OXFORD STUDIES IN DANCE THEORY

BODY, IMAGE, AND SPACE IN THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDES

POETICS OF DANCE

GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER

Poetics of Dance

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Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes
Gabriele Brandstetter

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GABRIELE BRANDSTETTER

TRANSLATION FROM THE GERMAN
BY ELENA POLZER WITH MARK FRANKO

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Oxford University Press is a department of the University of
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Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
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Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
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Published in the United States of America by
Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

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Originally published in German as *Tanz-Lektüren: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde* by
Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1995.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Brandstetter, Gabriele.
[Tanz-Lektüren. English] Poetics of dance: body, image, and space in the historical
avant-gardes / Gabriele Brandstetter; translation from the German by Elena Polzer.
pages cm.—(Oxford studies in dance theory)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978–0–19–991655–9 (cloth: alk. paper)—ISBN 978–0–19–991657–3 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Modern dance—Philosophy. 2. Body schema. I. Polzer, Elena, translator. II. Title.
GV1783.B7313 2015
792.801—dc23
2014023180

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

How curious these humans are,
Explaining here what cannot be explained,
And reading there what never had been writ.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Death and the Fool*

Unreadable this
world. All doubles.

Paul Celan, *Snow Part*

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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

This translation of *Tanz-Lektüren: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde* (*Poetics of Dance*) at last makes available to an Anglo-American audience Gabriele Brandstetter's groundbreaking work of dance scholarship that first appeared in German in 1995 but has remained little known outside the German-speaking world.[1] Although Brandstetter has published numerous articles in English since this time, *Tanz-Lektüren*—her *Habilitationsschrift*—represents the first opportunity for the English-speaking world to engage fully with the breadth and scope of Brandstetter's research, theory, historiography, and interpretation of dance and cultural history. As such, it is nothing short of a major event for the field of dance studies.

Gabriele Brandstetter recounts that Ruth St. Denis and Hugo von Hofmannsthal met in 1906 in Berlin. This was one of the many encounters between dance and literature crossing national boundaries and contributing to new visions of dance, literature, and visual culture at the turn of the century. The intersection of these arts brought about a radical reconceptualization of what Brandstetter calls the *body-image* thanks to which movement, text, and image could no longer be interpreted as existing in isolation one from the other. This collapse of boundaries was due in large part to a crisis of the subject that had scientific, psychoanalytic, linguistic, and colonialist dimensions. In *Poetics of Dance* we discover a masterful account of early European dance modernism and the avant-gardes at the turn of the century as catalyzed by the crises in subjectivity and language.

Many of Brandstetter's texts of reference are little known to Anglo-American audiences, and this is one aspect of this book that makes it a fresh discovery of

1. Gabriele Brandstetter, *Tanz-Lektüren. Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der AvantGarde* (Franfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1995). The book has just been reissued in German (Freiburg, Berlin, Vienna: Rombach Verlag, 2013).

this period in dance history and criticism, a period that reaches symbolic closure in 1929, the year of Serge Diaghilev's death, but also the year of the death of Aby Warburg, the art historian whose theory Brandstetter not only uses to such great effect in the conception of her analysis, but whose work—itself highly interdisciplinary—she was one of the first German intellectuals to rediscover and explore for its methodological potential.[2] It is not unreasonable to say that Brandstetter uncovers the very basis of interdisciplinarity as critical praxis in the hermeneutics of modern aesthetic practices around the turn of the century.

In this, Brandstetter's use of Warburg's iconographic concepts—pathos formula (*Pathosformel*) and topos formula (*Toposformel*)—is inspired, and constitutes a *methodological proposal*[3] in itself as a protocol for reading wherein dance, literature, and visual culture interact in productive and revealing ways.[4] Notably, here, with respect to her methodology and terminology, the term *body-image (Körperbild)* is key in that it refers neither entirely to the body nor to the image per se, but to a concept of the visual and kinesthetic that marks modernity in all its brilliance and complexity.[5] This is the field that Brandstetter opens up to us as she investigates overarching cultural patterns or paradigms that re-emerged in avant-garde dance, but also in the visual arts, in theater, and in literature around 1900. Body-images are frequently derived from classical antiquity and herein lies their particular power of memory as social energy in the detours—essentially "rereadings"—of their new framings and activations. Their re-performance is itself dependent on movement through which memory both returns and transforms itself. Yet they are equally markers of exoticism and representations of cultural otherness.

The *Lektüre* of the original title—readings—has thus more than one meaning. It connotes the ways in which dance was read or deciphered by literary authors and philosophers, but also the ways in which dance itself "read"—remobilized as danced movement—specific, preexisting "formulas" of bodily expression that

2. Ernst Gombrich's *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* was available in German in the early nineties, but there was not yet a critical edition of Warburg's at that time. Georges Didi-Huberman has acknowledged Brandstetter's influence in his book on Warburg, *L'image survivante*: *Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes, selon Aby Warburg* (Paris, Editions de Minuit, 2002).

3. Here I would evoke Fredric Jameson when he asserts that a methodological proposal is more than "a set of theses." *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London & New York: Verso, 2007), 94.

4. We translate *Pathosformel* throughout as pathos formula although we recognize this important term was translated as emotive formula in Kurt Forster's edition of Warburg's *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance (Texts & Documents)* (Los Angeles: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999).

5. In this translation we occasionally also use the term *body imagery* for fluency.

are found chiefly in the visual arts: the reading is visual, kinesthetic, and textual all at once. Many of the literary texts so effectively put to use here are themselves of an ekphrastic nature, such as Rainer Maria Rilke's treatment of Rodin's rendering of the torso, which opens up to discussion at long last the significance of Rodin to dance modernism. Hence, literature triangulates this research into the creative impulse behind the historical avant-garde of dance. Although some of the critical and artistic reference points in *Poetics of Dance* may be unfamiliar to English-speaking readers, the expansion of the scope of the corpus now available to scholarship will be of enormous consequence to the field.

Given the growth of dance studies in Germany today we can appreciate the impact *Tanz-Lektüren* had at the time of its first appearance on dance as an academic field in the German university: it basically pioneered that field and the interdisciplinary discussion that has since become a touchstone of excellence in the German academy.[6] In the 1980s and early 1990s the dance studies field had just begun to take shape in the Anglo-American world but was virtually nonexistent in Germany. Prior to *Tanz-Lektüren* there were primarily monographs on individual artists or technical discussions of dance without extended cultural context. Brandstetter's argument for the rhetorical structure and cultural significance of dance changed that. But, even more significantly, it pointed the way to German cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaft*) in that her reading was crafted around an impressively rich intertextual and intermedial network of reflections linking together literature, visual culture, philosophy, theater, fashion, and cultural theory.

The interdisciplinary methodology of *Poetics of Dance*—Brandstetter's ability to perceive the complex and transformative web connecting image, text, and movement—demonstrates a rich interdisciplinary perspective on dance.[7] *Poetics of Dance* thus represents not only a signal contribution to dance studies, performance studies, cultural studies, visual culture, and literary studies, but an effective expansion of the parameters and practices of each field in that it maps the means by which these fields interact with one another.

Mark Franko
Series Editor

6. See the discussion by Susan Manning and Lucia Ruprecht on the transition from *Germanistik* to *Kulturwissenshaft* in "New Dance Studies/New German Cultural Studies" in *New German Dance Studies*, edited by Susan Manning and Lucia Ruprecht (Urbana, Chicago & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2–4.

7. See the special issue, "Dance the Disciplines and Interdisciplinarity" of *Dance Research Journal* 41/1 (2009). Despite the trajectory of dance studies in the American university, interdisciplinarity as such has less respectability in the American university than in its German counterpart. See Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010).

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

Habent sua fata libelli

I completed *Tanz-Lektüren / Poetics of Dance* twenty years ago. It was my post-doctoral thesis, submitted to and accepted by the University of Bayreuth with the title "Lecture corporelle: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde" (Lecture corporelle: Avant-Garde Images of the Body and Figurations of Space"). Much time has passed since then—time during which dance studies has produced extensive and highly differentiated research into many of the topics and issues examined in this book. It has not been possible to incorporate in this translation all these subsequent findings. The result would have been an entirely different book in more ways than one. The inexorable progression of dance history and dance discourse, as well as shifts in viewpoints and knowledge, brings with it new perspectives, and in so doing produces an altogether different text. Books such as this one have their own history. The publication of this book in English introduces it to a new international realm of interpretation and a wider community of readers. Twenty years after its first publication, it thus offers a renewed chance to revisit European dance modernity. I hope that the insights offered here into new facets of dance history and my accompanying analysis of the aesthetic discourse at the time will provide discursive impulses for dance studies as a whole.

