

Hitler's Dancers

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German Modern Dance and the Third Reich

Lillian Karina and Marion Kant

Translated by Jonathan Steinberg

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Translator's Foreword

I thought I knew the main trends of twentieth-century history when I began to translate this book. After all, I have been a professional historian of twentieth-century Europe for nearly forty years, specializing in Germany, Italy, and Central Europe. I was wrong though: I missed one of the most important—the evolution of the culture of the body and its principal artistic expression: dance. Dance merges with bodily ideals, with race, eugenics, health and beauty, and it cuts across the cultural currents of mysticism, sectarianism, and utopianism out of which National Socialism and Italian fascism were to emerge. Dance provides another one of the inner connections between the grandiose rallies and the spectacles of fascist politics, politics as aesthetics or theater, as Walter Benjamin famously put it.

My ignorance is not unique to me. Ask any group of well-read Europeans or Americans if they have heard of Arnold Schönberg or Vasily Kandinsky, and they will look at you with astonishment. Of course, they know those names. Try Rudolf von Laban on them and you will find that they have never heard of the Kandinsky or Schönberg of the dance world and, what is more, do not realize their ignorance. Why one of the greatest Western arts forms—think of the popularity of *Swan Lake* or *The Fire-Bird*—should not be regarded as worthy of study in our principal academies continues to puzzle me. Consider whether a university would be complete without the history of literature, the history of art or the history of music, then ask how many of them teach the history of dance. Think about the importance of dance in every ancient, medieval, tribal, aristocratic or bourgeois culture, and then reflect on how little the educated person seems to know about it.

This book attempts to fill a small but important gap in our understanding of the twentieth century and does so through the medium of dance: the role of dance in the emergence and consolidation of National Socialism in Germany. It has three parts, very different in tone but not in purpose. Part I is an autobiographical essay by the dancer Lilian Karina, who worked in Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s, went into exile first in Hungary and then in Sweden. Her essay looks at the way dance became mixed up with racism, anti-Semitism, and then Nazism itself. She asks fundamental questions about why dance of all the main modern arts was so congenial to the Nazi leadership and why the dance community accepted censorship, the exclusion

of the Jews from orchestras, ballet, and dance companies, and the ultimate horrors of Nazism without a murmur of protest. Above all, she asks whether art, however great, can justify lack of morals and integrity.

Part II is a monograph by the dance historian, Marion Kant. Dr. Kant, who danced professionally while studying at the Humboldt University in Berlin and working as an academic, writes the inner history of the relationship between the dance community and the Nazi leadership as it worked itself out in the Nazi corporate state. Her focus is on the middle bureaucracy in Dr. Joseph Goebbels' Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, which gained absolute control of dance, opera and theater in the 1930s, and she shows how Nazism actually worked in the arts. Part III is a case study in Nazi culture politics and explores the ambivalence of the regime towards jazz and swing dance. There is Documentary Appendix that will allow English-speaking readers to look at, consider, and possibly use the primary sources that underpin the other parts of this work.

The original version of the book appeared in 1996 under the title *Tanz unterm Hakenkreuz*. It sold out its first edition and was reprinted in an enlarged edition in 1999. The book created considerable debate and was discussed across Europe in nearly seventy reviews. The opinions expressed by the authors are controversial, and question the established accounts and tarnish the accepted images of some very great figures in the history of dance.

I have tried where possible to catch the peculiar combination of ideology, bureaucratic pedantry, intrigue, inflated egoism, and sheer craziness that made Nazi dance politics in its chaos and authoritarianism so deeply characteristic of the Third Reich as a whole. Where certain German phrases have no English equivalent, I have left them in the original and suggested a possible English meaning in square brackets marked with my initials. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Jonathan Steinberg
Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania
January 2002

Preface

Nazism did not begin on 30 January 1933, nor did it end on 8 May 1945. It had a pre-history in the violence, hatred, and despair of the 1920s, a long after-glow in the 1950s and 1960s, and flared up in the 1980s and 1990s as Neo-Nazism. The antecedents are well known; the continuities after 1945 too often disregarded. This book attempts to restore those continuities in the history of German dance. The anti-modern and reactionary ideas proclaimed by German dancers in the 1920s, and their rejection of ballet as “foreign” (the code for Jewish) continued to mark their theory and practice of dance in the brave new worlds of East and West Germany in the 1950s and 1960s, and in places of exile in England, France or the United States. German dancers eliminated the overtly Nazi terminology, rewrote their biographies to omit the 1933-45 period or cast themselves as victims of the regime, but the underlying agreement with the basic premises of the Third Reich remained.

This was not unusual: the majority of the German population and the whole of the Republic of Austria spent four decades pretending to be victims of National Socialism. If a national state could draw a veil of falsehood over its past, certainly its doctors, lawyers, professors, pastors, engineers, historians, musicians, actors, company directors, and scientists could hardly be expected to do less. What makes dance history unusual was the extent to which the Labans, Wigmans, Paluccas, and the lesser figures of the German dance world succeeded. Where angry young Germans exposed the crimes and collaborations of their predecessors in other fields, the former Nazis in the dance world simply floated above the fray, practicing art for art’s sake. While the evidence has always been there, nobody wanted to look.

Lilian Karina, a professional dancer in the 1920s and 1930s, and I decided to break the silence, she with her memories and I with my historical research. When our book came out in 1996, it became clear that not every dancer or dance critic was prepared to see the evidence. The book stirred controversy. It received over seventy reviews in many continental European countries. Some were encouraging and thoughtful; many were hostile. In some cases we were literally shouted down and in others dismissed as small-minded, jealous outsiders, victims of our own narrow-mindedness who wanted to get revenge.

Why should dance be an exception to the general demolition of self-serving myths that protected Nazis in postwar Germany or Austria until quite recently? If Deutsche Bank or Allianz Versicherung have had to confess ties to the Third Reich, if historians like Werner Conze and Theodor Schieder have had their Nazi pasts exposed, if musicians like Wilhelm Furtwängler or Richard Strauss have been questioned, if Hitler's favorite composer's music, that of Richard Wagner, is not performed in the state of Israel, how is it that dance has been treated so gingerly? Why has a conspiracy of silence been observed around the subject of German modern dance?

Does it really matter anyway? We think it does. Art always has an intimate relationship to the society that bears it and it carries the signs and symbols of that birth into succeeding epochs. The behavior of the great creators of German modern dance shows how quickly art can be corrupted by proximity to power or wealth and how fictitious the art for art's sake actually is in practice. The paymaster calls the tune whether it is Goebbels's Ministry of Propaganda with its dance programs or today's multinational conglomerate that will pay huge advances for works that promise not to offend the prevailing order.

Dance has a relatively marginal place in the world of serious study. We believe that too is wrong. The art of the body reveals a great deal about how physical presence, movement, and gender are understood by a given society, in a given period and by certain artists. By the 1920s German modern dance, as one version of the art of the body, had adopted movement concepts and formal properties that expressed values very close to the radical racism embodied in national-conservative political movements in Germany. The German *Ausdruckstanz* or "expressive dance" fitted the Nazi ideology very well and it did so because it emerged from the same reactionary, cultish, racist, mystical circles that spawned many Nazis and Nazi ideas. Why was modern dance the only "modern" genre that the Nazis welcomed? Why was it not "degenerate" as was considered most of German expressionism in the graphic arts, atonalism in music or abstract formalism in architecture?

This book tries to find some of the answers and it does so across three genres: autobiographical essay, historical critique, close analysis of a case study and a selection of the documentary evidence. The first part is Lilian Karina's memoir. She lived through the period and here shares her experiences. She remembers her colleagues and their ruined careers, when they—and she—were forced out of their profession and then out of the country. She recalls the atmosphere in Germany in the 1930s, and tries to make sense of the Nazi offers and excited and passionate responses of choreographers and dancers. She constructs a personal history of modern dance and recalls what an intelligent anti-Nazi dancer saw and experienced during those terrible years and afterwards in the long decades of exile.

Part II and III are historical, analytical narratives of the politicization of German modern dance under the Nazi regime. The steps in that politicization are followed through one particular, yet immensely influential institution of the Nazi hierarchy, the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. Part II traces the way German modern dance cooperated with and was coopted by the regime. Part III provides a

case study of the Nazi attempt to suppress jazz and swing. The history of that attempt illuminates the crazy yet murderous bureaucratic machinery that went into motion when the Nazi system dealt with the problem of the popular “swing dance.”

