Expressions of Form and Gesture in Ausdruckstanz, Tanztheater, and Contemporary Dance

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EXPRESSIONS OF FORM AND GESTURE IN AUSDRUCKSTANZ, TANZTHEATER, AND CONTEMPORARY DANCE

by

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B.A., University of New Hampshire, 1998
M.A., University of Colorado, 2003

A thesis submitted to the
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Expressions Of Form And Gesture In Ausdruckstanz, Tanztheater, And Contemporary Dance
written by Tonja van Helden

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
My dissertation examines the historical trajectory of *Ausdruckstanz* (1908-1936) from its break with Renaissance court ballet up through its transmission into *Tanztheater* and contemporary styles of postmodern dance. The purpose of this study is to examine the different modes of expression as indicated by the character, form, style, and concept of *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* and contemporary dance. Through a close analysis of select case studies, each chapter provides a critical analysis of the stylistic innovations and conceptual problems evidenced by the choreographies from each movement. *Ausdruckstanz* challenged the traditional forms of dance given its necessity to convey subjective experiences and feelings through movements that were incompatible with the rigid structures and restrictive costumes of classical ballet. The problematic of this historical account follows.

Expressionist principles of individuality and subjective emotion produced an inflation and exaggeration of personal identity that proved problematic given its ideological tendencies. This impasse further distanced *Ausdruckstanz* from engaging with the presence of movement that was concealed by historical narratives and stagnant
forms repeated by traditional styles of classical ballet. As a result, an emphasis on mechanical and formal concepts of movement was created to counteract the lack of critical distance and superfluous emotion that was prevalent in the choreographic works of Ausdruckstanz. Oskar Schlemmer’s Bauhaus figures and Pina Bausch’s use of repetition in Tanztheater indicate the attempt to curb this individuality crisis through its formal mechanisms. However, since both of these technical styles relied on the concept of spatialization as derived from theatrical conventions, they subsequently failed to radically disrupt the representational value of dance.

With the establishment of contemporary dance in the late 1950s, a significantly different experience of temporality emerged that rejected the representational value of movement. When the object of dance is dance itself, the tendency towards ideological or content oriented claims is negated. In reframing how time is experienced, the presence of movement is seen through its immediacy and rhythmic configurations. This different experience of time marks a crucial intervention in the historical trajectory of modern dance insofar that form does not predicate itself upon an ideological content.
DEDICATION

In memory of Dr. Thomas Hollweck and Dr. Larry Rosenfield for their mentorship and guidance during the course of my academic quest.

I dedicate my thesis to all the aficionados of dance, who express their emotions, philosophies, ideas, passions, and experiences through their bodies by developing a physical and intellectual friendship within the skin they live.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Ausdruckstanz (1908-1936) established a revolutionary break in dance with its rejection of classical forms in ballet and its strong emphasis on emotional gesture and subjective expression. However, the concentration on individuality through symbolic and transcendent forms led to the subsequent demise of Ausdruckstanz due to its ideological tendencies and failure to impose limits on emotional expression. Nonetheless, Ausdruckstanz initiated a pivotal transformation in modern dance with regard to concept, form and style by revolting against the traditional spectacles of court dance and classical ballet. This point in dance history marked the beginning of a radically different understanding of movement, which challenged the Gesamtkunstwerk notion of theatrical performance with its staged narratives, tightly-fitted costumes, pointe shoes and authoritative ballet masters.

The artistic movement Expressionismus, or German Expressionism was enhanced by the climate of experimentation that was flourishing during the height of the avant-garde. Dance of expression became the physical embodiment of the “spiritual revolution” that was depicted in painting, literature, film and dance during this period. As Russian painter and theorist, Wassily Kandinsky claimed, “the spirit of the future can only be realized in feeling and to this feeling the talent of the artist is the only road” (12). Expressionism was compelled to explore new and imaginative possibilities that accentuated the Ausdruck of individuality and subjectivity. This was reinforced by the development of vibrant forms, dynamic colors, amorphous shapes, bold figures, and jagged lines that were exhibited by works of visual art. Expressionists displayed various
temperaments, which conveyed a spectrum of colors, tones, moods, feelings and psychological conditions as exemplified by Franz Marc’s blue horses, Kirchner’s sharp and angular brushstrokes, and Schoenberg’s atonal music.

The purpose of my dissertation is to examine the different modes of expression indicated by the character, form, style, and concept of Ausdruckstanz, Tanztheater and contemporary dance. Through a close analysis of select case studies, each chapter provides a critical engagement with its corresponding movement. Each case study focuses on stylistic innovations, aberrant forms, breakthrough concepts, and critical turning points that underscore a philosophical problem or complication evidenced by the choreographic work. My research and case studies indicate that Ausdruckstanz is not a uniform movement, which is evidenced by the eclectic nuances, complex contradictions, and eccentric personalities discussed in the following five chapters.

Chapter one titled, “Introduction to the historical and cultural context of Ausdruckstanz” provides an overview concerning the background of expressionist dance. This chapter sets up Ausdruckstanz as a revolutionary movement by examining its historical, cultural and conceptual context through six sections that elaborate on the following notions: rhythmic gymnastics, individuality, classicism versus expressionism, mechanical figures, development of modern dance, and German Expressionism. It is necessary to contextualize the historical background of Ausdruckstanz to fully grasp the leverage of this radical movement in addition to identifying some of its problems that were already present in its nascency.
Chapter two titled, “Ambivalent Tendencies in Ausdruckstanz,” discusses several choreographic modes that are examined against each other to explore the complexity and depth of this movement. The premise of this chapter is based on the argument that Ausdruckstanz is not a uniform movement. In supporting this position, chapter two focuses on two distinct case studies of Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert. These two choreographers/dancers have major dissimilarities in terms of social background, personality, aesthetic taste, and movement style. Wigman relies on symbolic and abstract motifs in her work, whereas Gert explores provocative, grotesque and socially critical gestures. These disparate interpretations of Ausdruckstanz demonstrate its complex character.

Chapter three is titled, “Iterations of Agency and Dissimilarity on the fringe of Ausdruckstanz.” This chapter examines the provocative style of Anita Berber's 'performative trauma.' Then, Jean Weidt and his interpretation of Kultursozialismus and socialist dance form will be discussed, followed by Oskar Schlemmer's concept of abstract figuration in Bauhaus theatre. Finally, Kurt Jooss and his early development of Tanztheater, including concepts of dramatic tension in modern dance movement will be analyzed. Chapter three establishes a pivotal turning point in the transition between the end of Ausdruckstanz and the emergence of Tanztheater. The fate of agency discussed in each account argues that the emphasis on subjective, individualistic and emotional portrayals is insufficient to sustain a movement.

Chapter four is titled, “Gestures of Difference: The critical works of Pina Bausch.” Chapter four discusses the development of Tanztheater, as it grew out of Ausdruckstanz during the 1970s by closely examining the use of emotive gesture,
repetition and *Verfremdungseffekt* or defamiliarization in Blaubart, Kontakthof and Café Müller. Bausch’s work seriously questions the traditional understandings of dance, which destabilizes the historical reference points that previously provided a foundation for meaning and significance of bodily expression and movement in *Ausdruckstanz*.

Chapter five is titled, “An engagement with contemporary forms of movement and temporality.” This chapter examines the tendencies, forms and concepts established by the contemporary, postmodern dance movement that developed not long before the emergence of *Tanztheater* in the 1970s. It analyzes concepts including chance, non-objectivity, spatial arrangement, anti-expressionism, and simultaneity through close analysis of several major works by the following choreographers: Merce Cunningham, Deborah Hay, Lucinda Childs, and Sasha Waltz. This chapter argues that contemporary dance establishes a different temporal experience that is not based on spatialization or its representational value.

My dissertation examines the different modes of expression presented through style, gesture, form, and concept in *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* and contemporary and postmodern dance. What is at stake in this project is the reoccurring reliance on spatialization and historical modes of representation that is prevalent in dance, which obstructs the presence of movement from being experienced without predetermined narrative structures, symbolic meanings, and ideological claims. With the introduction of different temporal relationships, however, the presence of movement is experienced through multiple frames without relying on an external foundation to determine its significance.
“Expressionismus ist Ausdruck des Geistigen
durch Form. Form ist Bewegung-Rhythmus”

- Oswald Herzog

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF AUSDRUCKSTANZ

Chapter one discusses the emergence of Ausdruckstanz (1908-1936) by examining its historical development, concept, style, and character. This chapter is divided into six sections. Each section focuses on a specific topic that is related to the establishment of expressionist dance as a revolutionary and modern artistic movement. The topics include: rhythmic gymnastics, individuality, classicism versus expressionism, mechanical figures, development of modern dance, and German Expressionism. The sections in this chapter are intended to provide an introductory overview of the historical and cultural background of expressionist dance.

The term Ausdruckstanz, or expressionist dance, was coined in 1928 and refers to the German modern dance form called ‘New Dance’ or ‘New German Dance.’ The notion of expression was viewed as a “universal Weltanschauung revealing certain relationships of inner truth” (Ruprecht 1). New German Dance rejected classical European ballet in favor of expressive gestures that engaged with emotional and
subjective experience. The Expressionist movement challenged historical perceptions of art by questioning its traditional practice and concept of representational art. This breakthrough in artistic expression was evidenced by the use of abstract, irrational, and bold styles that were portrayed in painting, literature, sculpture, film, and architecture.

Ausdruckstanz was a significant force in the historical avant-garde movement, which included Fauves, Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Neue Sachlichkeiten. The Expressionist movement largely reacted against Impressionism and Realism with its tendencies to idealize historical narratives and events in art. Different concepts of form in the arts emerged as a result of this dynamic climate of artistic, social, political, and cultural transformation. Dance physically portrayed the experience of modernity with unconventional styles of movement and subjective expression, which reflected the artistic innovations of the avant-garde. “Expressionism in dance meant first and foremost movement that it is expressive in and of itself, while being situated on a wider spectrum of narrative, dramatic, cultural and ideological possibilities” (Ruprecht 1). Given the ephemeral character of movement, dance was able to portray the immediate presence of expression without becoming fixed, which is significantly different than classical art forms such as painting, architecture and sculpture that endure over time. Ausdruckstanz became a fascinating art form during the avant-garde because of its ability to present expressive gestures directly in the moment. This relationship between immediacy and presence of expression also coincided with the interest to explore subjectivity.

Personal identity was displayed through emotional gesture and expressive movements in dance, which allowed modern concepts and ideas to be presented through a
live medium. As dance critic Schur contended in 1910, “Der Tanz ist ein Kapitel der modernen Kultur” (Schur 3). Unlike painting, sculpture, literature, and architecture, the faculty of dance encountered difficulty in establishing itself as a commensurate discipline in the hierarchy of the fine arts. However, with its focus on emotional presence, fleeting moments, and subjective impressions, Ausdruckstanz created a modern trend of movement, which enabled it to become recognized as a significant form of artistic expression.

The Expressionist movement also initiated a ‘naturalist’ wave that liberated the individual from alienating and socially exploitive conditions by encouraging a return to natural elements. “Der Expressionismus war vor Allem die Revolution für das Elementare” (Hatvani 68). To counteract the debilitating effects of functioning like a robot or machine in an industrialized age, Expressionist art emphasized the dynamic forms that were located in the elemental forces of nature. Authentic existence was achieved by aligning the body with primal forces to overcome the social pressures that obstructed the individual’s innate source of creativity. In order to heal the psychological wounds that resulted from an increasingly alienated existence, the social restrictions on physical expression and movement had to be removed. This process entailed a refusal of theatrical and social conventions that historically undermined the importance of subjective and emotional expression.

Hans Beckman describes how expressionist dancers performed “in halls with bare stages, all alone and almost without music” (Howe 2). Expressionism presented a radical shift in thinking which argued that, “ein neues Weltbild mußte geschaffen werden” (Edschmied 57). This modern paradigm was necessary to assure, “eine neue Form und
eingen neuen Menschen zu fordern” (Best 6). Expressionist works of art amplified this revolutionary spirit through its display of shocking vivid landscapes and dynamic colors. In *Der Radius des Tanzwerkes*, Fritz Böhme wrote that *Ausdruckstanz* was the, “expression of an era, the attempt through movement and gesture to realize along with sculpture, music, architecture and literature, the lines of this epoch” (28). These expressionist styles and naturalist credos in art portrayed the modern “*Ausdruck des inneren Menschen*” (6).

![Fig. 1: Zigaretten – Sammel Bilder der dreiziger Jahre zum Thema “Der Künstlerische Tanz” (Doris Humphrey, Rudolf von Laban, Niddy Impekoven)](image)

*Ausdruckstanz* or “New Dance” or “New German Dance” presented new angles, poses, and arrangements of movement patterns that emphasized individuality, self-expression, mystery, and nature. It liberated the body from point shoes and tight corsets by establishing a free and open style that rejected the imitation of ballet narratives, staged productions, and rigid compositions. *Ausdruckstanz* revealed a new dimension of physical expression that included gestures, props, masks, and mythical ideas to present an “other-worldly,” eccentric, and unique style of movement.

The main focus of expressionist dance was the exploration and presentation of the different facets and emotional nuances of subjectivity. Subjectivity is understood as the
individualized account of the self or *das Ich*. The dancers’ subjective attitude was conveyed through costumes, props, and theatrical décor to create a fleeting, yet intense emotional engagement with the audience. Their dances often displayed a range of emotion through a series of poses that portrayed various themes such as death, suffering, loss, joy, and melancholy. Each emotional gesture and movement sequence was improvised by emphasizing a natural, flowing quality of movement. Howe maintains, “the primary structure of *Ausdrucktanz* became a new episodic form in which successive units were related by overall theme rather than by cause and effect or temporal progression” (Howe 5). *Ausdrucktanz* frequently portrayed personal interpretations or vignettes related to nostalgia, longing, death, and rebirth. In doing so, it resisted the artificial theatrical structure of antiquated court ballets by expressing an “individual statement in the form of free artistic composition” (Howe 1). Expressionist dance rejected the history, style, and structure of classical dance that originated from Renaissance court dances. Dance critic Fritz Böhme argues,

> One despised the ballet…because it showed tightly laced up bodies, which left little freedom for the body, cramped up muscles etc. This new dance was a negation of the ballet but not yet a new kind of form which promised further growth (284).

Leading choreographers and dancers of *Ausdrucktanz*, or ‘New German Dance’ included the following figures: Mary Wigman, Gret Palucca, Harold Kreuzberg, Dore Hoyer, Valeska Gert, Kurt Joss, Yvonne Goergi, Niddy Impekoven, and Grete Wiesenthal. These dancers were fascinated by the body’s intelligence to convey their “innermost thoughts and realities” (Howe 95) by emphasizing the “selfhood (*das Ich*) of the individual” (Howe 1). *Ausdrucktanz* was especially appealing for young female dancers who felt alienated by the patriarchal dominance of ballet and desired an
alternative form of movement that supported the emancipation of the “new woman.”

Dance scholar Nobert Servos argues, “The origins of modern dance in Germany in the early years of the 20th century may be located in the desire of women to redefine female identity according to emancipating ideals” (308). With its ‘free form’ approach to movement, Ausdruckstanz modified the traditional dance vocabulary, which made it accessible to women who wanted to express with their inner experiences.

Mary Wigman’s choreographic style exemplified the primary characteristics of expressionist dance, which focused on: individuality, emotion, mysticism, and intensity of presentation (Howe 6). Wigman’s Ausdruckstanz revealed, “a consonance of our innermost feelings, and our sensitivity to form, dictated by our own time” (Howe 2). Expressionist dance was centered on the revelation of the individual through the inner exploration of subjective feelings, emotions, and affect. The outward manifestation of internal impressions and psychological states was given a new form through these abstract expressions, subjective feelings, and mythical gestures.

**Part I. Rhythmic Gymnastics and Freier Tanz**

The development of modern dance both in the United States and Europe was preceded by rhythmic gymnastic schools,\(^1\) which offered an alternative dance form outside the rubric of classical ballet. These schools emphasized the study of rhythm and movement, which attracted young, creative dancers who were disinterested in studying classical ballet. Expressionist choreographers, Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss both

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\(^1\) Isa Partsch-Bergsohn discusses how Laban studied with Monsieur Morel, a student of François Delsarte. Morel inspired Laban’s pursuit in human expressivity through the trinity of “time, space and motion” which he later modified as “Tanz, Ton, Wort.” (*Modern Dance in Germany and the United States*, p.13.)
trained with Dalcroze and Laban, and later taught these movement principles in their own private schools. Wigman and Jooss gradually developed personalized dance methods and signature styles. There were three major gymnastic schools, which were led by Francois Delsarte (from France), Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (from Switzerland), and Rudolf Laban (from Hungary). The head of the schools were all male, yet the majority of gymnastic students were female. Most of the students went on to pursue their own directions in modern dance after completing their training in rhythmic gymnastics.

Francois Delsarte (1811-71) was the first educator to develop a system for coding bodily expression and a concept for harmonic gymnastics. Emile Dalcroze (1869-1950) taught “rhythmic gymnastics” as part of his dance education program at the Dalcroze School in Hellerau, which was established in 1914. His school maintained an atmosphere that “imbued the study of bodily movement with an imperturbable Gallic-Grecian rationalism” (Servos 308). Dalcroze emphasized the tactical, metrical, and rational element of rhythm to sustain a highly structured relationship between the body and music. His method was based on Eurhythmics, which is the “use of movement to understand kinetically the structure and rhythms of music” (Howe 99). Eurhythmics was a systematic approach to movement that offered an alternative form to ballet, but also included precise techniques.

After studying rhythmic gymnastics with Dalcroze between 1910-1912, Wigman created her own form of movement and expression. She was dissatisfied with the study of rhythmic gymnastics and was compelled to find a different mode of expression that directly conveyed her emotional experience. During her rhythmic studies in Hellerau,

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Wigman became affiliated with the painter Emil Nolde, who frequently incorporated dance motifs in his work. Nolde noticed that Wigman had a similar movement style to Rudolf Laban, who would later prove to be a significant influence on her professional development. The collaboration between Wigman and Laban established the early stages of the modern dance movement in Germany.

Rudolf Laban stated, “we dancers are the pioneers of a new dawn in art” (Partsch-Bergsohn 27). Laban rejected the Dalcrozian structural approach of rhythmic gymnastics in favor of improvisational movement that was characteristic of a non-narrative based ‘free dance.’ Students who had no prior dance training were drawn to Laban’s movement expression because its open form allowed them to experiment with different emotional expressions without imitating a formal technique. ‘Free dance’ allowed young people to express themselves in a “direct and unconventional manner” (Partsch-Bergsohn 26). Originally from Hungary (currently Bratislava), Laban grew up during the Hapsburg Empire as the son of a military governor of Bosnia in the Austro-Hungarian army. His visits with his father (in a province near the Turkish border) proved to be pivotal because he became deeply fascinated by the ritualistic dances of the whirling dervishes. His interest in dance, expression, and movement far exceeded any interest to join the military. After he fulfilled his obligatory duty, Laban left his father and moved to Paris in 1900 to pursue his artistic interests. Given the vibrant art scene in Munich with the development of *Der Blaue Reiter*, Laban eventually left Paris to further advance his modern art form.

---

3 Mary Wigman: *When The Fire Dances Between the Two Poles*, VHS documentary.
In Munich, Laban taught “Freier Tanz” classes and began to seriously reform conventional practices of choreography. In his book Die Welt des Tänzers (1920) he writes,

_Der Körpertanz ist die Mitteilung einer Teilspannung in der Körperbewegung. Eine Spannungsfolge wird in Gesten ausgedrückt und sie ist ebenso mit allem Gefühl, allem Denken und dem ganzen Sein verknüpft wie irgend eine Wortdichtung oder eine musikalische Komposition (58)._

Laban constructed a movement style referred to as “Tanz, Ton, Wort,” which enabled the individual “to speak with his/her own voice, to contribute to a greater whole, and that allowed group access to the larger concerns of the human condition” (Bradley 11). Laban sought to liberate dance from its institutionalized heritage by encouraging modern, bohemian types of expression to manifest through movement. Later in his career, he devised a system of dance notation called _Labanotation_, which contradicted his previous anti-formalist stance. Laban combined esoteric principles with his formal ideas in an attempt to develop a progressive and modern dance philosophy.  

While Laban taught his “free dance” classes, Mary Wigman completed her training at the Dalcroze Eurhythmics School in Dresden-Hellerau. After her training, Wigman returned home to improvise her dances in the attic without musical accompaniment. Expressionist painter, Emil Nolde, was intrigued by Wigman’s expressive style of movement and would often sketch and paint her while she improvised. While Wigman posed for Nolde’s painting of “Candle Dancers” in 1912, he observed the similarity between Wigman’s and Laban’s movement style.  

Laban and Wigman met

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4 Laban based his concept of space on crystalline forms and Platonic solids to produce an orientation of spacial harmony.

5 Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, _Modern Dance in Germany and the United States_, p.17
shortly thereafter and collaborated on experimental dance sketches in Monte Verita in 1913.

During summer gatherings at the expressive arts community called School of all the Arts of Life, an “anarchist artist colony” in the mountain resort town of Monte Verita in Ascona, Laban and his cohorts developed the concept of movement choirs (Partsch-Bergsohn 14). These choirs were based on “improvisational impulses, musical theory, and visual design structures” whose form was “spontaneous, participatory and performative” (Bradley 11). This experimental atmosphere provided Laban and Wigman the artistic liberty to pursue unconventional movement styles, which ultimately established the foundation for Ausdruckstanz. The conceptual basis of expressionist dance was constituted by the following elements: 1) rhythm 2) expression 3) form and 4) gesture.

The rhythmic-gymnastic school’s philosophy was closely related to the aesthetic model of Körperschönheit with its support of physical health and beauty. Toepfer argues, “Body culture appears as a mode of aesthetic performance that collapses conventional distinctions between mind and body, subject and object, self and world” (7). According
to this concept of body culture, the body should perform like an instrument and remain in
tune with its natural rhythm so the self could move in harmony with the cosmos.

Totality, harmonic rhythm, and physical beauty were the primary elements that defined
the ideal standard of Schönheit, which fit the ideology of Körperkultur. The
industrialized, mechanized, and rapid pace of modern life forced the body to repress its
natural sense of rhythm, which created the desire to find spiritual harmony in the body’s
alignment with nature. Rhythmic gymnastics was therefore conceived as a means to
restore this loss of connection between the body, mind, and nature. Once the body was
calibrated to move in tune with its nature, the source of creative expression flowed
through the body in cosmic harmony.

Aller Rhythmus ist gebunden an den Strom des Lebens, und da alles, was
dem Leben entquillt, Form hat, so schliessen wir, daß auch die Totalität des
Lebens eine Form hat; wir nennen sie Kosmos und sein Gesetz ist der
Rhythmus (Bode 147).

Naktkultur and Körperkultur provided a refuge and retreat from the alienating
conditions of living in an industrialized society that rewarded a fast-paced lifestyle.
These alternative social communities encouraged an open relationship with the body
through uninhibited emotional and physical expression. Clubs, schools, and
organizations that advocated social unity and physical health led to what is still known
today as Freikörperkultur. The 1920s epitomized the development of rhythmic
gymnastics, which emphasized the relationship between body movement and natural
alignment with the cosmos. This modern understanding of Körperlichkeit included the
study of gymnastics, dance, cult dances, which emphasized the unity of body and spirit
towards “ein neues irrationales neues Etwas” or a new and irrational something (Graeser
This perception of the body was intended to free the body from the harsh conditions of a mechanized and industrialized society and to provide relief from the rigid practices of classical ballet. As Toepfer states,

> The body emerged as the dominant sign of a personality. A body’s identity was not the ideologically determined product of this or that school or theoretical construction, rather a body, appeared as an organic form through which competing, even contradictory theories or reflections about it intersected to disclose a unique identity: difference (1).

The latent primal energy and psychological complexities that were stored in the body became activated through an introspective engagement that refused external forces to be imposed upon the ‘natural’ inner body. The modern notion of ‘moving from the inside out’ fit the social reform aspects of Ausdruckstanz given its emphasis on individuality and subjective expression. Servos contends, “The chief value for dance lay in its power to differentiate bodies rather than unify them, to reveal highly distinct personalities, to promote individual rather than social identity” (308). Expressionist dance encouraged the individual to find their personal style by experimenting with unconventional forms of movement. This allowed the modern body to overcome the alienating effects of living in an industrialized society that restricted emotional expression.

**Part II. The Focus on the Individual**

This notion of the individual stems from the philosophical concept on the principle of individuation discussed by Arthur Schopenhauer and subsequently criticized by Friedrich Nietzsche. Schopenhauer advocated pessimism and denial of life in the conscious erasure of pain or pleasure whereas Nietzsche’s life-affirming position embraced the “yes” of life. Both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche argued for the “evaluation of culture,” (Simmel 13) which the Expressionists interpreted as a further reason to reject
outdated conventions. Laban and Wigman incorporated the philosophical notions of will and individual expression as a means to bolster their own ideological concept of a new *Lebenskunst*. Expressionists established their individuality by producing a signature style that represented their identity like an auteur with a specific taste or accent that differentiated them from the masses. However, this self-centered approach in constructing an externalized identity seems contradictory given their previous aim to liberate the ‘natural’ self from alienating social conditions.

The primary choreographic idea that Laban and Wigman developed was the notion of the choric principle, which harmonized the relationship between the individual and the group formation. They established a Dionysian concept of expression that transcended law, order, and structure through ecstatic and ritualistic acts that encouraged the dissolution of the self. This disintegration of the ‘old conditioned self’ theoretically produced an ‘individuated self,’ that was connected to the higher cosmic spheres of consciousness and nature. Düchting writes, “*Das Bewusstsein vom kultischen, dionysischen Ursprung des Tanzes bestärkte diese neue Faszination ausdruckstarker körperlicher Bewegungen*” (95). The Dionysian component of *Ausdruckstanz* was defined by its emphasis on ecstasy, mysticism, ritual, and nature.

It is important to recognize that each expressionist dancer or choreographer created their own distinct style in rejection of classical ballet vocabulary. Not all of the expressionist dancers were necessarily interested in creating an individualized “cult” identity by practicing an esoteric Dionysian ritual. The form and style of choreography by Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert, for example, demonstrated major aesthetic and
choreographic differences. Despite their disparate artistic visions, both dancers were considered the primary female figures of Ausdruckstanz. Expressionist dance consisted of two major groups. The Laban/Wigman group gravitated towards the mythical, individualistic, emotional, and esoteric ideas by using masks, gongs and choric principles in their choreography. The Valeska Gert/anita Berber group experimented with early ‘performance art’ by including montage forms and elements of social criticism in their choreographic works. The latter group is discussed in Chapters two and three.

While it is true that Ausdruckstanz challenged conventions of classical ballet, there was a significant amount of variation between the different modes of expression that emerged during this break. Expressionist dance was therefore not a uniform movement. Expressionism was not concerned with conforming to a single concept or style as it engaged fleeting individual expressions, which were presented through abstract imagery and natural flowing movements. Expressionist dance was moreover concerned with identity and engaging the Gegenwart, or present time, through individualized displays of emotional intensity and episodes of shock, which distinguished it from traditional dance styles. Servos maintains,

German modern dance was never a unifying force within European dance culture because its lack of a central point of emanation implied that the chief value for modern dance lay in its power to amplify difference and free the body from pervasive, constraining pressures for unity of identity and a common destiny (309).

The refusal of traditional ballet vocabulary was manifested through the rejection of tight costumes, orchestrated performances, and rigorous physical challenges. Ausdruckstanz

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6 A comprehensive analysis of the stylistic and conceptual differences of Ausdruckstanz between choreographers Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert is discussed in Chapter two.
concentrated on the emotional subjectivity of the dancer to establish different forms of movement that were in tune with natural forces. Before discussing Ausdruckstanz further in terms of its style and form, it is necessary to establish the historical background of classical ballet to understand why expressionists challenged its conceptual and aesthetic limitations.

Fig. 3: Wigman’s Ausdruckstanz
Part III: Classicism versus Expressionism

Ausdruckstanz interrupted the tendency to repeat artistic forms and patterns that have been imitated for centuries as a historical representation of classical narrative. Modern dance produced this radical break from the ceaseless repetition of outdated forms and styles that stemmed from the Renaissance. Renaissance court dances and Gesellschaftstänze established aesthetic principles that were later institutionalized by ballet academies throughout Europe and Russia. Classical ballet was recognized as an official dance form for almost three centuries. Institutions such as Academie Royale de Danse in Paris (established in 1661) preserved the historical styles and national icons that epitomize classicism. Between the seventh and nineteenth century, European classicism
and Romanticism developed a highly ornate and sophisticated style that was of course established in literature, opera, architecture, painting and sculpture.

Aristocratic, court dance, and classical ballet were significantly influenced by the movements of the Renaissance, Classicism and Romanticism. In its initial design, classical ballet was never intended to convey personal emotion or a subjective modern experience. Each dancer or object on stage was representative of an element or theme contained within the narrative structure of the ballet. There was no reason or interest to have a dancer convey their personal emotional experience and explore their individualistic perceptions on stage, but rather the intent was to follow a traditional narrative form that had a linear story.

This avoidance of personal subjectivity in dance was one of the decisive reasons why expressionists challenged historical depictions of art by presenting their modern arrangements and unconventional styles. Wigman discusses how ballet was, “not of her time but reminiscent of the Rococo age.” Ballet provided no means or access to a movement vocabulary that would allow her to convey her discontent of living in an age of “machinery and cacophonous music” (Howe 112). The following section examines the conservative, patriarchal history of ballet to establish the antagonistic relationship between traditional styles and the rising modern tendencies that encourage emotional subjectivity and abstract expression.

The structure, spectacle, choreography, music, lighting, and costumes of sixteenth century Renaissance court dances of Italy and France were designed to entertain nobility and enhance feudalistic power. Massive wooden stages in baroque style opera houses
were constructed to impress the aristocracy and entertain privileged spectators with illustrious, awe-inspiring performances. Court dance spectacles were both artistically and politically designed to establish prominence among its dueling principalities. Catherine de Medici served a major role in the “peak perfection” of ballet after she married King Henry II and moved to France. De Medici was instrumental in establishing the first ballet produced in Paris in 1581 titled *Ballet Comique de la Reine*. This ballet served as wedding entertainment to honor the marriage between Duc de Joyeuse and Marguerite Lorraine. The ballet included instrumental music, singing, theater and dance, which lasted all night. Schmidt writes,

> Zu dieser Zeit holten sich die Choreographen ihre Stoffe noch immer aus der griechischen Mythologie. Ausschließlich Götter und Heroen, Nymphen, und Faune waren die handelnden Personen (8).

The relationship between pantomime and court dance is evidenced by its theatrical presence and reliance on music, narrative, and emotional gesture presented on stage. Characters from Greek myths and ancient tragedies were often imitated in pantomime sketches with the accompaniment of instrumental flute music and verbal recitation. Lada-Richards contends, “Ancient pantomime was an expression-filled dance form, predicated on the mute delineation of character and passion” (13). Gestures, expressions, and attitudes were exhibited by the charismatic and animated characters, which were all based on pantomime sketches. Within the context of classical ballet, however, they became formalized and exhibited restrained features of control and discipline.
However, not all Renaissance court performances were formal, seated events. Many of the early court dances of the fifteenth century were masquerades “performed in open spaces and included lavish tournaments and processions with decorated wagons” (Kassing 83). The term ballet derives from the Italian ballare, which means to dance. Balletto is a short composed, or arranged work based on the concept of ballo, which means dance as part of a social gathering. In contrast to highly stylized and composed court dances, parade spectacles of the Florentine Renaissance were intrinsically playful, interactive and satirical. Pantomime elements derived from ancient Greek theatre were clearly imitated.

Florentine Renaissance spectacles were performed in carnival style at the common marketplace before performances became increasingly staged at opera houses in the eighteenth century. Dodd writes, “Elaborately decorated tableaux would be drawn on in gilded carriages like floats in a carnival today” (8). Chariots would bustle through the streets performing witty acts of pantomime, dance, song, mime, theater and acrobatics. Such charismatic figures and exaggerated characters displayed an abundance of flamboyant and expressive gestures. This jovial sense of celebration conveyed in chariot images from Florentine Renaissance indicated a social contrast between the common market carnival and the bourgeois opera house venues. Schmidt writes,

Court dances and *Gesellschaftstänze* received professional status with the establishment of Louis XIV’s *Académie Royale de Danse* (1661) and *Académie Royale de Musique* (currently *Opéra de Paris*), which opened eleven years after the dance academy. The academy was instrumental in refining and instituting classical ballet as the official form of European dance. Court dances in the seventeenth century became increasingly restricted by the imposition of rigid decorum and etiquette. During the reign of Louis XIV (*le Roi Soleil*), a specialized style of dancing was developed for ballet, which enhanced the use of the proscenium stage. The body was positioned in an outward direction, “as a picture framed by the proscenium, the dance featured intricate step movements, flowing arm gestures, and travel that delineated elegant patterns over the floor of the stage” (Cohen 5).

![Jean Le Pautre, Ballet in Versailles, 1674](image)

Fig. 5: Jean Le Pautre, Ballet in Versailles, 1674
In the eighteenth century, dance spectacles moved from the court to theatre halls or ballrooms. After the French Revolution in 1789, classical ballet began to shift from allegorizing Greek myths to reflect interpersonal relationships by incorporating romantic and pastoral themes. Movement was elevated with point shoes and fairytale narratives, which emphasized the supernatural, fantasy and sublime forces. By the nineteenth century in France, Italy and Russia, ballet reached a highly sophisticated level that enhanced European standards of composition, beauty, and harmony. This formalization in ballet was first introduced in 1588 with the publication of Thoinet Arbeau’s *Orchésographie*, which included a simple “notation system for dances of the period” (Kassing 105). His notation system related movement to musical measures and included illustrations of the dancers. Arbeau discussed principles such as the turn out of the legs and feet, along with the equal distribution of weight throughout the body. These ideas
constituted the foundation for Pierre Beauchamp’s five basic foot positions, which he established in 1700 and still remain the basic positions of ballet that are currently taught.

As the traditional court dance style of Europe, ballet was recognized for its masterful discipline, calculated balance, and sophisticated compositions. The Gesamtkunstwerk of a traditional and romantic ballet spectacle, such as Schwanensee, Romeo and Juliet or Giselle glorified every distinct accent and detail of the virtuous dancer’s advanced footwork, orchestral music, elaborate set design, and dramatic costumes.

Ballet als Kunstgattung der Bühne bezeichnen, die sich des Bühntanzenes im gleichen Sinne bedient, wie dies im Schauspiel mit dem gesprochenen Wort und in der Oper mit dem gesungenen Wort geschieht… Das Ballet ist die Frucht verschiedener Elemente des dramatischen Kunstschaffens (Liechtenhahn 29).
Court dance and classical ballet were based on historical narratives and artistic representations. Court dances staged a fictional harmony between the state and citizenry through a performance of allegorical figures that concealed social inequalities and political problems beneath the picturesque historical narrative. Institutions like opera, theater, and concert halls were instruments of the state that promoted their political views and propaganda through narrative, set design, orchestra, seating arrangement, and architecture. Schur writes, “Das Ballet fristet ein kümmerliches Scheindasein auf den Hoftheatern” (4). Court dances were political events that bolstered state authority by portraying its imperial elegance through its oppressive choreography. These massive entertainment spectacles included poetry, song dance, music, and elegant costumes. The harmonious structure of court dances was intended to reflect the order of the state, whereby each organ played a part in a unified performance. Court dance and classical ballet were composed of strict foot patterns that were accented by light and ethereal arm movements. Schmidt writes,

Foot, arm, head, and turn positions in ballet choreography were mechanically precise, linear, and symmetrical. Each phrase in ballet demarcated a clear beginning, middle and end, whereby the movement opened and closed following a linear and sequential pattern. The focus on mechanical precision and formalism in dance was also the subject of Kleist’s Über das Marionettentheater, which is discussed in the following section.

