

NEW CULTURAL STUDIES OF DANCE



MEANING IN MOTION

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- 49 On status anxieties caused by the growth of a female work force and the relation of these anxieties to lower-middle-class jingoism in the late nineteenth century, see Richard N. Price, "Society, Status, and Jingoism: The Social Roots of Lower Middle Class Patriotism, 1870–1900," in *The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870–1914*, ed. Geoffrey Crossick (London: Croom Helm, 1977), pp. 89–112. Allan attracted a large number of women to her performances, particularly the matinees. One article, "Miss Maud Allan: Palace Crowded with Ladies to See New Dances," *Daily Chronicle*, 13 June 1908, estimated that 90 percent of one matinee audience was female, commenting that "it might have been a suffragist meeting." The Salome dance was not presented on this program, and it is impossible to determine the significance of that absence for the composition of the audience. Nevertheless, if large numbers of women regularly attended Allan's performances, it may have been because they found her dancing liberatory (making the analogy to the suffrage movement more telling than the author no doubt intended). Without concrete information on the response of these women to Allan, one can only speculate that she perhaps modeled for them a use and presentation of the female body that they found attractive and that was not readily available elsewhere in their culture.
- 50 Important discussions of ambivalence as a characteristic of colonial discourse occur in Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1983), pp. 144–65, and "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (Spring 1984), pp. 123–33.

## 8 THE FEMALE DANCER AND THE MALE GAZE: FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF EARLY MODERN DANCE

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In academic circles it has become a truism that feminisms (plural) have replaced feminism (singular). However, this is not necessarily the case in dance studies, a discipline that has yet to develop and apply the diversity of feminist methods and theories currently found in other fields of the humanities.<sup>1</sup> To survey the recent literature on feminism and Western theater dance is to recognize the extent to which dance scholars have relied on gaze theory as a starting point for their analyses. Not that other approaches—particularly those adapted from anthropology and sociology—have been absent.<sup>2</sup> But to the extent that dance scholars have moved beyond discrete applications and evolved a dialogue on feminist methods, that dialogue centers upon gaze theory.

By "gaze theory" I mean a set of concepts that originated in film studies,<sup>3</sup> migrated to theater studies,<sup>4</sup> and now have found their way to dance studies. From my perspective, these concepts include not only the proposition that women on film and on stage typically are represented from the perspective of the male spectator (the notion of the "male gaze" or, alternately, the voyeuristic gaze) but also the counter-proposition that female spectators possess the potential to look in a way different from their male peers. How and when female spectators are enabled to look differently and thus to realize a subjectivity of their own remains a much disputed issue. In this essay I use the term gaze theory to refer to a broad range of literature that applies the concepts of the voyeuristic gaze and female spectatorship in diverse ways. For my purposes, the divisions within this literature—for example, between formulations that elaborate gaze theory in psychoanalytic terms and those that recast the theory in other disciplinary contexts—are less important than the ways that gaze theory, broadly defined, has entered dance studies.

Surveying the literature, one notes first that feminist critics who have applied gaze theory to ballet have reached strikingly similar conclusions. With

varying emphases, one scholar after another has demonstrated how candidly the form of ballet positions the spectator as voyeur.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, feminist commentators who have examined modern dance have disagreed over whether and how the form engages the voyeuristic gaze. Their disagreement is particularly vehement when it comes to early modern dance, a practice innovated by female performer-choreographers in the first decades of the twentieth century. Assuming that the more contentious the conversation the more interesting, I have chosen to track the dialogue among feminist scholars of early modern dance. Yet my choice is not disinterested, for at the end of this survey of the literature I enter the conversation and propose an alternate position that may resolve the seemingly contradictory positions staked out in the debate among feminist dance scholars.

The disagreement over early modern dance centers upon two issues. The first is the degree to which successive generations of modern dancers have realized the potential of their practice to undermine the voyeuristic gaze. While some commentators credit early modern dancers with subverting the eroticization of the female dancer,<sup>6</sup> others reassign this achievement to later generations, in particular to postmodern dancers.<sup>7</sup> The second point of contention among feminist critics is the degree to which the works of early modern dancers reflect dominant conceptions of race and nationality during the early decades of the twentieth century. This second issue has as its corollary the question of how essentialized notions of national and racial identity interact with conceptions of gender in the works of early modern dancers.<sup>8</sup>

As this review of the literature will make clear, the debate among feminist critics centers upon the question of whether early modern dancers resist or reinforce dominant conceptions of gender. On the one hand, commentators note how deliberately early modern dancers dramatized female subjectivity and authority and, in so doing, introduced the possibility of female spectatorship. On the other hand, commentators note how clearly, though perhaps unwittingly, early modern dancers dramatized essentialized notions of gender, race, and nationality that seemingly worked against their staging of female subjectivity.

