From *Ausdruckstanz* to *Tanztheater*:
The Search for a German Aesthetic in Dance

by

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Class of 2017
In loving memory

of

Jeri Silverman,

who put tap shoes on my feet and dance in my heart,

and

Michael Studdert-Kennedy,

who encouraged me to read, inspired me to write,
and always believed in the universal power of words.
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Introduction

Dance as Ideology: Reframing Dance History in Germany in the Twentieth Century

When I stepped onto the grounds of the Olympiastadion (Olympic Stadium) outside Berlin, Germany in the summer of 2015, I was struck by the sheer size and grandiosity of the structure. Though it was only partially reconstructed, its manicured gardens helped give it a general sense of calm that was present throughout the tour of the property. It was eerie to be visiting this place that both physically and aesthetically represented the meteoric rise of the Nazi regime.

The scenery transported me to 1936, the year that Hitler’s Germany hosted the Summer Olympics, when thousands of German citizens, imbued with a new sense of unity and vitality, filled the stadium to capacity. This was also the place where Mary
Wigman, the leader of the German *Ausdruckstanz* (Expressionist dance) movement, was invited to present her work *Totenmal* (Memorial to the Fallen) at the Opening Ceremonies of the Games. This collaboration represented the budding yet unreliable relationship between the Nazis and the leading dance figures in Germany at the time. The Nazi architecture, coupled with the imagery and memory of Wigman’s choreography, served as a gateway into the study of German art and culture.

My study abroad experience in Berlin that summer, during which I traveled across the city to museums and landmarks, put into perspective the intersection of history and the arts that defined the development of contemporary German culture. I also noticed a dearth of information from the final years of the Nazi era; at many of the museums and memorials we attended, photography between the years 1942 and 1945 was scarce, and when it did appear, it looked staged. This lack provided an opportunity
to keep digging for information about art during the later years of the Nazi regime. The German experience of the twentieth century, and the continual, tumultuous transfer of power, from the complicated wage gaps of the Weimar Republic, and the downfall into the turmoil of the Nazi era, followed by the possibilities for artmaking in West Germany coupled with the rise of subversive resistance tactics, directly influenced the production of art and culture among its citizens.

I began to think about how I could marry my interest in art production during particularly charged political climates with my own experiences as a student of history and the arts. I have been passionate about dance since I was five years old. My strong Jewish identity and interest in the urgency of understanding history have led to a passion for exploring different cultural perspectives of the Second World War. I wanted to pursue a project that could combine my love for dance with my interest in trying to understand the rise and fall of the Nazi regime. In addition, the origins of people and of movements have always fascinated me; as well as finding connections through storytelling across decades and between and among individuals. I am equally intrigued with how the past influences and dictates the present and the future. When I returned to Wesleyan in the fall of 2015, I began to envision a project through which I could track the progression of German dance through the twentieth century, and search for what all dancers and choreographers sought: a specific, distinct German dance aesthetic that gave way to a freer, more evocative mode of choreographic inquiry that could comment on political and social phenomena.

In the spring of 2015, dance historian Rebecca Rossen gave a lecture at Wesleyan on her new book Dancing Jewish, which explored how various choreographers have explored Jewish themes and tropes in their choreography over the past 50 years. At the
time, I had considered exploring dance in concentration camps during the Holocaust, but I realized I wanted to delve more deeply into the modern German dance that defined the form on an international scale. I began this research as my final project for HIST 362: Issues in Contemporary Historiography, the History Department’s required methodology class, which revealed to me how history is often written by the victor, by the elite, or by the party with privilege. This in turn led me to reconsider the Nazi history that had been ingrained in me since childhood, a narrative that painted the perpetrators as evil, bigoted villains. This narrative obscured the great young minds of early German modern dance and coerced them to create work in support of the Nazi agenda. However, it was clear that this narrative was one-sided and lacked a close examination of all parties and viewpoints involved.

These strands led me to investigate the history of modern German dance beginning in the early twentieth century. Central to this story was the rise of the Ausdruckstanz (Expressionist dance) movement, pioneered by Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss, through their participation in the creation of a Nazi dance aesthetic during the war. A decade later, after the literal and figurative rubble of the war had been cleared enough to begin to move forward, Pina Bausch, the woman who created Tanztheater and in doing so redefined and rediscovered the possibilities of German dance, brought the form into a new, distinct, and subversive era. Laban and his contemporaries had sought the answer to what exactly defined a German dance aesthetic, or rather, if that aesthetic could be widely accepted. Bausch then took that aesthetic and manipulated it to accommodate themes of radicalism and emotional revelation that were universal. Laban, Wigman, Jooss and Bausch embodied the development of a German modern dance style, accompanied with the swift
advancements in technology and the dissemination of ideas that brought twentieth
century Europe into a truly modern era.

Though the word modernity is too vast to encapsulate the idea of what was
happening to Germany and its citizens in the mid-twentieth century, it necessitates a
conversation about the concomitant rise of nationalist leanings and the aesthetics that
represented and even formulated the opinions that led to those beliefs. One was not
possible without the other – the arts served as a catalyst and a conduit for the Nazis, a
way to hone their ideas about what nationalism meant, how honoring one’s country
could be visually represented, and how artwork could establish German superiority by
employing propagandistic tactics. This idea of modernity – of technological and
industrial advancements, and in many ways, of the discord and relative instability that
were wrought by the turmoil of the Weimar Republic – ensured the rise of nationalism.
In fact, nationalism arose as a response to modernity; this new emphasis on the nation-
state reflected the transformation of socioeconomic societal structures, with a longing to
establish new forms of identity and aesthetic expressions with the support of more
stable, strong governmental structures. People sought an end to suffering, and turned
toward the idea of a leadership that would put German interests above all else, while
establishing fierce loyalty and stewardship to their country. This strong belief in the
power of country and nation directly influenced art creation and the aesthetics that
marked the Nazi era in dance. Still, this nationalism expressed through the arts
demonstrated more than simple aesthetics.

As Nazi Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment Joseph Goebbels
wrote, “The arts are…a public exercise, they are not only an aesthetic but moral in
nature...”1 How could dance be inherently German? Did Goebbels imply that morality is more than a distinction between right and wrong, but rather a commentary on its didactic possibilities? How did German culture change to incorporate and influence its choreographers to borrow from their predecessors and find their own way to further push their form? By adding this dimension of morality to the nationalist aesthetics discussion, we can further illuminate the factors that influenced the rise of both political ideology and artistic creation.

As dance historian Mark Franko wrote, “although modernism is frequently considered ‘aesthetically’ radical, it is often less politically radical. Aesthetic modernism often positions form as the most effective artistic consideration and thus sublimates and/or universalizes particular emotion.”2 One could argue, then, that this apparent radicalization of dance away from ballet and toward modernism looked and felt aesthetically revolutionary, but by no means implied being politically liberal or democratic. Nazi advisors, then, rather than pushing the German choreographers of the moment to adopt their political agenda, simply fit their agenda into the framework that the choreographers created. Their morality, in a sense, was determined based on the will of the artists through which their ideology was being proliferated – through dance, movement and powerful imagery.

Therefore, the notion that German choreographers were coopted by the regime is challenged. Instead, it remains clear that these choreographers joined this partnership of their own volition, equating what was necessarily a “German” aesthetic and a “Nazi”

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aesthetic. This thesis addresses the question of how the idea of a German dance aesthetic changed over the decades between the Weimar Republic and the Cold War in Germany. Though this question is mainly pertinent through the Second World War, the political choreography of the postwar period further demonstrates the idea that dance reveals both an era’s aesthetics as well as its dominant politics, thus artistically representing the social and political forces that dictate and direct artmaking.

**Dance as Ideology in Defining the German Aesthetic**

In early twentieth century Germany, most patrons of the arts did not consider dance an intellectual art form. It was surely an entertaining pastime for the elite to attend the ballet, and it was generally considered more acceptable for women to dance professionally than men. Dance was also not considered particularly German at heart, as most traditional ballet technique originated from France. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, methods of exercise and training the body for strength and fitness became increasingly important; physical strength and agility were now not only paramount for the country’s athletes, gymnasts, and dancers, but also, for the laypeople. Germany’s unification from many disparate regions to one massive, powerful country in 1871 encouraged the newfound German populace to put their power on display. Citizens now felt compelled to demonstrate their prowess through modes beyond intellectual and creative endeavors, but also, through physical strength and stamina.