Part IV. The Staging of the Mechanical Figure

This mechanical basis of language, movement and performance is referenced by Heinrich von Kleist’s Über das Marionettentheater. Ruprecht states, “Über das Marionettentheater at once talks of performances and is a performance itself, une scène écrite, as Hélène Cixous has termed it” (23). Kleist describes the mechanism of how a dancing marionette is dangled by strings connected to the machinist or puppeteer’s hands. The puppeteer consciously stands over his center of gravity to activate the marionette’s dance, which dangles in air gracefully. The marionette’s movements are in turn manipulated to create perfect angles, lines and linear sequences of movement. Marionettes are presented as “antigrav,” and appear to dance weightlessly. “Der Weg der Seele des Tänzers” is possible as long as the puppeteer stands in alignment with his Schwerpunkt or center of gravity. The machinist engages his center point of gravity to

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7 Kleists’ text published in the Berliner Abendblätter in 1810.
line his body up vertically with the doll. This alignment allows the machinist to pull the puppet strings and make the marionette appear weightless, defying all of laws of gravity.

This image of a moving, weightless, machinelike doll is similar to the image of the prima ballerina in classical ballet. Like a marionette, the ballerina is controlled by their ballet master and strung along while each movement is choreographed and scripted like a dictation. Classical ballet refuses personal agency, subjective expression, or experimental form for the sake of preserving its historical narrative and aesthetic control. The objectification of the ballerina as puppet or doll was repeated throughout classical and romantic narratives to enhance patriarchal structures and its hierarchical power. Dempster claims, “it follows within the logic of patriarchal social order that its power [the feminine] and the power of the body must be controlled, restrained and denied” (38).

Expressionists radically challenged these institutionalized ideas by rejecting the image of a doll figure in order to liberate movement from the sterile and antiquated conventions of theatre. Kleist’s mechanical and performative language similarly rejects the representational significance of classical dance. Ruprecht contends, “As Kleist clears movement of its representational value by representing it in a purely formalized mode, and thus opens it up to new meaning, his performance language of the fall becomes thick with signification” (52). While Ausdruckstanz was not interested in the mechanization of movement, it aimed to liberate movement of its “representational value” by establishing meaning through a subjective mode of expression. Kleist employs a mechanical language to convey the effortless grace of the marionette by removing its representational value to instead focus on the presentation of form. Kleist writes,
The mechanized movements of the marionette convey values of precision and technical intricacies. The nineteenth century ballet aesthetic echoed this tendency through its symmetrical lines, formalization and totalizing movements. “Ruhe, Leichtigkeit und Anmut” emanated from the dancing doll, whose base of mechanized and calculated movements rendered an alluring, ethereal appearance. Kleist’s marionette performs with grace and precision, which a dancer or actor must spend countless hours repeating gestures over and over to portray the effortless grace of the doll figure.

This hollow depiction of a dancing doll or puppet on a string is further demonstrated by Olympia, the doll figure in E.T.A Hoffmann’s Der Sandman. Scullion contends, “Hoffmann used body movement as an aesthetic metaphor for artistic expression, he favoured grotesque variants of this motif” (6). In his text on Hoffmann, Scullion argues how kinaesthetic and spatial motifs are used to convey romantic irony. Unlike Kleist, Hoffmann emphasizes the grotesque, unheimlich character of Olympia’s automaton figure. Both texts engage metaphors of dance by referencing a doll, which indicates how its language relies on a mechanical means to narrate and describe movement. The figure appears to have a soul, which is controlled by the machinist or craftsman, who manipulates the dancing object. Both Hoffmann and Kleist allude to the notion of craftsmanship and performance by adopting the hollow doll figure.
marionette and Hoffmann’s Olympia both rely on the agency of either the machinist, or Spalanzani, to “come to life” in the text.

In Der Sandman and Über das Marionettentheater, the doll or marionette is presented as an object that displays a formalization of movement. Kleist’s language focuses on the mechanics of movement, whereas Hoffmann conveys a grotesque and uncanny quality through his depiction. The aesthetic treatment of each figure explores the relationship between movement, language, performance, and text. It further implies the limitations of the human body that are surpassed by the mechanical manipulation of objects. The doll figure becomes the means for which the language operates in a kinaesthetic, technical mode by presenting itself through formalized, mechanical descriptions. “Ihr Schritt ist sonderbar abgemessen, jede Bewegung scheint durch den Gang eines augezogenen Räderwerks bedingt. Ihr Spiel, ihr Singen hat den unangenehm richtigen geistlosen Takt der singenden Maschine und so ist Ihr Tanz” (Hoffmann 33).

The implications of the mechanical figure convey the human desire to test its physical limitations by creating inanimate objects that perform acts of supernatural
ability. The artifice provides a means for transcending finite limitations that are otherwise determined by physical laws of gravity. The mechanical doll figures are vehicles for Nathaniel from Der Sandman and Herr C from Über das Marionettentheater to establish their authority. In classical ballet, the ballerina is ancillary to the ballet master’s choreographic script. The ballerina is expected to perform each phrase, step, and sequence with aesthetic perfection. The problem with the mechanical figure is that the vehicle that determines its movement is often unquestioned and obediently followed. This mechanical relationship between the dancer and the stage (or doll figure and the text) is precisely why Expressionists argued for agency, individuality, and personal subjectivity in modern forms of dance.

Oskar Schlemmer used the dancing mechanical figure in his Triadic Ballet and stage design for the Bauhaus theater. His work is closely examined in relation to concepts of abstract figuration in Chapter three. Schlemmer produced his dance sketches using distorted figures in “padded and sculptured” costumes to show different spatial relationships through different angles and perspectives (Wensinger 7). Unlike the Expressionists, however, his choreographic pieces were not intended to reflect nature, subjectivity, emotion, or individuality. Schlemmer was interested in artifice and constructing figures in simulated environments to convey an objective determination of lines, rhythm, geometry, and spatial dimensions. His sculptured figures are non-representational or reliant on an external narrative to determine its identity, nor do they indicate any particular subjectivity or emotional state. Gropius writes,
The endeavor to free man from his physical bondage and to heighten his freedom of movement beyond his native potential resulted in substituting for the organism the mechanical human figure (Kunstfigur): the automaton and the marionette. E.T.A Hoffmann extolled the first of these, Heinrich von Kleist the second (translation by Wensinger 28).

The common link between the automaton and the marionette is the mechanism that produces the Kunstfigur to establish different reference points, which undermine representation through the formal presentation of language, text, image and movement.

In “Aesthetic Formalization in Kleist: Über das Marionettentheater,” Paul de Man writes,

The stress on staging, on the mimesis of the diegetic narratives—the text shows people engaged in the act of telling—emphasizes the self-consciousness of the representational mode within the hermeneutic context of a persuasion and problematizes the relationship between a rhetoric and a hermeneutics of persuasion. When a persuasion has to become a scene of persuasion one is no longer in the same way persuaded of its persuasiveness (269).

Self-consciousness is the mode in which the mimetic act is interrupted and no longer sustains itself as a pure reflection. Instead the break in repetition is indicated, which calls attention directly to the presentation of the act itself.

The trajectory of nineteenth century dance aesthetics, with its emphasis on the formalization of movement and performance, was radically challenged by Expressionist dance. The mimetic act of imitating a form or concept that represented an historical narrative was rejected. The tendency to repeat past stories declined as the growth of modern movements began to disrupt classical foundations. This conceptual intervention positioned the dancer as an autonomous subject instead of a mechanical object lacking
the ability and self-determination to define its own movement, center of gravity and significance.

Traditional ballet does not contain lines or patterns that remain open or ambiguous because its form is determined by linear and symmetrical harmony. The object of classical dance was to synchronize ballet choreography with orchestral music to create a total work of art. Schmidt states, “Die Musik wird die Bewegungen präziser werden lassen, die Ohren werden sich an die Tempi und die Begleitung gewöhnen und die Bewegungen werden in Übereinstimmung mit dem Rhythmus sein” (70). Every aspect of a classical ballet performance from its choreography, musical score, costumes, lighting, architecture, and set design represented aesthetic beauty and patriarchal stronghold. Ballet performances were designed to please the ruling aristocracy by entertaining high society members with stories and motifs that preserved tradition. Experimentation, aberration, abstraction, distortion and expression are therefore irrelevant for classical art. The purpose of classical dance was to represent history with traditional narratives without provoking social criticism and revolutionary impulses. In the *International Dictionary of Modern Dance*, Don McDonagh writes,

> Unlike the popular forms of social and folk dance and court-derived ballet, serious concert dance outside these traditions had no existence or identifying name prior to the last decades of the 19th century. They featured expressive movement tailored by and for performance by the individual artists according to their creative desires (vii).

The following section discusses the development of modern dance in the United States and Europe by concentrating on the works of Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller.
Part V: The Development of Modern Dance in Europe and the United States

Towards the late nineteenth century, revolutionary choreographers and dancers including American dancers Loïe Fuller, Ruth St.Denis, Isadora Duncan, and Ted Shawn, along with Rudolf Laban (Hungary), and Aleksander Sakaroff (Russia) began to formulate different styles, which established the foundation of modern dance in Europe and the United States. Modern dance is recognized for its “individual expression in choice of themes and means of performance” over the imitation of classical ballet composition and vocabulary (McDonagh ix). At the turn of the twentieth century, modern dance schools in Europe and the United States were associated with the choreographer’s movement repertoire, authorship, and style. Modern dance styles were based on the choreographer’s perception of “where the movement impulse originated, and how it was to be developed logically” (McDonagh vii). Formalism became valued in American modern dance, while German modern dance trends reflected emotional expression and abstraction.

Modern dancers and choreographers radically rejected ballet largely because of its conservative past, which prevented new ideas and movement possibilities to be explored on stage. The ballet institution and adherence to its hierarchical structures was therefore problematic for modern concepts of expression and incongruent tendencies. The gap between the experience of modern life and the inability of outdated forms to convey contemporary existence had reached its limit. The rejection of the imitation of traditional forms provided Expressionist artists with a revolutionary desire and necessity to break through old foundations. These artists radically challenged classical styles by
experimenting with new angles, forms, concepts, ideas, styles, and experiences of dance. Expressionist modern dancers were compelled to liberate the body by developing unconventional forms of movement, which undermined previous determinations of what was considered “dance.” As dance historian, Ernst Schur wrote in 1910,

\[ \text{Das alte Ballet ist ein totes Schema; es kann uns nicht mehr sagen...Es hat kein Interesse für uns, ob die Menschen im Mittelalter so und in der Renaissance anders tanzten. Gott sei Dank, befreien wir uns.} \]

This period of experimentation in early modern dance is described by Howe as “a fighting time, full of rebellion against everything rusty, dusty, and traditional…the stored up creative forces broke through” (104). This liberation of movement helped choreographers and dancers find a new means of expression by challenging old customs to explore new possibilities in conveying a modern experience.

Norbert Servos writes,

\[ \text{Dance was an expression of modernity and modern identity to the extent that it heightened awareness of the body as an historical force capable of expanding the power and freedom of individuals within an increasingly complex and systematized social reality (307).} \]

The potential to transform social reality through experimental modes of expression was no longer restrained by historical foundations that repeated past stories. The climate of individual expression, sensory engagement and liberation of the body, offered a new paradigm in exploring the self. Instead of obediently following the status quo and performing the old scripts, expressionist dance provided a different means to physically interpret the rapid changes of modernity. In \textit{Das Wesen der neuen Tanzkunst} Blass states, “Modern dance embodied a powerful will whose object was not perfection but movement, a ceaseless condition of becoming rather than a state of being implied by the
The notion of ‘becoming’ was consonant with the modern tendency to engage with the present, everyday experience that shaped perception and experience. The focus on the *Gegenwart* is enhanced by the use of montage style sequences that had no particular storyline, but instead presented a selection of poses and innuendoes portraying everyday life. Expressionist dancer Valeska Gert (discussed in Chapter two) experimented with this form by drawing attention to the instance and moment that each gesture conveyed.

There are several major stylistic differences between the development of modern dance in Germany and the United States. San Francisco born Isadora Duncan is referred to as the first modern dancer, but it was actually Loïe Fuller who first began experimenting with dance through various color and light dimensions in Europe. Fuller started out as a vaudeville and burlesque performer in Chicago, and later moved to Paris, where her work received wide acclaim by the art nouveau and avant-garde scene. Townsend writes,

> Fuller performed her experimental dances at the *Folies-Bergère*, and her early performances in the 1890s were a spectacle unlike any seen before. Revolutionary costumes surrounded her entire body with mobile fabric and her pioneering work in the use of electric rather than gas lights created prismatic effects on the stage. Rejecting narrative and traditional scenery, Fuller typically performed a series of short dances: *The Serpentine, The Butterfly* and *The Violet* (132).

Fuller’s famous “*Serpent Dance*” was one of the first dances to be filmed in 1895 by the Lumière brothers, using their invention of the cinematographe in Paris. Fuller’s new form of dance reflected scientific and technological advancements with its
innovative lighting and stage design.\textsuperscript{9} Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Mary Wigman were strongly influenced by Loïe Fuller’s flowing silk costumes and circular movements on stage. Fuller became a major figure of the Art Nouveau scene in Paris, where she inspired poets, painters, filmmakers, and scientists including Germaine Dulac, Marie Curie, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Rodin, Mallarmé, and W.B. Yeats. Shortly after Fuller experimented with color and light in her dance pieces, Ruth St. Denis adorned exotic costumes from India and Egypt, and presented esoteric dances that appealed to the five senses. Her piece titled “Translations” (1909) was an attempt to introduce American audiences to an assortment of exotic expressions borrowed from the dance traditions of India, Japan and Egypt. St. Denis’ style of modern dance, however, was largely motivated by the commercial show business, which seemed to lack a certain level of depth and internal expression. Her exotic choreographic style established a strong contrast to the naturalist tendencies presented in the works by Isadora Duncan.

Duncan’s 1900 London debut of Grecian style barefoot dancing is arguably the most widely recognized modern dance performance that pioneered, “\textit{Der Tanz der Zukunft}” or ‘dance of the future’ (Schmidt 21). Duncan’s natural approach to movement liberated the body from oppressive social forces imposed by conventional norms and patriarchal institutions. This naturalist style appealed to progressive audiences in the United States and Europe who had grown tired of the baroque stage aesthetic. Duncan’s long, flowing hair, tunic style costumes and natural movements rejected the aesthetic formalization of classical ballet in terms of costume and movement. Instead of wearing

point shoes, she would dance barefoot, adorning Grecian robes rather than tightly fitted corsets.

Duncan’s new form of dance set a revolutionary trend in motion that challenged classical dance in a shocking, yet subjective mode of expression. Duncan’s natural style rejected both physical and aesthetic limitations imposed by classical ballet. She said, “My art is just an effort to express the truth of my Being in gesture and movement” (Franko 28). Duncan was “destined to rescue the art from the sterile infantilism which had possessed it in bondage, unbroken since the fifteenth century” (Franko 7). Duncan used the terms “dreary” and “routinized” to characterize America, as much as she used the term “mechanical” and “puppetlike” in her criticism of European classicism (Franko 7). Duncan states,

*Der Mensch, zivilisiert und seinen natürlichen Instinkten entfremdet, ist als einziger und am besten fähig, diese Impulse zurückzuhalten. Im Tanz, das ist ihre Quintessenz, sollte der menschlicher Körper trotz konventioneller Einschränkungen, alle Empfindungen und Emotionen zum Ausdruck bringen, die er erfährt. Er wäre dazu nicht nur fähig, er würde es tun, wenn man die Freiheit dazu ließe.*

Viennese dancer Grete Wiesenthal and Mary Wigman were both inspired by Duncan’s work as were the writers Hugo von Hoffmanstahl and Carl Zuckmayer. In 1904 Cosimar Wagner invited Duncan to dance at Wagner’s *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth, where she danced the Bacchanale from Tannhäuser with Dionysian fervor. Dance critic Hans Brandenburg recognized in Duncan a pioneer dancer, “who rediscovered the body and its natural expressive gestures and intuitively felt its harmony without being able to explain or teach it” (28). The positive reception of Duncan’s naturalist style of movement indicated how public audiences were generally interested in viewing different
dance forms. This modern climate of change and emphasis on inner psychology paved the way to producing different styles of expressive movement. Duncan states, “I did not invent my dance, it existed before me; but it was slumbering and I awoke it” (Franko 5).

**Part VI. German Expressionism**

The revolutionary breakthroughs that were established during the historical avant-garde strongly influenced the conceptual and stylistic development of *Ausdruckstanz*. The Expressionist movement presented radical changes that reflected the different perceptions and concepts of form in music, film, painting and literature. Although Expressionism and *Ausdruckstanz* shared common ideas and practices, these two parallel movements also contained some distinctions. Expressionism is conceived as a,

*Programm einer revolution, die Ideologie wie Ästhetik umfaßt, ihre Aufgabe in Gesellschaftsreform wie <Kunstwende> sieht. Um dies zu erreichen, muß der Mensch sich wieder ent-objectivieren, herauslösen aus der verwalteten Gesellschaft, die von Technik und Industrie bestimmte Dingwelt wieder also sein Gegenüber sehen, um sich selber as Mitte der Welt zu begreifen* (Best 7).

Artists from different media often disagreed on the philosophical and conceptual basis of Expressionism on the basis of its ideological claims. Modern developments in psychology, literature, and painting provoked revolutionary changes in avant-garde works of art. Dance historian Norbert Servos argues,

Dance absorbed much of the irrationalism and emotional turbulence of German Expressionism, with its focus on internal rather than external sources of energy, and the term *Ausdruckstanz*, or Expressive Dance, became a widely accepted appellation for modernist currents in dance culture (308).
Choreography was traditionally based on classical patterns derived by practical, rational, and precise methods. Each phrase of a dance sequence or pattern formation was calculated to produce a clear and logical sequence. The objective was to produce linear and precise compositions that were harmonious. *Ausdruckstanz* choreographers did not share this view and instead experimented with esoteric myths and symbols that encouraged improvisation, play, and chance. Expressionists were also compelled by the developments of Freudian and Jungian concepts given their attraction to experimental modes of self-exploration. Mysticism was a central theme of their work since the process of life, death, and resurrection produced a ritualistic mode of expression. Instead of scripting phrases of choreography, expressionist choreographers would instead improvise using images and symbols, allowing the movements to flow and emerge organically.

This revolutionary act in painting, literature, sculpture and dance radically challenged the fixation of meaning as depicted by historical representations of art. In *Der Moderne Tanz* (1910) Ernst Schur writes, “Die Gegenwart zeitigte neue Versuche in der Tanzkunst, die sich gegen das alte Schema richten. Sie gehen von Persönlichkeiten aus; ein lebendiger Reiz ist ihnen eigen” (Einführung i). Works of art such as, Edward Munch’s “The Scream” (1909), Kirchner’s “Frauen auf der Straße” (1914) and Jakob von Hoddis’ poem “Weltende” (1911) often employed abstract and irrational forms to express the turmoil and destruction of post-World War I with extreme and drastic gestures. These works demonstrate this dramatic shift towards subjective perception and emotional expression.
Der revolutionäre Impuls, befeuert von Skeptizismus der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung gegenüber, wandte sich schließlich nach innen, weg vom Licht des Establishments und dessen Hang, die Sprache total zu vergesellschaften – er setzte sich um in Esoterik (Best 22).

Edward Munch started to depict different forms of psychological conditions since 1890 in Norway. He claims, “Man sollte nicht mehr Interieurs und Leute malen, die lesen, und Frauen, die stricken. Es sollen lebende Menschen sein, die atmen und fühlen und leiden und lieben” (Düchting 37). The intense colors, exaggerated proportions, fleeting appearances, abbreviated forms and rapid gestures, as evidenced by expressionist paintings, displayed a significant variation of emotional expressions. Höddis writes in his poem Weltende, “Dachdecker stürzen ab und gehen entzwei, Und an den Küsten – liest man – steigt die Flut. Der Sturm ist da, die wilden Meere hupfen. An Land, um dicke Dämme zu zerdrücken.” Höddis’ storm in Weltende foreshadowed the political uproar and outbreak of World War I in 1914, which transformed a Wilhelmian militaristic Germany into an impoverished country of defeat. Weltende further conveyed the conviction and abrupt tone of early expressionist literature by setting up a contrast between the foreboding natural catastrophe and the increasing banality of social existence. Höddis unknowingly foretold his own tragic fate in Weltende given that thirty-one years later he died in a concentration camp in 1942.

Düchting claims,

Man lehnte die vielfältigen erscheinungsformen von Militarismus und Chauvinismus, die Glorifizierung von Macht, die saturierte Bürglichkeit und konventionelle Kultur-und Bildungsbeflissenheit ab. Die jungen Künstler sehnten sich nach neuen Werten im Elementaren und Wesenhaften, im Natürlichen (28).
The violent horror of World War I that devastated Europe from 1914-1918, produced an urgent necessity to create new forms and concepts in dance, painting, film, sculpture, literature, and architecture. The war-trodden past that claimed millions of lives, farms, families, industry, capital, military, and social alliances reflected a brutal reality, which heightened the importance of the present, or Gegenwart. Poets, painters, and dancers alike experienced an awakening and eager need to survive the trauma by experimenting with unconventional methods that engaged with their present experiences. By using novel techniques that conveyed notions of simultaneity, aberration, absurdity, the ephemeral and fleeting, the present experience was the most crucial point of engagement.

Es bleibt ein Einzelfall. Die Entwicklung liegt doch auf der Linie neuen Versuche, die tastend, unvollkommen sein können, aber doch allein für uns den eigentlichen Wert besitzen, weil sie aus unserer Gegenwart geboren sind (Schur 4).

Unlike Impressionists painters who evoked the relationship between objects and light, the Expressionists focused on bringing the internal and primal elements of the personality to the surface. Hatvani writes, “Im Impressionismus hatten sich Welt und Ich, Innen und Aussen, zu einem Gleichklang verbunden. Im Expressionismus überflutet das Ich die Welt” (68).

In conclusion, chapter one establishes the foundation of the revolutionary historical break of Ausdruckstanz. Since the aesthetic traditions of classical ballet and representational art were too limited to convey the experiences of modern life, Expressionists were compelled to experiment with new forms of movement. With the advancement of the avant-garde movement and emphasis on bold colors, fleeting
moments, jagged lines and abstract concepts, Ausdruckstanz presented the fervor and dramatic tension with its emotional expressionism.

Mary Wigman and Rudolf von Laban pioneered the pedagogical framework of Ausdruckstanz by experimenting with mythical and transcendent ideas that informed their path of subjective expression. Their unconventional approach to movement was characterized by the following elements: dancing without musical accompaniment; exploring Dionysian motifs with the body; dancing barefoot in loosely fitted clothes; and applying choric principles in group choreography. By combining elements from rhythmic gymnastics, Ausdruckstanz established a movement vocabulary that encouraged improvisation and open forms of personal expression. Female dancers who felt alienated by the patriarchal and hierarchical domain of classical ballet viewed Ausdruckstanz as an alternative style, which provided a liberating and emancipatory outlet. The focus on individuality was heightened by the interest to create a ‘signature style,’ which marked one’s personal identity. This concentration on producing an image of the modern individual self resonated with the naturalist ideology of Körperfultur, which advocated a physical and spiritual harmony with the elements and the cosmos.

Despite the tendencies in expressionist dance that focus on the individual and their inner emotional state, Ausdruckstanz should not be viewed as a uniform movement. Chapter two discusses the different interpretations of Ausdruckstanz by closely analyzing the variations in form, style, character and concept regarding two distinct cases of Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert.
Ein Tanzdarbietung muss nach saurem Schweiß riechen, ethisch sein, wirrgeistig und langweilig. Genialität ist weniger. Weil der Durchschnittsdeutsche kein Selbstvertrauen hat, hält er nur die Kunst für groß, die er nicht versteht und die ihn langweilt.”

- Valeska Gert

CHAPTER 2

AMBIVALENT TENDENCIES IN AUSDRUCKSTANZ:
A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF VARIANT CONCEPTS, STYLES, AND MODES OF EXPRESSION

Chapter two expands on the previously stated notion that Ausdruckstanz is not a uniform movement. As historian Peter Gay argues, “The expressionists were not a unified movement but a loosely allied band; they were rebels with a cause but without clear definitions or concrete aims” (105). Case studies of select choreographies are examined in this chapter to further demonstrate the respective conceptual and stylistic differences of the dissonant trends exhibited in this movement. The visual elements of Expressionism, along with the emphasis on movement and gesture, are discussed in relation to concepts of abstract spatial arrangements and Brechtian distantiation. As Lucia Ruprecht claims, “Ausdruckstanz freed gesture from directly readable mimic qualities for embodying abstract or absolute contents through physical tension and release” (259). Rudolf von Laban conceived of tension and release in terms of physical alternations between Anspannung und Abspaltung, Steigen und Fallen, which constitute the basic movement principles for Ausdruckstanz (71-72). In this chapter, the multiple choreographic modes within Ausdruckstanz are examined against each other to explore the depth and
complexity that is characteristic of this movement rather than generically describe them, which would flatten and erase their intricate nuances. The leading figures in the expressionist dance movement discussed in my dissertation include: Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban, Valeska Gert, Anita Berber, and Jean Weidt. Chapter two closely examines the choreographic works of two very different expressionist figures, including Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert. Chapter three will focus on the works of Anita Berber, Jean, Weidt, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kurt Jooss. Oskar Schlemmer was technically part of the Bauhaus movement, but his theatrical works were developed concurrently with Ausdruckstanz. Chapter four will discuss the downfall of Ausdruckstanz and the emergence of Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater and its emphasis on subjectivity and social criticism during the late 1960s.

There are two major waves or tendencies within Ausdruckstanz that constitute it as a movement. One circle of expressionist dancers and choreographers was drawn to the esoteric, mystical, cultish, symbolic, primitive leanings of Expressionism. This tendency within Expressionism was strongly evidenced by visual artists such as Erich Heckel, Emil Nolde, Egon Schiele, Max Beckman, and Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. Their exaggerated depiction of disproportionate bodies using bold and dynamic color contrasts were exemplified by two and three-dimensional objects, which included drawing, printmaking, painting, woodcut and sculpture. Color, line, and form were each enhanced by material constitution and unconventional style that revolted against the narrative structure and compositional harmony depicted in representational art.
Another circle of Expressionists employed unconventional forms of theater and movement as modes of social criticism and provocation. To some extent, this latter circle, or tendency, was influenced by concepts of New Objectivity, or *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Oscillating between these circles while remaining mostly on the fringe of *Ausdruckstanz*, are a few exceptional cases of dancers and choreographers including: Valeska Gert, Anita Berber, and Jean Weidt. Their works were later subsumed under the category of *Ausdruckstanz*, not by their own intention, but rather by default. Susan Manning writes,

Only a few dancers stood apart from the dominant aesthetics of Wigman and Laban. One was Valeska Gert, a Berlin cabaret dancer who also appeared in films and on the stage. Gert knew Bertolt Brecht, and her theory of the social function of dance in many ways paralleled his theory of theater. Once she asked Brecht to define epic theater. He replied, "What you do." (Manning 10).
Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert were principal figures of Ausdruckstanz and their works establish the main focus of this chapter. Their respective choreographies exhibited a wide range of styles and diverse modes of expression, and strongly demonstrated the ambivalent trends within this movement. With the exception of Valeska Gert, Jean Weidt, Oskar Schlemmer, and Anita Berber, most Expressionist dancers received some training with Dalcroze and Laban in rhythmic gymnastics during the early stages of their careers. This foundation of alternative movement emphasized the study of gesture, free dance, movement choirs,\textsuperscript{1} improvisation and different musical interpretations, which redefined traditional dance in terms of concept, style, form, and use of space. Each of these dancers formulated their personal movement vocabulary and signature styles, which challenged classical conventions with grotesque, mystical and primal expressions that reflected this new practice, presentation, and concept of modern dance. Newhall writes, “These artists were aware that humanity inhabits a number of complex, overlapping worlds and that these worlds, which are not seen by the eye, must be explored through the moving body” (16). This chapter demonstrates how these artistic modes of expression shift from the visual to the body, which allowed movement and dance to convey another dimension of gesture that was accessible through a physically tangible medium. For Brecht, the moment of theatricality happened when conventional models of art were interrupted by gestures that rendered the presentation of movement as strange, or in the case of Ausdruckstanz, grotesque and otherworldly.

\textsuperscript{1} “Complex often convoluted interactions between bodies which urged dance to move outside of the concert hall and appropriate new spaces for performance” (Bendow-Pflalzgraf 309).
Part I: Authentic Expression in the Language of Movement

The terms movement, expression, and gesture were foundational elements of Ausdruckstanz because of the movement’s emphasis on subjectivity and affect, which ultimately provided “Gegengewicht gegen die fortschreitende Mechanisierung des Lebens” (Klein 193). In discussing the concept of expression it is helpful to understand the etymology of the word. The etymology of the word “expression,” or Ausdruck stems from the early 15th century and means the "action of pressing out;" or an "action of manifesting a feeling;" or "a putting into words." The Latin term expressio is "an action or creation that expresses feelings.” The emphasis is placed on force, expulsion or manifestation through some form of action. The etymology of “movement,” or Bewegung, and “to move,” or bewegen, stems from 13th century Anglo-Fr. movere, which means to “set in motion” or "to affect with emotion" and "to prompt or impel toward some action." The etymology of “gesture” from the early 15th century means the "manner of carrying the body," from Latin gestura "bearing, behavior," and gestus "gesture, carriage, posture." Expressionists emphasized subjectivity by conveying “das Ich” through its complex nature in appealing to subconscious, primal forces that effectively disrupted formal concepts of representational art.

Newhall writes,

Just as Expressionist literature intends to startle the reader with subjective revelations of neurotic, often psychotic states and just as clashing dissonances of Expressionist music are intended to arouse rather than soothe the listener, Ausdruckstanz sought to produce a finished product that unsettled the viewer while finding a performance mode that took the dancer and her audience to the realm of transcendence and ritual (16).

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Ausdruckstanz is often described as a physical and spiritual expression that uplifted the soul with its rejuvenating movements and imagination. “Es galt als eine »Revolution«, als ungeplantes, direktivenloses, instinktives Aufbegehren einer jungen Generation” (Klein 193).

This young generation of expressionists rejected the functional, formal and mechanical aspects of classical ballet, such as corsets and point shoes that restricted the body’s natural movement. Instead, they emphasized more “natural” techniques such walking, jumping, skipping, turning, spinning, swinging, gliding, stamping, falling, circling and swaying that intended to move with gravity and fight against it. Klein continues,

\[ \text{Die neuen Techniken des Gleitens, Fallens, Schwingens, beruhten auf den natürlichen anatomischen und physiologischen Möglichkeiten des Körpers. Hier sollte »der ganze Körper sprechen,« der Mensch »seine Totalität gespiegelt im ganzen Körper haben.} \]

Isadora Duncan, Grete Wiesenthal, and Mary Wigman embodied this ‘falling, swaying’ movement with their unorthodox style of dance that opposed the upright and controlled balletic style. Wigman describes her final choreographic piece, Abschied und Dank (1942) as,

\[ \text{a dance motif of far-swinging movements, a motif of a diagonally upward fluttering gesture which sought to fade out in space, but, at an arrested instant of its suspension, was caught by the swinging leg and brought to its end in an almost imperceptible, eluding hip movement of withdrawal. Virtually, it was like a bird call, as one might hear it before dusk. Full in its sound, yet nevertheless the call of evening (88).} \]

The movement’s poetic resonance that Wigman described in the above passage conveyed a sense of calling, a homecoming, and return to natural elements. This calling to come into one’s own was the summoning of the self to return to the body: the primordial origin of movement through time and space. This source (Ursprung / Urdichtung) was primordial, semiotic, pure, void of script or marking of a historical consciousness or political ideology.
This unpeeling, erasure and rejection of social inscription was indicative of a trend to return to a natural, pure and essential state or condition that was untouched by religious, social, political, industrial forces. Whether this mode of being was possible, or it functioned as a ruse to distance oneself by ignoring a conscious differentiation between socially constructed identity and essential being was a separate question. It conveyed a desire to move closer to one’s truth and origin of being, which in terms of *Urdichtung*, was expressed in the echoes and resonance of expression through poetic reflection and thought. This aspect was consonant with Kristeva’s notion of an enigmatic and feminine “space beneath the text,” which she discussed in reference to Mallarmé’s *Le Mystère dans les lettres*. She writes,

> Mallarmé calls attention to the semiotic rhythm within language when he speaks of *Le Mystère dans les lettres*. Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, *this space underlying the written* is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax…For now, however, we shall quote only those passages that ally functioning of that “air or song beneath the text” with woman: (italics added 29).

As thought finds expression in the dimension of sound and movement, it became articulated through language with varying levels of intonation and resonance that were amplified through different forms of speech, song and oratory. The *Ursprung* of physical movement emerged from sensation and manifested through physical growth. Growth and motion were the coming out of source, demonstrated by the reaching or pulling towards a magnetic source of attraction. This mechanism of attraction oscillated between ‘emergence’ and ‘return’ to and from one’s home; from the moment of birth until death. This process was expressed as a *becoming* in terms of language and movement as growth passed in and out through the locus of the body. All of this
amplified the notion that dance, like language, is a living and breathing art. Its mode of expression is constituted by ‘movement in the moment’, which defied the static structure imposed by written codes of signification specific to the genre. Moreover, it was living, breathing mode of expression that presented itself between the myriad forms through which it moves. Rubert claims, “Wigman saw dancing as an act of subjection and sacrifice for this metaphysical instance, hypostatized as the ‘Bewegung aller Dinge’ or a universal ‘Tanz’ of the world. Thus moving was, quite literally, always already an experience of being moved” (259).

The body was the site of movement and transformation in its most intimate and organic expression of being. The will moved between repulsion and attraction in rejection of things, behavior or practices that compelled one to leave their home yet also affirmed their origin in the act of leaving it. An overcoming of what was socially conditioned (i.e. codes, patterns, spaces, habits and beliefs) was therefore necessary to accept mortality in reconciliation with nature. The calling to return to the primordial, semiotic Ursprung was an expression or attitude that confronted the finite resolution of mortal existence. To come home was to return to the place of one’s origin where one’s emergence as a physical self began. A rejection of the social script inherited by the conditions determined by one’s environment was therefore a requisite experience to recognize its concealment of essential being.

This concept was similar to the following ontological argument stated by Smith where he discussed Heidegger’s notion of poetry. Heidegger says the “poetry” in which we will then be able to hear the ‘speaking of language’ – as if we ‘release poetry into its

3 Smith, “The Poetry-Verse Distinction Reconsidered.”
essential place’ (der Dichtung ihren Wesensort freigeben); and this requires that poetry itself ‘must first determine and reach this place’ (7). The marked distinction between verse and poetry was analogous to the relationship between phrases of choreographed movement and dance.

Whether adorning a decorative costume or nude posture allowed for a profound engagement with oneself is subject to question. The sublimation of one’s identity through a superficial rejection of tradition via masking seemed lacking in significant revolutionary change. Revolutionary change should permeate social, political, environmental, and global barriers, and not simply attempt to unravel the complex layers of introspection. Problems related to the naïve character of the Expressionist movement should be addressed in order to examine why in fact its downfall was necessary.

The performance of a posture or gesture conveyed a desire of the self to emerge in a form that allowed it to surface out of a dark repression. This was a crucial yet adolescent step in a revolutionary process. Expression was ephemeral, and should not be seen or misconstrued as something enduring or everlasting. In fact, expression should be perceived within its temporal limits rather than conform to a deceiving semblance of longevity. The challenge against classical representation was precisely the driving force Expressionists used to liberate movement from the codes of ballet and confines of historical ideology and hegemonic, homogenous tendencies.

Expressionists rejected the social conventions of classicism to return to their essential nature by developing close relationships with the body through displays of emotion and kinesthetic awareness. As Ruprecht claims,
The gestural philosophy of Ausdruckstanz echoes the fascination of primal meaning and universality of expression in early discourse on film. This type of dance always encompassed a ritualistic, suprapersonal aspect: dance was the mystified dynamic embodiment of a higher, fate-like power beyond human will (259).

Mystical philosophies most likely appealed to Expressionists, given their confrontation with death as a playful, invisible force with which to engage. Mortality was a common theme that Expressionists explored to reject lofty performances of romantic ballet, which denied gravity by transcending earth to reach heaven on a vertical axis. In describing her conceptual process in the choreography for “Death Call,” Wigman writes,

I became the “caller” and the “called” all in one. Not my death nor the death of any other human being. It was rather as if a law of life wanted to be enforced, a command I had never encountered before… And that is how the dance ended in the conscious acceptance and recognition of that great law that looms above all of us and that we call Death (Language of Dance, 21).