It is my intention to propose an alternate position, an analysis of early modern dance that gives equal weight to the resistive and recuperative dimensions of the practice. Indeed, I would like to propose that it was precisely the double move of subverting the voyeuristic gaze while projecting essentialized notions of identity that defined the practice of early modern dance. It was this double move—along with the rejection of balletic conventions, the fashioning of idiosyncratic movement styles, and the adherence to the modernist program of highlighting the essence and independence of the medium—that

made a shared tradition of the individual styles of Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan, Ruth St. Denis, Mary Wigman, and the early Martha Graham.

In "Founding Mothers: Duncan, Graham, Rainer, and Sexual Politics," Roger Copeland celebrates modern and postmodern dance as the one art form where "women have been not only prominent, but also dominant."<sup>9</sup> Drawing on the distinction Luce Irigaray makes between the visual and the tactile, Copeland associates nineteenth-century ballet with the male choreographer's (and, by implication, the male spectator's) privileged looking at the ballerina. In contrast, early modern dancers, notably Isadora Duncan, "placed a much higher premium on kinetic empathy than on visual experience."<sup>10</sup> Thus Duncan reversed the hierarchical ordering of visibility over tactility characteristic of Western (and masculinist) thought. In so doing, Duncan danced out her own—and her generation's—rebellion against the Puritanism of the Victorian era. This rebellion culminated in the theater of Martha Graham, whose works dramatized the conflict between Puritanism and sexual expression.

The postmodernists in turn reacted against the physicality and overt sensuality of Duncan and Graham. Copeland explains this reaction in terms of the feminism of the sixties and seventies, which "eyed the sexual revolution with considerable suspicion, fearful that it hadn't really liberated women, but had simply made them more available."<sup>11</sup> Yvonne Rainer's 1973 film *This Is the Story of a Woman Who . . .* investigated the dynamics of the gaze, drawing an analogy between the spectator's relationship to the performer and the man's relationship to the woman, two years before Laura Mulvey published her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."<sup>12</sup> In pointing out the convergence between Rainer's and Mulvey's concerns, Copeland acknowledges the divergence between Rainer's and Irigaray's positions, that is, the divergence between Rainer's suspicion of sensuality and Irigaray's celebration of physicality. The author himself does not take sides in this debate, but rather notes how postmodern dance reflects the divisions in contemporary feminist thought.

From one perspective, Copeland historicizes the relations between early modern dance, postmodern dance, and varieties of twentieth-century feminism. From another perspective, he reduces these relations according to a model that posits art as more reflective than productive of social relations. His concluding paragraph walks a fine line between contextualizing dance in its historical setting and assuming that dance *mirrors* its historical setting:

Obviously, none of the choreography I've been discussing can, or should, be reduced purely and simply to its feminist dimensions. The aesthetic and political path that leads from Duncan to Rainer . . . is long,

circuitous, and complicated. Feminism is one of many influences exerted on, and reflected in, these works. But the fact remains that modern and postmodern dance are probably the only art forms in which various stages of feminist thinking are literally embodied.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his disclaimer, Copeland ultimately does view dance as a reflection of its society and thus commits what some scholars label the fallacy of reflection theory.

Like Copeland, Elizabeth Dempster presents broad contrasts between ballet, early modern dance, and postmodern dance in her essay "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances." Unlike Copeland, however, she consciously rejects the assumptions of reflection theory and premises her argument on the observation that "social and political values are not simply placed or grafted onto a neutral body-object like so many old or new clothes. On the contrary, ideologies are systematically deposited and constructed on an anatomical plane, i.e., in the neuro-musculature of the dancer's body."<sup>14</sup> Carrying through this claim, Dempster bases her analyses on the technical methods of the dance styles under discussion.

