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Review of “Dance as Text: Ideologies of  
the Baroque Body” by Mark Franko

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kinds of reading and watching films. Without this additional labor, scores appear as thousands of details without delivering a clear, overall sense of a dance. This problem can be minimized by including written analyses that offer insights into the overall gestalt of the dance.

The movement analyses that Stodelle contributes to each score are written as chronological scenarios of weight changes, movements of body parts, and changes in the dancer's inner feelings. The following is from her analysis of the opening of "Pointed Ascent," the second half of *Two Ecstatic Themes*,

The first series of movements has an irregular staccato accent not unlike that of a tack hammer. Abrupt shifts of weight coincide with rhythmically punctuated efforts to rise from the prone position that marked the end of "Circular Descent." A shoulder twists, an elbow thrusts upward; the head turns desperately from side to side in search of means of support; the hips pull under at a plane that gives the dancer secure positioning for subsequent attempts to rise. Gone is the luxury of sensuous suspension; everything now hangs on the thread of tenuous balance, a direct struggle against gravity and its threat of domination. (Pp. 61-62)

Although Stodelle writes from the third person, about "the dancer," she doesn't treat this analysis from the vantage point of a viewer. Stodelle writes as if she is performing the movement or as if she is trying to think through the movement for "the dancer."

Pleasurable as it is to kinesthetically work your way through Stodelle's analyses, she never gives you a succinct sense of the overall structure and impact of the work. For *Two Ecstatic Themes*, this is provided, later, in Humphrey's 1935 program note:

*Two Ecstatic Themes* is the keynote to Miss Humphrey's mature work. The first part is in circular and spiral movements, soft and sinking, to convey an emotional feeling of acquiescence. The second part, in contrast to the

first, moves in pointed design to a strident climax suggestive of aggressive achievement. The whole is counterpoint of circular and angular movement, representing the two inseparable elements of life as well as of design. (P. 64)

The contrasting vantage points represented by Stodelle's analysis and Humphrey's program note point to a general problem with using this collected volume for historical study. Viewing films or reading other sources, such as Marcia B. Siegel's Humphrey biography, *Days on Earth*, is more helpful in realizing the overriding impact of the dance (3).

These scores contain a clear indication of their production history, information notated scores sometimes lack. For example, the notation for *Air* and *Day on Earth* honors the contributions of the casts appearing in the work at the time of notation. For *Air*, Stodelle worked from the Westinghouse film, and the individual parts are both designated with letters, A, B, C, D, and E, and with names, Doris, Dorothy, Hyla, Ernestine, and Cleo (pp. 18, 19). Parts in the *Day on Earth* score are marked J for José Limón, R for Ruth Currier, L for Letitia Ide, and C, the only generic designation, for child (pp. 113-215). The inclusion of this information allows readers to understand the collective nature of dancemaking and the contributions dancers have to their roles.

Other included information helps readers realize the long, labor-intensive process of finalizing a score. As dances are reconstructed from film, research, and memory, and then Labanotated, a surprising number of people help shape the score. Stodelle reconstructed Humphrey's *Air* and *Two Ecstatic Themes* for the Limón company in 1975. Jane Marriett began the notation at that time. Both notation and dance were revised in 1980. At least two people check each score, a process that involves reconstructing the work on another set of dancers, and yet another person does the autography (pp. 1, 2, 53, 54). The history of production for the *Day on Earth* score is even more complex, including multiple revisions and greater input from dancers.

In 1995, Humphrey-ites celebrate the

one-hundredth anniversary of Humphrey's birth with a variety of activities including an October Humphrey conference at Teachers College • Columbia University, a memorial service in Oak Park, Illinois, a conference in London, and a concert of Humphrey reconstructions in Taiwan. These gatherings will provide opportunities to see the diverse perspectives available in written, Labanotated, and video resources played out in performance and lecture halls. People who knew Humphrey personally can converse with people who know Humphrey only as an historic figure. Humphrey specialists—the Labanotators, reconstructors, and dancers—can carry out discussions with the historians and critics who strive for a broader picture of Humphrey's life and work.

Ann Dils  
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#### NOTES

1. Stodelle attributes this phrase to John Martin, *The New York Times*.
2. Ernestine Stodelle, *The Dance Technique of Doris Humphrey and Its Creative Potential* (London: Dance Books, Ltd., 1978).
3. Marcia B. Siegel, *Days on Earth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

**DANCE AS TEXT: IDEOLOGIES OF THE BAROQUE BODY**, by Mark Franko. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993. xix + 238 pp., illustrations, photographs, Appendixes, Bibliography, Index. \$65.

