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Moments of Geopolitical Choreography: Performance of Cultural Ideals in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and Beyond

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Moments of Geopolitical Choreography: Performance of Cultural Ideals in Nazi
Germany, the Soviet Union and Beyond

by

Allison Elizabeth Bohman

A thesis submitted to the Department of Dance of The College at Brockport, State
University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts.

May 15, 2015

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by

Allison Elizabeth Bohman

2015

Dedication:

This work is dedicated to my parents Kenneth and Linda Bohman, whom without, these circumstances could not be possible.

In a study about context, it is only fitting to acknowledge where my context began—a loving environment where my opinions were valued, my voice was heard and the moving body was cherished. Thank you for shaping who I am today and how I will to grow in the future. Your imprints forever leave their marks on my moving mind, body and spirit.

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Abstract

This research analyzes the standardized regimens of bodily training characteristic of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and dance in general. Not only were the movements of daily life such as gesture choreographed within these contexts, but also the dance scene at large was highly designed to represent the political ideals of the government. Through analysis of gesture, marching parades and mass movement choirs in Nazi Germany combined with discussion of censorship and artistic repossession in Soviet ballet, themes of conformity and individuality are extrapolated to trends in movement culture in the United States today.

This is a study of bodies, not much different than our own—these bodies once moved through contexts we never will fully get to embody ourselves, but through looking at what physical movements defined their experiences, we can begin to grasp a better understanding of the history they moved through. Looking at history from the lens of movement and dance opens up a wider knowledge of the world we live in today. Dance inherently puts meaning into motion, and this written research puts physical motion into meaning. Your body is a sponge, absorbing the geopolitical climate you move through, and as you dance through life, consider the context and how it is leaving its inevitable mark on you.

Allison Elizabeth Bohman grew up in Sayville, NY with her parents Kenneth and Linda, and two younger sisters, Lauren and Shannon. She attended The State University of New York at Geneseo from 2008-2011 and received a Bachelor of Science in Childhood Education and Special Education, with a concentration in Dance in 2011. She began work toward a Master of Fine Arts in Dance at The College at Brockport, State University of New York in the Fall of 2012. Allison is also a New York State certified instructor of dance for grades Pre-K through 12.

Introduction

Close your eyes for a moment and think about what has shaped the person you are today. The biological components of your being—eye color, hair color, physique, and general health—those are all hereditary. But what about all of the other details that make up who you are. How do you move? What are your good and bad habits? What does your posture say about your personality? How does your body knowledge shape your personal opinion? Your body is like a living document in that your surroundings leave their mark on you whether you notice it or not. Movement is not only physical, it is political, and the geopolitical context that shapes it is critical to study.

This analysis studies the physical movements choreographed within political movements and how they compare to what has happened to concert dance within oppressive societies. It is stimulating to note the dual use of the word *movements* here. This word has grown to both define the embodied experience of several people, uniting under a specific given period, as well as the physical motions of a singular body. All political movements are built upon the backs of personal movements from an individual operating within a larger context. I not only take note of the nuances of this distinction, but I also track the influences of the choreographic aesthetics generated in times of oppression and see where they had an impact in the dance world as we know it today in America.

Specifically, I will look at modern dance in Nazi Germany (1930-1945) and ballet in the Soviet Union (1940-1970). The impact of these geopolitical contexts on movement of the body has trickled down the lineage of concert dance. But more importantly, looking at the body as a tool of social phenomena expands the definition of dance to

include the critical study of politics that shape it. In a culture such as the United States of America in 2015, the public is bombarded with a dance culture shaped by popular television shows like *Dance Moms*, *So You Think You Can Dance*, and *Dancing with The Stars*—shows that I diffidently admit are entertaining and sometimes addicting, but more often than not, dramatize, over-sexualize, and in some ways dumb down the essence of the art form. Perhaps contrary to a popular understanding of what defines dance, it “is largely a combination of physical and ideological disciplining. The body is literally shaped through years of training and rehearsal to the requirements of an aesthetical regime”¹ and the nature of movement in time and space has a legacy of conditioning the body to conform.

Plié, plié, tendu, tendu. As dancers, we repeat these physical motions constantly and eventually movements become engrained in our muscle memory. This physical conditioning of the body goes deeper than muscles and bones though—analyzing what happened to dance and movement in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union is an outstanding example of the power of politics in choreographing an entire culture into conformity of political ideals. The concepts of body and power are most suitable in bridging the gap between politics and choreography because dance is political—dance is culture.

The field of geopolitics has a unique detail in common with dance. Geopolitics and dance are both concerned with the human body, but they are also deeply invested in the concept of space. Much of geopolitical practice involves the splitting up of geography on maps, which is inherently very political. “One of the main contributions to

¹ Benjamin Pohlig, “Choreography and Politics,” *choreograph.net* (April 2014): <http://choreograph.net/raw/choreography-and-politics.1>.

the achievement of geopolitical concerns, was the understanding that since the dawn of history, people have been in a constant battle for space [and] this has led to changes in both human consciousness and thought and geographical space.”² This idea exemplifies the notion of geopolitics as political. “Maps became purposeful weapons. Mountains and rivers were moved right out of textbooks and made into real dynamic forces, threatening or promising. [Geopolitics] made a whole generation think spatially.”³ Geopolitics, like the body and gesture all make us think spatially as well—and more importantly, embodies political ideals.

My interest in much of this research was sparked after reading dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster’s *Choreographing History*, an article that places the body at the center of understanding historical happenings—a body that has value because it lived in the past and experienced the very history we read about. Through her poetic writing voice, she implies the importance of looking at the body as a central historical resource in understanding the past. She explains in the beginning of her writing that the body’s “habits and stances, gestures and demonstrations, every action of its various regions, areas, and parts—all these emerge out of cultural practices, verbal or not, that construct corporeal meaning.”⁴ Bodies are defined by their circumstances and they change depending on how and where you are. These contexts then pattern the human body in the way they move—skin, muscles and bones are influenced by the surroundings. Foster goes on to express that “all a body’s characteristic ways of moving resonate with aesthetic and political values. The intensity of those resonances are what permit genres

² Silviu Costaschie, “German School of Geopolitics Evolution, Ideas, Prospects,” *Romanian Review On Political Geography / Revista Româna Geografie Politica* 13, no. 2 (2011): 264.

³ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁴ Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographing History,” in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, eds. Alexandra Carter and Janet O’Shea (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 291.

of bodies to coalesce...Each body's distinctive pronouncements at a given movement must be read against the inscription, along with others, it continuously produces. A blank stare does not mean the same thing for all bodies in all contexts."⁵ It is for these reasons that we must consider gesture, movement and dance in these historically oppressive societies in synch with the larger contexts they move through, and these understandings can extend considerations of the larger historical context as well.

The following chapters analyze the standardized regimens of bodily training characteristic of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union and dance in general. Not only were the movements of daily life such as gesture choreographed, but also the dance scene at large was highly designed to represent the political ideals of the government. Foster eloquently invites us to consider that:

any standardized regimen of bodily training...embodies in the very organization of its exercises, the metaphors used to instruct the body, and in the criteria specified for physical competence, a coherent (or not so coherent) set of principles that govern the action of that regimen. These principles, reticulated with aesthetic, political and gendered connotations, cast the body who enacts them into larger arenas of meaning.⁶

These are arenas of meaning where we, the readers, can look back and analyze the political significance of the moving body. This is a study of bodies, not much different than our own—these bodies once moved through contexts we never will fully get to embody ourselves, but through looking at what physical movements defined their experiences, we can begin to grasp a better understanding of the history they moved through. Looking at history from the lens of movement and dance opens up a wider knowledge of the world we live in today. Dance inherently puts meaning into motion, and this written research puts motion into meaning.

⁵ Ibid., 293.

⁶ Ibid., 296.

Chapter 1: Nazi Germany 1930-1945—The Dangerous Dance

The context of Nazi Germany is an extreme and rich example of where a body culture was created that left its iconic mark on the world. To this day, the Hitler salute for example, is recognized by people all over the world. The German body culture generated in the context of Nazism not only encouraged conformity in physical movements, but also psychological allegiances to the government. This particular history deserves special attention because the manipulative mind/body connection that the leaders of National Socialism employed was actually quite calculating in forcing the masses to conform to political ideas. In a context of oppression, specifically Nazi Germany in the years surrounding World War I and World War II, gesture, marching parades, movement choirs, gymnastics and concert dance were all used as means of propaganda to serve the Nazi political agenda. Although not all of these will be discussed in the scope of this analysis, it is clear that the government infiltrated the most personal and private aspect of citizen life—the body. Whether people knew it at the time, their every cell was being penetrated with politics, exemplifying the importance of studying dance forms within the oppressive societies that might have shaped them. Dance as we know it today in America is influenced by what molded it in the past. In this chapter, I am going to define terminology, provide historical background and illuminate the connections between movement, dance and politics within the context of Nazi Germany.

Setting the Context: Terms, People and Sources

I define *geopolitics* as the combination of geography, or physical location, and the political atmosphere in that particular location. I originally arrived upon this definition

through a basic break down of the sub-terms—geography plus politics. Additionally, the amalgamation of these ideas was clarified through broadly reading about the term and this deepened my knowledge of the historical context that shapes the concept today. Sources such as Sigmund Neuman’s paper, “Fashions In Space” included in *Foreign Affairs* from 1943, although dated as a resource, helped mold my understanding of this multifaceted term and assisted in tracking the lineage of its school of thought.

The field of study known as geopolitics is much more complex than just the combination of geography and politics. Through my research process, I have noticed the tiptoeing nature of writing about the context of Nazi Germany. Many older sources, such as Newman’s paper on geopolitics, appear hesitant to zealously point the finger at anyone or anything linked with National Socialism. He implies in his writing though that the origins of this term, and the controversial field of study it describes, go back to a German trend that had been *rumored* to be linked to Nazi National Socialism. It is a discipline and field of research (just as dance is) with deep history.

The term originated in 1899 by Swedish political scientist Rudolph Kjellen. He began a political research path, eventually continued by Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Ritter, which strived to display the “living link between human communities and the environment inhabited by them.”⁷ In other words, they were examining the undeniable connection between people and their bodies and the mutual relationship between context and human interaction. Geopolitics has formed as a subject through collaboration of multiple scientists from diverse cultures and research fields. Despite the various perspectives that shaped the study, the term became most well-known under the German

⁷ Costaschie, 265.

school of geopolitics, which ultimately became linked with Nazi politics. The German school is considered the founder of this discipline because a high number of German scientists were involved. Through this lens of geopolitics, many scholars analyze wars and relations between countries based on political and geographical conflicts.

Professor-General Karl Haushofer, the founder of this German school of thought, had his start in the Army and later was referred to as “the man behind Hitler.”⁸ Perhaps the combination of his military experience with his career as a German geographer enhanced the potential for him to become the theorist of Nazi geopolitics. Originally influenced by Alfred Kjellen, the Swedish and *original* creator of the term geopolitics, Haushofer is credited with coining this “new science of power politics” and ultimately changed the way an entire generation thought about the social consciousness of the German state. The term, as it was used in Germany, emerged in the period between World War I and World War II. “Born of German defeat, the new science was meant to be no mere academic discipline but a workshop for tools of revenge.”⁹ In this way, many people viewed Haushofer’s geopolitical ideas as fuel for Hitler’s fire. Whether Hitler was truly inspired by Haushofer’s talk of geopolitics is complex; but is it clear how Haushofer’s voice and ideas can be traced throughout *Mein Kampf*. In addition, Haushofer “remained one of Hitler's closest advisers on foreign affairs”¹⁰ until 1946 when Haushofer and his wife committed suicide. Geopolitics, simply stated is the combination of geography and politics; however, the concepts of geography and politics

⁸ Sigmund Neuman, “Fashions In Space,” *Foreign Affairs* (1943): 276.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁰ *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Karl Haushofer,” accessed April 21, 2013, <http://ezproxy2.drake.brockport.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=39010654&site=ehost-live>

individually are incredibly dense and layered by themselves. This is a study that focuses on the textures of these ideas and the nuanced movements within the larger context.