Her argument sets up a clear opposition between classical ballet and postmodern dance. "In the classical dance," Dempster writes, "the spectator is invited to gaze upon a distanced, ideal world where the female dancer is traced as sylph and cipher, a necessary absence."<sup>15</sup> In contrast, "the body, and by extension 'the feminine,' in postmodern dance is unstable, fleeting, flickering, transient—a subject of multiple representations."<sup>16</sup> It is the shifting quality of the body and subject in postmodern dance that Dempster finds so liberating.

Her attitude toward earlier modern dance styles is far more ambivalent. She recognizes that Duncan and Graham "proposed a feminist dance practice which would return the real female body to women." Yet she also recognizes that Duncan and Graham posited a natural and interiorized body that seemed to reiterate traditional assumptions about the relatedness of women, nature, emotionality, and the body. It was Graham's codification of her technique, she believes, that led to the cooptation of modern dance. Once "one woman's speech [became] 'women's language,'" the ability of early modern dance to challenge dominant conceptions of gender was rendered null. Postmodern dance avoids such cooptation by defining itself not as a newly innovated dance vocabulary but as "an interrogation of language itself."<sup>17</sup>

Although in an endnote Dempster cites Susan Foster's distinction between resistive and reactionary modes of postmodernism,<sup>18</sup> her description of postmodern dance never becomes less than celebratory. She does not address the specific example Foster gives of reactionary postmodernism—the dancing of

Twyla Tharp. Indeed, her argument makes little reference to specific choreographers or specific works but remains an idealized description of postmodern dance *sui generis*. And she never resolves the question of the gender politics of early modern dance. If Martha Graham was largely responsible for the cooptation of the practice, then where does that leave Isadora Duncan? Dempster ends her discussion of Duncan without being able to decide whether to place more weight on her historical significance or her theoretical incorrectness:

Duncan's vision of the dance of the future presumes an unproblematic return to a body of untainted naturalness and to an essential purity which she believed was fundamental to women. To recognize that Duncan's vision is unrealizable and perhaps, from a 1980s perspective, in some degree complicit with the concept of "natural" sexual difference is not to deny the power of her rhetoric, nor to dismiss the considerable impact her dancing had upon audiences of her time.<sup>19</sup>

In "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics" Janet Wolff echoes many of Dempster's judgments. Yet Wolff does not write primarily as a dance critic but rather as a feminist theorist and sociologist of art. She structures her essay as a review of recent literature on the body and proceeds to question which model of the body best serves a "feminist cultural politics."<sup>20</sup> With impressive erudition, she summarizes the insights of Mary Douglas, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Mary Russo, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous. For Wolff's purposes, none of the available models quite work, for all presuppose either a purely constructed body or an essentialized body, and she is looking for an alternate position that acknowledges the female body "as discursively and socially constructed and as currently experienced by women."<sup>21</sup> This she finds in postmodern dance and in related modes of performance art, film, and visual art. Her essay concludes:

Beginning from the lived experience of women in their currently constituted bodily identities—identities which are *real* at the same time as being socially inscribed and discursively produced—feminist artists and cultural workers can engage in the challenging and exhilarating task of simultaneously affirming those identities, questioning their origins and ideological functions, and working towards a nonpatriarchal expression of gender and the body.<sup>22</sup>

Wolff's essay includes a cursory survey of dance history. In agreement with other feminist commentators on ballet, she sees the form "[colluding] in a discourse which constructs, in a medium which employs the body for its expression, a strangely disembodied female."<sup>23</sup> She then acknowledges the

transgressive potential of early modern dance, in particular its "commitment to women's stories and lives." But in the end, she believes, the essentialism of early modern dance, the "notion of women's natural body or women's universal essence," undercut its potential to resist the patriarchal status quo. Following the lead of Elizabeth Dempster, Wolff asserts that "dance can only be subversive when it questions and exposes the construction of the body in culture" and credits postmodern dance with this achievement, citing the examples of British choreographer Michael Clark and American choreographer-turned-filmmaker Yvonne Rainer.<sup>24</sup>

Although she mentions Clark and Rainer by name, Wolff provides no further analysis of their works. Even more than Dempster, she relies on an abbreviated, idealized description of postmodern dance. In the end postmodern dance becomes more of a metaphor than a practice in Wolff's account, a metaphor for the alternate position she stakes out in the debate between essentialists and anti-essentialists. Moreover, her metaphorical figuring of postmodern dance introduces a teleological narrative to her survey of dance history: that is, postmodern dance realizes the transgressive potential that early modern dance failed to achieve. A less pronounced version of this teleological narrative underlies Dempster's dance history as well.

