The Dancer from the Music:
Choreomusicalities in Twentieth-Century American Modern Dance

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ABSTRACT

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Revising Yeats’s rhetorical question, this dissertation asks: “How can we tell the dancer from the music?” In the early twentieth century Isadora Duncan and her barefoot protégées initiated a performance tradition that would later be recognized as American modern dance. They did this, to a great extent, by embodying European "absolute music." Soon, however, choreographers and dancers of this new art form faced modernist calls for medium-specific “absolute dance” that would express movement’s autonomy and not the autonomous music of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. As John Martin, one of the nation’s first dance critics, wrote in 1933, “There is a long, sad story to be told about the use of music for dancing which was never intended to be danced to.”

Today that story is even longer; *contra* Martin, it is not sad. As the use of classical music was a primary component in the earliest forms of “free dance” and as it remains in some of the most critically acclaimed and commercially successful modern dance today, this use is in need of critical and historical attention. Tracing an alternative genealogy from Duncan’s then-scandalous embodied empathy with sacralized art music, the central chapters of this study of the use of music in American modern dance focus on the lives, works, and reception of two choreographers: Ted Shawn and Merce Cunningham. Both of these men founded his own dance company and created works where choreomusicality, or the relationship between music and dance, remained especially vital.

For Shawn, wishing to go even further than Duncan, this meant creating choreographies where dance followed the music as closely as possible. Indeed, in his
“music visualizations” (a term that he coined with his wife and colleague Ruth St. Denis) his goal was to create dances that were perfect translations of the music itself. Such translation is ultimately impossible, and in attempting it, I argue, Shawn ended up revealing more of himself—specifically, his desire to perform a non-conventional masculinity that he normally felt was off-limits—than he did of the music.

Reacting against this tradition—the standard history of modern dance goes—was Merce Cunningham, in whose mature choreographies music and dance are united only by their overall duration. Yet Cunningham, under the influence of Cage, created several dances to the music of Satie that provide an illuminating exception to this practice. I focus in particular on *Idyllic Song* (1944) and *Second Hand* (1970), both of which Cunningham choreographed to Satie’s *Socrate*. Though created during his artistic maturity, *Second Hand* provides a link to the earliest self-expressive collaborations with John Cage. As a result, this choreography offers an unusual window into the Cage-Cunningham personal and professional relationship.

In examining Shawn’s and Cunningham’s choreography, this dissertation tracks not only the changing role of Western art music in the relatively young art form of modern dance but also examines these choreographers’ responses to contemporary attitudes toward the male dancer, unconventional masculinities, and the relatively new identity of the homosexual. In doing so I demonstrate how the choreomusicalities of these men reflected and refracted their masculinities and homosexualities. In addition to providing choreomusical analysis and interpretation, I revise current understandings of both specific scores and choreographies through intensive archival research (from silent films of Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, which I have synchronized with their unheard music, to
Cage-Cunningham manuscripts ignored or previously thought lost), observation of live and recorded rehearsals and performances, and interviews. Ultimately, “The Dancer from the Music” seeks to establish choreomusicality as an exemplary lens through which to view the meeting of music’s ineffability with the realities and identities of listening and performing bodies in motion.
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the dream of moving on to a new chapter in life with Ben that kept me focused and at my desk. I dedicate this dissertation to him with the greatest appreciation, love, and respect.
For Ben
INTRODUCTION

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we tell the dancer from the dance?
—William Butler Yeats, “Among School Children” (1928)

There is a long, sad story to be told about the use of music for dancing which was never intended to be danced to.
—John Martin, The Modern Dance (1933)

What does it mean to dance to the music? With the music? As music? What happens when one revises Yeats’s famous rhetorical question and asks: “How can we tell the dancer from the music?” When one can tell, how has that knowledge affected evaluations of the relationship between the two arts? When one cannot, do dancers become but so many slaves to the rhythm? There is very little scholarship exploring choreomusicalities—the relationships between music and dance—and their historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. Beyond merely noting the presence of certain music accompanying a dance, commentators have not interrogated how dance moves to music, as if the answer were self-evident and always the same (it is not, as anyone who has seen both a Balanchine ballet and a Beyoncé music video can easily sense). Historical musicology often ignores the body—especially the dancing body—and dance studies often foregoes sustained attention to music.

“The Dancer from the Music” addresses this disciplinary divide and examines embodiment of classical music in the history of American modern dance. I discuss the music of Bach and Mozart, but not simply as autonomous works of “absolute music.” Rather, I examine how U.S. modern dance choreographers have used this sacralized music
by translating it into dance. Modern dance—which, with jazz, is often touted as a distinctly American art form, a product of national exceptionalism—began with Isadora Duncan’s choreography inspired by preexisting European absolute music. Influenced by Duncan dancing barefoot to Beethoven, a younger generation of American women began dancing step-for-note “music visualizations” of canonical European art music. In an ironic reversal in 1933, one of the earliest U.S. dance critics, John Martin, called for “absolute dance” dependent not on music, nor narrative, but on bodily kinetics alone. Martin’s exhortation was only fully answered twenty years later, when Merce Cunningham and John Cage famously “divorced” music and dance by presenting these art forms simultaneously but not interdependently. Thus was modern dance pared down to the movement itself and truly modernized.

Reflecting a now long-standing modernist historiographical bias for medium specificity—similar to “the music itself” in musicology, and the Greenbergian ideal of “pure art” in art history—dance historians have long ignored the importance of “music visualization” to the founding and first three decades of American modern dance, as well as later appearances of the phenomenon. As Selma Jeanne Cohen, the first U.S. dance scholar, has claimed: “Music visualization did not last. It was not interesting. It said the same thing as the music and nothing more.”1 Critics and scholars who today write about contemporary modern dance still deride direct reflections of music as “Mickey-Mousing.” The assumption that such a choreomusicality is a “mere” translation suggests the persistence of a Romantic-era aesthetic even among self-conscious modernists: it is as if the transubstantiation of European art music into a dancer’s body were a reality to be taken

for granted. Yeats’s above-cited rhetorical question similarly points to a hopeful fiction, in which transcendent spirit magically triumphs over mundane matter. One too easily forgets that bodies must *perform* a choreomusicality, no matter whether that choreomusicality seems to be effortlessly “Mickey-Mousing” or completely ignoring the accompanying music.

Bodily performances of choreomusicality are historically and culturally constructed; so too are performances of gender and sexuality. “The Dancer from the Music” explores the intersection of these two types of performance in American modern dance (an art form initially created and performed solely by women) through an examination of onstage performances of gender, sexuality, and choreomusicality and of offstage lives. Following this introduction and two chapters that situate embodied empathy at the heart of both absolute music and the foundation of American modern dance laid by Loie Fuller, Maud Allan, and Isadora Duncan, this dissertation’s core chapters focus on two male choreographers and their dance companies: Ted Shawn (1891–1972) and Merce Cunningham (1919–2009). I suggest that the choreomusicalities and the masculinities/homosexualities of these men act as prisms of each other, reflecting and refracting not only changing ideas about medium integrity and the place of music in the relatively young art form of modern dance, but also these choreographers’ awareness of and anxieties about contemporary attitudes toward the male dancer, unconventional masculinity, and the relatively new identity of the “homosexual.”

My focus is on important developments at the intersection of these men’s choreomusicalities and sexualities: while this dissertation’s scope reaches from 1890 to the present, it does not offer a strict narrative history; there is no teleology of modernist
stylistic progress on offer here. This does not mean that my commitments are more critical
than historical: one of my aims is to situate the choreomusicalities and identities of these
choreographers within their respective pre-war, post-war, and recent U.S. landscapes. I
utilize archival research to revise current understanding of both choreographies and scores.
Beyond music and dance history, my project interacts with the wider history and sociology
of the arts (visual, literary, and performing), and American, gender/sexuality, modernist,
and performance studies. The underlying impetus for this dissertation, however, is
grounded in the recent historical musicological landscape, where scholars have
increasingly sought to undercut the persistent and ubiquitous mind-body dualism that
haunts the discipline. The primary aim of “The Dancer from the Music” is to establish
choreomusicality as an exemplary lens through which to view the meeting of music’s
ineffability with the reality of a performing body.

THE RECENT MUSICOLOGICAL PAST AND CHOREOMUSICOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES:
In the past twenty-five years, many historical musicologists have shifted their focus from
musical “works” to musical “texts,” which overflow with signification and are produced by
reader-listeners. Most recently, some scholars have turned to musical performances and
performers, whose materiality, carnality, and ephemeral presences challenge the very logos
of musicology.² Musicologists working in opera studies and studies of gender and

² The difficulties inherent in the recent turn to performance are explored in Carolyn Abbate’s
issues a disciplinary call to focus on the material phenomenon of performance and suggests that
writing about the materiality and carnality of “real music” in its presence is nearly impossible given
the past tense that writing about events demands. While Abbate’s idealistic alternative (falling
silent in the face of music’s ineffability in live performance) is thought-provoking, it is not
particularly practical for a dissertator.
sexuality have been the primary promulgators of this turn to embodiment and performativity, a conceptual focus that privileges doing over being, acts over identities, and performance over representation. This development has provided an antidote to the at times paralyzing disciplinary dominance of the nineteenth-century concept of Werktreue (discourses and acts that privilege the “work” ideal and exclude all else, even the actual work of performers, as “extramusical”). However, this new focus has also, I would argue, involved an a priori dismissal of the idea of absolute music—together with the all too canonical repertoire connected with the term—as disciplinarily and politically regressive. As a result, contemporary musicologists, whether committed to a more recent and more performance-based approach or to a more established and more work-based approach, have tended to ignore the myriad embodied and performative practices that have utilized absolute music.

If the idea of absolute music has been too easily dismissed by recent scholarship, there have been important attempts to rethink the related (indeed, subsidiary) idea of musical autonomy. Lydia Goehr, for example, has argued that the autonomy of absolute music, or the “purely musical,” has always been simultaneously dependent on the “purely human.” As Goehr writes, “Until historically mediated it has no positive or constitutive content at all. . . . [P]ractices [relating to musical autonomy] can remain open, critical, and historical.” The relationship of embodiment to musical autonomy has been a central

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concern in the work of Suzanne Cusick. In an article that posits the “cult of absolute music” as the ultimate barrier to feminist musicology, Cusick has criticized the scholar’s and concertgoer’s sense of identification with absolute music as a regressive “fantasy contradict[ing] the physical reality of the audience . . . provid[ing] us with a sonic experience of the middle-class self.”⁵ In a widely cited earlier article, however, Cusick had praised the effects of succumbing to music (even of the canonical absolute variety) when one not only chooses to submit but also remains aware of one’s embodied self.⁶ This is not a case of Cusick 1994 pace Cusick 1999: in the earlier article, the listener does not deny her embodied reality during listening. My dissertation is built on the foundation that Goehr and Cusick have laid by resituating musical autonomy and its many uses as a practice above all else.⁷

A number of scholars have noted and critiqued the injunction against acknowledgment of the body in the absolute music paradigm, whether manifested in the concert hall or in writing a music-theoretical analysis. Critiquing disciplinary practice and addressing historical lacunae are, however, two very different things. Recent scholarship has begun to recuperate musicking bodies in all their phenomenological and kinesthetic detail: Elisabeth Le Guin’s “carnal musicology,” bridging contemporary and historical

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⁵ Suzanne Cusick, “Gender, Musicology, and Feminism,” in Rethinking Music, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 495.


⁷ In privileging “musicking,” my project is also indebted to Christopher Small’s eponymous study, the thesis of which is that music is not an object, but an activity. Musicking (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998).
performing bodies, is exemplary in this regard. Yet scholarship (in musicology, dance and performance studies, and even ethnomusicology) that examines dance’s embodiment of music is surprisingly scarce; Philip Bohlman’s diagnosis from nearly twenty years ago remains valid:

That we should experience the body—our bodies—in music is enormously difficult for many musicologists to accept. Rejection of the body has long characterized musicology's historiography, and I submit that there is no better evidence of this rejection than the failure of musicology to incorporate the study of dance.

In order to address this failure, my project does not look to “musical gestures” in scores or performance, nor to music composed expressly for dance, nor even to the dance-like movements of musicians. I turn instead to American modern dance, at the founding of which was Isadora Duncan’s flagrant dismissal of absolute music’s injunction against the body. The U.S. modern dance stage presents musicology with an exceptional and unexplored phenomenon: one hundred years of intentional danced embodiments of music that was never intended for saltatory activity.

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Uncharted though this specific area of study may be, I am fortunate that there is a small—but strong and growing—choreomusicological literature.\(^\text{13}\) The focus of this scholarship has most often tended toward the pointe shoes of ballet and not the bare feet of modern dance, but it has nevertheless lent a more secure footing to my own work. In addition to the above-cited scholarship (especially that of Marian Smith), the work of another choreomusicological doyenne, Stephanie Jordan, has encouraged my own. More than any other writer, Jordan has explored the particulars of ballet’s movement to music.\(^\text{14}\) While she seeks to recognize a continuum between “music visualization” (which she names after the early American modern dance practice) and “counterpoint” (which she defines as “rhythmic contrast” between music and dance), her analyses occasionally betray a more binary interpretation, one that is admittedly difficult to escape.\(^\text{15}\) Unlike Smith’s critically historical work, Jordan’s paramount concern is full description—she invokes Anglo-American music theory as her model.\(^\text{16}\) Like Jordan’s book, all other recent full-length choreomusical studies are about ballet; and, apart from Marian Smith’s work, these are most about the Stravinsky-Balanchine collaboration; tend to highlight the ballet *Agon*

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\(^{13}\) In addition to a burgeoning choreomusicology, I have found the history and theory of film music relevant to my project’s critical toolbox. Even when these texts do not provide a transferable model of analysis (or even of description), the questions they pose have influenced my own thinking; for example, Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).


\(^{15}\) On the pervasiveness of this dualism, see Barbara White, “‘As if they didn’t hear the music,’ Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Mickey Mouse,” *Opera Quarterly* 22 (2006): 65-89.

\(^{16}\) See also the more recent Stephanie Jordan, “Choreomusical Conversations: Facing a Double Challenge,” *Dance Research Journal* 43 (Summer 2011): 43–64.
specifically; and, ultimately, they only rarely mobilize choreomusical description beyond purely formal concerns.  

Among the few articles dealing specifically with choreomusicality in modern dance, Marta Robertson’s work on the collaboration of Aaron Copland and Martha Graham on Appalachian Spring has influenced the direction of my project, and I admire its combination of ethnographic and formalist methodologies. Robertson interviewed a former Graham dancer to better describe how the rhythmic structure of the dance relates to that of the music; this is a rare practice in choreomusical studies outside of ethnographies. While there have been many ethnomusicological studies about danced musical repertoires predicated on fieldwork, it is unusual for these studies to describe exactly where and how dance steps fall in the music. Two notable exceptions that use such description sparingly but shrewdly and that have influenced my own work are Tomie Hahn’s extremely evocative ethnography of a nihon buyo dance studio in Tokyo and Louise Meintjes’s article on masculinity in Zulu ngoma song and dance in South Africa. Unlike most scholarship focused on choreomusicality in Western art dance repertoires, these studies move gracefully and persuasively from details of choreomusical practice to their wider implications.


19 Sensational Knowledge: Embodying Culture Through Japanese Dance (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), see especially 118-44 for Hahn’s exemplary discussion of using notation to convey choreomusicality both in scholarship and transmission of dances; “Shoot the Sergeant, Shatter the Mountain: The Production of Masculinity in Zulu Ngoma Song and Dance in Post Apartheid South Africa,” Ethnomusicology Forum 13 (2004): 173-201, see especially 174-87.
My project also attempts to meet the challenge of both describing how modern
dance has moved to absolute music and situating choreomusical description within broader
aesthetic, historical, and cultural contexts. As the above introduction and text to follow
hopefully makes clear, one of my principal aims is to implicate the meeting of modern
dance with absolute music in constructions of American modernism and homosexuality.
As identity (aesthetic or personal) operates in a broadband manner, I also explore how
choreomusicality has indexed race and class. For example, in my chapters on Isadora
Duncan and Ted Shawn—the latter, though gay, subscribed to then prevalent eugenetic
beliefs20—I show how “jazz” was the ultimate anxiety for early American modern dance: it
acted simultaneously as historical shorthand for any African-American influence (kinetic,
musical or otherwise) as well as all that was too “popular.” Examining the way a dancing
body moves to music, my project calls for an approach that moves between moments of
fairly precise description and critically historical contextualization. Wherever possible, I
attempt to acknowledge and bridge the literature and historiographies of musicology and
dance studies, between which there has been far too wide a disciplinary divide. This divide
has kept choreomusicality out of scholarly discourse despite its omnipresence on stages,
screens, and streets. Above all, focusing on the question “How can we tell the dancer from
the music” encourages one to resist the temptation to simply conclude “Doubly ineffable!”
and fall silent.21 Although fleeting, performances of choreomusicality are a force that
impresses performers, audiences, and discourses too compellingly to be ignored.

20 This has been covered in several papers by Paul Scolieri—who is working on a much-needed
monograph on Ted Shawn—most recently in his “Ruth St. Denis and the Science of Music
Visualization,” conference paper, Annual Meetings of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the
Congress on Research in Dance, Philadelphia, November 18, 2011

21 See footnote 2.
FROM LIVE TO THE ARCHIVE: PROJECT MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGIES

You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back... nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive.
–Merce Cunningham, “Notes on Choreography” (1968)

“The Dancer from the Music” has benefitted from the tremendous amount of access I have been granted both to dance companies and to their archives. Indeed, part of this dissertation derives from fieldwork: I acted as the choreomusical assistant to Merce Cunningham and his company on the 2008 revival of Second Hand (originally 1970), Cunningham’s last dance choreographed to music—and so a most important example in my dissertation—and the last revival before his death in July 2009. I have observed rehearsals of the Mark Morris Dance Company and have already twice interviewed Morris himself, which has contributed to my larger understanding of choreomusicality and which will form the basis of future writing. In addition to utilizing the on-site archives maintained by Cunningham’s and Morris’s companies, I have regularly used the nation’s largest dance archive, at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Finally, the Jacob’s Pillow Archive of Becket, Massachusetts entrusted me with copies of the silent films of the “music visualizations” by Ted Shawn and his Men Dancers, so that I could synchronize them with the music they visualize for my dissertation research. If performance is transitory, it also leaves traces in the archive in many forms: dancers’ notes, notated scores, interviews, reviews, photographs, films. While the archival authority of, say, a film might seem quite strong, I make every effort not to mistake any one representation of a performance for the performance itself. In my work on Cunningham—and for my future work on Morris—this
has meant reflecting and writing in the dark at every possible performance before committing myself to text on my dissertation’s pages.

While both music and dance are notoriously ephemeral, the interdisciplinary reach of my project depends on evocative prose and less on musical or dance notation. In writing this dissertation, I have made a conscious decision not to utilize dance notation to describe choreographies or their choreomusicality. While I have consulted Labanotation (which, like any notation system, is necessarily inexact) in my reading and research, the vast majority of dance scholars cannot read it with ease, and the number of Labanotation-reading musicologists can probably be counted on one hand.²² Furthermore, while there exists one full Labanotation score for a Mark Morris dance (All Fours, to be discussed in future writing) and several for Cunningham dances, both of these choreographers have repeatedly stressed that the system is so inexact as to be nearly worthless. In my analyses of Shawn’s “music visualizations,” I occasionally augment my prose descriptions with reference to a score that is accompanied by indications in prose of where certain steps are danced vis-à-vis the music.²³

In sum, my project demands a necessarily eclectic set of methodologies, including vivid descriptions both of archival film and of live rehearsals and performances; choreomusical description and analysis; reception history; cultural and historical contextualization of changing attitudes toward American modern dance, canonical art music, masculinity, and homosexuality; biographical research and interviews of

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²² A dependence on conveying description through Labanotation might be one of the reasons that Stephanie Jordan’s *Moving Music* (footnote 14) has not had an even larger impact on dance and music scholarship.

²³ My use of score for rhythmic clarification of where specific danced movement occurs is similar to that of Robertson, Hahn, and Meintjes (see footnotes 17 and 18).
choreographers and dancers; and, most importantly, critical awareness of the relationships between, and limits of, all of these methods in the translation of choreomusical performance from the stage to the page.
She sits—still, silent, almost alone. (Fig. 1.1.) Is she mourning a lost loved one? Regretting the state of her marriage? Suffering a nasty headache? No, one might reply, she is not troubled nor in pain: she is clearly listening to Schumann, as the painting’s title indicates. But apart from the title, how might one know that she is really listening? Perhaps she’s merely pretending to listen? Again, one only knows that the artist, Fernand Khnopff, has
suggested by his title that this is what she is doing, and furthermore (let’s say one does just a little research)\(^1\) it turns out this is Léonie Khnopff (née Dommer), the artist’s mother, and mothers are not so prone to distraction like their sons are, nor do they have time to pretend to listen to anything they don’t want to. What is this listening like for her? What is going on in her mind? Here one is really without a clue. Even the specific Schumann score, which that barely visible pianist is playing, is unknown. And even if Khnopff had not left the pages blank—say he provided three little notes for a musicologist to zoom in upon and thereby identify the score—one still would not have a clue about Madame Khnopff’s listening experience.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, painters, poets, and philosophers in Western Europe had all seemed to agree that the mystery of instrumental music—with its unsayable and untranslatable content inseparable from its form, and with its power to directly impact the absorbed listener—offered the *ne plus ultra* of aesthetic experience. Across the channel and only five years before this canvas was created, Walter Pater famously penned: “*All art constantly aspires to the condition of music.*” Concert music’s unbelievable power over a listener was still a recent phenomenon. This cultural phenomenon is what Fernand Khnopff, who as a dedicated Symbolist particularly valued music’s intimations of ineffable beauty, suggests on his canvas.\(^2\) His mother, of all people, becomes suddenly unreachable, lost in the *Innerlichkeit* (if not having lost sense of herself

\(^1\) Very few writers, whether art historians or others, note that the woman sitting in the center of the room (and canvas) is the author’s mother; of those that do note that the woman is Khnopff’s mother, almost none provide her name. An exception to this erasure of Léonie Khnopff can be found in *Fernand Khnopff, 1858–1921*, exhibition catalog, ed. Frederik Leen (Brussels: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 2004), 72-74, 80.

\(^2\) To glean a bit more of Khnopff’s symbolist predilection for music (including his paintings of musicking people and illustrations for concert announcements) see Michel Draguet, *Fernand Khnopff: Portrait of Jeanne Kéfer* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2004), 10-18.
entirely) that the proper appreciation of music (whether or not by Schumann and marked with a designation like “sehr innig”) seemed to demand in 1883.

I begin with *Listening to Schumann* because, on first glance, it seems the exact opposite of the images—as pictures and in prose—found throughout the first part of this dissertation. When one thinks of the dancer Isadora Duncan, for example, one does not imagine her with diverted gaze, sitting down, or in a heavy black dress. Like Léonie Khnopff, Duncan was a committed listener. Duncan, however, would face the music (and other devoted listeners) and dance. Despite breaking one of its cardinal rules, she was committed to the “cult of absolute music,” a phrase that captures the sense of a community (equally real and imagined) in thrall to concert music, the larger culture of Werktreue, and not only the embodied joy but also the cultural capital that such music could offer. In Part I of this study, I will note that such music, imbued with Bourdieu’s “distinction,” could provide an air of legitimation for these then tradition-breaking choreographic practices.³ Western European classical music did indeed provide such distinction and legitimation; even if most writers about dance, fearing any suggestion that the art form lacks an integral self-sufficiency, have most often been hesitant to directly state this. Beyond Beethoven lending barefoot dancing a respectable sonic profile, however, there is a slightly more interesting story. The overall argument of the following two chapters is that a large part of Duncan’s and her contemporaries’ success—and, therefore, also a large reason that the art form we now call “modern dance” came to exist—was precisely because these women

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³ This argument is briefly suggested in the elegant yet encompassing, and equally critical and historical, study on Duncan by Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1995), 143.
gave physical form to an experience of music that otherwise remained interior and invisible.

Duncan knew that the time was ripe for such embodiment. For all the talk of music’s movement in nineteenth-century Europe, the music’s listener was left immobilized. When compared to listeners in most musicking practices across time and the globe, such passive immobility was, and remains in today’s concert halls, atypical. While a photographic reproduction of Khnopff’s canvas above cannot be found in any study on dance—the art most concerned with movement—it has appeared in art and music scholarship, where the image is used to quickly signify a widespread cultural practice. In a recent article contextualizing *Listening to Schumann* and many other images representing the act of listening during the late nineteenth-century heyday of Wagnerism and Symbolism, art historian Anne Leonard at one point references Henri Bergson’s observation that “To perceive means to immobilize.” Some years earlier, Khnopff’s painting served as both the cover image and the final illustration in Richard Leppert’s *The Sight of Sound*. “En écoutant du Schumann is a turning away from the musical body, as though it were the very enemy of the music it produces.” Leppert recognizes in the

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4 In Jonathan Crary’s *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: October Books, MIT Press, 1999), the image appears on page 50 without ever being referenced in the surrounding text, which discusses the related states of attention and absorption. Nicholas Cook, in his *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), writes of the “[…] construction of bourgeois subjectivity. By this I mean that [the arts] explored and celebrated the inner world of feeling and emotion; music, in particular, turned away from the world and became dedicated to personal expression. (Better than any verbal expression of this is the painting in Fig. 8 [*Listening to Schumann*]),” text 19; reproduction, 20.


painting the exact opposite of what Roland Barthes celebrated in his writing: music (and especially the music of Schumann) as doing.

One of this dissertation’s many starting points is the place where Leppert stopped, leaving Barthes standing at the side of the road surveying nineteenth-century Western European classical music culture and waiting for another driver to foolishly pick him up for a ride, during which he will go on about Schumann and jouissance. When he played Schumann, the French theorist and maman’s boy seems to have found a strong body; a body, I would contend, that was really just a stronger, more attractive, and more active version of his own: “It is a muscular music; in it the auditive sense has only a degree of sanction: as if the body was listening, not the ‘soul’ . . . the body itself must transcribe what it reads . . . it is the scriptor, not the receiver.”  

7 Although Barthes begins that essay with sharp binary distinctions between listening to and playing music, this is really more a polemical gesture than anything else: all those solid scores (whether by Beethoven or Schumann, whether played or listened to, scripted or received) melt into praxis. They continue to do so in Barthes’s later writing from the 1970s, just as in embodied reality they always had. It is this embodied reality, specifically as it was framed upon the early twentieth-century stage as “barefoot,” “classical,” “interpretative,” or “free” dance—and by the 1930s as “modern dance”—that I will explore in the three chapters below

Even in the discourse of Hanslick, where bodies are avoided as if they were carrying the plague, “muscular music” was always implied, always the hidden supplement. Before turning to the women who first manifested this idea through their dancing, I will

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explore its trace in both canonical and less-cited aesthetic texts around the idea of “absolute music” in the nineteenth century. “Absolute music,” a negative term invented by Wagner, has inspired no shortage of prose, including recent scholarship suggesting the term has been blown out of all proportion and was only later back-projected as a conceptual catch-all over the nineteenth century. The opening of the following chapter, I hope, is not a mere excursus through a tired, familiar idea and an excuse for readers to roll their eyes; rather, I wish to suggest that the “movement” of absolute music was predicated on the late nineteenth-century German aesthetic concept of Einfühlung [the act of feeling/projecting oneself into an artwork to give it life and movement] before that term was even coined. I will then contend that it was this still fresh idea that Duncan, her contemporaries, and the following generation of dancers exploited, and from which the art form and tradition now known as “modern dance” leaped into existence.

Utilizing Khnopff’s Listening to Schumann as evidence, cultural historian Peter Gay notes: “The dominant ideology of the nineteenth century took women to be more sensitive, more passive, more receptive than the male. But men, even manly men, were far from immune to music’s charms.”8 Indeed, as my third chapter explores, Ted Shawn (one of the first men in the American modern dance tradition) reveals just how “far from immune” he was to music’s power. American modern dance was a field dominated by women throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Shawn saw this domination—as well as the idea that dancing was not a respectable activity, let alone profession, for men—as a challenge. He attempted to outdo the example of Duncan (whom he very much respected, and likely also envied), to be even more receptive and sensitive to music than

she was, and to translate music directly into choreography for his group of male dancers. In his “music visualizations,” as he called them, Shawn and his troupe found legitimation for performing as something other than the “manly men” that was their careful, closeted norm.
CHAPTER 1
IN SEARCH OF LOST MOVEMENT AND MOVERS:
HANSLICK, WAGNER, AND LOIE FULLER

Eduard Hanslick has long figured in musicological discourse as one of the main representatives of the “cult of absolute music.”¹ However it was Richard Wagner, long understood (too simply)² as the music-historical antipode of Hanslick, who first used the phrase “absolute music.”³ He did so in 1846 when writing about Beethoven’s Choral Symphony. Specifically, he notes that the cellos and basses, in their recitative at the beginning of the fourth movement, seem to talk back at the rest of the orchestra.⁴ As anyone even moderately awake during most versions of Music Appreciation 101 could tell you, the low strings seem to say, “Ugh, no, give it up—we don’t want those tones anymore.” Wagner’s first use of “absolute music” suggests negativity: music should not be separated from the other arts (here, language or poetry).Why shouldn’t, Wagner seems to

¹ I use this phrase following Suzanne Cusick in “Gender, Musicology, Feminism,” 494, as covered in this dissertation’s introduction. The phrase was previously dropped in Susan McClary’s “Narrative Agendas in ‘Absolute’ Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’ Third Symphony,” in Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 327. The likely first time the words “cult of absolute music” appeared in print was in an article on Glazunov, in which the author highlights the composer’s distance from the Kuchka by noting that “in place of the cult of descriptiveness [he adopted] the cult of absolute music.” This earlier use of the phrase is serendipitous: Glazunov, of course, would orchestrate Chopin piano pieces for the first non-narrative ballet, Les Sylphides. Leonid Sabaneev, “A. K. Glazunov,” The Musical Times, 70, no. 1033 (Mar. 1, 1929), 209.


ask, the low strings be able to escape “die Schranken der absoluten Musik” [“the boundaries of absolute music”] just like that liberated baritone some measures later? In slightly later writings, most especially his 1851 *Opera and Drama*, “absolute music” returns with a vengeance. By this time the phrase is, to Wagner’s mind, pejorative enough to be used for anti-Semitic criticism/slander of Meyerbeer: “As a Jew, he owned no mother tongue. … He spoke with precisely the same interest in any modern tongue, and set it to music with no sympathy for its idiosyncracies. He was interested only in how far it could be used as a compliant server of Absolute Music.”6 One can see how within only five years Wagner would mobilize this specific phrase for very different purposes. To Wagner’s mind the concept was especially negative and could pack a punch.

Among slightly later writers it would soon become interchangeable with the more common “the purely musical” [“das rein Musikalishe”] or “pure instrumental music” [“reine Instrumentalmusik”], the latter of which occurred in Wagner’s sentence immediately preceding the one containing “absolute music” in his 1846 program of the Ninth. By the beginning of the twentieth century, people would use the phrase, in several languages, to describe music ranging from Bach to Wagner to contemporary composers. It would be used to signify musicking practices from the eighteenth century to the present. By middle of the twentieth century, as the humanities embraced New Criticism’s formalist ideal of the hermetic work, the idea of “absolute music” would be colored by the idea of

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5 Ellis translates the phrase as “breaking the bounds of absolute music,” ibid. Grey’s translation is “transgressing the boundaries of absolute music,” *Wagner’s Musical Prose*, 2. Grey better captures the relationship between the words “Schranke” [“barrier” or “limit”] and “Grenze” [“border” or “limit”]. We might say that Wagner implies that “absolute music” is something like a territory and that the low strings want (Wagner, of course, to cross the border, “to leave” [“verlassen”]).

music “on its own terms” or the phrase “the music itself.” Therefore, even if works of “absolute music” might be a metaphysical chimera—and even if the specific phrase might not have been that common in nineteenth-century texts—it cannot be denied that use of the term (and cultish faith in what it did, and did not, stand for) from the beginning of the twentieth century onward signals a larger paradigm of Western European art-musicking obedient to the work-concept.

**Traces of the Purely Human in the Purely Musical**

It has been and remains notoriously difficult for writers to address the topic of what actually happens during an aesthetic experience, especially one involving absolute music. That about which it is most difficult to write is often, of course, that about which one most wants to know. The answer to the question of what an audience gets out of their experience of a performance of tragedy is a difficult one. Such an answer, in the form of a comprehensive definition of catharsis, is missing from Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Similarly difficult to provide is an answer to the question of how one experiences music itself; at least it was difficult for Eduard Hanslick to give a positive definition of this in his *On the Musically Beautiful*. Should one to think that both catharsis and the experience of “the purely musical” are unknowable? It is true that where Aristotle and Hanslick would have provided a description of aesthetic experience one finds instead a “gap,” which (even though the writer might not have intended it) “capture[s] the sense in which a practice is always *more than* any theory which either describes and/or prescribes it”?  

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For Aristotle, the end of the aesthetic experience of tragedy is catharsis, an end only vaguely defined. “Tragedy reduces the soul’s emotion of [pity and] terror by means of compassion and dread.”

In an English translation of Aristotle, can one substitute “sympathy” for “compassion”? “Compassion” and “sympathy,” by the looks of them, both seem to mean “the act of feeling/suffering with.” Not so. “Compassion” means witnessing suffering, acknowledging it, and subsequently feeling pity. “Sympathy” has a meaning closer to what its Greek prefix and root suggest: “feeling with,” a parallel between what another feels and what I then feel. What unites the two words is not so much their “with”-ness as their “apart”-ness; neither word suggests that one would “feel (oneself) into” another. The line between self and other is maintained. Taking this important distinction into account, only the word “compassion” will do in the above translation of Aristotle; the proof is in the pity [eleos]. In the instance of watching a tragedy, the other is but a representation on the stage; the spectator’s compassion and dread happen in a safe zone, otherwise such an experience would not be productive and pleasurable but overwhelming, if not terrifying. Compassion—with its remove, its sense of being a bit above it all—is crucial not only to Aristotle’s understanding of catharsis but also to understanding why one would sit back and watch, and not endure, a performance of tragedy. One might say that tragedy reminds its audience that “shit happens.” Considering

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9 Aristotle, “The Tractus Coislinianus (argued to be a summery of Poetic II)” in Poetics, trans. Richard Janko (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 43. Quotes from Aristotle with brackets indicate text that, though missing from all available sources, can be reasonably inserted.


12 Richard Janko’s note on 53b15 in Aristotle, Poetics (see supra 13)
catharsis, or, as some have referred to it, “purification,” one might say that both in tragedy and through tragedy there’s “shit going down.”  

“Feeling (oneself) into,” contrasted with “compassion” and “sympathy” above, is an overly literal translation of the German word “Einfühlung,” “empathy” in English.  

Consulting the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one will note that “empathy” did not enter the English language until the first decade of the last century as a translation of “Einfühlung,” as that word was found in Theodor Lipps’s *Leitfaden der Psychologie*. Lipps would popularize the word “empathy” and, unlike his predecessors, extend the scope of objects one could “feel into” from inanimate artworks to other human beings. It is because of Lipps’ extension that popular use of the word today suggests a meaning closer to “sympathy.” Staying with the older and original meaning of the word, however, the *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the definition: “The power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation.”  

This is closer to the main idea behind the aesthetic movement of *Einfühlung*, the earliest proponent of which was Robert Vischer, son of Friedrich Theodor Vischer. In empathy, the object of aesthetic contemplation (be it architecture, a painting, or some music) and the contemplating self merge, even if only temporarily. *Pace* the *O.E.D.*, it was not one’s “personality” but one’s ability for, and sense of, physical movement that the *Einfühlung* theorists imagined as
projected into the non-living substance of the artwork (be it stone columns, paint on a canvas, or sound waves).

The most comprehensive (and, at times, very confusing) explication of *Einfühlung* as an aesthetic response to music specifically is perhaps found in Theodor Lipps’s *Ästhetik*, For my purposes here, an earlier account of something close to *Einfühlung* found in Friedrich von Hausegger’s *Die Musik als Ausdruck* [*Music as Expression*] will suffice. What’s more, Hausegger’s text makes a direct connection between Aristotle’s elusive idea of catharsis and the late nineteenth-century concept of *Einfühlung*. Hausegger’s excitement-driven prose (with its shades of Schopenhauer) about the aesthetic experience of music is worth quoting at length.

In such states of excitation our basic nature becomes awake in an intensified way. They flash through us like a storm, cleansing and clearing, in that they lead us back to the source of nature and of all existence; in such circumstances we feel as though our sensibility suddenly secured a deeper insight into the process of all becoming, we feel lifted above ourselves, the creative force that resides in us becomes perceptible to a degree that gives us a presentiment that its fecundity extends far beyond our individual existence: we become aware of our identity with the whole remaining sphere of life.

Aristotle called purging of the passions the aim of tragedy. What moves us in art as feeling or passion, however, is only the intensified awareness of existence that is conveyed to us, arising from sympathy . . . To the capacity for this intensified sympathy [*gesteigertes Mitempfinden*] man owes his capacity to experience inner states of excitement readily through imagination.  

Hausegger’s understanding of the aesthetic experience as “intensified sympathy” above does not depend on a transitive notion of expression (as does Aristotle’s understanding of catharsis through watching a tragedy). The emphasis on “intensified awareness of existence” suggests only some kind of animus in the artwork and, subsequently, an

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17 Friedrich von Hausegger, *Die Musik als Ausdruck*, (Vienna: Carl Konegan, 1885), 47, as cited and translated in Edward Lippman, *A History of Western Musical Aesthetics*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 286-87. The original German for “intensified sympathy” was found in Mallgrave and Ikonomou’s “Introduction,” *Empathy, Form, and Space*, 43, (supra fn. 20).
intersubjectivity always already present between listener and music, if not *Einfühlung* as defined above.

Most likely responding to Eduard Hanslick’s positive statement that “the content of music is tonally moving forms,”¹⁸ Hausegger, considering the correspondence between human and musical expressivity, writes simply “[It is therefore a mistake] to believe that instrumental music is exclusively a play of tones.”¹⁹ Hanslick’s occasional concessions to the extramusical aside, the aesthetics of these two theorists are not as different as they might first seem. While I do not wish to entirely collapse differences between the work of these writers, I do wish to show how the concept of *Einfühlung* (and so too a more central position for the listener) was implied in writing about music throughout the Romantic era.

Let us begin in a rather obvious place: in section 16 of his *Critique of Judgment*, Immanuel Kant differentiates between “two kinds of beauty, free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) and merely accessory beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*).”²⁰ Free beauty is conceptless, and its manifestations represent [vorsstellen] nothing. Kant provides “music without a topic [Thema]... music not set to words” as an example of free beauty.²¹ Examples of accessory (adherent, dependent) beauty have a purpose—a purpose that will restrict the play of our imagination—consigning it to the realm of the intellectual and ideal. This was a realm much cherished by Hegel, whose thought provides aesthetic-historical context for, if not direct influence on, that of Hanslick. Hanslick would seem to agree about the influence; at

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¹⁹ Hausegger, as quoted in Lippman, 289.
²¹ Ibid., 77.
the beginning of the section, “‘Content’ and ‘Form’ in Music” from his *On the Musically Beautiful*, he writes, “Eminent people, mostly philosophers, have affirmed the contentlessness of music: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Herbart, Kahlert, etc.” Yet Hegel, though he acknowledged that music was contentless, expressed his desire for music to return to content.