This confluence of realities – the lack of a German dance style and the increased attention on bodies as capable of more than breathing and thinking – allowed for the possibility for dance to carry more weight than it did in the past, to mean something beyond the visual satisfaction that it brought audiences. Marion Kant, a famous German
dancer from the Ausdruckstanz and Nazi eras, first posited the idea of dance as ideology. Rather than simply expressing a set of beliefs or aesthetically representing values through movement, the dance becomes the ideology itself; movement, concept and values are fused. Kant presents this idea about Nazi aesthetics in dance in specific, but it is necessary to situate this concept for the entire trajectory of German dance. In the early days of Ausdruckstanz, and in the more recent days of Tanztheater, the ideals of freedom, of limitless abandon, and of making a statement, whether personal or political, were realized and made whole through the movement the choreographers created. With the concept of dance as ideology, locating and situating a German dance aesthetic in the historical canon becomes simpler. By reframing dance as more than simple bodily movement, but as embodying beliefs and ideals, we can look at the movement styles of each period and further draw a theoretical and aesthetic thread between each dance movement, establishing a clear link between German dance styles of the twentieth century.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter 1 briefly outlines the roots of the Expressionist movement across art forms, as it arose as the antithesis to the Impressionist movement, and situates the rise of this movement within the establishment of the Weimar Republic and the complicated freedom of expression and individuality associated with it amid socioeconomic turmoil. The writing explains the development and rise of the Ausdruckstanz movement in dance through its prominent leaders, Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss. I highlight

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three choreographic examples – Mary Wigman’s *Hexentanz* and *Totenmal* and Jooss’ *The Green Table*, to demonstrate the range of expression represented within the *Ausdruckstanz* movement as well as the distinct political commentary associated with the choreography.

Chapter 2 focuses on the use of movement practices to encourage nationalism and allegiance to the Third Reich. I argue that Nazi aesthetics were rooted in German gymnastics practices from the nineteenth century, and served as a guide in the search for the Nazi dance aesthetic. I track the rise of Joseph Goebbels’ Ministry for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment and its delineation of “degenerate” versus “decent” art and the place of modern dance along that spectrum. I explore Goebbels’ flirtation with Wigman and Laban’s movement and fame, and Wigman and Laban’s choice to participate in the regime’s arts initiatives. Yet the mutual infatuation did not last; the Nazis eventually rejected Wigman and Laban. The dearth of information about dance in Germany through the later war years has generally kept it from being scrutinized.

Chapter 3 takes up dance in West Germany after the end of the Second World War, when the immediate return to ballet paved the way for the rise of more socially-aware, provocative forms of dance. There is little written about the arts and art production in Soviet-occupied East Germany, or the German Democratic Republic (GDR), so this chapter will address the boundless opportunities present in the West German art-scene. The chapter explores the rise of *Tanztheater* founder and choreographer Pina Bausch and her revolutionary approach toward redefining dance in the German present to make it more accessible for audiences both aware of dance and completely unfamiliar with the art-form. I analyze four of her most prominent works – *Bluebeard, Café Müller, Kontakthof* and *1980: A Piece by Pina Bausch* – to further explore her continuation and re-imagination of the German dance aesthetic by imbuing it with
political commentary and a contemporary twist. Bausch brought dance back into the public imagination and provided an outlet for entertainment and social action for people across the world.

Chapter 4 explores my own choreographic research process in relation to my written research process. The writing situates my own body and choices in how I approached the choreographic process, as well as the selection process for each of my dancers. I explore my rehearsal process and the concepts and ideas that guided and directed the research, as well as the final performance iterations of both completed works— the first, an exploration of the rise and fall of Ausdruckstanz, and the second, an homage to the idiosyncratic choreography of Pina Bausch and Tanztheater. I rely on the experiences of my dancers to describe and reaffirm my research methods and to further reiterate the importance of both written and embodied research to argue for this German dance aesthetic.

Using an interdisciplinary approach, this thesis argues for the reframing of how we study dance history in our time, and for the necessity of studying the often-separate fields of history and the arts from alternate perspectives to understand the full scope of the eras that we are exploring. It is impossible to understand the origins of an art movement without understanding the social and political climate of that era, and vice versa. This search for a German dance aesthetic attempts to arrive at a deeply understood history of dance in Germany in the twentieth century – of the opportunities for artistic freedom that a republic provided, of the power dynamics of a temporary, all-encompassing regime that was equipped with the ability to influence and redirect the course of the arts mid-century, and finally, the social and political tumult of the 1950s and ‘60s that made the creation of subversive art possible again. The goal is to present a
new perspective on German dance during the past century. This thesis will pose questions and answers about freedom, power, identity, and individuality to shed new light on this debated, gapped narrative.
Chapter 1

The Rise of Ausdruckstanz and the Expressionist Art Movement

*Expressionism Defines German Art*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany was a prosperous nation. Kaiser Wilhelm II had brought the country into global prominence, with a booming economy, a strong and capable military, and the confidence of a nation that had come to wield great power. German art, however, desperately needed fresh, renewed resources – other European countries almost entirely dictated and guided its style, and there were very few uniquely German artists, besides Goethe in literature, and Bach and Wagner in music. Germany had been unified in 1871, and despite its capitalist successes, its leaders still struggled to overcome a disparate and decentralized sense of identity. Politicians and artists sought the creation of a German aesthetic, as this discovery could aid this process by cohesively solidifying what it meant to be German.

German art and culture floundered, lacking a sense of direction or an attitude that declared a distinctive style. Dancers as well as other artists felt the need to create a distinctly “German” dance aesthetic; a defined German form had never truly existed because choreographers had always borrowed from their neighbors. French dance traditions such as court dance and ballet had been the norm in Germany. Ideals of perfect line, bodily discipline and the necessity for dance to exist solely for the entertainment of the upper classes, rather than for making a social or political statement, had dictated choreographic progress and the proliferation of dance styles throughout the nation. This lack of an “indigenous classical tradition” forced Germany to be reliant on France and Russia for choreographic choices, performance qualities, and approaches to
ballet. In dance, as well as in other areas of creative life, German artists were easy prey to those who were interested and willing to influence them.

This trend of creative influence from abroad preceded the First World War and returned in later years. In terms of the visual arts, Impressionism, a movement that mainly grew in France, became popular in the late nineteenth century. Impressionism had been defined by its great French painters – Edouard Manet and Camille Pissarro, to name two - and was known for pastels, sweeping landscapes, and generally idealistic imagery that evoked a sense of calm. Though Impressionism emerged in France, Impressionist roots were sewn in Germany as well. Max Liebermann, a Jewish painter, led the German charge in Impressionism, and brought the movement to national attention in the late nineteenth century. The superficial and light nature of Impressionism reflected the optimism in Germany during this period.

However, the possibilities within the Impressionist movement were limited. There was not much room for emotional expression in the work – the imagery was captivating, yet could not necessarily be used for pushing social norms and challenging status quos, let alone evoking emotion other than serenity. Impressionist works were aesthetically pleasing, but artists did not have political or social power through their creation. Therefore, at the beginning of the twentieth century, an era that catapulted German artists toward more evocative artmaking, German artists in all disciplines found that there was a great need for spiritual renewal, for documenting human emotion and for demonstrating physical and expressive imperfections and inaccuracies through image and painting.

The Weimar Republic was officially proclaimed on November 9, 1918, but the democratic, liberal stirrings of the era preceded its creation by a decade. As the theologian Ernst Troeltsch wrote in 1918, “overnight, we have become the most radical democracy in Europe.”\(^5\) However, with the establishment of the Republic also came true aspects of hardship. As historian Colin Storer wrote, “the Weimar Republic was a weak and inherently flawed experiment, unloved by its people and doomed almost from the beginning by the circumstances of its birth.”\(^6\) The country was still young in terms of unity, and the echoes of the First World War were heavy reminders of destruction and destitution – nearly two million young men did not return home from battle.\(^7\) The Republic was founded without much planning and almost by accident, and was destined for a variety of difficulties; intense poverty marked the plight of most Weimar citizens.

Despite these difficulties, opportunities for freedom of thought became more accessible than ever. With the loss of many men during the war, a small women’s movement was born, and the discussion of sex and sexuality became more accepted in the public sphere. Concepts of art and culture began to circulate that had previously been taboo–art that meant something beyond aesthetic beauty, art that pushed boundaries, and art that advocated the individual rather than the collective. For the first time, emotional expression was given precedence in artistic works over primarily sensory, or impressionistic, and intellectual works. Thus, a new, personal artistic movement was born. Expressionism, as the movement had been named in 1905, served as the complete

\(^7\) Ibid., 28.
antithesis to Impressionism; though the movement was founded before the war, it gained the most traction during the Weimar era.

