapper from Bedford Stuyvesant, remembers that breaking began around the same time as rapping, as a physical analogue for a musical impulse. "Everybody would be at a party in the park in the summer, jamming. Guys would get together and dance with each other, sort of a macho thing where they would show each other who could do the best moves. They started going wild when the music got real funky" — music by groups like Super Sperm and Apache. As the beat of the drummer came to the fore, the music let you know it was time to break down, to free style. The cadenced, rhyming, fast-talking epic mode of rapping, with its smooth surface of sexual braggadocio, provides a perfect base for a dance style that is cool, swift, and intricate.

But breaking isn't just an urgent response to pulsating music. It is also a ritual combat that transmutes aggression into art. "In the summer of '78," Tee remembers, "when you got mad at someone, instead of saying, 'Hey man, you want to fight?' you'd say, 'Hey man, you want to rock?' " Inside the ritual frame, burgeoning adolescent anxieties, hostilities, and powers are symbolically manipulated and controlled.

Each segment in breaking is short—from ten to thirty seconds—but packed with action and meaning. The dancing always follows a specific format: the *entry*, a stylized walk into the ring for four or five beats to the

Frosty Freeze of Rock Steady Crew with Fab Five Freddy and Friends.
(Photo: Martha Cooper.)



music; the *footwork*, a rapid, circular scan of the floor by sneakered feet while the hands support the body's weight and the head and torso revolve slowly—a kind of syncopated pirouette; the *freeze*, or stylized signature pose, usually preceded by a spin; the *exit*, a return to verticality and to the outside of the circle. The length of the "combination" can be extended by adding on more footwork-spin-freeze sequences. The entry, the footwork, and the exit are pretty much the same from dancer to dancer—although some do variations, like Freeze from the Breakmasters crew, who stuffs a Charleston into his entry, and then exits on pointe. But it is largely in the freeze that each dancer's originality shines forth, in configurations that are as intricate, witty, obscene, or insulting as possible. A dancer will twist himself into a pretzel. Or he will quote the poses of a pinup girl. He might graphically hump the floor, or arch up grabbing his crotch. Someone else might mime rowing a boat or swimming, or emphasize acrobatic stunts like back flips and fish dives. Sometimes two breakers team up for a stunt: imitating a dog on a leash, or a dead person brought back to life by a healthy thump on the chest. According to Rammellzee, a DJ who's gotten too tall to break, the set of sequences adds up to a continuing pantomimic narrative. It is each dancer's responsibility to create a new chapter in the story. "Like if you see a guy acting like he's dead, the brother who went before him probably shot him."

When you choose your moves, you not only try to look good; you try to make your successor look bad by upping the ante. That's one way to win points from the crowd, which collectively judges. Going first is a way to score a point, but so is coming up with a cool response, chilling out. Through the freeze, you insult, challenge, and humiliate the next person. You stick your ass in his direction. You hold your nose to tell him he stinks. You put a hand to your spine, signaling a move so good it hurts. But the elegant abstract dancing that couches these messages counts, too. B-Boys from the Bronx and Manhattan look down on the "uprock" prevalent in Brooklyn, a mere string of scatological and sexual affronts without the aesthetic glue of spinning and getting down on the floor.

Naming and performing the freezes you invent are ways of laying claim to them, though some poses are in the public domain. A lot of breakers are also graffiti artists, and one way to announce a new freeze is to write it as graffiti. Speed and smoothness are essential to the entire dance, but in the freeze humor and difficulty are prized above all. "You try to put your head on your arm and your toenails on your ears," says Ken of the Breakmasters. "Hard stuff, like when I made up my elbow walk," says Kip Dee of Rock Steady. "When you spin on your head." "When you do 'the Baby' and you balance on one hand and move your legs in the air." "When you take your legs and put them in back of your head out of the spin."

During the summers the B-Boys gravitate to the parks, where DJs and rappers hang out. Younger kids learn to break by imitating the older kids,

who tend to outgrow it when they're about sixteen. Concrete provides the best surface for the feet and hands to grip, but the jamming is thickest in the parks, where the DJs can bring their mikes and amplifiers. During the winters, breakers devise new moves. Crazy Legs, of Rock Steady, claims the "W," in which he sits on doubled-back legs, was an accident. "Once I was laying on the floor and I kicked my leg and I started spinning," says Mr. Freeze, of Breakmasters. But inventing freezes also demands the hard daily work of conscious experiment. "You got to sweat it out." You don't stop, even when you sleep. "I have breaking dreams," several B-Boys have told me. "I wake up and try to do it like I saw it." Kip Dee dreamed he spun on his chin, "but I woke up and tried it and almost broke my face."

Part of the macho quality of breaking comes from the physical risk involved. It's not only the bruises, scratches, cuts, and scrapes. As the rivalry between the crews heats up, ritual combat sometimes erupts into fighting for real. And part of it is impressing the girls. "They go crazy over it," says Ken. "When you're in front of a girl, you like to show off. You want to burn the public eye, because then she might like you."

Some people claim that breaking is played out. Freddy Love disagrees. "The younger kids keep developing it, doing more wild things and more new stuff. We never used to spin or do acrobatics. The people who started it just laid down the foundations. Just like in graffiti—you make a new style. That's what life in the street is all about, just being you, being who you are around your friends. What's at stake is a guy's honor and his position in the street. Which is all you have. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good—that pressure on you to be the best. Or to try to be the best. To develop a new style nobody can deal with. If it's true that this stuff reflects life, it's a fast life."

13

Breakdancing: A Reporter's Story

Breakdancing is a craze that has easily surpassed the twist for media attention and wildfire popular diffusion — its energy and ambition seem to symbolize the 1980s. It is also a richly complex phenomenon to examine. First, breakdancing is not an isolated form of expression but is integrally linked to rapping (a form of chanted poetry descended from black oratory), scratching (the music made from record-mixing techniques), subway graffiti, slang, and clothing fashion. To study breakdancing is to study an entire energetic urban adolescent subculture called hiphop, that has spread from New York City black and Latin ghettos across the United States and beyond the Americas to Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. And to analyze breakdancing and hiphop is also to consider the ways in which the spread of that subculture has inevitably fragmented and distorted it and to note how the popular global media serve as both imagery for and agent of hiphop culture. Second, because breakdancing builds its unique style on the solid foundations of the Afro-American dance repertory, it opens a window not only on the present youth culture but also on the history of black dance on both sides of the Atlantic. Its study sheds light as well on the continuous process by which folkdance is transmuted into theatrical dance and vice versa. And further, in terms of its own short history, breakdancing is particularly compelling because new generations of dancers arise so quickly on the heels of the old. The telescopic story of its permutations and transformations, as well as its tenacity and flexibility in the face of various changes, lets us observe the vicissitudes of an oral tradition in an incredibly short time span. And finally, partly because of its close relationship with the media, the observers and recorders of the form — myself included — are willy-nilly participants, since they have had such an enormous effect on its meteoric history.

In the fall of 1980, I received a call from Martha Cooper — a photographer, a visual anthropologist who specializes in children's play, and a working journalist. For several years she had been documenting subway graffiti (her book, *Subway Art*, with Henry Chalfant, was published in 1984). She told me that as a staff photographer for the New York *Post* she had been sent to a police station in Washington Heights the previous winter

Folklife Annual (1986)

"to cover a riot." When she got there she found only a few dejected-looking kids who had been arrested for allegedly fighting in the subway when they claimed they were dancing. Marty's interest in them was fueled by seeing the confiscated cans of spray paint and martial arts paraphernalia that marked them as part of the graffiti subculture. According to the kids, the cops had to admit defeat, drop charges, and release them because the kids proved conclusively that they had, in fact, been doing a shared dance. Marty asked them to take her back to the subway station and show her their dancing moves. She photographed them and took down their phone numbers. When she called me, she was just getting around to looking them up and asked if I would be interested in writing an article about this kind of dancing for the *Village Voice* (where I frequently wrote about dance and performance). It was something she'd never seen before—solo performance with wild acrobatics and poses—and she found it hard to describe.

But having a second look turned out to be harder than we bargained for. For one thing, these kids were shy about demonstrating their dancing for adults, even for two encouraging and sympathetic reporters. Their mothers disapproved of their breakdancing indoors, since they invariably knocked into the furniture, and they also disapproved of their breakdancing outdoors, since (although the dancing itself wasn't, after all, fighting) the activity seemed connected to all kinds of illicit behavior and institutions—like graffiti and street gangs. (The word *crew* replaced *gang* when the talk was of graffiti or dancing rather than fighting.) And the competitive nature of the dancing at times did lead, in fact, to actual combat.

A further difficulty for our investigation was that these kids—members of the High Times crew—assured us that this kind of dancing no longer interested them or their friends. It was out of fashion, they insisted. Roller disco was now the going thing. They ran a little karate school in the basement of a neighborhood apartment building, where they finally hesitantly showed us bits and pieces of the form. Even the name hadn't crystallized; when we tried to tell them (and afterwards tell new informants) what it was we wanted to see, they referred to it as "B-Boy," "rocking," "breaking," or even "that kind of dancing you do to rapping." We recorded some improvised a capella raps and they invited us to several occasions where they thought a jam would materialize, but by Christmas, when we went to the karate school's recital for friends and families, we had yet to reach our elusive goal—to see "the real thing." It occurred to us that perhaps the form was hibernating and would reemerge the next summer in the parks. It also occurred to us that perhaps this was, indeed, a fad that had appeared and already disappeared without attracting mainstream attention and that we'd missed our chance.

But we were determined to satisfy our curiosity before a possible summer revival, and though we continued to search for the form at rap concerts, school dances, and other events, we tried another method: we

began to track down more breakdancers by sending out feelers among graffiti-writers. Henry Chalfant, Marty's colleague, was planning a slide show of his photographs of subway graffiti at Common Ground, a loft in Soho, to be accompanied by live rap music. When Marty asked him whether the graffiti-writers he knew did breakdancing and Henry discovered that they did, he decided to include that too as part of the show. A crew — Rock Steady — was found, and it promptly split itself into two for the sake of competition. The "fake" crew called itself Breakmasters. We supplied both sides with T-shirts ornamented with crew insignia — "colors" in hiphop slang, which serve as prizes in real jams, with the winner taking the loser's. At the time the T-shirts and the wide colorful sneaker laces were the most elaborate parts of the breakdancers' outfits. Later, crews developed entire uniforms as well as a style of layering and slashing clothing that formed a visual analog to the mixing and scratching of records by the DJs. Fab Five Freddy (Braithwaite), the graffiti-writer-turned-easel-artist who wrote Blondie's hit song "Rapture" and later would be the musical director of Charlie Ahearn's film *Wild Style*, served as both DJ for the event and knowledgeable informant for us. Rammellzee was the MC — an acronym reworked, in the hiphop manner, to mean "mike control" or rapper. As they all rehearsed for the upcoming "Graffiti Rock" show, we photographed, asked questions, and took notes (and even dance instruction); gradually other people dropped by to film and videotape the goings-on.

The form as a whole looked like nothing I'd ever seen before, though it did include very familiar moves. Its spatial level called to mind capoeira, the spectacular Brazilian dance cum martial art form that incorporates cartwheels, kicks, and feints low to the ground, but the two were dissimilar enough in shape and timing that capoeira seemed at most only a distant relative, and certainly one the breakdancers weren't acquainted with — at least on a conscious level. There was a Caribbean beat to the rapping and music that most often accompanied the early breakdancing — and rock-steady is a form of music related to reggae — but the dancing, though it shared with Jamaican ska and other Afro-American forms the use of pantomime and narrative capacity, wasn't a close relative of reggae dancing either. Though in certain ways breakdancing as a pastiche of pop culture in the 1970s and 1980s — with its references to TV, *Playboy*, comic books, kung-fu films, and even the spinning turntable — seemed utterly new, in other ways it was clearly a direct descendant of African and Afro-American dance traditions, from its format (a solo performer inside a ring) to its rhythmic structure (syncopated), to its movement vocabulary (the leg wobbles of the Charleston, the acrobatic spins of black dance from Africa to the flash acts of New York nightclubs, the mimed freezes), to its rhetorical modes (the boast and the insult), to its function (male exhibition and competition). It was a distinctive new dance, but one with a solid pedigree.

The term *breakdancing* continued (and continues) to provide food

for research. In music, the term refers to brief improvised solos in jazz, often making use of a suspended beat and inventive flourishes. It was exactly the break in swing music that made it "hot." The parallel with breakdancing seems clear. When I first asked kids what *breakdancing* meant, they told me, "It's when you go crazy on the floor," and that it was the change in the musical phrasing that compelled one to break out into the most outrageous possible movements. As Fab Five Freddy put it, "They started going wild when the music got real funky," when the drummer's beat took over. The term *breakdown* refers to both the dance and the music of a nineteenth-century black vernacular dance, a kind of reel that entered the white repertory as well—and by extension entered American slang to mean a raucous gathering. But also, the *break* in vodun is a technical term that refers to the point of possession in the dancer, controlled by the playing of the drummer. And further, in French Guiana a traditional dance is called, in Creole, *cassé-ko* (breaking the body). Clearly this linking of ecstatic dancing, suspending the beat, and the term *break* itself is a continuing idea in Afro-American dance culture. And further, the various violent, destructive meanings of the word see their parallels in the scratching of records by DJs and the ripping of clothes in hiphop fashion.

In April 1981 I wrote the article for the *Village Voice* that would serve as the preview for Henry's concert, scheduled for two performances in early May. The response to the article was overwhelming. By the following weekend, three extra shows had to be scheduled and the Rock Steady crew had performance dates lined up at several summer festivals and filming dates for various television news specials. In retrospect, it seems it was that article that introduced breakdancing aboveground.

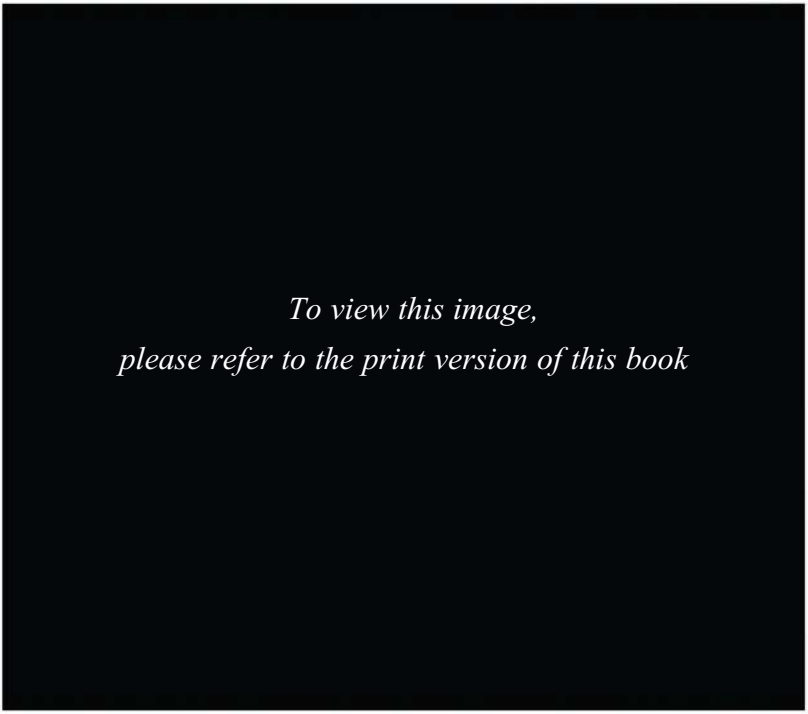
But Rock Steady's sudden fame had other repercussions. Before they could reap their rewards, they had first to pay for their hubris. After the first of the "Graffiti Rock" concerts, a rival crew, from Brooklyn, appeared at the performance space and threatened violence. Rock Steady was an uptown crew and had overstepped its turf, though it was never clear whether the Ballbusters, as this group was called, were rival dancers or simply fighters. Henry and the crew members decided to cancel the remaining shows. And our faith in what one breakdancer had told us—that breakdancing had replaced fighting among street kids—was shaken.

But the rise of breakdancing, and of the Rock Steady crew, was already unstoppable. What began as a folk form, a dance-game among adolescent boys that symbolically asserted various aspects of personal identity and group solidarity, became theatrical and then, in turn, was taken by its younger acolytes back out into the parks and streets. Every new performance situation initiated changes in the form. For instance, a few weeks after the "Graffiti Rock" show, Marty and I presented a paper on breakdancing with slides at a conference on the folklore of the Bronx. Members of the Rock Steady crew, entirely at home behind microphones and in front of a

mesmerized audience, served as commentators, and the next day they were given a local roller skating rink to perform in. The space and the equipment inspired them to new heights of invention: breakdancing on roller skates, group choreography, open-field performance. In another few weeks they had already outgrown the status of folk performers as Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver, who had met as a result of the *Voice* article, filmed them competing with a Queens crew, the Dynamic Rockers, in another roller rink, for the documentary film *Style Wars*, which appeared on PBS in 1983. The logistical needs of the film crew created yet more stylistic changes in the dance form. For example, the man who ran the roller rink kept telling the kids to open up the circle to give the cameraman room. The next time we saw breakdancing in the park—by now people were jamming in parks again—we happened to run into Rock Steady. Crazy Legs, by now president of the crew, was walking along the edge of the circle telling everyone to open up the circle.

The widespread media dissemination not only changed but also for a time homogenized the form. What at first had been moves of idiosyncratic personal style, with imaginative invention at a premium, though firmly rooted in the basic conventions as passed on from older cousin or brother to

Headstand in Subway Station.
(Photo: Martha Cooper.)



younger apprentice, were copied ad infinitum and became fashion. At a party the following fall I saw a group of neighborhood kids my host had hired for the evening's entertainment and noted their stylistic similarity to the Rock Steady crew; I asked them where they'd learned to breakdance. From seeing it on television, they told me.

Rock Steady began performing regularly at the Negril, a reggae club in the East Village, and refining their choreography with the instant feedback of video as well as audience response; at first Chalfant set up some jobs and then they took on as their manager Kool Lady Blue, who organized hiphop nights at the Negril, then at the new wave club Danceteria, then at the notorious Roxy. The professionalization of breakdancing had begun: downtown choreographer Julie Fraad organized the Magnificent Force and gave their performances a narrative structure; Michael Holman managed the New York City Breakers; the Kitchen, a Soho center for avant-garde music, video, and performance, presented an evening of Rock Steady as part of their dance series. The independent filmmaker Charles Ahearn shot *Wild Style*, a musical with a fictional narrative that featured real graffiti-writers, rappers, scratchers, and breakdancers. Patty Astor (who in the film plays a white reporter who discovers hiphop culture as she researches graffiti in the Bronx) opened The Fun House disco. The Hollywood film *Flashdance*, with the Rock Steady crew, came out in the same year, 1983, and, though its breakdancing sequences lasted less than two minutes, it made the dance a national phenomenon. *Breakin'* and *Beat Street* followed fast, as did an entire stream of movies that hasn't ended yet. These films documented another phase in the development of breakdancing: its merger with the West Coast form, electric boogie, an upright style (as opposed to the floor-oriented breaking) inspired by robotics (as opposed to the martial arts imagery of breaking).

At the same time, breakdancing as an amateur activity proliferated. By 1984, you could buy several how-to-do-it books as well as even more numerous how-to-do-it videotapes. All over the suburbs, middle-class housewives and professionals could take classes at their local Y's and dance centers. (Much of this instruction, however, centered around electric boogie rather than the more physically demanding breakdancing spins and freezes.) And the road from amateur to professional could often prove a very short one, as kids took to street corners to perform for donations from the crowds of spectators they attracted. The very term *street dancing* had changed its meaning in regard to breakdancing, from private to public performance, from folk to theatrical status, from performing for one's peers to performing for money.

The meaning and nature of the competitive element of breakdancing have also taken on new dimensions. In its original, folk form, breakdancing was a dance-game, a cooperative (though not always friendly) competition in which kids tried to top one another in order to win honor and fame

(sometimes symbolically expressed in tangible form by the above-mentioned "colors") not only for themselves as individuals but also for their crews. It was in the crucible of the contest that the form's moves were forged. Its vocabulary alluded to fighting in its use of martial arts maneuvers. That combative heat and pressure generated a style that was intricate, witty, raw, and flamboyant—inventive by necessity. The film *Breakin'* portrays (albeit in Hollywood fashion) just such a competition, where one senses that the dancing does metaphorically stand for fighting in proving power and virility. (Contrary to the norms of street life, in this movie women also enter into the fray.) As breakdancing became more theatrical, with public performances as interactions, the element of contest reemerged in a new form. At clubs like the Ritz and the Roxy, crews began to vie for cash prizes and movie roles in contests organized not by the kids themselves but by the club managements or movie producers; they were judged not by their peers but by panels of "expert" judges.

But with the rise of breakdancing on the Hollywood screen, yet another level of competition has appeared—the battle of the dance genres. From *Flashdance* to *Breakin'* to *Beat Street* to *Body Rock*, the plot of the hiphop movie inevitably takes a crucial turn when the youthful vitality and (literally) down-to-earth quality of the breakdancing is pitted against an entrenched form—ballet or jazz dancing—that is shown as effete, decadent, and creatively exhausted, if not downright offensive. The battle lines are clearly depicted as class lines. And, of course, breakdancing always wins.

Breakdancing was invented by a generation of kids raised on television, movies, radio, and video games. The relationship between the dance form and the mass media is densely layered, beginning with the use of pop culture imagery and with brevity of format, and evolving with the succession of responses to media coverage and dissemination. The very success of the form and of some of the dancers, in fact, seems an American dream-come-true that could only have been concocted in Hollywood. These kids' sensitivity to—and sophistication in the use of—the popular media is essential to the nature and development of this urban folk dance.

14

Lock Steady

I'm walking down Lafayette Street and I see some graffiti: DONDI ROCK ON BROADWAY WITH TWYLA THARP — TALKING HEADS. I'm trying to learn the basic breaking steps from the B-Boys, and Frosty Freeze tells me, "You gotta keep your head facing front while your whole body turns, then snap your head around at the last minute, just like in ballet." Toni Basil mixes white ballet dancers with black street rockers from Los Angeles in a remake of the four cygnets section of *Swan Lake*. Roll over, Tchaikovsky. Who says there's a separation between high art and popular art in America?

Of course, Western high art has always borrowed from folk and popular forms, both Western and non-Western, scoring a quick hit of vitality just when things threaten to get overrefined. You could look at the history of theatrical dancing, for instance, as a cyclical process that continually transforms vibrant social dances into legible forms for spectators. Twyla Tharp's appropriation of vernacular music and dance steps is nothing new; part of what went on in the original *Swan Lake* was Petipa's lively setting of czardas and mazurkas and polkas — nineteenth-century European equivalents of rock and roll — into an imperial jewel of ballet, encrusted with academic steps. But we sometimes forget that this kind of borrowing is a two-way street, and that in America traffic moves fast. Street artists borrow mainstream and avant-garde art. In dancing, steps and styles move from theater, film, and television to the street and back again. Our folk dancing updates its tradition daily, amalgamating Afro-American moves that reach back to ancient cultures with modern images of high-tech urban living, shifting from black to Latino to white culture, from kids to adults, with amazing fluency. And where do you draw the line between pop culture and high art? It may depend only on where you see it. Rock bands use film, video, theatrics, and choreography as sophisticated and far-out as anything postmodern artists are using. Graffiti artists paint murals on subways that quote Andy Warhol quoting commercials. Art school graduates form rock bands. And in New York the downtown museums and performing spaces show punk art that revels in "bad art" and trash imagery, and present street art and performance untransformed by the "trained" artist's hand.

This weekend at the Kitchen, the Soho center where all sorts of such

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exchanges have been going on for years, Toni Basil is bringing to New York a review of ten years of Los Angeles street dancing. Basil is a kind of one-woman exemplar of two-tiered art, standing with one foot in the entertainment world and one foot in the avant-garde. She has appeared in the films *Easy Rider, Five Easy Pieces, The Last Movie,* and *Greasers' Palace*. She has choreographed for Bette Midler on film and on tour, and for David Bowie's "Diamond Dogs" tour. Basil's choreography and video effects for the Talking Heads' *Cross-Eyed and Painless* are strangely surrealistic. Recently, Basil made a video album of her own, called *Word of Mouth*. Basil has become a choreographer in the entertainment world, but the real stars of her show at the Kitchen are the kids and the dancing she has been inspired by and borrows freely from. For ten years, Basil, who is white, has been documenting on film and videotape the dancing black kids are doing in Watts, and for eight years or so she has been organizing and producing theatrical and TV revues that feature street dancers. The Kitchen show will not only include Basil's documentaries but also dancers from the various groups with which she's worked: the Lockers, the Electric Bugaloos, and performers of a dance called the "Vogues."

In the early 1970s, Basil met Donald Campbell, also known as Campbellock, also known as Camelot, who claimed he invented a new dance form called "Locking." Combining elements of the "Football" and the "Funky Chicken"—most notably, the conspicuous flapping of elbows that is descended from the early Afro-American animal imitation dances—Campbellock improvised a new twist, a framing device that, in the competitive spirit of street dancing, called attention to his performance. Rolling his wrists in time to the music, he froze and pointed to spectators in a gesture that demanded all eyes turn his way. Toni Basil was amazed by "Locking," started bringing all her friends to clubs in Watts to watch people dance it—"It was like stumbling into a Busby Berkeley film," she remembers—and eventually organized a group of dancers, most in their early twenties, to perform the dance in a theatrical format. Although the Lockers had known each other, or known of one another, before Basil got them together, they had preferred solo forms and a freewheeling, competitive relationship, and had never been interested in organizing as a group. Under Basil's direction, they began putting their moves into set patterns, and soon were appearing on TV specials for Carol Burnett, Roberta Flack, and Doris Day. Each Locker brought his own specialty to the group. Fluky Luke, already famed as a cheerleader at Crenshaw High in Watts, specialized in acrobatics, Russian splits, and dancing on his toes. Penguin stressed a slow-motion walk and a heavy, waddling step. Slim the Robot introduced a mechanized somnambulist's mannerisms. Greg Campbellock, Jr., and Shabba-doo had a concept of unison movement that cemented the group.

Wearing outrageous uniforms of knickers, striped socks, thick-soled elaborate shoes, and fancy hats, the Lockers flapped, leapt, jumped, danced

on their hands, and scoo-be-dooed to music by the O'Jays, Sly and the Family Stone, James Brown, and Joe Tex. They did foot stomps and chants, mimed killing roaches with well-aimed slaps of the hands on the floor. They perfected their elbow movements by practicing on refrigerator handles. In their choreographed acts, they danced with female partners—besides Basil, there were Pat Davis, Damita Jo Freeman, and Janet Lock. The women had their own specialties too, but essentially their dancing was background material for the more assertive, flashy, macho "Locking."

Inevitably, the move from street to stage diluted the form. The music became a problem, especially on television appearances—"Did you ever hear a TV orchestra try to play 'Jungle Boogie'?" Basil comments—and all sorts of compromises had to be made for the sake of programming and the camera. And Basil's own role as choreographer/producer was problematic. She often used a story format to tie the dancers together with narrative and characters, devising rock versions of *Little Red Riding Hat, Casey at Bat,* and rechoreographing the prologue to *West Side Story*. But "Locking" was essentially an improvisatory, solo, competitive form, and the demands of unison dancing and rehearsing sapped its strength. The Lockers preferred to go out dancing at clubs over pressing the stuff into molds at rehearsals and in public performances, and their dancing went from what Basil remembers as a fine, vital madness—"everyone jumping around and freely improvising while I frantically called the cues"—to a watered-down, refined, predictable act. Basil's own ambitions expanded after she worked with Midler and Bowie. She wanted to be more of a choreographer, and to bring her childhood ballet training—with Edna McRae in Chicago—into the act. "It seemed to me that ballet and ghetto dancing matched up when you saw them together. I thought there was an audience of rock people who could love ballet but weren't interested in the music, and I also thought the ghetto dancing held up as an art form to the ballet. Besides, as a choreographer I thought it was a heavy idea."

At the same time, a new dance form emerged among gay black dancers in Los Angeles: the "Vogues," also known as "Posing," or "Punk." But this was a black version of punk that had nothing to do with the frenetic style of white punk dancing. Andrew Frank, Star, Tinker, and other male dancers Basil soon brought into her own shows knew about "Locking" but were interested in creating a feminine style. They took elements of "Locking," embroidering on the freeze-frame pointing of the finger and transforming the wrist-rolling into a gesture that moved decoratively around the head, and they added deliberately campy poses, quoting from *Vogue* magazine and from photos of movie stars like Greta Garbo and Marilyn Monroe. Shabba-doo of the Lockers worked out his own take on the "Vogues," turning transvestite imagery back into macho imagery by posing as a gangster or a muscle-man.

Basil's next hookup was with the Electric Bugaloos, members of the Solomon family and their friends, who had already organized themselves

into a group. The disco craze of the midseventies had instilled new values of unison and precision in social dancing, and the Bugaloos have embellished all the smoothness and mechanization of dances like the "Hustle" and the "Bus Stop" with idiosyncratic gestures, pantomime, and special steps that have sources as diverse as cartoon characters, dada performance, African dancing, and silent film comedy. Their names are indicative of their specialties: Bugaloo Sam, Poppin' Pete, Puppet Boozer, Robot Dave, Ticking William, Creepin' Sid.

Wearing costumes that are part pure elegance, part funk—ultra-baggy pants, vests, ties, shirts, and canvas round-toed shoes, all in shades of gray, black, and white—the Bugaloos have developed a style that, for all its diverse motions, is essentially about physical dissociation. The "Tidal Wave," a virtuosic belly roll, harks back to Voudoun possession dances belonging to Damballa, the serpent god. The baggy pants emphasize the corkscrewing and jackknifing leg motions, but also create the illusion, as the torso twists, that the legs are walking away from the upper body. Arms spatter the air with sudden paroxysms, or else the hands flop loosely from upheld wrists. Feet slip backwards secretly beneath a body turned in profile, making the dancer appear the pawn of external forces. The body shudders with microscopic convulsions that make flesh seem to turn to jello. The dancers form lines and patterns, moving out two-by-two or four-by-four, bending over, standing up, and regrouping with a clockwork, deadpan slipperiness that conjures up superhuman robots.

To look at ten years of social dancing telescoped into an evening is to see a microcosm of American change. At the end of the sixties and into the seventies, the dance floor was an arena for letting go, for wildness, for individualistic creativity at its height. Ten years later, from Lincoln Center to Soho to Harlem and Watts, our dancing mirrors the fact that we no longer want to let go. We want to hang on, to survive, and the watchword is control.

15

Critic's Choice: Breakdancing

Breakdancing may have made it from the black and Latin ghettos of New York City to suburban shopping malls and the cover of *Newsweek*, but the surest sign that it's gained a foothold in mainstream American culture is its appearance in the dance studio and, fast on those heels, on how-to and feature movie home-video programs.

Social dance is a skill we usually think of as passing from teacher to student through live contact—whether the teacher is a professional or an older sister or brother—but in Western culture written notation has aided in the process, at least since the Renaissance. In the twentieth century, every shift in technology has afforded dance instruction new and more ingenious ways of shaping itself. Radio and records made it possible to spread local dance music around the world. In the sixties, a rash of "instruction" lyrics ("Put your hand on your hip and let your backbone slip . . .") taught whites to do black dances, while TV revolutionized dance fashions by providing mass training to teenagers via studio sock-hops such as *American Bandstand*.

With home video, dance instruction has been doubly enhanced: Not only do we get the appropriate music and the visual model, but we can also rewind to repeat and practice those elusive, difficult moves. Now, with breakdancing, the dance craze that has captured today's American, European, and Japanese imaginations, we have video instruction for the one dance form that seems most apt for TV tutelage, born as it was in a generation obsessed by the medium—its imagery, its rapid-fire pacing, its drama, and the instant stardom it promises.

Breakdancing was an invisible underground current for years. (It had already been pronounced out of fashion by kids in the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn who created it, by the time it got its second wind and rocketed into flamboyant visibility in '81.) But it took to TV instantly, not surprisingly, since at times it seems like a live version of a videogame. Breakdancing and all the culture of hiphop (the umbrella term for graffiti, breaking, rapping, scratching, and their immediate social context) incorpo-

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Video Review (December 1984).

rate and use media style and imagery in a homemade, funky form. As usual, though, the media have polished hiphop and homogenized it.

At this point, therefore, any reference to breakdancing has to distinguish between prefame and postfame versions of the dance. Prefame breaking was (and, for some, remains) a folk form that emphasizes playful competition just this side of gang warfare. The urge to top a rival gave rise to the virtuosic acrobatic maneuvers, done close to the floor, that originally embellished the real climax of the dance—the pose or freeze, a personal signature that also served to insult one's opponent and win status for one's crew. Postfame is, of course, the version of breakdancing familiar to most of us through the media. Theatricalized and sanitized, it emphasizes gymnastics over meaning, and it has broadened to include various forms of "electric boogie"—an upright, pantomimic, elegant articulation of body parts.

Nowadays, breakdancing is utterly common as a TV image, from ads for Burger King and the U.S. Army to events such as the closing ceremonies of the Olympics. Those who want to learn or simply to savor the spectacle now have a wealth of footage at their fingertips, from the ads they can tape to the four major movies so far released commercially that feature breakdancing, to the mushrooming quantity of how-to videotapes. The reviews that follow offer first a history of the image of breakdancing in movies—its increasing role and appeal—and then a survey of the instructional tapes. With the movies, the ratings reflect the quality of the breakdance numbers they include, not their overall quality as pictures.

Flashdance (1983) ★ ★ ★

Flashdance was the movie that first catapulted breakdancing to fame, although the breakdancing sequences last for less than two minutes of the picture. The plot here is that of an up-dated Depression musical in which the heroine wins her audition at a prestigious ballet school with her nerve, a throbbing disco song, and a jazz routine that features a well-placed backspin, inspired by seeing the Rock Steady crew breakdancing on the streets. The heroine's ripped clothing and T-shirts slung low on one shoulder set a new style that also fits with hiphop fashion.

The scandal about the movie that later emerged was that Jennifer Beals, the lead actress, didn't do the dancing. (The uncredited stand-in was Marine Jahan.) It's hard to tell who does the winning backspin in the audition routine. The rumor is that it's Crazy Legs, from Rock Steady crew. Earlier in the movie, Crazy Legs and other members of the crew appear for barely a minute to show off quite an eyeful of the standard breakdance moves: backspins, freezes, a mimed puppet duo, and what later would become renowned as the moonwalk—the illusion of being pulled backward while walking in place.

Also with Mr. Freeze, Frosty Freeze, Prince Ken Swift, others. Directed by Adrian Lyne.

Wild Style (1983) ★ ★ ★ ★

This witty, vibrant, fictional account of the travels of hiphop from the Bronx to Manhattan, from the subways to the art galleries, and from anonymity to fame lovingly and accurately portrays hiphop culture as a multifaceted whole and preserves some captivating early performances by the cream of the scene. Although the narrative is fictional, the actors are the graffiti writers, rappers, scratchers, and breakdancers who created hiphop, playing characters very much like themselves, including Fred Braithwaite (musical director and collaborator on the movie, who's formerly of the Fab Five graffiti crew and the author of Blondie's rap hit "Rapture") as an impresario.

The plot is thin—one graffiti-writer tries to hold out as a purist and still paint subway cars while his friends make murals in the Bronx and canvases in Soho—and the tone is romantic, but the performances and the spirit of the movie are exhilarating. That there are only four brief breakdancing sequences—two in a club setting in the Bronx, one in a playground rhythmically intercut with footage of a DJ scratching records and graffiti artists painting a bandshell, and one in the bandshell that is the picture's finale—is a comment on the lower status of breakdancing compared to other forms of hiphop when the movie was being researched.

But, in a larger sense, the picture is full of choreography, showing us that the music, poetry, and movement here are all intertwined, on the basketball court as well as on the dance floor, in the hands of a DJ spinning discs as well as in the pretzeled limbs of a breakdancer.

Also with Chief Rocker Busy Bee, Grandmaster Flash, others. Directed by Charlie Ahearn.

Breakin' (1984) ★ ★ ★

Released in the summer of '84, *Breakin'* was the first movie to focus on breakdance. The acting is terrible, the heroine is unappealing, and the scene in which the jaded jury is astounded by the vitality of breakdancing is lifted straight from *Flashdance*. But there are sixteen breakdancing scenes, ranging from a few seconds (the Spider walk that flashes on after the final credits) to a full ten minutes (a showdown between two crews at the Radiotron). And the dancing is good—or, in hiphop lingo, *bad*. What's more, you really get the sense of breakdance as something urgent, even vicious, and of its importance in the lives of the breakdancers in a number of ways: for the older kids, as a way to win honor as well as to be creative; for the younger kids, as a way to be initiated into social life.

The competitive aspect of breaking emerges in another sense here when as a dance form it competes against Broadway-style jazz dancing . . . and of course it wins. The scene is Los Angeles, where the electric-boogie side of the breakdance family originated, and the cast features some of the pros who were in the vanguard of its creation.

With Lucinda Dickey, Adolfo "Shabba-doo" Quinones, others. Directed by Joel Silberg. Choreographed by Jaime Rogers.

Beat Street (1984) ★ ★ ★

Beat Street is a kind of *Wild Style* writ large, Hollywood fashion, with a more complex (but just as romantic) plot and professional actors — with the notable exception of Robert Taylor, who plays the younger, breakdancing brother of the DJ whose career and love interests are one of the central narrative threads. He falls in love with a composer who lives in a ritzy neighborhood in Manhattan, which provides contrasts with life in the Bronx.

A second thread tells the story of a graffiti-writer who decides to "become a man," leave the streets, and make a home for his young wife and baby in an abandoned building, but who's killed when he falls on the electrified rail during a fight in the subway. The final scene is a tribute to his life, to his art, and to hiphop.

Beat Street, like *Wild Style* before it, shows the underlying moral and aesthetic code that links the various elements of hiphop and gives them a shared style and meaning. Plot development takes precedence over scenes of pure breakdancing, but there is a wonderful battle between two dance crews in a futuristic subway station, scenes in a Bronx club, and a fast-paced audition scene that presents a wealth of dancers, rappers, and DJs. This movie uncompromisingly locates hiphop within its social context — not shirking the violence and ugliness of street life — as well as showing its joyful, tender, and beautiful side.

Also with Rock Steady and Magnificent Force. Directed by Stan Lathan.

Breaking with the Mighty Poppalots (1984) ★ ★ ★

The best of the four how-to-breakdance tapes available (although the perfect one has yet to be made), perhaps because much of the control over the program seems to have rested with the dancers themselves, this tape offers instruction by the four members of a Washington, D.C., crew: Breakin' Bett (Steve Durham), Crazzy Leggs (Jerry Cooper), Sly C (Donny Walker), and Red Rooster (Dale Hurd). The dancers take turns, each one teaching his forte, demonstrating the basics and variants of popping, the moonwalk, various mime specialties (from facial expressions

to the rope pull), and both elementary and advanced features of breaking per se.

After showing the moves, with the narrator talking the viewer through them and offering both encouragement and stylistic commentary, this how-to tape provides something none of the others do—a broader context to give all these separate moves coherence. We learn a routine, find out about crew-dancing through interviews and shots of the Poppalots performing, and even glimpse the roots of the form in inner-city fighting, with shots of "uprock" (which most resembles Oriental martial arts).

The instruction is very clear: The movements are broken down, put back together slowly, and then sped up while the narrator talks rhythmically and the dancers themselves chime in. The camera shows close-ups of crucial body parts, but also pulls back to show the configuration of the entire body for each move. Each sequence is well ordered and well timed, and the progression of the whole is nicely done. The Poppalots themselves are appealing performers with impressive physical technique and an infectious joy for dancing.

Produced by Harmony Vanover.

Let's Break (1984) ★ ★

This tape is notable for the fact that one of the instructors is a woman, a rare creature in the world of breakdancing. Like all four how-to tapes, pure breakdancing accounts for less than half of the lesson; it begins with electric boogie and moves on to the moonwalk (called gliding here), before getting down to the floor.

The approach is a little cutesy, with a studio rendition of a ghetto street as a set, endless graffiti titles, and a computerized voice constantly booming "Practice! Again! One more time!" But the camerawork is often ingenious, beginning with close-ups to focus on whichever body part is in motion and then pulling back as the movement is put together with the music, giving a good sense of the whole. The occasional use of slow motion distorts the style in the section on popping, but the overhead shots that are used help explain visually what a thousand words never could.

The emphasis throughout is on showing what the moves are, rather than explaining them verbally, though there are some helpful stylistic comments. Finally, this is the only tape that takes an appropriately laissez-faire attitude toward the form, reminding us again and again that, ultimately, the moves are just a raw vocabulary that each dancer will combine and elaborate on in his or her own way.

With Susie, Tony Rodriguez, and Frank Vega. Directed by U. Roberto Romano.

Breakin' in the USA (1984) ★

This tape is a lesson in the theory that dance consists of more than the sum of its movements. Here we learn all the moves, but without being shown how they fit together, what they mean, and in what manner they should be performed, we still have a long way to go before we're breaking.

The time spent on various components is out of proportion to their importance in the dance, and with long sections on how to warm up and endless previews, repetitions, and wrap-ups, you get the sense that the makers of this tape had a lot of extra time to fill. The solarization and other special effects are more distracting than helpful, the dancers look self-conscious, and the movements are so overanalyzed ("Now move your weight to the inside of the right knee. Now move it to the outside of your knee.") that most of the time you feel like the centipede who fell over when someone asked him which leg he starts walking with.

With David "Mr. Fantastik" Breaux, David "Fresh Jome" Robinson, and Mark Vincent. Directed by James L. Percelay.

Breakdance/You Can Do It! (1984) ★

The only good things about this tape are the scenes from *Breakin'*. (Some of the sequences are outtakes from *Breakin'*.) The setting is a breakdancing class taught by Odis Medley, and after he demonstrates one move quickly—often telling you to make twists and turns that leave your back to the TV set—you get to see his students practicing it. Gee, thanks, Odis.

Instead of using the music as a way to propel you into the dance, Medley drones out a relentless eight-count phrase, like a parody of a jaded Broadway musical director; only at the end of each section does he reward you with a song to dance to. Missing information is a problem, too. In teaching the moonwalk, he leaves out the crucial element of which foot takes the weight, and his suggestions for improvisation are downright embarrassing. ("You can use an everyday situation—like eating! Ooh, that spaghetti is good!") The camerawork only makes things worse.

But this tape has one virtue: When the students strut their stuff in the final jam, we see that—while one's become a virtuoso—anyone *can* do it.

16

Breaking

Breakdancing is a style of competitive, acrobatic, and pantomimic dancing. It began as a kind of game, a friendly contest in which black and Hispanic teenagers outdid one another with outrageous physical contortions, spins, and back flips, wedded to a fluid, syncopated, circling body rock done close to the ground. Breaking once meant only dancing on the floor, but now its definition has widened to include electric boogie, uprock, aerial gymnastics, and all sorts of other fancy variations.

Although breaking is the newest part of hiphop culture, it's the part that has made hiphop a media obsession. Five years ago the only people who had ever heard of breaking were the kids in New York's ghettos who did it. They didn't even have a definite name for the form — they sometimes called it "breaking," but they also referred to it as "rocking down," "B-Boy," or just "that kind of dancing you do to rap music." By 1980 — when the form had already been around for a few years — they weren't even very interested in it anymore. This kind of dancing was a passing fad, they felt, that would soon be replaced by roller disco. But history was to prove them wrong. Not since the twist, in the early sixties, has a dance craze so captured the attention of the media.

By 1984 only a hermit could *not* have known about breaking. It had arrived, not only in the United States but also in Canada, Europe, and Japan. Breaking had been featured in the 1983 Hollywood film *Flashdance*, the independent hiphop musical film *Wild Style*, and the documentary *Style Wars* (which aired on PBS), served as the inspiration for the 1984 films *Breakin'* and *Beat Street*, and was rumored to be the subject of fifteen forthcoming Hollywood movies. Countless how-to books and videos had hit the market. Breaking had been spotlighted on national news shows, talk shows, and ads for Burger King, Levi's, Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, and Panasonic. One hundred breakdancers heated up the closing ceremonies of the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles. And Michael Jackson had given the form national currency.

Breaking made the cover of *Newsweek* in 1984. Newspapers all over the country regularly carried stories on its latest ups and downs. The paradox emerged, as you flipped the pages of the *Washington Post* or the

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Fresh: Hip Hop Don't Stop. Co-authored with Nelson George, Susan Flinker, and Patty Romanowski. New York: Random House/Sarah Lazin, 1985. © Sarah Lazin Books.

Los Angeles Times, that breakdancers who'd come up in the ghetto were banned from city streets and shopping malls for causing disturbances and attracting undesirable crowds, while at the same time middle-class housewives and executives could learn to breakdance in their spare time at classes proliferating throughout the suburbs. Doctors added to the form's acceptability by giving medical advice on how to survive it unbruised. And the *New York Times* began using breaking as a metaphor even in articles that had nothing to do with hiphop.

By now, breakdancing was happening at bar mitzvahs, children's dance recitals, high school proms, college dances, in prison talent shows, at ballet galas, and on Broadway, as well as in clubs and discos—and, in a second-generation revival, in city parks and on the streets once again. Even President Reagan was delighted by breaking when he saw the New York City Breakers perform in Washington, D.C., at a Kennedy Center gala.

The media hype about breakdancing has changed both its form and its meaning. So to talk about breakdancing you have to divide it into two stages: before and after media. Before the media turned breaking into a dazzling entertainment, it was a kind of serious game, a form of urban vernacular dance, a fusion of sports, dancing, and fighting whose performance had urgent social significance for the dancers. After media, participation in breakdancing was stratified into two levels: professional and amateur. For the pros, breakdancing had become a theatrical art form with a technique and a vocabulary that, like ballet's, could be refined and expanded. On this level, competition took on new meaning. It was no longer a battle for control of the streets, for neighborhood fame, or to win your opponent's "colors" (T-shirt with crew insignia). Now cash prizes, roles in Hollywood movies, and European tours were at stake. For the amateurs, the element of competition had diminished. The appeal was a mixture of getting physically fit, tackling the challenge of breaking's intricate skills, and even becoming more like street kids, who've suddenly become stylish thanks to the meteoric vogue of hiphop.

Breaking first entered media consciousness when Martha Cooper, a photographer who had for years been documenting graffiti, was sent by the *New York Post* to cover "a riot" and found some kids—members of the High Times crew, friends and relatives from West 175th Street—who claimed they'd been dancing, not fighting, in a subway station. One kid demonstrated some moves to a policeman, who then called in the others one by one. "Do a head spin," he commanded as he consulted a clipboard full of notes. "Do the baby." As each crew member complied, performing on cue as unhesitatingly as a ballet dancer might pirouette across a stage, the police had to admit defeat.

Or so the story goes. But, like ballet and like great battles (it shares elements of both), breaking is wreathed in legends. Since its early history

wasn't documented—the *Post* never ran Cooper's photos—it lives on only in memories and has taken on mythological form.

The heroes of these legends are the B-Boys, the original break-dancers, black and Latino teenagers who invented and endlessly elaborate the heady blend of dancing, acrobatics, and warfare that is breaking. Like other forms of ghetto street culture and like the other elements of hiphop, breaking began as a public showcase for the flamboyant triumph of virility, wit, and skill. In short, of style.

The intensity of the dancer's physicality gives breaking a power and energy even beyond the vitality of graffiti and rapping. If graffiti is a way of "publishing," of winning fame by spreading your tag all over the city, breaking is a way of claiming the streets with physical presence, using your body to publicly inscribe your identity on the surfaces of the city, to flaunt a unique personal style within a conventional format. The body symbolism makes breaking an extremely powerful version of two favorite forms of street rhetoric—the taunt and the boast. The razzing takes the form of insulting gestures aimed at your opponent, while the bragging is expressed through acrobatic virtuosity. Breaking is a competitive display of physical and imaginative prowess, a highly codified dance form that in its early stages served as an arena for both battles and artistic invention and that allowed for cracking open the code to flaunt personal inventiveness.

The High Times crew told the cops they were dancing, not fighting, and as breaking captured mainstream attention it was touted in the media as a transfiguration of gang warfare. Breaking may be a stylized, rhythmic, aesthetically framed form of combat—but it still escalates, at times, into actual violence. Peace is volatile when honor is at stake, and the physical heat of the form itself makes for situations that are highly combustible, as scenes from both *Breakin'* and *Beat Street* show.

Until breaking became frozen and legitimated by media hype, it was, like much of kids' culture in our cities, self-generated and nearly invisible to outsiders, especially adults—who just didn't want to even think about it or know about it, much less watch it. It was both literally and figuratively an underground form, happening in the subways as well as in parks and city playgrounds, but only among those in the know. Its invisibility and elusiveness had to do with the extemporaneous nature of the original form and also with its social context. Breaking jams weren't scheduled; they happened when the situation arose. You didn't get advance notice of a breaking "performance"; you had to be in the right place at the right time. In other words, you had to be part of the crew system that provided social order among the kids of the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn ghettos.

Since May 1981, when Henry Chalfant presented the Rock Steady crew at Common Ground in Soho as part of a graffiti rock show, breaking has taken to theatrical presentation like a duck to water. The first article on the form, by Sally Banes with photos by Martha Cooper, appeared in the

Village Voice just before the concert, giving breaking instant visibility. By the end of that summer, breakdancers had appeared outdoors at Lincoln Center and at other festivals, and endless filming had begun. The Rock Steady crew signed up for an appearance in *Flashdance*, and kids were already learning to break, not from older brothers and cousins on the street, but from watching Rock Steady on TV. Breaking had entered the public eye and left the underground for the mainstream, and this new theatrical context, with a style largely disseminated by the Rock Steady crew, quickly crystallized the form for spectators.

Through breaking, in its original form, all the pleasures, frustrations, hopes, and fears of adolescence were symbolically played out in public spaces. Breaking was inextricably tied to rapping, both in terms of its style and content and because the rap provides the insistent percussion that drives the dance.

The format of the dance was at first quite fixed. The dancers and onlookers formed an impromptu circle. Each person's turn in the ring was very brief—ten to thirty seconds—but packed with action and meaning. It began with an entry, a hesitating walk that allowed him time to get in step with the music for several beats and take his place "onstage." Next the dancer "got down" to the floor to do the footwork, a rapid, slashing, circular scan of the floor by sneakered feet, in which the hands support the body's weight while the head and torso revolve at a slower speed, a kind of syncopated, sunken pirouette, also known as the helicopter. Acrobatic transitions such as head spins, hand spins, shoulder spins, flips, and the swipe—a flip of the weight from hands to feet that also involves a twist in the body's direction—served as bridges between the footwork and the freeze. The final element was the exit, a spring back to verticality or a special movement that returned the dancer to the outside of the circle.

The entry, the footwork, and the exit were all pretty formulaic, with very little room for showing off personal style, although some dancers created special versions of these elements—Frosty Freeze, for instance, often exited "on point," walking on the tips of his sneakers. The entry, the footwork, and the exit were like the stock expressions and nonsense syllables that sandwich narrative content in a rap. They provided a rhythmic frame for the freeze, an improvised pose or movement, which broke the beat. They also provided a nicely textured, comfortably predictable backdrop against which the freeze stood out in bold relief. And, besides their aesthetic function, these segments were a way for the dancer to "tread water" between strokes, to free the mind for strategizing while the body went through familiar uninventive paces.

The simplest combination of a breaking sequence was entry-footwork-spin-freeze-exit. But turns in the center could be extended by inserting more footwork-spin-freeze segments. In other words, you might get entry-footwork-spin-freeze-footwork-spin-freeze-exit. And so on.

The entry, the footwork, and the exit framed the freeze, a flash of pure personal style, which was the most important part of the dance. The main thing about the freeze was that it should be as intricate, witty, insulting, or obscene as possible. "You try to put your head on your arm and your toenails on your ears," explains Ken of the Breakmasters crew. "When you spin on your head," says another B-Boy. "When you take your legs and put them in back of your head out of the spin." A dancer might twist himself into a pretzel, or strike a cocky salute. He would quote the sexy poses of a pinup girl, or perhaps present his ass to his opponent in a gesture of contempt. Through pantomime, he might extend the scatological insult even more graphically, pretending to befoul his opponent. Or he might hold his nose, telling the other guy he stinks. He might put his hand to his spine, signaling a move so good it hurts. Sometimes the dancers in the opposing crew joined in, razzing the performer from the sidelines.

Some of the freeze motifs prophetically rehearsed possible futures for the B-Boys. Several images quoted sports actions—swimming, rowing a boat—and even more suggested the military. The freeze celebrated the flexibility and budding sexuality of the gangly male adolescent body, and looked forward to sexual adventures or commemorated past ones. The gun imagery of the military pantomimes doubled as phallic imagery. A dancer would often grab his crotch or hump the floor for a memorable finale.

Another important set of motifs in the freeze section was the exploration of body states in a subjunctive mode—things not as they are, but as they might be—comparing and contrasting youthful male vitality with its range of opposites: women, animals (dogs, horses, mules), babies, old age, injury and illness (e.g., a heart attack à la Richard Pryor's routines), and death.

Various dancers had their specialties, especially in the freeze, but also sometimes in the other sections of the dance. Crazy Legs got his name from his rubber-legged way of walking into the ring, a move descended from the Charleston, and he also takes credit for the W, both face-up and face-down. Kip Dee claims he invented the elbow walk. As breaking moved from the streets to the stage, dancers teamed up to make group freezes, a development that has been elaborately extended over the past two or three years.

In the broadest sense, freezes were improvised. Few were devised on the spot; they were imagined and worked out in advance. But they allowed for the greatest range of individual invention, and the choice of which freeze to use at a given time was often an extemporaneous decision. The B-Boys used a variety of methods to create new freezes, including techniques, such as accidents and dreams, preferred by shamans and by the dadaist and surrealist painters and poets. Not all freezes have names, but to name your specialty—and to write it as graffiti—was a way of laying claim to it, a kind of common-law copyright.

In breaking as street competition, the freeze was the challenge that

incited, a virtuosic performance as well as a symbol of identity. As each dancer repeatedly took his turn and, through a series of strategic choices, built excitement with a crescendo of complicated, meaning-packed freezes, he won status and honor for himself and for his group.

The B-Boys organized themselves according to neighborhood or family ties into crews, which were networks for socializing, writing graffiti, and rapping, as well as dancing, held together by a strict code of ethics and loyalty. Crews performed in a spirit of friendly competition at jams where the crew leader directed the group's moves. One kid would set up a challenge, and a B-Boy from the opposing crew would try to top him, or "burn" him. The crew leader was in charge of sending in new players to spell someone who had run out of moves. Onlookers—more friends, relatives, and neighbors—would judge the contest by consensus. B-Boys learned to dance in a system of master-apprentice, referring to each other as father and son—even though the "father" was usually only a few years older than his "son"!—and even chose names that reflected their relationship, like Ty Fly and Kid Ty Fly.

In those days, although there were some girls who joined in, most of the breakdancers were boys from the ages of about eight to sixteen. One reason that girls were the exception was that breaking was a specific expression of machismo. Part of its macho quality comes from the physical risk involved—not only the bruises, cuts, scratches, and scrapes, but also the risk of real fighting that might erupt. And part of it is the deliberate attempt to impress the girls.

Breaking was one kind of "rocking," which also included uprock, a more pantomimic, narrative style of dancing done jumping down and up to standing level, kicking, jabbing, and punching right in a rival's face, without actually touching. In uprock every move is intended to insult the opponent, and besides actual fighting gestures, a dancer might mime grabbing his rival's private parts, smelling his hand, making a face, and then throwing the offending odor back. Uprock is funny, but like a rapper's boast it has a mean edge.

The breakdancer's "costume" was born of necessity as well as style. T-shirts and net overshirts provide traction on the spins, and sneakers are important to the footwork. Their critical role in the dance is emphasized by making the feet look gigantic and by nearly fetishizing the shoes with embellishments like wide, bright laces loosely tied so that the tongues stick out. The insignia of the crew, as well as colors and outfits that coordinate with those of fellow crew members, play a part in intensifying group solidarity. And the overall look of militarized athleticism creates an image of power and authority. The other accessory for breakdancing is a mat, made of cardboard or linoleum, that originally protected the dancers from scraping against concrete.

For the current generation of B-Boys, it doesn't really matter that the

breakdown is an old name in Afro-American dance for both rapid, complex footwork and a competitive format. Or that a break in jazz means a soloist's improvised bridge between melodies. Or that *break* is a technical term in Haitian vodun, referring to both drumming and dancing, that marks the point of possession. Katherine Dunham defines the term as "convulsive movements and sharp temporary changes in a ceremonial . . . rhythm." Or that in a different Afro-American culture, in French Guiana, there is an old dance called, in Creole, *cassé ko* (translation: breaking the body). All these connections have obvious links with breakdancing as we now know it. For the B-Boys, memory is short and history is brief; breaking started in the midseventies, maybe in the Bronx, maybe in Harlem. It started with Afrika Bambaataa's Zulus. Or with Charlie Rock. Or with Joe, from the Casanovas, from the Bronx, who taught it to Charlie Rock. "Breaking means going crazy on the floor," one B-Boy explained back in 1980. "It means making a style for yourself."

As Fab Five Freddy (Fred Braithwaite), the musical director for *Wild Style*, remembers it, breaking began when rapping did, as an intuitive physical response to the music. "Everybody would be at a party in the park in the summer, jamming. Guys would get together and dance with each other, sort of a macho thing where they would show each other who could do the best moves. They started going wild when the music got real funky" — music by groups like Super Sperm and Apache. As the beat of the drummer came to the fore, the music let you know it was time to break down, to freestyle. The cadenced, rhyming, fast-talking epic mode of rapping, with its smooth surface of sexual braggadocio, provided a perfect base for a dance style that was cool, swift, and intricate. The structure of the rap, with its play of quick, varying rhythms going on and off the beat within a steady four-square pulse, is like the off-balance, densely packed, lightning-speed pace of the breaking routine. The sense of inclusiveness, of all being in on a fun time together ("Everybody say ho!" "This is the way we rock the house!" "I *am*! We *are*!"), of turn-taking, is there both in the rap and in the dance. At times the lyrics of the rap even dictate the breakdancing moves, as the MC calls out the names of the dancers and the steps.

For the current generation of B-Boys the history of breaking may reach back only to recent memory — and even those stories conflict — but of course in a broader sense the history of breaking goes back to the slave trade, when Afro-American dancing was born. Breaking *is* something new and original, born of American ghetto culture in the seventies and (in its latest manifestation) in the eighties, but its basic building blocks are moves from the Afro-American repertory, which includes the lindy and the Charleston and also includes dances from the Caribbean and South America. Capoeira a Brazilian form of martial art that, since slaves were forbidden to practice it, evolved as a dance to disguise itself, bears a striking resemblance to breaking, with its crouching, circling, cartwheeling moves.

And, as the Africanist Robert F. Thompson has pointed out, capoeira is a pretty direct descendant from Angolan dance. But while breaking is not capoeira, but something unique, and while breakers may never have seen capoeira until others pointed out to them the similarities of the two forms, the two dance/sport/fight forms have the same roots, just as rapping and the collage of music that comes with it are new and at the same time firmly rooted in a tradition of black and Latino music and verbal style.

The main source of the movement in breaking is black dance, but, like the rest of hiphop, breaking is an exuberant synthesis of popular culture that draws on everything in its path. Some moves can be traced to the Caribbean, some to the black church, some to the Harlem ballrooms of the twenties and thirties, some to such dances as the lindy and the Charleston, and others to such diverse sources as kung-fu movies—which were immensely popular in the seventies—*Playboy* magazine, French pantomime, cartoons, comics, and TV.

Like any form of dance, breaking is more than the sum of its movements; it is also the way movements are combined, as well as the costumes, music, setting, audience, and the interaction between dancers and spectators. And its context. As an integral part of hiphop, breaking shares many stylistic features with graffiti, rapping, and scratching. Like wild-style graffiti, it emphasizes flamboyance, and the embellishment of the tag finds its parallel in the freeze. The act of writing graffiti is, despite its acceptance on canvas at the Fifty-seventh Street galleries, an act of defacement, and breaking, in its days before media hype, was an act of obscene gestures, a threat. In both graffiti and breaking, each piece or freeze is a challenge, a call to rivals to try to top this, and at the same time a boast that it is unbeatable. Graffiti, rapping, and breaking alike celebrate the masculine heroes of the mass media—Superman and other comic-book heroes, the Saint of detective book and TV fame, athletes, kung-fu masters, and great lovers. The obscure gestural ciphers of breaking find their parallels in the (deliberately) nearly unreadable alphabets of wild-style graffiti, the (deliberately) nearly unintelligible thicket of rap lyrics, and the (deliberately) barely recognizable music that is cut up and recombined in scratching.

Graffiti-writers make up new names for themselves, choosing tags partly on the aesthetic grounds that certain letters look good together; breakdancers, too, rename themselves, either after their dancing specialty or style—Frosty Freeze, Kid Glide, Spinner, Little Flip—or, like rappers and DJs, with an alliterative name that sounds good—Eddie Ed, Nelly Nell, Kip Dee. And they name their crews in a similar fashion: Breakmasters, Rock Steady, Dynamic Breakers, Magnificent Force, Rockwell, Floormasters, Rockers' Revenge, Supreme Rockers, Furious Rockers. Just as graffiti-writers mark off city territory and lay title to it with their tags, breakers claim space by tracing symbols on the streets with their dancing and penetrating public space with their ghetto blasters. To write on subway

trains, to strike obscene poses, to wear torn clothing, to scratch records, to talk in secret codes, and to sing one's sexual exploits and other praises are transgressive acts. But it is a mark of our times that even such acts, vivid, proud, and aggressive, transmuting destruction into imaginative creation, can be defused as mainstream culture adopts them. Instead of dreaming of becoming revolutionaries, as they might have in the sixties, in the eighties the B-Boys aspire to be stars. And, at least for some of them, the dream has already come true.

After media exposure, the form of breakdancing immediately began to change as theatrical and other experiences—such as a panel at a conference on the folklore of the Bronx—were brought back to "home base." The folklore conference arranged a jam at a roller disco in the Bronx, and, soon after, Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver, the directors of *Style Wars*, shot a battle between the Rock Steady crew and the Dynamic Rockers (later Dynamic Breakers) at a roller disco in Queens. The stage was set for the scene at the Roxy, a roller disco in Chelsea, in Manhattan, that soon replaced the Negril as the venue for Wheels of Steel hiphop nights. When *Style Wars* was being filmed, the owner of the Queens disco kept clearing out the circle so the cameramen could get in. The next time Rock Steady was breakdancing in the park, the crew's president, Crazy Legs, was walking back and forth saying, "Open up the circle."

By now, the circular format has opened up so far it's become linear, for greater theatrical legibility. Less improvisation takes place as well-worn popular moves become standard. As is often the case in the development of a dance form, acrobatic transitions are elaborated, while the freeze, which once concentrated personal expression, competitive gestural dialogue, and group style into a single significant image, has dwindled away to almost nothing and sometimes even merges with the exit. What once was a dance for adolescents is now the terrain of young adults, professionals whose bodies are less gangly and whose higher level of skill is commensurate with their years of practice. Group choreography and aerial spins, reminiscent of the spectacular balancing acts of circus gymnasts, have added to breaking's theatrical brilliance, as has the influx of electric boogie, popping, locking, ticking, King Tut, the float, and other moves that are not break dancing per se, into the genre.

Locking is a comic dance that creates the illusion that a person's joints are stuck in one place while his extremities are swinging in wild, rapid circles. It was originally popularized in the early seventies by dancers on the popular black dance television program *Soul Train*, which spawned a dance group called the Lockers, whose flamboyance made locking and the related popping—where one segment of the body moves while others stay still—nationally known. Fred Berry, star of the seventies television comedy series *What's Happening!!*, Jeffrey Daniels, ex-member of the pop-funk vocal group Shalamar, and choreographer Toni Basil were key mem-

bers of the dance troupe. Berry's bouncy body and beefy face were symbolic of locking's comic appeal. Daniels, a willowy stick figure with an enormous Afro, not only locked and popped, but did a mean robot (the moves look like they sound)—and, along with Michael Jackson, helped spread the moonwalk, a pantomimed illusion of walking backwards, via Shalamar tours and videos. Basil, a choreographer since the sixties, when she worked on the television series *Shindig!* and the legendary film *The T.A.M.I. Show*, worked throughout the seventies and eighties integrating the Lockers' moves into progressive film and video projects, such as her contribution to the Talking Heads' trailblazing "Once in a Lifetime" video. Another noteworthy ex-Locker is the Latin dancer Shabba-doo, who went on to star in the breakdance film *Breakin'*.

The electric boogie is a mimelike movement of the entire body, full of wiggles and robotic head turns, that refined the Lockers' movements into a more fluid, less jerky style. It was inspired by moves seen on a summer replacement television show hosted by mimes Shields and Yarnell. Kids picked up on it from TV, as they had locking, and embellished it, though the mime artists' white gloves are often worn by street dancers. Also via television came the King Tut and its kissing cousin the Egyptian after comedian Steve Martin appeared on *Saturday Night Live* in mock Egyptian garb to perform his hit single "King Tut." With his arms aimed out at sharp right angles, Martin resembled a talking stonecarving, and this move was quickly assimilated by youngsters.

All these moves—locking, popping, the electric boogie, the King Tut, and the Egyptian—were similar in that each emphasized arm and upper-body motions, and, unlike breakdancing, kept the dancers in basically upright positions.

As kids began to learn breakdancing moves by watching the pros on TV or at dance classes, instead of from breakers on the street, the performance style became homogenized. There's now more of a tendency to copy personal style directly instead of making one's own signature. Amateur breaking still happens—in fact, more than ever, as children as well as adults of all classes and ethnic backgrounds get down at school dances, country clubs, shopping malls, in living rooms, and even on street corners, not in the original competitive mode, but as a money-earning public performance.

The flexibility and resilience of breaking is evident in the way it incorporated electric boogie and other new moves, rather than letting itself be replaced by them. B-Boys vow that it will never die out but, like ballet, become an honored tradition. Interviewed by the *New York Times*, Kid Smooth, sixteen years old, imagined having a son and that son having a conversation someday with his friends: "One kid says, 'My father is a doctor.' The other kid says, 'My father is a lawyer.' And my kid, he says, 'My father spins on his head.' "

At a time when youth culture is again taking center stage in America, the rest of the country is fascinated by black and Latin kids' street life precisely because of its vivid, flamboyant, energetic style. It symbolizes hope for the future—born of a resourceful ability to make something special, unique, original, and utterly compelling out of a life that seems to offer very little. As Fab Five Freddy puts it, "You make a new style. That's what life on the street is all about, just being you, being who you are around your friends. What's at stake is a guy's honor and his position in the street. Which is all you have. That's what makes it so important, that's what makes it feel so good—that pressure on you to be the best. Or to try to be the best. To develop a new style nobody can deal with. If it's true that this stuff reflects life, it's a fast life."

17

A House Is Not a Home

Kool Lady Blue moved her theater of operations from the Negril to Danceteria while Negril is closed for repairs. The Negril is a reggae club where for the past few months, on Thursday nights, KLB Productions/ Wheels of Steel has been presenting the best deejays, emcees, and performers in evenings of rapping, dancing, and entertainment. It's a fluid scene like a party in someone's basement where white, black, Latino kids mix to dance with one another, and to perform in every sense. To be out there. To get down.

At Danceteria, the immense space cast this heretofore friendly occasion in a new light. Take last week's event. Somehow the buildup was much bigger than the reality. The ads promised "girl rappers" and "electric boogie." Blue let everyone know that she had found the best dancers in the Bronx and tracked them down and they'd be performing on Tuesday at Danceteria. I got there early—around 10:30—and saw Take One and Crazy Legs from the Rock Steady breaking crew, there to watch the show too, maybe learn some new electronic moves. Not too many other people

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were there, but the deejays were spinning discs and a few people were dancing. Take introduced me to the guys who would be performing—Loose Bruce and Paulie Gee. They were over in a corner practicing unobtrusively and I could see that Blue was really right. These guys could segment their bodies with a drawn-out shudder that looked like a cold electric shock was passing slowly through their veins. Their feet always seemed bolted to the ground while their bodies swiveled robotlike along a vertical axis. Or else they'd do a slippery step, miming walking backward, as though they were stuck on a conveyor belt. And all the time their bodies were going through these contortions, they smiled with a spacy grin on their faces.

I didn't see any girl rappers around.

Take introduced me and Marty to Phase Two and we all went upstairs to talk because you couldn't hear anything over the music. The upstairs at Danceteria is decorated like someone's awful rec room from the fifties and numerous TV sets were broadcasting what looked like chance-edited imagery. It all seemed very homey.

At midnight we went back downstairs to see if the show had started. Well, some kind of show had started, even if it wasn't *the* show. The way the white kids were dressed up in punk regalia and dancing as outrageously as possible, not partnering, just presenting themselves as dancing beings, turned social dancing from an act of personal pleasure, or a way to dance *with* someone, to a mode of dancing *for* someone, anyone. At the same time, closer to the stage, the black and Latin kids, friends or competitors of the evening's acts, were performing in a much more conscious style, lining up in formations to mark the time of a reggae tune, in a kind of undulating marching step, or stepping out into a circle of space to underscore a funk tune with a spasm of footwork.

The space made everything strange. You kept waiting for the show to start but you weren't sure where it would happen. Loose Bruce and Paulie Gee would start up over in a corner and the crowd (by now it was crowded) would rush over to take a look. Then it turned out they were sort of only practicing. They sat back down and people started drifting back onto the dance floor. Around one o'clock Crazy Legs got down on the floor to start breaking and a wide circle cleared out on one side of the room. But when he went back into the circle to let someone else take a turn, the space stayed empty. Nothing happened. Finally a blissed-out white hippie bounced across the circle and people kept waiting, stubbornly but passively, for *some* kind of show to begin. You'd hear an emcee's voice start an announcer's rap and you'd go over to the stage—maybe now it would start—but then it would turn out to be a false alarm, just a recorded rap simulating intimate spontaneity.

But then around two, a live emcee introduced Silver Star, and two black women in silver outfits ran onto the stage formed by the wide steps

leading up to the turntables. They rapped and sang a funky version of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm"—a string of nursery rhymes spiced up with sexual content with the refrain, "Ee-I-Ee-I-O." And then they ran off. Was that it for the girl rappers? After another half hour or so of just dancing, the emcee introduced the electric boogie dancers. Loose Bruce and Paulie Gee moved to the center of the dance floor. They smiled and popped, played a clapping game, passed the action back and forth—Paulie Gee mimed shaking hands and Loose Bruce mimed playing a guitar. And then they bowed and disappeared. Was that it for the electric boogie dancers? It was almost 3 A.M. and the place cleared out fast.

The evening was more satisfying in terms of watching the impromptu performances that coalesced from time to time out of the general dancing and music playing than in the planned acts. At the Negril the Wheels of Steel evenings depend on the intimate atmosphere where nobody notices what race, age, or style distinguishes you from anyone else, where different groups truly feel at home, where the entertainment parts of the evening dovetail comfortably with recorded and live rapping, dancing, drinking, sitting, visiting, partying. Negril's homey ambience is an appropriate setting for the meeting of punk style and street style; it makes public the private party, a youth culture occasion that densely layers all domesticizing symbolism of a special world. It is a world bound by special rules, conventions, and secrets, often inaccessible or invisible to outsiders, deliberately obfuscated—as in the complex gestural codes of breaking, the incomprehensible patter of rapping, and "wild style" graffiti, art forms through which street kids evolve their own social organization and education. They learn from one another in a spirit of competitive cooperation, exploring and articulating issues of identity, creativity, and autonomy; negotiating the complex spaces and meanings of the city; claiming territory an status for themselves and their groups. They inscribe their environment with their style, not only by literally writing their names and messages on subway cars and public walls, but also by tracing symbols on the ground through dancing and by penetrating public space with blasts of music or, the other side of the same coin, making space private with Sony Walkmans. Street style domesticates public space, turning the omnifarious city into a familiar, manageable place, making it human scale. Punk style also mobilizes themes of domesticity with its fifties nostalgia, and both streams of American youth culture share a sense of disenfranchisement that finds its expression not in political organization but in extreme physical sensation—drugs and dancing.

White America has perennially turned to black America, especially to black and Latin dance and dancing music, for revitalization in times of cultural exhaustion, and white punk culture is currently fascinated by black and Latin street culture precisely because of its vivid, flamboyant, energetic *style*. At the Negril this fascination seems to point to some kind of real

fusion, some hope for the future, some alternate route to social harmony. But Danceteria, try as it might to be like home, can't seem to stop being a factory run by white entrepreneurs to market pleasure. And here the social relations were more reminiscent of the nineteenth-century minstrel show, or the Cotton Club of the twenties, where blacks performed for all-white audiences, than signposts for an uncharted future.