Especially in recent times music has torn itself free from a content already clear on its own account and retreated in this way into its own medium; but for this reason it has lost its power over the whole inner life, all the more so as the pleasure it can give relates to only one side of the art, namely bare interest in the purely musical element in the composition and its skillfulness, a side of music which is for connoisseurs only and scarcely appeals to the general human interest in art.

In the next paragraph his thoughts continue, turning to one result of music’s necessary lack of inner objectivity.

This sort of objectivity music must renounce in so far as it means to remain independent [e.g. of word] in its own field. The realm of sound, as I have indicated already, has a relation to the heart and a harmony with its spiritual emotions, but it gets no further than an always vague sympathy [unbestimmteren Sympathisieren], although in this respect, a musical composition, so long as it has sprung from the heart itself and is penetrated by a richness of soul and feeling, may even be so amply impressive.

Hegel would prefer an opera to a string quintet. Here one might also note that one man’s unbestimmteren Sympathisieren is another man’s Wille. To stay with how his thought might have influenced that of Hanslick, we can interpret Hegel’s quick alternations between heart/soul and composition and the “sympathizing” between the two the same intersubjectivity (a kind of animism *lite*) that would be further explicated in the broader

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22 Hanslick, 77, (see fn. 11).


24 Ibid., the bracketed text is the editor’s.
Hegelian concept of *Verdoppelung*. This is Hegel’s idea that a human has need to reduplicate himself in an artwork, “. . . an object in which he recognizes his own self. . . evoking thereby, in this reduplication [*Verdoppelung*] of himself, what is in him into vision and into knowledge for his own mind and for that of others.” Beyond vague sympathies, one might see the influence of Hegel’s *Verdoppelung* in the animism that shades Hanslick’s text. At the very least, Hanslick will admit that the purely musical work is an embodiment of entelechy. Even if the depth of Hegel’s imprint on Hanslick’s thought remains in question, *Verdoppelung* does provide yet another historical antecedent for the theory of *Einfühlung*.

*Verdoppelung* is similarly a not-so-distant cousin to Schopenhauer’s understanding of music as the objectification of the Will. For the reader looking for an affirmation of music’s power in German music-aesthetical writings, she might do no better than reading Schopenhauer—she might even find herself blushing at the wildly impassioned (if not occasionally gushy and turgid) prose. Compared to the more strictly idealist strain of post-Kantian thought represented by Hegel, Schopenhauer is concerned with a more embodied approach to free beauty. The scholarly literature on Hanslick regularly notes that Herbart, who took a more scientistic approach to Kant’s free beauty and its purposiveness without purpose [*Zweckmäßigheit ohne Zweck*], was the major formalist influence on Hanslick.


26 “Thus music is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is, indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas.” Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. 1, sect. 52, 257. All emphases (italics) are Schopenhauer’s own.
Schopenhauer’s “formalism,” on the other hand, might be thought of as “enhanced” to near implosion, and therefore not as immediately present in Hanslick’s work. Be that as it may, the determinate conceptlessness, or purposiveness without purpose, of Kant’s free beauty in his “Third Moment of Judgments of Taste” is quite present in Schopenhauer’s understanding of music’s expression.

“[Music] never expresses phenomenon, but only the inner nature, the in-itself, of every phenomenon, the will itself. Therefore music does not express this or that definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, [etc.] themselves, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without any accessories, and so also without the motives for them.”

Schopenhauer’s insistence on music’s inability to represent specific concepts is in complete agreement with the second part of Hanslick’s negative thesis; “It is that music is incapable of expressing definite feelings, indeed the definiteness of feelings lies precisely in their conceptual essence.” Schopenhauer’s belief that music “expresses only the quintessence of life” also accords with Hanslick’s understanding that “[f]rom the fact that music has no content in the sense of “subject matter,” it does not follow that music lacks substance [Gehalt]. Clearly “spiritual substance” is what those people have in mind when they fight for the ‘content’ of music.” The importance of purposiveness without purpose for both men obviously also leads to their mutual preference for contemplative listeners over pathological ones, instrumental music over opera, “absolute music” over program music, textless over texted music, et cetera.

27 Goehr, Quest for Voice, 19.
28 Schopenhauer, 261.
29 Hanslick, 9.
30 Ibid., 82.
For Schopenhauer, it is exactly his above-quoted sense of music’s conceptlessness that creates music’s “universality [Allgemeinheit]... [and] most precise directness [gemauster Bestimmtheit], that gives it that high value as the panacea of all our sorrows [Leiden].”

A paragraph later, Schopenhauer writes, “The inexpressible depth of all music... is due to the fact that it reproduces all the emotions [Regungen, so “movements” or “impulses” would also be appropriate here] of our innermost being, but entirely without reality and remote from its pain [Quaal, double-a sic].” While the above-quoted should make clear Schopenhauer’s understanding of our temporary escape from our individual wills, the below-quoted directly equates listening to music (as will) with an act of purgation, one which leads the listener to a realization of his own “worth.” It is worth quoting at length:

After long reflection on the nature of music I recommend to you the enjoyment of this art before all others. No art affects people as directly, as deeply, as this one, just because no other art lets us recognize the nature of the world [and therefore, of the Will] so deeply and directly. Listening to a great, full-voiced [full-textured, i.e. chordal, contrapuntal], and beautiful music is like a bath for the spirit; it washes away all that is impure, all that is petty, all that is bad, each person is [stimmt, attunes] up on [to] the highest spiritual level that his nature allows; while listening to great music each person feels what his worth [Werth] on the whole is, or rather, what his worth could be.

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32 Schopenhauer, 264; German (Diogenes 1977), 331.

33 Since the above is my own translation, I have included the original German here. “Nach der langen Betrachtung über das Wesen der Music empfehle ich Ihnen den Genuß dieser Kunst vor allen andern. Keine Kunst wirkt auf den Menschen so unmittelbar, so tief ein, als diese, eben weil keine uns das wahre Wesen der Welt so tief und unmittelbar erkennen läßt, als diese. Das Anhören einer grossen, vollstimmigen und schönen Musik ist gleichsam ein Bad des Geistes: es spült alles Unreine, alles Kleinliche, alles Schlechte weg, stimmt Jeden hinauf auf die höchste geistige Stufe die seine Natur zuläßt: und während des Anhörens einer grossen Musik fühlt Jeder deutlich was er im Ganzen werth ist, oder vielmehr, was er werth seyn könnte.” Arthur Schopenhauer, Neue Paralipomena: vereinzelte Gedanken über vielerlei Gegenstände, in series Arthur Schopenhauers handschriftlicher Nachlass, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Ph. Reclam, 1896), 398, as quoted and (partially) cited in Danko Grlić, “Autonome oder gesellschaftsbedingte Musik Versuch eines marxistischen Zugangs,” International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music, vol. 7, no. 2. (Dec.,
Taking the waters or not, this account of the aesthetic experience of music is closer to Aristotle’s understanding of catharsis than it is to Hanslick’s straw-man examples of music as remedy,\textsuperscript{34} which Schopenhauer would without doubt also dispute. How does Schopenhauer’s understanding of one’s temporary escape of his individual will, a kind of catharsis, fit with Aristotle’s compassion-induced catharsis? The question might best be answered by noting how Schopenhauer’s and Aristotle’s understandings of compassion differ.

While Schopenhauer’s valuation of music could be contested, it is incontestable that section 52 of Schopenhauer’s \textit{World as Will and Representation} was born of the writer’s own love of music. And what, for Schopenhauer, is love? “[L]ove \textit{[Liebe]}... leads to salvation, that is, to the entire surrender of the will-to-live, i.e., of all willing... All love (\textit{caritas}) is compassion or sympathy \textit{[Alle Liebe (\textit{caritas}) ist Mitleid]}.”\textsuperscript{35}

Apart from love, what else is this \textit{Mitleid}? It was what the Royal Danish Society didn’t buy as the basis of morality in Schopenhauer’s eponymous essay for them.

“...I feel his woe just as I ordinarily feel only my own... But this requires that I am in some way \textit{identified with him}, in other words, that this entire \textit{difference} between me and everyone else, which is the very basis of my egoism, is eliminated, to a certain extent at least. Now since I do not exist \textit{inside the other man’s skin}, then only by means of the \textit{knowledge} I have of him, that is, of the representation of him in my head, can I identify myself with him to such an extent that my deed declares that difference abolished. However, the process here analyzed is not one that is imagined or invented; on the contrary, it is perfectly real and indeed by no means infrequent. It is the everyday phenomenon of \textit{compassion [Mitleid]}... Only insofar

\textsuperscript{34}Hanslick, 51-55.

\textsuperscript{35}Schopenhauer, vol. 1, sect. 66, 374, German (Diogenes 1977), 464.
as an action has sprung from compassion does it have moral value [Werth, worth]...”

Just as the listener finds his worth in a compassionate engagement with music in the quote from the *Neue Paralipomena* above, here an action only has worth when engaged compassionately. But unlike the remove suggested by the pity in Aristotle’s compassion, Schopenhauer’s conception of *Mitleid* as presented in his *On the Basis of Morality* suggests an identification of other as self. When other writers (relevant examples here including Nietzsche and Wagner) use “*Mitleid,*” this connotation is not understood; on the contrary, the sense of slight remove between subject and object that pity requires is usually implied. In Schopenhauer’s use of the word here, however, this pervasive will-negating *Mitleid,* the foundation not only of his musical aesthetics but also of his morality, seems more closely related to “empathy” [“*Einfühlung*”] than to “compassion.”

**Hanslick as Empath**

What might all this suggest, if anything, about the writing of Hanslick? Hanslick cites Herbart repeatedly as an influence on his work; like Herbart, he was more concerned with perception than apperception. His work makes no secret of its appeal to be understood as “approach[ing] the method of the natural sciences, at least to the point of attempting to get alongside the thing itself and seeking whatever among our thousandfold flickering impressions and feeling may be enduring and objective” and “strive[s] for the ideal of an “exact” science of music after the model of chemistry or physiology.” Yet Hanslick’s

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37 Hanslick, 1.
success in being “exact” and getting near the “thing itself” seems anything but. The difficulty with which he has in forming a positive thesis of the beautiful in music is obvious.

After his dramatic single line of a positive thesis—“The content of music is tonally moving forms”—he presents a metaphor for music, that of an animated arabesque. “Now let us think of an arabesque not dead and static but coming into being in continuous self-formation before our eyes.” The metaphor is difficult to fit to music because an arabesque is perceived visually. It is a form in space. An arabesque “coming into being” would move through both space and time. As Hanslick uses the term, however, music’s “movement” is actually a time-based phenomenon and only metaphorically spatial. One could object that sound waves are moving through space, that acoustic phenomena require a space in which to reverberate: this is not what one usually thinks of when imagining music’s movement, least of all Hanslick’s “tonally moving.” So whence the relationships that suggest “movement”? Who’s doing the moving?

Hanslick waits until the end of the paragraph to suggest that an entelechy from a genius is responsible for the movement of the arabesque. In the following chapter, “The Subjective Impression of Music,” the “mover” behind those “tonally moving forms” shifts from the composer’s spirit to the performer’s realization. “Thus the emotionally cathartic [gefühlsentäußernde] and stimulating aspect of music is situated in the reproductive act, which coaxes the electric spark out of its obscure secret place and flashes it across to the listener.”

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38 Ibid., 29.
39 Ibid.
40 Hanslick, 49.
Following this, Hanslick promises a turn to the listener, but the only listeners he is able to contemplate for the rest of the chapter are those who are either physically or mentally unwell. The parade of unhealthy listeners continues into the next chapter with the “pathological listener” and the “enthusiast.” What distinguishes a healthy listener, when he finally gets to him, is pure contemplation: “To the beautiful corresponds an enjoying, not an undergoing, as the term *aesthetic enjoyment* [*Kunstgenüß*] neatly signifies.”\(^\text{41}\) As Hanslick stresses shortly thereafter: “The most significant factor in the mental process which accompanies the comprehending of a musical work . . . is the mental satisfaction which the listener finds in continuously following and anticipating the composer’s designs.”\(^\text{42}\) For all of his evasion in positively describing the listener and listening process, the above is an active mode of listening.

This mode is actually very similar to Robert Vischer’s understanding of scanning [*Schauen*], as opposed to seeing [*Sehen*]:

> Scanning is more conscious than mere seeing, for it sets out to analyze the forms dialectically (by separating and reconnecting the elements) and to bring them into a mechanical relationship. Scanning alone makes a complete artistic presentation possible, for its movement, as will be shown, is accompanied by an impelling animation of the dead phenomenon, a rhythmic enlivening and revitalization of it.\(^\text{43}\)

Though Hanslick notes that “[w]ithout mental activity, there can be no aesthetic pleasure whatsoever,”\(^\text{44}\) one imagines that he could not bring himself to admit that “tonally moving forms” are but a “dead phenomenon,” i.e., so many sound waves awaiting the “animation” of a listener, because listeners, especially the ones he like to list, are fallible.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 64.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.


\(^{44}\) Hanslick, 64.
In addition to avoiding a sustained examination of aesthetic listening, Hanslick highlights the immediacy of music. “The effect of tones is not only more rapid but more immediate and intensive. The other arts persuade, but music invades us.” Connecting immediacy to objective qualities, he writes,

The beauty of a self-subsistent, simple theme makes itself known in aesthetical awareness with an immediacy which permits no other explanation than the inner appropriateness of the phenomenon, the harmony of its parts, without reference to any external third factor. It pleases us in itself, like the arabesque...

What of the necessary “mental activity,” then? When not avoiding contemplation altogether, he denies that it is necessary.

“It is extraordinarily difficult to describe this specifically musical, autonomous beauty . . . it can be talked about only in dry technical definitions or with poetical fictions. Its realm is truly out of this world. What in every other art is still description is in music already metaphor.” It is extraordinarily difficult, but Hanslick tries nonetheless to speak of “tones... the untranslatable, ultimate language.” And when he does, he often makes music something human. He writes of “rhythm, the artery which carries life to music” and “[t]houghts and feelings run like blood in the arteries of the harmonious body of beautiful sounds. ...they animate it.” He also distances music from the mechanical. “The

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45 Hanslick, Musically Beautiful, 50.
46 Ibid., 32.
47 Ibid., 30.
48 Ibid., 82.
49 Fred Maus has explored these humanizing metaphors in his article “Hanslick’s Animism,” The Journal of Musicology, 10/3 (1992), 273-92.
50 Hanslick, Musically Beautiful, 28.
51 Ibid., 82.
most artistically contrived music box cannot move the hearer, yet the simplest street singer will do this if he is hear and soul caught up in his song.\textsuperscript{52}

Both the lack of a positive description of the experience of the purely musical and the humanizing metaphors suggest that what Hanslick both wanted most to avoid and quietly acknowledged was the subjective experience of music, an experience that, even when grounded in the sensuousness of an object, might too easily collapse into the sticky world of an individual listener’s subjectivity.\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps he was afraid that Friedrich Theodor Vischer, whom he read and referred to as “admirable,” was right when he wrote of music that “the individual who enjoys the work enters that work with his profoundest self, and the two become one. [In music] there will be a fusing of object and subject, more intimate but more obscure than the relationship in the plastic arts,”\textsuperscript{54} or, as his son, Robert Vischer, who coined “Einfühlung” put it:

> What are space and time to me? [...] What are all those forms to me through which the red blood of life does not flow? [...] Where there is no life—precisely there do I miss it. [...] At this point, however, our feeling rises up and takes the intellect at its word: yes, we miss red-blooded life, and precisely because we miss it, we imagine the dead form as living. [...] Thus I project my own life into the lifeless form, just as I quite justifiably do with another living person. [...] I am mysteriously transplanted and magically transformed into this Other.\textsuperscript{55}

The “enhanced”-ness of Robert Vischer’s understanding of aesthetic experience, and his entire concept of Einfühlung, is clearly indebted to Schopenhauer, who wrote: “We shall judge all object which are not our own body, and there are given to our consciousness . . .

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 49.

\textsuperscript{53} One will remember that Hanslick believes that women have a difficult time “renouncing their subjectivity,” by which he seems to mean something like “ignoring their feelings.” Hanslick, 46.

\textsuperscript{54} Friedrich Theodor Vischer, Aesthetics or the Science of the Beautiful, trans. Martin Cooper, section 746, as found in Music in European Thought, 1851-1912, ed. Bojan Bujić, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 84.

\textsuperscript{55} Robert Vischer, “On the Optical Sense of Form,” 104.
only as representations, according to the analogy of this body.”56 A philosophy so dependent on the body—and on Schopenhauer—seems at first the opposite of that of Hanslick. What’s more, the word “empathy” might at first strike today’s English speaker as denoting a concept most distant from Hanslick’s concerns. It is not. Again, Einfühlung does not presuppose specific feelings, as does “emotional contagion”; only later uses of “empathy” in English carry this connotation. With that definitional caveat noted, Hanslick can be read as a closeted aesthetic “emphat,” were such a noun referring to adherents of Einfühlung to have existed in the nineteenth-century German language. This tendency can be read not only in his metaphors for musical motion and space but also in the trace what is conspicuously absent. While at pains to hide it, Hanslick likely did understand that the purely musical was the purely human, as Schopenhauer pointed out in his unique way and the Einfühlung theorists, with hints of scientism, theorized.57 Indeed, his metaphors for tonally moving forms, his “arabesque” and his “kaleidoscope,” transforming music from a primarily time-based art to a spatial one recall the dialogue before the Transformation Music [Verwandlungsmusik] in Act I of Wagner’s Parsifal:

    PARSIFAL: I hardly move, yet feel I have come far.  
    GURNEMANZ: You see, my son, here time becomes space.

Absolute music has always been more of a metaphysical concept than a reality. Not surprisingly it was the man who coined the term—in a negative sense—who would attempt to give it an embodied, completed form.

57 My sense of Hanslick’s understanding is a response of “Yes” to the rhetorical questions regarding his disavowal posed by Lydia Goehr, The Quest for Voice, 97.
All Too Inhuman: Wagner, Mallarmé, and Dancing Women

When Friedrich Nietzsche turned on Wagner after his previous infatuation with the composer, he not only stated that he preferred the dance-impelling music of Carmen to the drowning waters of Wagner, he also attacked him for hiding his plans and sketches for symphonies without dramatic content from the world. It was in that context that Nietzsche (who, at this point, had also crossed Schopenhauer off his list of influences) accuses Wagner of “having the virtue of the Décadents: pity.” Walter Kaufmann’s translation here of “mitleid” as “pity” has since been corrected by John Deathridge as “compassion.” One might ask if Wagner’s conflation of the purely musical with the purely human might be understood as “empathy”—since, from the perspective of the audience, such intense identification with his drama’s music and characters on stage seemed to be demanded by their physical surroundings. With the distance of over one hundred years between today and the first performances at Bayreuth, we can more clearly sense that such identification hinged more on the demand for the audience’s attention enforced by the Festspielhaus’s design than by the written musico-dramatic content of Wagner’s productions. A main thesis of Jonathan Crary’s attention-holding book Suspensions of Perception is that “modern distraction was not a disruption of stable or ‘natural’ kinds of sustained, value-laden perception . . . but was an effect . . . of the many


60 John Deathridge, see the section “Sex and the Pity” in his essay “Strange Love,” in Wagner Beyond Good and Evil (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 203-04.
attempts to produce attentiveness in human subjects.” On the very next page following Crary’s thesis—floating, not referenced in the body of the text, offering a distraction—is a reproduction of the image of Fernand Khnopff’s listening mother, which opened this chapter. Later, in his discussion of Bayreuth’s effort to “produce attentiveness,” Crary focuses on the response of Revue wagnérienne writers Charles and Pierre Bonnier:

“According to these writers, the basis of Wagner’s ‘optics’ begins with ‘doing away with the autonomy of the audience’ by ‘absorbing and dominating it.’” It would therefore seem that Léonie Khnopff listening to Schumann in a private performance in her home or an audience listening to Parsifal in the dark of the aisle-less auditorium at Bayreuth are near equivalents despite all the surface difference. Both, like the art of the cinema just around the corner, intoxicate their audience into an attention resulting in immobility, if not total passivity—as numerous critics (Adorno, most vociferously) would later charge Wagner and his audiences, if not the dedicated structural listener of Schumann.

Yet, in reviewing the importance of the rapt audience, I do not wish to entirely dismiss the importance of either specific music or music’s relation to gesture—and its ultimate relation to compassion or empathy. Scholars not only of music but also of visual culture, theater, and literature have lavished much attention on Wagner and gesture, and this provides a valuable springboard into the late nineteenth-century beginnings of what we now call modern dance. Writing about Wagner’s use of the phrase “absolute music” (and before continuing his thesis that the concept informed every single word about concert music across the nineteenth century) Carl Dahlhaus notes that Wagner’s use of the word

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62 Crary, Suspensions of Perception, 253.
occurs with the prescription that “harmonia (the coherence of tones) must remain combined with *rhythmos* and *logos*, i.e., with ordered movement and language,” a combination he wanted his later music dramas to manifest.\(^\text{63}\) Accenting *rhythmos*, Lydia Goehr reminds the reader that Wagner wanted music to move toward “gymnastics,” so that his music dramas may occur “in full embodied presence, with the full outerness of bodily gesture . . . in full presence ‘before our very eyes’; it is music’s ‘visible counterpart.’”\(^\text{64}\)

So what of the later Wagner who wrote *Parsifal* (an operatic paean to disembodiment if ever there were), where music’s most visible living counterpart is found in Kundry? Her entrances sometimes suggest a friend who tends to enter your house like a bat out of hell—going on about something, bringing a sense of mess to your immaculate life and living room—only to suddenly collapse on your couch for the next few hours. Kundry’s importance to Parsifal is undeniable;\(^\text{65}\) yet she is hardly a positive gymnastic role model.

Numerous writers have highlighted Wagner’s change of focus over his oeuvre from outer to inner drama, from gesturing bodies to ever yet more metaphysical music, from the kinesthetic to the symbolic.\(^\text{66}\) Wagner’s many different uses of the word “gesture”

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\(^{65}\) Indeed, pleasantly going against the grain of critics who have considered Kundry a hysteric, Brian Hyer highlights her role in Parsifal’s hysteria, and the audience’s as well, in his “Parsifal hystérique,” *Opera Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2006): 269-320.

\(^{66}\) A fair amount of preliminary groundwork for Smart’s *Mimomania* is laid by Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen im Wagner Musikdramen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1970). A related idea, often with repercussions for the staged action, is the Wagner’s distinction (and then subsequent blurring) between phenomenal and noumenal music (here, I am thinking of her discussion of *Tristan*, where characters hear phenomenal sounds internally) proposed by Carolyn Abbate,
[Gebärde] has inspired a massive critical-theoretical debate that runs through Nietzsche, Mallarmé, Adorno (which I will briefly take up in my third chapter), and all the way up to Badiou. Sustained scholarly focus on the actual, specifically performed gestures upon the stage and on the meaning of musical synchronization with them has been less common, as if not worthy of attention. Providing such focus, and tempering Dahlhaus’s overreaching thesis about Wagner’s gesture referenced above, has led Mary Ann Smart to note not only that close synchronization appears throughout Wagner’s oeuvre but that it also most often signals characters who (like the silent audience before them) are “in a state verging on trance” and without agency.

This is a far cry from the “sheer bodily motion” of Auber’s Muette de Portici and the audience at the Opéra in 1828. Around the same time there were people dancing to Beethoven symphonies not yet reified and treated as pure or absolute. J.Q. Davies has revealed that the music of Beethoven (the composer whose works Wagner understood as both the apex of absolute music and the discovery of its limits) was often partnered with more visual forms, notably ballet, in the 1820s. The relationship between concert music and ballet from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the time shortly after

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67 Clarification of the earlier part of this messy web, and its importance within the even larger modernist arguments for and against theatricality or “theatricalism,” is provided by Martin Puchner, see especially 31-55.

68 Smart, Mimomania, 179.

69 Ibíd., 61.

Beethoven’s death was one where the aesthetic of concert music began to influence that of ballet (formerly more pantomimic, then as if tableaux vivantes gently shifting from one tableau to the next, then more ethereal), and vice versa (imagine the Romantic conductor in motion). This more ethereal danseuse leads Davies to write, “Whereas in the early century the dancer had been accustomed to presenting her body to be ‘read,’ by 1829 she increasingly began to recompose herself ‘musically.’”\(^{71}\) Indeed, though not yet carrying the metaphysical musical baggage of Wagner and though the audience was still in a lit auditorium, the focus on the non-human in ballet became regular. Ballets increasingly called for a female corps of ghosts dressed in white. While the textbook example is the Willis (a group of vengeful virgins) in the second act of *Giselle* (1841), the naughty nuns in third act of Meyerbeer’s opera *Robert le diable* (1831) provide the first example of a wildly successful (and sadly much forgotten by historians) scene. Though not yet the abstract and geometric “pure dance” of Fokine’s sylphs to Chopin in 1909, the idea of ballet blanc was well on its way.\(^{72}\)

“Specialist composers,” as they still are often disparagingly called, composed the majority of the music to which ballerinas danced throughout the nineteenth-century. Today, chances are that a larger percentage of balletomanes than of musicologists will recognize the name Jean Schneitzhoeffer. Schneitzhoeffer wrote the music for the first performance of *La Sylphide* with Marie Taglioni, whose command of dancing on pointe

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 41.

\(^{72}\) Marian Smith has recently offered clarification about the overused term “ballet blanc” and Andre Levinson’s projection of it back on to nineteenth-century dance—in addition to Levinson’s feminization of ballet tout court—in her brilliant article “The Disappearing Danseur,” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 19, no. 1 (2007): 33-57, especially 44-45. This retrospective labeling of a dance as “ballet blanc” from a modernist position is perhaps even more of a distortion than the comparable early twentieth-century labeling of “absolute music” found in the past.
would henceforth cement the association between sylphs and toe shoes. Even Adolphe Adam might be better recognized today by more people as the composer of “O, Holy Night” [“Cantique de Noël” or “Minuit, chrétiens”] than of Giselle.

Davies’s reference to “dance to be read” carries a host of associations and references for a dance historian. One of the most prominent also happens to involve a dismissal of the body in favor of the Idea with a capital ‘I’, just as in Wagner’s Parsifal, Here I am referring to Stéphane Mallarmé’s text “Ballets.” Such a dismissal is perhaps less surprising with music (where the base material of the art is sound waves) than it would be with dance (where it is a human body). Yet, in what is now likely the most cited run-on sentence scribbled about dance in the late nineteenth century, Mallarmé, the father of French Symbolism, wrote:

...the dancer is not a woman dancing, for these juxtaposed reasons: that she is not a woman, but a metaphor summing up one of the elementary aspects of our form: knife, goblet, flower, etc., and that she is not dancing, but suggesting, through the miracle of bends and leaps, a kind of corporal writing, what it would take pages of prose, dialogue, and description to express, if it were transcribed: a poem independent of any scribal apparatus.73

Having suggested (following the work of Goehr) that Hanslick and Wagner were not the antipodes music historians have long made them, and before moving to Isadora Duncan’s celebrated use of canonical music, it is necessary to revisit the French Symbolists’ preoccupation not just with Wagner but with the American dancer Loie Fuller. It is necessary because it was not, as is often claimed, only Isadora Duncan who danced to all those familiar scores; it was also Fuller. It was also Maud Allan. This is not a question that is better left to a history of “firsts,” which is not my interest. In exploring and clarifying

who danced which composer when in the following chapter, however, we can see just how effective such use was in creating an audience for dance.

More than any other musical figure it was Wagner who most influenced the Symbolist movement: from the 1861 essay “Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris” by Baudelaire, the grandfather of Symbolism, to Mallarmé’s “Richard Wagner: reverie d’un poète français” published in the August 1885 issue of the Revue wagnérienne and beyond, these Frenchmen could not stop writing about him. Yet before Mallarmé began writing about the composer in his contribution to the Revue, he felt it necessary to briefly note that apart from music it was “Dance [that is] capable of translating, in the perfection of its rendition, the fleeting and the sudden up to the Idea.” When Mallarmé begins to write of music and Wagner, he expresses his belief that “music’s presence and nothing more” is successful when it acts as “the fountain of all vitality: an audience should feel the impression that, if the orchestra stopped playing, the mime would immediately become a statue.” Wagner, dead for over two years when Mallarmé published this, might have disagreed with this statement and with Mallarmé’s faith in dance, at least if his third act of Parsifal was any indication of his most recent thoughts on the matter.


76 Ibid., 109.
Missing in Musical Action: Loie Fuller

For Mallarmé, the specific dancer who most embodied his concept of the Idea [l’idée]—i.e., the ineffable and mysterious truth that art can suggest—was Loie Fuller. Like the proto-modern dancers Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan who would follow her, she was raised (Marie Louise Fuller) in the United States but would gain her greatest fame as a performer in Europe (at the Folies Bergère in Paris in the 1890s). Before becoming la Loïe, the attraction of the Folies, Fuller had previously performed a “skirt dance” in 1889 in London; a “skirt dance” is one in which women lift skirts over their heads to reveal their long undergarments, a not very distant cousin of the cancan. This was likely the beginning of Fuller’s eventual specialty. Her own autobiography provides a more serendipitous creation myth, focusing on spur-of-the-moment invention. There she writes that in 1891, performing as a hypnotized patient in the unsuccessful play Quack, M.D., she decided to wear a dress that she elongated herself with extra fabric. The result was that when, acting hypnotized, she mimicked the movements of the doctor’s arms while running about the stage, the long flowing fabric assumed different shapes.

There was a sudden exclamation from the house: “It's a butterfly! A butterfly!” I turned on my steps, running from one end of the stage to the other, and a second exclamation followed: “It's an orchid!” To my great astonishment sustained applause burst forth. The doctor all the time was gliding around the stage, with quickening steps, and I followed him faster and faster At last, transfixed in a state of ecstasy, I let myself drop at his feet, completely enveloped in a cloud of the light.

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material. The audience encored the scene, and then encored it again—so loudly and so often that we had to come back twenty times, or more. Of course one should always approach the self-narratives of artists with a bit of doubt. But whether or not the audience at that performance was actually that appreciative—as audiences in the 1890s at the Folies Bergère were, according to numerous accounts—we can see Fuller’s desire to be understood as having created her dance in a moment of genius, a rather romanticist, and not modernist, autobiographical trope. While Fuller may have preceded Maud Allan by years in her appearances on the stage, she likely would have decided to publish her memoirs because of Allan’s success with hers five years earlier, as well as the marketing wonders of Duncan’s increasingly public private life in addition to her regular speeches and lectures. Of the last, one of Duncan’s most famous, as I will cover in the next chapter, took its title (or, and more accurately I will suggest, was given its title by Germans) from Wagner, “Der Tanz der Zukunft,” and was published in a dual German-English edition in 1903.

The biggest difference, however, between the story, career, and attraction of Fuller and those of Allan and Duncan was that Fuller presented not a “natural” body on stage, but a largely prosthetic one. Her fabrics, now manipulated by wands she patented, became almost impossibly longer. A vast array of lights of changing colors and patterns (she even patented an “underlighting device” that made her appear to be illuminated from within and to hover in mid-air) made her seem an otherworldly force. A patented mirror room left

79 Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer’s Life: With Some Account of Her Distinguished Friends*, introduction by Anatole France (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1913), 31-32.
81 Ibid., 42-44.
the audience seeing eight Fullers instead of one. Like Wagner’s music dramas, Fuller’s dances would later be understood as an important part of the pre-history of cinema.

Fuller was thoroughly at the center of her dance’s creation and performance, literally: she seems to have most often positioned herself at center stage. The fact that her sets did not depict a particular place, but only some abstract void, would have further focused the audience’s attention on her fabrics, which veiled her “short, plump” body. As if transfixed by the vortex of fabrics, however, both contemporary reviewers and later writers have fallen relatively silent on the specific music that accompanied Fuller’s dances. Her *Serpentine Dance*, Fuller writes in her memoirs, was performed to the accompaniment of “Au Loin du Bal” (actually titled “Loin du Bal”), a waltz by Ernest Gillet (see Ex. 1.1)—“a melody inevitably associated with Loie Fuller’s dancing.”

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82 Ibid., 45.
84 The adjectives for Fuller’s body are Garelick’s, *Electric Salome*, 2.
85 So wrote John Ernest Crawford Flitch, *Modern Dancing and Dancers* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1912), 84, and some years after Fuller stopped using the tune. Fuller claims that the producer of the play *Uncle Celestin*, in which she performed as a diversion, suggested this music for her after she auditioned for him. While every review of the play mentions Fuller, and most note that she is the highlight of the evening, not one mentions music apart from the play’s underscoring. On April 29, 1892, a few months after Fuller left this production, she appeared at Madison Square Garden on a program that featured an orchestra of 180 guitars and banjos playing waltzes arranged by that evening’s main attraction, Brooks and Denton (“Champion Banjoists of the World”). Immediately before Fuller’s turn, the duo alone played their version of Gillet’s “Loin du Bal.” Was this a tribute to Fuller, or the actual inspiration for her use of the Gillet? Fuller was followed by her friend, Marshall P. Wilder, whose comedic monologues (and not his dwarfism) made him a star throughout the 1890s, Loie Fuller Programs, *MGZB-Res.*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

The non-stop oom-pah-pah beginning in measure 9 together with the repetitive eighth-note figuration seen on this page, would provide the undulations of Fuller’s fabric with a musical motor. The extremely consistent square phrases, in groups of four or eight measures throughout the short piece, would have provided a sonic base for her visual
spectacle. It also would have made lighting cues considerably more predictable for even the most rhythmically challenged offstage crew.

Beyond this, the score might also further prompt our historical imagination of how Fuller would have moved her silks to the music. Of course, it does not provide us with any definite answers, but it immediately suggests some strong possibilities. Note the opening eight measures with the rhythmic diminution leading to running eighth notes: the sense of gaining speed, and then taking off upward. The melody hovers briefly on that high G in measure 11, and, via a coy grace note, comes down whence it started. The choreomusical suggestion of the opening is irresistible: as the swirl of Fuller’s silks gather momentum across measures 5–8, they begin to rise voluminously through measures 9 and 10, her face hidden in measure 11. Quickly pulling the wands extending from her body downward on measure 12, the silks descend, and her face reappears.

The above attempt to imagine a specific choreomusicality from the barest of sources is, admittedly, speculative, regardless of how strongly the melody that commences the piece (cast in simple ABA ternary form) suggests it. Watching Fuller’s Fire Dance, discussed shortly, in a 2003 reconstruction by Jessica Lindberg, dancer and scholar Ann Cooper Albright was unconvinced of Lindberg “[c]ueing all her changes to even beats of the movement.” Albright suggests that “Fuller’s relationship to her music was much more spontaneous and flexible,” and that “Fuller must have used a breath rhythm to continue movement impulses across the metric regularity of much composed music.” Yet Cooper Albright’s suggestion seems inconsistent with the many reviews that, while not identifying the accompanying music, do stress Fuller’s own sense of rhythm. Indeed, a review that

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86 Ann Cooper Albright, Traces of Light, 74.
Cooper Albright cites only a few pages later is most unusual, though most illuminating, for its focus on Fuller’s transfiguration of music: “It is a transformation: she wrenches and breaks the barriers of genres. Music is a joy for the ear; it can also be a joy for the eyes. She creates [the] pictorial equivalent of music; she sees it and makes it seen.” Though very unusual, Clarétie’s observation was shared by a few others whose aural capacities were not entirely deactivated by Fuller’s blinding lights.

A successful late nineteenth-century French Symbolist, one who is notorious for writing that attempts to divorce signifier from signified, is the last person to whom one might look for trustworthy reportage of the facts and just the facts. Yet Mallarmé, in a short essay focused on Fuller as the abolisher of cheap stage sets, as the creator of her own space, provides us today with one of the best accounts of the importance of music to Fuller’s dances in the 1890s.

The décor is lying about, latent in the orchestra, treasure of the imagination; to come out, with a big splash, according to the views dispensed by the dancer, now and then gives the audience the Idea on stage. As it happens, this transition from sounds to fabrics (is there anything resembling gauze more than Music?) is, alone, the spell cast by Loie Fuller, by instinct, with excesses and retreats, of skirts or wings, instituting a place.

Mallarmé believed that the “décor,” the vortex of fabrics surrounding Fuller, provided a glimpse of his elusive Idea, for which he found precedent in concert music. In this essay,

87 Léo Clarétie, “Loie Fuller materialize l’insaisissable,” program notes, May 1914; Théâtre municipal du Châtelet, Paris; as cited in Albright, Traces of Light, 82.
89 Dahlhaus sketches “structural connections” between absolute music and poésie absolue (or, Mallarmé’s term, poésie pure) to further advance his thesis that “the concept of absolute music . . . was a secular idea that represented the artistic feelings of an entire age” in the final chapter of The Idea of Absolute Music, 143. Noel Verzosa links the negation of Mallarmé’s poetic theory to twentieth-century music scholarship’s “primacy of form” in “art of no specifiable content” in
as in the Clarêtie review in the previous paragraph, one wishes the author told us what music Fuller was making visible. Perhaps the translation of any music to a mass of fabric was enough to ensure the Idea? The poet’s description unmistakably echoes descriptions of absolute music: “the site, all movement, becomes the very pure result.” In the essays final paragraph he writes: “So much is understood—but not spoken!—that to proffer a word about her, while she is performing, very softly and for the immediate vicinity, seems impossible, because, firstly, this sows confusion.” For Mallarmé, Fuller has turned the music hall into the silent concert hall, and her veils into music itself. For Mallarmé, Fuller had better achieved his Idea than Wagner. For Mallarmé, pace Frank Kermode, music, although metamorphosed by Fuller, was at the heart of this achievement.

And that music was not just popular waltzes. Fuller’s 1895 Fire Dance brought her even more acclaim than her Serpentine Dance. It was danced to “The Ride of the Valkyries” from Wagner’s Die Walküre. It was here that Fuller made use of her above-mentioned “underlighting device,” making her appear illuminated from within as if in a constant state of self-immolation. In the introduction to the issue of Dance Index containing Clare de Morinni’s essay “Loie Fuller: The Fairy of Light,” the editors praise Fuller as the first to dance “to the background of important music. Yet all of this is almost forgotten today.” While there has been significant scholarly attention paid to Fuller in the

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““The Absolute Limits: Debussy, Satie, and the Culture of French Modernism” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2008), 262.

90 Mallarmé, “Another Study,” 137.

91 “If it seemed necessary, as it did, for poets to reclaim their heritage from music, the dance provided something more exactly fitting as an emblem of what was aspired to; and in a sense Fuller can stand for the liberation of Symbolism from Wagner.” Frank Kermode, “Poet and Dancer Before Diaghilev,” Salmagundi, No. 33/34, “Dance” (Spring-Summer 1976): 44.

past ten years, this fact still remains forgotten. While Clare de Morinni’s 1942 essay lists some composers and compositions which Fuller utilized only after Maud Allan and Isadora Duncan did, de Morrini’s general idea (and that of the editors in their introduction) is correct. Indeed, at some of her performances it might have been the first time audiences heard these works, even if they didn’t realize it. For example, there is a strong chance that many of the Baltimoreans at the Music Hall on the evening of March 26, 1886 heard Wagner’s “Ride” for the first time. Would they have even noticed the music when confronted with the conflagration of silks before them? I will return to this question shortly.