The artist Randolph Schwabe defined Expressionism as “the concentrated presentation of emotion sought for within the artist’s consciousness – an insistence on feeling rather than on the visualization and reproduction of the external art world.”

Possibility abounded; artists allowed emotions to drive the creative process, rather than being confined to the normative conventions of society to guide their work. As politician and art critic Wilhelm Hausenstein wrote, “The end of Impressionism came as it began to demand too little from itself. Expressionism tests the saying ‘grasp all, lose all.’ It [embraces] the universe.” This idea of universal monumentality, of situating the individual in the context not only of one’s immediate society but in the global and even astronomical sphere, became paramount. Expressionism, like Impressionism, crossed national boundaries, but its influence in Germany, its country of origin, was profound.

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Germans took advantage of the opportunity to present a less sterile and more emotional version of themselves in societal interactions, and particularly, within a creative and artistic context. Emotion, then, became an essential focus of art. The conflation of art with the idea of expression was not necessarily valid until this moment; art had always served as a tool for manifesting political and social agendas through a creative medium, but the idea that it could be used to voice feelings and ideas that were difficult to express through prose, opened possibilities that artists had not previously been given the means to explore. Before this movement, artists still created from behind a veil, ready to be pushed toward the fringes of society if the work they created was too
controversial or evoked emotions that were not deemed fit for public expression and consumption.

Expressionism presented a new theoretical basis for abstraction that gave artists agency to break form, to set out on their own, and to create passionate, evocative works of art. However, the reality of this period before the Weimar era also presented an opportunity for artists to consider the past, and the many archaic traditions it represented, while creating the present and defining the future. In Dresden in 1905, a new group of artists formed a collective called *Die Brücke*, or “The Bridge,” to create

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expressionist works and band together to redefine art in Germany. The founders, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Fritz Bleyl, Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rutloff, did not have any formal artistic training and were more interested in expressing the emotional self than in the formal, technical creation of art. These artists worked to consider “conflicts between backward- and forward-looking attitudes, between...nationalist and internationalist aspirations, [which] generated much of the internal energy of the movement.”

These artists were grappling with German identity, how it manifested and how it changed under shifting leadership and parameters that were continually being redefined. This was a transitional period in German history, and Expressionism represented a transitional period in the evolution of modern art, literally serving as a bridge between worlds and artistic eras. Due to this transient moment, the artists of Die Brücke dealt with the crossroads between pragmatism and idealism, and more specifically, between Western and non-Western influences.

Moreover, the idea of primitivism began to serve as an impetus for artistic work. Though it remains unclear how exactly these artists conceptualized what was considered “primitive,” it is apparent that non-Western artistic influences played a prominent role in this categorization. The blending of Eastern and tribal influences served as a basis for much of the artwork the German Expressionists created, as well as an homage to Palau and African masks. By doing so, many of these artists were considered savages among...

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14 Ibid., ix.
15 Ibid., 16.
16 Ibid., 32.
more traditional artistic circles, because they felt that the Expressionist artists were pursuing artistic endeavors that did not honor their forebears.\textsuperscript{17} 

Still, the artists pushed on, describing this period in art making as “the spiritual ‘awakening,’ the increasing tendency to regain ‘lost balance,’ the inevitable necessity of spiritual plantings, the unfolding of the first blossom.”\textsuperscript{18} Another group of artists called \textit{Der Blaue Reiter} (The Blue Rider), was founded in 1912 by Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc as a coalition of Expressionist, Dadaist and Surrealist art-makers. The aim of these artists was to bring non-traditional art to an international scene.

The aesthetic qualities of Expressionist art were bold and sometimes difficult to take in. “Jagged, articulated movements” combined with “lurid colors” and angular geometric shapes were defining characteristics.\textsuperscript{19} Heavy brushstrokes were common, along with the depiction of realistic imagery with a sort of otherworldly quality. As Kandinsky wrote, “between the purely abstract and the purely real lie possibilities of combining abstract and real elements in one picture.”\textsuperscript{20} Expressionists blurred this line to attempt to tell the story of the human experience through dramatized, sometimes abstracted and exaggerated forms.

\textsuperscript{17} Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc ed. \textit{The Documents of 20th-Century Art: The Blaue Reiter Almanac} (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 64.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{19} Lloyd, \textit{German Expressionism}, vi.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 180.
Expressionism opened the gate for experimentation in many art forms. The proclamation and adoption of Expressionism into the artistic conscious of Germans allowed for the field of dance to expand. *Ausdruckstanz*, or “expressionist dance” in English, was the movement-based exploration of Expressionism, although the term *Ausdruckstanz* became the common name for this movement only after the end of the Second World War.\(^{21}\) Prior to that, the movement was known as “free dance,” “new dance,” “New German Dance,” or “expressionist dance.”\(^{22}\)

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, early pioneers of American modern dance, came to Germany to exchange ideas

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\(^{22}\) Ibid.
and learn more about European movement aesthetics. Much of the modern dance that developed in the following years in both Germany and the United States seems to have been influenced by this conversation and exploration of international movement tendencies from both these American choreographers and the Germans with whom they came into contact while abroad. John Martin, one of the earliest dance critics, delineated the similarities between American and German dance in some of his earliest articles in the *New York Times.* He wrote that “the American dance is never without propaganda…for it finds its whole being in the presentation of its perceptions of man in new manifestations of his inborn dominion, with as great a power of persuasion as it can possibly summon.” While the American dance was didactic in the sense of obviously leading the audience toward a particular state of feeling, the German dance was able to arrive at that feeling through more theatrical and abstract means. Each represented the human experience through slightly different yet persuasive avenues.

By the end of the decade in Germany, a new figure with an interdisciplinary approach to dance was ready to enter the scene, and inevitably, set German dance on a course toward freedom of expression and exploration.

*Rudolf Laban, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze and The Rise of Ausdruckstanz*

The year 1910 proved to be generative for German dance pioneers. Rudolf von Laban, who eventually became known as the father of German modern dance, began to

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26 Ibid., 242, 243.
work extensively in Munich. He enrolled in the local military academy as a child, but prior to graduation, von Laban chose to leave the school against his father’s wishes to pursue a life as an artist. He dropped the “von” from his name, married a local girl named Maja Lederer, and moved to Munich to explore the possibility of dancing and teaching movement as a profession in 1910. Though he was not born German, he chose to become the leader of a specifically German art-form.

In Munich, Laban founded his Choreographisches Institut (Choreography Institute), where all aspects of learning and teaching dance were honed and taught. At his school, Laban began to teach the ideas of “free dance” – dance that arises from within, rather than from a technical vocabulary. He also began to invoke the trinity of “Tanz, Ton, Wort,” or “Dance, Sound, Word,” thus simplifying the process of dance-making and making it accessible for those without technical training. The ballet standards until this point had required an elaborate collaboration between music, bodies and costuming. Laban attempted to eliminate that intricate conversation between mediums by boiling down dance to its most primitive elements – the self, movement that comes from inherent impulses, and little to no musical score. Laban wrote, “music originates from the rhythmical movement of the body.” With this, Laban untied the integral links between music and movement, and demonstrated that internal impulse was

27 Partsch-Bergsohn, Modern Dance in Germany, 35.
30 Preston-Dunlop and Lahusen, Schriftanz, 26.
31 Partsch-Bergsohn, Modern Dance in Germany and the United States, 13.
enough to drive rhythm and meter in dance. Laban’s disciple Mary Wigman said that “Laban had the extraordinary quality of setting you free artistically, enabling you to find your own roots, and thus stabilized, to discover your own potentialities, to develop your own technique and your individual style of dancing.”

The way Laban taught also reinvented the idea of the relationship between the dance teacher and dance student. Up until this point in Germany, dancing had been mostly an ensemble endeavor – women were directed by a male choreographer to perform ballet works, and though soloist roles existed in some ballets, the idea of solo dancing with no ensemble to support the soloist was essentially unknown. Laban served as a guide for his students – he gave suggestions and posited theories and ideas that his students should work from, but he did not explicitly direct his students toward a particular end, neither did he tell them how to perform, nor what quality to adopt while they were performing. The Expressionist mode in which he was working gave him the option of granting his students agency to make their own choreographic and artistic decisions throughout the process.

