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THE FASCIST TURN IN THE DANCE OF SERGE LIFAR

MARK FRANKO

INTERWAR FRENCH BALLET AND THE GERMAN OCCUPATION

The Fascist Turn in the Dance of Serge Lifar

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FOREWORD

This book has inestimable value for two kinds of reasons, at least.

First, for the scrupulous accuracy of the micro-historical and empirical inquiry on which it is based. With this book, the taboo covering Serge Lifar's activities during World War II is about to be destroyed, and the discursive strategies usually deployed by his apologists are about to become impossible and absurd. Thanks to several years of patient and determined research throughout Europe, with new archival materials and indisputable evidence in hand, Mark Franko does more than show that Lifar was actively collaborating with the occupying authorities between 1940 and 1944; this fact is well known and hardly debatable, even though too often overlooked by dance history, when not denied by Lifar's past admirers or disciples. Franko also demonstrates that these acts of collaboration were based on an authentic ground of *collaborationism*, whose ideological roots went back to the 1930s. Here, the usual apology, which one can still hear today in the institutional spheres of the Paris Opera, that Lifar was a purely apolitical artist, living in the ethereal world of dance, dedicated to that world, and indifferent to all the contingencies and the sordidness of politics and ideology, is definitively shown to be false and deceitful. As early as 1938, in his book *La danse: Les grands courants de la danse académique*, Lifar had developed a racist (Aryan) ideology of dance history, highly compatible with the cultural program of the Nazis, and as early as June 1940, he laid the foundation of his strategy of (both artistic and political) collaboration with a very clear goal in mind: becoming, with the patronage of the Germans, the leading figure of theatrical dance in the New European Order. The letters to Goebbels, with many other pieces of evidence, are quite clear on that point, and we can no longer ignore them. In this sense, Franko is definitively closing a chapter in dance historiography, a dark and until now quite confused one.

But beyond or beside the factual issue of Lifar's activities and political strategies during World War II, this book has another value. It tries to elaborate the notion, both political and aesthetical, of "choreographic fascism" (in Franko's

own words "corporeal fascism"), and does so in close connection to the interwar artistic debates on neoclassicism. Franko shows clearly the complexity of the intellectual genealogy of neoclassical aesthetics during the interwar period and how many different versions of it were actually in competition. If, precisely due to this diversity, neoclassical aesthetics cannot be reduced to fascism (not every neoclassicism is per se fascist), it is nevertheless true, as Franko demonstrates, that the choreographic fascism immanent in Lifar's dance is directly derived from a radicalized, reified, and politically engaged version of neoclassicism (in this sense, every artistic fascism mobilizes a certain version of neoclassicism). Lifar's fascism is finally described, in a very illuminating way, as a "polarity machine," a static and unresolved tension between two contradictory poles (form and force, Apollonian and Dionysiac, static and dynamic), poles which can coexist only in the very specific and idiosyncratic body of the (ballet) Master, the body of Power fascinated by its own narcissistic image. With these new reflections on the relationships between neoclassicism and fascism, Franko is opening a new chapter in dance studies, a chapter which calls for further and collective elaboration and which remains, more than ever, an ongoing concern for the world in which we currently live.

Frédéric Pouillaude

PREFACE

In the summer of 2012 at the State Theater in New York City I attended a Paris Opera ballet performance, "French Masters of the Twentieth Century."[1] On the program were works by Serge Lifar, Roland Petit, and Maurice Béjart, each choreographer being celebrated as an important contributor to the French choreographic heritage.[2] I was particularly interested in Lifar's *Suite en blanc*, as I had never seen one of his ballets but was familiar with aspects of his technique through my ballet classes in New York City in the 1970s with Hungarian ballet master Károly Zsedényi (1919–2002). Zsedényi received his training in Paris during the 1930s under Lubov Egorova, and his classes incorporated some of Lifar's modernized ballet syllabus. I perused Lifar's books on technique at that time but was unable to derive much from them; on the surface, however, they looked quite impressive so I filed them away in my mind as something I should look at more closely at a later time.

At the time that Lifar first entered my consciousness in this diffuse way I was writing a doctoral dissertation about the first dance treatises of the Renaissance. When I initially proposed my topic to my advisor in the Department of French and Romance Philology at Columbia University, he asked if I had in mind something like what Lifar had tried to do with dance history. Lifar had not only written on dance technique but was also known as a dance historian, and my advisor, Michael Riffaterre, although not a dance specialist, was aware of this. It was becoming increasingly apparent that Lifar's name was indelibly stamped on historical as well as contemporary ballet in the French context. Nonetheless, as I later learned, Lifar was neither a bona fide scholar nor historian. But he cut a literary figure, if not a scholarly one, as his choreographic and performing

1. For the review I wrote at that time, see http://www.jampole.com/OpEdgy/?p=110.

2. The program I attended on July 11, 2012, included Lifar's *Suite en blanc*, Petit's *L'Arlésienne*, and Béjart's *Boléro*.

accomplishments were enhanced, it turned out, with theory, criticism, historiography, polemics, journalism, and aesthetics.