To summarize my review of the literature thus far: the overviews penned by Copeland, Dempster, and Wolff necessarily rely on schematic arguments and broad generalizations supported by a few specific examples. Copeland's survey can be reduced to a single proposition: the evolving practice of modern dance reflects evolving notions of feminism. In other words, art reflects culture. Deliberately avoiding the reflection theory that informs Copeland's account, Dempster and Wolff risk another sort of reductive generalization. Their arguments come down to the proposition: early modern dance produced a corrupt feminism, postmodern dance an authentic feminism. In other words, contemporary theory becomes the yardstick by which the critic measures history.

It is telling that the surveys under discussion fall on opposing sides of the debate over whether early modern dance resisted or reinforced the status quo of gender. Copeland believes that early modern dance did resist dominant conceptions of womanhood during the Victorian era. On the contrary, Dempster and Wolff believe that early modern dancers' resistance to the status quo was coopted by, alternately, their codification of techniques first developed experimentally and their essentialist notions of woman and the body. There seems no middle ground between the two perspectives. The critic either endorses or dismisses the feminist aspirations of early modern dance.

The same either/or judgments inform the specific case studies of early

modern dancers penned by Ann Daly, Jane Desmond, and Amy Koritz. Yet the case studies complicate the rhetorical opposition by introducing issues related to racial and national identity. Whereas Wolff and Dempster criticize early modern dance for its essentialized notions of gender, Desmond and Koritz compound the critique by pointing out how solos choreographed by Ruth St. Denis and Maud Allan, respectively, essentialized not only gender but also race and nationality. In contrast to Desmond and Koritz, Daly downplays the national self-fashioning implicit in the dancing of Isadora Duncan, focusing instead on issues surrounding the voyeuristic gaze. Yet none of the authors extends her case study to the practice of early modern dance as a whole. And so the question remains of how their insights can be applied to understanding the larger trajectory of early modern dance from Loie Fuller to Martha Graham.

Ann Daly boldly challenges the applicability of gaze theory to Isadora Duncan's dancing in her essay "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze." Writing an implicit rebuttal to the position staked out by Wolff and Dempster, Daly remarks:

The male gaze theory forces the feminist dance scholar into a no-win situation that turns on an exceedingly unproductive "succeed or fail" criterion. We expect the choreographer to topple a power structure that we have theorized as monolithic. The dancer or choreographer under consideration will always be condemned as a reinforcement of the patriarchal status quo, despite any transgressive behavior, because, by definition, that which is communicated arises from within the fabric of culture, that is to say, within patriarchy.<sup>25</sup>

As a way out of, or around, this "no-win situation" Daly focuses on the kinesthetic quality of Duncan's dancing (figure 1), building on Julia Kristeva's notion of the chora as the realm of the "ineffable." In dance terms, Duncan "rendered [the ineffable] intelligible" by "choreographing the drama of the kinesthetic—the sense of intentionality communicated through activated weight, the attentiveness signalled through spatial sensitivity, and the impression of decisiveness or indecisiveness gained through the manipulation of time." In so doing Duncan projected a "dancing subject-in-process . . . constantly reimagining herself." Daly concludes: "Dance was no longer about the spectacular display of the legs for entertainment's sake; it was about the self's inner impulses made manifest through the rhythmic, dynamic expression of the whole body."<sup>26</sup> Focusing on Duncan's performances during her first American tours from 1908 to 1911, Daly argues that Duncan did not perform Woman but rather staged her own complex subjectivity. In other words, the



1. Isadora Duncan. Photo: Arnold Genthe.

Courtesy of the Dance Collection, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

2. Ruth St. Denis in *Radha*.

Courtesy of the Denishawn Collection, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

kinesthetic power of Duncan's dancing countered not only the voyeuristic gaze but also the essentialism that commentators such as Dempster and Wolff have perceived in the form.