18

Breaking Changing

It's been almost five years since some cops arrested kids for breakdancing in the New York subway, thinking they were fighting, and Martha Cooper, then a *Post* photographer, began to track down this elusive form of adolescent street dancing. Now, with breakdancers in poster ads for WPLJ and the movie *Beat Street* plastered all over the subway stations, if a bust happened all a B-Boy would have to do to explain his activities is point. But what cop these days, whether in New York, Philadelphia, Oakland, Tokyo, or even Moscow, has escaped the media obsession with breaking? Hiphop culture—the world of breaking, rapping, scratching, and wild-style graffiti, with its special slang and clothing—was once an underground current (both literally and figuratively) but has now burst into the mainstream of art, fashion, and entertainment full flood.

The front cover of *Vogue* this month sports a beautiful (white) model in a graffiti-decked hat. Perhaps the same inner-city elementary school teachers who four years ago told me breaking and graffiti were equally criminal will be moved to buy just such a hat, or designer Terry McCoy's graffiti shoes or chairs, or Willi Wear graffiti clothes. They must have seen *Flashdance*. And I hope they'll see *Breakin'*, which, for all its technical shoddiness, has a real feel for the vivacity of the style and its social roots. Certainly they should see the two movie musicals that, on different scales, wonderfully capture New York hiphop's exuberance—*Wild Style* and *Beat Street*. At least fifteen more breakdance movies are said to be in production or preproduction in Hollywood.

Burger King ads on TV show breaking, McDonald's ads feature

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rapping, and General Electric plans ads that include graffiti. Thom McAn shoe stores have ordered 17,000 pairs of *Wild Style*-brand sneakers—with their rubber shell-head toes, they're the preferred style for breaking. A flooring business near Philadelphia advertises linoleum mats for breakdancing for only $25. Meanwhile, graffiti-based art sells in 57th Street and Soho galleries, and even President Reagan was delighted when he watched the New York City Breakers crew perform at the Kennedy Center. The Roxy has become legendary. The first of a rash of books on breakdancing, a how-to-do-it-yourself guide, has appeared. Hiphop has moved so far from its folk origins that when Steven Zeitlin tried to hire the Dynamic Breakers, originally a Queens neighborhood crew, for the City Play festival this weekend in Flushing Meadows, he learned their fee was out of his range—$10,000.

The media hype of breakdancing has changed both its form and its meaning. The form itself (like much of hiphop) has always drawn flexibly from TV, radio, magazines, comic books, and movies, so it's not surprising that media appearances create instant feedback. The original format for breakdance jams in neighborhood parks was a circle with the soloist in the center. I remember that when Tony Silver and Henry Chalfant, who made the documentary *Style Wars*, were filming Rock Steady and Dynamic Rockers at a roller disco in Queens in 1981, the owner of the place kept clearing out the circle so the cameramen could get in. The next time I saw Rock Steady breaking in a park, Crazy Legs, president of the crew, kept walking back and forth saying, "Open up the circle."

By now the circular format has opened up so far it's become linear, for theatrical legibility. Less improvisation takes place as popular moves become standard. Acrobatic transitions are elaborated, while the "freeze," which once concentrated personal expression, competitive gestural dialogue, and group style into a single, significant image, has dwindled away to almost nothing and sometimes even merges with the exit. What once was a dance for adolescents is now the terrain of young adults, professionals whose bodies are less gangly and whose higher level of skill is commensurate with their years of practice. Group choreography has added to breaking's theatrical brilliance, as has the influx of electric boogie, popping, locking, ticking King Tut, the Float, and other moves that are not break dancing per se.

Another way the media has changed breaking is that the performance style has become homogenized as kids begin to learn the moves by watching the pros on TV or at dance classes instead of from older brothers and cousins on the street. There's more of a tendency to copy personal style directly instead of making one's own signature. Amateur breaking still happens—in fact, more than ever, as children of all classes and ethnic backgrounds get down at school dances, bar mitzvahs, shopping malls, in living rooms—and even on street corners—not in the original competitive

mode, but as a money-earning public performance. *Breakin'*, *Beat Street*, and *Street Dreams*, Peter Gennaro's musical at St. Clements, occasionally amalgamate Broadway-style jazz dance with breaking, to its detriment.

No doubt the book *Breakdancing*, by Mr. Fresh and the Supreme Rockers, will contribute to the whitewashing process. To begin with, it's hard to imagine that anyone could learn to do this kind of dancing by reading instructions, especially these instructions. But, then, the pictures are muddy, the prose repetitive and dull, informative descriptions lacking, and the data shallow when not downright wrong. Of the twenty-one lessons, only five are devoted to actual breaking moves, the rest to electric boogie. And readers are constantly warned that breaking is dangerous unless you study with a pro. Come on, folks! Breaking has only *had* pros for a couple of years.

The history of breaking, in this book, begins in New York in the seventies, instead of with the slave trade, when Afro-American dancing was born. Breaking *is* an original form, born in a particular context in the last decade, but its basic building blocks are moves from the Afro-American repertory, including the lindy and the Charleston, as well as moves from kung-fu films, *Playboy* magazine, French pantomime, cartoons, comics, and TV. But, like any form of dance, breaking is more than the sum of its movements; it is the way movements are combined, and also the costumes, music, setting, audience, and interaction between dancers and spectators. This book deals with the music, costumes, and dance imagery in an utterly cursory way. There is no analysis, for instance, of *why* certain poses are chosen, or *why* athletic clothes are worn (other than the obvious, ease and cost). Nor does anyone bother to mention the taste for military uniforms, special hats, wide shoelaces left untied, studded belts and chains, layered and slashed T-shirts, or to meditate on the significance of this deliberate, exaggerated iconography of the sinister and the outcast. And the book claims that as a result of breaking, gang warfare has stopped in the Bronx(!). Here's hoping Steve Hager's illustrated history of hiphop will offer more insight.

Hager also wrote the script for *Beat Street*, which opens this week and serves up some beautiful, sustained scenes of breaking at its hottest. Lots of different performers—including dancers, rappers, and deejays—are lovingly presented, and even the media influence on hiphop is wittily shown. The film uncompromisingly locates hiphop in its social context (not shirking from the violence and ugliness of street life), as well as in its joyful, tender, and beautiful side. Unlike *Breakdancing* and *Breakin'*, in *Beat Street* we can see that an underlying moral and aesthetic code links the various aspects of hiphop and gives them analogous stylistic features as well as a shared meaning. To write on subway trains, to strike obscene poses, to wear torn clothing, to scratch records, to talk in secret codes, and to sing one's sexual exploits are transgressive acts. The vivid, proud, and aggressive tones of hiphop transmute destruction into imaginative creation.

19

The Pleasin' in Teasin'

The last in a series organized by Tina Pratt to celebrate black dancers in America, this program had a special resonance because all the dancers in it were women. The black woman as dancer and the images she has managed to create within the stereotypical roles assigned to her could fill volumes. Pratt's program dealt with one of those roles. Shake and exotic dancers, in plain parlance, are striptease artists, and therefore, this tribute was in part an exploration of the artistry of striptease.

The performance took place on a Sunday afternoon at a crowded jazz club with a small stage. The context was entirely different for this kind of dancing, and the de-contextualization provided a new perspective on what really happens in the striptease performance. During the course of the afternoon each of the women presented her specialty, like a gift, to the audience, and this relaxation of the sexual tension usual in such performance created a spirit of generosity. That most of the spectators were singers, musicians, dancers, and other friends and associates of the performers also lent an air of friendly enjoyment. And there were as many women (if not more) in the audience as men; as viewers called out words of encouragement or appreciation, it seemed to me that, on this day at least, the women were dancing for other women.

Louise (Li'l Bits) Brown, a tiny, gray-haired, compact woman, started out the program with a mixture of comedy and eroticism. Dressed in a devil's outfit complete with horns, she not only vibrated movable parts of her anatomy with the expertise of long experience, but made everyone crack up as she toyed with the thick pink glittery devil's tail that swung between her legs. Betty Brisbane did a more conventional act, removing layer after layer of a seemingly endless supply of underwear of every description. Tina Pratt danced elegantly in a long gown, creating a friction between the seamlessness of the movement of the covered body and the articulation of individual body parts, once revealed.

Gerri Wayne did a remarkable drunk dance, wobbling on high heels and taking all sorts of objects out of a sacklike dress, until what at first

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Village Voice, March 22, 1983.

seemed like an unattractive, misshapen, out-of-control, sexless person be came extremely sexual and shapely partly through sudden immaculate control. Comanche let her hair down and swung it over the faces of unsuspecting targets in the audience and, as her body emerged from her American Indian-style costume, she twirled her breasts in opposite directions. Chinki Grimes cast angry glares at the viewers as she dropped articles of clothing with cold determination.

Beyond individual characters, special skills, and atmospheric costumes, the dancers were united in their incredible sense of performance style, a verve and flair that has less to do with the dancing per se than with the power of the gaze, the subtle handling of fabric to partially hide or emphasize planes of the body. They used expert timing to build suspense, and an equally knowledgeable sense of space—breaking the audience barrier, for instance, or turning suddenly to face away. All of these things are aspects of dance style, but when Pratt called up various women in the audience to sing or play music, they all showed the same masterful presence, from the ancient, wizened Cousin Ida to the Playboy bunny, perhaps still in her teens, who belted out a hot blues song. That presence takes shape in the dancing as a luxurious, confident enjoyment of one's own moving body, a pleasure in both sensing and revealing the dance as one makes it that exactly parallels the structure of the sexual act and seems, more than the particular movements of the dance, to supply the erotic edge.

In certain ways exotic dancing is like jazz music, which began as raunchy whorehouse entertainment. Historically, jazz music was an avenue open to black (male) musicians who were barred from "high art" musical performance when neither training nor jobs were available to them. Until late in the twentieth century it has been almost impossible for black women dancers to find jobs that did not involve sexually entertaining men. In fact, most of the lucrative jobs for black and white women dancers have always been provocative dancing. And the vocabulary of provocation draws on the body-oriented arts of Africa, on the hip-swinging, torso-undulating, physically proud dances of the various ancestral tribes of American blacks.

Black dancing has traditionally embarrassed mainstream white culture in the way that any dance of an unfamiliar culture shocks, intrigues, and revolts, because it is in our dancing that we most powerfully and directly manifest our views about the body. In Euro-American culture, one of the most deeply entrenched rules of dancing style is that the sexual power of the body is masked and controlled, rather than flaunted. The very exoticism of Oriental and African dance styles made them provocative in the nineteenth century, when striptease became an industry. I've seen West African tribal dances on film in which a woman turns her back to the dancing group, crouches forward, and vibrates her buttocks in exactly the

same sequence favored by American shake dancers. But the meaning of the movement changes drastically when the context shifts.

Roland Barthes has written that French striptease is a kind of harmless family entertainment that takes the evil out of sex by innoculating a nation with a dose of clinically sterilized voyeurism. The climax of the striptease—the ultimate revelation of the body—does nothing more, he writes, than turn the woman into an undesirable object. American striptease, especially as seen in this program, can be something else. As they taunted the men whose attention they held, these women became wielders, not victims, of power. The importance of their act lay in the process of unveiling, in the dance of undressing, rather than in the static nude image produced by that dance, almost as an afterthought. In the limitations of the economic and social structures of striptease — of marketing sexual appeal — they have managed to let the brilliance and ease of performance shine through.

20

The Moscow Charleston: Black Jazz Dancers in the Soviet Union

In 1926, authentic jazz dance arrived for the first time in the Soviet Union when an American black musical revue toured to Moscow and Leningrad.[1] *The Chocolate Kiddies* reached Moscow in February 1926. Billed as a "Negro operetta," the show played at the Second State Circus in Moscow and then moved on to the Leningrad Music Hall, remaining in Russia for three months. The advance publicity tantalized Soviet audiences with its lure of American exotica and at the same time assured them they could be as sophisticated as audiences in Paris, London, and Berlin.

It was the middle of the jazz age in Western Europe. Although Russia was a backwater—uncharted territory for black dancers and musicians—

Society of Dance History Scholars Conference, Riverside, California, 1992.

this was the middle of the NEP period. From 1921 to 1928, the New Economic Policy allowed limited capitalism and foreign trade, opening windows between the Soviet Union, Europe, and America, and creating a Soviet consumer culture as well as a nouveau riche bourgeoisie. During this relatively lax time of economic openness and exchange, a great many cultural commodities were imported from the West. And jazz was one of them. But at the same time, a political struggle over the value and meaning of this cultural exchange ensued. On the one hand, jazz was seen as *the* symbol of Western decadence. However, official Marxist ideology simultaneously celebrated African-American culture as the expression of an oppressed proletarian class. Thus American jazz had a special, more complex and contradictory significance for Soviet culture than for the other foreign cultures to which it was regularly exported in the 1920s.[2]

The Chocolate Kiddies was a group put together in the United States by an émigré Russian impresario for a European tour, beginning in Berlin, in May 1925. Consisting of thirty-five dancers, singers, and musicians, the troupe was a merger of part of the cast of the recent Broadway musical revue *The Chocolate Dandies* and Sam Wooding's jazz band, which had recently moved from Atlantic City to Harlem to Club Alabam in Times Square. This troupe had already toured Europe and North Africa for nearly a year when they accepted the attractive offer made by Rosfil, the Russian Philharmonic Society, to visit the Soviet Union.

In fact, the program was not an operetta, as billed (perhaps in order to capture — however inadequately — its multimedia nature).[3] It was, as later ads made clear, a two-part show: the first act was actually *The Chocolate Kiddies* (a song, dance, and comedy revue) and the second act was a jazz music concert by Sam Wooding's band, which had served up the accompaniment in the first act.[4]

Wooding, the grandson of a slave and the son of a Philadelphia butler, had conservatory training in piano and music theory. During World War I he was in the army in France, playing tenor horn with the 807th Pioneers military band. When he returned to the U.S., he played jazz at nightclubs in Atlantic City. Although trained as a classical pianist, he remade himself into a jazz musician, he writes, to "[earn] my bread and butter."[5] The conflict between Wooding's symphonic aspirations and his commercial success in the jazz world led to a conservative big band approach that garnered an uneven critical reception in Europe. He was often considered "too symphonic," and even in Russia some complained that his band was not at all "hot."

The Chocolate Dandies had opened on Broadway in September 1924. Originally titled *In Bamville* in its pre-Broadway tryouts, it was the second black Broadway show composed by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake,

though this time without their earlier collaborators, the comics Miller and Lyles. Like this quartet's 1921 surprise Broadway hit *Shuffle Along*, which set the pattern for the 1920s black musical, *Chocolate Dandies* was a series of song, dance, and comedy routines straight out of vaudeville (and not far removed from minstrelsy), hung together by a flimsy plot. In this case it was a love story in a racetrack setting that allowed for scenes of Ziegfeld-like splendor. (The book was by Sissle and Lew Payton.) Although not a commercial success (it closed after ninety-six performances), this show got some favorable reviews. However, it suffered financially because it was much more expensive to run than *Shuffle Along* had been and it charged relatively low admission for Broadway. As well, its cast was raided by the road tour of another black musical, *Runnin' Wild*. But as Allen Woll suggests, "perhaps the major problem that *The Chocolate Dandies* faced was that it was condemned by the white critics for 'ambition.' "[6] *Variety*'s Chicago critic wrote: "The absence of spirited stepping . . . looks as though it were deliberate in a plan to make the whole piece 'high toned.' It is that, but the results are achieved at the expense of a genuine negro spirit."[7] Ashton Stevens wrote in the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* that "the show seems to suffer from too much white man."[8]

Despite its short run, *The Chocolate Dandies* was notable for several reasons (besides its simulated race with three live horses on a treadmill, à la Belasco's *Ben Hur*). One was that in it Josephine Baker became a star. Although still a member of the chorus line, in it she had a special role as a clown. As well, she had several solo turns, both comic and elegant, and she was given equal billing with the four female stars. Baker, however, did not join *The Chocolate Kiddies* tour because by then she had been recruited for the starring role in *La Revue Nègre* in Paris. Another reason the show was memorable was one of its musical numbers, "That Charleston Dance," in which Baker did an amusing parody of the dance that had recently swept the country. *The Chocolate Dandies* may not have introduced the dance to the mass public—the Charleston had arrived on Broadway a year earlier, in the show *Runnin' Wild*—but the unforgettable image of Baker parodying the dance in *The Chocolate Dandies* engraved it on posterity's imagination. And the precision chorus line of *The Chocolate Dandies* danced the Charleston to perfection. As Baker herself described it:

> The first impression made by the Charleston was extraordinary. . . . As if excited by the dance to the point where they did not care whether they were graceful or not, the chorus assumed the most awkward positions—knock knees, legs "akimbo", toes turned in until they met, squatting, comic little leaps sidewise. And then the visual high point of the dance, these seemingly grotesque elements were actually woven into a pattern which was full of grace and significance, which was gay and orgiastic and wild.[9]

Although Baker doesn't mention it, what was seen as awkward or grotesque by white eyes is, of course, an African-based bodily canon of bent limbs, angular lines, and acrobatic moves.

It was *The Chocolate Dandies*, reconstituted as *The Chocolate Kiddies*, that brought the Charleston to Moscow.[10]

Moscow audiences may only have seen their first authentic black jazz dance performance in February 1926, but they had earlier been exposed to African-American music and dance performers. As early as 1873, the Fisk University choir sang spirituals in St. Petersburg, and in 1910 a Russian couple, the Nazarovs, introduced the cakewalk to Russian high society. They had learned it from an African-American couple at a Petersburg dancing school. In prerevolutionary days, Russian music publishers couldn't turn out dance tunes fast enough. They not only produced versions of the cakewalk, but also the tango, the maxixe, the one-step, the Boston, and the foxtrot.[11]

However, after World War I, when jazz was spreading rapidly throughout Western Europe, Russia was slow to absorb it, for several reasons: revolution and civil war isolated the country; debates raged about the relationship of native proletarian music to high culture; the popular music industry was strictly licensed; and certain requisite instruments like the banjo and saxophone simply were not available.

Finally, in 1922 (a year after the new freedom of the New Economic Policy was introduced), the first Russian jazz concert was given in Moscow, but not by African-Americans. The Russian-Jewish poet, dancer, and avant-gardist Valentin Parnakh, having already sent reports home from Paris about the latest black music and dance, came home to spread the gospel of jazz: it represented, he wrote, not only modernity, but also freedom. Parnakh organized "The First Eccentric Orchestra of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic" and put on a jazz concert in October 1922. At his second concert, in December, he demonstrated the shimmy, the foxtrot, and the two-step. Though Parnakh's band was anything but authentic, it appealed to the public's imagination—and that of the government and the intelligentsia. The film director Sergei Eisenstein requested foxtrot lessons. Parnakh's band appeared in Vsevolod Meyerhold's production *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922) and then was featured in a key cabaret scene in Meyerhold's *D. E.* (1924) as a potent (and popular) symbol of the decadent West. Ironically, however, the band also entertained at government and Communist party functions.[12]

Jazz, its meanings, and its forms, quickly became a hotly debated topic and thus had already become an object of connoisseurship in the Soviet Union by the time first Benny Peyton's Jazz Kings and then, a few days later, *The Chocolate Kiddies* arrived in 1926. But authentic African-American jazz musicians and dancers had not yet been seen. Previews in the press included enthusiastic statements by artists and cultural leaders—

including Meyerhold, the theatrical directors Konstantin Stanislavsky and Alexander Tairov, and Petr Kogan, the president of the Academy of Artistic Sciences. The filmmaker Dziga Vertov augmented the publicity by including the group in scenes in his poetic agit-documentary *One-Sixth of the World.*[13] Depicting graphically how capitalism destroys human relationships, through parallel editing Vertov compares African-American entertainers both to slaves and to toys of the bourgeoisie. Thus several scenes from *The Chocolate Kiddies* are recorded on film. These include: a high-stepping chorus line behind a singer, with men in suits, spats, and straw hats and women in dresses; a tapdance done in the manner of a military drill; a pair of acrobatic dancers in overalls performing a choreographed fight; a plantation scene with some women in mammy outfits and some in short dresses doing the Charleston; and an "exotic" number with women in grass skirts and wigs shaking their shoulders, swiveling their hips, and pressing their thighs. For Vertov, the Chocolate Kiddies—and all African-Americans—are indubitably exploited innocents, systematically devoured by the capitalist machine.

I want now to analyze two items. The first is the most detailed review available of the dance aspects of the show, written by the dance critic Vladimir Blum for *Zhizn Iskusstva.* The second is a poster for the show by the well-known Soviet artists the Stenberg Brothers.

Blum complains that, although the publicity "kindled the public's interest in this exotic sensation," and "Meyerhold himself, having returned from his travels in enlightened Europe, declared that the Negro operetta was amazing, a work of genius, stupendous"; in fact: "What we were shown, it turned out: 1) was not in the least an operetta, and 2) was not even very 'Negro,' so to speak, since nearly the entire troupe are obviously mulattoes, and two ladies are quite white-looking. . . ." Blum writes (and I quote him at length):

> There is neither plot nor theatrical acting in the revue. It simply consists of an unconnected montage of specifically circus attractions. And why the scenery changed twice is completely incomprehensible. Maybe for an American proprietor of a remote ranch out of O. Henry these silly rags are in some measure convincing and even necessary. . . .
>
> The attractions actually work splendidly. But they are monotonous. In the end, they are all either tapdancing—squared, cubed, raised to the nth power—or partnered acrobatics. You can watch this genre for a half-hour—maybe forty minutes—but the performance stretches on for two hours. . . . By way of contrast, the furious hullabaloo of tap and acrobatic numbers breaks off from time to time into a "serious"—that is, a clearly non-Negro—solo or duet song. This pitiful singing is beneath any criticism, but is probably very pleasing to a sensitive and unexacting habitue of a New York . . . cheap dive.

> Because that is precisely the origin — the vulgar Euro-American "cafe chantant" (as not long ago such haunts of vice were called) — of this so-called performance, which came to us in the USSR "directly via steamship."
>
> Thus fifty percent of this spectacle is covered with a thick layer of filth. The women — a good half of the troupe — accompany and alternate the attractions with indecent, cynical body movements and dances. They are frankly untalented and "act" exclusively by means of their natural resources. There is nothing "exotic" in their dances and "plastique"; no ethnography ever spent the night here. . . .
>
> But one has to do justice to the men. They are masters of their craft. They accomplish the most puzzling rhythmic tasks with ease, with spirit, carefree as a child. In general these people have rhythm — and contemporary European music could learn something from them. . . .
>
> The premiere of the "Negroes" was quite a public success. The great majority, of course, was happy that it finally got to a "European" entertainment. But there were naive souls who didn't even suspect that they had ended up in the ambiance of a cheap Euro-American dive, where not only was a decadent bourgeoisie celebrating its orgies, but where it even reconstructed these unfortunate Negroes according to the image of its own likeness, forcing them to spice up their unaffected, simple-hearted gaiety with the most vulgar, most international obscenities.[14]

Blum's review, itself deeply ambivalent (and the briefer review he wrote under the nom de plume Sadko in *Izvestiia*), exemplifies perfectly the warring sentiments with which the Soviet tour of *The Chocolate Kiddies* was received. To begin with, the show isn't black-looking enough. Moreover, when the group presents "white" material, its performance is contemptuously dismissed as "beneath criticism." The women are vilified as lascivious and are accused of having no skills, but only "natural resources." The men, stereotypically branded as having "natural rhythm," are "masters of their craft," but at the same time they are also childlike. While it is true that, as we have seen, American critics also condemned *The Chocolate Dandies* for its "white ambitions," Blum's reaction is slightly different. For running through the entire review, and exploding at the conclusion, is a thread of anti-European and anti-American suspicion, rooted in Soviet xenophobia, that identifies all that is bad about this performance with the machinations of the white bourgeoisie and all that is good with primitivist fantasies.

Blum doesn't mention the Charleston, and he focuses on the tap-dancing. Yet the Stenberg Brothers' poster — which must have been made from a publicity photograph — clearly shows the woman, at least, doing the Charleston, and we know from the Vertov film that it was part of the show. The Stenbergs' poster, like Paul Colin's for *La Revue Nègre*, emphasizes the "blackness" of the show. The features are those of minstrel-show blackface. And, while the Stenbergs probably could not have known this, the man's

pose is one of the most recognizable, iconic African-American gestures in the repertory. His left hand on his hip, his knees slightly bent, he holds out his right hand, fingers apart. An ancient Kongo pose, it shows up in generations of African-American and Caribbean dances.[15] Yet, in gender terms, the poster upholds the division Blum so bluntly draws up in his review. The woman's dress is short and revealing; the man's body is completely covered. Moreover, the man, wearing glasses, has an intellectual cast—suiting him to understanding the mysteries of "puzzling rhythmic tasks," while the woman is all body.

Both theatrical dancing and social dancing were profoundly influenced by *The Chocolate Kiddies'* ebullient performances of the Charleston, tapdancing, and other black dances. Shortly after their visit, the Blue Blouse movement—a network of actors and other artists that created "living newspapers" to promulgate Communist policy, mixing avant-garde techniques with popular variety-show formats—began performing their highly physicalized theater to jazz music, and even doing movements that look like jazz dance.[16] On the lyric stage, the avant-garde ballet choreographers Kasyan Goleizovsky and Feodor Lopukhov were influenced by the group.[17] And, on the popular stage, exhibition dance acts like that of Lydia Iver and Arkady Nelson demonstrated the new social dances.[18] Finally, after 1926, Soviet youth caught up with the rest of the Western world by Charlestoning the night away at clubs and private parties. They provoked the same old debates about the sexual element in these dances, but this time in a new context, for Soviet youth were supposed to be "high-minded and austere."[19]

The visit of *The Chocolate Kiddies* was both a catalyst and a symptom of Russia's Jazz Age. The troupe never would have even been invited to Moscow and Leningrad without the ground already having been prepared—politically, legally, socially, and artistically. However, their performances further inspired professional and social dancers. They became a point of reference as a symbol of truly excellent ethnic dancing in the Soviet dance world, and of freedom and individual expression in the larger world of Soviet society.[20] The new steps they introduced into the stage repertory were short-lived; those of the social-dance repertory persisted much longer. In certain ways the show reproduced and marketed racial stereotypes, which many Europeans, even the Soviets, were eager to receive. But some, like Vertov, criticized those stereotypical roles, and many saw beyond them to appreciate the artistry of these bravura performers.

IV

Other Subversions: Politics and Popular Dance

21

Stepping High: Fred Astaire's Drunk Dances

Fred Astaire made three "drunk" dances in three films, all in the 1940s. Although they are quite different from each other, all three dances are striking both in terms of their functions in the film narratives and in terms of their formal expressions of drunken sensations and drinking images. I will analyze here the New Year's Eve duet in *Holiday Inn* (1942); the solo number "One for My Baby (and One More for the Road)," in *The Sky's the Limit* (1943); and the "Heat Wave" production number in *Blue Skies* (1946), looking at the ways in which Astaire uses choreography to project social views and feelings of drunkenness, and sets up tensions between those qualities of inebriation and the notions of precision and agility his dancing embodies.

During the 1940s, the dominant public attitudes toward drinking and alcoholism were undergoing change. Before Prohibition, the prevalent position on alcoholism had been a morally judgmental one. Drunkenness was considered an immoral activity, the result of a moral flaw or spiritual degeneration, and alcoholism was simply the constant practice of drunkenness. Alcohol was thought to be intrinsically evil, but also special groups in society exacerbated the problem by tempting the morally weak. It was this kind of attitude that saw the legislation of temperance as a useful solution. By the mid-1930s, the repeal of Prohibition and the rise of Alcoholics Anonymous began to spread another conceptual model, that of alcoholism as a disease. Alcoholics were thought to be genetically determined, and therefore not morally responsible for their problem. But if they did not choose treatment for their "illness," they were doomed to continue, indeed increase consumption. However, in the 1940s, coinciding with the expanding practice of psychoanalysis in the United States, for the first time a more internal yet morally neutral model for conceptualizing alcoholism became prevalent. Rather than falling prey to social evils, moral flaws, or a predes-

CORD, American Dance Guild, Dance History Scholars Joint Conference, Los Angeles, California, 1981.

tined disease, the alcoholic was considered a product of unresolved childhood traumas which, if understood and resolved, through the will of the patient and the process of psychoanalysis, would provide the key to curing the alcoholism. Thus, with the rise of the biological and then the psychological model in the decade after the end of Prohibition, the social stigma of drinking and alcoholism decreased considerably.[1]

Still, the Hays Office Production Code of 1934 states that "the use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization, will not be shown,"[2] a precaution that harks back to the belief that external factors speed the moral degeneracy of the potential alcoholic. Prohibition attitudes and their lingering aftereffects added a darker note to the portrayal of drinking in film than had previously been known. Film had inherited certain modes of using drunken behavior, especially for comic effect, from theater—both popular entertainments and high art. John Durang, the American dancer, actor, and clown, wrote that in 1797 his clown act in John Bill Ricketts's circus included "[riding] the foxhunter, leaping over the bar with the mounting and dismounting while in full speed, taking a flying leap on horseback through a paper sun, in character of a drunken man on horseback, tied in a sack standing on two horses while I changed to women's clothes. . . ." He also "performed the drunken soldier on horseback, still vaulted, I danced on the stage, I was the Harlequin in the pantomimes, occasionally I sung a comic song."[3] John Towsen describes a burlesque equestrian act popular in the nineteenth century in which a clown disguised as a drunken audience member attempts a bareback horse ride. The clown Joe Pentland transformed the role, in the midnineteenth century, to that of a drunken sailor, and Dan Rice (1823–1901) made the inebriate a backwoodsman, a beloved, mythic comic figure of his day.[4] Towsen also tells of the British acrobatic team, the Hanlon-Lees, whose most famous production in the 1880s, *A Trip to Switzerland*, included among its antics "a brilliant drunk scene in which [the villain's] servants experience great difficulty in trying to light a candle while drinking, with one of them even sticking the lit candle, rather than the bottle, down the throat of the other."[5]

The American Broadway musicals and revues presented drunken behavior as pretexts for physical gags, as did the British music hall, and it is interesting to note in this context that Vernon Castle's early Broadway parts often demanded that he play the inebriated socialite, for example the role of Souseberry Lushmore in *The Midnight Sons* (1909). Similar comic dancing roles were the specialties of Jack Donahue and Nick Long, Jr. in the 1920s.[6]

Even on the ballet stage the role of the inebriate was mined for comic effect. George Balanchine's *The Triumph of Neptune*, itself inspired by the conventions of the old English pantomime, and choreographed for Diaghilev in London, 1926, had a scene in which "A drunken negro [danced

by Balanchine himself] upsets the magic telescope and so all connection with the fairy world is severed."[7] Catherine Littlefield's *Café Society* (Chicago, 1938) not only named among its cast of characters an Intoxicated Gentleman, but even anthropomorphized drinks: Champagne, Rock and Rye, Gin, and Scotch and Soda.[8] There is a tipsy guest, Josephine, in Frederick Ashton's *A Wedding Bouquet* (London, 1937), the ballet accompanied by a reading of Gertrude Stein's text *They Must. Be Wedded. To Their Wife.*, and there is A Drunkard, as well as a tipsy Timid Man (originally played by Massine), in Leonide Massine's *The New Yorker* (New York, 1940), an impression of nightlife based on drawings from *The New Yorker* magazine.[9]

Charlie Chaplin's earliest roles in the English music hall troupe of Fred Karno included that of the inebriated "swell," as in *Mumming Birds*, a Karno routine that ran for more than thirty-five years, in which Chaplin first appeared in 1908 (at the Folies Bergères in Paris) and which a Karno company brought, again with Chaplin in the leading role, on tour to Chicago, New York, and San Francisco in 1911, under the title *A Night in an English Music Hall.* Chaplin went on to memorialize that music-hall character in many of his own films, including *The Rounders* (1914), *A Night Out*, (1915), and the quintessential drunk film *One A.M.* (1916), in which Chaplin's intoxication transforms his entire house into one huge obstacle course.[10]

Another performer who capitalized on the incongruity of drunken numbness mixed with unexpected agility was the magician Cardini. He relied less on comic business than on a surprising display of coordination, juxtaposed to the image of intoxication. The same age as Astaire, by 1927 Cardini, *né* Richard Valentine Pitchford in Wales, had developed his persona as an upper-class, inebriated London clubman, whose "hallucinations" of recalcitrant objects continually befuddled him.

> "Paging Mr. Cardini! Paging Mr. Cardini!" A spotlight picked up the slightly tipsy, monocled Britisher as he walked unsteadily from the wings reading a newspaper. The page took the paper and used it to catch the fans of cards that began appearing at Cardini's gloved fingertips. Obviously annoyed, he threw aside one perfectly formed fan after another. The page took his cape, cane, top hat, and gloves. Cardini steadied his hand, and after considerable effort fitted a cigarette into the holder he gripped between his teeth. The cigarette disappeared and reappeared several times to his distress. He finally lighted the cigarette with a match from nowhere. Then a sudden blast of fire above his head startled him. The red flower in his buttonhole whirled dizzily. The white silk handkerchief he tried to knot untied itself. Billiard balls appeared between his fingers; they changed colors and multiplied.
>
> Lighted cigarettes plagued him. Sometimes he was so astonished when one appeared that the monocle dropped from his widened eye. Then a

> lighted cigar materialized from thin air. He puffed on it contentedly as the page brought him his cape, cane, hat, and gloves. As he strolled toward the wings, he tossed away the cigar—and two more cigarettes. Before he walked off, a large, lighted meerschaum pipe startled him by its sudden appearance. Smoking this, he left the stage.[11]

Cardini's act ran at the Palace Theater on Broadway in 1927, and during the 1920s and 1930s he played extended runs in London at the Palladium Theater.[12]

Despite this theatrical heritage of an image of the inebriate as comically inept or uncannily dexterous, it is the darker, more tragic psychological image of the drunk and drinking—in fact, of life in general—that pervades the films of the 1940s. Robert Sklar notes in *Movie-Made America* that with the onset of World War II most American films—not only the classic *film noir* but even the "escape" comedies—had a gloomy, claustrophobic look.[13] The films of the 1940s temper the often comic (though also sometimes moralizing) message drinking conveyed in earlier films with a bleaker note. Compare *The Thin Man* (1931), for instance, with its continual, endearing references to and portrayals of liquor and drunkenness, with *The Lost Weekend* (1945), the exemplary film tragedy on alcoholism. The bars and clubs in *Holiday Inn*, *The Sky's the Limit*, and *Blue Skies* are as ubiquitous as those in the Astaire-Rogers films of the 1930s. But in Astaire's earlier films the drinking is never foregrounded—through dance—nor shown as problematic, as it is in the later movies.

All three of the Astaire films with drunk dances are set in environments where drinking is taken for granted. Yet, within these arenas, there are differences in the role alcohol plays. In the essay "On Alcohol and the Mystique of Media Effects," Andrew Tudor draws distinctions between four modes of portraying drink in movies and on television: *routinized background*, in which drinking is a normal feature of the social world of the narrative, taken as a matter of course and not in any way emphasized, a format in which norms of acceptable drinking behavior are presented, learned, and legitimized by the audience; *routinized foreground (nonproblematic)*, in which drinking is emphasized but without appearing to cause problems for the characters, at times even seeming positive (for example, advertisements for liquor on TV, *The Thin Man*); *routinized foreground (semiproblematic)*, in which drinking and alcoholism may be treated as problems, but the specific plight of alcoholism is not the central theme, in which different patterns of drunkenness are presented; finally, *exceptional foreground*, in which alcoholism is treated as a serious dilemma, and typification of ideas about alcoholism and alcoholics is created.[14] Using Tudor's classification, we can differentiate between the ways in

which Astaire's drunk dances function to support varying social messages in the three films.

In *Holiday Inn*, Fred Astaire plays a nightclub performer, Ted Hanover, whose milieu always includes the social drinking of the sophisticated club set. One of his partners, Jim Hardy (Bing Crosby), decides to give up the performing rat race and take up farming. Their third partner, Lila Dixon (Virginia Dale), Hardy's fiancée, reneges on the retirement plan and remains with Hanover, both professionally and romantically. Crosby discovers that farming is even more taxing than crooning, has a nervous

Fred Astaire in Irving Berlin's *Holiday Inn*, Paramount Pictures, Inc. (Photo Courtesy of Wisconsin State Historical Society Film Archives.)

To view this image, please refer to the print version of this book

breakdown, and then decides to open his Connecticut farm as a club open only on holidays, a rural but still sophisticated retreat for urbanites. Linda Mason (Marjorie Reynolds, sung by Martha Mears), a shop clerk, seems to be the only person who auditions for Hardy and, once they sing "White Christmas" together, not only does she get the job, but they fall in love. Meanwhile, Lila leaves Ted for a rich Texan. Ted arrives at Holiday Inn on New Year's Eve roaring drunk, dances a two-minute, totally disoriented jitterbug with Linda—which the guests at the Inn take to be a choreographed, comic dance number—and then promptly passes out. The rest of the film concerns his efforts to relocate his mysterious dancing partner, whom he was too drunk to remember; Jim Hardy's dissembling strategies to keep Linda for himself; and Ted's own tricks, once he finds Linda, calculated to win her away from Jim.

In *The Sky's the Limit*, the setting is also the nightclub world, in which drinking is part of the general background, erupting into dance only when the hero has been rejected by the heroine (although in *Holiday Inn*, Jim Hardy is arguably the hero). *The Sky's the Limit* differs from *Holiday Inn* in that, though the latter film makes reference to World War II with its patriotic celebration of the holidays and its political montage in the Fourth of July number, the movie is basically a comic revue with a sentimental plot threading through it, whereas the former, though it has its comic moments, has dark undertones throughout. In *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of America Drawn from the Films of the 40's*, Barbara Deming sets up several categories of the films that seem to project on screen the predicaments of the collective American psyche in the war and postwar years. *The Sky's the Limit* falls into two of Deming's categories: the war hero, tough, lonely, and cynical, whose ambiguous motives and uncertain actions, stemming from a crisis of faith, form the narrative suspense of the film; and the Hollywood Ariadne, the plot in which the good woman must rescue the embittered hero from his bleak fate, viz., confronting himself in the hell of living. In the latter plot, the hero is the rolling stone, the wolf, but the heroine is the aggressor, the one who proposes marriage though she originally rebuffed his advances, the one who guides him safely home.[15]

In *The Sky's the Limit*, Joan Leslie plays a photographer, Joan Manion, whom Fred Astaire, as Fred Atwell, alias Fred Burton, sees in a bar and tries to woo. He's a Flying Tiger who's slipped away from a hero's tour for some fun in New York; she's a society magazine photographer who tries to convince her publisher to let her do serious work as a war correspondent. At first Fred chases Joan, to her annoyance, but gradually they fall in love. He hides his real identity from her and she, thinking him a ne'er-do-well, proposes marriage and then tries to push him into getting a decent job. After he ruins an important job interview, she rejects him, he makes a tour of several bars and, in drunken desperation, he finally breaks into a dance of destruction, tapping violently atop the bar and smashing the glasses and

mirrors. A tour de force of nihilism, ultimately the dance cathartically reveals Fred's assertion of self-control — confirmed when Joan shows up just as he leaves for his tour of duty. Yet the film ends ambiguously, leaving one to wonder whether Fred will return from that tour.

In *Blue Skies,* the drinking takes the form of a much more problematic routinized background, and, through metaphor, emerges as an exceptional foreground. Astaire plays a revue performer, Jed Potter, who tries to seduce a woman in the chorus line, Mary O'Dare (Joan Caulfield). But she falls in love with Jed's old vaudeville partner, Johnny Adams (Bing Crosby), who now has a habit of buying and selling bars, at which he sings. As Mary and Johnny's marriage teeters through compulsive business transactions, symbolizing Crosby's instability — an unmistakable transformation of the pattern of alcoholism — Jed still tries to win her love. Eventually Mary leaves Johnny, returns to show business as Jed's partner, and even makes plans to marry Jed. But they run into Johnny on tour and Mary realizes she still loves him. Jed begins to drink heavily. The drunk dance in this film, however, suppresses drunken behavior while simultaneously communicating internal sensations of intoxication. Here Jed must perform in a production number as though perfectly sober, though the previous scene shows he cannot walk a straight line. As he dances on a high bridge, Jed becomes dizzy and falls, never to dance again. He becomes a radio announcer, Johnny redeems himself with war work, and, in the end, Jed's nostalgic retelling of the story as a retrospective of Irving Berlin songs broadcast over the radio brings Mary back to be reunited with Johnny.

In all three films Astaire's character becomes drunk when rejected by a woman. But both the meaning of the drunken act and its consequences vary from film to film. In *Holiday Inn* two views are given of Ted's intoxication, adding up to an ambivalent view projected by the film itself. The guests at the Inn, and Linda as well, see the stumbling drunk as comic, putting on an act, whereas Jim, and Danny Reed, Ted's manager, know this behavior is not only real, but self-destructive. Yet beyond a hangover the next morning, and the undertone of tragic romantic loss, the drunkenness has no lasting repercussions in a negative sense. It even has positive connotations, for during it Ted has found the perfect dancing partner to replace the woman whose loss brought on the drinking jag. Drunkenness is almost a state of grace, of transformation, like Cinderella's when she meets the prince at the ball. Perhaps without experiencing this liminal state[16] Ted would not have made the transition between rejection by Lila and the resumption of work. And in his state of sublime semiconsciousness he improvises a prodigious dance. He loses Linda in the end, but not because of his drinking.

In *The Sky's the Limit,* the drunk dance again begins as angry, frustrated, even suicidal behavior. Astaire's helplessness is dramatized when the glass he is holding seems to jump from his hand and smash itself,

inaugurating a ripple of violence that permeates the dancing and ends in an apotheosis of destruction. Yet this episode gets the anger out of Fred's system in an ultimately nondestructive way. After this purging the hero can flip his hat on his head and walk out the door with perfect coordination. In the end he "gets his girl." Yet, as I have noted, this new strength and romantic triumph is equivocal, subverted by a melancholy suspicion that the hero may never return, and that the control he regained was a grim setting of his jaw to meet his fate.

In *Blue Skies*, as in *Holiday Inn*, Jed is doomed to be rejected by the woman he loves. But here the drunken dance number is even more sinister than in the two earlier films. It is almost a reversal of the drunk dance in *Holiday Inn*, for again there are spectators, but here they must not know that the character is drunk. Only the heroine knows the dangerous truth, and knows her role in Jed's condition. And Jed is able to fake perfect coordination until the very end of the "Heat Wave" number, when his drunken state causes a disaster. It injures Jed, preventing him from working as a dancer again, but at the same time it provides the means—his radio broadcasting job—for finally reuniting his friends.

The three drunk dances are striking in that each one is a palpable expression of certain images and qualities of intoxication, yet all three are different from each other. The differences come, not only from the various narrative functions the dances play, but, primarily, from the choreography. In each case Astaire makes an entire dance out of one or two salient qualities.

The duet in *Holiday Inn* is only two minutes long, but it is a wonderfully detailed, complex study in disorientation and balance. It is necessary, for the plot's sake, that this dance be a duet, for Ted Hanover can only dance with a partner, and also the dance begins as a social dance rather than as a performance. But this narrative requirement adds a useful formal element, since we already have seen a duet, between Ted and Lila, with which to compare and contrast the New Year's Eve dance. "You're Easy to Dance With," which Linda had seen Ted dance with Lila in the New York City nightclub on Christmas Eve, is the song to whose reprise the drunk dance is performed. But the later version with Ted and Linda is a total inversion of the earlier number. The first duet is a straightforward, simple dance that emphasizes verticality of the body and unison movement between partners. On New Year's Eve, from the moment Ted and Linda bump into each other and fall into each other's arms, the dance is structured like a series of accidents, embellished with fortuitous meetings. The music is a fast 4/4 rhythm, repeating two melodic phrases in a dogged ABAB pattern. The dance, however, changes constantly, in typical Astaire fashion. It begins in a standard closed partnering position. Astaire does a little scramble and slide with his feet, repeats it, and he and Reynolds step around in a small circle. They step-hop backward and forward, do a buck and wing, then open up to

walk in a circle, but Astaire trips and switches directions. Regaining his balance momentarily, he ends up on tiptoe and circumnavigates, bewildered, as Reynolds orbits him, always just behind him. Astaire staggers about on the outside edges of his curled feet. The two locate each other and, resuming the jitterbug format, slide out from each other's arms to lean at arm's length—but Astaire keeps on leaning and falls down onto an onlooker, who tilts him back upright. After a quick pivot back and forth, Astaire gives Reynolds a fast turn, but her arms become tangled and he neglects to let go of them. As he walks away he unwittingly drags her, arms still tangled, on his back. Finally, the two unsnarl themselves, resume the standard partnering position, and, after turning in large circles, Astaire collapses forward and falls to the floor, exactly in time with the music.

The dance is everything a dance should not be; no one could be less "easy to dance with" than the drunken Ted Hanover/Fred Astaire. And yet, in its utter recalcitrance, the dance becomes a kind of gem of impossibility. The same actions that keep threatening to disintegrate into total chaos actually keep time perfectly with the music, changing movement motifs with every musical vamp. It is as if the character were willfully rejecting that side of him that is "easy to dance with," finding it useless emotionally and boring choreographically; being drunk frees Ted to improvise wildly, cracking open the jitterbug form and adding ornate embellishments flowing from his lack of balance. *Holiday Inn*'s drunk dance presents alcoholism as an only partly bitter anodyne, and Ted's disequilibrium as a blissful state of being—out of synch yet full of grace.

In *The Sky's the Limit* the drunk dance is a solo, as befits the lonely, "tough guy" character Astaire plays. Fred's frustration at realizing he's fallen in love with his conquest, Joan, and his anger at being rejected by her, spur him into an acrimonious, violent intoxication. The violence seems almost unconscious, externally motivated. The dance number begins when Astaire sets down a glass so hard that it breaks. Startled by the mutiny of the object, Astaire breaks into song, in the form of the archetypical confession to the bartender, "I've got a little story you ought to know. . . ." About four minutes long, the number plays itself out melodically in an ABAB pattern.

The dance begins with a ballet of hand gestures, a motif that continues throughout, almost as if Astaire's hands, like the whiskey glass, were separate objects with wills of their own. At first the hands play out a legible pantomime accompaniment to the lyrics. Astaire beckons the bartender, motions him to "set 'em up, Joe," points and rests his head on his fist in a gesture connoting frustration. In another bar, on the second stanza of the song, he motions to "put another nickel in the machine," flips out a coin, wags his finger to show that telling the details of his problematic romance is "not in a gentleman's code," and, this time, rests his head on his open hand, indicating resignation. On the B stanza, in a third bar—which is, in fact, the same bar where the character Fred had met Joan—Astaire stands with

one hand in his pocket and the other holding a drink. He rocks back and forth — dramatizing the "tipsiness" of inebriation — and points and gesticulates volubly with the hand that holds the glass. Suddenly he throws down the glass, backs up startled — more mutiny! — and, shaking off the liquor and smoothing his hair, breaks into a total-body dance.

He beats out a violent tattoo with his feet, throws down his hat, and walks over to a pillar. Now the music switches into a reprise of "My Shining Hour," the song Joan had sung at the bar, and Astaire smoothly moves arms and body into a partnering position, reliving the dance with Leslie. But then the music changes again, and here the dance moves down the body, from hands and arms into feet and legs. Astaire jumps up on the bar, taps and slides first to the right end, then all the way to the left end. He comes back down the length of the bar whirling. It is an episode of pleased discovery, as if the storm had subsided in the turning and as if his body were surprising him now not with mutiny but with agility. He jumps down from the bar and violence erupts again: He kicks at the glasses on a table, smashing them, but, unsatiated, glances around for another target.

The music (still on a long B section) speeds up as Astaire jumps neatly on a stool, then the bar, drums out a barrage of taps in place and turns quickly with legs held close together in a parallel pirouette. His legs cling together, and their separation after each turn is like an explosive afterthought. He looks around him more and more urgently as he turns and, spying the three-section glass display in front of the mirrors, he aims three well-placed kicks in precise rhythm, jumps down to the floor, and throws the barstool at the mirror.

As the music returns to the conclusive A theme, Astaire smooths his hair (as he had at the beginning of the dance), collapses onto a barstool, and, as the bartender enters, sings a last, conciliatory stanza, resuming the gestural pantomime, pulling out his money, pointing, and making appeasing gestures. With his foot he flips his hat on his head and leaves the room jauntily, his left hand in his pocket as he opens the door, just as it had been when he broke that first glass. After a frenzy of activity and destruction, the number has left him cool, in control.

Besides the hand gestures, a number of distinct movement motifs thread through "One for My Baby," unifying the dance even while it progresses linearly toward mayhem. Even the motif of attack itself is stylized and streamlined, accelerating with well-timed bursts and accenting the storminess with frozen poses. At the same time that Astaire displays control and finesse — stopping his slide down the bar on a proverbial dime; stepping in complex rhythms; jumping up on the bar and back down to the floor with accuracy — this projection of control is constantly undermined with formulaic signals of drunkenness. These begin with the unsteady, rocking position at the beginning of the song, continue with leaning postures and the wavering path that lead Astaire to the pillar (where he leans again), and

end with his shock of unrecognition when he peers into the mirror and sees himself, like a surprising hallucination. All these themes, added to the explosive energy and movements, and the outbursts of destructive violence, correlate inebriation, not only with loss of balance, but also with belligerence, drastic shifts of mood, and unpredictable fits of destruction.

As I noted above, in *Blue Skies* there is another ambiguous message conveyed about drunkenness. The choreography in "Heat Wave" makes legible two distinct images of intoxication. One is shown by negation, a suppressed image of appearances: Jed must appear sober, and so Astaire's stance in most of the number is alert, tense, cheerful, and agile. The audience of the film—though not of the revue in the film—knows this stance is a false one and makes the necessary logical transformations. The qualities of drunkenness conveyed by their suppression here, then, are carelessness, inattention, relaxation (or lethargy), unhappiness, and clumsiness. In fact, the previous scene has shown some of these qualities to be true of Jed. But far more striking in "Heat Wave" is the second, internal sensation that the choreography evokes. In its very structure—its windings and circlings, and its use of spatial levels—the dancing of Astaire, Olga San Juan, and a large corps creates a dizzying feeling that makes Astaire's ultimate plunge seem inexorable.

The "Heat Wave" number is staged as a tropical revue. The women are dressed in halter tops and full skirts, while Astaire wears a sailor's suit, and the rest of the men are dressed in islander's costumes. The song is a mambo, with a 4/4 beat in an ABA pattern. The narrative plot of the dance is quite simple: Astaire sees San Juan, flirts with her, and follows her up to the top of the bridge, where the fall takes place. But this progression from one side of the set to the other, then up the stairs, happens in the most roundabout, stylized way, full of hesitations, reversals, turns, and backings-up, as if the whole number were a giant breakaway mambo step. At first Astaire is seated on a platform. His glance is caught by San Juan, who is singing and swaying her hips, atop a bar. He starts up into a lunge. The intense articulation of levels in space, leading logically to the proscenium-high bridge, has started.

Astaire does a few tight turns, smoking a cigarette and advancing toward San Juan. The rising sexual tension mirrors the boiling heat described in the song. Astaire lifts San Juan down from the bar, the music changes to a suspenseful B motif, and the two move out into a clearing, where the group awaits them in the background. This moving into the clearing is a formalized stepping back and forth. San Juan moves first; Astaire follows, his back to her, his arms crossed. She moves forward, then back, a beckoning with her entire body; he stamps out his cigarette and shadows her, catlike. They finally face each other and continue the back-and-forth stepping, accentuating the held note at the end of each measure with a pause and a quick, distinct gesture—a different gesture for every

measure. The lyrics stop, suggesting the dwindling away of conversation when serious lovemaking begins, and the music changes to an instrumental version of the A motif, and speeds up systematically over the next twenty bars. Astaire puts his arm around San Juan's waist, drops her and catches her (the same movement will be repeated twice on the top of the bridge), and both plunge into a full-scale mambo, stepping, swinging their hips, striking a side-by-side position, and even decorating their arm gestures with some Continental obliques. When the B motif returns to heighten the intensity, they break away from each other, hesitating, then whirling and each kicking a leg up behind them.

San Juan whirls to her knees, then leaves, while Astaire begins a fast, virtuosic tap solo to a jazzed-up variation on the A theme. His legs turn in and out, his hands flutter, held low; he executes a number of turns, tracing a semicircle away from the staircase, and then comes forward. He stamps, salutes, "trucks" for half a measure, wings, and ends the flashy two-minute catalog of stunts with a triumphant grin, his hands clenched, his body forming a proud stride.

Now a musical bridge starts the corps of dancers whirling. It is as if the solo had momentarily deflected the relentless vortex heading Astaire up on the bridge, to destruction. Astaire and San Juan resume their flirtatious back-and-forth pattern to the A music motif, but this time their pace is more urgent, and the whirling, jumping dancers around them have become a kind of obstacle course for their staccato chase. Reaching the staircase, both walk up it in a patterned, almost ceremonious design. Both revolve once to the right, step, toss their heads back and extend an arm, then run up a few stairs; next each revolves to the outside, then takes a step, tosses the head back, extends the arm, runs up more stairs. When they reach the top, they face one another and turn once again.

Once on the bridge — still to the A theme — Astaire turns his partner, drops her into one arm, obviously awkwardly (the first hint he gives of drunkenness or lost control), both whirl and then reverse direction. He drops her to one arm again, this time more slowly and carefully. Now San Juan stands still while Astaire spins around her on a circular path. But as we see his orbit widening we can predict his fall a split second before he dramatically puts his hand to his head, topples . . . and the orchestra concludes the final bar of music.

So many other parts of the film presage and buttress both the formal and substantive qualities of the "Heat Wave" number that one is tempted to read the whole movie as an antialcohol morality story. The nostalgic format makes a sentimental frame for a plot in which the alcoholic loses the girl, while the man who sublimates his alcoholism by buying and selling bars wins her. And true love triumphs over all obstacles, in the form of a solid, homey marriage. In formal terms the whirling that undoes Jed is the answer to the whirling staircase dance that begins the film, in the number "A Pretty

Girl Is Like a Melody," when Jed begins to court Mary. In terms of the social message, alcohol pervades each scene. Besides Johnny's string of clubs, there are endless mentions of drink, portrayals of Prohibition days, a song about the pleasures (chiefly alcoholic) of "C-U-B-A," Astaire miming a young man who enters a saloon and exits drunk in "Song and Dance Man," and Billy DeWolfe's Mrs. Murgatroyd act, in which he plays a matron who gets inebriated on her anniversary and complains about her marriage to her friend. (This small act would be interesting to analyze as a comic inversion of the sentimental plot of the film itself.) But, after the "Heat Wave" number, the glamor and comedy of the references to alcohol and inebriation are tinged with tragic consequence.

In these three drunk dances, as in most of his choreography, Fred Astaire manifests not only his choreographic inventiveness in moving a dance forward by constructing seemingly endless variations, rather than simply repeating movement motifs; he also plays with the formal incongruities of making a dance about physical difficulties that would ordinarily preclude virtuosic dancing.[17] The satisfaction in watching these dances stems directly from that incongruity, from watching Astaire the dancer triumph ingeniously over every hurdle Astaire the choreographer has contrived. The illusion of the loss of agility in fact, as we have seen, requires a great deal of skill. Yet it is a sly, never overt virtuosity we see in the drunk dances, a coup de théâtre of near misses and surprising resolutions.

22

The Men at John Allen's Dance House

In order to understand how the experiences of the men at Allen's dance house contributed to the dancing, it is relevant to look at the role of the dance house in the lives of those men. Therefore in this chapter we will consider the men other than Allen who attended the event—the customers, employees, and observers of various kinds.

The Customers: Seamen

John Allen's was known as a "sailor dance-house,"[1] a "sailor dive."[2] He must have opened the dance house especially to cater to seamen, for in the 1840s and 1850s New York port was at its height, crowded with clipper ships unloading their crews and cargoes; with markets, hotels, and businesses catering to the needs of the shipowner—chandlers, sailmakers, clerks, and so on; and with those who catered to, or rather exploited, the needs of the sailor ashore.

John H. Warren, Jr., was a detective who surveyed various types of houses of prostitution in *Thirty Years' Battle with Crime*. He describes the Water Street dance houses as "the lowest, if not the very lowest, link of the Upas of lewdness." Warren explains succinctly why the dance house thrived:

> It seems to have been invented originally by some fiend to catch the sailor on his return from a voyage. The first thing "Jack" wants when he gets on shore is a glass of grog, a female companion, and then a dance; and when all these are in his possession there is no happier creature alive, until the last cent goes into the till of the "lubber" who robs him, and then kicks him into the street. Armed with these, he will spend in a single week, the earnings of a year, and do it with a lavish generosity known to no other spendthrift.[3]

This essay was part of a collective research project written when I was a graduate student at New York University's Graduate Drama Department, for a course on nineteenth-century popular dancing taught by Gretchen Schneider. The other sections of the project were written by Ginnine Cocuzza and Sally R. Sommer; they concerned other aspects of the dance house run by John Allen, dubbed by journalists "the wickedest man in New York."

The changes industrialization had brought to shipping made it a growing business that by midnineteenth century paralleled the factory system. Instead of small vessels owned singly or in small fleets by families, ships were larger, parts of fleets that were owned by corporations, and carried heavier cargoes and bigger, unskilled crews. The hierarchy of authority on board, always observed when crises demanded discipline, crystalized into impersonal, stratified social systems. Though ships traveled faster, they went to places that were further away, and therefore voyages were longer. This created a new development in the lives of sailors that had a double effect: they were torn from sustained participation in communities on shore; and they became participants in new, cramped, transient communities—all male, without privacy but without conditions for close personal relationships, highly regimented in terms of time and space, and inescapable for the duration of the voyage. But these communities dissolved when the voyage ended, leaving the sailor once again without home, family, or community ties.

The nineteenth-century sailor was an outsider to normal American society. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., describes in *Two Years Before the Mast* the harsh authoritarian organization of a ship in the 1830s, likening the status of a sailor to that of a prisoner or a slave. Dana argues that the sailor's special code of dress sets him outside the pale of the community, though he reports from the vantage point of a landsman who perceives himself as the outsider:

> A sailor has a peculiar cut to his clothes, and a way of wearing them which a green hand can never get. The trousers, tight round the hips, and thence hanging long and loose round the feet, a superabundance of checked shirt, a low-crowned, well-varnished black hat, worn on the back of the head, with half a fathom of black ribbon hanging over the left eye, and a slip-tie to the black silk neckerchief, with sundry other minutiae, are signs, the want of which betrays the beginner at once. Besides the points in my dress which were out of the way, doubtless my complexion and hands were quite enough to distinguish me from the regular *salt*, who, with a sunburnt cheek, wide step, and rolling gait, swings his bronzed and toughened hands athwartships, half opened, as though just ready to grasp a rope.[4]

Sailors who jumped ship in one port, or who were unemployed, would soon find work—either voluntarily or through the ruses of a crimp*—on another vessel, perhaps one belonging to another country. There were more jobs than men. In the United States, the frontier could easily absorb the more industrious and ingenious of adventurers. The conditions on board ship would not have attracted any but those who were forced, by economic or social circumstances, to live there. And those who spent their lives on the dirty, crowded ships would be further demoralized,

* A crimp was a procurer of seamen, either by swindle or by force.

if not literally sickened, by the quarters. Dr. Heber Smith, writing on "Sailors as Propagators of Disease," complains that "our statute books define the limits of space which shall be allowed immigrants, but I am not aware that any such provision has ever been made for our sailors."[5] Smith quotes from a report describing living quarters in the forecastles of several American ships.

> "Steamship *Helvetia*, 3,327 tons. Lower forecastle twenty-seven feet from stem to bulkhead; twenty-four feet in width at bulkhead; seven and a half feet between decks. Light and air admitted by a hatch six by four feet, and two air ports, each nine inches in diameter, and which are closed at sea, occupied by twenty-eight men in two watches. Very dark; wet from leaky decks; air close and offensive. . . ."
>
> "Steamship *City of Antwerp*, 1,625 tons. Upper forecastle. Sailors' quarters on the port side, approached by a narrow and circuitous passage by stooping under a portion of the anchor machinery. Light and air admitted by passage of entrance; a four-inch stove-pipe hole, and five air-ports, open only in smooth weather; occupied by twenty-two men in two watches. Dark and damp; air close and offensive; berths, bulkheads, and deck, in a dirty condition. The firemen's quarters, on the starboard side, are similar to those of the seamen on the port side, but exposed to the further annoyance and offense of proximity to the passengers' water-closets."
>
> "Ship *Constantine*, 1,280 tons. Lower forecastles for starboard and port watches; twenty-three feet from stem to bulkhead; ten feet wide at bulkhead; seven feet between decks. Companion way steep and difficult. Light and air admitted by companion hatch, thirty inches square, and two air-ports closed at sea. Ten berths in two tiers. Dark and damp; air close, and charged with ammoniacal odors. Bulkheads and berths black for want of scrubbing. Deck slippery with filth. . . ."
>
> ". . . In the hundreds of total wrecks and disappearances occurring annually, if the actual truth in each case were ascertained and acknowledged, it is reasonable to suppose that an alarming proportion is due to the reduction of the working power of the crew by unhealthy quarters, unreasonable overwork, and, in some cases, by maltreatment."[6]

Smith concludes that the designers of these ships and the designers of some American prisons must have been governed by a similar desire: "To see in how small a space human life could be maintained."[7]

The lack of manpower, the crews hastily recruited in each foreign port, the amazing growth and industrialization, especially with steam, of the American shipping trade, was the subject for alarm in "An Appeal to Merchants and Ship Owners on the Subject of Seaman" by Robert Bennett Forbes in Boston, in 1854. Forbes warned that

> The American flag, the boasted stars and stripes, droops in sorrow and mortification at the position in which our commerce finds itself for want of American seamen! We are on the eve of a European war, and we may,

> by the chances of commerce, be involved in it; if we should be, whence are to come the "brave Yankee Tars" to man our ships—where are they? And if we preserve our neutrality, and go on increasing our tonnage, now amounting to about four millions of tons, where are we to get the bone and muscle to manage our ships?[8]

He compared sailors to children, blaming their inability to protect themselves from abuses at work and ashore on natural deficiency, rather than on the structure of their jobs.

> I speak as an *expert* in this matter, and I maintain that good order and discipline can no more be kept up in the navy and in the merchant service, without the *power* to inflict summary punishment, than it can be in a family without submitting the children to wholesome restraint. . . .
>
> I love sailors, (when they behave themselves,) and I would, therefore, treat them with parental kindness. I would feed them well, clothe them well from the ship's chest, when, by their improvidence, they have no clothes of their own; give them good quarters at sea, and, on shore, furnish them with seamen's homes, and, in their old age, give them an asylum in snug harbors; treat them tenderly when sick at sea, and on shore give them good hospitals: and, in return for these *duties*, I would exact the strictest obedience, even if obliged to restore the *power* to use the lash in certain cases.[9]

But he did acknowledge sympathetically the low status of the seaman on shore.

> We have been too much accustomed to consider the seaman, the foremast "Jack," as a mere machine—a mass of bone and muscle, to bear all the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" without a murmur, and for the smallest pittance. The seaman may be said to have no political existence; he cannot vote because of his absence, or for the reason that when present near the polls, he may not have been there long enough to warrant the exercise of this right. His wages are smaller, considering the amount of labor and the responsibility devolving on him, than are the wages of any other class of our working population. He must be up day and night incessantly, when duty calls; and, when the Sabbath, that great boon of the landsman comes, his rest depends on the faithless winds of Heaven. He has no day, no night which he can call his own, and when he begins to feel the effect of age, (and there are not many of this class,) he often has *no home*.[10]

Forbes told how foreign sailors managed to get past the law that a certain percentage of American ships' crews must be U.S. citizens; they simply Americanized their names and, often bribing Customs house personnel, were allowed to pass. "It is fortunate that American landsmen are not made as easily!" he remarked.[11]

The easy mixture of nationalities as ships replenished their crews

at various ports around the world was troublesome to Americans who perceived the growing waves of immigrants as a threat to the country's stability and morality. With the advent of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, blacks were seen as a similar threat: to working-class people they constituted a competing labor force; to middle-class and wealthy people they were an unpredictable social force, symbolizing chaos and loss of control.

Sailor's shanties (worksongs) tell graphically about the practices of various kinds of landsharks who capitalized on the shortage of labor.

De boardin' house masters wuz off in a trice,
  A-shoutin' an' promisin' all that wuz nice;
An' one fat ol' crimp he got cotton'd to me,
  Sez he, "Yer a fool lad, ter follow the sea."

Sez he, "There's a job as is waitin' fer you,
  Wid lashin's o' liquor an' beggar-all to do;"
Sez he, "What d'yer say, lad, will ye jump 'er, too?"
  Sez I, "Ye ol' bastard, I'm damned if I do."

But de best ov intentions dey niver gits far,
  After forty-two days at the door of a bar,
I tossed off me liquor an' what d'yer think?
  Why the lousy ol' bastard 'ad drugs in me drink.

Now, the next I remembers I woke in de morn,
  On a three-skys'l yarder bound south round Cape Horn;
Wid an' ol' suit of oilskins an' three pairs o' sox,
  An' a bloomin' big head an' a dose of the pox.

Now all ye young sailors take a warnin' by me,
  Keep a watch on yer drinks when the liquor is free,
An' pay no attintion to runner or whore,
  Or yer head'll be thick an' yer fid'll be sore.[12]

So warns "The Liverpool Judies," a capstan shanty that probably originated in the 1840s, describing a shanghaiing out of New York. "Whiskey Johnny," a halyard shanty* that sings the praises and rues the dangers of drink, carries a similar warning.

If yiz ever go to Frisco town,
Mind ye steer clear o' Shanghai Brown.

He'll dope yer whiskey night an' morn,
An' he'll then shanghai yiz round Cape Horn.[13]

* Shanties, or worksongs, had different rhythms according to the jobs they accompanied. At the capstan, where the crew hove up anchor, a long, constant haul was needed. Halyard shanties, used for setting upper topsails, upper top gallant sails, for bending sails, and other intermittent work, required shorter hauls with hitches.

James Holley Garrison, the brother of William Lloyd Garrison, was an alcoholic who became a sailor in the 1820s. It was the only occupation that could regularly provide him with employment, shelter, and clothing, while rationing out the liquor sparingly. (In the first half of the nineteenth century, the abuse of liquor, even by women, children, and clergymen, had reached alarming proportions.) Garrison served on many ships in his nearly twenty years at sea, including one in the British navy; on most of his voyages he suffered brutal treatment, including a multiple flogging after jumping ship in Cuba. Often, after getting paid, Garrison would find himself in port intoxicated and broke. His ship would have sailed with all his belongings, but without him. Or he would have been robbed of all his money while asleep. Or he would have spent it all, "laid it out in rum, treating all that came past, untill I became once more intoxicated. So hardened had I became that nothing could make an impression on my mind."[14] Constantly disoriented by drink and by the loss of his belongings and the instability of his employment, he would ship out again. Once, while in London,

> I took board with a man by the name of Wm. Chapman, a notorious crimp, who kept a dance hall for prostitutes on the corner of Ratcliff Cross. I had about 10 dollers comeing to me when paid off, which amounted in all to 60 dollers. My clothes I valued at one hundred if not more. I was pretty cunning and they could not get me to drink. One evening his daughter with the servent girl invited me into the ball room. I drunk some beer, and wether it was drugged or not I can not say. But I became insensible and awoke in the morning on the stair case, with my pockets picked and money gorn. I accused the girls of the robbery, and they abused me shamefuly. The landlord denied me my breakfast, said I owed him five shillings, and kicked me into the street. In vain I asked for my clothes, that I might sell some of them to pay him, and get something to eat for my self. But he turned a deaf ear to all my entreaties, and I was left to perish with hunger in the streets.[15]

Of the Water Street area in New York, the *Police Gazette* declared:

> Many of the houses here and the population, as well, subsist for one purpose alone, and that is to prey upon unwary Jack ashore. . . .
>
> Most of these places are nothing less than crimps where sailors are drugged and not only robbed, but shanghaied while still insensible. For years these desperadoes from Water Street have fastened on seamen as quickly as they left their ships and then through a system of advanced wages and exorbitant charges and "drinks for the house" have placed their dupes in debt. Once this fleecing was accomplished they were hustled on board some outbound ship while still intoxicated. Captains often had no other resource when it came time to make up their crews but to deal with these landsharks. Over one thousand girls between twelve and eighteen years of age were found in these places.[16]

In *New York by Gaslight*, George Foster reported that

> . . . the dance-house is a favorite resort with sailors ashore, who almost invariably, with that improvidence which marks their character, come with all the money they possess in the world in their pockets, and of course are generally robbed by their partners, whose profession combines theft with something a great deal more infamous. Not unfrequently worse tricks than mere robbery are practised upon these good-natured and unsophisticated creatures. Being well plied with poisoned liquor, the old hag who happens to be his partner commences making the most outrageous demonstrations of love and tenderness, which end in a proposal of immediate marriage! This startling proposition jumps with the adventurous and excited temper of Jack, exactly. He takes a fresh quid, splices the main-brace, and a magistrate (sometimes a *real* one!) appears, who performs the ceremony and poor Jack is by the enlightened laws of New York the legal husband, protector and defender of a miserable, rum and disease-eaten harridan. The next morning, with the fumes of the liquor dissipated but its sickening poison remaining, he slowly recalls the history of the night and finds that he has, as usual, made a "—fool of himself." But he hasn't yet begun to be aware of the extent of his folly: for when his vessel is ready to go to sea, and the poor husband, half dead with the wifely hardships he has endured on land, looks forward with joy to the moment when he shall find himself at the belaying-pin or yard with no drunken wife at his elbow—lo! comes a warrant summoning him to satisfy the law that he will either stay on shore or give security for the maintenance of his wife and family, under penalty of a prosecution for abandonment! Of course, he knows nothing how to act; and it depends entirely upon the lawyer or the magistrate into whose hands he may fall whether he is let off by giving an order on his owners for the whole or only half of his next three years' wages. Used up, probably diseased, and completely chapfallen, Jack resumes his station before the mast, and sees his native land sink under the blue wave with a fervent hope that the next solid place he exchanges for the deck of his vessel, will be the bottom of the sea.[17]

The sailor in port was a highly recognizable outsider, a potential source of danger to middle-class society. He had no home or family to stay with; his home was at sea and his community was highly heterogeneous. His clothing, stance, and language—part slang, part technical, part traditional—marked him off as distinctive from landspeople. In the course of his voyage, he would have experienced adventures and danger, as well as tedium and cruelty that would be incredible to others. But he would have few resources—though the dance floor might serve as one possible means—to express his experiences. He would have made contact with foreign cultures radically different than his own—with disparate political, economic, and social codes. Nevertheless, for two to four years he had lived in a confined, isolated group with its own special codes of behavior; he had

worked and lived closely with men of other national, racial, and religious backgrounds.

On shore, the sailor was either unemployed or on holiday, in either case a person who had suddenly been released from the constraints of an organized, authoritarian life. He was in a liminal state;[18] his sense of time, of balance, of space was altered. Marginal to polite society, he had amassed an enormous repertoire of behavior and now had the freedom and company with which to test it. He had his collected pay to spend, and probably was as unfamiliar with the value of a dollar as he was with the currency of the European, South American, African, or Asian ports he had visited or lived in. No wonder an economic system developed in the ports specifically to welcome the seaman, provide social space for him at the edge of the city, take his money, and sell his labor power when his money had run out.

> Oh, ships may come and ships may go, as long as the seas do roll,
> Each sailor lad, likewise his dad, he loves that flowing bowl.
> A lass ashore, he does adore, one that is plump and round.
> But when his money's all gone it's the same old song, "Get up
> Jack! John, sit down!"
>
> When Jack gets in, it's then he'll steer for some old boarding house.
> They'll welcome him with rum and gin and feed him a pork souse.
> He'll lend and spend and not offend till he lies drunk on the ground.
> When your money's gone, it's the same old song, "Get up Jack!
> John, sit down!"[19]

Sexual energy was another currency the sailor had to spend. But the sexual life of the transient sailor was inextricably bound up with the entire exploitative economic system that could cater to his needs for food, drink, shelter, companionship, and sex, and rob him at the same time.

> Shipmates, if you'll listen to me,
> I'll sing you a song
> Of things that lately happened
> When I come home from Hong Kong.
> To me way, you Santy, my dear Anny.
> Oh, you New York Gals, can't you dance the Polka?
>
> As I walked down from off the docks,
> A fair maid I did meet.
> She asked me for to see her home;
> She lived on Bleecker Street.
>
> "If you will take me to my house,
> If you will be so sweet,
> I'll give you something good to drink,
> And something nice to eat."