The fourth part contains a selection of over 100 documents in which the reader can see first hand the enthusiasm with which the dance community joined the Nazi crusade, expelled its Jewish pupils, composers, managers and colleagues, and clambered over competitors to curry favor with its new masters. This part has been provided to introduce our readers to the source material directly and thus enable them to follow and analyze for themselves the process and consequences of Nazification in dance.

* * *

Lilian Karina was the initial force behind the German edition. She wanted to understand what happened and she wanted the wider public to share her experiences in Nazi Germany and learn about her findings. After she was forced to leave Germany, she first emigrated to Hungary and then to Sweden. Lilian Karina asked me to provide a section that presented and analyzed the documents in the various archives. Though we worked with the same sources and frequently discussed our research, we do not agree on all matters; the chapters are by no means identical in their evaluation of the events in Nazi Germany. They focus on different aspects of the relationship between dance and the political regime. Even if they do touch on some of the same problems, which is obvious, they place them in different contexts, provide different explanations, and lead to different conclusions.

What can very clearly be seen throughout the book, though, is how seriously the Nazis took art. The collaboration between art and politics functioned to everyone’s advantage: the Nazis took over a section of society, the dance world accepted their ideology, and integrated it into their activities. The artists received a small, very small, portion of power in exchange for the favor they so warmly sought.

In one of his table talks, on 25 March 1942, Hitler declared “that dance, together with music, is the primary cultural expression of a Volk”. He said, in effect, that it was through dance and music and not “through the stammering jokes of clowns and fools” that the “Volk” articulates its inner feelings, longings, hopes, and fears. This sentence alone outlines the basic Nazi policy toward dance: as the key expression of “folkish” ideology, dance was a serious matter, it was no joke, and it had to be assigned a place in the regime which would reflect its importance. If it was the medium that made visible the philosophy of the national soul, if it was the equivalent cultural and artistic expression of a political movement, then serious attention was going to have to be paid to its development. Under such circumstances it was only logical that dance be completely integrated into the regime. First, it was moved under the administrative control system of the Third Reich. Hitler entrusted dance to Goebbels, and he took good care of it. Both assumed that the art of movement provided the way to implant social and moral values into the individual; it was the means to incorporate ideological concepts. That was not new; dance has always played a unique part in society, whether it flourished or was rejected. For the Nazis dance was

not only a specific reflection of the social order; it had the power to influence the invention of the new man, and become the representation of the master race.

The Hitler salute—the out-stretched arm—has often been recognized as the most characteristic gesture that symbolizes Nazism. It was this physical movement that visibly converted an anonymous mass into the people's community. This simple raising of the arm could turn a normal citizen into a follower of Nazism, for moments only or for ever after. Many modern dance artists used bodily movement to forge a similar utopian community long before the Nazi people's community was created. Several dance communities or gymnastic groups that preceded the people's community functioned as experimental grounds in which the actual conditioning for and subordinating to a group was practiced and tested by experience. Such groups provided the corresponding movement norms that transformed nationalism into a secular religion. Only too often did they resemble miniature versions of the later Nazi example. This book does not discuss the process by which dance communities emerged in the early twentieth century nor the attraction of these circles to "folkish" ideas. It looks at the result of this process, at the ideological fascination that led to a political system and its organizational form. The book deliberately limits itself to this side of dance's relation to Nazism.

The majority of sources used in the studies were taken from the Bundesarchiv (the Federal German Archives), at the time housed in Potsdam near Berlin, in the Berlin Document Center, just before and during the time the U.S. military force handed the material over to the German Federal Government, also files from the Geheime Staatsarchiv and microfilms from the Bundesarchiv Koblenz (the Federal German Archive in Coblenz). It contains a large collection of papers from the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. The files from the theater and dance departments are not complete, but substantive enough to reconstruct the history of dance turning political. In addition, many documents from theaters, opera houses and dance archives were consulted, particularly the National Resource Centre for Dance in Guildford/England, as well as archives in Cologne, Leipzig and Stockholm.

Marion Kant
Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania
November 2002

PART I

RECOLLECTIONS

by

Lilian Karina

Introduction

... I will not hear it said,
That time heals all wounds,
That all fades away with it.

– Vladimir Vysotsky, *Little Songs*

How this Work Came About

As I began to write my memoirs in 1986, I felt an urge to find out what happened to the dancers, ballet masters, and choreographers who stayed in Germany under the Nazi regime. Much of what had happened then was hard to understand. It puzzled me still and I felt I had to search for answers.

My own memories were naturally the starting point. As I tried to write down my thoughts, the outlines of those years began to emerge more precisely. They took on sharper contours. I talked to many colleagues. Most belonged to my generation and could recall the years between 1933 and 1945 from their own experiences. I kept notes of the conversations. I wanted to test the correctness of my memories against theirs. Later I widened the circle of interviewees and talked to younger people, the generation of disciples that followed on from my colleagues.

In 1987, I learned from Jutta Wardetzky's book on theater politics in Nazi Germany¹ that many documents that dealt with the relationship between the dance community and the Propaganda Ministry of Joseph Goebbels were housed in the State Archives in Potsdam. After what seemed an endless series of telephone calls, letters, and applications, I finally got permission in October 1987 to travel from Berlin to Potsdam. The Wall was still standing. A short rail journey seemed too much an adventure, so I took a taxi instead. The archive was in the Soviet Military Administration building and was especially strongly guarded. The presentation of my reader's ticket soon turned into the first act of an elaborate administrative routine of military precision, which at once amused, astonished, and angered me. In any case, it took a

lot of time. Finally a woman from the archive came to collect me and accompanied me to the reading room.

The material came covered in dust and tied with string. The thick folders and dusty, disorderly packets had clearly not been seen by anyone and may well have been sitting there since the Nazi period. I noticed how all the letters with marginal notes, the requests, the complaints, the accusations, the denunciations, the reviews, and the newspaper cuttings, brought the epoch to life and began to inspire me. My shadowy memories became clear and full of light; all of this because I had not taken “no” as an answer from the East-German authorities to my request to read the documents from a half-century earlier. I read about how the idols of German dance, exemplary paragons like Mary Wigman, Rudolf von Laban, and Gret Palucca, had written to the new potentates and saw the kinds of answers they received, and occasionally short marginal notes let me in on what the despotic, intriguing bureaucrats thought of them. The famous dancers were not moved by fear for their lives when they wrote. They wrote full of hope that in the new Third Reich they would have the chance at last to achieve their artistic visions. The price that they paid for this betrayal of friends, people from their circles, of their own artistic credo was clear to them. They were prepared, even eager to pay it. I could read about it in their notes, letters, memoranda, which I sought and found elsewhere. Yes, they were ready to pay a high price, and once again I call it betrayal of, treason to those humanistic values to which artists ought to feel themselves committed.

For some time I had been collecting literature from and about the period: books, articles, reviews. Time and again I was struck by the way the events after 1933 were falsely portrayed, how much was made pretty or simply omitted. In biographies and writing intended for training or education, the authors took only that part of the past that corresponded to the prevailing, acceptable view of things. Often the authors went beyond the necessary in order to adapt and submit to the desires of social order, which helped to secure the ideology of the rulers. In manuals, facts were omitted which had substantially influenced the art of dance and might have attracted attention towards certain causal connections and behavior patterns; sometimes people and their fates were simply not mentioned at all. The reasons for certain developments were obscured or falsified or recited without further investigation. In the end, I had to conclude that historiography, especially the history of dance, had in all too many cases not freed itself from the ideology of Nazism.

Granted, there has been a process of democratization after the Second World War. At the same time, however, I had to concede that following those conversations the threat that arose and still arises from Nazism and racism was in no way fully recognized in its entire dreadful scope.

I am well aware of the scope of my project and have as a result limited my writing here to the activities of a few personalities in the years 1933 to 1945. I have attempted to present the general ideological principles that were on the whole accepted in the dance community, and in addition mention the prehistories of certain artistic or personal developments and explain the results of these developments. In the

course of the work and the documentation, it happened that certain individuals moved to center stage: Rudolf von Laban, his protector Ministerialrat von Keudell, their critic, desk officer Cunz, his advisor Gustav Joachim Fischer-Klamt (formerly Yo Vischer-Klamt) and his wife Jutta Klamt, in addition to Mary Wigman and Gret Palucca, each with their followers, disciples, admirers, and denouncers. I collected copies of the documents from the archives of the GDR. Later, as I examined their content and began to work out my commentary for them, I found myself forced to write a much lengthier introduction than I had intended. I had to illuminate certain artistic developments and illustrate the links between ideological and artistic processes as well as to explain the behavior and reactions of the artists themselves.

Have Artists an Interest in Political and Social Circumstances?