The translation thus also and above all serves to demarcate and recall a specific period in academic history. In the mid-1980s, when I was researching and beginning to write this book, academic dance studies were still at an early stage in the German-speaking world. Much has changed since then. Dance studies has successfully established itself at German universities and caught up with international research. When I published *Tanz-Lektüren* in the early 1990s one of my main goals was to provide a historical and systemic outline of the

field and reveal specific approaches and possible contributions of dance studies to the interdisciplinary orchestra of cultural studies and art history. This book focuses on the period from 1900 until the early 1930s, when movement, rhythm, body, and space played a significant role in the aesthetics of European modernity. This was a historical phase in which dance in its various manifestations, transformations, shapes, and forms became recognized as the figuration of the very imaginary of cultural modernity.

The title *Tanz-Lektüren*—here translated as *Poetics of Dance*—gives an indication of my methodological and theoretical approach to the archival materials, texts, images, and documents used here. The concept of reading implies that dance in its cultural and performative form can be understood as a discursive formation. In her seminal study *Reading Dancing* (1986), Susan L. Foster demonstrates how transdisciplinary theories, ranging from historical studies to poststructuralism, can be applied to critical dance studies. The term *Tanz-Lektüren* used throughout this book follows a similar concept in some ways. However, the historical focus and the rhetorical and visual theoretical approach emphasize other aspects. *Lektüre*—that is, reading, interpretation, hermeneutics—is here defined as a conjunction of reading and writing, as an intertwined process. I here use the idea of a *lecture corporelle* analogously to the description of dance as *écriture corporelle*, which Stéphane Mallarmé developed in his poetics. This reading has a dual meaning: it describes the various ways in which authors, artists, philosophers, and academics read dance as part of a discourse on modernity. But it also describes reading as a physical process, in which dance and dancer become intertwined in their conscious and unconscious readings and rereadings of body and movement models, which preexist in and can be retrieved from visual memory, that is, the historical and imaginary storehouse of history. The book therefore has an interdisciplinary approach. It attempts to uncover and contextualize concepts of dance based on an analysis of general structures and recurring, transforming patterns found in the historical fabric of the art and culture of European modernity. Forms and models of dance are thereby regarded in terms of their figural and tropological constitution. Even twenty years after its original publication, this aspect—that is, the act of regarding dance movement as a process of re-membering and therefore as an art form that draws its energy in mnemonic form from cultural archives and discourses—constitutes a theoretical dimension of the book that is still open for further academic development.

The same applies in particular for my line of argumentation concerning the iconographic and mnemonic theories of art historian Aby W. Warburg. When I originally began writing *Tanz-Lektüren*, Warburg's work had been afforded little attention. Academic involvement with his work only increased and reached international circles in connection with the publication of Warburg's writings on art history and cultural studies from the mid-1990s on. Warburg's texts

provide a fruitful, theoretical approach for the analysis of visual and historical-mnemonic cultural references in modern dance, which incidentally developed during Warburg's lifetime. Warburg's concept of the pathos formula and the mobile accessories (*bewegtes Beiwerk*) contains a poignant theory of the affective dynamics of movement expression. And his *Mnemosyne* project of a visual atlas traces the historical repercussions and force fields of *mnemic kinesis*. By this he meant that memory itself moves or is made up of movement. Thanks to Warburg, a guiding concept of his iconography, translated into the field of dance movement, corporeal history, and its gendered aspects—in association with questions of rhetoric and discourse analysis—structured the theoretical framework and the methodological approach of this book.

The English edition of the *Tanz-Lektüren*, the *Poetics of Dance*, would not have been possible without support from various sides. The ongoing interest in the book expressed by colleagues and students during conversations about international and interdisciplinary research provided the impetus and the motivation for initiating a translation of this book into English. I wish to thank all who had a part in this endeavor from the bottom of my heart. It is Mark Franko who deserves my greatest thanks. His initiative and his willingness to include *Poetics of Dance* in the series Oxford Studies in Dance Theory at Oxford University Press now give me the chance to make this book available for English-speaking readers. I enjoyed our professional discussions on the theoretical and methodological aspects of the book, as well his lucid and eloquent sensitivity for language as an editor. I have been grateful for his commitment in the whole process of translation, especially his translations from the French as well as transferring the original style of thinking and writing found in the *Tanz-Lektüren* into readable English academic prose. I am happy that Norman Hirschy has agreed to publish the book at Oxford University Press. And I wish to thank Elena Polzer and her office *ehrliche arbeit* for the heavy work of translation. Her professionalism, commitment, attention to linguistic detail, and know-how in the often difficult process of finding English translations for cited texts have given *Poetics of Dance* its *façon* in English. This has been an intense process, in which Mariama Diagne and Ann-Kathrin Reimers also played an important role. I would like to thank both of them for their editorial perusal, for the tracking down of remote text citations and bibliographic details (in English), for the numerous exciting critical comments, and for their great help in photo editing and copyright research. Since books are always also accompanied by visions and expectations, I sincerely hope that readers in the English-speaking dance world will profit from this book and that the ensuing dialogue may enrich the exciting history of dance studies.

Gabriele Brandstetter
Berlin, Summer 2013

Poetics of Dance

Introduction

In 1907 *Bühne und Welt* (*Stage and World*) published "The Geisha,"[1] a novella by cultural anthropologist and author Lafcadio Hearn. Embedded in a framing discussion of Japanese art and culture we find the tale of an encounter between a *shirabyoshi*—a geisha of Japan's Golden Age—and a painter. "The Geisha" is a "legend" in two senses of the term: it is a mythical story, but its reading contains a key to deciphering the relationship between dance, image, and text, a relationship also played out in the novella at various levels.

During a journey on foot through the countryside the painter wanders into a desolate clime. Coming upon a remote cottage that promises shelter for the night, he discovers a beautiful young woman who lives there in solitude. She offers him food and her humble bed. In the middle of the night, he is "awakened by a singular sound." He peers behind the screen and "what he saw astonished him extremely":

> Before her illuminated *butsudan* [house altar] the young woman, magnificently attired, was dancing all alone. Her costume he recognized as that of a shirabyoshi, though much richer than any he had ever seen worn by a professional dancer. Marvelously enhanced by it, her beauty, in that lonely time and place, appeared almost supernatural; but what seemed to him even more wonderful was her dancing. . . . the spectacle fascinated him. He felt, with not less pleasure than amazement that he was looking upon the most accomplished dancer he had ever seen. (490 et seq.)

1. Hearn 1907 (the following page numbers in the text refer to the German magazine edition 1906/1907). *Translator's note*: the German title of the novella "The Geisha" carries far more connotations than the original English title, "Of a Dancing Girl," published in 1894 in "Glimpses of an Unfamiliar Japan"; original text in public domain and fully available online.

The dancer discovers the observer and tells him her story: she was a celebrated *shirabyoshi*, who fled one day with her lover to this lonely region so that they could exist only for each other. Soon, however, her companion died and she continued to dance the dances that had once given her lover so much pleasure. She did so every night as a ceremony of remembrance in front of the house altar.

The story then jumps forty years ahead, when the painter has become famous. One day a nondescript old woman visits him and requests he paint her portrait. Opening her ragged bundle of belongings, “the wreck of a wonderful costume of other days, the attire of a shirabyoshi” is revealed; old images rise up in the painter’s memory:

> In that soft shock of recollection, he saw again the lonely mountain dwelling in which he had received unremunerated hospitality—the tiny room . . . the faintly burning lamp before the Buddhist shrine, the strange beauty of one dancing there alone in the dead of the night. (493)

Suddenly, time ceased to exist. The dancer’s body and her movements came to life again in the painter’s mind.

He grants the geisha’s wish to recreate her dance from memory. This painting would henceforth replace her daily dance-ceremony for her deceased lover, as she is now no longer able to dance it herself. The painter produces a masterpiece:

> Upon soft white silk the artist painted a picture of her. Yet not a picture of her as she seemed to the Master’s pupils, but the memory of her as she had been in the days of her youth, bright-eyed as a bird, lithe as a bamboo, dazzling as a tennin in her raiment of silk and gold. (494)

Seeking her out the following day in her hut, he finds her dead, her face transfigured by a “vague sweetness,” his painting of her dancing on the wall before the shrine.