My initial sketchy encounters with Lifar were later complemented by ballet classes in Paris with Lucienne Lamballe (1902–1987), Lubov Egorova's star student and *étoile* at the Paris Opera who danced with Lifar in the 1930s.[3] During our classes, Lamballe never mentioned Lifar. When I saw *Suite en blanc*, however, I noticed that some of the ways she had connected dance vocabulary to choreographic syntax were present in Lifar's choreography.[4] This created a sensation of familiarity in viewing the 2012 performance. Also during 1979–1980 I studied ballet in Paris with Hélène Sadovska (1929–2014), who was Russian but had danced with the Ballets des Champs Elysées in the postwar period. This company, I later learned, was overseen by Boris Kochno, Diaghilev's former assistant and the actual heir of the Ballets Russes. In Hélène's classes there was virtually nothing of Lifar, as the ambiance was more related to the postwar era, to Kochno and Christian Bérard, who had been Kochno's partner, and also to the postwar continuation of the Ballets Russes: Les Ballets des Champs Elysées. In all of these ballet classes I was, in a sense, reliving the spectrum of French twentieth-century ballet without being consciously aware of it.

Nevertheless, there was something eerily unfamiliar in *Suite en blanc*, which, to all appearances, was nothing more than an abstract neoclassical ballet. The curtain opened to reveal a host of dancers arrayed in white against a severe black backdrop on an almost empty stage—nothing but a few stairs and a low platform at the back of the stage. Although perhaps designed to look frozen, this tableau was nonetheless alive. The uncanny moment of death in life before anyone moved was both chilling and fascinating. I was struck by an atmosphere of foreboding. I reached for the program to see when the ballet had premiered: 1943. It was the depths of the Occupation, and Lifar had created an abstract ballet in black and white to a nineteenth-century score by Edouard Lalo. It immediately struck me as odd that a work made in what are known as the dark years was being showcased as part of the French choreographic heritage without so much as a word in the program about the circumstances of its creation.[5] I could only imagine what was going on in the wings of the

3. Lucienne Lamballe was named *Petit sujet* in 1922, *Grand sujet* in 1923, and *Première danseuse* in 1924. A student of Zambelli and Aveline, Lamballe was formed by Egorova and responsible in her turn for the formation of Claire Motte, Claude Bessy, and Liane Daydé. Inventaire Fonds Lucienne Lamballe: 017 INV the 19 (BnF, Arts du Spectacle).

4. I am uncertain whether these characteristics were germane to Lifar or to the Paris Opera prior to Lifar.

5. I was unaware at the time that *Suite en blanc*, whose title Lifar changed after the war to *Noir et blanc*, had a long history of revivals.

Paris Opera and on Paris streets in 1943. In short, *Suite en blanc* read to me as a disturbing if still important historical document. I also had recently seen the film *Serge Lifar Musagète* by Dominique Delouche at the New York Dance Film Festival. I found the film excellent in the way it showed Lifar's choreographic aesthetic as steeped in the choreography of dramatic narrative.[6] In the course of the film a photo of Lifar sitting at a meeting with Nazi officers flashed by. In all my research since then I have never come upon that photo. Lifar appeared composed and engaged amidst the uniformed Nazis. In the Q&A I asked Delouche if he could say more about the photo. He looked pained and said that he regretted the Americans and British still show concern about that part of Lifar's history. That image has since been removed from the film. Several weeks after the performance of *Suite en blanc* in New York President François Hollande issued a public apology for the roundup and deportation of Jews at the Vélodrome d'Hiver on July 16 and 17, 1942,[7] and, shortly thereafter, the Préfecture de Police announced the opening of a previously sealed archive of the Occupation.[8] My curiosity was now fully aroused: I wanted to know the truth. A six-year research project then led to the writing and publication of this book.

6. Despite the evidence, Lifar himself claimed that dance "cannot be a story" ("ne peut pas être un récit"). This raised the possibility that his theory and practice did not correspond in any meaningful way. Serge Lifar, *La danse: Les grands courants de la danse académique* (Paris: Denoël, 1938), 28.

7. President Hollande delivered this speech on July 22, 2012. *New York Review of Books*, August 18, 2012. (https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2012/08/18/france-hollande-crime-vel-d-hiv/?printpage=true). In 1995 Jacques Chirac, then mayor of Paris, publicly addressed the responsibility of France in the deportation of the Jews; President François Mitterrand refused to do so.

8. The opening of the archive was preceded by an exhibition of documents. Scott Sayare, "France Reflects on Its Role in Wartime Fate of Jews," in *New York Times International* (July 29, 2012), 12.

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Introduction: The Transnational Path Toward Corporeal Fascism

This book concerns the career of the Ukrainian-born star dancer, choreographer, and ballet master Serge Lifar (1905–1986) in relation to the historical background and genesis of neoclassical ballet in France as an intellectual and artistic formation of the interwar period extending into the Occupation. *Neoclassical ballet* is still a widely used term in dance criticism and among dance-goers, but its meaning in current usage is often far from clear. Studying the historical precedents of what was also called the *new classicism* in ballet of the first half of the twentieth century will hopefully contribute to our critical understanding of the term as it is still applied to contemporary dance.[1]

Serge Lifar, the major exponent of French neoclassicism in dance, exerted a powerful influence over ballet at the Paris Opera from 1930 until the end of World War II, and some would say even beyond that until 1958. The Paris Opera is the home of the *théâtre lyrique*, which struggled in the late seventeenth century to differentiate itself from Italian opera and become consecrated as officially French culture comparable to classical tragedy.[2] The idea of neoclassicism in French culture, it is worth noting, is actually also a seventeenth-century phenomenon directly related to the theater of the late Corneille and of Jean Racine in which a return to the classical principles of

1. As Andrea Harris shows, Lincoln Kirstein's argument for Balanchine's classicism first emerged in two articles Kirstein published in 1947 ("Balanchine and the Classical Revival" and "Balanchine Musagète"). Edwin Denby took a similar approach to Balanchine by the early 1940s. This was ten years after the moniker of neoclassicism was applied to Lifar in France (see Chapter 2). Andrea Harris, *Making Ballet American: Modernism Before and Beyond Balanchine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78–79.