Similarly, I use the term *choreography* in a perhaps less traditional sense. Again, if a random poll were to be taken across America today on what defines choreography, a common understanding may include some sort of a mash up of the following. One may typically describe how one dancer tells the other dancers how to move and they tell a story together. In some contexts, this is absolutely true; however, in the context of my research, I am more interested in the deliberate choices and power a choreographer has in the creative process. Choreography is “some kind of system that organizes behavior.... [it] is not just a system that will shape body but also demarcate the possibilities of bodies to interact with each other”¹¹ Through purposeful decision making, the choreographer manipulates the moving body in time and space. I argue this definition can extend beyond the concert dance stage and can be applied to all bodies that move through space in any context. In this sense, it is a definition that serves as the crux of my research because I am mostly interested in how the context of Nazi Germany forced bodies to conform to political ideals and interact with each other physically and ideologically—thus the choreography of politics.

In addition to the definition of terms used frequently throughout the study, the people involved in this history are also important to discuss. First, Nazi Germany cannot be discussed without mentioning the top of the hierarchy himself, Adolf Hitler. Even though he officially came to dictatorship power in 1934, Nazism did not begin with his reign. It was an ideology that began brewing in the despair of the 1920’s and still has

¹¹ Pohlig, 1.

flare ups of Neo-Nazism throughout the world today.¹² The power and prevalence of Hitler's body culture and its physical symbols have infiltrated culture today in some extreme situations, demonstrating the lingering power of the body in politics. These enduring characteristics of politics in body culture are not always negative in every situation; however, in the context of Nazi Germany as discussed here, they were used as a political weapon. There were many people who worked and made decisions below Hitler, but everything that was decided upon in Germany ultimately aligned with the ideology Hitler set into motion. Dr. Joseph Goebbels for example, the director of the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, was Hitler's right hand man when it came to the arts and propaganda in Germany. This ministry ultimately "gained absolute control of dance, opera and theater in the 1930s"¹³ and dictated how Nazism would manipulate the arts.

One of Nazism's most eminent political puppets, national figureheads, and supposed "Father of German modern dance," was Rudolph Von Laban. Appointed by Joseph Goebbels as the director of Deutsche Tanzbuhne, Laban had a lot of responsibility in staging dance and movement within Germany. As Valerie Dunlap, dance historian and Laban biographer writes, "Laban's brief was to organize performances of artistic dance works, choreographing them where necessary, and to promote young German dancers, especially those of who were out of work because of the recession."¹⁴ How involved Laban was with National Socialism continues to be a highly contested issue in the dance world. Nobody wants to hear that the "Father of German modern dance" was a political

¹² Lilian Karina & Marion Kant, *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), x.

¹³ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁴ V. M. Dunlop, *Rudolf Laban: an extraordinary life* (London: Dance Books, 1998) 186.

enforcer of punitive Nazism, but many of his apparent actions set him up for that implication. When many German expressionist artists were fleeing the political restraints and desired conformity of Nazi Germany, Laban stayed behind for the majority of his adult life and worked *for* the government. A deeper analysis of the paradox between the intentions behind his well-known movement choirs and how they were actually viewed and interpreted by the public in the time period will unravel with the discussion to come on movement choirs.

Similarly, how Laban's actions are analyzed through a historical perspective is a note-worthy discussion as well. There are disparities among sources on the topic. Some books such as *Rudolf Laban* by Karen K. Bradley, *Laban For All* by Jean Newlove and John Dalby, and *Rudolf Laban: An Extraordinary Life* by Valeria Preston-Dunlop, praise Laban's work. On the other hand, some criticize it, as discussed in *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich* by Marion Kant and Lilian Karina, because of his willingness to conform to the context of Nazi Germany. Like dance, a written source holds a lot of power in shaping audience perception. What is read can have a huge influence on the understanding of a particular situation and it is for this reason that the sources used in this study are considered carefully. Who wrote them and in what context? The books and articles used in this research present invaluable insights by presenting insights on the successes of art that flourished in the times of hardship, while also considering what has been left out of dance history like questions that challenge standard notions of dance as we know it today. As dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster writes, the "production of history is a physical endeavor...the historian's own techniques of the body—past practices of viewing or participating in body-centered endeavors—

nurture the framework of motivations that guide the selection of specific documents.”¹⁵

Simply stated, the history we read is formed by the bodies that write it and context leaves its inevitable mark on them too, influencing how they record a particular situation.

Conformity in Context: Gesture is a Dance

At first glance, where do we see conformity in the context of Nazi Germany?

While there are many examples, perhaps most obvious is in gesture, or the Hitler salute—the out-stretched arm, which has often been “recognized as the most characteristic gesture that symbolizes Nazism. It was this physical movement that visibly converted an anonymous mass”¹⁶ into a defined example of conformity under Hitler’s dictatorship. A greeting is “an initial and symbolic gift to the person to whom it is addressed.”¹⁷ The infamous outstretched arm Hitler salute gesture of Nazi Germany is an exceptional example of the power of physical movement in enhancing a political movement.

What is in a gesture? How can something as simple as how our bodies move impact the social awareness of an entire nation? We must begin to acknowledge our body as more than an instrument through which we transport and live. Instead, if we examine body and gesture as tools of recording the geopolitical atmosphere in which it thrives, the body can then be seen as more of a “historical document... charter or diary or a parish register.”¹⁸ Gesture deserves to be studied in this way because of the rich content that is embodied within its experiences. “There is no attribute of the human body, whether size, shape, height or color, which does not convey some social meaning

¹⁵ Foster, 294.

¹⁶ Lilian Karina & Marion Kant, xiii.

¹⁷ Tilman Allert, *The Hitler Salute: On The Meaning Of A Gesture* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2008), 3.

¹⁸ Keith Thomas, “Introduction,” in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, eds. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Polity Press, 1991), 2.

to the observer.”¹⁹ In studying the past, specifically the history of Germany under the grasp of Nazism, it becomes clear how much more can be understood through analysis of body language combined with written words and documents.

Those who study the past sometimes find themselves arriving upon two contradictory conclusions. The first is that the past was very different from the present. We often look back at how people from the past lived and justify their actions based on their old-fashioned context. But how much has really changed? The body possesses the power to tell all. The second conclusion the historian reaches is that “it was very much the same.”²⁰ Even though most people in Germany are not still saluting Hitler (although it does exist in some extreme fundamentalist groups throughout the world), the concept of gesture capturing the essence of a time period still exists. Even more grotesque than the Hitler salute, was the gesture of submission resulting from Nazi dictatorship. “‘Looking away’ was perhaps one of the most important gestures of all in the Third Reich.”²¹ A gesture in this way can be more unconscious than a deliberate bodily motion. For example, a shifty eye during a conversation still can be found to mean some degree of insincerity, as it did in the past. A smile is still a smile. How we shake hands can be an indication of personality. This is why we must study gesture historically; it is a prime element in deepening an understanding of the past. We can understand history captured through the physical body because today we still recognize the body. It is the most basic form of self—and it becomes a historical document that is translatable to all. Especially in the case of the Hitler salute in Germany, this gesture can offer insight into the

¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

²⁰ Ibid., 10.

²¹ Mary Fulbrook, “Embodying the Self: Gestures and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Germany,” in *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Michael J. Braddick (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 271.

fundamental values and assumptions formulating a particular society. The past in this sense is not too different from the present.

It is critical to study the Hitler salute within the context of Nazi Germany and in the context of greetings in general. Social practices mediate human interactions. For example, think about the social dynamics in a particular family. Every family operates under different values, and those ideals influence how a person interacts with everyone else, in and out of the family. In this manner, we can then “begin to understand [the Hitler salute] as not only a product of those dark times but as a contributor to them.”²² In other words, not only does the body reflect the time period being studied, but it literally makes meaning of its context. In a dance, there is usually a relationship between dancers and a connection between the movements executed by their bodies. There is an acknowledgement of why we are moving in this way and a collective understanding of the context of shaping the movement. In this way, the Hitler salute enabled Germany to dance with Hitler.

When introducing the idea of dancing with Hitler, it seems almost inappropriate to be trivializing the gesture of the outstretched arm as dance—especially when the larger context of Germany under Hitler’s control is a dark and devastating history. The human loss of life, whether through war, in a concentration camp, or the loss of human individuality and a willingness to turn a blind eye to atrocities taking place all around, is absolutely shattering. However, when examining German policies between the years of 1930 and 1945, it becomes clear that this movement, or dance, was intentional, and central to the politics that shaped National Socialism. Hitler and his followers knew the power of movement and this gesture was so deeply engrained into the daily actions of

²² Allert, 11.

Germans that it began to symbolize much more than loyalty to the Fatherland—it became a symbol of national submission.

Why focus on the Hitler salute and the power of gesture in Nazi Germany, while there was so much happening in the world of modern dance itself during this time? The central most component of dance is the body—and what better way to study the influences of geography and politics and to gain an understanding of history than to study an artifact that literally embodies the context of its time? As dance scholar Susan Leigh Foster points out, “All a body’s characteristic ways of moving resonate with aesthetic and political values. The intensity of those resonances are what permits genres of bodies to coalesce.”²³ This is why we must study geopolitics—not only does the geopolitical matter to the field of dance research, but *dance is critical to the field of geopolitics*.

What does the Hitler salute have to do with dance then? A gesture is a dance—more specifically, it is the body’s dance with its context. The body is the starting point for all human interaction. How people move, what aesthetic of dance is appreciated by a given culture, and how dance is valued in society are all shaped by context. In this sense, the body is more than a vessel through which we move, but it is literally the embodiment of its surroundings: it is geopolitics. The body is politically charged because of its presence in space. “Any standardized regimen of bodily training, for example, embodies, in the very organization of its exercises, the metaphors used to instruct the body, and in the criteria specified for physical competence... a set of principles that govern the action of that regimen.”²⁴ The body is a written document of its time.

²³ Foster, 293.

²⁴ Ibid., 296.

Gesture Through Geopolitics

As introduced earlier, like the term geopolitics, the idea of gesture politics is also deeply rooted into German history. The Nazi dictatorship was highly concerned with creating the illusion of mass support and enthusiasm for the government. However, gesture in the Third Reich “went way beyond ceremony and ritual, penetrating every area of life and everyday encounters.”²⁵ Something as integral to daily life, such as a greeting, was co-opted by Nazism. The Hitler salute, “took a normal social situation and imbued it with the threat of sanction and punishment...it was a ghostly spectacle [which] invested every human encounter with magical fascination and helped to silence a nation’s moral scruples.”²⁶ Those who did not participate in this national greeting were deemed traitors and severely punished.

History of Gesture in Germany

Up until the point of Hitler’s takeover, German greetings were different in all areas of the country. Before Nazism, there was no such thing as *The German Greeting*. Neither a single spoken phrase, nor unified motion initiating “Hello,” tied the nation together. Instead, greetings were often “regional, and their use tend[ed] to be restricted to particular generations or occupations, social microcosms whose members reaffirm[ed] their common bond and shared affiliation by greeting one another in specific and formulaic ways.”²⁷ How people utilized their body language through greeting told more of their social status and geographical community than their political alliances. For example, the phrase “Gluck auf (“Best of luck”), was used among coal miners in the western region of Germany and it spoke to the dangerous nature of their occupation. On

²⁵ Fulbrook, 263.

²⁶ Allert, 13.

²⁷ Ibid., 24.

the other hand, the phrase “Moin-Moin—whose now-obscure literal meaning derives from “good” as in “Good morning” or “Good evening”—communicated regional rather than class allegiance.²⁸ The familiar “Guten Tag” phrase transcended the lines of localized meaning and was used more neutrally throughout various parts of Germany. Instead of marking a regional loyalty, this phrase was more telling of social status because it was usually followed up with the use of someone’s name, delineating their position or rank. In all of these situations, it is clear how there was not one common greeting for all of Germany. The separations of diverse greeting gestures were representative of a divided nation.

With Hitler in power though, his salute made it possible to unify all of Germany under one impersonal, militaristic motion. He took a broken nation, devastated by defeat and economic hardship, and unified the people under one gesture. World War I left Germany in shambles, and people were searching for hope and unity. “It offered a seemingly direct and uncomplicated way to establish contact, putting an end to elaborate rules of etiquette and neutralizing the class pretensions that could darken any encounter with the shadow social inequality.”²⁹ The people of Germany were in the perfect situation for Hitler’s movement manipulation because they were vulnerable and desperate for change. This arraignment into a collective German nation did have some benefit in bringing a devastated country together. In the moments of Hitler’s rise to power, any step towards unity, even something as small as a gesture, seemed like a grand idea. Through a historical perspective, the evil that was aroused from this unifying gesture becomes apparent. Looking into the past allows us to see the adversity more clearly.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 31.