Lafcadio Hearn’s story sets forth in exemplary fashion the most important features of a whole constellation of ideas in which dance and literature intersect throughout the early twentieth century: it suggests a fundamental crisis of perception. The crisis of perception has to do with a nature-culture divide, with the duality of dance on the one hand as a transitory art of the body, which is subject to mortality, and on the other as a culturally stable set of techniques for symbolic representation exercised by visual images and in literary discourse. We come here upon the theme of *memoria* as an art of remembrance with its power of metamorphosis as contained in the memory of an

image of the body: its production and its disappearance. Hearn's "The Geisha" moreover addresses the role of the plastic arts as a medium of iconographic modeling that is operative [*wirksam*] in mediating encounters between dance and literature. We also find in this story the connection between myth with the ceremonial act of memory, the linking of individuality with ritual, and the meeting of spatial figures [*Raumfiguren*] of a topographical nature and body-images [*Körperbilder*] in motion. Finally, we note a tension between the fleeting quality of unrepeatable dance moments and the transcendence of the model of presentness in dance performance by situations that transgress this immediacy. There is, in other terms, a moment of aporia between the "now" of movement and the historicity of representation. It occurs in the story with the overstepping of the boundaries between death on the one hand and the symbolic suspension of movements in both the visual and the narrated image on the other.

In its contextualization, Lafcadio Hearn's short dance story moreover points out characteristic traits of the manner in which the relationship of dance and literature was embedded in culture and the history of thought around the turn of the century: the story of the "shirabyoshi" appears as part of the longer text "On a Dancing Girl," which is itself part of a collection of prose entitled *Izumo: Glimpses of an Unfamiliar Japan*. The narrative framework of "On a Dancing Girl" combines elements of cross-cultural comparative studies with an aesthetic treatise. It thus addresses issues that play a major role in the self-reflection of European modernity and its experience with foreignness and alienation during the crisis of perception around 1900. On the one hand, these issues touch on the topic of innovative aesthetics for that time: the development of antinaturalistic, "abstract" patterns of representation. From an example of Japanese painting, Hearn addresses an issue of perception that is of great urgency in the age of the mechanical reproduction of art: the work of Japanese painters is "impersonal" and devoid of individuality; he idealizes and stylizes the detail, "makes of his experience a memory" (459).

On the other hand, these same issues form a cluster around the fin de siècle theme of the encounter with foreign cultures. Here Hearn's text becomes part of the discourse on the dissolution of existing habits of perception regarding both one's own culture and that of others, as also explored by Hugo von Hofmannsthal (in a response to Hearn's writings) in his *Briefe des Zurückgekehrten* (*Letters of a Returnee*) and its critique of the "European mind," which was also published in 1907. In "On a Dancing Girl," the famous authority on Japan informs the European reader of the social patterns, the symbolism, the ceremonies, and the dance forms associated with the role of the geisha.

In doing so, Hearn's text paradigmatically exposes cultural conventions prevalent around 1900, in which the configurations of literature and dance, via body imagery and figurations in space, have become the focus of aesthetic discussion. The blurring of the boundaries between cultural commentary and fictional text, between aesthetic manifesto and literary work, as evident in Hearn's narrative interweaving of framing reflection and retold dance legends, is also symptomatic of the self-commentary and the self-reflection found in modern art.

However, Hearn's text about the dance of the "geisha" has above all an effect on the cultural landscape of the year 1907, in which a strong influence emanates from the mechanisms and constructs produced by the multiple forms in which dance and literature read and reread body imagery.

Hofmannsthal is an ardent reader of Hearn's writings. He writes a review of his book *Kokoro* and Hearn's obituary (on the occasion of his death in 1904) and repeatedly experiments with images of Japanese culture[2] in his preliminary sketches for *Letters of a Returnee*. Finally, he culls the concept of "preexistence" from a story by Hearn about Buddhist concepts of preexistence and the transmigration of souls[3] and later stylizes it to become the central formula underlying his own aesthetic identity. In the same year as the publication of Hearn's "Geisha" in German, a friendship was struck up between Hofmannsthal and the dancer Ruth St. Denis. St. Denis is an important representative of the new free dance (*freier Tanz*) movement and brought her specific stylization of exotic body imagery from the United States to Europe in 1906.[4]

Hofmannsthal is fascinated by the intense presence of St. Denis, the sensual performance of her "hieratic" style, which is free from all "European conventions." He composed the essay "The Incomparable Dancer," in which he expounded his interpretation of St. Denis's Indian dances.[5] The personal encounter with St. Denis, instigated by Harry Graf Kessler, was transmuted into an extensive written and spoken "Conversation with the Dancer"—the model for a new creative-aesthetic ideal in Hofmannsthal's work from 1907 onward

2. There are multiple references in Hofmannsthal's notes from the years before writing the *Letters of a Returnee* (1905/7) to his intention of drawing up a "Story of the Japanese Officer," linked to the idea of holism lost, which Hofmannsthal finally adopted as a kind of guiding principle in his fictive *Letters*: "The whole man must move at once." Hofmannsthal CW 1979, A III, 435; see also on this subject Coghlan 1985.

3. Hofmannsthal adopted the term and its corresponding distrust of Western concepts of individuality from the essay "The Idea of Preexistence" contained in the compendium *Kokoro* by Lafcadio Hearn.

4. On Ruth St. Denis and H. v. Hofmannsthal, see Brandstetter 1991b.

5. Hofmannsthal, CW 1978, A I, 496–501; see also Brandstetter 1991b.

and the source of multiple preliminary drafts for dance and theater pieces, as well as works of literature.

On the one hand, the images from the archives of cultural history thus become the substrate of readings of and dialogue on images of the body: the poet and the dancer in the museum.[6] And on the other hand, texts of various origins from the history of literature and culture became subtexts, the framework and scenarios for such a *lecture corporelle*.

In the conversations between Hofmannsthal and Ruth St. Denis, Lafcadio Hearn's story "On a Dancing Girl" also takes on the role of a "script" for the presentation of exotic body imagery through dance: in 1908 Ruth St. Denis presented a new solo in her London program entitled *A Shirabyoshi*[7]—most likely a result of her conversations with Hofmannsthal and inspired by Hearn's story. Her dance concentrates on the heart of the story, the ceremonial dance of the geisha in front of the shrine erected for her deceased lover. Alongside her solos "Radha," "The Cobra," and "The Nautch," which she developed along the lines of "Indian" dance styles, St. Denis here employed dance imagery that is defined as Japanese: a transformation and combination of body imagery and gestures and of free dance movement techniques. The contribution to modern dance aesthetics made by this and similar translations of specific readings of body imagery is revealed most potently in the reception of and interaction with those Far Eastern theatrical patterns of presentation, which exerted a strong influence on European intellectuals' perception of the foreign "other" beginning with the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris, for example, Sada Yakko's and Hanako's performances of Japanese dances and drama.[8]

The individual moments in which the visual patterns of such multireflected sequences of interpretation underwent transformation back and forth between dance, literature, drama, and the visual arts cannot always be traced. The focus of the following study thus lies not in verifying direct influences or confirming acts of reception; instead it seeks to reveal and analyze characteristic patterns of reading art, which—with regard to body imagery and figurations of

6. See corresponding explanations in Part I of this study.

7. Shelton 1981, 85; the critics in London praised St. Denis's solo *A Shirabyoshi* as "one of the most interesting among the many impressive and beautiful things, which this remarkable artist has to show" (cited in Shelton, 85). St. Denis had already gained first experiences with *Japonisme* on stage during the first phase of her career in the United States in performances of *Madame Butterfly* (the model for Puccini's opera of the same name) by David Belasco's troupe. *A Shirabyoshi* was her first dance creation incorporating Japanese aesthetics; it was later followed by *O Mika* (1912) and *White Jade* (1926).

8. On the performances of Sada Yakko and Hanako, with regard to the dance historical connections to Ruth St. Denis and Loïe Fuller, see Brandstetter and Ochaim 1989.

space—carry potential in the semiotic field of the disintegrating and newly reorganizing structures of the arts system.