Many artists, dancers, choreographers and dance pedagogues deny the connection between their personal creative activity and social conditions or politics. Awareness and understanding of how their artistic activity may be profoundly affected by the society in which they live and work is not very widely spoken of. Contemporary art forms, which construct their own ideologies and publish them in manifestos, frequently declare that their work represents a closed system. Students and followers are made to accept these closed systems, as if they embodied religious truths. Political interest of artists often confines itself to the possibilities of economic support, which state or political party can afford. I have no doubt that similar attitudes prevailed in the period I am trying to describe and that these attitudes profoundly affected the acts of the prominent creators of dance. For most of them, I think that the only thing that mattered was the pursuit of their own careers and to that end they tailored their own numinous vision of life and their art to the ideas of the Nazis. They were in the end prepared to support the dreadful policies of fascism with their work.

I knew then and know today what happened and what it was all about. Fifty years after the event I cannot help thinking about those who did not collaborate or were not permitted to collaborate. What happened to the victims? What happened to the dancers and choreographers who were dismissed, who had to leave Germany, their homeland, who lost work, families, and often enough their lives?

Dance history says nothing about them. They have been excluded from the traditional framework of historical writing. They have simply fallen out of the categories according to which existence, and success and failure in work are measured. The way the Nazis wanted it was the way it happened. The Nazis wanted to eradicate these lives and silence and suppression of memory did just that. What do we know about those who simply disappeared silently, who died in Auschwitz or other concentration camps, who emigrated, who somewhere somehow tried to go on living? Who asks about them today? Who remembers Sascha Leontieff, ballet master at the Vienna Opera, who was murdered in Mauthausen? Today, for the first time, I know what happened to him. Even the most famous dancers, once they left Germany, have been largely forgotten.

The history of dance has not concerned itself enough with questions about the interaction of morality and ethical responsibility. However the question may be posed, it must first be faced fully and consciously: Can artistic productivity abolish moral responsibility? Anybody who says “yes” and thinks that art has nothing to do with morality should at least not try to justify as moral the flagrant violations of human rights as Mary Wigman tried to do when she argued that it was done to save the quintessential “German” character of art. Equally false is the attempt to make the work of Rudolf von Laban great by turning him into a hero. It contributes nothing to the understanding of that complex, unsteady, passionate human being, who was utterly convinced of his genius.

The object of this work is, therefore, to give a first view of, a very preliminary glimpse at, the development of dance as an art form in the Nazi period in Germany and to look at the actions of the artists named above. The impact of these creative dancers will not be reduced. On the contrary, the complexity of their decisions should make plain how much energy and insight is needed to arrive at an adequate assessment of their personalities and the strength of their artistic impulses. A second object of this work is to add a new subject matter to the continuous thinking about Nazi Germany. I hope to prevent the process by which misunderstanding, falsification, and legend-building take the place of exact description and analysis of documents.

The Faces of my Past

My personal experiences, the life I lived, and my contacts with teachers and friends formed my point of view and my relationship to people and events of the period. It seems important to me to name the names of those with whom I lived and worked and whose influences left an imprint on me. They are mainly people who lived through the Nazi era—as profiteers, collaborators, resisters, and as victims. At times when dictatorship limited or suppressed free expression of opinion and exchange of information in word or print, news passed from lip to lip, whispered rumors became more and more important. Like a brush fire news flitted from one person to another along well worn paths.

Evgenia Eduardova was my ballet teacher during my childhood in the 1920s in Berlin. She lived with **Josef Lewitan**, the founder of the magazine *Der Tanz*. He was a Russian Jew. Lewitan and Eduardova had to leave Germany. I was able to reconstruct their adventurous flight through the archives of the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. I last saw them in 1936.

Victor Gsovsky was not only my teacher but a close friend. I owe him the unfolding of my teaching capacity. He too had to leave Germany in 1936.

Tatyana Gsovsky was very close to me. She was less as a teacher and more an artist and representative figure for the Russian avant-garde of the early years in Soviet Russia. She stayed in Germany and made a distinguished career as a choreographer.

Sascha Leontieff was ballet master of the Vienna State Opera and in 1930 my partner. Through him I got to know the main transcendental currents in modern and spiritual² alternative dance forms. He was murdered in the concentration camp Mauthausen in 1942.

Egon Wüst was one of the star dancers of the *El Dorado* in Berlin. Like me he trained in Victor Gsovsky's ballet in 1933. It was through him that in 1934 I got my first shocking experience of the physical brutality of Nazi concentration camps. I saw the signs of mistreatment which he got as homosexual in Dachau.

Liselotte Köster was one of Gsovsky's best pupils. Victor saw in her the ideal embodiment of his dance style. According to her own account, confirmed by her colleagues, she was, as the prima ballerina of the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the favorite dancer of Adolf Hitler. I was close to her and visited her in the 1980s. Her views on dance and politics resembled those of many other dancers. They were marked by an absence of political awareness or insight into the situation, a preoccupation with her own success and utter indifference to the fates of other human beings—in spite of a certain curiosity about the lives of a few colleagues and friends she met.

Michael Piehl was my colleague during my engagement as a soloist in Wuppertal where I also choreographed and gave ballet instruction at the time. We became close friends and saw each other as often as circumstances permitted until his death in 1987. We wrote to each other frequently. He visited me in Stockholm several times when he was a ballet teacher at the State Ballet School in East Berlin. During the theater season 1935-36 in Wuppertal we got to know what working in a theater under the Nazis was like. It was during that year that I made the acquaintance of Mary Wigman, who made a guest appearance with her own program, and Laban as well, who acted as a sort of regulator general of theatrical ballet. As a homosexual Michael was very much in danger. In spite of that he performed as a soloist right through the war and after 1945 became Tatyana Gsovsky's partner at the State Opera in Berlin. From 1970 on he worked in Tatyana Gsovsky's Academy of Dance in West Berlin as a pedagogue for classical dance.

Günther Hess was ballet master during my engagement at Wuppertal. He too was threatened twice over as a homosexual and a Christian Scientist. In spite of this he was a devoted member of the National-Socialist Party and sincerely convinced of the correctness of the Nazi ideology. At the same time though he was absolutely loyal to his dancers.³ I kept up my contact with him until his death in 1979 and arranged among other things guest performances for him in Stockholm at the Dramatic The-

ater (Dramaten), where he conducted seminars in movement pedagogy for actors and directors. He refused right up until his death to talk about the years under Hitler.

Aurél von Milloss. For three years, 1936 to 1938, we worked together in the opera in Budapest and in the Nemzeti Színház, the National Theater, at different times and for different reasons. We performed in dance evenings together and with our group. We had our own dance studio. I taught classical ballet and directed rehearsals for Milloss' choreography. We had both fled Germany. I was living at the time with a Hungarian from a Jewish background, László Vásárhelyi, whom I later married.

Gertrude Engelhart was an instructress in the Wigman school and in 1938 fled to Sweden. She told me that in Berlin she had had about ninety Swedish dancers, pedagogues, and choreographers studying dance with her, but was persecuted in Sweden in spite of that by fellow dancers, including these former students, and prevented from getting work. The excuse in those days was that one was merely protecting the job prospects of the local talent; in reality there was a lot of support for the Nazi movement and much anti-Semitism, to which many well known artists in Sweden had lent their support. A growing anti-Semitism had taken root in spite of the long traditions of humanist, socialist, and liberal efforts in Sweden. Later Trude became the first teacher of the Culberg-Cramér group, the predecessor of the Cullberg Baletten. Trude taught lay people the elements of modern dance in my dance studio, which I founded in 1944.

Birgit Cullberg was from 1939 on and during the war both my moral support and my confidante in Sweden. For fifteen years she was one of the most devoted pupils in my ballet studio. One of her dance evenings awakened new hope in me, for in it I saw a dancer who recognized the danger of National Socialism and gave that danger expression in dance. An antifascist and pacifist, Birgit Cullberg brilliantly embodied Swedish humanism. She knew how to give her dance drama an inner greatness. She followed the precepts of her teacher Kurt Jooss and created in the almost naïve simplicity of her expressive dancing possibly the most powerful dance dramas of the modern era. In so doing she defied the risks that the German occupation of Denmark and Norway represented for neutral Sweden throughout the war. Birgit was a member of the Clarté, the association of artists and intellectuals founded by Henri Barbusse in 1919, which called for struggle against war and fascism. Extinguished in France, the group of Clarté lived on in Sweden. She belonged among the most prominent personalities who opposed the expulsion of German refugees by the Swedish authorities.