When we got down to Bleecker Street,
We stopped at 44.
Her 'mother' and her 'sisters'
Were a-standing in the door.

They gave me wine,
It tasted fine and went right to my head,
And then they peeled my clothes off me
And put me right to bed.

When I awoke next morning,
It was early in the dawn.
My clothes and all my money
And my lady friends were gone.

Now, I don't mind the money,
As some other sailors might.
But I wish someone would tell me
If I had some fun last night.[20]

The sailor's "sea legs," unsteady on land, symbolized his tenuous balance in American society. "After a Long Cruise (Salts Ashore)," an 1857 painting by John Carlin, shows three sailors creating havoc as they try to walk down a waterfront street; they hang onto each other, but still manage to knock down a vendor's tray of fruit, and one grabs a well-dressed woman. A bystander laughs at them; another eyes them apprehensively. The sailor literally brought to the dance floor this instability as well as a need for release—release from physical confinement and from the political and social hierarchy of the ship. Drinking between dances would intensify his condition, lowering inhibitions and physical competence at the same time.

To a WASP ruling class, concerned with taming chaos, organizing and managing space and time to fit the needs of growing industrial America, the sailor ashore was unpredictable, rough, untamed. He might be black, or Irish, Chinese, East Indian, South American, or Polynesian. He might be Catholic or without religion altogether. (Certainly, as the predominance of black spirituals and Irish tunes among shanties and forecastle songs shows, there was an internationalist experience of exchanging culture.) And he was a potential propagator of disease—smallpox, scurvy, venereal disease, foreign fevers—and strange, heathen customs.

Frederick Pease Harlow, a white sailor from New England in the early 1870s, describes his disorientation on debarking in Melbourne, Australia. "While walking up the dock everything looked bright overhead, because there were no heavy yards and hemp rigging above. . . . I began to stumble."[21] Harlow brings this sense of dizzying displacement, this discomfort with land life, with him to Mother Shilling's dance hall.

Mother Shilling was very anxious to have Kitty teach me to dance and on learning that I was a novice, she took both my hands and in her winning way urged me to permit her to show me.

Her touch was magnetic and holding her small, plump hands in my horny, calloused flippers, I never held a main brace with a firmer grip; in fact, I wanted to bowse away and take a turn and belay. She smiled as I squeezed her hands and with a nod of her head towards the floor (for she couldn't point with her hands), her gentle pleadings found me a willing lad.

"Really, you'll find the flawh not hawful bad," said she, tugging away till at last she succeeded, and bidding me put my arm around her she proceeded to show me the waltz step.

Counting one-two-three, first forward, then backward, with a bend of the knee, etc., I was surprised to find how easy I was getting along. Then, at the turn, this little dame threw herself into my arms—"head on." Another squeeze and my feet got mixed up with hers and we started all over again. Under her guidance with a whirl first to starboard and then to port—never complaining when I occasionally hit her foot as I misstayed, coming into the wind, she complimented me at almost every whirl.

It is surprising how hard one works when trying to learn and although I was loath to release my hold around her waist, a sense of politeness told me it was time to give her a rest for we both were perspiring freely. Taking her hand, which she permitted me to hold, I led her back to the table where Dave and Julia both complimented me at my showing.

Whether it was the beer or my confidence in Kitty's teaching, I was so elated, as I stood wiping the perspiration from my forehead, that I felt obliged to order another round of sheoak. In fact, I was willing to buy anything and drawing my chair close to Kitty, I noticed that Julia was sitting on Dave's lap. I saw no reason why Kitty shouldn't do the same with me and putting my arm around her she offered no resistance and so we sat sipping beer, while every remark seemed awfully humorous.

. . . By this time my head was whirling faster than my feet and consequently I held her tighter than I had previously done.

"Are you afryed of losing me?" she asked, laughingly looking into my eyes and I couldn't resist the desire to make a clove hitch around her waist, with my two arms, right there, when she gave a little scream and we bumped into a couple.

"I s'y! Square th' main yard, me 'earty, an' give 'er a good full!" the sailor laughingly said.

"Quite in order! A good full you have it!" I replied, wearing ship only to run foul of another couple.[22]

But, while the landsharks attended to the sailor's body, the Church competed for both body and soul. Runners from seamen's churches tried to reach the docks before the pimps and boardinghouse masters got there. At the Sailor's Mission at Melbourne, Harlow related,

> The entertainment consisted of songs, instrumental pieces, recitations and temperance speeches, winding up by passing around a Total Abstinence Pledge which our crew all signed. Alas! The next night, I am sorry to say, all hands were drunk except Falmouth and myself. The runner from the Mission evidently knew of it for he was always watching for us at the head of the dock, night after night, beseeching us not to get lu'arded into Mother Shilling's saloon as we went ashore.[23]

Banks, homes, bethels, employment exchanges, and floating churches for seamen were built on the waterfront in New York beginning in the 1820s. The vision of the American Seamen's Friend Society, for instance, was vast:

> *Resolved,* That in the opinion of the committee the shortness of the time that sailors remain at home, and their unrestrained exposure to temptation while in our ports, forbid the hope of a very general reformation among them by means of domestic operations alone.[24]

The society obviously disapproved of the mingling of races.

> Early in its history The American Seamen's Friend Society set out resolutely to the task of providing decent, safe places for seamen to stay while ashore. In 1830 plans were made for erecting a Sailors' Home in New York. . . . By 1840, the Society was operating three sailors' boarding houses, one of them exclusively for negroes.[25]

If segregation was one of the criteria for decency, then the integration of blacks, whites, and various shades of brown at John Allen's may have been one reason it was considered indecent.

The churches warned equally against drinking, dancing, the theater, and houses of ill fame. *Seamen's Narratives,* a book of several morally didactic tales published in pocketbook format by the American Tract Society in 1860, includes several injunctions against dancing. In "Tom Starboard and Jack Halyard," Tom persuades Jack to become temperate and to stay at the Sailors' Home that night, after praying at the Bethel. Jack recalls some of his past misdeeds.

> Well, when the Alert's cruise was up, and we were paid off, about a dozen of us went to lodge with old Peter Hardheart, at the sign of the Foul Anchor; and as we had plenty of money, we thought we would have a regular blow-out. So Peter got a fiddler and some other unmentionable requisites for a jig, and we had a set-to in first-rate style. Why, our great frolic at Santa Martha, when Paddy Chips the Irish carpenter danced away his watch and jacket and tarpaulin, and nearly all his toggery, you know, and next morning came scudding along the beach towards the Alert, as she lay moored near the shore, and crept on board on all-fours, like a half-drowned monkey, along the best bower, wouldn't have made a nose to it. Well, next morning I had a pretty smart touch of the horrors,

> and felt rather muddy about the head; but old Peter soon set us agoing again, and we kept it up for three days and three nights, carriage-riding and dancing and drinking and theatre-going, etc.; and we thought the world was too little for us: when all at once old Hardheart took a round turn on us with, "I'll tell you what it is, you drunken swabs, I'll not have such goings-on in my house; my house is a decent house: you must all ship; yes, ship's the word. I must have the advance; you're more than a month's wages apiece in my debt." Tom, I was sober in an instant. My conscience smote me. In three days I had squandered the wages of a three years' cruise, and had not a dollar left to take to my poor old mother in the country, whom I had intended to go to see after the frolic was over, and give all my money to.[26]

In "Conversation in a Boat," a similar exchange takes place between religious Harry and impressionable Tom.

> . . . you don't know what religion is, or how it can make a man happier than fiddles and dancing, and noise and racket; but the thing is true, although you do not understand it. You know, Tom, that I was once as mad-brained and thoughtless a fellow as ever sailed out of Shields harbor. I have tried what grog and noise and songs and fiddles can do; and now, Tom, whether you will believe me or not, I can say from experience, that these things do not go half so far towards making a man happy as religion does.[27]

"Letter to Seamen on First Coming Ashore" tells of the consequences of "THE GROGSHIP. I think THE ROAD TO RUIN would be a better title . . . THE THEATER, or, as it should be called, THE GATEWAY TO HELL . . . THE HOUSE OF ILL FAME, or, AVENUE TO THE GRAVE."

> Many go there "to kill time," as they say, when every moment is a precious talent, for which we must render a strict account to God. So very precious is time, that it is measured out to us by seconds. . . .
>
> Jack, have you ever been the victim of the smooth-tongued wanton? Have you lent a willing ear to her honeyed accents and professions of love, but found that all was false and hollow by the emptied purse, the gnawing conscience, the aching bones, the decaying constitution, and all the other painful and disgraceful consequences of your folly? And will you now venture to sail within even hailing distance of this perilous reef? Up helm and scud; with such an enemy in front, flight not only insures safety, but honor. But though you may not yet have been her victim, Jack, you well know that scores upon scores of our shipmates have, and what shocking penalties they paid. Therefore take warning from their sad experience.[28]

In the fall of 1868, the missionaries heightened their approach by taking over Allen's dance house for religious meetings. But, according to the newspaper reports, "most of those present were of the respectable classes, very few laborers or workingmen being present."[29]

The Customers: Gangsters and Workers

George Foster describes Saturday night at Pete Williams's, a dance house in Five Points which Charles Dickens visited on his trip to the United States: "The company begins assembling early, for Saturday night is a grand time for thieves, loafers, prostitutes and rowdies, as well as for honest, hard-working people."[30] Foster also mentions "the b'hoys, members of rowdy clubs, and those who 'run' with the engines."[31] Junius Browne calls the clientele of Five Points dance houses, just a few blocks from Water Street, "thieves and burglars, sailors and bar-tenders, cracksmen and murderers."[32]

Gangsters and criminals certainly frequented Allen's, for "by 1845 the whole area [the Fourth Ward] had become a hotbed of crime," writes Herbert Asbury. The dives in the neighborhood "sheltered the members of such celebrated river gangs as the Daybreak Boys, Buckoos, Hookers, Swamp Angels, Slaughter Housers, Short Tails, Patsy Conroys, and the Border Gang." Allen's place, in particular, "soon became one of the principal recreational centers for the gangsters of the Fourth Ward . . . one of the worst the city has ever seen."[33]

Up the street from Allen's, at 273 Water Street (an address that has also been given for Allen's), was Sportsmen's Hall, a rat pit run by Kit Burns, where in an interior amphitheater huge rats fought with dogs. George Leese, also known as Snatchem, an habitue of Sportsmen's Hall, was a member of the Slaughter Housers and

> . . . an official bloodsucker at the bare-knuckle prize fights which were frequently held in the Fourth Ward and Five Points dives. With two revolvers in his belt and a knife in his boot-top, Snatchem was an important figure at these entertainments, and when one of the pugilists began to bleed from scratches and cuts inflicted by his opponent's knuckles, it was Snatchem's office to suck the blood from the wound.

Asbury says that a contemporary journalist described Snatchem as "a beastly, obscene ruffian, with bulging, bulbous, watery-blue eyes, bloated face and coarse swaggering gait."[34]

Jerry McAuley, who later ran the McAuley Water Street Mission at 316 Water Street, was probably, in his youth and before his conversion, a typical customer at Allen's.

> His father had been a counterfeiter. He had been of the Catholic faith, if any. In his youth, Jerry McAuley had been a prize fighter in the Water Street dens and he had thieved on the river by night. He had committed enough crime, in his own words, to deserve prison a half-hundred times. Before his twentieth birthday he was sentenced to prison for a fifteen-year stretch. And in 1872, the same year The Seaman's Exchange came into existence, Jerry McAuley founded his Water Street Mission.[35]

Perhaps, during the Civil War years, some soldiers found their way to Allen's, using the dancing and the sex to spend nervous energy as they got ready to fight. In April 1861, when New York City served as a staging area for Union troops, temporary barracks in the Battery and City Hall Park housed 8,500 soldiers.

Perhaps, too, some of the thousands of homeless, orphaned newsboys shunned the Newsboys' Lodging Home, built in 1854 above the *Sun* offices on Fulton Street, preferring to scrape together enough money for an occasional dance, drink, and some sex at Allen's.

And probably a few working men in the neighborhood—fishermen, country merchants, military suppliers, warehouse or store clerks, blockmakers, ship chandlers, cotton brokers, sailmakers, "forwarders," pickle dealers, grocers, flour merchants, bakers, fishermen, fish dealers, printers, masons, or stove dealers—would have stopped in occasionally, especially if they lived in one of the hotels in the neighborhood.

Allen's Employees

About Allen's employees we know very little, except that if he was like other dance house owners, he employed, besides the women, a bartender, runners to meet the ships, and procurers to find women. He also would have employed between three and six musicians. And if the orchestra at Allen's resembled that at Pete Williams's, we can visualize their style clearly:

> In the middle of one side of the room a shammy platform is erected, with a trembling railing, and this is the "orchestra" of the establishment. Sometimes a single black fiddler answers the purpose: but on Saturday nights the music turns out strong, and the house entertains, in addition, a trumpet and a bass drum. With these instruments you may imagine that the music at Dickens's Place is of no ordinary kind. You cannot, however, begin to imagine *what* it is. You cannot *see* the red-hot knitting needles spirted out by that red-faced trumpeter, who looks precisely as if he were blowing glass, which needles aforesaid penetrating the tympanum, pierce through and through your brain without remorse. Nor can you perceive the frightful mechanical contortions of the bass-drummer as he sweats and deals his blows on every side, in all violation of the laws of rhythm, like a man beating a balky mule and showering his blows upon the unfortunate animal, now on this side, now on that. If you could, it would be unnecessary for us to write.[36]

The Observers

Even those who considered themselves decent men came to Allen's. Policemen came to keep order. Warren, a detective, came to conduct studies of civilization, ostensibly so that others might not have to suffer the sight themselves.

> The maxim that vice to be abhorred must be seen, has no application to such a scene as we have described from actual observation. No man or youth still unsullied, should ever lay eyes upon a dance house. It is enough to know that it is a sad reality. Human nature, under its most favorable aspects is bad enough, but this phase of it, once thoroughly photographed upon the memory, reveals possibilities of depravity and baseness in man that can never be effaced, or forgotten,—he has experienced a shock from which he will never recover.[37]

Similarly, "The Missionaries are constant visitors to these dens. They go with hope that they may succeed in rescuing some poor creature from her terrible life. As a rule, they meet with the vilest abuse, and are driven away with curses, but sometimes they are successful."[38]

Not only missionaries, but writers, like Dyer, Foster, McCabe, and others, went to the dance houses to observe, purportedly to alert the city to its darker side, but perhaps, judging from their persistence, to get some kind of secret pleasure out of watching the free, rough, giddy activity at Allen's. Oliver Dyer had been going to Allen's for at least two years before writing the article in *Packard's Monthly* that made Allen famous. And Dyer brought missionaries with him.

> In the year 1865, the Sabbath after President Lincoln was assassinated, we began an exploration and sub-soiling of New York city, as to its crime, poverty, want, wo, wretchedness and degradation, which we have pursued ever since, as other engagements would permit. Of course, it was not long before we found out John Allen. We at once recognized his genius for wickedness and made him an especial study. . . .
>
> Since that occasion we have repeatedly visited the abode of the Wickedest Man in New York, for the purpose of "studying him up," and of trying to hit upon some means of inducing him to abandon his course of life, and of saving his boy. For in truth, we not only feel an interest in, but also rather like him, wicked as he is. And so does nearly everybody whom we have taken to see him; and we have taken scores—most of them clergymen.[39]

For those people who were not forced to frequent Allen's, who had other social channels for the release of sexual and emotional energy than the Water Street dives, who had comfortable beds to sleep in, stable jobs, and secure family lives, Allen's could function as a tourist attraction, a freak show like Barnum's. "Strangers and New Yorkers often visit dance-houses for curiosity; but they take the precaution to go armed, and under the direction and guidance of a policeman."[40]

The observers who visited dance houses out of curiosity, rather than necessity, or desire, are those who had the resources to write about them, and they are the ones who call the participants "thieves, harlots and desperadoes," and the event "orgies revolting to the last degree . . . shameless sin . . . unrelieved grossness."[41]

One wonders what they thought was sinful and gross about Allen's. The mixture of races, nationalities, and religions? The frank acknowledgement of sexual needs, symbolizing submission to irrational forces the middle-class tried to repress? Dancing that looked free or chaotic? The anonymity of the partnering? The mood of immediacy, of urgency, of the squandering of money and strength in play? The clash of cultures and languages erupting into physical violence? Self-defined, improvised uses of time and space in a culture that with increasing industrialization valued hierarchical management and ordering of time and space?

Perhaps the participants in the event found other aspects sinful—drugging and robbing disoriented sailors, profit-making by a man from women's sexual relationships, the loneliness of urban life and the dissolution of family ties that would have brought them there. Perhaps, had the participants themselves the means to describe and preserve their perceptions, we would have a different view of John Allen's dance house today.

23

Red Shoes: The Workers' Dance League of the 1930s

The past few years have seen an upsurge of political activity among downtown dancers, from organizing for nuclear disarmament to making dances against U.S. intervention in Central America to making statements about black identity and history. This alliance between the avant-garde and progressive politics might seem surprising (in the U.S., though not in Europe). Yet there are precedents, not only in the 1960s, but from the beginnings of American modern dance. Operating in a less fragmented political scene and a smaller, tighter dance world, the Workers' Dance League of the 1930s was a highly organized, polemical body for producing political dance and organizing dancers.

Although the history of American dance has whitewashed it from

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memory, avant-garde dance and the rise of left-wing culture in the United States in the 1930s collided at a critical moment. During the late 1920s, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman broke away from Denishawn to form their own groups. In 1931, Hanya Holm founded the American branch of the Mary Wigman dance school. At the same time, a number of workers' theater troupes sprang up in New York City, offering a radical, serious alternative to what they saw as the frivolous Broadway stage.

After the economic crash in 1929, the left-wing theater brigades found larger audiences than ever among the millions of unemployed. In the context of widespread depression and the organizing efforts of masses of workers, aided by a growing Communist party, the workers' theater movement burgeoned, fueled by the CP's Third Period policies, which emphasized the imminence of worldwide revolution and called for suitable artistic theory and practice as part of political strategy and action. Unlike the activity of so much avant-garde theater and dance today, these groups found large working-class audiences, given the political context and the tight CP organization as well as its goals.

Today we have no models. But then, the obvious model for left-wing American artists and intellectuals was the young Soviet Union, which had managed to create modernist, avant-garde, politically charged artworks in every genre. In the United States, CP officials urged the building of radical working-class culture through its literary magazine, *New Masses*; through literary John Reed Clubs; and through various theater, music, film, dance, and sports groups. Through these arts and pastimes, class consciousness would be sharpened into a "weapon," to be wielded in the coming revolution.

Some of the young dancers who studied and worked with Holm, Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, Tamiris, Fe Alf, and other "bourgeois" modern dancers were working-class women, often the daughters of immigrants, who marched in May Day parades and stood with their parents on picket lines. They brought to the artistic "revolution" of modern dance a political commitment that led them to repudiate the work of their teachers as too abstract, mystical, or nostalgic. They looked to the model of the workers' theater movement for themes and social forms, a new content for the new dance forms they were discovering. And naive as it may seem to us, they really meant it when they wrote things like "Dance must be used to teach workers' children that they belong to the working class. . . . Use themes of nature to teach children to dance together in harmony, just as workers on a Soviet collective work together." Thus, Kay Rankin explained, children could be won over through dance to join the revolutionary movement and, in particular, the Young Pioneers of America. These dancers believed that, ultimately, they had the power and the obligation to change the world. We feel the obligation, but the sense of power is gone.

By the spring of 1932, the workers' theater movement was so active

that a national festival and competition was organized. A League of Workers' Theaters formed, and took over the publication of a radical journal, *Workers' Theater.* The workers' dance groups, although not as numerous, soon followed suit; they formed the Workers' Dance Council, which by March 1933 had become the Workers' Dance League (WDL). The organization boasted seventeen theater groups in New York City.

The Red Dancers, organized in 1929 by Edith Segal, performed at CP functions, at union meetings, and in at least one benefit for striking workers; they held summer classes for adults and kids. Esther Porter praised one of their 1932 performances: "Here were workers throwing all their energies into expressing in a strong and thrilling way the power of their class." Segal also organized the Nature Friends Dance Group in 1931; its first dances were *Red Army March* and *Red Marine.* The group was an outgrowth of a workers' hiking club, the Nature Friends, which campaigned against the 1932 Olympics and also sponsored an agitprop theater troupe.

New Dance Group (NDG), an amalgam of modern dancers led by students from the "bourgeois" studios and by performers in the "bourgeois" companies—most notably, Jane Dudley, Sophie Maslow, Miriam Blecher, and Bill Matons—was the most professional and prolific of the workers' dance groups. Within a year of its founding, NDG grew to a membership of 300, and it helped to set up similar groups in other cities. NDG reported that it had organized "large sections of workers who meet to dance and talk every evening."

Not only did NDG offer dance classes to workers in order to salutarily combine recreation with art, but also members collectively built a repertory of what they hoped were revolutionary dances. At its first anniversary concert, in March 1933, the program included satiric dances (*Parasite, Charity,* and *Peace Conference*), folk dances, and works on serious themes intended to rouse audiences to sympathy, if not action, for the working class (*Strike, Uprisings, Hunger,* and *On the Barricades*).

NDG experimented with improvisations on themes taken from workers' daily lives and—although they criticized themselves for problems arising from their own differences in dance technique, their self-admitted lack of understanding of the working class, and their perennial lack of headquarters—they continued to grow and to redefine their organization (which still exists today, offering evening classes at reasonable rates in a variety of techniques, but without any political emphasis). In the thirties, their pedagogy was organized along the lines of political cells, rather than ordinary dance classes; in 1933, NDG's stated policies included assigning specific themes (e.g., unemployment) to all classes for two weeks of exploration each; dividing students into squadrons of thirty according to ability; and discussing the work after each class session. Students in intermediate or advanced classes were eligible to join the performing company, and thus to

help choose the repertory. Classes cost a fraction of their price at the "bourgeois" studios. By 1934, NDG offered courses in teacher training (including Marxist theory), theory of dance, and practical dance technique in various methods: Dalcroze, Graham, Duncan, Humphrey, Wigman.

In the early thirties other dance groups sprang into being from classes at NDG, unions, and community centers. The principle of comradely competition put into practice by the workers' theater groups inspired the Workers' Dance League to organize its First Annual Spartakiade in June 1933. Seventeen groups entered the competition, including NDG, and the Jack London Rebel Dancers of Newark, and, although the organizers admitted that some dances were technically immature, they were proud that the content was strikingly new.

At a forum held in October 1933 called "What Direction Shall the Negro Dance Take?" Hemsley Winfield, a black choreographer, performed with his group, and the Red Dancers performed Segal's *Black and White*. At the 1934 competition, the NDG won first place for *Van der Lubbe's Head*, a collectively choreographed dance based on a poem by Alfred Hayes that castigated Nazi repression. Second prize went to the Theater Union Dance Group, led by Anna Sokolow, for *Anti-War Cycle*. And in third place was the Nature Friends Dance Group's *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche*, a sharp criticism of Hitler's program for women; the dance ended by urging German women to ally themselves with the revolutionary youth movement against Nazism. Other dance groups included the New Duncan Dancers, the Junior Red Dancers, and the Revolutionary Dancers. Reporting on the festival, Grace Wylie, an officer of WDL, wrote that many of the dances treated depression and revolt too generally, and that more specific dances were called for. "We hope that by next year all our groups will have gotten a *Revolt* (sometimes called *Uprising, Upsurge, Red Tide*) off their chests and find means of bringing forward themes which are of direct import to our audience."

Emanuel Eisenberg satirized in *New Theater* a typical revolutionary dance on the program: "Six or ten young women, clothed in long and wholly unrepresentative black dresses, would be discovered lying around the stage in various states of collapse. Soon, to the rhythm of dreary and monotonous music, they would begin to sway in attitudes of misery, despair and defeat. . . . This must be the proletariat in the grip of oppression. . . . The swaying would continue for a couple of minutes . . . and then, a vision. Sometimes it came in the form of a light flooding suddenly from the wings of the balcony; sometimes in the form of music intensity; sometimes as a dynamic figure in red, running passionately at the startled tragedians. . . . And always the group would respond with victory: hope had arisen, strength had come, freedom was here, the revolution had arrived."

There were benefits for *New Theater*, for the *Daily Worker*, and for the Committee to Support Southern Textile Organization, among other

efforts. Although it was the modern dancers who felt most strongly linked to the aims of the Workers' Dance League, the movement was not monolithic. It welcomed tapdancers, ballet dancers, chorus girls, and untrained hopefuls. It urged men to join in. Articles in *Workers' Theater* and *New Theater* noted the victories and (more often) the working problems in the dance industry.

Reviews and announcements of performances and classes appeared in the journal. But also, debates raged on topics basic to any new vision of culture. There were questions of technique, criticisms of "bourgeois" approaches to dance, articles on the problems of how to operate collectively within the groups, and, of course, the question of what subjects were appropriate to dance about. Eisenberg criticized a program called Revolutionary Solo Dances, holding that a truly revolutionary dancer would find a different idiom than that of the bourgeois studios. Nathaniel Buchwald retorted that socialist and communist dances could only emerge by growing dialectically out of the best of the bourgeois techniques. Just as the problem of what constituted proletarian literature vexed the writers of the time, the question of what, exactly, proletarian dance should be was fundamental. Did proletarian dances mean those made by workers, for workers, or about workers?

With the end of the CP's Third Period and the inauguration of the Popular Front in 1935, some of these questions were put aside. In the alliance of leftists and liberals against fascism, the brashness of the previous period abated, the vocabulary of class struggle vanished, and the expression of enthusiasm for the Soviet Union gave way to sentiments that spoke more clearly of American patriotism. The word *communist* was used less often. The left sought a new image that would court, rather than threaten, progressive liberals. Also, it shared in the hopeful mood of the nation as economic and social conditions seemed to swing upward.

In 1935, the League of Workers' Theaters changed its name to New Theater League, and changed its style as well, using previously disdained Broadway techniques to attract wide, diverse audiences. Yet it still managed to present themes of racial injustice, war, antifacism, and labor's right to organize. The same year the Workers' Dance League was transformed into the New Dance League; it expanded its thematic range as well as its membership, inviting choreographers it had so recently repudiated, such as Tamiris, Humphrey, Weidman, and Graham, to appear in its programs, and urging "dancers, choreographers, teachers, leaders of groups, dance students, regardless of other political or artistic differences . . . to join the New Dance League at once." Out of this expanded group Tamiris led the groundswell to form a dance wing of the Federal Theater Project. Lincoln Kirstein wrote several articles in *New Theater* that proposed ballet as the most revolutionary form for dance.

Seen in one light, the alliance with the modern dance liberals diluted

the message of the radical dancers; in another light, the bourgeois choreographers were moved through that alliance to politicize their performances. (For instance, a number of liberal choreographers, including Graham, contributed dances to a Spanish Civil War benefit program.) Ironically, when the dancers of the early sixties rebelled against older modern dance in the name of democracy and freedom, they protested against the genre's bombastic social messages. The McCarthy era had laundered modern dance, along with the rest of American culture, of its redder tints. Its revolutionary content was lost for the next generation, which had, in any case, to find a new way to make its own revolution.

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Postmodern Dance: From The Sixties to the Nineties

24

Judson Rides Again!

Judson Dance Theater has become the kind of legend whose reality is lost in a mist of nostalgia and imperfect remembrances. The people who were involved in the group nearly twenty years ago remember only fragments and each one, of course, has a particular perspective on that past. The people who weren't involved, either as participants or spectators, feel compelled to justify their absence. Dance historians and critics invoke Judson for all sorts of reasons, many of them inaccurate. And meanwhile, no one can agree on what, exactly, Judson Dance Theater *was*. With two programs of Judson reconstructions taking place this weekend at Danspace at St. Mark's Church, a great deal of light will be shed on just what happened at Judson Church in the sixties and its pervasive effect on new dance over the past two decades.

The strictest definition of Judson Dance Theater is that it was the loosely organized collective of choreographers who met in a weekly workshop at the Judson Memorial Church on Washington Square from 1962 to 1964, producing over two hundred dances in twenty concerts, mostly one-night stands. The first concert, on July 6, 1962, was a marathon that lasted over three hours, attracted hundreds of spectators (mostly Village writers and artists), and pointed a way for the future of avant-garde, downtown dance. That first concert, organized by students in a choreography class taught at the Merce Cunningham studio by Robert Dunn, set up a model for producing dance cooperatively and cheaply that corresponded to similar activities at the time in the poetry, film, and theater worlds. The brash, iconoclastic energy and ambition of the event foreshadowed the impulse toward physical and political liberation that captured the American imagination in the sixties. Jill Johnston wrote about this concert in the *Village Voice* and called it "Democracy." She also rang Judson Dance Theater's death knell in the *Voice* in 1965, after zealously covering nearly every concert in her column.

A broader definition of the Judson Dance Theater begins with that same concert but moves back in time to encompass the social and artistic networks that impinged on the workshop group. It also includes choreographers who gave concerts at the Judson Church but were never part of the

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Village Voice, April 20, 1982.

weekly workshop. So James Waring, who began to give concerts at the church after the group, but in whose company some of the group danced, and who shared a studio with Aileen Passloff and Yvonne Rainer where he taught many of the Judson dancers, is part of the bigger sense of Judson Dance Theater, as are Passloff and Katherine Litz, and Remy Charlip. It also includes people like Simone Forti, who was in the Dunn class but never appeared at the church, and people like Meredith Monk, Phoebe Neville, and Kenneth King, who began performing at the church after the initial workshop had disbanded.

In any case, the Judson Church, with its Dance Theater, Poets' Theater, Gallery and numerous political events, was a lively place in the sixties and the Judson Dance Theater was a particularly vital gathering place for artists in all fields. In the early years, anyone who abided by the democratic rules of the workshop could make a dance, whether trained as a dancer (like Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Ruth Emerson, Fred Herko, Elizabeth Keen, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Judith Dunn, Sally Gross, Trisha Brown, Elaine Summers) or as a musician (like John Herbert McDowell, Philip Corner, Malcolm Goldstein, James Tenney) or as a visual artist (like Carolee Schneemann, Robert Rauschenberg, Alex Hay, Robert Morris). The notion of choreography was an open field waiting to be explored.

Although we think now of Judson as the seedbed for the reductive, at times austere, style that characterized postmodern dance in the seventies, diversity of style and method was key to the group's operations. It was an attempt to plumb that diversity that led to the current Judson reconstructions. Wendy Perron, a dancer, choreographer, and writer, led her students on a search for their shared "roots" and began excavating Judson Dance Theater two years ago. Perron and Tony Carruthers set up the Bennington College Judson Project, which commissioned performances by Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer at Bennington, videotaped interviews with over twenty Judson Dance Theater "members," and mounted an exhibition of photographs, scores, programs, and videotapes (seen at Bennington and at New York University's Grey Gallery earlier this year).

One problem with the excavation was that very few documentations of the dances on film or videotape existed. Portable video technology was practically nonexistent in the sixties, and few of the dancers could afford to film their work. Even the best photographs could only suggest what the dances looked like in motion. Perron finally embarked on the reconstruction project, and found a place for the performances not at the original church site—at this point, Judson Church has cut back on performance production—but at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, where since 1974 the Danspace project has been sponsoring concerts and avant-garde dance. The Judson reconstructions will take place in the sanctuary of the church,

celebrating its reopening after it was gutted by a fire in 1978 and then gradually rebuilt.

Perron and Cynthia Hedstrom, the director of Danspace, invited a number of choreographers to contribute to the program of reconstructions. In a sense, the final program is, as the Judson programs were, a mixture of choice and chance. Not all of the Judson choreographers will be represented because some have died, some are out of town, some chose not to contribute work. But the dances that will be performed still show a remarkable range of content and form.

Elaine Summers, who has been making films since the time of Judson Dance Theater, will show (on Program B) *Judson Nights*, a film collage that includes the projections from her multimedia piece *Fantastic Gardens* (1964) and also some documentations of other dances on the Judson programs. Aside from an Andy Warhol film now unavailable for viewing, *Judson Nights* may be the only surviving record of performances by Fred Herko, who committed suicide in 1964. The other film is *Woton's Wake* (1963), a very early film by Brian De Palma that has music by John Herbert McDowell and perhaps for that reason was shown on A Concert of Dance #11 at the Gramercy Arts Theater. A thirty-minute black-and-white trance film satire about an alchemist named Woton Wretchichevsky, who looks like a Hasidic version of Tiny Tim, it anticipates De Palma's later works, in that it is full of parodic but loving quotations—not only from Ingmar Bergman and Maya Deren, but also *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *King Kong*.

Edward Bhartonn's *Pop* #2, which originally followed *Woton's Wake* on Concert #11, will also be seen in Program A at St. Mark's. *Pop* #2 and its predecessor, *Pop #1* (from Concert #10 and also on Program A) were miniatures in which Bhartonn unrolled a mat, blew up a balloon, and then did a back three-quarter (in #1) or a back three-quarter and a flip (in #2) onto the balloon, bursting it. Program A also includes Elaine Summers's *Dance for Lots of People* (1963), a mass dance reminiscent of German expressionist dances or films like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and Remy Charlip's *Meditation*, an expressive solo of slowly building drama based on moving along the body's chakras. Judith Dunn's *Dewhorse* (1963), a solo done in collaboration with musician Bill Dixon, will be recreated by Cheryl Lilienstein. Simone Forti will reconstruct her *Slant Board* (1961), a climbing game first performed pre-Judson on an evening of Five Dance Constructions and Some Other Things, at Yoko Ono's loft on Chambers Street. Philip Corner will rework his *Keyboard Dances* (1964), in which he used his entire body to play the piano, and *Flares* (1962), a dance that involved slide projections, darkness, and the simultaneous translation of a written score into musical and movement terms. Program A also includes Yvonne Rainer dancing her seminal *The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1, or Trio A* (1966), a "populist" dance that redefined the notion of phrasing and set the style for

the uninflected dances of the seventies. For fifteen years, Rainer did it nearly every day to keep in shape. Thursday she'll do it cold: she hasn't even rehearsed it since August 1981.

Program B includes two pre-Judson pieces—Aileen Passloff's *Structures* (1960), a chance dance, and James Waring's *Octandre* (1957–58), reconstructed by Passloff from Waring's notes. It also includes a post-Judson dance, Deborah Hay's *Ten* (1968), for ten dancers and nondancers dressed in white, lining up in various formations, and a rock band. Steve Paxton will perform his *Jag ville görna telefonera* (1964), a dance that was originally performed in Sweden and involved three chickens, a full-sized overstuffed chair made of cake and yellow frosting, and clothes with zippers in the seams that could be taken apart and put back together in new ways. Paxton's recently rediscovered score for this dance, a collage of sports photos, was on display at Grey Gallery. Lucinda Childs will perform her *Carnation* (1964), a dance with curlers, a colander, socks, and a blue plastic bag that related to pop art paintings and undercut the drama of human presence in the dance, substituting the cool presence of objects, an abiding theme in postmodern dance that later allied it with minimalism in the visual arts. Threading through Program B, as it originally threaded through Concert #13 (the collaboration by the Dance Theater with sculptor Charles Ross) will be Carolee Schneemann's *Lateral Splay* (1963), a group dance of running at top speed and energy.

This weekend's programs bring up basic questions about reconstruction, if not the identity of a dance itself. Does the performance of *Dewhorse* depend on its being danced by Judith Dunn herself? Was there some tangible interaction between dancer and musician that eludes notation and coaching and can never be recaptured? Does an Edward Bhartonn in his forties doing a back flip perform the same dance as the *Pop* #2 he did in his twenties? Will even the choreographers themselves remember the dances precisely enough to reconstruct them "exactly"—given the constraints of different spaces, bodies, and, of course, a totally different time? When we see these works made in a different era, can they possibly have the same meaning for us that they had for us or others in the sixties? Or are these discrepancies unimportant in the long run? Twenty years later, the Judson Dance Theater still provides food for thought about dance.

25

Choreographic Methods of the Judson Dance Theater

The Judson Dance Theater, the legendary amalgamation of avant-garde choreographers in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s, represents a turning point in dance history for many reasons. Its cooperative nature as an alternative-producing institution was a conscious assault on the hierarchical nature not only of academic ballet but also, more directly, of the American modern dance community as it had evolved by the late 1950s. The youthfulness of Judson's original members signified a changing of the guard in terms of generations and, emblematic of the Kennedy era, a cultural shift in authority from the wisdom and experience of age to the energy and creativity — the modernity — of youth. Aesthetic questions about the nature and meaning of dance and of movement were raised in the workshop and in the concerts, among them — fundamentally — the identity of a dance work, the definition of dance, and the nature of technique. The cooperative workshop was a training ground for most of the key choreographers of the next two decades.[1]

But perhaps the most important legacy the Judson Dance Theater bequeathed to the history of dance was its intensive exploration and expansion of possibilities for choreographic method. In their relentless search for the new, coupled with an intelligently analytic approach to the process of dancemaking, in repudiating their elders' cherished compositional formulae, the members of the Judson Dance Theater experimented with so many different kinds of choreographic structures and devices that for the generations that have followed their message was clear: not only any movement or any body, but also any method is permitted.

Choreography: Principles and Practice, Janet Adshead, ed. (University of Surrey: National Resource Centre for Dance, Guildford, Surrey, 1987). Reprinted with permission.

Robert Dunn's Choreography Class

The open spirit that animated the group had its roots in the sensibilities of the composition class taught by Robert Dunn out of which the Judson Dance Theater blossomed. Dunn's aspirations as a dance composition teacher were informed by several sources (he himself was, of course, trained as a composer, not as a dancer or choreographer). Most crucially, he translated ideas from John Cage's experimental music class, especially chance techniques, into the dance milieu; Cage's class, in which Dunn had been a student, already originated in an expanded view of music that encompassed theater and performance in a more general sense. Not only Cage's methods, but also his attitude that "anything goes," was an inspiration that carried over into Dunn's class. Certainly this permissive atmosphere was reinforced by the inclinations of the students, who were all engaged in various ways and to various degrees in the groundbreaking artistic scene in the Village, from the Living Theater to pop art to happenings to Fluxus, and some of whom studied as well with Ann Halprin, the West Coast experimentalist. But beyond this generative urge toward license, Dunn and his students consciously disavowed the compositional approaches taught in the modern dance "academy." Dunn remembers that he had watched Louis Horst and Doris Humphrey teach their choreography classes and was determined to find another pedagogical method; he found them too rigid and the dances by their students too theatrical.

The original class had started out with only five members—Paulus Berenson, Marni Mahaffay, Simone (Forti) Morris, Steve Paxton, and Yvonne Rainer. By the end of the second year, the participants included Judith Dunn (whose status as student sometimes seemed to blend with that of teacher), Trisha Brown, Ruth Emerson, Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, Fred Herko, Al Kurchin, Dick Levine, Gretchen MacLane, John Herbert McDowell, Joseph Schlichter, Carol Scothorn, and Elaine Summers. Valda Setterfield and David Gordon attended occasionally; Robert Rauschenberg, Jill Johnston, and Gene Friedman were "regular visitors," and Remy Charlip, David Vaughan, Robert Morris, Ray Johnson, and Peter Schumann, among others, came from time to time to observe. The composition of this population alone—it included visual artists, musicians, writers, a theater director, and filmmakers as well as dancers—made for an interdisciplinary brew.

The basis of Dunn's approach at first was to find time structures, taken from musical compositions by contemporary composers (Cage, Stockhausen, Boulez, and others), that dance could share. The principle technique was chance scores, but others included more wide-ranging methods of indeterminacy and various kinds of rules. Students were assigned to use a graphic chance score along the lines of that which Cage had made for his *Fontana Mix*. Another assignment involved using number

sequences derived from Satie's *Trois Gymnopédies*. Several students remember dances involving time constraints, for instance, "Make a five-minute dance in half an hour." Trisha Brown recalls distinctly the instruction to make a three-minute dance:

> This assignment was totally nonspecific except for duration, and the ambiguity provoked days of sorting through possibilities trying to figure out what time meant, was sixty seconds the only difference between three minutes and four minutes, how do you stop something, why, what relation does time have to movement, and on and on. Dick Levine taught himself to cry and did so for the full time period while I held a stopwatch instructed by him to shout just before the time elapsed, "Stop it! Stop it! Cut it out!" both of us ending at exactly three minutes. (21)

Other assignments involved collaborations in which autonomous personal control had to be relinquished within a "semi-independent" working situation. Others had to do with subject matter, for instance, "Make a dance about nothing special." Still others required the use of written scores or instructions. This had partly to do with Dunn's convictions about "inscrib[ing] dances on the bodies of the dancers, . . . on the body of the theater," and the notion of choreography as a kind of physicalized writing. "By planning the dance in a written or drawn manner, you have a very clear view of the dance and its possibilities," Dunn says. "Laban's idea was very secondarily to make a *Tanzschrift*, . . . a way to record. Laban's idea was to make a *Schrifttanz*, to use graphic—written—inscriptions and then to generate activities. Graphic notation is a way of inventing the dance" (7).

An interest in Labanotation and the theoretical issues of recording dance was on the rise in the dance community. Dunn's use of scores was certainly also related to the influence of Cage and other contemporary composers who were inventing new methods of scoring music in order to fit their new methods of composition and performance. But the dancers' use of written scores had a practical basis as well. According to Ruth Emerson: "There was no rehearsal space, and Bob understood that. It was well understood by everybody that most people didn't have a studio of their own. But in another week, you were expected to come in with something. [Scores were] the only practical way of conveying information. . . . [They were] expedient" (25–26).

Dunn recalls that his approach developed generally into supplying a "clearinghouse for structures derived from various sources of contemporary action: dance, music, painting, sculpture, Happenings, literature" (3). (However, because the previous generation of modern choreographers had so tied the meaning of their dances to literary ideas, the verbal arts were the least plumbed.) Beyond the freedom of method and the inspiration by other art forms, a crucial element in Dunn's pedagogy was the discussion of choice patterns as part of the presentation. Through this "postmortem"

verbal analysis, the importance of the dancemaking process was underscored. Choreographic method came to be seen as an arena for creativity prior to, sometimes even instead of, movement invention.

Before moving on to the Judson Dance Theater itself, let us examine some of the methods for student works presented either in Dunn's class or at the first end-of-the-year showing for the class, since the students' input, as well as Dunn's, served as a catalyst in that situation, and not all of the students went on to participate in the concerts at Judson Church.

As I have noted, chance was a favored technique, not surprisingly in light of Merce Cunningham's influence on the group (several danced in his company and several more studied with him, and the class itself was given in his studio). And John Cage's influence was even greater. For Marni Mahaffay, the marvel of chance was that it seemed to create limitless possibilities: "I used the rotation of the moon to make one structure, but it could have been anything—for instance, the routine of getting up in the morning and cooking an egg. The path of the moon indicated where things could happen in space, in the dance" (8).

Chance was compelling, not only for its generative capabilities, but because it performed an important psychological function in forcing the choreographer to give up certain features of control. Mahaffay recalls, "To give up your own clichés, to give up your own movement that you were so attached to, was very exciting. You might only be given enough time to do the beginning of your favorite movement, or to do it much less than you would have preferred to. You ended up putting movements together in ways that weren't at all obvious or expected" (8). According to Ruth Emerson, chance also seemed an escape route from the domination of hierarchical authority: "For me it was a total change from controlling the process of how you made movement, which was first of all that you were supposed to suffer and . . . struggle with your interior, which I couldn't bear. I hated it. . . . It was such a relief to take a piece of paper and work on it without someone telling me I was making things the wrong way" (25).

Once one accepted all kinds of previously unacceptable formal choices that chance engendered (for example, stillness and repetition), all sorts of other choreographic devices became possible—repetition or stillness or arbitrariness by choice, rather than simply by chance. Despite the calculated formality and fragmentation of these methods, the movements they organized were not always abstract. Rainer wrote, about her movement choices of that period:

> I dance about things that affect me in a very immediate way. These things can be as diverse as the mannerisms of a friend, the facial expression of a woman hallucinating on the subway, the pleasure of an aging ballerina as she demonstrates a classical movement, a pose from an Etruscan mural, a hunchbacked man with cancer, images suggested by fairy tales, children's play, and of course my own body impulses generated in different

> situations — a classroom, my own studio, being drunk at a party. I am also deliberately involved in a search for the incongruous and in using a wide range of individual human and animal actions — speak, shriek, grunt, slump, bark, look, jump, dance. One or many of these things may appear in a single dance — depending on what I read, see, and hear during the period I am working on that dance. It follows, therefore, that no single dance is about any one idea or story, but rather about a variety of things that in performance fuse together and decide the nature of the whole experience. (14)

Here Rainer is laying a groundwork for what would replace chance as the key choreographic structure for postmodern dance: radical juxtaposition. Collage — with roots in dada and Duchamp, but also reflecting the crazy-quilt of the American urban landscape — was a preferred method for many visual artists of the period; the *Village Voice* dance critic, Jill Johnston, likened a 1962 piece by Fred Herko to a Rauschenberg combine. In Rainer's *The Bells* and *Satie for Two* (also of 1962), Johnston finds a precedent for the repetitive choreographic strategy in Gertrude Stein's circular, repetitive writing.

Another choreographic method used in Dunn's class, the stripping down of movement to "one thing," which later would resurface as a stringent asceticism paralleling that of minimalist sculpture, characterized dances by Simone Forti and Steve Paxton. Forti's "dance constructions" from that period dealt in ongoing activity, a continuum of motion rather than phrases or complex movement designs. Even her response to one of Dunn's Satie assignments is telling: rather than ordering her movements to the counts given by the number structures, she used the numbers to cue certain singular actions: "If it was a five she put her head down. If it was a three, she just put her two feet down. It was an exquisite dance," Remy Charlip remembers. Paxton made a dance in which he carried furniture out of the school office a piece at a time, and another in which he sat on a bench and ate a sandwich.

And at least three other devices that would be used in future Judson dances or works by Judson members arose in the Dunn class: rule games, interlocking instructions for a group, and using or "reading" a space (or some other structure not originally made as a score, such as a child's drawing or the activity of other people) as a score.

A Concert of Dance (1)

The second year of Dunn's class culminated in a public showing of work in the sanctuary of the Judson Memorial Church on Washington Square in Greenwich Village. It was this marathon, hours-long evening, with twenty-three dances by fourteen choreographers, that snowballed into what soon became known as the Judson Dance Theater. As with Dunn's class, the

choreographic devices represented on this roster of works were many; since most of the dances had been composed as assignments for the course, the methods reiterate those discussed above, with some additions.

The connection between aleatory techniques and the automatism of surrealism emerged in the first event of the evening, which was not, strictly speaking, a dance, but a chance-edited film by Gene Friedman, John Herbert McDowell, and Elaine Summers. (It was not the last film to be billed as a dance event at a Judson concert.) Ruth Emerson's *Narrative*, the first live event on the program, used a score of interlocking directions involving walking patterns, focus, and tempo, as well as cues for actions based on the other dancers' actions. The "drama" in this "narrative" was physically, rather than psychologically motivated; a change in spatial or temporal relationships between people, no matter how abstractly based, seemed to carry psychological, interpersonal meaning. Emerson's *Timepiece*, based on chance (its very title was a tribute to the stopwatch, the renowned insignia of both John Cage and Robert Dunn), was structured by making a chart that had columns for movement quality (percussive or sustained), timing (on a scale of one to six, ranging from very slow to very fast), time limits (fifteen second periods, multiplied by factors ranging from one to six), movement material (five possibilities: "red bag, untying; turn, jump, jump; hands, head, plie; walking forward side back side side; heron leg to floor"), space time (10, 20, 30, 40, 50, or stillness), space (five areas of the stage plus offstage), front (direction for the facing of the body, with four square directions, four diagonals, and one wild choice), and levels in space (high, low or medium). The qualities having to do with movement and timing were put together, along the graph of absolute time, separately from the qualities dealing with space. Thus changes in area, facing, and level in space might occur during a single movement phrase. Given the fact that there were usually six elements in a gamut of choices for a given feature, the choices were probably selected by the roll of a die.

Emerson was a trained mathematician as well as a dancer; chance choreography appealed to her, and her *Timepiece* serves as a paradigm for chance choreography in its categorical exhaustiveness (for this reason, I have described it in detail). Elaine Summers's semiparodic approach to aleatory techniques in her *Instant Chance* signaled a growing impatience with a method that, for many, was becoming unfortunately fetishized. David Gordon complained that in Dunn's class, "Judy and Bob were really very rigid about this chance procedure stuff they were teaching. And I had already been through a lot of this chance stuff with Jimmy [Waring]. I wasn't very religious about it." Rainer wrote, "The emphasis on aleatory composition reached ridiculous proportions sometimes. The element of chance didn't ensure that a work was good or interesting, yet I felt that the tenor of the discussions [in the Dunn course] often supported this notion."[2] In Summers's *Instant Chance*, the "hidden operations" of the chance

procedure were made part of the piece when the dancers threw large numbered styrofoam blocks in the air and performed whatever movement sequences were dictated by shape, color, and number of the block.

The use of "one thing" as structure surfaced in two dances that, despite their formal simplicity, were extremely theatrical: David Gordon's *Mannequin Dance*, in which, wearing a blood-stained biology lab coat, he slowly turned and lay down on the floor while singing and wiggling his fingers; and Fred Herko's *One or Twice a Week I Put on Sneakers to Go Uptown*, which Jill Johnston described as "a barefoot Suzie-Q in a tassel-veil head-dress, moving around the big performing area . . . only the barefoot Suzie-Q with sometimes a lazy arm snaking up and collapsing down. [And] with no alteration of pace or accent" (43). Implicit in these works was the austere, formalist approach that would become rampant in the period I have elsewhere called "analytic postmodern dance" in the seventies;[3] although it had been introduced by Forti at least a year before, it was not yet a favored method in the "breakaway" years of the early sixties.

Two dances that had been made for a class assignment about "cut-ups" were Carol Scothorn's *Isolations* and Ruth Emerson's *shoulder r.* Scothorn's involved cutting up Labanotation scores and Emerson's included Laban material, among other elements. The cut-up is a subcategory of chance procedures that was favored by the dadaists. Tristan Tzara gives instructions for how to make a dadaist poem based on cutting words out of an article, shaking them up in a bag, and reassembling them. Through Cage, the young New York avant-gardists were familiar with Robert Motherwell's book on *The Dada Painters and Poets*, published in 1951, in which these instructions appear. Perhaps the Tzara manifesto was even the source of this choreography assignment. But, in any case, many of the methods used by the dadaists and surrealists to undercut meaning or to release new meanings—from chance to collage—were consciously explored in the dance arena. That is, through their knowledge of the historical avant-garde, the Judson dancers could find a methodological treasure trove for their own, similar purposes.

The use of instructions is related to chance in that it foregrounds issues of control. Chance undermines the choreographer's control by subverting personal choices. (That, at least, is the theory; ultimately, however, the choreographer's choices are revealed in the original gamuts out of which the chance-decisions are made.) Instruction scores given to the dancer(s) by the choreographer exaggerate control, making palpable and objective the normally implicit, hegemonic position of choreographer over dancer—at least, making it explicit in the choreographic process (since neither chance nor instruction as a generating device is necessarily evident to the spectator). However, depending on how strictly the score codes instructions, such a method can also permit a great deal of freedom of interpretation by the dancer, recasting hegemony into partnership. Steve

Paxton's use of a score for *Proxy* grew directly out of thoughts about such issues. He was attempting through the score to make the learning and rehearsal process more objective and impersonal, to get away from the cult of imitation that he felt surrounded modern dance, a cult that began with the direct transmission of movements from teacher to pupil and ended with a hierarchically structured dance company. At the same time, he attempted through the score to go beyond what Cunningham and Cage had done in using chance techniques, for, as he puts it, "My feeling . . . was that one further step was needed, which was to arrive at movement by chance. That final choice, of making movement, always bothered my logic. . . . Why couldn't it be chance all the way?" Paxton's score was made by randomly dropping images and then gluing them in place on a large piece of brown paper: cut-out photographs of people walking and engaged in sports, plus cartoon images (Mutt and Jeff, and one from a travel advertisement). A moveable red dot marked the beginning the dancer had chosen. The score, then, served to mediate between choreographer and dancer, to distance the movements themselves from the choreographer's body and hence his personal style. According to Paxton:

> That was a selection process but one removed from actually deciding what to do with the pictures, because I made the score and then handed it over to the performers, and they could take a linear or circular path through the score. You could start any place you wanted to, but then you went all the way through it. You did as many repeats as were indicated, and you went back and forth as indicated. But how long it took and what you did between postures was not set at all. It was one big area of choice not at all influenced by the choreographer. The only thing I did in rehearsing the work was to go over it with them and talk about the details of the postures. (58)

Summers used a newspaper as a score in *The Daily Wake* for similar reasons. She describes her procedure:

> I took the front page and laid it out on the floor and used the words in it to structure the dance, and used the photographs in it so that they progressed on the surface of the page as if it were a map. If you start analyzing that way, you get deeper and deeper. You get more clues for structure, like how many paragraphs are there? Beginning with *The Daily Wake*, I became very interested in using photos as resource material, and other structures as maps. (53–54)

Another way to distance movement from personal style or personal expression, anathema to this generation precisely because it had become so overblown in the works of "historical" modern dance, was the completion of tasks or the handling of objects. Summers had this in mind in her *Instant Chance*. Robert Morris programmatically developed this method in *Arizona* (to be discussed below).

Yet another term in the debates about choreographic control and the boundaries of chance was the use of indeterminacy, that is, intervention by the performers through limited use of improvisation. This exceeded even Cunningham's relinquishing of control through chance (he was later, in *Story* [1963], perhaps inspired by some of the Judson experiments, to try his hand at indeterminacy, but he was not pleased by the results). Rainer's *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*, also performed at Concert 1, was a trio in which the dancers could choose when to perform one of a series of predetermined movement options, most of which, as the title suggests, were concerned with gestures and positions of the arms. Rainer dubbed this method, which combined chance and improvisation, "spontaneous determination." William Davis, one of the dancers, remembers of the first performance (at the Maidman Playhouse in March 1962):

> I think it was the first time dancers were waiting for a curtain to go up without having any idea whatsoever of the shape the dance was going to take.
>
> That kind of thing was being done musically [in the work of Cage and his colleagues]. What it really resembled was jazz musicianship, more than chance operations, because we were all working for a time when we might, for example, do this, or seeing what someone else is doing, think "Oh yes, I can connect this to that," or "They're doing fine, I'll just let them go at it." It's a sense of shape taking place in three people's minds as the dance is going on. (52)

Without going into detail about the rest of the dances on this historic program, I would like to note several other choreographic devices appearing in this first Judson concert (some of which have already been discussed in the section on Dunn's class or will be discussed further below) that would remain rich lodes for the Judson choreographers to mine: children's and adult's games (Gretchen MacLane's *Quibic*); quoting other artworks, either dance or in other media (Rainer's *Divertissement*, Deborah Hay's *Rain Fur*); the use of popular music and social dancing (Herko's *Once or Twice a Week . . .*, Davis's *Crayon*); collaboration (*Like Most People* by Fred Herko and Cecil Taylor; *Rafladan* by Alex Hay, Deborah Hay, and Charles Rotmil); and the collage, assemblage, or list format (Paxton's *Transit*, Gordon's *Helen's Dance*, Deborah Hay's *Five Things*, Rainer's *Ordinary Dance*, among others).

The Judson Workshop

Shortly after the momentous Concert of Dance in July 1962, Elaine Summers had organized A Concert of Dance 2 in Woodstock, New York, an artists' summer colony (before it became famous for the rock festival held there in 1969). Several dances from the Judson Church concert were shown and some new works by additional choreographers were added.

When in the fall of 1962 Robert Dunn did not continue his choreography class, Rainer and Paxton organized meetings of the group, at first in the studio Rainer shared with James Waring and Aileen Passloff on St. Mark's Place in the East Village, and then, after about a month, at the Judson Church, where they met weekly in the basement gymnasium. The purpose of this workshop was understood to be analytic and critical; new dances were not rehearsed there, but performed for peer scrutiny and feedback. Thus the emphasis in workshop discussions was on compositional method as well as such related issues as performance style.

By January 1963, the Judson weekly workshop had accumulated enough material to organize two concerts. The press release for Concerts 3 and 4 specifically underscored the workshop's emphasis on choreographic method. And, importantly, it pointed out that even though the search was on for new devices, new structures, and new theories, even traditional methods were permitted as but one more possibility in a wide, unrestricted range. "These concerts," it read,

> are in the series initiated at the church . . . with the aim of periodically presenting the work of dancers, composers, and various non-dancers working with ideas related to dance. The methods of composition of the works in this series range from the traditional ones which predetermine all elements of a piece to those which establish a situation, environment, or basic set of instructions governing one or more aspects of a work — thus allowing details and continuity to become manifest in a spontaneous or indeterminate manner.
>
> It is hoped that the contents of this series will not so much reflect a single point of view as convey a spirit of inquiry into the nature of new possibilities. (82)

Some of the dances in these two concerts were partly structured by the physical space of the venue: the church gym (for instance a collaboration by Robert Huot and Robert Morris, *War,* which put La Monte Young playing the musical accompaniment in the cage). The constraints of the physical performance space would affect or directly shape the dances in several future Judson concerts, in fact becoming a hallmark of the innovative spirit of the group. One long thread leading from such works was the spate of "environmental" dances in the late sixties and early seventies. But even where such considerations were not explicit in the dances, the space still governed such elements of performance as the intimacy or distance between spectator and performer and the shape and visibility of the "stage." In Concert 5, held in a rollerskating rink in Washington, D.C., Robert Rauschenberg built his entire dance (*Pelican*) on place; in it, Carolyn Brown danced in pointe shoes partnered by two men on roller skates. As well, the enormity of the space led the group to perform in various parts of the rink, making the audience mobile, and sometimes to fill the space (and challenge audience attention) by performing two dances simultaneously in

different places. Concerts 9–12, held in the Gramercy Arts Theater—which had a proscenium stage so small one could barely move without moving off it—gave rise to a number of works in which motion was either minimal, very slow, or spilled into the house. These three radical approaches to movement, emerging here out of necessity, would also become approaches of choice, badges of the Judson heritage. Steve Paxton's *Afternoon*, sponsored by the workshop, took place in a forest in New Jersey; for this dance, Paxton was directly concerned with how the natural ground surface and "scenery" would change the movement, which had been constructed in a studio.

Many of the dances for Concert 13 were united both by spatial considerations and by the use of a physical structure (they all happened in, on, or around a sculpture commissioned from Charles Ross) as well as by performance style (the sculpture, evoking a jungle gym, sparked a common spirit of playfulness). Once again, a Judson emblem—dance and art as play—was strikingly condensed in a single event. Finally, a single concert, 14 (one of the last given jointly by the workshop before it disbanded in 1964), was organized around a single choreographic method: improvisation. Although improvisation was not, statistically speaking, a common device for the Judson choreographers, this concert, too, seemed symbolically to lay claim to a new alternative method for making and performing dances.

Some Exemplary Pieces

Nearly two hundred dances were produced by the Judson Dance Theater between July 1962 and October 1964, the time of the last concert officially sponsored by the workshop. After the workshop disbanded, dance performances continued to be produced at the church on an individual basis—the "bus-stop situation," as Judith Dunn later called it. A "second generation" of Judson dancers, including Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, and Phoebe Neville showed work at the church, as did members of James Waring's company (such as Toby Armour, Carol Marcy, and Deborah Lee), Waring himself, Aileen Passloff, and various original members of the Judson Dance Theater workshop. There was even a revival of Judson "hits," presented at the church, as early as 1966.

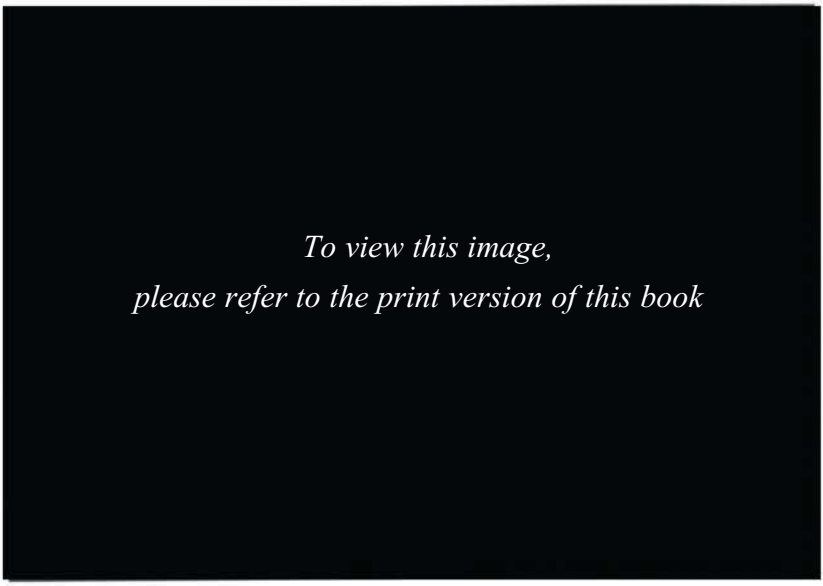
As I have noted above, many of the seeds of the methodology for the workshop were already planted in the Robert Dunn class; the first concert and those selected concerts discussed in the preceding section represent a sizeable cross-section of the techniques that would continue to provide food for dancing over the next several years, and by the next several cohorts of choreographers. I am concentrating here on the pioneering choreography by the members of the original workshop, but obviously space does not even permit a discussion of every dance performed over the year and a half

of the Judson Dance Theater workshop's lifetime (and, of course, since not every dance was the result of an entirely new method, such a review would be tedious). Therefore I would like to devote the next section of the paper to discussing selected dances that not only exemplify the choreographic concerns of the group and of individuals in the group, but that also point in directions that have proved fruitful for the succeeding generations of choreographers in the postmodern mode.

The first full-length evening dance by a single choreographer sponsored by the Judson Dance Theater was Yvonne Rainer's *Terrain*. This dance, in four sections, in retrospect seems a treasure trove of choreographic devices, structures, performance attitudes, and other aspects of style; in it one sees the preoccupations that wend their way in one form or another through the rest of Rainer's oeuvre, reaching their fullest expression in her *The Mind is a Muscle* and *Continuous Project—Altered Daily*. The title is prophetic, for this dance represents the "terrain" of dance Rainer continued to map out in her choreographic career and even in her film work. The dance used methods culled from child's play and rule games (the sections "Diagonal" and "Play"). It had an entire section based on parody through pastiche ("Duet," in which Rainer performed a ballet adagio and Trisha Brown performed a balletic sequence in the upper body with burlesque bumps and grinds in the lower torso, ending with both assuming "cheesecake" poses, all to a collage of music that included African drumming, American jazz, and fragments of Massenet's opera *Thaïs*). The technique of "spontaneous determination" that had provided the armature for *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms* also surfaced here, as did elements of repetition and chance, the list as organizational tool, and the generating of movement by turning to another art form—in this case, erotic Hindu temple sculpture. Talking while dancing, a technique by which Rainer had electrified spectators in *Ordinary Dance*, surfaced here in the two sequences from the "Solo" section that used texts by Spencer Holst.

Rainer also used several objects for some of the solos in the "Solo" section of *Terrain*. For the Judson choreographers, as for their contemporaries the pop artists, the ordinary object was particularly resonant. Robert Morris wrote in *The Drama Review* that objects and task behavior were two preferred methods for rinsing the dance of excess expressiveness and to find new ways of moving the body:

> From the beginning I wanted to avoid the pulled-up, turned-out, antigravitational qualities that not only gave a body definition and role as "dancer" but qualify and delimit the movement available to it. The challenge was to find alternative movement. . . . A fair degree of complexity of . . . rules and cues effectively blocked the dancer's performing "set" and reduced him to frantically attempting to respond to cues—reduced him from performance to action. (143)



Phoebe Neville and Kenneth King in King's *cup/saucer/two dancers/radio.* (Photo: Jonas Mekas.)

For Morris, objects were superior to tasks as a means to solve problems and thus create a structure for the dance. The manipulation of an object generated movement without becoming more important than the performer or the performance. In *Arizona*, Morris threw a javelin, swung a small light while the stage lights dimmed, and adjusted a T-form; all these objects, he wrote, "held no inherent interest for me but were means for dealing with specific problems," such as setting up relationships among movement, space, and duration, or shifting focus between the "egocentric and the exocentric" in the small light contrasting to the dimming stage lights.

Lucinda Childs in *Carnation* (and in several other works) also built a dance around the cool manipulation of everyday things. Yet here the deadpan attitude itself and the *kinds* of objects used (things associated with women's beauty care or domestic activities such as cleaning and cooking) add up to a seething "hot" significance. (Kenneth King's *cup/saucer/two dancers/radio*, a slightly later dance by a member of the "second generation" of Judson choreographers, radically extends the sense of alienation Childs hints at humorously, partly by equating all the elements listed in the title.) Undoubtedly the fascination with the object—the mute, ordinary, everyday object—reflects a growing consumer society, the burgeoning cornucopia of available goods of the United States during this period.

Yvonne Rainer's *Some Thoughts on Improvisation* (part of Concert 14) is another paradigmatic piece for several reasons: its use of improvisation as a structuring device, its baring of the devices, its analytic reflexivity. This dance, too, like so many others by Rainer during this period, includes a spoken text, but in this case the words are taped, serving as the "musical accompaniment" to the dance—or a sound track, to liken the event to Rainer's later terrain, the cinema. As Rainer improvised the dance, dressed in a black dress and high-heeled shoes (a costume that not only stands for a certain image of femininity, but that also severely limits movement possibilities), her voice described the improvisatory process, both in general and in this specific case. Her monologue moves from an almost phenomenological description of thoughts and experiences ("So I keep on sizing up the situation, see. And I keep on walking. And I make decisions. He has left the room, I will run; she is standing stockstill, I will bring my head close to hers; that man is moving his arms around, I will do as he does; the wall looms close, I will walk until I bump into it . . . [196]") to a dissection of the choicemaking patterns in improvisation. She lists three aspects of choice: impulses, anti-impulses, ideas. The action, she notes, can come from any of these, including the decision not to follow an impulse. It is, finally, the instinct of the performer, including the assertion of physical and mental control and the mastery of anxiety, that fuels the performance, she concludes. "When it goes forward it moves with an inexorable thrust and exerts a very particular kind of tension: spare, unadorned, highly dramatic, loaded with expectancy—a field for action. What more could one ask for" (197).

Although improvisation is often remembered as one of the most important legacies of the Judson Dance Theater, this particular concert (14), with its eight dances all conjoined by the shared method of improvisation, was not considered successful. Jill Johnston wrote:

> Ironically, one of the concerts on this last series . . . was a great improvisation, with minimal restrictions on freedom, and the most impressive collection of vanguard dancers and artists . . . couldn't get this tacitly accepted Open Sesame (free play) off the ground. Everybody was very polite except for Yvonne Rainer . . . and the response to her nerve should have been pandemonium if anybody had faced the assertion squarely. (198)

Yet it was this improvisatory side of the Judson Dance Theater, signaling freedom, that would later give rise to, for example, the Grand Union—one of the most brilliant projects of the postmodern dance.

Another key outgrowth of the Judson Dance Theater was the use of multiple media, or intermedia, especially film, in the dance. This seems only fair, since, although many of the dance ideas of the group came from searching for the essence of dance per se, still others came from the inspiration or influence of other media and other art forms, in particular the

visual arts, new music, and film. Of course, in the spirit of breaking down the boundaries between the art forms, artists in different fields were making events that so traded in mixing media that it was often difficult to categorize them, except by the author's label. An early mixed-media event at the Judson Dance Theater was Beverly Schmidt's *The Seasons*. It was a vignette from a larger "film-stage" performance, called *Blossoms*, conceived by the choreographer's husband, Roberts Blossom. For *The Seasons*, Schmidt memorized the dance she had improvised for the film shown in the earlier performance, then choreographed a new live solo, which was performed simultaneously with the film projection, sometimes in counterpoint or opposition and sometimes in unison. The dance was in four sections, with live music by Philip Corner and Malcolm Goldstein, and recorded music by Purcell. Each section had a distinctive movement quality, costume, and color—a distinctive mood, which Schmidt made correspond to the four seasons.

The Seasons served as a model for future events in both dance and film. The following year, two evening-length concerts by individual members of the workshop incorporating film into the dancing were sponsored by the Judson Dance Theater—Elaine Summers's *Fantastic Gardens* and Judith Dunn's *Last Point*. Meredith Monk, who arrived on the Judson scene after the end of the workshop, made the fusion of dance and film central to her work from the beginning, in such pieces as *Sixteen Millimeter Earrings* (1966). Reading Johnston's review of Schmidt's dance, one is even reminded of Lucinda Childs's recent collaboration with Sol LeWitt, using film as décor, in *Dance*:

> The interplay of images—the soft, majestic volume of the figure on the screen with the diminutive flesh and blood on stage—made a shifting mirror of the kind of dimension that reached far beyond, in the past and future, the moments of reckoning on that small stage. Near the end I had the uncanny feeling of an ancient presence when her head loomed large in an instant of immobilized totemistic grandeur. (159)

The list goes on and on: dances built on parodies of other dances or of performance styles (such as David Gordon's *Random Breakfast*); dances structured like sports events or based on sports movements (for example, Judith Dunn's *Speedlimit*), dances generated out of pure flashes of energy (Carolee Schneemann's *Newspaper Event*, et al.), repetition, tasks, free association, "ritual," unfinished work. As well, choreographers continued to use all the methods and devices I have mentioned above: time structures taken from music, chance, indeterminacy, "spontaneous determination," rules, limits, collaboration, written scores, interlocking instructions for a group, and using or "reading" a space (or some other structure not originally made as a score, such as a child's drawing or the activity of other people) as a score, children's and adult's games, quoting other artworks

(both dance and other media), the use of popular music and social dancing, the collage, assemblage, or list format, "a situation, environment, or basic set of instructions governing one or more aspects of a work," automatism, satire, cut-ups, handling objects, responding to physical space, improvisation, verbal content, mixing media — and even traditional methods of composition, such as classical musical structures, image construction, and aspiring to values of unity, complexity, and coherence.

I might say a word here about *my* methods. I have tried to get at choreographic structures or devices in a number of ways, not all of which were available for each dance. The dance historian is like an archaeologist, digging up fragments and — depending on the quantity and quality of the shards, their capacity for transmitting various types of information — she puts them together, with a glue partly consisting of informed speculation, to form a picture of the thing as it was. But this picture will almost always still be incomplete.

Using the scores and the oral and written memoirs of the choreographers, on the one hand (which tells us something about sources, intentions, and process), and the descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations of witnesses — colleagues, critics, and spectators — on the other hand (which tells us something about reception and product), I have pieced together the preceding accounts — accounts that, as you have seen, vary in terms of fullness and even in terms of accuracy.

The structures and methods of some Judson Dance Theater works are simply lost and will never be retrieved. (Deborah Hay, for example, destroyed her written records afterwards and does not remember most of her dances of that period.) For other works, we may know about the methods in a general way without gaining any sense of the way the dance looked and felt — its movement details, its performance style. Yet other works are well-documented and well-remembered enough to live on — some even in live reconstructions (though it is important to realize that reconstructed dances may not necessarily replicate the original exactly).[4]

A ground was cleared at the Judson that created new challenges for the following generation; in the 1970s, an entire wing of analytic, formalist postmodern dancers extended and consolidated that passion for revealing choreographic process, which sprang from the freedom of method (and the concomitant articulation of method) of the 1960s. But, by the 1980s, choreographic process seemed less important than choreographic product — for obvious cultural reasons, but also perhaps because methodological innovation was a frontier so thoroughly explored, to many it seemed no new devices could be discovered. But the 1980s are another story.

26

Vital Signs: Steve Paxton's *Flat* in Perspective

The dance *Flat*, by Steve Paxton, was first performed in Concert for New Paltz (an event organized by members of the Judson Dance Theater at the State University of New York at New Paltz) on January 30, 1964. I saw Paxton perform a reconstruction of *Flat* at Bennington College on April 18, 1980. The description of *Flat* given here is based on that viewing and on viewings of a videotape made at that performance.

The purpose of this study is to perform an in-depth analysis of a dance and to gain an understanding of its meaning through an assessment of its formal components, its cultural icons, and its style. To some, this analysis may seem overly detailed, especially in the section on description. However, I have deliberately approached this dance in an obsessive manner for several reasons. First, too many dances (in particular, too many postmodern dances) are poorly documented, if they are documented at all, and so disappear instantaneously. Therefore this essay is in part, like the recent reconstruction of the dance it glosses, an attempt to make a contribution to dance history. But, second and more importantly, this discussion is an illustration of a general theoretical point meant to apply not only to *Flat* but to other postmodern works as well, which is that postmodern dances not only *are* but also *mean*. Therefore I have tried here to present a model for an analysis that seeks to find the meaning given by form and style, an analysis that could be performed on any dance, postmodern or otherwise, and I have made this model as full and as detailed as possible, preferring too much information to too little in the process of unfolding the performance in a larger time and space. Often in taking apart an artwork for the purpose of analysis, one takes steps that might seem mundane or obvious or (as in the case of pure description) even tedious, for the purpose of amplifying and enriching the final interpretation. In trying to examine the cultural categories Paxton manipulates in *Flat*, then, I have tried to dissect the dance exhaustively.