I

The following study focuses on an exemplary analysis of those symptoms of the transformation process that found their expression in a fundamental upheaval of the semiotic systems of literature (in the so-called crisis of language), theater (in its aspirations toward a "retheatricalization of theater"), and dance (the extrication of "free dance" from the aesthetics of classical ballet) at the beginning of the twentieth century.

This far-reaching cultural crisis around 1900, which has alternately been described as a crisis of language, of knowledge, and of meaning, also appears—in light of developments in the natural sciences and the problems of legitimation faced by modern aesthetics—as a *crisis of representation*,[9] namely as an expression of a complex cognitive problem, which called into question the self-evident communicability of sensual experiences and their experience of sense or meaning through symbolic representation.

An essential aspect of these symptoms of crisis and disorder at the turn of the century is a constant discussion of "crisis" both in everyday discourse and in forms of artistic reflection.[10] Modernity creates for itself the *myth* of breaking with tradition: in Adorno's words, "[The experience of the modern] . . . does not negate previous artistic practices, as styles have done throughout the ages, but rather tradition itself."[11] And in the avant-garde's unceasing discussion of the term *art*, the crisis discourse, as cultivated by Nietzsche and Viennese modernism and elaborated by them into a complex rhetorical system, takes on a central role in the self-reflexive production of high art.

In the fields of literature and theatrical forms, this core criterion of modernity has been well described and much commented on.[12] However, "free dance"[13]

9. On the concept of perception see the corresponding section of Part I of this study, "The Break with Tradition and the Collapse of Memory."

10. A text that is exemplary for these symptoms of crisis and their role in the self-contextualization of art is Hugo von Hofmannsthal's famous text *Ein Brief* (1902), better known as the *Lord Chandos Letter*.

11. Adorno 1997, 21.

12. See Adorno 1997; Bürger 1974; taking Niklas Luhmann's systems theory as his point of reference, Georg Jäger attempts to define the avant-garde (Jäger 1991).

13. On the terminological delineation of "free dance" and "expressionist dance" see my notes at the end of this chapter.

has also and in particular been fundamentally dominated by a side branch of this crisis discourse, namely the unceasing reflection of its break with tradition and the aesthetic negation of the system of classical ballet. The reflection of the medium of dance itself, the development of both discourse and dance pieces that explore the construction and transformation of body imagery, patterns of movement, and concepts of meaning in free dance within the cultural landscape of upheaval around 1900, becomes a central criterion, evidence of modernity in a new understanding of dance at the beginning of the twentieth century. So far, there is no written theory of the avant-garde in dance; the following study seeks to provide some of the building blocks for such an endeavor and to do so on the basis of the reading of body imagery and figurations in space, as they have emerged in the interaction of literature and dance.

The line of inquiry followed by this study is thus based on the description and discussion of this crisis of perception: how can we gain a better understanding, on the basis of select examples, of the cross-references contained in literature and dance—while taking into consideration the theatrical reform movements of the moment—with regard to the representation of body imagery and figurations in space? Which new aesthetic (poetic and choreographic) solutions resulted from the self-referentiality and fluctuation of the symbolic systems of text and dance (movement) in crisis?

One of the goals of this historical, systematic, cultural, and semiotic analysis is to significantly contribute to a new academic understanding of the aesthetics of modernity and the avant-garde from a perspective hitherto not yet established in existing research on the history of literature and theater—namely a comparative study of the overlaps between dance, text, and the image.

The relationships between literature and dance and dance and literature only fully reveal themselves in their complex mediated quality against the backdrop of the culture-critical upheaval, the "threshold to the new era"[14] at the advent of the twentieth century. Theater, itself also in a fundamental phase of reformation, naturally appears—in the intermedial web of text, moving bodies, figurations of space, and concepts of staging—to take on the role of a mediator between developments in the avant-garde of literature and those of dance. The theatrical reform experiments of the avant-garde[15] will be taken into account in what follows only where, in exemplary cases, the innovations of modern dance and theater directly refer to one another. The reason is that, on the one hand, important impulses for the process described by the phrase "retheatricalization of the theater" came from the field of dance (in its emphasis on physical

14. See Gumbrecht and Link-Heer 1985; Herzog and Koselleck 1987.

15. See Brauneck 1984; Fiebach 1991; Fischer-Lichte 1983.

movement, gestural, rhythmicized movement, scenic choreography, and a choreography of the masses). On the other hand, because the paradigmatic shift in modern dance lies not only in the development of a new model of the body and movement, but also in the development of corresponding concepts for the stage, which in many ways—for example, in the theatrical handling of space and temporality, in its stylization of the body (via costumes, set, and lights), in the abstraction of the contents of what is being represented, in the relationship of solo and group choreographies—is closely related to the reforms taking place in theater; a relationship, all of which shall be analyzed in part in futuristic dance and its hitherto virtually unexamined ties to the theater and to the aesthetic and poetic program of futurism.

II

This study therefore proposes—via an analytical reconstruction of influential visual structures—an archaeology of the general reading processes that form the basis of a complex cross-referential web of signs and systematic violations by literature, dance, and theater.

Of central importance to *Poetics of Dance* is the concept of reading in terms of a *lecture corporelle*. This concept is itself in turn based on a definition of dance as *écriture corporelle*[16] as expressed by Mallarmé in his *Divagations*. Mallarmé emphasizes the aspect of signification, the body semiotics contained in the generation of movement signs in dance. The dancer simultaneously becomes both the vehicle of the physical act of writing and the sign itself:

> *The dancer is not a woman dancing* . . . but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form . . . suggesting . . . a kind of corporal writing . . . a poem independent of any scribal apparatus.[17]

The transcription of *écriture* into *lecture* highlights the fact that the focus has here left behind any perspective concentrating on the aesthetics of text production, for which the shifting configurations involved in the aesthetics of perception and effect have been substituted. The process of deciphering body imagery, its iconography, and their structures of organization—the possible readings of a grammar of *écriture corporelle*—is what is focused on here. The adjective *corporelle* hereby refers both to the act, that is, reading bodies as body

16. Mallarmé, “Ballets” (1945, 303–7).

17. Mallarmé 1945, 304; Mallarmé 2007, 130.

imagery and their figurations in space, and to a physical method of reading the specific cultural and artistic phenomena contained in images and text with the help of dance itself.

Existing academic theories on reading can only partially be taken into account in the research intended here, for almost all recent significant theories on reading, such as those by Hans Blumenberg, Jacques Derrida, and Paul de Man, are oriented toward writing as text (*Schrift*)[18] as an object and system of reading.

In our context however, reading should not be understood in terms of Hans Blumenberg's concept of the "readability of the world,"[19] in which the phenomena of reality—via the topos of the "world as a book"—become interpretable as text, but instead as a form of experiencing the body in motion through dance, hence as the independent act of reading a nondiscursive medium, on equal footing with the reading of text. I wish to focus here on the transfer occurring between these two forms of reading.

On the one hand, what is being read is dance itself; the writers decipher the dance, its forms of expression, body imagery, figurations in space, and the myth of new femininity contained therein. The *analytical* reading of these *literary* readings of dance is a part of the following study. On the other hand, dance itself is also a staged act of reading various "materials," images, and media. A hypothetical and analytically structured theory of reading processes best does justice to the fundamental dichotomy—dance and text, movement and writing—contained in this twofold object of investigation. For both the production and the reception of literature, as well as the creation and representation of dance movement, can be understood and described—with recourse to the tradition of pathognomy and iconographic patterns of depiction—as the deciphering of signs and symbolic systems.

From a methodological point of view, this model of analyzing specific readings of cultural signs offers the advantage—in comparison with concepts developed by research on intertextuality—of capturing not only the dialogue of the texts, but also the dialogue of nonverbal and unwritten codes—for instance, the kinetic signification processes of (dance/theater) performance and the iconographic structures of pictorial traditions.[20]

18. *Translator's note:* The German language differentiates between *Schrift* and *Schreiben*, which both translate as "writing" in English. *Schrift* stands for the material side of writing, i.e., text (typeface, font, script, etc.), whereas *Schreiben* indicates the actual physical act of writing.