Edgar Frank was a famous soloist at the Deutsche Oper, the German Opera, in Berlin. He too was Jewish and left Germany as a result, but only after being urged to do so by Kurt Jooss. For a while he taught in my dance studio in Stockholm. With Edgar as with Trude I had only a limited acquaintance, but their fates interested me. In 1987 I began to look in the Riksarchiv in Stockholm for documents about them.⁴

Bea Zoltana was initially a dancer, and later on a pedagogue, and was well known under the name Bea Lajtai. In 1940 she fled from Denmark to Sweden with her husband, the operetta composer Lajos Lajtai. Both were Jewish.

Albert Gaubier was also a Jewish refugee. He tried to work in Stockholm as a dancer and choreographer. Gaubier and Bea Lajtai became close friends. They were active politically and drawn by the events of those years ever more deeply into the dance of death of the Nazi period.

After the war I was able to be in contact with the following people:

Gerda Renon, my colleague from the Eduardova school. She was a friend from my youth. After her ballet education she danced in several groups and became a soloist at the Munich Opera. She married the Jewish pharmacist Manfred Aberle. In 1935 she divorced him in order not to lose her work. She left her daughter Viola, born in 1935, who according to the Nuremberg Laws was a “Mischling” [a half-Jew – JS], in the care of her fragile old mother. As a “Rassenschänder” [a racial polluter – JS] Aberle was sent to the concentration camp Dachau. Swedish relatives bought him out and got him to Stockholm in 1936. In 1948 Gerda Renon came to Stockholm with her daughter. She had passed the previous years in great hardship and had only managed to feed her family by indulging in nightly black market deals. She told me a great deal about the dark years under the Nazis. Her daughter Viola became my pupil and later a highly regarded member of the opera ballet company in Stockholm. Today she is a well-known film director.

Herta Wegeleben also arrived in Stockholm in 1948, together with her four year-old son through the intervention of some relatives. She had begun her training in the Klamt school and continued it with the two Gsovskys. After that she was a solo dancer at the Volksoper Berlin, the Theater des Westens, and had gone through the war there. After the war she fell ill with a bad case of tuberculosis and after a lengthy cure in Davos she tried very hard to regain her ability to work in her profession. She was first a student in my school and later a recognized teacher, especially for children’s dance and the training of young people and amateur dancers. Herta knew Palucca and Fischer-Klamt well since she had been a soloist in the Klamt Group. I owe a great deal of knowledge to her about the conditions in opera houses and ballet companies under the Nazis. She described the bombing attacks and the state of the theaters, including their closure in the last weeks of the war, the forced labor in industry, etc.⁵ I also owe to her my acquaintance with **Gret Palucca** with whom I shared a great friendship for many years. Although we talked for hours in great intimacy about personal and artistic things, Palucca maintained absolute silence about her career in the Third Reich. The only exception she made was her moving account of the bombing of Dresden in 1945, which she narrowly survived.

Hilde Buchwald, Herta Wegeleben's sister was also a Klamt pupil and at the same time a pianist. As pianist and repetiteur she had contact with many dance schools in Berlin and had a chance to see their work, their teaching methods and their behavior towards the holders of power. She was utterly opposed to National Socialism and for a few months was under arrest for harboring a deserter. She owed her life to the chaotic conditions in the last months of the war. After the war she made a name for herself through her movement techniques, which she taught to actors and describes in a book.⁶ She had great success with her courses on movement technique for actors in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland. Hilde, with whom I talked for hours, greatly enriched my understanding of events.

Ingeborg Klamt, the daughter of Jutta Klamt and Gustav-Joachim Fischer-Klamt,⁷ could tell me some things about her father's working relationship to Cunz. She was ten years old in 1936 when the *Das Jahrbuch des Tanzes 1937* (the Dance Yearbook) was written in the family's Berlin apartment. After the war she moved to Aarau in Switzerland and has lived there now for many years. She carried on the school for artistic dance founded by her mother with great success.

Sonja Sundberg was one of those Swedish stage artists who worked on the German stage right through the entire war up until 1944. She danced as a soloist in Gera and Essen. She was a trained Dorothee Günther pupil. Carl Orff, who was musical director at the Günther school, strongly influenced her style. In spite of her lack of political awareness and responsibility, she could tell me many interesting things about how Orff, Günther, Maja Lex, and above all the family of the Vice President and later President of the Reich Theater Chamber, Ludwig Körner, had behaved in the Nazi era. Sundberg knew Laban as well, whom she had met in Manchester.

Bengt Häger worked with Rolf de Maré in his Archives de la Danse in Paris. He was the founder of the Dansemuseet in Stockholm, the Carina Ari Library, and Rector of the Choreographic Institute in Stockholm, later the University School of Dance. As a friend of Kurt Jooss, he administered a great portion of the Jooss archive and the Jooss collection. He is one of my dearest and closest friends and has had a profound influence on my attitude toward the problems of our time and the way that I evaluate my experiences. In many conversations he has deepened my insights and supported my research work in every way, including economic support through burseries from the Carina Ari Foundation.

A Historical Overview of the Labanist Period

Pre-Labanism: the Rise of the Culture of the Body (1900s-1920s)

A short historical overview will help to understand the situation of dance before the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 and following 1945, the end of the Second World War. A division along the lines of Rudolf von Laban's career seems to me to be justified, for through it we can discern, on the one hand, the various developmental phases of the so-called Ausdrucksstanz [expressive dance – JS], which were fundamentally influenced by him and, on the other hand, the inter-relationship between modern dance and one of its iconic figures with respect to the power structures and Nazi ideology. The relationship between Laban and the newly founded Propaganda Ministry of Joseph Goebbels is of particular interest for it involves the appeal for modern dance to be elevated in rank among the performing arts, from which followed the claim for dance to have its own theater and its own higher school of dance.

This period before the arrival of Laban on the scene from the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1920s, was marked by all sorts of efforts to renew dance and the art of movement, music education, gymnastics, and pedagogy in the broadest sense. Among these efforts, I would include the eurhythmic movement [a movement concept developed by Rudolf Steiner through anthroposophy – JS] and the growing interest in the promotion of the body and body culture, which had evolved during the course of the nineteenth century. About the turn of the century Delsartism⁸ reached Europe from the U.S.A., transmitted above all by Delsarte's pupil McKaye and then by Geneviève Stebbins, who wrote the method down and preserved it for posterity, and was finally led by Ted Shawn. Isadora Duncan and her sister Elizabeth followed in their footsteps. Isadora went on to become the absolute symbol for renewal of the art of dance. She and her sister founded dance schools in which they propounded their worldview and their understanding of body culture and the art of movement. Bess Mensendieck also came from the U.S.A. and influenced the doctrine of body culture,

above all for women, and tried to develop a therapy based on consciously controlled and trained dancelike movements. One of her successors was Hedwig Kallmayer. Many pupils of Mensendieck and Kallmayer turned to artistic dance.

The Swiss Emile Jaques-Dalcroze tried to achieve a translation of music into movement. Many of those who later became Laban's disciples, including Mary Wigman, came out of the Jaques-Dalcroze training and had been to his school in Hellerau near Dresden. He created one of the earliest groups that performed at their own expense.

Rudolf Steiner, the founder of a spiritual movement he called anthroposophy, influenced avant-garde painting and sculpture with his doctrines on color and form. The eurhythmics, which he created, had primarily therapeutic purposes. Steiner's group appeared in their own dance concerts in the 1920s and thus staked their claim to be included in the modern dance scene. Even today Waldorf schools, which carry on Steiner's anthroposophical ideas, work out their own dances, which they also perform.⁹

Rudolf von Laban, Rudolf Bode and Medau started from these premises and sought new ways to develop bodily awareness and to renew the art of dance. Trance dancing, another phenomenon of the new century, was taken very seriously, even by critics. Alfred Kerr and his writings on the trance dancer Madeleine come to mind. Sascha Leontieff, the ballet master of the Vienna Opera, appeared before invited audiences and after his dance performances would show off his astonishing clairvoyant powers. In 1930 I danced as his partner at such events.

Nudism, the culture of the naked body, a consequence of the new feeling for the body, was closely tied up with the struggle for the right to enjoy sexual freedom. It played a smaller role on the stage, but for years there were recitals of art dances performed entirely naked.¹⁰

Also in those years there existed a pseudo-exoticism. Asian and African traditions were converted into stylized dances to meet the European taste, and were turned into magical artistic forms of expression. A certain parallelism could be found in the way romanticism took up and misunderstood Hellenism or other cultures like the Assyrian or Egyptian ones. Such pseudo-exotic dances with their yearning for India, Greece or Egypt and their overlay of occultism drawn from a variety of sources, found a counterpart in the so-called national dances with their folkloric ambitions.