Although Fuller danced to Chopin, Wagner, Beethoven, and other greats, reviews of her dancing imply that this did not cause any offense; rarely did anyone even comment on the specific music. Aided by so many multicolored lights and so much fabric she probably did seem to be “translating Beethoven or Chopin into motion,” as the New York Times announced, quite convincingly. While a very real person (female, lesbian, short, a bit stocky) was responsible for all of this, that person remained mostly hidden to the eye, as contemporary visual representations of Fuller (see Fig. 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4) suggest. Figure 1.2 is one of around sixty uniquely colored lithographs completed by Henri Toulouse-Lautrec in 1893. Many of these include gold or silver dust, as if to capture Fuller’s dazzle. What Toulouse-Lautrec’s lithographs ultimately capture, however, is Fuller as an empty site on which to project: sixty lithographs from five printing stones, and yet the dancer’s silhouette is always the same—the lithographs are all color and sparkle (and, even though the lithograph does not express it, music), but not Fuller herself. In noting Fuller’s relative

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93 “Success of Loie Fuller,” The Sun [Baltimore]. March 27, 1896, 10.
invisibility, I do not wish to re-inscribe the erasure of Fuller’s body that has been critiqued by Cooper Albight and Garelick, or to ignore (let alone dismiss) Julie Townsend’s understanding of Fuller’s performance as strategically queer. Rather, I would like to suggest that, no matter Fuller’s intention, her audiences in the 1890s saw her as movement itself, and even as “visual music.”

Fuller is represented in several famous works of Art Nouveau—including the iconic/over-reproduced Jules Chéret poster for the Folies Bergère—and Jugendstil, Nouveau’s German-speaking cousin. The latter can be seen in Thomas Theodor Heine’s *Serpentinentarzerin* [*Serpentine Dancer*] (1900) (Fig. 1.3). The image, like the one opening this chapter, has become a favorite for scholars working on this period, though here commentators use the image as illustrative of some connection between visual art and music.

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96. Heine’s *Serpentinentarzerin* served as the cover image for the first edition and the frontispiece for the Routledge reprint of Frank Kermode *Romantic Image*, Routledge Classics edition with a new epilogue by the author (London, Routledge, 2002). In the epilogue to this edition, Kermode writes that “She had always taken second place to her rival Isidora Duncan [sic] . . . but Fuller was the true innovator and the finer source of poetic inspiration.” Kermode’s spelling error wonderfully manifests his bias.
Fig. 1.2. Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, *Miss Loïe Fuller*, 1893.
Fig. 1.3. Thomas Theodor Heine, *Serpentinentanzerin*, 1900.
Fig. 1.4. F. Gautier, *To Miss Loie Fuller*, 1895.
After reviewing previous scholarly attempts at locating convergences between visual art and music, specifically between Jugendstil art and music contemporary to it, Walter Frisch suggests that scholars might finally “ask not what Jugendstil could do for music . . . but . . . what music can or did do for Jugendstil”. Frisch looks to the wonderfully quirky example of August Endell, an architect and designer who indulged in use of musical terms to describe formal properties of his architecture and design. One might also look to Fuller. To music (whether Wagner or Gillet) she whirled, leaving Heine with arabesques that recall the metaphorical one envisioned by Hanslick.

The idea that “music can or did do [something] for Jugendstil [or, Nouveau]” is driven home most forcefully in a watercolor (Fig. 1.4) by one F. Gautier, a watercolor found among 22 others by students of the École des Beaux-Arts. These art students collected their works in a silk album, both of its covers with a painting of Fuller dancing as Salomé, in honor of her 550th performance in Paris on March 24, 1895. Though not in the Nouveau style (or any recognizable style, really), this watercolor celebrates the Nouveau performer. Gautier places Fuller in a multicolored whirlpool, but it is one controlled by her. By a constant clockwise turn her torque has a prismatic effect on the white limelight, it draws out a full rainbow. The music (baldly represented here as notes on a score) is also transformed by Fuller’s movement: it takes flight, riding just above the surface of that rainbow vortex. Contra Mallarmé’s image of the dancer, Gautier would posit (one imagines) that “Fuller is a woman”: the viewer is made grossly aware of the artist’s

understanding of this as Fuller has been endowed with large, especially buoyant breasts that seem to not merely float but hover above her rainbow swirl. The audience in the darkened house applauds and, as a result, the flying notes become adulatory roses. Regardless of his/her aptitude with aquarelle, artistic adventurousness, or ability to draw believable breasts, F. Gautier, I would argue, took both Fuller’s work and the notes to which she worked (and thereby transformed) fairly seriously, even though the music represented here is not that of a Ravel, Boulanger, Schoenberg, Strauss, or other likely candidate for a link to Nouveau/Jugendstil. The B-flat major key signature; the triple meter (Gautier has it in 3/16 instead of ¾, but one need not be an art student to know that thirty-second notes look fancier than eighth notes); and the repeated F across the first painted measure followed by a stepwise ascent in the next measure: it is Gillet’s “Loin du Bal.” (Please review measures 8-9, ex 1.1 above.) Gautier, bless him/her for it, appreciated Fuller’s transformation of this specific music.99 While Fuller did not produce this music, she listened to it carefully, and while under hot lights in an exhaustingly vertiginous state. In Gautier’s understanding of Fuller, the dancer does not experience the loss that befalls Kundry, the loss of “the power to stir the orchestra into motion around her.”100

F. Gautier’s painting is a highlight of the minority report. For most in the darkened house, the music—even though lighting cues and Fuller’s movements were synchronized to it—could not compete with the spectacle in which it was subsumed. As a result, the

99 A brief hunt for the identity of “F. Gautier” left me with the enticing possibility that this was Féli Gautier, who would also appreciate Charles Baudelaire enough to write a slim biography (though not create an adulatory watercolor), Charles Baudelaire 1821–1867 (Paris: Editions de la Plume, 1903). Born in 1878, Féli Gautier would have been 17 at the time of Fuller 550th performance in Paris.

100 This description of what is lost at the end of Parsifal is that of Mary Ann Smart, Mimomania, 204.
following appraisal by S.L. Bensusan, found next to an image revealing Fuller’s patented underlighting technique, is fairly exemplary of Fuller’s reception:

When the music commenced the stage was entirely dark. Suddenly a light, dazzling as that attendant upon the Holy Grail, shot down from behind the top of the proscenium and revealed La Loïe clad entirely in white. Then the dances began. From first to last colour was the predominant effect. [. . .] With the rhythm of the music the colours changed, and where the white ruled before there was a kaleidoscopic vision. Violet, orange, purple, and mauve moments succeeded in rapid succession, until a rich deep red dominated the dancer, and she became, for on brief moment, a living rose, with palpitating heart and dying leaves. Then the hues of the rainbow came from all sides and ranged themselves upon the ever-moving draperies. Every fold had its tint and scheme of colour intensified by the surrounding darkness, until the eye could scarcely bear to look. Just as the strain was becoming almost intolerable the colours disappeared, there was a white flash of appalling brilliancy, and La Loïe faded under diaphanous drapery.\(^{101}\)

Fuller’s “turn” on the music hall stage would make Wagner’s electrically illuminated grail seem like a sixth grader’s science fair project placed next to a particle accelerator. Yet the image of that illuminated chalice, as this review makes clear, was one burned into the retinae of late-nineteenth-century aesthetes (even those who never went to Bayreuth). Even today one easily reads in the grail “the transfiguration from corporeal theatricality . . . to more fully dematerialized theatricality.”\(^{102}\) The “kaleidoscopic vision” of Bensusan’s review calls to mind Hanslick’s kaleidoscope, his other metaphor for music. Fuller, like Mallarmé’s ballerina and Hanslick’s listener, was ultimately lost, read by audiences in darkened halls as a symbol just a mysterious as music, just as luminous but also as lifeless.

\(^{101}\) S. L. Bensusan (“S.L.B.”), “Li and Loïe Fuller,” *The Sketch* [London] (December 30, 1896), 398. I was able to identify “S.L.B.” as his initials and name appear several times, though not with reference to Loïe Fuller, in Alexandra Carter, *Dance And Dancers In The Victorian And Edwardian Music Hall Ballet* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

\(^{102}\) Matthew Wilson Smith reads this transfiguration (dis)embodied by Wagner’s final stage image in his “Laughing at the Redeemer: Kundry and the Paradox of *Parsifal,*” *Modernist Cultures* 3 (Winter 2007): 14.
as the Grail. The powerful electric lights—one might imagine spotlights or searchlights curiously unable to fulfill their function—would leave Fuller’s body, most musical and muscular though it was, fading in the dark. Perhaps Fuller, a real person and neither a metaphor or an allegorically burdened character in a Wagner opera, “stirred the orchestra [and the lights, and the fabric] into motion around her” all too well.

Fig. 1.5. Samuel Joshua Beckett, [*Loie Fuller Dancing*], ca. 1900.

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103 At the end of his pivotal chapter on Mallarmé, the inventor of “the modernist closet drama and closet theater” (i.e., texts that, as in a similar view of musical works, could not be perfectly or even adequately performed by human actors but only realized by a mind reading the text in quiet absorption), Martin Puchner writes that “[Mallarmé’s] impulse, then, to depersonalize the performer comes from [Loie Fuller] who rebelled, in her own way, against the personalizing effects of the theater.” That on this same page Puchner mistakenly claims that Fuller debuted in Paris in 1871 reveals how pervasive the dismissal of the actor’s importance is, even while trying to make the opposite point. (Fuller would have been nine years old in 1871, and only performing in Chicago, see Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 22-24). His whole book considered, Puchner elucidates the closet drama and anti-actor, anti-theatrical, anti-performance biases (and their necessity to the larger construction of modernist literary and theatrical practice and thought) brilliantly, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 80.
CHAPTER 2
FROM THE LIVING ROOM TO THE LIEBESTOD: ISADORA DUNCAN’S DANCING THROUGH LISTENING

From morning to evening, in the red brick temple on the hill, I attended all the rehearsals, awaiting the first performance. Tannhäuser, The Ring, Parsifal—until I was in a constant state of intoxication from music. . . . my being was vibrating with the waves of Wagner’s melody. . . . One day I was the blonde Segelinde [sic] . . . Next, I was Brünhilde weeping her lost Godhead, and again, Kundry, uttering wild appreciation under the spell of Klingsor. But the supreme experience was when my soul arose, all trembling in the blood-lit goblet of the Grail. Such enchantment!

Duncan may have felt the above to be true during her enchanted hours of listening at Bayreuth in the summer of 1904, where she would travel to rehearsals and performances at the Festspielhaus on horseback in her diaphanous “Greek” tunics and choreograph the Tannhäuser “Bacchanal” (of the Paris score) and perform as the First Grace. Yet rarely in the three decades’ worth of reviews, essays, and anecdotes that comprise Duncan’s reception does anyone ever really confuse “Isadora” or “la Duncan” with something or someone other than “Isadora” or “la Duncan.” In this she is separated from her predecessor (similarly often mononymically designated) “La Loïe.” So too does this contrast hold with her exact contemporary, Maud Allan. Allan’s greatest fame (and notoriety) would be achieved as Salome in her 1906 Vision of Salome, and not from her earlier dances to canonical art music. More so than the even more scantily clad Allan, “Isadora”—through her combination of hard work (both in dance and discourse management), fairly extensive touring, and her strategically deliberate blurring of public and private roles—could be seen as the antecedent of one the greatest twentieth-century monoyms: “Madonna,” who maintained a similar grasp on the public imagination and who too was used as reference

1 Isadora Duncan, My Life (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 107. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as “(ML, page)”.

for what a liberated, fully independent woman should or should not be. “Isadora” was a captivating and a powerful presence on stage, but audiences also imagined that they knew her, were really just like her or could be: Duncan, projected “real” before the idea of “being real” was a goal of stage and screen.

Duncan was not just a celebrity, however; she was also a technician of sorts. Here I do not use that word in the sense that one might for Fuller and her array of lights and even larger array of patents. (Duncan’s biggest contribution to stagecraft was her gray-blue-green curtains and carpet.) Nor do I use it, though one might, in the sense that Duncan created, arguably, a distinct “technique” (as a style and system of modern dance is called; e.g. “Graham technique”), one outlined in The Technique of Isadora Duncan by first generation Duncan dancer Irma Duncan. Rather, as I will argue here, she brought to the cult of absolute music a focus on technê, on doing, and not on immobile, disinterested contemplation. Duncan would make her own listening visible through her dancing, inspiring a large number of women to do the same whether in their own homes or in Isadora Duncan’s schools and those of her imitators.

Working chronologically, this chapter follows Duncan’s career trajectory in order to highlight the development of her choreomusicality, both what little can be definitively stated about how her body moved to music (and to what music and when in her career, matters in need of some clarification) and the discourses about her use of music that Duncan and others promulgated. Duncan’s dances are performed today not as

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2 Irma Duncan, The Technique of Isadora Duncan (New York: Kamin, 1937; reprinted Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1970). Born Irma Erich-Grimme, one of the six dancers who toured with Isadora (and who, like the other five, was adopted by her). The six were often referred to as the “Isadorables,” and they changed their last names to “Duncan.” Irma would also accompany Isadora when the latter opened a Duncan school in Moscow in 1921. See Irma Duncan, Duncan Dancer: An Autobiography (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966).
reconstructions (as in Nijinsky-via-Millicent-Hodson choreographies) but as legacies: generations of “Duncan dancers” have taught each other the choreographies, keeping them alive (and not necessarily concretized and unchanging) through an oral and embodied tradition. The question of the “authenticity” of any of these is, of course, rather irrelevant and uninteresting; it is also far from my concerns here: I will not highlight performances of Julia Levien, Annabelle Gamson, Lori Bellilove, or any other second-, third-, or fourth-generation Duncan dancer. This is not because I am a pedantic musicologist distrustful of non-notated works; rather, I believe that there is too much information about Duncan’s performances, and specifically about her choreomusicality, that has been ignored, misinterpreted, or dismissed as tangential.

Class: Capitalizing on the Canon

Born in 1877 in San Francisco, Duncan’s parents divorced when she was three; Mary Dora Gray Duncan, her single mother, a music teacher, made ends meet as best she could for her theatrically inclined children. Sitting on the living room floor, watched over by a reproduction not of some painting of the Virgin Mother but of Botticelli’s Primavera (though the family was sometimes near poverty, their need for art was constant—poor bohemians with a strong bourgie streak), Duncan would listen to her mother play the

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3 Duncan’s life has been told numerous times. In addition to archival sources, I have found it most useful to toggle between Duncan’s own (sometimes exaggerated, sometimes very much so, and also very much modified by others after her death) My Life (see the previous footnote) and the following: the cutey titled but archive-in-a-book of Francis Steegmuller, “Your Isadora”: The Love Story of Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig (New York: Random House and New York Public Library, 1974); Elizabeth Kendall, Where She Danced: The Birth of American Art-Dance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); especially outstanding and theoretically aware is Ann Daly, Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1995); and, a rather balanced and thoroughly researched biography, Peter Kurth, Isadora: A Sensational Life (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2001).
piano. “My real education came during the evenings, when my mother played to us Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, Mozart, Chopin, or read aloud to us from Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, or Burns. These hours were to us enchanted” (ML, 15). She would later claim that she learned how to dance only from impressions granted her by Botticelli (as well as other Quattrocento fingers and Rodin), study of ancient Greek vases (and the rest of that long gone culture and its arts), the waves of the Pacific Ocean (and all “Nature”—Duncan loved to capitalize), and her mother’s piano playing (and the music of “the masters,” a group which did not include Debussy, as noted in the following section)—in short, from almost everything and everyone but a ballet mistress. She was, like many other successful modernists who trumpeted their auto-didacticism, lying: Duncan likely took ballet classes in the Bay Area and beyond.4

By the mid-1890s, with her family now in Chicago trying to find theatrical work, Duncan caught the attention of theater producer Augustin Daly, who would take her to New York, where Isadora would quit his company in 1897 and “bury[all] trace of the music hall.”5 She began to do so by giving private concerts for the wealthy. These entertainments consisted of short dances and various series of gestures (in the 1890s, the decades-long craze for Delsartism in the United States was going strong)6 interspersed with readings of poetry and classical texts by her brother Augustin (“Gus”), her sister Elizabeth, or one of a few actor friends, readings to which Isadora would sometimes give embodied expression. While not yet interpreting the music of “the masters” (but that of

4 Daly, Done into Dance, 68-74.
5 Elizabeth Kendall, Where She Danced, 63.
Ethelbert Nevin), her gestural interpretation to a reading of *The Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam (very popular at the time because of the recent translation by Edward FitzGerald) would be enough to turn off some audience members. Willa Cather, writing some fifteen years later in 1913, would remember one of these concerts and write, “I agree with the New York reporter who, in summing up Miss Duncan’s dancing of ‘The Rubaiyat,’ said that on the whole he preferred Omar’s lines to Miss Duncan’s.” Other audience members at the close of the nineteenth century, however, liked it enough to engage her for their own drawing rooms and garden parties.

The title of a program she gave among the “cottages” (as those mansions are still known) of Newport, Rhode Island in September 1898 was “Done into Dance,” a program in which she “did” her *Rubaiyat*. In her eponymously titled study, Ann Daly notes of Duncan’s entire oeuvre: “What was ‘done into dance,’ however, was more than just music or poetry,” but also artistic, cultural, intellectual, and political discourses of all kinds. Daly rightfully draws attention to Duncan’s desire to align herself with a moneyed white elite, perhaps “strategically.” While the issue of Duncan’s understanding of class (and her own class identification) would change over the course of her life, at this pivotal time it

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7 Willa Sibert Cather, “Training for the Ballet,” *McClure’s Magazine* (October 1913), 94. Looking through the “What is Doing in Society” or “Some Happenings in Good Society” columns of the *New York Times* in the years around 1900, one is struck by the number of “dramatic recitations” and “interpretations” of Kipling in particular. Duncan’s *Rubaiyat* even reached the British press: “The cult of Omar Khayyam has reached in America the nadir of absurdity. IT is no being translated into dance, and New York society rejoices night after night over the antics of Miss Isadora Duncan, who, surrounded by rose petals, pirouettes to the accompaniment of FitzGerald’s stanzas,” “The Literary Week,” *The Academy*, no 1411 (May 20, 1899), 549.

8 Daly, *Done into Dance*, 2.

9 Daly, *Done into Dance*, 113, see 110-15 for the bulk of Daly’s argument on Duncan and class. Daly’s attention to Duncan’s class, class identification, and class consciousness is especially consistent. Such focus keeps her from regurgitating romantic notions of Duncan and simultaneously demonstrates how her art, as all “high art,” was legitimated by what Pierre Bordieu famously termed “distinction.”
clearly inflected her understanding of what aesthetic appreciation might mean (and cost),
and therefore how she should position herself.

While published in the smartly edited 1928 Duncan memorial issue of Theatre Arts
Monthly (subsequently published as a book in 1969), a rarely if ever cited 1899 fragment
of Duncan’s writing referencing that Newport summer reveals Duncan’s equation of
upper-class comfort with her own aims, and so it is worth quoting at length:

I asked the Hon. C. D. [Chauncey Depew] last summer in Newport what was the
object of this society and he replied “enjoyment.” Then I looked about me. I saw
beautiful women, lovely girls, great men, and I said to myself if the object of this
society is enjoyment, it must the highest, most exquisite enjoyment possible, an
enjoyment that while being a delight for the time is also an unconscious
progression—as listening to beautiful music, while your body is happy in the
rhythm of sound your mind is progressing with the thought of the masters. I believe
I have found for society a new method of translating this happy progression. As the
musician uses his violin to tell of the highest thought, the singer the voice, I would
us that greatest of all instruments, the human body, and its language would be
movement.

The idea first came to me when a little girl, gazing at the reproduction of
Botticelli’s “Spring Time” which hung over our bookcase. It came to me what a
wonderful movement there was in that picture, and how each figure through that
movement told the story of its new life. And then as Mother played Mendelssohn’s
Spring Song, as if by the impulse of a gentle wind, the daisies in the grass would
sway and the figures in the picture would move, and the Three Graces, arms
twining together.¹⁰

Though she would not have known the word—remember, it didn’t exist in English yes—
Duncan was quite clearly a firm believer in aesthetic empathy, just as much in childhood
as when she was twenty-two years old. The slight twist here is that her empathetic
vitalization of the Botticelli reproduction comes only when she hears Mendelssohn’s
“Spring Song.” So immediately does Duncan understand the music her mother plays on the

¹⁰ Isadora Duncan, [untitled fragment, “from a sheet of notes, unpunctuated, for a lecture in New
York, 1898 or 1899”], in The Art of the Dance, ed. Sheldon Cheney (New York: Theatre Arts
piano as life-giving, that she doesn’t even notice the power of movement she has cathedated into “Spring Song”: she skips a big step, and jumps ahead to how (her audition and vitalization of) Mendelssohn’s music gives movement to an otherwise static image of Botticelli’s Graces.

Duncan’s lecture notes here make plain the very blurry line between strategic class identification (here, the adoption of a bourgeois cultural sensibility by one who seeks upward mobility through the acquisition of both cultural and financial capital) and class envy (Newport; new paragraph: a Botticelli reproduction). While Duncan does not explicitly state her family’s socio-economic status, it is simplified. In any case, to be blunt, the socio-economic elite of New York City and Newport would probably have very quickly read the family’s class without any of the Duncans even opening their mouths. This was not their Bay Area bohemian milieu. By referring to “the music of the masters,” Duncan seems to be trying, in vain, to find an equalizer: “We’re alike! I listen to them too!”

New York newspapers would regularly take note that Duncan was successfully courting and gaining employment by “The Four Hundred,” the moneyed elite socialites with Important Last Names (Vanderbilt, Astor) that ruled New York in the Gilded Age and after. Duncan became known as a “society dancer,” a fact rather sardonically explained by Broadway Magazine in 1899, and revealing of the line Duncan had already successfully drawn:

Miss Duncan is not a professional stage dancer. Don’t make any mistake on that score. . . . She is, you must understand once and for all, a society dancer . . . She spurns Broadway with a large, deep, thick spurn that almost makes us ashamed of having anything to do with the thoroughfare. Miss Duncan is “patronized,” of course; that is to say, there are certain women in society who pat her kindly on the back, say a good word for her to their friends who are getting up entertainments,
and even prove their sincerity by engaging her themselves. Thus it is that Miss Duncan can say “how-de-do?” to more society women than Loie Fuller can ever hope to know, although it quite possible that this fact does not worry Miss Fuller to any great extent. . . . [Duncan] is very, very classic and is horribly, dreadfully afraid of becoming anything but absolutely and painfully refined. It can thus be seen that Miss Duncan occupies a rather unique position among American dancers. Long may she retain it.\footnote{11 “Isadora Duncan as the Only Real Society Pet,” \textit{Broadway Magazine}, June 1899, 143, found in “Isadora Duncan (1877-1927): reserve dance clipping file (for years 1898-1982), *MGZRA (microfilm duplicate *ZBD–170), assembled by the New York Public Library Dance Collection.}

The voice of vaudeville suggests that plenty of hoofers thought Duncan not a sell-out—after all this wasn’t pandering to “lowbrows”; Duncan was selling “up and in” and not “down and out”—but a pretentious opportunist who would never be able to make it on a real stage.\footnote{12 When Lindo Tomko cites a line from this article, she does so not to situate Duncan or other industry professionals but the capitalized “Society” of the “Knickerbocker elite” and its powers of cultural arbitration and ability to recast class and its leadership. Linda Tomko, \textit{Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890-1920}, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 62-63.} The wish of the article’s final line does not, to my mind, betray envy; rather it suggests that, from the viewpoint of the lower-middle-class vaudeville performer, Duncan was barking up the wrong tree and would not achieve any real professional stature (to say nothing of fame, fortune, and the American Dream). Similarly, the captions accompanying pictures of Duncan demonstrating her movement—“How I love my friends, the Vanderbilts” and “Isn’t Mr. Highuppe kind to throw those flowers!”—are not spiteful so much as mocking, as if to question why a dancer would have faith in the possibility that elite society would actually care enough to help her advance her career beyond their caviar circuit’s home entertainments. A comparable scenario today might involve a rather effective clown hired for children’s birthday parties, one in demand throughout posh zip codes where everyone just must have him. Would one think that a few years later this clown would go on to star in critically acclaimed solo \textit{nouveau cirque} productions as well
as an art-house Oscar winner? This hypothetical scenario seems rather preposterous and therefore serves as a fair comparison: the idea of a dancer gaining fame through garden and parlor parties (and soon enough Duncan would be toasted in Parisian salons) was not how the profession’s ladder worked in the United States. One imagines the writer of these lines in Broadway Magazine smiting his or her brow only a few years later.

Turning to Duncan’s ideal of dancing at this time, we can clearly see from her focus in the Newport fragment on “progression” that it was aesthetic experience itself—the disinterested contemplation that requires time and a relatively clear mind (and so, perhaps, a bit of money)—and not the accompanying lines of poetry or music, that she wanted her movement both to provide and to express: Duncan thought that her audience, by watching her in the middle of her own aesthetic “progression,” would experience one too. For this reason, Duncan highlights that the most important result of the performance of violinist and singer was not the work played or the music itself, but rather the opportunity for a listener to have an aesthetic experience of that music in performance. This is like an enhanced version of empathy with Primavera via “Frühlingslied,” where “the figures in the picture would move” because of Duncan’s investement. As stated in the final sentences of that first cited paragraph, “progression” approaches something almost like spontaneous aesthetic contagion: it is not emotion or meaning that is transmitted from performer to audience, but the idea of following and apprehending the performance and the ability of such attention to give more life to already living things. These two closely related ideas, conceived well before Duncan would start dipping into nineteenth-century aesthetic texts, are not yet entirely clear ones. A bit vague, a bit mysterious, and somewhat highfalutin,
they were perfect for a Vanderbilt on a leisurely afternoon and not for the Broadway crowds.

This focus on “progression,” I believe, explains why Duncan did not begin using canonical art music (and, specifically, music without dance titles or not written as incidental music) with any regularity until 1903. She did not give her first celebrated Chopin Abend until January 22, 1904 in Munich. Before that time, it seems that she believed that all music could provide this “progression,” the aesthetic experience that she wished to model on stage and then transfer to her audience. She did not appear to have drawn any distinction between piano miniatures by Ethelbert Nevin and Mendelssohn’s incidental music for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which we can be certain she danced from newspaper notices of her society performances as well as performances on the Carnegie Lyceum and Berkeley Lyceum stages and elsewhere. The Newport fragment is Duncan’s earliest written use of the phrase “the masters” in reference to composers (and what a relatively large and inclusive idea of “the masters,” judging from her repertory, it was), but it would still be some years before Duncan used this phrase with any regularity when referring to composers. More importantly, Duncan was not yet really dancing to the music of the then agreed-upon so-called masters. It was not until Duncan’s second concert in London, to which she and her family set sail in May 1899, that Duncan would dance to the music of Chopin. Before her three New Gallery performances in London in 1900, at the second of which she danced three Chopin pieces, a program that would not be repeated for some time after, the only one widely celebrated composer to whose music she had a

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13 See as an example, for Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, “Philosophy in the Dance,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1898, 14. “Spring Song” was apparently a favorite for house entertainments, as several memoirs reveal; see Allan Ross Macdougall, *Isadora: A Revolutionary in Art and Love* (Edinburgh, Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960), 53.
created dance was Mendelssohn, with selections from his Midsummer Night’s Dream (the Scherzo can be verified) and that composer’s then ubiquitous “Spring Song” [“Frühlingslied”], the sixth song from the fifth book of his Songs Without Words [Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 62, No. 6], first heard by Duncan in her childhood living room.

Referenced in her Newport fragment, and referred to in early programs simply as “Song without Words,” Mendelssohn’s short piece (played in living rooms across America) would, in time, become one of Duncan’s musical calling cards and a reminder of her practice’s roots in childhood. Duncan was not alone in her love for this piece: so wildly popular was “Spring Song” throughout the turn of the century and after that in 1909 composer-lyricist Irving Berlin transformed the piece into a song with words: “That Mesmerizing Mendelssohn Tune (Mendelssohn Rag).” It begins: “Honey, listen to that dreamy tune they’re playin’ / Won’t you tell me how on earth you keep from swayin’?”

While Duncan would have no doubt agreed with that sentiment (as long as “swayin’” is understood as dancing and not the love-making suggested by Berlin), one imagines that if she ever heard this lifelong favorite of her and her mother transformed through the syncopations of ragtime—“Jazz rhythm expresses the South African savage” and reminded her of “the tottering, ape-like convulsions of the Charleston” and “the sensual convulsion of the South African negro” she would have been disgusted. Unlike her strategic snobbism, perhaps used in an attempt to “pass” among the wealthy, and shifting class

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14 See the program for her second London recital at the New Gallery, July 3, 1900, which is reproduced in Life into Art: Isadora Duncan and her World, ed. Dorée Duncan, Carol Pratl, and Cynthia Splatt (New York: Norton, 1993), 38.

alliances, her self-fashioning through the use of racist attitudes would remain, it seems, a constant in her life.\textsuperscript{16}

Although Duncan would not dance to Chopin onstage until her second concert at the New Gallery in London on July 3, 1900, writers seem to associate her with that composer to such an extent that they assume she always danced to his mazurkas, waltzes, preludes, and nocturnes. Biographer Peter Kurth’s statement that “early reviews in New York make plain, however, that she had been working on dances from Chopin since 1898” is incorrect. Kurth is presumably referring to a single review in the Duncan reviews and clippings file at the New York Public Library’s Dance Collection.\textsuperscript{17} As this review mentions the “stately waltzes of Schubert and a Spanish dance of Moskowski” together with the “Lyceum Theater,” one can be nearly positive that this clipping refers to Duncan’s concert in Rochester, New York on September 29, 1908.\textsuperscript{18} True, she might have been

\textsuperscript{16} Duncan’s anxieties about “primitivism” and the “primitive” (a word Duncan would use in reference to African-American culture and the lives of various non-white people more generally) are now fairly well known. Daly sums up her overall interpretation of Duncan’s racist discourse and attitudes under Toni Morrison’s concept of “American Africanism” (the use of the black Other for the construction of the white Self), \textit{Done into Dance}, 219. Duncan’s notorious use of the word “nègres” in Argentina is given its fullest narrative in Kurth, \textit{Isadora}, 349-53.

\textsuperscript{17} “In the Theater, Lyceum Theater, Miss Isadora Duncan,” [newspaper and date unknown, though filed incorrectly as 1898], in “Isadora Duncan (1877-1927): reserve dance clipping file (for years 1898-1982),” *MGZRA (microfilm duplicate *ZBD–170), assembled by the New York Public Library Dance Collection.

\textsuperscript{18} Kurth, working from this one review in the Duncan clippings file, is dismissive of the influence of John Fuller-Maitland, the London music critic who suggested that Duncan get rid of recitations and use better music, suggesting Chopin in particular. This story has appeared in Fuller-Maitland’s own autobiography, \textit{A Door-Keeper of Music} (London: Murray, 1929), 202-03; it was then taken up in several biographies, filled out a bit by Nesta Macdonald, “Isadora Reexamined: Lesser-Known Aspects of the Great Dancer’s Life, 1877-1900,” \textit{Dance Magazine} 57 (July 1977): 62; and then repeated, among other places, in Daly, \textit{Done into Dance}, 142, and, most recently, in Alastair Macaulay, "Thanks to Chopin, Isadora Duncan's Hop, Skip and a Jump to the Masters," \textit{New York Times}, Aug 25, 2008: E.5. The way that he “told” Duncan (in print) is explained below.
dancing to Chopin back in her Bay Area living room with her mother at the piano,\(^\text{19}\) (on this point, it is also possible that she might have wished to people to think she had always danced to Chopin, even if she had not), but when numerous writers make it sound as if she always danced to Chopin professionally, they are back-projecting her later success with the composer onto earlier times.

In her second London performance at the New Gallery (a space that was known for its promotion of the Pre-Raphaelites), when she first danced to Chopin, the three dances she performed were *Prelude in C Minor* (Op. 28, No. 4), *Waltz in C-Sharp Minor* (Op. 64, No. 2), and the *Mazurka in A Minor* (Op. 17, No. 4). One of the Chopin-Liszt *Six Chants polonais* (Liszt’s piano transcription of six songs from Chopin’s op. 74; we do not know which one) was played in between the waltz and the mazurka. At this concert, only one of these three Chopin dances, the mazurka, was titled almost as it would be on a score. They dances were listed as: *Chopin Preludes with dance* (despite the plural in the title, she only danced one, the C minor, before which the pianist played two others), *Waltz with dance*, and, a bit more descriptively as a music lover might wish, *Mazurka, A minor*. Naming a choreography directly after the title of the pre-existing piece of music to which one danced was not yet a practice; Duncan would not start doing this consistently with Chopin until 1904 at her first all-Chopin concert.

As I will discuss further below and in the following section, we might be able to get a small but important sense of what Duncan actually did to music in these dances from both a brief notice in London’s *Times* and also reviews of her later performances of them.

For now, I need only note that London music critic John Fuller-Maitland’s suggestion to drop any recitations and dance to more “classical” music much have been heeded between her first New Gallery concert in March and this, her second. Apart from the standard citation of Fuller-Maitland’s autobiography published in 1929, I would like to draw attention to an unsigned brief review that occurred between those two concerts, and which was likely written by Fuller-Maitland.

In aid of the Barclay House for Blind Girls at Brighton, Mrs. Stephen Ralli got up an entertainment at St. George’s-hall, on Saturday afternoon, when Miss Isadora Duncan gave what was virtually a repetition of the series of dances in which she appeared some little time ago at the New Gallery [i.e., in her first concert there on March 16, 1900]. . . . On a second view, her performance appears to be made up of a very small number of steps and gestures, and it may be hinted that, unless she engages her technical knowledge of the art, even in its conventional forms, her success can hardly be permanent. There are manifold opportunities for her to illustrate the well-known dance measures in music, as she at present does so prettily with Mendelssohn’s so-called “Spring song”; and the valses of Chopin, and many another well-known composition, would give her ample scope, even if the historical dances of the past were outside her self-imposed limits. But, for this, the surroundings of her entertainment must be greatly improved; the educational side of it, as exemplified in the reading of translation from the classics between the dances, is wholly unnecessary, and merely tiresome, since most of the audience know a story as that of Demeter and Persephone, for instance, before the reading as they do after: and the music is not well enough played or sung to be a fitting accompaniment.\(^\text{20}\)

The review goes on to criticize the musicians—including “the singing of a party of Mr Steadman’s boys”—as being altogether not “up to the level expected of professional performers.” Duncan surely felt like she could be perhaps a bit more stage “professional”; indeed, she most often appeared in the classifieds of The Times at this time in four lines of

\(^{20}\) John Fuller-Maitland [unsigned], “Miss Duncan’s ‘Dance Idylls,’” The Times, May 14, 1900, 4, column G. Corroboration of Fuller-Maitland’s authorship is provided by the line in his autobiography line that “The hint she took was that it would be an improvement if should would dance, not to poems . . . but to good music, and specially mentioned the waltzes of Chopin.” Fuller-Maitland, Door-keeper, 202.
miniscule font, offering “The Dance Idylls of Isadora Duncan arranged for drawing rooms, garden parties, &c.”\textsuperscript{21} But what was Fuller Maitland doing at the Barclay House for Blind Girls benefit, decidedly not a “professional” performance? Was he perhaps that taken with Duncan after seeing her first New Gallery concert that he sought her out? Did he just happen to be invited? He review of this benefit performance ends: “The idea is so good, and some of the execution so beautiful, that all lovers of grace and artistic beauty must wish the surroundings [i.e., the common music and unprofessional musicians, and the unnecessary readings and unpersuasive readers] brought up to the same level.”\textsuperscript{22} It is very likely that Duncan had never read a review that both appreciated her so much while still pointing out specifically how her “entertainment” could be improved and turned into something more “professional,” as well as more musically sophisticated.

Indeed, in previous reviews, preview articles, etc., the music accompanying Duncan was rarely mentioned at all, let alone how well the musicians played. When it was occasionally highlighted, a writer would often make bold unsubstantiated claims. Observing her during a rehearsal in her studio in the Carnegie Building in 1898, a reporter wrote of “Isadora Duncan, whose translations of music through the dance have filled so many ennuied society people with delight this past Winter. . . . [The Duncan family has] learned to detect a discordant note in movement as quickly as in music, and what they are working to do is to express with movement the truths of life in a harmonious symphonic whole.”\textsuperscript{23} Fuller-Maitland, however, skipped such vague praise and gave her the criticism

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} See for example the classifieds section of \textit{The Times}, April 2, 1900, bottom of column D, (“Entertainments, &c.”).
\item \textsuperscript{22} See second footnote \textit{supra}.
\item \textsuperscript{23} “Philosophy in the Dance,” \textit{New York Times}, April 17, 1898, 14.
\end{itemize}
she needed to get her “progression” progressing for the musically sensitive: if she wanted to impress “all lovers of grace and artistic beauty” she would have to use “dance measures” which were agreed upon by audiences to be of higher value.

How could Duncan, likely more impressed than concerned, not seek the critic out? It seems, pace Kurth, that Fuller-Maitland’s story is believable, that Duncan would have sought out Fuller-Maitland and respected his advice. In his autobiography he writes that “She introduced herself to me and asked me to recommend music that she could illustrate in her art.”24 While Fuller-Maitland likely did not remember this while writing his autobiography in 1929, Duncan’s second concert at the New Gallery on July 3, 1900 was given with the title “The Illustration of Music, by the Dance,” and even included a pre-concert talk by the composer Sir Hubert Parry, who, though best remembered today for his choral anthem “Jerusalem,” was at this time also the Director of the Royal College of Music as well as Professor of Music at Oxford. In his autobiography Fuller-Maitland continues, “I told her how anxious I was to have the rubato of Chopin carried out in the dance; and she came and went through one or two of the Chopin pieces until she could get the right elasticity of rhythm.”25 Neither Duncan nor her siblings recited the “Hymn to Demeter” or anything else on July 3, 1900. Her dances to Chopin’s Waltz in C-Sharp Minor (Op. 64, No. 2), and the Mazurka in A Minor (Op. 17, No. 4), marked a departure in her work, one espoused, vetted, and influenced by a very opinionated (and, here,

24 Fuller-Maitland, Door-keeper, 202. Nesta Macdonald, who researched Duncan’s early history in the late 1970s, suggests (and not based on information in Fuller-Maitland’s autobiography) that Duncan went to see Fuller-Maitland the very next day after her first concert in London, which was March 16, 1900. I cannot find any evidence that she would have had reason to meet Fuller-Maitland before his May 14, 1900 review of her benefit performance at Brighton. Nesta Macdonald, “Isadora, Chopin, and Fokine,” Dance and Dancers no. 408 (December 1983): 30.

25 Ibid., 202-03.
uncharacteristically generous) tough British critic. He was especially hard on those who, though with great talent, sought to provide mere “entertainment.” Maliciously snobby were his criticisms of Arthur Sullivan—“the taste of the average man was what he sought to meet”\(^\text{26}\)—and Fuller-Maitland took lyrics that he misheard as “the gravy’s cold” (actually, “the grave is cruel”) as proof that Sullivan crafted but low-brow entertainment for the gravy-eating hoi polloi.\(^\text{27}\) That Fuller-Maitland would have fuelled Duncan’s understanding that musical elitism could pay (at least as much as a good review from Fuller-Maitland might have some kind of value) is obvious.