Given the crisis of social, political and economic instability in the aftermath of World War I, the cause for the immense political failure in Germany underwent serious philosophical inquiry and criticism. The effects of an industrialized, mechanical lifestyle, coupled with the bitter reality of postwar ruins, led to a cultish search for essential meaning and being with nature. Whether this “turning” affected an authentic transformation is speculative because it gave rise to a temporary resolve without lasting fulfillment. However, this tendency was consonant with the expressionist credo that experience existed within an ephemeral mode, which is precisely how Ausdruckstanz should be perceived. Expressionism is a momentary depiction of a desire to be recognized as something different and individualistic to further establish a break with antiquated forms. A distinction between socially determined identity and an expressive
and emotive being is explored using various modes of drama and unconventional movement.

Perhaps, a more interesting question is what drives the subject to express their individuality and construct a false identity to overcome oppressive forces. The desire to gain control through self-autonomy by rejecting an inherited or oppressive mode of living motivates the need to posture superiority. In the performance superiority, one gains a sense of power. However, the truth is that this feigned sense of power is based on lack. Ausdruckstanz fails to reveal what this feigned sense of power conceals. A crucial problem of this movement is the desire to persuade audiences to believe the mask, cover, and concealment rather than showing a conscious display of concealing.

Brecht’s Verfremdungseffekt, or distantiation, utilized interruption as a mode of presentation that broke the conventions of theatricality. This gesture disrupted the standard action and made the convention momentarily stand out in a conspicuous manner. This mechanism was not intended to arouse emotion or empathy, but rather to maintain the functionality in the presentation of this interruption. As Benjamin writes, ‘…interruption is one of the fundamental devices of all structuring’ (305). This form of interruption was particularly evident in the witty pantomime sketches of Valeska Gert, whose works will be examined later in the chapter. Benjamin argues, “The truly important thing is to discover the situations for the first time. (One might equally well say “defamiliarize” them.) This discovery (or defamiliarization) of situations is fostered through interruption of the action” (304).
The expressionist performance was a search for meaning that was constructed through the trajectory of “loss of self,” which became a pseudo rendering of individuality. This feigned display of autonomy concealed the real issues, which lead to the conclusion that Ausdruckstanz is an ephemeral, hollow artistic engagement that lacks serious intellectual merit. Nonetheless, it is important to perceive Ausdruckstanz as an initial step in the larger evolutionary movement of modern dance that first needed to explore basic modes of expression through a medley of gestures, exotic postures and costumes.

**Part II: Case Studies of Choreographic Differences in Ausdruckstanz**

**CASE STUDY A: MARY WIGMAN (1886-1973)**

Newhall writes, “Mary Wigman’s greatest drive was to express what she described as the *stirrings* within her” (8, italics added). These internal ‘stirrings’ were presumably a result of the grave misery she experienced as a young woman growing up during the Wilhemine empire in a bourgeois middle class, West Prussian family. Wigman was formally engaged to marry twice, but broke off both engagements in protest of the traditional role of a *Hausfrau*, a lifestyle with which she fundamentally disagreed. She writes, “I cried, I begged, and asked my creator to bring me clarity. I didn’t know what I should do, I had to break away, I didn’t want to continue any longer, I could not. The entire bourgeois life collapsed on to me” (Newhall 8).
In her memoir, she described how she would lock herself in a room to cry about her personal crisis. She became increasingly aware of the hand gestures and movements she made while pacing through the room during these fits of despair. Her body conveyed the deep longing and inner turmoil through hand gestures, which helped Wigman express her struggle to overcome forces of internal and external oppression. These gestures allowed her to connect with a physical mode of expression that was deeply evocative of her personal trauma and subjective emotional state. Through distinct emotional expressions, Wigman developed a nonverbal means of communication that transformed her inner turmoil into artistic expression. Wigman writes,

The dance is a living language which speaks of man-an artistic message soaring above the ground of reality in order to speak, on a higher level, in images and allegories of man’s innermost emotions and need for communication. It might very well be that, above all, the dance asks for direct communication without any detours. Because its bearers and intermediary is man himself, and because his instrument of

Fig. 11: Space Shape
expression is the human body, whose natural movement forms the material for the
dance, the only material which is his own to use (10).

Wigman’s involvement in the Dadaist movement during the outbreak of WWI (when
many avant-garde artists sought refuge in Switzerland) shaped her early concepts of
Ausdruckstanz. “Dadaism questioned the aesthetic and the function of the work of art
and the role of the artist, through the ‘events’ of their Cabaret Voltaire which completely
overturned all conventions of theatrical conventions”4 (Dunlop-Preston 2). Cabaret
Voltaire in Zurich became one of the major venues of the Dada movement where
Wigman occasionally performed in 1916.

With a group of Dadaists, she performed “Dancing Songs” of Nietzsche’s
Zarathustra and read aloud verses from “Von den Verächtern des Leibes” including “Leib
bin ich und Seele” and “Der Leib ist eine große Vernunft, eine Vielheit mit einem Sinne,

4 For example several poems would be recited simultaneously from back to front in different
languages for example.
ein Krieg und ein Frieden, eine Herde und ein Hirt” (reasons lies in the body)\(^5\). The ‘despisers of the body’ alluded to Judeo-Christian ethics that advocated the repression of physical needs in service of religious practice and Cartesian doctrine, which separated mind and body. Nietzsche writes,

\begin{quote}
Hinter deinen Gedanken und Gefühlen, mein Bruder, steht ein mächtiger Gebieter, ein unbekannter Weiser – der heißt Selbst. In deinem Leibe wohnt \(e\), dein Leib ist er. Es ist mehr Vernunft in deinem Leibe, als in deiner besten Weisheit (300).
\end{quote}

Zarathustra’s prophetic call to engage with the self through the body was the exact Ausgangspunkt with which the Expressionists aligned themselves. “Mit Zarathustras freier Wortmelodie begann ein neuer Typus Tanz, der nichts will, als sich selber tanzen. Leibtanz, Geisttanz, in eins...Der atmende Leib ist das Instrument für die Fülle des ganz eigenen” (Rudolf von Delius, 1925). Despite the political turmoil and “colossal moral burden” of the Weimar Republic following the devastating Treaty of Versailles, the revolutionary tendencies in the arts shifted from a focus on representation and ideology to the bitter social reality and expression (Walther 4). This emotional expression was identified with self, whereby the body played host to self and natural drives, all of which became manifested through individuality.

Through the individual expression of the “free self,” the Expressionist movement (particularly in dance) demonstrated its revolutionary potential by rejecting outdated forms that hindered its stake in social change. As Agamben claims, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra is the ballet of a humanity bereft of its gestures” (137). This posturing of

\(^5\) Newhall, 70.
gesture signaled the potential for a new horizon of perception and experience to break the circular pattern of history without it continuously turning back upon itself.

Huelsenbeck writes,

what did Expressionism want? It “wanted” something, that much remains characteristic of it. Dada wants nothing, Dada grows. Expressionism wanted inwardness, it conceived of itself as a reaction against the times, while Dadaism is nothing but an expression of the times (Huelsenbeck and Green 44).

The paradoxical and absurdist tendencies of Dada appealed to Wigman as her interest for experimental movement expanded. Her close affinity with Nietzsche’s writings, particularly with the dance metaphors in Zarathustra, fit exceptionally well with her own Selbstüberwindung, and free spirit inclinations. Nietzsche writes, “untergeh’n will euer Selbst, und darum wurdet ihr zu Verächtern des Leibes! Denn nicht mehr vermögt ihr über euch hinaus zu schaffen” (Zarathustra 301).

This downfall or collapse in morals was necessary for the self to be reclaimed through the body. Wigman interpreted this notion within her dance sketches by emphasizing circular, whirling, dervish-like spinning steps, which allowed the self to transcend its limitations through movement of the body. This turning in upon oneself allowed for a space to engage forces of attraction and repulsion in one’s center.

For Wigman, this mode of pure expression ignited the creative spark that expanded from the “I” to the “we,” which captured the essence of dance. Newhall writes “One credo for the Zurich Dadaists was, absolute poetry, absolute art, absolute dance, and Wigman was more than willing to take on that title for her own dance art” (24). This focus on pure expression became central for Wigman and Laban, who led Ausdruckstanz towards “shifting away from the temporal dimension toward spatial and dynamic
dimensions of movement... these innovations achieved the ideal of absolute dance, dance that speaks through movement alone” (Manning 20).

_Ausdruckstanz_ negated the history that classical ballet represented. Through this negation or rejection, it attempted to recover an absolute form of movement that conveyed an elemental nature that was stripped from the decorative ornamentation of Baroque persuasions. This process is comparable to Hegel’s *Aufhebung* because history is negated yet raised through the common interest to present the Absolute. In _Literary Absolute_, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue, “the absoluteness of the Absolute consists precisely in occupying, in identical fashion, all forms in general, as well as in returning to its own pure identity” (Lacoue-Labarthe 107). The abolishment of classical form and establishment of a new expressionist form was relevant for _Ausdruckstanz_. As Lacouthe-Labarthe and Nancy assert, it is the “putting-into-form that is essential to this Absolute,” which presents the passage of transformation or becoming by marking a formal difference. However, the absoluteness of the Absolute argued that form essentially had the same root and mechanism with different significations, such as _Urbild_ versus _Gegenbild_. The movement within the mechanism of this chiastic structure was how the Absolute was expressed.

For Wigman, movement as a primal, ecstatic form of expression was the driving force behind her choreography. She was far more interested in recovering ancient rituals in a modern context by using abstract designs of pure form instead of imitating theatrical narrative or balletic performance style. She states, “Dance is the unification of

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6 Full quote from Lacouthe-Labarthe and Nancy “The absoluteness of the Absolute consists in its capacity to give itself in every form, then it is Bildung, or putting-into-form that is essential to this Absolute” (108).
expression and function, illumined physicality and spirited form. Without ecstasy no dance! Without form no dance!” (Wigman 19). The pre-modern origins of dance reflected ecstatic, religious themes in divine reverence of invisible forces and death, which Wigman embodied through her emotional pathos in what Sigfried Kracauer describes as “erstarrte [...] Bildsprache” (77).

In rejection of codified structures of classical ballet, Wigman located the new language of dance in gesture. She claims, “Den Wandel und Wechsel seelischer Zustand tanzer wir” (Wigman, Skizzen). She often included motifs that evoked an entranced, death-like state where the spectator was gripped by various levels of emotional intensity and sublime, yet somber overtones. The tragic element in her work was particularly prevalent in regard to dances that overtly deal with death, such as Totentanz and Totenmal. Wigman contends, “The finality of death was no longer compatible with the concepts that were evolving into motion” (Sorrell 97-98).

Although her abstract and universal movements simulate transcendence, they actually suggested a return. Norton writes, “Wigman did not perceive death as finite, but rather as an animalistic and mysterious force that moved within its own unique boundaries of space and time” (thesis 147). Wigman’s artistic virtuosity lay mostly in her keen expression of emotion through dramatic gesture and abstract expression that combined (pre-modern) ancient ritual with modern aesthetic form. Newhall writes, “Setting aside the specified and codified vocabulary of ballet, Wigman embarked on a search for new forms and gesture and movement that could be experienced more fully by dancer and audience alike” (79). The oscillation, or Schwingung, between dancer and

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7 Wigman, “Ohne Ekstase kein Tanz! Ohne Form kein Tanz!”
spectator further underscored the Expressionist intention to obtain cosmic harmony between the individual and community.

Wigman’s affinity for mystical, ecstatic experience and experimental movement led her to explore the Apollonian/Dionysian dichotomy in her choreography, which was suggested by her statement “when the fire that dances between two poles” in reference to dance composition. Her early exposure to Dadaism and Nietzsche’s philosophical ideas had a significant impact on the development of her own style and aesthetic approach. “Dance composition for Wigman is a creative process through which expression and function are joined” (Newhall 87).

The first phase of her creative process entailed an inner experience, image, thought or intuition that became manifested through the externalization or surfacing of this innate idea or dream. This improvisational act transformed a deeply personal moment into a larger and more tangible construct. Wigman was strongly driven by a need to communicate the darker side of hidden emotion, which was once transformed and grounded into performance ritual and choreographic form to become a work of art. She achieved this through dramatic gesture and pure expression. This process illustrated the basic concept of Ausdruckstanz, which showed the external expression of an internal and subjective experience.

This initial phase of Wigman’s compositional method was consonant with the irrational, subconscious, ecstatic, mystical, cultish allure of Dionysian attributes, where the self was subsumed into a much greater primordial force. The second phase included the Apollonian appeal to organization, control, form and design, where the inner idea
becomes contained and arranged into movement sequences following a rational order and schematization. Rubert situates Ausdruckstanz “somewhere between Dionysian return of the repressed and Apollonian sublimation” (260). She argues, “... the Ich that is meant to succeed the Es is decidedly placed in the body; Bewusstsein is of the body and achieved by moving through rather than talking through” (260). The emphasis on movement over speech was significant for gesture because it allowed the essence of trauma to manifest in pure physical form. Open or closed palms exemplified the burden of pain, yet at the same time conveyed the release or surrender of loss.

Wigman’s choreographic process contained a dialectical approach where “the initial emotional content served as the thesis, the shaping of the form through conscious crafting served as antithesis and the synthesis was fused in performance when the emotion and form came together anew—equally transformed and transformative” (Newhall 91). Wigman’s method struck a balance between the creative spark of an idea, image or dream with formal structure and calculation. However, this approach was not unlike most conventional choreographic strategies; yet, her presentation style was markedly different.

The early modern dancers who preceded Wigman, including Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and the Wiesenthal sisters from Vienna, shared a common vision in conceiving this new dance of expression, or Tanz der Zukunft. Grete Wiesenthal claims, “everything conventional in dance art has to be fought against...We were filled by only one thought: the transformation of dance art into inwardness. We had only one wish: not to dance like
the others”\(^8\) (Howe 48 italics added). Despite different interpretations and performance styles, each of the dancers were determined to create a style that broke with convention by giving women complete autonomy of their choreography, which had been dominated by male ballet masters. Isadora Duncan states,

> The dancer of the future…will not dance in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman’s body and the holiness of all its parts… she will dance the freedom of woman.\(^9\)

*Ausdruckstanz* can be viewed as ‘revolutionary’ because of its rejection of classical forms and unconventional performance style, but also in its liberating effect on women. In the advancement of modernist tendencies in dance, women claimed freedom and autonomy from the aristocratic, patriarchal history of dance by developing their own concepts of movement and expression. The dancers reformed the classical style to reflect the movement style and ideas that conveyed meaning for women who wanted to shape dance in a way that was intrinsic and deeply connected with their inner experience and reality. Therefore, this dynamic of changing inward impression into outward expression revealed the central tenet of *Ausdruckstanz*, which engaged movement as a manner to signify meaning. As depicted by Grete Wiesenthal, the gesture of *Schwung* effectively demonstrated this dynamic. Howe contends,

> Most essential to the dance was Wiesenthal’s performance style in which she was consumed by the movement and the emotional meaning of the dance. Her dance and performance was characterized by Schwung (a sense of motion through an arc from beginning to end, or swing).

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\(^9\) Isadora Duncan, *Tanz der Zukunft* (1903).
Movement oscillated with gravity in the to and fro, back and forth, wavelike swinging motion. The sense of Schwung underscored how Ausdruckstanz conveyed this inward turning desire to move in harmony with the cosmos through earthy, feminine expressions, which enhanced life-affirming connections with nature. Heidegger’s notion of Gelassenheit is comparable to Schwung because of its emphasis on the meditative experience of thinking, which is not predetermined or calculated. This rhythmic, circular, swinging motion in thinking corresponds to the physical sensation of the body when it flows easily between two points gracefully connected with its center of gravity. This approach to ‘essential’ thinking or dancing emerged from within, whereby the direction of its movement listened along the path of poetic engagement that moves between thought and feeling.

This internal turned external expression was similarly demonstrated by dances that explored the ‘grotesque’ by relying on darker subconscious realms of mystery and horror. Often times, these ‘grotesque’ dances were solo pieces that incorporated masks and gong music. For these choreographies, Dionysian appeals to ecstasy, absurdity and irrationality were a significant focus, both aesthetically and thematically. Wigman often relied on witches and demons as motifs in her work. Newhall writes, “Involving the entire cast armed with flutes, drums, and torches, The Demons of the Night section was a mystical play in which ‘witches and demons’ were conjured up in masked dances” (Newhall 25). In particular, Wigman’s Hexentanz (1926) drew on subliminal urges that directly opposed the mechanized doll or fairy depiction of romantic style ballet. While experimenting with images and gestures in the making of Hexentanz, Wigman observed herself in the mirror. Wigman comments,
What it reflected was the image of one possessed, wild and dissolute, repelling and fascinating. The hair unkempt, the eyes deep in their sockets, the nightgown shifted about, which made the body appear almost shapeless: there she was—the witch—the earth-bound creature with her unrestrained, naked interests, with her insatiable lust for life, beast and woman at one and the same time. I shuddered at my own image, at the exposure of this facet of my ego which I had never allowed to emerge in such unashamed nakedness (41).

The mask concealed the ego, or “I,” of the dancer and their respective fears by allowing her freedom from limitations of visibility that would normally determine her movement. The mask allowed the invisible force beneath the personality, or ego, to be revealed by transforming the meaning and experience of movement to a radically different dimension. The dancers experienced relationships with time in a much different way as the essence or soul beneath the “I” is revealed and made visible through the mask, movement and gesture. Wigman wore a mask in Hexentanz to “overcome the individual sphere in order to connect to the archetype” (Partsch-Bergsohn 114). Wigman’s fervent exploration of expression and individuality was manifested in the act of cover. Engaging the witch archetype required a loss of face and identity in order to connect with the underlying primordial force, which fueled the dramatic tension and subliminal elements of her dance. This possibility for transformation with the mask was also significant in exploring ambiguous relationships, particularly with regard to changing social constructions of gender and sexuality.

The young modern woman during the Weimar Republic who was not interested in imitating the classical ballerina mold, yet was in search of a creative and expressive medium, was strongly attracted to this experimental mask dance. It allowed for an articulation of emotions and experiences, which remained hidden and cloaked behind
conditioned masks women were expected to wear in the household and in society at large. The mask, in combination with the exploration of grotesque forms, resonated among those interested in exploring alternative ways of being, which received strong support throughout the avant-garde movement. “Through the mask, human action receives a new dimension…Whoever puts on a mask is no longer absolutely certain of himself. It might happen that he asks himself which is true countenance, the mask or his own face” (van der Leeuws 84).

Fig. 13: Wigman’s Japanese Noh Mask

Wigman’s Hexentanz, or witch dance, was quite unlike any conventional narrative or tale about witches. The only surviving fifty seconds of this piece is preserved on 16mm film from 1926, and does not show Wigman casting spells behind a cauldron or flying across the stage on a broomstick. Instead, she is seated on the floor directly facing
the audience wearing a Japanese Noh mask, 1920s style short black wig, and a silk brocade costume. Her arm and hand gestures flutter fervently with staccato force as her body movements suggest a seizure of earthly terror and demonic power. The grotesque aspects of her movement style are conveyed through her rough, jagged, edgy and stamping gestures. At one point, she moves in a circle seated on her hips with her legs spread apart pounding the floor with her hands holding her feet. The element of shock and surprise is evidenced by her mesmerizing and theatrical mastery of silence using slow, eerie turns of her masked face. See images of Hexentanz below:

Newhall contends, “The percussive movement of the arms and hands corresponds to the percussive sound of the score. Indeed it is the movement that initiates the sound. Because the movement slightly anticipates each percussive note, it appears to generate the very sound itself” (109). The repetitive use of sound and silence enhanced her
powerful use of gesture and rhythm. Unlike classical ballet where the musical composition largely determines how the dance is choreographed, Wigman’s expressionist dance rejected the harmonizing of dance and music altogether. The percussive tempo of her pieces enhanced expression by using subtle tones in the background texture of her theatrical tableaus.

Fig. 15: The Wigman dance group, *In the Sign of Darkness* from 1928 Celebration

Music was conceived as an accompaniment to the movement rather than defining how the dance steps were composed. Wigman was compelled to break with principles from her previous training in Dalcrozan rhythmic gymnastics, in which music and movement merged into a clockwork, cohesive whole. “Wigman preferred single sound or sound clusters to melodic patterns and thus introduced new ways of using percussion instruments as accompaniment” (Partsch-Bergsohn 32). She was inspired by a theme,
dream, or image and would then improvise movements based on this idea. In most of her choreographies, music played a secondary role throughout her conceptual development of Ausdruckstanz. Silence was exceptionally important for Wigman because it punctuated the appearance of essence, or soul, in her movement by captivating her audience with the lack of music. This stylistic approach allowed her to present the pure and absolute essence of movement without it becoming objectified, transformed or predetermined by a musical scheme. Props, costumes, lighting, décor and mise-en-scène (depending on the type of dance) served a minimal and modest role in Wigman’s work.

Although Wigman created many solo pieces throughout her career, including Hexentanz, she also choreographed several group and choric dances. The themes of her solo work ranged from melancholic, somber, grotesque, dark to light, ethereal, playful and animated. Her group choreographies were highly stylized using clear and symmetrical patterns that continuously spiraled to shape modern designs across the stage. The sketches and illustrations she drew for her group choreographies were detailed and often resembled compositions using shapes and arrows instead of musical notation. Her collaborations with painters, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner und Emil Nolde, presumably influenced her use of sketches as part of her choreographic method in pictorially mapping image, form and movements in space.
Insbesondere in der Zeit vor dem ersten Weltkrieg in Zusammenhang mit Entwicklung des Expressionismus gehörten Tanzdarstellungen zu den bevorzugten Themen der Malerei. Ernst Kirchner und Emil Nolde, die beide mit Wigman bekannt waren, begeisterten sich während ihres gesamten Schaffens für diese Sujet.  

Wigman’s work heavily relied on image and form as the basis of her choreographic structure. Once Wigman carved out the central image and form of the piece, the finer details of individual expression, percussion, costuming, lighting and elaboration of themes were later added. Her works focused on a central theme with which she combined a modernist style. Her group pieces often appeared like moving sculptures as figures continuously moved in and out of shapes, forming a rhythm of lines. 

10 Zitate recovered from M.W. Ausstellung at Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 1986 commemorating her 100th birth year anniversary.
In 1926, the painter Ludwig Kirchner stated the following about Wigman’s Ausdruckstanz,

*Heute erster großer Eindruck bei Mary Wigman. Ich empfinde das Parallele, wie es sich in ihren Tänzen ausdrückt in der Bewegung der Massen, die die Einzelbewegung verstärken durch Zahl. Es ist unendlich anregend und reizvoll, diese Körperbewegungen zu zeichnen...Die neue Kunst ist da. M.W. benutzt vieles aus den modernen Bildern unbewusst, und das Schaffen eines modernen Schönheitsbegriffes ist ebenso in ihren Tänzen am Werke wie in meinen Bildern.*

The movement of the masses that Kirchner mentions underscored the meaning of how the group, or choir format, represented certain values of the ‘new art’ of the Expressionism as a whole. Kirchner often portrayed bodies in angular, fleeting motions that conveyed the flurry of activity evident in fast moving cities, such as in his painting of *Potsdamer Platz*.

![Potsdamer Platz](image)

*Fig. 17: Potsdamer Platz*

For Wigman, group choreography conveyed an aesthetic of structural harmony by using formal elements of an architectural style that combines fluidity with form. She found it challenging to focus on individual self-expression and build the character of a group.
ensemble. The concept followed that the individual dissolves in the collective choric experience it becomes subsumed by the primordial unity of the group.

In *Gedanken von Mary Wigman*, her choreographic concept for the opera dance production of “Orpheus und Eurydike” (1947) included, “*Einzelfiguren und Gruppen vom Duo bis zur chorisch tänzerischen Raumgestaltung. Behutsam und leise, versonnen und versponnen im Gleiten und Schweben der sich schliessenden und sich wieder lösenden Reigenformen*” (5). The choric principle in her work echoed Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie*, which further extended the Dionysian appeal of the choric ritual and its tragic dimension. The satyric chorus dissolved the imprint of Greek culture on humanity, which as Nietzsche writes, “is the most immediate effect of the Dionysian tragedy, that

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11 Chapter four will discuss how Pina Bausch and Kurt Jooss were strongly influenced by the choric principle, which both Laban and Wigman developed in *Ausdruckstanz*.
12 Archival material on Wigman at Tanzarchiv Leipzig.
the state and society, and, in general, the gulfs between man and man, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature.”

The stylistic use of *Schwingung* spoke to the oscillation between the “I” and the “we” that was evident in most of Wigman’s group work. She states, “*Schatten, schatten –die Fantasie will eigene Wege gehen. Ich sehe, wie der Chor der Schatten sich bildet, wächst und Form annehmen will, heranwallend wie Nebel, der über den Boden sieht, eine ungeheuerliche, gespenstige Woge*” (5). This text indicates how Wigman’s language reflected the expressionistic mode of the choric principle, which was presented in “Orpheus und Eurydike” as an engulfing, haunting and seductive force. The unity that the chorus represented fits with the return to the essential nature of the self, which was a central tenet to Wigman’s choreographic philosophy. Her choric principle, emphasis on emotional and individual expression, masks, and unconventional relationship to music in dance continue to influence modern and postmodern choreographic styles today.


Wigman’s early work received favorable reviews within avant-garde circulations, but was largely rejected by mainstream performance and theatre critics. Her dances were criticized as “ridiculous” and “idiotic.” Further, critics stated “the dance without music – unbearable, fatiguing,” and “the drum and gong accompaniment was ear-splitting, tortuous” (Dixon 37). Many critics dismissed her new dance as primitive and uninteresting. Her early pieces were frequently misunderstood by audiences and
therefore largely rejected by the mainstream. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, after the establishment of her school and successful debut in New York City, her reputation as a pioneer of the modern dance movement in Germany heightened as her method maintained a stronghold in the performing arts. *Mary Wigman verkörperte nicht Tanz, sie war Tanz. Ihr Fuß konnte – wie sie dichtete – spöttisch lächeln, ihre Hand vermochte zu weinen* (Sieben 7).

Wigman served a major role in shaping the development and discourse of *Ausdruckstanz*. Her life is a testament to the artistic necessity for the avant-garde to revolutionize the old, classical forms despite turbulent political chaos and moral depravity. Her contribution to the historical movement with her individualistic and kinesthetic interpretation of modernity in form, style, improvisation is unprecedented. As Hans Brandenburg writes,

> The unique characteristics of Wigman are that her dance is completely without any trace of pantomime, truly “absolute,” based solely on themes of motion and architecturally structured: it is based purely on laws of form caused by a kinesthetic logic…This dance is from no tradition, but will be instrumental in creating a new tradition (202, Der Moderne Tanz).
However, Wigman is not the only major figure who initiated breakthrough concepts to establish new relationships and styles of movement in Ausdruckstanz.

**CASE STUDY B: VALESKA GERT (1892-1978)**

Fig. 19: Abschied und Dank

Fig. 20: Valeska Gert, Nervosität (1917)
Because the average German has no self-confidence, he considers great art only that which he does not understand and which bores him. Mary Wigman fulfills these expectations of the educated middle class and therefore has acquired a national reputation” (Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert, Der Querschnitt May 1926).

Valeska Gert is arguably one of modernity’s most fascinating, versatile and revolutionary figures, yet until recently her work has gone unrecognized. Although they were active contemporaries in the 1920s avant-garde scene, Wigman and Gert shared significantly different perspectives on expression, form and concept in the performing arts. Both Gert and Wigman were similarly drawn to exploring the soul through movement, gesture and ecstatic forms of dance using witch and mask motifs. However, the social and cultural disparities in their personal histories strongly influenced their respective pursuits and different styles of Ausdruckstanz. As Norton argues, “Gert relished in disrupting the contrived pleasantness of the classical dances. She found the bourgeois ideal of feminine beauty inherent in the ethereal works by her contemporaries insipid and predictable” (98). Gert challenged Wigman’s rendition of the grotesque by openly confronting a political issue that dovetailed into social criticism and provocation. “Not unlike that of the painters George Grosz and Otto Dix, the style and content of her [Gert’s] art often went beyond the limits of bourgeois acceptability into the realms of the grotesque, contributing to a phenomenon typical of the Berlin of the 1920s” (Preston-Dunlop 5).

Gert came from a middle class Jewish family in Berlin and established her artistic career early on as a cabaret dancer, actress, mime, and later filmmaker and writer. Most

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13 as exemplified by Wigman’s Hexentanz.
bourgeois women of her time disdained her because of her bold and tenacious opposition to conventional morality, which is evidenced by her grotesque and satirical art of provocation. In an interview recorded in 1931 on Radio Leipzig, Gert states:

The modern dancer had to liberate himself from old theatrical ways and he had to become independent. He did not concern himself with tradition, he was without the constraints of old theatrical conventions. In total naïveté he gave visible expression to his innermost feelings. The dissociation from everything superficial, the restriction to essentials created the most intense movement and the most intensive expression possible: the dance. The dancer of our time, if he does not want to stagnate, has to be articulate about his intentions (Dunlop 13).

Fig. 21: Canaille (1925) Suse Byk

Gert began dancing ballet at the age of seven. Later, in her early twenties (1915-16), her artistic direction turned towards acting and theater. She trained with Maria Moissi in acting, and later studied dance with Rita Sacchetto.\(^{14}\) As Howe writes, “This marked the beginning of her artistic career, which included dancing, acting, film and cabaret work” (195). A fiercely independent thinker and revolutionary figure, Gert’s mode of expression demonstrated a radical departure from traditional performance style that is

\(^{14}\) Sacchetto (1880-1959) was an internationally acclaimed dancer and actress from Munich deeply inspired by Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller. Anita Berber and Gert studied with Sacchetto in Berlin 1920s.
punctuated by a distinctly anti-art stamp. She would often mock, jest and distort the
customs she saw on stage by boldly transforming them into witty satirical sketches.
Gert proved unafraid of upsetting bourgeois elite by blatantly overturning social taboos
particularly regarding issues of religion and sexuality. This suggestive, teasing form of
social provocation exhibited by shocking movements and unorthodox theatrical practices,
largely depicts Gert’s performance style.

Gert’s versatile theater background included collaborations with Max Reinhardt
and acting in plays, “Murderer, the Hope of Women” by Oskar Kokoschka and “König Nicolo” and “Franziska” by Franz Wedekind. In 1917, when Berthold Brecht saw her
dance matinee at the Kammerspiele in München, he exclaimed, “Your dances are
Chinese, and you are not ugly as others say. To the contrary, in Tibet you would be
considered a beauty. You live in the wrong land” (Gert, Ich bin eine Hexe 31-32).

Gert’s satirical wit, utterances, rapid movement and contorted facial gestures
translated Brecht’s notion of defamiliarization into movement by conveying
discontinuous and heterogeneous trends. Later in her career, her film work further
exemplified a disruption of temporal conventions through the use of montage. Gert’s use
of gesture and imitation of common people and everyday movement questioned the limits
of Expressionism, which ultimately challenged the limits of dance and its relationship to
the performative and theatricality. Norton writes, “Brecht admired her for her ability to
create an alienation effect in the dance medium; he invited her to perform regularly at Die
Rote Revue, his cabaret at the Münchner Kammerspiele” (105).
Gert did not fit into the category of a ballet or a modern dancer. Instead, she combined elements of dance and theatre in a radically unconventional way that was unprecedented for her time. Her style incorporated satirical gestures or caricatures that portrayed a raw, grotesque social reality, which opposed exalted representations of romantic, classical and bourgeois sentiments. Gert’s performances were a “Mischung aus Schock, Überraschung, Verblüffung, und wilden Begeisterungsstürmen” (Foellmer 9). She was not afraid to push the boundaries of her performance style to include extreme bouts of screaming, silence, fast paced tempos and twisted, distorted facial expressions. Gert embodied the rhythm and tension of modernity by her suspended gestures, asymmetrical costumes, and mocking caricatures of other dancers. As she writes in Ich bin eine Hexe,

I wanted to activate people. The more the people shouted, the bolder I became. I wanted to get beyond all limits, my face changed into masks, my rhythm exploded, until I pounded like a machine. ‘That is the breakthrough from the aesthetic to the dynamic dance of a new, harsher time,’ my supporters said.

Unlike Wigman’s dances, which strongly relied on universal and abstract representations to convey the sublime nature of emotion, Gert’s work emphasized a level of social critique, where extreme forms underscored her antagonistic style of provocation. Gert’s performance mode was embedded in the everyday, electric, immediate momentum of her time, which was communicated by her fast paced, frenetic, violent style and exaggerated forms of satirical gesture. “Whereas Mary Wigman concentrated on the dark side of things spiritual, eschewing realism and searching for abstracted means to express

15 “Es war der erste Durchbruch vom ästhetischen Tanz einer bürgerlichen Kultur zum Dynamischen einer neuen härteren Zeit” (Gert, Mein Weg 26).
the essence of her subjects, Valeska Gert did not shy away from realism, even if it meant dealing with the uglier aspects of human behavior” (Dunlop-Preston 5). By presenting contradictory elements in a mocking fashion, Gert pioneered a form of pantomime that reflected and criticized modern life. Howe contends, “In her juxtapositions of movements opposite of one another, she found a movement metaphor and expression for the instability so characteristic of her era” (202).

Wigman and Gert both preferred to work without music to emphasize the emotional depth and impact of their movement. Gert experimented with movement and sound more exclusively later in her film and montage work. But in their early stages, both Wigman and Gert were drawn to the essential expressions of movement that formed without influence or reliance upon any musical accompaniment. As argued in one critical review of Gert’s *Tod*, “It is completely logical that the music falls silent: this art of expression works so intensively through itself, possesses so much inner rhythm and spiritual sound, that audible accompaniments would only weaken the impression” (Norton 101).

As the titles of her dance pieces suggest, such as: “Zirkus,” “Kino,” “Varieté,” “Verkehr,” “Sport,” “Japanische Grotesque,” and “Tod” her performance pieces often portrayed activities such as boxing, being in traffic, jesting and included various temperaments and psychological states, such as being nervous, anxious, vulgar, intimidating and erotic. Gert’s independent and bold performance mode demonstrated the Zeitgeist of modernity with its hyperactive temporal scale and fluctuation of physical tensions. When interviewed to describe her choreographic method, Gert comments,
Usually I am possessed by a certain tension, which can last for days. This tension disturbs me. I try out various movements. If they release the tension, then they are good. I often deliberately make the tension last in order to create the amount of new forms that I need (Dunlop-Preston 13).

Gert’s interruption of conventional practices in both theater and dance resulted in a polarized shock effect, because audiences either responded to her work with disgust or admiration. The question is how to sustain significance beyond gesture after the shock effect has taken place. Prolonged shock ultimately leads to a desensitizing experience, which impedes the means of significance because the moment inevitably turns mute.

Gert resisted the tendency to have her pieces conform to a singular idea and appear the same by disrupting patterns with sudden, shocking movements. She used repetition as a means to demonstrate the exaggeration of a particular motion, yet strongly opposed the uniform appearance of her movements. Once she sensed that a dance was overdone or had become desensitized, she refused to perform it because the dance no longer delivered its essential meaning. For Gert, the immediacy of experience was integral to performance. The moment when its awakening shock was not present, the piece was no longer alive. Gert states, “Often I hear from the audience, ‘why don’t you do your Tango or Circus or Cabaret,’ or one of the others, but if these dances are dead and finished for me I cannot ever repeat them” (Dunlop-Preston in Schriftanz 14).
Gert’s choreography often portrayed the edgy and vulgar conditions of social reality, which were presented in a provocative, yet honest manner. Through exaggerated displays of movement, she employed shocking, violent and indecent means to undermine the social conventions of her time. According to Gert’s own concept of dance, she claimed that it is, “movement of the soul that is translated into movement of the body. A dance only needs to consist of a few gestures of the hands, a slowly rocking head, or an arm stretching out. It might need nothing more to be called a dance if behind it we can see the expression of the soul”16 (Dunlop-Preston 15).