A Spectrum of World Dance: Tradition, Transition, and Innovation, Lynn Ager Wallen and Joan Acocella, eds., CORD Dance Research Annual XVI (New York, 1987).

One problem in this study is that I have had to base my observations on one performance only. Although with the help of video I have been able to examine this performance closely, I still cannot know how the dance changes from one performance to the next; I cannot know the constants and variables in the structure of the work. Judging from the choreographer's description of *Flat*, there are features that change, such as the order of the incidents.

Description

In a chronology of his works, Paxton describes *Flat* as follows:

> Photographic score-catalogue performed in unset order. Score mixed with activities: lean against wall, circle walks, removal of shoes, jacket, shirt, and pants; clothes hung on 3 hooks taped to body. Performer redressed and exits.[1]

In the performance of *Flat* under discussion, the performer (Paxton) did not lean against the wall. Perhaps this was because the back of the stage area was marked by a curtain rather than a wall. In addition to the activities Paxton describes, the dance also included poses, standing still, and movements frozen in mid-action; these probably are parts of the "photographic score-catalogue." All these actions and stillnesses were repeated and rearranged in a way that was both aesthetically symmetrical and meaningful.

A light comes up on the stage, revealing a wooden chair without arms—a plain, old-fashioned library chair (in fact, a chair from the Bennington dining hall)—standing stage right. A man enters from the upstage right corner and walks across the space to stand just slightly left of center, upstage. He wears a beige suit (jacket and pants), a white shirt, no tie, dark socks, and black canvas Chinese shoes. He stands, showing the audience his left profile. He faces away from the chair, which is downstage relative to him. He then walks in a large circle, stopping for a few seconds, then repeating the circular path. After tracing nearly two and a half rounds, he suddenly crouches, facing the chair, his left leg higher than his right, both elbows bent and hands curled into fists, the left arm held higher than the right. He holds this pose for a few seconds, then gets up and walks, making one and a half circles that widen to bring his path to the chair.

He starts to sit down, freezes momentarily just before making contact with the seat, then completes the action, sitting still in the chair in a relaxed manner, his knees open a bit, his hands resting on his thighs, and his feet flat on the floor.

The man gets up, walks in a circle again, then sits down in the chair, crosses his right leg over his left so that his right ankle rests on the left thigh, and removes his right shoe, then his right sock. As he pulls the sock off, he freezes. He completes the action, then puts the shoe, with the sock inside it,

on the floor underneath the chair. He repeats the operation on the other side, but this time he does not stop until he bends over to put the shoe on the floor. He returns to his neutral sitting position.

After taking off his shoes, the man gets up, walks to his original place on the perimeter of the circle, and stands. He takes a few steps, tracing only a small arc along his round path, and stands again. Then he circumambulates once more, strikes the crouching pose for just a few seconds, then briefly a second pose that looks like a baseball player up to bat, then the crouching pose, this time for fifteen seconds (that is, what feels like a rather long time). He then strikes a new pose: sitting on the floor with both legs folded toward his left, his torso tilted toward his legs, his left arm bent outward with the hand forming a fist, his head turned left, and his right arm bent up so that his right hand is behind his head, as in bathing beauty "cheesecake" poses or, perhaps, as in the Hungarian folkdance *czardas*. He holds this pose, too, for fifteen seconds, then returns to the crouching pose.

After this series of poses, the man gradually undresses. First he makes another circuit, then takes off his jacket, unbuttons a few buttons on his shirt while holding the jacket in his left hand, and hangs the jacket on a hook taped to his chest. With the jacket hanging down the front of his body, he again walks a full round, then strikes a new pose: standing with his back to the audience, his legs apart and straight, both arms bent but reaching up toward the ceiling. He walks a short arc, one quarter of the circle, strikes the batter's pose, then immediately strikes a second crouching configuration, recognizable as a baseball catcher's position.

Standing up in the same spot, the man takes off his pants. He holds them in his right hand while he unbuttons the rest of the buttons on his shirt and removes it. He transfers the pants to his left hand, then hangs the shirt up on a hook taped to his back, using his right hand. He takes his pants with his right hand and hangs them up on a second hook taped to his back. He stands still. Then he assumes the first crouching pose (fifteen seconds), the sitting pose (fifteen seconds, this time with the left hand open), then the batter's pose (ten seconds). He walks around the circle again until he reaches his original station, and there he gets dressed.

He takes the pants off the hook with his right hand, begins to put them on—freezing after inserting his left leg in the trousers—and then completes the operation. He takes another circular walk, takes his shirt off its hook with his right hand, puts it on and stands still, then unhooks the jacket with his right hand, and puts it on.

He walks another round, widening the circle so that he reaches the chair. This time he pauses before beginning to sit down. Then he puts on his left sock, his left shoe, his right sock, picks up his right shoe and freezes for ten seconds, and then puts on his right shoe. He sits in the neutral sitting position for fifteen seconds, then gets up and exits out the upstage right corner.

Figure 1 illustrates the fourteen segments I have isolated in this dance. The dance is not organized into rhythmic phrases. Rather, the recurring circle forms a natural marker for the segments. This repudiation of rhythmic organization is important to the meaning of the dance in several ways, as we will see in the final sections of this study. I have used each circle or portion of a circle as the starting point for a new segment of activity, no matter how much activity follows the circle. Figure 2 illustrates the gamut of numbered poses used in the dance and gives the exact timing for each. In addition to the numbered poses, I refer to the neutral standing and sitting poses as the zero standing and sitting positions.

Toward an Analysis

Figures 1 and 2 show that the main categories manipulated in this dance are space, time, movement and poses (absence of movement), and objects. This may seem trivial or obvious, but it is important to notice that dances often also emphasize other features, including the use of musical accompaniment, and that many dances do not employ objects. Verbal language, absent here, is not considered a usual element in most traditional theatrical dances (that is, in ballet or modern dance), yet in the early 1960s avant-garde it was often used. Facial expression is another feature that usually comes into play in dance and theater. The fact that here the facial expression, lacking in affect, never changes, is in itself meaningful.

Space is used in two ways in *Flat*. First, one can clearly see a floorplan, with a circular path carved out by virtue of repetition and with three stations on the circumference of the circle where various activities take place (see fig. 1). There is also one station outside of the circle — the chair — where more actions occur (although at one point Paxton widens the circle to envelop the chair in his path). The orbit the performer follows only deviates when he crosses the space toward or away from the chair and when he enters and exits. The fact that nearly all of the activities take place along the rim of the circle and that the tracing of the circle (or part of it) sandwiches every segment of the dance is important to the poetics of the work. It (literally) provides a shape. The circular walk acts as a kind of rinse for the spectator's visual "screen," clearing the way for each new set of actions. The circle also acts as an all-encompassing leveler, reducing all of the segments to a state of equal importance. Similarly, the coexistence in space of the circle and the chair serves to equalize the man and the object, which always stand in visual opposition to each other.

The second use of space is in terms of levels (see fig. 2). Activities take place at a high level (pose 4), at a medium level (zero standing and pose 2), at a medium-low level (zero sitting), at a low level (poses 1 and 5), and at an extremely low level (pose 3). Thus, although the dance seems very simple and even monotonous, in fact it densely articulates the various levels of

Figure 1. Fourteen segments in *Flat*.

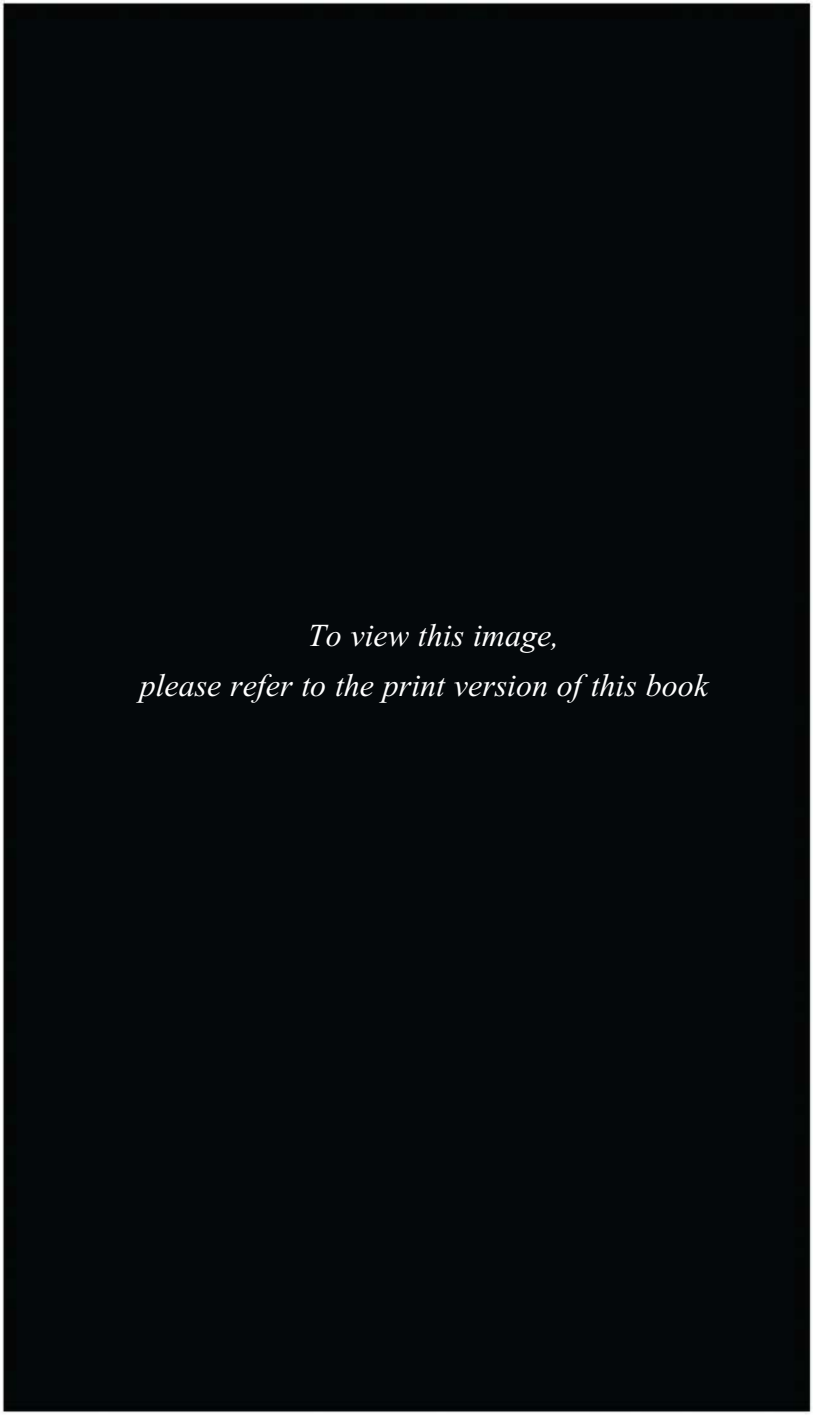


Figure 1. Fourteen segments in *Flat*. (continued)

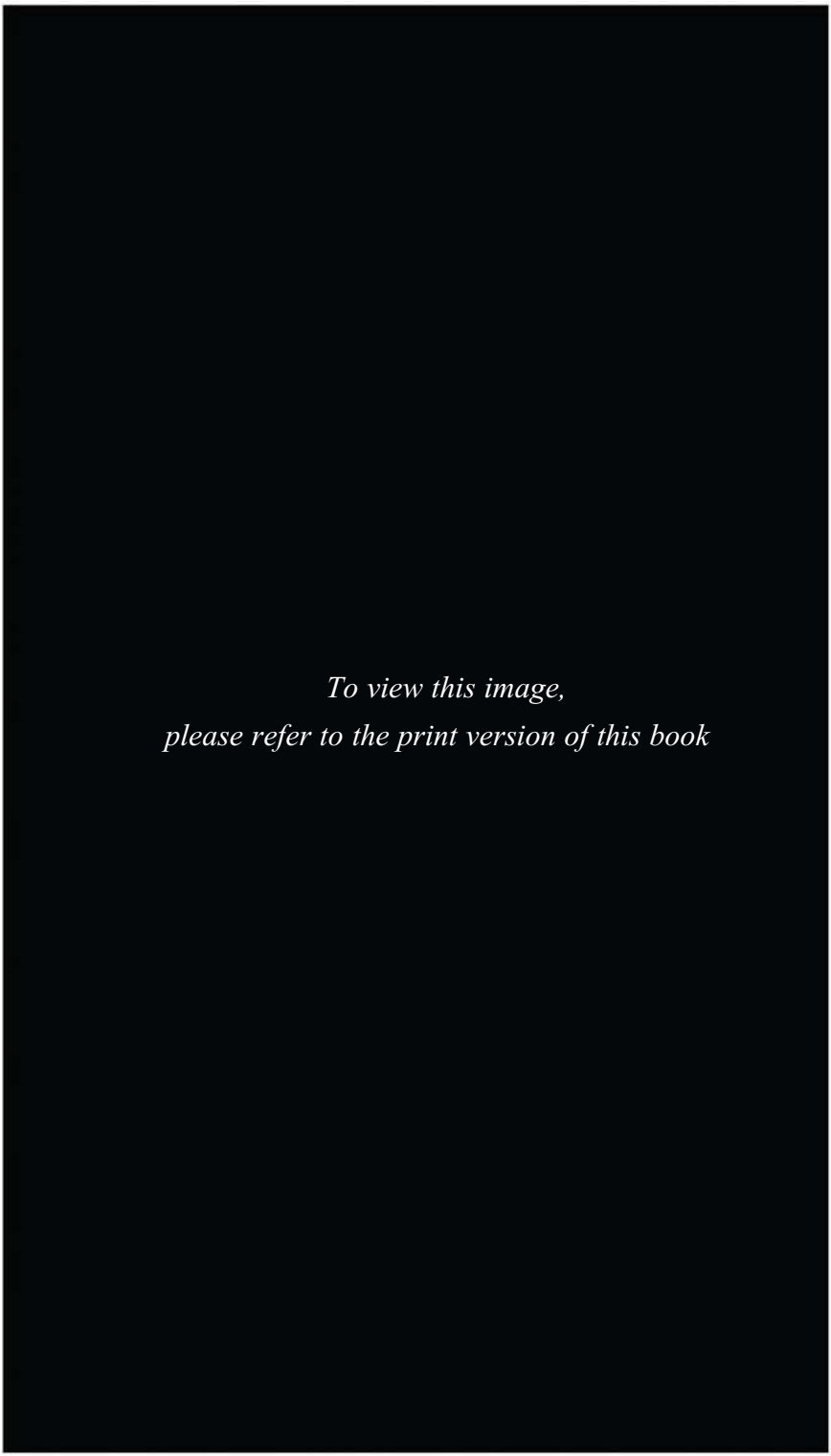
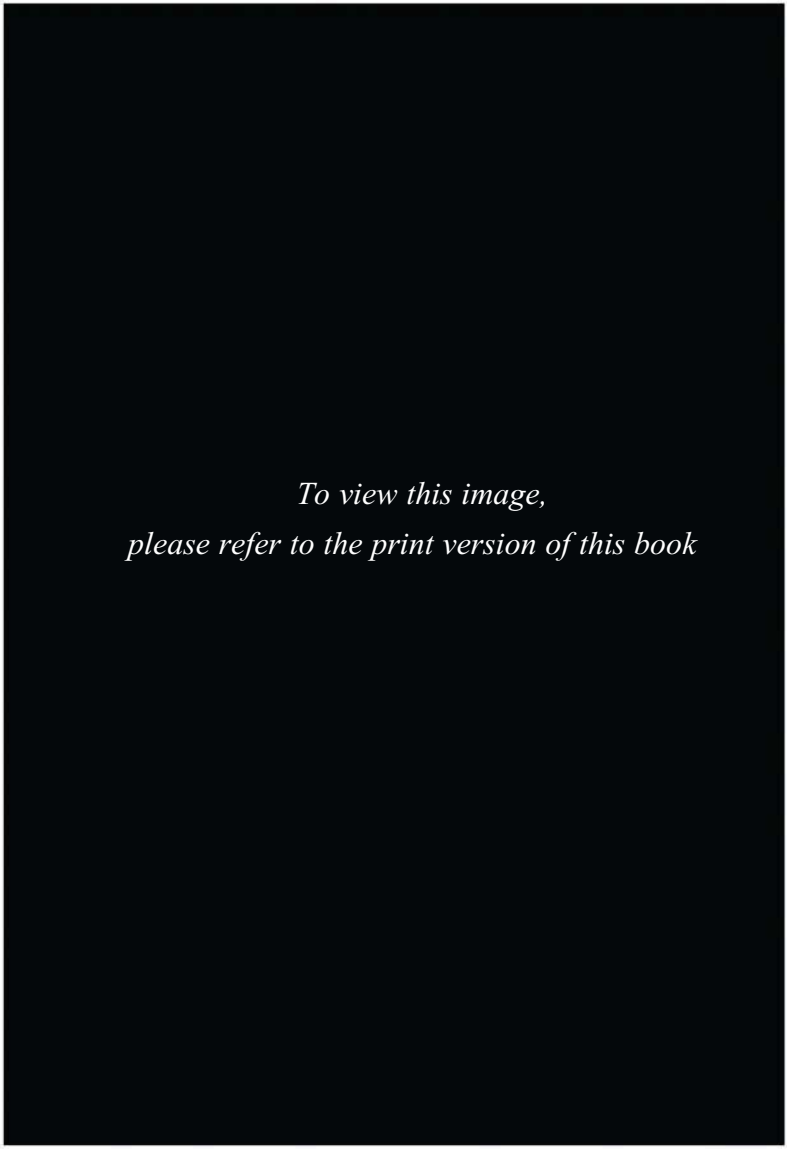


Figure 2. Five emblematic poses in *Flat*.



space in which people operate. Although his path is unvarying and constricted, through the range of levels of space the "hero" of the dance assumes a complex, variegated human dimension.

Like the path in space, the way time is used also serves to flatten and equalize events. Timing is not used for the kind of phatic function one finds in many dances, where a marked climax draws the audience's attention and where the alternation of slow and fast movements maintains contact as well as operating poetically. Here the timing is both steady and arbitrary. The poses are sustained for different lengths of time, but one notices their differences only in that the timing fluctuates unpredictably and does not operate with a rhythmic pulse. In other words, one feels that this pose is brief and that one long, not that the dance is changing from a four-count to a twelve-count phrase.

Most of the variation in the dance comes, as one might expect, in the realm of movement and poses. However, none of the movements here are technical dance movements. They are, rather, ordinary, everyday movements, movements that are "natural" in the sense that, although they function as cultural signs in that they identify the mover in terms of culture, class, and so on, they are not especially stylized, abstracted, or ornamented. These movements are: walking, sitting down and getting up, and manipulating clothing (that is, dressing and undressing). In fact, where these movements are stylized by freezing in the act of performing them, that simply serves to underscore their ordinariness as actions and the casual, untheatrical way in which the actions are performed. The poses include neutral standing and sitting, both of which, like the movements, fall into the category of the everyday. In addition, there are five special poses, which can be considered emblems; that is, they are postures that have a set, specific meaning in our culture. The total gamut of poses, then, comprising both the neutral and the special poses, includes three standing poses (zero, pose 2, and pose 4), two sitting postures (zero and pose 3), and two crouching positions (poses 1 and 5). The total range of activity in the dance consists of combinations of these movements and poses, together with stillnesses, frozen movement, and one variation in gesture in pose 3, from a hand held in a fist to an open hand.

As Marcel Mauss and Gordon Hewes have shown, no movement or posture is natural and universal.[2] "Techniques of the body," as Mauss refers to the repertory of body movements, are learned cultural traits, and these techniques include such basic functions as walking, sitting, sleeping, excreting, sexual intercourse, giving birth, and nursing, as well as more specialized techniques such as dancing and sports. For any given position, Hewes shows a number of alternative styles. Thus the very way one sits or crouches, and not merely the fact that one is sitting or crouching, is rich with meaning. The walk that Paxton uses in *Flat* is a relaxed, efficient walk, with no excess movements of the arms and legs. The arms swing slightly in

opposition to the leg movements; the legs bend just enough to permit a medium-sized step. The back and neck are erect, and the head faces in the direction of the walk. It is a relaxed, comfortable, yet correct, and not at all sloppy, American white middle-class male walk. The movements of dressing and undressing, sitting down and getting up are all done in the same nonchalant, unhurried, unexceptional, efficient way.

The zero standing and sitting postures are, again, typical white middle-class male postures. The standing position shows a man standing up straight, in a relaxed yet alert position. The sitting position has the same connotation; the man's back is straight, his knees are slightly apart, and his hands rest on his thighs just above his knees.

In terms of the special poses, the first crouching pose, pose 1, corresponds to the crouching posture Hewes labels number 127. The arms are held forward of the body with the elbows bent, the left arm higher than the right, and the hands forming fists, as if grasping an instrument. This pose is emblematic of the warrior grasping a spear or the sportsman handling an oar. The second crouching pose, pose 5, corresponds to Hewes's posture number 131, but with the right hand placed on the right hip. This is the emblematic pose of the baseball catcher. Standing pose 2 is the stance of the baseball batter. Standing pose 4 corresponds to the action of a weight lifter.

The sitting position that falls into this category of emblems, pose 3, is more problematic. It has different connotations when it is performed in different states of dress. According to Hewes, in almost every culture to sit with the legs folded to one side is a "strongly feminine custom" (1955:240). Certainly that is true in the United States. The gesture of holding the hand behind the head is also considered feminine in mainstream American culture. When a man wearing a suit strikes this pose with this gesture, he presents a token of effeminacy. However, when Paxton strikes this same pose a second time, he is clothed in draperies (formed by the clothes he has taken off and hung on his body) that create a classical look, and his left hand is now open. Now the image is redolent of the masculine beauty and strength expressed in Greek sculpture and in Michelangelo's painting *The Creation of Adam* on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The change in clothing and the alteration of a single gesture transform the image from one despised in mainstream American culture to a treasured icon of masculinity in the Western world.

Thus in *Flat* Paxton presents a set of actions with several meanings. One ensemble of actions calls to mind an ordinary, conventional, even humdrum white American upper-middle-class man, perhaps a lawyer, an accountant, or an advertising man. Another ensemble of activities connotes other, highly symbolic images of masculinity from sports and from fine art. And still another pose represents femininity.

The activities in the dance (that is, the entire range of doings, from

motions and poses to transitions and stillnesses) function in a number of ways. First, they operate poetically. There is a symmetry in the order of the movements. Both the circling and the symmetrical structure of undressing, striking poses in various stages of undress, and then dressing provide artistic unity in the dance. The array of poses in different levels of space, from standing to crouching to sitting, is formally quite pleasing.

Second, the doings are referential in the ways noted above, in that they refer to specific meanings in the culture. But also, they comment on the code of dance elements. They are an illustration of a theory of movement for dance that challenges the notion that a dance is an arrangement of special technical movements or even an arrangement of ordinary motions that have been imbued with extra expressiveness or energy.[3] Instead, *Flat* illustrates the proposition that a dance can consist of artfully arranged movements no matter how ordinary those movements or the style in which they are performed. This fits with the practice not only of Paxton in his earlier dances—which included such basic nonspecialized body motions as walking, moving furniture, and eating—but also of several other choreographers in the Judson Dance Theater, of which Paxton was an active member.[4] In *Flat* a full complement of the categories of movement and pose is arrayed: moving and not moving, posing and not posing, walking and not walking, and so on. The stillnesses often function analytically. Like stop-action photography, they freeze a movement one might think of as a single flow of action, rendering the movement less familiar and also dissecting it as a series of actions, revealing its multiplicity. Thus the action of sitting down or of taking off a sock proves to be an ensemble of motions and is enriched and imbued with aesthetic value.

In terms of their referents, the movements and poses in *Flat* fall into two distinct categories: those that refer to natural functions and those that refer to cultural functions. On the natural side fall the actions of walking, standing, sitting down, and getting up. As I have noted above, these are not natural in the sense that they are universal in terms of style. Rather, they are natural in the sense that all people do them and animals can, too. On the cultural side fall the activities having to do with getting dressed and undressed and also the designated poses, which are emblematic of social meaning.

I have discussed the use of space, time, and movements and poses in the dance; the use of objects remains. There are three categories of inanimate objects in *Flat*. One is the chair, which is a particular kind of chair. It is a Windsor chair, an armless wooden chair with a back made of an oval frame surrounding numerous narrow vertical rods. It is the type of chair one sees in intellectual institutions like libraries and universities, or in tasteful upper-middle-class homes, or in restaurants and men's clubs. It has a specific Anglo-American identity; it connotes stability, rural modesty, taste,

and intelligence. Paxton has used such chairs in other dances, and he is well aware of their implications.

> [They represent] stolidity. In *Section of a New Unfinished Work* a bent-wood chair was assembled, but the other chairs were very sturdy oaken old-fashioned office chairs. And I just quite like them. I think they're an amazing form, the engineering is rather complicated, and they were good solid comfortable chairs as opposed to a lot of the stuff that gets made, mostly a kind of quasi-modern design office furniture, which I think is weird shit. (Paxton with Béar 1975:28)

The second group of objects is the ensemble of clothing Paxton wears. This consists of a beige jacket and matching beige pants, a white long-sleeved shirt, dark socks, "kung-fu" shoes, and jockey-type underpants. Paxton has a closely trimmed mustache and beard, but I think this is irrelevant to his costume, for two reasons. First, he did not have facial hair when he first performed the dance in 1964; that means that a beard and mustache are not integral to the costume. Second, in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, facial hair no longer categorizes men in regard to age, occupation, class, conformity to social conventions, and wealth, as it did in the 1960s, when it marked a man as a member of a specific social set. Now men of all classes, incomes, ages, and social aspirations may wear beards. Except for his shoes, the rest of Paxton's costume in the dance identifies his "character" as a man to whom the chair might easily belong. He is a man who is somewhat conventional and formal. (He does not, for instance, wear jeans and a T-shirt, nor does he wear a pastel or brightly patterned shirt.) However, he is not so authoritative or formal that he wears a three-piece suit or even a tie.

The shoes are an interesting deviation from the rest of the costume. They are black canvas shoes that slip on. They are more casual than shoes that tie; they are even more casual than leather loafers. But they are not, for instance, sneakers. They simultaneously carry associations both of the "macho" heroes of martial arts films and of a countercultural choice of exotic dress. When Paxton takes off his jacket, the costume is rendered even more casual. The effect is that he is about to "roll up his sleeves and get to work." But this expectation is subverted when he hangs the jacket on his own body, and then when he hangs the rest of his garments on his body the subversion deepens. In fact, this action creates a third category of "object": the human body, which I will discuss further below.

Besides the different articles of clothing, the clothes appear in different combinations. First the man appears fully dressed. Next he is barefoot but otherwise fully dressed. Third he is barefoot, dressed in shirt and pants, and has a jacket hanging from his chest. And fourth he is naked except for his underpants, and the other three articles of clothing, which all hang from his body, form a kind of free-floating set of draperies. In fact, the draperies

make him no longer naked but a nude—a work of art. When the same movements and poses occur in the different states of dress and undress, as I have noted above, they seem to mean different things.

Thus the costume functions in a number of ways. As Petr Bogatyrev has observed, clothing acts simultaneously as object and as sign. As a pure object it protects the wearer from nakedness and from climate; as a sign, it indicates such attributes as social status, sex, nationality, age, and occupation.[5] In *Flat*, it also functions as equipment. It transforms the body of the dancer from an animate to an inanimate object in terms of the cultural message of the dance. The human body is rendered a thing whose function is to hang clothes on, like a coat rack; it becomes equivalent to the chair. And this leveling is another aspect of the title of the dance. Also, the clothing literally functions as a frame for the postures and gestures, surrounding the bodily configurations in disparate contexts in a physical sense.

Given the social context of the modern dance concert, the costume also comments on the code of dance "language"[6] by deviating from the standard costume for the dancer: the leotard. By substituting a specific kind of ordinary clothing for the dancer's costume choice, Paxton sends his audience a clear message not only about the character he plays in the dance but also about dance costume and, more generally, about theatrical costume. He illustrates the proposition that the costume need not be a "sign of a sign," in the sense in which Bogatyrev uses that expression (that is, something that is not a suit of clothing but signifies it),[7] but the sign itself (that is, the suit of clothing itself). There is a certain irony here, however, since the dancer's leotard is meant to reveal the muscles and sinews of the body without reaching a state of total nudity, and strongly resembles underwear, while Paxton, overdressed at first for a dancer, violates the taboos both of undressing on stage and of appearing in one's underwear in public. The rules of the dancer's appearance have preoccupied Paxton in several other dances. *Word Words*, a duet with Yvonne Rainer in which the two danced nude (or as close to it as New York State law allowed at that time—pasties for Rainer and g-strings for both), was inspired in part in response to a disparaging remark by a member of the modern dance establishment that the members of Judson Dance Theater all looked alike. In *English* he tried to make his eleven dancers all look alike by putting pale pancake makeup over their faces, lips, and eyebrows. In *Afternoon*, an outdoor performance, some of the trees were dressed like the dancers. Paxton has worn as a costume an entire plastic room, deflated (*Music for Word Words*), a telescoping set of cardboard boxes (*Rialto*), and a set of clothes that had zippers in the seams so that they could be taken apart and put back together in new ways (*Jag ville görna telefonera*). His 1970 plan to do a performance of his *Satisfyin Lover* with forty-two naked red-haired performers was vetoed at the last minute by the sponsor.[8] More recently, in *Bound*, he wore costumes

that were either altered or hidden by slide projections, as well as a bathing cap with holes placed such that a string traversing the room seemed to pass through Paxton's head.

Some Conclusions

Paxton's *Flat* is meaningful on at least two levels. On the one hand, it is a dance about a kind of character. On the other hand, it is a dance about the art of dance.

I said earlier that the facial expression in *Flat* is fixed. The fact that it is unchanging makes it recede from the list of prominent features of the dance. However, the very stoniness of expression, like the prosaism suggested by the title and the reduction of the body to objecthood, supports the meaning given in the symbols of constancy, evenness, and monotony discussed above. The affect in this dance is flat. This apparent lack of expressiveness in the face, clothing, style of walking and standing, and in the other activities is expressive in its own way: it intimates a cool stance.[9] But the cool stance is also a sign of repression. On the narrative level, this dance is a small tragedy about a man who is bound and inhibited by his social role. He is "the man in the gray flannel suit," who is nothing more than an object, a coat rack, an automaton who unfeelingly stands, sits, undresses and dresses himself in a routinized, mechanical way, in stops and starts, over and over. His cultural identity, expressed in his clothing and his actions, is stripped away when he takes off his clothing, and it is contrasted with alternative images. The man "tries on" the role of a sportsman, a woman, an idealized classical male figure. But finally he returns flatly to his culturally assigned definition of self.

The other level of meaning given by the dance, the one I have outlined above, also has to do with identity. The dance is a reflexive artwork. By substituting ordinary clothes for costume, everyday movements for technical ones, repetition and monotone for the rhythms and climaxes of traditional dance, Paxton in *Flat* comments on the codes of dance and calls into question the identity of a dance. If dance consists of neither special movements nor metered movements, what is it? *Flat*, along with other dances of its genre, illustrates the proposition that a dance can consist of movement organized poetically, familiar movements made strange by virtue of a new context.

27

Meredith Monk and the Making of *Chacon*: Notes from a Journal

In 1973 a small Chicago publisher sent me to New York City to write a book about contemporary dance. I had been performing, designing and constructing costumes, and writing in Chicago; that summer I had met Jill Johnston, read her writing for the first time, and discovered Judson Dance Theater and the "postmodern" dance aesthetic. In New York, hungrily devouring all the dance I could see, reconstructing history, trying to define the focus of my book, and wondering how my own conflicting desires to write and to perform would be resolved, I was increasingly attracted to the work of Meredith Monk. She, Ping Chong, and Monk's company, The House, planned to make a new piece during a three-week residency at Oberlin College in January 1974; I decided to go along and watch.

At Oberlin, I threw myself into the routine of both the students and the company, taking dance classes and workshops taught by members of The House during the day and, to my delight, was invited to take part in the creation of *Chacon* as a member of The House in the evenings. Because I had decided that the book, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, would be an investigation into how people make dances, the following "Notes from My Journal" are an attempt to record how Meredith Monk, Ping Chong, and The House collaborated on the realization of *Chacon*.

Notes from My Journal

1/10/74

Arrived in Oberlin yesterday. It's quietly snowily cold here, beautiful peace, quite a change from NY. It's wonderful to dance so early in the morning (practically in the dark, because of the switch to daylight saving time) in the barnlike gym. I'm taking technique classes in the mornings and workshops in the afternoons along with the Oberlin students. MM [Meredith Monk] gives nice stretchy classes, teases herself in disbelief ("What?! Me, teaching

Dance Chronicle, 1/1 (1977).

technique classes?"). But they're not muscular classes, not fast classes, we just work hard at waking up, warming ourselves, opening our joints, becoming flexible. After class I asked her if I could watch the company rehearse tonight. They're making a new piece here—actually she and Ping Chong are making the piece together: *Chacon*, not the French dance form but the name of a town in New Mexico where MM & PC spent the summer visiting MM's sister, who lives there. *Chacon* will be the second part of *Paris*, a duet by MM & PC which I haven't seen, although I did see a videotape of it a few months ago.

So I asked if I could come to the rehearsal. And she said, I don't like the idea of your sitting there watching us all the time. Why don't you just do it with us?

The rehearsal: We warmed up to one side of a record (Bulgarian folk music, which reminds me of Arabic music—nasal, repetitive), everyone doing his/her own warmup. I checked out what everyone else was doing and copied them. Then MM led us in vocal warmups: scales and chords. Then the work began.

Nothing about the piece has been planned or made except the title (even that is up in the air, MM keeps reverting to *Bernallio*) and the ambiance (deserty) and that there would/might be a villain and a birth. Tonight, then, we worked on villain's entrances. One at a time we came in the door of the studio. Monica [Moseley]—who ordinarily looks elegant and genteel, steel-blue eyes and bony balletic carriage—icy, a ramrod. Tall, beautiful Sybille [Hayn] slouches sleazily, tossing blonde hair behind one ear. Danny [Daniel Ira Sverdlik] is all bent-up, hobbling, a frizzy-haired mad-scientist sort of villain. Skinny, spectacled Ping stands in the doorway, smiling so calmly and blandly he looks evil. MM plays on her smallness, gutsy and defensive: her arms crossed, she sticks up her chin: "Hey!" Huge gray-haired Lee [Nagrin] does a slow dramatic stab. Haan [Endred] is subdued nastiness, twisting his ring slowly and deliberately around his finger, glancing sideways. And I am last, channeling my nervousness into a paranoid, nail-biting villain.

We enter again, just to crystallize things, and then come in two at a time, this time trying to turn the entrance into something longer, developing a "bit" to frame the character. We walk around the studio in groups of three, walking and walking in our own particular villain-character-walk. Then all of us walk around, letting interactions—glances, gestures, attractions, distances—happen between our characters, trying to push the movements we find in the characters *beyond* the characters and into more abstract arrangements, repetitions, suggestions. MM is the only one using her voice as well. "Hey! Hey hey hey! . . . . . heyHey!"

When that reaches an impasse, we sit down and talk. About stereotypes and archetypes, how they differ, when to use them, how to transcend them, how to avoid them. I wonder how it all works—rehearsal dynamics,

that is. Everyone giggles, acts corny, fools around and then also knows when to straighten up and take care of business. There seems to be some unspoken agreement about letting impulses arise and take their course, about surrendering to the rhythm of the group's activity. Nothing, no matter how off the wall, is tossed away without first examining it, mining it for material. The balance between playing and working seems natural and fruitful.

We sit in a circle to sing. MM wants to use again a small round she composed for *Education of the Girlchild*. She sees nothing wrong with reusing material; this song, she points out, didn't get used nearly as much as she'd have liked. So we sing the song. No words to it, only vocalized syllables. Heh heh/heh heh/heh heh heh/heh heh heh/hoi. MM tries punctuating the singing with a simple repetitive motion, a fist pressed against the floor. She looks at PC: Won't a repetitive song with a repetitive gesture be too boring? PC: Well, repetition is a crazy thing. The first few times you do something it's interesting. Then after a while it gets boring. But if you do it for an hour it turns into something else entirely.

We sing all the rounds anyone can think of: madrigals, French songs, "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," spirituals, beautiful baroque intricate songs. And then to the Student Union to drink beer.

1/11

Rehearsal: warmup. Then: walking around the space as if it's a wide open plain, all of us at once.

Then (MM is giving the instructions) one at a time we run across the studio as if it's a wide open etc. And it's amazing how this light, bare, man-made room transforms into plains. Because of the slowness of Danny's sliding, the way Sybille holds her cheek to the wind, the breadth of PC's arms, the way Lee seems to look deep deep into the distance?

We stand in a circle. Think about birth, MM says. And for a few minutes we all stand there thinking or visualizing. Then we take turns showing our birth-thoughts. (It doesn't have to be the act of giving birth, MM tells us. Just whatever comes into your head or your body when you think about birth.) Lee squats. Her face goes through incredible contortions. Labor pains? Orgasms? She mumbles a lot of unintelligible stuff that finally gets shaped into a single spat-out word, and her whole body releases. Sybille lies on the floor on her back with her head toward us. Her whole body tenses and she lifts off the floor, pelvis thrust skyward, all her weight on one shoulder. Ripples of tension pass through her. A thin high scream.

Monica squats, her head between her knees. Quiet private tensing. Danny, clowning, holds the baby in one arm and points to it. I squat, thinking unconvincingly about contractions. All I feel is the discomfort of not knowing what I'm doing while people are watching me. Haan gets down on the floor in a sort of air-raid defense position, his hands covering

the back of his head. His whole body contracts and releases beautifully, gently. Is he a baby being born? I wonder.

MM stands in a lunge, holding one arm out straight, bracing it with the other arm. She is pulled, hangs on to her own weight, waiting. She is released. Pull, release. Pull, release, pull. PC watching lilliputian activity very far below him sends the child off with an omnipotent godfather pat.

MM & PC look at each other. MM: Yep, Sybille is going to be the birthgiver, all right. Nevertheless, we teach each other our different births, explain what it was we were feeling, thinking, and doing. Then Sybille does four of our different births in a row, walking off and on stage in between each. No, MM & PC look at each other and frown. Maybe. . . . Monica tries it, without exits and entrances. Then Lee does only Sybille's birth, in a series that develops: walking around, starting to lie down, walking around some more, almost lying down, walking again, etc. MM & PC exchange glances. Well, not exactly . . . but it is the right track. . . . Haan refines Lee's (Sybille's) thing. And then Sybille tries it. But this time the walking in the circle has too much momentum. As Sybille keeps pacing, PC suddenly caws. She stops, listens. Yes. She paces slowly, stopping and listening irregularly. Suddenly lies down. MM tells the rest of us to close in the space just slightly and stand there watching her. Danny as doctor must now zigzag, skating, behind and then come in front.

Whew. A whole section has just been created.

It's amazing how naturally all this flows. MM directs the currents of our material, rather than telling us precisely what to do. It's unclear how much MM and PC discuss privately; mostly she does the talking, he modifies or adds to what she says. One of them will give a problem, then all of us (including the two of them) work on it. We take turns showing our solutions, then we all talk about it. Maybe fool around a bit. Maybe some sparks from fooling around. MM lets it all happen, the looseness, the bullshitting, the playing—I have this image of her as our kindergarten teacher, going off somewhere mentally to sort out the material she's just seen, leaving us to play while she busily tries to figure what to do next. But she's also leaving half an ear open to our playing to maybe pick up on more good material, then she comes back to us and we move on.

1/12

In the costume shop.

We all play, trying things on, kids in a candy shop. Villains, farmers, housefraus. We look for things that feel right for us, keeping in mind MM's dicta: stick to brown; blue for the farmers. I can't help being drawn to yellow and white, though (I've just found out that I'm a farmer)—I feel summery and fieldish in worn white overalls, a faded yellow plaid shirt, ivory scarf on

my head. Monica, meanwhile, has come up with the same things only in beiges and browns.

Sybille fluctuates between a homespun brown skinny dress that bags down to her calves, and a flimsy tennessee williams lavender print, lace-edged. We all mess around, trying on this and that, sudden inspirations, gravitations back to certain pieces. And then occasionally MM lines us up and looks at us as a cluster, as a composition.

How to put the "edge" on things? The crucial question of the day. The costumes can't be too period, nor too modern; not too matching (we look like a high-school musical, MM wails) but not too makeshift either.

What about the villains. Is wearing black too clichéd? All the villains try on hats. (MM, PC, Haan are the villains, Sybille is the mother, Lee the painter/poet, Danny the doctor, and Monica and I are the farmers, along with Blondell [Cummings], who hasn't arrived from NY yet.) MM wants to wear an eyepatch, an evil touch that has personal significance as well (she had to wear one as a kid). Now the problem is—where does one find a black eyepatch in Oberlin? Or should the patch simply be a folded-over bandana?

Everyone is getting hungry and, back at the dorm where the company eats, lunch is almost over. So we stop, taking our costumes with us, with alternate choices, to be seen/felt at rehearsal.

Rehearsal. At which I feel uncomfortable because I wanted to go to Columbus, three hours away, to see Twyla Tharp's company perform. But I had felt too guilty to even ask MM if I could be excused from rehearsal, especially to go see someone else's work. Now, is my first responsibility to MM, because I am performing in her piece, or to my own work, the book, which means having to see other people's work as well as hers? Everyone in The House loves to see movies and so rehearsals are always scheduled around whatever movie is showing on campus. But my role is not too clear here, I can't expect special treatment. At the rehearsal my discomfort is increased when I sense that MM is beginning to mistrust me-as-reporter. She doesn't let anyone watch her rehearsals and I think she is beginning to regret letting me do this.

The rehearsal is short. Damn, I think, I should have gone to Columbus after all, but by now am too tired from struggling with the whole dilemma to even care. We do the farmer plowing/singing in rounds, singing the hoi song as two lines of farmers, starting at the walls, move to the center of the floor. We make plowing or farming motions on the first and last beats of the round. MM & PC keep trying out other formations with the same song, but keep coming back to these two lines.

We do villains' entrances, which keep dribbling off and not working, and I feel it's my down energy, my discomfort that's interrupting. We decide to end the rehearsal and let the villains work separately tomorrow.

1/14

A very exhausting day. To begin with, it's Monday. Yesterday MM and I talked about our feeling cagey with each other, our mutual feelings of vulnerability. It must be double nervousness for her this time, the normal state of wondering whether this piece will work and then on top of that having this stranger around all the time. I, however, always have to prove my sympathy and valor to dancemaker after dancemaker; they have every right to be defensive but it taxes me, and don't I wonder enough on my own about my legitimacy as a writer. I gave her some of my writing to read, and that and the talk made us both feel better.

So today: a very demanding and mind-blowing workshop by PC, a lesson in concentration. And then, immediately, a heavy rehearsal. Will I recover in time for tomorrow's work?

Ping's workshop: First in the upstairs gym (where the workshops are usually held), he gave us instructions. Go to the downstairs gym. Walk slowly and regularly, single file, around the room, your bodies flush against the inner wall that goes all the way around the gym. You will be walking at right angles to the wall, your head turned to the right, so that you will be looking to your right at all times even though you are constantly moving forward. Look carefully but only at those things that are directly in your line of vision. Let your eyes be like a camera with only dead-ahead focus.

He had augmented the already marvelous environment. The gym—wooden lockers with rows of open doors, golden wood, cinder blocks, mirrors, the shower rooms with their shiny tiles and their translucent, peony-patterned shower curtains; the partitions, the slats, the panels, the spaces. And then inside this space: Sybille sitting in the showers, sometimes facing one direction, sometimes sitting somewhere else, reading symbolic logic, muttering in German, reading a magazine. A shower dripping. Ping and Haan arriving at postures. Whispering, a hand raised, a hand placed on the piano. Bulgarian music starting and stopping.

We were free to sit down in the middle of the room if we got tired, and that variable too became part of the landscape that began to get macroscopic. Dilations occur because of total concentration. Like LSD. Three times around the gym took me an hour.

Recognizing a piece of dust on the wall. Seeing my own eyeball abrupt and large in a mirror after turning a corner. Coming to a crack after a long stretch of the inner golden wall and suddenly seeing a whole magnified world inside: the piano, Ping and Haan, mats, mirrors, and, through a space in the opposite inner wall, a whole line of people shuffling slowly by, staring, their heads expressionless turned perpendicular to their bodies.

The rehearsal: We go over the birth again. We go over the farmers again, teaching it to Becky [Gilford] and Jan [Jones], Oberlin students augmenting the cast. Teaching it gives it a kind of permanence.

Now Lee as painter/poet/narrator figure walks in, sits down, pulls out a pipe and lights it. Look around, MM directs, make a horizon out there, very distant. Lee will paint a mural on the back wall during the whole piece. Lee, a painter in real life, making her own personal metaphor become a performance metaphor; the mural will be a landscape and we will simultaneously make the same landscape with our bodies and voices.

And what the villains resolved yesterday was that there will be only one villain now, Haan. Haan enters as villain. Then we run through the whole thing, in order. The beginning. Birth. Farmers. Lee. Villain.

1/15

Rehearsals are becoming more linear now, the material is getting pieced together in an order. . . .

Tonight we rehearsed in the big gym where we do our technique classes and workshops, instead of in our small familiar beautiful studio. Our energy diffused in this new, overlarge, unfamiliar space, but this is where we will perform in two weeks. For some reason we kept losing our orientation, forgetting the sequence of things, forgetting which sides to enter from. Danny writes down the correct order of events so this won't happen again, and I do too:

1. Piano music, written by MM, which she sits and plays, since she's no longer a villain.
2. Sybille paces in a circle. She lies down and screams. We farmers move in from the sides and watch.
3. Danny zigzags across the floor, doctor's bag in hand, as if ice skating to the scene. Then he crosses front, where he gives a speech on bonding (chemical). Another personal metaphor: In real life, back in NY, Danny is a chemistry professor. And from time to time he looks or points in front, although Sybille is behind him, and says, "How's the baby?"
4. Monica comes on and gently walks him off as he continues to explain bonding, antibonding, and nonbonding.
5. Lee comes on and sits. Pipe. Horizon.
6. Dawn (light cue). We back out, having been standing there since watching the birth.
7. Sybille gets up, goes to the side and gets a pitcher of water, washes or drinks while Lee behind her sits and smokes.
8. Monica comes on and does a preview of the farmer-plowing thing with a faint hoi song, stops and looks for rain. Backs out.
9. Lee empties her pipe and starts painting.
10. Farmer thing with round singing. Lines of farmers cross once and get to the other side (my line picking up Sybille along the way).
11. Haan enters as villain, drinks the water Sybille has left there.

1/16

No rehearsal today, MM's voice concert and party after.

1/17

Today MM gave the workshop: Lie down on the floor on your back, she said. Listen to your body. . . . Find three sounds. . . . Listen to them. . . . Make the first sound, but with your voice (i.e., don't cough but do with your voice what a cough *is*). Now make the sound very low and slowly. Very high and quickly.

Still lying on your back on the floor with your eyes closed, be in a desert. Have the whole gym become a desert. This desert might have other beings in it. Use the sound to become part of the desert.

Now leaving the desert and body-sound behind, use sound and movement to make that world consist only of the floor and flatness. . . . Now go find a place on the wall; eyes closed, let the surface of the wall be your only world.

Divide up into groups of seven. Make a sound landscape. Let an event happen that changes the landscape. (Our group made a mountain top, very still and delicate; our event: the sunrise.)

Assignment for next time: staying with the same group, make a full landscape, with movement, sounds, characters, animals, anything. Have in it one cosmic event—a wedding, birth, or death—and one food ritual. Design it to be viewed from a specific place in the gym (ours to be seen from the balcony/track).

The rehearsal. Now we have even more Oberlin students as farmers. So we begin by teaching the farmer thing and working on it; the farmer thing is becoming the touchstone for the piece. But today MM is impatient with it, it plods and drags too much, it looks and sounds too much like the "Song of the Volga Boatman," there's not enough variety, dancing, or magic in it, no "edge."

We make our singing more nasal—and yes, that helps, it puts an edge on the weighty regularity of the singing, also seems to free our movements. The movements now begin to turn into something more abstract than farming movements; more like symbols or ritual gestures. Throwing in delicate variations and shifting the focus of our eyes lightens matters.

We work on *Paris*, choosing which of us will be the puppet announcer, laughing at each other, at ourselves, clowning; disembodied heads mouth disembodied words, made by PC across the room. It's a relief to be able to let go, to act as hilarious and bizarre as possible; after all, *Paris* was made long ago, performed, videotaped, known, familiar territory now.

Paris is a duet for MM & PC, a duet they made together, which will be the first part of the performance here; *Chacon* is the second part. Now they rehearse parts of it with Jan at the piano. It's stunning: the sitting still

for durations, the skittering, falling, greeting gravely. The strolling and humming. Transforming into monkeys and back again, swatting invisible flies. Moustaches, coats, glasses appear and disappear and reappear. MM taps the pianist's shoulder and he stops playing.

After *Paris* we start to leave, realizing that the performance is in a week and a day, and that *Chacon* is just beginning to grow. MM starts talking about deadline pressures, about how much work there is left to do and it was we, not she, who insisted that we return to rehearse more after dinner.

I got a letter from Ellen today, a xeroxed quotation from Isadora Duncan:

> The dancer of the future will be one whose body and soul have grown so harmoniously together that the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body. The dancer will not belong to a nation but to all humanity. She will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts. She will dance the changing life of nature, showing how each part is transformed into the other. From all parts of her body shall shine radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thoughts and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of woman. . . . Oh, she is coming, the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of new woman; more glorious than any woman that has yet been; more beautiful than the Egyptian, than the Greek, the early Italian, than all women of past centuries—the highest intelligence in the freest body!

After dinner: We sit around and talk about costumes. How do we find that infamous "edge"—overalls for the farmers have to go. Too corny. What should we wear instead? Suits? Fur coats? We make another appointment for the costume room.

We talk the play through. And then we start accumulating material like crazy! Enough of this business of repeating the beginning over and over! Time to invent the middle and the end.

No slot for this yet, but at some point the farmers enter diagonally from the upstage corners doing the *Education* walk (looks like genuflecting). Then once we reach the center we form a tableau. MM & PC look at each other and say: "It's perfect for the rain scene, now comes the rain scene."

"What's the rain scene?" we ask.

"We don't know yet," MM says. "We haven't made it yet. But anyway, now we have a transition *into* the rain scene. And we should also have a preview of the rain scene, a fake rain scene, like Monica's preview of the farming scene; visual rhymes."

Now, what does the villain do? What makes him a villain? And how

does he die? He has to die, but not too melodramatically. We try a funeral dance for the villain.

We try things for the end: Lee comes forward with her family portrait and starts giving life histories of her ancestors. What if Sybille were to give a simultaneous translation in German? We try it and it is bizarre. Time to quit then, all of us tired from so much progress.

Tonight I have been thinking about what an extraordinary woman MM is. Obsessed marvelously with her visions, thoroughly and lucidly and diligently working toward them. Her fascination with St. Joan (*Vessel*, and her momentary appearance as Joan in PC's *I Flew to Fiji; You Went South*).

At times she's unapproachable and formidable. Intent, worried about things not working, having hysterical fits; people reassure her and take care of her. She is a wonderful knot of charm, megalomania, energy, needs, strength, innocence, demands, gentleness, obstinacy, capriciousness, fanaticism, nervousness, sensitivity, spontaneity, spirituality. She's quite beautiful from some angles, not from others. When I stand next to her I am always surprised at how small she is; her presence is huge and commanding. Her hair is sometimes braided into a thousand tiny gypsy braids, sometimes into one thick braid down her back, sometimes hanging straight and loose. Her usual clothing here: overalls, purple brocade Chinese jacket, and workboots.

Today she got a letter from a friend advising her to stop doing group work and only work on solo stuff if that's what she feels drawn to. She talks to me about my writer/performer conflict, tells me how she works on her music and her dancing, bringing them together when she can, devoting herself to them separately when she can. It's a struggle. Then don't these things ever end?

1/23

How long since I last wrote. A week? I've been totally devoted to and exhausted by dancing every morning, working on the student workshop presentation, rehearsing afternoons and evenings.

Tomorrow night is dress rehearsal. So much more has been added and changed and edged.

Now the farmers wear suits, funky countryish Sunday-best suits, with white shirts tinted slightly with tea, to cut the glare. At various points various of us remove our jackets, and bandanas appear and disappear and reappear in pockets, around heads, around arms (reflection of *Paris*).

Haan as villain walks into the space, into Sybille's circle, and sneakily, stingily drinks out of her cup. Blondell (who is both a farmer and a secret folkwitch villain, who has power over Haan) walks straight across the stage not even looking at Haan, who crouches there holding the cup. She walks to the little portable phonograph and puts on the rain record. Some farmers do the *Education* walk diagonally into the space from stage right (since this

is happening in the gym, we are completely visible even when offstage; we stand there watching quietly when not on). We form the tableau. Blondell takes the record off, Sybille starts to sway and recite a fairy tale in German. The rest of us in the tableau glance loadedly at each other and at points in space. Then we get up and start walking off, falling and getting up again repeatedly.

Then Blondell does strange gestures and sounds, she approaches the cup and backs off from it. Then she wraps the cup in a bandana and leaves. Sybille walks around in the circle again, and Haan follows her. He teaches her a gesture. They stand there side by side, a strange wondering childlike look on the face of this tall gaunt woman in workboots. Haan walks away and taps the pianist on the shoulder; the music stops (reflection of *Paris*). The woman finally does the gesture on her own; learning it is her death and she crumbles. Then the farmers cross the stage again, farming, this time in silence.

Danny comes on again as doctor. This time he does a transmutation of the bonding speech—tracing maps or acupuncture charts with his fingers. Monica again gently leads him off. Then the farmers cross a third time, this time singing and embroidering the gestures with jumps and flyswattings. We again pick up Sybille along the way (her resurrection).

Haan is onstage. Monica, Danny, and Jan walk diagonally upstage as

***Chacon*, by Meredith Monk and Ping Chong, at St. Peter's Church in New York City. (Photo: Phillip Hipwell, Courtesy of Meredith Monk, The House Foundation for the Arts.)**

To view this image,
please refer to the print version of this book

town criers, skewing the hoi round into something even more repetitive, more nasal, and much louder. Monica is carrying a camera (in real life she is a photographer and has been taking photos at rehearsals); she takes a picture of the villain as she passes him. He cringes.

Blondell walks onto the stage backwards. Puts on the rain record—the real rain. She stands there with her arms crossed. Haan walks on behind her and walks over to her, wiggles his fingers as if about to strangle her. He touches her, and immediately falls to the ground. Blondell turns and walks to the phonograph, takes the record off, walks quickly in a zagzag path to the real door in the back wall of the gym, opens the door and goes outside.

Then there is a false ending. Lee genuflects forward with her family portrait. Everyone else walks on, some of us genuflecting, to form a line, everyone with their right hand on the shoulder of the person in front. Blondell (who has come back from outside) puts banjo music on the record player. Then we do a figurine dance, making little characters for twenty-four counts, holding hands on shoulder in front with head tilted for twenty-four counts, always snaking the line forward. When the song ends, we freeze. Lee slowly walks forward with the family portrait, slowly says some sentences which Sybille translates simultaneously: The shoe is made of brown leather. The stitches on it are handcrafted and the leather is well-worn. Today is January 25, 1974.

MM and PC in their *Paris* costumes, who have been sitting in front watching (MM playing piano) during the whole thing, come on stage walking and looking around—as they do in *Paris*—swatting flies.

Ellen will be here Friday to see it. I am anxious; will she like it? What is it that she'll see? I have no idea of what it looks like.

7/4/77

My performance journals always seem to end just before the climax. Maybe the climaxes aren't the same in the writing as they are in life. Two different reasons for the abruptness of the narrative's end occur to me: First, the demands (time and energy shortages) of those last two crucial days of the performance process. A very practical reason. And second and more mysterious, the quality of those final stages. One can only record and observe up to a point; in the performance itself, one is swept into another state of consciousness that narrows the vision drastically, destroys any pretense of objectivity. Perceptions are heightened and distorted, the air is saturated with all the familiar material and with something else too: the exchange of energy between performers and audience, the new relationships between the performers, the life of its own that the piece assumes.

And then, it's over, and there's no vocabulary to capture all that complexity and changing with. And somehow, it no longer seems important to capture it. The piece exists as a separate object, in the videotapes, the

photographs, the reviews, the muscles of the performers, the retinae of the audience—and the future editions performed on other stages.

Chacon was performed at Oberlin only once, on January 25, 1974. It has since been performed in a revised form, first as part of *Paris/Chacon* (Spring 1974), and then in *Paris/Chacon/Venice/Milan* (1977).

28

Dancing on the Edge

In the West, where the history of the arts since the Renaissance has been the story of specialization, theater and dance are not twins (as they are in many other cultures), but merely siblings—and at times rival ones. The interpretation of the various arts in the 1960s, however, has made an impact on recent dance, bringing the literary and physical aspects of theatrical spectacle close together in ways that are reminiscent of the Renaissance or Greek drama. Although this has happened on every level of dance, it is especially clear in the area of postmodern dance, where choreographers stake out their theories and practice at the edge of what we still consider to be dance.

In the sixties and seventies, avant-garde choreographers tried to find out what is specifically dancelike about dance—how it is different from other arts and other theater forms. By rejecting theater, they were setting themselves apart from classical modern dance and from traditional ballet. But, in recent years, postmodern dance has moved from denying theatricality to embracing it.

The first two generations of modern dance choreographers began by repudiating the academic ballet vocabulary and grammar, which seemed to them sterile and too formal, as well as the fairy tale plots of the nineteenth-century ballets. The forerunners of modern dance (Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, and others), many of whom had training in popular theater troupes at the turn of the twentieth century, and then the pioneers of modern dance (Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Helen Tamiris, Hanya Holm, and others) of the 1920s and 1930s, all found individualized vocabularies for expres-

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sing feeling tones and social messages in stylized movements and energy levels.

By the 1950s, Merce Cunningham in modern dance and George Balanchine in ballet had become the leading proponents of dance for its own sake, rebelling against the age-old situation of dance as the stepchild of theater. They embraced a new formalism that posed questions about the essential qualities of dance as an independent, kinetic art, not one that substituted movement for words.

By the 1960s, a new branch of modern dance was emerging and experimenting with the very limits of what could be defined as dance. Judson Dance Theater, a choreographer's collective that operated out of Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, was the center for young artists in various fields, and was instrumental in redefining dance in every way, from training and technique, to choreographic content and style, to the relationship of audience to performer, to the venue itself.

Out of this laboratory came an interest in the nonillusionistic presentation of pure dance, of movement per se, especially in the work of such choreographers as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs. During the later 1960s and 1970s, these choreographers made dances that were antitheatrical in that they deliberately dispensed, not only with character and plot, but also with other theatrically expressive elements such as music, special costumes, and suggestive stage lighting.

Ironically, while the avant-garde choreographers of the 1960s were involved in stripping their dances of every vestige of theatricality, the nontheatrical arts borrowed from the theater, and the theater, stressing physicality, became more dancelike. In "happenings," visual artists called attention to the processes rather than to the products of their activity; poets chanted and sang their poems in public; experimental theater groups such as the Living Theater, the Open Theater, and Jerzy Grotowski's Theater Laboratory incorporated various aspects of physical work into their "dramas."

In the plays of these groups and the many groups influenced or inspired by them, including the Performance Group (later The Wooster Group) and Mabou Mines, physical actions spoke as loudly—sometimes more loudly—than words. The emphasis on the verbal text was diminished. Perhaps the only difference between these performances and dance performances was that these groups still marketed themselves as theater.

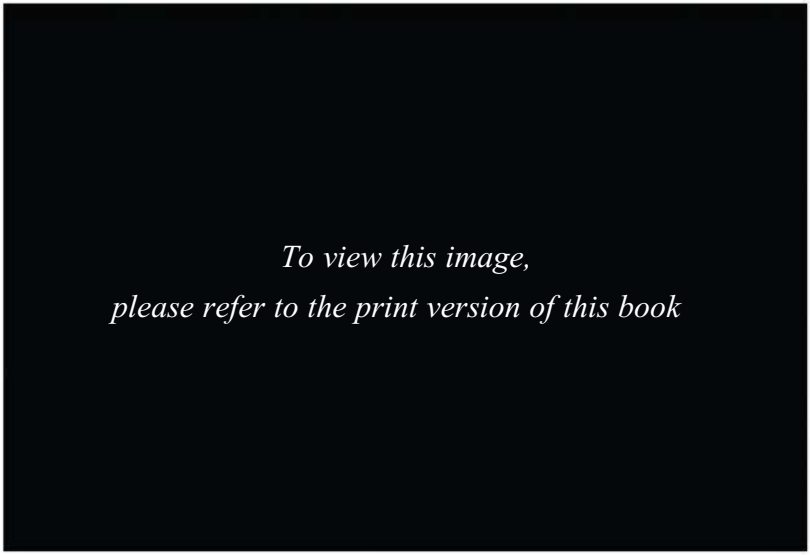
Since the late 1970s, postmodern dance has entered a new phase. It hasn't exactly returned to the drama or literary connections of the older modern dance; it has become more theatrical with a new twist. Sometimes this new theatricality is the result of a new emphasis on the mise-en-scène of the dance. In the 1960s and 1970s, avant-garde choreographers operated in a spirit of pragmatism, embracing the ordinariness of everyday actions,

enjoying the discovery of the "natural" body and attempting to present dance as a unique art by refusing to let it share the limelight with any other art. Today the upcoming generation of postmodern choreographers as well as the earlier generation are once again willing to share the focus with the visual and aural aspects of staging. The technology and artifice of the theater is no longer seen as false, but as enhancing.

Of the earlier generation, Trisha Brown has begun to collaborate with other artists to create multimedia spectacles, à la Diaghilev or Cunningham, in which the choreography nonetheless remains the prime ingredient. Her *Glacial Decoy* (1979) featured magnificent décor—slide projections the height of the proscenium that slipped in sequence across the stage—as well as costumes by visual artist Robert Rauschenberg. She used music (Robert Ashley's *Atalanta*) for the first time in years for *Son of Gone Fishin'* (1981), which also featured moving drops in watery colors, by artist Donald Judd. Currently Brown is working on a project with Rauschenberg and performance artist Laurie Anderson, to be given its premiere this fall at Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Similarly, Lucinda Childs, whose work of the early seventies was a model of the austere, analytic school of postmodern dance, has made two large-scale collaborations: *Dance* (1979), with visual artist Sol LeWitt (who contributed films and a lighting design) and composer Philip Glass; and *Relative Calm* (1981), with Robert Wilson and composer Jon Gibson. In both of these dances, the sets and the music added layers of mood and atmosphere, adding a grand sense of scale to the clarity and rhythmic brilliance of the dancing. Another collaboration, David Gordon's *T.V. Reel* (1982), created with visual artist Power Boothe and video artist Dennis Diamond, translates Gordon's penchant for infinitely interlocking patterns into several complementary media.

The younger postmodern choreographers draw their inspiration from popular entertainments and social dancing, from the fashion industry and the art world, and from the garish colors, shapes, and sounds of punk rock, new wave, and street style. Molissa Fenley, an American who grew up in Nigeria, mixes memories of West African ritual dance, gestures from American social dancing, cosmic iconography and driving percussion in endless streams of movement. Fenley's recent *Eureka* (1982) was a complex, long solo for the choreographer that changed mood and character with shifts in the music. Karole Armitage, formerly a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, draws on punk rock iconography and has frequently collaborated with composer Rhys Chatham and his new wave band. Armitage's *Drastic-Classicism* (1981) used six dancers and five musicians on stage. The dancers wore bright costumes in strange shapes (designed by Charles Atlas, the artist and filmmaker who often collaborates with Cunningham), the music's high volume assaulted the ear, and the dancers' movements were rapid, abrupt, almost violent. The presence of



Pooh Kaye in her *Home Life of a Wild Girl.*
(Photo: Wim Riemens.)

the musicians onstage at times made the piece look more like a rock concert than a dance performance.

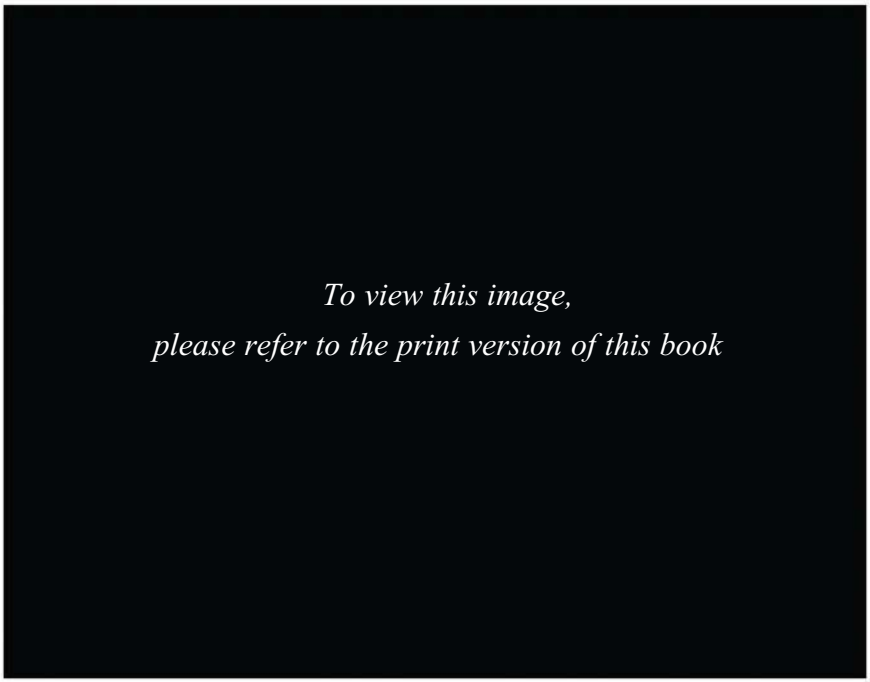
Yoshiko Chuma and Pooh Kaye work sometimes together and sometimes independently. Their work often invites narrative interpretation, but, at the same time, it eludes being pinned down precisely. Both women revel in animal and infantile movements and sensation—crawling, jumping, falling, and snuggling, throwing dirt and leaves with joyous abandon, building houses out of bricks and concrete blocks.

However, another strand of postmodern choreographers has worked since the mid-1960s in a more metaphorical vein. Unlike the analytic dancemakers, whose dances became objective as they presented pure, often simple movement in ways that called attention to the workings of the body, choreographers such as Meredith Monk and Kenneth King have, since 1964, used dance as one element in their *gesamtkunstwerk*, which incorporate gesture, movement, music, the spoken word, light, and sometimes taste and smell. Monk's performances have a homey, folktale quality; they seem to symbolize the processes of seeing, hearing, remembering, and even art-making. For instance, her recent *Specimen Days* at the New York Shakespeare Festival evoked both the context (Civil War America) and the content (a celebration of the physical) of Walt Whitman's poetry, with references to composers Louis Moreau Gottschalk and Matthew Brady as well. The humdrum rituals of daily life deepen in Monk's work into rich, multilayered metaphors for teaching, learning,

making art, loving, and building communities—as well as seeing them destroyed. King's dances, with their verbal puns, films, and dances-within-dances, are like complex riddles that pose questions about life's mysteries on many levels; very often, they seem to be metaphors for technology, information, and power systems. Robert Wilson's spectacles, such as the twelve-hour *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* or *Einstein on the Beach* (an opera with music by Philip Glass) fall into this category as well—a dense collage of elements located somewhere between dance, theater, and opera, or a "theater of images," as critic Bonnie Marranca has called it.

Bill Irwin (a former member of Herbert Blau's group Kraken), whose technique most closely resembles that of a silent film comedian, is another performer who seems hard to categorize. In the nineteenth century, he might have been simply thought of as a vaudevillian whose specialty was clowning; on a variety theater bill, no one would have worried about precise labels. but in these days of specialization, newspapers have to know in advance which critic to send to an event, and grants agencies need to know which panel to send an application to. A theater-trained performer like Irwin, whose humor is more physical than verbal, may still be claimed by the dance critics even if he doesn't call himself a dancer. Tim Miller, who began working in New York five years ago under the vague rubric of performance artist, blends autobiography and history, words and movement, as he cooks hamburgers, pushes a lawnmower, steps on a string of lightbulbs, and paints his name on his chest. He, too, has been claimed by the dance world, and in his newest work, *Cost of Living*, he is working with a group of trained dancers.

Traditionally, the main—and vast—difference between dance and theater has been the script or text. Once ballet separated itself from opera in the nineteenth century, dance spectacles could be thought of as wordless plays, and even before the nineteenth century dance theorists had advanced just such an idea. Although mime in ballet served as a kind of sign-language substitute for verbal text, and although modern dance choreographers have experimented with poems and other documents since the early part of this century, it is in the postmodern genre of dance that language has definitively emerged as an inalienable right of the choreographer. And it is in the "talkie" dance concert—as in the "new talkies" of the avant-garde cinema—that new dance presently finds itself closest to theater in the literal sense. The work of the Grand Union (1970–76) was an apotheosis of various postmodern concerns, including questions of improvisation and permanence, the various relationships among choreographer, performer, and spectator, and the overlap of movement and language. These dancer-choreographers (Becky Arnold, Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley [Lloyd], Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Nancy Lewis, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Lincoln Scott) were as articulate with words as they



Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane in *Rotary Action.*
(Photo: Lois Greenfield.)

were with movement, and, using every channel of expression available, they not only created work in the moment of performance, but also commented on their activities, planned their strategies, and engaged in all sorts of word wit. Watching a Grand Union performance, one began to wonder why so many dancers robbed themselves by assuming that language was not their terrain.

Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane are like a duet version of the Grand Union, as comfortable talking as dancing, and equally comfortable doing both at once. The moment-to-moment responses of the two performers to their materials (objects, environment, music, movement themes, two contrasting bodies, and a long friendship and collaboration) are the subject of the dance, and a stream-of-consciousness narration makes the dancing richly resonant.

Gordon's recent *Trying Times* (1982) not only incorporated text in the form of incessant storytelling (in a confessional mode) as the dancers performed exacting physical tasks; it also included a paradigmatic courtroom scene (recalling not only Perry Mason and the Marx Brothers, but

also *The Merchant of Venice*) and went on to poke fun at the dance critics, as Gordon's troupe accused him of various choreographic crimes. Trisha Brown's dances have also, from time to time, involved verbal instructions and commentary.

So many younger choreographers use language and plot structures now that P.S. 1, a performance/art center in Queens, has sponsored two "Paranarrative" festivals in the past two years, and the critic Ann Barzel noted recently in *Dance Magazine* that one disgruntled Chicago viewer implored the dancers to stop talking and get on with the dancing. Charlie Vernon, from Chicago, often uses taped stories as the "music" for his dancing. The dancers' partly abstract, partly referential gestures slip in and out of specific meaning as they coincide with, then separate from the words. Johanna Boyce, of the younger generation of choreographers most interested in pedestrian movement and activities, set her dancers singing and playing childlike word games (as well as running relay races, flipping coins, dressing and undressing, and performing other tasks). Jim Self has also been talking and dancing since the early seventies, and in his recent choreography he has collaborated several times with writer Richard Elovich, juxtaposing abstract movement sequences with very specific stories, so that at times the two match up, but at times (for instance, in the long solo *Lookout*, 1982) there are separate stories going on in the quirky dancing and in the spoken text.

Because postmodern choreography has radically redefined dance, our traditional theories for categorizing what we see on stage have crumbled. We can now go to an event advertised as a dance concert and see movement that is neither rhythmic nor wordless. Similarly, the experimental theater movement has redefined what constitutes a play, and we can see dramas that have very little written text. Part of how we decide whether it's dance or theater that we're seeing depends on what the thing is called. Part also depends on "genetics": in which art form were the artists in question born and bred? But perhaps one of the most salutary features of the breakdown of boundaries characterizing postmodernism in the arts is a certain freedom. Whether what we are watching is a dance or a theater piece is not the issue; that settled, we are free to see the work, in all its aspects, simply for what it is.