After less than a year in London, the Duncan clan moved to Paris in the autumn of 1900. They quickly attracted Belle Epoque high society and respected artists: within months of their arrival Duncan was in the salon of one Madame de Saint-Marceaux dancing to Chopin as played by Maurice Ravel on the piano. It wasn’t all fun—Americans in Paris, after all, always tend to miss certain cues: Duncan, likely still a virgin, fell in love with a man whom she did not realize was homosexual, André Beunier, a man who was sent into a terrible depression by the recent death of Oscar Wilde. Duncan didn’t get it; she still longed for his caresses.\(^\text{28}\) It was also a time when Duncan gave serious thought to her dance practice: sometime during these Paris years she famously (i.e., cited in every history


\(^{28}\) The specific salon is noted in the dazzlingly researched and example-setting work of Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes*, first Da Capo Press edition (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 282. Garafola, citing the later examples of Mata Hari, Marie Rambert, and Natalia Trouhanova, notes that the Parisian salon would continue to be a career-making site for dancers. Duncan’s Paris years are also depicted in Kurth, *Isadora*, 68-84 (Ravel playing Chopin, 73; Beunier, 75). For a specific focus on Duncan’s mobilization of the idea and ideals of Ancient Greece in Parisian salon culture see Samuel Dorf, “Dancing Greek Antiquity in Private and Public: Isadora Duncan’s Early Patronage in Paris,” *Dance Research Journal* 44 (Summer 2012): 3-27.
of American modern dance and Duncan biography), and only after “hours” of standing
“quite still,” discovered “the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power, the
unity from which all diversions of movements are born, the mirror of vision for the
creation of the dance,” her “solar plexus” (ML, 58). Throughout the family’s two years in
Paris, Duncan’s mother would play much Chopin (as well as Gluck’s Orfeo ed Euridice) in
their atelier while Isadora tried out dances to this music.

Duncan would later highlight the relationship between her discovery and all of her
mother’s playing:

After many months, when I had learned to concentrate all my force to this one
Centre, I found thereafter when I listened to music the rays and vibrations of the
music streamed to this one fount of light within me—there they reflected
themselves in Spiritual Vision, not the brain’s mirror, but the soul’s, and from this
vision I could express them in Dance. (ML, 58)

As previously noted, My Life is definitely a memoir, with all the revisions that memory—
together with the desire to appear more interesting than one was, as well as proactive
editors revising this after Duncan’s death—makes, and not a chronicle despite its
chronological narrative. The specific caveat lector here is that Duncan’s intentions were
not yet nearly as music-focused as (judging from her own writing and speeches, the
anecdotes of others, and reviews) they appear to be following 1903. While in the years
between 1900 and 1902 Duncan was likely laying the groundwork for her 1904 Chopin
Abend and her embodiment of “absolute music,” and while Fuller-Maitland was without
question a strong influence, I believe that it was not until Duncan saw the example of two
other proto-modern dancers that she realized that the music of “the masters”—and not just
music with dance titles—was her most progressive option for dance accompaniment.
Competition: Following in Fuller’s Footsteps, Allan and Appropriation

The ultimate networking coup came without much warning, and without, it seems, any special effort on Duncan’s part in Paris early in 1902. She would meet Loie Fuller thanks to the connection provided by her brother Raymond, who, according to Gertrude Stein, “was acting as advance agent for Emma Nevada who had also with her Pablo Casals the violoncellist, at that time quite unknown.” Emma Nevada, to whom Duncan referred as the “Western Nightingale,” was, like Duncan, born in California (née Emma Wixom in Nevada City, whence the new name), dedicated to her art (she was a soprano who, like Duncan, found her greatest success in Europe), and to Art (she would name her child Mignon). Unlike Duncan, she counted among her friends Loie Fuller. Nevada arranged for Fuller to visit Duncan in her family’s studio. Fuller, after watching Duncan dance, invited her to shadow her troupe (Fuller now had a group of young women with whom she danced) across Germany. Here, watching the numbers where Fuller danced alone, Duncan would have seen her vision incarnate: a single woman, dancing, holding the stage.

What would begin as a relatively innocuous apprenticeship would turn into, judging from their respective retrospective accounts, high drama for each. In Fuller’s autobiography, Duncan’s time with her is covered in a chapter called “An Experience,” in which—pretending propriety—she never mentions Duncan by name. Fuller notes that at


31 Duncan’s apprenticeship with Fuller is covered in *My Life*, 71-75. Fuller’s side of the story is told, in Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years*,

the end of her group’s tour of Germany and Austria, on an afternoon in Vienna in February 1902 at the Hotel Bristol, Isadora was to give a recital with Fuller’s orchestra, a recital which Fuller had helped Duncan prepare. Ten minutes before the beginning of her concert, to Fuller’s horror, Duncan was lounging in her bath combing her hair. As Duncan did not appear on the stage of the Bristol Hotel until well after the appointed time of 4:30pm, Fuller was forced to improvise a speech on dance aesthetics. At some point during this, “All at once she made her entrance, calm and indifferent, looking as if she did not care in the least what our guests thought of her.” What really shocked Fuller, who as she usually appeared under yards of fabric was considered an entertainer who could make the Folies Bergère family-friendly, was that Duncan “appeared to me nude, or nearly so, to so slight an extent did the gauze which she wore cover her form.” She reassured Princess Pauline von Metternich that Duncan’s costumes had been lost in travel and she had no choice but to perform in her practice gown. Despite Fuller seeing more of Duncan’s breasts than she would have thought professional, the performance was a grand success. Fuller arranged subsequent performances in Vienna and Budapest and Duncan gained important admirers: “Everybody was ready to help her, including . . . the Princess of Metternich.” While Duncan’s popularity would skyrocket in the next two years, and so they might have learned of her in any number of way, the Wagner family, I would like to suggest, might have first been tipped off to Duncan by Pauline von Metternich, whose words with Napoleon III led to the mandated Parisian debut (and debacle) of Tannhäuser in 1861.

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abandons kindness and identifies Duncan as the offender. In the English-language edition of 1913, though not named, most readers would be very well aware of the dancer to whom she referred.

33 Ibid., 228.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 231.
Duncan left Fuller’s company in Budapest to return briefly to Vienna for a concert with Fuller’s orchestra and its conductor; the orchestra and the conductor returned to Budapest alone. Fuller recounts the conductor’s direct quotation of a conversation between Duncan and her mother: “‘Now that she has started you,’ she said, to her daughter, ‘you have no more use for her.’ To which the daughter replied, ‘Well, I haven’t the least desire to go back to Loie.’” Written years after that of Loie, Duncan’s story (which in the French-language edition of My Life involves stronger suggestions that Fuller and her “girls” were a kind of lesbian cult), acknowledges that Fuller’s “generosity was unbounded” (ML, 71) and also exclaims “What an extraordinary genius! No imitator of Loie Fuller has even been able to hint at her genius!” (ML, 72). Duncan then states that she left Fuller because a maniacal dancer in Fuller’s troupe, by the name of Nursey—thus called “because she was always ready to soothe and nurse anyone who had a headache” (ML, 73)—entered her room and told her that God had directed her to kill her. Duncan, in her treatment of the story, flees the room,

in my nightclothes, my curls streaming behind me, and cried, “Lady gone mad.” Nursey was hot upon my footsteps. Six hotel clerks leapt at her and held her prisoner until doctors arrived. The result of their consultation was so embarrassing to me that I decided to telegraph my mother to come from Paris, which she did. When I told her all I felt about my present environment, my mother and I determined to leave Vienna. (ML, 74)

The “embarrassing” “result of their consultation”; the name “Nursey” with its association of a offered breast; and the fact that once “in the middle of the night, [she] approached me and kissed me passionately, saying in fervid tones: ‘I am going away to Berlin’ (ML, 73):

Duncan is not so subtly telling the reader that all of that lesbianism made staying with

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36 Ibid., 230. Fuller goes on to mention that she learned, in later years, that Duncan denied ever having met her, 231.
37 Kurth, Isadora, 85.
Fuller impossible.\textsuperscript{38} This—especially from someone who would have several lesbian relationships herself and who would also profit from, among her many female spectators and patrons, a sizeable number of lesbians\textsuperscript{39}—reveals a less sexually liberated and considerably more bitter side of Duncan than one typically reads. It was, one can be fairly certain, Duncan’s awareness that she could make it without Fuller’s sponsorship and not some caricature of a predatory lesbian that led her off to someone else who wanted to help (but also benefit from) her. And so Duncan went to Budapest to meet Alexander Grosz, who had offered to be her manager after seeing her dance in Vienna and who would help her conquer audiences throughout \textit{Mitteleuropa}, starting with thirty nights at Budapest’s Urania Theatre.

What is all too easily lost in the midst of these colorful stories of this apprenticeship are Duncan’s dances and the music she used at these Fuller-sponsored early solo concerts, as well as Duncan’s clear debt to Fuller’s professional example (a single dancer holding a stage for an evening was a new idea), name (the Hotel Bristol concert led her first manager to her), and orchestra (some years later Duncan would realize that orchestrated Chopin was what she wanted). Judging from Fuller’s comments it appears that after lounging in her bath dangerously close to show time Duncan then the danced the very Chopin pieces she had premiered in London after Fuller-Maitland’s suggestion, but in an arrangement for orchestra. I suggest this because of the similarity between Fuller’s

\textsuperscript{38} Writing of Kenneth MacMillan’s biographical ballet-drama \textit{Isadora}, Arlene Croce criticized his interpretation of Duncan, and this event specifically, by noting that “Duncan’s problem with Nursey, as she relates in ‘My Life,’ was not lesbianism but homicidal mania.” Croce, who often reads both dances and texts about them perspicaciously, is quite off here, \textit{Going to the Dance} (New York: Knopf, 1982), 394.

memory of the dances, Fuller-Maitland’s review almost two years earlier, and later reviews of these same Chopin dances. Please recall the order of the Chopin section of Duncan’s New Gallery concert in London on July 3, 1900: *Chopin Preludes with dance; Waltz with dance; Chant Polonaes* (without Duncan dancing); and *Mazurka, A minor*. Of her Chopin pieces in the 1900 New Gallery concert, Fuller-Maitland wrote:

Herr Zwintscher played with beautiful finish and artistic style three of the preludes, the waltz in C sharp minor, and a mazurka in A minor; the third of the preludes, that in C minor, was illustrated by an appropriate set of solemn gestures, and the waltz and mazurka Miss Duncan made an accompaniment of exquisite grace. . . . [After listing songs sung, without dance accompaniment, by Countess Valda Gleichen, Fuller-Maitland notes that] Herr Zwintscher also played Bull’s “King’s Hunting Jig” and the “Chant polonais” of Chopin arranged by Liszt. 40

Compare that to what can be learned from Fuller’s autobiography:

She appeared to me nude . . . She came to the front, and, while the orchestra played a prelude from Chopin she stood motionless, her eyes lowered, her arms hanging by her side. Then she began to dance. Oh, that dance, how I loved it! To me it was the most beautiful thing in the world. I forgot the woman and all her faults, her absurd affectations, her costume, and even her bare legs. I saw only the dancer, and the artistic pleasure she was giving me. When she had finished no one spoke. 41

Corroborated by later reviews of her full Chopin Abend, discussed in the next section, it appears that Duncan would often use a first piece in a section of a program (here, Chopin’s Prelude in C minor) as a kind of warm-up: not a warm-up of stretches for legs, arms, and torso, but one for the ears, for the mind in the body, and the imagined body in that mind. At this time still only dancing to works with dance titles, Duncan, standing onstage near the piano in London or orchestra in London, uses the Prelude as a chance to say, “Look. I am listening. I am only moving slightly; one is not supposed to move to this music based on its title and our respect for it, but it is awakening my body.” The orchestra in 1902 or

40 John Fuller-Maitland [unsigned], “Miss Duncan’s Evenings,” *The Times*, July 6, 1900, p. 4, column C.
41 Fuller, *Fifteen Years*, 228.
the pianist in 1900 then begins Chopin’s Waltz in C sharp minor and Duncan begins her full-blown dance: “Look! This is what listening to Chopin really means, as you and I both know.” Duncan staged the progression from listening to moving—showing the evolution of the listener she wished to bring about—and then showed the audience that listening was moving, was dancing.

It is often difficult to pinpoint exactly which composers’ works Fuller choreographed at what time, especially because the historical record for Fuller is most often silent on what music she used before 1905. One can still be certain, however, of much more than has previously been noted. Fuller was dancing to Chopin at the same time, and likely several years before, as Duncan. Indeed, Duncan probably got the idea to choreograph her famous 1915 “Funeral March” while touring with Fuller in 1901, when Fuller and her company were dancing the *Marche funebre* (i.e., the third movement of Chopin’s Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35).42 In 1902, Fuller was also already dancing to a Chopin nocturne (reviews never state which one) as if she were a blind woman, as well as to the Bach-Gounod “Ave Maria,” possibly the first time anyone had danced to Bach on a professional stage.43 (See Figure 2.1 below.)

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42 This was caught by Diane Milhan Pruett, “A Study of the Relationship of Isadora Duncan to the Musical Composers and Mentors who Influenced her Musical Selections for Choreograph,” Ph.D. diss (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1978), 127-28
43 “Seen on Stage,” *Vogue* 19, no. 22 (May 29, 1902): 581.
Regarding the ultimate in canonical music, it has gone unnoticed that Fuller danced to Beethoven before either Maud Allan (November 24, 1903, in her debut concert in the small hall of the Musikverein in Vienna) or Duncan (March and April 1904, throughout Germany); Fuller had danced to Beethoven (alas, one cannot know what by Beethoven) by April 29, 1903 at the latest. The *New York Times* announced:

The dances which Miss Loie Fuller will give tonight before an exclusive audience of members of the Arts Club are indicative of a return of the dance to its ancient place among the arts. The inane dances of the ballet in Italian opera and the acrobatic feats of the young ladies on the vaudeville stage are remarkable from the physical side; they represent industry and endurance. Miss Fuller has been striving for something more than mere curiosities of the dance; she has been trying to accompany the music of the great composers with movements that translate the feeling and thought in fine music into the sphere of human movement. The piano soloist, Mr Ward Steven, will lead the music in this part of Miss Fuller’s performance, she translating Beethoven or Chopin into motion.\(^{44}\)

\(^{44}\) “Arts Notes,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1903, 8.
That Fuller danced to Beethoven without any further comment or uproar before or after this announcement in the *Times* might seem at first surprising, given the opprobrium Duncan met when dancing to Beethoven that I will discuss below. The “exclusive audience,” among which there might very well have been not one reporter, likely had something to do with this. It is possible that this was a one-time shot. The event also leaves the researcher with many questions: Did Fuller decide to dance Chopin and Beethoven because of the success Duncan had with Chopin a year earlier? Did Duncan confide in Fuller some plan to dance Beethoven while she was touring with her, a plan still a year away from being realized? This last question, to which an affirmative answer seems a stretch, points to Duncan’s likely inspiration for dancing Beethoven.

Best known for her 1906 *Vision of Salome*, Canadian-born and Californian-bred Maud Allan (née Durrant) has long been considered a Duncan imitator. Her biography and story, while relatively unknown by dance scholars, is too fascinating to be done full justice here. Suffice it to say from the sources just referenced, Allan had a more traditional musical education and was on what we would recognize today as the pre-professional track of a musician. She claims that it was as a child that she first thought (but mentioned to no one, not even her mother) that she “could demonstrate in the movements of the body the delight of my favorite composers” (*MLD*, 45). The movements of her fingers, however,

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would remain her primary concern: at the age of 22 she left San Francisco to study piano at Berlin’s Hochschule from 1895 to 1900, during which time she befriended the school’s director, Joseph Joachim. During this time, Allan wrote, she took trips across the continent, including to Florence where she was most impressed by Botticelli’s *Primavera*, which led her to realize—*en garde*, La Duncan—that “to express in movement the thoughts stirred by melody, beautiful pictures and sculpture had become my ambition” (*MLD*, 53). She stood in admiration *Birth of Venus*, but was moved “from the sublime to the ridiculous” by museum-goers who approached the painting with a guidebook in hand asking loudly after the corresponding reference number for the image. “That book might have been their Bible, and their salvation dependent on getting those facts off by heart. Blind eyes!” (*MLD*, 57). Only two paragraphs later, Allan reveals what happens when a conservatory musician becomes enchanted after setting her eyes on something other than a score.

I was still studying and playing; but there were times when a feeling of being a prisoner would come over me at the piano. Music was still an intense delight to me; but not all-sufficing. I would imagine rhythmic movements to whatever I might be playing. The trunks and boots and shoes had become dancing fairies in my cabin on the liner, and now music would almost visualise into rhythmic motion, shape and pose (*MLD*, 57).

Though not explicitly connected by Allan, the proximity on the page of her own sense of missing something, of having “blind eyes”—blinded by the musical score and her faithful execution of it—is clear enough. Whereas for Duncan the need to vitalize the art object came solely from her perspective as a viewer and listener, for Allan it came from her roles as viewer, listener, and unsatisfied player.

Hunger to be among those who appreciated the drastic delights of art without suffocating under the words and labels of the guidebook set was probably what led Allan to write Ferruccio Busoni, who accepted her as a student for intensive study in Weimar in
1901. Throughout her later years of piano study in Germany, Allan had begun incorporating “physical culture” exercises to her daily routine and apparently read Delsarte, who “compared the human being with a musical instrument. . . .The player of this instrument is the soul, which is designed to transpose the movements of the body into music” (MLD, 65). She started experimenting with her “great, grand secret.” In confidence she shared her wish to give full-bodied expression to music through movement with the Belgian composer Marcel Rémy, who would one day compose the score for her Vision of Salome in 1906. Her mind now made up and finally having shared her secret goal with someone, she applied to her task the work ethic of a conservatory musician: “After that I worked, worked, worked, harder than ever. Not drudgery, nor mechanical training; but work, and very hard work at that” (MLD, 74).

In writing her autobiography, it seems rather clear that Allan is often repeating certain statements made by Duncan to the press. It also seems likely that Allan would have witnessed, or at least heard about, Duncan’s success throughout Germany in 1902 and 1903. Allan’s appropriation of the discourse of Duncan, who had been telling anyone who would listen about the influence Botticelli had on her since she first started dancing, led Edward Gordon Craig, Duncan’s lover and father of her first two children, to write “the first to try it & to find the robbery would pay.” Indeed, Duncan appears to have made some kind of threat to Allan, as surviving correspondence from Allan’s mother makes clear; this might have even been part of the reason that Allan did not perform publicly

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again until January 1905. Duncan clearly must have learned about Allan’s 1903 concert; it would have been the use of “Spring Song” in particular that would have infuriated Duncan, for she likely felt that, in some ways, she “owned” the work as a dance. The program for Allan’s 1903 Musikverein concert was given as follows:

"Musikalisch-plastisch Stimmungsbilder von Miss Maudy Gwendolen Allan”
2. Beethoven: Adagio aus der Sonata im Cis-moll (Mondschein).
3. J. S. Bach: Gavotte und Musette (aus der englischen Suite, G-moll.)

Pause

In addition to being seriously irked by someone else dancing “Spring Song,” Duncan, one imagines, would also have realized that Allan’s use of the Beethoven’s Adagio from the Moonlight Sonata, Chopin’s “Funeral March” (which Fuller had choreographed and Duncan would choreograph in 1915), Schumann’s “Träumerei,” and even, despite the dance-form titles, Bach’s Gavotte and Musette were considerably more daring excursions further into the territory of absolute music than any of Duncan’s contemporary repertoire. Indeed, Allan never seems to have questioned whether or not her accompaniment was too far from what audiences might think could possibly qualify as musique dansante, whereas for Duncan the title of the work was still enough of a guarantee of its suitability for dance accompaniment, never mind what formal properties or specifically musical elements were

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47 Cherniavsky, “Maud Allan, Part II,” 192-94.
48 The program, held in the Viennese State Archives, is transcribed in Cherniavsky, “Maud Allan: Part I,” 29.
49 To my knowledge, the only writer who has suggested this is Elizabeth Kendall, Where She Danced, 67. While Kendall does not spend much time on the idea, her suggestion reveals an awareness that what-music-was-danced-when-by-whom might be an important part of the history of early modern dance.
to be found in that music. For example: listen to Chopin’s Mazurka in A minor, op. 17, no. 4, which Duncan had danced in London and would continue to do so in her Chopin Abend.

Ex. 2.1. Frédéric Chopin, Mazurka in A minor, op. 17, no. 4, mm. 1–15.

(See Example 2.1). The *Lento* tempo, the *rubato* (that the *espressivo* designation together with the grace notes and varied rhythmic profile would elicit from even a robot), the right hand’s deliciously chromatic fourteen notes against the left’s three: though titled “Mazurka” one does not immediately think upon hearing this music, “Oh, I simply must dance now,” as one might, for example, imagine oneself digging one’s heels into the earth when watching the jolly villagers in the Act I Mazurka of Delibes’s *Coppélia*. Yet one can, of course, dance to this Mazurka—reader, find a streaming recording online (perhaps even one of the lovely, especially liberal interpretations of Horowitz) and try it yourself.

In sum, Allan probably made Duncan aware of something she already sensed: the only thing stopping one from dancing to Beethoven was that it was not expected, and it therefore seemed more off-limits and impossible than it actually was. There would be real resistance—often from especially respected mouthpieces of the classical music establishment—as I will cover in the following section. An example of such resistance involving Allan’s dances: when she triumphantly returned to the *Hochschule* in Berlin to
give a concert (now as a dancer and not a pianist), she had intended to dance the Adagio from Beethoven’s “Moonlight” as she had in the small hall of the Musikverein in Vienna.

She met with Joseph Joachim before the concert:

Professor Joachim seemed so glad to see me, and so interested to hear about my dancing; but he said, with the quaintest whimsical earnestness, patting me on the head as if I were a small child, “Yes, my little girl, you may dance anything that comes into your little head—only please don’t dance my Beethoven! So that day I crossed the Moonlight Sonata from my program.50

But just that day, because of her dear old Joachim, did she nix it. Otherwise, Allan had no problem being seen as storming the vast reserves of music that she and many other listeners loved and respected.

Comparisons between her and Duncan became common; while most critics preferred Duncan overall, and while most realized that there was some serious imitation going on at Allan’s end, it was often noted that Allan’s dancing, unsurprisingly, had a stronger musical basis. Here one finds some of the first direct references to the newfound importance of musical rhythm in the art form that would become modern dance. “She keeps time, keeps time better, perhaps, than the Duncan.”51 “The quality which Miss Allan possesses to a greater degree than her predecessors is a rhythmical sense.”52 Indeed, one soon realizes that this focus on a dancer’s rhythm was quickly becoming the ultimate arbiter for how musical a dancer was. As revealed by the words of respected English critic John Ernest Crawford Flitch, however, Allan could do more than just step on the beat:

50 Boutelle, “Maud Allan and her Dances,” 703.
If Isadora Duncan is a poet, Maud Allan is before all things a musician. In the musical qualities of her art she has no rival. Apart from her instinct for music, she has profited by a musical training such as probably no other dancer has been equipped with. Her steps are to the eye the exact equivalent of the notes which reach the ear. One of the most felicitous of her accomplishments is her ability to pass with the music from the major to the minor key, or vice versa. When a phrase occurs first in one key and then in the other, it is repeated in her dancing with just that modification of aspect and accent which expresses the change of mood. Some of the movements in Grieg's first Peer Gynt suite gave her admirable scope for this beautiful art of transposition. The faithfulness with which her movements follow the moods of the composer is probably only fully realised by those who are musicians as well as connoisseurs of the dance. Her translation of music has not seldom that rare quality of translations of being finer than the original, and there are not a few who, when they hear again, unaccompanied, the music which her dancing has ennobled, will be conscious of a sense of incompleteness and loss.

If only Joachim had seen her art in its maturity, he would perhaps have been content to allow her dance his beloved Beethoven! 53

Flitch’s words are important: this is one of the earliest examples of a critic understanding proto-modern dance as a “translation of music.” With the coming popularity of Dalcroze’s Eurhythmics just around the corner—and, more important and more influential because more widely witnessed by the majority of audience members, the sound film—viewers would soon expect such close alignment between music and a moving human body more so than ever before in history. (The idea of “translation” will be covered in the next chapter.)

Flitch’s praise for Allan’s musical training and technique stops just short of the ultimate romantic choreomusical trope, that of the dancer becoming the music. Such praise (if metamorphosing into sound waves can be considered praise) was given to Isadora Duncan. Allan, however, deserves a more credit for the embodiment of classical concert music than she has been given. This was main goal of her art before her Salome dance.

53 John Ernest Crawford Flitch, Modern Dancing and Dancers (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1912), 116-17. For those readers coming to this dissertation with more of a music-historical background than a dance-historical one, please realize that the “Modern Dancing” of Flitch’s title does not refer to the art form of “modern dance,” he is using the adjective only to mean “recent.”
Figure 2.2 reproduces an “autograph” Maud Allan provided to the British periodical *Pall Mall*. Allan has written out the opening measures of the sixth piece in Robert Schumann’s *Papillons*, op. 2. Allan has provided the tempo indication of “*Bewegt*,” a designation that, to my knowledge, neither Schumann nor any subsequent publisher had ever accorded this piece, the published metronome mark of which is 152 BPM to the quarter note. Indeed, in other pieces where tempo indications are given as words in *Papillons*, they are given in Italian, and not in German as would soon become Schumann’s practice. In the last chapter F. Gautier implied that Loie Fuller transformed Gillet’s “Loin du Bal”; Maud Allan’s autograph far outdoes Gautier’s understanding of Fuller. The dancing performer, composer and copyright be damned, writes herself into the score. Her writing of the above autograph, I sense, would make Barthes giddy: Allan is the reason that

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54 The autograph is reproduced at the beginning of Boutelle, “Maud Allan and her Dances,” 699.

55 Correction of the sad state of performers being left out of music history through attention to the phenomenon of singers autographing composers’ scores (among many other phenomenal practices) is provided by Karen Henson, *Singing Acts: Singers, Opera, and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming). For singers’ autographs in autograph scores, see chapter 3, “Massenet, Sibyl Sanderson, and the Soprano Celebrity.”
Schumann is bewegt, animated, moved. “The explosion of the Muttersprache in musical writing is really the declared restoration of the body—as if, on the threshold of melody, the body discovered itself, assumed itself in the double depth of the beat and of language . . . : the indicating word is the receptacle of signifying.”  

Both in her dancing and in the discourse she promoted arounded it (including that Schumann-Allan autograph) it was not so much a matter of her metronomic sense as it was “that of the body in a state of music.”

It is was just such a state that Germany found in Isadora Duncan.

Done into Deutschland, Provoking Petersburg, Revisiting New York: Finding Duncan’s Perfectly Musical Performances

. . . the [Greek tragic] choruses were accompanied with dancing, which we in Germany would consider frivolous in view of our contemporary style of dancing, while for the Greeks it was an essential feature in the whole spectacle of theatrical productions.

—G. W. F. Hegel

Ask who is the best dancer in Europe of any one in Europe who knows and he will say, “The Duncan,” or else, “Not the Duncan, she isn’t my style.” But you, being English, have probably never heard of the Duncan.

This is how she was invented. Germany cannot dance, except in a Carnival way. She is too fat, but she likes good dancing. Knows it when she sees it, and is free to have it when she likes it, for in every thing in that country except politics, Germany is the freest country Europe, and so in dancing, as in nearly in all the other arts, she has taken out a patent as the competent wet-nurse of all new ideas.

—W. R. Titterton

Departed from Fuller and now with Alexander Grosz as her manager, Duncan rose to fame very quickly in 1902. During the run of some thirty performances in Budapest, she created

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57 Ibid., 312.
a dance that from that point on would be an audience favorite, her *Blue Danube Waltz* to the music of Johann Strauss. As can still be witnessed in performance by third-generation Duncan dancers, the choreography is brilliantly effective in its simplicity: Duncan comes downstage, joyously rising like a wave, and then, still facing the audience, washes back upstage. She threatens to lap too far—right over the footlights, past the orchestra, soaking the audience.\(^{60}\) Like inebriated beach-goers who refuse to move their towels and coolers further up the sandy banks as the tide comes in (the Danube has suddenly become an ocean), the audience enjoyed the feeling and demanded repeated encores. They wanted never to stop bathing in Duncan’s beautiful, fluid musical motion. Within two years, they would luxuriate “in the apotheosis of the Dance” on “the shore of Dance” (as Wagner located it) while Duncan danced Beethoven’s Symphony no. 7. Within ten years so expert was Duncan at embodying music’s movement that audiences would trust her enough to plunge with her into the “Liebestod” of *Tristan and Isolde*, waters far deeper—where, after all, *ertrinken* and *versinken* is the goal—than those of the *Blue Danube*.

Like her former sponsor, Duncan attracted the Nouveau/Jugendstil crowd. With the approval of Gustav Klimt, Duncan gave concerts at the Secession in Vienna as well as at the Künstlerhaus in Munich on August 26, 1902. She danced to a few selections from Gluck’s *Orfeo*—at the time critics said that she “interpreted” them. Indeed, her main goal was to “interpret” and thereby vitalize artworks from the past, and not necessarily musical works. In these 1902 concerts, she was still most often trying to bring a painting to life: Botticelli’s *Primavera*, of course; but also, in her “Angel with a Viol,” *Angel in Green with a Vielle* (1506) by Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis, as well as Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*

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in a dance of the same name. This would be stated directly under the dance’s title: “Tanz nach einem Motiv von Sandro Botticelli” or “Tanz nach einem Gemälde von Titian Vecellio.” She would not offer a full-length evening of interpretations of music, like her “Chopin Abend” or “Beethoven Abend” (“Soirée Beethoven” when in France) until 1904. And while the Wagner family knew of her by 1902, I want to suggest that, at this point, Duncan knew very little about Wagner.

Siegfried Wagner, perhaps tipped off by Pauline von Metternich as suggested above, was among those present in the wildly enthusiastic Munich audiences. “She was seen by Siegfried Wagner, who engaged her for the season at Baireuth next year. She will appear then as one of the graces in the first act of Tannhäuser.”61 Duncan would appear at Bayreuth not in 1903, but in 1904. Looking for a demonstration of her inspiration from Wagner, previous writers regularly cite Duncan’s lengthy 1903 speech “The Dance of the Future.” True, one cannot read those words and help but think that here is someone under the influence of the Wagner fog. The actual content of the speech, however, bears no more than some surface relationships to Wagner’s writings. While Duncan looks to an inspirational Greek past (as did Wagner) and chastises ballet (as Wagner did French and Italian opera) and even throws in a few quick references to her “Will,” previous writers have overstated the influence.62

Duncan’s speech was given on Thursday, March 5, 1903 before the Berlin Press

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61 Siegfried Wagner saw her dance in Munich in November 1902, a few months after her Munich debut at the Künstlerhaus on August 26, 1902. In “American Dance Praised,” New York Times, November 30, 1902, the writer notes that “She was seen by Siegfried Wagner, who engaged her for the season at Baireuth [sic] next year. She will appear then as one of the graces.”

62 The most satisfying explication of the text, on the other hand, is provided by Ann Daly, Done into Dance, 29–36.
In what must be one of the least quoted lines in the speech, Duncan states: “I am brought from the seclusion of my study, trembling and stammering before a public and told to lecture on the dance of the future.” The “told” here is important: with rumors of Duncan’s impending debut at Bayreuth (which, again, would happen over a year from the time of this speech), the organizers of the speech likely expected her to fit the Wagnerian mold more than she actually did. Furthermore, the speech reveals that Duncan did not yet hold great store in the culturally regenerative powers of nineteenth-century music, as she would only a year later. Indeed, Duncan does not use any form of the word “music” once throughout her speech. The few times she refers to “rhythm” it is either to that of danced movement, which she believed must be more successive and flowing than that found in the pose-to-pose style of ballet, or to “the eternal rhythm of the spheres.”

Perhaps the most important difference between Duncan’s speech and Wagner’s “Artwork of the Future” or “Music of the Future” essays is Duncan’s shift, to which she does not directly draw attention, from speaking of “the dance of the future” to “the dancer of the future,” a shift most noticeable in the final, triumphant minutes of her speech: “Oh, she is coming, the dancer of the future: the free spirit, who will inhabit the body of the new woman; more glorious . . . than all women of past centuries—the highest intelligence in the freest body!” Her enthusiasm here represents a glorious collision between Nietzsche and early twentieth-century feminist discourses, but Wagner? Where does Wagner similarly extol the

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63 To my knowledge, this date has not previously been presented. It can be figured out through a reference to “last Thursday” in “Ballet Dancing as a Ritual,” New York Times March 12, 1903, found in the Duncan Press Clipping file at NYPL Performing Arts.
65 Ibid., 55 and 57 respectively.
66 Ibid., 63.
freedom of the “singer of the future” or the “actor of the future”?

In addition to a freer, more flowing dance and the liberation of the turn-of-the-century New Woman, Duncan’s speech offered clarification about her “Greek” ideals and how this fit in her larger project of cultural regeneration:

To return to the dances of the Greeks would be as impossible as it is unnecessary. We are not Greeks and therefore cannot dance Greek dances. But the dance of the future will have to become again a high religious art as it was with the Greeks. For art which is not religious is not art, is mere merchandise.67

Greeks, cultural regeneration (because of all that was “degenerate” or “unhealthy”), coupled with lines “echoing the rhetoric of eugenics, ‘It is a question of the development of perfect mothers and the birth of healthy and beautiful children’”68: it is not difficult to see how Duncan’s discourse could called as support for practices as different as corset burning and fascist spectacle. What I want to focus on here, however, is how once Duncan decided that she should only dance “music of the masters”—Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms, Wagner—her practice and discourses of what might be best termed “historicist modernism” both aligned and challenged similar discourses about music, specifically about the now reified and revered canon.69

Over a decade later, Duncan would stress (for the millionth time, one imagines) in a letter to her students the importance of the music to which they danced.

Please don't let any one persuade you to try to dance to Debussy. It is only the music of the Senses and has no message to the Spirit. And then the gesture of Debussy is all inward—and has no outward or upward. I want you to dance only that music which goes from the soul in mounting circles. Why not study the Suite in Re of Bach? Do you remember my dancing it? Please also continue always your

67 Ibid., 62.
68 Ann Daly, Done into Dance, 27; citing Duncan, “Dance of the Future,” 61.
69 Here I am using the term “historicist modernism” following Walter Frisch in the fourth chapter, “Bach, Regeneration, and Historicist Modernism” of his German Modernism: Music and the Arts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 138-85.
studies of the Beethoven Seventh and the Schubert Seventh, and why not dance with Copeland the seven Minuets of Beethoven that we studied in Fourth Avenue? And the Symphony in G of Mozart. And there is a whole world of Mozart that you might study.  

Duncan’s idea that Debussy is “inward” suggests what she perceived to be its decadence. While Duncan would have no such issue with Scriabin or—contra later Nietzsche, who later, changed perspective on the composer Duncan apparently never read—Wagner, she apparently found the French composer utterly unhealthy, or at least not good for the soul, which was inseparable from the body for Duncan. French audiences, however, found Duncan’s German repertoire to be a revelation. Much as they once did with Wagner, they devoured her embodiment of perhaps the ultimate in German music: the music of Beethoven. Her solo performance at Paris’s Trocadero Theater of Beethoven’s “Seventh Symphony,” “Presto from the Sonata in C minor,” “Pathetique Sonata,” and “Quasi una Fantasia Sonata”—all titled thusly, directly after the music, as Maud Allan had done in November 1903—were acclaimed by audiences and critics alike. When she had given that same program throughout Germany in March and April of 1904, audiences were thrilled. Critics and composers, however, were not.

Just as Joachim had questioned Allan’s use of Beethoven, a fairly important musically conservative figure would question Duncan’s use of Beethoven as well. The composer Max Reger is now known today—where he is known at all—for his extreme dedication to Bach and the high value he placed on counterpoint in his compositions. He could also be rather nasty with his pen. In a brief response to a music critic he once wrote: “I am sitting in the smallest room of my house. I have your review before me. In a moment

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71 Walter Frisch, *German Modernism*, 139–172.
it will be behind me.”  

With Duncan his style would not be terse, but rather long-winded and allegorical. Duncan, and with her the entire applauding city of Munich, had committed a grave offense against Beethoven. In a letter to the editors of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, Max Reger included a fictitious letter from a friend alerting him to the powers of a milkmaid, named Urschl, who is very clearly a parody of Duncan. The always barefoot Urschl, in wiggling her “right big toe” to the music of Chopin and Bach, is able to call forth the spirits of the composers and reveal the truth of musical art. When Bach’s Fugue in C-sharp minor is played by a local villager on a harmonica, Urschl’s toe “grew to unimaginable heights of the most inward expression” so much so that in the barn appeared a “a figure . . . [who] held the Gospel of the ‘inner experience.’” This figure, upon touches Urschl’s big toe and

> from it emerged the spirit of Joh. Seb. Bach, which spoke: "Oh, thou divine big toe! Now, far from bitter harm, I can take pleasure in the joys of heaven; you have taught me that which was denied me during my earthly pilgrimage, that which, until now, the joys of heaven would repay: Now I finally understand what I wanted to express with my C-sharp-minor Fugue. Your power of expression, your majesty of transcendental feeling has taught me this."

Reger, after providing his friend’s letter (which goes on to note that Reger’s own music did not have any effect on Urschl’s big toe) in full to the editors, sarcastically notes that he wishes it the “greatest circulation considering its invaluable worth with regard to an appreciation of the essence of art.” Reger’s letter reveals not only his distrust of those

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74 Ibid., 73.

75 Ibid., 74.
who would “interpret” Bach without a musical instrument, and not only his misogyny. His portrait of Duncan-as-milkmaid, in sticking but to her big toe, reveals his inability to describe what a fully embodied approach to music could look like. Reger probably could not write about what Duncan actually did onstage as he didn’t have the vocabulary for it, nor was he likely practiced enough in the difficult art of writing about bodies in motion: describing Duncan’s movement would require either a keener sense of dance or many more pages.

Duncan made it a point to resist being captured on film. Following her death, Shaemus O’Sheel would wonder, mistakenly, why Duncan never thought of the possibility: “At least some pale and imperfect image of her might have gone down to the generations to make evident what I and other abler than I must despair of telling with words.”

Duncan’s lover, Edward Gordon Craig, was amazed by Duncan when he first saw her in concert in Berlin in December 1904 (the program is given below as Fig. 2.2) and wished to publish a selection of images of Duncan, which he did in 1906. Even for Craig, close as he was to Duncan and as many times as he saw her, it was difficult for him to provide a decent representation of Duncan’s movement. Culling images from his notebooks, many of which he reworked, he ended up selecting images that ultimately lessen her movement, and suggest that she utilized less space on the stage than she actually did. Compare the image of Duncan dancing to Beethoven that Craig published in his *Sechs Bewegungsstudien* in 1906 with an image found in his notebook from 1905 (see Fig 2.3 and 2.4). You can tell that Craig did not feel able to adequately represent Duncan’s speed, her flow. He chose the image of her in a gentle skip to Chopin’s C-sharp minor Waltz

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instead of the break-neck run to an unidentified Chopin piece in his notebook. See too how he draws meek little arrows under her feet to designate movement that travelled the entire depth of the stage (Fig. 2.5). Finally, consider also the final of the six images that Craig published (see Fig. 2.6) and its resemblance to a contemporary sketch of one his Übermarionetten, Craig’s ideal actors (2.7).
When Duncan performed her Chopin Abend in St. Petersburg, two members of the audience were able to translate the bigness of Duncan’s movement into both prose and, in short time, his own Duncan-influenced choreography. The December 14, 1904 review of Nicolai Georgievich Shebuyev and the later dances to Chopin (Chopinaiana and what would eventually become known as Les Sylphides) by Michel Fokine, provide, perhaps oddly, a much fuller picture of Duncan’s movement. The influence of Duncan’s fluidity on the choreography of Fokine has been beautifully encapsulated by Lynn Garafola’s description of how Fokine’s arabesque was different from all those that preceded it: “Fokine broke the step’s containing sphere; no longer the quadrant of a circle, his
arabesque leaned gently forward, reaching for infinity. He thus temporalized the static image.”