Gert’s statement is consonant with the philosophy and guiding principles of ‘New German Dance,’ or Ausdruckstanz, as developed by Wigman and Rudolf von Laban. Although Gert’s style of Ausdruckstanz was presented in a radical, extremist manner, in terms of gesture and exploring the essence of movement, her intentions were not different than Wigman and Laban. However, the delivery and presentation of these intentions were distinctly different, and demonstrate the major stylistic deviations within the Ausdruckstanz movement. Gert contends, “I do not believe that by simply devising a

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16 From an interview with Valeska Gert recorded on Radio Leipzig (Schriftanz vol 14, no 1, June 1931).
skillful sequence of movement one can reveal one’s soul. Art shies away from the deliberately ‘artistic.’ It happens so often that dances are created according to recipes” (14).

Unlike Wigman, Gert rejected the presentation of an aesthetic arrangement of movements that formed a resemblance to an abstract concept or image. For Gert, the most basic and simple steps were far more compelling than highly choreographed dances. She did not view herself as a soloist, and shared no interest in choreographing group dances. She states, “I am not a solo dancer. I need a partner and this partner is my audience” (15). The stage and floor design of the theatre was particularly important for Gert, who generally preferred small stages to “increase her expressive powers” by establishing a close, intimate atmosphere.

Rejecting the barefoot dancing, Greek-tunic-adorning Duncan/ Wiesenthal/ Wigman generation, Gert preferred to dance in shoes that enhanced her character’s costume and stage appearance. With regard to costuming, Gert states, “I always choose the most simple designs and I prefer pure and clear colours. I was the first artist to introduce brilliant and loud colours to the stage” (16). Her dynamic, bold costumes complemented the exaggerated, distorted and grotesque use of gesture shown in her pantomimes, which exposed the contradictions of modern life and bourgeois values.

Norton contends, “Gert was the first dancer who supplied German modern dance with a revolutionary aesthetic that catapulted the art form into the realm of critical thought and social consciousness” (101). Not only did she advance Ausdruckstanz to embody social criticism, but she also revolutionized standard forms of theater by
introducing her exaggerated, distorted and grotesque forms of caricature that mixed cabaret with expressionist movement and gesture. Gert pioneered a unique performance style that received scant recognition because of her openly defiant and controversial style. This historical figure, whose work clearly demonstrated the spirit of the avant-garde in terms of her radical opposition to dominant trends in aesthetic traditions and ideological structures, still remains widely unknown.

Wigman is primarily recognized as Germany’s pioneer of modern dance. Examined critically, however, this claim is problematic. Unlike Gert (who fled Germany in 1938), Wigman stayed in Germany during World War II and continued to build her reputation as a leader of the modern dance community. Although Wigman’s work was later considered degenerate by the National Socialists, Wigman received, “Nazi subsidy to choreograph group dances, staging the body politic envisioned by fascist ideology” (Manning 170) between 1934-36, and choreographed “Olympic youth” for the opening ceremony of the 1936 Olympics in Munich.

After Goebbels’s Cultural Ministry ordained Ausdruckstanz to be renamed as Deutscher Tanz, Wigman published a book called Deutsche Tanzkunst (1935), which complies with fascist ideology in terms of its dance aesthetics. Ausdruckstanz was subsumed under the Third Reich to conform to nationalist, anti-semitic representations of the Volkgemeinschaft. The essence of movement, which was a central tenet to the avant-garde Expressionists, became indoctrinated into the fascist paradigm that located “essence” within the German people (192). Wigman’s journal entries indicate that her relationship with National Socialism was ambivalent, gravely uncritical and met with “limited resistance” (Manning 220). Determined to promote herself and her work under
the auspices of the New German Dance, Wigman complied with the Cultural Ministry despite its political implications.

Gert sought exile in the United States and arrived in New York City by boat in 1939. As Gert’s work practically disappeared during the war, Wigman’s company in Dresden received critical review. Wigman deserves some credit for rejecting ballet and establishing a foundation of a subjective, emotionally engaged dance form. However, it would be major oversight and misguided historical reading to ignore Gert’s indisputable influence on Ausdruckstanz with her modern forms of political satire in pantomime and performance art. Her significant role in changing the course of Ausdruckstanz’s historical development and influence on contemporary dance must be recognized. Gert claims, “Our works will appear timeless to future generations only if they are profound enough. They will deliver a message which passes from generation to generation which reveals that we are all human, we all have to follow the same laws, we all have to fight, we all have to die” (16).

Agamben writes “An era that has lost its gestures is, for that very reason, obsessed with them; for people who are bereft of all that is natural to them, every gesture becomes a fate” (137). For Gert, gesture was an integral mode of expression that exposed the depravity of the social reality that shocked the spectator to consciously observe their experience of alienation. Rather than imitating images or shapes that constructed an abstract aesthetic harmony, Gert’s performance style reflected the discontinuous mode of

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17 During her time in exile (1938-1949), Gert managed to save enough money to establish a few small cafes and cabarets for fellow émigrés and young artists. She opened a cabaret venue called the Beggar Bar in Greenwich Village in 1941 modeled after Montparnasse that showed satirical performances, poetry readings, and grotesque dances. Tennesse Williams was hired by Gert to wait tables and recite poetry.
everyday experience that most people of her day were unaware of. Her repetitive use of contorted gesture, distorted facial expressions and grotesque utterances disrupted empathy or possibility for audience identification.

This distancing mechanism forced the spectator to remove their emotions from the spectacle to objectively examine their own reactions. This gesture allowed the audience a moment to formulate their own judgment and to what extent their own “natural” movements and expressions followed or mimicked phantom echoes of history. Through the mechanism of distancing and unconventional theatre techniques, such as distortion, the possibility for critical discourse emerges. The reliance on language is changed in the context of movement, dance, visual art and theater because the gestures and system or codes for expression are not dependent on familiar tools of generating meaning. The communication that occurs in movement negates normal channels for significance, and points toward signs that are grasped by the faculties, which have not been conditioned by regulative societal measures. The inherent freedom within the language of gesture allows for this critical space to emerge, where the self-reflective quality that art provokes ultimately incites thinking and interpretation to move beyond its conventional mold.

Seine Gebärde bedeuten überhaupt keine Begriffe, sondern unmittelbar sein irrationelles Selbst, und was sich auf seinem Gesicht und in seinen Bewegungen ausdrückt, kommt von einer Schichte seiner Seele, die Worte niemals ans Licht fördern können. Hier wird der Geist unmittelbar zum Körper, wortelos, sichtbar (Balázs 16).

In conclusion, the aim of chapter two has been to compare and contrast the different trends and tendencies of Ausdruckstanz by focusing on the works of two major
female choreographers: Mary Wigman and Valeska Gert. The point of comparing two starkly different figures is to underscore the diverse form, concepts, and tendencies that are present the modern dance movement in Germany. Chapter two demonstrates that Ausdruckstanz is not a uniform movement, but instead is an engaging and complex set of modern concepts, structures, and styles that may not seem apparent at first glance.

Chapter three will discuss the works of Anita Berber, Jean Weidt, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kurt Jooss to show the further development of heterogenous modes of expression within this historical movement in addition to examining the downfall of Ausdruckstanz.
CHAPTER 3

ITERATIONS OF AGENCY AND DISSIMILARITY ON THE FRINGE OF
AUSDRUCKSTANZ

This chapter focuses on the less familiar and more complex works of dancers and choreographers in the margin of Ausdruckstanz to show how different expressions of agency are exhibited as a counter response to dominant trends in modernity, namely industrialization and mass society developments. Further, this section will deepen the examination of different styles and forms existent within Ausdruckstanz by revealing the more radically distinct permutations that interweave choreographic and theatrical styles in order to present a complex, incongruent shape of non-uniformity. A close examination of the following historical figures: Anita Berber, Jean Weidt, Oskar Schlemmer, and Kurt Jooss, will be discussed to show the fate of agency in these accounts.

Each case study will address issues regarding subjectivity, dramatic tension related to tragedy, abstract figuration, and symbolic gestures, all of which complicate Ausdruckstanz to a significant degree and allude to its downfall. The predominance of excessive, naïve and idealistic tendencies held in the pursuit of individual agency essentially precipitated the decline of the Ausdruckstanz movement. The contradiction is that this revolutionary break from classical tradition relies on transcendent, absolutist, and abstract claims, which revert back to the idealism of representational art that it had initially set out to reject.

The purpose of examining choreographers located on the fringe of Ausdruckstanz is to discuss the concept of agency as it relates to the body, and to show how
unconventional forms and styles are used to oppose totalizing forces and dominant power structures contained in art, society and politics. Each account will explore how Ausdruckstänzer and the Ausdruckstanz movement ultimately reached a standstill as they are forced to recognize their fate in a moment where expression is interrupted. Ausdruckstanz is demonstrated by an exaggerated expression of individuality, irrationality, emotional pathos that evokes ‘natural’ body movements and tragic themes, all of which fail, marking its own end. The collapse of this revolutionary movement of modern dance in Germany is particularly evidenced by the tragic story of the young and vibrant dancer, Anita Berber.

This chapter will begin by examining the provocative edge in the stylistic analysis of Anita Berber's ‘performative paralysis’. Then, Jean Weidt and his interpretation of Kultursozialismus and socialist dance form will be discussed, followed by Oskar Schlemmer’s concept of abstract figuration in Bauhaus theatre. Finally, Kurt Jooss and his early development of Tanztheater, including concepts of dramatic tension in modern dance movement will be analyzed.

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1 This issue is further discussed in Chapter four on the postwar reform of Ausdruckstanz and emergence of Tanztheater.
Part I. Anita Berber: Performative Trauma

Anita Berber was neither interested in pursuing a professional dance career in classical ballet, nor in joining the Tiller Girls\(^2\) infamously anonymous and mechanically uniform canon. Instead, Berber carved out her own movement expression, which characterized the course of her scandalous life and early fate. In 1912, Berber studied at the Dalcroze school in Hellerau where Wigman had also completed her training in rhythmic gymnastics. By 1917, Berber began to perform as a professional dancer and cabaret artist. Sharing a likeness in performance style to Valeska Gert (as previously discussed in Chapter two), Berber also studied ballet for a brief period with Rita Sacchetto in Berlin. The avant-garde movement and expressionist dance scene in Berlin deeply influenced Gerber. Gert and Berber were contemporaries, but did not share a friendship or acquaintanceship outside of their affiliation with Sacchetto. Berber worked primarily in the cabaret scene and later pursued acting in film, landing several minor roles, including one in Fritz Lang’s *Dr. Mabuse* (1922). On the other hand, Gert traveled abroad extensively and worked intensely in theater venues, but also did some experimental film work using montage techniques. Both Gerber and Gert developed their own style of expressionist “performance art,” which at the time had not yet been established as a recognizable art form.

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\(^2\) These (Tiller) girls of similar stature hold their bodies in linear, angular shapes, linking arms and legs, resulting in images where it is difficult to distinguish one girl’s limbs from another (Hughes 322).
Berber’s tumultuous life was cut short by a fatal twist of events due to her cocaine addiction, financial instability, and promiscuous lifestyle. Berber’s hardship, trauma, open bisexuality, and socialite dramas were often the subject of the tabloids, as well as the main theme of her provocative dances including Selbstmord (Suicide), Morphium (Morphine), Kokain (Cocaine) and Haus der Irren (Mad House), some of which contained nude and seminude performances. Hughes writes, “Far from being artificial productions, which asked for the audience’s suspension of disbelief, Berber’s performances were a way of experiencing the excitement and titillation of being in her world” (327). Funkenstein further argues, “With a range that extended beyond nude dancing, Berber combined aspects of the erotic and the expressionistic in her work, and her theatricality shares much more recent trends with performance art” (26).
Berber’s choreographic repertoire largely included dances that confronted death, darkness, lament, pain, and suffering. Berber never attempted to hide the overwhelming despair and macabre mood that motivated the subject matter of her pieces. She was not interested in painting a decorative cover that would ultimately conceal or distort the painful reality of her tragic experience. Berber was interested in exposing the raw edge of her experience in its full emotional depth, rather than constructing a false artifice that would cover up its harsh reality and distance her artistic expression from her personal plight. Her on stage, emotional portrayals were direct references to her real traumatic experiences, which underscore Berber's courage to break the conventional mold by rejecting the trajectory of social conventions that restrict subjects available for women’s expression. Her risqué performance style and focus on solo choreography proved Berber’s engagement in disclosing the raw truth within her personal subjectivity. In doing so, her work comprised some of the key elements that are characteristic of
Ausdruckstanz: emotional expression, subjective postures, theatrical gestures, improvisation, exotic costumes, and non-classical styles of movement. Berber’s interpretation of Ausdruckstanz engaged tragic themes by directly confronting death, emphasizing its violent and catastrophic elements rather than attempting to transcend it.

The psychological complexity in Berber’s work was demonstrated by her focus on ‘performative paralysis’ and erotic expressionism, which radically broke the conventions of theatricality. Toepfer writes,

Berber used all parts of her body to construct a “tragic” conflict between the healthy body and the poisoned body: she made distinct rhythms out of movement of her muscles; she used “unexpected countermovements” of her head to create an anguished sense of balance…Berber’s dance dramatized the intense ambiguity involved in linking ecstatic liberation of the body to nudity to rhythmic consciousness (90).

Berber challenged the content and style of conventions in dance with her tragic and titillating interpretation of Ausdruckstanz. She also leveraged a revolutionary, brutal and violent expression that offered a pure outlet for sexual repression. In Max Herrmann-Neiße’s writings on German cabaret in the 1920s, he discusses Anita Berber as an “entirely independent individual in search of absolute freedom” (73-74). Yet, her desire for absolute freedom ended abruptly in 1928, when a severe case of tuberculosis ended her life at the young age of 29. Otto Dix’s painting of Anita Berber depicted her as a tragic, grotesque, yet revolutionary dance figure whose life is caught wedged between the crumbling world of classicism and the fast paced chaos of the modern avant-garde.

In her dance piece titled Absinthe (1925), Berber performed the sole act of drinking absinthe, which “evoked the power of death and implied a dark and solitary end to life” (Funkenstein 28). Like Gerber, the painter Otto Dix did not “shy away from a
brutality of expression” (536). Considering their common interest in dark and subversive themes, it is conceivable that Dix felt compelled to paint a brilliantly red, yet grotesque image of Gerber only three years before her death (see Chapter two). His ghastly, yet provocative portrayal of Berber suggested the seductiveness of her flashy lifestyle while evoking a secretive death wish, which she openly tempted in her dances. Funkenstein contends,

Dix was drawn to many of these same artists and themes because they conveyed suffering through detail and verisimilitude. Moreover, Berber's expressionist language was similar to that which Dix had utilized to express the horrors of trench warfare (Funkenstein 27).

The aestheticization of Berber’s image, along with her suffering, should not be viewed as an attempt to sterilize her plight. The downfall of Berber’s dances conveyed her life experiences, which cannot be fixated by a portrait in an attempt to absolve her otherwise tragic life. The national socialists confiscated Dix’s painting of Berber and labeled it “entartete Kunst,” or degenerate art. After the war, it surfaced in an art collection in Paris and was later acquired in Munich. Dix’s “Berber” currently belongs to his wife and its worth is estimated to be one million Euros. The echoes of the tragic expression surrounding Berber’s life exist enigmatically beyond the painting of her by Otto Dix, almost in defiance against the framing of her life experience as something that did not belong to her or that existed outside of who she really was.

In George Steiner’s introduction to Walter Benjamin’s “The Origin of German Tragic Drama” or Der Ursprung des Trauerspiels, he discusses the distinction between

3 “Dix scheut keine Brutalität des Ausdrucks” quoted by Willi Wolfrad in Barbara Hales article, “Dancer in the Dark.”
Tragödie and Trauerspiel. Tragedy is “grounded in myth” and “acts out a rite of heroic sacrifice,” whereas Trauerspiel is “counter-transcendental” and “emphatically mundane, earthbound, corporeal (9).” In contrast to Mary Wigman, who emphasizes the transcendent, mystical qualities of her tragic dances, Berber’s style is heavily imbued with the mundane and corporeal elements of movement and expression. Berber resolutely challenged, yet at the same time embraced the face of death by directly tempting conventional habits that restrict her freedom of both artistic and sexual expression. Berber stated,

*Die Vorführung ist mir Ernst. Ich habe das mit den Mädels lange einstudiert. Wir tanzen den Tod, die Krankheit, die Schwangerschaft, die Syphilis, den Wahnsinn, das Sterben, das Siechtum, den Selbstmord, und kein Mensch nimmt uns ernst. Sie glotzen nur auf unsere Schleier, ob sie nicht darunter etwas sehen können, die Schweine* (29).

Berber’s indiscreet handshake with death, explicitly shown through her dances, conveyed her rejection and social critique of death's hostile, demeaning conditions. Her contempt for a life of obedience and mediocrity was manifested through her radical displays of provocation, which subverted conventional codes of propriety and conformity, particularly concerning issues of the female body and sexuality.

During her brief and turbulent marriage to Austrian Sebastian Droste, Berber and Droste published an expressionist book of poetry based on their dances titled, “*Die Tänze des Lasters*” (1923). Their poems alluded to abstract relationships existing between dance and the body by showing how physical movement opens a channel to sublime, universal forces, which allowed inner longings and primal urges to be accessed and

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4 Lothar Fischer, “*Tanz zwischen Rausch und Tod – Anita Berber 1918-1928 in Berlin.*”
released. Hales writes,

Berber and Droste’s book, *Die Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und Ekstase* defines the ecstasy of dance as movement designed to make contact with a higher power. According to the text, dance was an expression of inner experience, where the dancer did not play a part, but was the embodiment of emotions such as ecstasy and horror (540).

![Anita Berber](image)

**Fig. 27: Der Tanz ins Dunkel**

Berber is a significant figure to discuss because of the provocative way that she openly subverted the stereotype of the exploited, objectified woman who dances on stage at the mercy of the male gaze. Instead of placing herself in the expected role of a subservient female object of desire, Berber staged warfare by assuming agency and control over her body, acting out in a violent, disagreeable manner before her audience. Although her dark facial features and 1920s ‘vamp’ style could arguably be interpreted as
exhibiting the ‘grotesque,’ her passionate and tumultuous attitude defied social expectations by disrupting the image of a harmoniously staged performance.

Berber’s work was clearly in the expressionist vein because of its emphasis on emotional affect and subjective disclosure, which were central forces of her choreography. However, the most provocative element of her work was arguably the extent to which she blatantly rejected the female ballet dancer stereotype of the innocent butterfly. Berber completely denied this mold. Instead, she introduced a mode of expression that was crass and internally exposed to such an intense degree that a fairy princess image could hardly endure the severity of her edgy attitude. She openly tempted death in her work, as well as in her life, which is testament to the level of temerity she exhibited during a time when women began to explore new gestures of social, sexual, physical and political liberation.

Her *danse macabre* expressions further conveyed a resistance to the sterile and fixed notions of staged expectations, which she refused by performing her own death and destruction. Berber's life was consumed by oppressive social structures that tried to inscribe meaning and significance on to her life. As a way to assume control, Berber rehearsed her death. She further revolted by claiming her individuality and agency, which was expressed through her work. The following description of her performance style indicates her insistence on disrupting theatrical conventions by overturning tables and creating a catastrophic scene.

*Anita aber nahm ihre Vorführungen bitterernst. Deshalb nahm sie jede Störung tragisch. Zurufe beantwortete sie mit unanständigen Ausdrücken. Jedoch drehte sie sich währenddessen in ihren durchsichtigen Schleiern*
Part II. Jean Weidt: Choreography of Kultursozialismus

Jean Weidt, dancer and choreographer, established a leftist political dance troupe called the *Die Roten Tänzer* in the 1920s. Like Berber, Weidt was also interested in disrupting aesthetic traditions in dance. However, his interpretation of *Ausdruckstanz* was directed towards the portrayal of movement to convey socialist values and proletariat themes. Weidt’s dance aesthetic comprised constructivist elements, which combined themes of social mobility through group movement sketches that demonstrated the ideal Gemeinschaft or community. In a 1948 review discussing Weidt’s postwar premiere of *Ode nach dem Sturm* at Kurfürstendamm in Berlin, dance critic Stuckenschmidt cited Weidt describing his perspective of dance. He states:

*Nicht die Beweglichkeit der Arme oder der Beine genügt, um einen Tänzer zu machen, sondern, über allem anderen, der Geist...Das wesentliche bei einem Tänzer ist seine Persönlichkeit; sie stützt sein Werk, das seine Seele prägt.’ Ein klares Bekenntnis zum Ausdruckstanz, zum vergeistigten Kunstwerk; gegen Ornament, Ballett und Pas des Deux (Stuckenschmidt 25).

Weidt’s style combined the Expressionist emphasis on the individual personality, psychology, and Geist with his intense concentration on the working community. He adopted elements of *Ausdruckstanz* to incorporate them into a socially critical context,
which was demonstrated by the individual and group dynamic, as well as with his use of solo and ensemble choreography. Like Valeska Gert and Anita Berber, Jean Weidt’s “konventionsfern, anti-graziös” approach positioned his work on the fringe of the Ausdruckstanz movement, which was largely seen as an exception to the choreographic rule (Stuckenschmidt 25).

His symbolic language of gesture and use of masks conveyed romantic, agrarian images that contained tragic and grotesque moments presented within a working class context. As dance historian Yvonne Hardt contends, “His dance philosophy was associated with Kultursozialismus (cultural interpretation of socialism) – through its “emotionally charged movements, clear cut spatial and rhythmic structures,” Weidt was able to “stage the worker’s body and political issues” (62).

In a close study of Jean Weidt, it is significant to examine different forms and concepts in Ausdruckstanz to show how it reveals the relationship between the expressionist principles of choreography and socialist ideology. Weidt internalized the freedom promoted by Ausdruckstanz to move the body in unconventional ways through a socialist dance that explored the performative relationship between Arbeiter and Gemeinschaft. This construction of identity through expressionist movement offered a liberating vehicle that allowed a socially engaged individual to demonstrate their position through dance by using their body. This avenue created tremendous potential for modern possibilities of socialist expression through art and movement, which were no longer constrained by standard repertoires of marching songs, political slogans etc. Hardt writes,
“In his dances the worker conquered the stage as a person/individual and a topic. The worker was simultaneously subject and object of his choreographies” (64).

The body was presented as a medium for Agitprop-Kunst for Weidt, which does not explicitly mitigate or overcome the problem of worker’s exploitation. However, this account suggested a tendency in Ausdruckstanz that is problematic for the development of Tanztheater in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which distinctly rejected and criticized dance and the body as tools for idealism and political propaganda. This established the necessity for a reformed, or post-expressionist movement that emphasized the importance of developing movements that were distinctly self-reflexive and self-aware. Brecht articulated these problems in theatre. Dance did not experience this shift towards its own

Fig. 28: Jean Weidt in Arbeiter, 1925

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conscious self-awareness until later developments of Tanztheater, under the direction of choreographer, Kurt Jooss, and later Pina Bausch.

Originally from Hamburg, Weidt moved to Berlin in 1929 after spending his formative years training and working in several theaters and dance studios in Hamburg. Weidt rejected the common practices in Ausdruckstanz to focus exclusively on solo choreography, and he was compelled to explore the relationships between the individual and the group by experimenting with new ways to develop artistically persuasive choreography that focused on the Arbeiterklasse. Weidt argues, “Our goal was to create a new and proper form for issues that had previously been ignored” (16-21). These changes in form resulted in a social realist aesthetic that emphasized the mobility of the proletariat. This enabled Weidt to engage with social and political problems in the Weimar Republic through the new medium of expressionist dance.

Weidt’s mode of expression demonstrated a particular tendency within Ausdruckstanz, which revealed how ‘expressionist’ dance was often adapted to suit the needs of the choreographer to promote their own personal ideology or project. This suggested a problem with the discursive use of personal agency that supported the challenge against historical models, yet did not question the complacency in sublimating oneself for the purpose of an ideal solidarity on the grounds of a conformist ideology.

Ausdruckstanz choreographers gained a new lens and vocabulary through the different modes of expression and respective forms of movement now offered. They used these contemporary methods to challenge and confront a range of social issues through

5 Jean Weidt, *Auf der grossen Straße*. 

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dance, movement and the body. The focus on the body is significant because of its potential to mobilize social change by transforming a passive participant into an active agent. This activation process revealed the oppressive conditions that the body is subject to, while creating a new way to consciously manifest artistic and political freedom in overcoming forces of alienation, loss and immobility.

Jean Weidt developed a dance style oriented towards social activism called *agit-prop*, which advanced artistic expression through the use of movement and speech. Weidt was very connected to the notion of ‘the worker’ and emphasized a socialist sensibility in his choreography. He provided workers (typically lacking in any formal dance training) with an opportunity to develop their artistic ability and expression as a means to enhance the significance and value of the working community. His style of dance modified the techniques of *Ausdruckstanz* by introducing a new structure of expression that was particularly concerned with the activation of one’s body. Weidt applied expressionist concepts of rhythm, nudity, masks and also included dance sketches that explore emotional experiences of *Entfremdung* (detachment) and *Leiden* (suffering).

Although Weidt exposed the modern, technical changes that *Ausdruckstanz* established, he failed to create a form of dance that truly liberated bodies by raising a socially critical consciousness and instilling personal autonomy through the activation of bodies. Instead, he adopted modern elements and the ‘new German dance’ form to follow the function of his own ideological concept.

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6 agit-prop is a reference to vehicles used for film propaganda in the Soviet Union.
Weidt was critical of capitalist forces that shaped the body with its emphasis on fast paced, technical mechanization, but strongly condemned the bourgeois and aristocratic foundations of classical ballet. Intent on developing a unique political dance style, Weidt retained foundational elements of *Ausdruckstanz*, such as individual expression, subjective experience, gestures, masks, and themes of lament with the intention of restoring the human dignity and artistic value of the worker. Yvonne Hardt writes,

*The Rhythmisierung* (rhythmic structuring) of Weidt's pieces established another mimetic link in (re)presenting the worker's everyday life and a movement form that could be characterized as modern dance. Rhythmic patterns worked especially well in group works. In keeping with the trend of the times, Weidt's dances perceived rhythm, industrialization, and works mutually dependent (74).
Weidt started the dance groupe *Die roten Tänzer* shortly after arriving in Berlin in 1929, where he became acquainted with the Laban school and was exposed to works of Valeska Gert and her satirical dance theater. His works received critical acclaim and favorable reviews by dance critic Fritz Böhme. In one dance review on Weidt’s choreography, Böhme writes,

> An access to the understanding of these dances lies here: his creations are expressions of human sorrow in contemporary society, they are not simply mirrors of this reality, but endeavors and attempts to uplift everyday reality by way of movement creation in to the realm of the symbolic.

As widely practiced in *Ausdruckstanz*, the framing of the body through symbolic, abstract gestures was integral to Weidt’s choreographic style. Not only did he want to reshape perceptions of the worker’s community, but Weidt was further interested in grappling with the tensions that abstract and symbolic gestures conveyed in the depiction of the worker’s political struggle and collective fight for autonomy. Occasionally, Weidt also performed with masks, practiced nude dancing, and danced as an elderly woman, which all indicate his openness to experiment with expressionist dance elements within a socialist context.

This symbolic understanding was not perceived as a mimetic device that reflected reality like a mirror, but instead presented a different composite of movements and rhythmic patterns that were distanced from the real and everyday. It established an idealized, symbolic language that contained expressionist elements, which Böhme argues, “uplifts” mundane reality to create something new. This transcendent quality evokes one of the central motifs of *Ausdruckstanz*, yet Weidt’s particular rendering of it was placed
into the representation of the ideal working class. Weidt used Expressionist elements to further his own ideological claim to represent the working class body as an ideal, which contradicted the assertion of reflecting something real. Therefore, Weidt’s “political dance” was no different than the ‘form follows function’ concept that was appropriated by modernity, nor was it theoretically any different than the historical understandings of representational art. Weidt essentially adopted the mechanism of historical representation but modified its form, which manifested itself as an external difference, but internally, it utilized the old program of idealism and representational art. This problem was evident in the social realist art of Soviet Russia, where its constructivist monuments served to unify the proletariat under its regime without bearing any reference to its dystopian reality.

Weidt donated most of the proceeds of his performances to benefit the poor and elderly. His dances “Klages des Soldatens,” “Tanz für Lenin,” and “Gesicht eines jungen Arbeiters” strongly demonstrated his leftist position and intention to create dances that promoted his political and cultural views for the benefit of social reform. As an active Lebensreformer and cultural socialist, Weidt was interested in making choreographic works that conveyed the relationship between life, art and politics. He later became a member of the communist party in 1931, and fled to Paris after the Nazis took power in 1933. Nonetheless, his politics remained a central force in his choreographic style during the DDR, where he continued to produce works that combined styles of Ausdruckstanz with a focus on leftist, socialist ideology. Weidt wanted to “transform workers into dancers, into people with agency over their lives and bodies” (Hardt 68).
The claim was problematic because the legitimacy of agency, according to Weidt, existed in terms of functionality put into the service of a grandiose idea. Agency of the body was conceived as a vehicle, or tool, to represent the socialist proletariat ideology, rather than to perceive the autonomous body through a critical engagement of the subject’s relationship, which contradicted and problematized its identification with the greater whole. This point raised the issue of how dance questioned agency through its intrinsic relation with the body and the problems that ensued when ‘the body’ was discussed through language as a static, objectified thing, rather than a moving subject that related to itself through sensory awareness while moving in time and space.

The body played a particularly salient role with regard to political expression with its emphasis on freedom, autonomy, liberation, agency and action. Every human being has a body regardless of their race, gender, social class, religion, political view, historical, geographical, and cultural origin. The expression of freedom, autonomy and subjectivity is located in the body. How the body moves, the shapes that it takes and how it performs acts of (dis)obedience, (non)conformity, (non)complacency are all demonstrated by the body through action, gesture, movement, language and voice. The body is the vital sphere in which political identity and subjective expression are constructed. Iterations of agency surfaced through the body and became enacted in a live and active process that refused stagnancy or decay.

However, the body contains a finite and measurable source of life. The finite nature of life within the body stands in perpetual conflict with the desire to connect with the symbolic, or infinite source that transcends all physical and rational limitations.
Social environment and conditions imprint the body with values, ideas and laws. These are not necessarily in accordance with natural, essential forces that enervate the body with its rhythmic pulse that is manifested through one’s passage from birth to life. The task of modern choreography is to break through conventions that restrict the potential for social transformation and revolutionary ideas. Nonetheless, this rhythmic task should contain a mode of expression that conflicts with the symbolic understanding of transcendence by interrupting the cycle of historical representation and its idealization of absolute forms. The contemporary choreographer has the responsibility to disrupt the outdated ideological models passed down through history, which elevate transcendent claims through measures of movement that separate the dancer from the dance.

The expressionist choreographer manifested the break against classical dance by working with masks, subjectivity, emotional portrayals, solo dance, grotesque, sublime elements, satire, rhythmic motion, gesture, and symbolic abstraction. Through these different forms and styles, Ausdruckstanz was able to manifest a new opening of meaning and significance for bodily movement that rejected the aristocratic historical traditions of classical ballet. With the host of distinct styles, modes of expression and choreographic principles, Ausdruckstanz established a new dimension of movement vocabulary that allowed the dancer and choreographer to create their signature style, which initiated a new range of possibilities to iterate the modern experience with all of its shapes and misfits.

The discourse concerning the relationship between individual expression, the body, autonomy, and agency in Ausdruckstanz lacks a criticism of the reliance on
symbolic, transcendent forms that become idealized in dance as representations of 'inner experience' and 'authentic expression.' There are no self-conscious mechanisms at place within the works that expose how these modes of expression are inherently no different than those of representational art. Both modern and traditional movements of art are engaged with the idealization and reproduction of images. In doing so, they become static, sterile, and fixed. The emphasis on individual expression and personal autonomy in Ausdruckstanz therefore lacks a critical moment to effectively confront the problem of immortalizing the dancer or choreographer’s identity and authorship, which leads to cultish followings and self-aggrandizing portraits instead of self-conscious or self-reflexive modes of expression.

Part III. Oskar Schlemmer: Abstract Figuration in Bauhaus Theatre

The visual artist and choreographer, Oskar Schlemmer, attempted to limit individual expression through his constructivist approach to movement and figuration, which was largely shaped by his participation in the Bauhaus movement. Bauhaus emerged from the Neue Sachlichkeit movement, which was often viewed as a counter response to Expressionism. New Objectivity positioned itself against the pure emotionalist fervor of Expressionism and posited a sober picture of the relationship between art, life, and politics.
The tendency toward abstract minimalism in *Neue Sachlichkeit* and Bauhaus were not only pivotal in terms of influencing the form, style and concept of dance for Schlemmer, but they were also highly influential on the Judson Dance Theater and postmodern dance movement that took place in the 1960s in New York City. Oskar Schlemmer’s work reflected this objective turn in *Ausdruckstanz*, whereby bodily movements resembled figures of geometric patterns that were designed with a technical emphasis on relationships between space, time and rhythm. His calculative, measurable approach reverted back to a rationalist philosophy that was aimed against the symbolic elevation of a transcendent ideology.

![Image](image.png)

*Fig. 30: Oskar Schlemmer mit Maske, 1930*

Schlemmer’s extensive background in the visual arts as a sculptor, painter, and graphic designer gave his work a unique structure and form that demonstrated a distinct shift from expressionist “emotional” dance to an objective presentation of movement that showed how figures, lines and forms related to each other in time and space. Schlemmer
was not interested in the nature of subjectivity in physical bodies or moving emotional vessels of tastes. Rather, he wanted to explore the *mechanism* existing within the tension and force that bound and released motion through the display of alternating geometric lines, figures, costume, space and forms.

The most characteristic artistic quality in Oskar Schlemmer’s work is his interpretation of space. From his paintings, as well as from his stage work for ballet and theater, it is apparent that he experienced space not only through mere vision but with the whole body, with the sense of touch of the dancer and the actor…He transformed into abstract terms of geometry or mechanics his observation of the human figure moving in space (Gropius, *Theater of the Bauhaus* 8).

Originally from Stuttgart, Schlemmer was a formal member of Bauhaus from 1921-1929 and began teaching sculpture classes in Weimar and later Dessau. He soon became involved in the practice, theory and instruction of stage design, initiating theater and dance projects. For Schlemmer, the experimentation of moving bodies in space to produce new forms or concepts and relationships was most significant. His focus on formal abstraction and minimalism was an integral part of his work that indicated how objective and technical developments in movement, as opposed to subjectivity, compelled him to explore a mechanical interpretation of dance.

Given the Bauhaus concentration on objective and minimalist design, Schlemmer’s interest in mechanization seemed logical. It further indicated Schlemmer’s rejection of creating a movement style that was based on the construction of an identity or personality. His omission of affect and emotion was an anti-expressionist gesture that resisted the importance of subjectivity and individual persona, which were central forces of *Ausdruckstanz*. The collision between line, form, space and subject, as exhibited by
Schlemmer’s work, sobered the excessive intoxication of emotion washed up in the prevailing works of *Ausdruckstanz*.

Schlemmer’s work problematized autonomy and identity through his style of mechanization and abstract figuration. He objectified the body, masked its identity and presented movement through mechanical and kinetic operations. The movement style of the body was not predetermined by an emotional expression or narrative, instead it was conceived through an objective point in space that traveled according to the laws and principles of his grid-like patterns, shapes and designs.

![Abstract stage](image)

**Fig. 31: Abstract stage**

Walter Gropius writes how Schlemmer became, “Possessed with the idea of finding new symbols” and considered it a “mark of Cain in our culture that we have no symbols anymore and worse that we are unable to create them” (8). However, Gropius’ comment concerning the symbolic conflicts with Schlemmer’s concept of movement and figuration, particularly because his work did not attempt to signify meaning outside of what his pieces presented. Gropius further contends, “The aim of the Bauhaus was to
find a new and powerful working correlation of all the processes of artistic creation to culminate finally in a new cultural equilibrium of our visual environment” (1). Bauhaus attempted to create a synthesis of art and modern technology by using new materials such as glass, wood and plastic with a minimalist form and style. Although Schlemmer’s concept of movement contained a unified arrangement based on his highly structural approach, there was ample evidence in his work that indicated a continuum of motion through a multitude of lines that created possibilities for movement, rather than remaining fixed or resolved in a closed circuit.