A very different impact on the development of modern dance came from Serge Diaghileff, the brilliant impresario and founder of the Ballets Russes de Diaghileff. He was able to achieve a significant renewal in ballet by engaging a series of artists who arrived at an entirely new conception of music, choreography, thematic shaping and scene setting. The great abilities of the Russian dancers blossomed in works by Mikhail Fokine and later Vaclav Nijinsky and Bronislava Nijinska. These artists could not only dazzle audiences with complicated variations and pas de deux's but at the same time managed to burst the bounds of the art form in all sorts of ways. Their expressive power grew out of their effort to bring the peculiar magic of Russian symbols and forms of expression, deeply rooted in folk traditions with all their

inexplicable strength, to a high artistic form and to translate them for the public of the European stage. The impulse to renew Russian stage dance came in the highest degree from music. Alexander P. Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, Nikolai A. Rimsky-Korsakov, and Igor Stravinsky opened with their compositions the possibility of revolutionizing dance forms, dance movements, choreography, costumes and scenery, attracting visual artists like Bakst, Benois, Gontcharova, and later Picasso and other modern visual artists.

The period was also marked by efforts to find a way back to the original roots of peasant life, their culture and art. Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály initiated this attempt to renew and reform the expressiveness of music.¹¹

Finally, jazz, coming from the U.S.A. influenced social dancing as well as stage dance and the avant-garde in painting and sculpture. Progressive young people, above all from bourgeois backgrounds, found in the Afro-American rhythms of jazz a way to express their ecstatic yearnings, which traditional culture denied them and which seemed to be disappearing in modern society.

The Era of Labanism at its Peak: the Development of “New Dance,” Modern and Stage Dance (1920s-1937)

The great representatives of the new directions of dance, Rudolf von Laban and also Mary Wigman and their pupils and disciples, who later went along their own paths developed modern dance as an art and style in the 1920s. Changes took place in every branch of dance: dance pedagogy, children’s dance, dance therapy, the so-called artistic lay dance, concert or podium dance, chamber dance and, it must not be forgotten, in the field of ballet in the great opera houses. Russia’s influence on the dance culture of central Europe and on Labanism is not to be underestimated. It came with the wave of Russian refugees who gradually fled from the Russian Revolution of 1917. The level expected in the Russian schools was higher than the standard in the German schools, and so parallel to the growth of schools of expressive dance, in Germany the Russians brought new impulses to the techniques of traditional ballet schools. This double process began immediately after the end of the First World War in 1918.

The “new dance” in all its variations and with all its weaknesses—from lay dancing to dance as a method of healing—thus engendered a revolution in stage dance. Its breadth and depth was not at first perceivable: gymnastics was completely renewed; attention was directed to the creative forces in children of both dance and the art of movement; the dogmatic training of ballet dancers was loosened; the composition of traditional ballet works broke free. Mikhail Fokine had already criticized and condemned the sterility of traditional ballet. Traditional compositional models had customarily to accept the role of musical structure as framework. It had become distant from the logic of its own thematic movement connection and presented nothing more than opportunities for virtuoso technical performances such as variations, pas de deux, and groupings.

Laban's students and successors had a tremendous influence on opera ballet across the many opera houses, which had been court, city or provincial theaters before 1914. Even smallish cities like Gera, Münster, Hameln etc. had theaters that combined drama, opera, and ballet under one roof and one administration. Sometimes the ballet groups had no more than six or seven dancers and the ballet master was often forced to act as soloist, training master, and choreographer at the same time. Sometimes ordinary dancers had to carry out these tasks. Before the emergence of "new dance," this limited the development of ballet on the traditions of classical ballet: dance episodes in opera, management of crowds of extras, and in rare cases a few opportunities for soloists. The representatives of the new wave, Labanists like Kurt Jooss, Aurél von Milloss, Julian Algo, broke radically with these traditions. Many difficulties arose in the early stages and those not willing to adapt were dismissed as we shall see. Nevertheless the Labanists carried out the decisive step. They created a dance art form that wanted to be recognized as independent, even within the theater.

A number of schools from other currents in the "new artistic dance" can also be mentioned here again: Jaques-Delcroze's school of Hellerau-Laxenburg, the Lohe-land school, Steiner's eurhythmia, Bess Mensendieck's and Hedwig Kallmayer's schools, the Klamt school, the Orff-Günther school, the schools of the Duncan sisters, the Gertrud Bodenwieser school, not to mention Rosalie Chladek's in Vienna, and Suzanne Perrottet's in Switzerland, among others. All were significant institutions with many pupils and all gained interested audiences. But the most significant individual in the process of revolutionizing dance was Laban.

Laban's appointment as director of ballet at the Staatsoper in Berlin aroused great expectations and was widely welcomed in the press and on the radio. The critic Josef Lewitan wrote in the May 1930 issue of *Der Tanz* an article entitled: "Habe-mus Papan" [We have a Pope – JS]. Yet in spite of a few great successes, such as the new choreography for the *Polovtsian dances* from Borodin's opera *Knight Igor* and the *Venusberg* in Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, Laban's years of work at the State Opera from 1931 to 1934 were a disappointment for him and for the dancers.

Laban knew that he had failed and blamed his bad relationship with the director of the opera, Tietjen, for his lack of success. Laban described this in a letter to Frau Lieschke dated 3 September 1937, when he stated "that dwarf Tietjen was in my opinion ... never a fully paid up human being."¹² In addition, there were conflicts between Laban and the ballet ensemble, which I shall illuminate below. The conflict that obstructed Laban's work and the realization of his radical reforms consisted of the following elements:

First, Laban decided to dismiss Victor Gsovsky as ballet master, who was very highly valued by the ballerinas Dorotea Albu and Genia Nikolayeva who had recommended him, and by Max Terpis who admired him. Laban's decision to fire Gsovsky in December 1929 with effect at the end of the season in 1930¹³ was simply based on the fact that he was a "ballet" person and hence a rival. But Laban and the press underestimated the effect the dismissal would have. Nobody could have fore-

seen that Victor and Tatyana Gsovsky would become the core of a group hostile to both Laban and Wigman.

Second, Laban dismissed the soloists, the ballerinas Dorotea Albu, Daisy Spiess, and Genia Nikolayeva and the male dancers Rudolf Kölling, Walter Junk, and Jens Keith for the same reason—they belonged to the ballet camp and not his own modern dance camp. This release was confirmed by Laban on 9 April 1930 and made final on 18 June 1931.¹⁴ The dismissed dancers, “the State Opera Six,” managed to generate much publicity in a scandal-loving press. The soloists appeared in their own dance evenings, at great variety shows, and on other occasions. They had the advantage of a very popular and well-established repertoire and enjoyed much affection.¹⁵

Third, the ballet direction decided to abolish the contractual status of soloists.

Fourth, there was the question of dancing bare-foot: it was quickly clear that many barefoot dances, which Laban favored, were simply incompatible with point technique. Lizzie Maudrick, ballet mistress and choreographer, had given traditional point dancing a new modern actuality at the State Opera. She stayed at the State Opera.¹⁶

Gsovsky left the State Opera without a murmur. His position as instructor there had never been entirely satisfactory, but it had made him famous well beyond the professional dance circles in Berlin. He had every opportunity to open a private ballet school and to secure his standard of living was there for the taking. The best dancers in the State Opera, later the Deutsche Oper, still continued to study with him, such as Daisy Spiess, Dorotea Albu, Genia Nikolayeva, Jens Keith, Rudolf Kölling and, as the youngest, Liselotte Köster. Many of them were later to have great influence on dance in Berlin and all of Germany. Although some were in fact Laban pupils, they all contributed to his fall—with the support of higher authorities. In 1943 Kölling became the director of the Berlin dance school, which Laban had founded.

Some additional elements in Laban’s failure at the State Opera should be mentioned. He was, in the end, not capable of reconciling tradition and innovation in a way that could work within the framework of a state theater. There was a gulf between his and Wigman’s revolution in the art of dance and the justly condemned old-fashioned habits of the ballet company at the State Opera with its choreographic stereotypes. He never found the entrée into that culture and created no way to mediate between them.