2. See Catherine Kinztler, *Poétique de l'opéra français de Corneille à Rousseau* (Paris: Minerve, 1991).

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Photo 1 Serge Lifar posing at Versailles in the early 1950s. Archives de la Ville de Lausanne, P 063 (Lifar, Serge).

Aristotelian tragedy was heralded. Hence, when we speak of neoclassicism in the 1920s as a turn from modernism toward classical French culture, we are using a term that was already culturally relevant to the seventeenth century itself. This points to the fact that the notion of the classical in French culture is itself a derived concept, always already *neo*. For all these reasons the Paris Opera as the site of French neoclassical ballet in the twentieth century had amassed a significant cultural capital by the late nineteenth century. At the inauguration of its new theater in 1875—the *Palais Garnier*—the Opera was

intended to stand as a symbol of the nation's power, "to visibly project the radiance of France into the world."[3]

The neoclassical turn in art practices preceded Lifar's arrival to France in 1923. Musicologist Scott Messing points out that in music "[I]n the first decade of the twentieth century the terms *nouveau classicisme* and *néoclassicisme* . . . became commonplace."[4] As with music, there is evidence of a neoclassical turn in French ballet of the early twentieth century. And, as with music, this did not happen in a vacuum. The cultural connotations of the classical turn are usually considered to be conservative. The classical age of seventeenth-century French culture was for Charles Maurras the touchstone of a renewal of nationalist sentiment with decidedly fascist overtones. Note that when fascism arose in France as a quasi-philosophical idea and a political cause it was not associated with Germany.[5] From the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II Maurrassisme was a politically reactionary doctrine drawing heavily on the importance of seventeenth-century monarchy and political Catholicism to the revival of contemporary political culture. The *Ligue de la patrie française* was formed in December 1898 and *Action française* in June 1899.[6] Maurras's enthusiasm for classical culture is well known.[7] Hence, neoclassical aesthetics already carried a political subtext in France prior to World War I. Similarly, the synthesis of socialism and nationalism in opposition to democracy undergirded proto-fascist thought in France well before the First World

3. Frédérique Patureau, "[T]raduire ostensiblment le rayonnement de la France dans le monde," *Le Palais Garnier dans la société parisienne* (Liège: Mardaga, 1991), 10 (my translation).

4. Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1988), 87.

5. "[N]ot only did French fascism, despite its political weakness, come closest to the ideal, the 'idea' of fascism in the Weberian sense of the term, but France was also the country in which the fascist ideology in its main aspects came into being a good twenty years before similar ideologies appeared elsewhere in Europe, particularly in Italy." Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Left nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France*, translated by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 26–27. Although a return to monarchy was on the agenda of the *Action française* under Charles Maurras, the father of French fascism was nonetheless virulently and consistently Germanophobic.

6. See P. Fournier, "La Déclaration des jeunes félibres féderalistes *et l'école Parisienne du félibrige (1892–1899)*," *in Revue des études critiques (1922).* Fonds Charles Maurras, Archives Nationales (Paris): 576 AP 169.

7. "Maurras's classicizing aesthetics presents a discourse that aims to guide or reintegrate the ethical and the political back into an organic whole, as represented by Greco-Roman tradition as well as France's neoclassical, monarchical, and Catholic past." Gaetano DeLeonibus, *Charles Maurras's Classicizing Aesthetics: An Aestheticization of Politics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), xiii.

War.[8] I do not claim that all artistic engagement with neoclassicism was forcibly of a fascist or proto-fascist persuasion, but neoclassicism has been treated as a politically conservative phenomenon in much arts research.

As art historian Kenneth E. Silver explains, the conversion of the Parisian avant-garde painters from modernism to neoclassicism with its strong Germanophobic emphasis was the result of the First World War and continued until at least 1925.[9] Ballet differs from the history of visual art, however, because ballet constitutes its initial claim to modernism through a reassertion of its classical elements whereas in other arts neoclassicism is often interpreted as a betrayal of modernism. In other terms, to be modern in the first place, ballet had to find a novel way to be classical. Moreover, the turn to aesthetic traditions of the seventeenth century in dance, as in music, preceded the First World War. There has been substantial scholarly investigation of French music's political engagements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which involves returning to earlier musical traditions and the politicization of past composers.[10] The idea of a "nationalist classicism" that emerged from Maurras's proto-fascist and equally Germanophobic milieu was already promoting a return to French classical art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[11] The term *nationalist classicism* itself embodies the mélange of politics and aesthetics that this study will attempt to confront in dance. By the 1930s, these ideas were circulating in dance criticism.

When it comes to dance, however, Lifar was in some ways an unlikely candidate for doctrinaire neoclassicism. Starting with his appearance in George Balanchine's *Apollon Musagète* in 1928, continuing with his reception across the 1930s at the Opera, and culminating in his artistic triumph at the Paris Opera under the German Occupation, the Russian dancer introduced a cultural tension into ballet that blended modernist reform with traditionalist conservatism, ballet pantomime with so-called pure classical style, and French with Central European traditions. In Chapter 3 I discuss how these tensions in Lifar's aesthetic betrayed the influence of the German romantic conception of classicism.

8. Sternhell, *Neither Right nor Left*, 60.

9. Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). Silver provides the standard account of the turn to classicism in modern French visual art as a reaction to the devastation of the First World War.