In terms of agency, Schlemmer was not interested in giving the individual a subjective voice that iterates itself through variations of emotional expression. Instead, his agency is subtly conveyed through abstract figuration. The lack of conventional framing refused the determination of the subject on the basis of personality. The viewer was equally relieved from having expectations of how this mechanical figure on stage should or should not behave or act according to its character or identity. Agency was iterated in the absence of a subject and through the rejection of the burden of expectation that an individual subject or persona would be forced to sustain. The momentum necessary to construct a subjective identity or persona would suggest the desire to make something of a symbolic order intended to endure and last over time, which is something that Schlemmer was not compelled by. For him, the mechanical expression of figures moving through space without an emotional purpose is the form that was most applicable for his style of Bauhaus theater.
Schlemmer’s style of expression was in the abstract figuration of human objects moving in space, which interacted and related to each other without a set narrative that would otherwise determine its movement. Abstraction pointed to the mechanization of lines, surfaces and angles in space that had no historical basis or narrative structure. There was no author or identity to define the meaning of the lines that were configured on a plane drawn in space. Schlemmer’s use of abstraction explored the mechanism of motion that was presented through his figures, which moved on their own accord. Through lines that intersected and crossed or spiraled and gyrated, his abstract figures presented movement as anti-historical by rejecting the value of narrative voice, author, or subjectivity. Instead, his figures operated and functioned to produce kinetic relationships through mechanical means that dance without a script.

The mechanical establishment, paired with the bouncing off of an objective character of form, is therefore completely motivated by technical displays of movement, rather than a subjective inquiry and personal self-exploration. As Dirk Scheper writes, “Der Mensch im Raum, Schlemmers Grundthema, ist als theatricalische Ursituation Ausgangspunkt seiner Bühnentheorie” (310). The formal elements of the Bauhaus theater were comprised of space, form, color, light, materials and representations of human form. Schlemmer interpreted these elements by using his own theoretical and practical understanding of Bauhaus theatre, emphasizing costumes, masks and stage. “Schlemmer setzt den kubischen abstrakten Raum der Bühne als ein Gebilde aus Maß und Zahl voraus, bestehend aus den Formelementen des Kubus, aus Punkt, Linie, Fläche, Flächenformen und Körperformen” (Scheper 310).
Schlemmer was initially trained as a master painter at the *Stuttgarter Akademie* before entering the Bauhaus with Gropius in 1919. His painterly background acted as a significant influence on his theatre design and dance concepts, particularly with regard to Cubism. The painting style and form of Paul Cézanne and Georges Seurat were notable influences on Schlemmer’s development of different ways of representing the human form in space. “*Der Mensch, aufgefaßt als mathematisch-geometrisch bestimmter Typus und Repräsentant einer höheren Ordnung, beherrscht von nun an auch Schlemmers Tanzideen und gibt ihnen eine neue Richtung*” (307). Different perceptions of how to present objects in space on two dimensional surfaces informed Schlemmer's new direction. He was further compelled to demonstrate these different spatial-temporal
relationships of objects moving in space by putting his geometric figures to work on stage.

Schlemmer opened his *Triadisches Ballet* (1922) in Stuttgart, which recalled his notion of “künstlerischer metaphysischer Mathematik” (Scheper 307). Jochen Schmidt argues, “Tatsächlich hat ja Schlemmer selbst immer wieder auf Kleists Aufsatz über das Marionetten hingewiesen” (92). This ballet of geometrically shaped costumes defined Schlemmer’s new type of dance that portrayed the abstraction of human form in variant shapes and dimensions. This abstract figuration served a twofold purpose. Firstly, it rejected the historical conception of the human body that moves in linear space, like a narrative that unfolds through time. Secondly, the mechanization of movement that the figure displayed described its own lines of destiny through technical application instead of thematic organization. Therefore, the figure’s movements were governed by its own mechanics that compelled it to interact with the different points and planes in space, which were not limited by an external concept or ideology.

Given Schlemmer’s major focus on the human figure in space and his expertise in designing two- and three-dimensional objects, it was plausible that Schlemmer perceived a culmination of his human figure study by applying his Bauhaus principles into his theatrical display of *Triadisches Ballet*. Not only did Schlemmer provide Bauhaus principles a new platform, in which to infiltrate a new context and direction through theater and dance, but he also challenged the aesthetic form of what was conventionally considered ballet. His earlier sketches, designs, prints, paintings, sculptures of human figures were instead performed in the live production of *Triadisches Ballet*.
Costume design was arguably the most significant visual component of his choreography because the form of the costumes dramatically changed how the dancers relate to the space around them. The costumes were sculpted in round, bulbous, spiral, square, and oval geometric shapes. Most of the costume shapes were at times exaggerated to extraordinary proportions so that the dancers appeared nonhuman and assumed otherworldly characteristics. Scherper contends, “Tatsächlich spiegelt die Bauhaus-Bühne auf eigene Weise die Entwicklung des Bauhauses vom Handwerk zur industriellen Formgebung wider und gestaltet sie mit, wenn auch nur am Rande” (310).

In contrast to the standard Ausdruckstanz, which was decidedly influenced by the subjective and emotional sways of Mary Wigman’s focus on individualism, Schlemmer’s Triadisches Ballet presented a complex and interesting problem for dance scholars and historians. His choreography did not fit the standard rubric of ballet, nor did it contain a
distinct trace of the emotional affect that was so deeply intrinsic to the style and form of Ausdruckstanz. The footwork was mostly of balletic origin, but the composition, arrangement and above all, the costume design, were completely unconventional and they largely recall the design principles of the Bauhaus movement. There was no value given to decoration or nature metaphors, but instead a steadfast commitment towards a structural minimalism that was reminiscent of cubism or Bauhaus architecture.

The costumes of the geometrically shaped mechanical figures included straight lines, spirals, curves, which comprised the Gestaltung of Schlemmer’s balletic interpretation. The three main sections of Triadisches Ballet are color-coded by 1) gelb 2) rosa and 3) schwarz accordingly. The ballet comprised choreographic variations of a solo, duet and trio, each displaying a wide range of phantasmagorical costumes. Although Schlemmer employed a high degree of technical composition, his concept of formality moved outside traditional frames by including asymmetrical sets, obtuse figures, exaggerated lines, distorted forms utilizing a wide range of materials such as metal, paper, cloth, wires, and an assortment of fabrics with distinctive textures. The stage backdrop often resembled a grid or chessboard, except the moving chess pieces in the space appeared abstract and disfigured. Abstract figuration was central to Schlemmer’s concept of Bauhaus theatre because the focus on the mechanization of movement favored a technical, objective purpose over a nostalgic, emotional theme.

Scherper writes,

Der Name «triadisch» abgeleitet von der griechischen Bezeichnung für Dreiklang, steht für das Ordnungsprinzip, nach dem das Stück angelegt ist. Drei Akteure, eine Tänzerin und zwei Tänzer, tanzen insgesamt 18 Kostümen zwölf Tänze, allein, zu zweit oder zu dritt. Das Ballet hat drei

The sculptural design of the costumes was one of the most striking visual elements of Schlemmer’s choreography. The costumes were partially made of “padded cloth” and partially of “stiff papier-mâché forms, coated with metallic or colored paint” (Gropius 34). The large and bulky costumes tended to restrict the dancer’s movements, making them appear awkward by filling the space in ways that completely rejected traditional stage design for ballet. Scherper contends, “Die ‘Bewegungsgesetze des menschlichen Körpers im Raum’ in einem Kostümtyp übersetzt, führen zum sogenannten ‘technischen Organismus’” (311).

Schlemmer’s rendering of the human figure as a technical organism differed from Ausdruckstanz because of its disinterest in emotional affect, natural forces or subjectivity.
However, the common trend between Schlemmer’s Bauhaus theatre and *Ausdruckstanz* was the use of masks, and an emphasis on abstraction in order to convey movement to mean different things by introducing new formulations of relationships between time, space, object, color and light. Through a cubist, geometrical choreography, Schlemmer’s dancers portrayed a staged mechanization of movement, rather than displaying an emotionally driven presentation. The consequence of this decision indicated the infinite possibility of different movement patterns through technical configuration, which liberated movement from the historical burden of repeating an emotionally driven story. Using different materials, he created abstract costumes and masks, which introduced eccentric dimensions to theater that challenged traditional constructions of the way the body moved and appeared on stage.

Schlemmer’s abstract figuration indicated an intersection between German Romantic literature and Cubist painting located during the Bauhaus movement. The figure of the mechanical doll is positioned on a grid and moved through space with exaggerated, distorted physical proportions, which explored variations of movement through different planes of geometry. This abstract formalization indicated an internal design that presented new possibilities for conceiving how figures moved and related with each other as they intersected different planes of time and space. Although Gropius writes,

Costume and mask emphasize the body’s identity or they change it; they express its nature or they are purposely misleading about it; they stress conformity or organic or mechanical laws or they invalidate this conformity (25).
It is unlikely that Schlemmer had any intention to disclose a natural or hidden identity by incorporating masks and eccentric costume shapes into his work. Rather, Schlemmer designed his figures to sculpt space in ways that yielded mechanical laws, presenting an otherworldly vision of objects and figures that had no narrative or identity. These mechanical laws pertained to a minimalist design that had objective functions. Some of his designs contained lines that were continuous, whereas others were discontinuous. Each shape presented an unfolding of a spiral logic, sequence or dimension that demonstrated an abstract structural concept of movement. As Scherper writes, “Im Kostüm der Spirale wird die Rotation des Körpers in ihrer Abstraktion zur technischen Form einer Spirale dargestellt” (311).

Schlemmer’s additional Bauhaus dances incorporated different material objects, shapes and forms as suggested by the following titles including Metalltanz, Glastanz, Stäbetanz, and Reifentanz. Trimingham states that during the time between 1925-1929 when Schlemmer worked at Dessau, “he transformed the possibilities of stage space in fundamental ways. He introduced body, time and motion into the static painterly space that hitherto constrained him. It was a transformation that was present in The Triadic Ballet …” (25). Schlemmer’s work was largely antithetical to the central ideas of Ausdruckstanz. Through abstract figuration and mechanization of movement, he conceived movement as a technical, formal and objective display of kinetic relationships on stage. He portrayed the human figure through exaggerated geometric proportions, which refused the historical tendency to define movement as representative of a narrative, external ideology or personal biography.
Part IV. Kurt Jooss: Early Development of Tanztheater

The works of choreographer Kurt Jooss incorporated elements of Ausdruckstanz and reformist ballet to develop his specific interest in creating dramatic tension that is stylized through technical precision, social criticism and emotional appeal. Susanne Walther writes,

Although some expressionist themes can be found in Jooss’ works and especially in the ballet The Green Table, the objective manner of presentation and the orientation toward social problems point clearly to the post-Expressionist movement known as Neue Sachlichkeit, the New Objectivity. Humor, irony, caricature and realistic drama were Jooss’ expressive tools (xvi).

The works of Kurt Jooss, and his interest in exploring gesture and movement as a means to express dramatic tension through a unique style that combines ballet and modern drama, arguably make him the first innovator of Tanztheater. Schmidt writes, “Was bei Brecht Sprache bewirkt, schafft bei Jooss Bewegung” (81). Like the expressionist dancer, Mary Wigman, Jooss also trained with Rudolph von Laban early in his career. Laban tremendously influenced Jooss’ life and shaped his choreographic vision and movement principles. Along with fellow dancer and Sigurd Leeder, Jooss created the Jooss-Leeder method, which was comprised of tension and release; “weight and strength; three basic rhythms; and the flow of movement” (Walther 99). Early in his career, Jooss recognized that classical ballet lacked the expressive and dramatic quality that he was interested in developing and defining through movement.
For this reason, Jooss was drawn to Laban’s unconventional style of dance movement that allowed for the open exploration of different modes of expression that were not existent in the classical ballet repertoire. Unlike other contemporary Ausdruckstänzer, Jooss was far more interested in showing how technique could convey dramatic expression, rather than disclosing a particular subjective emotional theme or state. Although Jooss’ style was not void of emotion or affect, his concentration was on the engagement with movement itself, and exploring different relationships between dramatic tension, tempo, gesture and technical innovation using nontraditional patterns and theatrical devices. Isa Partsch-Bergsohn writes,

Jooss witnessed first-hand the spiritual upheaval of expressionism, which, in turn, resulted in Ausdruckstanz of the 1920s. “The answer seemed to have been found,” Jooss noted, “dance is expression...overjoyed, we watched human beings revealing themselves through the dance and we were almost satisfied. But something at first indefinable was missing. Could these often embarassing revelations of the soul and emotions be called ‘art?” (29).

The choreography of Kurt Jooss largely demonstrated a synthesis between ballet (without pointe shoes or ornate costumes) and modern dance. A radical break with narrative driven performance escaped from his concept of dance. The driving force behind his work remained the production of dramatic tension. His approach included expressionist elements such as masks, abstract movement and tragic themes, but his overall performance concept did not indicate a significant departure from representational art. Although he trained with Rudolf von Laban in the early expressionist dance movement, his work did not fit the mold of Ausdruckstanz. His style shared some of its principles and primary motives, but the basis of his movement vocabulary was
unequivocally balletic. However, the difference existed largely in the extent to which Jooss adapted the foundation of ballet to comprise elements of modern drama in establishing an early form of what later came to be known (mainly through Pina Bausch who was Jooss’ star pupil in the 1960s) as Tanztheater. Susanne Walther writes,

Jooss called himself ‘a playwright of movement.’ In his choreography he used movement to construct a drama, and the dramatic significance is the unifier of everything else. This dramatic basis is what weaves together the elements of plot, characterization, motivation and expression. Technique is always a means of expression, and expressive meaning because of its contribution to the drama (italics added, 98).

Like Wigman and Laban, Jooss was drawn to Ausdruckstanz because classical ballet had become stagnant and tired. At the time, young dancers who had a sense of self, or Selbstgefühl, were not motivated to study ballet, but desired alternative forms that allowed for a direct expression and immediate connection to contemporary issues. Instead of displaying a subjective, intimate account of self-disclosure, Jooss was far more compelled to create choreographic works that adhered to structure, thereby allowing an emotional or dramatic content to be suspended through form. The central difference between Schlemmer and Jooss was the importance of thematic narrative, which was integral to Jooss’ dramatic tension that he achieved through caricature, balletic references and story telling. Isa Partsch-Bergsohn further contends,

Ausdruckstanz, which regarded itself as totally individualistic, was what Jooss fought against. He recognized, early on, that for dance to develop it must have structure and choreographic clarity. He firmly believed that to build modern dance (a term he disliked) it should have at its base classical ballet (29).
This case study on Jooss’ choreography and style establishes another angle to perceive the subtle nuances and iterations of Ausdruckstanz by concentrating on the works that existed in the margin of this complex historical dance movement. In discussing the notion of agency and its relationship to the choreographic repertoire of Kurt Jooss, there is certainly the political component of The Green Table, which is worth addressing. The different iterations of agency with respect to choreographers who did not covet the central spotlight of Ausdruckstanz actually enact the essential meaning of Expressionism through their rejection of adhering to any particular generic style, status quo or standard formality. Instead, each choreographer modified either classical or expressionist dance movements in a particular way to establish meaning in their work according to their own senses and commitments as a means of gesturing towards something important and necessary to communicate.

The sense of agency and urgency is presented in different forms throughout each choreographic case study examined in this chapter. The counter response to the rejection of classicism has led to an open wellspring of transcendent claims that relate to the perception and conception of movement. This opening has produced waves of revolutionary tendencies that have yet to stop asking pertinent questions about the meaning and significance of dance and the value of expressive movement since the early twentieth century.

Similar to Jean Weidt, Jooss’ dances (most notably The Green Table) also contained a political statement. However, unlike Wigman or Anita Berber, Jooss’ choreographic style emphasized form, tension, expression and dramatic content through
pure movement instead of personal subjectivity, autobiography and emotional narrative. Therefore, Jooss’ style was also comparable to Oskar Schlemmer’s constructivist approach in terms of figuration and spatial harmony, which seemed to follow a post-expressionist trend and reflect the objective approach of the Neue Sachlichkeit movement in the visual arts.

Both originally from Stuttgart, Schlemmer and Jooss conceived choreography in terms of a total work of art, or Gesamtkunstwerk. Schlemmer designed the stage space, costumes, musical score, and choreography to such a highly technical degree that his total work of art almost resembles an architectural blueprint. Jooss and Schlemmer's intention was to create music, décor, lighting, costumes, choreography and stage design that constructed a totality, rather than to present contrasting elements that collided, conflicted and remained oppositional as exemplified by Sergei Eisenstein’s use of dialectical montage in his experimental constructivist films from the 1920s. Valeska Gert was arguably the most experimental Ausdruckstänzerin in that her movement style is not necessarily defined by a goal that would enable the dance to complete itself in a totalizing manner. Rather, she presented montage sequences of opposing sounds, movements and gestures that were not easily translatable to any one category of singular genre or adhered to the principles of a Gesamtkunstwerk.

Jooss was conservative in his stylistic approach by maintaining theatrical conventions in his works such as Big City, Chronica, Ball in Old Vienna and Journey in the Fog (1952), nonetheless he was concertedly interested in creating a modern form of dance drama that presented social political problems yet without providing any concrete
or direct solutions. However, some of his dances contained elements of resistance that criticize political structures, which overtly or covertly aim to shatter and destroy humanity. Jooss’ choreographic style reflected this politically provocative edge, which amplified the values of *Neue Sachlichkeit* with regard to the proliferation of theatrical gestures that evoked political satire.

![Image of The Green Table](image)

**Fig. 35: The Green Table**

Jooss’ most famous dance piece called, “*Der grüne Tisch*” or *The Green Table* was an antiwar ballet. Considered a masterpiece by most dance critics, Jooss’ *The Green Table* won first prize at the *Concours International de Choréographie* in Paris in 1932. At the time, Jooss already cofounded the *Folkwang Schule* of Performing Arts in Essen (1927), and served as its director in addition to fulfilling his duties as ballet master of the Essen Opera. The dramatic success of *The Green Table* quickly established Jooss as a reputable young choreographer in the international dance scene. Following this grand
success, Jooss started his dance company *Ballets Jooss*, which toured worldwide and received widespread recognition as an early modern dance company with critical acclaim and international appeal.

Jooss’ success in 1932 was overshadowed by the political and social nightmare when Hitler and the NSDP came to power in 1933. The timing of his award-winning, socially critical dance piece with the rise of Hitler seemed to suggest that his antiwar message of political resistance was absolutely crucial. The content and style of *The Green Table* were revolutionary because it presented an antiwar position. Further, the form did not fit within the rubric of traditional ballet, nor did it fit within the rubric of *Ausdruckstanz*. Instead, it modified traditional dance steps of classical ballet and combined them with masks, caricatures, political satire, theatrical gestures, and a dark, menacing figure of death, which make it an exceptional piece of modern dance choreography.

Jooss had been under the National Socialist’s radar because of his openly antiwar position and Expressionist artistic tendencies. Once the Nazi party discovered that Fritz A. Cohen (who later moved to New York and helped establish the Juilliard School of Music), a composer who had written the musical score for *The Green Table*, and three dancers in the company were either Jewish or half-Jewish, Jooss fell under increasing suspicion. After he received a warning from the freemasons to leave Germany at once or be sent to a concentration camp, Jooss and his company immediately fled the border through the Netherlands to southern England where his company received political asylum in Dartington Hall during World War II. The turmoil from the outbreak of World
War II caused a halt in the rehearsal, practice and touring schedule because of changing members of Ballets Jooss, but despite the difficult conditions, it still managed to function throughout the war using modest means.

*The Green Table* was an exceptional modern dance drama because of the way it juxtaposed the hypocrisy of war through its depiction of the cunning, opportunistic ruling class with the victims of loss and their ruinous experience of battle and trauma. The piece opened with ten ‘politicians’ wearing black suits and dancing around a green table, wearing masks that have exaggerated features. The scene was reminiscent of George Grosz’ satirical style of caricature in painting. The gentlemen’s opposing gestures and movements conveyed an assembly of greed, corruption and deceit, which presented a dramatic contrast to the convivial tango music. The politicians dancing around the table struggled to find consensus as their movements and gestures suggested radical disagreement. The ominous dancing figure of *Death*, who appeared throughout the piece, resembled a cross between a Roman warrior and the medieval *danse macabre* skeletal figure, which was often associated with the black plague of Europe in the 15th century.
Jooss found part of his inspiration for *The Green Table* from the *Lübecker Totentanz (1460)* where the ideas of Hans Holbein’s *dance macabre* etchings originated the portrayal of the skeletal death figure who serenades victims of the black plague. Jooss danced this sinister portrayal of death in his original choreography. Although Jooss’ *Green Table* could be conceived as foreshadowing World War II, his piece was a commentary on corrupt power structures that existed in modern societies and the alienating social effects in the aftermath of World War I.

Fig. 36: George Grosz, Eclipse of the Sun, 1926
Jooss’ choreography of *The Green Table* was arguably the first serious attempt to use modern dance to offer a social critique, although Jooss publically denied that his piece had specific political motivations. Nonetheless, it still resonated with modern contemporary companies worldwide, from the National Ballet of Slovenia to the Joffrey Ballet in Chicago, which have restaged Jooss’ ballet. His use of caricature, exaggerated gestures, masks, costumes, and the dramatic tension made it a novel approach to this early form of *Tanztheater* that was balletic in origin, but was framed by an antiwar topic. He incorporated modern movements, tango music, stage props, normal clothes, instead of formal costumes, combined with choreography that was dramatic and expressive, yet remained simultaneously controlled and precise.

Chapter three establishes a pivotal turning point in the transition between the end of *Ausdruckstanz* and the emergence of *Tanztheater*. The fate of agency discussed in each of these accounts indicates how the emphasis on subjective, individualistic and emotional portrayals is not sufficient enough to sustain a movement. This tendency to construct a sect of identity presented under the guise of agency lacks an objective, critical framework to control naïve, narcissistic and adolescent expression. When agency is
coupled with individuality without concrete limitations in place, the outcome can lead to catastrophic measures, as evidenced by the deceptively charismatic, cultic personalities of Nazi Germany. *Ausdruckstanz* is largely seen as a response to the disintegration of historical values and practices that modernity set out to challenge. However, the reliance on symbolic forms and transcendent meaning remains a prevalent force in expressionist works, which indicates its failure to effectively overcome the historical structures that this movement challenges.

Abstract figuration and mechanization of dance movement effectively neutralize the emotional excess. Yet the technical reliance and emphasis on the automaton and robotic character subdues affect to the point of reducing it to a minimalist extreme. With mystical-transcendent, symbolic forms on one hand and geometric automotons on the other, these variations of form evidenced by this movement constitute its complexity. The struggle to preserve individuality without becoming attached to the image of what the personal identity represents indicates the problem concerning the relationship between agency, bodily expression and autonomy in *Ausdruckstanz*. The reliance on forms of representational art is evident throughout each account, which largely questions the extent to which *Ausdruckstanz* is a convincing revolutionary movement in terms of how effectively it disrupted the traditions it aimed to dismantle.

Classical ballet and narrative based productions strongly influenced Kurt Jooss's early form of *Tanztheater*. However, his student, Pina Bausch, later conceived *Tanztheater* as an art form that problematized thematic conventions by distorting illusions of theater. Pina Bausch danced the role of the *Old Mother* in *The Green Table*’s
refugee scene under Jooss’ direction at the Folkwang School in the late 1960s. The original footage from the BBC filming of this postwar version is quite invaluable since her recent death in 2009. Traces of emotional expressionism, combined with technical mastery of modern ballet, create a dramatic presence in Bausch that is visibly stunning. This shows how the seeds of her own dance expression and form had already been planted during her early training and close contact with Kurt Jooss. Her modern interpretation of Tanztheater, which portrays elements of classical ballet, Ausdruckstanz, and socially critical theater is the topic of Chapter four.
CHAPTER 4
GESTURES OF DIFFERENCE: THE CRITICAL WORKS OF PINA BAUSCH

The impasse that precipitated the downfall of Ausdruckstanz was located in the inflated sense of individuality, lack of critical distance and subsequent reliance on symbolic and transcendent notions of subjectivity. This led to the advancement of a self-conscious and contentious form of modern dance drama. Chapter four discusses the development of Tanztheater, as it grew out of Ausdruckstanz during the 1970s by closely examining the different styles, concepts, and forms that are presented in several of the critically acclaimed choreographic works of the late Pina Bausch. Bausch’s work seriously questions the traditional understandings of dance, which destabilizes the historical reference points that previously provided a foundation for meaning and significance of bodily expression and movement. Norbert Servos writes, “Sie hat ... mit ihrem Tanztheater den Begriff des Tanzes selbst revolutioniert und neu definiert. Seine Einflüsse reichen weit über den Tanz hinaus, erstrecken sich auf Theater, Oper, auch den Film” (11). This moment in dance history establishes a pivotal point in the expanding world of modern dance that is strongly shaped by the emergence of Tanztheater.

Tanztheater presents a conscious, self-reflexive mode of dramatic expression that concentrates on the failure of old ideas to sustain meaning through emotionally dramatic scenes, tragic depictions, and repetitive gestures. Rather than constructing a new system or method of movement, Bausch’s choreography explores the weakness of old habits and relationships that inevitably fail to endure as whole, meaningful entities. Bausch
emphasizes conflict, destruction and breakdown, which are indicated by the frequent display of “falling down” rather than “lifting up” motions that portray the struggle for relationships and meaning to remain secure over time. An image of Pina Bausch is shown in Café Müller below.

Fig. 38: Pina Bausch in Café Müller (i)

This chapter discusses the similarities and differences between Tanztheater and Ausdruckstanz, arguing that some level of continuity exists between the two movements. Tanztheater is not a complete break because it maintains a strong emphasis on emotional expression and tragic experiences that deal with loss, suffering, despair, and failure. However, the approach is different because the treatment and portrayal of tragic matters is not presented thematically. The essence, or Potenz, of tragic expression is presented in the form of Tanztheater, but unlike Ausdruckstanz, the intention is not to represent an
idea or theme, but instead to show the shattering and failure of modes of representation and idealization that are unable to sustain meaning.

*Tanztheater* is a combination of modern dance, theater, mime, and music that uses stage design, props, lighting, and décor to enhance elements of acting, dancing, singing, and gesture. “Two stylistic elements that characterize *Tanztheater* are the principle of montage and integration of spoken language in a danced piece” (Stegmann 1). This unique art form fuses different styles and artistic traditions to provide a new theatrical experience. In the early 1970s, when *Tanztheater* first originated, it was largely influenced by ballet and story driven narratives under the direction of Kurt Jooss. With the influence of Pina Bausch, *Tanztheater* soon became a controversial art form that challenged the conventional boundaries of dance and theater, forcing audiences to experience different levels of shock, surprise, laughter, and anxiety.

In “An American Perspective on Tanztheater” Manning writes, “Like her contemporaries in theater, Bausch combines a visually rich production style with techniques drawn from Stanislavski and Brecht, and the result approaches Artaud’s idea of a theater of cruelty” (61). Bausch questions the status quo, particularly with regard to social relationships through her provocative, yet witty criticism, urging audiences to experience a different type of dance and theater that engages the senses and opens the possibility to perceive life differently. During the symposium on ‘German and American Dance: Yesterday and Today’ held in 1985, at the Goethe Institute in New York, German dance critic Jochen Schmidt said,

The break really came in 1973. In that year, Mary Wigman and John Cranko died. At the same time, Pina was appointed director of the Wuppertal Ballet, not *Tanztheater* at the time. That was really the break. It was she who made
Tanztheater. Without her success, which was not an easy success, there would not have been Tanztheater (7).  

Tanztheater openly confronts problems of expression, subjectivity and relationships through various means of gesture, repetition, alienation, dramatic tension, which challenges constructions of gender, social class, and aesthetic ideas of beauty. Bausch’s choreography produces ephemeral moments and short glimpses, which hint at the web of tragic forces that complicate social relationships without providing clear solutions to the profound questions addressed in her work. Her work positions the viewer to move through a labyrinth of questions at multiple points and tangents that intersect through a titillating and expressive discourse. This performance mode often appears in a montage form using a series of episodes, images, and vignettes through a call-and-response mode of action that reveals a jolting and multitudinous range of affect. Rather than asserting a totalizing grand narrative that would erase the highly fluid nature of complexity exhibited in her dances, this mode of expression radically complicates the social issues portrayed in Bausch’s work.

The limits coded within the traditional ballet vocabulary, as it has been passed down and repeated over the centuries, is disrupted by the vivid, intense, destructive, and violent images presented in Bausch’s works. Her unique choreographic vision provides audiences with an experience where one is guided through a hall of mirrors to see and reflect upon the undeniable failure of modes of social behavior, gestures, attitudes, and

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language to sustain meaning in the complex world of modern relationships. The social behavior and dramatic episodes presented in her works repeatedly call attention to the inescapable downfall of relationships whereby bodily expression, language, and gestures are unable to provide reliable connections, but instead relentlessly hit a wall of defeat with no exit, lifelessly falling to the ground. This process of disintegration, along with the collapse of meaning in relationships as things inevitably go awry and fall apart, are dramatized in Bausch’s work.

Part I. The End of Ausdruckstanz

After World War II, there was a resurgence of classical ballet; opera houses and theater companies staged traditional ballet productions. The general public was not interested in seeing avant-garde, abstract, experimental, and expressionist drama. Instead, audiences wanted to be entertained and to forget their harsh everyday reality in the aftermath of a devastating war that had crippled Europe socially, economically, and politically. Partsch-Bergsohn writes, “Classical ballet seemed to match the new audiences’ need for security and diversion; their tastes reverted to those of the nineteenth century. Whereas in other cultural venues the purge from Nazism had been more thorough, in the opera houses the same faces reappeared, and with them the same stylistic stereotypes” (124). The public interest in anesthetizing the postwar guilt and trauma in Germany manifested through an increase of opera houses and ballet companies that staged the classical, aesthetically pleasing, historical narratives. This effort avoided the
engagement with socially critical works that provoked audiences to confront their shameful past.

Susan Manning attributes the resurgence of ballet during the postwar era to the emphasis on formalism in American Dance in addition to the “refuge of internationalism, classicism, and formalism”\(^2\) that National Socialism relied on. In the late 1960s, German modern dance began to experiment by using dramatic tension and subjective expression from \textit{Ausdruckstanz} combined with the different theatrical methods. This experimental period paved the way for \textit{Tanztheater} to adopt a different perception of dance in the transforming art scene in Germany. As a result, \textit{Ausdruckstanz} began to deteriorate as a movement and was only practiced in special schools, such as the Wigman School in Berlin-Wilmersdorf, Gret Palucca School in Dresden, and Hanya Holm Studio in New York City. Susan Manning writes,

\begin{quote}
Its association with National Socialism drained ausdruckstanz of artistic vigor. Hence it is not surprising that ballet came to dominate both East and West Germany after World War II. Ironically enough, it was the Nazi promotion of ballet as light entertainment that made the ballet boom possible (44).\(^3\)
\end{quote}

Modern dance in Germany experienced a brief period of decline and slight regression as classical ballet and traditional forms became demanded, which decreased the interest for unconventional dance forms. Although \textit{Ausdruckstanz} did not completely fade from mainstream venues, it gradually became subverted by the public’s


overwhelming nostalgia for the classics that allowed viewers to escape their bitter reality and forget the war. Climenhaga contends, “Modern dance was often overlooked in favor of ballet” (9). This trend was similarly reflected in film with the development of the *Heimatfilm* genre. These kitschy and typically conservative homeland films were largely shot in rural settings, and displayed themes of nostalgia and sentimental longing for a past that predominantly existed in historical memory and narrative context. Fehrenbach writes,

*Heimat* celebrates the local, mundane, the domestic; it refers to geographical place of birth but also the peculiar landscape, dialect, customs, and traditions attached that locality. As such, it has a strong emotional component, since it is invested with all of the sentimental content of one’s childhood...Symbolizing the unchanging, “essential,” even spiritual, German nation *Heimat* became a central cultural construct in the early postwar period (150).

The artificial representation of Germany through the idyllic images presented in *Heimatfilme* concealed any evidence of postwar guilt, trauma, and political atrocity. *Ausdruckstanz* shared similar traits with *Heimatfilme* because of its nostalgic longings for a pure, essential physical and spiritual experience. Nonetheless, *Ausdruckstanz* emphasized expression over form by downplaying narrative for the sake of subjective portrayals of emotion. Fehrenbach continues,

Heimat solved two postwar dilemmas with great economy: it provided an affirmative representation of the German nation and at the same time jettisoned the unsavory aspects of the German past. Given the postwar political climate, the immense popularity of the *Heimatfilm* throughout the mid-1950s should surprise no one (151).

However, this period of decline in modern dance produced a rather critical gap following its initial breakthrough of new styles and different movement concepts. The gradual downfall of *Ausdruckstanz* stagnated the modern dance movement in Germany.
In the revolutionary context of 1968, audiences, dancers, and choreographers faced the darkness of the war-trodden past and began to experiment with unconventional patterns of movement to release their immobilizing fear that blocked new ways of moving, thinking, relating, feeling, and perceiving. Tanztheater emerged uninhibited as a reformed version of Ausdruckstanz, which contained a critical backbone and a vantage point that sought to articulate and engage with the difficult questions previously left unanswered.

Tanztheater developed out of the necessity to express something intrinsic to the experience of loss while concurrently providing a platform where new ideas and relationships could grow. Bausch encountered numerous obstacles in convincing her spectatorship, musicians, and even her own dancers, that Tanztheater was unique and unprecedented, yet highly relevant and valuable as an art form. She states,


As discussed in Chapter three, Kurt Jooss led the Folkwang-Ballet at the Folkwang Schule in Essen and developed a new type of dance drama. His early concept of Tanztheater was highly influenced by his work with Rudolf von Laban, particularly

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with regard to his *Tanz, Wort, Ton* choreographic principle, which strongly emphasized non balletic dance movements that integrated dance, word, and sound in unconventional ways. Partsch-Bergsohn argues, “The term ‘tanztheater’ was perhaps first used by Rudolf Laban in the early part of the twentieth century as a way to describe his choric dance rituals of that time” (37). Laban’s revolutionary ideas concerning the building of new relationships in the dialogue between movement, space, and expression took on different characteristics in the development of a socially conscious dance drama through the choreographic vision of Kurt Jooss. Sörgel writes, “In formaler Anlehnung an Labans Studien bezieht sich Jooss’ Pädagogik zunächst auf Labans Lehre der Choreutik, nach der Bewegungen im Raum psychologisch motiviert gestalten” (62). Jooss’ style continued to maintain a significant degree of formalism with its strong balletic component. He created a structure that incorporated Laban’s expressionist technique, which is arguably how *Tanztheater* first became articulated as a movement style and new concept of modern dance that distinguished itself from *Opernballet*.

Pina Bausch studied with Kurt Jooss and danced for the Folkwang Ballet in Essen during the 1960s and became his leading student. She respected Jooss for teaching her the fundamentals of dance and helping her to articulate and refine her artistic message through movement. She states in her commemorative lecture for the Kyoto Prize,

> Jooss selber war etwas Besonderes für mich. Er hatte viel Herzenswärme und Humor und ein unglaubliches Wissen auf allen möglichen Gebieten. Durch ihn bin ich zum Beispiel überhaupt zum ersten Mal wirklich mit Musik in Berührung gekommen... Er wurde wie ein zweiter Vater. Seine Menschlichkeit und seine Sicht, das war mir das Wichtigste (6).

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After receiving a *Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst* or German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) scholarship to New York, Bausch left Germany at eighteen years of age to attend the Julliard School of Music and studied with José Limón and members of the Martha Graham Dance Company.

She eventually became director of the *Wuppertal Tanztheater* in 1973, where she led the theater for thirty-five years until her recent death in 2009. Manning writes, “Directing the Tanztheater Wuppertal since 1973, she has evolved a large-scale, improvisational performance mode that long transcended its specific sources in her training at Juilliard in New York (1960-61)” (p.61). 6 Jooss taught Bausch the foundational techniques and principles of *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater*, yet strongly adhered to the rubric of classical ballet.