However, Daly does acknowledge that American spectators of Duncan's early tours did generalize her performances of the "subject-in-process" in national terms. Noting that this was a time "when America was obsessed with finding for itself a national selfhood, a cultural identity, and a means of individual self-expression,"<sup>27</sup> Daly believes that Duncan's American audiences projected their own self-fashioning onto her performances. In the eyes of progressive liberals, Duncan "embodied an optimistic belief in the reformability of the social and political system," while in the eyes of the radicals, the dancer "enacted a paradigm of complete social rupture."<sup>28</sup> Limiting her comments to the early phase of Duncan's career, Daly presents the association between Duncan's dancing and the fashioning of an American identity in terms that are more celebratory than critical.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to Daly's attitude toward Duncan, Jane Desmond and Amy Koritz harshly judge Ruth St. Denis's and Maud Allan's engagement with agendas of racial and national self-fashioning. Drawing on the theorization of Orientalism by Edward Said and others as well as on feminist theory, Desmond and Koritz interpret solos by St. Denis and Allan, respectively, and point out how transparently the two choreographers staged Western stereotypes of the East. Neither critic sees much redeeming value in such thoroughgoing assent to Orientalism.

In "Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* of 1906," Jane Desmond reads St. Denis's solo as a multilayered performance text. Her analysis turns on the solo's framing of female sensuality within a narrative context of renunciation and transcendence, the evocation of Indian temple dancing suggested by the dance's title (figure 2). Desmond sees the juxtaposition of female sensuality and representational pretext working in a complicated way, both subverting and reinforcing strictures on the sexuality of middle-class white women while projecting the Oriental Other as a figure of dangerous and excessive sexuality and redemptive spirituality. Yet despite her acknowledgment of the complexity of *Radha*, Desmond in the end views the solo as far more recuperative than resistant. Indeed, her concluding remarks call attention to the "invisible links that bind racism, sexism, and cultural imperialism so tightly together,"<sup>30</sup> in St. Denis's oeuvre and in society at large.

Amy Koritz extends Desmond's argument about how early modern dance conflated the staging of Woman and Oriental in her essay "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan's *The Vision of Salome*." To a greater degree than Desmond, Koritz explores the potential disjunction between the Western

woman as performer and the Oriental Other as subject matter. Koritz first notes how Allan displaced the threat of her assertive female sexuality onto her representation of an Oriental woman. But Allan could not afford to identify herself wholly with an Oriental Other. Rather, she "made the East transparent to the West by representing its essence,"<sup>31</sup> thus simultaneously embodying and distancing herself from her performance of the spiritual and sensual Oriental. Yet Allan's embodiment of the essence of the East also circled around and reinforced her staging of the Western women's separate sphere, for her dance reaffirmed "the spiritual nature of (middle-class) womanhood."<sup>32</sup> Thus her solo resolved the potential disjunction between Orientalism and the ideology of separate spheres, as "the dark continents of Western femininity and Orientalism [met] in Allan's depiction of Salome."<sup>33</sup>

Koritz surmises that the reason why *The Vision of Salome* enjoyed such popularity among English audiences when Allan appeared at the Palace Theatre in 1908 was that the dance "both [calmed] and [embodied] anxieties about female power and sexuality being raised by the suffrage movement and the incursion of middle-class women into the work force. [The dance] both [calmed] and [embodied] anxieties about English knowledge and imperial domination of the East."<sup>34</sup> Although Koritz casts her analysis of early modern dance in less judgmental terms than does Desmond, she nonetheless concurs with Desmond's conclusion that *The Vision of Salome*, like *Radha*, functioned to contain potential threats to the social order.

What both Koritz and Desmond overlook, however, is the kinesthetic dimension of Allan's and St. Denis's performances, a dimension that surely informed their dancing as well as Duncan's. Like Duncan, both Allan and St. Denis innovated their own movement vocabularies that drew on methods of physical culture—*aesthetic gymnastics* and *Delsartism*—widely practiced among middle-class women of the time. Unlike spectators of nineteenth-century ballet, whether male or female, who rarely had direct experience of the movement techniques presented onstage, many female spectators of early modern dance did have such direct experience, which surely intensified their kinesthetic response to the performances they witnessed. Although few women wrote reviews of early modern dance, more than a few recorded their enthusiasm in letters and memoirs, and these sources suggest that they viewed the kinesthetic power of early modern dance as a metaphor for women's heightened social mobility and sense of possibility. It may well be the case that the representational frames of Orientalism were less central to the responses of contemporary female spectators than they were to the responses of male reviewers of the time.