10. See Jane F. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

11. The phrase "nationalist classicism" is borrowed from Neil McWilliam, "Action Française, Classicism, and the Dilemmas of Traditionalism in France, 1900–1914," *Studies in the History of Art* 68, Symposium Papers XLV: Nationalism and French Visual Culture, 1870–1914 (2005), 269.

Nevertheless, the period in which Lifar became professionally active in France marks an intensification of the neoclassical concept not only in music and ballet, but across the arts and culture more generally. When Lifar became engaged at the Paris Opera, first as dancer (1929) and then as ballet director (1930), there was also an upsurge of public interest in the dances of the people as practiced in rural France, which was stimulated by the new field of dance ethnography in the context of the rise of the social sciences.[12] Folkloric dance could be considered a variety of neoclassicism "in the field" because it contained survivals of seventeenth-century movement, and thus the place of folkloric dance in interwar French culture is integral to this book. The fledgling discipline of folkloric studies gravitated toward the study of traditional regional dances, but the idea of an urban folklore was already present in the 1917 Cocteau-Satie-Picasso-Massine collaboration on the ballet *Parade* and was later to become associated with the Popular Front.[13] Hence, a dialogue between ballet, the popular, and folklore had already begun. Lifar's role in this dialogue was more as critic than as choreographer.[14]

NEOCLASSICISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

From the early twentieth century the neoclassical turn in dance was intertwined with anxieties over national identity whose main catalysts were France's loss of the Franco-Prussian War, the Dreyfus Affair, and World War I.[15] Although not French, Lifar and his particular success need to be interpreted in relation to the struggles over national identity unleashed by these events and their impact on art practices. Debates over neoclassicism in the arts irrevocably echoed upon contemporaneous debates over historical traditions per se. In France, these classical traditions were embroiled in divisive political debates over French identity.[16]

12. My focus is on the ethnography that took as its subject the peasantry of France and Europe.

13. In discussing the urban dimension of *Parade*, specifically with reference to the street cries (*cris de Paris*) and the *homme affiche* (the walking poster), Kenneth E. Silver notes: "Cocteau's street theater [in the ballet] is specifically of the Parisian—not the provincial—type." Silver, *Esprit de Corps*, 123–124, 427 n65.

14. See Chapter 4.

15. For the general context of the rise of nationalism in the *fin de siècle*, see Enzo Collotti, "Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, Socialism, and Political Catholicism as Expressions of Mass Politics in the Twentieth Century," in *Fin de Siècle and its Legacy*, edited by Mikulás Teich and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 80–97.

16. McWilliam, "Action Française," 268–291.

The seventeenth century was the classical age from the French perspective and its significance to debates over national identity began in the 1890s. Classicism, tradition, and nationalism were closely and often problematically intertwined. The notion of a crisis, or, more accurately, of *crises*, besetting neoclassicism in dance concerned not only a dual definition of neoclassicism—one that worked across differing concepts of tradition—but also the very historical basis of the French seventeenth century itself as the fulcrum of the nation's classical identity.[17] "Throughout the decade preceding the war," writes Jane F. Fulcher of music, "the conceptual and aesthetic terrain [of music] was being prepared for a return to tradition and an elevation of classicism as the French 'national style.'"[18] Much the same could be said of ballet. In this climate, the seventeenth century itself was open to reinterpretation: instead of one single seventeenth century there were multiple imaginary ones with a range of artistic and political interpretations undergirding them.[19]

The poet and playwright Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) was a prominent theorist of neoclassicism and its relationship to the popular and the national in music and dance.[20] Although Lifar was a colleague of Cocteau and the two men occasionally collaborated, Lifar thought of traditional dance as a primitive form of classical ballet. Unlike Cocteau, Lifar went from being associated with the avant-garde to an increasing identification with an academic position on ballet. In the course of the 1930s Lifar also progressively distanced himself from the avant-garde precedents of the Ballets Russes, a company in which he and Cocteau had worked, while adopting an increasingly conservative artistic stance. Lifar's choreographic career in the 1930s was therefore intertwined with a contested concept of neoclassicism both with respect to avant-garde artistic practice and to new discoveries in the social sciences. The first way to understand this is through the contrast of classicism as a strictly academic phenomenon with the realization made possible in ethnographic fieldwork that the heritage of regional popular culture also had national and aesthetic significance. A second way to understand neoclassicism as a contested concept is

17. The tragedies of Jean Racine are doubtless the literary texts most singled out as the standard-bearers of classicism in French letters from the nineteenth century through World War II. Since Roland Barthes' *On Racine* (1960) this status has been contested.

18. Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, 6.

19. See David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 9. For a refutation of *Action française*, see Jacques Maritain, *Clairvoyance de Rome* (1929) in Jacques et Raïssa Maritain, *Oeuvres completes*, vol. 3 (Paris: Editions Saint Paul, 1984), 1029–1191.

20. I give extended attention to Cocteau's criticism in Chapter 4 where I compare it to the writings on dance of poet Paul Valéry and anthropologist André Varagnac.

through the interest of the avant-garde in popular and ethnographic sources, which also played a role in how national self-consciousness could be expressed in avant-garde performance.

NEOCLASSICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

Because of the contested notion of the history of the national past, the emergence of French dance historiography in the early twentieth century also has a role to play in our analysis. Henry Prunières's history of court ballet, still read today, introduced the "classical" past of dance minus the aura of a glorious national past. A precedent for Prunières's careful philological approach to the documents of dance history was Aby Warburg's work on Italian festival culture of the Renaissance. In addition to the topic of Lifar, therefore, this book treats the emergence of dance history, aesthetics, criticism, and ethnography in France during the first half of the twentieth century, and the development of a French dance discourse as an intellectual formation. This involves a genealogy of dance in modernity, the subject of Chapter 1. To better understand how Lifar fit or did not fit into the French dance formation of the 1930s, I inquire into the neoclassical basis for that formation before the dancer's rise to prominence. To do this, I organize the three levels of dance and dance-related activity—folkloric dance, ballet, and historical research—under three conceptual rubrics: the artifact, the myth, and the document. These in turn correspond to three modes of conceptualizing movement materials: survival, revival, and archival, respectively. These terms and their meanings are useful in assessing the vicissitudes of neoclassicism in the decades to follow.

By the 1930s Lifar himself participated in the historiographical discourse on ballet not only as a choreographer whose work with mythic subjects made him a frequent case study, but also as a historian in his own right. This very fact indicates his awareness of the cultural stakes involved in dance history at this time. By 1938 Lifar had already published an ambitious book on world dance history, *La Danse: Les grands courants de la danse académique* (*Dance: The Main Currents of Academic Dance*). The Lifar discourse on dance history was primarily designed to fortify his own position in the dance world by painting his own work as the endpoint of historical development. But it also reached for a theoretical dimension, a brief overview of which follows.

La Danse begins with a modernist poetics of ballet that proceeds by a process of elimination. What, asks Lifar, can dance accomplish that no other art can? The presupposition is that what dance and dance alone can do is what dance should concentrate its energies on. Following the modernist mandate to isolate the specificity of each art and to reduce each art to its own essence, Lifar proposes that dance's essence is to be found not in its technical principles,

as Volynsky had claimed, but in emotion. In this section, Lifar also claims dance cannot tell a story. This is perplexing, as the story ballet had existed since Noverre, but it is possible Lifar is referring to the act of dancing per se, not to choreography. For Lifar in this text the body can mime as long as it does not narrate. The reason given is that danced emotion necessarily lacks subtlety: "Dance cannot portray anything . . . and it cannot even translate the infinite and infinitesimal nuances of the human soul."[21] Lifar's theory of neoclassicism thus turns on a commonplace: "We only dance our simplest and strongest emotions."[22] Taking no account of Russian critics Lifar must have known—Volynsky and Levinson—who understood technique as the formal material through which dance could renew itself, Lifar instead pictured dance as fundamentally poverty stricken. The material proper to dance set forth in the opening pages of his book places a strategic limitation on what dance can express: it does not propose the neoclassicist strategy of exploring the technical permutations of dance technique itself as a choreographic method. Paul Valéry also discussed dancing with no reference whatsoever to the art of choreography. But Valéry envisaged dance as the mimesis of the act of creation itself. As Frédéric Pouillaude has pointed out, Valéry thus lifted dance to a metaphysical level.[23] This, however, seems far more expansive than Lifar's claim: "The strength and weakness of dance resides in its limitations in the frame of its expressive means."[24] As Lifar would have it, it is only by keeping dance at this restricted level that it can lay claim to any evocative power. In the rich and imaginative discourse on the dance of the interwar context Lifar's theoretical pronouncements were self-marginalizing.

Ultimately, Lifar lays claim to Noverre's pantomime by fusing it with dancing rather than allowing it to operate independently of fully danced movement.[25] The quality of gesture Lifar sought was a hybrid of dance and pantomime. The theoretical content of *La Danse* is divided, however, between this quasi-modernist reduction of dance to its essential principles at the beginning of the book and the professed revelation that dance was pure abstraction in the most pristine neoclassical sense at the book's end.

21. "La danse ne peut rien peindre . . . et elle ne peut même pas traduire les nuances infinies et infinitésimales de l'âme humaine." Lifar, *La Danse*, 28.

22. "Nous ne dansons que nos émotions les plus simples et les plus fortes." Ibid.

23. Frédéric Pouillaude, *Unworking Choreography: The Notion of the Work in Dance*, translated by Anna Pakes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 13–30.

24. "[La] force et la faiblesse de la danse résident dans le peu d'étendu du cadre de ses moyens d'expression." Lifar, *La Danse*, 28.

25. See Lifar, *La Danse*, 79–86.

To the degree that Lifar participated in the theoretical debates of the 1930s, his intellectual position was as irreconcilably bipolar within this one book as the reception of his physical presence and actions were in critical discourse of the same period.

Chapter 2 deals with the critical reception of Lifar between 1930 and 1939, where we can perceive the formally polarized vision of the dancer gradually taking shape. One problem critics and theorists had to confront was that Lifar's personal style emphasizing narrative and emotional expression was a poor match with received ideas of French classicism or with its Russo-French modernist re-reading.[26] In this way, the whole idea of balletic neoclassicism itself became subject to debate because Lifar was actually more properly associated with eighteenth-century action ballet. Jean-Georges Noverre (1727–1810), a Swiss choreographer and theorist, was an Enlightenment proponent of ballet reform who introduced a new concept of the passions and their mimetic representation to the European ballet stage. The critical mandate for identifying Lifar's dancing as neoclassical required that eighteenth-century developments in dance be incorporated into the idea of French classicism. Russian dance historian Julia Sazonova in particular claimed Lifar was in the Noverre tradition of action ballet. Hence Lifar was both at the center of a debate on the origins of ballet neoclassicism and caught up in a problem concerning the historical dimensions of ballet classicism and modernity at the very time he was assigned the role of renewing the classical tradition of French dance at the Paris Opera.