Kurt Jooss was the first to use the term tanztheater in a formal and consistent manner. Her sought a new term to differentiate works such as his ground-breaking anti-war ballet/drama *The Green Table* from the overriding aesthetic of the more conventional story ballets presented throughout Germany at the time (Manning 246). 7

Bausch’s development of *Tanztheater* is largely influenced by her early training with Kurt Jooss. Traces of *Ausdruckstanz*, particularly in her role as the mother in Jooss’ *The Green Table*, or *Der grüne Tisch*, emphasized theatrical elements that combined modern and expressionist tendencies that were exaggerated by this keenly dramatic and emotional portrayal. Bausch’s exposure to American modern dance, in addition to her

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interest in establishing radical differences in movement, compelled Tanztheater to take a
direction that Jooss would not have conceived of. His particular concept of modern
dance affirmed notions of formalism and narrative, both of which Bausch’s work largely
rejects.

Kurt Jooss and Pina Bausch are shown in the images below working on the
production of The Green Table.

![Image of Kurt Jooss and Pina Bausch working on The Green Table]

Given the wealth of literature published on Pina Bausch after her recent death in
June 2009, along with the release of Wim Winder’s critically acclaimed film
documentary, titled PINA (2010), frequent reference is made to her popularized quote,
“Mich interessiert nicht, wie die Menschen sich bewegen, sondern, was sie bewegt” or “I
am not interested in how people move but in what moves them.” In her commemorative
speech delivered in 2007 upon receiving the Kyoto Prize Laureate for Arts and

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Philosophy, Bausch referenced her own quote and said “Dieser Satz ist viel zitiert worden – er ist bis heute gültig.” This quotation is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, it shows Bausch’s unwavering interest in studying the language and movement exhibited by social interaction and gender constructs, which is a major inspiration for her choreography. Often drawing on images of nature, fantasy, and everyday life, Bausch reflects what she observes in her external environment instead of repeating an historical narrative structure and stage design that adheres to classical ballet. Everyday life experiences and moments become “staged” in her work to convey a level of realism in establishing a contrast from the sterile and aesthetic world of ballet.

Secondly, the ubiquitous repetition of this quote seen in countless books, articles and interviews indicates the extent to which media perpetuate an attachment to the “afterlife” of Pina Bausch. The media’s attachment to this citation largely defines Bausch’s contribution to the dance world before and after her death. These scripted ‘famous last words’ endure beyond her death, which suggests an element of transcendence and immortality, ironically contradicting the bitter criticism, social realism, and self-reflexive mode of expression that is strongly depicted in her works. In a 1978 interview, Jochen Schmidt questioned Bausch about her famous quote, “How does someone who holds this maxim come to be in dance theater?” To which she replied,

Why do we dance in the first place? There is a great danger in the way things are developing at the moment and have been developing in the last few years. Everything has become routine and no one knows any longer why they’re using

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8 Sample articles on Bausch’s obituary that include her famous quote, “Mich interessiert nicht, wie die Menschen sich bewegen, sondern, was sie bewegt”
http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,4444691,00.html
these movements. All that’s left is just a strange sort of vanity, which is becoming
more and more removed from actual people. And I believe that we ought to be
getting closer to one another again (227).\(^9\)

Bausch raises an important philosophical question regarding the causal motivation
for what compels humans to move in the ways that they do and why. Her work critiques
the danger in obediently following routine movements that are disconnected from people
and everyday situations. Her choreography presents movement patterns as a form of a
conditioned experience, and also attempts to bracket the basic, and perhaps, universal
impulses that create expression. The outcome is less significant than the actual ‘potence’
that conveys the \textit{Ursprung} of the movement and expression. The basic question “\textit{Was}
bewegt mich?” or “what moves me,” asks a very simple, yet subjective question in
addition to probing the issue regarding what force precedes manifestation and outward
expression. The reaction to the cause and its resulting signification takes shapes as a
result of this initial spark. It is unclear whether there is a causal relationship between
impulse and expression in Bausch’s work given the repetition of ephemeral movements,
which contradicts a static or linear arrangement.

Frequently, the external manifestation contradicts the spark or impulse from the
source where it emerges. This contradiction challenges the logical sequence of cause and
effect, and underscores the complex relationship between expression and subjectivity that
Bausch’s work evokes. Servos maintains, “Pina Bausch’s approach is in the widest sense
phenomenologically determined. Her adaptation of motifs demonstrated phenomena
without naming their causes” (442). Rather than showing a fixed sequence perform the
mechanics of a logical narrative, Bausch ruptures the viewer’s expectations by using

\(^9\) Interview conducted in November 1978 as cited in Norbert Servos’ book titled, \textit{Pina Bausch-Wuppertal Dance Theater or The Art of Training a Goldfish.}
incongruent motifs and imaginative props (such as the giant hippopotamus in *Arien*) that radically break, and at times, violently clash with any rational explanation.

In explaining the meaning of “potence” in his *Philosophie der Kunst*, or “Philosophy of Art”, Friedrich Schelling writes that, “It refers to the general proposition of philosophy concerning the essential and inner identity of all things and of all that we are able to discern and distinguish in general…Philosophy emerges in its most complete manifestation only within the totality of all potences” (14). The concept of *Ausdruckstanz* (particularly for Wigman and Laban) was connected to this notion of inner identity within the subject. However, for Bausch, the construct of inner identity is understood differently, and is implicated through the use of *Verfremdung*, defamiliarization and negation. The act of constructing identity is essentially about producing recognition through some form of external signification. Bausch challenges the relationship between identity, truth and reality by negating the mimetic character of identity to mirror, reflect and sustain itself. Instead, images of destruction and downfall are presented to disrupt the representational value of the personal identity construct. Schelling continues,

> Within philosophy in general each individual potence is absolute for itself, and in this absoluteness, or without detriment to it, is in its own turn a member of the whole. Each is a genuine part of the whole only to the extent that it is the complete reflex of the whole and completely takes it up into itself (15).

Bausch’s work is not predicated on the absolute potency of a singular, unified whole as with Schelling, but there is a slight variation of this concept present in her choreography by locating the potentiality of movement in the subject. Bausch’s work substantiates *Tanztheater* as an autonomous art form that stands alone without requiring
any external source to define it. However, when perceived on its own terms, the work contains an insular character that is comprised of multiple performance elements including: stage décor, mime, costumes, props, and music. Bausch rarely made an explicit statement about what her works were about, which allowed the viability and interpretation of her work to become largely determined by the experience of her audiences. An image from *Sacre du Printemps* is shown below.

![Sacre du Printemps](image)

Fig. 40: *Le Sacre du Printemps*

Dance spectacles are essentially public offerings, which on a very basic level provide the viewer with an experience. The experience, whether it is disturbing, ineffable, disorienting, strange and confusing, is really inconsequential because it is a
lived and shared “reflexive” moment that occurs between the performers, choreographer and spectators. This reflexive moment is unifying because it is a moment that is shared between the audience, choreographer, crew, and performers. However, this does not imply that the emotional experience is necessarily agreeable, entertaining or aesthetically pleasing.

Hermann Schrödter further contends, 

*Wenn Schelling lapidar formuliert „Wo keine Potenz, ist keine Bewegung“, so bedeutet dies, im Möglichkeitsaspekt der Potenz eine Bedingung der Möglichkeit für Bewegung zu erkennen...Die Potenz stellt ein sicheres Fundament des Denkens dar, weil hier die „entwickelnde Kraft des Inhalts“ vom Gegenstand (nämlich die Möglichkeit) selbst ausgeht* (569).

Bausch’s concept of movement is closely linked to this notion of possibility. While exposing modes of social behavior that have gone unquestioned, Bausch invites the possibility for different relationships to be known, thought, experienced, and to emerge through an intense engagement with this highly physical interpretation of human relationships. *Potenz* for Bausch, therefore, exists in this moment of possibility that occurs during the interaction between part and whole through a process of negation and failure, which offers the potential for new relationships and connections to emerge, collide and spark.

Ironically, Bausch’s desire to dramatically explore different layers of expression and to engage the underlying reasons that motivate expression was precisely the objective *Ausdruckstanz* initiated, but never fully achieved. *Ausdruckstanz* became preoccupied with the acquisition of various masks, props and gestures to signify personal expression, which led to a formalized, symbolic identity that was attached to the image of the dancer.
The *Potenz* for the movement became subsumed by this grand interest to sculpt a culture of individuality. With Bausch’s fiercely observant, careful and decisive eye for precise articulation concerning the motivation of expression, *Ausdruckstanz* effectively culminated its objective through the form of *Tanztheater*.

**Part II. Subjectivity and Individual Expression in *Tanztheater***

Bausch’s primary focus in questioning the relationship between subjectivity and expression, particularly with regard to issues of gender and social constructs, is significant. Price argues, “Bausch’s dance theater reveals the body as the site of a social inscription – the body on which the writing of the politics of gender reveals itself in performative acts – and the body as the nexus of the nonlogocentric imaginary, which reveals itself through expressive acts” (323). Her movement vocabulary is based on the basic emotive quality that was generated by experimenting with her dancers using informal choreographic exercises. The expressive quality of movement and dramatic forms of gesture constitutes the crux of her work, making her contribution to *Tanztheater* uniquely significant.
By borrowing elements from dance and theatre, Bausch molds the initial emotive quality by expressing it through novel techniques, which essentially disrupt traditions in both dance, as well as theatre. Price writes, “Bausch, like Brecht, takes pleasure in shattering the illusion of theater. Unlike performers in classical ballet, Bausch’s dancers do not attempt to make their movements effortless. Bausch’s dancers are physically pushed to the limit, and they exhibit their exhaustion and pain quite openly onstage” (326). In effect, this assemblage of styles produces a complexity in Tanztheater that does not strictly adhere to one particular style or form. Moreover, it tends to oscillate between different dramatic gestures and movement patterns that resist the production of a total work of art, or Gesamtkunstwerk.
Nervos states in reference to Brecht, “Their dissonances are not united into a Gesamtkunstwerk (total work of art, Richard Wagner’s term for his operas), but rather their connection with one another consists in the fact that they verfremden one another” (440). The gestures of emotion convey a purity of expression that quickly become fragmented and trickled into exaggerated forms that repetitively engage a singular motion. Bausch’s choreographic style tends to move in a mode of trans-gesture, leading the viewer, dancer and spectacle through a passage of profound emotional expression that violently jolts, hysterically laughs, seductively calls and woefully falls. Bausch states, “The work – like everything I do – is about relationships, childhood, fear of death, and how much we all want to be loved” (19). Hesitant to attach any concrete or affirmative labels to the meaning and significance of her works, Bausch intends her work be openly interpreted without a singular answer or easy solution concerning both form and content of her choreography and imagery.

11 Quotation is taken from a 1985 phone interview with Bausch for New York Times article titled, “When Avant-Garde Meets Mainstream” by Stephen Holden. Full citation: “The image of a hippopotamus has many personal associations for me, as I’m sure it will for the audience,” the 45-year-old choreographer said on the phone last week from her home in Wuppertal, West Germany. “But it would be unfair to say what they are. The work - like everything I do - is about relationships, childhood, fear of death, and how much we all want to be loved. Relationships seem so small in the face of reality, and yet they're so important. One question I am always asking is, 'What can we do?'”
In his comprehensive analysis of Bausch’s style of Tanztheater, Norbert Servos writes,

*in seinen bewegten Bildern eine Poesie..., die sich über die reine Sprache von Metaphern mitteilt. Nichts ist da zu interpretieren, kein verborgener Hintersinn auszuforschen. Alles ist genau das, was man sieht und hört: Eine verstörende, faszinierende, so vertraute wie fremde Exkursion ins Labyrinth der Leidenschaften* (251).\textsuperscript{12}

As Servos maintains there is no hidden meaning or symbolism behind the movements and images. Bausch presents her images without a script, which allows the viewer to focus on any given image or movement without being forced to perceive the dance in any prescribed manner.

Through repetition, Bausch makes the viewer acutely aware of how all movement, gesture, dance and socially constructed patterns of behavior is essentially artifice and therefore performative. However, by indicating this point about artifice, it

draws attention to *poiesis*, in terms of the process of ‘movement-making’ in choreography. This recognition of the *Potenz* and *poiesis* of movement gives spark to an expression or gesture that has been broken, disconnected, and stagnated over time. According to Agamben, “an age that has lost its gestures is, for this reason, obsessed by them. For human beings who have lost every sense of naturalness, each single gesture becomes a destiny. And the more gestures lose their ease under the action of invisible powers, the more life becomes indecipherable.” Agamben’s argument suggests that there is an intrinsic “naturalness” that human beings are obsessively and desperately trying to recover. For Bausch, however, this ‘natural sense’ is also socially constructed and therefore subject to destruction and criticism. The failure to articulate meaning, along with the obsessive desire to recover some form of language to communicate, is precisely the mode of Bausch’s dramatic tension and gestural expression.

For example, in the final scene of *Kontakthof*, a group of men surround a single woman. What starts with an ensemble of affectionate touching, gradually shifts into a debacle of pulls, tugs and blows as the woman eventually collapses beneath the weight of the men bullying her. This exaggerated scene portrays different ‘touches of affection’, and is a metaphor for a violent gang rape. Although harsh in its depiction, this example draws attention to the rapid escalation by showing a scene where a single woman is overwhelmed by attention from the opposite sex. This scene then devolves into a racy, turbulent storm of physical aggression and violence. The initial image of a glamorous fantasy quickly turns into a harrowing nightmare. The joyful and charismatic tango

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*Kontakthof* (1978) is a piece by Bausch that reflects the dramatic tension and playful attractions between the sexes regardless of age or social background through theatrical poses and gestures.
music establishes a further contrast from the horrific image presented. This negation underscores the dramatic tension that is evidenced by the riveting effect of various images, motifs and metaphors that collide throughout Bausch’s work. The presentation of alluring beauty in one moment can easily downshift in the next scene to a dark episode of destruction.

This dialectic presents the complex dramatic tension at work in Bausch’s choreography, which continually undermines the symbolic structures in her works that inevitably fail to endure. There is no concrete resolution at the end of Bausch’s dances. Instead, the viewer is left suspended with questions and dangling images, which offer a moment to pause the rhythm of one’s life and think about how to “complete” these questions that are provoked.
Part III. Gestus, Repetition and Verfremden

Similar to Antoine Artaud’s, Théâtre de la Cruauté, Bausch employs a performance style that is largely based on gesture to show a physical language of expression that radically differs from classical ballet or any scripted repertoire of dance vocabulary. Susie Tharu writes, “Artaud’s theater of cruelty is perhaps the earliest and certainly the most explicit attempt to establish an aesthetic of performance based entirely on bodily perception and expression” (82). The extremist measures exhibited by gestures of torture, brutality and violence, however, suggest more than domestic violence or gang rape. The violent images also portray the desperate human struggle to break through the confinement of social conventions. This resistance takes extreme form to evoke the rupture and shattering of “naturalized” social patterns that have been imprinted on the body for years. Climenhaga argues,

What dance becomes for Bausch is a confrontation with behavior and bodily presentation, it is an organization of action that addresses life itself rather than an imitation…Dance had always concerned itself with the possibilities of physical expression, but never before has that expression been extended to include the way in which we define our selves through our bodily relationship to cultural codes (51).

Reckless displays of physical violence are more complex than the mere performative act. For example, the dropping of a glass jar that shatters to the ground, or the sound of a smashing windowpane that splinters its shards across the floor is a performative gesture. This gesture is an attempt to awaken viewers from their complacent sleep by disrupting the innocuous programs and codes of indoctrination, which the masses turn a blind eye to in submission to a dominant power structure such as religion, patriarchal organization or political/economic ideology. Bausch’s work
confronts these issues on a micro level by exposing minute problems in intimate relationships, which extends into a social critique on global issues.

For Bausch, gesture conveys a complete action in itself, which expresses something external that is shown to the viewer without assigning specific meaning or resolution. Rather, the gesture establishes the question and allows a certain level of ambiguity to play an important role in preserving the space for movements to signify many things for different viewers simultaneously. This poetic, gestural device is frequently, yet not limited to the context of physical movement. Words, speech, mise-en-scène, costume, and musical composition also contribute to the building of dramatic tension that Bausch’s gestural language conveys on stage, but her argument is articulated through the primary medium of the body relating with its own body, along with other bodies and objects. These myriad interactions of physical expression and layers of performative gesture create an experience that Servos refers to as Theater der Erfahrung, or Theater of Experience.

This experience occurs in the moment, and presents itself through gestures that strip illusions to the bone by revealing the ugly beast lurking behind sterile, hollow concepts of beauty. For Servos, this notion of theater of experience “changes not only the conditions of critical reception; the translation of dance from the level of aesthetic abstraction to everyday physical comportment means changes in both form and content” (437). The critical reception of Bausch’s Tanztheater has evolved significantly compared to the late 1970s when her unconventional dances were frequently booed by audiences at the Wuppertal Tanztheater. In general, audiences openly resisted engaging with her
'gestures of difference', which presented new concepts and harsh realities that largely departed from the style and formalization of classically staged ballet performances. Several of her own dancers and members of the company strongly resisted Bausch’s changes. As a result, Bausch retreated for a short time, away from the theater, and worked intensively with a small group of dancers who were deeply invested in developing new trends of movement.

Servos further contends, “Like Brecht’s, her theatre derives, “everything from the Gestus” (alles aus dem Gestus). However, in this case, the Gestus is strongly related to the field of body actions. It neither supports nor contrasts something spoken; rather, it “speaks” by itself; it is the mode, but also the subject of the performance”(440). The argument is therefore presented in the gesture itself. It stands alone in its own right, bearing a message that is communicated through its pure physical form. However, how this message is then received, interpreted and understood by the viewer creates a second level in the completion process of its meaning and significance of the piece. “Evaluation of Pina Bausch’s work is becoming more and more a question of a subjective following, of the willingness of the individual to think it through for himself” (437 Servos). The mode of gestural expression evidenced throughout Bausch’s work opens a dialogue with the audience instead of remaining closed within the work. The gesture enables her work to form the experience of the audience who receive her potent messages, which are presented by the gestural language of theatricality and expression.

Gestures are particularly salient for Brecht and Bausch’s style of presentation given their ephemeral mode of expression. The moment in which a gesture is presented also marks its disappearance as it fades from view. What is made visible to the eyes of the viewer and how that moment becomes interpreted is a far more enduring process than the actual gesture. The enigmatic effect of an image and its influence on thoughts or questions that are provoked within the recipient can last for seconds or decades, depending on sensory association and memory. The process of meaning is more important than the actual presentation of the gesture, because instead of isolating the gesture as a fixed representation, meaning is allowed to circulate and transform rather than remain stagnant.

Bausch employs repetition of gesture quite frequently in her dances to underscore several important elements. Repetition is most notably apparent in Café Müller, a rare occasion where Bausch danced in the piece. Firstly, it reveals the absurdity of the unconscious habitual patterns that men and women unknowingly (or not) find themselves stuck in. Secondly, it makes the viewer conscious that they are watching a gesture through its continuous repetition. Thirdly, it produces a pause, or caesura, in the pattern of the bodily movement to which it calls attention. When one watches the same thing over and over again (as with film), the focus is placed on the disruption of the work rather than the content of what is being disrupted. Like a broken record, the song itself or the lyrics lose meaning because the emphasis has shifted to underscore the act of interruption.
Climenhaga argues, “Gesture is more inclusive than a simple movement, and becomes a complete action, often with underlying intent” (116). *Gestus* (unlike *Geste*, which simply means “touch,” “gesture,” and “sign”) discloses the underlying intention behind the action. Climenhaga discusses the notion of *Ausdrucksgebärde* in relationship to Bausch’s choreography as constitutive of two main characteristics: i) behavioral gesture and ii) emotive expression. Behavior gestures are mundane and habitual, largely unconscious patterns or rituals that are practiced without much thought. Examples such as brushing one’s teeth, unlocking a door or buttoning one’s shirt are behavioral gestures.

Emotive expressions are more feeling and sensory oriented, and engage with a subjective response to a given situation. Bausch used both types of *Ausdrucksgebärde* in her work to build dramatic tension and to question conditioned behaviors of habit. Climenhaga contends,
While behavioral gestures may be revealing, especially when recontextualized as Bausch does with typically masculine or feminine gestures, their aim is not necessarily to project intent. Emotive gestures carry the energy of the underlying idea and often give it palpable form, helping us to feel a performer’s intent rather than simply understand it (117).

While intention is a decisive factor in Bausch’s choreography, analyzing movement and gesture on the basis of an objective purpose is a misguided approach to engaging with her work. As previously discussed, there is a potent essence within each gesture, but how one gesture connects with another is not a logically determinable process. To extrapolate an organizing principle on the basis of intention would therefore undermine the openness and possibility of the movement’s potency used to question stale values by allowing for new relationships and ideas to surface. The force of repetition in her work enables the viewer to make these connections by watching the same motions happen repeatedly, inviting a moment or space to pause the rhythm before the familiar tune appears.

“Bausch uses principles of dance construction and theatrical methods to explore an issue and the audience is let it on the exploration. Rather than using these methods to tell the audience something, she creates an open metaphor for the audience to complete” (Climenhaga 99). For example, in Bandoneon (1980), the dancer Dominique Mercy portrays the role of a ballerina who cannot maintain his balance and properly execute a few basic ballet steps such as tondu and plié. Instead, Mercy wobbles desperately in his tutu, and even topples over on to the floor several times in a strangely comical way. The repetition of the ballet steps in this scene fail to achieve perfection and beauty, which satirically comments on the historical tradition of ballet where ceaseless practice and obedient repetition of specific sequences is equated with virtuosity.
Mercy’s role in *Bandoneon* (in the photo above) shows the failure of his body movements to attain balletic perfection, but instead reveal a continuous sense of alienation and deficiency. His body appears estranged from the ballet vocabulary, as if the technical, scripted phrases were nonsensical, disorienting and completely void of meaning. Each attempt to perform the steps fails as Mercy’s repeatedly portrays the impossibility of achieving an idealized form of movement in a successful and complete manner. As Servos writes, “Es geht immer wieder um die Unmöglichkeit «schön» zu tanzen” (98). The desire to attain a standard of beauty, or a glamorous illusion of an ideal, is repeatedly undermined throughout Bausch’s choreography. Fernandes contends, “Bausch’s works are not the display of socially agreed ‘beautiful’ movements. Instead they are a critique of the social concept of beauty, and of the individual’s sacrifice within theatrical and social relationships to achieve such an ideal” (61).
Aesthetic ideals are moreover repudiated in Bausch’s work. The physical brutality required to attain the flawless technical mastery of ballet is exemplified by: forced turn out position; restricted breathing due to corsets; relentless criticism by severe ballet masters, and are all serious points of contention for Bausch. She states,

To understand what I am saying, you have to believe that dance is something other than technique. We forget where movements come from. They are born from life. When you create a new work, the point of departure must be contemporary life- not existing forms of dance (Climenhaga 50).

Bausch was not interested in erasing the personality of her dancers in the conception of her dances. In ballet, a dancer is expected to memorize a set of scripted phrases that must be repeated until they achieve perfection. Each phrase of ballet steps is connected to emphasize a specific theme such as joy, sadness, loss, or fear. Rather than impose a script on to her dancers and have them memorize the phrases, Bausch conducted interviews in order to extract ideas, images, themes and movements from the working material that emerged from her dancer’s bodies during these question-and-answer sessions at rehearsals. She asked her dancers questions like: “what are you searching for in life”; “what motivates you?”; “what do you fear”; “how do you express sadness?”

Based upon the personal responses from her dancers, she modified certain gestures, poses, and movements into montage-like episodes, or scenes, that would constitute the mode of presentation of her work. Bausch’s approach, therefore, strongly engaged with the dancer’s subjectivity and built upon their personal experience as the source material from which her gestures, expressions and dances are derived. Servos
maintains, “Pina Bausch’s works begin at the concrete place of everyday social physical experiences, which she puts in a context of objectifying sequences of images” (437).

The “everyday social/physical experience” is portrayed in Bausch’s work in multiple ways, and is distorted to critique the absurd and peculiar ways and tendencies of human behavior that are largely unnoticed and dismissed. In Café Müller, for example, walking is one of the most exaggerated elements in the piece that seems obvious, yet is easily dismissible. The somber and austere images presented throughout Café Müller display a sense of alienation, anonymity, and frustration that produces a complex texture that is interwoven with multiple strands of personality conflicts and tension. The café setting consisted of tables, chairs and a revolving door that are in continuous motion as the chairs are rearranged to be cleared for the closed eyed dancers to make their way across the stage. In Café Müller, the objects on stage are in flux and move just as frequently as the dancers themselves, which forms a kaleidoscope-like, shape shifting canvas of constant rearrangement. None of the pieces in this puzzling, enigmatic performance stay stagnant or endure for very long. There is no narrative or verbal speech in the piece that provide any information about the plot, characters or geographic location, or a clear cue to indicate the beginning and end. The dance is completely anonymous, void of narrative, yet in constant flux.
Bausch plays the role of a crippled somnambulist who moves with her eyes closed in a white slip hobbling from one position to the next. She is deeply engaged with her internal world throughout the piece, as her disconnection from the vacant café and the other dancers is portrayed by her subtle, yet profoundly intense performance. Bausch remains on stage during the entire length of the piece, yet her body is often leaned against a wall, emphasizing the silent struggle of her character. Her absence or silence, however, is powerfully nuanced. A second woman is seen sitting at the side of the stage on a chair with her legs up, tracing the wall with her feet as if she were walking vertically instead of horizontally. A third woman, wearing a red wig and high heels is shown removing her shoes and gestures with her feet a sense of disorientation of where and how to step down on the ground. Her body is slanted off center as her body weight leans to one side as she struggles awkwardly to maintain balance and equilibrium. During a later segment that portrays the relentless tension between two lovers, the female is held up by a third male
dancer who helps her walk over and “step on” her lover’s body, which lies flat on the floor in an act of submission and domination. The sound of footsteps shuffling about with, or without, the clacking echoes of heels is emphasized throughout Café Müller, which draws attention to the mundane act of walking and the echoing footsteps of lives that seem hollow and empty of meaning.

High heels in modern society, and point shoes in ballet, signify areas of contention for Bausch, because they evoke transcendence from reality to attain an ideal that is disconnected from where and how one’s feet move them through everyday life. These gestures criticize the conditioned “nature” of how women and men relate to each other and walk a downtrodden path, unaware of their own movement patterns and why their feet are compelled to move in certain directions. They fail to question why things never work, and remain in a state of despair without recognizing their own self-destructive traits and resistant habits. Bausch provides a mirror for the viewer to examine their role in relationships and to question to what extent they are obediently following a false belief, and whether there is a calling to unsettle the walls of emotional security, comfort and social complacency.

Gesture is a mode of expression that pervades Bausch’s choreography and is applied as a tool to distort, repeat and exaggerate basic movements, images or ideas to interrupt behavioral patterns that are unquestioned and therefore problematic in social relationships. Behavior relies on repetition to become habitual. Bausch makes this “logic” apparent by pointing out the ubiquitous nature of imprints or codes of bodily messages that are passed on and culturally reinforced. Her work reveals the extent to
which these physical and behavioral imprints serve as alienating forces that separate people from each other thereby causing suffering, isolation and despair. Gestures of difference are presented with each bend, twist, repetition and distorted gesture to convey how the repetition of a movement simultaneously articulates its relational difference.

Nägele writes,

Brecht’s *Gestus* paradigmatically shows the difference in the body: *Gestus* is the sum of concrete bodily gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and the rhythm and figures of speech, but it is not identical with any of these. It contains the relation to another body and *Gestus* (112).¹⁵

This relationship is neither causal, nor is it configured horizontally. Instead, it sets up the possibility and potential for different layers of meaning to be presented through the momentary interruption of static rhythms and homogenous social forces.

*Verfremden* is an important concept to consider in terms of how Bausch makes the everyday banal world appear strange, and defamiliarizes it to provoke the audience to recognize their own ignorance of the world that exists before them, but seems to be invisible. By recreating an event that portrays some instance of trauma, joy or fear, Bausch provokes the audience to experience this expression by engaging their feelings. Bausch appeals to her viewers through this process of emotional identification. Once this connection is achieved, she then draws attention to the limitations that are prescribed by social conventions, exposing them through various displays of physical violence, alienation and aggression.

Brecht defines the alienation effect or *Verfremdungseffekt* as “turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one’s attention is to be drawn, into something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected” (Brecht 143). Both Bausch and Brecht were keenly aware and critical of theatrical illusions, which their works explicitly challenge and shatter. Steer argues,

> It can readily be seen that the *Verfremdungseffekt* plays an integral part in this new conception of the theatre. The positive function which Brecht assigns to the effect is that of imparting to the audience an insight into social reality. By presenting a situation in a striking and unaccustomed light, it is to draw the audience’s critical attention to the social forces which determine destiny (639).

However, unlike Brecht, Bausch activates emotive gesture through bodily expression to arouse the senses, rather than to distance or desensitize the viewer. Steer continues, “Brecht also attributes a negative, destructive function to the alienation effect – that of thwarting the illusionism of the stage, of inhibiting the audience’s traditional propensity to *Einfühlung* or emotional identification with the dramatic characters and the situation” (639). Ironically, the viewer often experiences emotional distance and alienation to the point of numbness after watching some of the brutal, violent scenes included in Bausch’s works such as in *Blaubart* and *Sacre du Printemps*. While both Brecht and Bausch are similarly interested in provoking critical awareness, their methods of achieving *Verfremdungseffekt* are distinct.

*Die Sieben Todsünden der Kleinbürger* or *The Seven Deadly Sins of the Petty Bourgeoisie* is a *ballet chanté* composed by Kurt Weill, and written by Bertolt Brecht in 1933. Brecht wrote the libretto as a satirical commentary that twists the seven cardinal sins of Christianity, which include sloth, pride, anger, gluttony, lust, greed and envy, into virtues instead of vices. The storyline traces the journey of two sisters, Anna I and Anna
II, through their travels in the southern part of the United States with hopes of buying a house for their parents in Louisiana. Anna I represents the practical, business savvy sister, whereas Anna II plays the role of a naive and flamboyant commodity. Brecht explores the dichotomy of the two sisters in order to criticize the social conditions that alienate and distort human relationships into commodified objects.

Bausch premiered her rendition of the Brecht/Weill Abend at the Wuppertal Tanztheater in 1976. Her portrayal of Anna’s I and II, however, is a far more severe and desperate exposé that focuses on the sexually exploitive conditions of the commercial market that objectifies women. Bausch extends the moral critique against Christianity by focusing on the exploitation of women as sex objects. Her choreography shows the alienating social and economic conditions that deprive women from determining their own value and worth as individuals in a sexist, patriarchal and male dominated system. Servos writes,

_Pina Bausch legt in ihrer Inszenierung den Akzent – anders als Brecht – nicht auf die Darstellung der gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen. Bei ihr steht das Schicksal der_
Frau im Zentrum, die ihre Haut zu Markte tragen muß. Ware ist Anna II vor allem die Männer. Ihr Körper und ihre Jugend sind ihr einziges Kapital, das sie einsetzen kann, um Eigentum zu gelangen. Ausbeutung bedeutet hier Ausbeutung durch den Mann (45).

Bausch explores similar themes related to gender relations and sadomasochistic tendencies in her intensely dramatic portrayal of Blaubart. While Listening to a Tape Recording of Béla Bartóks Opera “Duke Bluebeards Castle (1977).” Bausch’s interpretation of Charles Perrault’s harrowing tale of La Barbe bleue (1697) is a contemporary commentary that explores the tension between men and women by critically engaging the themes of domestic violence and the objectification of women. Through emotive gesture and repetition, Bausch reveals the vulnerability of each character in their search and failed attempts to find intimacy in personal relationships. “Bausch did not, as is the case in linear story ballets, subordinate the dancers to the narrative of the words and music through illustrative choreography” (Mumford 46). The narrative structure that conventionally organizes the plot development of a ballet is not important for Bausch. Her works are far more engaged with exploring the complications that emerge through disrupting the classical rubric of a linear narrative.

Throughout the dance, Blaubart interacts with a tape recorder on a roller cart, which plays Bartok’s score. He frequently stops the tape, rewinds it and then repeats this procedure to emphasize his compulsive, tyrannical necessity to control and dominate the actions and movements of the dancers on stage. Blaubart’s character, danced by Jan Minarik, controls the tempo, rhythm and pace of the dance through his manipulation of
the tape recorder. The music drives the dance forward, but is frequently interrupted by his obsession to dominate others by pausing, rewinding and repeating the music. Judith, danced by Beatrice Libonati and the cast of dancers, obeys Blaubart’s oppressive conductor cues and continues the performance. Mumford writes, “Pina’s Blaubart marked the beginning of the choreographer’s trademark challenge to the boundaries between dance and theatre through collaborative improvisation and verbal expression” (1468). Jan Minarek is shown in the photo below performing the role of Blaubart.

Bausch’s setting of Blaubart’s gothic castle is in a grand hall with white walls, high ceilings and tall shuttered windows. “In place of the bookcases there are holes in the wall where shelves may have been lodged. The performers use these to anchor themselves in numerous episodes where they literally climb up the walls in flight and
madness” (Mumford 56). The floor is covered with leaves, filling the room with an earthy smell and rustic appearance. The first scene opens with Blaubart lying on top of Judith as they scurry across the stage over the scattered leaves. Blaubart stands to rewind the tape each time the music reaches a certain point that he cannot stand hearing, which incites him to rewind it back numerous times. Judith flings her head from side to side as Blaubart violates her while she repeatedly tries to flee, only to bang her body against the walls of the castle that inevitably confine her. The dramatic tension of Blaubart is enhanced by the intense pace and rhythm of the piece, which oscillate between a rapid flurry of motion to long drawn out periods of stillness and suspension. Climenhaga writes,

The piece is physical in the extreme, but the physicality now serves the purpose of laying bare the inner dimensions of character and relationship. It brings together dance and theatrical energies to give us moments in which we are pulled beneath the surface of the movement and enter into the raw emotion underneath (16).

In particular, this dynamic is heightened by one of the opening scenes when the dancers are shown running back and forth across the stage, as they continuously slam their bodies into the walls, displaying their inescapable confinement.
The female dancers are occasionally shown with their long cascades of hair draped over their faces as if to resemble beards, which hide their facial expressions and make them appear downcast, anonymous, and homogenous. The gestures and dance movements in *Blaubart* are at times distinctly reminiscent of *Ausdruckstanz*. For example, Judith performs a solo that is reminiscent of the sharp, angular movements presented in Mary Wigman’s *Hexentanz*, with her dark black hair and swinging head gestures that sweep from side to side.16

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16 Beatrice Libonati performs a solo (see video link below at 6:50-7:30) that references Wigman’s particular style of *Ausdruckstanz* with her exaggerated swaying head and arm movements as shown in both *Hexentanz* and *Pastorale*. [Video Link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EFhzMdHlej4&feature=related)
The women in *Blaubart* are not always portrayed as victims of oppression because gender roles are often reversed by showing the women bullying the men on stage and becoming the oppressor. In one scene, for example, the women are shown violently tugging the men by their legs, roughly pulling them by their feet across the stage with cold and jagged motions. At different times, both men and women demonstrate a variation of sadomasochistic expressions that ranged from vulnerability, hysteria and subservience to authority and dominance. A scene from Bausch’s *Blaubart* with Jan Minarek and Marlis Alt is shown below.

![Blaubart](image)

*Fig. 50: Blaubart (iii)*

In *Blaubart*, Bausch portrays the eruption and overturning of historical ideologies, social conventions ad behavioral patterns that deteriorate in a violent and destructive manner. Like the leaves that lie strewn across the stage, Bausch shows how historical narratives and structures fail to endure and lose their value and connection to the world. Outdated modes of expression and behavior are distorted through exaggeration and repetition, warning against the danger of clinging to old habits and ways of the past. Rather than remaining attached to history by repeating or unconsciously resurrecting it,
Bausch shatters these illusions with her violent images and anti-aestheticized performance style that radically opposes the social forces and sticky webs that relationships and human beings find themselves confined by.