Despite the unifying component of this gesture, it was also quite decisive in making a divide. The salute revealed two groups within Germany—“those who gave orders and those who obeyed them—heighten[ing] in civilian encounters the threat inherent in any human interchange.”³⁰ Only these two groupings existed because *not obeying* was simply *not an option*. The Hitler salute is an outstanding example of how as scholar Mary Fulbrook explained, “Gestures do not have a history of their own, disembodied from the collective lives of those gesticulating; they represent forms of communication between historically situated individuals under particular circumstances.”³¹ Through this gesture, Hitler created a physical motion of what it meant to be German in that moment in time—and it infiltrated all areas of German life promoting loyalty to the Fuhrer.

Analysis of the Hitler Salute: The Strength of Movement

In addition to becoming a symbol of national obedience, the physicality of this movement was also quite telling of German political and militaristic ideals. Unlike most greetings, which normally open up the possibility of communication, the Hitler salute was rigid and tense throughout the entire body. Concentration and solemnity were critical elements as well.³² We often associate a greeting as a welcoming gesture, but the Hitler salute was not partnered by a smile. It was a serious, stiff and direct motion, which proclaimed loyalty to Germany, rather than the individual being greeted. The outstretched arm created an inflexible barrier between two people and ultimately established a distance upon encounter—the exact opposite of the traditional purpose of a greeting. In the Hitler salute, the arm was not extended directly towards the person being

³⁰ Ibid., 47.

³¹ Fulbrook, 277.

³² Allert, 46.

greeted. Palm open, arm erect, this motion extended beyond the person being greeted, as if upward to a higher being. Germans had open hands but never made physical contact. “Like lines of perspective or the beams of searchlights at Nazi Party rallies that shone into the night sky where they met in an infinitely distant beyond, the arms and hands of those giving the Hitler salute forever approached each other but never joined.”³³

The physicality of this idea mirrors the intensity of uncertainty common to the time period. Even though this was intended to be a unifying gesture, and ultimately it did unify people under National Socialism, the Hitler salute is also a prime example of the barriers that were put up between people. Citizens who were once friends dropped associations with one another to avoid being complicated in their affairs. The people of Germany found themselves living in isolation of one another in fear of being criminally associated with someone else. The Hitler salute is a physical representation of the power of gesture in appearing to represent one idea, but really embodying another. The façade of the outstretched arm went deeper than what first may have met the eye.

The salute was only half of this famous Nazi-era greeting. This movement was also complimented by sound. The ominous phrase, “Heil Hitler” combined with the salute made for the ultimate example of obedience to Hitler. With the words “Heil Hitler,” either two things can be interpreted. One, the greeter is wishing Hitler good health or calling about Hitler’s great authority to *bring the recipient* good health. The phrase could also be interpreted to mean that Hitler is entering the exchange as higher third party. In other words, “Heil Hitler” could be understood as “May Hitler offer our encounter his blessing, his protection and his wish that we both emerge unscathed.”³⁴ In

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 43.

either situation, Hitler set himself to be deemed god-like and capable of having a higher power of wishing well upon the people of Germany. All of these meticulous details built into the fabric of Nazi culture were intentional. Hitler was choreographing his Nazi movement throughout Germany.

In this analysis it is also important to note the difference between representation of the gesture and a full embodiment of it. Just because it looked like the masses were saluting in harmony, was everyone really embodying it? Or were they just doing it because they had to in order to survive? People accepted the new greeting for various reasons. It is difficult to place judgment on why—our critical distance to the history allows us to see more objectively. However, we must continue to examine *how* choreographing the masses under a single gesture occurred. How did this practice become routine and dance-like? This arm motion became a new principal of political sociability and a staging of values.

The impact of this eminent movement on the success of the Nazi movement brings up the question of whether the Hitler salute can even be considered a greeting? Instead of addressing the recipient of the salute, it created a barrier. Instead of welcoming communication, it offered praise to the god-like Hitler. The Hitler salute “fused with the structural principles of the greeting, turned it into a loyalty oath and membership badge, and thus utterly distorted its normal function as a gesture of mutual acknowledgment and reciprocal commitment.”³⁵ By implementing the Hitler salute into the muscle memory of Germans, the true connection between dance and politics literally became personified within the human body. The Hitler salute was not only a symbol of blind conformity, but it was the essence of how a physical movement developed one of

³⁵ Ibid., 97.

the most atrocious political movements known to history, illuminating the dual meaning of the power within different types of *movement*.

Marching Parades and Mass Movement Choirs

Similarly, central to this discussion of conformity in Nazi Germany is the visual connections between militaristic marching parades and Laban's mass movement choirs. Marching parades were embodied examples of conformity in that they demonstrated how Nazis actually designed a spectacular display of loyalties to National Socialism. Nazis used "the urban landscape as a type of stage for human action."³⁶ In this sense, marching parades were choreographic performances of bodily politics. These parades were performative propaganda that showcased the ideals of race and obedience to the government. According to Barnard College dancer and writer Marjorie Shrimpton, the men marching in essence effectively portrayed the "ideal citizens, the ideal community. In apparent brotherhood they represent[ed] a perfect physical body of men following the command of one superior..."³⁷ These Nazi parades were an intentional form of national spectacle that were effective in shaping the minds of the public.

Rudolph Von Laban's mass movement choirs had a similar sense of performative spectacle as Nazi marching parades when viewed from the outside. According to one of the many contemporary websites supporting Laban's work, *Laban for Animators: The Meaning of Animated Movement*:

Rudolph Laban (1879-1958) is widely recognized as the most important movement theorist of this century. As an Austro-Hungarian choreographer, dancer, teacher, philosopher, and writer, he worked alone and in collaboration with such figures

³⁶ Marjorie Shrimpton, "Laban's Movement Choirs vs. Nazi Soldier Parades and Propaganda Imagery: Spectacle or Gemeinschaftstanz?" *Academia.edu*, (May 2012): https://www.academia.edu/5064763/Labans_Movement_Choirs_vs._Nazi_Soldier_Parades_and_Propaganda_Imagery_Spectacle_or_Gemeinschaftstanz, 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

of European modern dance as Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss. He developed an internationally used movement notation (Labanotation), while uncovering the basic principles of movement structure and purpose.³⁸

His work is still practiced and admired throughout the world; yet the implications of his Nazi past is often left out of the picture. Similarly, I think it is interesting to note that Laban was an Austro-Hungarian dancer and choreographer—his nationality at birth was not German, so that the “Father of German Modern Dance” as he is often referred to as in most dance texts, was not even German.

In a movement choir, tens to hundreds of people dance in coordinated movements in unison, in public. This left very little for the viewer to interpret about the individual. From a visual perspective on the outside (due in part to manipulation from the political powers that be), movement choirs were about the spectacle of conformism. This is exactly why German leaders supported Laban’s quest for community in movement choirs—they knew they could exploit his true goals of unifying through community dance, because Laban’s intentions would not read as clearly to the masses as their overpowering objectives of movement propaganda. What movement looks like on the outside, can oftentimes trump the initial and internal intent of the maker. It is interesting to note that much of Laban’s own writings, such as diaries, and publications, make little to no reference to politics at all. He was more interested in dance as an art form and the expression of the individual within the larger whole of the movement choir. It is sardonic that he was so disinterested in politics because Laban became a prime example of falling victim to the political puppetry of Nazism. His life, his career and his contributions to the

³⁸ Leslie Bishko, “Biography of Rudolph Laban,” *Laban for Animators*, (September 2008): <https://labanforanimators.wordpress.com/2008/09/01/rudolf-laban/>

field of dance and history as a whole were dictated by the politics of his context. Laban viewed his movement choirs as a place “for each person to find relief from the daily regime of space by searching out a place in which to be an individual in a self-constructed small community.”³⁹ The movement choirs were not a “dedication of the self to State but to harmony between people and between people and nature.”⁴⁰ But did they actually read this way? Whether naïve or desperate for solace and artistic outlet in difficult times, from a historical perspective, Laban’s intent was trampled by the context of National Socialism.

Nazi marching parades and Laban’s mass movement choirs clearly had this characteristic of “muscular bonding” in common, which is a trait common to the field of dance. Both movements tapped into a drill-like, rhythmic human inheritance that dates all the way back to the days of cave men and women dancing around the fire before embarking on a dangerous hunt. As Laban’s biographer V.M. Dunlap suggests:

In essence, collective movement to a collective pulse or motion [was] music in and of itself; one [didn’t] actually need an enforced melody for it to be an inner music from which movement originate[d]. Furthermore, the movement that result[ed] [was] a natural byproduct of what bodies communally want[ed] to do.⁴¹

In other words, even though Laban generally tried to separate his dances from a dependence on music, the nature of movement, whether it be marching or moving in and out of mass formations, involves a basic sense of beat and internal rhythm. People have been bonding over this sense of rhythmic muscular conformity of motion in time and space since the beginning of humanity. Both of these displays of political movement manipulation pulled onlookers in because there was “music or a steady beat

³⁹ Dunlop, 195.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Shrimpton, 12.

(accompanying the commotion), there were more people involved, and/or when the [event] was rehearsed,”⁴² which automatically gave it a performative nature. It was no mistake that the leaders of Nazi Germany chose to hone in on a culture of body politics—they knew the power of the body and the potential of muscle memory.

Despite the numerous similarities between marching and movement choirs, there was a huge difference in intention. As alluded to earlier, marching parades were intended to be spectacle and were more successful in demonstrating conformist propaganda by infiltrating the political psychology of the public. This was because the military was more relatable to the general public than movement choirs. People recognized and admired the military. Marching parades grew to become a national symbol of admiration and bravery and the public wanted to be part of it to bring honor to their country. It is not all that much different today in the United States of America. Although outside the scope of this analysis, there is still a sense of nationalism and pride for America when soldiers come marching by in a parade. Laban intended for there to be an emphasis on the individual within the larger unification of community, but onlookers did not always feel included in this form of spectacle. “Partly by the nature of being dance—something not everyone is comfortable with doing themselves—partly because people usually associate dance with performance and spectacle already, and partly due to the unclear intention of emotion and expression that some perceived,”⁴³ Laban’s movement choirs were deemed too disconnected to the public from Nazi officials over time. They were simply not as successful as marching parades from a political propaganda standpoint. Because of this, writer Marjorie Shrimpton argues that “even though both the movement choirs and the

⁴² Ibid., 13-14.

⁴³ Ibid., 15.

Nazi parades and propaganda imagery espouse similar goals, the fact that the movement choirs correlate to negative elements of spectacle more easily in the public's eye negates its positive community-bonding qualities."⁴⁴ Laban would not be happy to hear this speculation; however, it serves as a prime example of how context has the power to subdue intention. In the fight between politics of context and personal artistic intent, context will always win. Laban's intention was and will always be there, but the sheer overpowering strength of a geopolitical context such as Nazism crushed the intention of the artist from a historical, scholarly perspective.

The Body and Politics: An Analysis

It is helpful to look through the lens of choreography to become closer to an understanding of the relationship between body and power in politics. What can be observed and analyzed through this study are the many intricate choreographies taking place in the process of politics. "One only needs to look closely at what bodily and spatial gestures and formations are required to organize the behavioral system"⁴⁵ of political culture. In the case of Nazi Germany, the aesthetic of conformity through a national body culture can be observed. It can be found in daily life in marching and gesture, in sport spectacle like gymnastics (not discussed in detail here), or even in concert dance as spectacle with Laban's movement choirs. Dance became an issue of race in the hands of Nazism.

In the quest for racial conformity, the body became a central target of propaganda. While reading a letter from Fritz Bohme to Reichsminister for Propaganda and Popular Enlightenment, Dr. Goebbels, the need for clarification in the definition of dance,

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pohlig, 1-2.

according to new German standards, is carefully articulated. The letter proves that political officials were considering what the art of movement should look like for this nation. This primary source letter written on November 8, 1933 reveals how men were carefully calculating how to make Germany conform to Nazi politics, even through dance. “The effect must be of such a nature, that is, only such forms must be projected that the German as a person is rebuilt and renewed, led back to himself and educated. Dance is a race question. There is no international dance form that is above race.”⁴⁶ The aesthetic of conformity then became the Aryan race and movement manipulation was the means of achieving this ideal.