Thus, in the world of Parisian ballet Lifar became the central protagonist in a critical debate over how best to conceptualize balletic neoclassicism. This is the subject of Chapter 2. The Russo-French (or Russo-Slavic as it was then called) school of French dance criticism was influenced by the writings of Russian-Jewish author Akim Volynsky between 1908 and 1910. Volynsky's disciples in France proposed the idea of a pure technique that was sufficient unto itself as an expressive tool for modern ballet. This technique was an inheritance from the classical past but when isolated from outmoded historical styles and settings it pointed the way to balletic abstraction. In addition, Volynsky believed ballet "was service to a higher spiritual principle."[27] That is, he believed in a spiritual or theological dimension of classical ballet, which he attributed to the principles of ballet technique as discovered in seventeenth-century France. Volynsky, not unlike the painter Wassily Kandinsky, allied abstraction with the spiritual

26. The major exception in his output is *Suite en blanc*.

27. Helen Tolstoy, *Akim Volynsky: A Hidden Russian-Jewish Prophet*, translated by Simon Cook (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 122.

in art.[28] Liora Bing-Heideker points out that Volynsky compared "the essence of turnout (ballet's orientation of the legs *en-dehors*) with Jesus's open palms in Leonardo's *Last Supper.*"[29] Let us recall that for Kandinsky the triangle was best suited to represent the life of the spirit.[30] Although a critic rather than an artist, Volynsky's alliance of formal abstraction and spiritual significance was similar to Kandinsky's if only because the shape of the feet in a turned-out position replicated that of the triangle. Turnout enabled the body to accomplish movements with an unprecedented assurance and balance. Interwar dance critics conceptualized ballet's spiritual orientation as based on a rational principle enabling pragmatic results but also on a transcendent principle engendering a striking symbolism. The two appeared to coalesce in the image ballet produced of the human body escaping from the weight of gravity. Within this critical discourse, dance came to be associated with freedom.[31]

This idea of freedom was often associated with an escape from reality. French critic Maurice Brillant likewise pinpointed the fundamental principle of classical ballet as the dancer's turnout, the fact of rotating the legs out from the hip sockets:[32]

> The principle that guides all of classical dance appears clearly to us from the very first lessons. . . . [I]t is the notion of turnout. The classical dancer is "turned out," that is to say, is ready to escape, to fly in every direction.[33]

28. Kandinsky saw abstraction as a rejection of materialism. "The more abstract is form, the more clear and direct is its appeal." Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, translated by M. T. H. Sadler (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1977), 32.

29. Liora Bing-Heideker, "Akim Volynsky: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Exaltation," unpublished typescript. Bing-Heideker adds that Volynsky suggested "a common ground between ballet's tiptoe and Jewish ritual prayer." According to Bing-Heideker, Volynsky blended Jewishness with Europeaness in ballet although he referred to this reconciliation as hyperborean. Volynsky also bemoaned the loss of turnout and *épaulement* in the physicality of Jewish prayer. I wish to thank Liora Bing-Heideker for sharing her work with me. Volynsky's writings on dance were recently rediscovered and published but in an edition that expurgated the passages on Jewish mysticism.

30. "The life of the spirit may be fairly represented in a diagram as a large acute-angled triangle." Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, 6.

31. This is a theme treated also by Franz Anton Cramer in his *In aller Freiheit. Tanzkultur in Frankreich zwischen 1930 und 1950* (Berlin: Parados, 2008).

32. There was no research in the 1930s into the historical advent of the *en dehors*. The recent research of Christine Bayle locates it in early-seventeenth-century dance treatises. I am indebted to her re-creation of *La Merlaison* (1635/2011), for my understanding of the historical emergence of the *en dehors*.

33. "Le principe qui guide toute la danse classique nous apparaît clairement dès les premières leçons de danse. . . . [C]'est la notion du *dehors*. Le danseur et la danseuse classiques sont placés

Brillant ascribed this idea to André Levinson because the latter "brought to light [the dancer's] desire for escape, for flying away."[34] But Levinson, like Brillant, also envisaged the dancer's freedom as the outcome of a rational historical process resulting in the "conventional" characteristics of classical dance: "The movement of the classical dance . . . is ex-centric—the arms and legs stretch out, freeing themselves from the torso, expanding the chest. The whole region of the dancer's being, body and soul, is dilated."[35] Thus freedom gains expression in dance not only through the dancer's ability to move in any direction at will but also by a body that is "dilated," that is, a body that conveys an outwardly-oriented multiple directionality in the very type of energy coursing through it. This is to say that before any particular movement is performed, and before a particular dance deploys freedom of movement in a choreographic configuration to actually propose or express something about freedom, freedom is already signified by the formal disposition of the medium itself, and more particularly by the way the dancer's training shapes the dancer's phenomenal appearance. This is perhaps why T. S. Eliot claimed "[A]ny efficient dancer has undergone a training which is like a moral training."[36] What attracted Eliot to ballet was above all form, which he felt realist theater had lost but which verse, as a discipline parallel to ballet, could restore to theater.[37] As with Kandinsky and Volynsky, for Eliot form had a spiritual or sacred dimension: "[Ballet] is a liturgy of very wide adaptability."[38] The Russo-French conception of ballet was at once a *formalist* and an *idealist neoclassicism*.