After establishing himself as an innovative dance-maker and teacher in München, Laban was later invited to open a school at Monte Verita, a mountain resort in Ascona, a region of Switzerland, called “The School for All the Arts of Life” in 1913. Students at the school began their day with an exploration of swinging scales, in which students swung their legs in front of their bodies and then behind them, and were then guided through Laban’s educational path of suggestion rather than overt direction. He became influenced by Wassily Kandinsky’s treatise “Concerning the Spirituality of Art” in 1913.

which demonstrated to him the links between art and out-of-body experiences. Based on Kandinsky’s examples, Laban wrote, “dance as an art cannot be based on spontaneous improvisations only.” Kandinsky’s ideas were enough to drive the creation of movement, but it was up to the performers to hone it and craft it into an intelligible, cohesive whole. Without this curation, Laban believed that dance would remain an art form that was not taken seriously.

An important peripheral figure who aided the transition of the form from a pastime to a serious artistic endeavor was Emile Jaques-Dalcroze. Born on July 6, 1865 in Vienna, Jaques-Dalcroze was not a dancer, but a musician by training. He founded his own dance school in Hellerau in 1910 as well, called the Rhythmic Institute at Hellerau-Dresden. Despite his lack of dance training, his musical foundation allowed him to help his students develop a strong sense of rhythm that served as the momentum and driving force for their personal movement exploration. This sense of rhythm was cultivated through a technique Jaques-Dalcroze eventually called “Eurythmics,” or the process of translating sound into physical action. Yvonne Rainer, an American dancer in the 1960s, acknowledged Dalcroze’s legacy years later, and said that the Dalcroze method “[enables] musicians, singers and composers to respond physically to rhythm rather than relying on counting or a mental relation to a beat.”

Dalcroze’s approach was revolutionary – prior to his specific mode of dance education, music had been used as a tool to guide choreography, to help situate

37 Partsch-Bergsohn, Modern Dance in Germany and the United States, 6.
38 Ibid.
movement in a framework that was quantifiable through rhythm. By teaching the dancer to respond emotionally, rather than technically or through intense concentration, Dalcroze broke open the possibilities of movement when paired with sound. The possibility of dancing against the music, rather than with it, was born, as well as other inventive approaches to the use of music with dance: responding minimally, using music as an expressive rather than dictatorial guide, and others. Dancing a cappella became a major defining aspect of the Ausdruckstanz movement as the form gained momentum.

Both Laban and Dalcroze served as important leaders in the beginnings of the Expressionist movement. Dalcroze's contributions to dance expanded beyond the Weimar era and into the United States. His most significant contribution to the dance community, however, was his student, Mary Wigman.

**Mary Wigman and the Creation of Expressionist Dance**

"The dancer of the future will not dance in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman’s body….She will dance the freedom of woman.” – Isadora Duncan

Mary Wigman, christened Carolyne Sofie Marie Wiegmann, was born on November 13, 1886 in Hanover, Germany, to a wealthy family. As a child, Wigman did not study dance or art of any sort. She had been a patron of ballet from a young age because of her family’s elite status, though she was discouraged from dancing ballet because it was not seen as a high-class endeavor. As she grew older, she became increasingly disenchanted with ballet’s seemingly limited possibilities, as well as the limitations of being a woman in upper-class society. As a young woman, she sought an

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outlet to pursue bodily freedom of expression and began to look for ways to study dance.

In 1910, at age 24, Wigman discovered dance. She began to explore movement outside of the traditional balletic context to which many young women in Germany were exposed, and she changed and shortened her elite name to reflect her interest in pursuing dance professionally. Late in that year, she began to experiment with dancing without music. This was revolutionary – dance was supposed to complement music, particularly within the realm of ballet, and express a particular narrative. Wigman’s radical tendencies led her to Dalcroze’s school in 1911, and she became one of his most effective, fearless students. However, Wigman’s most important relationship in her early dance years was her intense, sometimes fraught collaboration with her mentor, Rudolf Laban.

Wigman met Laban in 1913, after working extensively with Dalcroze at his school in Hellerau-Dresden. Both were attempting to create a new form of dance that was not defined – something less limiting than ballet, and something that could encapsulate the gamut of human emotion. Wigman later said that “[Laban] was [her] teacher, though never in the sense this word is generally used. He was the moving spirit, the guide who opened the gates to a world [she] had dreamed of, not yet knowing that it was dance [she] was seeking.” Wigman began as a student of Laban’s, entrenched in his discovery and exploration of “free dance.”

At this point, Wigman was more interested in solo rather than group choreography. She was the only well-known European female soloist at the time and her

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42 Partsch-Bergsohn, Modern Dance in Germany: Concurrents and Influences, 16.
ascent in the dance world was arguably highly feminist. Wigman reassigned the woman’s role in the dance world; she was more interested in the spectator’s interpretation of the “essence of dance” rather than a physical aesthetic. The idea of the “conspicuous woman” in society was garnering notoriety at this point, as women were beginning to pursue professions other than housework, in addition to wearing less conservative clothing (the Jazz Age was just around the corner). Wigman, through both personal and professional pursuits, was certainly conspicuous.  

Wigman instilled her movement, and the movement of the era, with an overtly conceptual and intellectual critique. In the context of other choreographers and dancers of the era, she served as “a point of contention, as a footnote and as an absence, and as a point of departure.” There was no one like Wigman; she was both a woman and a radical, yet somehow managed to attract the attention of reviewers, other dancers, and men, while at the forefront of establishing roots in the movement.  

However, there certainly were other prominent figures in the movement. Though Wigman was undoubtedly the face and spirit of the Ausdruckstanz movement, there were many other choreographers who made prolific contributions to the movement and helped to define its parameters. Among them, Valeska Gert, Gret Palucca, Anita Berber and Harald Kreutzberg, who each moved forward a version of Ausdruckstanz that gained acclaim both in Germany and across the world. In fact, some of these choreographers, because they did not become household names in the same way

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44 Elswit, Watching Weimar Dance, 43.
45 Susan Allene Manning, Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dance of Mary Wigman (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 1, 18.
46 Ibid.
that Wigman did, pushed the boundaries further and experimented more deeply than Wigman could have done because of their distance from the spotlight.

Still, Wigman’s choreography and mind-body approach to her movement practice gave her the edge she needed to attract not only the German public, but eventually, American audiences. Wigman would not have achieved the level of notoriety that she gained without her often tumultuous, yet generative relationship with Laban. Both dancers, in the second decade of the twentieth century, sought new ways to define dance as an endeavor that was not only bodily but also emotionally and spiritually engaging. Both were experimenting with movement without music, and both possessed large egos that would occasionally cause turbulence in their relationship in later years. Still, Wigman and Laban influenced one another, and it was through Laban’s careful and calculated direction that Wigman’s movement capabilities began to soar.

**Laban and Wigman’s Choreographic Endeavors**

One of the most important parts of Laban’s practice was his encouragement of his dancers to explore their own choreographic practice. By 1913, Wigman began to experiment with setting her own choreography. Her first piece, “Dance of the Straight and Curved Lines,” explored the idea of bastardizing ballet by rejecting its rigidity and austerity, and instead looked toward new modes of inquiry that privileged the actual curvature of the human form.\(^{47}\) However, Laban rejected its validity, noting that Wigman had not done enough to explore the possibilities of emotion within her aesthetic and physical exploration.\(^{48}\) One of the main points of contention between Wigman and

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\(^{47}\) Odom, “Mary Wigman: The Early Years,” 82.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
Laban throughout their relationship was that Laban did not reject ballet as Wigman did; he saw possibilities within the form that he could manipulate, while Wigman chose to work entirely outside of the form to see where her own imaginative and individualized modes of physical inquiry could come together. The dispute became one that dictated most of their working relationship, and eventually led to major disagreements. Yet, Laban’s initial rejection of this piece led Wigman to dig deeper to develop one of her most seminal works in the following year.

Wigman’s Choreographic Journey: Hexentanz and Totenmal


In 1914, on the cusp of the First World War, Mary Wigman choreographed *Hexentanz I*, or “Witch Dance I.” The idea for the piece came to her through a dream, as a vision, of a witch professing a deep secret to an audience.⁴⁹ In the work, Wigman

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immersed herself in a deep “rhythmic intoxication” to push herself closer toward the demonic, spiritual character that she was embodying. It is likely that some of this interest was inspired by Africanist influences due to the rhythms and masks that she was set on using. In the work, Wigman begins seated on the floor, wearing a long, patterned dress that resembles a cape, with an open back – a provocative costume for the era. However, Wigman's most radical decision seems to have been her choice to wear a mask. She felt that the truest way to embody the eerie qualities of witchery was by removing her own expressive face from the piece and instead covering it with the exaggerated, permanent emotions that a white, ghost-like mask would convey. Wigman was also interested in exploring the emotions of humanity, in addition to her own individual emotions, and scholars speculate that donning a mask helped her achieve that sense of universality within her own movement.