Duncan returned to New York City in 1908, only after her years of acclaim in Europe. Just as Reger and Rimsky-Korsakov were bothered by Duncan’s use of “the masters,” so too were several in the New York musical community shocked. While American audiences loved her embodiment of Beethoven and Wagner, many critics first resisted such a challenge to the absolute music paradigm. As we can see by reviewing the reviews of three concerts presented by Isadora Duncan accompanied by the New York Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Walter Damrosch at the Metropolitan Opera House, even the defenders of the musical faith were ultimately too moved to maintain their opprobrium..

The first of these three concerts reviewed by Van Vechten was on November 9, 1909 at the Metropolitan Opera House. Isadora, dancing solo, was accompanied by Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Orchestra. Isadora had danced at the Metropolitan before, in December 1908, a performance about which a contemporary critic noted, “It is doubtful if a woman ever appeared on a New York stage with more sincere admirers of her own sex in the audience, than has been the case with Isadora Duncan during her appearance as a Greek dancing-girl in her present engagement.” On her November 9, 1909 Duncan danced both the ballets and choruses from Gluck’s Iphigénie en Aulide, in addition to other works by Gluck. Here is where we can see the beginning of Van Vechten’s “this is not music for dancing” complaints. In his New York Times review the next day, he wrote, “Most of her dances were accomplished to such aid, but a least one of

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77 Lynn Garafola, Ballets Russes, 42.
78 Daly, Done Into Dance, 238 fn. 44.
them, a Chorus of Priestesses, was taken from Iphigénie en Tauride, and its original purpose and signification were greatly distorted by the dancer. It is a number which was never designed for dancing, and to any one who has heard it in its proper place in the opera it must seem more or less of a sacrilege to have put it to such purpose.”79 In the next paragraph, Van Vechten can only balance the opprobrium by noting that “There can be no possible objection, however, to Miss Duncan’s appropriating the ballet numbers from the Gluck operas for her particular purpose.”80 Apparently, the simple fact that these numbers were intended about 150 years before Duncan danced them for the act of dancing makes their being danced aesthetically approvable: in the first decade of the twentieth century, still valued nineteenth-century ideals about music held powerful sway.

In her third Met performance a week later, November 16, 1909, the second performance reviewed by Van Vechten, the stakes were higher; Gluck is one thing, Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony apparently was quite another. Here is Van Vechten:

Miss Isadora Duncan again appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House yesterday afternoon and danced for the first time this season to Beethoven’s A major symphony, which was played by the New York Symphony Orchestra, with Walter Damrosch conducting. It is quite within the province of the recorder of music affairs to protest against this perverted use of the Seventh Symphony, a purpose which Beethoven certainly never had in mind when he wrote it. Because Wagner dubbed it the “apotheosis of the dance” is not sufficient reason why it should be danced to.81

These are rather strong words with which to begin a review, even for a catty New York dance critic, one who most likely had the word “perverted” thrown at his photos of nude African-American dancers. Again, the idea that non-dance music, especially music that

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 17.
could be considered as exemplary of later absolute music and and its attendant culture, would be danced was intolerable. Since Beethoven cast himself from dance’s shores, we should stay upon that sea.

And yet, we can see that Van Vechten is beginning to come around to Duncan’s style, perhaps to the new freedom that many found in (proto-)modern dance, when he later writes in the review that

if one takes it for granted that Miss Duncan has a right to perform her dances to whatever music she chooses, there is no doubt of the high effect she achieves. Seldom has she been more poetical, more vivid in her expression of joy, more plastic in her poses, more rhythmical in her effects than she was yesterday. Wagner’s title for the symphony might very properly be applied to Miss Duncan.  

The transference of Wagner’s praise, with Van Vechten as the transferring ventriloquist, from the symphony onto the dancing body of Duncan is interesting. How often does one suddenly find herself standing in for the glories of a Beethoven symphony? I will return to this below.

The next Duncan concert that Van Vechten reviewed was her fourth Met appearance a year and a half later, on February 15, 1911. After noting that Duncan is “responsible for a train of barefoot dancers who have spread themselves, like a craze, over two continents in the last five years,” Van Vechten goes on to review her musical selections of the past, noting that, “it has been the custom for Miss Duncan to dance to music which originally belonged either to the opera house or the concert room.” After discussing her performance of Bach’s Suite in D—“If Bach did not intent that his music should be danced to, at least several of the numbers in this suite bear the names of dances,

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82 Ibid.
so Miss Duncan cannot be taken too much to task for employing them for her purposes.\footnote{83}—

he moves to the second half of the program, consisting entirely of Wagner excerpts, some danced, some for orchestra alone. The orchestra was to begin the second half of the evening’s program with the Prelude and 

*Liebestod* from *Tristan und Isolde* sans dancing Duncan. But Damrosch made a speech; Van Vechten recounts that

> Instead, however, of rapping for attention from his orchestra, Mr. Damrosch asked the audience for attention, turned about, and made a little speech. The purport of his remarks was to the effect that it had originally been intended that Miss Duncan dance only music which had been arranged by Wagner in his music dramas for that purpose.

> “It had been my intention,” said Mr. Damrosch, “simply to play this music from *Tristan*. Yesterday, however, Miss Duncan modestly asked me if I would go through the *Liebestod* with her. She has, as is well known, a desire to unite dancing to music in a perfect whole, as an art which existed in the time of the early Greeks. Whatever she does now, of course, must be largely experimental. However, the results which she has already achieved with the *Liebestod* are so interesting that I think it only fair to set them before the public. As there are probably a great many people here to whom the idea of giving a pantomimic expression to the *Liebestod* would be horrifying, I am putting it last on the programme, so that those who do not wish to see it may leave.”\footnote{84}

Damrosch’s speech is uncannily similar to Daniel Barenboim’s speech before playing the *Tristan* prelude as an encore in Jerusalem in July 2001. That comparison serves to show how high the stakes were. Van Vechten’s last paragraph covers the *Liebestod*, but barely.

After noting that barely anyone left, and those who did probably did so to catch trains, what he writes of Duncan’s performance is amazingly vague. “Miss Duncan’s conception of the music did not seem to suggest a pantomimic Isolde, nor was it exactly dancing. In other words, she puzzled those who knew the music drama, and did not interest those who did not. Therefore, one may ask, Why?”\footnote{85}

\footnote{83} Ibid., 18.
\footnote{84} Ibid., 19-20.
\footnote{85} Ibid., 20.
One will remember that Van Vechten began his review by noting that there were Duncan imitators across the land, both pro and amateur. While the answer to Van Vechten’s “Why?” might not be answerable from a poetic perspective, one can see why it might have worked from the audience’s standpoint.

As Mary Simonson has noted, Duncan’s dancing would have been suggestive and interesting to the New Woman of the early twentieth century in America, as were Steidl’s performances of Wagner in New York. Unlike Kundry, Duncan was one of them; her dancing seemed quasi-improvisatory. It was as if someone decided to stand up in a concert hall and dance along with orchestra, revealing the purely human. Indeed, Duncan’s wish to inspire her audience to move while listening in the concert hall struck her as the bizarre paradox the paradox of her art to her: As third generation Duncan dancer Annabelle Gamson has noted, “Isadora in her art was a democrat. There was nothing in her dances that someone watching could not imagine himself doing. Isadora offered her public the opportunity to love themselves as they were. She was their medium, through her they could dance, and through her they could recognize their own humanity.” Indeed, Duncan

Noting how Duncan blurred the boundaries between herself and the music, Van Vechten, in a 1918 essay on Duncan, writes “she remained faithful to her original ideal, the beauty of abstract movement, the rhythm of exquisite gesture. This was not sense echoing sound but rather a very delightful confusion of her own mood with that of the music.”

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87 Annabelle Gamson et al., On Dancing Isadora’s Dances

88 Van Vechten, Dance Writings, 24.
Although it would be better if her wrote “her own sense of movement” instead of “mood,” the critic realized that Duncan’s was a musically empathetic act. Writing on her Liebestod performance later in the essay, and perhaps suggesting that the Liebestod he saw seven years earlier was something of a “music visualization” (as we will explore in the next chapter) at some higher, abstract level, Van Vechten writes, “Her medium, of necessity, is still rhythmic gesture, but its development seems almost dream-like. More than the dance this new art partakes of the fluid and undending quality of music. Like any other new art it is not to be understood at first, and I confess in the beginning it said nothing to me, but eventually I began to take pleasure in watching it.”89 Even the previously tentative Van Vechten is now a full convert.

Duncan’s performance style, with its sense of her listening being an act of vitalizing the music through fairly natural movement, and her use of absolute music (the dances were always titled after the name of the work) seem to suggest that Duncan made the music her own. It could be seen as an empathetic response to music, one in which Duncan both animates the music and is overcome by it. Though this may seem but a maximalization of Romantic tendencies, it is was also the beginning of what would come to be called modern dance.

That the music which led to Van Vechten’s realization is considered (by the composer, Nietzsche, and numerous other commentators) Wagner’s most absolute and symphonic might not be without coincidence. Noting that Isolde’s final lines closely parallel a poem by Nikolaus Lenau about the overwhelming greatness of Beethoven’s music, John Deathridge writes, “As Isolde grows oblivious to everything around her, she

89 Ibid., 26-27.
gradually sinks lifeless into the world of the absolute, which . . . she similarly appears to
equate with [Beethoven]." \(^90\) Deathridge realizes that the *Liebestod*’s status as absolute
music veils certain extramusical horrors (here one thinks of the resistance Barenboim faced
in 2001), that it is “a very public fantasy about an endless escape into pure feeling and
pleasure–an allegory of the musically absolute itself, inside which remain indelible signs of
precisely those harsh realities of human experience it attempts magnificently to exclude.” \(^91\)
But with the autonomy of the piece resituated in the embodied presence of dance, we
might realize not only that “practices [relating to an absolute music paradigm] can remain
open, critical, and historical,” but also that such practices have been not only regressively
inhuman in the past but also progressively human. \(^92\) Following that philosopher’s
understanding of the resituation of musical autonomy, in the next chapter I will explore a
choreographer who sought not “the perfectly musical performance” through dance but “the
perfect performance of music.” \(^93\)

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\(^{90}\) John Deathridge, “Postmortem on Isolde,” *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley: University
of California Press, 2008), 139.

\(^{91}\) Ibid., 155.

\(^{92}\) Goehr, *Quest for Voice*, 131.

\(^{93}\) Ibid.,
most of us, while hearing music, visualize some sort of plastic images, vague or clear, concrete or abstract, but somehow peculiarly related and corresponding to our own perceptions of the given music.

In the more rare circumstance of an abstract rather than a concrete or a dynamic visualization, someone's recollection of Gounod is significant. While listening to a Bach concert, Gounod suddenly and thoughtfully remarked, "I find something octagonal in this music. . . ."

--Sergei Eisenstein, “Form and Content: Practice,”
The orchestra quiets down as Deems Taylor steps forward in a tuxedo to introduce the audience to the motion picture they are about to see, Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*. He notes that there will be three types of music played: music “with a definite story”; music that “while it has no specific plot, does paint a series of more or less definite pictures”; and “music that exists simply for its own sake.” Taylor then identifies the film’s first segment, the Bach-Stokowski *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor*, as belonging to the third type, “what we call absolute music.” As if anticipating the viewers’ anxiety—“So what are we going to be looking at if there is no ‘definite story’ or ‘definite picture’ for this music?”—Taylor reassures with an authoritatively delivered (if somewhat vague) preview:

> What you will see on the screen is a picture of the various abstract images that might pass through your mind if you sat in a concert hall listening to this music. [. . .] They might be, oh, just masses of color, or they may be cloud forms or great landscapes or vague shadows or geometrical objects floating in space.

At times in the opening number of *Fantasia*, Disney’s translation of the “abstract images” engendered by music in the listener’s mind (see Fig. 2.1 above) recalls Hanslick’s metaphor for music, “an arabesque not dead and static but coming into being in continuous self-formation before our eyes.”¹ The S-curves above also recall Heine’s drawing of Loie Fuller in the first chapter, whose movement, enhanced by her wildly flowing silks, suggested the Image of art after which the symbolists so hankered.

> While Mallarmé found Fuller to turn music into physical material through the movement of her fabrics, and nearly everyone found Duncan to embody music’s movement, what would it mean for a human to become the music itself? To attempt a

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¹ Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, 29. Please note that all video examples for this chapter can be found online at: [http://vimeo.com/user9669176/albums](http://vimeo.com/user9669176/albums) Please click on the "album" at that link titled "Chapter 3 Video Examples." The password for viewing both the album and the videos in it is: shawn [entirely in lowercase letters].
direct translation? Such transubstantiation is an impossible and thoroughly romanticist act, but, we will see, this has not kept people from trying or believing that they were doing a great job. While it might not be possible to become Mozart’s Fortieth just as convincingly as Stanislavski became Chekhov’s Trigorin or Brando became Tennessee William’s Stanley Kowalski, what would the imitation look like and why would one attempt it? In the opening scene of Bertolt Brecht’s *Messingkauf Dialogues*, the character of the Philosopher asks, “You don’t think it’s possible to distinguish your imitations from your purposes in making them?” “Impossible,” replies the Dramaturg.²

In this chapter, I will elucidate the purposes, stated and unstated, of a very particular—and perhaps very peculiar to our eyes—set of “imitations”: the “music visualizations” of the mostly forgotten Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers, the first all-male modern dance group. In the 1930s at Jacob’s Pillow—the cabins, studio, and farm these men built just off the winding Jacob’s Ladder Byway (US Route 20) in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts—the company rehearsed dances depicting hyper-masculine stereotypes: the athlete, the field laborer, Prometheus, the Blackhawk chief, the Japanese spear dancer, or, my favorite, the god of lightning (see Fig. 3.2). These representations are clearly exoticist, in which a representation of a racialized Other was often used as legitimation for a primitivist display of machismo and flesh. The dancers, however, also rehearsed choreographies in which they danced as if they were the music of Bach and Brahms itself. The Men Dancers were recently graduated college athletes without previous dance experience; they were trained by the then forty-something Ted Shawn and began touring the United States and Europe with him in 1933. When the company disbanded in

1940—the majority of the men were drafted into the U.S. armed forces—they had given
well over one thousand performances. Critics and audiences, whether in a school
gymnasium in rural Texas or in Carnegie Hall, acclaimed the men not only for their
bravura dancing but also for their model masculinity.

Fig. 3.2. John Lindquist, [Barton Mumaw as the God of Lightning].
While a few dance scholars have used Shawn’s numerous pro-men-dancing writings to highlight gender anxieties in early modern dance, Shawn’s dances are rarely discussed in any detail. His music visualizations are barely mentioned in the dance studies literature and remain entirely unknown to music scholars. Furthermore, while some recent scholarship has rightly noted that music visualization in dance has been denigrated over the past seventy years, possible reasons for the desirability of such visualizations are never broached.³ My immediate rationale here is twofold: first, I want to reconsider the place of the absolute music paradigm within the rather modernist history of US modern dance. Second, I wish to revise the current understanding of Shawn’s choreographies as nothing but so many flights of bare-chested athleticism and exoticism emanating from a notoriously deep closet.⁴ I will focus on two very different music visualizations by Shawn, in order not only to demonstrate how broadly construed this genre was, but also to explain how these performances of music visualizations could license performances of a rather non-standard masculinity.

“Music Visualization”: Practice made Discourse

“There is a long, sad story to be told about the use of music for dancing which was never intended to be danced to.” So wrote John Martin in his manifesto, The Modern Dance, in

³ Barbara White, “‘As if they didn’t hear the music,’ Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Mickey Mouse,” *Opera Quarterly* 22 (Winter): 65-89.

1933, the same year that Shawn and his troupe began touring the United States.\footnote{John Martin, \textit{The Modern Dance} (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1933; reprt. Brooklyn: Dance Horizons, 1965): 114.} Martin was one of the earliest proper dance critics in the United States—that is, he was not a music critic assigned to review dance performances just because there was music involved. Martin and other early modernist critics desired “absolute dance” predicated only on kinesthetic integrity.\footnote{Ibid., 90-92. See Susan Manning, \textit{Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dances of Mary Wigman.}} Such desires, however, unintentionally affirmed Walter Pater’s rather Romantic idea that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.” It was “absolute music,” after all, that had been celebrated throughout the nineteenth century for its unity independent of representation, an art where content and form were truly inseparable. That “modern dance” developed out of Isadora Duncan’s earlier attempts to embody absolute music in what was then termed “interpretive dance” does not seem to have mattered that much to Martin. His great hope was that U.S. modern dance would one day grow up into a good autonomous art form. And it did—so the story goes—with Merce Cunningham’s choreography in the early 1950s that supposedly represented nothing but movement itself.\footnote{The modernist desideratum of “medium specificity”—championed especially by art critic Clement Greenberg—and its repercussions are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.}

It is no surprise that in 1962, privileging dance’s ultimate autonomy, even from accompanying music, Selma Jeanne Cohen, in many ways the founder of dance studies as a valid academic discipline the United States, wrote:

A dance is usually performed to music, and when we think of the time element of movement, we think of it in relation to music. The relationship must be clearly perceivable, yet not so simple that it offers no challenge to the intelligent observer. In the 1920’s Ruth St. Denis [and her husband, Ted Shawn] experimented with a form she called music visualization. Each dancer directly mirrored the rhythm and tempo of an instrument of the orchestra and even the melodic line had its parallel in
spatial design. Music visualization did not last. It was not interesting. It said the same thing as the music and nothing more. It made no comment.⁸

Even today there are writers who deride step-for-note choreography as “Mickey-Mousing,” as if the choreographer had abdicated creative duties in favor of mere translation. Such critique, however, depends on a fallacy of equivalencies: as if music and dance could simply “sa[y] the same thing,” as if the transubstantiation of classical music into a dancing body were a quotidian reality undeserving of further explication.

Cohen’s remarks, like those of many others, also effectively treat “music visualization” as a monolithic, consistent practice. Her description of “each dancer mirror[ing] . . . an instrument of the orchestra” actually refers to the Denishawn (as the 1920s dance company run by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, her then husband of convenience, was called) practice of “synchoric orchestra,” the strictest, and least often employed, style of music visualization. In the visualizations of St. Denis, Shawn, and their protégée Doris Humphrey, the choreography usually sought to reflect the music as a whole and not, as in “synchoric orchestra,” each individual instrumental line. Moreover, “music visualization” could be, and was, used in tandem with non-musical narrative content.

Think of Disney’s *Silly Symphonies* in the 1930s: the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf battle each other but while all remaining in unison with the accompanying soundtrack.

**Ted Shawn’s *New World***

A relatively unknown example of such visualization with narrative is Ted Shawn’s 1936 visualization of the fourth movement of Dvořák’s Symphony no. 9, which Dvořák

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subtitled “From the New World.” Shawn and his company performed this dance only twice. They did so, however, over an August weekend with the much-celebrated Philadelphia Orchestra at the massive outdoor concert space Robin Hood Dell with an audience numbering over 5,000 at each performance and with much press.

Shawn titled his dance *Finale from the New World*, just as Isadora Duncan had often presented her dances under the titles of their accompanying music. Shawn’s dance, however, told a story beyond any to be found in Dvořák’s score. In a recorded curtain talk before a screening, over ten years after their filming, of silent 16mm reels of his visualization, Shawn provided a scenario for this dance, beginning with “a band of pioneers, setting out into unknown land, the wilderness, the frontier, the West. And they come up against the usual things, the dangers from animals, and attacks by Indians and so on.” I kindly request that that the reader now view the opening of that silent film, and first as one would view it at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts or at the Jacob’s Pillow Archive today. [*Please refer to first film example on the website noted in the first footnote.*] Knowing Shawn’s scenario, one might better *see* the dancers crossing diagonally from upstage left as “pioneers,” their arms heralding an ever-distant horizon upon reaching downstage right. Watching the silent film, however, most viewers will not *hear* the music in their mind’s ears. Further complicating one’s sense of the dance as viewed in the archive, this is an amateur hand-cranked 16mm film of a rehearsal at Robin Hood Dell, which means not only that *reel* time is faster than *real* time, but also that inconsistencies in the amateur cranker’s “cadence” preclude any stable direct relationship between *reel* and *real* time.
What is the choreomusical researcher to do? Both with this dance—and again with Shawn’s “synchoric orchestra” choreography to all four movements of Mozart’s Symphony no. 40, which I have also synchronized and which I discuss in the chapter from which this writing sample was excerpted and shortened—I encountered great archival luck, and then promptly learned Final Cut Pro editing software. In the recorded curtain talk referenced above, Shawn boasted that the Philadelphia Orchestra had been most impressed by the dancers on their first rehearsal, giving the men a standing ovation. Shawn credited the dancers’ readiness to the fact that he had been using the orchestra’s recording of the symphony conducted by Stokowski. Knowing this, I was able to edit a digital transfer of the silent film to a digital transfer of the records that Shawn used for 1936 rehearsals. One can be positive that on the silent film the men are rehearsing to Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra’s 1934 recording of the symphony (as opposed to one of the other Stokowski recordings—1925 and 1927—also available at that time) and not to live accompaniment: the film is spliced at the exact two unique locations where the 1934 set of records had to be changed. (Luckily for my synchronization work, the long-playing revolution had not yet arrived.) In short, I took Shawn’s first step seen on the film and the upward thrust of his arms on the movement’s last chord as the keyframes for my first large-scale speed change: this expanded the film’s duration from 9’22” to 11’04”. To rectify the cameraperson’s very inconsistent cranking cadence, I performed numerous speed changes throughout the film, with the goal of performing as few as possible. (I ultimately performed twenty-two speed changes). Viewing the synced opening of the film, one can see how musically engaged Shawn’s choreography really was. [Please view second film example].
The synchronization process not only leaves us with a much stronger idea of the choreography witnessed by thousands seventy-five years ago but also, I would argue, allows us access into the kinesthetic position of the cameraperson doing the cranking. In this next brief synced clip, one can see the men spinning at a now realistic speed (in the silent version they seem inhumanly fast), but please also notice their punches on the upbeat interjecting chords of the strings near the clip’s end. [Please view third film example.] The final eleven seconds of that clip is the shortest segment of film that I modified with a speed change—that is, I did not go through the film and synchronize every single “hit point” (here, each punch per chord) with a new speed change. The longest segment that I modified with a speed change encompassed the entire second theme of the exposition.

While the choreography of the second theme still contains many “hit points” on specific notes (note, specifically, Shawn’s arm gestures coordinated with the cello responses to the lyrical clarinet), the cameraperson’s cranking seemed to have been almost as calm as the minute-long second theme itself, as if in kinesthetic empathy with the music. [Please view fourth film example.]

Shawn’s overall scenario for this dance, however, gives little time to peace and quiet. Describing the conclusion of his Finale in his recorded curtain talk, Shawn explained that the “pioneers”

... come into battle, they fight, they win though with some loss of life and some grief, and then they arrive at, let’s say, a great mountaintop from which they look out over a whole rich valley that is their promised land that they have reached, and after all their struggle, these men, the pioneers who have fought through and won through have finally come to the great vision ...

In Shawn’s many published writings, which are never modest in their self-evaluations, he fancies himself quite the mythical all-American macho pioneer. He had endured many long
road tours. He had survived a psychologically tortuous marriage with, and final separation from, his wife Ruth St. Denis (archival correspondence shows that this followed the couple’s infatuation with the same man). Furthermore, if one takes into account the Berkshires-y splendor of Jacob’s Pillow, Shawn’s narrative begins to quickly sound like thinly veiled auto-hagiography. After the company’s depiction of a post-battle “breakdown,” it is then as if they are dancing a depiction of the fulfillment of both American Manifest Destiny and Shawn’s desire to create an all-male company on a mountainside, all to the strains of Dvořák. [Please view the fifth film example.] Challenged, but of course triumphant in the end, the lead male protagonist performs a masculinity in Finale that squares with the one we know Shawn was careful always to rehearse and to enforce when his men were in public throughout the 1930s.

**Mice, Mozart, and Machines**

When I have screened this film in its silent and synchronized versions—and in presentations I have usually first played a minute-long excerpt from the opening of the original, then that same excerpt with its music—for audiences ranging in number from one to about fifty, the audience’s response at the beginning of the synchronized version has consistently been one of laughter and smiles. Not uncontrollable belly laughs that lead to tears and snorting, but solid chuckles, followed by a few more when a choreomusical phrase comes to a clear conclusion. Even after the first synchronized clip is seen, the laughter will continue during subsequent clips: for example, each time a subset of Shawn’s dancers raised up their arms to the final tonic chords of the movement, from my place at the lectern, viewing the audience and not the clip I have seen far too many times, I could
always count on seeing and hearing a large number of titters throughout the room. One might attribute these chuckles to the joy brought by dancing to music, or to the seeming obviousness of Shawn’s choreography. I would like to suggest that this laughter hints at a deeper, less obvious reaction that occurs whenever a spectator is confronted with a body behaving so completely musically on screen.

There have been two notable exceptions to these chuckles of Shawn and his men. One was when I screened the film in a darkened classroom for longtime Jacob’s Pillow archivist and Shawn historian Norton Owen. Owen gasped excitedly at the beginning of the screening, and from the middle to the end he was rather teary—from joy, he has assured me. The other exception occurred when I screened the synchronized film for philosopher Lydia Goehr. In a manner similar to Owen, Goehr at first opened her mouth with delight. She flashed a quick congratulatory smile at me, said “very good work,” and immediately returned her focus to the screen. Her aperçu came all of thirty seconds later: “It’s so fascist.” The remark is one that need not be understood only as acerbic wit; indeed, I think Goehr meant it. After all, the symptoms—the near-naked bodies of körperkultur, the group locked in step—are familiar to those found in many a scene from the films of Leni Riefenstahl. However, the degree of the symptoms here—it’s a smaller group; they are not performing, at least not directly, in honor of any political entity—suggest a diagnosis considerably less dire. As with conference audiences, it was only the synchronized version that elicited Goehr’s comment, which caused me to wonder if the conference audience’s laughter was related to the same laughter that Benjamin found
cathartic and Adorno found dangerous in early Disney cartoon, which often accompanied
the carefully synchronized violent treatment of everyone’s favorite mouse.⁹

Dvorak’s re-introduced score here provides the film with what composer and film
theorist Michel Chion has called “added value” of sound:

By added value I mean the expressive and informative value with which a sound
enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression, in the immediate or
remembered experience one has of it, that this information or expression
“naturally” comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself.
Added value is what gives the (eminently incorrect) impression that sound is
unnecessary, that sound merely duplicates a meaning which in reality it brings
about, either all on its own or by discrepancies between it and the image.¹⁰

It is only with added value of this audiovisual coordination (or, what Chion more
specifically terms “synchresis,” “makes Shawn’s pioneers seem more like dancers at a
fascist spectacle [footnote documentary], or—not much further along that chain of
associations—an army. In his book on the history and unflagging persistence of unison
movement (focused especially on dances and drills) across cultures as a form of social
bonding, historian and United States Army veteran—like the majority of Shawn’s dancers,
he was drafted into World War II—William H. McNeill notes that,

Military writers have preferred to justify continued resort to close-order drill, after
it lost its practical meaning on the battlefield in the 1840s, by making unconfirmed
assertions about how drill inculcates automatic, unthinking obedience. Before then,
the obvious, intended effect of improving the effectiveness of volleyed fire was all
the justification that drill, and still more drill needed.¹¹

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⁹ Miriam Bratu Hansen, Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and

¹⁰ Michel Chion, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman, with a foreward

¹¹ William H. McNeill, Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History (Cambridge,
It was just this sense of drill that would lead cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer to understand the “mass ornament” and also the then popular Tiller girls as the product of a society under Taylorism.

Everyone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality. Like the pattern in the stadium, the organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers, and barely observes it himself. –It is conceived according to rational principles which the Taylor system merely pushes to their ultimate conclusion. The hands in the factory correspond to the legs of the Tiller Girls. Going beyond manual capacities, psychotechnical aptitude tests attempt to calculate dispositions of the soul as well. The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires.\(^\text{12}\)

This division of tasks is exactly how Shawn approached his “synchoric” choreography. If Shawn’s synchoric choreographies don’t fulfill all of the criteria for Kracauer’s “mass ornament”—not enough people, dancers are not otherwise working day jobs in factories, etc.—they can still be read, however, a manifesting the Taylorist principles that Kracauer found in the Tiller Girls. Furthermore, in matters of his practice beyond choreography, we can see how in thrall Shawn was to the wonders of Benjamin’s “age of technological reproducibility.” During the Denishawn years he and St. Denis not only oversaw Denishawn studio franchises, they also published their dances with the accompanying scores that they visualized so groups of amateurs across the United States could recreate their dances. Consider also Shawn’s drive for donations throughout the 1936 season: programs would request contributions so that the Men Dancers could film all of their works for the benefit of posterity.

After performing with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Shawn wrote in his correspondence about how the orchestra’s management would see to it that he would

perform with other major orchestras across the country. These offers never materialized. Shawn, however, would not give up his desire to dance to symphonic accompaniment. As a result—just as he did when rehearsing his men for the Robin Hood Dell performance of the *Finale from the New World*—Shawn turned to gramophone records. Today, when the majority of modern dance companies perform to recorded music, this might seem like an obvious idea, if a rather disturbing one for lovers of live performance (and union musicians) everywhere. In the 1930s, however, the idea of dancing to records was still very new. Indeed, it is not until the 1920s that one can find regular references in literature to people pulling up the carpet and dancing to the gramophone. Part of the problem was that the machine’s sound was not usually loud enough to be heard over the shuffle of feet.

For his 1938 *Symphony no. 40 in G minor* Shawn choreographed his synchoric interpretation of Mozart to a performance of the work as recorded by Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1930. When they performed the work—outside of later performances at Jacob’s Pillow, it was only performed once—at Broadway’s Majestic Theater on March 27, 1938, Shawn had the recording played and then broadcast over the theater’s very new speaker system. While I will discuss the choreographic details of this dance in my future work (I am currently synchronizing the silent film with the Stock recording), suffice it to note here that the dance is an exemplar of the work of choreography in the age of technological reproducibility. Each man’s dedication to his part results in an odd Mozartean machine. For Shawn, one might say, this was an attempt to achieve the “perfect performance of music” if not a “perfectly musical performance.”

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While this looked nothing like the ridiculous machine-age dances imagine by the Futurist Marinetti, the result was still hauntingly machine-like. Indeed, Shawn had occasionally promoted his Men Dancers in just this way.

Fig. 3.3. Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers posing at the General Electric’s power plant in Schenectady, New York, 1934.

**Absolutely Unmanly Empathetic Men: Shawn’s Bach Visualizations**

So what does happen when Shawn’s music visualizations suggest a more abstract approach to their content than in the *Finale from the New World*? When the content is—to Shawn’s mind, no matter the actual impossibility—the musical form and content directly translated into dance, nothing but “imitation” of the music itself without any added narrative? How
might one understand, beyond Shawn’s stated purpose, the resulting performance of masculinity in such an imitation? I would like to now turn to a few short clips from a film of Shawn’s visualizations of Bach’s music. The next film examples were synchronized in the late 1980s by a team that included the original accompanist of the Men Dancers from 1933 to 1940, Jess Meeker, at the piano. The 16mm film was shot at Jacob’s Pillow during the company’s final 1940 spring season, at which time the most performed program was one entitled *The Dome*, consisting of a very brief prologue and four larger sections. The prologue consisted of a single music visualization of Bach’s ubiquitous “Arioso.” In this brief prologue the men wear long-sleeve white tops and white pants as they kneel in a circle performing *port de bras* exercises (simple lyrical arm gestures) around Shawn, who walks with measured steps and pauses like some prophet lost in deep meditation at the center of the stage.

The first large section of *The Dome*, which presents seven more Bach visualizations, follows this. In between the Arioso prologue and this suite of seven Bach visualizations, all the men remove their pants, now appearing in their white long-sleeved shirts and short white trunks. One gets the impression that they are now really ready to begin—but what? Furthermore, why these costumes? Although such dress is especially striking and entirely anomalous for the men dancers—they are almost the exact inverse of the groups’ standard trunks or pants alone look, as in *Finale*—neither Shawn nor anyone since (so entranced, perhaps, by the step-for-note chroemusicality of the dancers) has mentioned them as being at all unusual.
What Shawn does mention on the tape of a curtain talk he gave as these silent film
were being shown long after the Men Dancers disbanded in 1940 is how he, as a young
choreographer, wished to outdo Isadora Duncan. He says,

She was the first one who dared to lay hold of the great classic music . . . which
was very daring, very radical, very revolutionary in its day. However, in seeing
Isadora dance to symphonic music, I realized that she was dancing her emotional
reaction to that music. And from a certain standpoint, I thought that it was no more
possible for one person to dance a symphony than it was for one violin to play a
symphony . . . It seemed to me there was possible a much more scientific
relationship between movement and music than was being done at that time.

For Shawn, waxing even more scientistic and modernist, this meant turning to Bach:

Since Bach is so, you might say he was pure mathematics in the music, I use
symmetrical and geometric forms, not necessarily angular, but balanced and
proportioned . . . I was the first dancer in modern times to take the contrapuntal
music of Bach . . . to have some dancers dancing exclusively through the notes of
one part of the invention or one voice of the fugue, and other dancers dancing
exclusively to the other parts or voices.

Shawn wants his audience to understand that he was adhering to the score, to the
“mathematics” of Bach. In his 1933 Two-Part Invention, you will notice how each pair of
dancers moves as if one of the two contrapuntal lines. [Please view the sixth film example.]

To what extent can a score dictate how one should move, or dress? In Shawn’s
1915 Three-Part Invention, notice how the center group bourrées (i.e., travels almost on
the toes, as ballerinas, fully on the toes, do in pointe shoes) forward at the end of this next
clip. [Please view the seventh film example.] Were the men’s hands not firmly planted on
their shoulders, they might rather look like swanlets. One could protest that Three-Part
Invention was choreographed in 1915 when Shawn was working almost entirely with
women (who were wearing long flowing white dresses). But what of the Bach
visualization of which Shawn was most proud, his 1940 Toccata and Fugue choreographed
for the men’s final 1940 tour? Shawn even claimed that everyone knew that George
Balanchine had often seen the Men Dancers perform it that year, and that Balanchine was therefore moved to choreograph his much-lauded *Concerto Barocco* to Bach. It is a small wonder that Shawn doesn’t also suggest that Disney’s *Fantasia* (created in 1940, when music visualization became an art best suited for children) stole his moves, moves that again include *a lot* of bourrée-ing to and fro. Here is the opening of the fugue section.

*Please view the eighth film example.*] Shawn is careful to always have the faster sixteenth notes visualized by bourrées, and the eighth notes with a prancing step, at one point coming upstage with a bit of a *ballon* (i.e., a style of movement that seems to hover). In the next and final clip, from the earlier Toccata section, the initial bourrées of Shawn’s corps from center to upstage left could be similarly justified by the rapid sixteenth notes. But then notice how, just after *chaîné-*ing (i.e., stepping out into a fast turn with the feet coming together) down the diagonal, the men bourrée in place, without any justification from the score. *Please view the ninth film example.*

Taking this mock pointe style together with the costumes, one would be hard pressed to think of another situation on the twentieth-century concert stage—apart from Mark Morris’s “Dance of the Snowflakes” in his *Hard Nut* and Matthew Bourne’s all-male *Swan Lake*—in which men so approach the style of a 19th-century *ballet blanc* female corps. Shawn claimed that Bach’s music is not only “mathematical” but also “masculine.” By the time Shawn was choreographing these works, Bach’s music was also anachronistically labeled as “absolute music,” an autonomous music of the spheres laying forth the path for Beethoven and Brahms. For Shawn this eternal “absolute” quality provided justification for the least traditionally masculine dancing he ever produced.
Several letters from Barton Mumaw, Shawn’s lead dancer and lover at that time, to writer Lucien Price offer rare insights into one male dancer’s understanding of performance of gender and sexuality both on- off-stage. Price was one of Shawn’s major supporters—he wrote a glowing article in *The Atlantic*—and his lifelong friend following an adulatory letter following the first performance of the Men Dancers. He would visit the Pillow often, and he would send the men gifts. A letter from Mumaw to Price dated November 14, 1938 contains a rare direct statement about homosexuality and untraditional gender performance,

> I’m reading (or I should say, skipping thru, for I don’t like it) the new life of Oscar Wilde by Boris Brasol who accounts for all of Wilde’s *queerness* by the fact of his homosexuality—I’m so tired of this clinical-case-study business. Just because he happened also to be homosexual as well as queer they blame it all on that. Brasol does go into raptures over Wilde’s Fairy Tales tho’ which pleases me much.14

Mumaw’s interpretation provides a most strong demonstration of the separation between sexuality (here, homo-) and gender; “queer” designates a gendered subjectivity predicated on performances (not only sexual but also spoken, sartorial, etc.)—the historical specificity of this separation (and, before that, even just the separation itself) is one that late 20th-century theoreticians and historians of gender and sexuality have covered extensively.15 It

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14 Barton Mumaw, letter to Lucien Price, box of “Barton Mumaw correspondence,” Jacob’s Pillow Archives, Lee, Massachusetts.

15 Writing specifically about the semantic shift of the word “queer,” George Chauncey notes, "homosexual behavior per se became the primary basis for the labeling and self-identification of men as ‘queer’ only around the middle of the twentieth century; before then, most men were so labeled only if they had displayed a much broader inversion of their ascribed gender status by assuming the sexual and other cultural roles ascribed to women. The abnormality (or ‘queerness’) of the ‘fairy,’ that is, was defined as much by his ‘woman-like’ character or ‘effeminacy’ as his solicitation of male sexual partners; the ‘man’ who responded to his solicitations -- no matter how often -- was not considered abnormal, a 'homosexual,' so long as he abided by masculine gender conventions. Indeed, the centrality of effeminacy to the representation of the 'fairy' allowed many conventionally masculine men, especially unmarried men living in sex-segregated immigrant communities, to engage in extensive sexual activity with other men without risking stigmatization and the loss of their status as 'normal men.’” See his *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and*
was just this separation that led Mumaw to understand that, no matter who he slept with, his was truly manly.

Mumaw later reveals to Price his fear that his own choreography to Bach—his Bourée presented in Shawn’s The Dome and then later danced in his solo career—might have been perceived as effeminate. It surely would not have been the barrel turns each marked by the piano’s imitation of the violin’s double-stops. Perhaps the fast, sprightly footwork sprinkled in between all of those jumps in the dance? Another letter from Mumaw to Price in the archive is from Yankton, South Dakota. Though undated, we can assume it was written on November 23, 1939, as Mumaw notes that it is Thanksgiving. Apparently the good people of Yankton, South Dakota—then with a population less than 6,800, then without football to watch on television—found an all-male dance performance great holiday fare. Perhaps they even especially appreciated Barton, as he wrote that evening, “It surprises me that my Bourée is such a success for it seems to me to be rather on the feminine side and pure dance and not very spectacular.” Before tackling Mumaw’s understanding of “pure dance” and what is and isn’t “feminine” and “spectacular,” it is worth noting that the official route sheet for the Men Dancers at this time (all of which have been wonderfully assembled by Christina Schlundt, to whom any researcher on Shawn should be thankful) does not list Mumaw’s Bach solo here, nor any music visualization to Bach. It is therefore likely that Shawn was letting Mumaw try it out on the road here and there (e.g., in Yankton) before incorporating it into the suite of Bach music.

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visualizations that would open *The Dome* on the tour throughout the winter and spring of 1940.

Interestingly, nowhere does anyone mention that Shawn’s Bach visualizations were seen as at all effeminate. Perhaps this is because, on the rare occasions where Shawn’s group did perform the feminine, it was so clearly coded as such, as it was in Shawn’s depiction of what he saw as the effeminate degeneracy of jazz in his 1937 *The Jazz Decade* (Fig. 3.4).
Fig. 3.4. John Lindquist, detail from photo of *The Jazz Decade*.