The paradox here is that in the quest for conformity, a lot of separation was taking place. The very nature of trying to unify reveals a sense of hierarchy. There are those who have power and those who obey. There are those who are included and those who are left out. There are those who are Aryan and the “ideal” German, and then all of the others. This “us vs. them” mentality of separating in order to “unify” is common throughout history. It can be seen in other cultures and within other contexts; what is important to note here is that the unity Nazi Germany imposed was “merely the official language of generalized separation.”⁴⁷ Does true unity even exist, or was it in the case of Nazi Germany, just another example of a loaded term of political propaganda?

Why This is Important and Preliminary Conclusions

As Shrimpton concludes her discussion of Nazi marching parades and movement choirs, she states, “If it can be said that the aesthetic regime of choreography always distributes power and thus engages in politics, then vice versa, politics always requires a

⁴⁶ Lilian Karina & Marion Kant, 198.

⁴⁷ Shrimpton, 3.

moment of choreography that organizes its subjects according to power.”⁴⁸ In this way, power, politics, culture and dance are one and should be studied together because they are so intertwined.

Nazi Germany is a prime example of when dance can become dangerous because the movements of a culture became so engrained into the muscle memory of its citizens that in the moment, people did not realize the political choreography that was taking place. The “dance” rather than the “dance maker” becomes dangerous in this context because as illustrated by Laban’s experiences, the “dance” maintained more control. The movements of the masses, whether through gesture, marching or movement choirs, had the power and has resonated through time as symbols of Nazism, even after the dance makers are no longer alive. With this said, it is obvious that political leaders such as Adolph Hitler could be considered a “dance maker” through this metaphor—and he was certainly dangerous. The dance becomes perilous in this context because ultimately the dance maker was a threat. It is here that it becomes clear how the cultural context can overpower an artist’s intent. When dance and movement become more of an issue of race identity than artistic individuality, a true connection between dance and politics becomes illuminated.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 2: The Soviet Union 1940-1970—Choreography Stronger Than Politics

A Brief History of Ballet: Creating Context

Ballet is a unique art form because it has no standardized form of notation and there are many schools of thought that shape its motions. It is a storytelling art passed down from one generation to the next, yet “the steps are never just the steps—they are a living, breathing document of a culture and tradition.”⁴⁹ Dance historian Jennifer Homans suggests in her book *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*, that:

because ballet has no fixed texts, because it is an oral and physical tradition, a storytelling art passed on, like Homer’s epics, from person to person, that it is more and not less rooted in the past. For it *does* have texts, even if these are not written down: dancers are required to master steps and variations, rituals and practices. These may change or shift over time, but the process of learning, performing, and passing them on remains deeply conservative...Ballet, then, is an art of memory, not history. No wonder dancers obsessively memorize everything: steps, gestures, combinations, variations, whole ballets...These are physical memories; when dancers know a dance, they know it in their muscles and bones...Thus ballet repertory is not recorded in books or libraries: it is held instead in the bodies of dancers.⁵⁰

Within this physical embodiment of history, multiple ballet contexts can be traced—Italy, England, France, Russia, the East and the West—all have ballet in some form or another and the stories these dancing bodies hold onto tell a great deal about the context in which the style was formed.

Ballet originated in the Italian Renaissance courts of the fifteenth century. Dancing and music were used to celebrate extravagant events for the wealthy such as weddings. “In the 16th century, an Italian noblewoman, Catherine de Medici, wife of King Henry II of France and a great patron of the arts, began to fund ballet in the French

⁴⁹ Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House, 2010), Inside Jacket.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, xix.

court. Her elaborate festivals encouraged the growth of ballet de cour and a century later, King Louis XIV helped to popularize and standardize the art form in France...his love of ballet fostered its elevation from a past time for amateurs to an endeavor requiring professional training.”⁵¹ Ballet began to gain more attention and respect for the rigor of training needed to satisfy the requirements.

It was in France that ballet started to become increasingly important. To this day, ballet vocabulary retains French names.⁵² The French borrowed from Italy because it was the source of so many developments in art, music and dance. Even though ballet gained its platform through the courts and developed an aristocratic attitude in nature, by 1681 ballet moved from the courts to the stage through opera and included ballet elements in its performance, creating a long-standing opera-ballet tradition in France. “By the mid-1700s French ballet master Jean Georges Noverre rebelled against the artifice of opera-ballet, believing that ballet could stand on its own as an art form. His notions—that ballet should contain expressive, dramatic movement, and that movement should reveal the relationships between characters—introduced the ballet d’action, a dramatic style of ballet that conveys a narrative.”⁵³ This narrative form of the ballet is to this day, one of the most popular classical forms. For example, audiences still flock to theatres around the holidays to watch the holiday classic story of *The Nutcracker*.

In the 19th century, early classical ballets such as *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* were created during the Romantic movement. These works were “concerned with the supernatural world of spirits and magic and often showed women as passive and fragile.

⁵¹ Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, “A Brief History of Ballet,” http://pbt.org/community-engagement/brief-history-ballet?gclid=CMv0koHM_cOCFYI8gQodHJKARw.

⁵² Jack Anderson, ed., *Ballet & Modern Dance: A Concise History*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company Publishers, 1992), 37.

⁵³ Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, “A Brief History of Ballet.”

These themes are reflected in the ballets of the time and are called *romantic ballets*.⁵⁴

During this century, pointe work became a staple for female dancers as well.

Additionally, the romantic tutu, a full skirt made of tulle down to the calf, was introduced.

Like Western European ballet, Russian ballet had its starts with movement that combined dance, speech and song in the 17th and 18th centuries. When Peter the Great came to power in 1689, he brought ballet to an isolated and culturally impoverished nation where musical instruments were considered sinful and dance was something peasants did. Court ballet did not even exist yet.⁵⁵ As a leader, he had a goal of reconstructing Russia in Europe's image—"to *make* Russians into Europeans."⁵⁶ Jennifer Homans discusses in her history of ballet, *Apollo's Angels*, that:

classical ballet came to Russia as etiquette and not as art. This mattered: ballet was not initially a theatrical 'show' but a standard of physical comportment to be emulated and internalized—an idealized way of behaving. And even when it did become a dramatic art, the desire to imitate and absorb, to acquire the grace and elegance and cultural forms of the French aristocracy, remained a fundamental aspiration.⁵⁷

In addition to the aristocratic and proper attitude of Peter the Great's ballet, this art form had two other points of entry into Russian culture. The first was the military—or the connection between ballet and fencing combined with the obvious militaristic training needed to obtain the technical rigor of the art form. To this day, ballet training is characterized by the discipline and regimentation of its learning process and Russian ballets were even known to include full-length battle scenes, putting the militaristic

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Homans, 245.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 246.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 247.

nature of the ballet up on a pedestal.⁵⁸ Secondly, Peter the Great's push towards westernizing Russia included drawing connections between Western ballet and Eastern Orthodoxy. "The Russian Church was (and remains) opulently theatrical: faith has less to do with doctrine than spectacle. It is best seen and heard, rather than read or talked about....It was but a step from these religious and courtly rites to the lavish theatrical productions that would grace the Russian ballet stage"⁵⁹ Once again, it becomes clear how a political leader saw the opportunity to bring movement to the forefront of culture by making connections to already standing values of a particular context.

From that point on, "several foreign ballet masters were invited to Russia, and one of them, the French-born Jean Baptiste Landé, founded the St. Petersburg Ballet School in 1738."⁶⁰ Ballet did not receive official patronage though until Catherine II established "Dictorate of the Imperial Theatres, which had jurisdiction over opera, drama and ballet" in 1766.⁶¹ The popularity of ballet grew in Russia, and during the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russian choreographers and composers took it to new heights. "Marius Petipa's *The Nutcracker*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*, by Petipa and Lev Ivanov, represent classical ballet in its grandest form. The main purpose was to display classical technique — pointe work, high extensions, precision of movement and turn-out (the outward rotation of the legs from the hip)—to the fullest."⁶² Dance sequences were designed to show off the technical strength and aptitude of the dancer. Legs were kicked high, the amount of turns that dancers executed increased and both men and women flew through the air. The classical tutu, which was much shorter and stiffer

⁵⁸ Ibid., 249.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Anderson, 100.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, "A Brief History of Ballet."

than the romantic tutu, was introduced.⁶³ It revealed more of the ballerina's legs and therefore the difficulty of her footwork. Under Petipa's leadership, the entire face of ballet began to shift. For two centuries in Russia, ballet had been primarily French, but Petipa made classical ballet Russian. What really changed was the way ballet became:

entwined with Imperial Russia herself. Serf-dom and autocracy, St. Petersburg and the prestige of foreign culture, hierarchy, order, aristocratic ideals and their ongoing tension with more eastern folk forms: all of these things ran into ballet and made it a quintessentially Russian art.⁶⁴

Ballet in all its grandeur quickly became an integral part of Russian culture and remains so even in a contemporary context. The evolution of the art form from the days of the Italian court, through Europe and all the way to Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes in Russia (although outside the scope of this discussion), all embody rich historical hints of the contextual frameworks, which shaped ballet's form.

Soviet Ballet Survival

Ballet is an art form that has survived even the hardest of times—war, poverty, freezing cold winters and limited resources. Even in the grim post-revolutionary years, there was a deep belief in the arts that burned surprisingly bright, not because of the Soviet yearning for the past imperial days, but because of a cultural understanding of the need for art. Ballet was already deeply engrained into the definition of Russian culture because of the contributions of Peter the Great. One can even get a sense of this Russian pride in their historical ballet roots through a contemporary lens. In the 2014 Winter Olympics, held in Sochi, Russia, ballet was one of the focal points of both the opening

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Homans, 288.

and closing ceremonies. Here, the Bolshoi⁶⁵ and Mariinsky⁶⁶ theatres joined forces to represent ballet and Russia's cultural and artistic heritage and identity on an international stage. "Two of Russia's most famous ballet companies—the Bolshoi and the Mariinsky—performed in a sequence that told the story of the famed Ballets Russes and its founder, Serge Diaghilev. Members of the Bolshoi were distinguished with the color red, while the Mariinsky was bathed in blue."⁶⁷ While watching the event live on television, the technical caliber of the dancers as well as the prominence the art form holds for Russia could be noted. When given the opportunity to display their national values in front of the eyes of the world, they chose to showoff their ballet lineage.⁶⁸ This illustrates the Russian pride linked to ballet, even to this day.

Ballet was such an integral component of the Soviet Union's history that even when the entire nation was turned upside down by revolution, ballet was preserved. Similar to Germany under the grasps of Nazism, the Soviet Union after the revolution where Lenin's Bolshevik Party seized control in November of 1917 (October in Russia),⁶⁹ was a context where art normally would have died along with many people. But for some reason, ballet survived—in fact, it thrived in a creative and progressive way that has had a profound influence on the development of the art form.

⁶⁵ For more information on the history of the Bolshoi Ballet and its establishment, visit <http://www.bolshoi.ru/en/about/hist/history/>.

⁶⁶ For more information on the history of the Mariinsky Theatre and its establishment, visit http://www.mariinsky.ru/en/about/history_theatre/mariinsky_theatre/.

⁶⁷ David Ng, "Sochi Olympics: Closing ceremony features ballet, Valery Gergiev," *Los Angeles Times*, February 24, 2014: <http://articles.latimes.com/2014/feb/24/entertainment/la-et-cm-sochi-olympics-ballet-valery-gergiev-closing-ceremony-20140224>.

⁶⁸ For more information about the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, visit <http://www.examiner.com/slideshow/olympics-closing-ceremony-sochi-russia#slide=3>, or see www.Youtube.com for video coverage of ballet at the opening and closing ceremonies.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Kendall, *Balanchine & the Lost Muse: Revolution & The Making of a Choreographer* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

Ballet, the very symbol of the Soviet upper class and icon of the hated European court, was still supported by the new policies. Although governed by new rules, it is intriguing that ballet was given support while civilians were starving and freezing to death. In many cases, new works were not successfully being created by the Bolshoi and Mariinsky Theatres (at least with approval of the Soviet government). However, ballet still offered an escape from the horrors of revolutionary reality. “The starved, freezing populations of Moscow and Petrograd were flocking to see the same ballets that shortly before had delighted a bejeweled audience.”⁷⁰ The same reasons people were drawn to ballet before the revolution, for entertainment and escape from daily life, transcended the political context and provided the art form with a pedestal to remain on. On this podium, ballet had the opportunity to grow and change, understandably only according to the Soviet cultural agenda. Once again, when looking back through a historical lens, we can see the power of dance in political times of need. Leaders in oppressive societies have been ingenious about utilizing the moving body to enhance culture. Nazi Germany tried to conform the masses through their body culture, and the Soviet Union took an already stylistically unison art form, and preserved it to bring honor to the country as a whole, while spreading political ideology through narrative ballets.

