

## Editor's Note: Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Role of Political Intent in Choreographic Performance

What is the role of movement in the political and ethical culture that provides the context for the emergence of the aesthetic: in this case, the emergence of dance? Such is the common theme uniting varying points of view in the articles of this issue of *DRJ*. A diverse range of methodologies and subject matter frame this question with varying outcomes leading from Germany in 1908 and 1936 (Walsdorf), to America in 1935 (Jones), to Israel in 1971 (Bing-Heidecker), and to the U.S. of the present moment (Mullis).

Liora Bing-Heidecker's revisiting of John Cranko's ballet *Song of My People—Forest People—Sea* for the Batsheva Dance Company of Israel in 1971 not only brings a forgotten work to our attention, but also situates that work from a complex historical perspective. First, there is the Israeli context where references to the Holocaust, Bing-Heidecker tells us, were at the time rare. Then, there was the broader post-World War II context when Theodor Adorno had announced that poetry was untenable. Finally, there was the artistic context of John Cranko himself, whose work for the Stuttgart Ballet was acclaimed for its grasp of narrative ballet. The Batsheva's invitation to Cranko occurred in the year of the shooting of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, and Cranko decided to make a ballet on the Holocaust that was shorn of narrative but that used poetry. Out of this complex contextualization in "How to Dance After Auschwitz? Ethics and Aesthetics of Representation in John Cranko's *Song of My People—Forest People—Sea*," Bing-Heidecker raises the question of aesthetics and ethics that haunts this work. Despite its mixed reception in Israel and internationally, *Song of My People—Forest People—Sea* is not confirmed here to have been a failed work, but analyzed as a careful and thoughtful working through of issues of language and testimony for which Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben, and Paul Celan point the way.

Hanna Walsdorf explores twentieth-century performative renditions of ostensibly ancient Germanic sword dances by Olga Desmond and Harald Kreutzberg. In "Nudes, Swords, and the Germanic Imagination," Walsdorf first traces the existence of the discursive rendition of sword dance widely assumed to have established a tradition rooted in the German imagination. In 1908, however, dance soloist Olga Desmond introduced female nudism into what had been understood to be the traditional domain of German male bellicosity. When in the course of the twentieth century famed modern dancer Harald Kreutzberg staged a sword dance for all male dancers in the 1936 Olympic Games, the National Socialist influence is hard to miss. Indeed, Walsdorf points out the growing influence of a nationalist discourse conveyed by sword dances as they entered modernity. Yet, in the absence of explicit discursive evidence, she refrains from attributing political or ethical intent to either artist. In this way, the article contrasts interestingly with Bing-Heidecker's in that it raises the question of whether ethical intent can only be read in the artist's statement or whether one can decode it in the work of the artist. In a carefully philological approach to the material, Walsdorf is reluctant to speculate and thus she concludes the results are, in this respect, inconclusive.

Kim Jones's "American Modernism: Reimagining Martha Graham's Lost *Imperial Gesture* (1935)" raises similar issues around a lost solo of Graham's that the author was commissioned to reconstruct. The reconstruction process guides the narrative and analysis so that the question of the

role of movement cannot be occluded. One realization of Jones that has significant import for dance history is that *Imperial Gesture* was Graham's first anti-fascist work of the 1930s. In other terms, it was likely her first politically motivated dance. The truly collaborative scope of the reimagining process—one that includes both those absent and those present—brings to Jones's account a richness which in itself constitutes a social statement about modernism in America in the 1930s. Moreover, the article also illustrates the close connections between movement and research that take place in the excavation of the past. It is as though the reconstruction of movement opens the ethical dimension of decision making to an aesthetic process whose politics are, in Jones's hands, unmistakable.

In "Ought I Make Political Dance?," Eric Mullis reorients the discussion to a broader philosophical perspective and argues for a pluralist approach to dance values when it comes to the relation of theatrically performed dance and social justice. Said pluralism derives from a "multivalent somatic hermeneutic" (page XX) in the light of which Mullis revisits the making of political dance as an "ethical obligation." Having relativized formalist/contextualist differences, Mullis moves on to a particularly American way of understanding the question: libertarian and the communitarian approaches. That is, the question of ethics with respect to politics and aesthetics becomes refocused here on the ethics of making dances, or the ethics of the dance maker. This thinking reverberates back upon the other articles in a productive manner. Whereas in the preceding articles it is not a question of an "ought" but of a "did," Mullis locates the complex relation of aesthetics and politics to ethics in the dimension of futurity.

Finally, in Leslie Satin's essay, "Dancing in Place: Exhaustion, Embodiment, and Pereg," I would like to think we have taken the historically and theoretically determined themes of the previous essays and shaken them up again in a new crucible that brings Satin's practice into confluence with the writings of Georges Perec. I leave it to the reader to perceive the resonances or to simply enjoy the essay on its own merits.

This is Gay Morris's last issue of *DRJ* as book review editor. Working with Gay has been an absolute treat, and I am so grateful to have had her working with us for practically my entire term. She has raised the level of reviews with her editing skills and has bequeathed to *DRJ* the review essay, a new format in which larger issues brought up by books can be discussed at length. With the next issue we welcome on board Ariel Osterweis as Gay's successor.

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