29

"Drive," She Said: The Dance of Molissa Fenley

Molissa Fenley's choreography bewilders the eye, entices the ear, and challenges both the memory and the intellect. Incessant, everchanging motion, saturated with polymorphous arm gestures, performed to a driving, repetitive, percussive beat, the dances are complex series of tensions between constancy and mutability, structure and disorder, abstraction and imagery, exoticism and familiarity, social and theatrical forms.

American dance audiences are accustomed to watching ballets composed of legible phrases, often matched to equally distinct musical patterns. The traditional modern dance creates a succession of expressive postures and gestures that prompt the spectator to arrange them in a narrative flow or a metaphoric gestalt. The achievement of postmodern dance was to isolate an even smaller unit of perception in dance — to frame the posture, gesture, or movement itself as the central subject of the dance — either by repetition or by complexification. To a choreographer of Fenley's generation (she was born in 1954), the dilemma of how to make dance new is increasingly problematic; her situation is unusual in that she is an American who grew up in another culture. In some sense an outsider to two dance cultures — a white American growing up in Nigeria, Fenley returned to the United States as a young woman who had lived through neither the theatrical nor the social dance traditions of the 1950s and 1960s in the U.S. — she has a certain objectivity about movement styles that seems to free her from conventions. She blends an African sensitivity to ritual dance, in which music, song, movement, and the symbolism of cultural expression are inextricably interwoven, with an acute awareness of her heritage as a modernist, American choreographer. For Fenley, what is singularly American about dance — and what she stresses in her own choreography — is speed, motion, and change, in both an immediate and a historical sense.

Fenley was born in Las Vegas but at six moved to Ibadan, Nigeria, where her father worked for the USAID mission of the United States State

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Department. She went to intermediate school in Spain, and in 1971 she returned to the United States to study dance at Mills College. Although she never studied Nigerian dance, she remembers the power of the experience of watching festivals.

> You'd see fifty people in a line just moving their heads back and forth for two hours! The colors, the costumes, the makeup were just incredible, and the beat was constant. I think that had a strong effect, not on my choreography, but on my person. I don't think I'm doing a ritual dance. African dance is highly ritualized, and it is narrative. There's a reason for all those people to be out there bopping; someone is going through puberty or whatever. There's a definite psychological or calendrical reason for the dancing.

She suspects that her own choreography has been more inspired, stylistically and formally, by the popular Nigerian modern social dance, the Highlife.

> It's a hip-swinging, finger-snapping thing, extremely sexual, with lots of gyrations. It's all about the hips and genitals, constantly rhythmic, and wonderful to watch. People enjoy themselves when they dance Highlife. Social dancing here has more to do with attitudes than actually getting into the dancing, actually getting inside your body and being involved with your partner and having the sense that there are all these other people gyrating around you.

In school in Spain, Fenley took a few lessons in Flamenco dancing, which contributed some arm gestures to her current vocabulary. But, for the most part, her physically active childhood and adolescence were spent without dance instruction. She jogged, played basketball, cut down trees on safaris. She chose dance as her college major, she says, because she had become fascinated by motion. "Even cars passing would interest me. It didn't coalesce as an interest in speed until I started working that way. But I had an interest in the perception of motion in space. I wanted to be involved in it somehow."

At Mills, Fenley recalls, "I spent the first two years in a state of culture shock." She studied Graham and Humphrey technique and learned Louis Horst's methods of composition, including his analyses of preclassic and modern forms. She found Horst's use of strict rules in relation to musical structures useful, and she began to set up her own arbitrary rules as a device to rhythmically order her own dances.

Fenley graduated from Mills in 1975 and the following year moved to New York, where she danced with other choreographers, including Carol Conway and Andrew deGroat. She steadily worked toward gathering a company to perform her own choreography. Her initial strategy in sparking movement innovation was the use of stylized arm configurations. The first dance Fenley presented in New York, *Planets* (1978), was informed by the

iconic arm gestures of sculptures and paintings of Greek and Egyptian gods and goddesses. The spatial patterns in the dance were inspired by the orbits of the planets, abstracted and elaborated in a set of colored drawings Fenley used as visual scores for each section of the dance. Small running, stamping, and jumping steps set up a baseline of rhythm at times overlaid by the contrasting percussion of ankle bells, sandblocks, woodblocks, wrist castanets, afuches, and a percussion hammer. The propulsive rhythms, the repetitive stepping patterns, the circling and weaving of the dancers, the impassiveness of their faces, and the purposeful—even hieratic—sequences of arm gestures, all lent a mysterious, ritual quality to the dance. This borrowing of ritual forms—significantly, the circle—has been current in postmodern dance throughout the 1970s: in Deborah Hay's communal Circle Dances, Simone Forti's primal circular crawls, the ecstatic spinning of Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, Laura Dean, Andrew deGroat. But perhaps nowhere was the cosmic symbolism of this ritual dance form as explicit as in *Planets*.

A forty-five-minute work in six parts, *Planets* was originally choreographed for performance in the Hayden Planetarium. At first, the plan included not only eight planets, but also a chorus of comets, asteroids, and meteoroids. According to Fenley, the planetarium staff was apprehensive about putting on a dance performance, and ultimately *Planets* was performed, with only the eight main dancers, at the Cunningham Studio. The first section, "Solar Nebula," began with the dancers gathered in a tight circle, facing inward, their arms clasped behind one another's backs. Swelling and contracting the size of the circle, breaking away to move as individuals, only to return to the rotating circle, the dancers represented the beginnings of the solar system in an expanding mass. In the second section, "Iconic Gesturing," each planet repeatedly executed two identifying, metaphoric arm signals within a rhythmic framework. The dance continued through "Orbiting," "Planets' Dance," solos for Mercury, Mars, Venus, and Pluto, and, in a final coda, a burst of motion. The general movement of the dance was a rhythmic progression from slow, nearly static positions to a flurry of action. But the central position that questions of rhythm would later occupy in Fenley's choreography was not yet established; the emphasis in this dance was on positions in space, and especially the diagrammatic arrangements of the arms and hands.

The use of the arms evolved. Fenley remembers, "Once I'd seen them in *Planets* and worked with them very statically, then I started to move them, to make them a matter of dancing." She wanted to find a way to deploy the dancer's arms that was neither decorative, as in the fixed arm placements of classical ballet, nor communicative, as in pantomime and other signaling systems. "I allowed the gestures to become more motional, rather than stopped in space, gestural. I wanted to use the back as fully as I could, and to use the arms as more than simply extensions of the spine, as

they are used in most techniques. After *Planets*, I did not want to use gestures to conjure up metaphoric meaning in the spectator." Although now she culls hand and arm motions from a variety of sources, the changefulness of those gestures and the fact that they are embedded securely in an overall rhythmic context, without any narrative continuity, discourages interpretation. But, on the other hand, the centrality of the arm movements to the motion of the rest of the body prevents one from seeing them as simply embellishments.

Fenley's second dance was a twelve-minute duet for herself and Rick Guimond: *The Willies* (1978). Although the title suggests a misspelling of the ghostly maidens in the Romantic ballet *Giselle*, Fenley's reference was not to ballet history. In Yoruba, "willy" means cat. In this dance, Fenley's choreographic project was twofold: she wanted to speed up the tempo and to create a social relationship between the dancers that grew concretely out of the situation of dancing together. This was in contrast to both the statuesque and the metaphoric qualities of *Planets*. Although she used cat movements as sources for the choreography, the imagery was not explicit in the dance. The two faced the audience, stepping several steps forward, then back, in a steady four-count beat accentuated with ankle bells. Their hands and arms sculpted the space around their bodies, rising and circling overhead, or stretching stiffly along oblique lines radiating from the body. The wrists flexed, palms changed facings, fingers hyperextended backwards or curled in scooping motions. At other times, the arms counterposed two disparate shapes—straight and angled—or swung metrically across the body. After dancing side by side in unison, the dancers changed orientation, dancing to each other rather than to the audience, and the texture of the dance thickened. The paths began to interweave and to cross the entire space, making use of the diagonals; the steps became at times lighter and bouncier, at times heavier, with an almost military tread. The dancers set up a steady pulse with clapping, allowing the stepping patterns to stop and start in complex rhythms. They alternated erect postures with quick forward swoops, the arms carrying the torso over with force. Finally, as their movement tempo sped up, Guimond and Fenley picked up maracas, adding one more layer of sound to the relentless, roving movements. The dancing reached a peak of fullness, not only because of the countervailing visual and aural rhythms, but also because the creation of music and movement were so inextricably fused, as if the dancing were the flesh that gave body to the skeleton of sound. Then it ended abruptly.

For Fenley, *The Willies* was a new stage in terms of the evolution of her choreographic style. The next three dances, *The Cats* (1978), *Red Art Screen* (1979) and *Video Clones* (1979), were arenas for the consolidation and elaboration of several elements: speeding up the dancing; plumbing the depth of the stage space; making pathways that interweave asymmet-

rically; meshing the aural and kinetic elements in an ongoing flow; and creating an authentic, intimate interaction between the dancers through touch and glance. In these dances, Fenley kept the movement and the rhythm going at a steady pace.

Mix, comissioned by The Kitchen Center in 1979, was a more ambitious attempt to keep the pulse of the dance fast and steady while varying the dynamics of the movement itself. Fifty minutes long, *Mix* mobilized four dancers in a variegated structure of floor patterns, hand and body gestures, and the manipulation of percussion instruments. The tempo remained at a brisk 4/4 beat, but it was expressed in various ways. In the first section of the dance, the performers' clapping and stamping sounds were amplified by a miked floor, and they reverberated through the use of an Echoplex. In this section, the visual patterns began symmetrically. The dancers moved counterclockwise in a circle, stamping and shuffling, crossing in couples, taking turns moving in and out of the center of the round. Clapping out diverse patterns, scooting out to the edge of the circle with head down, arms stretched up, hips wiggling, the dancers looked as spontaneous as square dancers, except that Fenley had inserted a red thread of irregularity into the dance's design, whenever it threatened to become regular. They left the circle at times to gallop, whirl, hop. They reentered the round, dancing with a hand on each neighbor's shoulder. In the second part of *Mix*, the dancers played sandblocks and then maracas, and, as in *The Willies*, the movements flowed visibly from the physical action of making music.

Mix was striking in a number of ways. The complexity of the combinations of deceptively simple steps, hand positions, and other "kinemes" gave the dance a rigor that was only slightly relieved by the demeanor of the dancers—a lively, engaging interplay of glances, touches, and smiles that added to the folkdance impression. But in fact the intricacy and heterogeneity of the movement combinations were not only quite the opposite of the redundant figures of folkdance; these qualities also made *Mix* distinctive in terms of the pattern genre of postmodern dance. Unlike Lucinda Childs, one of the leading pattern choreographers, Fenley used duration as a salient element and put the arms, hands, and head into play in elaborate ways. Childs's group dances, usually about ten minutes long, are austere and precise, building a concise set of variations on the internal tensions of a single geometric shape and a single, albeit complex, rhythmic structure. One might compare the brilliance and clarity of Childs's method to Bach's music. There is an impersonal, cool sense of formal invention in the dance that distances it from the spectator. The dancers function like fine instruments tracing out an elegant design. Compared to Childs's work, Fenley's choreography, with its deliberate asymmetries, erratic moments, warm sociability, bright costumes, and exhilarating sensuality, is expansive and inviting. The rigor of Fenley's work is not as readily apprehensible as that of

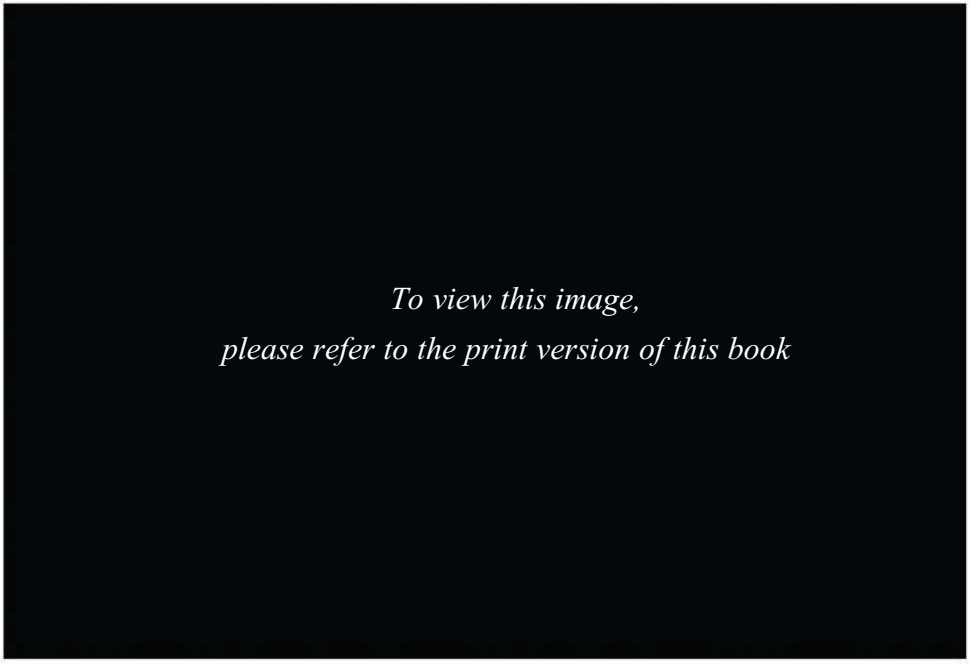
Childs's, because the minute scale of Childs's variations provokes the spectator to sort and assemble visual data until, by the end of the dance, a complete paradigm has become legible. With Fenley, the variations play themselves out on such a broad scale and in such an unfathomable order that even if one attempts to systematize them, they are perpetually elusive. In the face of such a protean stream of dancing, one is tempted simply to plunge into the kinesthetic experience of it, rather than catalog. And, in fact, to catalog the motions presents a problem, because of both the swiftness of their execution and the richness of the vocabulary. One action erases the preceding action, so that the memory replaces, rather than accumulates, images.

In this way, Fenley's choreography also differs from that of Laura Dean, even though some of their hand gestures are similar: the hands that revolve around each other as if winding a ball of yarn; the flat hand, flexed up from the wrist, that wipes the air with a side-to-side motion; the oriental flourishes and arabesque formations made with the hands overhead; the stiff extensions of arms and hands at times contrasting with the play of hips and feet. But Dean's strategy is to repeat such movements over and over in unchanging, easily recognizable configurations over long periods of time. Like the Sufi whirling dervishes, Dean weaves a serene, uninterrupted fabric of motion whose simplicity, over time, draws attention to the individual expressiveness of each dancer, inducing in the spectator a hypnotic flow of peaceful sensations. Fenley's dances are about excitement, rather than order. Although *Mix* was difficult both for the performers — they did not rest for nearly an hour — and for the spectators — its length and complexity overloaded the perceptions at a certain point — it was an important dance in terms of focusing on these contradictory elements.

The next work Fenley choreographed was *Boca Raton* (1980), commissioned by Elisa Monte and David Brown of the Martha Graham Company. Fenley performed the duet several times in New York with Elizabeth Streb. The piece began with a long musical prelude, a calypso beat electronically produced by repeating the first four bars of a Talking Heads song on a tape loop and distorting it with electronic effects. Fenley and Streb, wearing striped t-shirts, pants, and jazz shoes, ran onto the stage and, as in *Mix*, mingled wiggling hips, undulating arms, quick steps and stamps, and a vivacious presence with an exacting, if mercurial, structure. Playing off the Latin-sounding beat, the two built an elaborate couple-dance, swirling arms close around head and shoulders — both their own and one another's — and breaking away to run and leap, all the while moving through a rapid fire of gestural shapes. Also as in *Mix*, any threat of redundancy or dry tidiness was always subverted by spatial asymmetries and changing movements. After a few minutes, the two disappeared; the music continued for several minutes, leaving the impression that the dance had been a sudden, fleeting vision, an accidental embodiment of the ongoing music.

Fenley's latest work, *Energizer* (1980), shows a choreographic intelligence that has synthesized previous concerns in a sophisticated theatrical presentation. More concise than *Mix*, but just as ambitious, *Energizer* is an evening-length work in three parts: a fifteen-minute quartet, a ten-minute duet, and a second fifteen-minute quartet. Each section is structured by its electronic score, which Fenley composed with a rhythm box and synthesizer in collaboration with Mark Freedman. In contrast to most of her earlier dances, in which the music issued from the dancers' bodies either directly (as claps, steps, or stamps) or in a mediated way (by wearing ankle bells or shaking maracas while moving), in *Energizer* Fenley worked in the opposite direction, fitting the dancing to the sound. "My interest is in speed," she said. "In the past, I worked by always making myself go faster. In that way, an underlying rhythmic sensation would evolve, and I would either stay with it or change it. Then it would start to become very clear. The movement would make the rhythm occur." In choreographing *Energizer*'s three sections, Fenley would begin with the piece of music—multilayered percussive fabrics threaded with the open tones of an acoustic organ, and twangs and shrieks that evoke jungle images—and improvise

Molissa Fenley, Susana Weiss, Lynne Allard, and Patricia Graf in Fenley's *Energizer*.
(Photo: © 1980 Paula Court.)



alone to find dance themes she then expanded. She thought of the score as "the initial generator and overall energizer" for each of the three dances. The warm-hued lights and the bright, stylish costumes, along with the exotic-sounding music, added to the juiciness of the dance. The visual attractiveness, the loudness of the music, and the pure speed of the dancing created an extremely exciting bombardment of the senses.

In the first section, all four dancers (Fenley, Lynne Allard, Pat Graf, and Susanna Weiss) enter from the four corners of the stage several minutes after the music has begun. An organ note has faded, and a clicking beat has begun, moving closer and closer and seemingly bringing on the four women. They move in and out of a central circle, their arms circling, tilting in long oblique lines, thrusting forward and back, swinging around the body. Quick side tilts of the head mark rhythmic accents; sudden forward curves of the spine stress new climaxes. The dancers extend their paths into crossings of the stage, occasionally punctuating a stream of forward motion with a spin. They dance in pairs, arms twined; they separate to dance out individual figures. They leave the stage for a moment, clearing the visual screen, and, when they return, the tempo seems to speed up. The imagery courses unpredictably through this flood of motion: at one moment these women look like warriors, their arms snapping crisply in salutes and feints; the next moment, they line up facing the audience and back up, rhythmically shaking shoulders and hips like a cancan line; then they gallop friskily across the floor like small wild animals. Their broad-shouldered, nappy jumpsuits in black, blue, violet, and pink make them look at times like models and at times like infants refusing to lie down to sleep.

In the second part, Fenley and Allard appear, more sirenish in one dark blue and one taupe silk outfit. Their gestures are both closer to their bodies and more powerful than in the previous section, and the music seems thicker with squeaks, shrills, bird calls. They stalk up and back, tossing their heads back languorously as they turn. The motions of their arms whip their bodies into spins they articulate with their feet. They spring and prance. Their movements are so indirect, one part of the body constantly facing away from another, arms scooping and spiraling, cheek pressed against shoulder, that they seem to prowl.

The third section combines motifs from the first two parts. For the first time the dancers enter and exit separately and repeatedly during the dance. This section is different, too, in that it constantly seems to move toward a crisis or climax. In fact there are three. Short solos for each dancer stress the individuality of their combinations of gestures, adding, too, a sense of competition and virtuosity. The legs trace wider arcs as they run, skip, leap; the arms slant and arch with more vigor. The patterning of organ crescendoes, dancers' variations, and entrances and exits, as well as the quicker tempo in this section, all contribute to the sense that the dance is moving toward a state of frenzied intoxication, broken only as they exit and

the lights dim. Yet within this frenzy the dancing itself never moves toward chaos, but remains highly articulate.

From the conscious use of floor patterns and static arm signals in *Planets*, Fenley has arrived, in *Energizer*, at a "wall of dance" whose dynamics are so dense and so rapid they are almost impossible to index. In devising movements for the dance, she says, she was interested in neither floor patterns nor body shapes, but simply in motion. "The endurance of performing fast motion seems to hold the key to new experimentation," she has stated. She varied her movement themes, once she had devised them, in somewhat traditional ways. But the spatial interactions, what Fenley calls "space consciousness," came about only after she had taught her dancers the movement patterns and very concretely moved them through space. In the course of setting up weavings, crossings, and plumbings of up and downstage space, she sees the dance as altering space in a way that a stage set would. She is interested in perceptual afterimages, and sets up paths through which dancers move successively, each one following the traces of the previous dancer.

Energizer creates a curious dialectic of discipline and ease. The demands it puts on the performer are visibly enormous, not only in terms of pure stamina, but also in terms of memory and concentration. Fenley rehearses wearing weights, like a long-distance runner. "I want to get rehearsals to the point where we just absolutely *kill* ourselves, so that in performance, when we have everything else to deal with—nervous energy, lights, costumes, the objective of reaching the audience—we're not tired out by the endurance level we really need to have." The dancers are constantly counting and listening for music cues in order to keep track of the often arbitrary movement changes. Fenley thinks of herself primarily as a choreographer rather than a dancer; although, watching her perform, one has the sense that the movements she invents come easily to her and suit her small, full-hipped body well, she constructs those movements through a series of intellectual choices, and not because they "feel good." Yet finally, in performance, the dancing has all the exuberance and lightness of a spontaneous outburst. "I think dancing is an optimistic, joyful art form, and that the social interaction of people dancing together is really quite beautiful. Ideally, the audience is sharing this pleasurable experience."

For avant-garde choreographers in the 1960s, everyday movements, untrained bodies, and simple tasks were the stuff of dance, infinitely compelling, not only because they represented a break with academic conventions, but also because through them one could present the human body and its actions in a down-to-earth manner. A wave of democratic romanticism in the arts, valorizing the natural, the spontaneous, the commonplace, reflected the optimism of a country in motion. Twenty years later, the American temper has changed. In an age of economic distress and political cynicism, we seek glamour, style, and artifice in life and art. Molissa Fenley

is one of a second generation of postmodern choreographers, who has reinstalled a new virtuosity in dance performance. Yet it is a nonillusionistic virtuosity that builds on the achievements of a previous generation, presenting dancers in a ritual of technical brilliance that seems to coax the spectator to join in. In the 1980s, art no longer frames real life; it turns toward something better. But the gulf between artist and spectator has been irrevocably bridged. Fenley's dances turn matters of community, drive, and vivacity into energy.

30

Self-Rising Choreography

The first time I saw Jim Self dance, he was eighteen and I was twenty-one. He had just graduated from high school and was already dancing professionally in one of Chicago's few modern dance troupes. I had just graduated from college and had no idea that I would become a dance critic. But I remember that there was already something clear and authoritative about his dancing. There was a strength in his stage presence that contrasted with his physical appearance: willowy, double-jointed (with arms that bent backwards when he held them taut), he had an angelic, snub-nosed face, long straight hair, and looked rather androgynous.

A year or so later, I was looking at dance more seriously, and I saw him in his first dance, *Miami Beach* (1973). He danced and ran in white overalls, a hat, a jacket, and red tennis shoes. He tested the floor, checked out his body, at one point turning his back to the audience to peep inside his jacket. He took off all his clothes except for bathing trunks, shoes, and socks. He kept looking at the audience, turning us all into voyeurs. He took off one shoe and sock and listened to his foot while standing perfectly still. He was clearly the kind of person who comes alive on stage and makes every action, no matter how unrelated to the previous action, look like the right thing to do next.

Over the next few years, I found Self the most consistently interesting

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and inventive choreographer working in Chicago. It wasn't just that our lives became more intertwined, which they did. The world of avant-garde art, theater, performance, music, and dance in Chicago was small enough that if you did any of them you were involved with everyone else. But also, I think we became friendlier because we discovered our interests and tastes often coincided. I was writing about dance, but I was also making performances. I took dance classes from Self at MoMing, a center for dance and performance in Chicago that was run by a collective we both helped to found. It was a lively time for dance in Chicago. We brought people like Sally Bowden, Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, Barbara Dilley, Kenneth King, and, later, Grand Union to MoMing. Meredith Monk came to the Dance Center a couple of times; so did Viola Farber. Merce Cunningham and Company performed and taught at University of Chicago. Yvonne Rainer showed an early version of *Film About a Woman Who*. . . . Dance companies in Chicago were splitting and proliferating, and younger choreographers were finding it easier to show their work.

As Self reminded me recently,

> It was an active time artistically and politically. I felt the freedom to try out anything I had ever seen or heard about, and it was all happening in a community where everyone knew one another very well. You were writing a book about postmodern dance and bringing back a lot of ideas from New York I'd never known about. With our friend Ellen, I was writing about sex, work, and romance, and how people's personal lives affected their art. We were trying to figure out how to work collectively, but at the same time I was doing solo work. Everything about everybody's life became more information that could be put in the work. We were doing things inside and outside, with and without music, improvised and structured, formally and informally. It was one great experiment, and there were so many things to do, I didn't stay with any one thing too long. Before I finished one project, I was well into another.

Self was incredibly prolific, choreographing solos and group pieces for dancers with varying degrees of training, presenting a twelve-week series of Monday evening *Self Studies*, teaching classes, leading a performance group called Huperbody that made events for parks and at the airport. He seemed to learn from everyone he came in contact with, syncretizing various discoveries into a personal brand of powerful theater.

Born in Greenville, Alabama, in 1954, Self moved with his parents to Phoenix City, then Tuscaloosa, and then, at fifteen, to Evanston, a suburb of Chicago. In high school, he studied art, started to paint and make collages, and took dance classes as a gym elective. Soon he started taking classes at night with Shirley Mordine, and then started ballet training with Ed Parish. In 1972, Self asked Mordine if he could join her company, and he danced with her until 1974. In the postmodern tradition, many of his choreographic ideas were linked to visual art concerns.

> My painting teacher, John Neimanas, was always encouraging. One thing I learned from him was a sense of collage, of taking different things and putting them together. Another was a compositional sense—for instance, using color in one place and picking it up again in another place. You do the same thing in a dance when you emphasize relationships between different things. But in a dance you do it in terms of time and memory.

Self says that at eighteen he felt he had to choose between painting and dancing. "I decided that since I was young I would take advantage of that. I decided that I would begin by putting together dances, but that I would only do it for five years."

In 1976, Self came to New York to study with Merce Cunningham, and by the end of that year joined Cunningham's company. Dancing with the group from 1976 to 1979, he found little time to make his own work. And when he reached his five-year limit, he was so busy touring and performing that he forgot his vow. "When I turned twenty-five, I felt the need for another decision, and I quit dancing." He left the Cunningham company and thought about what to do next. But after two months he realized that dancing and choreographing are "how I make meaning of the world."

Self's concert at American Theatre Laboratory (Tuesdays through October 28) show a new side of both the choreographer and the dancer. Works ranging from 1976 to the present show the Chicago and the New York side of Self. In Chicago, he had already shown certain consistent stylistic features: a strong sense of formal structure; the use of theatrical elements, especially props, characterization through gesture, and talking, all of which added another suggestive layer of meaning to the otherwise stringent formalism of the dance; a vocabulary that combined quick, quirky articulations of the body with a fluid sense of phrasing; an iconic use of popular music; a childlike absorption in the movement; a pictorial use of the performing space.

I still have strong images of *Tuscaloosa* (1974), performed to various Aretha Franklin songs, in which Self at one point danced up the steps and against a door jamb leading to a tiny proscenium stage behind the general dance floor, then slunk along the back wall of the stage doing a series of stripteaser's high kicks. He did some technical dancing, told stories, and later put on a cowboy hat and tailored jacket, said "You don't kiss very good," lit a cigarette, and smoked it languorously while looking at the audience, then exited slowly on an upstage diagonal, came back, left again, while Aretha sang "Life can be so lonely/Without the one you love."

His dancing in those days had a look of naturalness that came from that fluidity, from his use of everyday gestures, the social dancing moves he sometimes borrowed (swiveling pelvis, swaying to the music, shaking shoulders), and the simplicity and directness of presentation. His *White on White*

(1976) was an evening-long work for two men and two women that drew formal contrasts between movements and between bodies, mixed technical and idiosyncratic gestures and movements, and involved strewing objects like beer cans and cigarette packs on the floor. In most of his dances he liked to drop things, throw things away, change appearance, and go off balance—in the literal and figurative senses.

In Self's recent work, the same ingenious theatricality prevails, the same methodical construction, the same evidence of an intelligent structure underlying the flyaway gestures. But Self's way of moving, and even the way he looks, have changed. He has a polish and physical strength that come from the daily discipline of Cunningham's technical demands. His body has become fuller and more muscular. And his choreography calls for much more complicated and precise technique. He's learned how to partner and to jump. Cunningham's greatest influence on him, he thinks, was in giving him a new, more objective and precise way of measuring time. "My movement is still not as precise as Merce's. But before I worked with him I had a totally personal sense of time. If I had an idea, I would do the idea, and if I did the same piece three nights in a row, it might take three different lengths of time.

"I also learned about a dancerly physicality from Merce. Before, dancing was the tool for making a theatrical experience. I learned about dancing as something that requires an intensity, maintenance, and consistency, an understanding of how to work the body, to keep it going and do movements over and over again, and to make them clear. I didn't always even know how a particular movement fit into the overall picture of his pieces. In Chicago, I was involved in developing as a performer—experimenting with dealing with the audience, coming up with different ideas about making dances. I feel that with Merce I learned how to be a dancer."

Self's work in New York has another dimension; collaborating with writer Richard Elovich and visual artist Frank Moore, he has expanded the textual and decorative aspects of his choreography. Where in the past he often danced in blue jeans, the recent and the older works in the Tuesday concerts at ATL are spectacularly designed. Last June at the Cunningham studio, Self performed a duet with a stool while Elovich read a story about a teenage boy who dances alone in his parents' attic. On that concert and at ATL, Self showed *Marking Time* (1980) a trio that operates on both a formal and a dramatic level. In its current version, danced by Self, Ellen van Schuylenburch, and Joel Luecht, the dance exploits the wings, entrances, and exits. The dancers leap in and out of sight. They are three vaguely defined characters—Luecht dressed in a blue leotard festooned with white skeleton's bones, van Schuylenburch in a cartoonlike red dress decorated with outlines of shells, and Self in a bright yellow fishnet outfit with black and white piano keys running up the sides. The tempo is steady

while the actions change, giving the illusion that time is being "marked" differently. But the three dancers also play the roles of three people who have different ways of marking time in the sense of waiting. Luecht is steady, functioning almost like a timepiece; van Schuylenburch is more tentative; Self is wild, constantly in motion, careening through space. The result is an abstract but witty comedy of manners.

In *Scraping Bottoms* (1976), a new version of the last piece Self made in Chicago, he walks onstage dressed in a black suit that has been wired to hold a bulky, angular shape, and a little hat. At times he looks like dadaist Hugo Ball in his famous paper column costume, at times like a Kabuki warrior, at times like Buster Keaton as he slouches, stonyfaced, tripping gracefully, waltzing at a tilt, throwing things around. He whistles a few bars of "As Time Goes By." Suddenly he puts his hands in pockets that one would not believe exist in such a bizarre getup, and pulls them inside out, flinging coins everywhere. He touches and talks about different body parts as if they had suddenly appeared to surprise him. He turns on a tape of distorted disco music, tosses three big cushions on the floor, moves in jerky slow motion, and finally sinks to the floor.

The newest dance on the program is a duet for Self and van Scuylenburch. Called *A Domestic Interlude* (1980), this dance suggests two playful characters while sticking to a strict conceptual formula. Dressed in pastel sleeveless jumpsuits that look like pajamas, and accompanied by the almost inaudible sounds of a digital clockradio that sits on stage, blue numbers glowing, the two repeatedly circle one another, do a sort of strutting gallop, hold hands, travel quickly, tumble to the floor, and later lie down for long stretches of time. Self does spinning, off-center turns. He looks at his partner with an exaggerated expression of disbelief mingled with pleasure. He lifts her to sit astride his shoulders. It's an appealing, totally unsentimental romantic duet, mixing humor, action, and affection to convey fleeting emotional shapes.

Self says that in making the dance he began with the idea of making movement for van Schuylenburch that would be different than the balletic movement she is often given to perform. "I wanted to use her strength but without accentuating that perfect, stretched line. I wanted to get her moving fast, using her back, dancing in a relaxed, weighted way." He then set up the structure: Choosing an arbitrary time limit of ten minutes, he subdivided it into ten sections of six counts each. The first half of the dance is deliberately stuffed with as much activity and movement as possible; the second five minutes contain half as much activity and movement as possible; the second five minutes contain half as much action. Later, Self says, partly through Moore's suggestions as he watched the dance to get ideas for the costumes, the dramatic meaning began to emerge. "At first he thought Ellen was a honeycomb and I was a bee, or that she was a web and I was a bug. He thought of it as playful, and that changed the way I thought about it. It's not

so much about a couple, but about some kind of generalized, physical relationship between two animals, or two humans regardless of sex."

Self is one of a number of younger choreographers whose work—partly in reaction to a generation of antitheatrical choreography—deals in drama, characterization, artful costumes, and vivid decor. It's strange to realize that after choreographing for nearly a decade, Self stands in another vanguard in dance.

31

Transparent Living

Wendy Perron's dances open onto the world like a window. They are frames that intelligently but plainly reveal particles of daily life. You see, in a group of fresh-faced, sturdy, thoughtful women, moving together, a steady flow of fleeting images: the awkward grace of children playing, the cool sensuousness of slowly twisting bodies, spastic energy, a femininity that evokes both tenderness and strength. Nothing you could put into words, exactly, or that remains as a distinct statement. The pleasure of watching Perron's dances comes from the ongoingness, changeability, and ambiguity of those crowding impressions. You are absorbed into careful viewing, especially because the dancing is often done in silence. The pleasure comes, too, from the curious mixture of wit and sobriety that unfolds through a frank, generous physicality.

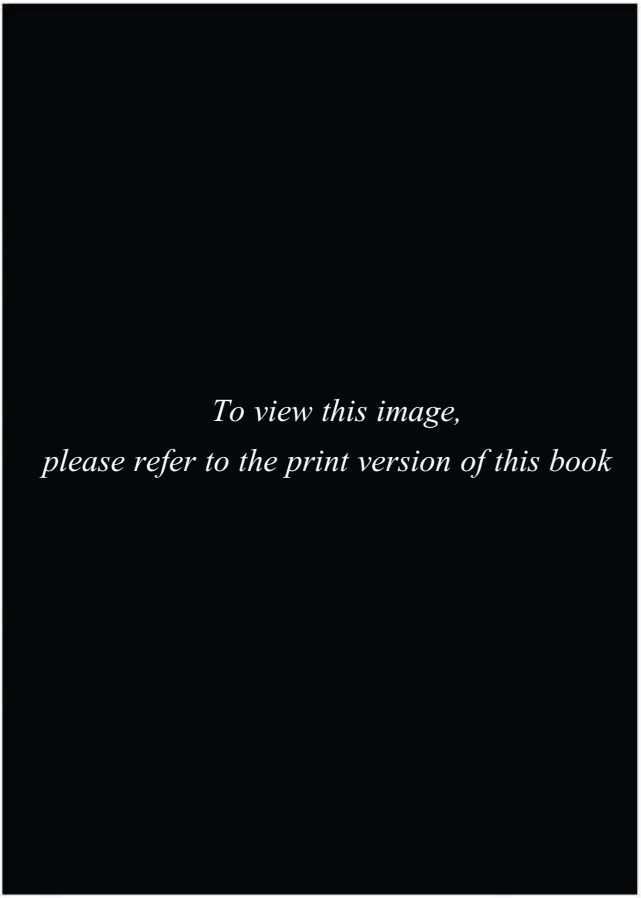
A member of a generation that turned to formalist movement invention as an antidote to the excessive symbolism and literary underpinnings of "old" modern dance, Perron has recently become interested in reinstalling narrative. But—like some of her contemporaries, not only in postmodern dance, but also in film, literature, and visual art—Perron approaches plot in a very unconventional way. Her newest work, *The Paris Sciences* (at The Kitchen, March 5–8), is structured not so much by narrative as by a fascination with the notion of narrative—its power to hold one's attention and to unify the artwork. Yet Perron's sensibility is too porous to let her material fall under such neat control. *The Paris Sciences* emerges from a welter of story fragments; its title is a result of free-associating with words like parasites and parasciences. If this performance is a story, it is one that

Village Voice, March 4, 1981.

refuses to end: Perron has asked artist Sophie Healy to write a story based on watching the dance. Then she plans to use Healy's story, along with any unsolicited submissions, as a score for a new dance.

Perron is one of those rare grown-ups who still have a child's insatiable curiosity about new ideas, new images, new mental associations. Her inspirations can come from anywhere: songs, books, films, social situations, even other dancers. One inspiration for the deliberate narrative confusion of *The Paris Sciences* was the film *Men Who Are Men*, in which the filmmakers directed men on the island of St. Lucia to perform tasks while speaking in a combination of their native patois and pure nonsense words. Then the directors wrote a series of English subtitles that gave fictitious explanations for the action.

Wendy Perron in *A Three-Piece Suite*.
(Photo: Lois Greenfield.)



Building on this notion, Perron gave her dancers fragmented images whose meanings are contradictory. "One image is of lifesaving, the way you have to knock someone out," she says. "You're saving their life, but you also have to get them into a weird, dead position to do it. Another came from seeing *Raging Bull* and being struck again by the way, in boxing, you sometimes can't tell if they're hugging or fighting."

The open look of Perron's work comes partly from the postural style of the dancers, with their straight, vertical torsos, relaxed arms, open palms, springy legs. But it also comes from the openness of her choreographic method. "A lot of things I bring into rehearsal are half-baked. I don't want to finish them, because they can be finished by the dancers, or by my working on them in the studio. Sometimes someone makes a mistake, and that brings you somewhere else. You *have* to keep that option open. And I want the piece to be open enough that that can happen in performance, too. So there are parts we don't rehearse very much." She was impressed, when she recently read *POPism*, by Andy Warhol's habit of asking people around him what to do. "I used to feel that I should come into rehearsals with everything fully planned. But other people's ideas are as good as mine, so why not use them?"

Perron studied ballet with Irine Fokine as a child, and later at the Joffrey school. At fifteen, she began modern dance classes at the Martha Graham studio. She went to college at Bennington, where, she says, she first started to connect dancing with the mind. In 1969, after graduation, she came to New York to choreograph her own dances, perform in the works of other choreographers, and write about dance and performance art. She now characterizes her early pieces as "cautious, lovely dancing." In *Shorts* (1972), to the music of B. B. King, and *Oath* (1973), to traditional African drumming, that loveliness became sharper, more specific, the product of an analysis of movement flow. In 1976 she made *The Daily Mirror*, a solo that was a process of accumulating material, a kind of journal in which she explored her own movement preferences. "I thought of it as my playground. It was a field day for my own eccentricities."

Perron managed to keep working independently as a choreographer while performing other people's work. An important influence was Twyla Tharp, in particular *The Hundreds*, which Perron saw in 1971. "The way the dancers would start at the back and move forward doing the phrase, then walk to the back to start the next phrase still sticks in my mind. It was so pure. They just did the movement. It held my attention every second. That influences every piece I do." Working with Tharp the following year, Perron was impressed by her emphasis on the movement impulse. "It didn't really matter where the movement took you, or where it ended. I always liked that way of thinking—'What does the movement do to you?' rather than 'Be sure you finish at this point.' " Perron also danced with Rudy Perez, Frances Alenikoff, William Dunas, Kenneth King, Sara Rudner, Risa Jaroslow,

Stephanie Woodard, Susan Rethorst, and, from 1975 to 1978, with Trisha Brown.

Perron also wrote criticism, first for *Dance Magazine* and then for *Soho Weekly News* (where she edited Concepts in Performance), and the *Village Voice*. "Ingrid Bengis once said that what makes a person a writer is energy. I'm sure that for me writing criticism came from an overflow of energy in my reactions to seeing dance. I remember rehearsing with Sara Rudner. She and Risa Jaroslow and I would come into rehearsal and talk about what we'd seen. Then Sara and Risa would finish talking, but I couldn't stop!"

In 1978, Perron began teaching dance at Bennington College, where she is now chairperson of the Dance Department. She divides her time between teaching and choreographing, between Vermont and New York. She made the move partly because she felt inundated by the volume of dance and performance in New York. "I started feeling 'Why do I need to do anything? There's already so much going on.' "

Teaching has opened up a new set of issues: How do people communicate ideas about dancing, physically and verbally? "It all has to do with *seeing*. Sometimes you have to be very patient with beginners. Often someone will ask me, 'Should I repeat that phrase later in the piece, maybe with a little variation?' and I say, 'You don't have to repeat it for me—I saw it the first time.' But maybe there are people who need that repetition, or who like it. For me, one movement has an impact that remains for a long time."

One hallmark of Perron's recent style is a sweet awkwardness that signals innocence, directness, but also requires a certain abandon from the dancers. "I try to let everything in, like a vessel. But the awkwardness is also a reaction to studio training, which leads you in the direction of finding the most control, the most speed, the most articulation of all parts of your body. That can close everything off. I try to give the dancers license to feel awkward. First, I have to find people who can and will do that. But also, I give them as much information as I know about the movement. I say things like 'Feel like your bladder is full,' instead of just demonstrating the movement. Or I ask them to do something that is physically impossible. I use analogs of situations with irregular rhythms, like stuttering, or a bird flapping its wings to take flight. It's important to verbalize what's going on, so they know what I have in mind. It's like writing criticism."

The frankness in Perron's dances also lies in the sense of unity among the dancers that seems more than physical—a glimmering of emotional bonds, of attentiveness. Perron's ideas about unison in dance are more social than kinesthetic. "I like to keep an eye on everyone when I'm performing, instead of feeling that it's just me out there performing, hoping I'm in synch with everyone else. I use counting less and less; it tends to

deaden things. Instead, we try to breathe together, to feel where everyone else is in the phrase. I like feeling connected to the other dancers when I'm performing. And, as a spectator, I like watching people who are watching people. It's so much more interesting than watching people who are just dancing for an audience."

32

No More Ordinary Bodies

The line between play, games, and sports, on the one hand, and dance, on the other, is not always a clear-cut one. For one thing, key to many children's games is a dance element, movement sequences savored for all sorts of qualities, from vertiginous pleasure, to the development of muscular or hand-eye coordination, to social glue. But even in theatrical dancing there is a sense of a tenuous border between the two realms. In times when ballet has become overly virtuosic, critics have complained of performances that have "degenerated" into gymnastics, while to see the dancerly qualities in a gymnast's routine is to praise it. And yet it would be hard to say what, beyond context, distinguishes the one from the other. When a baseball team plays the game sans ball, has the performance become a dance? When we decide to pay attention to the movement of the players even as they use the ball, have we turned the game into a piece of choreography?

These kinds of questions vexed the first generation of postmodern dancers in the 1960s, as did questions about the blurry boundaries between dance and other arenas: not only specialized nondance movement forms like sports, but also ordinary, pedestrian actions, and of course the other art forms. The problems of defining dance in distinction from other events provided these choreographers with important structures and materials in regard to play, games, and sports. I think of Simone Forti's *Huddle*, *Rollers*, and other pieces using children's play as source; Yvonne Rainer's follow-the-leader format for the pivotal *Room Service*, one of several dances in a

Village Voice, April 23, 1985.

Judson Dance Theater collaboration with the sculptor Charles Ross that used a jungle-gym-like structure, springs, platforms, and other equipment. I think of Trisha Brown's rule games, Steve Paxton's use of iconic baseball postures, Judith Dunn's references to wrestling, and the more general playful attitude in such strategies (used, not only by the dancers at the time, but also by musicians, filmmakers, poets, happenings-makers, visual artists, and theater people) as improvisation and spontaneous determination.

Play, games, and sports were fascinating to this generation for other reasons than those of definition. These activities, though specialized in their own ways, were easily accessible and had a more democratic feeling than the modern dance or ballet of the time. You may have to know the rules governing the game in order to play it, but you don't have to go through years of rigorous training or become an acolyte in a cult of personality. It was the democratic commitment of the early postmodern choreographers that led them to use children's games and quintessentially American sports like baseball; you didn't see dances based on Olympic events.

But also, the view of the body and of behavior in the sixties had something to do with it. In dance, the ordinary body executing its mundane tasks and functions suddenly emerged as something surprisingly extraordinary, something amazingly graced. To perform a task, in the theory of such choreographers as Forti, Rainer, and Robert Morris, was a way of presenting the intelligently engaged body modestly stripped of the alluring gaze so typical of theatrical performance. Game structures, like the chance techniques of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, served as more strategies for depersonalizing performance; play activity served as a kind of task that simultaneously generated movement invention.

So notions of spontaneity, democracy, the naturalness of children, and the pleasures of the liberated adult body were united in these artists' fascination with play, games, and sports. Beyond that, in dance, as in Fluxus events, happenings, and other art of the early sixties, to present play as art was to deflate the grandiose seriousness of the previous generation's "high art" and to stake out a claim for a new generation of artists who partly celebrated their own youth.

Games and sports have again seized the imagination of choreographers in the eighties. But the differences between the way these themes emerged then and now show us two eras that are worlds apart. Compare, for instance, Forti's *Slant Board* with Elizabeth Streb's various uses of equipment, including a slant-board. In the former, the spectator feels a sense of kinesthetic empathy as s/he watches people like herself scrambling along a difficult surface by navigating along knotted ropes. In the latter, we marvel at two sleek athletes performing difficult feats of skill and endurance. In Charles Moulton's precision ball-passing pieces, in Molissa Fenley's driving "walls of dance," which require the dancers to rehearse wearing weights, in

Colleen Mulvihill's and M. J. Becker's gymnastic excursions (and in Batya Zamir's aerial dances foreshadowing these, not to mention Twyla Tharp's choreography for John Curry), as well as in the verbal games of Wendy Perron and Johanna Boyce, the dancer's mind/body resumes specialist status—with a vengeance. But this is not exactly a return to older values, especially in light of the current generation of avant-gardists' dialectic with the past.

Perhaps the new virtuosity is a response to the changing American body. The choreographers of the sixties were preoccupied with the ordinary body, but in the eighties the "ordinary" body is no longer simply that with which nature has endowed us. With the rise of jogging, health spas, and body-building machines, the ante has been upped; even the average person now is some kind of athlete.

If in the sixties we wanted to free the body—to let go—today we are no less obsessed by our anatomy, but we express it in opposite ways. In a difficult economy, no one is embarrassed by ambition and control. And one of the cheapest, most convenient things to master is one's body. So it's not surprising that, contra the "natural" beauty of the sixties, our present culture demands an appearance that is fully constructed, a body that is reimagined, padded, dyed, trimmed, molded, decorated, and pumped up. You can literally shape your own destiny, the rhetoric of physical culture promises. In an age seemingly bereft of resources, and certainly short on hope, the Horatio Alger myth reappears in its most concrete, physical form.

33

Happily Ever After? The Postmodern Fairytale and the New Dance

Now I am going to tell you the story of the postmodern fairytale in the new dance, which is really four separate stories. All four of these stories—the history of recent postmodern dance; the history of theatrical dance since the nineteenth century; the history of the folktale and of recent folktale scholarship; and the intellectual history of modernism and postmodernism—converge in this new genre. Space will not, of course, allow me to unfold these stories in full. However, as I weave together strands from each story, the reader should keep in mind that the postmodern fairytale in the new dance can only be understood as located, not in a single context, but in several separate though overlapping contexts, and that this particular new genre of postmodernism in dance expresses a dense web of dance-historical and cultural issues.

The 1980s have seen a broad trend toward the narrative in avant-garde dance. One of several strategies to rebut the modernist, essentialist, antinarrative preoccupations of the previous generation of choreographers in the sixties and seventies (that is, the group that we now call postmodern), the new narrative in dance, like the "new talkies" in avant-garde film and the "new textuality" in avant-garde theater, raises old issues for the art form, but in new ways.[1] In the age of poststructuralism, narrative in general has captured the intellectual and artistic imagination, where it has been analyzed, dismantled, demystified, and deconstructed. The fascination with narrative—its conventions, its meanings, and its reception—seems a logical sequel to the repudiation of narrative that earlier characterized the modernist project overall. And the field of avant-garde dance, where in fact the notion of the seamless narrative had already perished before the current generation of dancers was born, shares this fascination.

Merce Cunningham in the fifties and then the postmoderns of the sixties and seventies wanted to get rid of narrative partly for essentialist

La Danse au Défi (Montreal: Parachute, 1987). Reprinted with permission.

reasons — if they wanted to tell stories, to paraphrase John Cage, they would have been writing, not dancing. But these same artists opened up choreography to so broad a field of action that, even while attempting to pare dance down to its essence, they planted the seeds for a postmodern proliferation of techniques, styles, and functions.[2] By 1980, anything could be in a dance — but that meant not only walking, playing games, talking, silence, and untrained bodies, but also character, plot, music, and virtuosity.

Certainly the new narrative is a response in the dance dialectic to the obdurate "inexpressivity" of the seventies.[3] Some of the early postmodern choreographers themselves began to turn to narrative forms by the late 1970s. The pursuit of the story led Rainer from dance per se into performance art and then film. Gordon for a time specialized in a kind of semiotic of the gesture, playing with the various meanings of bodily movements as they shifted function and context, especially in relation to words; a notable example is his *What Happened*. Brown moved her signature pure-dance piece *Accumulation* into a new era first by telling the story of its making as she performed it, and then by telling several stories simultaneously while interpolating another dance into the sequence. Yet the generation of choreographers that emerged in the eighties has outstripped the earlier postmoderns in its insatiable appetite for narratives of all kinds: autobiography, biography, fiction, political document, interview, the use of sign language and other emblematic gesture systems. And, this in a development that at first glance seems improbable — the fairytale.

The fairytale was, of course, the exemplary narrative form of the nineteenth-century ballet, reaching its apotheosis in Petipa's works for the Russian Imperial Ballet; the paragon of this genre was *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890). For a number of different reasons (its rigidity of form, technical "magic," extravagant mise-en-scène, hierarchical politics, and seemingly trivial themes) the fairytale ballet, with its sparkling divertissements punctuated by literary pantomime to advance the plot, became a despised old chestnut for most of the twentieth century, especially for artists who aspired toward the modern. If the fairytale speaks of otherworldly marvels, Duncan, for one, wished to show the here and now of the human body; if the fairytale is a myth writ small, Graham, for one, aimed at monumentality; if a fairytale stylizes and condenses experience into glittering symbols of consciousness, Rainer wanted to explore reality in all its mundane, unmanipulated glory. One might think that, other than the academic reworkings of nineteenth-century classics, this genre had disappeared. Yet the fairytale ballet has not perished. On the contrary, it is presently emerging in the new dance in a richly provocative manner.[4] When one examines what I call the postmodern fairytale — the fairytale reread — both in terms of its use in the dance and in terms of its broader cultural context, one sees that, far from improbable, this "return" (or more accurately, revision) is perfectly apt.

If for no other reason than to flaunt narrativity in the face of the

previous avant-garde, the new choreographer of the 1980s might have turned to the fairytale as a special kind of story, as a paradigm of narrativity per se. In fact, for a generation of folklorists, literary critics, and art historians—Western structuralists inspired by Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (English translation, 1958) and also by the writings of Lévi-Strauss—the folktale, in particular that enigmatic type of folktale known as the *Märchen*, or fairytale, or wondertale, seemed, not just a type, but a prototype of narratives in general. Indeed, the structuralists of the 1960s and 1970s were not the first to advance this theory that the fairytale is a paradigm for narrativity. Robert Petsch wrote in 1942 that the *Märchen* is the "archetype (*Urform*) of human narrative art."[5] Joan Jonas's dance/performance *The Juniper Tree* (1976) and later *Upside Down and Backwards* (1979), based on the Grimm brothers' tale "The Boy Who Set Out to Learn Fear," were early gestures in the direction of the postmodern fairytale, and for their time these pieces were anomalous both by their references to wonder and by the fact that they had a story at all. Meredith Monk's works in the seventies had a folktale quality—especially *Education of the Girlchild* (1973)—but hers were idiosyncratic visionary tales that seemed to offer an alternative, not a return, to tradition. In general, structuralism's heyday in the sixties and seventies may have been, in other disciplines, related through Propp to the fairytale, but in dance it was not even distantly related. Structuralism corresponded, in dance, to the formalist, antiexpressive proclivities of the earlier generation of postmodern choreographers mentioned above.

And, in turn, the new generation of folklorists and literary critics who search for meaning in the tale beyond either its morphology (Propp) or its style (Lüthi) or even psychoanalytic interpretation (Bettelheim)[6] corresponds in dance to the later generation of postmodern choreographers who insist that dance has content—in particular, historical and social content. Twenty-odd years after the powerful impact of Propp and Lévi-Strauss, folklore analysis has turned away from form, toward an analysis of content, codes, performance, and reception.[7] In dance theory and dance practice, the impulse is analogous. So avant-garde dance turns to fairytales—a subject that, despite an historical intimacy, its own formalist and essentialist constraints could not allow it to explore during the age of structuralism. The present interdisciplinary spirit in both intellectual and artistic life allows for a heady (some might say even dizzying) alloy of methods, fields, genres, mediums, and styles. That dance finds itself once again attracted to the fairytale, then, stems from a network of newer concerns that may be characterized as postmodernist and poststructuralist—concerns that begin, to be sure, with a mediumistic desire to examine *how* dance can narrate (a question with roots in the analytic dance of the seventies), but concerns that at the same time fan out beyond the medium itself to embrace questions about dance history, the "genre" division within dance (for example, ballet,

modern, and folk dance), the relation of dance to literature and other art forms, the relation of "high" art to folk and mass culture, and, as well, larger social questions about gender roles, ethnic identity, and moral/political education.

In the examples that follow, we can see that there is a family resemblance between the postmodern fairytale and the ballet fairytale, and yet we can also see how the former diverges from the latter, in formal terms primarily by its use of verbal narration. The use of words adds an extra communicative channel, but it also geometrically increases the possibilities for new meanings in the dance overall. That is, the Petipa fairytale was univocal: the music, the costumes, the scenery, the pantomime, as well as the dance steps, all told the same story. In the postmodern fairytale, the relationships among the different elements become unstable, generating new meanings. The choreographers sometimes irreverently adopt the fairytale precisely because it is a despised genre; sometimes in all seriousness present it as wondrous; sometimes debate the social values the tale upholds; sometimes anarchically parody the moral message of the tale; sometimes frame it specifically *as* a moral, and hence politically laden, tale; sometimes acknowledge its unmistakable power, beauty, and allure.

In *Folktales* (1985) by Ralph Lemon, folktales and fairytales are mixed.[8] Here the narrative method is also varied, for some of the tales are told in words only, some via dance and spoken text, some more theatrically with gestures, scenery, costumes, and objects as well as words, and some with pure dance. Altogether there are eight "stories," including a dance-game that has two additional, verbal tales inserted in it. The origins of the tales range from Africa to Europe (Germany and Russia) and America. The juxtaposition of the tales, with the ensuing friction of cultures, of classes, of eras, of individuals, gives each separate tale new meaning. Anthologized, each tale becomes a coded fragment of a culture, a piece of a puzzle that may never be resolved, since its various parts shift meaning, or even lose meaning, out of context.

Not only is *Folktales* a synthesis of tales of various national origins and a sampler of narrative methods; its choreographer is Afro-American and the cast includes blacks and whites, adults and children. Both the (heterogeneous) form and the (multicultural) content of *Folktales* bespeak an ambiguous vision of the creolized traditions that have formed America. For, taken individually, the tales are small gems, seamless and spellbinding, and apparently innocent of political meaning. But when we start to put them together, as the pivotal tale of the Tar Baby—with its explicit commentary on tales as socializing agents—instructs us to do, we also begin to ask questions about these traditional, seemingly timeless, seemingly universal repositories of wisdom.

"The Wonderful Tar Baby Story or Bayin' at the Dixie Moon," from

America, is the one tale that is both presented and commented on. It deserves some description here. First, in the deep blue light of a bright blue moon, a man in the shadows tells a Brer Rabbit story in contemporary jive talk, while another man rows a cardboard boat. The lights brighten, and the speaker of Black English turns out to be white. He stands on a box to tell his own "story" about Brer Rabbit—about hearing the tales first on the Disney screen (in *Song of the South*), then hearing them from a teacher in an all-white school, about discovering racism among friends, parents, and in himself, about wondering what the image of the "Tar Baby" could have possibly meant to black kids.

After we hear "Tar Baby" we begin to associate verbal images from the earlier tales in the piece, to compare and contrast them. It is as if the commentary embedded in the performance suddenly triggered the spectator's analytic reasoning. Why does the lazy, greedy daughter in "Mother Holle," who comes home from the "other" world covered with pitch, resemble the Tar Baby? Why is it that what is bad is signified by black? Why, in the German tale, is the good daughter the one who is unquestioningly obedient to any authority? But many other issues than that of race and ethnicity are raised by these tales. We ask, as well, about other divisions between people, particularly between generations. We are led, then, to ask, What are all these binary differences between people that fairytales so sharply and unmercifully delineate? And why do we long for an image of Eden, as in "Tale with Men, Boys, and Oranges," that is undifferentiated? At the same time, this motley collection makes us realize that our own American culture, whether we are black or white, young or old, male or female, *is* formed of fragments—that pastiche is our cultural style.

The pastiche of styles and methods, then, results partly in a political understanding of the tales, and partly in a peculiarly postmodern understanding of choreography itself. If the postmodern choreographers of the sixties and seventies used collage to circumvent literary meaning and narrative structure, the pastiche of the eighties situates narrative in a new framework. Here narrative can be enjoyed, even as it is subverted; it can be perceived as discontinuous, even while we watch it working.

Peter and the Wolf (1985) by Arnie Zane was originally commissioned by the Dance Division of SUNY-Purchase as a performance for schoolchildren. Zane ended up choreographing a punk version of the Prokofiev piece that probably mystified the young audiences but delighted the adults who saw it. Zane used a woman on pointe in the role of the wolf, a man in drag in a campy version of the bird, and various splintered characters; he told the story in several languages, at one point had the animals cavorting at a disco party with boomboxes, and suggested kinky sex as the red-cheeked farmboy Peter captured and tied up the vampish wolf.

Peter and the Wolf is not entirely a traditional folktale, but a modern

version of one. Sergei Prokofiev wrote the libretto (based on old stories) and the music in 1936 as a "symphonic fairytale," a didactic piece for orchestra and voice that was intended to teach children to recognize the individual instruments in the ensemble, for each character is represented by a different musical "voice" that the narrator identifies before the tale proper begins: the bird is the flute, the duck the oboe, the cat the clarinet, the grandfather the bassoon, the wolf the French horns, Peter the strings, and the hunters the drums. (It was also a political-moral tale, for Peter's full name is Peter the Pioneer, and he could serve for Soviet youth as a model of self-reliance, attuned to nature, and a cooperative worker as well.) In 1940, Adolph Bolm did a ballet version of *Peter and the Wolf* for Ballet Theater in New York; critics praised the music by comparing Prokofiev to Walt Disney![9] Since then the ballet has been reworked ad infinitum by choreographers in Europe, America, and the Soviet Union.

In a sense, *Peter and the Wolf*, probably a familiar work from the childhood of many young choreographers of the 1980s, provides a crucial template for the mode of storytelling preferred in the postmodern narrative. Unlike the classical ballet, which advances the plot through mute pantomime, here the narration takes place on two simultaneous levels—verbal commentary and dancing. While this form of storytelling seemed far too repetitive to many in the early versions of the ballet in the 1940s (Cyril Beaumont said, about Frank Staff's 1940 version of *Peter and the Wolf* for the Ballet Rambert, that the musical expression was so clear and the verbal description so vivid, the dancing often seemed superfluous[10]), in the eighties that redundancy along multiple channels not only heightens the postmodernist irony but also, paradoxically, creates the possibility of multivocal meanings. The Cunningham-Cage model of discrete channels whose (nonnarrative) meanings do not necessarily harmonize connects to a new narrative sensibility and is transformed. The new model is, on the one hand, deliberately "dumb" and literal-minded; on the other hand, it provides a multilayered "text" punctured by allusions, subtexts, plural voices.

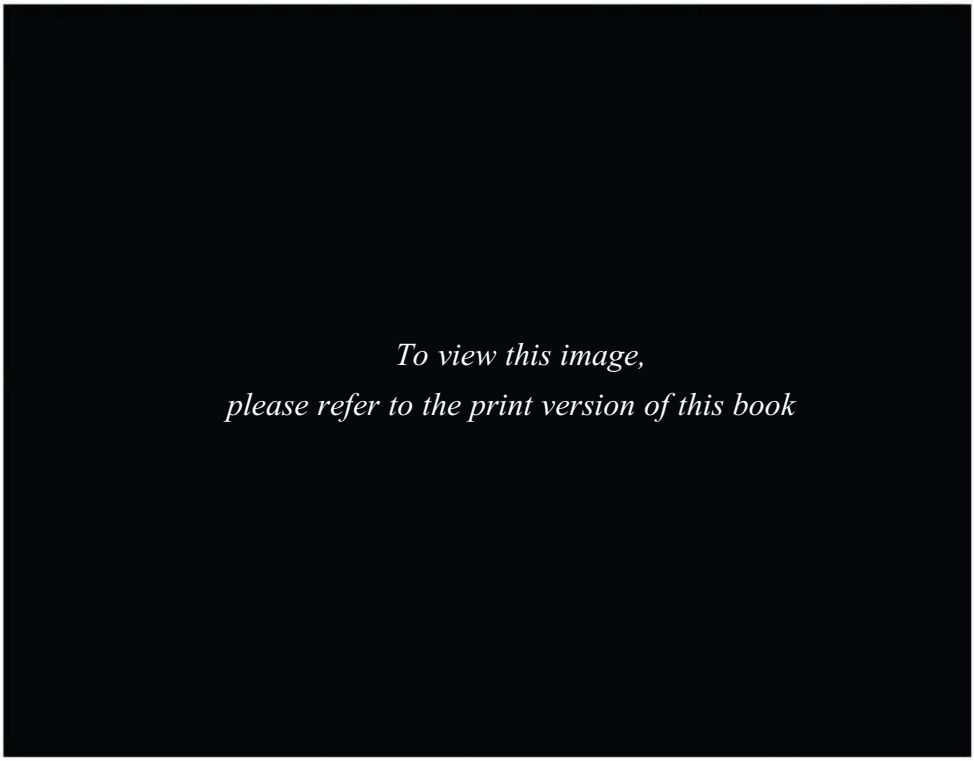
For Zane's *Peter and the Wolf* is an impish inversion of the piece as a received cultural artifact. It is both the *Peter and the Wolf* we already know and something else. It can be seen simultaneously in two ways. Suddenly it is a tale, not only for children, but at the same time for adults; it not only teaches us, but also upsets what we already know; it upends our notions of gender, of sexuality, of good and bad, even of unified character. Its humor, of course, is parodic. Zane relies on our already knowing the "right" version of the story, to which he can refer without having to make sense—a point that is underscored by the conglomeration of voices speaking in foreign tongues. Yet the very naughtiness of this dance, its spirit of *épater le bourgeois et l'avant-garde aussi* (because it is both avant-garde and retrogressive), makes even its adult sophistication yet another playful pose.

* * *

The Snow Queen (1986) by Kinematic (Tamar Kotoske, Maria Lakis, Mary Richter) is based on the fairytale written by Hans Christian Andersen. It tells of the boy Kay—whose heart is frozen by a splinter of ice and who, increasingly impervious to humanity, is abducted by the Snow Queen—and of his warmly loving friend Gerda, who ventures out to save him and returns him to this world. In Kinematic's version, a group of children (Kinematic plus Thom Fogarty and Carlos Arevalo) watch TV and seem to become possessed—or enchanted. First one child acts out a cartoon and then, when the television narrator's voice suddenly starts telling a fragmented version of "The Snow Queen," they all begin to take on aspects of the characters in the story, to dance to the sundry music, and to gesture as if in some half-forgotten, vestigial code. By the end of the tale, it seems they have been dancing out their own story, for isn't television our own modern version of Andersen's distorting mirror that shrinks human souls—the very mirror whose splinters are the bits of ice lodged in Kay's eye and heart? But who is the Gerda who will rescue these children?

The Snow Queen is the most ambitious and the most complex of the

Kinematic, *The Snow Queen.*
(Photo: Tom Brazil.)



fairytale ballets explored here. With its interludes of abstract dance and pseudo-folkdance and its main text of gesture language, it seems to quote the Petipa format—even though it is a wild version of that format, fills its structure with distinctly unPetipaesque dancing, and also adds the framing device of the TV (verbal) narrator. Dressing its adult dancers as children, the dance not only poses a question in regard to the tale about what has happened to Kay and Gerda (their travails and triumphs seem to be equated with the process of growing up, and, at the end of the story, they have acquired "grown-up children hearts"), but also it is has a very up-to-date punk look. And that punk aesthetic is further double-edged, for it is both utterly contemporary and at the same time nostalgic for the 1950s—that is, for the early childhood of the present generation of artists. Dressing both men and women in unisex pinafores, the dance suggests a cartoonish androgyny that is equally suited to the infantile (pre-splinter, pre-Snow Queen, pre-Fall) world of Kay and Gerda and to the cultural style of the eighties. The image of the dancers as automata (at first out of control, but increasingly regulated by the invisible television voice) is paired with their image as children (passive and malleable, and in the process of acquiring language), and further is yoked to the slipperiness of the characterizations (not only do the dancers-as-children seem to play at being the various fairytale characters, and sporadically at that, but, when the voice begins to interact with them, they even have difficulty identifying themselves), to impart a chilling view of our puny helplessness as our docile minds and bodies are molded by the instruments of socialization—from fairytales to dancing to advertisements and TV shows. The view is particularly chilling because the TV is the source both of the disembodied authority that controls and of the story that tells the "truth" about control.

Space does not permit me to discuss a number of other interesting examples of this genre, such as Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard*; Hope Gillerman's *The Princess Story*, in which the sexual and class codes of the traditional fairytale are overturned; Susan Foster's *Lac des Signes*, a deconstruction of the Russian classic *Swan Lake*; Diane Martel's dances, which rework folkdance and folk music motifs in transgressive contexts; and the work of Jawole Zollar of the Urban Bush Women, who takes her inspiration from African and Afro-American folktales.

As I suggested earlier, one reason the modern and postmodern choreographers preceding this generation found the fairytale anathema was simply that it was associated with the ballet, and, more specifically, with the peak of the academic style in the late nineteenth-century Russian Imperial Ballet. In fact, the European literary fairytale, whose history begins with the French writers Charles Perrault and the Countess d'Aulnoy in the seventeenth century, was the perfect form to inspire the Russian court ballet, for their tales, often new versions of traditional oral tales, were a kind of guide

to the young aspirant to Versailles, codifying in graphic form the language, values, and manners of the exceedingly ritualized society of Louis XIV's court—an era the Romanov court itself tried to emulate.[11] By the late nineteenth century, fairytales were no longer written as exemplars for ambitious courtiers, but, repopularized through chapbooks and other cheap editions, played a new socializing role. They had come full circle from their original, feudal, folk origins, through the aristocratic and bourgeois forms developed by Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and Andersen, to the popular literature and mass media of the modern industrial age.

In the 1970s, Marxist and feminist analyses of the social values coded by the literary fairytale, particularly in regard to status and gender, led to attempts to rewrite the classic tales from antiauthoritarian, nonsexist perspectives. And, by the 1980s, a postmodern consciousness focused on the fairytale not only as a literary genre that straddles both "high" and "low" culture, but also as an ambiguous thing, both pleasurable and dangerous. Hence the British writer Angela Carter lovingly reworks the classic fairytales in a feminized, neosadeian erotic manner, while the recent exhibition at Artists Space in New York entitled *The Fairy Tale: Politics, Desire, and Everyday Life* took as its organizing principle "a critical analysis of the fairy tale as a form of representation that embodies cultural notions of authority, power, morality, and sexuality" and noted that "The fairy tale inserts the child into a discourse that reduces social complexity to simple, unproblematic oppositions such as good vs. evil, male vs. female, power vs. weakness. . . . The use of the fairy tale in the mass media perpetuates a split between fantasy and reality, at the same time that it confuses one for the other."[12] Ericka Beckman's films, most recently and explicitly her *Cinderella* (1986), poetically explore the complex relations among fairytale forms and imagery, dreams, children's play, games, sex roles, and consumer culture. The juncture of various poststructuralist concerns—psychoanalysis, feminist reevaluations of gender roles and the early socialization of children, and Marxist critiques of consumer society with its mass media—excites a new interest in the form of literature most of us knew first.

One major difference between the "old-fashioned" fairytale ballet and the new, postmodern one, is a political and historical consciousness that criticizes and questions "fairytale discourse," as Zipes terms it. How is this difference expressed in concrete terms—through the form of the dance? The presence of the spoken word in the new fairytale ballet is a key departure, and one that serves as a wedge to pry open the meanings of the dance. I noted above that the presence of multiple channels allows for disparate meanings—the undermining or ironic contradiction of a single fixed meaning—in the work. The nineteenth-century ballet fairytale used pantomime to advance the plot, but verbal narration is much more specific than gesture language can be—at least, than the pantomime vocabulary of the ballet allowed. But—unlike what happens in modernist works, where a

cryptic verbal text might rub against the kinetic element to create ambiguous poetic sparks — here when the verbal channel presents a narrative as clear-cut, direct, and familiar as a fairytale, a contrasting movement component doesn't rub, it abrades. And out of that abrasion postmodern irony is born.

While the ballet, with its illusions of flight and its brilliant stagecraft, has been, historically, a form of dance-theater particularly suited to magical transformations, the fairytale is appropriate to postmodernists for other reasons. For one, the flatness of the fairytale characters and the formulaic plot allow for a narrative without character development or suspense — that is, a narrative that is still antirealist. This stylized, abstract quality of the fairytale satisfies the part of postmodernism that is heir to modernism.[13] For another, the mixing of styles, techniques, and genres that characterizes postmodernism's "tradition of the old"[14] — which satisfies the part of postmodernism that attacks modernism — characterizes the fairytale as well. And the seemingly primal emotion that saturates the fairytale fits well with the return of feeling to eighties' new dance.

The fairytale is, perhaps, one of the most mysterious narrative forms because it appears to be so old and so marked, like a palimpsest, by the traces of successive cultural transformations. Linda Dégh writes of both the oral and literary forms of the *Märchen*:

> We now know that the magic tale is a precious document of human history. Like the zone-rings in a very old tree trunk, important events in the cultural evolution of man can be traced through a Märchen. A relative chronology might be set up by scrutinizing the Märchen motifs in one and the same narrative. The oldest layer and also the most impressive for modern man is the reflection of a strange [totemistic] world. . . . All animals, natural forces, and objects in the universe are humanized.[15]

But there is a further reason for the fairytale's new appeal in dance. The postmodern dance of the eighties has, for a variety of reasons — including, but not limited to, its historicist imagination and the emergent "tradition of the old" — become interested in working in the ballet arena, in a way that, despite occasional forays, its predecessors never were.[16] And to work in this arena means, not only trying on the technique and appropriating the scale of the opera house, but also experimenting with ballet's most cherished themes.

The intriguing, paradoxical fairytale, so old and yet so oddly emblematic of postmodern culture, has, as I have noted above, captured the imagination, not only of choreographers, but also of artists in film, literature, and the visual arts. While fairytales have not necessarily always been told or written for children — in *The Blue Fairy Book* Andrew Lang quotes an eighteenth-

century lady of the French court who explained, "J'aime les jeux innocents avec ceux qui ne le sont pas," and Ralph Manheim translated the title of the Brothers Grimm as *Grimms' Tales for Young and Old*, explaining that not until the tales reached England did they become rationalized, sanitized, and "gift-wrapped" for children[17] — in our day they have come to be almost entirely relegated to children's culture. Thus the fascination they hold for the current avant-garde can be seen as part of a larger fascination with childhood associations of all kinds (as in the "toy-puppet" performances of Stuart Sherman and Paul Zaloom, the relay races and early reminiscences of Johanna Boyce's dances, Jim Self and Frank Moore's cartoonlike cinedance *Beehive*, and even the fifties "rec-room" atmosphere of Lower East Side performance clubs). This tendency seems to be a dialectical response to a mainstream cultural obsession with childhood, not surprising in an era of the most recent American baby boom. The postmodern fairytale ballet places itself in a position of resistance, as I have suggested, to that uncritical mainstream celebration of children and childhood.