Neither Daly, Desmond, nor Koritz extends her argument to the practice of

early modern dance as a whole. But if they did, their arguments would fall on opposing sides of the same rhetorical axis that divides Copeland from Dempster and Wolff. Like Copeland, Daly focuses on the resistive potential of early modern dance. Like Dempster and Wolff, Desmond and Koritz draw attention to the recuperation of the subversive potential of the practice. It seems that pursuing the debate over early modern dance in terms of whether the practice transgressed or upheld dominant conceptions of race, gender, and nationality results in a dead end comparable to the "no-win situation" Daly posits as a consequence of applying gaze theory to dance.

As a way around this impasse, I propose an alternate position that accepts the validity of Daly's argument as well as Desmond's and Koritz's and extends the implication of their case studies to the practice of early modern dance as a whole. That is, I would like to pay as much attention to the kinesthesia (Daly's focus) as to the representational frames (Desmond's and Koritz's focus) of early modern dance. To do so is to recognize a complexity in the formal structure of early modern dance that traced a distinct ideological profile, the dismantling of the voyeuristic gaze and the reliance on essentialized notions of identity. And it was this ideological profile that marked the paradoxical social function of the form, its ability to contest and to conform at the same time.<sup>35</sup>

In my view, it was the kinesthesia of early modern dance that allowed for its choreographic dismantling of the voyeuristic gaze and its address to the female spectator. Here I would like to extend Daly's analysis and suggest that not only Duncan's dancing but also the dancing of her contemporaries projected a kinesthetic power that challenged male viewers to see the female dancer as an expressive subject rather than as an erotic object. At the same time the kinesthesia of early modern dance engaged female viewers in ways that the spectacle of late-nineteenth-century ballet did not. In fact, since many female spectators had experienced the same movement techniques that the dancers transformed in performance—*Delsarteanism* and *aesthetic gymnastics*—their kinesthetic response was particularly intense and led more than a few to identify the dancer's flow of bodily motion as reflective of their own. As Mabel Dodge Luhan once wrote about her experience of seeing Isadora Duncan: "It seemed to me I recognized what she did in the dance, and that it was like my own daily, nightly return to the Source."<sup>36</sup>

Whereas the kinesthesia of early modern dance challenged the voyeuristic gaze, its representational frames deployed essentialized images of identity, images of a universalized Woman or generalized ethnic or national type. Here I would like to extend Desmond's and Koritz's analysis and suggest that just as the Oriental frames of St. Denis's and Allan's dancing countered the performance of their individual subjectivities, so too did the representational frames

employed by their contemporaries. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the kinesthesia and representational frames of early modern dance often worked at cross-purposes. Or perhaps more accurately, the juxtaposition of individualized kinesthetic subjectivity and generalized representational type created a dynamic tension underlying the form of early modern dance, a tension that grounded the paradoxical social function of the form. Whereas the representational frames reiterated and updated preexistent images of gender and ethnicity, the kinesthetic dimension introduced a new image of the female body in motion that was without precedent.

Stated in these terms, my analysis is necessarily schematic. What is required now is a precise comparison of how different dancers inflected the dynamic tension between kinesthetic flow and representation frame, between undermining the voyeuristic gaze and deploying essentialized images of identity, between resisting and reinscribing dominant cultural values. Although this is not the place to detail such a comparison, it does seem an appropriate occasion to call upon dance scholars to acknowledge and confront the tensions and paradoxes of early modern dance. For until we do so, we will remain limited in our ability to write early modern dance into the history of a "feminist cultural politics." And that is where the practice clearly, if complicatedly, belongs.

#### Notes

- 1 Christy Adair's *Women and Dance: Sybbs and Sirens* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), begins the project of bringing diverse methods of feminist analysis to bear on dance studies. However, since her book does not present a view on early modern dance that differs from the perspectives outlined below, it is not included in my survey of the literature.
- 2 See, for example, Judith Lynne Hanna, *Dance, Sex, and Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Helen Thomas, ed., *Dance, Gender, and Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
- 3 See Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade—Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, nos. 3/4 (September/October 1982), pp. 74–88; and her "Masquerade Reconsidered: Further Thoughts on the Female Spectator," *Discourse* 11, no. 1 (1988/1989), pp. 42–54. See also Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), pp. 6–18, and her "On Duel in the Sun," *Framework* 15 (1981), pp. 12–15; and E. Ann Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?" in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), pp. 23–35.
- 4 See Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988), and Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1988).
- 5 See Evan Alderson, "Ballet as Ideology: *Giselle*, Act II," *Dance Chronicle* 10, no. 3 (1987), pp. 290–304, and reprinted in this volume; Ann Daly, "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers," *Drama Review* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 8–21; and her "Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference," *Women and Performance* 3, no. 2 (1987–