Radical change invariably occurs through a collision, shattering, or devastating event such as a natural disaster or political coup. Bausch’s choreography invites a litany of destructive forces to become the main centerpiece of her work. This catastrophic spectacle is intensely dramatic and challenges the viewer to witness an overwhelming torrent of violence and upheaval that effectively disrupts the old structures from blocking new energy to move on its own accord. Bausch is reluctant to replace the old structures with something new, as her choreography is far more compelled by the repetitive action of downfall, emphasizing deterioration with unconventional stage design, obscure props, music, emotive gesture, repetition and exaggeration. Bausch insists that through the device of repetition, the viewer is allowed “to look again and again” (91). Servos writes,

The movement canon is drawn directly from everyday existence. The dancers do not dance as they did in the earlier works. Here they walk, run, jump, fall, crawl, slide and so on. The repetition of the same movement as often as ten times or more physicalizes the fatality inherent in the state of being bound up in the course of events (55).

Bausch’s stylistic emphasis on repetition allows the viewer to recognize the tendency within social behavior and relationships of becoming stuck in old habits or programs.

Bausch’s work does not have a linear plot structure, but coherency is established through the juxtaposed montage sequences and in the tension that emerges between images and dramatic gestures. Bausch’s montage structure of choreography is similar to Brecht in maintaining “the open form of his epic theatre with its episodic development, in
which ‘one scene existing for the sake of the next’ is replaced by ‘each scene for its own sake’ and the ‘linear development of events’ is replaced by a development in curves’ (Steer 641). Even with dances that reference specific operas, ballets or literary works such as Blaubart or Sacre du Printemps, there is a loose connection to the original piece, especially with regard to plot and character development. Bausch uses elements from the original work, but radically distorts them to present the audience with contrasting images that create a significantly different experience. Mumford writes,

Her emphasis on the piling up of images which relate associatively or ironically to the narrative, and the dismemberment of the music through Bluebeard’s constant stopping and rewinding of certain passages, distanced her work from the opera both formally and thematically (Mumford 47).

Distance is therefore produced between the audience and the dance, as well as within the work itself by establishing coherency through non-linear, discontinuous structures.

This anti-aesthetic motif is pervasive throughout Bausch’s work, given her emphasis on gesture, which is closely related to the potency of movement and the underlying force beneath the action. Her choreography is engaged with the performance of motion and emotion, instead of content, narrative and theatrical conventions. This focus on potency, emotion, and gesture allows for different possibilities of meaning to emerge by refusing an external narrative structure that imposes and determines the significance of her work. Verbal speech, words, and text are, in most cases, arbitrary and incomprehensible as sentence fragments and word combinations frequently sound monotonous and meaningless.

17 Steer’s articles “Brecht’s Epic Theatre: Theory and Practice” cites passage from Brecht (Schriften, II, s.117).
Bausch’s use of emotive gesture is manifested through an appeal to the senses, which often culminates with an objective distancing, rather than from the outset forcing the spectator to disengage from their emotional reactions. Given the emphasis on bodily movement and sensual relationships, it is not surprising that Bausch uses emotive gesture as a primary mode of expression in contrast to Brecht’s primary reliance on narrative and verbal speech. Although Brecht and Bausch share an interest in distancing the viewer from their emotions in order to develop a critical attitude toward social reality, their theatrical tactics and application of *Gestus* are demonstrated differently. Servos writes,

The *Verfremdung* technique, true to the Brechtian principle, clarifies this point. Everyday, normal things are removed from their context and made particular, and thereby newly capable of being experienced. For dance, the subject is the deformed, everyday language of the body; representing it through *Verfremdung* lets the body be recognized, certainly, but at the same time makes it appear “strange” (440).

Making the everyday, banal reality appear strange and different is a significant element throughout Bausch’s work. Both Bausch and Brecht are interested in producing the alienation effect through their theatrical methods, but they each approach it slightly
uniquely. Bausch strongly relies on the physicality of the body to distort, twist and bend mundane movements to appear “strange,” whereas Brecht primarily uses the spoken word, utterances and gesture to defamiliarize the everyday world to establish a critical distance between the work and audience identification.

Repetition comprises a significant element of Bausch’s choreography. In a sequence of ten instances that repeat one single movement or gesture there can be a distinct range of variation. Each repetition is unique and slightly different from the preceding or the following movement. As a whole, the sequence is composed of one movement phrase that is repeated several times, but each repetition contains a slight disparity. This creates a critical difference that is inherent in the mode of repetition, which on one level produced ‘sameness,’ but on another level, it simultaneously refuses a pure harmony given the breaks between each repetition, which separate one from the other. Bausch’s mode of repetition therefore preserves a caesura of difference that allows one movement to separate itself from another, while at the same time returning to itself thereby evoking a discontinuous continuity. This style of repetition underscores the incongruent character of Bausch’s work whereby each movement is distinctly different to ward off the tendency to appear homogenous and sterile.
Part IV. Technical elements of *Tanztheater*

Bausch’s work establishes a major contrast to the tradition of classical formalism of ballet or the abstract expressions of *Ausdruckstanz*. Her choreographic style also significantly departs from the shiny, glamorous and illusory appeal of revue because her theatrical work presents motifs that playwright Heiner Müller describes as “the image is a thorn in our eye“ (140). The images that are presented in Bausch’s work are largely anti-aesthetic in that they do not represent a grandiose, overarching unified concept or idea. Servos writes, “Glossy stage illusion is replaced by the introduction of subjective fears and doubts; this change radicalizes the statement of the problem at the emotional (and emotive) level” (442). Through her use of emotive gesture and repetition, the historical tradition of aesthetics in theatre are interrupted and dismantled in Bausch’s work.

The resistance to formalization is demonstrated by Bausch’s continuous distortion of aesthetic images and historical dance vocabulary to show how this outdated physical language of representation fails to sustain meaning. Through technical usage of montage and fragmentation, Bausch pierces through illusions, using emotive and performative gestures that shatter relationships by placing them in perpetual conflict. Commenting on the images and qualities of Bausch’s dramaturgical method, Berringer writes,

They take time, and sometimes we cannot see them all at once because they run parallel, commenting on and overlapping with each other. Sometimes they return in a different context and assume a different emotional quality, like the many stories that emerge and disappear again, accentuating the subjective reality of experiences that are both pleasurable and painful (138).
Similar to Eisenstein’s theory of dialectical montage, Bausch presents her viewers with a collision of perception, thereby challenging expectations and knowledge of what dance is supposed to look like on stage and how it should be experienced. Multiple strains of imagery and movement happen on stage simultaneously, which largely undermines the necessity for a central plot motif or narrative structure. Audiences are given fragments and pieces of a story that lack any clear beginning, middle or end. With this approach, Bausch allows for subtle and cryptic elements that emerge obliquely, which do not happen in the center of the stage to orchestrate the dramatic tension.

The conventional rules of theatre, as exemplified by the proscenium arch and seating arrangement, direct the viewer’s attention to focus on the center stage, where the main action unfolds in the window or stage frame. This framing of the theatre space creates a fourth wall between the audience and performers, which also hides props, set pieces and technical provisions in the wings. Bausch challenges these conventions in her
work by minimizing the importance of providing a central plot or action. Instead, her pieces offer multiple scenes and angles to perceive defamiliarized movement phrases that repeatedly dispel the illusion of a total work of art. The lines that would conventionally separate ‘on stage’ versus ‘off stage’ procedures do not apply in Bausch’s Tanztheater, because off stage habits, such as costume changes or placement of props, are frequently done in front of the audience. At times, Bausch positions the musicians on stage facing the audience directly, rather than having them hidden in an orchestral pit.

This approach invites the viewer to engage with a series of disruptions of theatrical conventions that continuously challenge historical understandings of dance, theater, the staging of the body, and the expectations of a performance in terms of experience. Bausch often relies on overlapping images and emotional portrayals that do not necessarily have a direct or causal link to the interactions happening on center stage. Bausch’s mode of performative expression is reminiscent of Woolf’s description of the myriad impressions of the mind. In The Common Reader, Woolf writes, “From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there;...” Both Woolf and Bausch emphasize the experience of ‘differences in accents’ in their respective works because each depart from following the rules of yesterday, instead presenting new possibilities to express meaning through their different forms of language.

Bausch’s pieces such as Kontakthof, Walzer or Bandoneon often appear to be in rehearsal mode. The dancers make costume changes on stage, occasionally break their
character, and do not mask their struggle in the vigorous challenges placed on their bodies during the physically intense dance scenes. *Blaubart* or *Sacre du Printemps* are primary examples of the highly rigorous and physically laborious demands that Bausch’s dancers often experience. In contrast to the sterile aesthetic of an ethereal ballerina who still appears fairylike despite the immense physical challenge her body endures, Bausch’s dancers sweat, breathe heavily, and openly display their discomfort and exhaustion. An image from *Sacre du Printemps* is shown below.

![Image of dancers performing in *Sacre du Printemps*](image)

*Fig. 53: Le Sacre du Printemps (ii)*
Costumes in Bausch’s work range from everyday street clothes, 1950s style of high heels, dresses and suits, colorful flowing satin gowns for the women to loose leggings for the men. Women’s hair is frequently shown loose, long and flowing. At times, hair is displayed as an extension of the body that exaggerates the dimensions of the body through a “hair pulling” gesture. Stage designs are strongly influenced by *mise-en-scène* concepts as seen on film sets, which are taken directly from theater. Bausch incorporates surreal elements, such as bizarre props and obscure materials for the basis of her stage décor. She often enhances the wooden stage flooring by covering it with layers of soil, leaves, water, carnations, roses, chairs, rocks and boulders. An image from Bausch’s *Arien*, photographed by Jochen Viehoff (2006), shows the hippopotamus below.

![Arien](image)

Fig. 54: *Arien*
The use of props in Bausch’s *Tanztheater* provides an important function because the sheer monstrosity of size and incongruent proportions dramatically disrupt a compositional harmony in her pieces. The placement of these “misfit” objects bend the aesthetic arrangement to upset conventional framing and expectations by presenting an object that is obscure and grotesque. The props destabilize the set design and ultimately destroy the illusion of the theatre as an historicized, representational space. Objects such as a) hippopotamus b) boulders c) *Nelken* or carnations d) pools of water e) whale tail, bear no intrinsic value other than sensory appeal, comic relief and to obstruct symbolic meaning. When the viewer is suddenly confronted by a random appearance of a vastly disproportionate hippopotamus on stage, the tension that is provoked often diffuses in laughter due to its sheer absurdity.

Agamben asserts, “at some point between 1885 and 1971” that “everybody had lost control of their gestures and was walking and gesticulating frantically”(137). This chapter discusses how Pina Bausch’s style of *Tanztheater*, along with her explicit emphasis on repetition, *Verfremdung*, and emotive gesture, dramatically transforms the meaning and interpretation of movement in an unprecedented way. By modifying ‘frantic gestures’ and turning them into controlled expressions of movement, Bausch presents viewers with a bodily language of movement that emerge from everyday life as a means to challenge confining social constructs and behavioral conditions that lead to human suffering or destructive habits.
Traces of *Ausdruckstanz* are found throughout Bausch’s *Tanztheater*, indicating a strong connection between these movements in terms of emotional expression, internal experience and engagement with tragedy, loss and despair. Bausch’s dance vocabulary is reminiscent of *Ausdruckstanz* in terms of walking, swaying, spinning and falling, but her approach and intentions are radically different. Unlike *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* confronts the affairs and matters of social reality, as opposed to glorifying a purely transcendental, symbolic and subjective state. As Servos writes,

*Die Ästhetik der zwanziger Jahre*—jedenfalls die Labans und Wigmans—zielt unkritisch auf ein Aufgehen des tanzenden Individuums in der Gemeinschaft. Die Tanztheater-Ästhetik dagegen untersucht die Einflüsse und Zwänge der Gesellschaft auf den einzelnen kritisch und unternimmt es, die Kraft des Individuums gegenüber die Gesellschaft zu stärken (11).

Bausch’s choreography establishes a major contrast to the highly individualistic portrayals of *Ausdruckstanz* and the sterile, ethereal aesthetic of classical ballet with a brutally honest depiction of the social conventions that human relationships and expressions are unconsciously controlled by. Throughout her pieces, such as *Blaubart*, *Bandoneon*, *Kontakthof* and *Café Müller*, Bausch emphasizes the failure of conventional understandings and historical representations to endure. Instead of resolving the problems her works confront, she leaves the question open for the audience to critically deliberate.

Through her myriad display of ‘gesture of differences,’ Bausch defamiliarizes the habits of social behavior through repetition and distortion to reveal the comical absurdity of how human beings are consumed by fabricated stories and idealized images. Her work dispels theatrical illusions by repeatedly showing how these artificial constructs are often disconnected from the *Potenz*, or potency, of the forces that compel humans to move and
express themselves. By distorting the common traits and habitual patterns of human behavior, Bausch reveals the inability for historical narratives and traditional models to grapple with contemporary problems that necessitate a different form to be presented in.

Chapter four argues that Tanztheater is characterized by a discontinuous continuity with Ausdruckstanz insofar that subjective expression serves its role as a necessary emotional outlet, yet it simultaneously remains subject to social criticism. This approach allows for social transformation to happen consciously, whereby gestures are no longer frantic and insignificant, but clearly convey potentiality in the repetition and transmission of different perceptions and movements. Chapter five further examines these issues through close analysis of the following contemporary choreographers: Sasha Waltz, Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs and Deborah Hay. It questions the extent to which Bausch’s Tanztheater has transmitted concepts such as nonlinearity, repetition, absurdity and emotional gesture, which are found in contemporary forms and postmodern arrangements of movement.
AN ENGAGEMENT WITH CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF MOVEMENT AND TEMPORALITY

Contemporary dance establishes a different temporal awareness in its mode of presentation by locating the presence of movement in the immediate happening and experience of the moment, which resists the historical tendency to repeat problems of representation and spatialization. Spatialization separates or displaces the presence of movement from the immediate experience of its presentation, which frames it as a point of signification in time and space. The historical tradition of classical ballet is predicated upon the relationship between the presence of movement and its symbolic or representational value. Ausdruckstanz attempted to challenge the outdated style of classical ballet by emphasizing emotional and subjective expression over formalization. However, Ausdruckstanz essentially filled the classical mold with expressionist attributes, which did not change its underlying structure, but simply altered its external appearance.

The counterargument and resistance against this inflated concept of individual expression, cultish identity, and exaggerated emotional state, led to the development of an objective, formalized and mechanical approach as displayed by Oskar Schlemmer’s Bauhaus dance figures and Pina Bausch’s reliance on repetition. These particular styles
rejected both classical and expressionist forms by concentrating on the mechanization of movement. However, they still maintained a spatial relationship that did not alter the temporal experience of dance given its reliance on theatrical concepts. In contrast, contemporary dance focuses on the immediate presentation of movement by establishing a different temporal experience that is neither spatially determined nor representational.

The poem by W.B. Yeats, “Among School Children” asks the rhetorical question, “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” How can we assume that the distinction made between the subject (the dancer) and the object (the dance) is inherently possible? The temporal awareness that contemporary dance establishes does not conceive of the relationship between subject and object in terms of antinomy or dichotomy. It conveys neither a separation nor a unity between them, but rather presents how movement arrives and how it takes on a particular form, arrangement, and appearance. This experience of time is not determined by a destination or signification, but rather it engages with the process of presence moving through form.

This chapter examines the tendencies, forms, styles, and concepts established by the contemporary, postmodern dance movement that developed in the late 1950s-1960s not long before the emergence of Tanztheater in the 1970s. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the developments of modern dance in Germany and United States attempted to make a decisive break from classical traditions of ballet, but largely failed to achieve this task. The emphasis on individual expression and emotion in German Ausdruckstanz, as exemplified by the choreographic style of Mary Wigman, was consonant with the focus on formalism and abstract symbolism in the United States, as
demonstrated by the works of Martha Graham. New wave choreographers in the 1960s in both countries were discontent with the continued reliance on formalism and representational art, which modernity had failed to effectively intervene and rupture the familiar patterns, concepts, and themes that kept resurfacing in the arts.

Contemporary styles of movement confront this failure of modernity by critically disrupting and substantially questioning the repetition of outdated historical models and narratives. In Germany, this movement started with Pina Bausch’s *Tanztheater* (as discussed in chapter four) with her social criticism and self-conscious performance style that presented new forms of gestural expression. In the United States, the growth of non-expressive and non-formalist tendencies in the arts, served as a catalyst for contemporary thinking to be exhibited through the medium of postmodern dance.

Unlike the historical origin of *Tanztheater* in Essen and Wuppertal, Germany, postmodern dance has its roots in New York City with development of the Judson Dance Theater and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. Judson Dance Theater was an “informal collective of experimentalists who rejected traditional choreography and technique in favor of open-ended scores and ordinary movement” (Daly 42). Merce Cunningham, who was a central figure of the postmodern dance movement, left the Martha Graham Company in 1945 to pursue his own choreographic direction and established the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953. Cunningham and John Cage collaborated for fifty years and significantly transformed the perception, shape, process, structure, and appearance of modern dance.
This chapter analyzes concepts including chance, non-objectivity, spatial arrangement, anti-expressionism, and simultaneity through close analysis of several major works by the following choreographers: Merce Cunningham, Deborah Hay, Lucinda Childs, and Sasha Waltz. The postmodern style dance seeks to find a relationship with movement that is not formalist in its tradition, classical in its style, or emotional in its expression. Instead it engages the physicality and technical relationships in dancing as such. Foster writes,

Unlike modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, whose vocabularies seemed to issue from pan-human psychic dynamics, choreographers from the 1960s shifted the focus away from the psychological origins and toward the physical matter of dance-making (forward xi italics added).

The emphasis on the kinesthetic composition and physicality of the body on a structural level was achieved by its technical orientation in recognizing the body’s physical abilities and limitations. The emotional, psychological, and formal tendencies of modern dance were rejected in favor of engaging with non-expressive, mechanical, yet fluid forms of physical movement. The subject matter of dance was movement itself, which had no story, feeling, or significance to convey.

This concentration on technical physicality further established a means for engaging with the present moment by leaving the outcome open in an undetermined way that did not rely upon the resurrection of a past, historical narrative. In his essay on “Grace and Clarity” John Cage writes, “That one should, today, have to see Swan Lake or something equally empty of contemporary meaning in order to experience the pleasure of
observing clarity and grace in the dance, is, on its face, lamentable” (24).\(^1\) Contemporary meaning for Merce Cunnigham, John Cage, Lucinda Childs, and Philip Glass was located within a mechanism of temporal form, which allowed for a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations using different shapes, sounds, and designs to convey postmodern tendencies through variable patterns of movement, stage décor, and gesture.

![Merce Cunningham](image)

*Fig. 55: Merce Cunningham*

Each of the choreographers examined in this chapter confront problems of representation and causal relationships by focusing intently on what is happening in the body in the present moment. What happens from moment to moment with a single motioning of a gesture, such as a slight flick of the wrist, signals the potential to convey multiple levels of meaning without being limited to any one single definition nor remaining locked within a symbolic construct that refers outside itself to establish

\(^1\) John Cage, “Grace and Clarity.” In *Silence*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1961. This essay is also published in *Merce Cunningham: Dancing in Time and Space*. 

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significance. Rather than trying to grasp or formalize an idea or theme, postmodern
dance is interested in the presence of body movement and the conscious awareness that is
experienced in the moment detached from an historical narrative or symbolic meaning
that would otherwise fix it into a category or an ideology. Robbe-Grillet writes,

> Instead of this universe of “signification,” (psychological, social, functional), we
must try, then, to construct a world both more solid, more immediate. Let it be first
of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this
presence continue to prevail over whatever explicatory theory that may try to
enclose them in a system of reference, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian,
or metaphysical.  

As comprehensively discussed in Chapter one, the expressionist dancers were
motivated by an interest to develop a movement vocabulary that was emotional, internal,
mystical, and nontraditional. The tight fitting costumes, rigid ballet masters, linear
patterns, harmonic narratives, and patriarchal dominance proved strongly problematic for
Ausdruckstanz at the turn of the twentieth-century. Postmodern dance rejects the
aesthetic standards of ballet as similarly demonstrated by expressionist dance, but it also
challenges the formalist, abstract, emotional, and symbolic tendencies of modern dance.
This double rejection operates on two levels in that the classical reliance on historical
narrative and representational art is critically undermined, while the abstract formalism of
modern expressionism is also refuted.

Cunningham and Bausch similarly rejected the modern forms that were taught to
them by their mentors, Martha Graham, (in the case of Cunningham) and Kurt Jooss, (in

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the case of Bausch). Both Bausch and Cunningham received harsh criticism and resistant audiences in the early stages of their works, but their reputations have since reached legendary status in the current field of experimental and postmodern dance. Bausch challenged Jooss’ formalist reliance in his concept of Tanztheater by presenting movements that resisted narrative structures through the repetition and amplification of dramatic forms of gesture and emotional expression. Cunningham rejected the strong emphasis placed on narrative and emotion in Graham’s choreography in addition to the modern focus on the body’s gravity and weight in contrast to ballet’s ascent through the air. He states, “Even when I was first there, I thought the way she moved was very amazing, but I didn’t think the rest of it was interesting at all.” Cunningham was more interested in exploring different relationships with the body moving in space, at times interacting with objects on stage, yet independently from music. Cunningham further contends,

> In the most conventional dances there is a central idea to which everything adheres. The dance has been made to the piece of music, the music supports the dance, and the décor frames it. The central idea is emphasized by each of the several arts. What we have done in our work is to bring together three separate elements in time and space, the music, the dance, and the décor, allowing each one to remain independent. The three arts don’t come from a single idea which the dance demonstrates, the music supports and the décor illustrates, but rather they are three separate elements each central to itself (Lessschaeve137).

Each art form has its own autonomy and potential for expression according to Cunningham’s choreographic approach, which refuses the modern tendency to homogenize and resolve differences in terms of quality, form, and temporality through a forced unity. The image below is from Cunningham’s dance Walkaround Time, which

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3 Bausch and Cunningham both passed away in summer 2009
presents transparent plastic boxes designed by Jasper Johns after Marcel Duchamp’s *The Large Glass*. *Walkaround Time* (1968) demonstrates how Cunningham’s choreographic approach engages with visual art, but without synthesizing the different forms.

![Image of a performance](image)

**Fig. 56: Walkaround Time**

The difference between postmodern dance and the preceding forms of modern dance including *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater*, is how it disrupts a linear trajectory of historical continuity without replacing it with another generic version of the problematic structure that it intends to overcome. The adage “out with old and in with the new” does not agree with this postmodern tendency because the “new” is recognized as ephemeral and once its status of “newness” has abated; it quietly slips back into a familiar expression. Postmodern dance is therefore a critical intervention between the new and the old that sees itself neither belonging to one side or the other. Instead it tends to oscillate between multiple points of time and space, pausing intermittently to consciously present a “freeze frame” moment to bring awareness of the body moving in a circular, straight line, and forward/reverse motions in space and time.
Part I. Chance, Instant, and Variation

Formalism in American modern dance was largely influenced by the style and technique of Martha Graham. Her method includes the use of contract/release technique and her movement vocabulary emphasizes sharp, angular, jagged movements over elongated, ethereal and flowing movements that are characteristic of classical ballet. Graham conceived modern dance to be an expressive medium that could channel the natural and mythic sources that lie hidden beneath the surface of contemporary society. The Judson Dance Theatre and Merce Cunningham Dance Company rejected the understanding that dance was a means to represent an ancient, abstract, and objective meaning. In the postmodern movement, dance itself became the subject. Cunningham states, “You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on the walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive” (90). Movement for movement’s sake was of much greater import in that it challenged notions of permanence, harmony, nostalgia, and anti-expressionism by focusing on the possibilities of the instant, happening, and present moment. Cunningham further remarks,

“All my subsequent involvement with dancers who were concerned with dance as a conveyor of social message or to be used as a testing ground for psychological types have not succeeded in destroying that feeling Mrs. J. W. Barrett gave me that dance is most deeply concerned with each single instant as it comes along, and its life and vigor and attraction lie in just that singleness. It is as accurate and impermanent as breathing (http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/cunningham).

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5 Citation from The Vision of Modern Dance: In the Words of its Creators edited by Jean Morrison Brown, 2nd edition.
6 Maud Barrett was Cunningham’s first tap dance teacher in 1932, Washington State.
The interest in this ‘singleness’ that is held and presented in an instant’s time is one common element that motivated many of Cunningham’s artistic collaborations with John Cage, Jasper Johns, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, Josef Albers and numerous figures of the avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s. Their collaborations frequently employed chance as a means to disrupt the continuity of an intellectual framing device within the choreographic work. For example, dancers would move on stage at different times without a causal link presented between when and how their movements would relate to each other on stage and when the dancers would enter or exit the stage. Random objects reminiscent of Duchamp’s readymades, color coded ‘crayon’ costumes, décor, and lighting effects designed by Rauschenberg, and props such as plants, projection screens and glass cubes were used to further interrupt conventional spaces and the customary use of the proscenium stage. Cunningham was sometimes offered gymnasiums, ballrooms, and open spaces on tour that would allow his choreography to introduce a different spatial landscape unhindered by the limitations of the conventional theatre. Kostelanetz writes,

His (Cunningham’s) performances were for me a revelation about the possibilities of nonexpressionistic movement and, by extension, of nonexpressionistic mixed-means performance; about noncentered space and, analogously, uninflected time; about experiment that nonetheless respected grace…What one dancer did had no definite connection to what the others were doing, while the music had no ostensible connection to the dance (16).

Kostelanetz discusses several major points that demonstrate the postmodern tendencies present in Cunningham’s performances such as decentralized space, nonexpressionism, and autonomous relationships between music and movement. Coins were tossed and the

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7 Rauschenberg’s first job for the company was to design the décor for Minutiae (1954), a free-standing object that became known as the first of the artist’s “Combines.”
http://www.merce.org/company/artists.php


**I Ching**\(^8\) was referenced to employ chance as part of the choreographic process in addition to determining where and how objects were to be presented in the space. Robert Wilhelm\(^9\) translated the *I Ching* into German and introduced the “Book of Changes” to Western Europe in 1924. Wilhelm claims,

> Nearly all that is greatest and most significant in the three thousand years of Chinese cultural history has either taken its inspiration from this book, or has exerted an influence on the interpretation of its text. Therefore it may safely be said that the seasoned wisdom of thousands of years has gone into the making of the *I Ching*. Small wonder then that both of the two branches of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism, have their common roots there (xlvii).

Cage and Cunningham were inspired by the *I Ching* and used the concept of chance in their work to allow for another ‘player’ to decipher the structure, timing, and style of their choreographic pieces while conceiving music and dance independently from one another.

In the foreward to Wilhelm’s *I Ching*, Carl Jung writes,

> Just as causality describes the sequence of events, so synchronicity to the Chinese mind deals with the coincidence of events. The causal point of view tell us a dramatic story about how \(D\) came into existence: it took its origin from \(C\), which existed before \(D\), and \(C\) in turns had a father, \(B\), etc. The synchronistic view on the other hand tries to produce an equally meaningful picture of coincidence. How does it happen that \(A',B',C',D'\), etc., appear all in the same moment and in same place? (foreward to Wilhelm’s *I Ching* or Book of changes xxiv).

Causality as opposed to synchronicity is a significant point of contention existing between modern and postmodern understandings of dance. The linear “A-B-C-D”

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\(^8\) *I Ching* or *Yi Jing*, which means “book of changes,” is a 3000-year old Chinese divination system that is based on 64 hexagrams that contain a combination of broken (Yin) and unbroken (Yang) lines representing light, dark, or transformation. Three coins are tossed to determine the hexagram, which is then read line by line from bottom to top. Pennies or yin/yang coin are used. Heads is 3 points and tails is 2 points. Yin is two points and Yang is three points. The total number of points in the combination determines the constitution of each line in the hexagram.

narrative or trajectory is challenged by the concept of chance because it allows for a different temporal quality to be experienced through the simultaneous manifestations of movement happening and visible at the same moment. There is no central organizing principle or theme that attempts to harmonize these variables together. Instead the dissonance and disagreement between each layer of movement or expression becomes the means by which the traditional, historical models are disjointed.

Chance opened up another layer of possibility to experiment with the arrangement of movement sequences and positions of dancers in what appears as Cunningham’s ‘moving canvas.’ Often resembling the shape and form of mobiles by Alexander Calder, the individual dancers form clusters that assemble and dissemble, as each part moves through time and space relating to the other parts while at the same remaining steady and whole in its own composition like a note (or alphabet letter) in of a musical chord (or word). Cunningham’s dancers interact with each other in the space without an emotional performance. The dramatic qualities of Cunningham’s choreography are achieved by its fluid ingenuity and internal rhythm that is interrupted at times by a spontaneous moment, where in an instant, the movement sequence shifts and the space and arrangement of the dancers on the floor either respond or continue articulating their particular pattern.

In Variations V	extsuperscript{10} is an experimental, multimedia collaboration between Merce Cunningham (choreographer) and his dancers, John Cage (composer), Nam June Paik (video distortion), Stan VanDerBeek (filmmaker), Robert Moog (electronic percussion) and Billy Klüver (photocells) that premiered in New York City in 1965 and was

\[^{10}\text{http://ubu.com/film/cage_variations5.html}\text{ (video available on ubu.com for reference).}\]
videotaped in Hamburg, Germany by Norddeutscher Rundfunk (see link below).

*Variations V* combined sound, projection, and movement that experimented with different relationships in movement through time and space. Photocells and antennae were positioned throughout the space, which allowed the dancers to activate the sounds that were wired through a circuit system. “Whenever the dancers interrupted the light to the photocells or came within a four-foot radius of the antennas, they triggered switching circuitry in the mixer, which in turn fed six loudspeakers spread around the hall” (Miller 546).¹¹ Nam June Paik’s distorted images and VanDerBeek’s “kaleidoscopic collage” of spliced images were projected on to the large screens in the back of the space providing a shifting landscape, which augmented the atmosphere of visual frequency and motion. The projections were larger than the actual dimensions of the screens, which allowed light waves to expand outside the frame giving the space a contoured, yet asymmetrical appearance. What is most striking is the overlapping of movement, sound, projection, and superimposed images, which continuously interrupt the static conventions of dance, choreography, and theater. This effect conveys a contemporary experience of modern technology in combination with different possibilities for perceiving movement through various forms in time and space.

The interaction of all of these elements gives *Variations V* an exceptionally unique form in that there is no narrative, proscenium theatre, central figures, themes, or emotional displays that would determine its meaning or provide a narrative structure. “As an exploration of the possibilities of collaboration among music, dance, and technology, however, *Variations V* was revolutionary” (Miller 546). The experience is one of pure movement that emanates from the dancer’s moving bodies, projected images, indistinguishable sounds, and intricate montage effect. The experience of time and movement in this piece is nothing like classical ballet or a work of modern dance by Martha Graham or Kurt Jooss. The audio-visual components, which continuously shift
from point to point, produce a metamorphic, transformational effect without 
synchronizing into a static Gesamtkunstwerk. Sally Banes claims,

Another increment of “intelligence” in Cunningham’s work is a quality of clarity. Most often, this amounts to a principle of separability – i.e., 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 (73).12

Sound as opposed to music; movement as opposed to dance; and color, as opposed to painting; are concepts that are demonstrated in the pivotal postmodern works of Cunningham and Cage. The presence in the mode of expression of each particular art form is allowed to emerge without the imposition of an historical or traditional framework that would determine it externally. Through the separate and independent play between sound, movement, and image, the autonomy of “art” is presented without a category, narrative frame, or formal device, which would limit its propensity for expansion and transformation. In a 1985 symposium titled, The Forming of an Aesthetic: 

Merce Cunningham and John Cage, Earle Brown states,

That philosophy was certainly prevalent in the change in painting and sculpture and art attitudes, in which the art object itself, like a Mondrian, doesn’t represent anything except colors and lines. The viewer is free to associate with such a painting in any way he wishes. That philosophy was strongly influential on both Merce and John. The “thing” in itself, as Gertrude Stein said; “It-ness,” “Itness” was a matter we felt very strongly about.13

“Itness” is significant because it underscores the previous discussion about the singular and separate instant when chance allows for the substance within an art form to present itself on its own terms. The emphasis on line and color in painting is similar to the focus on jumps, turns, falls, holds, and twists that postmodern dance engages with. This multidimensional and complex tendency presented by postmodern movement preserves the possibility for moving images, body movements, and indistinguishable sounds to convey motions through its form that do not conform with the rules of representational art.

**Part II. Temporality in Postmodern Dance**

The instant or present moment is for postmodern dance the most compelling element of movement because it allows a space in which a sound or gesture can be inflected without necessarily having a causal link to what precedes or follows it. In Cunningham’s work there is a significant emphasis placed on the change of directions while moving though space. The movement from point ‘A’ to ‘B’ is not linear or serial for Cunningham. A dancer can be shown moving forward on a diagonal, arc, or straight line and then suddenly they change their direction by moving backward, sideways, or both. This continuous change of direction is indicative of the use of nonlinear space in Cunningham’s work. The movement sequences tend to employ different directions, planes, variations of tempo, and asymmetrical forms, which produce different spatial relationships that present a continuous discontinuity through its visual transformation.
The marking of time is also much different for Cunningham compared to modern or classical traditions, which largely rely on a western meter or a standard 4/4 count. Cunningham and Cage questioned the “natural” relationship between music and dance by conceiving of the movements and the sound independently. “Cunningham began to develop choreographies without music and rehearse his dancers in silence, timing them with a stopwatch. The dancers would typically hear the music for the first time at the premiere” (Miller 547). This method allowed for chance to play a decisive role in establishing the relationship between movement, sound, time, and space. The dancers would have to adjust their movements of the rehearsed choreography to find connections with the sound composition on opening night. This live component made the movement come alive in a remarkably different way than in rehearsal because of the instant or present moment allowed the sound/movement relationship to find each other in space without being predetermined. This process is not technically improvisational given that the movement structure was already rehearsed and the question regarding how the music would relate to movement was left open. Cunningham writes,

Now time can be an awful lot of bother with the ordinary pinch-penny counting that has to go on with it, but if one can think of the structure as a space of time in which anything can happen in any sequence of movement even, and any length of stillness can take place, then the counting is an aid towards freedom, rather than a discipline towards mechanization. A use of time-structure also frees the music into space, making the connection between the dance and the music one of individual autonomy connected at structural points. The result is the dance is free to act as it chooses, as is the music. The music doesn’t have to work to death to underline the dance, or the dance create havoc in trying to be as flashy as the music (39 italics added).^{14}

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^{14} Merce Cunningham “Space, Time and Dance” (1952).
Cunningham’s decision to use his stopwatch instead of counting steps using an eight count with meter (or measured rhythm) establishes a different relationship between movement and time. Both systems are mathematical and broken down into measurable parts. However, by using a stopwatch to count “real time” seconds in relation to the steps (instead of framing the steps by a standard eight count) it gives the movement sequence a different sense of duration. His claim that, “counting is an aid towards freedom rather than a discipline towards mechanization” underscores how he and Cage have allowed for chance to open a space in which movement and sound can relate to each other structurally without relying on each other to stand. The art forms in this presentation have matured to the extent in which an opening for expansive experience can happen without the need to repeat a dead tradition.

Cage and Cunningham periodically arranged “Events” in the mid-1980s that were performances of fragments and assembled selections from different choreographies. This collage or montage form of spliced sequences taken from different dances resembled a mosaic compilation of separate elements that were not unified since each “Event” was decidedly different.

As Mr. Cunningham defines the term, an "Event" is a performance lasting about 90 minutes and consisting of bits and pieces from dances in the company's repertory. But instead of being presented as a set of obvious excerpts from longer works, these fragments are so intermingled as to constitute a new entity that is satisfying on its own terms. All "Events" attest to Mr. Cunningham's compositional mastery, for he can weave coherent designs out of what less talented artists might treat only as choreographic scraps. 15

This notion of event is significant in terms of temporality because of the random selection of the dances that are included, which are not determined by a narrative structure.

Instead the event is presented as a “happening” in one singular occasion that disrupts the normative theatrical expectations of viewing the same composition or choreographic recipe of a programmatic and thematic production such as Swan Lake or The Nutcracker. Kostelanetz writes, “Events are composed of earlier dances, either in whole or part, performed in continuous sequence for over an hour. They are unique self-anthologies drawn from an ample storehouse” (18). This style of performance is not narrating a story or portraying an historical tradition, but it engages with pure movement and sound through a series of fragments that are treated as autonomous entities.