One of the main reasons why ballet was saved after the revolution is because of the emphasis the government saw on education—leaders believed in opera and ballet’s “potential as propaganda tools for shaping their audiences; consciousness, especially given the popular success of opera and ballet.”⁷¹ The Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky, was especially passionate in his supports of the arts, an

⁷⁰ Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

appreciation not shared by all Bolsheviks. As dance scholar Christina Ezrahi, author of *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* argues in her informative book, Lunacharsky endlessly had to defend his thinking on ballet's propaganda potential and hoped that the emotional energy created by the "evocative power" of these propaganda pieces "elevated to the status of common symbols would increase the audience's commitment to the state's project of building socialism and the spectators' loyalty to the regime."⁷² During an address at the Bolshoi on May 12, 1930, Lunacharsky asked, "If it is such a great aesthetic force that it invigorates our audience notwithstanding even its alien content—now what a mighty weapon is it going to be in our hands if we insert into it our content?"⁷³ It was a deliberate and political choice to preserve ballet after the revolution. The potential for the art form to fit a Soviet mold was an exciting political tool for Soviet leaders.

Playing the Political Role

Artists had no choice but to accept the political organization of the Soviet regime. Although long established throughout time, government rules controlled all facets of culture, even ballet. However, what makes the study of movement in the Soviet Union particularly interesting is the embodiment of resiliency among artists. Ezrahi states in her research that:

Artistic repossession can be seen as a form of systematic subversion because it embodies tactics that operate within the system but seek to use the system to promote goals foreign to it. It demonstrates that sometimes constraints could become an enabling factor, inspiring extraordinary creativity to overcome the constraining pressure of circumstances.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid., 29.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

In this sense, I am focusing on the cultivation and metamorphosis of artistic creativity in navigating the Soviet cultural system, rather than the repression of the arts during this time period. In contrast to the Nazi era choreographers I discussed in the last chapter, limitations or perceived restrictions in the arts can inspire even more creativity—“Constraints could acquire enabling power: the more pressure there was on artists, the more creative they had to become to overcome the constraints of the system.”⁷⁵ In other words, the complex relationship of artistic subversion and political-ideological power was one of mutual influence. I am interested in how ballet IS political, but in contexts such as this, ballet was also stronger than politics.

The Success of Spartacus: A Choreographic Paradox

One such example of where ballet appeared stronger than politics is in looking at *Spartacus*—a precious gem of Russian choreography to this day. It is interesting to note that this particular piece was set twice, and failed dramatically both times, prior to the version discussed here found great success. The success had both political approval from the state, as well as approval in the hearts of dancers and audience members across the world. A ballet that was attempted three times, and severely failed the first two, ended up being an iconic emblem of Soviet ballet ideology, while still remaining a symbol of the individual power the artist possesses in trumping politics. A sketch of the plot and discussion of its aesthetical relevance will unfold throughout this next section. “Of all the ballets created during the Soviet period, Yuri Grigorovich’s⁷⁶ *Spartacus*, premiered at the Bolshoi in 1968, came closest to providing the regime with a popular ballet on an

⁷⁵ Ibid., 232.

⁷⁶ To read a brief biography of Yuri Grigorovich, visit http://www.bolshoirussia.com/company/other/choreographer/yuri_grigorovich_chor/.

ideologically sound, educational topic that was also successful with audiences at home and abroad.”⁷⁷

At first glance, this ballet, with its ensemble of leaping soldiers and rebels appears to embody the ideological goals of the Soviet Union. It promotes war, unity, and ultimately, the overthrow of the enemy. But what sets this piece apart from other political works of the time, was Grigorovich’s meticulous choreographic eye that had the power to draw the audience’s attention into the “power of the performance, making the viewer forget about the ballet’s propagandistic subtext.”⁷⁸ In a similar way, the artistic choices made by the performers and their commitment to the creative process, made this ballet more about deep embodiment of the characters in the plot, rather than the overriding political message. In other words, Grigorovich left just enough room in his interpretation of the story and his staging of the ballet for the audience to interpret it as they pleased—a dangerous move in the Soviet Union where people were generally told what to think. His “choreography offered his dancers a text of resistance by allowing them to add their own shades of meaning and interpretation to what could have been little more than an ideologically informed struggle between good and evil.”⁷⁹ This was one of the many reasons why the Bolshoi Ballet’s third attempt at this piece was more successful than the others.

Before success was found with Grigorovich’s *Spartacus* in 1968, Igor Moiseyev experimented with the first production with the Bolshoi in 1958 and Leonid Iakobson in 1962. Despite failures with both of these productions, the Bolshoi seemed obsessed with getting *Spartacus* right. But why? Here, the geopolitical context and the influence on the

⁷⁷ Ezrahi., 202.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 224.

body in the Soviet Union becomes illuminated. “The immediate context of the Bolshoi’s decision to stage the ballet for a third time was highly political: the Kremlin’s ‘court theater’ was preparing for the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution during the 1967-1968 theatrical season and was supposed to respond to renewed calls by the USSR Ministry of Culture for the creation of ballets on contemporary Soviet or historical revolutionary themes.”⁸⁰ What better time to bring ballet to cultural center stage than to have their work showcased at fiftieth anniversary celebration? In addition to the Bolshoi main stage season, since 1962 the company was obligated to also perform works at the Kremlin Place of Congress (KDS). This obliged “performance” space, built for meetings of the Communist Party, “symbolized the Bolshoi’s closeness to political power and the problems that came with that closeness.”⁸¹ With this political center stage also came some technical complications. The KDS was often used for propaganda performances, but it was not built as a theatre and did not have the regular facilities needed to support a ballet company such as storage space for costumes and props, rehearsal space, and enough rooms to hold the large numbers of dancers needed to fill such a large stage.⁸² In addition to the political undertones of the ballet, revisiting *Spartacus*, a familiar work, seemed like a good idea given the technical disadvantages of the KDS. The political powers at the time wanted the pieces shown at KDS to appear to be especially crafted for the Soviet space. In addition to *Spartacus*, Alexander Kholminov’s opera *An Optimistic Tragedy* was also planned for the performance, and leaders stated they “should use the distinctive features of the KDS to a maximum, making them ‘productions of a new type’ precisely two ‘productions of a new type’: the new *Spartacus* would not be a historical

⁸⁰ Ibid., 203.

⁸¹ Ibid., 214.

⁸² Ibid., 215.

chronicle but a romantic legend based on one of the most brilliant episodes of the liberation struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors; ‘romantic zeal and legendariness, though of a different kind.’”⁸³ *Spartacus* was to be a *made-to-order* ballet by the Soviet political agenda.

Although not overtly about contemporary Soviet life, *Spartacus* qualified as a Soviet ballet because of its “score by a Soviet composer and its revolutionary historical plot that could be given contemporary significance by drawing parallels between the oppression of slaves in ancient Rome and the oppression in contemporary—capitalist—countries.”⁸⁴ This scenario is similar to when one might hear people tell a story about “their friend,” when in fact they are trying to tell a story about themselves. The Soviet Union was obviously not narrating their revolution through this ballet, but they were hinting at other situations, in different contexts with similar themes. To stage Aram Khachaturian’s⁸⁵ epic tale of slave uprising against the Roman Empire, was a deliberate and underhanded political move. The Soviet political agenda intended for this piece to elicit parallels between universal revolutionary themes—connecting to ethos throughout time and contexts. To paint a better understanding of what this ballet actually looked like, and still looks like currently in Bolshoi repertoire as it is still active repertoire of the company, here is a brief synopsis of the plot, as described by the Bolshoi today:

Act I—Scene 1: **Invasion.** The military machine of imperial Rome, led by Crassus, wages a cruel campaign of conquest, destroying everything in its path. Among the chained prisoners, who are doomed to slavery, are Spartacus and Phrygia. **Spartacus’ Monologue.** Spartacus is in despair. Born a free man, he is now a slave in chains.

Scene 2: **The Slave Market.** Slave dealers separate the men and women prisoners for

⁸³ Ibid., 216.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 212-213.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 202.

sale to rich Romans. Spartacus is parted from Phrygia. **Phrygia's Monologue.** Phrygia is overcome with grief. She thinks with horror of the terrifying ordeals that lie ahead of her.

Scene 3: **Orgy at Crassus's Palace.** Mimes and courtesans entertain the guests, making fun of Phrygia, Crassus's new slave. Aegina draws Crassus into a frenzied, bacchanalian dance. Drunk with wine and passion, Crassus demands a spectacle. Two gladiators are to fight to death in helmets with closed visors, i.e., without seeing each other. The victor's helmet is removed. It is Spartacus. **Spartacus' Monologue.** Against his will, Spartacus has been forced to murder a fellow man. His despair develops into anger and protest. He will no longer tolerate captivity. He has but one choice of action — to win back his freedom.

Scene 4: **The Gladiators' Barracks.** Spartacus incites the gladiators to revolt. They swear an oath of loyalty to him and, of one accord, break out of the barracks to freedom.

Act II—Scene 5: **The Appian Way.** Having broken out of their captivity and finding themselves on Appian Way, surrounded by shepherds, Spartacus's followers call the latter to join the uprising. Shepherds and populace proclaim Spartacus as their leader.

Spartacus's Monologue. The thought of Phrygia's fate as a slave gives Spartacus no peace. He is haunted by memories of his loved one whom he thinks of day and night.

Scene 6: **Crassus's Villa.** His search for Phrygia leads Spartacus to Crassus's villa. The two lovers are overjoyed at their reunion. But, due to the arrival of a procession of patricians, led by Aegina, they are forced to hide. **Aegina's Monologue.** Aegina has long dreamed of seducing and gaining power over Crassus. Her goal is to win him and thereby gain legal admittance to the world of the Roman nobility.

Scene 7: **Feast at Crassus's Villa.** Crassus celebrates his victories. The patricians sing his praises. The festivities are cut short by an alarming piece of news: Spartacus and his men have all but surrounded the villa/ The panic-stricken guests disperse. Crassus and Aegina are also forced to flee. Spartacus breaks into the villa. **Spartacus' Monologue.** Victory! It elates him and fills him with faith that the uprising will be successful. Victory!

Scene 8: **Spartacus's Victory.** Spartacus's men have taken Crassus prisoner and want to kill him, but Spartacus is not bent on revenge and suggests that they should engage in single-handed combat. Crassus accepts the challenge and suffers defeat: Spartacus knocks the sword out of his hand. Crassus makes ready demonstratively to meet his death, but Spartacus, with a gesture of contempt, lets him go. That all shall know of Crassus's dishonor is punishment enough. The jubilant insurgents praise the victory of Spartacus.

Act III—Scene 9: **Crassus Takes His Revenge.** Crassus is tormented by his disgrace. Fanning his hurt pride, Aegina calls on him to take his revenge. There is only one way forward — death to the insurgents. Crassus summons his legions. Aegina sees him off to battle. **Aegina’s Monologue.** Spartacus is Aegina’s enemy too. The defeat of Crassus will be her downfall. Aegina devises a perfidious plan — she will sew dissension in Spartacus’s encampment.

Scene 10: **Spartacus’s Encampment.** Spartacus and Phrygia are happy to be together. But suddenly his military commanders bring the news that Crassus is on the move with a large army. Spartacus decides to give battle but, overcome by cowardice, some of his warriors desert their leader.

Scene 11: **Dissension.** Aegina infiltrates the ranks of the traitors who, though they have abandoned Spartacus, might still be persuaded to go with him. Together with the courtesans she seduces the men with wine and erotic dances and, as a result, they put all caution to the winds. Having lured the traitors into a trap, Aegina hands them over to Crassus. **Spartacus’s Monologue.** Crassus is consumed by the wish for revenge. Spartacus shall pay with his death for the humiliation that he, Crassus, was forced to undergo.

Scene 12: **The Last Battle.** Spartacus’s forces are surrounded by the Roman legions. Spartacus’s devoted friends perish in unequal combat. Spartacus fights on fearlessly right up to the bitter end but, closing in on the wounded hero, the Roman soldiers crucify him on their spears.