In 1984, Noël Carroll remarked that the new dance images of play and childlike "fun" seemed to assert themselves as antidotes to the austere minimalism of the seventies, contributing to a more general return of expression in postmodern dance that signaled a yearning for rejuvenation.[18] The genre of the postmodern dance fairytale that has emerged in the mid-eighties conjoins that infantile, polymorphous pleasure, focused on the body, with the very adult pleasure of analysis, focused on the text.[19]

34

Pointe of Departure

If the 1960s prized speaking directly, the eighties is an age of irony. Quotation marks surround everything; originality becomes a matter of quoting differently, of wearing tuxedoes *and* tennis shoes. Call it pastiche. It is the aesthetic of postmodernism. An about-face from modernism's "tradition of the new," it at the same time represents an extension of the collage techniques beloved of the modernist avant-garde. No less than in the other arts, this nostalgic eclecticism has swept through the contemporary dance

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scene. And nowhere has it more strangely—or more revealingly—expressed itself than in the current invasion of avant-garde choreographers into that bastion of choreographic conservatism, the ballet stage.

At the Metropolitan Opera House last spring, American Ballet Theater audiences viewed Mikhail Baryshnikov as quick-change artist portraying a series of character types from Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde, to a Pavlova-as-Camille ballerina dying of a cough, to Mata Hari's accomplice, to Smith the butler in a murder case where everyone's surname is Smith. This was David Gordon's *Murder* (with music by Berlioz and sets by Edward Gorey), a work that combined a balletic vocabulary and opera-house scale with the typical Gordonian choreographic devices his loft audiences have come to know: spoken texts; a narrative structure that shifts meaning and coils around itself to end, with a surprise, at the beginning; a patterned, almost obsessively repetitive way of manipulating objects and dancers with the same comfortable casualness; transitions effected not by logical causation but by "moving furniture" to literally create a new space (here taken to ceremonial extremes in a recurring funeral procession); quotations of Gordon's own choreography as well as loving allusions to film and ballet classics.

A heretofore fiercely independent experimental choreographer, Gordon designed the movement for the Philip Glass opera *The Photographer* at the Next Wave Festival of the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) in 1983. This is Gordon's second ballet for the American Ballet Theater (ABT), which in 1985 premiered his *Field, Chair and Mountain*, and his third ballet on the Metropolitan Opera stage, where Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1985 performed his *Piano Movers*.

Those same ABT spectators last spring saw quite a different avant-garde ballet in Karole Armitage's *The Mollino Room*, with décor by David Salle, music by Paul Hindemith, and dialogue by Mike Nichols and Elaine May. The tone of the ballet is an oblique tribute to the twentieth-century Italian architect and designer Carlo Mollino, who championed kitsch and prefigured (the press release informs us) "the current thesis of banal design." Yet despite the dancers' awful fifties clothing and the monstrous everyday objects painted on Salle's drop curtains, *The Mollino Room* is anything but banal. Armitage's first important work, choreographed for modern dancers and set to punk/new wave music by Rhys Chatham, was *Drastic Classicism* (1981). As Arlene Croce wrote in the *New Yorker*, "Classical values that were flayed alive stayed alive." Armitage, who danced with Merce Cunningham but had earlier danced Balanchine as a member of the Geneva Ballet, seems a true choreographic heir of both men, wedding a spiky, elongated, off-center neoclassic line, elegantly erotic partnering, and startling costumes and sets, with open-field choreography and a self-conscious commitment to "deconstructing" dance conventions.

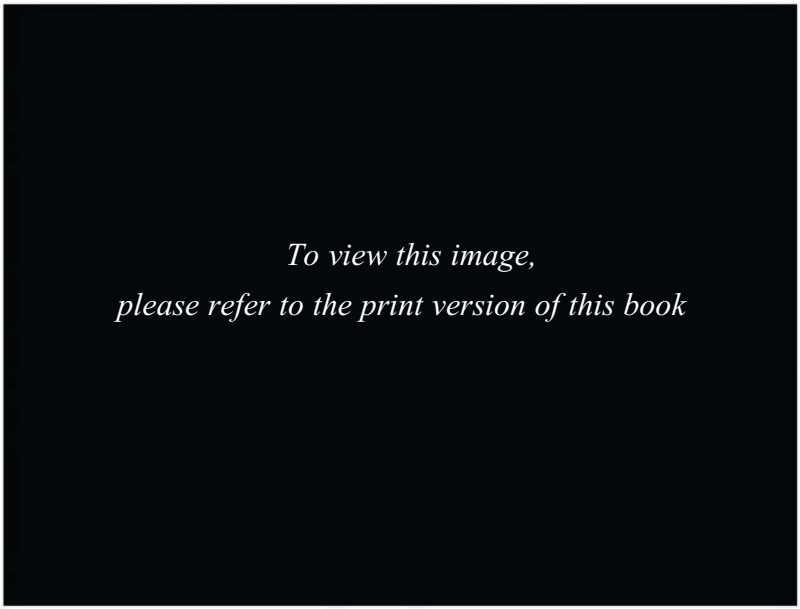
The Mollino Room is both an attack on and celebration of the ballet

event. Its scale absolutely dictates the need for an opera-house performance, yet the dancers are dwarfed by gigantic objects on the backdrops, which rise and fall according to their own choreography during the piece. One curtain, depicting enormous shoes several times human size, seems actually to squash the tiny, insignificant dancers as it ominously descends. Baryshnikov's role as a soloist is diabolically undercut; his dark costume makes him blend into the corps de ballet as the corps itself seems to fuse into so much décor, and he performs his virtuosic aerial embroideries hiding among a moving forest of bodies. When the voices of Nichols and May boom out their outrageous *My Son, the Nurse*—in a recording that includes the comedians' guffaws, false starts, and reworkings of the theme—one loses sight of the dancers altogether. But the jokes about gender codes are poignantly iterated, redirected home to ballet, as the dancers enter dressed as cartoon boys in shirts and ties and cartoon girls with bright toy falsies studding their leotards.

These are but two examples of the burgeoning ballet repertory by avant-garde choreographers. It all began in 1973 when Robert Joffrey commissioned Twyla Tharp to make *Deuce Coupe*, a bold mix of ballet dancers and Tharp's own company dancing to music by the Beach Boys, with graffiti writers spray-painting fresh décor during each performance. Utterly anomalous as it seemed at the time, this project did have certain historical precedents in some of Diaghilev's collaborations. A later precedent was the 1959 New York City Ballet production of *Episodes*, with separate sections choreographed by Balanchine and Martha Graham, and a guest appearance, in one of Balanchine's sections, by modern dancer Paul Taylor. But Tharp's irreverent pastiche of "high" and "low" art demonstrated a new postmodernist sensibility that flew in the face of the austere, formalist, high modernism that dominated the dance avant-garde of the seventies. That sensibility has infected the dancing of the eighties, and its central arena has become the ballet stage.

Since *Deuce Coupe*, Tharp herself has been working regularly for Joffrey, ABT, and even the New York City Ballet (in a 1984 collaboration with Jerome Robbins). Joffrey invited Laura Dean to make her first ballet for the company in 1980 and that association has continued. More recently Lucinda Childs, known for her "minimalist" dances in the seventies, has choreographed for the Pacific Northwest Ballet and the Paris Opera Ballet; the Ohio Ballet's latest season included works by Molissa Fenley and Laura Dean; the Boston Ballet has a new dance by Mark Morris and a work-in-progress by Jim Self; Armitage has choreographed for the Paris Opera Ballet.

The impetus comes partly from the company directors. By comparison with modern dance, which since the turn of the century has bred generation upon generation of choreographers, American ballet was until



Karole Armitage's *GV-10*, choreographed for the Paris Opera Ballet, 1984. *L* to *R*: Sylvie Guillem, Karole Armitage, Isabelle Guerin.
(Photo: Randolphe Torette.)

recently dominated by a single generation. And for over fifty years the presiding figure was George Balanchine, whose roots were in nineteenth-century Imperial Russian ballet. Even the younger choreographers—like Jerome Robbins—belonged artistically to the world of Balanchine, Antony Tudor, and Agnes de Mille. When Balanchine died in 1983, the end of an era tolled; and the lack of great, up-and-coming ballet choreographers became painfully apparent. A frantic search for new talent began.

Baryshnikov's desires to refresh the ballet repertory and to challenge himself as a dancer are well known. Ballet West (whose director, Bruce Marks, has recently moved to the Boston Ballet) sponsored an open-ended laboratory in 1985 for young experimental choreographers to work with ballet dancers. Liz Thompson, at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, has for several years commissioned young postmodern choreographers to make new works for the dancers in the Festival's annual Ballet Project. In London, the Ballet Rambert is now headed by Richard Alston, one of the founders of the British New Dance movement. In addition to showing Alston's own choreography, the troupe is committed to work by young choreographers like Michael Clark. Clark, who has worked with Armitage,

recently made a film for British Channel 4 with the American cinedance director Charles Atlas, and will appear on BAM's Next Wave this fall.

And this cross-fertilization between the avant-garde and institutional dance is itself becoming institutionalized. The National Choreography Project, for instance, was established three years ago with money from the Rockefeller Foundation, Exxon, and the National Endowment for the Arts to fund just such (but not only such) connections, and to spread new work to repertory companies around the country. It has sponsored work by Meredith Monk for the José Limón Company, Merce Cunningham for the Pennsylvania Ballet, Mark Morris for the Boston Ballet and the Joffrey, Susan Marshall for the Dallas Ballet, and Charles Moulton and Nina Wiener for the North Carolina Dance Theater, among others.

While not every avant-garde choreographer is drawn toward working with ballet dancers—Trisha Brown, for instance, will not choreograph for any company but her own, and Steve Paxton remains committed to alternative body techniques—a parallel impulse toward spectacle is taking place in the avant-garde arena itself. I have dwelt on the ballet invasion at length here because it seems emblematic of the current avant-garde's great shifts of attention and aspiration. The recent collaborations sponsored by the Next Wave Festival—like Childs's *Dance* (1979), with music by Philip Glass and décor by Sol LeWitt, or Brown's *Set and Reset* (1984), with décor by Robert Rauschenberg and music by Laurie Anderson—are very much in the same ambitious vein. And work by the younger generation of avant-garde choreographers—Johanna Boyce, Pooh Kaye, Tim Miller, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Fred Holland—is also impelled by a multimedia imagination, contra the pure dance tendency of the seventies.

The shift has practical as well as aesthetic origins. For one, the older members of the current cohort have, after twenty-five years, become established. Dipping into the mainstream, they are discovering that a certain amount of theatricality is desirable, if not necessary. Brown, for instance, says she began using music partly because she felt it made spectators more comfortable with her work. Childs was inspired to infuse her work with theatrical magic after working with Robert Wilson and Philip Glass (on the avant-garde opera *Einstein on the Beach*), but also notes that she had to change her choreography to accommodate the scale and frontality of the opera-house stages where her company now appears. The Next Wave Festival has increased its houses by selling tickets to collaborative efforts whose spectators are drawn equally from the art, music, dance, and theater worlds. And such projects are looked upon more kindly than media specialization by funding agencies.

But the major impetus for the move into ballet, into the contemporary opera house, and, in general, into spectacle and out of the intimate venues and bare-bones dancing of the seventies, comes from the choreographers

themselves. In the eighties we are witnessing a new stage of avant-garde dance—one that may ultimately result in full cooptation by the mainstream. Earlier I called the ballet experiments of the eighties strange. What makes them so unlikely? While ballet choreographers have repeatedly looked outside the academy for new inspirations, ballet's adversaries—and that is the stance modern and avant-garde dancers have historically struck—have, until recently, generally disdained entering ballet's ivory tower.

Modern dance began when Isadora Duncan and others challenged the academic vocabulary of classical ballet, borrowed from popular entertainments and various systems of physical culture, and made a new, distinctively American art dance that embodied an individualistic, pioneering spirit and created emblems of freedom through movement. The generation that followed—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and their contemporaries—crystallized individually coded movement vocabularies to communicate personal feelings and social themes. Their models were musical forms; the underpinnings of their dances were literary.

By the mid-1940s, Merce Cunningham was experimenting with abstraction. Working with the composer John Cage, Cunningham sought to free dancing from the constraints of music by letting the two simply coexist in time and space. By the late fifties and early sixties, when in all the other arts a new postwar generation exploded on the scene (and when the hallmarks of those arts were performance, vitality, and motion), dance too produced its own young vanguard.

Working at first in the Judson Church in Greenwich Village (which also housed an off-off Broadway theater and a gallery that showed pop art and happenings), the new dancers made their task a total reconsideration of the medium; and, to discover the essence of dance, they broke every rule. They walked, carried out written instructions, played games, enacted rituals, used chance techniques, improvised, and presented films, lectures, visual art, music, and everyday action as dances. The identity, nature, history, and function of dance were the objects of their animated inquiry.

By the 1970s, a wide range of questions about dance had been asked and a new phase of consolidation and analysis had begun. Choreographic structure was emphasized, and pure movement (movements without expressive or illusionistic references) predominated in the lofts, galleries, churches, and other alternative spaces that had become the venues for postmodern dance (as it was called by the midseventies). For such analytic postmoderns as Yvonne Rainer (now an independent filmmaker), Paxton, Brown, Gordon, and Childs—as well as for their contemporaries, the minimalist sculptors (like Donald Judd and Robert Morris) and the new music composers (like Philip Glass and Steve Reich)—the basic axiom was "less is more."

This postmodern dance in fact had much in common with "modern-

ism" in the other arts: it was reductive, reflexive, and abstract. What, then, to call the new dance of the eighties? Post-postmodern? Certainly it looks and means very differently from analytic postmodern dance. "More," dancers have now decided, "is more." Taken up with popular culture, parodic historicism, and entertainment values, the new dance has everything to do with what in all the other arts we call postmodernism. Perhaps the very impossibility of finding another label—the feeling that we've run out of labels—is one of the marks of the postmodern age.

In dance, the mistress of the age is Twyla Tharp, whose work exemplifies Charles Jencks's definition of postmodern architecture as doubly coded: entertainment for the general public and esoteric historical reference for the cognoscenti. Her rigorously structured choreography uses vernacular dance, blends genres, takes hedonistic pleasure in dancing to the music, and stands with one foot in the avant-garde and one foot on Broadway. In the seventies she seemed utterly sui generis, but she heralded a new generation of "new dance" choreographers who mix the casualness and eclecticism of postmodern dance with the expressiveness of modern dance, the gusto of social dance, and the virtuosity of ballet.

And not only its virtuosity. In the sixties and seventies, many postmodern dancers studied ballet technique as an antidote to the personal style of teaching in modern dance; others had first studied ballet as children and found in its vocabulary yet more material for their pluralistic view of dance. In the spirit of both pluralism and pastiche, if anything can be used in a dance, why not the Western high art tradition as well as social dance, non-Western dance, and nondance movements? But also, the same technical perfectionism, narrative capacity, and expressive power that made ballet anathema in the sixties make it attractive to both dancers and spectators in the eighties.

Our dancing is always shaped by our attitudes toward the body. In the sixties we wanted to let go, to relax, to improvise; in the eighties the mode is one of control—of the organism as well as of the images it produces. From body-building to fashion to sexual mores, our body culture attests to this desire to rein in, mold, and remake our physical selves. It is encoded in our clothing, our hairstyles, our eating habits (and disorders)—and in our dances. From aerobics to ballet to the avant-garde, the quest for technical perfection and the urge toward capturing meaning mark our present mania for control.

The avant-garde choreographers of the sixties were fascinated by the "natural" body of the untrained dancer. In the eighties, when everyone is jogging, swimming, or lifting weights, what it means to have an ordinary body has changed, the very notion of the natural body has come under fire, and even social dancing is highly choreographed. On the concert stage, the level of dance-technical training has skyrocketed. Choreographers of all

aesthetic persuasions are making works for superbly trained dancers with multiple performance skills — in different dance genres, but also in sports, gymnastics, acrobatics, even circus arts. Like the omnicompetent dancer, the dance itself has become a multimedia event, a polymorphous meeting of all the arts in the lived moment, in the singularly postmodern presence of performance.

35

Classical Brinksmanship: Karole Armitage and Michael Clark

There are times, it seems, when the classical tradition in dance needs massive shocks to the system to renew itself. Karole Armitage and Michael Clark, working on opposite sides of the Atlantic, in their separate ways, keep dreaming up those shocks. Like Diaghilev in an earlier era of crisis, Armitage and Clark both understand the need to infuse the dance performance with the tonic verve of the other contemporary arts. But also, as exemplary postmodernists of the 1980s, they traffic in a different kind of astonishment, one that wryly mixes classicism and kitsch, the high modern and the vulgar, abstraction with eroticism, the beautiful with the satanic — and the sardonic.

Both Armitage and Clark have been commissioned to bring their wrenching, revitalizing spirits to major ballet companies — Armitage has worked with the Paris Opera Ballet and last year made a dance for Mikhail Baryshnikov and the American Ballet Theatre; Clark has choreographed for the Scottish Ballet, Paris Opera Ballet, London Festival Ballet and Ballet Rambert. But as they dance here in Los Angeles with their own, smaller companies, one can see how they bring a classical spirit — especially discernible in their own dancing — to invigorate modern dance as well.

Armitage was born in Kansas in 1955 and studied ballet as a child with a transplanted former New York City Ballet dancer. Abroad with her family at sixteen, she joined the Geneva Ballet, dancing in a Balanchine-

Program note, *Performing Arts: Los Angeles Festival*, September 3–27, 1987.

dominated repertory. But, feeling rebellious toward even that brand of abstract ballet, she came to New York, where from 1976 to 1981 she was the marvel of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, with her poise, speed, and pliable, seemingly infinite extension. Certainly in Cunningham's company she had already become part of a world where innovations in dance, art, and music intermarried.

By the time she left Cunningham, Armitage had already been experimenting with her own choreography for several years. The titles of some of the early works, such as *Ne* (1978), hint at both her humor and her spirit. *Vertige* (1980), a duet for herself and new wave musician Rhys Chatham, first performed in a downtown Manhattan club, asserted a bracing frenzy. *Drastic Classicism* (1981), in which her company performed movements from the ballet canon with raw energy, literally in concert with a live punk rock band, articulated a logical direction—given her ballet background, her years with Cunningham, and her proclivity for new wave music. Writing in the *New Yorker* of the way Armitage "flayed [ballet] alive," Arlene Croce concluded that *Drastic Classicism* "transcended its own wildness to become a vindication of formal values in dancing." Though her tastes in music have shifted and the visual element has grown in importance, that direction, a radical classicism, remains constant.

In *The Watteau Duets* (1984), Armitage again deconstructed ballet as she and Joseph Lennon, another ex-Cunningham dancer, explored partnering techniques clad in a variety of costumes, including spike heels for her (that functioned much like the pointe shoes she wore later), a leather skirt for him, and, for both, huge block-stilts. Not only the erotic and sadistic elements of the classical pas de deux, but also its cumbersome spectacle was apparent in this piece, which was performed to a blast of sound from David Linton's band that, like the dance, was both exquisite and tortuous.

Critics dubbed Armitage the "punk ballerina." But while she has used its music and shares with punk a gift for assaulting the senses and a nostalgia for fifties style, Armitage's scheme is more consciously interwoven with artworld and danceworld achievements. "What I want to do is make ballets for this time," she has stated. "The work does not have a pioneering spirit. It is tied to the four hundred years of steps and technique and style that have evolved in ballet, and it is trying to take that somewhere else."

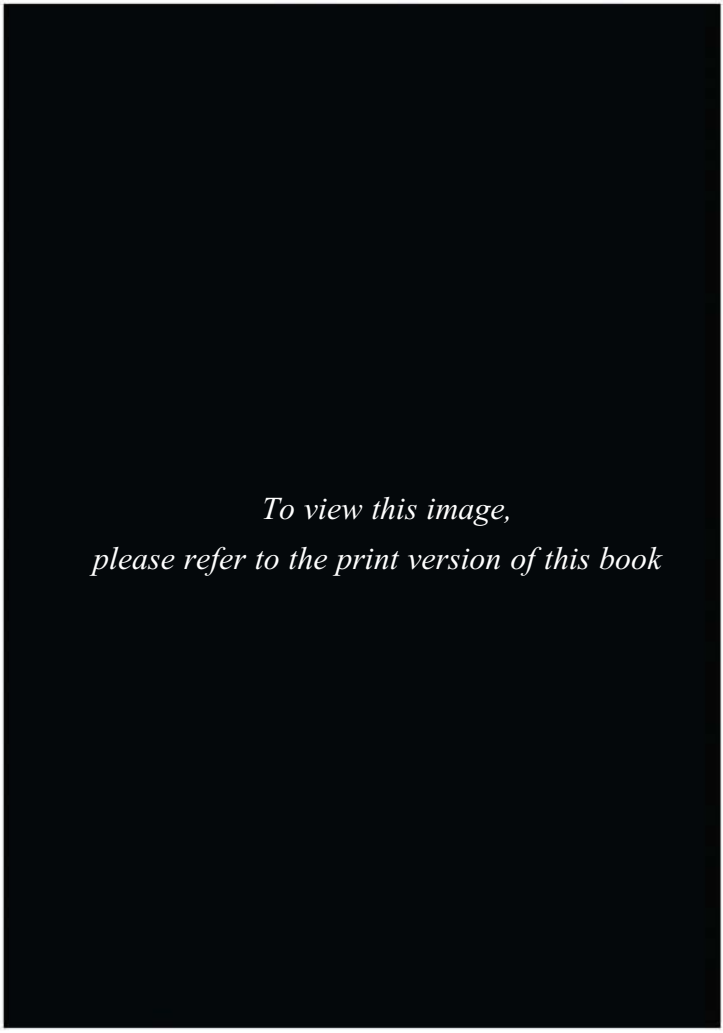
Armitage's compositional style resembles that of her collaborator, the painter David Salle, with whom she lives. Salle has designed the décors and costumes for a number of her works, including *The Elizabethan Phrasing of the Late Albert Ayler*. Both artists specialize in a kind of aesthetic version of cognitive dissonance, juxtaposing part against part in clashing styles, quoting both high and pop culture, art and everyday life. The resulting ironic distance is very much in tune with the fifties style they often appropriate, but is tempered with a singularly eighties tough elegance.

With the Salle collaborations, Armitage's musical requirements have

become correspondingly more complex and eclectic; her sense of rock as an energizing, liberating force has simultaneously waned. So the sound for *Phrasing* moves from the Shakespearean declamations of Lord Buckley (a fifties hipster comedian), to Webern, to Yo-Yo Ma performing traditional Japanese music, to Stravinsky, to the jazz musicians Albert and Don Ayler. Yet, though rock has disappeared, the importance of syncopation as a dislocating force remains.

Sex and gender are at the heart of much of Armitage's work, sometimes revealed as the unacknowledged subject of traditional ballet, and

Michael Clark.
(Photo: Richard Haughton.)



sometimes (as in *The Mollino Room*, the piece for ABT), commented on, goofily tongue-in-cheek. Michael Clark, who has danced with Armitage on several of her European tours, sees his outrageous sexual content as a direct frontal attack on the antiquated, rigid codes of classical ballet, with which he, like Armitage, grew up. "The whole sexual side of dance is something that is quite often ignored or even rejected," he has pointed out. And yet ballet's ideas in general "are so straightforward, so rigidly defined. . . . So male and female."

The glorious stew of polymorphous sexual identities and sexual action in Clark's work goes far beyond unmasking the amenities of ballet, however. The English see it as a protest against Thatcherism and an emblem of post-punk London in the 80s—not just a symbol, but an embodiment of the club scene, for the company includes designers (Leigh Bowery and David Holah of Bodymap) and musicians (The Fall and the Yugoslav band Laibach) as both collaborators and performers. "The idea of having your own company is to have people you care about around you, even if it means changing the way you work to incorporate those people," Clark says. It also means making dances that partake of the sights and sounds of life outside the dance studio.

Clark, who was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1962 and began doing highland dancing at age four, trained at the Royal Ballet School and at seventeen joined the Ballet Rambert. The Rambert has always been a company that experiments, and there Richard Alston, the young artistic director who had been a pioneer of British New Dance and had also spent time in New York studying with Merce Cunningham, made Clark a showpiece in dances both classical and contemporary. It was clear that as a dancer Clark was extraordinarily gifted, with fluid grace and élan that have prompted comparisons to Nijinsky.

When Clark left Rambert in 1981, it became clear that he was also a gifted choreographer, one who was able to glean from his ballet training technique and phrasing that could be reused in new contexts. For, despite his criticisms of the ballet as a social institution, and, unlike an earlier generation of avant-garde choreographers, Clark acknowledges that "ballet is a very rich technique, and it can be used in all sorts of ways." Those ways include parody—as when in his dances men wear tutus while women wear combat boots, or when in *Pure Pre-Scenes* he reinterprets the Bluebird Variation and sets women dancing to Chopin piano music—but they also include the seriously dazzling virtuoso dancing that is the essence of classicism.

Ballet is not, however, the only tradition of dance that shows up, reworked, in Clark's choreography. There is a whacky, quintessentially British pantomime-inspired aspect to the cross-dressing, phallic byplay and fantastic costumes. That popular, bumptious strand of dance history rears its head in rebellion in Clark's work.

Is Clark just a chronicler of the wild world he puts on stage, with its narcissistic glitter and its fascistic overtones, or is he a political critic? One British critic saw in *Now Gods*, one section of a longer ballet called *No Fire Escape in Hell*, "a powerful hypnotic vision of the sort of violent society which seems just an election away."

In the 1970s, avant-gardists saw the body as material for art and the performance as a moment both for rinsing movement of all the excess trappings of theatricality that distracted from the dance itself and for technical innovation. In the eighties—the age of the postmodern spectacle—Armitage and Clark lead the way for a new generation of dancers to reinvest the body with sexual and emotional meanings, to reinstall the other arts in the theatre and to rediscover the wealth of dance history.

36

Terpsichore in Sneakers, High Heels, Jazz Shoes, and on Pointe: Postmodern Dance Revisited

In dance, the term "postmodern" came into use in the early 1960s, when Yvonne Rainer and other emerging choreographers used it to differentiate their work from that of the preceding generation—modern dance. By the midseventies, it had become a critical term to label a movement. Now, in the late 1980s, when the term has been theorized not only in the arts, but in cultural criticism generally, "postmodern" has come to mean something quite different for dance—though clearly our current usage is an evolution from those original ruptures with the dance academy in the sixties.

For we in the late twentieth century are everywhere enmeshed in "the postmodern condition."[1] In one sense, everything about our current first-world, post-industrial, mass-media culture is postmodern. But postmodernism, it should be remembered, has had specific, though disparate,

Dance 89 (Munich, 1989).

meanings in the various spheres of culture, meanings that are tied to the particular history and practice of each discipline.

Charles Jencks, the architect and critic, popularized the term (which was first advanced in the 1930s, and then entered literary-critical discourse in the early 1960s) for his own field, beginning in 1975. In his recent book *What is Post-Modernism?*, Jencks reiterates his definition: that postmodern architecture involves "double coding," in two senses. Deliberately hybrid, it appeals to two separate audiences; it both continues and transcends modernism by mixing it with classicism—combining old and new styles, materials, and techniques—in order to engage both the general public and the experts. For Jencks, this eclecticism has a moral and political, as well as aesthetic mission. It is entertaining, decorative, and symbolic, reanchoring architecture in the public service; at the same time, its playfulness is professionally informed, reinstalling the art in the depth and breadth of its historical tradition. But Jencks is adamant about protecting his category from what he considers easy elisions with postindustrial culture generally.[2]

Jencks disputes the definitions given by such critics as Hassan and Krauss, which ally postmodernism with experimentation, radical discontinuity, and deconstruction. For these critics, Jencks argues, any break with high modernism is labeled postmodern. But in his view, because such artists as John Cage, William Burroughs, and Robert Morris still work in a singly coded, hermetic avant-garde tradition—without the symbolism, ornament, and pluralism that characterize postmodern architecture—they should be categorized as late-modernist, not postmodernist.

In literature, John Barth and Umberto Eco, among others, have used the term postmodern to refer to the ironic use of traditional forms, again doubly coded, in that postmodern literature will be enjoyable to broader audiences (say, than Beckett's), yet will still intrigue the literary expert. Fredric Jameson has theorized postmodernism as pastiche, signaling cultural schizophrenia. Charles Newman sees it as an expression of inflationary culture. In the practice and criticism of the visual arts, the term refers to appropriation from mass culture, the "death of the subject," a Lyotardian "loss of master narratives." In theater, postmodern has been used to mean the death of character.[3]

But this jumble of meanings should not paralyze us in looking at dance history. Jencks disagrees with the way the term is used in literature and the visual arts because his definers for architecture are not necessarily applicable across the arts. Since modernism dictated that each art specialize in its own unique essence, it is not surprising that postmodernism has taken different directions in each art. And yet a fundamental part of postmodernism—or postmodernity—is the antimodernist, interdisciplinary mingling of these previously separate spheres. By the eighties, it seems

clear that there is a shared project across the arts, but also that the disparate paths to it may not all look the same.

In dance the term "postmodern" also has had a specific meaning—as in the other arts, a meaning particular to the discipline, though that meaning has changed over the last three decades. And it is certainly not accidental that its use in critical discourse began to spread first in the midseventies in order to track developments, dating from the early sixties, parallel to those in the other arts.

The meaning of the term "postmodern" in dance is partly historical and descriptive, as I have suggested. It began as a choreographer's term to call attention to an emergent generation of new dance artists. Those choreographers—many, but not all, of whom were connected with the Judson Dance Theater—were not necessarily united stylistically. Their methods ranged from chance procedures to improvisation to picture-scores to rule-games and tasks, and from a minimalist interest in sustaining "one thing" to a welter of multimedia. Their vocabulary, too, partook of a uniquely early sixties spirit of democratic pluralism, embracing unstylized ordinary activities—child's play, social dancing, daily tasks—as well as the more specialized actions of athletics, ballet, and modern dance techniques. In their work lay the seeds of both the analytic, reductive work of the seventies and a baroque, theatrical style that has reemerged in the eighties. Although these choreographers in no way represented stylistic homogeneity, they were, however, united in their antimodern project—that is, their desire to make dances that departed from the values and practices of the modern dance of Wigman, Graham, Humphrey, Limón, and followers.

By the late sixties and early seventies, however, as members of this generation increasingly allied themselves with the gallery artworld, a more unified style emerged—what I have called "analytic postmodern dance."[4] This is the style that in 1975 Michael Kirby pinpointed as postmodern dance.[5] Its practitioners included Yvonne Rainer (until, by 1973, she was working exclusively as a film director), Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, and the group Grand Union. Conceptually (rather than musically or literarily) based, analytic postmodern dance was reflexive—not only abstract and shorn of excess theatrical trappings, but also framing these features as revealing the essential characteristics of the medium of dance. It was, that is, *modernist* according to the criteria set down by the art critic Clement Greenberg,[6] and it shared methods and goals with the high modernist project of minimalism, which dominated visual art in the seventies. In postmodern dance, too, the analytic style prevailed, and yet simultaneously another strand of choreographers (such as Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, and Laura Dean), working in a more overtly theatrical vein, pursued in the seventies what I have called "metaphoric postmodern dance."[7]

But, by the eighties, a second generation of what could by then only

be called postmodern choreographers—many of them students and followers of the first generation—as well as various formations of postmodern movements abroad (such as butoh in Japan, poor dance in Germany, new dance in England, danse actuelle in Montreal and Paris) had joined the first generation. And, as well, a range of institutions, networks, and festivals had been developed for producing and distributing postmodern dance. Once again, stylistic diversity prevailed, though certain traits recurred—notably, an alliance with the avant/pop music world (and its logical outcome: increased popularity) and an interest in both narrative and the traditions of dance history.

This is true, to varying degrees, not only of the upcoming generation of younger choreographers, but of those who had come of age in the sixties, at the beginning of the postmodern dance movement, as well. And in this respect, recent work by the avant-gardists of the sixties and seventies and their progeny joins forces with the historically dissimilar projects of choreographers like Twyla Tharp and Mark Morris. Its references to classicism and to other dance cultures, its plenitude of theatrical means, and its increased accessibility make this latest chapter of postmodern dance more like what Jencks narrowly admits to the canon of postmodernism than the analytic postmodern dance of the seventies had been.

Yet all three (or more) of these chapters are part of the story of postmodern dance. This is partly because at various points its practices have meshed with aspects of postmodernism in the other arts. But, more importantly, it is because practices that are (compared to the visual arts, for instance) both *modernist* and *postmodernist* have already both been subsumed under the rubric "postmodern dance." Historically—no matter what its twists, turns, digressions, and alliances along the way—the movement has called itself postmodern, and many of its practitioners still use that title. There is no turning back the clock, in this particular case, even if to do so would provide the relief of categorical neatness. In a sense, postmodern dance began as a *postmodernist* movement, underwent a *modernist* interlude, and has now embarked on a second *postmodernist* project. Let us now look in slightly more detail at those three chapters, which fall more or less into three decades.

The Sixties

In the experiments of the early sixties, the groundwork was laid for both the (*modernist*) analytic postmodern dance of the seventies—characterized by minimalism—and the (*postmodernist*) postmodern dance of the eighties—characterized by abundance, appropriation, and theatricality.

The early departures from the modern dance had to do with both form and content; they paralleled the concurrent breaks in visual art from modernism—even though modern dance was never *modernist* in Green-

berg's sense. And, although this feature is often forgotten nowadays, one way early postmodern dance broke from historical modern dance and seized artworld status was to ally itself with the visual art world. Simone Forti's earliest New York concert took place at the Reuben Gallery, home of happenings and junk art, in 1960; her second concert installed "dance constructions" meant to be viewed in the round, like sculpture, in a downtown loft. Avant-garde dance in the early sixties shared with pop art (as well as happenings, underground film, and the Off-Off Broadway theater movement) a playful exuberance, a democratic impulse, and a visionary faith in the concrete truth of the human body that challenged modernist academicism in American culture at large. Dance, in particular, foregrounding the artist's body, became a central vanguard arena not only for trained dancers, but also for visual artists, musicians, poets, and filmmakers. Further, it was not seen simply as a vanguard arena, for it both borrowed from popular, folk, and mass arts and also sought wider audiences. And, simultaneously, choreography was rendered less esoteric exactly because it had opened itself to nonprofessionals. Often akin to dada in its blurring of boundaries between life and art, between artist and spectator, and between art forms, early postmodern dance in this regard seemed the opposite of Greenberg's modernism, where every art form reveals its special essence.

But (again peculiar to dance), because the earlier generation's concerns were symbolic and expressive (rather than abstract) one way to break with the tradition of modern dance was to embrace modernist — reflexive — concerns, to bare the devices. Merce Cunningham and others had opened the door to abstraction and the short-circuiting of personal expressivity through chance methods. But modernist reflexivity requires something more — namely, that the formal elements of abstract work be seen as revealing essential characteristics of the medium. Historically, this required an added semantic dimension — that the work not merely be itself but that it be about being the kind of thing it is. Something from the internal structure of the work or from its context was necessary to establish that this sort of reflexivity was operative. The postmodern dancers of the sixties transmuted Cunningham's (and others') abstraction into reflexivity through a variety of means — including manifestos, the insertion of verbal material in the dance itself, nudity, and ordinary movements.

Hence the ways dancers sought to challenge the artistic status quo in their own field in the sixties had elements in common with *both* modernism and postmodernism in the other arts. Their work was often abstract and reflexive, but just as often ironic, dealing in everyday materials and inspecting historical and vernacular conventions. Perhaps because the body is so drenched with social and political symbolism, it was possible to create such symbolic meanings even in ostensibly nonrepresentational dance.

For instance, in Yvonne Rainer's *We Shall Run* (1963), the dance consisted, on one level, of people running at a steady pace in different floor patterns, grouping and regrouping. But a number of factors—the grandiose music by Berlioz, the serious calm of the dancers' demeanor, the variety of their body types, the very steadiness of their pace, and the way the paths allowed neither any one person nor any one gender to take a leader's role (while they did allow for individual forays from the group)—made this dance seem to be as much about a vision of a utopian, democratic community as it was a dance "about" a particular kind of movement or choreographic structure.[8]

Other cultural themes of the early sixties pervaded these dances, not only reflecting many of the issues of post-World War II American society, but at times contesting, and even, at times, creating them. In this time of a "troubled feast"—where despite a teeming cornucopia of goods and an economy more and more geared toward pure consumption, there were pockets of poverty and overarching racist inequities—these dances spoke of freedom and democracy, embracing improvisational and collective methods. The superabundance of objects was satirized in such dances as Lucinda Childs's *Carnation* (1964)—where, under attack from household items like sponges, a colander, and a plastic garbage bag, a young woman remakes her body into a surrealist object; or Kenneth King's *cup/saucer/two dancers/radio*, in which all the items in the title are leveled into a frighteningly dehumanized homogeneity. But also, in this prefeminist moment, dance performance was a venue where the woman artist was fully empowered, carving out a zone for women's work and a status for the woman artist that foreshadowed feminist demands of the seventies.

These dances redefined the body, releasing it from the heroic, symbolically overinflated images of modern dance (for instance, Martha Graham's Greek mythological heroines or the distillation of Shakespearean passion in José Limón's *Moor's Pavane*). Instead, the body became what the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin had earlier called "the grotesque body": festive, exorbitant, confusing inside and outside, focusing on the "lower" processes of sex, ingestion, and digestion, and all the orifices that lead into and out of the body.[9] Appropriate to the expansive sixties, the grotesque body is itself a figure of abundance. From Simone Forti's playful *Huddle* (1961); to Carolee Schneemann's orgiastic *Meat Joy* (1964); to Steve Paxton's *Physical Things* (1966) (in which the audience passed through a 100-foot plastic tunnel decorated with trees and fake grass); to the "love" section of Yvonne Rainer's *Terrain* (1963) (where she and William Davis assumed a sequence of erotic poses based on Indian temple sculpture); to Robert Morris's appropriation of Manet's *Olympia* in his own *Site* (1964), the facts of the body were aggressively asserted, expressing a cultural moment of confidence, economic expansion, and teeming creativity.

The Seventies

By the early seventies, a new phase of consolidation and analysis began, as many choreographers pursued specific projects unearthed by the wide-ranging experiments of the sixties. This research aspect of the avant-garde laboratory superseded the playfulness of the earlier decade, as a serious work ethic emerged in both the rhetoric and the methods of the postmodern choreographers. The "work" was factual, down-to-earth, objective, a style often arrived at through task activities that, as Robert Morris noted as early as 1965, served as a useful strategy for producing concentrated, unself-conscious, "real" movement.[10] Scores, verbal commentary, and ordinary movements and postures also contributed to the search for movement detached from personal expression. The absence of music and special lighting, scenery, or costumes increased the movement's importance—since the movement became all there was to concentrate on. The antiillusionist approach demanded close viewing and clarified the smallest unit of dance, shifting the emphasis from the phrase to the step or gesture, inviting the spectator to concentrate, in an almost scientific way, on the choreographic structure and the movement per se.

Rainer's *Trio A* (1966), also known as *The Mind is a Muscle, Part 1*, was a harbinger of this trend. A single phrase, four-and-one-half minutes long, it dispenses with phrasing, development, climax, the virtuosic feat, and the fully extended body of modern dance, substituting energy equality, equality of parts, found movement, and human scale, as Rainer herself explained.[11] The movements are all abstract, yet they are performed with a tasklike energy and concentration. The various strategies for shortcircuiting the performer's gaze add to the neutral, objective performance demeanor. The choreographic structure is that of a list; one movement follows another without any particular dancerly logic, underscoring Rainer's observation that "Dance is hard to see. It must either be made less fancy, or the fact of that intrinsic difficulty must be emphasized to the point where it becomes almost impossible to see."[12]

Similarly, Brown's Accumulation Pieces and Structured Pieces and various dances by Lucinda Childs, most notably *Calico Mingling* (1973), used structural devices such as repetition and reversal, mathematical systems, geometrical forms, and comparison and contrast to encourage the perusal of pure, often simple movement.

Analytic postmodern dance was consistent with—and consciously aligned itself with—the practice of minimalist sculpture. It was also a fitting art for a post-Watergate, post-oil-crisis America—sober, factual, conservationist in terms of energy and theatrical means.

The work of Twyla Tharp, which had its roots in the modernist project of the analytic phase of postmodern dance, seemed by the mid-seventies to diverge from these structuralist, minimalist—and, admittedly,

specialized — concerns. As she began to explore popular music and dancing, at times going so far as to insert the vernacular into the ballet tradition — in works like *Eight Jelly Rolls* (1971) and *Deuce Coupe* (for the Joffrey Ballet, 1973) — she became a practitioner of *postmodernist* dance in Jencks's sense. The rigor of her choreographic structures persisted, while her musicality and catholic musical taste gained her wider, more popular audiences.

The Eighties

Tharp's moves prefigured and meshed with several key directions of the eighties. For a number of reasons — ranging from the aesthetic to the economic — the interests of the first generation of postmodern choreographers shifted to large-scale, spectacular, multimedia collaborations (often under the auspices either of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival or of progressive ballet companies). Childs's *Dance* (1979), a collaboration with the visual artist Sol LeWitt and the composer Philip Glass, is paradigmatic of this shift, as is Trisha Brown's *Set and Reset* (1983), a collaboration with visual artist Robert Rauschenberg and composer Laurie Anderson. At the same time, a younger generation emerged in the 1979–80 season — including Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Jim Self, Johanna Boyce, Molissa Fenley, Karole Armitage — who, themselves impatient with the seemingly puritanical seriousness and dry asceticism of the analytic approach, independently found various means to reinstate theatricality while remaining committed to the avant-garde venue. Further, a post-Tharp generation — whether directly descended from her company, like Sara Rudner and Nina Wiener, or inspired by her example (one with wider circulation and impact than that of her analytic colleagues) — began to appear as well. And further, by the mideighties, a wing of choreographers who identified themselves as both black and postmodern — among them Blondell Cummings, Bill T. Jones, Bebe Miller, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Fred Holland — integrated what had hitherto been a predominantly white arena, often introducing explicitly political themes of black identity in their dances. Other political concerns — notably feminist and gay — surfaced at this time too.

Besides the desire for political representation, there was an aesthetic cultural pluralism at work in the eighties that broadened both the pool of participants and the audience appeal. A number of Japanese dancers, including Kei Takei, Eiko and Koma, and Yoshiko Chuma, introduced techniques from butoh and Japanese avant-garde theater; the alternative techniques plundered by various choreographers and producers — from capoeira, salsa, and breakdancing to tapdancing and juggling — showed the postmodern proclivity, not only for traditions from other cultures, but also for those despised or overlooked from American subcultures and popular culture.

Mikhail Baryshnikov's appointment as director of American Ballet Theatre in 1980 and the death of George Balanchine in 1983, the Joffrey Ballet's success with Tharp's ballets, commissions by such producers as the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, and the growing regional ballet movement with its demand for new choreography, as well as a postmodernist interest in history and tradition, all contributed to the move into the ballet arena of a number of postmodern choreographers, including David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Laura Dean, Karole Armitage, Mark Morris, Molissa Fenley, Jim Self, and Ralph Lemon. In another variation on the same theme, a number of postmodern choreographers, working in alternative venues, have exploited the narrative appeal of the story "ballet"—notably the group Kinematic, with their trilogy of fairytale works. The collaborative turn, the move toward ballet, and the interest in cultural pluralism are all factors that have aligned eighties postmodern dance with developments in the music world—which has itself undergone similar changes.

As the term postmodernism has taken on a broader cultural, interdisciplinary meaning, postmodern choreographers are consciously bringing their work in line with the term as it has been theorized across the disciplines over the last decade or so. Thus Mark Morris makes a series of dances based on Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*; Susan Foster deconstructs *Swan Lake* and makes references to Barthes and Foucault; Stephen Petronio describes his *Simulacrum Reels* as history flashing past the eyes of the spectator.[13] In the eighties, "postmodern" is no longer a descriptive term, categorizing directions already in motion, but a prescriptive one—a commitment to a project that takes postmodernist, poststructuralist theory as a set of directive guidelines.

In the sixties, many of the aspects of postmodernist dance we note today were already present. In fact, those features of post-World War II avant-garde culture with which early postmodern dance was connected originally gave rise to the term postmodern, in literature and the other arts, as well as in dance. But, owing to the historical circumstances of avant-garde dance, as theory informed practice, dancers moved away from multimedia, interdisciplinary experiments and quotations from both popular culture and dance history, in order to explore their chosen medium. That analytical, often austere research program, in a modernist key—which dominated the seventies—gave way in the eighties to new interests in pluralism, in politics, in narrative, in ballet, and in collaborations between the disciplines. And, at the same time, contemporary developments in the other arts have aligned this phase of postmodern dance—which eschews the essentialist bias of modernism—with *postmodernist* practice in current cultural theory and in the other arts. This third phase of postmodern dance shares with the sixties the desire to bring dance into contemporary artistic discourse. But the making of the postmodern dance

of the eighties—partly because it is descended from developments in the avant-garde dance of the sixties and seventies, which defined "postmodern" through practice, and partly because art-cultural discourse has redefined postmodernism—is guided now by the theoretical prescriptions the term has come to imply.

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Dancing [with/to/before/on/in/over/after/against/away from/without] the Music: Vicissitudes of Collaboration in American Postmodern Choreography

In thinking about collaborations in American postmodern dance and music, several distinctions in the relations between the two arts that have emerged in the broader history of theatrical dance are useful. As well, it is helpful to review briefly the history of postmodern dance in terms of its connections to (and disconnections from) music in general. For it may be that the ways postmodern dance has treated music and the composer-choreographer partnership make collaboration itself a problematic term. How much consultation does it take to make a commission a collaboration, and how much must the separate components fit together in the finished work? Or is a commission itself the minimal act of "laboring together," as the etymology of the word collaboration suggests? What happens when the choreographer is the composer, or the dancers the musicians? What if a composer chooses to choreograph? These, indeed, are some of the kinds of

Choreography and Dance 1/4 (1992).

questions that have animated the postmodern choreographic inquiry from the start.

One distinction in the broader history of theatrical dancing is that between first-rate and second-rate music—the debate, as ballet began to detach itself from opera in the early nineteenth century to become a separate art form, as to whether the music should refrain from calling attention to itself (and away from the dance) by its excellence. The idea was advanced that the music should support the dancing in specific ways: by providing, first of all, a clear rhythmic basis for the dancers' timing, and, second, a "dancerly" (*dansante*) melody for modulating the flow of energy and expression. Yet these "program-music" aims were not necessarily consistent with the goals of serious composers—as they had been, for instance, during the baroque era—once dance-music and symphonic music diverged, and once social dance and theater dance were no longer congruent. Serious composers could play around with dancing music and ballet music, but it was not their most serious work; and the composers—mostly hacks—who specialized in such music were not expected to aim for excellence in musical composition. It was even reasoned that the music should avoid innovation, for familiar tunes, by context, could augment the mise-en-scène with the narrative and emotional development that pure dance could not supply on its own.

Closely intertwined with this idea that the music should not upstage the dance—and hence should stay in the hands of dance-composer specialists without aspirations toward serious music—was the slightly different nineteenth-century notion that, in the collaborative process, the dance came first. That is, the music played second fiddle to the dance, not only in terms of quality, but also in calling the tune, so to speak. Ballet, it should be remembered, had grown out of social dancing; in that model, of course, the dance form structures the music. But this hierarchy continued to apply even when the dance vocabulary had become more specialized and even when choreographers used first-rate music—not only in the parts of the ballet based on social dances (mazurkas, waltzes, and so on) but also in the more abstract sections of pure classical ballet as well.

Thus Tchaikovsky was surprised, in working on the 1877 version of *Swan Lake*, to see Julius Reisinger reverse the usual work process by choreographing to the music—rather than ordering the music by the measure to fit the dances. Despite Tchaikovsky's growing reputation as a symphonic composer, Marius Petipa did not hesitate to dictate complete requirements for the music for *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and we know that Tchaikovsky was happy to comply. This was the standard method of their collaboration. Nor, as we also know, did Petipa and Lev Ivanov hesitate to rearrange the composer's music for their own 1895 version of *Swan Lake*.[1]

The working methods may not have changed since the earlier part of

the century, but the artistic potential released in these late nineteenth-century ballets—when as a result of theater reforms I. A. Vsevolozhsky did away with the position of staff musician and commissioned first-rate music—was an important inspiration to members of the younger generation of Russian artists and intellectuals. Out of their group would issue the Diaghilev paradigm that combined both these concepts—a full collaboration between music and dance (and visual art), in which, ideally, composer and choreographer were both serious, first-rate artists in their own right, and in which they worked together to make a unified artwork where neither art form was subjugated to the other.

In modern dance, too, the early twentieth century was characterized by a new attitude toward music. Duncan's interpretations of the great composers and St. Denis's music visualizations each in their own ways parallel the aspirations of modern ballet choreographers to foster a more symbiotic relationship with the work of serious composers, albeit to already existing works. Yet, as the century wore on, there were instances when modern dance struggled to free itself from conventional musical support. In tune with the primitivism of the dadaists and the German expressionists, Mary Wigman substituted pure percussion—on non-Western instruments—for the melody previously considered essential to European music and dance performance. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, several choreographers choreographed in silence, either adding the music when the dance was completed or presenting the finished dances entirely without music, as in Doris Humphrey's *Water Study* and Tamiris's *The Queen Walks in the Garden* (both 1927). From the midthirties, Martha Graham and others consistently commissioned new music by American composers.

Merce Cunningham's dance theater, with John Cage as musical director, represents a watershed moment in which dance wrenched itself free of music—although not from musical collaboration—for the first time.[2] In the Cunningham-Cage model, the work of both artists stresses the rhythmic complexities at the core of dancing, but the choreography and musical composition present autonomous rhythms that rarely connect, and, when they do, connect by chance. As Roger Copeland has pointed out, one might protest that this separation of elements barely seems to constitute collaboration; but perhaps this "collaboration at a distance," as he calls it, is but one extreme on a spectrum of possibilities for artistic partnership.[3]

I have argued in the previous chapter that the movement we call modern dance was never "modernist" in the Greenbergian sense. That is, unlike the reflexive work of modernist painters and sculptors, historical modern dance never revealed its own essence as an art form. Though the way was paved by Merce Cunningham's abstraction and his separation of the dancing from the music, it fell to the analytic postmodern choreographers of the 1970s to take on this modernist task. This, of course, is why the

nomenclature of artistic generations in dance differs from that in the other arts; our "postmoderns" include both what I have termed the "analytic" (modernist) choreographers of the seventies and the postmodernists (in the more general cultural sense) of both the early sixties and now again in the eighties. This also helps explain why, in the analytic stage of postmodern dance, music was often avoided altogether. Let us look, then, at how the different stages of postmodern dance—in its "modernist" as well as "postmodernist" phases—have treated music and the notion of musical collaboration.[4]

The Sixties: Anything Goes

If postmodern dance as it conceived itself in the early sixties was a criticism as well as an extension of modern dance, one form that criticism took was to transcend the various models of the choreographer-composer collaboration—even the Cunningham-Cage model—and to ventilate even more possibilities for the sound component in dance, both during the choreographic process and in performance.

The reigning theory of dance composition at this time was taught by Graham's musical director, Louis Horst, who had already formed several generations of modern-dance choreographers in his well-known classes. For Horst, emotion inhered in the very forms of music; whether one chose sacred medieval music or American folksongs as one's source, the meaning and shape of the dance, as well as its vocabulary, were already dictated by expressive qualities Horst found in the musical genre. The goal was to imitate an entire zeitgeist of an era by using the music—as well as painting and architecture—as a program for style. For example, in the medieval sacred dance (not, he warns, to be confused with either medieval secular dances or Renaissance religious dances), Horst recommends using the parallelism that, he finds, pervades this period, from painting style to the musical structure of the organum, and that symbolizes "the meek acceptance of earthy trials" typical of the Christian figure dominated by the Church. Though unique to its own era, Horst reasons, the distortions and irregularities of the medieval period style resonate with our own; therefore modern dances imitating such highly coded notions of a generalized medieval style will be easily accessible now (in the early sixties).

> [This] style is based on religious ecstasy. It is weak with a weakness born of meekness and a paleness born of self-denial. Dance movement based on the parallel designs of medieval religious art is attenuated or twisted out of natural postures to a point of torture. It is apt to be performed in a very limited area; for the most part moving from one parallel design to another without covering much floor space. . . . The dance will repeat the elongated, reaching, contorted art of those times. The conception of medieval man suffering under an inner, self-inflicted pain is plainly

> analogous to many of our familiar modern psychological ideas of emotional conflicts and complexes. . . .
>
> Dances about self-inflicted penance, fasting, flagellation, denial of the world suggest themselves; or in psychological terminology: guilt complexes, withdrawals, etc. Lives of medieval saints and martyrs can be examined for subject matter . . . — the hair shirt, the straw pallet. . . . Mixed and uneven rhythm give the needed uneven, asymmetrical, oblique character to the dance design.[5]

Despite their specific, historically rooted styles, these dance forms, he claims, are all easily assimilable into the modern temperament. And amazingly, the appropriate dance structure for each one of these musical styles, though they are unique products of their culture and time, Horst concludes, "is usually a relative of the basic ABA form" (even though the musical structure may not be).[6]

Not surprisingly, many young dancers in the sixties looked for alternative approaches to dance composition. They found a stimulus in the choreographic workshop that was to spawn the first Judson Dance Theater concert in 1962 — a course also taught by a musician, Robert Dunn, rather than a choreographer. Dunn, a former student in John Cage's experimental music class, took a different path than Horst. He asked his students to transpose more formal music composition problems and concepts (including the use of scores) to movement — rather than making a dance that would mimic a given musical style as part of an expressive package. In Dunn's class, the music that generated a piece of choreography might not even end up accompanying the dance.

The first Judson concert included an improvised collaboration between a choreographer and jazz composer (Fred Herko's and Cecil Taylor's *Like Most People — for Soren*), a dance choreographed by a composer (John Herbert McDowell's *February Fun at Bucharest*, set to music by the baroque composer Charpentier), and an appropriation of rock and roll (William Davis's *Crayon*, to records by the Volumes, Dee Clark, and the Shells). As well, there were pieces in which the dancers sang (David Gordon's *Mannequin Dance*), squeaked (Yvonne Rainer's *Dance for 3 People and 6 Arms*), and talked (Rainer's *Ordinary Dance*), and one in which the audience was instructed to blow up balloons and let the air out slowly (James Waring's musical score for part of *Mannequin Dance*). There were also dances to music by Erik Satie (Fred Herko's *Once or Twice a Week I Put on Sneakers to Go Uptown*) and by John Cage (Carol Scothorn's *Isolations* and Ruth Emerson's *Shoulder r*, both to Cage's *Cartridge Music*). And there were several dances performed in silence.

After the first Judson concert, a number of other young contemporary musicians besides McDowell joined the group — Philip Corner, James Tenney, and Malcolm Goldstein. The composers in the group collaborated on dances by supplying musical accompaniment (Corner and Goldstein,

for instance, wrote music for Lucinda Childs's *Pastime* and *Three Piece* [both 1963], respectively; Tenney often worked with Carolee Schneeman; Goldstein and McDowell wrote the music for Elaine Summer's *Fantastic Gardens* [1964]; and even Robert Dunn contributed a musical piece, *Doubles for 4* [1959], as an accompaniment to Judith Dunn's *Index I* and *Index II* [1964]). They also made their own dances. Sometimes, as in Corner's *Certain Distilling Processes* (1963), the dancers' movements became a living score for the musicians to interpret (in Corner's piece, four dancers choreographed individual solos to a calligraphic score by the composer, and their gestures, in turn, were translated into sounds during the performance by seventeen musicians and a singer, each assigned to watch a particular dancer). Sometimes pure musical compositions, with no dancing whatsoever, were presented as part of a dance concert, encouraging the audience to think of music itself as dancing. The physical act of making music was sometimes framed as a dance (Corner's *From Keyboard Dances* [1964]). And dancers, in turn, made music (e.g., Steve Paxton's *Music for Word Words* [1963], which was a sound-producing action—the inflation and deflation, using a vacuum cleaner, of a twelve-foot-square plastic cube with arms and legs, which eventually became a costume. This took the separation of "music" and dance to an extreme, since it was performed the day after his and Rainer's silent duet *Word Words*).[7]

Although a great many younger dancemakers presented work at the Judson Dance Theater, it was not the only site of early sixties experimentation. Simone Forti, on arriving in New York after dancing with Ann Halprin, worked with Rainer, Robert Morris, Trisha Brown, and others who would later form the Judson group. Forti incorporated singing, talking, shrieking, reading aloud, laughing, and other sounds made by the dancers themselves. The ongoing nature of her early dance structures was partly influenced by La Monte Young's use of sustained sounds; and one of Forti's dances—*Accompaniment for La Monte's "2 sounds" and La Monte's "2 sounds"* (1961)—deliberately reversed the usual relationship between dance and music by announcing itself as an accompaniment to Young's *2 sounds*.[8]

James Waring, never part of the Judson workshop itself, was a contemporary of Cunningham's and Halprin's who presented his own work at various venues, first in San Francisco and, beginning in 1948, in New York—including the Living Theater, the Master Institute, and the Judson Church (after 1963). Waring was teacher to several of the Judson group and many younger choreographers danced in his company. In retrospect, Waring's musical practice alone (not to mention his movement inventions) qualifies him as an early model for postmodernism. He was a master of pastiche, juxtaposing Bach and George Brecht; Couperin, McRae Cook, and Maria Alba; Glière, John Herbert McDowell, Rossini, Louis Alter, and traditional Spanish music. In the early sixties he collaborated with a number

of contemporary composers, commissioning music — often assemblages — by McDowell and Richard Maxfield especially, but at the same time he choreographed entire dances to Bach or Mozart. In the later sixties he was inclined more toward romantic and modern composers, from Liszt and Chopin to Stravinsky, but often mixed them in collages with popular song. In the fifties Waring had turned to the use of musical forms to structure his dances, specifically as a way of rinsing his choreography of overbearing narrative or drama. (Perhaps he was not aware that even literary choreographers like Graham also, following Horst, worked from musical structures). But his later use of musical collage not only created new musical forms by which to structure dances, but also served, as well, as atmospheric — often nostalgic and theatrical — coloring. Don McDonagh (1971) describes Waring's phrasing as "embroidery around rather than on the music." Much of the music he used — the sound assemblages, for instance, of contemporary composers — might not provide any handles at all for dancerly phrasing, while, in using more traditional music, Waring's choreography often deliberately strayed from following the rhythmic and melodic structure precisely. Partner to the whimsical eccentricity of gesture and costume was an unconventional, slightly off-kilter use of the musical basis.

So the early sixties were marked by a wide-ranging use of music in different styles, as well as a wide-ranging practice in terms of how the music was (or was not) incorporated into the choreographic process. In these breakaway years of early postmodern dance, every tenet of the reigning choreographic methods was called into question. (And even some of the early experiments of the modern dance masters, unknown to this generation, were repeated.) The grandeur of certain musical choices now seemed pretentious and was treated ironically (e.g., Rainer's *We Shall Run* [1963], to Berlioz). Partly as a result of John Cage's teachings, which advocated the acceptance of all sounds as part of music, material formerly considered inadmissible was incorporated in the sound track of a dance — words, popular music, vocalizations and breathing by the dancers themselves. Yet while "lowbrow" music was suddenly permitted, much "highbrow" music, especially that of the twentieth-century pre-Cage composers favored by the modern dancers, began to seem like the old-fashioned, second-rate program music. The relationship, not only between dance and music, but also between choreographer and composer, was explored with a vengeance — and new relationships were imagined.

The Late Sixties and Seventies: Museums, Laboratories, and Silence

In the late sixties and the seventies, an expansive, wide-ranging sense of interdisciplinary experimentation gave way to a situation in which artists returned to their "home" disciplines. In a modernist vein, minimalist painters and sculptors concentrated on exploring the limits and possibilities

of their given media. For both aesthetic and social reasons, the choreographers who emerged from the Judson group were gallery-oriented. That is, they participated in the visual artworld discourse;[9] their venues were often museums, galleries, and international art festivals; their audiences were artworld audiences. There were parallels, as Rainer charted in her essay "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," between the work of the visual artists and choreographers of this period.[10] But, although minimalist art shared values and goals with both analytic postmodern dance and minimalist new music during this period, the arts did not usually meet in performance — for one of the values of that minimalism dictated that each art devote itself to refining and reflecting on its own essence. Thus the late sixties and seventies were largely a time of separatism, in the arts as well as the political arena. When the choreographers did use music, often it was "found" sound — popular music in particular. One exception was Simone Forti, whose collaborations with Charlemagne Palestine and Peter Van Riper explored improvisatory interactions between dancer and musician in performance. Another was Deborah Hay, whose *Ten* (1968) was accompanied by a rock band, the Third Eye.[11]

In dance as in visual art, a serious work ethic emerged in both the rhetoric and the methods of postmodern choreographers. The style of the "work" was factual, down-to-earth, objective. Tasks and scores were among the strategies employed to strip movement of personal expression. And movement per se was foregrounded further — scrutinized, as if under a laboratory microscope — by revealing choreographic structure, on the one hand, and by abolishing such theatrical trappings as special lighting, scenery, and costumes — and, often, music as accompaniment — on the other. Moreover, by now the choreographers deliberately shied away from borrowing as dance structures even the kinds of musical structures that had been avant-garde in the fifties and early sixties (e.g., Erik Satie's repetitions). Instead, they used scientific models — geometrical forms (for example, Lucinda Childs's *Calico Mingling* [1973]) or mathematical systems (Trisha Brown's Accumulation Pieces [from 1971]).

Yvonne Rainer used various kinds of sound — including rock and roll, a recording of Lenny Bruce's monologue *On Snot*, a composition by Gordon Mumma, and movie music — for her various "composite" pieces of 1968–70. One section of accompaniment in *Performance Demonstration* (1968) was a tape of Rainer's voice delivering a jeremiad against the use of music at all, a diatribe that was ironic (since music was used in the piece) but at the same time offered a thoughtful critique, forcing the viewer to consider the various theories and possibilities of music-dance correspondence:

> ... I would like to say that I am a music-hater. The only remaining meaningful role for muzeek in relation to dance is to be totally absent or

> to mock itself. To use "serious" muzache simultaneously with dance is to give a glamorous "high art" aura to what is seen. To use "program" moosick or pop or rock is to generate excitement or coloration which the dance itself would not otherwise evoke.
>
> Why am I opposed to this kind of enhancement? One reason is that I love dancing and am jealous of encroachment upon it by any other element. I want my dancing to be the superstar and refuse to share the limelight with any form of collaboration or co-existence. Muzak does not accompany paintings in a gallery. . . .
>
> . . . I simply don't want someone else's high art anywhere near mine. . . . I *don't collaborate*. . . . Furthermore, I am all for one medium at a time.[12] (emphasis mine)

In *Rose Fractions* (1969), Rainer stated her attitude toward musical accompaniment even more forcefully when she included in the program's list of elements to be found in the first section the term "Mucis"—assimilating music to the social impropriety, later in the list, of "Body and Snot (Lenny Bruce)."

While this period was dominated by the analytic, modernist concerns I have outlined here, the seventies also witnessed a different strand of postmodern dance, one I have called "metaphoric" or "metaphysical." While it shared many stylistic aspects with the first and second phases of postmodern dance, the metaphoric postmodern dance by such choreographers as Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, and Laura Dean took a holistic approach to dance-theater.

In the late sixties and early seventies, King was for the most part using verbal texts as sound elements in his dance pieces—including readings from philosophers, political fantasies, and lectures on dance theory. In the late sixties, Monk collaborated briefly with Don Preston (of the Mothers of Invention) and other musicians on the scores for her dance pieces. But by 1970 she alone composed the music for her often site-specific, epic-scale performances. From 1970 on, she simultaneously choreographed, directed, and carried on a career as a new music composer in a minimalist mode, publishing recordings—the first was *Key* (1971)—and giving concerts for voice, piano, and less conventional instruments like wineglass and jew's harp. These concerts, including *Raw Recital* (1970) and *Our Lady of Late* (1973), were primarily musical in focus, but always theatrical in presentation. The exploration of the voice—its range and expressive qualities, in solo, chamber, and choral form—has been fundamental to both her music and dance-theater works. During the same period, Dean collaborated with the minimalist composer Steve Reich, and by the late seventies began writing her own music in a similar vein. In Dean's work, repetitive modules of movement keyed precisely to music accumulate, serving, like a mantra or the incessant whirling of Sufi dervishes, to reach an intense, meditative, almost mystical pitch.[13]

In a separate arena from either the analytic or the metaphoric postmoderns, Twyla Tharp explored musicality in choreography to existing music, using both classical and popular scores. If the analytic improvisatory group The Grand Union—in its at times surrealistic, at times antiillusionist demystifications of theatricality—put on an omnium gatherum of favorite records to dance to, those interludes were marked as ironic, often incongruous acts. But Tharp, choreographing dances to Jelly Roll Morton, Haydn, the Beach Boys, or Chuck Berry, while sophisticated and ironic in her own way, clearly began with an appreciation for the phrasing, rhythms, and dynamics of the music. In this regard, she is more like Balanchine or Paul Taylor than like the early postmodernists whose pop sensibility she shared. When, as in *The Bix Pieces* (1972) and so many of her other works, the dance is choreographed to one piece of music (or in silence) and then set to another, contrasting composition in performance, the ensuing stylistic and rhythmic tensions create a complex, multilayered structure—though the sources of those tensions (the echo, as it were, of the original music, set in conflict with the later accompaniment) are not always clear to the audience.[14] And the eclecticism of Tharp's musical choices from piece to piece, as well as her catholic taste in dance vocabularies—from the baton-twirling and tapdancing of her childhood to classical ballet moves to quotations of black jazz to the intricate movements generated by structural permutations—put Tharp more squarely in the purview of the term "postmodernist" as it is used now in culture generally. That is, to use Charles Jencks's definition from architecture, her dances are doubly coded, mixing elements from classical and vernacular traditions, but also appealing, on different grounds, both to a general public and to specialists.[15]

Thus in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, collaboration was not a dominant practice in the avant-garde, even for a musicalist choreographer such as Tharp, who used preexisting musical works from both "high" and "low" culture. For the analytic choreographers, to dance in silence, to verbal texts, or even to sound collages that included music—that is, to refuse, one way or another, to "dance to the music"—was a way to clarify and focus on movement for its own sake. For the metaphoric choreographers, an opposite aspiration—a coveted union of music and dance—often led, in its own way, to a move away from collaboration and toward an omnitalented single creator, a metteur-en-scène who produced a total artwork combining sight, sound, and kinetics.

The Eighties: Culture Clubs

Simultaneous with the arrival in the eighties of a new generation of postmodern choreographers, the disparate interests of two streams of seventies postmodernism—the gallery-oriented analytics and the more theatrical

metaphoric choreographers—began to merge, though not always for the same reasons, and to join as well with the interests of Tharpian musicalists. The result was a striking congruence of themes and preoccupations among both older and younger generations, now joined as well by previously peripheral groups.

As the early postmoderns came to the end of the analytic phase, their own interests began to shift toward new collaborations, similar but not identical to the more casual partnerships of the early sixties. When three minimalist arts met in Lucinda Childs's *Dance* (1979; music: Philip Glass; décor: Sol LeWitt) the quantitatively increased result was a qualitative turn toward a new aesthetic of maximalism. Laura Dean's own forays into composition began that same year, with *Music*. And, while Trisha Brown did not admit music into her work until 1981 (when Robert Ashley's *Atalanta* accompanied *Son of Gone Fishin'*), her collaborative turn also came in 1979, when Robert Rauschenberg designed the sets and costumes for *Glacial Decoy*. Brown's 1982 *Set and Reset* also featured sets and costumes by Rauschenberg, but the music by Laurie Anderson opened an alliance with a younger generation of new musicians. David Gordon initiated a different kind of "sound track"—the dance equivalent of avant-garde film's "new talkies" (of which Yvonne Rainer, who had moved from choreography into film during the seventies, was a leading exemplar)—with his *What Happened* (1978). But, also notably, in his *The Matter* (*plus and minus*) (1979) he made his first in a series of postmodernist allusions to classical ballet: he presented a minimalist version of The Entrance of the Shades from Petipa's *La Bayadère* (1877), to the well-known music by the nineteenth-century ballet composer Léon Minkus.

It seems that, after a period of rinsing dance clean of visual and aural accoutrements, analytic postmodern choreographers were becoming interested in the increasing possibilities music and visual art could provide. But the specific reason for the renewed interest in music varied with each choreographer. Childs, for one, had worked with Glass when Robert Wilson invited her to perform her solo choreography as part of *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) and, sensing that their styles were compatible, she wanted to work with Glass in a production of her own. Brown has frankly stated that she was tired of seeing the larger audiences for which she was booked by the eighties walk out during her performances and wondered—in a reversal of the seventies principle in which it was claimed that the music obscured the dance—whether the absence of music created too much discomfort for them even to see the dancing. In general, the style of the visual art world, performance art, and new music was also changing from austerity to spectacle, and in the culture generally, perhaps as a result of Reaganomics, the partnership of music and dance (from breakdancing and rap music to MTV to tango) commanded a new fascination, reminiscent of 1930s dance films and dance crazes.

If Twyla Tharp, some of whose early pieces had been performed in silence at the Judson Church in 1966, had diverged from the analytic postmodern line of inquiry exactly because her choreography was so musically inclined, by the 1980s, when the analytic choreographers "rediscovered" music and its various uses, that interest realigned her—and her followers, such as Sara Rudner, Kenneth Rinker, and Nina Wiener—with the postmoderns. Like Tharp, the analytic choreographers explored the tensions between music and dance: Gordon delighted in repeating the same dance to different music in a single performance, showing how changing contexts shift meaning; Childs made her spare but complexly arranged vocabulary of steps, hops, skips, small leaps, and turns at times fit and at times disengage from the precise rhythms of Glass's music (and then music by Jon Gibson, Michael Riesman, John Adams, Michael Nyman, and others); Brown choreographed *Set and Reset* to an earlier song of Anderson's and then Anderson composed "Long Time, No See" (to which the dance was ultimately performed) after watching a videotape of the silent dance.[16]

Meanwhile a new group of younger choreographers had stirred up such musical interests on their own—in part to differentiate themselves from their minimalist, analytic, antimusic forebears in a way that fit with the general cultural trend; in part to engage with their own artistic contemporaries in other fields. For by the late seventies and early eighties, the younger generation of new music composers were often hybrid creations, art students turned punk or new wave musicians, that is, avant-gardists with pop ambitions—or with pop experience. Peter Gordon, for instance, claims he founded his Love of Life Orchestra in 1977 to reconcile his classical and avant-garde musical training with his job experiences as a rock saxophonist. "I wanted . . . to make an intelligent, and intellectual, music that can still feel good and still be fun to play. I wanted to use the vernacular in serious music."[17] Whether for theoretical or personal reasons, the lines between popular culture and high art, between visual art and music, between Western and non-Western musics were on their way to a postmodernist disintegration.

Such endeavors took various forms. Karole Armitage, trained in Balanchine ballet (first by Tomi Wortham in Lawrence, Kansas, and then in the corps of the Grand Théâtre de Genève) and a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, collaborated at first with Rhys Chatham, a raucous new wave composer. Armitage's *Drastic Classicism* (1981) presented, among other things, members of Chatham's band sharing the stage space equally with the dancers and sometimes even interacting with them. In her 1985 critique of ballet partnering, $-P=dh/dq$ (later retitled *The Watteau Duets*), Armitage commissioned an original score by David Linton (formerly a drummer with Rhys Chatham and one of the musicians who had performed in *Drastic Classicism*) titled "The Simpleton's Guide to the

World's Greatest Music." A mix of live percussion, guitar, and taped musical selections (including Wagner, Stravinsky, and Handel), it was played at such loud volume that at the piece's premiere at Dance Theater Workshop in New York, audience members were given cotton to protect their ears. Yet those who braved the loudness often found its atmospheric pandemonium an exhilarating foil for the precision and delicacy of the dancing. As Robert Greskovic (1985) put it, "I found the hurly-burly atmosphere compelling and quite an ideal landscape for her and her dancing . . . the idea of a long, supple, willowy Karole Armitage stretching simple tendus or raising silky battements amid a tornado of sound is . . . riveting and magical." In these collaborations, the music provided no easily discernible rhythms or melodies for the dancers to follow. Instead, on the Cunningham-Cage model (though not in their style), music and dance created separate dense channels, provoking the spectator's senses in multiple directions. But in subsequent works (especially after her collaboration with painter David Salle began), such as *The Mollino Room* (1986) for American Ballet Theater or *The Elizabethan Phrasing of the Late Albert Ayler* (1986) for her own company, Armitage forsook the thicket of sound of contemporary art-rock composers for taped sound collages that mixed jazz, comedy routines, and classical music.