Opposition to the Russo-French school arose among avant-garde artists, producers, and thinkers—Jean Cocteau, Alexandre Sakharoff, Rolf de Maré, and Pierre Tugal—thanks to whom the debate over neoclassicism rejoined the question of the popular. In Chapter 4 I analyze their engagement with

'en dehors,' c'est-à-dire prêts à fuir, à s'envoler dans toutes les directions." Maurice Brillant, "Esprit de la danse classique," in *Encyclopédie française*, vol. 16, chapter 2 (16-4-11).

34. "[Levinson] a mis en lumière son désir d'évasion, d'envol." Ibid.

35. André Levinson, "The Spirit of Classical Dance," in *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, edited by Lynn Garafola and Joan Acocella (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 45–46.

36. T. S. Eliot, "A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, Limited, 1934), 47.

37. Eliot's aesthetics, however, were not classicist in the French sense. For him, modernity had yet to catch up with the radicalness of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poet John Donne. See Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Essays*, 281–291.

38. Ibid.

dance as significantly divergent from the Russo-French school of neoclassical thought. Each in different ways related dance to a more fundamentally anthropological if not to say popular conception of movement. I place Paul Valéry within this group although the latter's ideas were in their own way unique not least owing to the influence of Nietzsche. Here, I show that Valéry's ideas of dance were contested by classicist Louis Séchan as being particularly Nietzschean.

As a choreographer Lifar was not particularly sympathetic to any of these ideas, but neither was he suited to the Russo-French project of formalist and idealist neoclassicism that had enlisted him as an iconic figure. Yet as a Russian émigré in an influential position at the Opera, Lifar occupied the center of their attention. The situation was in itself fundamentally problematic. It brought about a gradual tendency on the part of critics across the decade of the 1930s to move beyond ballet's sacramental and popular dimensions to a fascination with Lifar's segmented, bipolar body of a markedly narcissistic character. In the rhetoric used to describe Lifar one does not get the sense of his devotion to the so-called higher principles of classicism, as André Levinson had argued, and the avant-garde tendencies in his work also faded away. Instead, Lifar's actual body became the center of critical focus, and it was analyzed in its static morphological form as well as imagined to be the site of a violent struggle. For Nietzsche, the synthesis of form and energy—the Apolline and the Dionysian—gave birth to Greek tragedy. In Lifar's case no such synthesis was evident. Lifar's tragic mode was Icarian, in the terms of Hans Thies-Lehmann, in that it was based solely in "transgressive energy."[39] It is perhaps for this reason that Paul Valéry theorized dance, with ballet and Lifar in mind, as an art of constantly metamorphosing forms. This relieved Lifar of the burden of tragic form as conflict by diverting attention from choreography to dance itself as a free and disengaged activity. Nevertheless, Lifar's bipolarity is troubling because it suggests an abiding tension between permanently unresolved forces. As Alice Yaeger Kaplan has remarked: "[F]ascism works by binding doubles," an activity which results in a "polarity machine."[40]

39. In this case, pity for the downfall of the hero is minimized as the tragic is not based on conflict. Recall that Lifar's signature choreography for himself was *Icare* (1935) and that his *Les Memoires d'Icare* was written to exonerate himself. The tragic dimension of Lifar, if there is one, confuses the Lifar-person, the Lifar-discourse, and the Lifar-image. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* translated by Erik Butler (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 61.

40. Alice Yaeger Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 23–25.

RUSSIAN BALLET/FRENCH BALLET

Since the eighteenth century, Russia had emulated the French model for academic ballet training by inviting French ballet masters to Russia. During the period of ballet's decline at the Paris Opera in the later nineteenth century Russian ballet flourished in St. Petersburg under the direction of French ballet master Marius Petipa. Between 1934 and 1936 both Levinson and Lifar claimed that if French dance had declined in France, it had survived nonetheless intact in Russia. Thus was consecrated the narrative of the survival of French ballet in Russia. This is a questionable claim on the face of it, since the Russians had their own national ambitions concerning ballet. The narrative of the return of French dance to its point of origin in France implies that ballet in Russia, like Sleeping Beauty, had remained in suspended animation for an entire century. But as Harsha Ram points out, although it was in some ways inspired by Boileau for its poetic expression, "the sublimity of the Russian state lay in its imperial rather than its purely national character."[41] That is to say, Russia translated and transformed French ballet into Russian ballet.

The fact that Russian dance fashioned its own brand of non-Russian identities was commented upon by Russian critic Valérien Svetlov in a book published in French, *Le ballet contemporain* (1912).

> In all the arts, Russia has long lived off of foreign styles. Our palaces, our painting, our poetry, everything was done under external influences. . . . But Russia also transformed all of that to its own uses, infused into foreign styles its own traits and its own character, sometimes even placed there something of its own making, something completely original, essential, and purely Russian.[42]

For Svetlov, Russian ballet worked through the French influence to refine its own understanding of ballet into something more properly Russian. In the wake of Petipa, Svetlov claimed, the Ballets Russes discovered ballet's own properly Russian identity. Svetlov processed the French reception of the Ballets Russes

41. Harsha Ram, *The Imperial Sublime: A Russian Poetics of Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 22. It should also be noted that the Russians concerned with ballet in France were for most part refugees of the Russian revolution.