Mark Franko is a choreographer, dancer, dance theorist, and dance scholar, and this book reflects the full range of his artistic and intellectual commitments. It is a profoundly interdisciplinary work, which takes as its subject French court dance between 1580 and 1670 but which speaks most urgently to choreographers of the late twentieth century. Franko describes a new approach to historical dance that he terms "construction," as opposed to reconstruction; construction, he argues, aims to recreate the

power of the original dance rather than its literal steps and gestures. Franko practices what he preaches. In 1990, for example, he choreographed a new work of baroque dance, *Characters of Dance*, and in one of four appendices to the present volume he publishes his preparatory notes to and photographs of the piece. These materials help the reader to grasp what Franko means when he talks elsewhere in the book about using critical theory rather than positivistic research to understand dances performed in the 1580s, 1620s, or 1670s. Working from the same meager base of evidence as those who try to reconstruct the lost dances of the late Valois and early Bourbon court, he has tried to imagine what their kinetic and visual effects would have been and to craft new dances that produce such effects. Critical theory in Franko's hands can make a significant artistic statement.

But *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* is not simply a choreographer's manifesto for a new approach to historical dance, although I think this is the most important contribution of the book. Reflecting its author's interdisciplinary interests, it is also a critique of existing scholarship on the dances of the period 1580 to 1670 and a reinterpretation of the nature of baroque dance as such. Although his writing is difficult and his history weak, Franko offers a series of close readings of key dances of the French court dance tradition that will require attention by future dance scholars. He makes a convincing argument that the relationship between the physical and spoken or written (textual) components of court dance changed in artful ways over the century under review. His fresh look at the danced and the literary elements in these performances is fruitful; his account of the historical reasons for the changing relationship between bodies and texts is less satisfactory.

A word of caution at the outset: this is not a book for beginners, and certainly not one for undergraduates. The surviving evidence of these dances is not systematically described or evaluated. Franko either omits or confines to footnotes such basic information as the occasion, setting, patron, choreographer, dancers, audience or subject for

the performances he analyzes. He does not define such terms as "theatrical dance" or "twentieth century critical notions of 'performance text'" and he does not explain why "court ballet" is not the same thing as "ballet at court." Franko acknowledges his dependence on the scholarly work of Margaret M. McGowan, and the ideal reader would be familiar with her books on French court dance from 1581 to 1643 (1). In some ways Franko's volume functions best as a commentary to be read alongside those of McGowan.

Franko will also startle advanced students of dance history, however, by his periodization. Rejecting the dates to which dance historians have traditionally given the label baroque (1660 to 1750), he instead follows the chronology of literary scholars and calls the dances of the preceding period, 1580 to 1660, baroque. In Franko's view Louis XIV's founding of a royal academy of dance in 1662 signaled a new era in dance history in which centralized training and regulation fundamentally transformed the character of French court dance (2). He is interested in the evolution of court dance *before* the professionals and bureaucrats cracked down on it. In its "potentially chaotic" mixture of "dancing, acting, improvisation, miming, and mumming," its audience participation, and its "vertiginous complexity of collateral arts" baroque dance, as Franko defines it, is "much closer...to twentieth century performance art" than to later developments in academic dance (p. 1).

Within the period he has selected for attention Franko highlights exemplary works from each of three distinctive moments: (a) when dance is textual, (b) when dance is anti-textual, and (c) when dance and text collapse into one another. Two Valois court dances, the *Balet des Polonais* of 1573 and the *Balet comique de la Roynne* of 1581, illustrate Franko's thesis about the textuality of dance. Dance's dependence on writing at this historical juncture is best expressed in choreography that placed the dancers' bodies in geometrical patterns spelling out words. Dances are interludes that interrupt spoken sections of the production, serving as icons of order to underscore the literary message of a universe of harmonious stability. The court en-

tertainments of the Valois dynasty are, of course, in poignant counterpoint to the reality of religious war outside their palace gates.

After a brief excursus on Montaigne, Franko moves forward to the reign of Louis XIII (1610-1643) and uses the burlesque ballets of the 1620s, particularly *Les Fées des forests de Saint Germain* of 1625, to argue his thesis about dance as anti-textual (3). Narrative has no role in this production, there is no moral to the non-existent story, and there is no dramatic action for the dances to interrupt. Instead of a sequence of acts and interludes we simply have a string of danced metaphors. Farcical figures (*fées* or *fairies*) symbolizing music and dance frame three unrelated and self-mocking scenes of gamblers, lunatics, and soldiers, representing "three different aspects of dance: the improvised, the unregulated, and the satiric" (p. 88). While spoken texts or *récits* occur in the entertainment, the outlandishly dressed participants and their improvised movements permit "ample space for any dancer to work against the text of his *récit*, producing unexpected ironies" (p. 94). In a spirit of playful whimsy, rather than pointed critique, courtier-performers make fun of everything from love to valor.