I want to be careful not to fall into the clichés of a conflict between “classical” and “modern” dance. However, Laban did in fact revolutionize the State Opera in 1930 by overthrowing the traditional ballet ensemble of a prima ballerina, ballerinas, coryphées and their male counter-parts plus a corps de ballet. The Prussian ballet tradition had been broken. The work of Max Terpis as ballet master had already undermined the remnants of that tradition even before Laban’s arrival on the scene. The explosion of the new dance had already reached the great theaters. Ballet master Kröllner had introduced innovations, which Terpis had continued. Most of the soloists were either Laban pupils or products of other modern schools. The older bal-

let soloists like, for example, Margarete Altmann, who came from the Zorn-Freising school and represented Kröller's style, were about to retire. Hence when Laban took over the ballet company, it was certainly not exclusively classical in its training. At the same time the private ballet schools of the most varied techniques and types were flourishing in Berlin. They represented the full variety of classical styles and ballet teaching methods, notably Margarete Altmann's school in the Schönhauser Allee, Eduardova's St. Petersburg school or the Moscow studio of Catherine Devillier. These two latter represented the Russian styles as practiced in the former case at the Maryinsky Theater and the latter at the Bolshoi. Finally there was the much more modern Russian school of Victor Gsovsky, which was a kind of Russian avant-garde ballet approach.

In 1933 the Nazis came to power and in the great book-burning events showed their true barbaric approach to culture. Laban ignored all that and took steps to realize his grand plans. He made an application to the office of the Intendant for Prussian theaters to have an archive created to be attached to the State Opera. The archive was dedicated to the introduction of Laban's system of dance notation, which was then still in its early stages. In addition he demanded the establishment of an archive for film. In the dance archive in Leipzig I found Laban's handwritten sketches for a radical transformation of dance instruction at the State Opera, which actually amounted to a final liquidation and eradication of the traditional ballet schools.¹⁷ Apparently Laban wanted to show his loyalty to the Third Reich and its ideals in letter, which now has such an incriminating content.¹⁸ The handwritten note on the copy reads: "removed from a folder where it had been misfiled." The letter from Laban as ballet director to the General Intendant of the State Theaters in Berlin, dated 7 July 1933 reads: "The B.D. [ballet director – JS] has removed all non-Aryan pupils from the children's course effective the end of the season. End of season: 7 July 1934. Attached please find the new pupil register". "Removed" means, of course, dismissed. Laban was over-eager because it was not until 1938 that non-Aryan, Jewish children were required to be removed from school instruction.¹⁹ The fact that the document has survived by an error is significant. My experience has been that such damaging evidence has been frequently removed from personal files. They are, we are told, no longer available although archive registers and indices continue to list them.

Laban's readiness, and that of many other important dance artists, to accept the anti-Semitism of the new regime as fast as they could makes later excuses of ignorance impossible. The bits of evidence that survive speak a very different language. As far as Laban is concerned, his letter to the General Intendant of the Prussian State Theaters about the removal of non-Aryans from the children's courses is an undeniable sign of his eagerness to join the Nazi regime. Six months later he ordered the Aryanization of the entire ballet school. Wigman behaved in exactly the same way.²⁰ Years later Jewish friends and acquaintances of Laban and Wigman would continue to assert that they had not behaved like anti-Semites. Why did they, the victims, also show such devotion?

In 1934 Laban left the State Opera and enrolled in the service of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda of Dr. Goebbels. It was not long before he had become the leading personality in artistic dance in the Third Reich. Fritz Böhme described this situation:

If Laban is in contact with you, then everything will be just fine, because, as I see things, he seems to have become the responsible man for the entire creative programming for German dance in general.²¹

The 1934 dance festival programs represented Laban's work.²² They took place at the Theater am Horst-Wessel-Platz, the new Nazi name for the Volkstheater, the Folk Theater of Erwin Piscator. Laban wrote the first section of the program notes and gave a very clear indication of his plans related to and his attitude toward the Nazi regime. In the following years he declared his closeness to Nazi ideology again and again. He emphasized the "German" in dance; on every occasion he displayed his anti-democratic attitudes. He advocated the Führer principle [absolute obedience to the person of the leader – JS], which he saw embodied in Adolf Hitler:

We want to place our means of expression and the language of our art at its most intense in the service of the great tasks, which our people [Volk in the original – JS] must accomplish and to which our Führer has pointed the way with implacable clarity of vision.²³

Through the Reich Culture Chamber, he believed, there was now the possibility of founding a German Dance Theater, as the home base of German artistic dance, the fulfillment of the dream he had cherished for a decade or more. The time of congresses and blather was over as was the era of chaotic and contrasting performances without criteria. There would be no more dance parliaments but festivals of German dance art.²⁴

A letter from Kurt Jooss²⁵ to his teacher Laban, dated 17 October 1928, illuminates Laban's plans, above all his relationship to his colleagues and the constant bitter rivalry between him and Wigman. The "interesting things" from Berlin refer to the position at the State Opera:

In the meantime, four weeks have passed and we are in the midst of our work. One rejection follows another. From colleagues I hear all sorts of interesting things from Berlin and would be glad to hear from you what is really going on and what is just gossip. We have had a big clash with Kestenberg, when he told us that the state was now supporting Wigman, that by underwriting her group they are moving towards the long-cherished idea of a state dance theater. Schulz-Dbg and I spoke rather sharply to him and said that there could be no question of supporting Wigman and leaving you out in the cold once again. To all that he replied "what do you want from me? Laban comes up with one suggestion after another. No ministry can deal with that."

The excerpt shows how embattled the dance scene of that era was and how the dancers worked against each other. Laban and Wigman were the two big personali-

ties of Weimar German Dance and it is understandable that in the following years they should continue to try to consolidate their positions under the Nazis.

A training camp for dancers was set up in Rangsdorf in the summer of 1935 by the Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda and Laban was made its director. There he attempted to convince the dance community of the importance of the ideology of National Socialism and to place them firmly under the direct control of the Propaganda Ministry. The dancers in the State Opera who enjoyed the protection of Reich Marshall Hermann Göring felt safer there than in Laban's scheme. They dared to refuse to attend the course. Not only that, they let it be known in a newspaper report. According to a handwritten note on the text Lizzie Maudrick, ballet mistress, composed the statement and the General Intendant approved it. It was printed in the daily Berlin newspaper *Tageblatt* on 28 August 1935:

The General Intendant of the Prussian State Theater asks us to communicate that members of his ballet group have not taken part in the training camp at Rangsdorf. Further training of the ballet group rests according to a general and comprehensive new set of regulations exclusively in the hands of the senior choreographic direction of the Prussian State Theaters.

Laban's last choral work, *Of the Warm Wind and New Joy* was supposed to introduce the Olympic games. After the dress rehearsal Goebbels ordered that it be cancelled. According to numerous reports from witnesses and some later historiography, Goebbels's decision to cancel the work proves that Laban was an anti-Nazi. It was supposed, it is claimed, that he was a "pacifist" or a "socialist." The Laban devotee Lisa Ullmann claimed that Rudolf von Laban went to England and France after he had fallen out of favor with the Nazi regime in 1936. According to her, Laban worked as a free lance artist in Berlin and other cities.²⁶ Although that is today the general understanding, it is simply factually false. All these accounts, which claim to demonstrate by evidence, do not tell the truth. Laban received a proper contract from the Propaganda Ministry and was their employee until 1937. Laban's correspondence with desk officer Cunz shows how and why he was relieved of the direction of the Master Workshops. Laban fell ill and begged Cunz to be allowed, in spite of his illness, to plan the next stages of the Master Workshops. He wanted to keep his post at all costs.²⁷ The letter from Rudolf von Laban to Rolf Cunz, written from the Sanatorium Schloss Horneck in Gundelsheim a.N. (Württemberg) dated 23 September 1936 demonstrates his utter devotion to the Nazi State and his eagerness to continue to work for the Goebbels administration.

You can easily imagine how hard I find it to stand aside or more accurately to lie in bed during the beginning of the realization of one of the most important tasks for German dance. ... So I have decided to submit to the Ministry the medical certificate together with a request to prolong my leave of absence. I do not want to neglect to thank you for your recent friendly lines and to tell you how pleased I am that you have committed yourself—with or without me—to the work of schooling for master and other dance pupils more or less competently begun by me. We have to carry on and it must become a great and exemplary affair.

In what way, how or how much I can help in that endeavor is today difficult to assess. At any rate I hope to be in Berlin soon in some sort of consultative capacity. Until then, as has been planned from the first moment, I have ordered the completion of the previous well-tryed planned hourly program of study. One will have first to know the type and number of pupils before new dispositions can be considered.

Please forgive me for writing with a pencil as I lie here, but sitting is difficult for long periods.

With every good wishes and best greetings to your wife and to you,

Heil Hitler!

Always yours (signed) Laban

Laban was passionately involved in the establishment of the Master Workshops. These were intended to be the first steps toward the creation of his dream, a Higher Institute of Dance. He saw himself a short step from fulfilling his dream and Laban was certainly the sort of person who could have directed such an institute. Of course, one could object to his rather one-sided style and narrow conception of dance, but, as the subsequent evolution demonstrates, a fusion of tradition and revolution in dance turned out to be entirely possible.