Molissa Fenley began her choreographic career without any particular interest in collaboration with composers. For instance, in her early *Mix* (1979) dancers made their own percussion with maracas, bells, and sandblocks. But by 1980 Fenley had collaborated with Mark Freedman on the high-energy, repetitive sound score for *Energizer* by manipulating a beatbox, the omnipresent instrument of late disco music. She assimilated her own image of choreography at the time to the Phil Spector ideal, in sixties rock music, of a diffuse, unbounded "wall of sound." She was also influenced by a childhood in Nigeria witnessing West African ritual and social dances, as well as schooling in Spain that exposed her to flamenco dancing. A shared interest in both popular and non-Western musics eventually led Fenley to commission scores from important new composers of her generation, including Peter Gordon (*Eureka*, 1982) and Anthony Davis (*Hemispheres*, 1983).[18]

Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane for several years had collaborated with Helen Thorington, who contributed avant-garde atonal electronic music for their trilogy *Monkey Run Road* (1979), *Blauvelt Mountain* (1979), and *Valley Cottage* (1980). But beginning in 1982 they also moved into the art-rock effect when they worked with Peter Gordon, on their jointly choreographed *Rotary Action* (1982) and *Secret Pastures* (1984), and on Jones's own choreography for *Fever Swamp* (1983). A different kind of collaboration took place in Wendy Perron's and David Van Tieghem's *Divertissement* (1986), in which both choreographer and composer danced and spoke; Van Tieghem (who has worked as a percussionist with Laurie Anderson and the

Talking Heads, among others) added both sound and drama as he rattled objects littering the stage.

Other examples of young choreographers collaborating with their contemporaries in music include Yoshiko Chuma and Christian Marclay; Wendy Perron and Craig Bromberg (who played in Glenn Branca's band), Bosho, Andy Blinx, and Don Hunerberg; Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and Edwina Lee Tyler. Or, to look at it another way: composer Scott Johnson has collaborated with Charles Moulton and Jim Self; Lenny Pickett with Chuma, Bebe Miller, Stephen Petronio, and Marta Renzi; David Linton with Armitage, Kinematic, Fred Holland; Van Tieghem with Tharp, Perron, Elisa Monte, Jennifer Muller, and new vaudevillean Michael Moschen. The list could go on and on. And the types of correspondence range from amorphous sounds that surround or underline the dancing in a general way, at one extreme, to exact parallels in rhythmic and melodic patterns.

In the early eighties, Charles Moulton's dancers did precision ball passing to A. Leroy's pleasingly melodious version of electronic new wave cocktail music. It was the meticulousness of the twin phrasing of both music and arm motions that made this "routine" a delightful dance (in fact, whenever a dancer dropped a ball, Leroy dropped the phrase and went back to the beginning). Marta Renzi made *You Little Wild Heart* (1981), a proto-MTV videodance, for the public television station WBGH. In it, teenage couples partied, fought, and made love, to the successive cuts in a Bruce Springsteen album, choreographed and edited exactly in the style of MTV's rhythmic montage. Lisa Kraus's *Going Solo* (1983) was a collaboration with a woman rapper. Wendy Perron was the choreographic consultant for Laurie Anderson's film *Home of the Brave* (1985). As these particular examples suggest, when contemporary music began to slouch toward rock, the synthesis of art and rock music provided new models for choreographers—the social dancing act itself, as well as the dancing acts of rock performers. And this was true whether the music was found or commissioned.

Or perhaps it is more correct to say that the new postminimalist interest of art composers in popular and non-Western music forms coincided—or collided—with the interest of eighties postmodernist choreographers in social and ritual dancing (and, hence, the most persistent forms of dance-music relations). As popular and subcultural dance—from salsa to hip-hop to *Black and Blue* on Broadway—captured the world's imagination, the avant-garde took its lead from popular culture. Popular culture itself, a creation of the McLuhanesque electronic global village, had already taken on a "one-world," internationalist beat. Postmodern music and postmodern dance found themselves newly wedded in venues from dance clubs (Danceteria, Pyramid, The World) to television (Alive from Off-Center); but also, avant-garde venues (The Kitchen, P.S. 122,

DTW, Brooklyn Academy of Music) presented popular music/dance—from breakdancing to African highlife to samba to polka—sometimes even arranging their audience in cabaret style. And even rock clubs like the Ritz or the Roxy, where no avant-garde choreography was to be seen, shared audiences with the rest of the venues on this spectrum. Susan Marshall's company played with ballroom dance forms in a witty, poor man's version of the more upscale American Ballroom Theater. Even the renewed interest in baroque dance (a period in which not only were the music and dance still firmly rooted in social dance forms, but also the discovery of the anthropologically exotic Other was an important theme) seems part of this postmodern, interdisciplinary, multicultural project—as does the 1987 reconstruction by Millicent Hodson, Kenneth Archer, and the Joffrey Ballet of that milestone of modernism, the original Nijinsky-Stravinsky-Roerich *Sacre du Printemps*.[19] That multidisciplinary, cosmopolitan, internationalist culture is inspired by—and appropriates in jarring juxtapositions from—the fusion of the arts we have come to think of as disparate, in cultures distant from our own high-art notions of separation and specialization either geographically (e.g., West Africa or Japan), temporally (eighteenth-century Europe or pre-Christian Russia as interpreted in Diaghilev's Paris), or in terms of class stratification (the Bronx or Chicago's Milwaukee Avenue).

In other words, as postmodern dance in its later phases turned away from the *modernist* essentialism of earlier postmodern dance to a *postmodernist* (in the more general sense) interdisciplinarity, there was a binding of the splits between social and theatrical dancing, on the one hand, and between art music (previously altogether separate from the theater) and popular music (whether for social dancing, or for program music in ballet, film, etc.) on the other. And although the notion of collaboration was at first celebrated (for example, in the marketing strategies of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, which devoted the catalog of its first Next Wave Festival, in 1983, to the topic of collaboration), the very desire to bind the splits eventually made the marking off of collaboration as a special method superfluous.

As in the sixties, the many ways dance and music may be parceled out among performers is under exploration, further rendering the very term collaboration problematic. The dancer may function as musician (Fenley's *Mix*; Zollar's many works for her singing, acting, and dancing Urban Bush Women; the sounds of pouring water that counterpoint Richard Munson's piano music in Johanna Boyce's *Women, Water, and a Waltz* [1987]); the musician may function as dancer/performer (Bebe Miller's and Linda Gibb's *Vespers* [1982], Robert Kovich's and John King's *The Dialogues* [1988]; Perron's and Van Tieghem's *Divertissement* [1986]). The figure of the choreographer as composer (Monk, Dean, Tim Miller, Diane Martel, Kumiko Kimoto) or of the composer as choreographer (Van Tieghem in his

recent *Caution to the Wind* [1988]) once again serves, as it did in the sixties, as an agent of interdisciplinary admixtures.

Given the cultural context of the eighties, such hybrid activity now tends to signal double specialization, rather than antispecialization, as it did in the sixties. Still, the desire for a unified culture — in terms of blasting open categories such as high and low art, as well as separate art disciplines — is a motive power. Thus the kinds of nineteenth-century distinctions I raised in the introduction to this essay — the progressive splintering of high and low art music, theater and social dance music, and the creation of hierarchies between the spheres of music and dance — all come under postmodernist attack as the twentieth century comes to a close.

One important trend in the eighties has been the mutual attraction between postmodern dance and ballet (discussed earlier in "Pointe of Departure"). This trend is worth looking at briefly here, not because it has spawned new composer-choreographer collaborations, but because in a way it has pointed many choreographers in the opposite musical direction.

Not only does Armitage now run an "alternative" ballet company; she amalgamates a Balanchinian vocabulary — the bent wrists of a fashion model, quick high extensions, brilliant allegro work, a taut line that breaks into sudden, surprising angles — with the shrugs, shimmies, and overtly sexual partnering of contemporary (African) American rock dance, as well as with more lurid gestures that border on porn fantasies. She has, as well as his vocabulary, a Balanchinian approach to the music — making movements ride the melody as well as the (often quite complex) rhythmic design. Armitage takes the musical approach further; she has noted that in *Slaughter on MacDougal Street* (1982; music: Rhys Chatham), as in many of her ballets:

> [A] tightly metered rhythm gave the dancers a base upon which to swing the quarter note — to dance on the beat, behind the beat, or in front of the beat. My interest in using music with a steady beat was precisely to give the dancing that kind of flair and drama and hipness. . . . We would use [a combination of classical and popular styles, with a steady beat] to demonstrate an attitude of liberation, a sophistication, and an irreverence toward the rule of the beat or toward other unbending rules of dance behaviour.[20]

Yet, despite Balanchine's own stylized forays into jazz and Armitage's own quite conscious homages to her guru (her ballets include the abovementioned *Slaughter* and *Kammerdisco* [1988; music: Jeffrey Lohn]), no one would mistake Armitage's brazen, thoroughly postmodern pastiche for Balanchine's modernism. The title of her recent piece, *Go Go Ballerina* (1988; to songs by Jimi Hendrix and the rap groups Schoolly D. and the Hard-Ons), is apt. Mark Morris, too, has the musicality of a Balanchine or Taylor, making him the darling of the ballet world starved for new choreo-

graphic blood. Like Armitage, Morris delights in kitsch and sometimes uses both movements and messages that would set the previous generation of ballet choreographers whirling in their graves. Yet his recent commissions—including *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes* (1988; music: Virgil Thomson) for American Ballet Theater, the success of the season—and the installation of his company (replacing the Béjart Ballet) in residence in Brussels have thrust him squarely into the mainstream.[21] The roster of other "downtown" choreographers who have moved onto the ballet stage—from Tharp's pioneering forays in the seventies to those, in the eighties, ranging from David Gordon and Lucinda Childs to Jim Self and Ralph Lemon—grows by the season.

Although working on the ballet stage would certainly not in itself preclude musical collaboration, many of these choreographers have chosen to concentrate on collaborating with ballet dancers, rather than with composers (perhaps due to time constraints). They have often used preexisting music or musical collages as accompaniment, rather than commissioning new scores. Childs, for instance, working with the Paris Opéra Ballet on *Première Orage* (1984), used music by Shostakovich; David Gordon's *Murder* (for American Ballet Theater, 1986) was set to music by Berlioz.

Perhaps this trend is responsible for another recent proclivity, in the late eighties, toward musical masterpieces from different eras—whether classical (Stephanie Skura used Beethoven's Fifth in *Cranky Destroyers* [1987]); romantic (Arnie Zane's *The Gift/No God Logic* [1987; music: Verdi], or Wendy Perron's *Schumman Op. 102* [1986]); or modern (Fenley's *State of Darkness* [1988; music: Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*] or Ralph Lemon's *Les Noces* [1987; music: Ravel and Debussy]). Or perhaps, since that staunchly antiballet choreographer Steve Paxton recently improvised to two Glenn Gould renditions of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (1987), one can see in the use of classical music yet again a current point of convergence by different routes. If in postmodernism anything can be used, why not old music, beautiful music, highbrow music—as well as the lowbrow, hackneyed, and despised? Why not canned music as well as commissioned? In other words, all the contradictory sides of the dance-music debates seem to coexist comfortably in late eighties postmodern dance.

It has often been noted that the eighties is a period marked by spectacle, on the one hand, and the desire to have it all—to deny denial—on the other. As Jim Self put it in the film *Retracing Steps*, "Yvonne Rainer said no to all those things. . . . And I felt like saying yes."[22] These two postmodernist tendencies are embodied in the latest developments of postmodern dance—in its maximalist, expansive mode, where other artists are brought into the work, and where a pronounced virtuosity, ambitious set design, stylish costuming, and a savage beauty exploit music for all it's got.

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La Onda Próxima: Nueva Latina Dance

Recent scholarship in multiculturalism and issues about alternative canons and cultural authority have raised questions not only about how national, racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities are produced, but also about how the histories of peoples and cultural systems are written. Dance is usually overlooked as a site where cultural experience and knowledge are produced. Nevertheless, there are many instances, especially during the present period, of dances that are distinctly meant to critique the discourse as well as the ideological assumptions of the culture in general, and of choreographic practice in particular, with respect to these issues of political identity. Among the most vital of the current challenges to the dance canon are works by postmodern choreographers that focus on the politically conscious articulation of difference in regard to "race," class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

To be sure, some issues of political identity have been and continue to be explored and celebrated in dance, by such groups as the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, Dance Theater of Harlem, and Ballet Hispanico. But in the 1980s for the first time various groups of young choreographers have identified themselves as bicultural in a specifically avant-garde mode: black *and* postmodern; gay *and* postmodern; Latino *and* postmodern. Their work is equally informed by their postmodern dance heritage and their political identities. That is, they see their affiliation with political groups as a radical engagement that impinges on and disrupts their artform's discursive practices.

This essay on the work of several Latina choreographers in New York is part of a larger project of documenting and analyzing the articulation of gender identity, the recognition of sexual preference, and the affirmation of ethnic identity on the part of contemporary American choreographers. As we will see, in Latino postmodern dance at times these themes are interwoven.

The group of Latina choreographers I am concerned with here emerged on the New York scene in the eighties and nineties. Their dances

Choreography and Dance (1994)

have been presented in "downtown" venues in New York like Dance Theater Workshop, P.S. 122, Movement Research, and P.S. 1. Their work has also been produced in festivals celebrating new dance, film, and performance art by Latinos—such as La Misma Onda, Tour de Fuerza, and ¡Muévete!.

A number of issues arise in analyzing this work: the stance of the choreographer in terms of group identity and history; how notions of ethnicity are constructed in the representational practices of the dance; how ethnicity is seen to be constructed in the culture at large; what devices are used as signifiers of "race," class, gender, and sexuality in the dances; where and how language is used as part of the discourse of the dance; what other postmodern interventions take place; what kinds of images of Latinos these signs produce, reproduce, or critique; what audiences the choreographer addresses in the work. Space does will not permit me to discuss here all of these items for each dance. However, I hope to suggest the trajectory of my larger research project, in which I plan to analyze the strategies of pursuing identity in dance, in this case Latina/Latino identity. I view these strategies as fundamental to a twin project that challenges the master narratives and myths of homogeneity in our culture as well as the specific discursive practices of mainstream dance.

The Latino postmodern dance I am discussing originated in New York City. So, before turning my attention to specific dances, I would like to sketch a brief demography of Latinos in New York. Also, I would like to point out that I am using the term Latina/Latino, which is preferred by many scholars in the field of Latin American studies, rather than the term Hispanic. As Xavier Totti explains, "*Hispanic* excludes racial and cultural differences, evoking only Spaniards and their descendants. *Latino* (from Latin American) is a more inclusive term accounting for those who come or descend from a specific geographical area where the Spanish and Portuguese legacy is dominant but not exclusive. It recognizes the presence and importance of nonwhite populations (Amerindian and African) in the group."[1]

There were already Puerto Rican and Cuban communities in New York City in the nineteenth century. But a much larger Latino population arrived in New York after World War II. The demography shifted even more radically after changes in the immigration laws in 1965 and 1978, and with the rise of illegal immigration. Because the largest wave of immigration began during the rise of suburbia and the decline of urban centers, and peaked in the seventies, during the last recession, the Latino working-class population in New York has suffered from increasing unemployment, mounting housing costs, and deteriorating social services.

Although Puerto Ricans still constitute the largest group of the city's Spanish-speaking population, the Latino community is at this point quite varied. It comprises Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Colombians,

Ecuadoreans, Salvadoreans, Chileans, Argentinians, Uruguayans, and people whose origins are in other Latin American countries.

Despite differences in national, political, and class backgrounds, Latinos in New York share a sense of unity, partly because of their exclusion from mainstream American culture, and partly because of their shared language—and their common communication systems (including two Spanish-language daily papers and several local and national television and radio stations). Many (though not all groups) also share economic and social discrimination.[2]

So various aspects of the current move to assert a unified, though not homogeneous, Latino identity in the arts, and in particular in dance, should not surprise us. For one, Puerto Ricans predominate, but are by no means the only nationality represented—for example, of the artists represented in Tour de Fuerza and ¡Muévete!, Viveca Vázquez, Merián Soto and Pepón Osorio, Arthur Aviles, Karen Langevin, and Evelyn Vélez are Puerto Rican; Carmelita Tropicana and Ana Vega are Cuban; David Zambrano and Livia Daza Paris are Venezuelan; Eva Gasteazoro is Nicaraguan; and Patricia Hoffbauer is Brazilian. For another, issues of class emerge in various ways in these dances. And third, common themes and common markers of identity, from language to music to clothing, thread through many of the works.

Works in the Latino postmodern mode are at this point too numerous and too varied in style to analyze in a short essay; therefore, now I would like to focus on three exemplary works.

Viveca Vázquez is a Puerto Rican choreographer, trained at New York University, who has deliberately chosen to embody the geographical schizophrenia of many Puerto Rican New Yorkers by dividing her time between the island and the mainland. Her choreography explores this state of being. *Mascando Inglés* (Chewing English) (1984), for instance, is, according to the choreographer, about the cultural displacement and linguistic frustration suffered by Puerto Rican migrants to New York. But there is almost nothing literal about Vázquez's treatment of this theme, except, perhaps, for the few moments when the collage sound track mixes a lecture on language with a list of English words and their correct pronunciations. Rather, as Joan Acocella has noted, Vázquez uses dance metaphors for this enstrangement. "Forced to speak a new language, Vázquez forces the body to do the same."[3]

In *Mascando Inglés*, five dancers perform erratic phrases of movement, at times in unison, and at times completely out of synch with one another. To the danceable sounds of a cante jondo, they stand stock still, then make somewhat mad, repetitive gestures in front of their faces. In silence, they move. Their arms flail up and out, sending their bodies into jumps and turns. Suddenly, they fall into a Spanish stepping dance, tapping out a smart rhythm with their sneakers and raising their arms in full

flamenco curves. Their movement phrases are fragmented. They fall on the floor, push themselves backwards; they crouch, hop, and fall like children at play. The constant interruption of the movement impetus and the mismatch of movement and music join to create a feeling of dislocation that is structural, rather than expressive. Only at one point—when a man and a woman seem to enact a parting of lovers, to the strains of salsa music—is there a suggestion of character or story. But then the dance shifts gears, concluding with what is perhaps a memory of a time when life was not fragmented, as the dancers remove their shoes and African-rooted movements take over their dance. These movements *do* constitute a new language, but one that acknowledges its dance heritage as a mosaic of legacies: African, Spanish, and downtown New York postmodern.

In *No Regrets* (1988), Merián Soto and Pepón Osorio mix live performance with specifically Latino popular genres—soap operas on Spanish TV and the fotonovela, a cross between a comic book and a romance novel, told with photographs. Maria, a clerk in a fabric store, meets Roberto, a cabdriver. Fantasies about him make her feel guilty about her sick mother, her macho husband Miguel, and her kids. One Sunday she leaves the kids, the husband, and the laundry at home to go with Roberto to P.S. 122, where they see his cousin in a dance show about Puerto Rican political consciousness. Anxious about her dilemma—should she remain a faithful wife or run away to Puerto Rico with Roberto?—Maria searches her soul. The upshot is that she leaves both men, gets a college degree, and becomes a social worker—with no regrets.

Aspects of the story are romantic, satirical, serious, silly, politically pointed, melodramatic, and reflexive. Though the love affair is the pretext for the story, the predictable conventions of the soap opera and fotonovela are subverted when the heroine takes control of her own future and makes the surprising choice to settle for no man. And this particular love affair is firmly rooted in its social context: working-class people who live in the Bronx, Maria's determination to find upward mobility through education, Miguel's machismo, Roberto's homesickness for the island.

The shifts in tone are partly accomplished through the shifts in media. For instance, as the soap opera of Maria and Miguel unrolls on the giant video screen in the theater, we see Maria watching herself kissing Roberto on her own TV. The fotonovela format stylizes the drama even more drastically than the video. But when the mass-mediated action gives way to live dance, a very different kind of representation takes over: the characters' inner lives are given body, but in ways that are more abstract. The movement vocabulary makes no reference to Latino styles. Rather, it is the juxtaposition to culturally specific forms like the fotonovela and Latin music, and also the presence of Latino characters, that creates the strong sense of ethnic identity in this piece. And just as Maria found it hard to see just how Roberto's cousin's dance show—in which people dressed in black

jumped around, shimmied, and fell on the floor—represented political consciousness, so we are challenged to see multiple layers of meaning in the seemingly abstract movements of the dancers.

Carmelita Tropicana is a Cuban-born performance artist. *Candela*, her mixed-media collaboration with Ela Troyano and Uzi Parnes, is not strictly dance. However, it is included here for several reasons: it was part of Tour de Fuerza, it overlaps with postmodern dance in embracing multimedia, and also dance is the topic of the performance piece. Like *No Regrets*, *Candela* invokes various forms of popular culture, here both Latin and Anglo: the zarzuela (a Spanish form of operetta) and the American film Western, the Cuban nightclub floorshow in pre-Castro Havana and the glitz of Las Vegas. But the staging—with its deliberately bad song and dance routines, its ironic representation of nostalgia, its film quotations, its transvestites, and its endless, feverishly colored scarves, shawls, and shmates—also owes something to the camp performances of the underground filmmaker Jack Smith.

To condense the wandering, surrealistic plot enormously: Just when Carmelita Tropicana is about to find fame dancing in the floorshow at the

Candela, by Uzi Parnes/Ela Troyano/ Carmelita Tropicana. *L* to *R*: Parnes, Tropicana, Maureen Angelos. In movie, Ishmael Houston-Jones. (Photo: Dona Ann McAdams.)

To view this image,
please refer to the print version of this book

Tropicana nightclub in Havana, the choreographer, Mr. Rodney, is shot by gangsters from Las Vegas, and Carmelita's brother, Machito, is framed for the murder. Possessed by Rodney's spirit, Carmelita becomes a successful choreographer, and she and Machito flee to Las Vegas (via the New York City subway) to avenge Rodney's death.

It's a backstage musical of sorts, in which the plot keeps being interrupted by dance routines, including an enchanted conga line that owes something to *The Red Shoes*. *Candela* is also, like the zarzuela and the Western, concerned with honor and moral responsibility. But, unlike these conventional forms, here ethnic identity is both satirized and asserted as the ultimate strength. Carmelita, with her fake heavy Cuban accent, is an endless source of malapropisms, and the great Cuban dance Mr. Rodney died to protect is utter kitsch by any standards. But there are other Cuban dances, done outside of the nightclub show, that are shown as vital. And it is memories of Havana that give the Tropicanas their hope and determination (and the idea for their show-stopping number). And finally, as Carmelita says of Mr. Rodney's dream, "Is no piece of cake, is a flan. Rodney gonna turn a deaf ear every time he hears/ . . . "You're black, you're poor, you're queer. No you can't."/ . . . Rodney just grits his teeth and tell his feet/"Come on, feet, dance, dance, dance!"

One striking aspect of these and other Latino postmodern dances is that certain formal elements of postmodern dance are valued as compositional choices: these include the use of ordinary movements; collage structure (even in the use of narrative); and dancing in silence. As well, the postmodern embrace of language in dance is quite apt in these works, where verbal material serves, not only to comment on the situation or forward the plot, but also to underscore linguistic and ethnic difference. Just an accent can signal ethnicity. But also, featured in several of these dances is a kind of linguistic fancy footwork, a virtuosic display of verbal speed and dexterity that has to do with the rhythms and tempo of the Spanish language itself.

One characteristic of postmodernism that these choreographers relish is the appropriation of popular culture. This they share with Anglo postmodern choreographers, such as Jim Self, who borrows from cartoons, domestic comedies on TV, and pop songs in his works; Barbara Allen, who has made dances inspired by Harlequin romances; and Marta Renzi, who uses an MTV music-cum-story structure. However, in Latino postmodern dance, the soap opera, fotonovela, zarzuela, and Western provide structures and images, while also supplying grounds for expressing cultural differences and pointing to the worldwide domination of the U.S. mass media. As well, the use of popular Latino music asserts ethnicity, while the contrast between various popular music forms stresses the heterogeneous class and national affiliations within that ethnicity.

Finally, the ambiguous, ironic tone many of the choreographers

adopt is postmodern, as well. Popular culture is appreciated, but it is also parodied. And there is a certain evident delight here in creating stereotypes, even when the point is to undercut them.

Thus postmodern techniques have been adapted to create a political identity. This tendency connects with the eighties trend toward content in postmodern dance. But in nueva Latina dance, the content is in the interest of a specific community.

39

Dance and Spectacle in the United States in the Eighties and Nineties

With Noël Carroll

American avant-garde dance of the seventies captured the international imagination. Building on the formal inventions of Merce Cunningham as well as the tendencies of minimalism in the visual arts and music, the makers of what began by 1973 to be called postmodern dance were steadfastly antitheatrical. Paring away such trappings of spectacle as costume design, special lighting, even musical accompaniment—not to mention character, plot, and emotional content—these choreographers turned their attention to pure movement and dance structure. Yvonne Rainer's famous "NO" manifesto—in which she rejected virtuosity, glamour, role-playing, and even the gaze of the audience—is emblematic of that repudiation of theatricalism.

However, after a decade of formalist abstraction, postmodern dance radically changed its course at the turn of the decade. In the eighties, postmodern dance met postmodernist culture, and the result was the emergence of a pastiche that reintroduced—albeit in new ways—many of the values of the generations preceding the sixties and seventies. An aesthetic of

Il Corpo Parlante Conference, Rome, 1990.

abundance and pleasure emerged from the ashes of minimalism. As the choreographer Jim Self put it, "Yvonne Rainer's thing was saying no to . . . all those things. . . . And I felt like saying yes to all those things. So I did. I said yes to theatricality, yes to costumes, yes to virtuosity, yes to staging works on a big scale, yes to creating ballets, yes to everything I could think of to say yes to." Moreover, the new, interarts eclecticism characterized the work both of an upcoming generation of young artists and of the older Judson Dance Theater generation that had begun working in the sixties.

For a number of reasons, from aesthetic restlessness to the economic and political anxieties of the seventies that culminated in the drastic contradictions of the Reagan years, a generalized quest in the culture for meaning was sparked in the eighties and continues into the nineties—and dance is no exception. This search for meaning in dance was matched by a shift to large-scale, multimedia formats, often under the auspices of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival or progressive ballet companies. First-generation postmodern choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, and Laura Dean were becoming more marketable and were beginning to be presented in large proscenium theaters (instead of the galleries and lofts of the seventies). The addition of music, costumes, and décor by well-known composers and artists—like Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Robert Ashley, Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, and Sol LeWitt—was appealing to both choreographers and producers in these situations, for not only would they command the attention of a wider, less esoteric audience, but also these other art forms would bring their own respective followers to fill larger houses with audiences of varied interests.

At the same time, a younger generation emerged in the 1979–80 season—including Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane, Jim Self, Johanna Boyce, Molissa Fenley, and Karole Armitage—who, themselves impatient with the seemingly puritanical seriousness and dry asceticism of the analytic, antitheatrical approach, independently found various means to reinstate theatricality while remaining committed to the avant-garde venue. Further, a line of descent from Twyla Tharp—including Sara Rudner, Nina Wiener, Timothy Buckley, and Bebe Miller—appeared simultaneously. This group reveled in a Tharpian appreciation for musicality and virtuosic movement. Also, by the mideighties a wing of choreographers who identified themselves as both black and postmodern—among them Blondell Cummings, Bill T. Jones, Bebe Miller, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Fred Holland—integrated what had hitherto been a predominantly white arena, often introducing explicitly political themes of black identity in their dances. Other ethnic groups—such as the Latina choreographers Viveca Vásquez and Merián Soto and the Japanese choreographers Eiko and Koma and Yoshiko Chuma—have helped push postmodern dance toward multiculturalism; while other political concerns—notably feminist and gay—surfaced in the

eighties as well. Finally, by the end of the eighties, yet another group of young choreographers was coming to the fore, including Diane Martel, Kumiko Kimoto, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, and Susan Marshall, for whom spectacle was already the mother's milk they were raised on.

In terms of the desire for meaning, we would like to suggest a number of modes that emerged in the United States in the eighties as ways to install content in the dance, besides the above-mentioned political themes. One important method is the interest in narrative, which corresponds to the coterminous rise of the "new talkies" in film (e.g., the work of Yvonne Rainer) and storytelling in performance art (e.g., Spalding Gray). This fascination with narrative form is not, however, simply a return to old methods. Often the new narrative in dance makes use of verbal language to advance the story, either in spoken narration or in the lyric of a song (à la MTV). A whole subset of this category of dances makes use of the fairytale as an exemplary narrative structure. The group Kinematic, for instance, has made an entire trilogy of fractured fairytale ballets, beginning with *The Snow Queen* (1986).

Another subset is the autobiography, as practiced by choreographers such as Johanna Boyce, Tim Miller, and Ishmael Houston-Jones, which often—stressing the seventies maxim that the personal is political—deliberately takes on political overtones. In Tim Miller's solo *Me and Mayakovsky* (1980), for instance, he cooked, told stories about his childhood, set things on fire, and worried about war.

It was feminism that began to frame the personal as political, but not only the dance autobiography has served as a vehicle for feminist concerns in dance. Means for invoking feminist analyses also appear in explorations of the conventions of partnering, new images of women onstage—as in the Urban Bush Women's images of strong African-American women—and overt investigations into the cultural signs of gender—as in Susan Foster's *Corpus Delecti* (1988), in which she transforms herself from a cartoon muscle-man into a delicate figure of a lady. These means also contribute to gay issues in dance, as in the Mangrove contact improvisation group in California and the many participants in the Men Together festival in New York in the early eighties, and more recently in the work of Tere O'Connor, Creach and Koester, and Mark Morris.

In a more general way, beyond narrative and political content there has been a "return of the repressed" in terms of character, mood, emotion, and situation—in the "new primitivism" of Pooh Kaye (who explores infantile and animal movements), Ellen Fisher, Jo Andres, and others; in the passionate relationships explored by Marta Renzi (who makes duets to rock and roll love songs), Victoria Marks, or Susan Marshall; in the genre-based, sometimes parodic works by Stephen Petronio (in the film noir style), Barbara Allen, Carol Clements.

Another method to make the dance meaningful has been to reinstate technical virtuosity in a number of ways. This may in part be a reaction-formation to "the less is more" ethos of the seventies, but it is also connected to an eighties attitude of professionalization and control, as well as to the related changes in body culture in that decade of aerobics and health clubs. The turn to virtuosity is manifested in ways ranging from the use of highly trained, multicompetent dancers, often with professional degrees in dance; to the presence onstage of dancing bodies that look athletic and built; to the building of permanent companies and repertory; to the rediscovery and proliferation of techniques, from ballet to baroque, tap, and ballroom dancing; to the use of complicated steps and partnering devices; to a fascination with stamina, precision, and balance; to a refined sense of musicality. Molissa Fenley, for example, uses muscular women and music with a disco beat in ongoing "walls of dance" that display skill and endurance. The entry of postmodern choreographers after Twyla Tharp onto the ballet stage—from Laura Dean, David Gordon, and Lucinda Childs to Jim Self, Mark Morris, and Susan Marshall—and the creation of "downtown" ballet companies—like that of Karole Armitage—are paradigmatic instances of the avant-garde urge toward virtuosity.

We have already mentioned a return to musicality. Of course the often-mysterious workings of emotional states in music have been key to much of the new-found expression in recent postmodern dance. Choreographers have gone far indeed from the seventies position of eschewing music. They work with contemporary composers (ranging from Philip Glass to punk bands), recorded music of all kinds (from rock and roll and folk music to Bach to standard ballet music) and even, following Meredith Monk, to composing their own music (like Laura Dean and Diane Martel). Mark Morris's sensitivity to an entire gamut of musical styles has made it possible for him to work consistently in mainstream opera-house theaters, despite the often outrageous content of his dances—the cross-dressing, for instance, of *Dido and Aeneas*.

Given this alliance with the music world, it is not surprising that both postminimalist composers and postanalytic choreographers share an interest in popular music and dance forms. Social dancing provides an historically rich context for the wedding of music and dance. And as social dancing—from MTV to hiphop to theatricalized tango and ballroom dancing on Broadway—began to rivet the world's attention in the eighties, the avant-garde took its lead from popular culture. Postmodern dance and postmodern music found themselves newly joined in New York dance clubs like Danceteria and The World, and on television. And in avant-garde venues popular music and dance—breakdancing, tango, polka—entered the limelight. The splintering of culture into high and low, the splintering of music and dance into theater versus pleasure, and the traditional hier-

archies among the spheres of music and dance all come under postmodernist subversion.

The music connection and the popular dance imagery enhance the accessibility of postmodern dance for larger audiences. In this and many other ways, the return to theatricality itself—in the context of American dance—is a move to make dance more approachable, in contrast to the formal austerity and dance-specific hermeticism of the seventies. The introduction of character and narrative is key to framing the movement, and spectacle overall has served as a means of motivating the significance of the dance movement as it has come to be embedded in an informationally rich image. In a more extended sense, these contribute to content, which, of course, attempts to connect the dance to a wider world of concern.

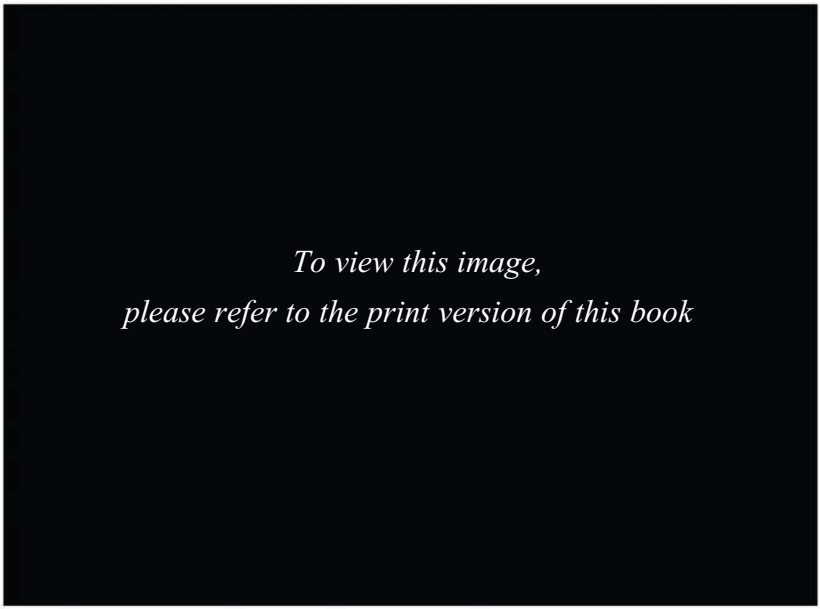
In order to illustrate some aspects of the new theatricality in American dance of the eighties, we would like to discuss Jim Self's recent piece entitled *Dream Maker/Heart Breaker.*

Self is a choreographer with a tremendously diversified background. Born in Alabama, he was raised both in the American South—a legacy he acknowledges in his work in many ways, including the use of country and western music—and then moved to Chicago, where he began choreographing at the age of eighteen. Self originally was drawn to the fine arts, and the aesthetic principles he learned from his painting teacher, John Neimanas, continue to inform his modus operandi as a choreographer. Of Neimanas, Self says: "One thing I learned from him was a sense of collage, of taking different things and putting them together. Another was a compositional sense—for instance, using color in one place and picking it up again in another place. You do the same thing in dance when you emphasize relationships between things. But in dance you do it in terms of memory."

The Chicago of the early seventies, where Self began his career, was an exciting place. An important venue for touring avant-garde artists from New York, Chicago afforded Self the opportunity to see not only a great deal of contemporary dance but also important examples of the emerging theatrical style called performance art, of which there was also an indigenous branch stemming from the Chicago Art Institute School. And the fluid idiom of performance art—mixing the concerns of theater, dance and painting—has remained a continuing influence on Self's development.

In 1976, Self moved to New York and joined the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. From this experience, Self learned a highly disciplined technique as well as a sense of how to pace an evening of work. The demanding schedule of a performer left Self with little opportunity to pursue his own choreography. So he left the company in 1979 in order to resume the development of his own style.

Self's work of the early eighties at first bore the formal and abstract stamp that was virtually inevitable, given his intensive immersion in the



Jim Self and Frank Moore, *Beehive*.
(Photo: © 1991 Patricia Reynolds.)

Cunningham vocabulary. But, while explaining one of his abstract dances to the visual artist Frank Moore, Self realized the degree to which his own method of composing even abstract dances relied on his concocting story lines in his head—story lines that generated the movement, but that the audience could never know. Self decided to break with the abstract constraints of Cunningham-style dance, asking himself what would happen if he showed the audience the fragmented stories that gave rise to the heretofore abstract imagery.

One result was the ballet and the dance-film, both called *Beehive*, two interrelated collaborations with Frank Moore, involving the anthropomorphic representation of the life of bees on a spectacular set. As the outlandishness of the conceit indicates, these works are comic in their delirious, so to speak, "immaturity," but the irony afforded by their very outrageousness provides Self with the opportunity to reflect on the human condition rather in the manner of chatty updates of Aesop's fables. We commented earlier on the importance of content for contemporary choreographers in making their work accessible, and Self's deliberately campy, though witty, imagery—at once infantile and kitschy—supplies the audience with the wherewithal to recognize his gentle satire. At present, Self asserts that he is opposed to an approach to choreography in which the audience is confronted by something that is "mysterious and impenetra-

ble"; instead he prefers to work with images, often alluding to media icons and stories—or story fragments—that the spectator can identify.

Self has worked extensively with Robert Wilson, the metteur-en-scène perhaps most renowned for his oneiric dramas, and the theme of dream suffuses *Dream Maker/Heart Breaker*—as its title indicates. The piece begins as a solitary male figure in a nightshirt enters the softly darkened proscenium stage; the moon appears, as strains of the once popular song "Moon River" start up. When the song refers to "my Huckleberry friend," three oarsman, outfitted like Huckleberry Finn on his raft, glide across the background, raising the question of whether they are the dream of the solitary figure, or vice versa.

Another male dancer joins the first figure. They behave like madmen, intermittently straightjacketed, but then flailing out like asylum inmates when they intrude into each other's territory. As the word "lunatic" indicates, they seem to be under the thrall of the moon. There is a narrative here, but it's dreamlike, the presence of the lunatics alerting us that it will be imagistic and irrational.

As in a dream, sense in *Dream Maker/Heart Breaker* is juxtapositional. But, consistent with Self's earlier remarks about collage, certain motifs thread through the piece as a whole, giving it a casual structural unity. For example, the moon functions as the central image of the first movement of the piece. Subsequently, it reappears by means of playful associations—a crawling dancer, for instance, "mooning" the audience. The last section then tops off this motif as the cast howls at the moon, reasserting the theme of the lunatic, now ululating wildly at a serenely magnetic, lunar image.

Dream Maker/Heart Breaker, like much of Self's recent work, is very dependent on the use of music, particularly popular songs. These songs provide references, often stories, that the movement and action incompletely illustrate in various ways. For instance, "Moon River," with its allusion to Huckleberry Finn, as already noted, provides the motivation for a transitory image of Huck-figures gliding down the Mississippi.

Self plays with the imagery supplied by the songs in different registers. A rendition of "Harlem Shuffle," for instance, is accompanied by a trio of women performing exaggerated versions of the "monkey" and the "shimmy"—popular dance phrases that naturally go with the music—in a way that is satiric, but also life-affirmative; while in a similar gesture of comic defamiliarization, Self also turns a Russian folkdance into a zany image of clockwork gone crazy. The song "I won't say I will" enables Self to create a coquettish character who seduces and then rejects male suitors with the authority of a larger-than-life movie actress as if interpreted by a female impersonator. And when the piece concludes with the country-western favorite "The Wayward Wind"—perhaps a nod in the direction of Self's southern heritage, albeit one leavened by a parody of the pop icon of

the singing cowboy—not only do the dancers move as if windswept, but the "Christ-figure" appears at just the point when the song portentously announces "I met him there. . . ."

The "passion" in the song is limned by a mock passion play. A "Christ-figure," outfitted in black bikini briefs, effectively comments on the thin boundary between religion and sexual desire; he is hoisted on a set of overhead cables, calling to mind a crucifixion, but also the ambiguous ecstasy of martyrs like St. Sebastian, who provide serviceable erotic icons for the gay subculture. However, as soon as this observation takes hold, Self leavens it with goofy antics—the crucified figure is bombarded with multicolored water balloons, which may be read either as dousing the eroticism in a cold shower or as culminating a wet dream.

A certain overt gay sensibility runs through *Dream Maker/Heart Breaker*; it is not only detectable in the ironic and camp perspective, but also it appears in the male partnering, among other images, such as the crucifixion, as well. Indeed, the piece that Self created for the August 1990 Lincoln Center's summer program, "Serious Fun," was entitled "Jim Self and Julio Torres in Getting Married—A Wedding for the 90s." This was a literal enactment of a marriage ceremony between Self and his real-life male lover Julio Torres, accompanied by comic metamorphoses such as the newlyweds jumping into a basket that becomes a car, while the song "I'm putting all my eggs in one basket" fills the auditorium. The geniality and humor here is vintage Self, while the affirmation of gay rights represents Self's effort to give voice to social content that until recently has been suppressed.

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Dancing in Leaner Times

Improvisation *was* the sixties. From social dancing to politics, on fronts of culture as varied as free jazz, Off-Off Broadway theater, and Judson Dance Theater—whose members at times questioned the convention of the "choreographer-as-boss-lady," as Yvonne Rainer put it—liberation and spontaneity were the twin watchwords.

Now, in the nineties, improvisation is back, at least in theatrical dancing. Once again, a generation of dancers is finding value in spontaneous choreography. But this is not a nostalgic return to old times. Improvisation means something different in the post-Reagan era.

Of course, in a sense, improvisation has always been the very stuff of dance. When people make dances, they usually begin by experimenting with movement material and choreographic structures, even when the genre of dance is highly conventionalized, like ballet. We know that the choreography in nineteenth-century ballets was loose enough for star ballerinas regularly to embroider their own solo variations upon set choreography, even though partnering required much more predictability, and corps de ballet work an exacting unison. In the twentieth century, however, just as the theater director became a powerful manager, controlling the actors' contributions and the entire mise-en-scène, in dance, the figure of the choreographer took on more authority, not only in ballet, but also in the new art form of modern dance. It was the choreographer, not the dancers, who invented the movement in the studio, to be presented onstage intact.

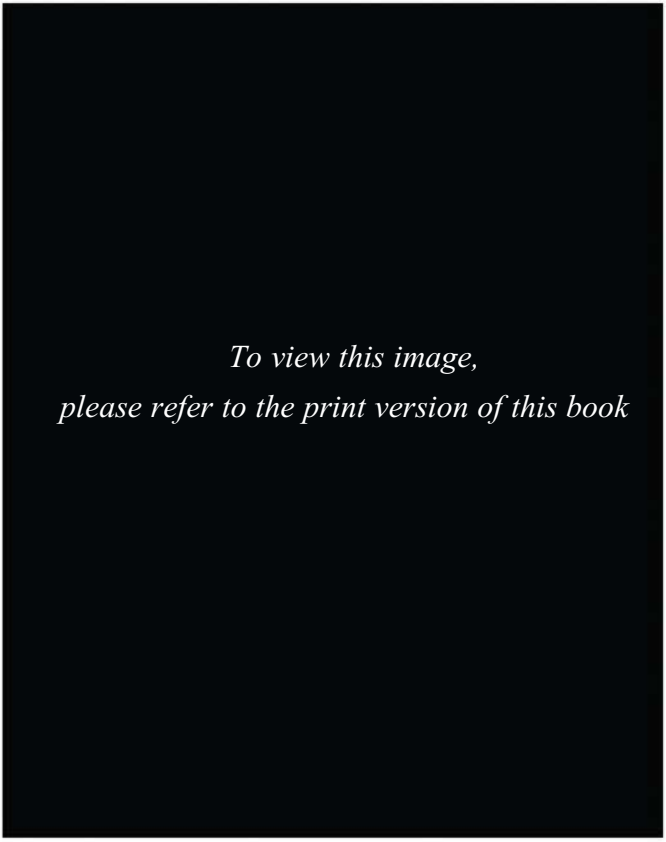
Cynthia Novack suggests in her recent book, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, that perhaps modern dance's model of authoritative choreography and its repression of improvisation grew out of a desire to differentiate the professionalization of modern dance in the twenties and thirties from what was seen as the taint of amateurism in educational "creative dance." If self-expression was the goal in the university studio, where students freely improvised to discover their own individual ways of moving, in the world of professional modern dance a fully formed creative genius rigorously molded her movements into art. In fact,

Dance Ink 2/3 (Winter 1991–92).

Anna Halprin, who made improvisational performances on the West Coast in the late fifties and early sixties and taught several of the Judson dancers, had studied the form under Margaret H'Doubler in the dance program at the University of Wisconsin.

One way for the sixties dancers to break with the generation that came before them, then, was to put the despised "amateur" form of dancing right there onstage, often in venues that weren't really theaters (to the horror of teachers and critics, who looked for a finished product on a proper stage). Moreover, the values of amateur activity—dailiness, equality, and dancing for pleasure—were attuned to the ethos of the period. The improvisatory impulse that began in American dance in the sixties peaked in the seventies in two arenas: the dance-theater group Grand Union, and the contact improvisation network that spread across the United States and Europe.

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar in her *LifeDance I . . . The Magician (the Return of She)*. (Photo: Hakim Mutlaq.)



Although some of the sixties values appeal to the current generation of improvisers, their motives — as well as their styles — often diverge sharply from the earlier generation. In a period of economic expansion, improvisation symbolized an abundance of choices; during the present recession, improvisation offers a welcome shoestring approach to production. In the sixties, white improvisers may have picked up black influences from the culture at large; in the eighties and nineties a number of African-American postmodern dancers bring distinctive improvisatory traditions from their culture into the downtown dance world. As well, in a society daily increasing its threshold of violence, improvisation today has a tougher edge.

For instance, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the artistic director of the Urban Bush Women, attributes her interest in improvisation to the influence of jazz music and her admiration of the group dynamics of the jazz ensemble. Studying traditional jazz dance and Dunham technique, she learned movement invention from the start. And she feels a historical link to the form, for improvisation is fundamental to most African and African-derived music and dance. Her own ways of approaching improvisation vary from musical ideas to dramatic ideas (derived, in part, from her work with Joseph Chaikin, the experimental theater director).

"Improvisation gives the individual a voice," Zollar asserts. "It allows for — to put it in political terms — what I call collective individualism." Zollar's dances have political messages: they speak of women's experience, of black women's experience in particular, as founded in and supported by community. So it seems appropriate to choose a collective political method to create that content.

Zollar looks for dancers who are open to experimenting with improvisation. But she has recently been frustrated at auditions for new dancers. She concludes that the educational system squelches spontaneous self-expression in blacks, especially poor blacks. And this frustration has led her to propose improvisation as a far-reaching tool beyond the stage, for educational reform and social change. Giving workshops in different communities, and reaching both adults and children through grass roots organizations, she uses the radical pedagogical principles of Paulo Freire to do community organizing through culture. Zollar believes that improvisation can be empowering to those who have been disenfranchised, for it can teach people how to be independent and "to move through situations, to structure a path."

"Improvisation is a spiritual philosophy as well as a movement tool," she insists. "It includes the Marxist concept of collectivity, the African notion of cooperative tribal action, the Native American council."

Like various other dancers who emerged in the eighties and nineties, Zollar uses improvisation both in the studio, to create pieces that will eventually be set, and onstage, in dances that will happen only once, then disappear. Some, like Stephen Petronio or Donna Uchizono, ask their

dancers to contribute to the choreography by assigning them choreographic tasks or by "throwing" them material that may look quite different when what's "caught" is shown. Others, like Stephanie Skura and Sally Silvers, may make videotaped improvisatory material permanent by setting it on the dancers.

Silvers is committed to keeping space open for spontaneous invention in her solos—"it keeps the performance fresher for me," she notes—but rigorously avoids asking for individual contributions in group pieces, because so many of the dancers she uses also work with other downtown choreographers and contribute to their choreography. "It tends to make everybody's pieces look alike and creates a potential for the generic in postmodern dance. And it's confusing for the dancers."

Petronio, who started dancing as a contact improviser, then learned various methods of incorporating the dancers' contributions when he worked with Trisha Brown, finds himself now moving, as he puts it ironically, "from democracy to dictatorship." Where formerly he gave his dancers a great deal of freedom, he now asks them to learn more material "by rote." A few years ago, he says, "I wanted an anarchic, chaotic look and letting the dancers improvise was the best way to get it. Now I know how to get it better by making it myself." Though the dances are about "the body as

Urban Bush Women in Jawole Willa Jo Zollar's *Bitter Tongue*.
(Photo: Cylla Von Tiedemann.)

To view this image,
please refer to the print version of this book

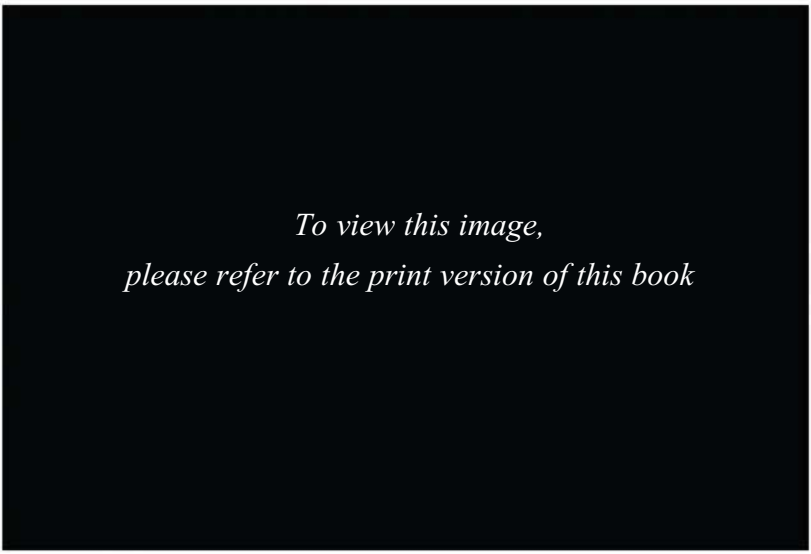
a political battleground" where notions of freedom, control, gender, and sexuality are played out, those ideas are not necessarily expressed through the method of creating the dance. "I'm not so interested in rules or structures," Petronio explains, "as in physical and emotional ideas."

However, there are other dancers, such as Jennifer Monson, Yvonne Meier, John Jasperse, and Clarinda Mac Low, who are committed to improvisational performance itself, who see improvisation not just as a means to a finished product but as a statement about what dance is and what bodies mean in our culture. Mac Low, a biologist who earns her living doing AIDS research, has an almost scientific curiosity about dancing. She also asks questions about the social and political implications of dancing in these trying times. "I ask myself why I continue to dance. But in our society it seems more important than ever, because the body is being de-emphasized, as if it isn't part of you. If you dance, your body is your instrument and you intuit connections between mind and body. Improvising communicates that most eloquently, because everything about you is reacting immediately to the situation at hand. And you can push the limits of your physical body. That's important for people to do or see." Moreover, Mac Low values improvisation, or what she refers to as "creating situations where things can happen," over choreography, since "a dance feels like a solid thing to me; I'm interested in fluid things." And she is interested in the humor, wit, and sometimes clumsiness that improvisation opens up as well.

The daughter of poet Jackson Mac Low, she arrived at improvisation partly through an Oedipal struggle against the chance methods favored by his generation, while still remaining attracted to the egalitarian aspects of an experimental project ("Anyone can do it," she reasons). Her thesis at Wesleyan University was on chance methods as an artistic pursuit of freedom: "The next logical step is informed improvisation, because then you're free even of the rules that govern chance."

"It's hard to shake your first experiences," admits Mac Low, who appeared at age three or so in a mixed-media performance by her father and remembers her first conscious experience of performing, in Meredith Monk's *Vessel* when she was five. "But I have subtle arguments with my father and his generation." Even contact improvisation comes under fire. "By the time I got to it," she says, "it had a certain preciousness that bugged the hell out of me—and a lot of people in my generation."

As its name suggests, contact improvisation stresses systems of support, usually in duet form, through diverse modes of touching, from lifting to ducking, with various body parts. Though it requires strength and quick reflexes, its appearance is calmly organic. But the new generation of improvisers, like Mac Low, Monson, and Meier, is looking for a focus different than the gentle cooperative partnering of contact. Meier believes that improvisation is political because the audience is made privy to the dancer's creative process: hierarchies that remove the performer from the spectator



Donna Uchizono's *San Andreas*.
(Photo: Tom Brazil.)

are undercut. Also, in a group improvisation, "you have to be able to dance with anybody." But beyond that, intimations of violence often lurk in her improvisations. "Violence is something that's happening these days. And dance is political in showing that."

There is a search for simultaneous pleasure and virtuosity in some improvisation that also stamps it as a product of more recent times. "I need to throw myself around in an articulate way," Meier puts it simply. But also, "Improvisation is much more fun for the performer—it frees people up, and everything is new each time. You tap into a different system when you improvise than when you choreograph."

Monson notes that in her duet work with Meier, there is a movement-oriented investigation that is "more complex and virtuosic" than in her group work—where unison movements inspired by folkdancing express community, often among people from different backgrounds. Improvisation now, Monson feels, is different from that of the sixties and seventies in its fierceness and urgency. "The times are so different. The world we're living in is harsher. We're responding to tragedy and hopelessness. And performances are getting shorter and shorter. People then were willing to take more time with their explorations. I want to cut back to the leanest amount and just go out on the streets and perform."

Like Zollar, Meier, and Monson, Donna Uchizono takes inspiration

from musical improvisation. Two years ago Uchizono and Marga Guergué began curating the series Bread to the Bone at the Knitting Factory (a music club on East Houston Street) to give dancers a chance to work with new musicians. They also wanted to invite dancers who don't usually improvise in public (like David Thomson, Lisa Schmidt, and Lance Gries, from Trisha Brown's company, and independent choreographers Bebe Miller, Sarah Skaggs, and Vicky Schick) to let down their hair and try it, with some dancers who usually do (like Monson, Jennifer Lacey, David Zambrano, John Jasperse, and Donald Fleming). Bread to the Bone was a chance for dancers to "jam" without the pressure of fund-raising, high-tech production, and reviews (there weren't any, until the series was presented at St. Mark's Church last February). "After her evening, Bebe Miller told me, 'I forgot how much fun you have when you dance.' " Uchizono remarks, "Marga and I wanted to give dancers and choreographers a break from what they normally have to deal with, and at the same time to do something different than Hothouse at P.S. 122, because it's in a music venue. Everyone is there to have a good time. We called it Bread to the Bone because we wanted to keep it minimal — no costumes, no press releases, just music and dancing. Something basic, like bread — without butter, jelly, or jam — that we could feed each other with."

Meier notices that improvisation seems to be coming back into fashion in the nineties. Perhaps, Uchizono muses, improvisation is the appropriate dance form for the recession. Grant money is evaporating and companies are shrinking. There's no longer much money to pay dancers or to rent rehearsal space. If the eighties were a producer-driven period in dance, with high production values, perhaps with improvisation we are moving into a new period of minimalism that keeps control at the lowest level of the dance production pyramid — that of the dancer herself.

41

Going Solo

It seems clear that there are more choreographers working solo these days.

Is it a sign of the times? Of the recession economy? A producers' gimmick? Or is it a standard feature of modern and postmodern dance? Wendy Perron, who organized the week-long Solo Flights program at Jacob's Pillow last summer, speculates that the solo is appropriate for a recession economy because "it has always been cheaper to book solos." Solo Flights came about because "the idea had been brewing for a long time," Perron says, having collected in her mind's eye several memorable pieces. "And it occurred to me that it could be a very economical week."

Even before planning the program, Perron was thinking of putting together a solo evening for herself, featuring works by other choreographers, from Isadora Duncan to Meredith Monk and Trisha Brown. "I thought, Oh, this would be so affordable. I would get booked so easily." But, she admits, the project will probably never materialize—she likes having the dancers in her company around, in the studio and on tour. Still, solo choreography attracts her because, she notes, "You know yourself without asking yourself questions. You don't have to conceptualize when you choreograph for yourself. Somehow it's all preverbal." Beyond her immediate satisfaction with the process of solo choreography, she finds the form particularly striking to view. "Once you've seen a terrific solo, you'll never forget that dancer."

Molissa Fenley, who disbanded her company in 1988 to work almost exclusively as a soloist, says going solo was an artistic choice, not a fiscal necessity. "I felt that my relationship to my work needed to change. All along I've been very interested in the idea of the individual transforming herself through the work. And there seemed to be something missing in the ensemble form. I wanted to work the way a painter or a writer does—there's no translation between thought and action." Fenley acknowledges that "there might be a trend toward going into solo work because people don't want to deal with the finances of a dance company. The point is, a choreographer should keep working no matter what, in whatever form she can manage. It's wrong to think about solos as a purely economic solution.

Dance Ink 3/4 (Winter 1992–93).

But of course, ultimately, everything is an economic response. You don't live in a huge house, because you can't afford it. You don't play the Met, because you can't rent it."

Unlike Perron, Fenley chose to forgo the collegiality we usually associate with dancing. "Dance is notorious as a social art form. It's you and the company. I felt that I would find something very interesting in the solitude of being not only alone on the stage, but also alone every day in the studio. I felt that there was some kind of intense research that could take place in that kind of isolation. I think I've found it; it's a very deep, profound experience. There's never any sense of loneliness. The daily doings of going to the studio — I give myself class every day and then work on whatever I'm working on — have really changed how I feel about my art and dance in general."

Blondell Cummings thinks the solo option is sometimes more a matter of saving time than saving money. "I started out as a soloist because it was practical. I could work around my own schedule. And it gave me more control." And Lisa Nelson feels that the economic side of solos is simply beside the point. "Choreographers make solos for many reasons: to look at work in a different dimension, to be able to work by oneself."

The solo, of course, was a distinctive marker for early modern dance. That Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis dared to hold a stage alone was a programmatic offensive against ballet, which usually embedded its solo variations in an onstage social world, an interlocking pattern of solos, duets, and groups of various sizes. Perron speculates that modern and postmodern choreographers continue to be drawn to solo work "because it's so familiar — it's where we all started." And this is true both historically and pedagogically; college composition classes usually treat the solo as the basic building block from which the more "advanced" forms — duets and groups — develop in an organic progression. But Fenley, for one, argues that "that notion simply has to be revised."

For Dennis O'Connor, the solo form was initially a way of wiping the slate clean after leaving Merce Cunningham's company in 1989. "I needed to start over. I knew so many things about dance that I had to forget. I had to deal with myself first." But, by now, other motives impel his solo work, and it is not exclusively for his own body. *Sacra Conversazione*, the piece O'Connor is currently making, includes four solos for friends — "all dancers whom I love." If Fenley thinks of her solos as an absorption into "a persona, a psyche," and the audience's experience as "the opportunity for people to involve themselves with what's going on with that person, the transformations, the changes, the different experiences," O'Connor holds almost the opposite view, part of the Cunningham principle that he still values. "I don't want to involve the audience in a clear psychological journey in a mid-twentieth-century vein. I require from the audience the willingness to engage in a conceptual field."

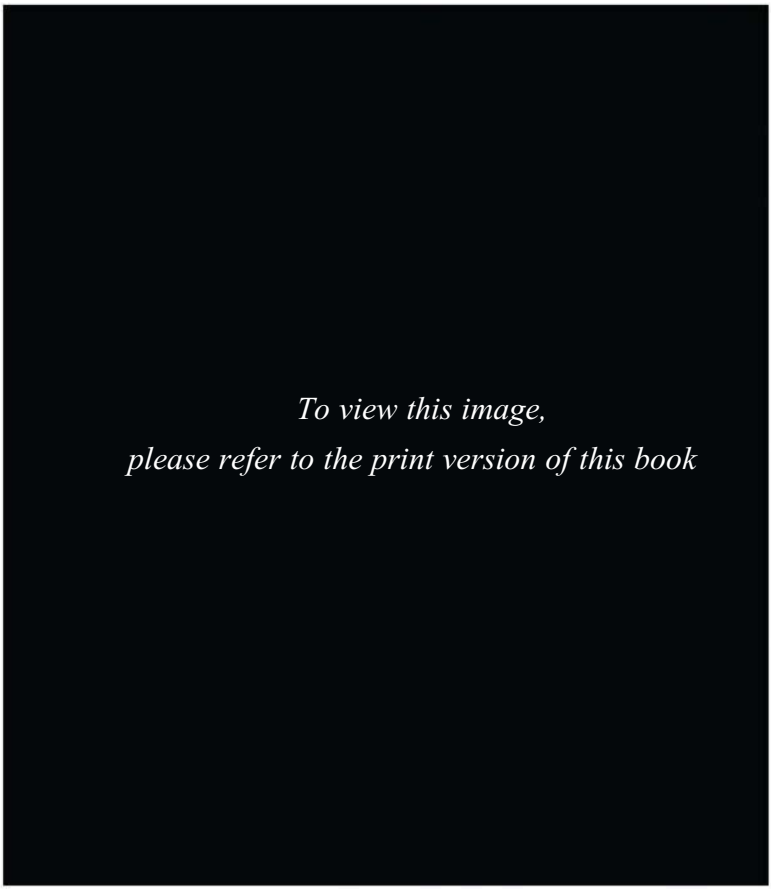
Steve Paxton's stance as a soloist is not so much a fiscal one as a radically democratic political choice that has remained constant since his earliest work, in which he felt "the need to see if a democratic situation could exist in a world where it was professed." For many in the fifties and sixties, Cunningham's choreography seemed to topple hierarchies and symbolize democracy. But for Paxton, who danced in the company in the early sixties, "even the Cunningham company was in fact a dictatorship." Paxton turned to the use of scores and rule-games "to acknowledge the performer's creativity." And now, thirty years later, he muses, "I still refuse to manipulate other people. I'm a soloist by default. It has nothing to do with art or choreography. I haven't thought of a way to work with others the way I work myself. I can't ask them to do my movement. I can't have a company." Even contact improvisation, the duet form Paxton initiated in the early seventies, has proved insufficiently democratic for his taste. "I thought it would create so many movement possibilities and enrich choreography. And in a way it has—in terms of sexual equality and the positioning of partners. But its form was set right at the beginning and hasn't been questioned enough." Through his solos—most recently, *The Goldberg Variations* and *Unknown Solo*, set to Bach's *English Suites*—Paxton is involved in "using improvisation as a force" to discover architectural and emotional forms simultaneously, exploring "movement as a reason, not just as an expression of someone's momentary need."

If Paxton's ideal of democracy means refusing to manipulate a group, Deborah Hay, who was nurtured by the same communal ethos of the early sixties, finds the group workshops she leads each year essential to her own solo choreography. "I need the group to make the solo," she states simply. "The process is a whole system. I choreograph for a group, and then I distill the material that I see reflected back to me day after day, three hours a day, for four months. When that group leaves my life, I spend the next six months refiguring that material into a solo for myself." Rather than giving the members of the large group specific movements, Hay "creates parameters"—images and verbal directions—that result in twenty individual views, which, in turn, enrich the vocabulary for her own solos. Hay compares the difference between her large-group and her solo work to something like the difference between grade-C and grade-A maple syrup—and, she hastens to add, she loves both kinds. "In the large group, your eye can jump around all over the place. You can take in the group; you can take in different people. It's like a feast. But a solo is one long trip that you go on. It's like one drink of water."

Timothy Buckley made the solo *The Grave Digger* (1992), to music by Béla Bartók, partly out of the frustration of having to communicate his ideas to other dancers. In this case, after making a group work to the first movement of Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*, he felt the other dancers couldn't learn the complexities of the music well enough.

"They weren't having the same responses and impulses as I was. I always had to remind them when something was coming up. Their performance drama came out of exhaustion, not the music." So Buckley decided to tackle the whole Bartók work, head-on, himself. Buckley had stopped dancing and choreographing in 1987. When he began again in 1991, having moved from New York to Chicago, he was also involved in theater. And he created another solo, *Middleman*, that included dramatic monologue and the physicalization of images. His interest in acting has contributed to his view of solo choreography as providing room for improvisation. "There are places where you can create just an outline, so the performance can have some in-the-moment truthfulness, so you only discover what's going to happen when you're actually there. I find that dancers aren't

Blondell Cummings.
(Photo: © 1993 K. C. Bailey.)



trained to do that the way actors are, partly because they've been subjected to the discipline of absorbing and executing steps."

If dances are partly about relationships, where are the relationships in a solo? For Buckley, it is the relationship with the audience that becomes central, but there is, as well, one between "the inner self and the outer self." Perron created *Ten Thoughts Slipping* while thinking about the situation of constantly having to leave her young son in order to work. She thinks of that solo "as a duet with an absent partner." Paxton notes that in *The Goldberg Variations* he has a relationship with Bach and Glenn Gould, the pianist, as well as with the performance space. "Can you take your capacity for dialogue into nonhuman and nonliving realms?" Paxton asks. "The answer seems to be yes. I find myself entering into little conversations with a tree, with gravity, with momentum, but not very much with the audience; the work has its own life." For Nelson, there are also many partners: the audience, the light environment, even the sound person, who in her solo *Terminal Defense* responded in performance to her live instructions. "In a way," she muses, "the whole idea of a solo is spurious. In the theater, one isn't alone."

Cummings finds solo work a welcome respite from creating from the outside in, on a group. "There's something about the solo choreography process that's centering. When I'm doing group work, after a while—because I'm working outside of myself—I start feeling the need to reaffirm my work processes, how I go about making choices and creating movement." And yet she sees the solo as the very opposite of private. "Every person has a solo voice. There are times when you're with other people, and you bring them into your realm. But you're born alone and you die alone. So whenever I'm creating a solo, I feel like I'm speaking for that part of each of us that is always alone. Even though I'm representing a solo voice onstage, I'm definitely going through a lot of different voices to feed that solo, to try to make it universal so it connects to a lot of diverse people. The act of doing it might be a solo, but the sharing of the information is definitely not. To me, choreography is always the act of sharing."

The solo seems to be a hallmark of modern dance, but postmodern dance has left its own imprint on the form. Perron points out that "after Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*, the solo has never been the same. Now solo choreographers always have to confront the issue of narcissism. It's like the way composers had to think differently about sound after John Cage. The ante has been upped."

Notes

1. Jill Johnston (pp. 3–10)

All references are to articles or books written by Jill Johnston.

1. "Dance Journal," *Village Voice*, February 20, 1969, p. 25.
2. See *Marmalade Me* (New York: Dutton, 1971) for a selection of Johnston's later reviews.
3. "Thoughts on the Present and Future Directions of Modern Dance," *Dance Observer* 22 (August–September 1955): 101–102.
4. "The Modern Dance—Directions and Criticisms," *Dance Observer* 24 (April 1957): 55–56.
5. "Abstraction in Dance," *Dance Observer* 24 (December 1957): 151–52.
6. "Totem," *Village Voice*, February 3, 1960, 10; "Nikolais at Henry St.," *Village Voice*, February 16, 1961, p. 7; "The Gentle Tilt," *Village Voice*, March 26, 1964, p. 5.
7. "Paul Taylor," *Village Voice*, November 22, 1962, p. 7; "Dance Journal: Paul Taylor on Broadway," *Village Voice*, January 12, 1967, p. 20.
8. "Old Hat and New in Connecticut," *Village Voice*, September 8, 1960, p. 10.
9. "Merce Cunningham & Co.," *Village Voice*, February 24, 1960, p. 6.
10. "Cunningham in Connecticut," *Village Voice*, September 7, 1961, p. 4; "Cunningham in Hartford," *Village Voice*, April 9, 1964, p. 19.
11. "Fresh Winds," *Village Voice*, March 15, 1962, p. 13.
12. "Democracy," *Village Voice*, August 23, 1962, p. 9. Out of 57 reviews between this review of the first Judson concert and the end of 1965, Johnston devotes 30 (in whole or in part) to Judson Dance Theater and related choreographers like Waring and Passloff, and concerts by Judson Dance Theater members given elsewhere. Eight of these 57 reviews are of related nondance events, happenings, music, Fluxus, etc. She reviews Cunningham twice during this period.
13. "Fluxus Fuxus," *Village Voice*, July 2, 1964, p. 7.
14. "Preface," *Marmalade Me*, p. 14.
15. "Lois Lane Is a Lesbian," *Village Voice*, March 4, 1971, p. 9. Reprinted in Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 143.
16. Personal communication from Diane Fisher, Johnston's former editor at the *Voice*, January 21, 1980.

17. Johnston began writing on dance and art again after this article was published.
18. "Judson concerts #3, #4," *Village Voice*, February 28, 1963, p. 9.
19. "Kings and Queens," *Village Voice*, June 27, 1963, p. 9.
20. "Cunningham, Limón," *Village Voice*, September 5, 1963, p. 10.
21. In "Boiler Room," *Village Voice*, March 29, 1962, p. 14, Johnston quotes Antonin Artaud: "There is still one hellish, truly accursed thing in our time, it is our artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames."
22. "Pain, Pleasure, Process," *Village Voice*, February 27, 1964, p. 15.
23. "Critics' Critics," *Village Voice*, September 16, 1965, p. 18.

2. Working and Dancing (pp. 10–16)

This paper was originally an invited response to Monroe Beardsley's paper for the expanded proceedings of the "Illuminating Dance" conference. The authors wish to express their gratitude to Monroe Beardsley, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Adina Armelagos, and Anne Hatfield for their careful readings of this paper.

1. Monroe C. Beardsley, "What Is Going On in a Dance?" *Dance Research Journal* 15/1 (Fall 1982): 31–36. All mentions of Beardsley refer to this paper, given at a conference entitled "Illuminating Dance: Philosophical Inquiry and Aesthetic Criticism," cosponsored by CORD and the Dance Department of Temple University, held at Temple University May 5, 1979.
2. Yvonne Rainer, "Some retrospective notes on a dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called *Parts of Some Sextets*, performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (T-30; Winter 1965): 168. Reprinted in Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 45. In her discussions of *Room Service in Work 1961–73*, on pp. 45 and 294, Rainer may give the impression that the first performance of the work was the one in Philadelphia in April 1964. However, it was first performed as a choreographic collaboration between Rainer and sculptor Charles Ross at Concert of Dance 13, on November 10–12, 1963, at the Judson Memorial Church in New York City.
3. Quoted from Marcia B. Siegel by Professor Beardsley, p. 33, in order to show why the movement in *Rooms* is dance.
4. Trisha Brown's Equipment Pieces are well documented in Sally R. Sommer, "Equipment Dances: Trisha Brown," *The Drama Review* 16 (T-55; September 1972): 135–41. Simone Forti writes about her dance constructions and other works in her *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974). See also the chapters on Trisha Brown and Simone Forti in Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980).
5. Michael Crichton, *Jasper Johns* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1977), p. 31.
6. For an analysis of the workly movements of Rainer's *Trio A*, see "Yvonne

Rainer: The Aesthetics of Denial," in Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, pp. 41–55.

7. Some of these problems are examined in Noël Carroll's "Post-Modern Dance and Expression," a paper delivered at the American Dance Festival at Duke University in July 1979, published in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers, eds., *Philosophical Essays in Dance* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1981), pp. 95–104.
8. We are indebted to Paul Ziff for the suggestion that concepts like omission, forbearance, and refraining, as used in both legal theory and action theory, would be useful in the description of avant-garde dance.

3. Criticism as Ethnography (pp. 16–24)

1. In my account of the changes in recent ethnography, I have relied on several sources: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
2. Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*.
3. Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in Clifford and Marcus, pp. 194–233.
4. Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Donald Bahr, Juan Gregorio, David Lopez, and Albert Alvarez, *Pinman Shamanism and Staying Sickness* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1974).
5. John O. Steward, *Drinkers, Drummers, and Decent Folk: Ethnographic Narratives of Village Trinidad* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974).
6. Susan Sontag, "The Anthropologist as Hero," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966).
7. Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (New York: William Morrow, 1988); Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth: The Dance of Doris Humphrey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
8. Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as Form of Ethnic Dance," *Impulse* (1969–70): 24–33.
9. Joseph H. Mazo, *Dance Is a Contact Sport* (New York: Saturday Review Press/E. P. Dutton, 1974).
10. The dissertation has since been published as *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

4. On Your Fingertips (pp. 24–43)

1. Edwin Denby, "Criticism, Dance," in Anatole Chujoy and P. W. Manchester, eds., *The Dance Encyclopedia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967; revised edition), p. 237.