One of the reasons that Wigman’s choreography was revolutionary was her interest in both the occult and the pursuit of what she termed “ecstasy” through her movement endeavors. Wigman believed that “dance transgressed traditional western divisions of mind and body, of present and past.” Then, represented the possibility of inhabiting a spiritual in-between world through which she could discover what she often described as “the essence of the original man.” She danced to connect spiritually to herself and to others, and to harken back to the simplicity of emotion that she believed existed as a tenet of humanity.

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50 Sorrell trans. ed. The Language of Dance.
In addition to searching for oneness between the spirit and the body through dance, Wigman also explored other cultural influences so that she could experiment with human primacy through a broad scope of traditions. Her work on *Hexentanz* I was rooted in an exploration of traditional dances from what Western peoples then considered “the Orient,” a term used to lump together and exoticize many countries in Asia. The mask and costume in *Hexentanz* I were appropriated from Japanese Noh theater. Orientalism “refers to a set of assumptions embedded in the representation of the ‘Other,’ which, as anthropology has shown, is constructed rather than encountered.”53 This division of East and West, of the Occident and the Orient, was drawn more from imaginary boundaries than actual geographic distinctions.54 At this time, the Western mentality and way of life were privileged above all else, and othering Eastern cultures was a swift way to end the discussion and take from those cultures without having to justify that appropriation. Western imperialism of the East was also rampant during Wigman’s reign, and allowed for “theses of Oriental backwardness, degeneracy and inequality with the West” to pervade narratives about the East.55

By othering her own body in a way that was insensitive to the cultural traditions of the East, Wigman’s work cannot be perceived from a complete standpoint of honor in today’s world. Though her work was undoubtedly appropriative of Asian cultures, one could argue that her process for using those influences mostly originated from an interest in looking for purity of creative product, rather than concocting meaning from

55 Ibid., 206.
scratch, and building upon pre-existing spiritual connections to establish legitimacy through her work.  

Wigman was also interested in the idea of drawing from what she saw as primitive movement, or organic, bodily movement so that she could continue to explore dance from a variety of perspectives. Wigman’s ideas of primacy and primitivism followed Western-centric and European norms that conflate primitivism with a subhuman reality. However, Wigman seemingly explored these ideas to arrive at an understanding of humanity at its most base level; it was more of a research endeavor, rather than an exploitation.

*Hexentanz I* explored these ideas of primitivism and of connecting with spirits through an extremely obvious, yet original aesthetic subversion: breaking traditional standards of beauty in dance. Wigman spent most of this piece on the floor, with her back curved and hunched and her face pointed directly toward the audience, with hands in the shape of claws thrown aggressively into the air every so often. For Wigman to break the traditional elongation of line and to sit on the floor and declare herself a dancer, was a political, radical move in itself. The music that she danced to involved ominous loud clangs and bangs from drums, with no sense of melodic cohesion and a constantly changing time signature that was appropriated from an Indian dance that inspired her. However, because the work was not fully documented on film, we do not know who the composer of this work was.

*Hexentanz I* was first performed for the public in 1920, the same year that Wigman founded her own school of dance, The Wigman School, later called The Mary

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56 Tsitsou and Weir, “Re-reading Mary Wigman.”
58 Ibid, 56.
Wigman Central School, in Dresden.\textsuperscript{59} Wigman took some of the principles of movement and the approach of creating a style of absolute dance that involved a new way of incorporating body and mind and applied them to her own curriculum and educational approach to dance. She wrote that absolute dance is “independent of any literary-interpretative content; it does not represent it, it is; and its effect on the spectator who is invited to experience the dancer’s experience is on a mental-motoric level, exciting and moving.”\textsuperscript{60} Wigman hoped that the movement she produced could not be compared to, or be described as, any pre-existing text or idea; it should be seen as arising solely from personal impulses. She wanted her movement to allow the audience a freedom of interpretation and understanding that was not dictated by the social norms of watching performance.

Wigman’s first major performances coincided with the codification and branding of her own style of movement, and her own interpretation of \textit{Ausdruckstanz} from a feminist, spiritual perspective. By 1920, Wigman had secured the grounding, the financial acumen, and the vision to further her pursuits as a professional dancer and choreographer.

Wigman’s intellectual and choreographic rise accompanied the chaos and destruction wrought by the mechanized violence of the First World War. It is impossible to track the trajectory of Wigman’s career without acknowledging the reality that she was granted a certain amount of privilege from being a white woman of elite status at a time when most of Europe lay in shambles; the bourgeois enjoyed artistic privileges to which

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\textsuperscript{59} Partsch-Bergsohn, \textit{Modern Dance in Germany and the United States}, 31.
\textsuperscript{60} Elswit, \textit{Watching Weimar Dance}, 6.
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others did not have access. The great German dancers were luckily unharmed during the war, though the devastation was felt by many. Wigman was also not denied the resources and the time that she needed to build her resume and hone her skills. However, it does not seem to be a coincidence that 1920 was the year that Wigman’s fate changed for good and her work became recognized internationally; the war had ended, relative stability was sought and found, and an upsurge in art to honor the fallen and bring the world into its next evolution was emerging.

Later, Wigman’s students became some of the most prominent figures in both German and other European styles of dance. Among these students was Wigman’s most important and prominent disciple, Hanya Holm, who would eventually carry the Wigman legacy to the United States and influence a new generation of dancers to create their version of Expressionist dance; Holm was the unnamed link between ideas of expression and freedom in Ausdruckstanz and ideas of rejection and radicalism in postmodern dance. However, her influence remained mostly in the United States, while other dancers picked up this legacy in Germany.

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Wigman’s first performances of *Hexentanz* I laid the groundwork for further experimentation and bodily manipulation, and served to solidify her place as the “high priestess” of Ausdruckstanz. Her choreographic endeavors were prolific; between 1920 and 1940 she created almost 200 dances and her name was splashed across headlines in Germany and New York. However, following *Hexentanz* in both its first iteration in 1920 and its second iteration in 1926, the most controversial and defining piece that Wigman

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created prior to the Second World War was her collaboration with Albert Talhoff, a Swiss theater director, in their career-defining work, Totenmal, in 1930.

*Totenmal,* or “Monument to the Fallen,” was a multimedia spectacle. The year 1930 was a major, ominous turning point for the Weimar Republic, which until then had boasted relative profits for the rich and devastation for the poor. In 1929, this success abruptly ended with the fall of the American stock market and the rise of deflation across the world. It seems eerily fitting, somehow, that a large-scale monument to the dead, an homage of sorts to the period of growth and wealth that Germany had just enjoyed, garnered national attention.

![Figure 6 Totenmal, 1930. Photographer unknown, courtesy of the Tanzarchiv Leipzig](image)

The work was supposed to run about 90 minutes long, but with over 60 dancers, eight scenes, and countless interludes, the massive production ran about two and a half hours. Wigman described the piece as “a total work of art” and a “dramatic-

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63 Elswit, *Watching Weimar Dance,* 95.
64 Ibid, 96.
choric vision for world dance,” invoking German composer Richard Wagner’s ideals on all-encompassing art production. 65 Through the later years of the 1920s, Wigman’s interest in solo choreography expanded to working with large groups of dancers; she believed that spiritual messages could perhaps be portrayed better through a gathering of bodies, rather than through a single human being. Still, she created her choreography from a place of emotive expression and spiritual connection to both the self and a divine, unnamed source. At the time of Totenmal’s premiere, an unnamed reviewer from Oakland wrote that the work was “a series of glimpses, somewhat unrelated, into a new and mystical realm – a realm in which the senses and the subconscious are recognized as of equal value with the conscious intellect.” 66

The year 1930 was also a moment for reflection – in the previous 15 years, Europeans had dealt with the devastating effects of a world war, in addition to financial and political instability. It seemed only fitting that Wigman and Talhoff should concentrate their efforts on honoring the fallen of the war, particularly at a moment when the future was uncertain, the nation on a journey of continuous and harrowing identity crisis. The work, and later, Kurt Jooss’s moving, extremely controversial work The Green Table, signified a change in the general interpretation of Ausdruckstanz. Totenmal, a work that promoted group submission, demonstrates how Ausdruckstanz, a movement that was once identified for its privileging of the emotional self and exploration, was being repurposed and would eventually be completely reoriented to fit the National Socialist agenda.