Laban sent medical certificates into the Ministry to prove his incapacity. He began to realize that he would not be able to complete his contract. Finally he was offered what he had hoped for: a contract as a consultant. Laban thanked the authorities for the approval of the change in his contract and for the guaranteed monthly stipend of RM 500 (in contrast, soloists at the State Opera were at the time earning RM 410).

On 20 November 1936 Laban confirmed in a letter to Ministerial Director Dr. Schlösser, President of the Reich Theater Chamber that he was happy with the new work and payment arrangements:²⁸

Above all, I want to express my great pleasure that you have granted me special tasks, which will allow me an opportunity to promote the efforts, which the state has in so generous a manner initiated to promote dance. The projects, which your Desk Officer has communicated to me, are well suited to enable me to devote my entire energy to the artistic area, in which I am competent. I am entirely satisfied with the level of remuneration and following your instruction I will get into contact with him to arrange the details of practical execution.

He signed, as usual, with “Heil Hitler!”

On 14 August 1936, Laban submitted to the Propaganda Ministry a proposal to grant to the newly founded Master Work Shops the status and function of a Hochschule [literally a “high school” but in fact a higher institute or institute of advanced studies is more accurate – JS].²⁹ Desk officer Cunz noted on the margin that the idea was premature. Laban’s plans testify to the breadth of vision but unfortunately an opera house was not the place to realize it, but even with the Propaganda Ministry behind him he could not fulfill it outside the opera house either. He ran into increasing opposition both from bureaucrats and dance artists. An alliance grew up between Desk Officer Cunz and the Klamt family, which frustrated Laban’s plans.

The Dance Section of the Reich Theater Chamber clearly needed Laban as a consultant. He was too big a figure to replace. On the other hand the accusations

against him and his closest collaborators began to accumulate. They stated that he had an unreliable attitude toward National Socialism and that he was irresponsible in the administration of state funds. No doubt the issues were small: taxi receipts, private expenditures for travel, loss of stage costumes and requisites, but one thing is clear: Laban was absolutely incapable of managing a substantial budget nor was he reliable in the administration of petty cash. He had no practical experience in administration. The management of his schools and other enterprises had always been in the hands of various devoted ladies and female collaborators, who were emotionally and personally committed to him and his work. The inter-dependency between Laban and the admiring women around him contributed to his downfall. He had chosen them not according to their management skills but their devotion to him. He got impatient and bored with fact sheets and calculations and never accepted that reality was an important factor when making plans. In fact Laban despised every form of bureaucracy. He considered himself above petty considerations and procedures. He dwelt in higher regions of the world of thought. He was the genius who was lifted beyond normal constraints.

None of this prevented him from grasping that there were failings in his organizational work. In the 1930s he often wrote to Suzanne Perrottet. In such letters Laban swung back and forth between his contempt for bureaucracy and his awareness that bureaucracy was the only means to fulfill his dreams. He saw the dilemma clearly. As early as 1928, he had written: "There has to be a Higher Institute of Dance in Germany and all these German organizations ... I have to accept all these silly organizations, because they will bring me money." And in 1929, he wrote: "... Now I am feeling miserable. My dance theater has scattered to the four corners of the world and I am all alone in Hamburg ... I am famous like few others are but somehow too dumb and gypsy-ish to raise money."³⁰

A variety of unexpected difficulties began to plague Laban's "freelance" work. It was not only the threatening bureaucracy. Now there were complaints about his work and his behavior. Modern dance had developed freely, without committees, minutes and resolutions. Its dynamism arose from this freedom, and to the suggestive charisma, which he radiated.

It seems to me that neither Laban, nor Wigman, nor even Palucca knew about the threatening letters, nor the denunciations. Laban was certainly unaware of the duplicity of the ministerial civil servants with whom he dealt, who covered up such threats and denunciations with ironic marginalia. He may have had a suspicion, evidence of which can be seen in his "farewell letter" [my name – LK] to Marie-Luise Lieschke.³¹

Opposition to Labanism: Realistic Dance Theater

In the years following the First World War, other new currents, which came from futurist, surrealist or dadaist impulses as well as political cabaret, found their way into the material that was giving dance a new substance. Valeska Gert and Anita Berber

represented the extreme poles of dadaist dance. Valeska Gert's style was all about satires and the revolutionary social criticism, which the dada artists advocated. She was an immensely political dancer and strictly opposed to Mary Wigman's and Laban's theories, as can be seen in her articles and books.³² Anita Berber, photo model and movie star, was originally a dancer. She achieved recognition and respect in the radical art scene through her performances in the most daring of sex education films.³³ Going as far as sadomasochism, Anita Berber personified in her art and life a protest against the existing society, a protest which dada carried out through satire.³⁴ Although these tendencies gradually turned into perversions in the later 1920s, their basis in social protest was never lost for me and for other attentive observers.

During the second half of the 1920s, many creative artists turned towards a new realism, generally known as *Die neue Sachlichkeit* [the new matter-of-factness – JS]. It is within this new realism that I see both the development of the lay-dance movement and the creation of realistic dance theater. Representatives of this course were dancers like Jean Weidt, who later became famous as the “red dancer.”³⁵ Weidt had been influenced by Laban indirectly through his teacher Sigurd Leeder, but where Laban created mass movement choirs, Weidt and others turned them into “red groups” of the workers' movement. Laban's idea was thus put to a purpose very far from the original. Kurt Jooss became famous in 1932 when his *Green Table*, an anti-war dance drama, won the first prize in the International Choreographic Competition in Paris. His work generated great excitement by the burning actuality of its theme and the limitation of choreographic devices, which gave the piece its shattering impact. Those were years in which the threat of war lay like distant thunder in the air.

Art and Culture under National Socialism

The New Legislation

There was never any secret about the aims and intentions of the National Socialists, their ideas on art and culture, the directives that they sought to promulgate or the means they intended to use to get their way. One can assume that leading personalities in the dance world like Rudolf von Laban would have read Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler makes no secret of his dreadful ambitions. Before 1933 one could hardly avoid having knowledge of the proclamations of hate, which the Nazi press shamelessly spread. Once the Nazis seized power, the intentions were realized one by one. They were ordered by Hitler, carried out in the realm of culture and art by Joseph Goebbels, and hastened along by the constant struggle for power among competing great and middling satraps of the regime from Herman Göring through Alfred Rosenberg and Robert Ley to Julius Streicher. They each added a special twist to the general Nazi declaration of faith. Part of the development of dance was directly and immediately affected by the new legislation, which covered all theaters, training places for dance, and all "free" groups.

There are many documents lying in the archives that shed light on certain events. The newly promulgated laws were well known to all the leaders and prominent artists in the dance world because copies were systematically distributed to each of them. It was up to them to carry these directives out and to arrange for the corresponding measures.

Weeks after the first Nazi pogrom, "spontaneously" staged by the S.A., against the Jews in April 1933, the "Law for the Re-establishment of the Professional Civil Service" was promulgated. This decree institutionalized and sanctioned state brutality against Jews. It was the first of a series of laws that systematically excluded Jews from the "Aryan community" and was ultimately meant to destroy all persons who thought, felt or acted differently, looked different, belonged to the wrong religions, were politically undesirable, and so on.

On 22 September 1933, the Reich Culture Chamber of the Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda was set up.³⁶ The Reich Theater Chamber (RTC) was one of its sections. The Reich Dramaturge, Eugen Klöpfer, was appointed president. The dance community was divided into those professional dancers who worked on the stage, that is in theaters (*Fachschaft Bühne*), and those free creative dancers, dance pedagogues, directors of movement choirs and the like (*Fachschaft Tanz*). *The German Dance Yearbook*, published in 1937 by Cunz and Fischer-Klamt through the Dorn-Verlag, Berlin, describes the new system as follows:

VI. Dance within the Reich Theater Chamber:

The Reich Theater Chamber administers with exclusive competence all dancers and dance affairs including lay dance and physical dance training. It cares for the training of the young and regulates admission to the professions of dancer and dance teacher. It supervises all institutions of dance instruction, administers examinations and tests, determines the methods of examination and establishes the regulations governing school and teaching.

The exercise of instructional and any other professional activity in the field of artistic dance, movement choirs and all other artistic enterprise in dance requires membership in the Reich Theater Chamber by joining "The German Choral Singer and Dance League, e.V. [registered society – JS] (now *Fachschaft Tanz*, Professional Group 1) as the competent and relevant professional association.