19. Blumenberg 1981.

20. Here and in the following, I make use of the tools of iconographic and iconological analysis as defined by Erwin Panofsky and in his wake academic art history—whereby a precise differentiation of iconographic and iconological reflection, which Panofsky's own

The deconstructivist theory of "deciphering" developed by Jacques Derrida[21] ultimately also solely focuses on the textual and the phenomenon of *différance* in a steadily inscribing, "supplementing" process of reading and writing that makes note of differences and deferments (note the play of words in the use of the terms *différence/différance*). Terms such as *texte en général, écriture, marque*, or *trace* may no longer describe the subject matter of a distinct text; however, Derrida's theory of reading fails to take into account pathognomic phenomena, nor does he look at the reading of body imagery as text in the staging of movement. Instead, writing is so much the universalized metaphor of his theory that even reading appears as a form of unceasingly self-reproducing *écriture*:

> If reading and writing are one, as is easily thought these days, if reading *is* writing, this oneness designates neither undifferentiated (con)fusion nor identity at perfect rest; the *is* that couples writing must rip apart.[22]

The same applies to Paul de Man's concept of the *Allegories of Reading*.[23] His theory of literature—a concept in which modes of reading are mutually exclusive, hermeneutically inaccessible, and delimited by the figural language of literature—refers exclusively to written text. Even where de Man speaks about dance—for example, in his essay about Kleist's "On the Marionette Theater"[24]—he describes it as a figurative element of rhetorical practice, which cannot be transcended in the system of the ongoing *Allegories of Reading:* in any case, this concept of reading is not adaptable

definitions are equally unclear about, can here be disregarded; see Panofsky 1991, as well as Straten 1989.

21. Derrida 1976 and Derrida 1972.

22. Derrida 1981, 63–64.

23. See Paul de Man 1979. In his readings of Paul de Man, Derrida asks himself why de Man always preferred to speak of reading and not of "écriture"/text:

> Some have asked why Paul de Man always speaks of reading rather than of writing. Well, perhaps because the allegory of reading is writing—or the inverse. But perhaps also because every reading finds itself caught, engaged precisely by the promise of saying the truth, by a promise which will have taken place with the very first word, within a scene of signature which is a scene of writing. It is not enough to say, as we have so often done, that every reading is writing, it is necessary to demonstrate it: following, for example, this structure of the promise. *Allegory of Reading*—this means many things in the book which bears this title: the scene of reading represented in the abyssal structure of a text, the allegory of "unreadability," "textual allegory," etc. (Derrida 1986, 99–100)

24. See de Man 1984.

to a reading of body imagery and figurations of movement in dance as a kinetic-performative act.

In contrast to these deconstructive concepts of reading and writing, the theories on reading that have developed in the field of theater studies and more recently in dance studies are different. They are semiotic methods,[25] which largely define the analysis of theatrical staging in terms of subject matter and a theory of signs. In the field of theater studies, the semiotic model of "reading performance" studies aspects of reception and the relationship between performance and the reactions of an audience.[26] The theory behind the model highlights various aspects of semiotics and the aesthetics of reception as can be found in the relationship of dramatic text with its manifestation on stage in terms of the associated act of reading shared by author, director, performers, and audience.[27] In dance studies, Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing* has recently shown that a semiotic-structural approach to reading dance and movement theater is viable.[28] Her studies, however, largely refer to contemporary American dance, which is for a large part documented on film and video. She makes little mention of dance in relationship to other systems of signification, such as the visual arts or literature.

The difficulty of "reconstructing" theater and musical theater mise en scène due to their more or less incomplete documentation can be postulated for the historical study of the performing arts in general[29]—and is all the more prevalent in the study of dance history: the original work itself in its transitory singularity is no longer available for later analysis. While in drama—at least in the European tradition—we usually at least have the dramatic text handed down through time, which once served as the backdrop for the creation of a stage production according to the theatrical conventions of its day, dance for the most part lacks the specifications of choreographic notation. The problem faced by historical source materials in dance is the lack of methodology for making them

25. An overview can be found in Fischer-Lichte 1983.

26. Pavis 1988; Carlson 1990.

27. Wolfgang Iser's model of a theory of "empty spaces" in literary texts and Hans Robert Jauß's receptive-aesthetic theories and his concept of the "implied reader" have been adapted to a theory of reading suitable for theater studies, e.g., by Anne Ubersfeld (1978). The writings of Victor Turner on the relationship of ritual and theater (Turner 1982), as well as Iser's theories on fictionality and representation (Iser 1991) all fall within this same research context.

28. See Foster 1986; Foster draws on the semiotic theories of Charles S. Peirce, Roman Jakobson, and Roland Barthes.

29. See Steinbeck 1981; furthermore and taking into account a discussion of semiotic approaches and the history of mentalities: Bayerdörfer 1990.

accessible. The discussion of reconstruction, as it has surfaced again in recent years due to various practical attempts to reconstruct historical work in the field of dance and theater, does not fully take into account all the fundamental aspects relevant here. In the era of shifting paradigms that we will be looking at here—from classical ballet to free dance—both the concept of the dance work and methodological attempts at reconstruction seem in need of revision. For while the illusion of a consistent work was at least retained during the era of ballet in the nineteenth century, thanks to the conventions of presentation, the musical-theatrical composition of the stage—for example in Petipa's *Swan Lake*—and the rhetorical system of ballet as a whole, the basis for a virtual reconstruction of those dance events considered revolutionary around 1900 was considerably reduced with the emergence of free dance. This is due in part to a feature of free dance that is in itself noteworthy as a symptom of change and the emancipation of dance—namely the fact that the protagonists of free dance (which from its beginnings was presented as an avant-garde art initiated and maintained by women) acted simultaneously both as creators and performers rolled into one. The separation of "role" and interpreter-"actor," as prevalent not only in classical drama, but also in ballet, was abolished with the advent of work by Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and those who followed them. The habitus of the unique individual[30] in free dance, which was raised to the level of an aesthetic and ideological program—and in the case of almost all representatives of free dance was linked to a conspicuous dislike of documentation, sketches, or even notation of their dances—caused the conventional concept of the work to become almost obsolete.

Thus when we speak here of reading in regard to the questions posed in this study, our understanding of reading in no way aims at any form of reconstructing early twentieth-century works of dance. Instead *Poetics of Dance* seeks to describe the act of transmission (*Vermittlung*) contained in the construction and the deciphering of specific body imagery, which have been influential in dance, especially in the new plurality of styles that arose after its reformation. We are operating here with an indirect method of analysis, with the help of which we hope to evaluate, interpret, and organize heterogeneous source and documentary material (e.g., reviews, photo material, theoretical and aesthetic texts, program notes, autobiographical documents, and—in very rare cases—film) with regard to the line of inquiry described above.

30. The "individual" here differs from individuality in the (role) play of actors or dancers, who even in cases of strictly conventionalized form still retain a certain degree of leeway. Especially in strongly regimented theater systems—e.g., Japanese Noh—small nuances of presentation become the carriers of meaning in the dialogue between the connoisseur-viewer and the actors.

III

The terms *body-image* and *body imagery* are used in this study as set phrases to bridge the gap between dance and literature. They are based on the social-anthropological theory that our perception of the body, its "nature," and functions is flexible and socially constructed and thus reflects a specific historical context. The writings of anthropologist Mary Douglas, themselves based on the findings of Norbert Elias and Marcel Mauss, summarize this perspective on the social construction of the body as follows:

> The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces the categories of the other.[31]

The body-image in connection with this research is defined as a symbolic construct that migrates between scenic event and text. This enables access to pictorial as well as textual documents that influenced free dance iconography, without assuming the visual and the textual to be the same kind of evidence. When we introduce here an iconographically[32] oriented pattern of reading dance through the body-image and figurations in space—always doing so with the knowledge that, in the long run, all attempts to historically understand forms of dance, movement patterns, and the underlying mental images are of course interpretative constructs in themselves and thus merely attempts at making them understandable—it is done explicitly in order to avoid the (ultimately unrealizable) fiction of reconstruction. I do not attempt to discover the (no longer accessible) movement designs of the dances in my study of how body imagery and figurations in space are transmitted, but seek instead to unearth their visual paradigms—the *patterns* that form the deep underlying structure that shapes the foundation of dance at the turn of the century and which become tangible for us where they overlap with comparable phenomena in theater and in literature.

With the help of the body-image concept, we can link the question of *physical presence*, and of the presentation of the moving body as a shifting sign primarily situated in the nonverbal and nondiscursive symbolic field,

31. Douglas 2003, 93.

32. On the reading patterns of "pathos formula" and "topos formula" see the following explanations.

to the question of literary text and writing (*Schrift*): as a system of signs that seeks to evoke the presence of the corporeal in its representational deferment. Body imagery is thus also capable—as a type-oriented pattern of reading—of facilitating communication between the staged and the discursive, between dance-theater and literary text.