2. Théophile Gautier, Review of Marie Guy-Stephan, in Arthur Saint-Leon's *Lutin de la Vallée, La Presse*, February 1, 1853; excerpts translated by Edwin Binney III in Selma Jeanne Cohen, ed., *Dance as a Theatre Art* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), pp. 88–90.
3. Clive Barnes, "Taylor's 'Court' Judged Genius," *New York Post*, April 16, 1981.
4. Jack Anderson, "A Potpourri of Works By a Passel of Performers," *New York Times*, September 23, 1991.
5. See, for instance, Yvonne Rainer, "Some retrospective notes on a dance for 10 people and 12 mattresses called *Parts of Some Sextets*, performed at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut, and Judson Memorial Church, New York, in March, 1965," *Tulane Drama Review* 10 (T-30; Winter 1965); reprinted in Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), pp. 45–51.
6. However, for an early essay that did use anthropological methods "at home," see Joann Kealiinohomoku, "An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as Form of Ethnic Dance," *Impulse* (1969—70); reprinted in Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, eds., *What Is Dance?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 533–49.
7. Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), p. 7.
8. Indeed, the special postmodern dance issue of *The Drama Review* 19 (T-65; March 1975) spread the critical label "postmodern" in regard to dance and set forth a definition.
9. Burt Barr, "David Gordon's *What Happened*," *The Drama Review* 23 (T-83; September 1979): 33–34.
10. Noël Carroll makes the same point in "Options for Contemporary Dance Criticism," in Lynn Blom and Susan Lee, eds., *Anthology on Dance Criticism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).
11. Arlene Croce, "Prizewinners," *The New Yorker*, August 27, 1973; reprinted in Arlene Croce, *Afterimages* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 4.
12. Gus Solomons, Review of American Ballroom Theater, *Dance Magazine* 62/3 (March 1988): 50.
13. Allen Robertson, "Dance audience boos performance," *Minneapolis Star*, October 12, 1981.
14. John Mueller, "Notes for the Film, *USA: Dance—Four Pioneers*, including Doris Humphrey's 'Passacaglia,'" *Films on Ballet and Modern Dance: Notes and a Directory* (New York: American Dance Guild, 1974), p. 37.
15. Jean Nuchtern, "Cinderella Makes Good," *Soho Weekly News*, May 10, 1979.
16. Noël Carroll, "Choreographic Canvases," *Soho Weekly News*, December 1978.
17. Marcia B. Siegel, "*The Green Table*: Movement Masterpiece," *At the Vanishing Point: A Critic Looks at Dance* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973), p. 65.

18. Deborah Jowitt, "Merce: Enough Electricity to Light Up Broadway," *Village Voice*, February 7, 1977.
19. Joan Acocella, "Mark Morris and the Classical Vision," *Art in America* (January 1991): 51–55.
20. See Monroe C. Beardsley, "Critical Evaluation," *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988; second edition), pp. 454–99, for a fuller discussion of these three evaluative dimensions and the three general canons, to which I refer below, under which aesthetic judgments may be subsumed.
21. Rob Baker, Review of Ballet Nacional de Cuba, *Dance Magazine* (October 1978): 112, 119.
22. Ann Daly, "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers," *The Drama Review* 31 (T-113; Spring 1987): 8, 14.
23. See Susanne Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Scribner's, 1957), p. 12.
24. Elizabeth C. Fine, "Stepping, Saluting, Cracking, and Freaking: The Cultural Politics of African-American Step Shows," *The Drama Review* 35/2 (T-130; Summer 1991): 40, 56–57.
25. Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), pp. 86–87, 89.
26. Jill Johnston, "Rainer's *Muscle*," *Village Voice*, April 18, 1968.

5. Power and the Dancing Body (43–50)

1. Deborah Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), pp. 8–10.
2. Panel on "American Dances, American Bodies, American Culture," organized by Cynthia Novack, Dance in American Culture series, The Center for American Culture Studies, Columbia University, 1986. Susan Manning's question to me at that panel regarding my use of the term "reflect" to characterize the relationship between dance and society has in part prompted the present essay.
3. Sally Peters, "From Eroticism to Transcendence: Ballroom Dance and the Female Body," in Laurence Goldstein, ed., *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 147.
4. Anthropologist Cynthia Novack, for instance, writes (in *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990], p. 8) that "culture is embodied. . . . We perform movement, invent it, interpret it, and reinterpret it, on conscious and unconscious levels. In these actions, we participate in and reinforce culture, and we also create it,"
5. Lincoln Kirstein, *Dance: A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935; reprint Dance Horizons, 1969), pp. 146–47. Roy Strong has the same interpretation in *Splendor at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and the Theater of Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp. 149–51.
6. Jowitt, p. 243.

7. See Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance in the United States from 1619 to 1970* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1980), and Robert Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).
8. Natalia Roslavleva, "Prechistenka 20: The Isadora Duncan School in Moscow," *Dance Perspectives* 64 (Winter 1975): 43–44.
9. The reference in the section heading is to an agit-photo by Barbara Kruger. The text reads: "Your body is a battleground. Support legal abortion/birth control/and women's rights." Susan Bordo uses Kruger's artwork to illustrate her position on the cultural struggle over the body in " 'Material Girl': The Effacements of Postmodern Culture," in Goldstein, pp. 114, 120.
10. Bordo, pp. 109, 113. I should make it clear that, although I disagree with Bordo specifically about the extent of "the grip of culture on the body" (p. 117), there is much in her article, particularly in regard to representations of racial difference in mass consumer culture, that I find illuminating and accurate. For other feminist appropriations of Fourcault, see Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby, eds. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), and Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
11. Susan Rubin Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," in Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *The Female Body in Western Culture: Perspectives* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 24.
12. John Fiske, "Madonna," *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 97.
13. Bordo, pp. 122–29.
14. I put "race" in quotation marks because, following Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and others (see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *"Race," Writing, and Difference* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986]), I want to avoid suggesting "natural" or biological difference where cultural difference is meant.
15. Useful here is Robert C. Allen's point (in *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991]), that a dichotomy between "domination" and "resistance" oversimplifies these matters. Allen prefers the terms "ordination" and "insubordination" to describe the dynamic of cultural struggle, since in our contemporary society direct force rarely comes into play in the sphere of ordinary life, at least in matters of fashion, health, theater, and so on. This is not to deny the repressive use of force in our society but, rather, to say that it is not employed to enforce on a mass level the representations purveyed by popular culture. Indeed, it seems to me that one would want to maintain the distinction between, say, police brutality or tape and the "disciplining of bodies" in aerobics classes. In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), the historian Thomas Laqueur makes a similar point regarding the balance between cultural and biological construction of the body. He upholds "a distinction between the body and the body as discursively constituted, between seeing

and seeing-as," and notes that although he believes that biology is not given, but is shaped by culture, at the same time he believes that a material body is "*really* there," underlying representations. He cites his revelation, on spending a year in medical school, when "body as cultural construct met body on the dissecting table. . . . For all of my awareness of how deeply our understanding of what we saw [on the dissecting table] was historically contingent—the product of institutional, political, and epistemological contingencies—the flesh in its simplicity seemed always to shine through" (pp. 14–15).

16. Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners: The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
17. See Elizabeth Aldrich, *From the Ballroom to Hell: Grace and Folly in Nineteenth-Century Dance* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1991).
18. Aldrich, pp. 83–85.
19. For instance, see Lawrence Vincent, *Competing with the Sylph: Dancers and the Pursuit of the Ideal Body Form* (Kansas City, Mo.: Andrews and McMeel, 1979). Jowitt does briefly discuss pregnancy and diet, in regard to Romantic ballet dancers (pp. 46–47).
20. Tim Armstrong, "The electrification of the body at the turn of the century," *Textual Practice* 5/3 (Winter 1991): 303–25.
21. See Sally Sommer, "Loïe Fuller," *The Drama Review* 19/1 (T-65; March 1975), and Jowitt, pp. 90–91.
22. For instance, one could profitably examine the historical moment when weddings changed from being the *occasions for* ballets into being the *subject of* ballets. Too, it would be instructive to analyze the changing representations of weddings, from the interrupted ones of the Romantic era to the triumphant ones of the Russian Imperial era to the somewhat brutal one depicted in Nijinska's *Les Noces*.

6. Balanchine and Black Dance (53–69)

1. Deborah Jowitt, "A Gem Remounted," *Village Voice*, December 13, 1983, reprinted in Deborah Jowitt, *The Dance in Mind* (Boston: David Godine, 1985), p. 22.
2. *Partisan Review*, Fall 1968, quoted in Nancy Reynolds, *Repertory in Review* (New York: The Dial Press, 1977), p. 249.
3. Quoted in Reynolds, p. 250.
4. In my telephone interview with him on August 14, 1991, Villella remarked, "There's one step that's now lost in the opening movement, when the man does four steps to the woman—it's all thirties jazz."
5. Merlin, *Le Monde*, June 24, 1969, quoted in Reynolds, p. 250.
6. *New York Times*, April 14, 1967, quoted in Reynolds, p. 248.
7. Joseph H. Mazo, "Jazzdance: Art Not Art?," *Dance Magazine* 65/9 (September 1991): 62.
8. Arlene Croce argues that "*Rubies* has always seemed to me recherché neoclassicism and jazz-ism, and deliberately so. It was 1967 and GB wasn't hip to the new era of rock and he knew it. The fact that *Rubies* hit the

audience so hard and seemed so *new* is a tribute to his genius" (personal communication, February 29, 1992).

9. I should note that although some might argue that the terms "jazz dancing," tapdancing," or "show-biz dancing" might be used by the critics and the dancers without consciously associating these genres with the African-American Tradition, I have taken these references to support my claims for several reasons. First, any historical investigation of all these genres shows that they are rooted in black vernacular dance styles (see Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance* [New York: Schirmer Books, 1968]). Second, my own viewing of some of the dances and movements that have been described this way corroborates the African-American connection. Third, as I intend to show, Balanchine was exposed to the black practice in all these genres and learned them from African-American experts. Fourth, as we shall see, he referred to the steps that way himself.
10. In this respect I differ with Brenda Dixon, who has argued that Balanchine and other white choreographers "without crediting sources . . . used Afrocentric influences at will from their Broadway choreography to their ballets." Dixon suggests that such appropriation may have taken place "with malicious intent" ("Up from Under: The Afrocentric Tradition in American Concert Dance," *The Hong Kong International Dance Conference July 15–28, 1990, Conference Papers*, 1 (A–J): 179). I do not disagree, however, with Dixon's list of African-American elements in Balanchine's style, several of which correspond to features I have often noted myself. In 1985, for instance, attending the Dance Critics Association Conference on *The Four Temperaments*, I was surprised that, although there were some references to "jazzy" movements and to Balanchine's choreography on Broadway and in Hollywood dancing, the deep connections in this ballet to black dance style were not plumbed further. That event inspired the present article (see especially "Celebrating *The Four Temperaments*—II," *Ballet Review* 15/1 [Spring 1987]: 39–43).
11. For instance, tapdancing is a hybrid form, mixing European (primarily Irish) and African elements, and since the nineteenth century it has been performed by both blacks and whites. Tapdancing, as well as other dance forms—like the cakewalk and the soft-shoe—that originated in African-American cultural practice, all have a history of appropriation by whites on the minstrel stage and reappropriation on the black minstrel circuit. The racism of the minstrel show portrayal of African-Americans is undeniable and inexcusable. But to speak, as some commentators have, of certain dances or steps as "belonging" to one "race" or another, or of being "stolen," seems to be missing the point in regard to cultural production. (I put the term "race" in quotation marks because, following such writers as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Kwame Anthony Appiah, I view this category as a cultural, not a "natural," construction. See, for instance, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Introduction, *"Race," Writing, and Difference* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], pp. 1–20.) Vernacular culture is produced by people, but it is not private property. What made minstrel shows racist was the disparaging, parodic context in which these dances were performed.

Both African-American and Euro-American concert dance choreographers have used "black dance" and "white dance" elements in their work.

12. Edwin Denby, "Some Thoughts About Classicism and George Balanchine," *Dancers, Buildings, and People in the Streets* (New York: Curtis Books, 1965), p. 68. The article was first published in *Dance Magazine* (February 1953) and is reprinted in Edwin Denby, *Dance Writings*, edited by Robert Cornfield and William MacKay (New York: Knopf, 1986), pp. 433–40. All citations here from Denby reviews and articles, whether or not they were published in previous collections, refer to the definitive *Dance Writings*.
13. Telephone conversation with Elizabeth Kendall, September 1991.
14. Frederick Starr *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union 1917–1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 31–34; Bronislava Nijinska, *Bronislava Nijinska: Early Memoirs*, translated and edited by Irina Nijinska and Jean Rawlinson, with an introduction by Anna Kisselgoff (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981), p. 25. Ruthanna Boris remembers that when she choreographed *Cakewalk* for the New York City Ballet in 1951, Lincoln Kirstein suggested using music by the white New Orleans composer Louis Gottschalk, "whom nobody had hear of then—except for Balanchine, because Gottschalk had been famous in Russia" (in Reynolds, p. 121).
15. See Starr, pp. 43–53; also, Valentin Parnakh, "Novye tantsy" and "Dzhaz-Band," *Veshch*, nos. 1–2 (Berlin 1922), p. 25.
16. Starr gives a lively account and an informative sociological analysis of "Russia's Roaring Twenties," pp. 54–62.
17. The foxtrot, popularized by Vernon and Irene Castle, spread rapidly throughout Euro-American culture, and its origins may be untraceable. However, like other dances with animal names it seems to be rooted in African-American practice. As well, it has a semisyncopated rhythm. Irene Castle attributed the "invention" of the foxtrot to James Europe, the well-known African-American Jazz musician who was the Castle's musical director: "It was Jim Europe . . . who suggested the foxtrot to us, and for all I know he invented it" ("Swing Music and Popular Dance," *Dance Herald* [February 1938], quoted in Stearns and Stearns, p. 98). Katrina Hazzard-Gordon's interviews with African-American vaudeville performers confirm this view of the black origins of the foxtrot (personal communication, March 1, 1992).
18. *Choreography by Balanchine: A Catalogue of Works* (New York: Viking, 1984; An Eakins Press Foundation Book), pp. 54–55. The second foxtrot was reviewed in *Krasnaya Gazeta*, May 20, 1924. On Balanchine's Russian years, see Elizabeth Suritz, "The Young Balanchine in Russia," *Ballet Review* 18/2 (Summer 1990): 66–71; Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, translated by Lynn Visson and edited with an introduction and additional translation by Sally Banes (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 73–78; Yuri Slonimsky, "Balanchine: The Early Years," *Ballet Review* 5/3 (1875–76), reprinted in abridged form in Francis Mason, *I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who*

Knew Him (New York: Doubleday, 1991), pp. 19–78; and Bernard Taper, *Balanchine: A Biography* (New York: Times Books, 1984), pp. 53–73. The two quotes from eyewitnesses to Balanchine's work at the Maly are taken from Slonimsky, pp. 58–59 (in *Ballet Review*).

19. Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), pp. 124–25.
20. These dances are described in Sally Banes, "An Introduction to the Ballets Suédois," *Ballet Review* 7/2 & 3 (1978–79): 28–59, and are documented in Bengt Häger, *The Swedish Ballet* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), pp. 189–219.
21. Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 70.
22. Bryan Hammond and Patrick O'Connor, *Josephine Baker* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), p. 118; Lincoln Kirstein, personal communication, November 18, 1991.
23. Cyril W. Beaumont, *The Diaghilev Ballet in London* (London: Black, 1951), p. 269. The information about Snowball comes from Edward Ricco, "The Sitwells at the Ballet," *Ballet Review* 6/2 (1977–78): 87.
24. *Choreography by Balanchine*, pp. 90, 100–101.
25. On Buddy Bradley's work, see Stearns and Stearns, pp. 160–169; Mary Clarke and David Vaughan, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Dance & Ballet* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), s.v. "Bradley, Buddy"; on Bradley's collaborations with the British ballet choreographer Frederick Ashton, see David Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and His Ballets* (New York: Knopf, 1977).
26. Lincoln Kirstein, Letter to A. Everett Austin, July 16, 1933, reprinted in Mason, pp. 116, 118.
27. Denby, "A Letter on New York City's Ballet," *Ballet* (August 1952), reprinted in Denby, *Dance Writings*, p. 429.
28. Both before and during Mitchell's tenure, however, several African-American dancers appeared as guests. For the Ballet Society production of Lew Christensen's *Blackface*, in 1947, Betty Nichols and Talley Beatty appeared as "The Colored Couple." In 1950, Arthur Bell had danced in Ashton's *Illuminations*, and, in 1952, Louis Johnson danced in Robbins's *Ballade*. In 1960, Mary Hinkson, from Martha Graham's company, appeared in *The Figure in the Carpet*, and John Jones danced in *Modern Jazz: Variants* (see Reynolds, pp. 81, 136, 203, 212). (I am grateful to David Vaughan for pointing out several of these guest appearances.) Two more African-American dancers were to dance with the company after Mitchell's departure while Balanchine was still alive — Debra Austin in the 1970s and Mel Tomlinson in the 1980s. In 1992 there were three African-American dancers in the company and about twelve African-American students in the School of American Ballet.
29. The music for the revue was by Vernon Duke, the lyrics by Ira Gershwin. For a description of Baker's numbers and an account of her critical reception, see Rose, pp. 165–70. Also see Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 497–98.
30. "Celebrating *The Four Temperaments* — II," p. 43. Harper had been Buddy

Bradley's studio assistant in the 1920s and 1930s. About *On Your Toes*, see Bordman, p. 498.

31. See *Choreography by Balanchine*, pp. 135–36 and Bordman, pp. 501–502. The Nicholas quote is from Stearns and Stearns, pp. 280–81.
32. Balanchine's tap consultant for the film was the white tapdancer Sammy Lee. See *Choreography by Balanchine*, p. 142.
33. I want to thank Robert Cornfield for raising this and other points.
34. According to *Choreography by Balanchine*, "Balanchine combined classical ballet technique with [the Dunham company's] own highly developed dance forms and choreographed special dances for the leading players." Also see Bordman, pp. 521–22. Dunham's reminiscences are published in Mason, pp. 190–93.
35. The show premiered in Philadelphia; Balanchine quit the production team before the New York opening, and Herbert Ross rechoreographed some of the dances, while others were cut. It was Ross who brought Ailey into the cast. See *Choreography by Balanchine*, p. 214–15.
36. Interview with Edward Villella.
37. See *Choreography by Balanchine*, pp. 208, 252–53, 257; Reynolds, pp. 255, 274–275. In my telephone interview with Arthur Mitchell, September 20, 1991, he described the collaborative process.
38. However, Balanchine was criticized for featuring his own company in the more classical sections and Mitchell's company in the more "black" sections. Indeed, John Gruen has chronicled how Clive Barnes responded to the piece in the *New York Times* by calling for more "black faces" in the New York City Ballet. Karel Shook, associate artistic director of Dance Theater of Harlem, complained to Gruen that "our dancers were presented as the cliché idea of all-black dancers — All they can do is jazz." Mitchell, however, was more forgiving: "One must remember that we were working with a man who is a genius — a genius who comes out of another era. . . . I felt that my kids learned a great deal by working with the New York City Ballet. . . . Of course, it was fantastic for me, because it was the first time I worked with Balanchine in another capacity [than as a dancer]. . . . Just the association of the two companies established The Dance Theater of Harlem" (John Gruen, *The Private World of Ballet* [New York: Viking, 1975], pp. 441–42).
39. *Choreography by Balanchine*, pp. 119, 285, 145, 152–53, 170–71, 235–36, 249, 243–44, 255–56; Reynolds, pp. 39, 71, 199–201, 211, 246, 212–13, 227, 268–70; Edwin Denby, "A Letter on New York City's Ballet," p. 420; Edwin Denby, "Balanchine Choreographing," *Kulchur* (1962), reprinted in *Dance Writings*, pp. 474, 476; David Vaughan, personal communication, January 1992.
40. These two African-American features of dance style were discussed by John Szwed and Robert Farris Thompson, respectively, at the Dance Black America conference, April 21–24, 1983, presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and the State University of New York.
41. Denby, "A Letter on New York City's Ballet," pp. 423–24. Denby complains, however, that the company couldn't muster up the proper style for Jerome Robbins's *Pied Piper*.

42. Interview with Mitchell.
43. "Forces of Harlem," *The New Yorker*, May 13, 1974, reprinted in Arlene Croce, *Afterimages* (New York: Knopf, 1977, p. 60. David Vaughan notes that "When I first saw *Barocco*—in 1948 by Grand Ballet de Monte Carlo—it was *much* jazzier than it is now, even by Dance Theater of Harlem" (personal communication).
44. Arlene Croce, "News from the Muses," *The New Yorker*, September 11, 1978, reprinted in *Going to the Dance* (New York: Knopf, 1982), p. 112; interview with Villella; Reynolds, pp. 47–49. The term "multi-unit" torso is taken from Alan Lomax and the Choreometrics project. It refers to the use of a flexible torso, as seen, for instance, in traditional African dance and African-American dance, not only in twisting but also in isolating shoulders or hips or moving different parts of the torso to different rhythms.
45. Reynolds, p. 66; Edwin Denby, "The Rockettes and Rhythm," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 20, 1944, and " 'Concerto Barocco' at Needle Trades High School," *New York Herald Tribune*, November 1, 1943, reprinted in Denby, *Dance Writings*, pp. 201, 167.
46. Reynolds, p. 68; "Celebrating *The Four Temperaments*—II," p. 42; interview with Villella. (I am grateful to Arlene Croce for sharing this information, which Villella repeated to me.) Regarding Danieli's comment, however, David Vaughan notes that no other dancer remembers the finger-snapping (personal communication).
47. The term "angular archaisms" comes from a review in the *New York Herald Tribune*, October 16, 1965, and is quoted in Reynolds, p. 73; Edwin Denby, "The Four Temperaments," *Dance News* (December 1946), reprinted in Denby, *Dance Writings*, p. 415; Mitchell is quoted in Reynolds, p. 72.
48. See Robert Farris Thompson, *African Art in Motion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 13–14, for a discussion of the "get-down" posture in black dance; Arlene Croce, "Momentous," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 8, 1975, reprinted in Arlene Croce, *Afterimages* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 188. On what I am labeling "ecstatic arms," see Robert Farris Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun*, exhibition catalogue (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1981), pp. 176–77. My own descriptions and interpretations of this ballet are based on my live viewings of its performance by the New York City Ballet and a close study of the 1977 Dance in America recording, directed by Merrill Brockway and broadcast by PBS as part of *Choreography by Balanchine I*.
49. Flash acts combine jazz dancing with acrobatics. The Nicholas Brothers were an outstanding example of this genre. See Stearns and Stearns, pp. 276–82.
50. Mitchell in Reynolds, p. 72; Croce, "Momentous," p. 189; Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun*, pp. 122–24, 172–76. Thompson expands on this gesture in "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," in Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), pp. 161–64, and cites John Szwed, "Introduction," Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (Philadelphia:

University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. vii. On "stepping it down," see Bessie Jones and Bess Lomax Hawes, *Step It Down: Games, Plays, Songs, and Stories from the African Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). For other characteristic features, see Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "A Comparative Study of Dance as a Constellation of Motor Behaviors Among African and United States Negroes [1965]," in Adrienne L. Kaeppler, ed., *Reflections and Perspectives on Two Anthropological Studies of Dance*, CORD Dance Research Annual VII (New York: CORD, 1976), pp. 15–179; Margaretta Bobo Goines, "African Retentions in the Dance of the Americas," *Dance Research Monograph One, 1971–1972* (New York: CORD, 1972), pp. 209–29; Gertrude P. Kurath and Nadia Chilkovsky, "Jazz Choreology," in A. Wallace, ed., *Man and Cultures*, Papers from the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 152–59; Stearns and Stearns; and Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

51. Hence, perhaps, the references by various critics, notably Thompson on the mambo, to cubism in describing black dance. Of course cubism was itself influenced by the African aesthetic.
52. See Goines and also Nadia Chilkovsky, "Analysis and Notation of Basic Afro-American Movements," in Stearns and Stearns, p. 423, diagram 1.
53. Edwin Denby, "Three Sides of 'Agon,' " *Evergreen Review* (Winter 1959); reprinted in *Dance Writings*, p. 462; Edwin Denby, "In the Abstract," New York City Ballet Souvenir Program (1959–1960), reprinted in *Dance Writings*, p. 466; Denby, "Three Sides of 'Agon,' " p. 463; Denby, "Balanchine Choreographing," p. 478. Denby's complaint that Balanchine was old-fashioned when it came to current jazz dancing corresponds to Croce's point in n. 8 above.
54. This, according to John Willett (in *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917–1933* [New York: Pantheon, 1978], p. 90), was the term the German music critic Heinrich Strobel used to describe the impact of the European tour by Sam Wooding on Hindemith and others.
55. Interviews with Mitchell and Villella. On the process of modernizing ballet by incorporating and abstracting "exotic" folkdances, see Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially ch. 3, "The Making of Ballet Modernism."
56. I am grateful to Ramsay Burt for making this point (personal communication, February 25, 1992).
57. According to Kirstein, "He never could find a black composer who could give him an authentic black jazz ballet. He loved jazz, but it was George Gershwin and the popular Broadway tunesters that really moved him in this genre" (personal communication).
58. Nancy Reynolds, however, argues that although Balanchine may have had "exoticism" in mind at times when casting Mitchell, the role of Puck was not one of those times. "In that uncanny way GB had of zeroing in and highlighting individual movement idiosyncrasies in dancers, he picked up on Mitchell's essential fleetness and lightness and made it part of the Puck

character. . . . All the effects were dance effects" (personal communication, January 10, 1992).

59. See Jack Slater, "They Told Us Our Bodies Were Wrong for Ballet," *New York Times*, April 27, 1975, and "Black Bodies vs. Classic Symmetry," *New York Times*, May 18, 1975.
60. Balanchine told John Gruen in 1971,

    The fact is, we have black children in our school. But they don't stay in the school long enough. It's always like that, with whites or blacks. Mothers would come to me and ask how long it will take her child of eight to become a ballerina. I say it takes about eight to ten years. Then it takes another ten years. So it's about twenty years' work. . . . Well, the mothers say, "Oh no, that's too long." Then they take their children away.

    Years ago Arthur Mitchell and I made a big campaign. We went to Harlem to find children. We offered them scholarships. But you see, they didn't want to stay. (Gruen, p. 443.)

    Kirstein, writing to me recently about the African-American students in the company and at the School of American Ballet, claims, "It's very hard to find black boys who want to learn classic ballet. They think it unmanly, affected, and inappropriate. . . . They work doubly hard, but so many luckless factors stand in their way, having nothing to do with racial prejudice or physical ability" (personal communication).

    It seems to me that the issue of recruiting African-American students is a complicated one that neither Balanchine nor Kirstein fully addresses, and one that *does* have to do with racial prejudice, from which the school and its students, as part of a culture at large permeated with institutional racism, could not be immune.
61. For help on this article, thanks go first to Joan Acocella. I would also like to thank Mindy Aloff, Valerie Briginshaw, Virginia Brooks, Ramsay Burt, Noël Carroll, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Robert Cornfield, Arlene Croce, Ann Daly, Susan Foster, Lynn Garafola, Katrina Hazzard-Gordon, Stephanie Jordan, Deborah Jowitt, Elizabeth Kendall, Judy Kinberg, Woody McGriff, Nancy Reynolds, John Szwed, David Vaughan, and, at Dance Theater of Harlem, Sharon Williams and Ed Scholwer. I am indebted to Arthur Mitchell and Edward Villella for graciously permitting me to interview them and to Lincoln Kirstein for his prompt correspondence.

7. Ballets Suédois (pp. 70–81)

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from the French or Swedish are translated by S. Banes.

1. Arnold Haskell with Walter Nouvel, *Diaghileff: His Artistic and Private Life* (New York, 1935; reprint ed. Da Capo Press, 1978), pp. 278–301.
2. Bengt Häger, "The Wise Fools," in *Modern Swedish Ballet* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1970), p. 6; Rolf de Maré, "Naissance et Évolution des Ballets Suédois," *Les Ballets Suédois dans l'Art Contemporain* (Paris: Éditions du Trianon, 1931), pp. 19–26.
3. The biographical information comes from Börlin's cousin, Hedvig Nenzén-Haquinius, in "Le Petit Garçon Qui Ne Demandait Qu'à Danser," *Les Ballets Suédois dans l'Art Contemporain* (hereafter referred to as *LBS*),

pp. 144–48, and from Pierre Tugal, "L'Art de Jean Börlin," *LBS*, pp. 154–56.

Fokine, in his memoir "Börlin, Mon Élève . . ." (*LBS*, p. 148), gives 1911 as the date when he first saw Börlin. However, Bengt Häger corrects this date to 1913 in "The Wise Fools," p. 6, and Anna Greta Ståhle, in "Sweden, Ballet in," *The Dance Encyclopedia*, ed. Anatole Chujoy and P. W. Manchester (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), s.v., gives 1913 as the date for Fokine's first visit to Sweden.

4. Fokine, "Börlin, Mon Élève . . . ," pp. 148–49.
5. Haquinius, "Le Petit Garçon," p. 148.
6. Ståhle, "Sweden, Ballet in," s.v.
7. Tugal, "L'Art de Jean Börlin," p. 156.
8. Mikhail Fokine, "The New Russian Ballet," *The Times* (London), July 6, 1914.
9. de Maré, "Naissance et Évolution," p. 26.
10. "Next the Swedish Ballet," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 11, 1923.
11. de Maré, "Naissance et Évolution," p. 27.
12. Häger, "The Wise Fools," p. 7.
13. "Histoire Critique et Analytique des Ballets Suédois," *LBS*, pp. 39–40.
14. de Maré, "Naissance et Évolution," p. 45; Victor I. Seroff, *Maurice Ravel* (New York: Henry Holt, 1953), p. 206.
15. de Maré, "Naissance et Évolution," p. 37; "Histoire Critique et Analytique," pp. 43–44.
16. Cyril W. Beaumont, "Jean Börlin," *Complete Book of Ballets* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), pp. 672–73.
17. "Swedish Ballet Out of Paris," *New York Telegram*, November 26, 1923; see also various other American Reviews of the same date.
18. [Florence Gilliam?], "The Swedish Ballet: Its Repertory and Its Accomplishment," *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 1, 1923.
19. "Varia," *LBS*, p. 194.
20. Dansmuseet, Stockholm, *Svenska Baletten* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1969), p. 25.
21. "Varia," p. 194.
22. Paul Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, ed. Jacques Petit and Jean-Pierre Kempf, trans. Christine Trollope (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1972), p. 45.
23. Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie Heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), pp. 92–93.
24. Claudel, *Claudel on the Theatre*, p. xvii.
25. Ibid., pp. 45–47. However, Claudel's scenario, in Paul Claudel, *Théâtre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 635, only calls for three levels.
26. Neal Oxenhandler, *Scandal and Parade* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 49.
27. Jean Cocteau, "The Wedding on the Eiffel Tower," trans. Michael Benedikt, in *Modern French Theatre*, ed. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1966), pp. 99–100.
28. Beaumont, "Jean Börlin," p. 677.

29. Milhaud, *Ma Vie Heureuse*, pp. 124–25.
30. Robert Kimball, ed., *Cole* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 67–68; Charles Schwartz, *Cole Porter* (New York, 1977; reprint ed. Da Capo Press, 1979), pp. 79–82; Calvin Tomkins, *Living Well Is the Best Revenge* (New York: Viking, 1971), pp. 39–40.
31. "Histoire Critique et Analytique," pp. 65–66.
32. Noël Carroll, "Entr'acte, Paris and Dada," *Millennium Film Journal* 1 (Winter 1977–78): 11. The descriptions of the ballet come from "Histoire Critique et Analytique," pp. 73–79; Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, revised ed. (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 172–74; and James Harding, *The Ox on the Roof* (London: Macdonald, 1962), pp. 161–71.
33. *Francis Picabia* (Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1976), p. 124.
34. Beaumont, "Jean Börlin," p. 683, gives December 4 as the opening date, as does "Histoire Critique et Analytique," p. 76.
35. René Dumesnil, quoted in Shattuck, *The Banquet Years*, p. 174.
36. Ibid.
37. "Pourquoi J'ai Écrit 'Relâche,' " quoted in "Histoire Critique et Analytique," p. 74.
38. Häger, "The Wise Fools," p. 6.

8. Soirée de Paris (pp. 82–91)

1. Both the souvenir program and the poster for the event call it Soirée de Paris (singular) and give the dates for the season as 17 May–30 June 1924. Some reviews and almost all the autobiographies or biographies consulted call it Soirées de Paris (plural). Paul Collaer, *Darius Milhaud* (Antwerp: N. V. de Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1947), p. 111, and various others report that the season was named after Guillaume Apollinaire's prewar magazine of the same name (plural). I have kept the singular, choosing to agree with the program and the poster. However, I have disagreed with the dates, following instead the daily theater listings in *Le Figaro*.
2. Soirée de Paris, Souvenir Program, Paris, 1924, n. p.
3. Francis Steegmuller, *Cocteau* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown, 1970), pp. 326–27; Richard Buckle, *Diaghilev* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), passim.
4. Léonide Massine, *My Life in Ballet*, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll and Robert Rubens (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 158.
5. Le Comte Étienne de Beaumont, Preface, Souvenir Program.
6. Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale, *Misia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), p. 238.
7. Ibid., p. 239.
8. Reginald Bridgeman, quoted in Steegmuller, p. 227 note.
9. Steegmuller, p. 284.
10. Gold and Fizdale, p. 239.
11. Jean Hugo, quoted in Steegmuller, p. 308. Gold and Fizdale say, p. 239, that it was Marie Laurencin who came as "La Malade Imaginaire," but agree that Radiguet came as measles.

12. Gold and Fizdale, p. 239.
13. But, for instance, in "Figaro-Théâtre" of 2 June 1924, the *répétition générale* for *Romeo et Juliette* is announced for 9 o'clock in the column "Répétitions générales," while under "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," the dance program of the preceding week is still listed for 9 P.M. Similarly, a new dance program is announced in Maxime Girard's column "Courrier des Théâtres" (*Le Figaro*, 7 June 1924, p. 3) for June 8 and 9, but on June 8 *Romeo et Juliette* is still listed under "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," and the dance program is listed respectively in the issues of June 9 and 10.
14. "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," *Le Figaro*, 18 May 1924, p. 4; 19 May 1924, p. 4; 20 May 1924, p. 4; 21 May 1924, p. 3; 22 May 1924, p. 3; 23 May 1924, p. 5.
15. Souvenir Program. the program gives *Vogues* as the title on one page and *Vogue* on another. The same problem exists in regard to the spelling of dancers' names.
16. Maurice Boucher, " 'Soirées de Paris,' à la Cigale: 'Mercure' de Erik Satie," *Le Monde Musical* 35 (June 1924): 215.
17. Souvenir Program.
18. Tristan Tzara, "Author's Introduction, *Mouchoir de Nuages*," *The Drama Review* 16 (T-56; December 1972): 112.
19. Tzara, "*Mouchoir de Nuages*," p. 118.
20. Souvenir Program.
21. G. Allix, "Soirée de Paris, à la Cigale," *Le Monde Musical* 35 (May 1924): 167.
22. Massine, p. 158.
23. Souvenir Program.
24. Gilson MacCormack, "Pavlova in Paris; Massine's New Productions," *The Dancing Times*, no. 164 (June 1924): 896–97.
25. Darius Milhaud, *Ma Vie heureuse* (Paris: Belfond, 1973), p. 131.
26. Collaer, p. 113. Allix counts five singers.
27. Massine, p. 159.
28. Collaer, p. 114. Translation mine.
29. MacCormack, "Pavlova in Paris," p. 896.
30. Allix.
31. Souvenir Program. Maxime Girard, "Courrier des Théâtres," *Le Figaro*, 23 May 1924, p. 5, announces that the exhibition will open on 24 May; in his column of 24 May, p. 5, he reports that the exhibition is open that evening for the first time.
32. As mentioned above, *Le Figaro* gives conflicting information. The dance program may have run through June 4, as it is listed every day under "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," from May 25 through June 4. However, *Romeo et Juliette* is listed under "Répétitions générales" for 2 June, p. 4, and under "Premières Representations" for 3 June, p. 3, and finally under "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," for 5 June, p. 3.
33. Massine, p. 159.
34. Maxime Girard, "Courrier des Théâtres," *Le Figaro*, 22 May 1924, p. 3.
35. Massine, ibid.

36. Souvenir Program.
37. See note 32 above.
38. Steegmuller, passim.
39. Steegmuller, p. 327 note.
40. Neal Oxenhandler, *Scandal and Parade: The Theater of Jean Cocteau* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 54.
41. Steegmuller, pp. 327–28; Jean Cocteau, *Journal d'un inconnu*, p. 222, quoted in Steegmuller, p. 328.
42. Cocteau, Lettre à Jacques Maritain, *Oeuvres completes* IX, pp. 277–78, quoted in Steegmuller, p. 330.
43. "Romeo et Juliette," *Le Théâtre* 27 (15 June 1924): 525.
44. Jean Hugo, quoted in Steegmuller, p. 329.
45. "Romeo et Juliette," translation mine.
46. "Spectacles et Concerts: Ce Soir," *Le Figaro*, 14 June 1924, p. 3; Boucher; MacCormack, "The Russian Ballet in Paris; Les Soirées de Paris," *The Dancing Times*, no. 165 (July 1924): 999.
47. MacCormack, ibid.
48. Boucher.
49. Souvenir Program.
50. Steegmuller identifies the poster for the season, reproduced in his book (p. 375) as by Marie Laurencin. It is the same image as the sketch entitled "Amazon" in the Souvenir Program.
51. Boucher.
52. MacCormack, "The Russian Ballet in Paris," p. 999.
53. "The Sitter Out," *The Dancing Times*, no. 168 (October 1924): 4.
54. Maxime Girard, "Courrier des Théâtres," *Le Figaro*, 11 June 1924, p. 6.
55. Maxime Girard, "Courrier des Théâtres," *Le Figaro*, 12 June 1924, p. 5.
56. Erik Satie, interview with Pierre de Massot, *Paris-Journal*, 30 May 1924, quoted in Douglas Cooper, *Picasso Theatre* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), p. 56.
57. Cooper, p. 56.
58. Ornella Volta, *L'Ymagier d'Erik Satie* (Paris: Francis van de Velde, 1979), p. 81.
59. Cooper, pp. 56–57.
60. Cooper, p. 59 note 160. I have not changed the spellings of the dancers' names to be consistent with the Souvenir Program.
61. Cooper, p. 58; see plates 322–47.
62. Cooper, pp. 59–61. The letter from André Breton, et al., "Hommage à Picasso," *Paris-Journal*, 20 June 1924, is reprinted on p. 60.
63. Boucher.
64. MacCormack, "The Russian Ballet in Paris," p. 999.
65. Cyril W. Beaumont, *The Diaghilev Ballet in London* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1951), pp. 280–81.
66. Cooper, p. 59; Buckle, p. 434; Cooper says that the event described by Lifar was the opening night; Buckle says that it was on June 18, which would make it the closing night.
67. Buckle, p. 426.

68. Milhaud, p. 131.
69. Collaer, p. 111, my translation.
70. Massine, conversations with Buckle, quoted in Buckle, p. 446.
71. Buckle, p. 450.

9. Kasyan Goleizovsky's Ballet Manifestos (pp. 92–103)

In transliterating titles and names of authors of Russian works, I have used the Library of Congress system. However, both in the text and in the notes I have left names familiar to the American reader in their more popular form of transliteration — e.g., Alexander Gorsky rather than Aleksandr Gorskii.

1. Mary Clarke and David Vaughan, *Encyclopedia of Dance and Ballet* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), s.v. "Goleizovsky, Kasyan," by Janet Sinclair and Natalia Roslavleva. Lydia Joffe, in "Kasian Goleizovsky," *The Dancing Times* 56/669 (June 1966): 461, gives 1882 for his birthdate, but I suspect that this is an error, since this would make him twenty-seven at the time of his graduation from the Ballet Academy. Yuri Grigorovich, *Balet: Entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Sovietskaia Entsiklopediia, 1981), s.v. "Goleizovsky, Kasyan Yaroslavich," gives 1892 as his birthdate and Moscow as his birthplace (so does Joffe). Sinclair and Roslavleva give Königgratz, Bohemia, as his birthplace. The rest of the information in this paragraph comes from Elizabeth Souritz, "The Beginning of the Journey: Moscow and Leningrad Ballet in 1917–1927," in Vera Krasovskaya, ed., *Sovietskii Baletnyi Teatr: 1917–1967* (*Soviet Ballet Theater: 1917–1967*) (Moscow: Iskussivo, 1976), p. 36, and from Natalia Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), p. 214. For more information on Goleizovsky's career, see Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. Lynn Visson, ed. with additional translation by Sally Banes (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

   Selma Jeanne Cohen first called my attention to Souritz's essay and showed me her translation of the passage about Goleizovsky. However, the extracts from Souritz quoted in this Introduction are my own translations.
2. Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 37; Souritz, *Khoreograficheskoe iskusstvo dvadtsatykh godov* (*Choreographic Art of the Twenties*) (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), pp. 158–62.
3. Roslavleva, p. 212; Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," pp. 43–44.
4. Souritz, *Choreographic Art*, p. 168; Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 40; Truvit (A. I. Abramov), "The Latest Goleizovsky," *Hermitage* 15 (22–28 August 1922): 9, quoted in Souritz "The Beginning . . . ," p. 40.
5. Souritz, *Choreographic Art*, p. 168; Yuri Slonimsky, "Balanchine: The Early Years," *Ballet Review* 5/3 (1975–76): 37–38.
6. [B. Chmury (?), "Anatol Petrizky,"] *Theatre Arts Monthly* 14 (March 1930): 255. This article gives 1922 as the year for *Eccentric Dances*, but this may be the date of the design rather than the production. Souritz gives 1923 as the date both in "The Beginning . . ." (p. 52) and in *Choreographic Art* (p. 168). For an account of Goleizovsky's work in the 1930s, see Si-Lan Chen Leyda, *Footnote to History*, ed. Sally Banes (New York: Dance Horizons, 1983). On *D. E.*, see Valentine Parnakh, "Notes on the Dance in

the Soviet Union," *Soviet Travel* 4 (1933): 34; James M. Symons, *Meyerhold's Theater of the Grotesque* (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1971), p. 121; Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 52; and Llewellyn H. Hedgbeth, "Meyerhold's *D.E.*," *The Drama Review* 19 (T-66; June 1975): 23–36.

7. John E. Bowit, *Stage Designs and the Russian Avant-Garde (1911–1929)* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation, 1976–78), p. 79.
8. Zakhary L. McLove, "Russian Ballet Has Risen in Revolt," the *New York Times Magazine*, 15 November 1925.
9. Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 46.
10. Souritz, *Choreographic Art*, p. 200.
11. Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 73; Mary Grace Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 311; Kasyan Goleizovsky, "*The Whirlwind* [*Smerch*]," *Sovremennyi Teatr* 7 (18 October 1927): 106, quoted in Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 76.
12. "*The Whirlwind* at the Bolshoi Theater (Conversation with Goleizovsky)," *Novyi Zritel'* 40 (4 October 1927): 15, quoted in Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 74; Goleizovsky, "*The Whirlwind*," p. 106; Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 76; Goleizovsky, "*The Whirlwind*," p. 107, quoted in Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 77.
13. A. Gidoni, "Ballet at the Breaking Point (On the Performance of the Ballet *The Whirlwind*)," *Sovremennyi Teatr* 17 (27 December 1927): 265; Vik (V. Iving), "*The Whirlwind*," *Pravda* 296 (25 December 1927); both quoted in Souritz, "The Beginning . . . ," p. 77.
14. Souritz, "Goleizovsky Dies," *Dance News* 55 (June 1970): 20; *Encyclopedia of Dance and Ballet*, "Kasyan Goleizovsky"; my conversations with Si-Lan Chen and Jay Leyda, New York City, 1979–82.
15. Joffe, p. 465; Chen; *Ekran*. The first manifesto appeared in *Ekran* 31 (4 May 1922): 3; the second in *Ekran* 32 (15 May 1922): 3–4. The translation is mine. For their help on the research and translation, I wish to thank Irina Belodedova, Thomas Beyer, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Mel Gordon, Michael Kirby, Edward Lee, Jay Leyda, and and Si-Lan Chen Leyda.
16. Nijinsky was dismissed from the Imperial Ballet after he appeared on the Maryinsky stage in a production of *Giselle* (not *Les Sylphides*), in an allegedly revealing costume that Alexandre Benois had designed for Diaghilev's production of *Giselle* the previous year in Europe. Nijinsky was not forced to leave Russia, but, rather, chose to work with Diaghilev outside of Russia. (See Richard Buckle, *Nijinsky* [London: Penguin Books, 1980], pp. 191–93.)
17. *Vain Precautions* is the title used in Russia for the ballet *La Fille mal gardée*.
18. Isadora Duncan had arrived in Moscow in 1921 to open a school, at the invitation of the Soviet government. The first issue of *Ekran*, in the fall of 1921, features an article by Duncan ("My Goal"), and subsequent issues carry articles about the dancer and her performances. On 7 November

1921, Duncan performed an evening of dances at the Bolshoi Theater in celebration of the fourth anniversary of the October Revolution.

19. Goleizovsky probably refers here to Alexander Gorsky's ballet *Eunice and Petronius* (choreographed in 1915 to music by Chopin), which was said to be influenced by Isadora Duncan's style.

    Another possible reference is to Michel Fokine's 1907 ballet *Eunice*, which according to Beaumont was a transition between the old and the new ballets, in which Fokine attempted to create a ballet in antique Greek style, without yet achieving the freedom from ballet tradition he would later, for instance, achieve in *Narcisse* (Cyril Beaumont, *Michel Fokine and His Ballets* [New York: Dance Horizons, 1981], pp. 28–29, 72).
20. Gorsky (1871–1924), trained at the Imperial Ballet School in St. Petersburg, became the leading choreographer at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow after 1900. He experimented with new forms and with dramatic realism and, in addition, reworked several classic ballets in the repertory, such as *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Little Humpbacked Horse*.
21. *Princess Brambilla* (a "capriccio" based on the story by E. T. A. Hoffmann) and Racine's *Phèdre* were two productions of the 1921–22 season at the Moscow Kamerny (literally, Chamber) Theater. Founded in 1914 by an experimental theater collective under the directorship of Alexander Tairov, after the revolution the Kamerny became one of the most important theaters in Moscow. Like Meyerhold, Tairov was opposed to the naturalism practiced by Stanislavsky; he called for a "synthetic" theater that drew on every aspect of theatrical spectacle, including popular forms such as acrobatics, juggling, and pantomime. He rejected the literariness of most theater and substituted a coherence based on a rhythmic musicality.
22. *King Harlequin* was one of the most successful of the Kamerny Theater's productions; Tseretelli was an actor at the Kamerny.

10. Merce Cunningham's *Story* (pp. 103–109)

1. "Chronology," *Robert Rauschenberg*, exhibition catalog (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1967), pp. 33–37; interview with Trisha Brown, Alex Hay, and Robert Rauschenberg, New York, 17 February 1980.
2. Interview with Barbara Dilley [Lloyd], New York, 15 November 1979.
3. Merce Cunningham, *Changes: Notes on Choreography*, ed. Frances Starr (New York: Something Else Press, 1968), p. [141]; Merce Cunningham, "Two Questions and Five Dances," *Time to Walk in Space, Dance Perspectives* 34 (Summer 1968): 52.
4. Cunningham, "Two Questions and Five Dances," p. 52; film of *Story*, produced by the Finnish Broadcasting Company, 1964.
5. Cunningham, *Changes*, pp. [138–41].
6. Ibid.; Cunningham, "Two Questions and Five Dances," pp. 52–53; interview with Dilley; film of *Story*.
7. Interview with Dilley; interview with Reid.
8. Carolyn Brown, "On Chance," *Ballet Review* 2/2 (1968): 21–22.
9. Interview with Albert Reid, New York, 16 May 1980.

10. Merce Cunningham, "Music and Dance, and Chance Operations: A Forum Discussion," with Robert Stern, Marianne Simon, Anita Page, WFCR, Amherst, Massachusetts, 16 February 1970; interview with William Davis, New York, 3 March 1980; interview with Reid; interview with Dilley; Brown, "On Chance," p. 21.
11. Interview with Dilley; interview with Brown, Hay, Rauschenberg.
12. Interview with Brown, Hay, Rauschenberg.
13. Rauschenberg in Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, p. 81.
14. Carolyn Brown, guest lecture, seminar on Merce Cunningham, New York University, New York, 10 May 1979; Cunningham, "Two Questions and Five Dances," p. 52; interview with Dilley.
15. Interview with Brown, Hay, Rauschenberg.
16. Ichiyanagi has written a description of this composition, which is published in Cunningham, *Changes*, pp. [165–66].
17. Unidentified article, *Przekroj*.
18. Interview with Brown, Hay, Rauschenberg.
19. Brown, guest lecture, Cunningham seminar.
20. I would like to thank David Vaughan, who read and commented on an earlier version of this paper, described the dance to me, and generously provided many research materials.

20. The Moscow Charleston (pp. 161–167)

1. Following Marshall and Jean Stearns, I am defining "jazz dance" here as "*American dancing that is performed to and with the rhythms of jazz* [*music*]—that is, dancing that *swings*." Jazz music and dance are intertwined and evolved out of African-American folk culture. Building on older forms of African-American music, jazz emerged in New Orleans in the late nineteenth century and became more widespread (with centers in New Orleans, Chicago, New York, and Kansas City) by 1917. In the twenties, it became an international phenomenon. Jazz music is characterized by "swing," or rhythmic propulsion, accentuated weak beats, blue tonality, open sonority, and improvisation, among other elements. I am using jazz dance, in the Stearnses's sense, to refer to African-American vernacular dancing that can be traced back much earlier than jazz music as we know it, to the earliest days of African-American slave culture. See Marshall and Jean Stearns, *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (New York: Macmillan, 1968); Marshall W. Stearns, *The Story of Jazz* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958); and Gunther Schuller, *early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).
2. On Soviet jazz, see S. Frederick Starr, *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), and Aleksei N. Batashev, *Sovetskii dzhaz* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1972).
3. However, Eubie Blake later noted that he felt *Chocolate Dandies*, of all his scores, showed most clearly the influence of Victor Herbert, one of his inspirations.
4. Ads in *Izvestiia*, February–March 1926.
5. Wooding, p. 233.

6. Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), p. 91.
7. *Variety*, 24 September 1924, p. 12, quoted in Woll, pp. 91–92.
8. Quoted in Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 391.
9. Interview with Josephine Baker by Tineri Murari, *Guardian*, 26 August 1974; quoted in Bryan Hammond and Patrick O'Connor, *Josephine Baker* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), pp. 11–12.
10. On *The Chocolate Dandies*, see Woll, pp. 91–92; Henry T. Sampson, *Blacks in Blackface: A Source Book on Early Black Musical Shows* (Metuchen, N.J., and London: Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp. 180–82; and Hammond and O'Connor, pp. 11–13, 23–25.
11. See Starr, pp. 31–33, and Batashev, p. 7.
12. See Starr, pp. 43–53.
13. Batashev, pp. 17, 20.
14. Vladimir I. Blum, "The Negro-Operetta," *Zhizn' Iskusstva*, no. 12, (23 March 1926): 14–15.
15. Robert Thompson has traced this pose through African-American and Haitian usage to Kongo origins, and John Szwed sees it in the African-Kongo derived baton-twirling pose of American majorettes. See Robert Thompson, *The Four Moments of the Sun*, exhibition catalogue (Washington: The National Gallery of Art, 1981), pp. 122–24, 172–76. Thompson expands on this gesture in "Kongo Influences on African-American Artistic Culture," in Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), pp. 161–64, and cites John Szwed, "Introduction," Arthur Huff Fauset, *Black Gods of the Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), p. vii.
16. See E. D. Uvarova, "Teatry malykh form," *Russkaia sovetskaia estrada, 1917–1929* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), pp. 327–44.
17. See Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*, trans. Lynn Visson, ed., with an introduction and additional translation, Sally Banes (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990).
18. N. E. Sheremetevskaya, "Tanets na estrade," *Russkaia sovetskaia estrade, 1917–1929*, pp. 249–50.
19. On the ubiquitous Charleston, see, for instance, Alfred H. Barr, "Russian Diary, 1927–28," *October* 7 (Winter 1978): 18. Barr describes a party at Herzen House as "boringly bourgeois—bad jazz, no room for dancing, ostentatious Charlestoning, good food." A graduate student in art history at Harvard, Barr became the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York on his return to the U.S. in 1928 and was active in introducing the American public to the Soviet avant-garde, in his exhibitions, acquisitions, writing, and lectures. In a section called "The Fast Life During the NEP," *Red and Hot*, pp. 57–62, Starr gives a good account of the new popularity of black jazz dances in Soviet culture and the debates about their role in the leisure of Soviet youth.
20. By 1928, Soviet policy had begun to shift and the bourgeois, individualist ethic of jazz was utterly denounced; by 1932 socialist realism was the only

possibility onstage. However, in terms of nightlife, after 1932, jazz dancing was reborn. Because of the new Soviet policy pronouncing African-Americans a distinct nationality with revolutionary potential, jazz was rehabilitated as the expression of the coming proletarian American revolution. A new officially underwritten jazz era, though again short-lived (it lasted until 1936), was ushered in. (On these abrupt oscillations of Soviet policy on jazz music, see Starr, pp. 79–80.)

21. Stepping High (pp. 171–183)

1. Mike Lewington, "Alcoholism in the Movies: An Overview," in Jim Cook and Mike Lewington, eds., *Images of Alcoholism* (London: British Film Institute and the Alcohol Education Centre, 1979), pp. 22–23. Also, Arnold S. Linsky, "Theories of Behavior and the Image of the Alcoholic in Popular Magazines, 1900–1966," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1970–71): 573–81.
2. Andrew Tudor, "On Alcohol and the Mystique of Media Effects," in Cook and Lewington, p. 6.
3. John Durang, *The Memoir of John Durang: American Actor, 1785–1816*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966). Quoted in John H. Towsen, *Clowns* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), p. 108.
4. Towsen, p. 114.
5. Ibid., p. 184.
6. Program, *The Midnight Sons*, Broadway Theater, 1909. Also, clippings files on Vernon Castle, Jack Donahue, and Nick Long, Jr., in Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, Billy Rose Theater Collection. Barbara N. Cohen suggested this connection.
7. Cyril Beaumont, *Complete Book of Ballets* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1938), p. 795.
8. Idem, *Supplement to Complete Book of Ballets* (London: Putnam, 1942), p. 125.
9. On *A Wedding Bouquet*, see David Vaughan, *Frederick Ashton and his Ballets* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977), p. 150. On *The New Yorker*, see Beaumont, *Supplement*, pp. 63–64.
10. Raoul Sobel and David Francis, *Chaplin: Genesis of a Clown* (London: Quartet Books, 1977), provide an excellent discussion of Chaplin's music-hall background and the cultural context of music-hall gags and early silent films.
11. Milbourne Christopher, *The Illustrated History of Magic* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1973), p. 279.
12. Ibid.
13. Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1976), pp. 253–55.
14. Tudor, pp. 11–13.
15. Barbara Deming, *Running Away from Myself: A Dream Portrait of American Drawn from the Films of the 40's* (New York: Grossman, 1969), pp. 3–71.
16. "Liminality" is a term used by anthropologist Victor Turner, which he

borrows from Arnold van Gennep's analysis of *rites de passage*. Turner describes as liminal that period during transition rites when the status of the ritual subject becomes ambiguous—when he or she is on a threshold (real or symbolic), or *limen*. The betwixt-and-between state can be brought about in a number of ways, including intoxication with alcohol or other drugs. For a discussion of liminality, see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), and Turner, "Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols of Communitas," *Dramas Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, paperback edition, 1975), pp. 231–71.

17. It would be interesting in this regard to analyze other dances about the difficulties of dancing, such as "I'm Putting All My Eggs in One Basket," the number about rehearsal mishaps in *Follow the Fleet*; "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off," on roller skates, in *Shall We Dance*; or "Where Did You Get That Girl," in which Astaire tests an injured knee, in *Three Little Words*.

22. The Men at John Allen's Dance House (pp. 184–199)

1. Oliver Dyer, "The Shady Side of Metropolitan Life. No. One. The Wickedest Man in New York," *Packard's Monthly* 1 (July 1868): 39.
2. Charles Townsend Harris, *Memories of Manhattan in the Sixties and Seventies* (The Derrydale Press, 1928), p. 117.
3. John H. Warren, Jr., *Thirty Years' Battle with Crime* (Poughkeepsie, New York: A. J. White, 1875; reprint, New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1970), p. 121.
4. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Two Years Before the Mast* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1946), pp. 1–2.
5. Heber Smith, "Sailors As Propagators of Disease," in *Migrants and Sailors Considered in Their Relation to the Public Health* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1875), p. 19.
6. A. B. Judson, "Report upon Sanitary Condition of the Waterside and Seamen," *Report of Metropolitan Board of Health*, New York, 1869, pp. 142–51, cited by Smith, pp. 17–19.
7. Smith, p. 21.
8. Robert Bennett Forbes, *An Appeal to Merchants and Ship Owners on the Subject of Seamen*. A lecture delivered at the request of the Boston Marine Society, 7 March 1854, p. 7.
9. Ibid., p. 14.
10. Ibid., p. 6.
11. Ibid., p. 15.
12. Stan Hugill, *Shanties and Sailors Songs* (New York: Praeger, 1969) pp. 159–60.
13. Ibid., pp. 190–91.
14. Walter McIntosh Merrill, ed., *Behold Me Once More: The Confessions of James Holley Garrison* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1954), p. 55.
15. Ibid., p. 43.

16. Edward Van Every, *Sins of New York* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972; reprint of 1930 edition), p. 288. Van Every's book is based on and quotes extensively from articles from the *Police Gazette*, but unfortunately he never gives references to individual issues.
17. George G. Foster, *New York by Gaslight: With Here and There a Streak of Sunshine* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850), pp. 75–76.
18. Liminality is a term anthropologist Victor Turner borrows from Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passages* and develops in his own essay, "Passages, Margins, and Poverty," in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1974; Cornell paperbacks, 1975), pp. 231–71. Turner refers to the liminal period of the ritual process as that which takes place after separation, in which the state of the ritual subject "becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all the fixed points of classification; he passes through a symbolic domain that has few or none of the attributes of his past or coming state" (p. 232). Liminality also implies "the state of outsiderhood, referring to the condition of being either permanently and by ascription set outside the structural arrangements of a given social system, or being situationally or temporarily set apart, or voluntarily setting oneself apart from the behavior of status-occupying, role-playing members of that system" (pp. 232–33). In liminal situations, time is often experienced as an "eternal now," nature is stressed over culture; rules, structures, and hierarchies are eliminated; social statuses are leveled and stripped.
19. Eric P. Russell and Mark Lovewell, *Songs of South Street—Street of Ships* (Woodbridge, N.J.: Chanteyman Press, 1977), pp. 16–17.
20. Ibid., pp. 14–15.
21. Frederick Pease Harlow, *The Making of a Sailor; or Life Aboard a Yankee Square-Rigger* (Salem, Mass.: Marine Research Society, 1928), p. 221.
22. Ibid., pp. 223–26.
23. Ibid., p. 235.
24. George Sidney Webster. *The Seamen's Friend* (New York: The American Seamen's Friend Society, 1932), p. 41.
25. Ibid., pp. 73–74.
26. *Seamen's Narratives* (New York: American Tract Society, [1860]), pp. 12–13.
27. Ibid., p. 93.
28. Ibid., pp. 252–55.
29. "The Water-street Prayer Meetings—Allen's and Hadden's," *New York Times*, 17 September 1868, p. 8.
30. Foster, p. 73.
31. Ibid., p. 75.
32. Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (Hartford: American Publishing Co., 1869), p. 279.
33. Herbert Asbury, *The Gangs of New York: An Informal History of the Underworld* (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, 1927), pp. 48, 56.
34. Ibid., pp. 49–63.
35. Van Every, p. 290.

36. Foster, p. 73.
37. Warren, p. 124.
38. James D. McCabe, *Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or, the Sights and Sensations of the Great City* (Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis: National Publishing Company, 1872), p. 598.
39. Dyer, p. 37–38.
40. Browne, p. 278.
41. Ibid., p. 279.

25. Choreographic Methods of the Judson Dance Theater (pp. 211–226)

1. The sources for the information in this paper not otherwise footnoted will be found in the text and footnotes of my book *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983). Page numbers from *Democracy's Body* are in parentheses following the quotations.
2. Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73* (Halifax: The Press of the Novia Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), p. 7.
3. Sally Banes, "Dance," in Stanley Trachtenberg, ed., *The Postmodern Moment: A Handbook of Contemporary Innovation in the Arts* (Westport, Conn., and London: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 81–100.
4. A program of Judson reconstructions, curated by Wendy Perron and Cynthia Hedstrom, was produced at St. Mark's Church Danspace in April 1982, as part of the Bennington College Judson Project. The reconstructions were recorded on videotape by the Lincoln Center Library Dance Research Collection and may be viewed there.

26. Vital Signs (pp. 227–239)

1. Steve Paxton with Liza Béar, "Like the Famous Tree . . . ," *Avalanche* 11 (Summer 1975): 26.
2. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2 (Feb. 1973): 70–88; Gordon Hewes, "The Anthropology of Posture," *Scientific American* 196 (Feb. 1957): 123–33, and "World Distribution of Certain Postural Habits," *American Anthropologist* 57 (April 1955): 231–44.
3. See Noël Carroll and Sally Banes, "Working and Dancing," ch. 2, for a discussion of the kind of movements used in postmodern dance and their theoretical relationship to current practices in the visual arts.
4. See Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), and *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980); second ed. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).
5. Petr Bogatyrev, *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia*, Approaches to Semiotics No. 5 (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1971).
6. I have put quotation marks around the word "language" here as a kind of shorthand because, although I do not believe that dance is a language, it is useful here to assume for the moment that it functions like one. To

expound upon this very complicated and important issue is beyond the scope of this essay.

7. Petr Bogatyrev, "Semiotics in the Folk Theater," in L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik, eds., *Semiotics of Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 33, n. 2.
8. For descriptions of all these dances, see Banes (1980, 1983) and the chronology of Paxton and Béar (1975).
9. See Noël Carroll, "Expression and Post-Modern Dance," in G. Fancher and G. Myers, eds., *Philosophical Essays on Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1981), for a discussion of the expressiveness of "lack of expression."

33. Happily Ever After? (pp. 280–290)

1. By the postmodern choreographers of the 1960s and 1970s, I mean such people as Simone Forti, Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, et al. For an account of the postmodern choreographers work in the sixties and seventies, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980; reprint ed., Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987). In the new introduction to the reprint edition, I discuss the problem of nomenclature for the generations of avant-garde dance, since the concerns of the "moderns" were never really modernist, while those of the "postmoderns" very often were, leaving us without a proper label for the most recent group (whose work I am discussing in part here), who could easily be grouped in terms of themes and styles with "postmodernists" in other art forms.

   On the new narrative, see Marcia Pally, "The Rediscovery of Narrative: Dance in the 1980s," New Wave Festival Catalog (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1984): 11–15, for a brief but suggestive study.

   On the new issues cropping up in eighties dance generally, see Sally Banes, "New Dance New York," Festival International de Nouvelle Danse Catalog (Montreal: Festival International de Nouvelle Danse, 1985); Noël Carroll, "The Return of the Repressed: The Re-emergence of Expression in Contemporary American Dance," *Dance Theatre Journal* 2/1 (1984): 16–19, 27; and Deborah Jowitt, "The Return of Drama: New Developments in American Dance," *Dance Theatre Journal* 2/2 (1984): 28–31.
2. I am not claiming here that these generational repudiations and rebuttals necessarily happen in a premeditated, theoretically elaborated, or even conscious way, though in some cases (e.g., the choreography and writing of Yvonne Rainer) they certainly have.
3. Of course, even a dance putatively shorn of expressive meaning still says something—that is, its very "inexpressivity" is an expression of an idea. See Noël Carroll, "Post-Modern Dance and Expression," in Gordon Fancher and Gerald Myers, ed., *Philosophical Essays in Dance* (Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1981), pp. 95–104.
4. The fate of the fairytale in the ballet, as opposed to modern or postmodern dance, is of course a quite different, and more continuous story; it is not my purpose to explicate it here. However, it should be noted that there is a

conspicuous return of the fairytale to the ballet stage as well. In spring 1987, the Boston Ballet added three Hans Christian Andersen tales to their repertory; American Ballet Theater opened Kenneth MacMillan's new *Sleeping Beauty*, and both Rudolph Nureyev's and Maguy Marin's *Cinderellas* played in New York.

5. Quoted in Max Lüthi, in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (1947; English translation, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 92.
6. See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).
7. Roger Abrahams suggests that "we are in a post-modern or at least post-structuralist period in folkloristics, . . . insofar as we seek to add both historical and ethnographic specificity to the way in which we present our collections." He cites Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); Alessandro Falassi, *Folklore by the Fireside* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); and Elizabeth Mathias and Richard Raspa, *Italian Folktales in America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) as examples of folklore studies that "show that even fairytales must have specific audiences who are able to relate the particulars of narrated experience to the ways in which lives are lived within a specific group, even by specific individuals" (personal communication, May 1987).
8. I am distinguishing here between the larger category of the folktale and the subcategory of folk narrative known in English as the fairytale. Also called the *Márchen*, magic tale, or wondertale, the fairytale has come down to us primarily as a literary form, though based on oral texts, that arose in seventeenth-century Europe; it is a literary genre, even though (as in the case of the Grimm brothers) the writers may claim to be simply collectors of oral texts. See Linda Dégh, "Folk Narrative," in Richard M. Dorson, ed., *Folklore and Folklife* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 53–83; Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folk-Tale: A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications 184, 1961); and William Bascom, "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives," *Journal of American Folklore* 78 (1965): 3–20. Jack Zipes, in *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk & Fairy Tales* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979; reprint ed. New York: Methuen, 1984), makes the distinction between the folktale as "part of a *pre-capitalist people's oral tradition*" and the fairytale as "of *bourgeois coinage* . . . a new literary form" (p. 27). One can also make distinctions between the fairytale's traffic with the supernatural and other forms of the folktale such as the tall tale and the legend.
9. Israel Nestyev, *Sergei Prokofiev: His Musical Life*, trans. Rose Prokofieva, with an introduction by Sergei Eisenstein (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), p. 131.
10. Cyril W. Beaumont, *Supplement to Complete Book of Ballets* (London: C. W. Beaumont, 1942), p. 159.
11. See Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), and Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New

York: Wildman Press, 1983), especially the chapter entitled "Setting Standards for Civilization through Fairy Tales."

12. The exhibition, organized by Curt Belshe, Ana Busto, Sarah Drury, Hilary Kliros, Lise Prown, and Steven Schiff, included work by twenty-nine artists, among them Vito Acconci, Ericka Beckman, Mary Kelly, and Perry Hoberman. A catalog for the exhibition is available, and these essays were later supplemented by additional essays and photographs of works in the exhibition, in a special issue of *New Observations* 45 (1987), available from New Observations Ltd., 142 Greene St., New York, N.Y. 10012. The quote here is from the introduction, by the organizers of the exhibition, to the catalog, p. 4, and was reprinted in *New Observations*, p. 2.
13. Related to this revaluing of prerealist conventions by modernists is David Gordon's comment on a section of his *The Matter (Plus and Minus)* that quotes The Entrance of the Shades from Petipa's ballet *La Bayadère*. Above all, he praises the repetitive quality of all those shades' entries (*Beyond the Mainstream*, "Dance in America," 1979).
14. Pace Harold Rosenberg, who termed the modernist avant-garde's obsession *The Tradition of the New* (New York: Horizon, 1959). Alluding to Rosenberg, I titled a column about the new postmodern interest in theater traditions (from Shakespeare to vaudeville) "The Tradition of the Old" (*Village Voice*, 27 April 1982).
15. Linda Dégh, "Folk Narrative," p. 63.
16. I discuss the phenomenon of postmodern ballet in ch. 34.
17. Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*, revised edition (Middlesex: Kestrel, 1975), p. 354. Quoted in Betsy Hearne, "*Beauty and the Beast*: The Survival of a Story," *New Observations* 45 (1987): 27. Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimms Tales for Young and Old*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), pp. 1–2. Of course, the very notion of children's culture is itself a recent invention; hence fairy-tales, before the nineteenth century, were not considered part of children's domain.
18. Noël Carroll, "The Return of the Repressed," pp. 18, 27.
19. I would like to thank Roger Abrahams, Joan Acocella, Noël Carroll, and John Szwed for their helpful discussions in the writing of this essay.

36. Terpsichore in Sneakers, etc. (pp. 301–310)

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
2. Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).
3. See John Barth, "The Literature of Replenishment, Postmodernist Fiction," *The Atlantic* (January 1980): 65–71; Umberto Eco, "Postmodernism, Irony, the Enjoyable," *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Charles Newman, *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1985); Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July–

August 1984): 53–92; the various essays in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983); Elinor Fuchs, "The Death of Character," *Theater Communications* 5/3 (March 1983). See also Noël Carroll, "Illusions of Postmodernism," *Raritan* 7/2 (Fall 1987): 143–55 for criticisms of some of these positions.

4. See Sally Banes, introduction to the Wesleyan paperback edition, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).
5. Michael Kirby, introduction to the Post-Modern Dance Issue, *The Drama Review* 19 (T-65; March 1975).
6. See, for instance, Clement Greenberg, "The New Sculpture," originally published 1948, revised in 1958, and reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 139–45.
7. In the introduction to the Wesleyan paperback edition of *Terpsichore in Sneakers*.
8. I saw a reconstruction of this dance, directed by Rainer, at Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont, 18 April 1980.
9. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968; reprint edition Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984).
10. See Robert Morris, "Notes on Dance," *The Drama Review* 10/2 (T-30; Winter 1965): 179–86.
11. Yvonne Rainer, "A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of *Trio A*," first published in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 263–73. It also appears in Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: The Press of The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), pp. 63–69.
12. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey," p. 68.
13. In the film *Retracing Steps: American Dance since Postmodernism*, directed by Michael Blackwood, 1988.

37. Dancing [with . . .] the Music (pp. 310–326)

1. Roland John Wiley, *Tchaikovsky's Ballets* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), passim.
2. See David Vaughan, "Cunningham, Cage, and Joyce: 'this longawaited messaigh of roaratorios,' " *Choreography and Dance* 1/4 (1992): 79–89.
3. Roger Copeland, "A Community of Originals: Models of Avant-Garde Collaboration," *Next Wave Festival* catalog (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1983), pp. 10, 12.
4. I will be looking only at American dance here. This is not meant to imply that interesting and important developments have not taken place outside the American situation. I have also concentrated on the New York dance world, where most of the activity is concentrated and where non-New York choreographers showcase their work.
5. Louis Horst and Carroll Russell, *Modern Dance Forms in Relation to the Other Modern Arts* (San Francisco: Impulse Publications, 1961), pp. 81–82.

6. Ibid., p. 140.
7. For descriptions of these and other Judson Dance Theater works, see Sally Banes, *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater 1962–1964* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1983; reprint ed. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).
8. Simone Forti, *Handbook in Motion* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974).
9. See, for instance, the dance reviews in *Artforum*; 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 Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), pp. 263–73; Kenneth King, "Toward a Trans-Literal and Trans-Technical Dance Theater," in Gregory Battcock, ed., *The New Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), pp. 119–26.
10. Rainer, "A Quasi Survey," p. 263.
11. Forti; for descriptions of these and other dances, see Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980; second ed. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).
12. Yvonne Rainer, *Work 1961–73* (Halifax: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design; New York: New York University Press, 1974), pp. 111–12.
13. For descriptions of works from the metaphoric phases of postmodern dance, see Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. For information on Laura Dean, see Noël Carroll, "Introducing Laura Dean's Choreography," *Dance and Dancers* (May 1983).
14. See Richard Colton's account of this aspect of Tharp's choreographic process in John Mueller and Don McDonagh, "Making Musical Dance," *Ballet Review* 13/4 (1986): 23–44.
15. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977); Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).
16. On Brown's collaborative process for *Set and Reset*, and on several other postmodern collaborations of the early eighties, see Roselee Goldberg, "Dance from the Music: Performance in the Age of Communications," *Next Wave Festival* catalog (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 1983), pp. 17–22.
17. Jon Pareles, "Reprise for 'Secret Pastures,' a Populist Score," *New York Times*, 11 January 1985.
18. Sally Banes, " 'Drive, She Said: The Dance of Molissa Fenley," ch. 29.
19. Noël Carroll notes this in regard to baroque dance, in "The Return of the Repressed: The Re-Emergence of Expression in Contemporary American Dance," *Dance Theatre Journal* 2/1.
20. Mueller and McDonagh, pp. 40–41.
21. On Mark Morris, see Joan Acocella, "Morris Dances," *Art in America* (October 1988): 178–82.
22. Michael Blackwood, *Retracing Steps: American Dance Since Postmodernism*, 16mm film (New York: Blackwood Productions, 1988).

38. La Onda Próxima (pp. 327—333)

1. Xavier X. Totti, "Latinos in New York," *The Portable Lower East Side* 1/1 & 2 (1988): 7.
2. Ibid., pp. 1—8.
3. Joan Acocella, "Loisaida Story," 7 *Days*, November 9, 1988, p. 62.

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