Everybody working in dance received these directives. The 1937 *German Dance Yearbook 1937* is of particular interest since it lays out some of the principles applied to art and culture under the Goebbels ministry. The intention of the Goebbels ministry was without any doubt to tailor every aspect of cultural expression to the views of the Third Reich. The presidents of the different sections, the Ministerial senior civil servants, and the desk officers had all been members of the party for a long time or had early on showed that they were sympathizers. They protected and promoted those prominent in the arts who suited their tastes and ideology. The patron-client relationship between von Keudell and Laban is a perfect example of mutual support. In the majority of cases the protected and favored artists showed an almost athletic flexibility in adapting their ideas to those desired by the Nazis, even if before 1933 they had shown little or no interest. A comfortable and extremely common way of securing their careers without manifesting the degree of compromise was to say, "oh well, it's not really that bad anyway." This feeble excuse and a vague hope for change enabled many artists to accept the most appalling atrocities, some of which happened on the streets before their very eyes. In a nutshell, the various cultural fields looked as such:

Literature and Press: Goebbels controlled the press and every other form of literature right from the start. Censorship was harsh. Many writers, journalists and editors ended in concentration camps or in exile. Book burning was common in 1933 to demonstrate both symbolically and literally that literary and scientific writing that failed to fit the National-Socialist worldview was to be destroyed.

Film: Goebbels recognized the enormous importance of film in influencing and indoctrinating the masses, and exploited it ruthlessly. His censors determined down to the smallest detail what could be shown in each film. The UFA film studio [Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft—Germany’s biggest film company – JS] became Goebbels’s special instrument in this process.

Radio: For the first time in the history of radio, cheap receivers, the Volksempfänger [the people’s radio – JS] became an instrument of rule. Advanced technology made this possible. Of course, Mussolini had pioneered this technique on a much smaller scale during the Ethiopian campaign of 1935.

Painting and Sculpture: The “beaux arts” were thoroughly bent to suit the Nazi program. The great art exhibition in Munich and the “degenerate art” exposition of 1937 showed quite clearly the method and selection of desired and undesirable art. In painting and sculpture Hitler’s tastes and preferences played a great role.

Architecture: Even more prominently than in the visual arts the search for the super-sized and megalomaniac found expression in architecture. Gigantic edifices were supposed to symbolize the durability of the Thousand Year Reich, which was fated to be a world empire. Hitler’s passion for classical antiquity determined this predominant choice of style.

Theater: In this field the same rules as for press and literature applied. Contemporary works were easily classified into acceptable and unacceptable. The classic posed a much more subtle and complicated problem, in spite of which some famous works were simply banned and others shortened. The authorities even tried to eliminate silences and other passages that might give rise to misunderstandings. Certain monologues were eliminated altogether and certain emphases ruled out. As relatively easy as it was to burn a book, it was much harder to prevent its private ownership. In the end the Nazis could never completely eliminate the heritage of classical humanism or bend it to the demands of National-Socialist ideology.

Music, concerts, opera: all Jewish and non-Aryan composers were stricken from the repertoire and the works of all “left-wing,” socialist or communist artists forbidden. Avant-garde works, which strove for new or unconventional effects, were branded “cultural bolshevism” and condemned. In spite of all that there were composers who refused to fit themselves into the acceptable categories and survived. Until 1938 at least, music was less tightly regulated than the other arts.³⁷

Dance: The Nazi years began with great uncertainty about what was or was not acceptable. With the exception of the “Jewish question” and the exclusion of the left, there was no clear direction about how modern and classic in dance were to be understood. The representatives of modern dance did not simply adapt themselves

to the ruling Nazi ideology; they began by assuming that their modern dance was by its nature an expression of Nazi ideas. Goebbels could, therefore, afford to be tolerant in his dealings with dance and simply wait for the battles among the various currents in dance and dance pedagogy to be fought out. In the dance world, censorship really hinged on self-censorship of themes and of styles of movement within the dance world itself.

The possibilities of development and the plans for reorganization of the entire dance community had already begun to be worked out and fought over in the 1920s. A bit of background information helps to understand how these plans were realized and ultimately went terribly wrong: the power that Joseph Goebbels exercised over all decisive questions was absolute, but the choice of personnel and substantive issues that came to his attention depended, as in all bureaucracies, on the choices and decisions made by his subordinates. They advocated various directions and favored various artists and fiercely rejected others. Besides, the Propaganda Ministry had to fend off competitors. Alfred Rosenberg, author of *Der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The Myth of the Twentieth Century), which along with *Mein Kampf* expressed the core of Nazi ideology, directed an office for racial politics and meddled in cultural matters. Although Goebbels had to push him to one side, Rosenberg never missed an opportunity to try to regain his primacy as chief ideologue of the regime.

The Gestapo played a special role. Goebbels enjoyed certain police powers in his ministerial capacity [he was also Gauleiter of Berlin – JS], but he could not control or foresee the sudden, incalculable, and intrusive operations of the secret police, which seemed to conduct investigations and searches of leading theaters and their personnel independent of any other authority. The Reich Theater Chamber was the main counterpart to the Gestapo. The trouble was that as time went on the SS [Schutzstaffel, a private police agency of the Nazi party, which gradually fused with the state secret and regular police – JS] turned itself into a universal “counter-intelligence and investigative agency.” It frightened everybody at all levels of authority. People took preventive action and adjusted their behavior and ideas so as not to annoy the SS. Its main journal, *Das Schwarze Korps* [the Black Corps – JS] had an interest in the arts and interfered with favorable or hostile criticism of productions and artists.

The governing group in the world of ballet—the ballet masters, choreographers, chefs de ballet, leaders of dance groups, soloists in the great Berlin opera houses—maintained close personal contacts with the politicians and power brokers around Hitler, Göring, Goebbels, and Himmler. Such contacts were traded among the top figures in dance. In view of the lawlessness, corruption, and pathological thirst for power in the upper levels of the Nazi State, such contacts became an essential ticket to survival and artistic success and threatened the control exercised by the powerful bureaucrats in the Goebbels ministry. Goebbels was well aware of the importance of influential outsiders and the dancers knew how to use outside contacts to undermine the bureaucracy.

I knew of the way the system operated in the opera houses, which was my special terrain and work environment. There was a powerful and influential group

headed by Rudolf Kölling, Liselotte Köster, Jockel Stahl, and Daisy Spiess. Tamara Rauser became the favored ballet mistress. Terpis was tolerated and Jens Keith was a passive member. After Laban, Lizzie Maudrick conquered for herself the ballet direction at the Berlin State Opera. It would be worth analyzing more closely the success of this group in a special study, because these relationships became stable elements in the administration of the opera houses and sources of funding. These relationships explain otherwise incomprehensible unassailable positions held by certain people. Laban and Mary Wigman were absolutely excluded by this group, but they had their own circles, supporters, and patrons. Nobody has yet examined the reciprocal relationships between administrative power and artistic integrity.

The Doctrines of Race and Inheritance

Dance history has so far ignored the influence of these doctrines and it plays no part in the history of dance after 1945. Yet for certain forms of dance, concepts like “race” and “racial hygiene” played an essential role and were quite consciously adapted to dance. The figures who represented the reformers and renewers of German dance adopted these concepts as the sources of their inspiration and molded both their dancing and pedagogy according to them. Racial ideas stamped their imprint on the almost manic cult of the beautiful body, which sought its models in classical antiquity, and on the style and aesthetic of body education. Expressions of these views are easily found in the many proclamations, monographs, critiques, doctrinal declarations and advertisements produced at the time by the important schools of dance.

In the limited framework of this book there is no place for a proper exploration of the anthropological and sociological aspects, nor the historical origins of the racial doctrines I consider here, so I must, alas, limit my discussion of them to an abbreviated form. I am, however, convinced that my short summary will adequately convey the main arguments used by the artists, dancers, choreographers, and pedagogues in my youth to justify their positions. Human history is also the record of the success of human beings in elevating themselves above other human beings. It is the history of race and racial superiority. How is it that the doctrine of race, in spite of its illogicality and arbitrariness, achieved such prominence after the First World War with such disastrous consequences?

In pre-historic times primitive peoples developed the idea that their own tribe was the “chosen” one and its members the only “true” people. This view emerged although there were no marked differences from the members of neighboring tribes. In slave societies in the ancient world, slaves were not reckoned to be human, even if, as was often the case, the slaves originally came from the ruling caste of the defeated tribes or civic communities. The slaveholders in the American south developed a similar view of their black slaves, who were seen as members of a less developed human category, as it were, a race of human beings closer to animals or in their intellectual development very like children. In feudal society from the Middle Ages to the French