Requiem. Phrygia retrieves Spartacus’s body from the battle field. She mourns her beloved, her grief is inconsolable. Raising her arms skywards, Phrygia appeals to the heavens that the memory of Spartacus live forever..⁸⁶

Spartacus is a story of love, war, resiliency, revenge and defeat that has transcended the oppressive context of the Soviet Union and is still performed and beloved by audiences around the world today. How did Grigorovich take Khachaturian’s epic war tale and find an appropriate balance between the Soviet militaristic spirit and a sense of humanness in the characterization of the dancers? As Grigorovich began to create the ballet “with his four leading dancers, meeting of these unique artistic talents led to an

⁸⁶ Bolshoi, “Repertoire/Aram Khachaturyan Spartacus, Ballet in three acts, Synopsis,” <http://www.bolshoi.ru/en/performances/47/libretto/>.

extraordinary process of mutual inspiration...a collaboration [that] developed a dynamic that apparently transcended any considerations of the work's political significance.”⁸⁷ I am not implying that the geopolitical context was shed from the creative process of this ballet, because the moving body is and always will be a reflection of the context in which it functions. But rather, it is here that we see choreography as resistance to the geopolitical factors that appear to overwhelm a given context.

In addition to the dancers' creative fulfillment throughout the choreographic process, “the ballet's creation took place primarily at the personal level of choreographer and dancer, irrespective of the ideological tasks the ballet was supposed to fulfill.”⁸⁸ The very nature of artistic creation made art such a threat for a regime seeking to control the minds and movements of its citizens. Generally speaking, art allows for “the meaning...[to be] eternally fluid and open to interpretation by the individual”⁸⁹ and this is where Grigorovich's choreography was brilliant in his coaching of the plot. His dancers not only thoroughly researched their characters, but Grigorovich encouraged them to get into the minds and bodies of the people they were portraying.

For example, the anti-hero, Crassus, danced by Maris Liepa, appeared at first glance to be reminiscent of the goose step marching of Nazism, but his preparation for the role went much deeper than such political insinuations. In his personal memoirs, he writes:

“What was the patrician Crassus like?...What were ancient Rome, its famous military leaders, commanders, victors like? What were the culture, art, ways of life of this era? I have to confess that these questions troubled me already in 1962, when in the same Bolshoi Theater I performed the role of Spartacus in Leonid Iakobson's production. But then I was younger, and I didn't dance in the first cast. I obediently followed the

⁸⁷ Ezrahi, 220.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 233.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 224.

traditional line: everything Spartacus does is right, wise and fair. And the Roman empire is an evil that has to be destroyed. But now my hero had to live in this Rome, defend it, be flesh of its flesh.”⁹⁰

Notably, the evolution of Crassus’ character over time represents a depth of choreographic processing unprecedented in the other stagings of *Spartacus*. “Instead of sticking to an ideologically deterministic interpretation of Crassus...his interpretation grew in complexity, and he introduced different colors to his reading.”⁹¹ These layers of characterization, enabled by Grigorovich’s choreographic process ultimately created room for interpretation of the ballet by audience members. This *made-to-order* ballet appeared to fulfill the political agenda, yet the depth and shading of its characters exemplified the artists’ capacity of reflective thinking and individuality.

There is a duality here in what movement appears to elicit and what defined larger intent, which may seem similar to my discussion of Nazi movement choirs. The intention of the choreographer and valuing of the individual was the basis for both of these movement practices—*Spartacus* and movement choirs. Yet, from an outside perspective, it appears that both are examples of political propaganda and conformity because to the spectator, the body is conforming to the geopolitical pressures. This complex layering of movement as resistance to geopolitics reminds us of the power the audience has in interpreting the art of movement. Just as context influences how the body physically moves, the context of the viewer influences how they perceive it. Perhaps this is why *Spartacus* was so successful—“The inherent vagueness of [the piece] and the ultimate universality of its main theme—a struggle for freedom—ensured that the ballet could adapt to changing political circumstances, whether this meant the success of the ballet in

⁹⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the capitalist West or its survival at home after the collapse of communism.”⁹² After all, the definition of oppression and who portrays good and evil depends on the ideological perspective of the audience member.

The Story Reshapes

When discussing audience perception, although outside the scope of this research, it is interesting to question the changes in the style of ballet before and after the revolution. Did the ballet technique visually appear different? If the moving body is like a historical documentation of the context in which it dances through, how did the politics leave their mark on the ballet? I believe the reshaping of the story within the ballet is telling of the geopolitical context as well. In addition to *Spartacus*, there was a plethora of other ballet repertoire at the hands of Soviet ballet companies, some of which were forbidden to be performed because of their potentially anti-Soviet undertones. Popular ballet classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* all had been performed in and out of the Soviet Union and performed by ballet companies, but *how* these classics were produced differed depending upon the context.

A brief glance into the history of ballet hints at the notion that art “had indeed been censored”⁹³ to fulfill a political agenda. For example, in another classic ballet work, *Giselle*, changes were made to make the production appropriate for a worker’s state. Dance scholar Mary Grace Swift writes in her book, *The Art of The Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, that:

Giselle’s Hilarion, a man of the people, is not as villainous as his Western counterparts because ‘the people’ should not be portrayed in a sinister manner on a Soviet stage. Along with the old classics, numerous new ballets produced during the years of

⁹² Ibid., 228.

⁹³ Mary Grace Swift, *The Art of The Dance In The U.S.S.R.* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 285.

Soviet power have dealt with blatantly propagandistic themes, ranging from the subtle to the absurd.”⁹⁴

At the crux of these propagandist goals, Frederick Barghoorn, a specialist in Soviet methods of propaganda, points out the Soviet Union’s special aim in picturing the United States as a “decadent civilization which wishes to corrupt all the workers of the world—in contrast to the U.S.S.R., the champion of folk cultures and patron of all fine art throughout the world.”⁹⁵ In several instances, these ideals are mirrored throughout Soviet ballet.

Similarly, because of the grand legacy of ballet in Russia prior to the revolution, there were a number of works that already existed in addition to the new ballets being made under the Soviet ideology. Swift writes, “The unstable period after the revolution was a time of fascinating experimentation in all arts, and ballet also felt this invigorating release of the creative spirit”⁹⁶ but this did not last for long due to the inevitable costs of new productions. She goes on to explain that “Faced with the cost of making the whole nation literate, Lunacharsky and Lenin felt they could justify the expense involved in preserving Russia’s monuments of the past (in stone and in dance) better than they could excuse the expense of mounting some of the startling new theatrical works which innovators wanted to produce. Thus many of the older classics were preserved,” with appropriate, Soviet edits, of course.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 288.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 288-289.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 287.

In this way, Soviet ballets were given classifications in a “Repertoire Index,”⁹⁷ from 1929, noting the ideological appropriateness of each production. The ratings given and a list of ballets on the index are included below:

- A** The best works ideologically; universally recommended for presentation.
- B** Ideologically acceptable and permitted without hindrance.
- C** Not completely supportable ideologically but not forbidden. Rehearsal for examination purposes required.
- D** Ideologically acceptable but usually primitive in content, form, and language. Timed to a special political campaign or historical date.
- E** Forbidden.

(Alphabetized by English spelling of composer’s name)

Title of Ballet	Composer	Rating
<i>Le Corsaire</i>	Adam	C
<i>Giselle</i>	Adam	C
<i>Egyptian Nights</i>	Arenskii	C
<i>The Poor Bride</i>	Armsheimer	C
<i>Fairy Doll</i>	Bayer	E
<i>Smerch</i>	Beer	E
<i>Chopiniana (Les Sylphides)</i>	Chopin	A
<i>Coppélia</i>	Delibes	B
<i>Bolsheviks</i>	Deshevov	B
<i>Les Millions d’Arlequin</i>	Drigo	B

⁹⁷ Ibid., 301-303.

<i>The Magic Flute</i>	Drigo	B
<i>Cinderella</i>	Fittinghof-Schell	C
<i>Raymonda</i>	Glazunov	B
<i>The Seasons</i>	Glazunov	B
<i>The Trials of Damis</i>	Glazunov	B
<i>Chrysis</i>	Gliere	C
<i>Red Poppy</i>	Gliere	A
<i>Jota Aragonesa</i>	Glinka	B
<i>Walpurgis Night</i>	Gounod	B
<i>The Ice Maiden</i>	Grieg	C
<i>The Vestal Virgin</i>	Ivanov	E
<i>Svetlana</i>	Klenovsky	C
<i>Danta</i>	Konius	C
<i>Serf Ballerina</i>	Korchmarev	C
<i>Magic Mirror</i>	Koroshchenko	C
<i>The Swan</i>	Lecocq	C
<i>Le Carillon</i>	Massenet	C
<i>Camargo</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Don Quixote</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Fiametta</i>	Minkus	C
<i>La Bayadère</i>	Minkus	C
<i>La Fille des Neiges</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Le Papillion</i>	Minkus	C

<i>Les Bandits</i>	Minkus	C
<i>The Little Goldfish</i>	Minkus	C
<i>The Magic Pills</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Roxana</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Zoraya</i>	Minkus	C
<i>Number O, or the Wreck of the Council of Five</i>	Nikulin	E
<i>Chout</i>	Prokofiev	A
<i>Le Pas d'Acier</i>	Prokofiev	A
<i>Esmeralda</i>	Pugni	C
<i>Katerina</i>	Pugni	C
<i>La Fille du Pharaon</i>	Pugni	C
<i>Tsar Kandavl (Le Roi Candaule)</i>	Pugni	C
<i>The Little Humpbacked Horse</i>	Pugni	C
<i>The Pearl of Seville</i>	Pugni	C
<i>Vain Precautions</i>	Pugni	C
<i>Daphnis et Chloé</i>	Ravel	B
<i>Capriccio Espagnole</i>	Rimsky-Korsakov	A
<i>Le Coq d'Or</i>	Rimsky-Korsakov	A
<i>Mlada</i>	Rimsky-Korsakov	C
<i>La Vigne</i>	Rubinstein	C
<i>Teolinda</i>	Schubert	B
<i>Carnaval</i>	Schumann	A
<i>La Sylphide</i>	Schumann	A

<i>Firebird</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>Les Noces</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>L'Histoire du Soldat</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>Petrushka</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>Pulchinella</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>Tale of a Fox (Renard)</i>	Stravinsky	A
<i>Nutcracker</i>	Tchaikovsky	B
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	Tchaikovsky	B
<i>Swan Lake</i>	Tchaikovsky	B
<i>The Masque of Red Death</i>	Tcherepnine	C
<i>Gypsies</i>	Thomas	B
<i>Joseph the Beautiful</i>	Vasilenko	B

As a reading of this chart reveals, popular ballet classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, all rated around a B. Perhaps this is why their legacy of ballet brilliance still resonates throughout the world today, because of the political popularization of these works even in times of Soviet oppression. *Spartacus*, is not on this list because the ballet was not yet produced at the time this list was published in 1929. I speculate this ballet would have also received an A or B rating because of its overtly political motifs, despite its individualistic undertones in artistry. It is also interesting to note the trends in ranking based on composer. It is no coincidence that ballets which were performed to music composed by Soviet artists such as Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky consistently were ranked in the A and B range. It becomes apparent

through this index how Soviet leaders used their political power to promote who and what they wanted preserved throughout time. Through this process, whether they were conscious of it or not, the Soviet political powers were altering the face of ballet as an art form by meticulously promoting and preserving only what they deemed best—and many of these works are still popular today around the world because of the support they received from an oppressive government.

The narratives behind the moving bodies are what ultimately were at the hands of Soviet reshaping. How these ballets were restructured, even with the smallest edits, reveals a great deal about the Soviet scheme to use ballet as propaganda. The classic works continue, but the story is consistently reshaped because the dancing body is inherently remolded to new contexts.

Artist as Resistance: Leonid Iakobson

Another outstanding example of the strength of dance in the Soviet Union is in an examination of Soviet choreographer, Leonid Iakobson⁹⁸, and his work. While it was known that the Soviet leadership had the final say in what was considered appropriate art, Iakobson chose to challenge this, rather than be intimidated by its censors. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, he was the second choreographer to attempt the creation of *Spartacus*, but his production did not pass the test—several of his other works did though.