65 Ibid, 98.
66 Ibid, 97.
The scenic structure of Totenmal involved meticulously organized choruses to serve as ensembles, with solo figures called the Demon of War and the Dance-and-Play Figure representing the foreboding presence of death that remained prominent in the German conscious.\(^{67}\) The first scene, known as the Hall of Summons, came after a fifteen-minute overture that involved dramatic crescendos that was supposed to be reminiscent of the chaos of the battlefield. A chorus of women entered the stage, attempting to save their men from meaningless deaths.\(^{68}\) This scene represents a significant shift in Wigman’s ideas about the role of women in dance – until this point, she danced for herself and to represent her own ideals. This first scene proved a reactionary turn toward traditional gender roles for Wigman, one of the first signs that her interpretation of her role in the Ausdruckstanz movement was changing.

\[\text{Figure 15 Women's Chorus from Totenmal, 1930. Photographer unknown, courtesy of the Tanzarchiv Berlin}\]

The interlude after the first scene involved speech, one of the first instances in which Wigman chose to make her dancers break their performance presence and interact

\(^{67}\) Ibid, 99.  
\(^{68}\) Ibid, 100.
verbally with the audience. The performers repeatedly recited “Ah, remember the dead/In memory keep the dead.” This particular line was one of the main reasons that reviewers responded so viscerally to the work because to them, it represented a pacifistic ideology that was distinctly anti-war. Wigman and her contemporaries, throughout the 1920s, began to conflate ideas of truth with death that emphasized physical relationships with metaphysical ideas. Totenmal was an overt example of this conflation; by fighting against death and honoring the fallen, Wigman and Talhoff were also declaring truth and the reality of mortality. The idea of addressing humans as mortal beings and portraying death onstage was just coming into prominence during this era, as notions of the afterlife were going out of fashion. Still, openly discussing death and mortality in a performance setting was essentially unheard of. Even through the movement of Ausdruckstanz, dark themes such as death and violence were rarely explored through performance.

The remaining sections of the work, called the Hall of Oblivion and the Hall of Conjuration, represented an attempt at awakening the spirits of the fallen from the dead. The final solo, danced by Wigman, was called the Dance of Sorrow, in which she offered her own death as sacrifice for the lives that were lost years earlier. This solo was often excerpted and was later performed on Wigman’s tours of the United States in 1930 and 1931. Totenmal was one of the first overtly political works in German dance history. It opposed war and violence, and it explored controversial themes of suicide, ghosts, and vindication for the fallen. Interestingly, dance historian Susan Allene Manning argues that despite its radical and perhaps anti-establishment characterization, the work still set

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69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid, 1.  
71 Ibid, xvi.  
72 Ibid, 100.
a precedent for what would become Nazi dramaturgy.\textsuperscript{73} If looked at from the opposite vantage point, the work was an homage to war and an embrace of death. However, the most extreme demonstration of pacifist tendencies came from another important figure in the \textit{Ausdruckstanz} movement: Kurt Jooss.

\textit{Kurt Jooss: The Green Table and the End of the First Chapter of Ausdruckstanz}

Kurt Jooss remains perhaps the most controversial and difficult to characterize among the \textit{Ausdruckstanz} leaders. Jooss’s work fits into the ethos of \textit{Ausdruckstanz} yet he spent time distancing himself from it, as he felt it was limiting.\textsuperscript{74} Still, he must be considered and situated in the context of the movement, because without the

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, 101.
\textsuperscript{74} Partsch-Bergsohn, \textit{The Makers of Modern Dance in Germany}, 30.
movement’s support, Jooss would not have been able to create political dances nor command influence.

Jooss, like Laban and Wigman, did not have any formal training in dance. He was born on a farm in Wittenberg in 1901, where he trained as a singer and actor. He was introduced to Laban in 1919, and felt that there were greater possibilities in dance than in either of the art forms that he trained in, so he left to follow Laban toward his new movement ideology. Jooss wrote that “[he] was entirely unsuited to become a dancer. From the first moment of being in the new world, however, a complete change overtook [him]. [He] became deeply involved, [his] body changed, and [his] whole body gradually became part of this art.” Jooss, like Laban, did not fully reject the ideals of ballet, as Wigman did. He believed that there was possibility in the manipulation of the form for further experimentation.

Jooss worked closely with Laban, and in 1929, took over leadership of the Choreographisches Institut, when Laban decided to pursue other outlets. It was at this juncture, through which Jooss gained experience in teaching and had the opportunity to refine his own techniques and ideas, that Jooss began to choreograph on a political level and convey messages through his movement that had a direct target and clear moral value. His students at the Institut served as excellent tools for this work.

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77 Partsch-Bergsohn, *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States*, 42.
In 1932, Jooss debuted *The Green Table*, perhaps the most controversial European
dance work since *The Rite of Spring* in 1914. The piece had been choreographed in
stages; it began as a duet, was then delayed due to a knee injury that Jooss endured, and
then continued as a solo before it was expanded into a group work. *The Green Table*
explored themes of death and the end of life, and posited death not as an amorphous,
terrifying idea, but as a true, tangible, human event. Acknowledging mortality on the
stage was, even after *Totenmal*, still seen as revolutionary as it recognized the fallible
nature of humanity. On the cusp of the rise of the National Socialist movement, the idea
of the German citizen as fallible was perverse, as the Aryan ideal demonstrated the
strength, vitality and permanence of the German people.

*The Green Table* explored the brink between traditional treatments of death as an
insurmountable idea, and expressive, experimental projects in which death had a physical
and lasting presence. The thirty-six-minute piece explored this dichotomy through a
range of social archetypes represented by dancers. The most interesting of these
archetypes was the character of Death, played by Jooss. The fact that Death was played
by an actual person rather than a ghost-like figure directly questioned the ways in which
German society dealt with the passage of time and the impermanence of life. Instead, it
instilled Death with a sort of all-knowing power and will. By imbuing Death with a set of
decision-making skills about whom to take and whom to let live, Jooss drew an analogy
about war and oppression, about whom to kill and whom to spare.

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79 *The Rite of Spring*, choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky and composed by Igor Stravinsky,
was the first modern dance work to appall audiences. First staged in Paris in 1914, the
work used dissonant music, flexed feet, and themes of death and sacrifice.
81 Ibid, 9.
82 Ibid, 11.
The Green Table also placed Death at the center of the movement, as “Death [was] almost always moving; even when hovering at the back of the stage while men [fought] or women [wept], his feet often [stamped] a rhythm that the main scene [was] compelled to follow.” Rather than portraying a light, airy movement quality onstage, Jooss chose to play Death as weighted, relating to gravity through downward, heavy motions. This gave the character an explicit aura of authority, and a clear rebellion against the more classical lines of ballet that Jooss was once drawn toward to depict the protagonist. The character of Death was also quite noisy; as he lowered his pelvis toward the floor and demonstrated superiority, he also made heavy sounds. Though there is little surviving footage of the piece, it is clear that by looking at the musical score that went along with the work that the boots that Death wore always made sound.

The character of Death also blurred the line between human and animal. Jooss said in 1930 that he was intrigued by making a piece where he could embody the ideals of a “beast,” which was how he eventually conceived of Death in the final structure of The Green Table. Portraying Death as an animal, and in many cases, sub-human with a derogatory connotation, further solidified the rebellious nature of the work. Conflating humans to animals, particularly during an era in which the purity of the German people was sanctified above all else, was unholy and definitively dangerous for Jooss and his dancers.

Finally, The Green Table was provocative because it reminded audiences that death is real and can present itself at any moment, even if it seems to be far in the future. Most

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83 Kate Elswit, “Berlin…Your Dance Partner is Death,” The MIT Press 53.1 (Spring 2009), 82.
84 Ibid, 83.
85 Ibid.
of the performers were onstage throughout the piece, so “the sustained dancing of Jooss’s Death and his victims held the threat of actual death at a distance,” as dance historian Kate Elswit notes. Jooss’s ceaseless choreography mirrored the trajectory of life, while positing Death as an ever-present force.