However, the flexible methodological concept of reading dance and literature introduced here—namely the formulas "body-image" and "figurations in space"—also takes on a more central role in light of our topic here: namely the *construction and deconstruction of the concept of the subject*[33] as itself central to discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Thus there are two directions of inquiry in my argumentation, in the analyses of examples and in the questions posed concerning the intermedial relationships of dance, theater, and literature: one focuses on the respective concepts of the subject and the other on the relationship of the subject to the space surrounding him or her, as modified by our specific object of inquiry—namely the representations of the body in question in dance movement and their respective models of utilizing space.

The two main parts of this study will therefore also link concepts of the subject with an analysis of how this body imagery and these figurations of space, which are so characteristic of the newly emergent free dance and its readings in literature, developed.

In the process described, the *concept of the subject* seems to be closely related to a specific *concept of nature*: both concepts are central to an understanding of modern culture, and they document the manifestations and modifications of the social construction of reality; both the body imagery prevalent at the turn of the century and the full range of ideas implied by the term *nature* in correlation with the construction of this very body imagery reflect this situation.

The first part of this study brings together two topics that are are symptomatic for the crisis of culture around 1900: one is the issue of the subject in light of increasing disbelief in the idea of personality as a coherent unit; the other concerns the construction of body imagery in connection with the emergence of free dance.

For the iconographic representation and analysis of body imagery—in terms of the development of free dance at the beginning of the twentieth century—I

33. The term *deconstruction* is here used in two ways: on the one hand, it refers to forms of destruction and dissolution, as the antonym of construction (especially in regard to the presentation of the subject); on the other hand, it is understood as a term in the context of theories of "deconstruction," namely insofar as this term encompasses both operations—construction and deconstruction in flux—within a single formula of manifestation.

have recourse to Aby Warburg's theory of the "pathos formula."[34] The underlying principle behind the pathos formula—as a "primal expression of human passion"—is based on a theory of art that emphasizes the dynamics of expressive potential in sculpture and painting. According to Warburg, pathos formulas are visual inscriptions of collective cultural memory, "dynamograms," which still contain the imprint of cult ritual—as the origin of symbolic representation—and are constantly transformed anew in the receptive traditions of art.

In his anthropological and psychohistorically based theory, Warburg assumes that a process of culturally coping with primitive action by creating distance between oneself and the world—by binding it to the image—has found its symbolic expression in certain passionate emphatic gestures of art that are emotionally charged with "primal instinct."

In his introductory comments to the *Mnemosyne* project, Warburg writes:

> It is this process of "undemonizing" the inherited store of impressions that fear had once created which embraces the whole gamut of expressions in the grip of emotions, from helpless brooding to murderous cannibalism. It also imparts to the dynamics of human expressive movements which lie between the extremes of orgiastic seizures—such as fighting, walking, running, dancing, grasping—the hallmark of an uncanny experience. It made the educated public of the Renaissance, brought up in the discipline of the Church, look upon this sphere as a forbidden region where only the godforsaken who indulged in unrestrained passions were permitted to run riot. It is this process which the Atlas *Mnemosyne* is intended to illustrate. It is concerned with the effort psychologically to absorb these pre-existent coinages for the rendering of life in movement.[35]

In the *Mnemosyne* atlas Warburg sought to produce a comprehensive inventory of images depicting the pathos formulas and to document their transformation over the course of the history of art and culture since antiquity. He hoped that an "atlas of emphatic gestures" as a systematically organized repertoire of gestures and movement patterns would reveal how the present is connected to the past—a history of "the mimetic human" (*mimischen Menschen*) in corporeal images. This archive of corporeal memory lists various manifestations of "primally expressing the dynamics of passion": traces of Dionysian frenzy, orgiastic ecstasy, religious awe, triumph, Olympian mirth, grief, sacrifice. Examples

34. See Gombrich 1984; see also Barta-Fliedl 1992.

35. Gombrich 1970, 291.

of these pathos formulas can be found in the dances of the Greek maenads, the gesticulations of Nike, and the Roman Victoria.

Warburg's model of the pathos formula—modified and adapted to the body imagery of modern dance—appears, as a pattern for reading subjective emotionally charged expressive acts and the iconographic topoi of the representation of affect (as a quasi-pictorial rhetoric), to be especially suited to analytically capturing the typical characteristics of "free dance" and "expressionist dance." The body imagery of dance at the beginning of the twentieth century—read as pathos formula—thus appears as symbolic figurations, within which the engrams of passionate dynamics come alive, hidden under and transformed by the self-interpretations of the modern subject.

Here the pathos formulas fulfill a dual function in their specific transformation of body imagery: they contribute both to the construction of concepts of the subject and to their dissolution.

The body imagery upon which movement models of dance are based—for example, the "Greek" pattern or the "exotic"—often appears as emphatically staged acts of liberation from cultural restraints: free dance is thus celebrated as an artistic antidote to the damage civilization has wrought. The act of reshaping the subject into a *neuer Mensch* [new person] with the help of the cultural and emancipatory effects of free dance paralleled contemporaneous theories and practices of the deconstructing, or even the destroying/destructuring, of elements previously held to be fundamental to notions of the integrity of the individual and self-definition.

However, alongside the subject-constituting functions of body imagery, we also find patterns of self-dispersal—as pathos formulas of dissolution in dance and literature: whirling dances, fire dances, ecstatic frenzies of movement address and reflect images of depersonalization and the destruction of the boundaries of self in movement, as well as render them accessible as body imagery.

In the second part of the study, I will focus not on the constitution of body imagery in dance—as in the first part of the study—but rather on its transcendence in a turn toward the spatial: I will address figurations of space that frame dance movements, the production of typical "spatial formulas." Not body imagery, but rather its metamorphosis into abstract figurations, its transcription into spatial patterns, will become legible—almost as a topology of dance.

The term *topos formula* is here derived from Warburg's concept of the pathos formula, the latter defined as a pictorial pattern of symbolically shaped expressions of movement, which can practically be retrieved as formulas from the inventory of cultural memory and transformed.

The term *topos formula* can be applied similarly: as a compound of topos and formula, whereby topos here describes the space, the site of (dance) movement in the literal sense of the word, and on the other hand, the places—"commonplaces" (Ernst Robert Curtius)[36]—as formulas that inventory perception, much as does the use of topoi in classical in rhetoric. The topos thus fulfills the function of linking figures of speech and figures of space in dance. Topos formulas condense and transform symbolic patterns of perceiving "socially identifiable empirical and theoretical knowledge" (Lothar Bornscheuer) into figurative spatial shapes.[37]

Space and the relationships between the kinetic parameters defining it are the subject and the medium of the topos formula; the concept of topos formula thus refers to formative figurations, formulas of spatial relationships in typical configurations of depicting a subject and its surrounding space. In contrast to a pathos formula, which transports the manifestations and the modern reformulations of affect engrams in the body and movement imagery of dance, topos formulas appear as specific variations of processes of abstraction in modern art.

Topos formulas prove to be well suited to patterns of abstraction, which broadly define the processes underlying twentieth-century modern art—processes that run contrary to those oriented on the body and its presentation in various forms through pathos formulas as described in the first part of this study—and yet they also enter into dialogue with each other: the relationship of corporeal movement to space.[38]

The special function of "emptiness," the tension-laden space between various elements of spatial composition, assumes central meaning in twentieth-century modern art, as well as in modern dance.[39] There is no longer one *obligatory* perspective. Instead the multidimensional, empirically intangible space detaches viewers from their orthogonal orientation; the figurations of movement, the kinetic elements, draws them into a multicentered spatial perspective as if through an underground system of tunnels.

Two examples of such topos formulas—the movement and spatial figurations of the labyrinth and the spiral—will thus be examined in the various

36. See Curtius 1967 on the term *topos* and the literary use of rhetorical topoi.

37. Bornscheuer 1976, 17. In his study on "topic," Bornscheuer attempts to differentiate "aspects of a social, productive, critical, and linguistic-symbolic imagination (habituality, potentiality, intentionality, symbolicity)" (23).

38. Here "space" is not meant in terms of its functional theatrical definition, not as the place of the stage, but in its diversely connoted, mythical, "auratic," specific aesthetic qualities.