In Janice Ross' new book just published this year, *Like A Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia*, she explains Iakobson:

⁹⁸ There are multiple spellings of his Russian name. For the purposes of this research, I refer to him as Leonid Iakobson, but other scholars may cite him as Leonid Yakobson.

offered dancers and audiences an experience quite different from the prevailing Soviet aesthetic. He was unwilling to bow completely to the state's limitations on his artistic opportunities, so despite his fraught relations with his political overseers, his ballets retained early-twentieth-century movement innovations such as turned in and parallel-foot positions, oddly angled lifts, and eroticized content, all of which were anathema to prevailing Soviet ballet orthodoxy.⁹⁹

With occasional backlash from the Soviet government, Iakobson actually got off quite easily. While many of his contemporaries fled the oppressive artistic restraints of the Soviet Union, like his young disciples Natalia Makarova and Mikhail Baryshnikov,¹⁰⁰ Iakobson remained and continued to challenge the status quo, and actually thrived by Soviet standards (which according to *Washington Post* dance critic Sarah Kaufman, means he got to live¹⁰¹). Not only was Iakobson an artistic troublemaker because of his modernist aesthetic, but he was also Jewish—and he enjoyed making ballets that poked fun at Nazism and other highly charged political pieces.

Like the strong choreographic choices made in Grigorovich's version of *Spartacus* that helped it pass under the Soviet radar, Iakobson was meticulous in earning an overall blessing from the government. But how did he do it? Sarah Kaufman writes in her book review of *Like a Bomb Going Off* that, “good old capitalistic supply and demand”¹⁰² helped him avoid the gulag. In other words, because the Soviet Union utilized ballet as a main propaganda tool, there was a constant need for more dances to be made, and Iakobson was good at making it appear that he was following the rules. As a choreographer, he was brilliant at hiding his defiance in the dances. “He created an

⁹⁹ Janice Ross, *Like A Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015), Inside cover fold.

¹⁰⁰ Sarah Kaufman, review of *Like A Bomb Going Off: Leonid Yakobson and Ballet as Resistance in Soviet Russia* by Janice Ross, *The Washington Post*, February 26, 2015. http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/like-a-bomb-going-off-by-janice-ross/2015/02/26/0e443088-bc5c-11e4-bdfa-b8e8f594e6ee_story.html, 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

ascetic anti-swan, as severe and sharp as black-inked calligraphy, in response to ‘The Dying Swan,’ the iconic solo by another Russian choreographer, Michel Fokine, in which an angelic creature in white melts prettily to the floor in quiet acceptance of her fate.’¹⁰³ Kaufman goes on to describe how Iakobson’s swan, “with the same music by Saint-Saens, wears black, and the ballerina creates bent angles with her body, twists her arms and crumples awkwardly. The solo feels ‘autobiographical in its quality of suffering,’ Ross writes.”¹⁰⁴ With this caliber of artistic repossession, it becomes apparent that some anguish still takes place. As an artist, it can certainly be frustrating having limitations applied to your vision, but Iakobson is an excellent example of a Soviet artist who made it work.

I conclude this chapter on Soviet ballet with this discussion of Iakobson because I feel he fits into all of the main ideas expressed throughout. Like many Soviet works that earned official approval in this context, his ballets are “cheerfully benign on the surface. But with their ‘aggressive aesthetic,’ they also challenge the status quo with themes about being an outsider and a survivor.”¹⁰⁵ There is no doubt Iakobson was a survivor of the Soviet context, and an outsider who learned to play the game well. At the end of Kaufman’s book review she shares an example of the daring bravery Iakobson demonstrated in his relationship to the government. Although several of his ballets towards the end of his career were censored such as his “Jewish Wedding,” renamed “Wedding Cortege”¹⁰⁶ by authorities, Iakobson stayed true to his fiery spirit, as demonstrated in one of his final interactions with the government:

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

At one point, they forbade his troupe to leave Leningrad. Iakobson, ailing and near death, took his protest to the top. The resulting exchange is priceless:

Iakobson: "I want the entire Soviet Union to be exposed to my art."

Minister of Culture: "There is no such thing as your art. Everything we have is our Soviet art."

Undeterred, Iakobson invited the minister to a performance to judge for herself. She sent an emissary, who liked it so much that the touring ban was lifted.¹⁰⁷

In a culture designed to choreograph even the smallest details of dance, Iakobson continued to exemplify the true essence of what it means to be an artist by choreographing his very place and legacy within the context.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Chapter 3: My Motion into Meaning—Choreographic Insights

In a study about context, it only feels appropriate to share my own personal history and the context that has shaped who I am as a dancer, choreographer, researcher, writer, and human. As a dancer and choreographer, I not only utilize my body as an instrument and muse, but I have learned what it means to value the beauty of movement in all forms and understand the history that each of these movements carry beneath the skin and bones. Dance has brought me in touch with my mind, body and soul and in the process has enlightened how I view the diverse world around me. I do not only create dances to entertain audiences, nor do I perform on stage just to move through the space. I dance to leave my mark, spread a message and make people think. Dance, although fleeting in nature, is an excellent means through which to spark emotion and thought. Similarly, I value keeping the arts, specifically dance, accessible to everyone. We all have a moving body in common, all the way down to our hearts keeping a steady beat, and dance is the common language we have to unite us. I am a dancer, choreographer, educator, researcher, and advocate of dance. This art form has trained me to move with poise and to juggle many responsibilities and roles—in a sense, dancing through difficult situations with grace.

I am a 25-year-old, Caucasian, female, with blonde hair and green eyes. Standing at 5'4, my petite stature does not deflect my gusto. The context that has shaped my creative work is important to consider while researching the applications of context on the moving body. I come from a ballet and theater background, but have learned a lot in recent years about modern dance and movement improvisation.

Many choreographers and artists from various dance styles have inspired me. George Balanchine's attention to lines and rhythmic dynamics has always been of interest to me. All of my teachers and choreographic collaborators here at The College at Brockport, State University of New York had an impact on how I think and create work. In terms of modern dance influences, I have recently explored a lot of release technique, but have also studied May O'Donnell (with Nancy Lushington and Diane Nowicki), Rudolph Von Laban (especially relevant to this study because of the context of Nazi Germany) and Irmgard Bartenieff. At Brockport, I have extensively studied modern dance techniques with Heather Acomb, William "Bill" Evans, James Hansen, Mariah Maloney, Stevie Oakes, Suzanne Oliver, and Karl Rogers. My ballet influences include Jonette Lancos, Kathleen Cairns-Scholz (American Dance Theatre of Long Island), Vanessa Van Wormer, and Denise Brakefield. The list of contemporary choreographers that inspire me would be too long to include here, but during my time at Brockport, I have learned a lot about choreography from my technique teachers as well as dance faculty Maura Keefe, Juanita Suarez, and Kevin Warner. I am inspired by the people I live and work around—I get the urge to create from everyday life and I am curious about the human side of movement—who people are and what their bodies hold.

Much of my written research centers on this idea of context and the importance of considering geography and politics when looking at what dance aesthetic is appreciated by a given society. By analyzing dance under the two oppressive regimes discussed throughout this thesis, I have been able to extrapolate themes of context and aesthetic still apparent in dance today in the United States. Dance and movement play a critical role in history because the body has always been a central player in the actions, both political

and artistic, of the people. My research places the moving body as a historical resource that should be considered when looking at what happened in the past. The movements of people can tell us a lot about any given time period.

In my thesis research, I have been focusing on the physical movements choreographed within political movements and how they compare to what has happened to concert dance within oppressive societies. I track the influences of these choreographic aesthetics generated in times of oppression and see where they have an impact in the dance world as we know it today in America. As discussed earlier, the impact of these geopolitical contexts on movement of the body has trickled down the lineage of concert dance and even today, 85 years later, they leave trace marks on dancing bodies across the world.

Throughout the last three years, while my mind was wrapping itself around these complex concepts, I found the study of context was also influencing how I liked to dance and how I was inspired to choreograph on other movers. But how could I integrate my knowledge of the contexts of these oppressive regimes without making a dance that looked like goose-stepping, Hitler-saluting ballerinas? My thesis research includes so much more than the specific contexts that shaped my writing. I became interested in the histories that our bodies are currently holding onto and I explored how individual history influences the movement aesthetic of a group. My window into these concepts, as described earlier, was initially inspired by Susan Leigh Foster's acknowledgement of how "to choreograph history, then, is first to grant that history is made by bodies, in moving and in documenting their movements, in learning about past movement,

continually conspire together and are conspired against.”¹⁰⁸ This work, both written and choreographic, places the moving body as a historical resource that should be considered when looking at what happened in the past. The movements of people can tell us a lot about any given time period.

In the dance making process, I am drawn to musicality and rhythm as well as a deliberate and careful use of space. Currently, I am captivated by the careful layering of details in dance making. This attention to detail ultimately directs the audience’s eye, creating a methodical, yet specific viewing experience for onlookers.

111, Go! (MFA Thesis)

This piece I am sharing with first is the choreographic portion of my MFA thesis.¹⁰⁹ It is a contemporary ballet for 10 dancers¹¹⁰ and it was inspired by the personal histories that each person brought to the table. In the creation process, we spent time exploring what their bodies were holding onto and how that affected the way they liked to move. In addition, as a cast, we did extensive journaling, where we identified words that were at the “heart” of who we were and then looked for similarities and differences between people. Where there was overlap between dancers’ personal contexts in the words that they chose, I experimented with allowing their movement to become unison. Just as in life we sometimes find people with whom we share commonalities, I became captivated with illuminating these shared traits between dancers. Juxtaposing these moments of unison with the individuality and personality of each mover became a major

¹⁰⁸ Foster, 299.

¹⁰⁹ Allison Bohman, “111, Go!” MFA Thesis, Private Channel. Posted May 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkFzs-XcivQ>.

¹¹⁰ This piece was originally performed by Amy Cookfair, Alexis Cordella, Lynea D’Aprix, Zachary Frazee, Maleda Funk, Emily K. Gerst, Samantha Johnson, Chloe London, Maura Quinn and Nicole Woodcock at The College at Brockport, State University of New York in DANCE/Hartwell (October 2014). Costume design by Emma Scholl; Lighting design by Benoit Beauchamp; Filmography by Gregory Ketchum.

focus of the piece. Ultimately, this project became an exploration of what happens when self-expression, conformity, and the classicism of Bach collide.

The choice to set this work to J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major (Parts I and III)* was deliberate and in line with the rest of the process. This third concerto, of Bach's preeminent six *Brandenburg Concerto's*, was created for ten instruments—three violins, three violas, three cellos (adding up to three instrumental sections), atop the continuo bass, or harpsichord. Not only was I drawn to the complex rhythms in the first and third section of the segment, but it also seemed that this piece of music blended the exact choreographic concepts I was aiming for in movement. Ten dancers, and ten instruments—all exploring their individual virtuosity, passing in and out of group sections, while blending in and out of the ensemble as a whole. As one of the program notes written by James M. Keller from the San Francisco Symphony summarizes:

The violinists and violists...perform in unison, as a section, but in the contrasting episodes they go their separate ways as three soloists. The opening Allegro offers a magnificent example of what might be called “musical choreography,” in which the musical material is tossed from one instrumental group to another. In performance, the listener inevitably becomes a rapt viewer as well, watching the themes pass from violins to violas to cellos like a sonic volleyball.¹¹¹

These musical metaphors mirror the choreographic goals I had in mind. You can see the movement themes pass from duet to trio and then come together in total ensemble unison.

The closing movement is also an allegro and I was inspired by the high-spirited energy evoked from the sound and pace that seems to push the dancers to their physical limits.

¹¹¹ James M. Keller, “Brandenburg Concertos No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048 No. 2 in F major, BWV 1047 No. 6 in B-flat major, BWV 1051,” *San Francisco Symphony* (April 2013): <http://www.sfsymphony.org/Watch-Listen-Learn/Read-Program-Notes/Program-Notes/BACH-Brandenburg-Concertos-No-3-in-G-major,-BWV-10.aspx>.

The dance, which started off as ten solos, evolved into group work as I manipulated commonalities in their solo work: movement affinities, personal values, and general characteristics of personality. Based on overlap of these individual contexts, I then arranged the dancers into duets, trios and larger groups based on common traits, which yielded moments of unison. I was deeply invested in the personal body history that each dancer brought to the table and juxtaposed that history with movement that embodied what we all had in common to create dynamic movement phrases.

The title of this piece, *III, Go!* was also specific to the context of this particular group of dancers. In our rehearsal ritual warm-up, the “go-circle,” the dancers exchanged places in a circle as fast as they could by maintaining direct eye contact and an easy flow throughout the body, in one-minute. I felt it was important to maintain some type of a rehearsal ritual to bring the cast closer with each other, solidifying the specificity of their special context. As choreographer Jan Erkert writes in *Harnessing the Wind: The Art of Teaching Modern Dance*, “Rituals provide a repeatable routine to connect body, mind, and spirit. Whether elaborate or simple, rituals are a part of every culture and art form.”¹¹² I timed these “go-circles” at each rehearsal, and by the opening of the performance in October 2014, the dancers had made it to 111 exchanges in one-minute, more than doubling where they were at the first rehearsal in August 2014. Not only was this a fun, community building warm-up exercise, but also it became critical to the context of this cast, and ultimately the final product.