Seeing Shawn’s dances, contemporary critics and audiences felt that these truly were especially masculine male dancers (even in the Bach visualizations) as the last three sections of *The Dome*—without Bach and with more of the usual shirtless foot stomping—might more readily suggest to our eyes today. Looking at videos and photographs in the
archives today—many of which were taken with the men in the nude, either while dancing or during afternoon sunbathing (Shawn was a stout believer in the daily practice of naturism) in the Pillow’s garden while Shawn read from Plato, Whitman, and Havelock Ellis for the Men Dancers’ edification—one is extremely aware that all members of the company were biologically sexed as male. [Please see Image 3.5, a photograph of the men in the Three-Part Invention, at the end of this chapter.]

Yet Shawn—and, I would argue, the last century of dance critics—too easily elide the Musical and the Human into anthropomorphized mice and machines, into, basically, something not human. In this practice, critics have been almost as dehumanizing as Antonin Artaud was when describing the dancers he witnessed the Paris exhibition, dancers he claimed were “able to budget movement and sound so perfectly that it seems the dancers have hollow bones to make these noises of resonant drums and woodblocks with their hollow wooden limbs.” The music visualizations of Shawn, coupled with an audience whose sensorium was now primed and ready for such audiovisual phenomena, succeeded in achieving the geometry that Gounod’s image of Bach music as an octagon, cited by Eisenstein at this chapter’s opening, suggested. While it is true that the Bach presented by Shawn’s choreography embodies the “sewing-machine style” that was then—and quite often remains—very much in vogue, it does not follow that music has the power to animate people (just so many dead marionettes) and not the other way around. Music is indeed powerful, but when Irene Cara sings “I am music now” at the end of the movie Flashdance, one need not take her literally. In 2006 composer and scholar Barbara White suggested that one “look past the binary fallacy of whether the [musical and visual]
elements are coordinated to observing where it is that they inevitably meet." Curiously, so natural and given does the phenomenon of visual-sonic coordination in dance seem, rarely does anyone ask why dance and music meet and to what end. Or, to recall Brecht’s Dramaturg referenced at the beginning of this chapter, what are the inseparable purposes of Shawn’s imitations?

As introduced in the previous chapter, the word “empathy” entered the English language only in the early twentieth century, and then only as a translation of the German aesthetic concept of “Einfühlung,” the vitalization of a non-living art object through the projection of one’s own kinesthetic self. It is Shawn’s own very unique kinesthetic empathy with, or a projection of a part of himself upon, Bach’s music that one witnesses in these Bach visualizations. Shawn’s stated purpose was to clearly visualize the “absolute music” of Bach in a “scientific” manner: he would like his audience to believe that his men, bourrée-ing around in white, are the music itself, just so many inhuman slaves to the rhythm honoring the high art of Bach. At the same time, the modernist ideal of dance’s autonomy has left Shawn’s music visualizations languishing on silent film in the archives, and it has also forestalled acknowledgment that such kinesthetic empathy with music is an active projection on the part of a choreographic agent. It seems that unless one is talking about Balanchine, or—and only in recent years—Mark Morris, the disparaging descriptions used for music visualization are “slavish,” “step-for-note,” or “Mickey Mousing,” all attributing an impossible amount of power to the music, and not to choreographic and performing agents. Shawn’s visualizations of “absolute music” obviously do not qualify as “absolute dance,” and for many today they might not hold

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16 White, “As if,” 73.
much aesthetic merit. They are, however, absolutely human, no matter how masculine, feminine, or non-gendered and “musical”—a popular codeword for “gay” in Shawn’s time—they may seem. Much more than they could ever represent, let alone translate, any musical score, Shawn’s music visualizations clearly reflect and refract his own desires for self-expression, which, as Shawn repeatedly notes in his writings, was the leading tenet of “expressive dance” from Duncan right up to his own work. That very human desire could be to act just as masculine as some brave American pioneer or even more “musical” than a tutu-clad sylph.
Fig. 3.5. John Lindquist, Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers in *Three-Part Invention*. 
PART II

THE DIVORCE OF MUSIC AND DANCE?
CAGE-CUNNINGHAM CHOREOMUSICALITIES AND THE AESTHETIC OF INDIFFERENCE

Following the death of choreographer Merce Cunningham in July 2009, obituaries, remembrances, and appraisals were published around the world. The authors of these celebrations all noted a dazzlingly full career as a choreographer and performer of American modern dance spanning more than seventy years. They all note that this career was marked by a constant drive to innovate, and that it led to the absolute modernization of modern dance. These appraisals were anything but surprising: Cunningham and his critics, whether writing from a formalist or critical-theoretical perspective, or with the intent to canonize or harshly criticize, have consistently maintained that his choreography expresses nothing but kinesthetic integrity—what one might call “the movement itself.” This strip-down to a medium’s specificity—unlike the neglected music-dependent dances of Duncan and Shawn discussed in the previous two chapters, or the dances of Martha Graham dependent on capitalized concepts like “Blood Memory” and “Pioneer Spirit”—has long been celebrated by critics of American modernism, most especially in the visual arts.¹

Connecting a version of this tendency in the neo-avant-garde to an American landscape under the influence of McCarthyism, the art critic Moira Roth famously termed the retreat from expression, meaning, and politics in the works of (specifically) Cunningham, John

¹ The reader will recall dance critic John Martin’s desideratum of “absolute dance” from the previous chapter. In art criticism, the locus classicus is Clement Greenberg’s “Towards a Newer Laocoön,” Partisan Review 7 (1940): 296-310. The medium-specific torch has since been carried forth most proudly by Michael Fried, as revealed by his collected criticism in Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
Cage, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg as the "aesthetic of indifference."²

The core of this chapter examines the history behind, and the choreomusical relationships in, a most unusual dance by Cunningham, Second Hand (1970), in order to productively challenge the long-standing characterizations of Cunningham's oeuvre as representing an aesthetic of indifference and the divorce of music and dance. Using unpublished archival sources, as well as observations of Second Hand’s 2008 revival in rehearsal and performance, I will here provide the first sustained account of choreomusical relationships and distinct programmatic content in a Cunningham dance. The last work that Cunningham choreographed to music, Second Hand premiered in January 1970 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and remained in the company’s repertory for two brief years. It was recently revived and added to the Merce Cunningham Dance Company’s repertory in March 2008, and is currently being performed on the company’s “Legacy Tour,” which followed the choreographer’s death in July 2009 and at the conclusion of which the company will disband on January 1, 2012. Second Hand also has the distinction of being the only dance the company performed to a crowd of thousands at Cunningham’s Memorial Concert at the Park Avenue Armory in November 2009. This chapter explains why this unusual dance was so important to Cunningham and his intimate circle, and demonstrates Second Hand’s direct connection to the transitively expressive early collaborations of Cunningham and Cage. More than any of the various texts about Erik Satie penned by Cage, Second Hand also reveals the paramount importance of that composer in the imaginations and aesthetic and personal histories of Cage and

Cunningham. I will suggest that *Second Hand* represents a moment of retrospective ambivalence for the collaborators. Specifically, it represents an ambivalence about the aesthetic and the collaborative model that not only cemented their canonical status in the American performing arts but that also led to the characterization of their collaborations as formalist, objectivist, and “indifferent.” I will also demonstrate that it directly reflects the personal histories of the two men, and contributes to a much fuller understanding of the Cage-Cunningham collaboration.

“Cage-Cunningham” or “Cage/Cunningham” is an adjective now widely used not only by scholars and critics of music and dance, but also by writers in art history, literary studies, and performance studies. While “Cage-Cunningham” might suggest a marriage, the adjective actually signals the opposite: happily divorced. More specifically, it signals a collaborative model in which different performance elements (dance, music, décor) are presented, though simultaneously, as completely independent of each other. The only unifying factor between these elements was the duration for which they would appear on stage. The often-repeated historical claim is that, unlike a Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Cage-Cunningham collaborations present random juxtapositions of performance elements that have their own medium-specific integrity. Someone only slightly familiar with “Cage-Cunningham” probably would at least know that the two men divorced music and dance, that these two elements “don’t line up” in their collaborative work. Dance historians interpret the Cage-Cunningham divorce of music and dance, in the wake of earlier modern dance, as an absolute historical and stylistic rupture. According to this view, their work marks a radical break from step-for-note *Einfühlung* with music, from Shawn’s “synchoric orchestra” of dancers, and even from the choreography of Martha Graham, in whose
company Cunningham danced in the 1940s (he danced and co-choreographed the role of the Revivalist for the premiere of Appalachian Spring), and who, capitalized concepts aside, still set dances to music.

For the majority of Cunningham’s “mature” (i.e., 1953-2009) choreographies, whether or not Cage was involved, “divorced” does indeed perfectly describe the relationship between the choreographic and musical elements in performance. Along with coordinated climaxes between music and dance, narrative was also banished from the stage by Cunningham. This, however, had not always been the case, and was not the case even in some of Cunningham’s most important “mature” works. Cunningham’s output is vast: he choreographed his first work in 1939, and then doubled his already prodigious efforts when he founded his own company in 1953. I will demonstrate that as late as 1970, “mature” Cunningham was creating a dance set to music and with specific narrative content that one can easily interpret as self-expressive. In doing so, I aim to provide a clearer picture of Cunningham’s career: after Second Hand left the company’s repertory in 1972, the choreographer’s work and his company becomes noticeably more “indifferent” than before. It is only in the early 1970s that critics begin to notice an expressionless face worn by the dancers, and a virtuosity that seems no longer merely challenging but now nearly inhuman.

Understanding Second Hand and this post-1972 development requires not only attention to its choreomusical details but also to Cunningham’s earlier history. After providing a brief critical historiography of the aesthetic of indifference as applied to Cage and Cunningham, this chapter first turns to the couple’s earliest self-expressive—so identified by Cunningham and Cage, and still unexplored by current scholarship—
collaborations. Utilizing previously unavailable archival documents (including the never before published and previously unavailable full script of *Four Walls* (1944), I revise several long-standing musicological characterizations of early Cage scores and demonstrate that these early collaborations presented direct indictments of American heteronormativity. Furthermore, through reference to the premiere’s program note and previously unavailable excerpts from Cunningham’s script (gleaned both from Cage’s draft manuscript and Cunningham’s few surviving notes), I reveal that the script of *Credo in Us: A Suburban Idyll* (1942) consists of Cunningham’s consolidation of Cage’s personal and family histories with the aim to provide a critique of the institution of marriage.

If Cunningham, unlike his predecessors in modern dance, did not aim to visualize canonical absolute music, the love that he and Cage shared for Erik Satie engendered numerous exceptions to this “rule” in his mature work. So strong was their respect for Satie that, I suggest, they turned him into their own Beethoven, for whom they would most happily, and rather frequently, break their self-imposed injunction against direct collaboration and expression. Several commentators have already noted the seriousness with which Cage approached the avant-garde composer (from his 1948 lecture “Defense of Satie” to *The First Meeting of the Satie Society* in 1985)⁵, but they have not sufficiently examined Cunningham’s work, nor Cage’s place in it, for Satie’s influence. I will show that this influence is, to put it mildly, strong. Between Cunningham’s *Idyllic Song* (1944, to the first movement of Satie’s *Socrate* as arranged for piano by Cage) and *Second Hand* (1970, set to John Cage’s *Cheap Imitation*, which is a monophonic, *I-Ching*-determined

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⁵ Of the few writers who have explored this influence on Cage, Marc Thorman has done so most persuasively by taking broader view of this influence. “John Cage’s ‘Letters to Erik Satie,’” *American Music* 24 (2006): 95-123.
reduction of the entirety of Socrate), the choreographer also created, among other Satie works, his much lauded Septet (1953, to Satie’s piano duet Trois Morceaux en Forme du Poire) and Nocturnes (1956, to Satie’s eponymously titled work). Septet, I demonstrate with reference to archival video, contains some of the most step-for-note choreography Cunningham ever produced. Nocturnes is unusual in that it was a commission; it is most unusual as the commissioner was none other than a now elderly Ted Shawn, for whom Cunningham provided what he described as a “white ballet” (like those by Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers described in the previous chapter) featuring “a sequence of rendezvous.” If Marcel Duchamp has traditionally been interpreted as the avant-garde godfather (and personal friend) of the American neo-avant-garde (including Cage and Cunningham), I suggest that Erik Satie might best be interpreted as a kind of queer exemplar for the couple. At the very least, Satie and Socrates were clearly viewed as models worth emulating by Cage and Cunningham.

The chapter concludes by revisiting Cage-Cunningham historiography and connecting it to recent debates about the place of performance in current musicological scholarship. Cunningham and Cage have long been touted (especially by performance studies scholars) as the providers of extremely in-the-moment—or “drastic,” if you wish—aesthetic experiences; this has been especially argued for Cunningham’s dancers, who must stay entirely focused on their rhythms despite the musical and scenic hullabaloo often surrounding them. With such arguments, and sometimes just with these writers have also created a reified “Cage-Cunningham” aesthetic model for collaboration, a model that is now little more than an empty epithet that is too often substituted for actual engagement with the specifics of the couple’s collaborations. This, I conclude, has led to a history and
criticism indifferent to the more-than-“Platonic” relationship between Merce Cunningham and John Cage, and it has even obfuscated fuller understanding of the “dance and music itself.” Ultimately—above and beyond correcting misinterpretations about the works of both men through archival research and choreomusical analysis—this chapter’s goal is to demonstrate that it is only by also acknowledging the aesthetic and history of difference (without recourse to an essentialist notion of homosexuality) in the couple’s creative output that their contributions to the twentieth-century performing arts can be fully understood.
Chapter 4

Early Expressions of Frustrated Desire:
*Credo in Us: A Suburban Idyll* (1942) to Cunningham’s First Solo Concert

At the premiere of *Second Hand*’s revival in Washington D.C. in March 2008, audience members and critics were startled by the piece’s utterly different character from the rest of the program: on the one hand there was the to-be-expected kinesthetic pyrotechnics in that evening’s performances of *CRWDSPCR* and *eyeSpace* and, on the other hand, the very different admixture of the tranquil and the elegiac in the dancers’ movements in *Second Hand*. In order to understand *Second Hand* and its difference, it is necessary to turn to the earliest Cunningham-Cage collaborations from the 1940s, collaborations that were not only self-expressive—as several writers have sensed from the dances’ titles and vague remarks from Cunningham and Cage—but also, as I will show with reference to previously uncited archival documents, expressive of a rather specific idea. Unlike Katz’s floating “performative selves” noted above, many of these early collaborations are firm representations of a strong distaste for traditional marriage, of a put-on-a-happy-face disingenuousness masking connubial discord. These dances critiqued what one might call “heteronormativity” and its attendant maintenance. Cage and Cunningham surely found some precedence for such themes in the oeuvre of Martha Graham, in whose company Cunningham danced from 1939–1946. The theme was also motivated, I will suggest, by John Cage’s growing distance, separation, and eventual divorce from his wife, Xenia Kashervaroff Cage.
Credo in Us and Cunningham’s Early Roles with Martha Graham

The very earliest of these collaborations—with Jean Erdman (a fellow Graham dancer) sharing choreographic and performance duties with Cunningham—is Credo in Us from 1942. According to Cage, in the summer of 1942, having been thrown out of Peggy Guggenheim’s house (while being calmed by a smoking Marcel Duchamp) for arranging a future concert at the Museum of Modern Art (and not at Guggenheim’s own Art of This Century Gallery), he moved in with Jean Erdman and Joseph Campbell. Instead of rent,
Erdman asked him for dance music for her summer performances with Cunningham at Bennington.¹

Whether writing with a focus on music or dance, scholars have neglected to notice anything more than a vague Joycean ring to the dance’s synopsis for *Credo* available to them in the book *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years* by longtime Cunningham archivist and friend David Vaughan.² But, as revealed in a published interview with William Fetterman, co-choreographer Jean Erdman’s recollection of the dance suggests more. “[It] was based on a script that Merce had written, but he didn’t want anyone in the world to know that he’d ever written anything, so we just pretended that we’d gotten it out of a French magazine and translated it! It was a kind of criticism of our own bourgeois backgrounds—the parents having a little too much trouble or something [...] The script was the secret.”³ An excerpt from a fragment of the dance’s synopsis, included in the first program, reads:

> They are happied husband and wifed. / They have harmonious postures. They facade their frappant ways across a sacred spot. / Ah, but what! This breakage of pattern. And on-and-ons—is he only Machine?—with her unreality. But . . . soon breakage too. / So he searched for the Glory that was Greeley’s, and she wondered after. It killed time.

What has so far gone unnoticed in the Cage-Cunningham literature is that the “Glory that was Greeley’s” could refer to Greeley, Colorado, where Cage’s paternal grandfather, Gustavus Adolphus Williamson Cage, settled as a missionary preacher after much travel

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throughout the country.\textsuperscript{4} In addition to grandfather Cage’s constant travels in the name of God, John Junior’s own father, John Milton Cage Sr., was constantly forcing his son and wife to move due to the lack of security that comes with the occupation of “inventor.” That in 1942 Cage’s own wife, Xenia, was following her husband from city to city across the country, might also not coincidental to Cunningham’s script. Given Cage’s propensity to share his life’s narrative, one that—common practice for most successful modernists, musical and otherwise—shades into a personal creation myth, it is entirely possible that Cunningham and Erdman, whose characters in the dance were listed in the program as “Husband—Shadow” and “Wife—Ghoul’s Rage” respectively, were dancing a troubled marriage modeled on those of John and Xenia, his parents, and his grandparents. This, I believe, explains why the synopsis of the dance, as published in its first program, designates the time of the action as “Three Generations,” and its location as “Westward Ho!”\textsuperscript{5}

Cage has said of \textit{Credo in Us}—and, by extension, Cunningham’s dance and script for it—that it is “a kind of satire on America.” He was once asked if “the ‘Us’ is the U.S.” While he did not explicitly deny the possibility, he noted that “it’s also you and me […] that we believe in all that.” In this same interview with Charles Amirkhanian, Cage notes

\textsuperscript{4} Information about Cage’s grandfather can be found in David Revill, \textit{Roaring Silence}. Revill mentions Greeley, Colorado and the trouble John’s grandfather encountered there. A year after I presented part of this chapter as a paper, musicologist Paul Cox suggested that “the glory that was Greeley’s” refers to Horace Greeley, to whom the phrase “Go west, young man” has often been attributed, Paul Cox, conference paper, Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, “An Imaginary America: Cage and Cunningham’s \textit{Credo in US},” November 6, 2010.

\textsuperscript{5} These designations of time and setting are not included with \textit{Credo}’s synopsis in Vaughan’s book.
that “there are many holes in the music, and in the holes there were words of a text that Merce Cunningham had written.”

It became fairly common for modern dancers in the early 1940s—influenced by many of the leftist dancers of the 1930s—to include spoken text in their choreographies. Just as polemical articles about the relationship between music and dance were common in the journal Dance Observer in the 1930s, so too were pointed contributions about the place of text in dance in the 1940s. Martha Graham’s American Document of 1938 is often cited as the first successful example of a dance-drama with fully integrated spoken text in the American modern dance tradition. Throughout the dance, commentary is provided by an Interlocutor, which was performed by Merce Cunningham from 1942 to 1944. In addition to the famous line, “An America—What is an American?” Cunningham, during the “Third Episode: The Puritan” of the dance, would have recited a text which alternates between descriptions of hell by Puritan preacher Thomas Shepard—and not Jonathan Edwards

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6 John Cage, in Conversing with Cage, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Limelight Editions, 1994), 62; taken from an interview of Cage by Charles Amirkhanian in 1983, an audiotape of which was given to Kostelanetz.

7 Cunningham would also have an entirely offstage reading role in Graham’s Salem Shore. Jean Erdman would return as a “guest artist” after she left Graham’s company to read her lines, as the character “One Who Speaks,” in Graham Letter to the World (1940). An especially critically acclaimed dances in the 1940s with accompanying recitation was Valerie Bettis’s The Desperate Heart (1943, poem by John Brinnin; John Martin named it the most outstanding dance of the 1942-43 season, “The Dance: Honor Roll,” New York Times, August 29, 1943, X2). Pearl Primus regularly used spoken text at this time: The Negro Speak of Rivers and Our Spring Will Come (1944, both Langston Hughes, the latter with music by Cage) as well as Strange Fruit (1945, Lewis Allan, pseudonym of Abel Meeropol, without music). One might see Sophie Maslow’s Folksay (1942, Carl Sandburg’s The People, Yes, Woody Guthrie performing folk songs) as influenced by Graham’s American Document; see Ellen Graff, Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-42 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 147-51. Doris Humphrey used some spoken text in 1931 in her The Shakers (which, as several scholars note, no doubt influenced Graham’s textless Appalachian Spring), see Foulkes, Modern Bodies, 132-36. The larger earlier precedence was US Leftist/Popular Front dance groups in the 1930s, who often utilized spoken text throughout the 1930s; for more, see Graff, who notes, however, “Probably nobody had integrated the text with the dance in the way that Graham did [in American Document],” Stepping Left, 129.
(except for the brief, penultimate, and very recognizable line in this episode: “Sinners in the hands of an angry God!”), to whom Graham’s scripts attributes the hellfire lines and which commentators since have reaffirmed—and the comparatively sex-positive rhapsodizing of the *Song of Songs* from the Bible:

> I am my beloved’s  
> And his desire is toward me.

> Death comes hissing like a fiery dragon with the sting on the mouth of it.

> Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,  
> For thy love is better than wine

> God shall set himself like a consuming, infinite fire against thee [. . . ]

Following *American Document*, Martha Graham’s *Punch and the Judy* took up the idea of the lack of sexual fulfillment in American marriages even more directly. A married woman imagines herself carried off by Pegasus (danced by Cunningham) into a world of bliss, only to return again to her everyday life. This dance-comedy ended with Jean Erdman asking the audience sarcastically, “Shall we begin again?”

What has thus far remained unknown is that John Cage’s autograph score for *Credo in Us* at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts contains some of those “words of a text that Merce Cunningham had written.” These words offer us a new perspective on the script and this earliest Cage-Cunningham collaboration. These script excerpts were cues; they would designate where unmeasured rests—whole-measure rests with fermatas—were to end. Brief and bizarre though these cues are, they reveal much about the overall idea Cunningham’s script intended to project. For example, while it is clear that Cunningham lays the blame on “Ghoul’s Rage,” the wife figure—“But Credo in us was Ghoul’s Rage motto and *la vie* bid them well to use it” [see also Figure 1, one of
several Barbara Morgan photographs of this dance that captures the sense of the female character as dominant and fierce, the male as cowed and evasive]—for maintaining marriage at all costs, it is ultimately “la vie,” or heteronormative American society, that demands such maintenance. Cage’s score calls for recordings of popular “classical” composers. On page 19 of the manuscript score, Cage reiterates what he would like played on the phonograph in a parenthetical: “Beethoven, Sibelius, Shostakovich, or whatever.” That very dismissive grouping of Great Composers with “whatever” suggests his alignment of the canon not only with the status quo but also, given the play’s context, with the trials of an ultimately unnecessary and unhappy marriage. Furthering an interpretation of *Credo in Us* as a critique of an oppressive heteronormativity is the tellingly sardonic subtitle that Cunningham and Erdman included in programs for the two subsequent performances of the dance: *A Suburban Idyll*.

Cage and Cunningham continued collaborating in New York throughout the next three years leading up to Cage’s divorce in 1945. As several commentators have noted, the titles and brief program notes for most of the works which Cage composed—the majority of which served as accompaniment for Cunningham’s dances or were performed on Cunningham programs—suggest a person or relationship under stress: *The Perilous Night, Tossed as it is Untroubled, Root of an Unfocus, A Valentine out of Season*.8

Just as he commented on the expressive content and overall meaning of *Credo in Us*, so too did Cage regularly discuss the intent and content, transitively expressed to his mind, in some of his works that were not for Cunningham dances.

When I finished [studying with Schoenberg], I was suddenly an active member of the musical world. As such, it was my responsibility to say something, because at

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8 One of the most cited examples is Revill, *Roaring*, 84.
that time—it was in the thirties—people said an artist “must have something to say.” So I tried, as composers do, or poets, or whatnot, to see what I had to say, and to say it. For instance, when the Second World War came along, I talked to myself, what do I think of the Second World War? Well, I think it’s lousy. So I wrote a piece, *Imaginary Landscape No. 3*, which is perfectly hideous. What I meant by that is that the Second World War is perfectly hideous, and I meant incidentally that *Time, Life*, and Coca-Cola were also hideous, that anything that is big in this world is hideous.

Logically I thought that anything that is small and intimate, and has some love in it, is beautiful. Therefore, I wrote a piece for prepared piano, which is very quiet. It is called *Amores*, and it is about my conviction that love is something that we can consider beautiful.\(^9\)

In the above response in an interview, Cage moves from his perceived duty to “have something to say” in composition, to his understanding of *Amores* (finished in 1943, and, with its outer two movement for prepared piano, Cage’s earliest work for that modified instrument that was not composed to serve as dance accompaniment) as being a piece that said something—exactly what one will never know—that was not critical of love but actually celebratory of it.

Whatever Cage was “trying to say” in *Amores*, it is, for this time, quite anamolous—i.e., neither critical nor “perfectly hideous”—when taken with the expressive content of *Credo* and his 1944 works. Consider his *The Perilous Night*, which Cage started in the winter of 1943 and was the first work he completed in early 1944.\(^10\) In a 1948 lecture at Vassar, Cage stated that, “The *Amores* concerned the quietness between lovers. *The Perilous Night* concerned the loneliness and terror that comes to one when love becomes

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\(^10\) At the end of the autograph manuscript, Cage wrote “New York City / Winter 1943-44.” See folder 111 in the John Cage Papers, JPB 94-24 (originals), New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
unhappy.” Among scholars of Cage and Jasper Johns—who painted a series of paintings on The Perilous Night in the 1980s—the most often used statement is somewhat stronger. Cage made this statement in conversation with curator Richard Francis with the comfortable distance of forty-five years from the piece’s composition and his marriage’s deterioration. Francis writes, ending with a quote from Cage:

John Cage has referred to the “perilous night” as particularly dark period in his own life. He says that the image came from an Irish folk tale which he remembers in a collection made by Joseph Campbell. For him, the music tells a story of the dangers of the erotic life and describes the mystery of “something that was together that is split apart.”

Cage was yoking the challenges he faced as he separated from his wife not necessarily, as he says, to “an Irish folk tale” (and as is repeated by several writers discussing Perilous Night), but actually to one or two separate stories drawn from the Lancelot and Grail writing of Chrétien de Troyes (with some of this material also appearing in Wolfram von Eschenbach). One can be nearly positive that Cage learned these stories from Joseph Campbell—again, Jean Erdman’s husband—who in 1943 may have noted to Cage that their origins were in the Celtic oral tradition (leading to Cage’s attribution of the source as “an Irish folk tale”). At this time, Campbell started editing the mythologies collected by Heinrich Zimmer, with whom Campbell consulted before his “sudden death, in the spring

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of 1943.”

Both stories to which Cage refers as the “Irish folk tale” contain “a certain perilous bed, *Liz de la Mervoille*, ‘The Marvel Bed’—no pleasant piece of furniture.” In the first story that appears in the Zimmer collection, the bed upon which the knight Gawain lies in the *Château Merveil* [the Marvel Castle] flies to and fro across the room. It is then pelted with hail—Gawain was wise to go to bed in his armor—before a lion enters the room. By enduring all this, Gawain “had satisfied and quelled, at last, the recalcitrant feminine element of the castle.”

The second possible source story involving a “marvel bed” or “perilous bed” tells of Gawain and Lancelot sharing a bedroom with three beds, one of which—the nicest one, of course—they are forbade to lie upon “by the directing damsel” of the house. Lancelot undresses and lies on it, and barely escapes being pierced by a falling, flaming lance that sets the bed on fire. On the very next page, the reader learns that the following day Lancelot, now on his own, has met another damsel willing to house him. His accommodation comes with a condition: he must share a bed with this woman, who demands that he make love to him. After some time laying in their undergarments in bed together, Lancelot unresponsive the entire time, the woman leaves him: she understood

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14 Heinrich Zimmer, *The King and the Corpse*, 86.

15 Ibid., 87.

16 Ibid., 167.
that “he had on hand a more perilous and grave affair than any ever undertaken by a
knight.”17 As in Cunningham’s script for Credo in Us, in these tales that inspired one of
Cage’s most acclaimed and earliest pieces for prepared piano (and one not accompanying a
dance), it is the demands (perhaps specifically sexual) of a woman that challenge the male
protagonist. Taking Cage’s references to these stories and his personal history seriously,
one has a more complete sense of how deeply his life penetrated his work at this time.18

Cage premiered The Perilous Night at Merce Cunningham’s first solo dance concert.
Cunningham has stated that he dates “his beginning” from this performance in New York
City on April 5, 1944, at 9pm on the stage of the Humphrey-Weidman Studio Theatre at
108 West 16th Street. The concert was in three parts separated by two intermissions: first,
three Cunningham dances (Triple-Paced, Root of an Unfocus, and Tossed as It Is
Untroubled, all with accompaniment by Cage, and all eponymous save the music for
Tossed as It Is Untroubled, titled Meditation); followed by three musical compositions of
Cage (The Perilous Night: Six Solos, Songs (She is Asleep and The Wonderful Widow of 18
Springs), and Amores: Prelude, Trio, Waltz, Solo); and concluding with three more
Cunningham-Cage collaborations (The Unavailable Memory of..., Totem Ancestor, and
Spontaneous Earth). Totem Ancestor and Root of an Unfocus remained in Cunningham’s
repertory until the mid-1950s. Totem Ancestor, furthermore, was recorded in dance
notation, and has been occasionally danced in the recent past, often within Events, which

17 Ibid., 169.
18 Since several commentators—including art historians who are often on the lookout for
cryptographic personal references in the work of Jasper Johns, including his Perilous Night
series—refer to the “perilous bed” or “marvel bed” as slipping around on a floor of jasper—for
what is possibly the earliest example, see Revill, Roaring, 85—I would like to point out that this
detail only occurs in a later text Campbell wrote, The Masks of God (vol. 4): Creative Mythology
are a mash-up a various excerpts from Cunningham’s oeuvre. There is a video of Daniel Madoff, a final-generation Merce Cunningham Dance Company member, that shows him crossing the diagonal of the stage, repeatedly falling nearly to his knees and then springing up repeatedly; this is the same move so brilliantly captured by Barbara Morgan in 1942, and which was used for Cunningham’s first appearance on a magazine cover, that of the influential Dance Observer, created and led by Louis Horst.

The review by Robert Sabin in that issue of Dance Observer of both Cunningham and Cage is quite positive, and also reveals how “pure” even Cunningham’s early expressive works must have seemed to reviewers of modern dance during the war years. For instance,

Pure, unadulterated dancing (How seldom one sees it any more!) is what interests Mr. Cunningham, and everything he had to say was expressed in clean, beautifully time and executed movement which was a joy to watch. He is a classicist (is one may venture to use that dangerous word) in the sense that he obviously believes in dance as an independent medium of expression with its own laws and objectives.

Sabin, however, does not entirely dismiss the expressive content present—“[…] Root of an Unfocus and Totem Ancestor were psychological studies of a penetration truly amazing in so young a dancer”—he just seems to want more of it: “When he has put more ‘theatre’ and more warmth and variety into his work, he will have the same attraction for a less specialized audience.”

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20 Morgan’s photo appeared on the cover of Dance Observer 11 (May, 1944), [49; though unnumbered, the covers of Dance Observer are included in the running page count for each yearly volume].


22 Ibid.
For the dance critic—“He was poet. He wasn’t really a dance critic.”—Edwin Denby, however, a lack of “theatre” was not an issue. Denby apparently found quite enough drama entirely in the movement of Cunningham’s body. His review was overwhelmingly positive: “I have never seen a first recital that combined such taste, such technical finish, such originality of dance material, and so sure a manner of presentation.”

Previously, Denby had nothing but praise for Cunningham’s work in Graham’s company. In a March 1941 review of the Martha Graham Dance Company’s performance of Letter to the World (and likely the first time Denby saw Cunningham dance) he wrote of the “three fine dancers with her” that “Cunningham, the least finished dancer of the three, delighted me by his humor, his buoyancy, and his wholeness of movement.” By 1943, and just four months before the rave review of Cunningham’s solo debut, he was even more appreciative of Cunningham’s dancing: “Among the dancers in the company Merce Cunningham’s long dance phrases, his lightness, and his constantly intelligent head are very fine.”

All the same, and especially given his overall impression discussed below, one does wonder if Virgil Thomson—a longtime friend as well as chief music editor of the

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23 Cage said this in an interview with B. Michael Williams in 1988, “The Early Percussion Music of John Cage,” Percussive Notes (August 1993), 62. A selection of Denby’s poetry, to which scholars have paid more attention in recent years, can be found in Edwin Denby, Dance Writings and Poetry, ed. Robert Cornfield (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9-29. Denby would later become a close friend of Cage, who wrote a poem for him, and also Frank O’Hara, who would write “Edwin’s Hand” and other poems referencing the poet-critic.


Denby compares Cunningham’s build to a Picasso *saltimbanque*. He notes how all of his movements—“brilliant in lightness and speed”—and the “sensitivity” of his “lightly free” and “light and long” posture and carriage are “suited to lyric expression.” Even more importantly, in his third paragraph Denby focuses on Cunningham’s clarity of “physical rhythm” and his the precision, but subtlety, of his attack and phrasing: “His dances are built on the rhythm of a body in movement, and on its irregular phrase lengths. And the perfection with which he can indicate the rise and fall of an impulse gives on an aesthetic pleasure of exceptional delicacy.” Denby (who, it should be noted, received a certifificate in Dalcroze eurhythmics from Hellerau) similarly praises Cage’s music, highlighting the music-only middle third of the concert, for their “delicate sensuality.” In this 443-word review, pivotal in catapulting Cunningham’s career—and no doubt his confidence too—Denby continually returns to the idea of “elegance”: “a program […] of the greatest aesthetic elegance,” “the effect [of the dances] is one of an excessively elegant sensuality,” and, in his final sentence and the review’s thesis statement, “[Cage’s] music, like Mr.

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27 While I realize that the suggestion is more than a bit Homintern-ish, Thomson was very often a very strong advocate for the bright, young, gay men he knew. See, for example, Anthony Tomassini, *Virgil Thomson: Composer on the Aisle* (New York: Norton, 1997), pages 353-77 cover his meetings with Cage, Harrison, and Rorem. Much of Nadine Hubbs’ book also covers this aspect of the “Copland-Thomson circle,” *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). For more on the relationship between Denby and Thomson, see William MacKay’s “Edwin Denby, 1903–1983,” in (different from, and more complete than, the above-cited collection) Edwin Denby, *Dance Writings*, ed. Robert Cornfield and William MacKay (New York: Knopf, 1986), 11–34.
Cunningham’s dancing, has an effect of extreme elegance in isolation."28 Coming from Denby—who, though wildly well-connected throughout his life, believed in “The Importance of Being an Outsider Everywhere”29—this was not only high praise, but also the recognition of kindred spirits. While it is extremely doubtful that Denby knew of the romantic affair between the creators, his review—Denby, as far as I can tell, only used “elegant” when discussing female dancers—suggests a recognition beyond similar aesthetic interests.

An “Evanescent Door of Shadows”:
*Four Walls and Appalachian Spring* (1944) to Leaving Graham

One imagines such elegance in isolation onstage, just Cunningham and his shadow cast by stage lights upon the boards. Offstage however, the composer and choreographer were increasingly very much together, even if they found themselves questioning their desires. “Shadows” were apparently very important to Cunningham during these early years. Recall the character of “Husband-Shadow” in *Credo in Us*, the earliest manifestation of the preoccupation with the theme of heterosexual love gone wrong that would continue throughout the war years up to Cage’s divorce. The use of the word “shadow” to describe the Husband (or perhaps his darker, deeper side) suggests the influence of Carl Jung upon Cunningham, Cage, and their circle at this time. Indeed, Jung was a major buzzword in the early 1940s New York milieu of artists and scholars. Joseph Campbell, a notably

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28 All quotations are from “Merce Cunningham,” *Dance Writings and Poetry* (the 1998 edition), 117-18. Again, this was originally published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, April 6, 1944.

committed Jungian, is responsible for Martha Graham’s reading of him in 1938.30 Cage, who would converse with Campbell about mythology and *Finnegans Wake*, their favorite book, was likely first introduced to the thought Jung by Campbell as well. Sometime later, he even tried Jungian analysis, but dismissed it after a single visit. In later writings, Campbell would sometimes refer to the bruised portion of the unconscious represented by Jung’s “shadow” as “the ‘knock-knock principle,’ when one is in fear of one own’s self.”

The knocking at the door would have been especially loud during the summer and fall of 1944.

In between Cunningham’s debut recital and his second solo recital in New York in early 1945, Cage and Cunningham collaborated on two works, *Four Walls* and *Idyllic Song*. *Four Walls* was a dance-play to a script by Cunningham about a troubled family. The opening stage directions, published in David Vaughan’s *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years*, read “One should feel the rigid pattern of a family set by years of time, particularly in the parents, and the complete subservience to it. [. . .] The BOY [which was Cunningham’s character] is completely away from it inwardly. The GIRL fights it inwardly and outwardly.”32 Even more illuminating than that description, a copy of the script for *Four Walls*, which has not been seen for the past 65 years, was entrusted to me by David Vaughan of the Merce Cunningham Archives in 2008. The script, discussed shortly, greatly enlarges our knowledge of the expressive concerns of Cage and Cunningham during the first half of the 1940s.

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32 Vaughan, 33-34.
When previous writers have discussed *Four Walls*, they have done so mainly to use it as an example of Cage’s compositional approach at this time. It has also been fit, in a rather Procrustean manner, into Cage’s development toward 4’33” and, in a very Procrustean manner, into the history of minimalism. Cage and Cunningham have often used the phrase “rhythmic structure” to describe the composer’s compositions in the early 1940s to explain what made their earlier separation of music and dance possible. At the most basic level, “rhythmic structure” is similar to Cage’s later prevalent use of the word “phraseology”; he is referring to units of measures, units that could be used as structural beginning and end points for Cunningham’s choreography.

As Martin Erdmann has pointed out, *Four Walls* is a particularly elegant example of “rhythmic structure,” Cage composed the first act is composed in groups of 44 measures in 2/2 time.\(^{33}\) With the given metronome marking of a half note played at eighty-eight beats per minute, each group of 44 measures should last exactly one minute. As total number of 35 groups of 44 measures across the entirety of the first act, the act should last exactly 35 minutes. The second act—consisting of 24 groups 60 measures, each measure in 2/2 time with the tempo designated as a half note equal to 120 beats per minute—should last exactly 24 minutes. As Paul van Emmerik noticed, Erdmann mistakenly understood the second act to contain 25 groups.\(^{34}\) But Erdmann’s mistake is one easily made if, instead of counting measure by measure, one merely looked for the notated vertical double lines at

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\(^{33}\) Martin Erdmann, “Untersuchungen zum Gesamtwerk von John Cage,” PhD Dissertation, Rheinischen Freidrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 114-19. Erdmann’s discussion of *Four Walls* occurs in a chapter about Cage’s relationship to Satie, a smarter and less teleological connection than those who hear it as proto-Minimalism.

a measure’s end that Cage used to designate the end of each group (or “period,” as Emmerik and others have referred to them): one appears twenty measures into the ninth group of the last scene of the second act. The very real possibility here is that Cage cut 40 measures of what was once the ninth group, and twenty of what was then the tenth group, thereby consolidating the two previous sections into the ninth group one sees in the score today. As Cunningham has stated that he was asked by Perry-Mansfield for a production lasting exactly one hour—and as the only score for *Four Walls* in the John Cage Manuscript Collection is a completely clean score from which Henmar would publish the work in 1982—I believe Erdmann’s “mistake” might actually point to the likelihood that there were originally 12 groups in the final scene of the second act; thereby creating a dance-drama—if performed perfectly with a metronome—lasting exactly one hour.