39. See Brandstetter 1991c; on the function of weightlessness, the dispersal of the central perspective in modern visual art see Simmen 1990.

contexts of their representation in dance, theater, and literature as fundamental pivotal patterns of movement and figurations in space. The topos formula hereby appears in various forms of metamorphosis: last, but not least, as the dissolution of the subject in the spatial figuration of abstraction, in particularization, in the montage and disassembly of body imagery. With regard to the concept of the subject, this primarily involves the destruction of holistic models of the individual as a natural unit of body, mind, and soul.

Integrative models of *space* replace the holistic, integrative concept of the *subject*: organizational structures and constructive principles underlying topologies, organic and abstract figurations of space, which are produced by movement and—in closed or open gestalt—multiplied or destroyed. Constructivism and conceptualization both reference structural forms of topology as well as its production by the "instrument"—meaning both the apparatus of the dancer-body and the "machines" of the technological and media age.

The impact on the discussion of the nature of the subject is evident:

- A deindividualization of the body (shifting the focus from body imagery to its expression in dance)
- The deconstruction and de-formation of the individual: the disorganization of body and movement is expressed in the hypertrophy of body parts and individual movements (as in grotesque dance), in the cloaking and reassembly of segmented bodies and body shapes (e.g., in Oskar Schlemmer's "Bauhaus dances," in "puppet" and "machine dances")

Phenomena of alienation are thus addressed in dance via the physical and the mechanical. On the one hand, "individuality" disappears in the ornaments of spatial formula, and on the other hand, it is defined by the impersonal gestures of "constructed" bodies, especially in the avant-garde author-personality.

The "pathos formulas" communicate the appropriation and reformulation of iconographically predefined affect engrams by the subject in the movements of free dance. The emphasis lies in the *habitus of individuality* in presentation: the emphatic self-fulfillment of the subject in the dance solo, as also expressed in the rhetorical figure of the "lonely ego" in early twentieth-century literature.

By contrast, the topos formulas apply to processes of abstraction in reference systems surrounding the subject and the space created by his movement: they apply equally to abstract figuration, the stereotyping of the corporeal in spatial ornaments, and the dissolution of the subject in semiotic space: all important aspects of avant-garde aesthetics in twentieth-century dance and literature.

IV

To bring these introductory remarks to a close, I would like to elucidate certain *issues of terminology*,[40] namely those abstract concepts that are here repeatedly employed in a differentiated manner throughout this study, such as the terms *modernity* and the *avant-garde* in their various meanings in literature, theater, and dance; and the expressions "free dance" and "expressionist dance," which we must differentiate in order to better understand our subject of inquiry.

First, some remarks on the use of "free dance" and "expressionist dance," which seem useful to me at this point. The term *expressionist dance* is often used to describe, without any form of differentiation, all manifestations of dance after 1900 that cannot be subsumed under the system of classical dance. Even in dance studies itself, we have as yet no consistent terminology for the new forms of dance that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. The distinction that I wish to suggest here for the use of the terms *free dance* and *expressionist dance*, however, largely corresponds to their use in more recent dance studies publications.[41]

I use the term *free dance* in a different historical and aesthetic context than the term "expressionist dance." Free dance in central Europe emerged *before* expressionist dance. It begins with the reform initiatives of Loïe Fuller (1892) and Isadora Duncan (ca. 1900) and continues until far into the 1920s in the work of those who followed them and the activities of the many practitioners of this movement reform. A main characteristic of free dance as a new style is a "natural," simple manner of moving from the center of the body.

Expressionist dance, in the narrower sense of the word, historically and aesthetically describes that emphatic-expressionist school of modern dance, which programmatically and pedagogically revolves around the dancer and choreographer Rudolf von Laban and his movement theory. The first phase of expressionist dance (after a preliminary stage in Munich around 1910) lies in the period between 1914 and 1917, beginning with Laban's summer courses at Monte Verità. During World War I (as with the beginnings of Dadaism in

40. I do not wish to define here all the terms used in this study; partly because certain terms such as, *discourse* (which is in any case used sparingly) and *iconography* are used in consensus with the established terminology of literary research and art history; partly also because certain problems of representation—such as, e.g., movement descriptions, for which there is (as yet) no consistent terminology in dance studies—should not be determined beforehand in theory. For the sake of a more precise phenomenological and historical assessment, they will be developed on the basis of the given respective case (as in the aesthetic, technical-physical, and historical analysis of "whirling dances").

41. E.g., Müller 1986; Klein 1992.

"exile" in Switzerland), a dance model emerged that then became known in the 1920s as "German" expressionist dance (and in America as "German dance") and that developed its strongest potential for innovation in a combination of expressionism and elements of new objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). Important representatives of this dance form were Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban, Suzanne Perrottet, Sigurd Leeder, Kurt Jooss, Gret Palucca, Hanya Holm, Rosalia Chladek, and Dore Hoyer.

I would like to emphasize one specific aspect in the definition of expressionist dance—in terms of aesthetics, programmatic ethics, and physical dance technique—that has hitherto received almost no attention in its relevance for the avant-garde aesthetics of dance: the role of an "aesthetics of ugliness." Only after dance had examined ugliness and integrated it in an aesthetics of expression that no longer gave priority to beauty and grace, but showed interest in dynamics and the expression of "truth" as the aim of movement composition, only then did dance join the ranks of the "former beaux arts"—a movement that, in the case of literature, began as early as the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, ballet, the "beautiful art of dance,"[42] separated the ugly from an aesthetics of weightlessness via representations of the grotesque-humorous—mostly in roles *en travesti*. Free dance at the turn of the century combined the ideal of the beautiful body moving "naturally" and gracefully with concepts of the "new woman." In contrast, expressionist dance integrated expressive forms of representing ugliness, that is, the unbeautiful, for the first time in its aesthetics and design: in its theoretical-ethical program of shaping the "truth" of human existence; in its aesthetic theory of the power of movement and the experience of space; and in its technical emphasis of body weight and tension—"expression" was a modern movement language that no longer paid homage to beauty: as the pathos of terror and grief (Mary Wigman) and as social-critical manifestation of distortion in motion (Valeska Gert).

The expressions "modernity" and "avant-garde" are used in the following study to define and delineate specific eras in the same way as they are used by academic literary studies. In the definitions of time periods and aesthetics, it

42. This is the title of Verena Köhne-Kirsch's dance-phenomenological dissertation; the "beautiful" not only alludes to the aesthetic of ballet; in this respect, the study indirectly attests to the degree in which movement arts—in the context of the "beaux arts"—seem to cling to this aesthetic model (Köhne-Kirsch 1990). How ambivalently the integration of the "no (longer) beautiful" has been evaluated can be seen in the writings of Frank Thieß (1920, 110ff.) in his dance aesthetics: "Dance as an art form" has finally achieved the same appreciation as the other arts, and "so the not-beautiful also rightfully exists in dance"; and yet Thieß draws a line in the aesthetics of the ugly regarding the image of the body: the dancer's body must not be unattractive, that is, ugly.

is important for our subject of study that we take a closer look at the common terminology denoting names of epochs, as they appear in the study of literature, theater, and culture, in light of the developments and historical upheavals that took place in dance. From this comparative point of view, we can then differentiate and put into perspective the parallels and differences that occurred in each respective field.

"Modernity" here refers to an artistic-literary phase of development since the late nineteenth century, a phase of programmatic self-reflection in art in its confrontation with new media (beginning, for instance, with the age of photography). In his essay "Le peintre de la vie moderne" (1863) Charles Baudelaire links the attributes of the transitory (*le transitoire*), the fleeting (*le fugitif*), and the contingent (*le contingent*) to his concept of *modernité*: "By modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" ('La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent')."[43] This statement not only identifies criteria for a definition of modernity, but simultaneously describes the art of dance: the transitory, the ephemeral is a fundamental, idiosyncratic feature of dance as an especially revealing example of the performing arts. Contingency becomes a specific criterion of free dance *after* breaking away from the aesthetic paradigm of ballet—the emphasis on chance, on improvisation and the presentation of movement imagery as spontaneous expressions of feeling. Hence, dance embodies a fundamental pattern of aesthetics in modernity and thus rises from its position at the bottom rungs of art's hierarchy to the top: dance becomes a key symbol of modernity and the central medium of all arts seeking to reflect the new technological age as an era defined by movement.[44]

As with modernity, the term *avant-garde* is used in the same context—insofar as it refers to literature, the theater, or visual arts—as in the various respective disciplines. As in the case of the term *modernity*, I seek to avoid using the term *avant-garde* in a general theoretical way that expresses the endless polarity of old versus new, but instead utilize it to differentiate historically those schools of thought that—more or less situated between 1912 and 1935—are called the historical avant-garde.