With this piece, I wanted to make the space move—and I believe it does, both onstage and offstage. It is worth noting that this piece was originally performed on a

¹¹² Jan Erkert, “Centering Minds: Rituals,” *Harnessing the Wind: The Art of Teaching Modern Dance* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2003), 39.

proscenium stage, which means there were wings and there were moments when the dancers would completely disappear backstage, becoming invisible from the audience. In the most recent performance on Scholar's Day 2015 at The College at Brockport: SUNY on April 8, 2015, we changed our performance context slightly—the piece was performed with nine dancers. At this performance,¹¹³ it was also danced in a space with audience on three sides, without wings. The space was much larger here than the original performance, providing an exciting opportunity to share the high-energy exchanges that typically take place backstage. This is a physically rigorous piece, and because of the change in performance context, we revealed a little bit of the choreographed chaos that was taking place in the wings as well. Similar to the impetus needed to be successful in the “go-circle,” the dancers on the sides of the stage need to be ready to “go” at any moment.

Contemporary Post-Modern Commentary (Informed by MFA Thesis)

In this satirical solo,¹¹⁴ I experimented with what it would look like to change the context of a typical post-modern dance. Although not part of my choreographic MFA thesis, it is related because the concept was spawned from my thesis research on context. I first asked myself, what is post-modern dance? In my time at Brockport, I have heard this style be referred to as many different things—*modern, contemporary and post-modern*. What did all of these words mean and why do we all define them differently? What are the elements we commonly see in this genre of movement? Because of the stereotypical minimalistic nature of the art form, I thought it would be interesting to

¹¹³ Allison Bohman, “Scholar's Day 2015.” MFA Thesis, Private Channel. Posted May 1, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ereeN6ExvZo>.

¹¹⁴ Allison Bohman, “Contemporary Post-Modern Commentary.” MFA Thesis, Private Channel. Posted May 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M797inPvyo>.

transpose the context of the dance into a more sports-like spectacle arena.

I first created a solo, based purely on movement and tried to include some of what I identified as basic elements of post-modern choreography—repetition, theme and variation, the use of gesture, the “under curve” and fall and rebound. I then layered this solo with a sound score of sports-like commentary (similar to what happens when you watch an ice-skating routine). The irony in this piece is that I brought a “larger than life” attention to the minimalist nature of post-modern dance. In doing so, I think I was successful in speaking to a variety of different audience members. People with dance training appreciated the humor of the concept, while non-dancers similarly connected with the wit and excitement that was familiar to them in other movement forms, such as sports. On a more analytical level, because my own voice was one of the commentators on the sound score, along with Zachary Frazee, there was a certain level of self-criticism that could have been interpreted from the piece. As I danced, my own voice commented on my performance; exemplifying the critical analysis that is stereotypically and historically associated with dance.

This piece was related to my research in that I was playing with how context influences how dance is perceived in any given location. It also made dance more accessible to the audience because the commentary literally told people what to look for, and in a sense, educated the audience about some of the fundamentals of post-modern dance.

I would like to note how my MFA thesis, *III, Go!* was more related to my research on movement in Nazi Germany because I was initially interested in the individuality of the dancer against the unison, more codified movements, of the whole group—

reminiscent of what actually happened in Laban's movement choirs. Whereas, my solo explorations in *Contemporary Post-Modern Commentary* felt more in line with my research on dance in the Soviet Union. This is because I have been highly involved in the dance culture at The College at Brockport, State University of New York for the last three years—and like any context, over time, culture begins to leave its imprint. As students at Brockport, we all train with the same teachers and therefore, in time, begin to move in similar ways and value related choreographic choices. Not to mention, dances that fit under this so-called “Brockport” movement aesthetic, fitting the values and mission of the department as a whole, often times were selected to be in dance concerts. I was beginning to find the “Brockport” movement aesthetic (a style common amongst student choreographed works at the college) was infiltrating my own choreographic endeavors. Conscious of this, I created the movement of this solo with all of those ideals in mind—no music (check), use of repetition (check), theme and variation (check), exploration of something personal to me (check)—and then after receiving ample feedback from faculty and colleagues, decided to change the context completely and add the commentary layer. This relates to my study on the Soviet Union because I was experimenting with trying to follow a set of perceived ideals put in place by a culture, my context as a graduate student at Brockport. The addition of the commentary layer was in the back of my mind the whole time, but the exploration of trying to fit the perceived mold of the type of dance I *should* be making for a graduate level choreography class, felt related to my written MFA thesis research.

Just like Iakobson, Grigorovich, and many other Soviet ballet choreographers managed to make work with multiple layers, this solo appeared satirical and entertaining

on the surface, but was truly a much more in depth exploration of personal interests. With this said, in no way did I find my experiences at The College at Brockport to be oppressive and it feels odd to even draw these extreme parallels. My time at Brockport has been nothing but a joyful and enlightening three years of study—but in my context as a dancer and choreographer, my written research has certainly influenced my choreographic interests, and these two pieces symbolize the connections between my dancing and my writing.

Conclusion

It becomes clear how “a society rehearses not just art practices but many different often collective experiences whose rules differ according to space, ranging from military marches to a casual stroll through a shopping center.”¹¹⁵ Nowadays, college students meander around campuses with their noses buried in their cell phones, checking their Instagram feeds by the minute. One might even take note of the culture of coolness embodied by people at a trendy music concert or out at a club. Culture choreographs how we move everywhere, whether we are talking about Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union or colleagues gathered around the water cooler at the office. Thinking about dance in this way broadens the definition of movement in time and space and generates more possibilities for understanding the importance of movement within context.

Let us return for a moment to the 1929 Repertory Index¹¹⁶ referenced in Chapter 2:

- A** The best works ideologically; universally recommended for presentation.
- B** Ideologically acceptable and permitted without hindrance.
- C** Not completely supportable ideologically but not forbidden. Rehearsal for examination purposes required.
- D** Ideologically acceptable but usually primitive in content, form, and language. Timed to a special political campaign or historical date.
- E** Forbidden.

If we use this index, stripped from the context it was created in and apply it to other settings, the importance of context becomes illuminated in understanding how

¹¹⁵ Pohlig, 2.

¹¹⁶ Swift, 301-303.

movements are interpreted. Taking the Hitler salute as an example, in the context of Nazi Germany, as discussed throughout this analysis, I believe this movement would receive an A—it is the essence of Nazi ideology and the government strongly recommended it for public presentation. What if we transport this movement into a new context though, like The United States of America in 2015? The Hitler salute would certainly receive a rating of E, as it is forbidden here because of the ideological values it implies. A new context still imbues the movement with a sensitivity to what defined it in its framework of creation and in its historical location. Marching parades in the context of Nazi Germany would also receive a rating of A because they were recommended for presentation and they embodied Nazi ideological values. In changing the context and transplanting marching parades into the United States today, I feel they would receive a B. One does not see marching parades often, but they still exist and there is a great deal of pride and respect associated with soldiers marching in public. They are not forced upon the context, but by no means are they censored. Lastly, considering Laban's movement choirs in the context of Nazi Germany, I believe at first they would have received a rating of C, and then towards the end of Laban's career in Germany, a D. Nazi officials, although supportive of Laban's Nazi alignment in dance making at first, grew to doubt him towards the end, before Laban fled the country. It becomes apparent how even the slightest change in context, the progression of only several years in politically charged times, can alter how a movement is understood.

Because this index was discussed in the chapter on the Soviet Union, I will not speculate on any more ratings of Soviet ballets; however, I would like to apply these ratings to my own choreographic processes. I believe that in the context of The College

at Brockport, The State University of New York, my MFA thesis *III, Go!*, would receive a rating of B because it was able to be presented without hindrance and I received ample support from the Department of Dance. My solo, *Contemporary Post-Modern Commentary*, probably would have received a rating of C because although it was permitted to be performed in a dance concert, it did not completely support the traditional ideology, yet it was not forbidden. If I transport both of these works onto the concert stages of either the contexts of Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, I believe my choreography would receive a rating of D—a grade not often given because of its vagueness. I believe both geopolitical contexts would not see much purpose to my dance making and therefore would not care to promote it or forbid it. The movements in these contexts do not appear to be overtly political or serving of their ideologies and therefore most likely would be labeled as primitive in content, form and language. Perhaps they would consider these works for particular historical dates or political campaigns as just mere entertainment.

Through this research process, I have drawn conclusions that I did not expect to make. The studies of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are similar; however, they do not arrive upon the same conclusions as I first thought they might. In my observations, I feel that the context of Nazi Germany proved to be stronger than the artistic intent of German modern dancers and citizens in general. Context ultimately overpowered individual intent. This is a time period marked by a body culture that is known to this day in America because of the Hitler salute and military marching parades—these are images that stick in our heads even today, and we are able to apply an understanding of these movement motifs to a contemporary context. The meaning behind such movements

remain the same today, as they did in Nazi Germany. Even Laban's movement choirs, although as discussed earlier had different motives underneath the sheer mass of moving bodies in space, were overwhelmed by the oppressive context. In this sense, to put the motions of Nazi Germany into meaning we must acknowledge that this was a context that suppressed all.

On the other hand, in my studies of the Soviet Union, I feel there were more nuances in the oppression and control over the arts. Artists still found ways to pursue their personal interests and sometimes this was overlooked by the powers that be for extenuating reasons. I believe artistic intent proved to be stronger than the oppression in the context of the Soviet Union and we sense this in a contemporary context in that many of the ballets favored in the Soviet context are still beloved by audiences today throughout the world. We are able to understand these ballets in new contexts, and the themes have transcended the oppressive regime that shaped them. To put the motions of the Soviet Union into meaning, we must look below the surface of what the ballet appears to be on the outside and consider the artist's voice. In this context, artistic repossession proved to be stronger than I noted in Nazi Germany. Why then does it appear that choreography and the artist trump ideology in this context? Is this because of the already conformist nature of ballet as an art form? Although outside the scope of this analysis, it is an appealing question to consider onto new research, in a new context.

These unexpected differences in conclusions between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union prove that context is in fact, even more important than I originally had thought. Not all oppressive societies will have the same experience. But there is an overwhelming similarity here in movement practices within the political movements.

Both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union utilized the body in a manipulative, cunning, and propagandist manner. These geopolitical contexts are outstanding examples of how culture was successful in not only choreographing bodies in space, but also forcing these bodies to perform political ideals. Susan Leigh Foster explains in her article,

Choreographies of Gender, that:

choreography resonates with cultural values concerning bodily, individual, and social identities, whereas performance focuses on the skill necessary to represent those identities. Choreography presents a structuring of deep and enduring cultural values that replicates similar sets of values elaborated in other cultural practices, whereas performance emphasizes the idiosyncratic interpretation of those values.¹¹⁷

The dangerous part of these dances and movements, choreographed within the oppressive regimes discussed, is that they were successful in *both* choreography and forcing performance. Not only did officials in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union “choreograph” what they wanted the cultures to look like, but they also infiltrated so deeply that the citizens literally performed these ideologies as desired. By targeting the body as a central tool of propaganda, the choreography of these regimes left their mark so deeply on a national body culture that people began to perform the identities of the states. These movements, when examined from a historical perspective, still hold a great deal of meaning.

Dance is an ideal lens to study history through because of the richness of what the moving body captures in its movements. These political times in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union are extreme and have undoubtedly left their mark on bodies throughout time. Because we are able to look back through a historical perspective and analyze these movements, the true relationships between dance, politics and culture become illuminated

¹¹⁷ Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Gender,” *Signs* 24, no.1 (1998): 5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175670>.

more obviously. Through this writing, I hope to have put motion into meaning through a discussion of moments of geopolitical choreography. The examples analyzed throughout demonstrate the performance of cultural ideals in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and beyond—and as you move through *your* personal context now, I hope you consider the value of dance as a conceptual framework for sorting through complex issues. As Susan Leigh Foster states, “Focus on dance enables a more thorough understanding of the cultural contractedness of body and identity and a more far-reaching set of strategies for effecting social change.”¹¹⁸ Your body is a sponge, absorbing the geopolitical climate you move through, and as you dance through life, consider the context and how it is leaving its inevitable mark on you.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

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