Both of these scholars, whose intelligent but brief discussions of *Four Walls* constitute the majority of scholarship on the work, are very keen to place it in the larger artistic development of the artists who made it. Both Erdmann and van Emmerik have suggested that works like *Four Walls*, which the relationship between metronome markings and clock time is evident, point forward to Cage’s later composition where durations of whole scores and musical events within them were based on clock time alone. Erdmann is more concerned with connecting Cage to his collaborators. However, by only looking at the score (the only evidence available to him) and the retrospective statements of Cage and Cunningham, he understands the collaboration is as one where the artists worked separately:

*Für jeden Satz stand eine bestimmte Anzahl von Minuten zur Verfügung, und beide Künstler konnten weitgehend unabhängig voneinander in ihren jeweiligen Bereichen arbeiten.*
For each scene [“Satz”/“movement,” but given the context of a dance-drama, “Szene”/“scene” makes more sense] there were a certain number of minutes available, and both artists could work largely independently of each other in their respective domains.35

Without access to the long unavailable libretto, Erdmann could not possibly ascertain a possible relationship between the score and the choreography and text that it originally accompanied. His conclusion about the score, therefore, is quite strong. It is worth citing at some length as it represents the prevailing musicological projection of mature Cage-Cunningham choreomusicality backwards onto their early collaborations:

Wie an den Notenzitaten schon zu sehen ist, verhält sich die Musik innerhalb eines jeden Ausdrucksbereiches gleichsam statuarisch, sie bewegt sich nicht von der Stelle, selbst da nicht, wo die äußere Bewegung am schnellsten ist (wie im VII. Satz, s. o.). Die Ausdruckskurve des ganzen Stückes haftet nicht an der Abfolge der Details, sondern ist auf die Großform projiziert. Diese Konzention erlaubt kein direktes Eingehen auf gesprochene oder getanzte Bühnenvorgänge: eine im Detail dieser korrespondierende Funktion der Musik ist ganz offensichtlich nicht intendiert. Positiv formuliert bedeutet dies, daß die Musik wiederum ein ameublement zu den anderen Medien darstellt, wie im Socrate (sowohl dem Original als auch der Bearbeitung) und den anderer, erwähnten Satie-Stücken wie z. B. USPUD.36

[As already shown in the above-cited music, the music behaves within each expressive area in a quasi-statuesque manner, it does not move from the spot, even where its outward movement is the fastest (as in the seventh scene [Erdmann is referring to the perceptuo eighth notes and syncopated accents]). The expression-curve of the whole piece is not liable to the sequence of details, but is projected onto the large form. This concentration does not allow direct response to spoken and danced stage events: such a response in the details of this corresponding function of music is obviously not intended. Formulated positively, this means that the music is again a ameublement to other media, as in Socrate (both the original and arrangement) and the other mentioned Satie pieces for example USPUD.36

While it is true that musical development in any given expressive area—Ausdrucksbereich, i.e., loud and fast, slow and calm, or, in the author’s words, “die bedrohlich-gewaltsame Macht des Schlußteils [the threateningly violent power of the conclusion]”—of Four Walls

35 Erdmann, 117.
36 Erdmann, 116-17.
might not be especially dynamic in itself (as in, say, Brahms) it does not follow that the
dance and the spoken text would not cue from specific musical events. While it is possible
that some of the script was indeed spoken over the music, many of the longer tacets belie
such an approach. With knowledge of the long-lost libretto and a few excerpts of *Four
Walls* captured on silent film, one can imagine tighter correspondences between the music
and the stage action.

Though still in quasi-Joycean language, the indictment of heteronormativity in
*Four Walls* is even stronger and clearer than the one gleaned from the cues and synopsis of
*Credo in Us* above. The plot: Mother and Father are very excited that an upright and
successful man—a character designated Lover, even though his history of physical
inaction does not support that title—seeks their daughter’s hand. The daughter, or Girl, is
disgusted, because she desires first not a husband and father of children, but rather, as
many of her lines make clear, a lover who will satisfy her sexually: “I ache for tousled legs
and lobes,” “Oh, if only he were a one to grab my arms and legs,” And, then, to the lover:
“You have given me no reason to be alive / You have left me with a ring to place upon a
hollow hand,” and also, “You will insist for propriety / for all the things that quide [sic]
your world.” Her brother, the character designated as Boy, is the only one who understands
her. He tells the Lover that his sister might be looking for something a bit more physical.
The Lover thinks he gets the idea, but it is too late: at their next meeting the Girl kills the
Lover (who never was one). At various points throughout the dance-drama, a chorus of six
Nearpeople and a chorus of six Mad Ones occasionally appear. The six Nearpeople speak
in unison; they represent bourgeois respectability and its tendency to stick one’s nose
where it doesn’t belong under the pretense of making sure that everyone else is being
respectable too. The Mad Ones, who inhabit “transparent time,” appear at times when the family order is broken, most notably when the Girl kills the man who wishes to marry here. They do not speak; they dance with the Boy. Just as the Girl seems to be inspired by them during her murder, the Boy seems to almost speak for them—or at least what they might say were the Mad Ones to bother with words—especially in two separate soliloquies. In one, the boy laments society’s privileging of those “breeding forever like mosquitoes” over those who truly use their bodies. In another, he invites a number of fantastical personages—“Enter all the mad ones of my soul in silent svelted cheap array”—both male and female, to enter into his soul. If some have found Cage’s music for Four Walls to anticipate minimalism, an even stronger argument could be made for Cunningham’s text here anticipating Frank O’Hara’s “In Memory of My Feelings” with its list of selves that inhabit its speaker’s being in a kind of mid-twentieth-century, queerer version of Whitmanesque ecstasy. [A transcription of Cunningham’s script for Four Walls is provided as Appendix A; I kindly ask the reader to refer to it as necessary when reading the below.]

Taking the script and the music together, it is clear that Cage was in possession of a copy—or, at the very least, a very detailed outline of it—when he composed the solo-piano score to be played by the unknown accompanist at the Perrry-Mansfield Performing Arts Camp. (The pianist at the work’s premiere would be Drusa Wilker, who was a very experienced dance accompanist.) Take, for example, the melody presented in piano octaves in both the right and left hands at the outer registers and the gently stepping and skipping monophonic melody presented with it [see musical example 4.1].
Ex. 4.1. John Cage, *Four Walls*, Act One, Section IV, mm. 30–55.

This is the music of the Puritanical and nosy Nearpeople. The example, taken from their first appearance in Act I, Scene 4, occurs again in Act II, Scene 9. (Cunningham continued his scene numbers into his second act; i.e., “Scene 9” is the first scene occurring in the second act.) The music captures the simplicity and inanity of these bourgeois busybodies. Whereas the music for the The Boy’s dance with the Mad Ones (which would also be used for Cunningham’s later solo, *Soliloquy*, taken from *Four Walls*) captures the driving and
restless physicality of these beings who resist the heteronormative socialization for which Cunningham’s script shows such contempt. [See musical example 4.2.]

Ex. 4.2. John Cage, *Four Walls*, Act I, Dance, mm. 44–59.

Whereas Cage’s manuscript score for *Credo in Us* revealed where unmeasured rests would end with spoken cues, with *Four Walls* one can only sometimes tell with certainty where text or action would be inserted in a larger rest and where it would run over the music. For example, following the Girl’s song just before the murder at the conclusion of Act I, one can be fairly certain that within the minute-long rest at the beginning of Cage’s section VIII the lover states his final line, follows the Girl, and is killed offstage. Whereas in the first scene of Act II, following the introduction of eleven
measures, one can be fairly certain that the uneasy questions of the Nearpeople were spoken over Cage’s accompaniment. In the following scene of the second act (Scene X), the Boy would likely have delivered his brief monologue over the piano sections, with the piano’s fortissimo outbursts perhaps acting as interjections among the boy’s condemnations of the Nearpeople.

Several brief excerpts from *Four Walls* were actually recorded on silent film by Portia Mansfield. From these excerpts we can see just how night and day the choreography for the Mad Ones and the Nearpeople was. The Mad Ones, six women in long red dresses (the same color as the dress of the Girl), really move: they lunge, their torsos bent at the waist; their arms, in a kind of off-kilter second position, suggest the manipulation of energy; they kick their legs up and around. The Nearpeople (dressed in a light gray), as seen in the filmed excerpt, keep their hands folded in front of the them at the waist, like the von Trapp children. Their movement is constricted, each in her own little tight circle—almost like a box step—occasionally gently weaving in and out of each other, but always keeping their their back straight and their gaze forward, even though they apparently aren’t going anywhere. Cunningham’s choreographic brilliance was clearly not on the side of these angels.

*Four Walls* was performed only once at the Perry-Mansfield Performing Arts Camp in Steamboat Springs, Colorado, which, as the crow flies, is 1635 miles from New York City, but a mere hundred miles from “the Glory that was Greeley’s.” Cunningham did take some of his choreographic material as this resisting Boy and re-formed it into a solo dance titled *Soliloquy*, which would be premiered at his second solo concert in New York in early 1945. There he would also perform his first choreography to the music of Satie, which he
premiered the previous November in a solo concert in Richmond, Virginia. As we will see, its expressive concerns were far removed from the heteronormative family dramas of *Four Walls* and *Credo in Us: A Suburban Idyll*. They were also removed from the last role Cunningham created for Martha Graham, that of the Revivalist in her *Appalachian Spring*.

With such solid reviews for his solo concerts and his increased teaching outside Martha Graham’s studio’s walls, it is not surprising that Cunningham would soon have to leave her dance company. What is surprising is that scholars, critics, and—especially surprising, as he is without question the by far most knowledgeable expert on the choreographer—Cunningham’s committed archivist David Vaughan have been long mistaken about the date of Cunningham’s departure from the Martha Graham Dance Company. While this bit of misinformation is Cunningham’s own doing—he told Vaughan when he left; he was off by a year—it is striking that no writer has caught this discrepancy: one realizes here just how strong a hold the standard Cunningham narrative possesses. Furthermore, this misinformation has led to ignorance of the most enthusiastic reviews Cunningham ever received while he was with Graham. The majority of these reviews, sampled below, focus on his brief solo as the Revivalist in *Appalachian Spring*.

Another fact that, though recorded, seems much too unknown is that Cunningham choreographed the Revivalist’s solo entirely on his own. As a result, parts of otherwise brilliant contributions to our knowledge of *Appalachian Spring*—here I am thinking of the work of musicologist Marta Robertson and dance scholar Mark Franko—require some disclaimers. Many scholars have discussed how Graham’s earlier draft dance synopses for *Appalachian Spring* involved, first, an onstage performance of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and, later, characters entirely absent from the ballet as we now know it: a “Fugitive” slave, an
“Indian Girl,” and a “Citizen” who was basically an abolitionist who was modeled on John Brown. Cunningham, it seems, would not have known about these scripts, especially as he entered the creation and rehearsal process when it was already well underway:

[W]hen Appalachian Spring came along [in the fall of 1944]—the summer before we worked on it I went to Perry-Mansfield to teach [and to create Four Walls], and I wasn’t around while she was doing some of it [at Bennington], but when I came back we started to work, to rehearse, and she said, “I don’t know whether you’re a preacher or a sailor of the devil,” none of which was ever solidified, and she said, “Why don’t you work on it?”

So I and the pianist, Helen Lanfer, worked on it, and I made a dance, and when I had finished it I asked Martha to come and see it. I used a kind of gesture at the end—I thought, she’d talked about a preacher, and I would be a Baptist preacher, and I made a gesture of denouncing somebody, and she looked at all this and she said, “Oh, this is fine, now I know what to do with the rest of the piece.” And I don’t remember her changing that dance.

This dance of a “preacher” was entirely his. It therefore would come as a surprise to Cunningham were he to have read “One can see within the Revivalist’s gestures of panic and fear, movement that may have originally been intended for the Fugitive,” or

37 Mark Franko is the only scholar to focus on the Citizen/abolitionist, Martha Graham in Love and War: The Life in the Work (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 50-65. See also Marta Elaine Robertson, “‘A Gift to Be Simple’: The Collaboration of Aaron Copland and Martha Graham in the Genesis of Appalachian Spring,” (PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1992); Wayne D. Shirley, Ballet for Martha: The Commissioning of Appalachian Spring; and, Ballets for Martha: The Creation of Appalachian Spring, Jeux de Printemps, and Hérodiade (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1997); and Elizabeth Bergman Crist, Music for the Common Man: Aaron Copland During the Depression and War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165-76.

38 Merce Cunningham as told to David Vaughan, in Vaughan, Merce Cunningham, 35.

39 Cunningham seems to have been consistent in referring to the character as a “preacher”: “The Preacher’s solo in Appalachian Spring, I remember making. Graham said, ‘Well, you work at it.’ Then she left the room, so I made the dance.” Merce Cunningham as told to Robert Tracy, in Tracy, Goddess: Martha Graham’s Dancers Remember (New York: Limelight Editions, 1997), 75. The film shot by Ann Barzel containing brief excerpts of Appalachian Spring is also catalogued with Cunningham’s role listed as “Preacher” even though all programs consistently listed his role as “Revivalist.”

40 Franko, Martha Graham in Love and War, 57.
“Graham condensed the haunted frenzy of the Fugitive and the fanatical personality of the Abolitionist into the convulsive sermon of the Revivalist.”

A more persuasive interpretation of the Revivalist’s solo might be based not on Graham’s discarded scripts—granted, the last of which was the basis for Copland’s score—but on Cunningham’s own choreography in the context of his personal history at this time. Cunningham’s solo, a filmed performance of which by Bertram Ross in 1958 provides our best window, stands out for its fervent movement very much driven by Copland’s score. The choreomusicality here is one in which the dance clearly follows the music. For present purposes, however, my discussion here need only focus on the other most important aspect of the solo: the drama and character being expressed. Cunningham repeatedly points in a judgmental, if not downright denunciatory, manner—and no fewer than ten times. John Butler, the dancer who replaced Merce, suggestively remembered that “[Martha] was, of course, completely in love with Erick [Hawkins, playing the Husband in Appalachian Spring]. She gave Erick everything [including the lead male roles]. I don’t know whether or not Merce felt left out to the point point that Merce finally had to leave and I took his place.” As Appalachian Spring was yet another example where Hawkins had the main role and Cunningham a character role, it is tempting—and actually quite reasonable—to believe that Cunningham must have relished pointing at the couple.

One might also understand the preacher as character similar to the more quietly judgmental Nearpeople in Four Walls, which Cunningham had just created and performed and in

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41 Robertson, “‘A Gift to Be Simple,’” 222-23; cited approvingly in Franko, Martha Graham in Love and War, 58. Robertson similarly neglects to credit Cunningham with this choreography in her otherwise excellent article “Musical and Choreographic Integration in Copland’s and Graham’s Appalachian Spring,” Musical Quarterly 83 (Spring 1999): 6–26.

42 John Butler as told to Robert Tracy, in Tracy, Goddess, 96.
which the criticism of marriage and heteronormativity was passionate and direct. In this light, the preacher would be yet another negative stereotype of those who promote marriage not as a meeting of two people in love with each other, body and soul, but as an impossibly holy and metaphysical commitment. As his lover was leaving his wife for him at this time, Cunningham would have been able to imagine all too easily what it felt like to be on that other side of that finger.

If Cunningham read the reviews of his performance of the revivalist—as a young dancer with hopes of a career beyond that of a featured Graham dancer, he likely, and most eagerly, did—he would have found his confidence and ambition stoked to an intensity greater than the hottest hellfire. Even if one limits oneself to reviews in 1946—the year that writers have neglected to notice was actually Cunningham’s last in the Graham company—one quickly gets the sense that Cunningham departed none too soon. Of his performances in the two-week run at Broadway’s Plymouth Theatre in early 1946—a run that was an unprecedented box office success for Graham—Rosalyn Krokover wrote, “Merce Cunningham revealed that he is probably the finest male American modern dancer before the public.” Another critic pointed out that Cunningham did not have enough material in which to shine: “Appalachian Spring is one of few compositions that give

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43 John Martin wrote that “Martha Graham’s ‘experiment’ with a two-week Broadway season was such an outstanding success that there is talk of a spring season when she returns from touring some time in April. The recent engagement at the Plymouth Theatre started only moderately well but ended with eleven of the fifteen performances completely sold out, including all the legal standing room, and many people were turned away.” See his “The Dance: Ballet Repertory,” New York Times February 10, 1946: 48. There was no April season; only the May 10, 1946 invitation-only concert at Columbia University’s McMillin Theatre, discussed below. Two weeks earlier, Martin was more specific about how many had been turned away, when he noted that a “literally hundreds of potential ticket-buyers [were] turned away at both the Saturday and Sunday evening performances” on January 26 and 27, 1946; see John Martin, “Graham Dancers in ‘Punch and Judy [sic, without “the” preceding ‘Judy’],’” New York Times, January 28, 1946, 15.

Merce Cunningham opportunity to display the magnificent virtuosity of which he is capable. His solo section, while slower in tempo than last season, remains a highlight.”

There was even one New York critic who did know that Cunningham’s choreography for the Revivalist was his own, and he wanted everyone else to know it too: Richard Lippold, an editor and critic for the monthly journal Dance Observer. Cage likely knew Lippold through the circle (including Joseph Campbell) around Dance Observer, to which Cage himself had also contributed. Lippold’s wife, Louise, could have been taking classes with Merce around this time; the couple would later become very good friends with Cage and Cunningham. All would participate at Black Mountain in two years, and would collaborate on Cunningham’s production of Satie’s Ruse of Medusa. Cage would have Richard’s sculptures—for which, not his dance reviews, he is known today; consider his massive “Orpheus and Apollo” hanging in the lobby of Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center—hang in his Lower East Side apartment, where Richard Lippold would soon also live and engage in an affair with artist Roy Johnson. Cage would also write music for Louise Lippold’s choreography in the 1950s. Of Cunningham’s performance during the early winter run on Broadway, he wrote, “Merce Cunningham’s ‘March’ [from Letter to the World] has become a classic, and his solo, to his own choreography in Appalachian Spring, brings new life to a piece whose backward-looking is indicated in its sub-titled explanation, and he restates here a faith in the magic and power of movement itself.”

Lippold’s public acknowledgment—and in a journal created and managed by Louis Horst, Martha Graham’s long-time music director, friend, and confidant—probably raised a few

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45 Doris M. Hering, “Martha Graham and Dance Company,” Dance Magazine 20 (March 1946), 52. Hering would also write an article about Cage’s prepared piano that year.

eyebrows in the Graham company. His praise of the “movement itself” for a solo so clearly
dramatic and character-based strongly suggests that he was aware of the direction in which
Cunningham was just beginning to take his own dancing. The New York modern dance
scene in 1944, though vibrant, was small.

It was not just in the nation’s undisputed dance capital that Cunningham stood out
in the company. Throughout the Sol Hurok tour in the winter and spring of 1946, he—
much more than the other two “principals” in the company (Erick Hawkins and May
O’Donnell)—was repeatedly singled out in reviews across the country, most especially for
his brief solo in Appalachian Spring as the Revivalist. In Chicago, Claudia Cassidy wrote
of “Merce Cunningham of the [Revivalist’s] flying coattails” that “The best way I can
describe Mr. Cunningham is to say that if he were a race horse I would bet on him every
time just for the spring in his walk that threatens momentarily to fly.”

In Cincinnati: “The outstanding dance in [Appalachian Spring] was that of Merce Cunningham who, as the
Revivalist, made “Hell Fire and Damnation” singe the eyebrows of those in the front
rows.” At the end of a review following a St. Louis performance including Appalachian
Spring, Letter to the World, and Every Soul is a Circus: “Merce Cunningham, to come to
individual credits, seemed the most exciting of the nine dancers.” Such reviews would

47 Claudia Cassidy, “On the Aisle: Martha Graham and Aaron Copland Good Companions in
Superb ‘Appalachian Spring,’” Chicago Daily Tribune, March 18, 1946, 21. In this same review,
Cassidy wrote of Letter to the World “The work as a whole was not quite in its best estate
yesterday, though Mr. Cunningham’s March wind had a special likeness to St. Patrick’s Day in the
morning.” In a shorter Chicago review, Cunningham was highlighted: “Merce Cunningham writhes
and caracols through the role of the reviveralist with feverish intensity,” William Leonard, “Martha
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200153645/default.html

48 Howard W. Hess, “Martha Graham Brilliant in Dance Program,” Cincinnati Times-Star, March
21, 1946.

have provided Cunningham with more than enough confidence to strike out on his own, and eventually into a less obviously dramatic and transitively expressive mode of dancing.

His last performance with Graham’s company was on May 10, 1946 at Columbia University’s McMillin Theatre before the invite-only audience of the Second Annual Festival of Contemporary American Music. *Appalachian Spring* was the first half of the program; the premiere of Graham’s *Serpent Heart* (later known as *Cave of the Heart*), in which Hawkins played Jason to Graham’s Medea and in which Cunningham was not cast, comprised the second half. Not surprisingly the reviews, focused as they were on the premiere, did not discuss the cast for *Appalachian Spring*.\(^5\) Cunningham’s Revivalist was the first dancer to enter the stage, walking through Noguchi’s minimalist suggestion of a house’s frame. When he would exit shortly before the dance’s end, Graham and Hawkins, the pioneer newlyweds—with their on- and off-stage drama—were left on it. In retrospect, it seems an especially fitting exit for Cunningham.

Only two nights later, May 12, 1946, he gave his third solo dance recital in New York City, and—a long way from his first all-Cage-composed concert—his most diverse yet in terms of the music choreographed. It included not only the second New York performance of *Idyllic Song* to the first movement of Satie’s *Socrate*, but also *The Princess Zondilda and Her Entourage*, a dance-drama for three characters with music by Alexei Haieff, *Fast Blues*, for which Cunningham was accompanied by the jazz drummer Baby Dodds; and even a piece by the once quite popular Alan Hovhaness, *Invocation to Vahakn*. Within a month Cunningham was with Cage in Pittsburgh where they taught and

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\(^5\) The sole exception was an uncredited staff review, “New Work by Martha Graham,” in the July 1946 issue of *Musical America*: “In this latter and familiar composition both Miss Graham as the Bride and Mr. Cunningham as the Revivalist outdid themselves, and the rest of the cast was in fine form.”
performed, including *Idyllic Song*, together. On October 27, 1946 John Martin announced the season lineup for the new Ballet Society (renamed the New York City Ballet two years later) directed by Lincoln Kirstein and George Balanchine. The season would include a May 1947 performance of a commissioned ballet—*Seasons*, although first announced as *Northwestern Rite*—by Cage, Cunningham, and Noguchi.\(^{51}\) The night before, on a shared concert with former and current Graham dancers Jean Erdman and Yuriko, he also performed *Idyllic Song*, which would remain in his repertory until 1948, when he assisted Cage with his Satie Festival at Black Mountain.

Chapter 5

Reconcilable Differences: Satie, Socrate, and Second Hand

*Idyllic Song* was the other dance on which the couple collaborated between Cunningham’s first (1944) and second New York (1945) solo concerts. The dance was performed at the 1945 New York concert, but not for the first time. Its world premiere marked the collaborators’ first joint out-of-town (i.e., out-of-New York) engagement where they traveled together and alone. The premiere took place at the well-heeled Women’s Club of Richmond, Virginia, in November 1944. The dance’s title, *Idyllic Song*, and its program note—“The seeing of things hidden to everything but the personal, the individual imagination, and the wooing of these to human touch”—are antithetical to the critique of heteronormativity in *Credo in Us: A Suburban Idyll and Four Walls*. Cunningham’s choreography and performance of *Idyllic Song* was set to Cage’s solo piano arrangement of the first movement of Erik Satie’s *Socrate*, a symphonic drama for vocalist or vocalists and chamber orchestra that sets Platonic texts on the life and death of Socrates.1 Before exploring the long history of *Socrate*, I will briefly review the historiography surrounding the couple and their work as it relates to their identities as gay men. This will help one realize the revisionary contribution an examination of the couple’s engagement with Satie makes possible.

1 Most Cage scholars have identified Cage’s arrangement of the first movement of *Idyllic Song* as being for piano duo and created in 1945. Both the program for the concert at the Richmond Women’s Club and the review in the Richmond Times-Dispatch reveal that the arrangement was a piano solo.
The Aesthetic of Indifference, Sexual Politics, and Cage-Cunningham Historiography

Art when it is art as Satie lived it and made it is not separate from life (nor is dishwashing when it is done in this spirit).
—John Cage, 1951

I do the cooking and Merce washes the dishes.
—John Cage, 1989

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns—now the two most canonically enshrined U.S. artists from the mid-twentieth century—shared with Cage and Cunningham a retreat from clear meanings, messages, and self-expression. Like Cage and Cunningham, who were life partners from the early 1940s until Cage’s death, Rauschenberg and Johns were, from 1954 to 1961, in a committed relationship. Like Cage, Rauschenberg and Johns were both previously in heterosexual relationships, broken up by the desire to enter a relationship with another man (Rauschenberg left his wife and child for visual artist Cy Twombly, Johns left his girlfriend for a newly single Rauschenberg). Like Cage and Cunningham, both were uncomfortable with the hyper-masculine and angst-ridden ethos of New York Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. Most importantly, both men were intimate friends with Cage and Cunningham, and they worked for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company: Rauschenberg acted as artistic adviser and resident designer for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1954-61, with Johns assisting Rauschenberg on several projects. Following their relationship’s dissolution, Johns held the same post from 1967-80.

Coupling these four men with their aesthetic godfather and personal friend, Marcel Duchamp, the art critic Moira Roth published an article in 1977 with a title that summed
up the relationship between art and politics for these five, “The Aesthetic of Indifference.”²

Now widely cited as one of the definitive critical takes on the aesthetic of mid-century U.S. high art, Roth suggested that the passivity-beyond-neutrality and “cool intelligence” of this circle should be seen as coming out of the crucible of early 1950s McCarthyism. Cage’s 4’33”, Rauschenberg’s blank white canvases and his Erased de Kooning Drawing, Johns’ concealed and painted-over objects: all suggest an aloofness not only from politics but also from meaning and expression. Furthermore, this indifferent stance became the major influence on, and standpoint of, much of the visual high art that numerous other American artists produced in the politically turbulent 1960s.

Roth wrote that others looking at this circle from without noted “a dandy-like elegance of body build and a manner which delighted in cool and elegant plays of the mind,” in marked distinction to the Abstract Expressionists. Quickly after citing that description, Roth herself notes that “changes in appearance and temperament were also expressed by differences in sexual mores. The machismo attitudes proudly displayed by the Abstract Expressionists were now countered by the homosexuality and bisexuality permissible and even common among the new aesthetic group.”³ While not directly identifying the sexualities of any of the artists she discussed, Roth managed to suggest that the neo-avant-garde evaded not only direct engagement with public national politics but also any discourse about personal sexual politics. In juxtaposing queer identities with indifferent canvases and performances, Roth implies that professionally, these men were operating out of a closet.

³ Ibid., 49.
Later writers have taken semi-exception with Roth for not further developing the connection between indifference and sexuality.\(^4\) One writer who has done so gracefully—completely acknowledging that Roth’s criticism “points toward the possibility of a social history of the mappings of gay identity in postwar American art—the first such analysis ever published”—and in direct dialogue with Roth herself is Jonathan D. Katz.\(^5\) Bringing out “the deeper sympathy between Rrose Sélavy [the alter ego Duchamp would assume in drag] and Duchamp’s dandyism,” he writes:

> But it through the frustration of longing, perhaps the most persistent of all our desires, that the real depth of Duchamp’s anti-naturalism can be measured. If longing, as Wilde argued, is perhaps the most densely mystified of all our social constructs, then the frustration of longing may help demystify it, rescuing it from the realm of nature where it was shunted, unexamined.\(^6\)

Katz’ idea is that the use of performative selves here is not simply the mere play of identity, but an act that derails the hegemonic operations of identity itself.\(^7\) Understanding

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\(^4\) For example, Jill Johnston in *Jasper Johns: Privileged Information* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996) writes that Roth “made no connection between the sexual orientation of her Indifferent group and the extreme homophobia that existed in conjunction with that era’s anti-Communist hysteria. Curiously, she omitted mention of that dark sub-stratum of government policy altogether. Without it, her case for the special “indifference” of her four men in those repressive, paranoid times in not very strong,” 150-51. She even suggests that Roth labels Johns as a “‘dandy’—a hackneyed code word for gay men,” 152, even though Roth only uses the word “dandy” when summarizing artist George Segal’s memory of the Indifferent circle. When Roth does apply the word ‘dandy’ to a specific artist in the article, she uses the word, in the same way it was used by Baudelaire, to describe Duchamp’s enjoyment of projecting not some natural self but either an inscrutable coolness or alternate identities.


\(^6\) Ibid., 58-59.

\(^7\) Katz argument is, of course, greatly influenced by the early writings of Judith Butler, who writes against the dangers of a true interior self. “[G]ender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior ‘self,’ whether that ‘self’ is conceived as sexed or not. As performance which is performative, gender is an ‘act,’ broadly construed, which constructs the social fiction of its own psychological interiority. As opposed to a view such as Erving Goffman’s which posits a self which assumes and exchanges various ‘roles’ within the complex social expectations of the ‘game’ of modern life, I am suggesting that this self is not only irrefutably ‘outside,’ constituted in social discourse, but that the ascription of interiority is itself a publically [sic] regulated and sanctioned form of essence fabrication.” “Performative Acts and Gender
the closet as a mandated position in the U.S. 1950s, Katz sees the retreat less as passivity than as the maneuvering demanded by the closet. As a result, over Roth’s “aesthetic of indifference,” Katz prefers “‘a politics of negation,’ wherein negation functions as an active resistance to hegemonic constructions of meaning as natural or inherent in the work,” and so, too, to hegemonic constructions of the self.8

The problem with application of these very astute theoretical frameworks to Cage and Cunningham is that it can too easily lead to an essentialized, though expansive, notion of queer difference. Well-meaning scholars (in both music and dance) have found this “politics of negation” in the work of the choreographer and composer everywhere—and, again, it is there—but they have focused on it to the point of missing other connections between life and work, and even life in the work. Cage and Cunningham were not, pace Katz, constantly trying to present the “frustration of longing” that Katz reads across their oeuvres.9 Whether one labels this specific phenomenon the “aesthetic of indifference” or “a politics of negation,” the scholar or critic still risks succumbing to aftershocks of the modernist “Greenberg effect,” whereby both the specificity-beyond-medium-specificity of the artworks as well as histories and identities of their creators are oversimplified.10 It is exactly because of music- and dance-critical versions of the “Greenberg effect” that the

divorce of music and dance in Cage-Cunningham collaborations is so celebrated by histories of the arts.

The “Greenberg effect” manifests itself entirely too strongly in the first, only, and recently published single-author monograph on Merce Cunningham by Roger Copeland. His book, despite the personable and chatty historical-criticism-meets-dancegoer’s-memoir veneer, often sounds a polemical call to a formalist past that the field of dance studies never really had (especially when compared to music studies). Merce Cunningham’s work is in no danger of being appreciated any less because of some “race/class/gender gurus” that Copeland believes are out to take down dance studies.\footnote{The phrase foreshadows some even stronger words in later pages. *Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 24.} Copeland repeats—like Katz, like Alastair Macaulay in his obituary for Cunningham, like many others—the most often cited sound bite given by Cage regarding his relationship with Merce Cunningham; he even gives his paranoid, and downright prejudiced, imagination free reign in the process:

In 1989, during a panel discussion of his work, someone (perhaps a gay activist who was into “outing”) tried to put Cunningham and Cage on the spot. Smugly (and no doubt, accusingly) the audience member inquired about the “true nature” of their partnership. Cage chimed in with an exemplary response: “It’s very simple,” he said, “I do the cooking and Merce Cunningham does the dishes.” This, it seems to me, is more than one needs to know about Cunningham’s private life in order to fully appreciate his work.\footnote{Ibid., 257.}

After viewing and transcribing a video of this panel discussion at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, one might note that Copeland clearly was not in the audience that night. For starters, he and all other writers who cite the sound bite do not provide it verbatim. More importantly, Copeland misrepresents the spirit of both the question and the response.
David Vaughan [as moderator]: Yes, somebody in the middle there.

Male audience member: [quietly] What is the nature of your personal relationship with each other, and what’s life like with you when you’re at home together in New York City? [something brief and inaudible].

John Cage: Well, I do the cooking [briefest pause, a slight beat, which is immediately filled with audience laughter, cheer, and applause, at which point Cage, Vaughan, and Cunningham all start giggling; Cage and Cunningham exchange a glance] and Merce washes the dishes. [Cage turns to Cunningham again, they look at each other and laugh more, as does the audience.]

While we never see the man, the tone of that audience member’s voice—plain, quiet, almost tentative, not pointed—suggests that he was just genuinely curious, as if to say “How can you work together like this all the time, and for so long?” After all, Cunningham had just recounted a much earlier story about the couple attending a staid party in Centralia—a story that Cage had also earlier published and would also read onstage during Cunningham’s How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run—the punchline of which is that the host tells the couple, “Oh, thank you for coming and fitting in so well.” In a conversation with Stanford dance historian Janet Ross, who covered this event back when she wrote for the Bay Area Reporter, Ross confirmed that her memory of the question’s innocence and sincere curiosity matched what I heard on the tape. As for the audience’s laughter and cheering—one doesn’t think of Berkeley’s Zellerbach audience as particularly conservative with regard to such matters—their laughter and cheering sounded like support for Cage’s confirmation of the relationship and its quotidian nature.

But what about their work onstage? In what follows, I will challenge Copeland’s understanding that “[a] ‘sexual/political’ reading . . . might tell us something of interest about Merce Cunningham, but it would do little to illuminate his art.”13 It is exactly

13 Ibid., 258
because *Second Hand* and the earlier dances discussed in the previous chapter participate
in neither a “politics of negation” nor an “aesthetic of indifference” that they offer a unique
window into the lives and practice of Cunningham and Cage. Illuminating the importance
of *Second Hand* requires not only interpreting its choreomusical details and situating these
both in 1969-72 and the present, but also by showing how it relates to specific themes—
and how it even recycles an entire dance from 1944—from the earliest self-expressive
Cage-Cunningham collaborations and their less known history.

**Satie as Queer Influence and Impetus**

Cage first heard *Socrate* several years earlier when he met composer and music critic
Virgil Thomson. Thomson developed a reputation for often performing a piano-vocal
reduction of Satie’s *Socrate* for close friends who were also homosexual artists, including
Gertrude Stein, Alice Toklas, Paul Bowles, Leonard Bernstein, Lou Harrison, and Ned
Rorem.\(^\text{14}\) Cage, like these others, was greatly moved by Thomson’s performance of
*Socrate*. As a guard of the New York music scene who was committed to a network of gay
musicians and composers, Thomson became a staunch supporter of Cage’s work
throughout the mid-1940s. This, together with the facts that: 1.) the piece was
commissioned by and originally performed for the lesbian salon of the Princesse de
Polignac, 2). that its excerpts from Plato’s dialogues specifically highlighted the loving
relationship between Socrates and his disciples and not his philosophy, and 3.) that Satie’s
sexuality was never not under question: all this would have lent *Socrate* an air that was

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anything but heterosexual.\textsuperscript{15} As a result, I do not think it is inappropriate to suggest that, taken in the context of their other collaborations from this time, \textit{Idyllic Song} and the music of Satie’s \textit{Socrate} acted as a kind of hopeful life raft out of a whirlpool of scores, choreographies, and collaborations that otherwise reflected the difficult transition from John Cage as husband of Xenia Kashevaroff-Cage to partner of Merce Cunningham.

Although Cage and Cunningham stopped creating works that relied on a transitive notion of expression following Cage’s divorce and some nasty pans of his music, and while, increasingly, the only unifying factor between music and dance in their collaborations was duration, Satie and especially \textit{Socrate} remained a lodestar to both throughout their lives. Cunningham won a Guggenheim to support his newborn dance company in 1954. In his grant application he expressed his great desire to expand \textit{Idyllic Song}, his 1944 solo to the first movement of Satie’s \textit{Socrate}, into a full work set to all three movements for his infant company. Cage had urged Cunningham to do just this ten years earlier, when they first worked on \textit{Idyllic Song} together. \textit{Socrate} didn’t happen in 1954, but that desire to choreograph the remaining two movements, as well as to re-present \textit{Idyllic Song}, remained with Cunningham all the way to the summer of 1969.

While \textit{Socrate}’s choreographic completion would have to wait 15 years, Cunningham saltatorily rendezvoused with other works of Satie in the interim. He staged dances for a performance of Satie’s \textit{La piège de Méduse} (with sets by Willem de Kooning, and Buckminster Fuller and Elaine de Kooning playing the main roles) at Cage’s large Satie Festival at Black Mountain College in 1948 (when the composer presented his lecture

\textsuperscript{15} Samuel Dorf has highlighted some of these facts in “‘Étrange n’est-ce pas?’: The Princesse Edmond de Polignac, Erik Satie’s \textit{Socrate}, and a Lesbian Aesthetic of Music?” in \textit{Queer Sexualities in French and Francophone Literature and Film}, ed. James Day (New York: Rodopi, 2007): 87-100.
“Defense of Satie”). Once he established his own dance company in 1953, he would also allow exceptions to “the divorce of music and dance” when Satie was involved.

As a first example of these noteworthy and (note-abiding) exceptions, one might consider the opening movement of Cunningham’s *Septet* (1953, to Satie’s piano duet *Trois Morceaux en Forme du Poire*) An archival video (with sound) of the dance in a 1964 performance in Helsinki reveals that *Septet* contains the most step-for-note choreography Cunningham ever produced for his company.\(^\text{16}\) The dance set to the first movement (of the seven in Satie’s mischievously titled *Trois Morceaux*) reveals this within seconds.

Three female dancers appear across the length of center stage. They are bathed in a bright light casting a sharp rectangle on the stage floor. Before the music even begins, Cunningham runs on and suddenly stops in the darkness, as upstage as possible. The music now begins with its lyrical eighth-note phrase and the women within the central rectangle of light hold poses in between their very slow changes of stance—it is reminiscent to the “plastique” occasionally practiced by Dunham and Shawn. Cunningham then runs quickly to the area of darkness downstage of their rectangle of life, stops, and then runs back to the darkness upstage of them. He reaches the upstage area just in time for the moment in the music when Satie quotes his popular *Gnossienne* [score excerpt from the *prima’s* part in the first movement below]. On the attack of each of those four heavily accented notes (at least as played by the uncredited pianist playing the *prima* part on the archival video), Cunningham jumps straight into the air. Each time he tilts his head back and up, with his mouth open, as if in screams of desperation to some god above. The first and third times, he raises his right arm into the air; the second and fourth his left. At measure 15, where an

\(^{16}\) Merce Cunningham Dance Company, *Septet* [videorecording], New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, MGZIDVD 5-946.
accented quarter note and half note now ascend to end the brief phrase, Cunningham jumps even higher. While in the air he quickly beats his upper chest repeatedly with his right and left hands on the quarter note, and somehow still hovers in the air long enough to throw his arms straight into the air above him. The overall choreographic image is one of virtuosic despair and protest, as if the dancer is trying to escape a place he does not wish to be and that is anything but idyllic to him.