In Points in Space16 John Cage mentions how his process of composing this piece was “non-intentional” in that he was neither interested in expressing his likes or dislikes or communicating a certain feeling. The composition that he created independently from Cunningham’s choreography is a compilation of breaths that sound like waves of inhalation and exhalation, expanding and contracting at random moments. The sound ranges from slow and long extensions to moments that are suspended in fragmentary intervals. Cunningham discusses how the music and dance are not conceived together intentionally, which allows the viewer to decide whether they think the sound and movement should be perceived as united or separate. There is no instruction or pedagogical model on how to engage with either form as each is presented in its own right without conveying a harmonious or agreeable relationship. Ironically, there are moments whereby the dancing and the sound seamlessly come together and then break away again.

16 Collaboration with Merce Cunningham, John Cage, Bill Anastasi, Dove Bradshaw, and film director, Elliot Caplan, for BBC documentary, 1986.
In the segment from 29:30-29:33 of *Points in Space* (DVD version) there is a moment where the sound of the breath and the movements are suspended, yet remain seamlessly in tune together and then suddenly they move apart again. This fluid dynamic or fluctuation between unity/disunity where the music and dance assemble and dissemble at different structural points is evidenced throughout the piece. At times this trend of ‘incongruent congruency’ seems so effortless, it is almost inconceivable to believe that these two systems were in fact produced independently of one another. In several moments the wavelike “breath” sounds are paused and the dancer’s breathing or their feet sliding and tapping across the floor are the only audible sounds. An example of this is shown in the segment from 35:06-35:30. When John Cage’s wave sounds fade out and dancer’s footwork and breathing become enhanced, a subtle shift between different levels of awareness at variant, yet overlapping stages of time is experienced. One plane of
sensory awareness is suddenly more “zoomed in” and then it “zooms out” again only to be followed by yet another a configuration of sensory engagement. *Points in Space* is like a magnetic constellation of different spatial, audio, visual, and kinaesthetic relationships that bounce, attract, repel, spin, and enervate like molecules through a shifting landscape of moving bodies and vibrant forms.

Bill Anastasi, the set designer of *Points in Space*, painted a massive backdrop using heavy, jagged brush strokes, which formed a pastiche canvas of bright colors, lines, and shapes. Nothing was consistent, harmonious, or symmetrical in the landscape as the non-uniform lines describe multilayered directions and dynamic zigzags on this giant wallpaper. Non-objectivity was emphasized on the canvas through the random brush strokes and bold color schemes. The costumes, designed by Dove Bradshaw, also exhibited a non-uniform character in that each dancer wore a different colored bodysuit with a pattern painted directly on to it consisting of dots or lines in various shades of color, gradation, and tone. The dancer’s bodies provide another layer of variation.
depending on their particular shape, height, physique, and hair color. Stagnancy is
insurmountably negated by the structural ingenuity and colorful fluidity of this visual,
audio, and choreographic work.

In terms of dance technique, there is a significant reliance on the vocabulary of
classical ballet steps inherent to Cunningham’s choreography. The technical control,
skill, balance, and discipline portrayed by his dancers are derived from a foundation in
ballet training. However, the arrangement of the steps and the inclusion of pedestrian or
‘non-balletic’ movements present an exceptional contrast to the standard performance
style of traditional ballet. The ballet steps such as pas de bourrée, fouetté, fondue, écarté,
and attitude are referenced in Cunningham’s choreography, yet the arrangement of the
steps and the nonlinear sequences of footwork are markedly different than the classical
“formula”. As previously mentioned, chance was used as a mechanism to determine how
many times a phrase would repeat itself, when the dancers’ entrances/exits would be, and
where the dancers would be positioned in the space. Copeland states,

For Cunningham, chance and the ballet vocabulary are two means toward the same
end: they help to liberate the choreographer from the limitations of his own
instincts. The ballet lexicon offers up a preexisting body of movement
considerably more impersonal than the vocabularies of earlier modern dance
choreographers. Similarly, chance methods are a strategy for making aesthetic
decisions in a manner that transcends purely personal inclinations…When
Cunningham incorporates both chance methodologies and aspects of the ballet
lexicon into his work, the result is a uniquely contemporary brand of classicism
(7).

Copeland underscores the potential for the choreographer to work through their
limitations by employing chance, however, this does not necessarily ‘transcend’ personal

inclinations, but rather engages with a different possible means to move through the limitation rather than to surpass it. The strategy used in Cunningham’s choreographic process is therefore inclusive and integrative rather than exclusive. Copeland further claims that Cunningham’s style is a ‘contemporary brand of classicism’, which seems contradictory given the postmodern argument against the necessity for wholeness, Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk, and harmonic convergence of different art forms. There is not enough evidence within the trajectory of Cunningham and Cage’s work to suggest a vague interest to ‘branding’ or categorize their work in that way. The need to label the work of art outside the terms established by the work itself is historically a modernist approach to art, which is precisely the framework or tendency that Cage and Cunningham’s work critiques. In discussing Martha Graham’s concept of modern dance, Cunningham states,

Her dance vocabulary was unique…the forms she used were nineteenth-century, that is, each work built to a climax from which it fell away. Furthermore, the subject of each dance was something that could have been expressed in words, as indeed it was in the program note (Lesschaeve 139).

Considering Cunningham’s insightful and critical knowledge about what needed to change in modern dance, it would therefore serve the reader, critic and viewer to engage his work without imposing categories of descriptive measure, which place his dancing into the very conjecture that his work challenges.

**Part III. Deborah Hay’s Experiments in Movement**

Deborah Hay was a member of the radically charged and experimental dance community of the Judson Dance Theater, who danced with the Merce Cunningham
Company in the mid-1960s. Goldman writes, “Hay toured for six months with the Merce Cunnigham Dance Company in 1964, and was a dancer in the famous Judson Dance Theater, where she began to experiment with what would become a lasting fascination: challenging distinctions between trained and untrained dancers” (160). Hay presented her piece “Solo” as part of a program that was presented in New York City called 9 Evenings, Theater and Engineering (1966). This technological work is a collaboration of sound, lighting, movement, and objects, which have no trace of narrative structure or emotional expression. Similar to Cunningham and Cage’s Variations V, the dancers move independently of one another and do not show a complimentary or associative relationship to the lighting or sound elements. Some of the dancers remain still and posed like statues in the space while others are moving around on remote controlled carts. This early example of Hay’s experimental choreography shows the juxtaposition between formalist, mechanical tendencies and the emphasis on technological collaboration, which have strongly influenced her current perception, style, and development of contemporary dance.

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19 Video footage of Hay’s Solo (1966) is available on the following website generously provided by la Fondation Daniel Langlois: http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1773
Hay’s approach to movement is disinterested in conforming to aesthetic ideals of beauty in dance. Hay claims, “By calling dance ‘dance’ we are then making a judgment about stuff we are not calling ‘dance’. I have an unquenchable thirst to present that area of movement not recognized as dance – to pull it back into the world of dance” (Daly 36). Hay uses a series of directives and experimental modules with her dancers that abstain from using a generic pedagogical method. “She devises these ridiculous illogical contradictory tasks in order to eliminate the rules of movement. The point is not representation (Hay never demonstrates movement for her dancers), but how to get beyond representation, to the body’s infinite capacity to inform” (Daly 39).
Similar to Pina Bausch, Hay also engages her dancers with a series of questions and meditative ideas, which then develop into movements that become the substance or raw material of the choreography. Hay and Bausch both resisted imposing dance steps and pedagogy on to their dancers by instead establishing connections with each other while at the same time developing the material, which gradually became the process of performance.
In the protocol of conventional dance classes or workshops, the instructor usually stands in front of the class to break down a set of phrases, which are then connected, repeated, and performed by the dancers at the end of class. Foster maintains, “The dancer works to master these shapings and timings and, through the process, learns what the body can and cannot do” (foreword, xiv). Hay does not follow this authoritative model. Without demonstrating in detail how the movement sequences should look like, she instead provides “koanlike” questions, guidelines, and directives, which are “designed to challenge the dancer’s perceptual awareness” (Goldman 157). Hay works with groups of trained and untrained dancers of different ages and backgrounds in workshop settings, which provide her group performances with an urban, pedestrian quality as opposed to an aesthetic, sterile, and formal presence. Foster writes,

Rather than instruct students in a standard repertoire of technical skills and then proceed to fashion a dance, Hay organizes both the acquisition of technique and the choreography around a focused inquiry into bodliness (foreword xi).^{20}

By working outside the conventional framework in her choreographic process, Hay’s dances build their own shape and character that emerge from the practice rather than from a blueprint imposed on to the dancers’ bodies. Hay is critical of choreographic methods that have a preset ‘end’ in mind, which would determine how the dance should look. Instead Hay urges her dancers develop a conscious awareness of their own bodies as they move through the “coaching directives” and exercises to recognize their own physical habits of “scripted” patterns. This experimental approach emphasizes the

conscious awareness of the body as the dancers move through a sequence of steps rather than an unconscious repetition of a set phrase. Foster writes,

   Students receive no approval or criticism for engaging in these explorations, nor do they learn to hate the body for its inadequacies. Rather, they orient toward the body as a generative source of ideas. Their reward comes less from mastering specific skills and more from the body unfolding as a site of infinite possibilities (foreword xv).

Hay’s dancers often employ unconventional tactics such as dancing nude, engaging with audience members through direct eye contact, starting the performance before the audience is seated, and satirizing references to classical ballet and traditional dance vocabulary. In 2009 Hay choreographed a dance titled, *At Once* and shared it with twenty international dancers who participated in her experimental project called the “Solo Performance Commissioning Project.” In this program, Hay works intensively with her dancers in residency for eleven days consecutively. After the eleven days of the workshop are completed, the dancers are required by contract to practice the choreography for three months after which they are obliged to perform their solo piece at a public venue.

The *Tanztage* dance festival in Berlin 2010 premiered two adaptations of Hay’s *At Once* performed by Marcela Donato and Stina Nyberg. Both dancers were issued identical directives by Hay during their training, but each of them had a starkly different interpretation. Donato’s adaptation was a commentary on the historically inscribed body that shows the rejection of social conventions and normative measures imposed through

dance, gesture, culture, language, and costume. With the exception of a rose tinted Marie-Antoinette wig, sparkly blue buckled shoes, white socks, and a string of pearls, Donato performed her adaptation of *At Once* nude. Her facial gestures and awkward movements conveyed a sense of detachment and alienation as she performed the rejection of baroque ornamentation by stripping down her movement vocabulary to elicit a pervasive void of meaning. Her direct eye contact throughout the piece demanded the audience’s attention as if she were a live, contemporary version of Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) that had emerged from the painting and defiantly stood up to turn the male gaze back on itself. The audience reactions varied as some members dodged her glances, while others fidgeted nervously or laughed.

Fig. 63: Marcela Donato in *At Once*
Nyberg’s adaptation of *At Once* showed a young fair skinned woman wearing a black t-shirt, cargo pants, and white sneakers who was searching for a movement vocabulary that could convey her inner experience and provide some level of security or grounding. Her facial expressions appear vulnerable, timid, and self-conscious as she scuttles through the space presenting a wide range of frantic, leisurely, and anxious gestures. Nyberg’s solo makes use of the entire space, particularly the peripheral space (instead of front and center) and vocalizes her movements using indecipherable hollow tones that do not contain an orderly rhythmic structure or narrative coherence. Hay encourages the use of voice in her choreography as an extension of the body. She states,

> Why limit the meditation to the movement of the body when you could be projecting sound into space? You can play with the sound as part of the meditation. It takes on space. It has dimension to it…It’s not accompaniment. It is an extension of what I can do with my body (Daly 50)

Nyberg’s movements and voice extension collided with the framing of the space at times thereby drawing attention to its spatial limitations composed of three walls. Her non-balletic, pedestrian movements imply her desire to meander outside the conventional frame, which had set limits on her physical expression and verbal intonation. Nyberg’s piece largely conveyed a negotiation between the past and the present, in which her body became a site in between a navigable place where the inscription of the old encountered the inscribing of something awkward, strange, and different.

Nyberg and Donato’s separate versions of *At Once* both challenge conventional expectations of what “dance” is supposed to look like by undermining the imposition of traditional dance vocabulary and spatial concepts that determine where and “dance” should take place and how it should be perceived. Hay’s work is strongly engaged with
the question of visibility. Her choreography explores how one sees and is seen by others, which is a significant dimension presented through multiple angles in *At Once*. Foster remarks how, “Hay’s moving body is thus watching itself moving and watching itself watching itself.” (foreword xviii). On the one hand there is the viewer’s perspective and how they view the performance in relationship to how they see themselves. On the other hand there is the dancer’s perspective and how they perceive themselves in relationship to their dance movements and performance. These intricate layers of perception augment the complexity of visibility that is challenged by Hay’s choreographic works.

Hay’s participation with the Judson Dance Theater and her experimental choreography produced in the 1960s have strongly influenced her current practice and theory in challenging normative perceptions about what constitutes dance. Hay states, “It took me twenty-two years to learn how to dance, and it took me twenty-two years to unlearn how to dance” (Daly 36). Hay’s work questions social boundaries and conditions established by classical and modern concepts that have historically categorized certain movements as belonging to “dance” while forsaking pedestrian movements as “non-dance.” Through her meditative approach with the body, coaching directives in workshops, and rejection of pedagogical models, Hay’s work has significantly transformed the perceptions of dance through her choreographic practice. Foster writes,

Her dances elaborate a theatricality that appears pedestrian, intimate, and casual one minute while filled with wonderment, alterity, and sumptuousness the next. Above all, her work invites us to laugh at our own seriousness and take in the dancing seriously, both at the same time (foreward x).
Although Hay’s work is not as widely recognized in the United States in comparison to Merce Cunningham, Lucinda Childs, and Yvonne Rainer, she continues to be a strong force in the development of postmodern trends in dance, particularly in the European contemporary art scene. In an interview with Hay titled, *Up Until Now*, she mentions how her work explores a widespread problem in western culture, namely the need to grasp and to hold on to the moment. In her dance workshops, she guides dancers and choreographers to observe the moment through a subtle lightness and conscious awareness of presence in movement rather than to fix, grab, or hold on to it. Hay’s work urges audiences and dancers alike to recognize the infinite possibilities that emerge when one’s perception allows a sequence of moments to be noticed without trying to hold on to one in particular so that others moment can easily follow. When a Labanotation expert once explained to Hay that her dances could not be scored according to its particular coding system, she exclaimed, “I got very excited, because I didn’t like the way it looked on the page…It really bothered me to think that my dance would be limited to these shaded rectangular boxes” (Daly 44). Deborah Hay’s message (along with other postmodern choreographers such as David Gordon, Kenneth King, and Trisha Brown) clearly states that her choreography and understanding of movement is not intended to neatly fit into a box or category.

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22 *Up Until Now* Interview with Deborah Hay

http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=j5SYVDPpxUI
Part IV. Lucinda Childs’ Minimalist Style of Movement

Lucinda Childs was a founding member of the Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960s, studied with Merce Cunningham, and later established the *Lucinda Childs Dance Company* in 1973. Child’s work is strongly engaged with minimalist and conceptual tendencies in postmodern dance, which is particularly nuanced by what she refers to as “stripped down ballet.” Her early work in the 1960s experimented with technological modes of choreography that were largely conceived without musical accompaniment and instead explored relationships between repetitive physical movements, ultrasonic light waves, and three-dimensional objects. Her piece titled *Vehicle* explores the interaction between light and sound waves as manipulated by the physical body through kinetic relationships between three-dimensional objects. The concept of *Vehicle* is the technological manipulation of movement, which employs the “Motion Music Machine” and the “Ground Effect Machine” that “translate body movements directly into sound.”


24 Lucinda Child’s *Vehicle* was presented at the *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering* event of dance and technology collaborations in 1966, which also featured Deborah Hay’s *Solo*. Video footage of *Vehicle* is available on the following website: [http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1734](http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=1734)

This mechanism produced a play between light and sound waves, which directly and immediately respond to the performer’s movements. Rather than having a musical score externally determine the structure of the movement patterns, Child used these technological devices to produce a kinetic relationship that is driven by her movements. *Vehicle* explores the mechanical interaction between sound and light waves, which are void of narrative structure, emotional portrayal, and subjective experience. The focus on the mechanics of objects moving through space constitute *Vehicle* as a work that has no precise end goal other than to present different variations of frequencies of sound and light wavelengths in space and time. Childs states,

I used materials as objects, combining dance phrases with movement activity in relation to objects. To eliminate this idiomatic contradiction, I chose to have the movement governed by the materials and subject to the limitations of their physical qualities. I experimented with movement events in relation to objects. I then altered and extended these events in time and space, connecting them in a specific
sequence until a kind of logic emerged which indicated a necessary design for the dance.\textsuperscript{26}

Childs is arguably the most conceptually based choreographer to emerge from the postmodern dance movement given her significant concentration on shapes, décor, and forms, which make her work mathematically, spatially, and geometrically complex. Her dance vocabulary largely consists of turns, skips, and low jumps that describe spiral forms and circular patterns that constantly move and change shape across the floor. She often limits her pieces to a few set phrases, but then produces a dynamic range of variation within each phrase by presenting different combinations each time thereby rendering the deceptively “simple” design as highly complex.

The absence in narrative, theme, or subjectivity in Childs’ choreography ironically has a dramatic effect. The dancer’s physical bodies are presented moving with such control and vigor that they appear to be frequencies of light and angular lines reacting with and against one another in a contrapuntal, rapid flow of time. This intense motion, visual complexity, and variable sequences underscore the fluid intricacies of Childs’s minimalist choreography. Unlike the modern choreographers that were strongly formalist and emotional in style (e.g. Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey), Childs minimalist approach combines form with a much different intensity and focus altogether. What sets her work apart is the concentration on the movement dynamics and limitations that are determined in part by the musical score as well as the décor composition. These different elements are not unified, but rather interact with each other through a discordant structure.

Dance is a collaborative work between Lucinda Childs (choreographer), Philip Glass (composer) and Sol LeWitt (minimalist/conceptual artist) that was commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and performed in 1979. Philip Glass’ musical score titled, *Dance Nos.1-5*, was the first layer of the piece that is comprised of five sections (each twenty minutes long). After receiving the musical score, Childs choreographed three main sections using visual score sheets, which comprised the second layer of the piece. Sol LeWitt shot a black-and-white film of passages from *Dance* on 35mm, which was edited and projected on to a transparent scrim on stage as the third layer. LeWitt’s film projection of *Dance* was synched up with the simultaneous live performance of the choreography, but split screens, diagonal viewpoints, overhead shots, freeze-frames and close-ups were included to interrupt the semblance of a mimetic reflection. The conflict produced between the dance on film and the live performance underscores the separation...
between the two media on temporal, spatial, and visual levels. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin writes,

> Then came film and burst this prism-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject (236).

The emergence of “new structural formations of the subject” is significant regarding the engagement with different modes of perception and overlapping temporal frames that are as demonstrated throughout *Dance*. The scale of the overhead shots contained in the filmed version are enlarged to such a high resolution that they appear tens times larger than the actual performers. Given the scale of the projection of Lucinda Childs’ filmed solo piece, the structural formation of her movements overshadows the contemporary, live performer who is dancing the same solo. While the focus on geometric shapes is consistent throughout, there are moments when objective relations of motions shift to moments of glorifying the auteur/subject as demonstrated by this solo moment in particular.

In the choreographic segments that are divided into groups of four, the movements of the live dancers are at times slightly ahead of the dancers on film and other times they lag slightly behind. This layering effect creates an overlapping style of movement that is temporally structured, which could only be possible with the medium of film. Since LeWitt worked primarily with print and photography and had never made a film before collaborating on *Dance*, it seems plausible that given the parameters of the
work, the most appropriate to engage with this work visually would be through moving images as opposed to print.

In 2009, *Dance* was remounted with a restored version of LeWitt’s film and remastered soundtrack at the Bard SummerScape music festival and then later shown internationally on tour with *Lucinda Childs Dance Company*. The juxtaposition between LeWitt’s film that featured dancers from thirty years ago in contrast with live contemporary dancers is impressive in that the past and present frame each other at various moments. Canigilia writes, “The interplay between the fixed sizes of the live dancers and the altering sizes of the filmed dancers imparts an illusion of three-dimensionality to the whole structure, enhanced by the projection of the film’s gridded floor over the white stage.” The grid in the film projection provides a sculptural and
geometric quality that the live dancers charge with their horizontal lines drawn across the floor in precise, sharp, and accented movements. Jowitt writes, “In pairs and fours, in counterpoint or unison, the dancers seem to skim across the stage like dragonflies, alighting only to take off. The music bears them in its rippling surface” (1).

The interactions between the minimalist music, film décor, and choreography emphasize process over content, whereby the subject matter is the pure act of seeing, hearing, and moving. Different modes of perception are produced by the tension that holds the three different media together, yet without dissolving their differences. The movement, projection, and musical configuration are synchronized at specific moments, but then the formal relationships become contrapuntal depending on the particular arrangement of the media at a given time. Within this frame of moving image, intricate layers between music and movement, there exists a wide range of complexity as each pattern or shape is revealed.
A singular phrase of movements in dance or in music can have an infinite number of possibilities in terms of its variation by inflecting particular notes or accents at different times in each combination or repetition. For example, when a dancer changes direction in a phrase they can either choose to step up or step down to make their transition. This slight adjustment in footwork can significantly change the structural quality and appearance of the phrase as a whole. The variations and montage layering effect within the structure of *Dance* are so intricate, that the experience as a whole is visually intense and spatially dramatic. The tension that is produced by this multidimensional work is not derived by an historical narrative or theme that progresses to an end, but is instead instigated by the technical variations at work in the dance.
The experience of seeing pure motion is arguably the most powerful element in *Dance* given that all three media present different modes of perception, which provoke the viewer to engage with multiple layers of sound, image, and movement at once. Unlike Cunningham and Cage who largely worked with chance in their process of making collaborative works, Childs, Glass, and LeWitt have chosen to work with new variations within a minimalist shape or pattern that become intensely modified through different structural formations. The emphasis on structure and form, as evidenced by the choreographic works of Cage/Cunningham and Lucinda Childs, do not rely upon subjectivity and emotion to engage their viewers. There is no story contained in these works, but rather a juxtaposition of different movements, shapes, patterns, images, and sounds that engage the viewer’s sense through a precise and complex manipulation of technical skill. This focus on mechanics is to some degree modernist, but with a very specific intention to negate representational value that would otherwise impose a determinant meaning to the movement.

**Part V. Sasha Waltz & Contemporary Tanztheater**

Sasha Waltz is a contemporary choreographer from Germany who has developed a hybrid form of dance that incorporates styles that are characteristic of *Tanztheater* combined with unconventional arrangements of space, costume, movement, music that challenge perception. Unlike Merce Cunningham, Deborah Hay, and Lucinda Childs, Waltz is not focused on developing a minimalist or structural approach that is manifested through a complex and technical style of movement. Her dancers exhibit a range of
dramatic gestures and emotional displays through their facial expressions and physical expressions, which creates a charismatic, dynamic, and at times absurdist energy on stage.

Waltz’s choreographic style is clearly influenced by the style of Pina Bausch given her focus on dramatic, emotive gesture as well as portrayals of destruction, loss, catastrophe and absurdity in social relationships. However, Bausch’s Tanztheater presents an unrivaled quality of emotional depth and theatrical integrity that is particular to her choreographic style. Sasha Waltz’s Tanztheater is to some extent a contemporary interpretation of Bausch in terms of emotive gesture and the mixing of elements of dance, theater, text, music, props, costumes, and music. However, there is a certain veneer in the choreographic style of Sasha Waltz & Guests that is distinctly not present in the gritty and grainy works of Pina Bausch. Waltz attempts to mimic this grainy allure in her works that deal with destruction such as Gezeiten, but the effect is not as convincing in comparison to the radically violent works of Bausch. New York Times dance critic, Claudia La Rocco writes,

Soon enough Ms. Waltz’s continuous configurations, deconstructions and reconfigurations began to run one into the next. The pacing seemed dully arbitrary, as if she grew attached to certain movement ideas and had her dancers execute them for a set amount of time, simply because...“Gezeiten” did not provide many other moments of comic relief, despite acquiring an increasingly absurdist tone. (Although there were touches straight out of Pina Bausch, as when a woman, wearing an evening gown, broke into great racking sobs, shooting “tears” from a plastic bag full of water she held pressed against her face).
The emphasis on different emotional qualities particular to each dancer as well as to the dance as a whole in Waltz’s work produces a movement style that is accessible to all walks of life regardless of one’s background or familiarity with dance. Waltz’s work appeals to a global audience particularly given her preoccupation with choreographic operas, which tend to have a *Gesamtkunstwerk* harmony. In discussing her choreographic opera of *Dido & Aeneas* by Henry Purcell, Waltz states, “My aim is not only to tell the story via the singes, but also to use the stage set, gestures, and the unique language of dance to complement the music. It is an attempt to fuse the various levels of representation, without any one of them dominating.”

Waltz harmonizes the different stage elements to represent the story that is narrated in opera form, but she clearly has no intention to radicalize the traditional concepts of theatricality based on nineteenth century classical ballet and opera aesthetics.

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27 This citation is published in the booklet of the *Dido & Aeneas* DVD.
This notion of accessibility is particularly evidenced by Waltz’s concentration on space as a choreographic component, which for her is equally important as the music and the dance. She states “Ich denke an den Raum, noch bevor ich an Bewegung denke. Der Raum muss für mich die Essenz des Stückes in sich tragen. Er ist der Ausgangspunkt, der Träger der Atmosphäre” (Schlagenwerth 11). Unlike Lucinda Childs who conceives of space in terms of décor, Waltz understands space as an essential and live element that contains significant potential for transforming modes of perception and atmospheric qualities. The acoustics within a space such as a museum, opera house, concert hall, or outdoor venue can strongly influence the dramatic effect in how the musicians, choir, and the reverberation of footsteps are heard and experienced. For Waltz, movement is not something that is limited to physical motion and expression, but is rather inherent to anything that contains a structure. Sasha Waltz’s partner Jochen Sandig states, “es ging schon damals um eine Struktur, die in Bewegung, die offen ist” (Schlagenwerth 50). The space determines the arrangement of dancers in terms of how they are divided into groups, pairs, or solos and how the dancer’s movement patterns and costumes will interact with the musical accompaniment in the space. This approach in producing a spatial sensory experience challenges conventional perceptions of how movement is perceived. However, Waltz relies upon a ‘mixed media’ choreographic approach that creates a totalized construct of movement consisting of various forms of expression, which is unlike the collaboration of Dance by Lucinda Childs, Philip Glas, and Sol LeWitt, that preserves the separation between the three different media.

In 2009, Sasha Waltz and Guests performed Dialogue 09 right before the revealing of David Chipperfield’s architectural design of the renovated Neues Museum in
Berlin. *Dialogue 09* is a form of ‘movement installation’ whereby the dancer’s steps, poses, and choreography are determined by the shapes, walls, and structure of the museum spaces. Since the performance was shown for a limited time prior to the museum reopening, the presentation of *Dialogue 09* had a distinct ephemeral quality due to its expiration date before the museum had to prepare its exhibition of art objects. The video of *Dialogue 09* is available to purchase on DVD, which is an attractive appeal for museum visitors to consume and commemorate the reopening of this historical “new but old” art museum.

Fig. 69: *Dialogue 09*
Given the reliance on mixed media, diversity of form, and various international guest performers that rotate through her tours, Sasha Waltz and Guests, appeals to wide range of audiences, styles, backgrounds, and age groups. Waltz works almost exclusively with a mixed cast including dancers, musicians, filmmakers, visual artists, architects, opera singers, and choirs from all over the world making her company an ideal representation of global hybridization. Her choreographic opera style is essentially a compilation of contemporary renewals of classical operas that have been modified in terms of form, arrangement, and expression, yet their overall function is not inherently different than modern works of art. In that regard, Sasha Waltz’s choreography is not radical, revolutionary, or original in terms of style, presentation, and concept because her work is still largely determined by subjects and themes. Although there is not a particularly strong emphasis on narrative structure in her work, a thematic motif is present, which satisfies the expectations of a traditional, yet progressive opera audience.
Waltz’s contemporary form of choreography is evidenced by the spaces in which her work is shown, such as the Radialsystem in Berlin, Jüdisches Museum, Neues Museum, and the MAXXI (National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Rome), all of which are comprised of postmodern architecture styles. Waltz’s choreographic operas such as Dido & Aeneas and Matsukaze further demonstrate how she has innovated the conventions of opera by having her musicians on stage (instead of being in the orchestral pit) as anonymous bodies behind their instrument. The musician and the instruments become movers as well as parts of the theatre décor. Schlagenwerth writes,

_Orchestermusiker würden oft hinter ihren Instrumenten verschwinden, hat Sasha Waltz einmal gesagt. Es sei aber etwas anderes, ob man Musik nur hört, oder ob_
Although Waltz’s work contains contemporary accents to modern forms, her work does not pose critical problems in a way that postmodern art today should.

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that contemporary dance establishes a different temporal experience that is not based on the spatialization of movement or its representational value. Instead, it locates presence within its immediate presentation by showing how movement arrives and how time is experienced through the motioning of form. Postmodern and contemporary trends in dance have been in practice since the late 1950s-1960s. The Judson Dance Theater in New York City combined with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company revolutionized how dance is conceived by focusing on dance movement itself rather than the content or subject matter that dance traditionally represented. By recontextualizing dance by using visual art and concentrating on movement for movement’s sake, new possibilities for the conception and perception of dance emerged. Cunningham and Cage were the first collaborators in the postmodern dance movement to explore chance with a serious discipline and through their studies of the I Ching.

This concept of chance engaged with an open, yet structured process that changed how choreography was conceived by experimenting with various arrangements of sound, image, and movement in time and space. With their “Events” and the technical collaborations with sound engineers on Variations V, Cage and Cunningham established

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a form of dance using technology, sound, light and movement that paved the way for the proliferation of digital media seen in today’s current dance scene.

Deborah Hay’s work does not focus on technology, but instead challenges how dance is conceived by incorporating movement ideas and meditations through her workshops that help dancers develop a conscious awareness of their own habitual patterns of movement. Lucinda Childs also came out of the Judson Dance Theatre and studied with Merce Cunningham, but applied her choreographic vision in the world of conceptual and minimalist art. Her emphasis on highly technical, precise, and complex forms of movement also radically questions the perceptions of dance by showing that emotional content and subjective displays are not the only way to produce theatrically engaging and visually intense works.

Sasha Waltz is a reputable German choreographer that produces concert works that are arguably a contemporary version of Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater. However, her focus on ‘choreographic opera’ is not radically different than representational art and classical ballet given the focus on Inszenierung. Waltz’s works predominantly have a central, thematic motif, which appeal to Gesamtkunstwerk that harmonizes music, décor, dance, text, and song. Her work is contemporary to the extent that she renews traditional operas by exaggerating certain cosmetic elements such as props and costumes, but her work lacks a critical edge that engages with postmodern questions and tendencies in art.
CONCLUSION

My dissertation has established several complex problems in the examination of the different styles, concepts, forms and tendencies in Ausdruckstanz, Tanztheater and contemporary dance. Ausdruckstanz marked the beginning of a revolutionary breakthrough in modern dance, but it took several decades for dance to develop a critical mode of self-reflexivity. This necessity for self-reflexivity in movement resulted from the lack of critical distance that was evidenced by the choreographic works of expressionist dance. Ausdruckstanz, as developed by Mary Wigman and Rudolf von Laban, was ideological in its conception. What started out as a genuine interest to explore the inner realms of subjective expression through movement was consumed by an ideological aim to harmonize the group/individual dynamic like a totality or Gesamtkunstwerk. This belief system coincided with the phenomenon of German body culture or Körperkultur, which was subsequently indoctrinated by the propaganda machine of Hitler and the national socialist party.

The initial purpose of Ausdruckstanz to challenge the conventions of classical ballet that had no reference with which to convey the modern experience appeared legitimate. However, the problem was that through its rejection of traditional models, it adopted a transcendent, mythological, and symbolic paragon in the quest for individuality and personal identity. The unconventional costume props that were adorned by expressionist dancers conveyed the need to differentiate their identity, but did not deal with the loss of presence in movement, which had been stagnated for centuries given the repetition of generic historical narratives by traditional forms of dance. This initial crisis
or loss was the deeper issue that incited the Expressionist movement, but it became buried in the mist of ideological persuasions, which failed to acknowledge this absence.

The obsession with individuality, exaggerated emphasis on emotion, ideological tendencies and thematic or representational values proved to be a highly problematic and fatal combination for Ausdruckstanz. However, in the early 1920s, two pivotal events happened. Firstly, the art movement Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity developed and secondly, Oskar Schlemmer started to combine his Bauhaus designs with theater and dance elements. These initiatives established the first serious attempt to undermine the superfluous emotion and Dionysian ecstasy that depicted Ausdruckstanz. Valeska Gert’s choreographic works proved to be an exception to this rule as evidenced by her concentration on grotesque gestures, social criticism and montage style performances.

The marginal fraction of social resistance aimed against the Laban/Wigman initiatives in Ausdruckstanz, given its emphasis on symbolic and mythical modes of expression, was established in the early 1920s. This protest was located in the formalization and mechanization of movement, which criticized the profusion of subjective expression and personal identity in Expressionism. However, Schlemmer’s Kunstfigur concept, as portrayed in his Triadic Ballet, was also based on concepts of spatialization that were derived from traditional theatre design and representational art. The modern dogma “form follows function” was applied in Schlemmer’s work, which despite its visually innovative designs, failed to seriously challenge the problem of representation in dance.
Kurt Jooss introduced the early forms of *Tanztheater* by combining formalist principles of ballet and modern drama with expressionist gesture. His leading student and successor, Pina Bausch, led *Tanztheater* in an unprecedented direction. Her choreographic works engaged with emotive gesture, alienation, and repetition in a highly self-conscious and self-reflexive manner that combines a technical approach with the feelings and emotions of her dancers. Bausch continued to work in the expressionist vein by focusing on subjectivity and dramatic forms of gesture. However, Bausch presented the facets of subjectivity with an extreme degree of dramatic intensity, violence, humor and sharp wit, which renders the emotional engagement in her work physically and visually disruptive. Bausch’s works exposed the pits of human drama, suffering, tension, destruction, downfall and tragic predicaments. Through the use of repetition not only did Bausch point out the absurdity of social habits that were imprinted on the tissue of human souls, but it also presented an opening through the cracks between each fragment. This opening alerts the potentiality for a different response, perception, image, pattern or gesture to allow social reality to be perceived, experienced and conceived differently. Nonetheless, despite the lack of narrative structure in Bausch’s choreography, her *Tanztheater* was still framed by spatialization, which relied on theatrical representation and the rehearsal of repetition presented by its performance mode.

With the establishment of postmodern, contemporary dance in the late 1950s, a significantly different experience of temporality emerged that rejected the representational value of movement. When the object of dance is dance itself, the tendency towards ideological or content oriented claims is negated because the internal mechanism is geared towards motion not matter. However, in order to perceive this
difference, the experience of time requires alteration to allow the presence of movement to be seen and engaged through its immediacy. This reframing of *how* time is experienced marks a crucial intervention in the historical trajectory of modern dance insofar that form does not predicate itself upon an ideological value. Instead, form opens up different possibilities for new arrangements to be perceived vis à vis its rhythmic mechanism, which continuously moves through inflected variations of movement in multiple places simultaneously.

However, this different relationship concerning temporality poses two problems. Firstly, there is no preventative measure to prevent an external observer or historically based critic from imposing a category of representation on to the work. Secondly, if the concept of temporality is not substantiated by the experience of time in multiple places with different angles of perceptions that collide simultaneously without becoming unified at any end point, it risks being displaced into a representation of “time.” Time is not a static or fixed entity as its signification indicates. Therefore, this intervention should be located in the experience of the subject who engages with the medium of movement and the rhythmic mechanism to physically, intellectually and consciously “grasp” its temporal presence. This comprehensive study of the different styles, concepts, forms and tendencies in *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* and contemporary dance, further establishes a critical perception of form and how it relates to presence and movement through temporal configurations that remain open yet distinct.
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