In his penultimate chapter Franko proceeds to the moment when dance and text collapse into each other during the early personal rule of Louis XIV (1643-1715), highlighting two of Molière's comedy-ballets, *Les Facheux* of 1661 and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of 1670. Franko argues that in these works Molière consciously inverts the conventional relationship between dance and drama by making plays about dance. In *Les Facheux* the old sequence of act and interlude now becomes a danced text about the act of interruption, and in *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* Molière weaves a dance lesson and a dance spectacle into the plot of the play. Court dance's own discussion of dance, which we saw first in burlesque ballet, reaches its climax with Molière's comedy-ballets, just as Louis XIV brings the curtain down on baroque dance as we have come to know it. The king's academy arrests the developing autonomy of a form that can talk about itself and

redefines it as a technique to be learned by study with the proper masters.

Franko's formal analysis of some of the most famous court ballets of the first century of theatrical dance provides some keen, fresh, and convincing reinterpretations of these mostly well known works. It is an analysis richly informed by reading in dance history, French literary history and theory, and cultural history. However, it is an analysis regrettably ill informed by reading in the social or political history of France during the period with which he is concerned. This is troublesome because Franko claims that he wants to recreate for the reader the political nature of the dances he describes, and he rightly opines that, regardless of whether it made explicit policy pronouncements, court entertainment was political to its very core. How could it not be when court dance was performed exclusively by the political elite of the regime for its own delectation? But Franko's historical statements are not reliable and his political readings of his chosen dances are not persuasive. To take one example, Franko argues vigorously that the courtiers' exploration of whimsy in burlesque ballet expressed their growing sense of political impotence at Louis XIII's court; why then doesn't he cite a single historical work on the government of Louis XIII, a king whose political problems, court intrigues, and cultural policy have been studied minutely? Where are Ranum, Jouhaud, Beik, and Bercé, or even Neuschel and Motley? I searched the bibliography in vain for major historical studies of the French aristocracy, about which Franko makes broad claims, or of the French kings, about whom his statements are equally grandiose. Their absence is a pity because I think ballets like *Les Fées des forêts de Saint Germain* do comment on life at court, but not in the crude and schematic way Franko suggests. Such dances take their place in a lengthy literary tradition of ironic and sometimes bitter reflection on the courtier's artificial existence and the capriciousness of his fortunes. The political question to ask is "why this theme at this particular moment in Louis XIII's reign?" I noted further that Louis XIV's year of birth was given two different dates, both

wrong, and that Henry Valois, king of Poland in 1573, was not Henry III, king of France, until a year *after* the performance of the *Balet des Polonais*. Franko says he cares passionately about the historical power of the performances he revisits, but he doesn't seem to care passionately about the congealed history that they embody. I suspect what has happened is that Franko has had his hands full staying on top of two disciplines, dance and literary theory, and that like many literary scholars he works with only a rudimentary and outdated reading list of historians. This is unfortunate, if understandable, because one of the very richest and most conceptually refined fields of historical inquiry has been French political and social history of the seventeenth century.

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#### NOTES

1. Margaret M. McGowan, *L'Art du ballet de cour en France, 1581-1643*. Paris: C.N.R.S., 1978; "Le Ballet Comique" by Balthazar de Beaujoyeulx, 1581. Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1982; *Ideal Forms in the Age of Ronsard*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; *The Court Ballet of Louis XIII*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1986.
2. In Appendix 3 Franko publishes the original text and an English translation of the statutes of the royal dance academy established in 1662.
3. In Appendix 2 Franko publishes the original text and a translation of a contemporary prose synopsis of *Les Fées des forêts de Saint Germain* (see chap. 4, n. 67).

**DANCING: THE PLEASURE, POWER, AND ART OF MOVEMENT**, by Gerald Jonas. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992. 256 pp., photographs, Bibliography, Index. \$45.00.

**DANCING**, Rhoda Grauer, executive producer. Produced by Thirteen/WNET in association with RM Arts and BBC-TV; distributed by Public Media Home Video, Chicago, Illinois. VHS format, color, 8 tapes approximately 1 hour each. \$199.95.

It is rare in today's publishing world to see ventures as ambitious as *Dancing*, a lively and lovingly crafted book that is a companion to an equally lavish eight-part video series. The book is lavish in its spectacular color plates (125 of them) and black and white images depicting dance as portrayed in artifacts, drawings, paintings, and photographs. The bibliography too is extensive, organized first by general works and then by chapter topic. While the bibliography will facilitate further exploration on the part of readers, it will point them in the direction of studies of specific dance genres rather than to the theoretical literature on the themes.

*Dancing* is ambitious in its scope and organization. It combines two approaches often separated, dance history and criticism, and the anthropology of dance. The former has tended to focus on western forms while the latter has included non-western dance. *Dancing* also avoids organizing material by time period or geography, choosing rather to examine historical and cultural aspects of dance by topic or function. Topics include dance as an indicator of identity, as part of religion, as an aspect of social order and power, as an expression of the values and mores of society, especially issues of gender, as exemplified in classical forms, as a way of bringing about the fusion of different cultural traditions, as a medium of individual accomplishment and creativity, and finally as a statement of where we are today at the end of the twentieth century. Each of these topics is illustrated by specific dance genres and traditions.

The video series connects with these topics but is not synonymous with their portrayal in the book. It is an excellent