The Green Table’s 1932 premiere coincided with the rise of the National Socialist Party in Germany. Thus, Jooss’s work debuted at a time when artistic scrutiny toward any work of art that was considered threatening to the goals of the Nazi agenda was on the rise. Jooss’s work was pacifist and overtly anti-war, ideals that did not make him a popular figure during the rise of a fascist regime. His portrayal of Death as a menacing figure that was always lurking in the shadows could be described analogously with the constant presence of the militarized National Socialists. After the work’s premiere, Jooss received negative press about his work and began to feel threatened by the growing power and influence of the National Socialist ideals. Thus, Jooss chose to go into hiding and fled to England, where he continued his work for the next 15 years.

Jooss’s exile foreshadowed the next decade of German art-making – the Nazis had full control over all artistic practices, so the creativity and freedom of expression that had marked Ausdruckstanz was repurposed to signify shared, militaristic ideals, with German identity and strength at the epicenter of German art.

Ausdruckstanz had come into existence at a time when German society needed a new artistic force, and served to ignite the German artistic conscience. The movement demonstrated the possibilities that freedom of expression could provide young dance-makers. However, the desire to conform to a larger sense of German unity quelled

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86 Ibid, 10.
87 Bergsohn and Partsch-Bergsohn, The Makers of Modern Dance in Germany, 64.
notions of individuality and self-expression. German dancers and choreographers launched into a challenging discussion of upholding their own aesthetics versus choosing to manifest their ideals and choreographic pursuits to fit the goals of a regime intent on communicating fascist, communal ideals, rather than individual expression.
Chapter 2

The War Years: The Nazis’ Rigid Art Policies and the Transformation of *Ausdruckstanz* into “The New German Dance”

The Origins of the National Socialist Party’s Artistic Censorship

As the *Ausdruckstanz* movement was experiencing a distinct transition from self-reflexive to more communal, traditional forms of movement, the German government was also approaching an imminent, drastic transition. The later years of the Weimar Republic brought great turmoil – the economic crisis of 1929 caused inflation to soar, and political fragmentation between the right and the left created a clear opening for a new leader to bring Germany out of despair. In 1933, a year after the premiere of Kurt Jooss’s controversial work *The Green Table*, which introduced political commentary into dance works on a large scale, Adolf Hitler, “the former tramp from Vienna, the derelict of the First World War, the violent revolutionary,” was democratically elected Chancellor of Germany.

After a decade of shifting rule and uncertainty about the political climate of the country, the fascist ideals of Hitler and the National Socialist party promised stability, success, and comfort for the disenfranchised citizenry. Fear clouded the minds of the German people at this point, for the future of their nation hung in the balance. Artists, too, felt the lack of a German social and cultural aesthetic standard as a means of negating their artistic power. Hitler capitalized upon this fear as a means of obtaining and then maintaining power and realizing his goal of making Germany a globally-dominant superpower that placed the purity of the Aryan race above all else. This rise of

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nationalism, both propagated by the new government and perpetuated by the people in need of hope, was accompanied by a heightened interest in the establishment of an inherently German style of art.

As he began to establish the Nazi political agenda, Hitler also finely honed his plan for German culture. Early on in his reign, “modern architecture, expressionist art and music, and aspects of popular culture such as modern dancing and jazz…were all categorized as cultural bolshevism (a term coined for modernist art movements that were generally associated with Jewish or otherwise unacceptable peoples).” Hitler recognized that art needed to play a major role in his vision for a powerful Germany, and sought avenues for artists to create and present works of art that fit the Nazi agenda. As politician Franz von Papen had written during the Weimar era, “A German cultural policy that carefully tends, in a conservative spirit, to the treasures of German culture and defends them relentlessly against all destructive attempts can only be carried out successfully by an independent state power.” Hitler became that independent state power, and with his own conservative agenda, the possibility of establishing a dominant German culture fell within immediate reach.

Artists had the power to further the Nazi message to make the party’s platform palatable on a creative scale, as Hitler understood that a larger cross-section of people could more effectively be reached through artistic messaging rather than through simple political ideology. A precedent for demonstrating German unity through art had been set in the late nineteenth century, and served as a base and a model for both the regime and

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the artists they employed to recreate and reinvent the idea of using art as a vehicle for obtaining power and maintaining unity.

**Turnen and the Volk: Early Origins of Dance and Movement as Fascist Guide**

The idea of the German *volk*, or folk, is centuries old. The Hitlerian reconception of the *völkisch* ideal stated: “through a process of mystical fusion, the individual was seen to access a higher reality beyond the material world of superficial reason and Enlightenment thought.” This conflation of otherworldly access and intellectualism demonstrated the godlike qualities that Hitler and his regime perpetuated. In their eyes, the Aryan race was superior and connected to mystic beings elevated above human status. This connection was a clear representation of the way that Hitler wanted German artists to produce artwork. He said “The artist does not create for the artist. He creates for the people, and we will see to it that the people in the future will be called in to judge his art.” He strongly felt those people should feel their connection to a spiritual other chiefly by creating and looking at art.

Hitler’s obsession with this idea was drawn from the earliest iteration of movement that was created to stimulate nationalist leanings. In the 1890s, when the German people were longing for a physical means to come together and celebrate what had become a unified German identity, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn created the form of *turnen*, the German gymnastics system. It was an “active physical expression of nationalism,” manifesting a corporeal reality of the German *volk*, while encouraging submission and

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93 Carole Kew, “From Weimar Movement Choir to Nazi Community Dance: The Rise and Fall of Rudolf Laban’s Festkultur.
95 Kant, “German Gymnastics,” 8.
discipline to benefit the success of the form.\textsuperscript{96} There were cult-like characteristics required in practicing the form – awareness of the collective, suppression of the individual, and a rejection of dissent. At the time, “turnen became the antidote to French ballet and supported the gymnastics cause in a substantial way.”\textsuperscript{97} Through movement, Jahn harnessed German talent toward a collective end, and encouraged German idealism and loyalty in the process.

Hitler drew on these principles as he imagined the concept of \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}, or “the people’s community,” with a clear emphasis on the creation of a “master race.”\textsuperscript{98} Nazi aesthetics became prone to theatricality – massive rallies and expressions of a communal identity through both visual and physical means. By emulating the successes of \textit{turnen}, Hitler could reimagine a Nazi aesthetic and define what was appropriate art on his own terms.

\textbf{Nazi Aesthetics and the Creation of Art Under the Regime}

The style of art that Hitler felt was representative of the Nazi ideal was extremely specific, yet also hard to create. The German phrase \textit{Blut und Boden}, or “blood and soil,” demonstrated the purity and all-encompassing German identity that Hitler proposed as true German art, an attempt at a codified style that reflected Nazi ideals.\textsuperscript{99} What were those Nazi ideals exactly? Nazi ideology, even to this day, remains muddled and contradictory – power through strength and unity, but what sort of unity? Nazi art, from the modern perspective, is often considered “bad” art – lacking intention, continuity and

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{99} Kew, “From Weimar,” 87.
By dismissing this artwork as non-art, a sort of ideological unity is assumed, declaring that any work created under the auspices of the regime was both invalid and uniform. However, it soon became clear that rather than the dance representing Nazi ideology – strength, power, unity – the dance became ideology, an expression of superiority, entertainment, cleanliness and reverence of Hitler and the regime. Dance as ideology was radical in a sense, but it was simply a continuation of the ideals that Mary Wigman had established through her work in the Ausdruckstanz movement.

The idea was to propagate the image of a strong Germany, so any art that threatened ideals of power and prosperity was considered unacceptable. There had been a precedent for artistic censorship in German history – most recently, Wilhelm Frick, an early leader of the Nazi Party in Thuringia, censored the work of modernist painters Paul Klee, Oscar Schlemmer and Emil Nolde in 1930. All were artists that had contributed significantly to the power of the Expressionist movement in Germany, and all began to experience the tightly clenched fist of the Nazis’ artistic policies.

Joseph Goebbels, one of the most sinister and destructive figures in the Nazi regime, was chosen as the Propaganda Minister of the Nazi Party following Hitler’s rise, through which a visceral hatred and distrust of both Jews and non-Germans became normalized. Goebbels and Hitler did not see eye to eye on many issues; Goebbels found

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100 Marion Kant, “German Gymnastics,” 7.
102 Kant, “German Gymnastics,” 6.
103 Goggin, “‘Decent’ vs. ‘Degenerate’ Art, 84.
Hitler’s thinking stunted and considered himself the intellectual leader of the regime.\textsuperscript{104} As the head of the newly-created Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, which had been established on March 14, 1933, Goebbels said that “we want to give people their due, though admittedly in another form than occurred through parliamentary democracy.”\textsuperscript{105} The term “propaganda” did not have a negative connotation during this period, though now it implies censorship and brainwashing. Propaganda was simply considered a means of conveying information and establishing messaging practices, so it was not immediately suspect to the general populace.\textsuperscript{106} From the outset, Goebbels was explicit that artists could express what they wanted, though under direct example and instruction from the Ministry and regime officials.