In the prima’s whole rest at measure 16, Cunningham runs quickly into the bright rectangle of light. He arrives at the centermost female dancer in time to partner her on her more physically extended and off-balance pose during the repeat of the “Gnossienne” half notes. Through surprisingly strict “visualization” of the music, Cunningham has created an interesting personal drama. Namely, he creates a sense that this first male dancer who

enters the stage (a role that has only been danced by Cunningham) has come upon these peaceful women without any delight, but impelled by some duty despite his confusion and desperation. Unlike Nijinsky’s Faun, the dancer is not here to watch and engage. He enters the circle only quickly and hesitantly, and his partnering of the central woman is extremely brief and matter-of-fact. Furthermore, he only engages the woman after virtuosic solo material that, although set to coordinated climaxes, is anything but indicative of pleasure.

While there is no archival video that survives for *Nocturnes* (1956), which was Cunningham’s following choreography on the eponymous music of Satie, there are
numerous archival photographs in both the New York Public Library Dance Division and
the Merce Cunningham dance archive. The dancers are all clothed in white. The women
wear bizarre headdresses of white wire and tulle; the men all have their faces painted, on
one half one color, the other another. If the entirely white costumes and the face paint were
not anomalous enough, the dance is further unusual in that Cunningham has directly stated
that “Nocturnes was a white ballet. . . . concerned with the theme of Eros.” It was also a
commission from a senior Ted Shawn, who asked Cunningham for something “light.”
Despite its extreme difference from what we know of the other dances the choreographer
created in the 1950s, Cunningham was obviously considerably proud of it: for his first
cover on a major national magazine, Cunningham had the photographer capture him in the
face paint of Nocturnes. [See Figure 2.] In response to the cover’s question—“Who is this
man?”—one possible answer is that he is a choreographer deeply committed to the idea of
a Satie who does not deride expressive (if not expressionistic) techniques but makes them
possible. While scholars in art and dance never fail to note that Cunningham devoted a
choreography to Marcel Duchamp—his Walkaround Time from 1968 featured an on-stage
replica of the artist’s The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (often referred to as
“The Large Glass”) manufactured by Jasper Johns in consultation with Duchamp—it
seems that (more so than the Duchampian “performative selves” noted above by Katz) it
was truly the influence of Satie (whom Duchamp, too, much admired) that most permeated
Cunningham’s more expressive choreographies.
Fig. 5.1. Cunningham in *Nocturnes* face paint, cover of the *Saturday Evening Post*.

The summer of 1969 was thirteen years after the premiere of *Nocturnes*; since that
time Cunningham had choreographed no works to music. It was fifteen years after the Guggenheim award (with which he intended to choreograph the entirety of Socrate) and twenty-five years after the 1944 premiere of Idyllic Song. While one associates 1969 with protests and riots—Stonewall the one closest to Cunningham; literally, as it occurred only blocks away from his home and studio—it had also been almost two years since Cage was firmly rooted in New York, having taken a residency at the University of Illinois, followed by another residency at the University of California at Davis in the fall of 1969. Both Satie’s Socrate and Cage’s presence in New York in the winter of 1969 would have seemed especially comforting to Cunningham, returns of things most dear. It is only by taking this history into account that the real importance of Second Hand to both Cage and Cunningham can be fully understood.

**Satie’s Socrate, Cage’s Cheap Imitation, and Cunningham’s Second Hand**

The number of difficulties that Cage and Cunningham encountered and surmounted in finally completing their grand collaboration upon, and tribute to, Erik Satie’s Socrate could stand as evidence alone of this dance’s importance to them. Cage, together with Arthur Maddox, prepared a two-piano arrangement of Socrate, without its sung text, for the premiere of the dance during the company’s January 1970 run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In a major setback, the publisher of Socrate, Editions Max Eschig, refused rights for the performance of this arrangement. Additionally, while the Brooklyn Academy of Music offered to pay both for performance royalties and for a full orchestra and vocalists, Eschig demanded that the company perform the work with full forces in at least eight cities with populations greater than one million. The company and the majority of its presenters
could not afford to shoulder that cost. Cage, as he often did for the company, played the hero fast to the rescue. He prepared a monophonic (i.e., consisting of only one note at a time, with no accompanying chords) piano solo that followed *Socrate*’s melodic line, most often that of the vocalist. The original melody’s meter, rhythms, and, at times in the second and third movements, intervallic distances were maintained. Cage transposed the melody’s pitches, however, by consulting the *I Ching*. The “new” first movement, to which Cunningham danced his solo from 1944, is the music furthest removed from the original *Socrate*. The third movement of *Cheap Imitation* is the most similar. This is not because Cage had certain sonic preferences, as some musicologists have suggested in the past, but because the third section was danced by an entire company whose choreography depended on musical cues from Cage’s two-piano version of *Socrate*. Cage titled his “arrangement” *Cheap Imitation*, and Cunningham called his dance not *Socrate*, but *Second Hand*. Satie’s *Socrate* was decidedly present for the collaborators and the dance company. For the January 1970 audiences and critics, Satie’s *Socrate* was suppressed, unheard.

Following *Second Hand*’s first performances in Brooklyn, word spread quickly that Cunningham choreographed *Second Hand* to *Socrate*. In response, a terse note appeared in all subsequent programs. It acknowledged that *Cheap Imitation* was a chance-derived arrangement of *Socrate*. Yet, while *Second Hand* remained in the company repertory for three years, neither Cunningham nor his critics presented audiences with much information about what kind of relationship existed between *Socrate* and Cunningham’s dance. Following the revival’s premiere in March 2008, Alastair Macaulay’s glowing review in the *New York Times* appeared under the headline “The Dance Has a Meaning, But That’s Not the Point.” Here, the Cage-Cunningham aesthetic of indifference is discursively
maintained no matter how anomalous the performed choreography would seem to anyone even fairly familiar with Cunningham’s work. Even following the revival (and its continued performance as part of the company’s repertory) no commentator has connected the choreographic specifics of Cunningham’s *Second Hand* through Cage’s *Cheap Imitation* to Satie’s *Socrate*. Similarly, the importance of the incorporation of *Idyllic Song* from 1944—with its meaning vis-a-vis *Credo in Us: A Suburban Idyll, Four Walls*, and the other early works about the difficulties of love mentioned above—has been ignored. In order to demonstrate but a some of the most meaningful connections to the suppressed text, I will focus on three specific moments from *Second Hand* below.

I intend my first example to be extremely clear. An audience member with only a casual knowledge of the texts in Satie’s *Socrate* might even be able to catch this connection in the fleeting moments of a performance. The choreography for the second movement is a lyrical duet that was danced in 1970 by Cunningham and Carolyn Brown, who had been with the company since its inception in 1953. The unheard libretto of *Socrate* in this movement is an excerpt of light dialogue from *Phaedrus*. Phaedrus and Socrates, deciding on a place to sit outside the city walls, eventually settle on a spot under a plane tree. At the point in Satie’s score when the two men reach that spot and praise its beauty, Cunningham and Brown dance a combination of steps, a combination repeated four times. They both go to the floor and strike a reclining pose. In a video clip from a 1972 Brooklyn Academy performance, which is one of only two performances of *Second Hand* recorded and the only one with audio, one notices a heavily accented grace note and note. This double *sforzando* (a sudden strong accent marked by a higher volume) occurs toward the end of this “sitting under the plane tree” combination, when the female dancer
descends to the floor for the fourth and final time. A photograph, by James Klosty, captures the reclining pose even better than the video taken from the back of the house at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. [See Figure 5.2.]

Figure 5.2. James Klosty, [Carolyn Brown and Merce Cunningham “sitting under the plane tree” in the second movement of *Second Hand*, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music], 1970.

Here we have a very clear example of the simplest imagery from *Socrate* entering Cunningham’s choreography.

Socrates: By Hera, what a charming place to rest! How broadly the mighty plane tree spreads its branches! And this chaste-tree with its arms shooting up and the fine shade it gives, could one not think of it in flower, just to scent the air? I ask you, what could be more gracious than this brook that runs beneath the plane tree, whose water our feet have proved cool and fresh?
And so the dancers strike a reclining pose, with the female dancer even noticeably flexing her feet, as if feeling the brook’s water. What’s more, the extremely accented grace note and note which I mentioned, notes otherwise surrounded by a cool and legato piano, is not indicated in Cage’s published score for *Cheap Imitation*. Rather, Cage was clearly providing a clear cue from the piano in the pit. This is a cue for the company’s two most experienced dancers, who in 1972 had been performing and rehearsing these roles for two years.

Choreomusical difficulties, toward which Cage’s loud cue points, are magnified in my second example. The modus operandi for Cunningham dancers, whether those of 1970 or today, is to maintain their own dance counts in relation to the overall progression of the dance. After many rehearsals with a stopwatch, they can perform an hour-long choreography with little variation in duration from performance to performance. But in *Second Hand* they are dancing to music. Why would this be difficult for a company that (both in 1970 and today) daily takes a technique class with a live piano accompaniment in clear meters? When Cunningham choreographed the dance in the summer and early fall of 1969, he did not have a score. Rather, Cage sent Cunningham a rather idiosyncratic explanation of the score’s “phraseology” (a most peculiar, non-standard term the two used throughout their lives) from the University of California at Davis. Cage first equated a certain number of measures with a certain number of seconds for the benefit of Cunningham and the stopwatch he always carried while choreographing and rehearsing. By mail, he then indicated his understanding of where phrases start and end simply by giving the number of measures per phrase. One of Cage’s given “phrases” lasts 48 measures. This occurs about 14 minutes into the seventeen-minute-long third movement,
the movement choreographed for the entire company. From Cunningham’s preliminary personal choreographic notes, we can see the beginnings of a choreographer’s nightmare. [See Figure 5.3.]

Figure 5.3. Cunningham’s manuscript dance “libretto” with corresponding measures.

Above the text of *Socrate*, he places measure numbers corresponding to those in each “phrase” parsed by Cage. Great difficulty arises because Cunningham apparently wanted to create a final choreographic moment for himself as the Socrates-soloist where he would dance in unison with the entire company. He wanted that moment to occur in the middle of that 48-measure phrase, a phrase that he and the dancers had to internally count throughout their rehearsals. The matching portion of his final notes for the third movement is startling. [See Figure 5.4.]
In an otherwise fairly clean copy of final personal choreographic notes, this stands out. It represents the difficulty of getting large dancing traffic patterns to come together for that ensemble moment. The difficulty was especially apparent in March 2008 rehearsals before the revival’s premiere. The dancer Andrea Weber had to madly rush to get in place for the ensemble kick phrase that she was to initiate. Often in rehearsals, she realized that no matter how carefully she may be counting, she was often much too early. This seemed looked extremely odd, as the dancers would stand still and wait, creating a large break in the dance’s flow. Then, in unison, they would then perform high kicks (or, *battements*) to regularly repeated high notes in John Cage’s piano reduction of Satie. Cage, again coming to the rescue, compensated for the difficulty his odd 48-bar phrase caused by what I believe is a clear deviation from his *I Ching*-derived arrangement at this point in the score for *Cheap Imitation*. He wrote three high As (three exact same notes, and separated by a
large upward jump from the rest of the melodic line) on each downbeat upon which the dancers kick, across 2 full measures: this is statistically improbable if he were truly following his chance-derived operations for arrangement of Satie’s original score. Cage was most likely aiding the dancers at this final moment of ensemble dancing with the soloist: he put his strong beliefs in chance operations determined by the *I Ching* entirely aside to give a clear cue. This moment of unison in the dance with those *battements*, or high kicks, is very important to the suppressed sung text. At this point in the unheard libretto, Socrates begins to lose feeling in his legs. Measures later Cunningham, clearly dancing the role of Socrates, first sits and observes the other dancers from the floor. He then slowly moves to the furthest point upstage center. Here he becomes fixed, and slowly sinks. The rest of the dancers go on without him downstage, and the curtain falls.

My third and final example directly links *Idyllic Song* (1944) with *Second Hand* (1970). The choreography for *Idyllic Song*, which became the first section of *Second Hand*, is generally very calm and purposeful, consisting mostly of slow, sustained movements. Then something wild happens at measure 121, which is two-thirds into the first movement of *Cheap Imitation* (and so of *Socrate* as well). At this point, the dance soloist executes his most rapid movement found in the entirety of *Second Hand*. Shifting balance from his left leg to his right, his right arm cuts across the space in front of his chest. He then shifts back from his right leg to left, now cutting with his right arm. He repeats this cutting side-to-side, starting slow but with a noticeable accent in the cutting arm, and constantly accelerating the movement until it is furiously fast. It is as if he is cutting blades of high thick grass, accelerating to the point where his arms become a blur and one worries for his physical safety. He then stops suddenly, performs a relevé (a rise to the balls of his feet),
and passes a hand over his head as if amazed at what has just happened to him. At this point in the first movement, the suppressed sung text in *Socrate* is Alcibiades’ celebration of the effect Socrates has upon him: “For me, my friends, did I not fear to seem to you completely tipsy, I would swear to you under oath the extraordinary effect his speeches had on me and still do now. Listening to him, I feel my heart beating more powerfully than if I was shaken by the manic dancing of a group of Corybantes.” Again, this is the climactic moment not only of the first section of *Second Hand*, but also of the only angst-free Cage-Cunningham collaboration from 1944, *Idyllic Song*, set to Cage’s piano solo arrangement. Completely aware of the correspondences between *Idyllic Song* and Satie’s music and libretto in 1944, Cunningham would also have been aware of the correspondence between the personal and artistic joys and anxieties given to him by Cage, and those given to the younger, fitter Alcibiades by the older, wiser Socrates.

Cunningham actually recycles this wild moment from the first movement for the Socrates soloist in the third movement of *Second Hand*. Cunningham repeats this standout excerpt exactly as it was choreographed in 1944, but now as Socrates isolated from his followers in the middle of the third movement of *Second Hand*. The company in the third movement never makes eye contact with the male soloist, even when he partners them. As if the point needed to be made any clearer, at the moment in the third movement when the first movement’s memorable highlight is repeated, the male soloist is isolated all the way upstage. The company is downstage, gazing toward the wings. This is very similar to the very final moment of the dance, when Cunningham sinks, stuck to a point far upstage center, while the others continue dancing downstage of him without notice. Thus, a gesture that in 1944 *expressed* joy and excitement is portrayed in the third movement as one that,
in 1970, is entirely ignored and not understood. Its presentation in the third movement of
the dance is not mournful, but melancholic.

**Reconcilable Differences: Beyond a “Platonic” Cage-Cunningham**

Several music scholars have noted that *Cheap Imitation* was a major stylistic turning point
in the composer’s career. In his 2001 article “Techniques of Appropriation in the Music of
John Cage,” David Bernstein even suggested that this turning point might be seen as a
return to Cage’s earlier expressive practices. Yet no scholar has demonstrated an interest
in actually taking account of the dance for which *Cheap Imitation* was composed and
which seems to have motivated this turn. Several modern dance scholars and critics
consider Cunningham’s choreography created after 1972—when *Second Hand* left the
company’s repertory and when Carolyn Brown left the company—more innovative but
also more seemingly inhuman. About Cunningham’s company members after 1972, critics
write of their more impressive technique but also of their depressing lack of personality.
Yet apart from a few scattered comments by company insiders, no critic or dance scholar
has taken the music of *Second Hand*’s score seriously. Whereas *Cheap Imitation* might be
interpreted as an Expression Defrost in Cage’s career, it has yet to be argued that, for
Cunningham, *Second Hand* represented an Expression Exorcism.

If Cunningham and Cage moved in contrary motion with respect to their use of
expression after *Second Hand*, they also, however, finally moved in together. When
*Second Hand* was pulled from the company’s repertory in 1972, Cunningham, having
finally achieved the kind of international fame that makes grant applications a breeze,

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obtained a massive set of studios on the top floor of a large former factory (now known as Westbeth) in New York City’s West Village. Today, this is still the base of operations for the company. Cunningham and Cage moved into a small garden-level apartment only two blocks away from Westbeth. (This was a few years before they moved to the more glamorous, light-filled Chelsea penthouse—regularly seen in documentaries on Cage and/or Cunningham—where they would stay for the remainder of their lives.) Here they lived together, openly and officially, for the first time ever in their then over thirty-years-long personal relationship.¹⁸ The much-delayed completion of the couple’s long-standing choreographic project on Satie’s *Socrate, Second Hand* picked up from where 1944’s *Idyllic Song* left off with Cunningham alone in the studio in the summer of 1969 shortly after the Stonewall riots, which were only blocks away. *Second Hand* ended, I like to imagine—and if Roger Copeland can have an imagination, why shouldn’t I?—not with the company’s final performance of it on tour in Paris in 1972, but rather with an apartment-warming party for Cage and Cunningham in the West Village earlier that summer.

Art, literature, and music historians have not been shy in connecting Cage’s readings of Satie, Thoreau, and Duchamp to the composer’s writings and poetry. They are much less willing, however, to acknowledge the presence of specific non-musical content within Cage’s music. This is partly attributable to the air of autonomy that scholars still attach to those compositions, an air that Cage encouraged.¹⁹ Similarly, dance scholars have

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¹⁸ Prior to this, the couple had always maintained separate addresses.

become complacent with the idea of Cunningham’s oeuvre as a total embodiment of the high modernist, medium-specific ideal of movement stripped of all extra attire. I have argued that in *Second Hand*, Cage and Cunningham have revealed not only the privileged status they accord the music of Satie (their own version of a Bach or Beethoven), but also parts of their very own history. The late musicologist Philip Brett’s entry for John Cage in *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia* ends with the suggestion that, for future scholars wishing to say something interesting about the possible relation of Cage’s sexuality to his work, “A good place to start would be his collaborative partnership with Cunningham, which exemplifies many things that musical critics, typically single-minded in their approach, have omitted to notice.”²⁰ I would suggest that, of course, the same is true for those wishing to relate Cunningham’s work to his life.

Performing artists and scholars have long relied on “Cage-Cunningham” for the “divorce” of music and dance and many other historiographical metaphors of modernist liberation. In the process, they have collectively imagined a chasm between Cage and Cunningham and their respective arts, which, though they may be presented simultaneously, are not dependent on each other. The negativity of that space between them is similar to the type of evidence mobilized in all previous attempts to address the queer aspects of the creative output of each man. Here I am thinking of two of the most cited examples: Jonathan Katz’ reading of *4’33’* as queer reverse discourse, and Susan Leigh Foster’s reading of Cunningham’s ultra-pure, fiercely non-dependent choreography as a manifestation of the closet and a larger modernist insensitivity to actual lived difference. The above choreomusical history and analysis, I hope, has suggested a different

approach: one that takes account of both the specificity of their creations and their personal histories.

The wildly ephemeral and unpredictable nature of performance, musical or otherwise, has been a cause for celebration by an entirely different “downtown” institution—Performance Studies. Anyone who has read the literature on Cage and Cunningham coming from that discipline knows that it is crowded with discussions of the ephemeral, the performative, the haptic, the mistakeful, and the unpredictable. In his *Music and the Ineffable*, as translated by Carolyn Abbate, Vladimir Jankélévitch writes of Satie’s *Socrate* that “Music seems to accept not taking account of Plato’s text as its duty: for, just as the *Phaedo* conjures away the tragedy of death, so Satie’s psalmody smooths out incidents in the Platonic narrative.” While it is true that I have—against the warnings of performance studies—privileged the archival document, somewhat reified the performance as a text, and even utilized soft hermeneutics, I have done so strategically. *Second Hand* and early collaborations such as *Credo in Us* and *Four Walls* do not represent an aesthetic of indifference. These are works that not only have a clearly expressed content, but that also strongly betray the personal musical tastes and personal sexual histories of their performer-creators. Here Cunningham and Cage exercise an aesthetic of difference. Whether or not one considers these compositions and dances to be stylistically exemplary, they provide an exemplary focus of study for those who wish to examine the intersection of aesthetic and personal identity and who do not see contextual and formalist approaches to art works as diametrically opposed. An examination of the specifics of collaboration—here, ones outside their standard working procedures—between Cage and Cunningham

(and, in this case, Satie) offers an escape from the all too "Platonic" and concretized discourse surrounding the Cunningham-Cage relationship and the music-dance collaborations that relationship produced.
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APPENDIX A: MERCE CUNNINGHAM’S SCRIPT FOR *FOUR WALLS*
I

(Scene opens on family; father and mother are walking down stairs, BOY and GIRL are seated on stage, if possible near foot of stairs.

A definite formalized movement feeling is established at the outset by the movement of the FATHER and MOTHER down the stairs, and the BOY and GIRL seated. One should feel the rigid pattern of a family set by years of time, particularly in the parents, and the complete subservience to it. The same pattern feeling in the BOY and GIRL but without the subservience. The BOY is completely away from it inwardly, only observes it when conveniently outwardly. The GIRL fights it inwardly and outwardly.

FATHER and MOTHER proceed down stairs, BOY and GIRL get up and four move towards up left exit, under stairs.)

Mother: Well, children, we gather for another time.

FATHER: We have weathered times so well.

MOTHER: You look sweet tonight my dear, but sometime wear the blue——

   the doors are open.

   our near people will soon be here to bid our memories again——

    It is pleasant.

BOY: Yes, soon the centering of the nerves leaves——

FATHER: We will remember that the paid position, is the one we know.¹

GIRL: We will remember——and let the throat catch.

MOTHER: You look so doctored all of you. Oh, I feel so sure.

BOY: Guarded by the heritage of millions we stand together as the emblem of a nation.

II

(LOVER enters down right.)

LOVER: This is indeed a prize. Once again to see the soon-wedded need of all my life.

MOTHER: Well, it is pleasant.

¹ The comma in this sentence was a period, a penciled-in correction changes it to a comma.
FATHER: And you are earlier.

LOVER: Perhaps love can never wait.

BOY: And passion never exist.
or twist its tiny facets
‘round a well-worn tree.

LOVER: What words are those? You are looking well tonight, my dear.

GIRL: But feeling like a nomad.

MOTHER: If the young only knew the courage and beauty they bring.

BOY: You have the world at heart, my mother.

FATHER: Come along, you two. They have a world to make.

-2-2

GIRL: Don’t go!

BOY: The whispering now screaming.

MOTHER: This youth, shy and frightened. My word---

FATHER: Come along, son.

(Exit FATHER, MOTHER, BOY, up left.)

LOVER: Now darling, we have problems to arrange, and even dates to forecast.

GIRL: But not relationship to question?

LOVER: What?----we must decide a wedding date. You must, you know.

GIRL: We have decided there is love between us? We have decided we love enough to kill all else?

LOVER: I do not understand. Ours has been a childhood match. And I am becoming wise in business. And your father----

GIRL: Blind!-

---

2 This is the page number. The first page is not numbered
LOVER: Our future is so sure and so surely peaceful. We will have all the things our parents have---

GIRL: But this is not love. The heart does not ache for all the time, desiring majesty in love.

LOVER: But I do love you----

GIRL: Love me like a small sick possum loves a weed----I ache for tousled legs and lobes.

LOVER: Your strangeness leaves me haunted.

GIRL: Strangeness? Oh why do we pervert ourselves? You leave me mad for insanity. Go.

LOVER: But this is no solution.

GIRL: But yes, only echo. You are no solution. Run, run, before the sibyl seizes my desires, and creates them into reason.

LOVER: Anger? It cannot portend a happy life----

GIRL: Oh cease, you ganderer of feebles. Run, run.

(He leaves, off up left.)

GIRL: Run, run, my mouth runs, what kind of bile is this that wants me to exude a poison for him? Oh, there is no bridge----- (GIRL runs off down left.)

III

(BOY has appeared at end of II and throughout following, goes upstairs, as mad-ones come down, and eventually disappear upstairs again.)

---

BOY: the seldom seen remembrance of long dead days----- we are not here just now, have been, but now only bad memories of the firsts. ah, blushing bitten wanton themes---

---

3 This final line of stage directions—“upstairs again.””—is penciled in at the bottom of page 2.
feeble incarnations we have made of the bodies given us---
like broken pods of broken seeds.
this earth--this place that is right here---
but each to end.

my memory divides in smoothest times---
gaining what by gaining being?
the rape of mind and body that means mobility to present---
immobility to future.
what solace these ends of times, these straggling-made
idiot casualties that we call blood-bonds.

incessant feud of matters within a scope.
it is to find, to be, to seek, to steal, to earn, to change,
to weather---
to know that one thing’s right when one is wrong---
to gather midget terminology for mountain usage.
a being? there is no make-shift there.
it shapes its ruin often. I cannot change it.
i look to every way and see a mad-indentured seemness.

ah, whisk me off thou fantasies--my head is spinning.
it leaves me, it leaves me!

i toss this haunted soul and take another time!
(The MAD ONES have appeared.)
the seasoned ones. reach back, deeper-leavened needs!
(DANCE. Eventual exit upstairs.)

IV

(FATHER and MOTHER reappear up left with LOVER.)

FATHER: The time is set now, yes? It will be a good thing.

LOVER: No. I do not understand her, sir. We would be happy, prosperous.

MOTHER: And the eligible couple.

LOVER: But she faces⁴ it as if it were the grave.

FATHER: That is only a wave of solitary---

MOTHER: A young girl’s questioning---

⁴ Cunningham typed “shwefaces” and then went back and typed over the “w” repeatedly with an “e.”
FATHER: ‘Twill pass.

MOTHER: ‘Twill be a wondrous thing.

(ENTRANCE OF NEARPEOPLE STARTS HERE, AND CONTINUES)

MOTHER: Oh, fancy evening. Welcome.

NEARPEO: It’s like a white sail in the night.

FATHER: What friction that could cause.

-4-

NEARPE: Your lovely house is just as lovely.

NEARPE: Why does it never change?  
(TO LOVER) and you are here----

NEARPE: Not an uncommon sight.

FATHER: A good reason too---

LOVER: Good evening. I am glad---

MOTHER: Ah seeing you is charming once again.

NEARPE: This house breeds charm even when---

NEARPE: we are not here.

MOTHER: Let’s see the garden. It stretches into Eden tonight.  
(MOTHER LOVER\(^5\) and NEARPEOPLE exit down left.)

(BOY and GIRL enter from different entrances, walk to seat and sit in opening positions. PAUSE. Then MOTHER enters down left.

MOTHER: Ah, there---the night is dressed for you---and all of our friends too.

BOY: Mother, you cover such sadness so well---

MOTHER: What do you mean, son? I only live wherein I swell.  
(TO GIRL) I see you carrying a wand dear.  
   My mother always told me many things of wands.

\(^{5}\) “Lover” is inserted in pen.
They are such lovely trends---
Oh, whenever there is time
we must make some models.
They are so sweet.---My mother---

(MORE GUESTS. FATHER, LOVER, NEARPEOPLE enter down left.)

FATHER: Oh, more to please our home and memory---

BOY: Our conscience and our vanity.

GIRL: Don’t! You only press it worse!

FATHER: What words! Good evening.

NEARPE: You could not say it for a better one.

NEARPE: We are so glad to come here once again.

BOY: We are so glad you fit so well into our lane.

NEARPE: How do you do?

NEARPE: How are you?

NEARPE: When was it last?

-5-

NEARPE: Let me see. Why only yesterday---

NEARPE: I am aghast.

BOY: Space flies.
Time mends its way for you. Alas.

FATHER: Won’t you come out into the night again?

NEARPE: Yes, it is best, lest we lose it.

(EXIT down left.)

MOTHER: I never know where’er the friends do come or go---
but even when they come, there is still sometimes a
vain flapping of wings.
Are you evanescent there?
GIRL: My mother---

BOY: She’s walking in the shadow. The mirror hides no tale.

MOTHER: I’ve caught myself several times looking past the mirror.

BOY: The mirror tells a tale
my mother never told me.

MOTHER: (TO GIRL) What’s the matter, child?

GIRL: Nothing, mother, nothing!

BOY: It whispers of a gale
that make a maid unholy.
Search not, mother.

MOTHER: What are you telling?
(Enter PEOPLE from down left.)
Ah, here they are again.
(MOTHER goes to meet them.)

BOY: Yes, here they are again to send us into bedlam.⁶

GIRL: Why do you laugh so?

BOY: Because you know as well as I,
the bar is through the door.

GIRL: Oh, if only he were a one to grab my arms and legs.

BOY: I would touch you
but it wouldn’t help.

GIRL: No, and he could too.⁷
Oh, what to do!

(During this the NEARPEOPLE ET AL have been making patterns---
the essence of such a gathering, condensed into movement.)
GIRL stays quietly on the bench.
BOY enters patterns, only to break them now and then.)

---

⁶ Between “again” and “to” there is an inserted forward slash, suggesting a line break.
⁷ Between “No,” and “and” there is an inserted forward slash, suggesting a line break.
NEARPE:  (TOGETHER)  We are having gay days.\(^8\)

BOY:  The loaves were never more in need.

NEARPE:  (TOGETHER)  How ventured when it lives!

BOY:  These days one needs a sponge.
     And sounds of anytime.

NEARPE:  (TO BOY AND GIRL)
     Your upperfolk have lived so long together. Now like one.

GIRL:  Weeds.

BOY:  New seeds.
     Break down the wet weeds.

(PATTERNS continue. LOVER has entered down left, and crosses
to side of GIRL. Eventually all exit up left.)

LOVER:  I feel I must be firm.

GIRL:  Do not.

LOVER:  Please. Civility.\(^9\)
     I want only the one answer.

GIRL:  Not now. Only wait.

LOVER:  I want only that one.

GIRL:  Oh! go---

LOVER:  I must. You must reply.

GIRL:  I cannot. I will not be tormented.

LOVER:  What do you mean?
     I am only asking for our wedding day,
     to say that it is set.

\(^8\) Cunningham typed “We” and then moved back two spaces to type “(TOGETHER)” over it.

\(^9\) There are pronunciation marks penned within “Civility”: “Ci-vil´i-ty.” Similar pronunciation marking are penned in for the words “adamant remonstrance” in scene V and the word “subverses” in scene VI.
GIRL: It is impossible!

LOVER: But---
I do not understand.
Please answer me, my question.
I have given you no reason for this adamant remonstrance.

GIRL: You have given me no reason to be alive---
You have left me with a ring to place upon a hollow hand.
The birds can taste more things than you.

LOVER: Be sensible. I must insist.

GIRL: You will insist for propriety.
    for all the thing that quide your world.
All the things that quide your world have crashed
into my skull.
The burnings,
the tampering will never cease
to guide my world toward hell.

-7-

GIRL: (continued)
I cannot catch another arrow. (RUNS UPSAIRS.)
    (LOVER starts toward stairs, and BOY enters and stops him.)

VI

BOY: Be firm, be rude. Catch her and demand. It is the thing.

LOVER: But she subverses so.
And yet I’m sure there’s love.

BOY: The ancients had a crueler---more surer way.
They took what they wanted. And may the
gods help them.

LOVER: That was crude.
Our civilized meanings
give us other leanings.

BOY: Ha, but at times
the mind slips a noose---
    and, just as she is,
runs around on the loose.
LOVER: But we must be gentle  
In love’s ways at least.

BOY: Perhaps, she’d for the moment, prefer the beast.\textsuperscript{10}

LOVER: Rude and crude.  
But I will be firm.

BOY: With all your manners, and the rod.  
You’ll worm your way in.

LOVER: I will demand, I will  
make her understand that---

BOY: Life is for the living.  
Oh yes---she’ll agree,  
And band her forces the the blow.\textsuperscript{11}  
( EXITS up left.)

\textbf{VII}

LOVER: He is a funny fellow.  
But I will expect the answer, yes.  
And rigidly I’ll meet the every shallow wave she brings  
to put me off my feet.  
There are times in the man’s life when---  
(GIRL descends stairs; LOVER SEES HER)  
when words prolonged are necessary.

GIRL: (STARTS SINGING in broken rhythm; song almost unheard, as  
she continues down stairs.)

\textbf{-8-}

GIRL: (continued)

\begin{verbatim}
Sweet love,  
My throat is gurgling.  
the mystic mouth leads me  
so defted.
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{10} In between “moment,” and “prefer” a forward slash has been inserted, suggesting a line break.

\textsuperscript{11} The ‘b’ in “blow” is penned in over an “f” in the typed word “flow.” The word “the” is typed twice, as above.
and the deep black nightingale
  turned willowy.
by love’s tossed treatment berefted.
(Song is broken by LOVER’S words at two places. The second time in middle of last line of song, at which place LOVER grabs wrist of GIRL and turns her towards him.)

LOVER: Well, have you placed the time and place?
  (MORE SONG)

LOVER: Then again,
have you decided where and when?

(GIRL grabs wrist away; last words of song; backs off stage down right in ever increasing speed; by her actions in these seconds, the following action, although done off stage, must be inherent and known to the audience.)

LOVER: (Following her slowly)
Well, I shall break this---wait!
I will repeat until this debate has reached a close. (EXITS.)

(There is a silence which is broken only by a human inhuman sound from off stage down right after two or three seconds. Immediately the BOY comes running from up left; runs to the down right entrance, turns once and runs cross stage and upstairs.)

( GIRL comes back again through down right entrance, and from now till the curtain, moves across down stage, turns and goes up the stairs with the realization of what she has done overpowering her.)

(At this time, the MAD ONES come floating down the stairs, The transparent time begins once again, and the BOY and MAD ONES dance again.)

CURTAIN
IX

NEARPE:  (Moving with conversations)

What is this?
why are there silences?
whose actions seem erased?
will it lead to---
when did it seem so makeshift?
there seem
only grim feeling,
no action done for notation,
no action seen---
in rotation
but acceleration
of every image, sense.
disaster wends a turn.

what is this---
house for mad-like flingings?
silences dispelled by whispered
silences, only more.

we were here before?
not really---for
never---
here before---
has there been an evanescent door of shadows.\textsuperscript{12}
we were here before---
yes, but no shadows
written on the floor.
no echoes of a madness
from ancient household lore.

we were really never here before.
only sometimes came
through that same door.
but here a different room----
only different sounds
resume their quiet ways.

\textsuperscript{12} The ‘d’ in “door” is penned in over an ‘f.’
we were never here before

this is no longer friendly home!
there is moaning in the walls here!
how does this family roam?

(TOGETHER AND IN A RUSH)

we were never here before.
not really, for never
here before.
has there been an evanescent door of shadows.
we were never here before with shadows on the floor.
with echoes of a madness brought by household lore.
we sometimes came through that same door.
but here a different room
and different sounds resume their quiet ways.

we were really
never here before

-10-

(as NEARPEOPLE disperse through up left and down left exit,
BOY, having seen this, comes down stairs.)

X

BOY: what fantasies of fakes they are---
breeding forever like mosquitoes,
delving forever into others.
    what to find, and how to say it.
    the witch- brewers.
the only evil,
the only truly evil ones we know.

shushing words of goodness back and forth.
while each hopes to each that something wretched has occurred.
ah---they are the malignants in our world.
they feed on birth and death and all between.
    what use to sack a troy?
    what use to banish arms when minds remember words of hate
and heads can turn with glee from whispers.
    what use?

(BOY is seated on bench, as mother comes in from up left.)
XI

MOTHER: my son---you are my son.
and she is my daughter.
this house is mine.
but belong to me they never have.

I have been here a long time,
a long forgotten time.
once by choice,
now by inadequacy.

the vagueness that was bred in me
was doomed to leave me always shaped by others,
always left behind,
twisted, told,
returned to what I am.
the sad insanity of flies in webs.

oh, i wander many times, i know---
but there is no real way.
I look at you and the others, my family.
and wonder whatever gave them to me and me to them
and how do I ever guard it?

memories are wicked,
but not-valid ones are agony.
the seasons come and go and i am forever here,
winding my way.

your sister is for me a mystery.
I cannot bend my mind to feel that she remembers me
sometimes.

---and she loved him
yet she labored to deny it.

although he was not a perfect one,
he was fine and as your father felt,
would do us proud, and her.
but such words she sounded to resist.
this house has been mine for twenty years yet
i do not belong to it---
i feel a stranger to it always.
i feel a stranger to your father many times.
it is bewildering---

what pitch of terror threw her soul?
and I am helpless, for somehow, always
i have been helpless where you,
the members of my heart were touched.

Your sister killed the man she loved.
and i who should have understood and did understand
with a soul too weak to say it,
have the killing on my heart as well.
of that i am as sure as he is dead---

oh--when one is lost---

I cannot sob, son---
I know not how.
I can only bow.

But your father will remain. (EXIT up left.)

XII

BOY: When we weave a web,
and turn to find it weaving us,
what need to utter sound?

the sight of deeds that twist our throats,
although gowned in smoothest cloth,
need not provoke our word.

it tells now where we are,
and where we are to go.
some fantasy of mind does whisper like the whisperings
of satan.

The web is here.
it pitched and bound us.
we will not escape.

XIII
(NEARPEOPLE RETURN: father and mother come down stairs in beginning positions. NEARPEOPLE resume inquietude amongst themselves. Tension mounts through movement: fussing of NEARPEOPLE, and friction in the patterns.)

-12-

BOY: have you forgotten the poison of finger-pointing?--- ‘tis not polite to point, but just a tiny scratch.

NEARPE: Your house is cold—and in the walls too.

(During this scene GIRL begins to ascend the stairs)
(Suddenly she is noticed. SILENCE.)

NEARPE: Why does she look so taut? And where is he? Yes, where is he, he, he? Is that the word? it's more than just the slapping of the wrist and ring.

BOY: Yes, more. I hope much more.¹³

NEARPE: For, there’s something here that makes us want to cling to other¹⁴ other memories.

BOY: There’s something here that makes you want to point to ones, and trace out words to others--- to tell of things you know exist, but not with you.

NEARPE: There’s something more than lover’s breakage here. there’s something here. like writing on a door. there’s something more that makes us feel, that we were never here before. not in a room that tastes a doom listed in the shadows on the floor.

¹³ “I hope” is penned in. “BOY” is also penned in over “LOVER:” which has been struck-through.

¹⁴ The appearance of “other” at the end of this line is extremely faint, as if it were erased.
we were really never here before.

BOY: What strangeness left in store!

XIV

BOY: Enter all the mad ones of my soul in silent svelted cheap array---

enter zuerdon, beaded by a lead-fire.
enter magdoreed, beset by snares from olendor-
enter gifts of porden-fire, amphetamine-water, air of bound, malkin line, brought by memories-in-skin.
the lady bountiful-of-sin,
the lady gatherer-of-poison-love,
the lady mad-by-blindman’s-touch,
the lady queen-in-sodden-silk,
enter sagrinned mellow eaten souls, turn my fury into flames, take wing and lead me to the mad-view.
this earthfakescene is worse than shamming god.

What crowds of eaten folk do stand around?
-----are you of morning?
-----what deadened place gave you?
-----where are the waxen roses?

we are here dead, forgotten unsouled idiots caught in the human web.
give birth? give death? it doesn’t matter.
I see the laden chimera leaping in the sky---
the doing? a skin taxed by shaky dagger, a leaden thing from small steel circle, a dripping bottle, contents settling a stomach---

the deed? a fool dead.

but fool, no!
we are the fools,
we remnants here, we bits,
not even tragic,
just sad bewildered heritage---
a murder, yes! In cold, cool blood to warm blood oozing!

ache, scream, scatter now the hybrid victory, you lepers!
(During this, NEARPEOPLE are frozen with horror; FATHER and MOTHER and GIRL have resumed opening statures; MAD-ONES have appeared to drift in and out of the NEARPEOPLE until suddenly the nearpeople fell at the end of the spectacle, and the MAD-ONES gradually disappear.)

(SILENCE DESCENDS.)

(BOY gathers family, and they start up the stairs.)

BOY: This is the peace, this is the end we needed---Now take our small bewildered selves to long soft shelves. forgetfulness can never come.

CURTAIN FALLS.