42. "Dans tous les arts, la Russie a longtemps vécu sur les styles étrangers. Nos palais, nos tableaux, nos poésies, tout se faisait sous des influences du dehors; . . . Mais tout cela, la Russie l'a transformé à son usage, introduisant dans les styles étrangers ses traits de caractère propres, parfois même quelque chose de *sien*, de tout-à-fait original, d'essentiel et purement russe." Valérien Svetlov, *Le ballet contemporain*, translated by M.-D. Calvocoressi (St-Petersburg: Société R. Golicke et A Willborg, 1912), 45. I thank Hanna Järvinen for calling this book to my attention.

for the French reader by explaining that in ballet the French public sought not an image of themselves but instead the new experience of Russianness.[43] In the French reception of Russian dance in Paris there was indeed never any doubt as to the Slavic character of the dancers.[44]

Yet the Ballets Russes and Russian ballet more generally acknowledged the French influence by paying homage to and also mimicking French dance history in certain productions, notably in *Sleeping Beauty*, but also the first work the Ballets Russes presented in Paris: *Le pavillon d'Armide*. These were the flip sides of the well-known orientalism and exoticism that led to the popularity of the Russian ballet in France. The Russian translation of French culture on the ballet stage may have been responsible for the idea that the revitalization of an indigenous French ballet could hinge on a negotiation between endogamous and exogamous traditions. "Russia's manifest destiny," as Andrew Wachtel has shown, "was built not on any inherent quality of Russian culture itself but rather on its ability to absorb and perfect what it had taken from outside."[45] By 1922 the Russian dance critic André Levinson wrote: "Theatrical dancing is still and especially a French art. The Russians have proven this to us."[46] He seemed to imply that the French public was prepared to take the translation for the original. French and émigré Russian dancers did receive Russian ballet training in the private Parisian studios of Lubov Egorova, Olga Preobrejenska, Mathilde Kschessinskaya, and Véra Trefilova. Moreover, the terms of the debate over

43. Janet Kennedy describes Diaghilev's cultural nationalism and Benois's desire to have Russia appear part of Europe. Yet it seems that French audiences were more drawn to indigenous portrayals of Russia. Jane Kennedy, "Pride and Prejudice: Serge Diaghilev, the Ballets Russes, and the French Public," in *Art, Culture, and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Europe*, edited by Michelle Facos and Sharon L. Hirsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 90–118.

44. See, for example, Jean Cocteau's readings of Nijinska, whom he always characterized as a Slavic woman. Järvinen points out that the "nationalist implication" of French ballet extended both to the grand siècle and to nineteenth-century romanticism. "The Russians were seen to acknowledge this history in works like *Pavillon d'Armide* and *Les Sylphides* in 1909 and *Giselle* in 1910, all of which could be read as emulations of the greatness of French ballet." Hanna Järvinen, *Dancing Genius: The Stardom of Vaslav Nijinsky* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 39. Ramsay Burt's discussion of the reception of Nijinsky in France as a non-European male is also part of this awareness of the limitations of a reciprocity between Russian and French dance at this time. See Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1995).

45. Andrew Wachtel, "Translation, Imperialism, and National Self-Definition in Russia," in *Alternative Modernities*, edited by Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 64.

46. "La danse théâtrale est encore et surtout un art français. Ce sont les Russes qui sont venus un jour le prouver." André Levinson, "Comme Quoi la Danse est un Art," in *La danse au théâtre: Esthétique et actualités mêlées* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1924), 11.

neoclassicism that swirled about Lifar in the 1930s were articulated primarily in the newspaper columns of Russian expatriate dance critics with recent Diaghilev productions as reference points.

LIFAR IN THE OCCUPATION

This book is not only about the Russian but also the German presence in French culture. The German Occupation of France beginning in 1940 put an end to the lively debate over neoclassicism in the field of interwar dance even as folkloric dance was appropriated to the Vichy project of national renewal. The influential presence of Lifar, however, only expanded under the Nazis. It was under the Occupation that the political implications of Lifar's reign over ballet established in the course of the 1930s became apparent.

By collaborating with the Nazi authorities under the Occupation of Paris, Lifar brought the Paris Opera into its golden age, which one historian commented was actually the golden age of Lifar himself.[47] After the Liberation Lifar was accused of collaboration with the Germans. Lifar was lightly sanctioned by a brief ban on his performing on national stages but was then rehabilitated and resumed work at the Paris Opera until 1958. Chapter 5 presents the evidence of Lifar's collaborationism.[48] Although the crisis of the Occupation was an event of colossal proportions that far exceeded the situation of dance itself, discussion of Lifar's collaboration has long been taboo in the French dance world.

What could be characterized as the dance world's position on Lifar since the end of World War II has represented, both in and outside France, an eccentric and decidedly minority perspective when compared to serious historical work on the other arts during the Occupation.[49] There are a number of artists whose names historians cite as artistically active during the Occupation, and who were "Tout-Paris" collaborators: Harry Baur, Arletty, Sacha Guitry, Jean Giraudoux, and Henri Montherlant, to name but a

47. See Sandrine Grandgambe, "La Réunion des Théâtres Lyriques Nationaux," in *La vie musicale sous Vichy*, edited by Myriam Chimènes (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2001), 119.

48. I do not expect the reader to accept my conclusions at face value; for anyone concerned about this part of my argument I recommend turning immediately to Chapter 5.

49. This is true both of works that study cultural life in general and of those that study particular art fields, such as theater, art history, and music. See Serge Added, *Le théâtre dans les années Vichy, 1940–1944* (Paris: Ramsay, 1992); Laurence Bertrand Dorleac, *Art of the Defeat: France 1940–1944* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008); Myriam Chimènes, editor, *La vie musicale sous Vichy* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 2001); Frederic Spotts, *The Shameful Peace: How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).