- 1988), pp. 57–66, and reprinted in this volume. See also Lynn Garafola, "The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet," *Dance Research Journal* 17, no. 2, and 18, no. 1 (Fall 1985 and Spring 1986), pp. 35–40.
- 6 Roger Copeland, "Founding Mothers: Duncan, Graham, Rainer, and Sexual Politics," *Dance Theatre Journal* 8, no. 3 (Fall 1990), pp. 6–9 and 27–29; Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," in *Gender in Performance*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992), 239–59.
- 7 Elizabeth Dempster, "Women Writing the Body: Let's Watch a Little How She Dances," in *Graft: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Susan Sheridan (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 35–54, and Janet Wolff, "Reinstating Corporeality: Feminism and Body Politics," in her *Feminine Sentences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 120–41, and reprinted in this volume.
- 8 Jane Desmond, "Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's *Radha* of 1906," *Signs* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 28–49; and Amy Koritz, "Dancing the Orient for England: Maud Allan's *The Vision of Salome*," *Theatre Journal* 46, no. 1 (March 1994), pp. 63–78, and reprinted in this volume.
- 9 Copeland, "Founding Mothers," p. 6.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 12 See note 3.
- 13 Copeland, "Founding Mothers," p. 29.
- 14 Dempster, "Women Writing the Body," p. 37.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 18 Susan Foster, "The Signifying Body: Reaction and Resistance in Postmodern Dance," *Theatre Journal* 37, no. 1 (March 1985), pp. 45–64.
- 19 Dempster, "Women Writing the Body," p. 51.
- 20 Wolff, "Reinstating Corporeality," p. 120.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 134.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 25 Ann Daly, "Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze," in *Gender in Performance*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992), p. 245. For more on Isadora Duncan, see Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance* (1928; New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1969).
- 26 Daly, "Dance History," pp. 252, 254, 255.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 254.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- 29 In a book published after this essay was written, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), Ann Daly does carry her discussion into the later phases of Duncan's career and confronts the racism of Duncan's 1927 essay, "I See America Dancing." As Daly writes, Duncan "effectively [constructed] the genre of American modern dance as whiteness" (p. 219).
- 30 Desmond, "Dancing Out the Difference," p. 49.



- 31 Koritz, "Dancing the Orient," p. 68.  
 32 Ibid., p. 70.  
 33 Ibid., p. 68.  
 34 Ibid., p. 76.  
 35 This position is implicit, though not explicit, in my book *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).  
 36 Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Movers and Shakers* (1936; Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), pp. 319–20.

## 9 SOME THOUGHTS ON CHOREOGRAPHING HISTORY

**Brenda Dixon Gottschild**

We all see things through our personal histories, with their parts rooted in convention and their parts that became subject to change. These histories come to include reflections on what made us enter into them. Through such reflections I believe we become political, because they address questions of gender, race, class, nationality and family origins. With political consciousness . . . some knowledge of self and place . . . change becomes possible.—Jill Johnston<sup>1</sup>

History is a fable agreed upon. So too is identity, which is a story not only arrived at by the individual but conferred by the group.—John Lahr<sup>2</sup>

**F**or historians in any discipline the process of writing about the past is an exercise in metaphoric choreography. Deconstruction theory has taught us that to formulate a history means to interpret selected events. Besides the subjectivity of any one interpretation, the researcher/historian also risks the danger that theory/philosophy will come loose from context—an untenable situation, as the two quotations above indicate. In order to avoid that occurrence, I find it helpful to remind myself that I am first cause / first context. As an erstwhile theater professional, I find that choreography and the dancing body play a role in shaping my approach to research. I arrive at ideas affectively and kinesthetically, as well as cognitively. For example, I was actively at work on this essay in times of vulnerability and intuition: waking from sleep (especially from naps!); in the midst of my movement workout; as I lay sunbathing in midday summer heat. Such is the way in which I am seduced into a topic, listening to my accumulated research as it begins to speak to me. It parallels the way in which I worked as a performer, choreographer, and director. It approximates the findings noted in literature on the creative process.<sup>3</sup> Other performing artists who have become writers and scholars may note similar processes. In the same vein, I advise my doctoral