In principle, modernity in the field of dance began somewhat later than in literature, theater, and visual arts. Not until the last decade of the nineteenth

43. Baudelaire 1954, 892; 1964, 12.

44. The decisive role played by the media of photography and film in this context of an aesthetic of modernity, having caused a shift in the intermedial relationships of the arts, is not the dominant subject of this study; it will however often be referred to; in Parts I and II, on the role of (chrono-)photography and in Part II, the role of dance, theater, and literature in the development of film.

century, to wit: with the arrival of Loïe Fuller in Paris in 1892 a process began that signaled a radical break with the hitherto reigning paradigm of concert dance in classical ballet through its confrontation with free dance.

As yet there has been no attempt in the field of dance studies to differentiate between the development of modernity in dance and the advent of an avant-garde, which in turn behaved negatively toward modernity—analogously to the relationship of modernity and the avant-garde in theater or in literature. Such specificities are not the paramount intention of this study. In our context, it seems of greater importance to remain aware of the fact that this question has as yet not been clarified and that all pertinent outcomes of this study (as a result of the analyses contained in the second part of this study, in which a number of criteria for a definition of avant-gardism in dance are put to the test) must merely be regarded as tentative research results on the subject of "modernity"/"avant-garde" in dance.

Finally, a few thoughts concerning the problem of historical and aesthetic definitions in dance history: if we compare literature, art, theater, and dance on the basis of their characteristic attributes, it will appear that modernity and the avant-garde are almost identical in the case of dance (from a historical and aesthetic point of view)—namely when measured against the most important criteria for defining the avant-garde as mapped out by Peter Bürger:

- A radical break with the traditions of art and its institutions
- The establishment of new aesthetic paradigms
- The announcement of the new through treatises and manifestos (which are themselves also part of this new aesthetic)
- The self-reflection and self-contexualization of the respective artistic medium, as well as the conceptualization of art and its production
- An altered relationship to the recipient, who is driven to abandon conventional patterns of behavior through shock and provocation and made to become an "active" viewer

All these criteria basically already apply to the early period of free dance. The beginning of modernity in dance thus appears, with the arrival of Loïe Fuller and Isadora Duncan, to be characterized by these "avant-gardistic" features:

- A radical break with tradition; with the hitherto reigning model of concert dance in ballet
- A rejection of established institutions in theater, opera, and affiliated ballet academies, as well as the search for new performance venues
- A negation of aesthetic premises and codes of representation as dictated by the ruling form of concert dance: ballet

- The self-reflection of dance as an art form, both in dance itself (through the constitution and exploration of body imagery) and in texts and programmatic treatises: Isadora Duncan, for example, often combined dances and manifesto-like lectures on the aesthetics of free dance in her performances[45]
- The activation of the viewer, not only through scandals, which were provoked by new images of the body (nakedness) and new patterns of movement (primitivism), but also through the merging of life and art, as suggested in the relationship between popular physical culture and gymnastics movement and the body and movement aesthetics of free dance

Against the backdrop and at the crossroads of the language crisis and the excesses of discourse, the wordless art of dance appears to offer more than simply an alternative solution to issues of legitimate authorship and work in its focus on body imagery and figurations in space. In an age that fundamentally calls into question the productive efficiency of language for the investigation and reflection of the changing constellations of twentieth-century awareness, the attributes of *modernité* in dance—of *transitoire*, *fugitif*, and *contingent* (Baudelaire)—shift the focus of poetics away from the description of text to the exploration of the medium and the materiality of signs. In literature (in Mallarmé, Hofmannsthal, and Musil) and in dance and theater (in Loïe Fuller, Valentine de Saint-Point, and Oskar Schlemmer), the self-reflection of the medium leads to processes of semiotic negativity: not signification, but designification—the emphatic demarcation of an emptiness of signs—becomes the epitome of *poiesis*. "Destruction has been my Beatrice" ("La Destruction fut ma Béatrice"), says Mallarmé[46]; destruction becomes the epitome of inspiration, as well as creation. Not the piece itself, the work of art, but the metamorphic process in the poetic play of finding and extinguishing form enters into the

45. An avant-garde conceptualization of dance oriented on the model of Futurism (including manifestos and performance elements) was developed by Valentine de Saint-Point in her creation *Métachorie* (1913); see its analysis in Part II of this study. Finally, I wish to also draw attention to the numerous autobiographical publications by the founders of free dance regarding the self-reflection of dance and dance aesthetics, many of which were written in a very early phase of development: e.g., Loïe Fuller (1913); Maud Allan (1908); Adorée Villany (1912); Grete Wiesenthal (*Der Aufstieg* [*The Ascent*], 1919); Isadora Duncan (1903, and memoirs 1928b); Valeska Gert (*Mein Weg* [*My Road*], 1930).

46. Mallarmé:

> Je n'ai créé mon œuvre que par *élimination*, et toute vérité ne naissant que de la perte d'une impression qui, ayant étincelé, s'était consumée et me permettait, grâce à ses ténèbres dégagées, d'avancer plus profondément dans la sensation des Ténèbres Absolues. La Destruction fut ma Béatrice." (Letter to Lefébure, May 17, 1867, in Mallarmé 1985, 148.)

focus of aesthetic production and reflection. "Transition", the transitory and transgressive, becomes the formula of an art in which the image has disappeared: in a moment of (ultimate) transgression, transition combines *dance*, the play of signs indicating movement and physical transformation, with *death*—as in Lafcadio Hearn's story "Of a Dancing Girl." In the tale of the *shirabyoshi*, text (the narrative) and dance (the evening ritual) face each other as media of memory, as culturally stabilizing *memoria*. The text visualizes that ultimate moment of transformation which manifests itself in dance, as in no other art, as something completely other, as indescribable.

In this sense, free dance embodied, for poets such as Mallarmé and Valéry, Hofmannsthal and Rilke, the idea of a sophisticated form of poetics that aimed at the eloquent elimination of all signs, the staging of absolute silence.

The most extreme manifestation of this aesthetic is the "white page," that empty page, that challenge to the never-ending process of creativity, onto which the signs of absolute textuality—"Le Livre" (Mallarmé)—inscribe themselves. Dance is a manifestation of the white page of movement. George Rodenbach wrote, in reference Mallarmé's poetics, that dance—as the epitome of pure suggestion—gives birth, in the ephemeral play of its signs, to the perfect text of a "vivid, colorful, rhythmic poem," drawn in the empty space, translated into the medium of the body, just as into the white page of the endlessly evolving text of dance: "Plastic poem of colors, rhythms, wherein the body is nothing more than a blank page, a page upon which the poem is about to be written" (*Poème de plastique, de couleurs, de rythmes, où le corps n'est pas plus qu'une page blanche, la page où le poème va s'écrire*).[47]

47. G. Rodenbach, "Danseuses," *Le Figaro*, May 5, 1896. Translation: Mark Franko.

PART I

Pathos Formulas

Body-Image and Danced Figuration

PATHOS FORMULAS: ON THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE BODY-IMAGE IN DANCE

The first part of this book brings together two issues that are symptomatic of the crisis of culture around 1900. One is the question of the subject and the doubts that arose in this period concerning its existence as a coherent unit. The other issue concerns the construction of the body-image as associated with the emergence of free dance.

As a "formula" for grasping the historical frame of mind and the aesthetics of a specific era, body imagery contributes significantly to understanding specific concepts of the subject. As a tangible artistic indicator of prevalent concepts of individuality and of the limits of the individual, the body-image is a particularly valuable tool for analyzing an age of shifting beliefs in which new media giving preference to the image, such as photography and film, were just emerging. The reading of body-images offers not only clues for deciphering and interpreting culturally dominant concepts of the self, it also contributes decisively—through its applications to discourse—to the constitution of the typical mentality surrounding individuality and subjectivity.

For the iconographic representation and analysis of images of the body—in terms of the development of free dance at the beginning of the twentieth century—I have recourse to Aby Warburg's theory of the *pathos formula*.[1]

1. See Gombrich 1970; see also Pochat 1983, 76–87, as well as Barta Fliedl 1992.