Goebbels and Hitler were influenced, curiously, by Jewish philosopher Max Nordau’s book, \textit{Entartung}, or “Degeneration,” which had been published in 1892 and described the dangers of showing the public “degenerate” imagery.\textsuperscript{107} Nordau was a trained physician who diagnosed “degeneration” and the use of the grotesque in art as a mental illness.\textsuperscript{108} He then applied the term “degenerate” to art that invoked either evil or sinister images that demonstrated a threat to power, which in this case was a categorical labeling of most advanced or conceptual work.\textsuperscript{109} Nordau further argued that modern art was created out of a major deficit in human character, and that he stood “in the midst of a severe mental epidemic; of a sort of black death of degeneration and hysteria, and it

\textsuperscript{105} Noakes and Pridham, \textit{Nazism 1919-1945}, 381.
\textsuperscript{107} Goggin, “‘Decent’ vs. ‘Degenerate’ Art, 85.
\textsuperscript{108} Peters, \textit{Degenerate Art}.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 17.
is natural that we ask anxiously on all sides: ‘What is to come next?”. Nordau’s dramatic assertion was then carried out in his equation of the modern artist with the criminal; he posed the idea that only those with truly destructive and sinister thoughts could produce works that demonstrated emotions from within.

Nordau’s distinction between degenerate and decent art became fodder for the Nazi agenda. Of course, labeling art “degenerate” served as a means for the Nazis to systematically categorize works of art and declare them unacceptable; by establishing a binary that connoted degenerate versus decent art, the Nazis enforced very specific standards and suppressed freer artistic expression. To the Nazis, degenerate art included all art that threatened the Aryan ideals of a strong family and a militarized citizenry. As Walter Grasskamp later wrote about artistic policy of the movement, “National Socialism represented an attempt to obscure a modern real world with an anti-modern ideology, and gratefully took up the self-proclaimed closeness of the artists to the mentally ill as an indication that every other attempt to come to terms with modernism was condemned to fail.” This rigid platform and categorization process meant that most “modern” art, or the more controversial, self-reflective style of art that had become prominent over the course of the early twentieth century, became “a symbol of corruption and degeneracy.”

Modern artists in Germany had blurred the line of what had been considered “art” – manipulating mediums, exploring the concept of the self, and making work that defied the normative beauty standards that evoked comfort and awe. Expressionist

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111 Ibid, 18.
112 Ibid, 49.
113 Goggin, “‘Decent vs. ‘Degenerate’ Art,” 86.
artists who had thrived during the Weimar era were chiefly concerned with the primitive
tendencies of German painters from the early eighteenth century.\footnote{L.D. Ettlinger, “German Expressionism and Primitive Art,” \textit{The Burlington Magazine} 110.781 (April 1968), 191.} Abstraction, and the
blurring of concepts and binaries, some of the most important aspects of Expressionist
art, further threatened the unity of thought and order that the Nazi regime sought.\footnote{H. Stefan Schultz, “German Expressionism: 1905-1925,” \textit{Chicago Review} 13.1 (Winter-Spring 1959), 9.} To
establish a distance between Nazi art and modernist art, Goebbels often perpetuated the
notion that modern art was “Semitic” in nature, and also arose from the dreaded
communist Bolshevik ideals that the Nazis so vehemently opposed.\footnote{Ibid, 86.} Modern art was
also seen as immoral because it privileged the individual over the collective and therefore
influenced the German state negatively.\footnote{Ibid.} Any Jewish or Communist connotations were
of course considered degenerate and impure by Nazi standards, and individuality
threatened the collective identity and unity of Nazi Germany. Both of these realities
further solidified an opportunity for establishing a typical Nazi aesthetic – but what
would that aesthetic resemble?

In fact, prior to the nationally unified rise of the Nazi regime, censorship of all
art other that was not explicitly German-centric began in full force. Non-Jewish art
therefore, eventually meant art that did not include Jewish artists or represent Jewish
ideas.\footnote{Potter, \textit{Art of Suppression}, 31.} In the early 1920s, the \textit{Deutsche Kunstgesellschaft}, or the German Art Society, was
established to promote the creation of art that manifested German ideals of purity and
supremacy.\textsuperscript{119} They were interested in promoting racial purity in the arts in Germany, and felt it was their personal duty to educate the public about the dangers of modern art.\textsuperscript{120} To further standardize this practice, on April 7, 1933, the \textit{Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamten} (The Professional Civil Service Restoration Act) was passed. The act restored a tenured civil service and allowed for the unceremonious dismissal of arts professors, museum officials, and artists that worked at other organizations, on political, racial (in the Nazi sense) and ideological grounds.\textsuperscript{121} The Nazis now had free reign to remove arts professionals that were propagating ideals that did not fit with their agenda.

To define what was acceptable art, the Nazis released a five-point manifesto, called the \textit{Deutscher Kunstbericht}, (The German Art Report) in 1933, authored by Goebbels, which laid out the following designations for artwork produced in Germany under the regime: all communist-themed work had to be removed from museums, but first exhibited and then burned; all museum directors who had previously displayed degenerate art were to be dismissed from their posts; no artist with Marxist or Bolshevist political affiliation should produce art of any sort; no Bauhaus artwork should be privileged or seen as high art; and all public sculptures that were not approved by the regime were to be immediately removed.\textsuperscript{122} This manifesto amounted to a clear attack on communism, Bolshevism, and individualism.

To declare what was considered acceptable art within the confines of the Nazi agenda, Goebbels and Hitler decided to organize an exhibition of undesirable art to

\textsuperscript{120} Joan L. Clinefelter, \textit{Artists for the Reich: Culture and Race from Weimar to Nazi Germany} (New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 25.
\textsuperscript{121} Barron, \textit{“Degenerate Art,”} 83.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 12.
teach the masses about what they considered to be the sinister impact of modernist artists. It served as one of the defining moments for artists prior to the all-encompassing censorship in the years of Nazism that followed.

Entartete Kunst: The Degenerate Art Exhibition and the Clarification of the Nazi Artistic Agenda

Goebbels recognized the necessity for clarifying for the German public which art to consider “degenerate” and which to consider “decent.” On June 30, 1937, Goebbels granted the president of the Reichskammer der Bildenden Kunste (The Reich Chamber of the Fine Arts), Adolf Zeigler, the right “to select and impound works of German art of decline since 1910 currently in the possession of the Reich, the states, the communes, from the fields of painting and sculpture, for the purposes of an exhibition.”

To demonstrate the dangers of engaging with and producing modernist, degenerate art, Hitler and Goebbels organized the exhibition in question, called Entartete Kunst: The Degenerate Art Exhibition and the Clarification of the Nazi Artistic Agenda.

123 Goebbels qtd. Ibid., 21.
Kunst, or “Degenerate Art,” in Munich. The origins of the word *entartete* are biological; the word defines a plant or animal that is altered so that it is no longer counted as part of the species it originated from.\(^{124}\) The idea of alteration beyond recognition perfectly encapsulated the idea that degenerate art no longer counted as an artistic endeavor, but instead, a sinister and destructive path.

The exhibition opened on July 19, 1937, and displayed 64 paintings, two sculptures and 20 graphic works from 32 German museums, the art of Klee, Schlemmer and Nolde among them.\(^{125}\) The exhibit was curated to demonstrate the erratic and sinister nature of these modernist works.\(^{126}\) The art on display featured some of the most striking works that the regime could find, and Goebbels used it as a propagandistic tool to demonstrate to the masses the horrors of perpetuating and promoting degenerate art.

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\(^{124}\) Barron, “*Degenerate Art,*” 11.

\(^{125}\) Goggin, “‘Decent’ vs. ‘Degenerate’ Art,” 88-89.

\(^{126}\) Peters ed. *Degenerate Art.*
The work was purposely hung to depict an even more negative view of the artists that created it: the frames were taken off the paintings, very minimal information was offered about the creation of the work, and the art was organized in a seemingly random and haphazard manner that only furthered viewers’ confusion about the work they saw.\textsuperscript{127} In addition to the random ordering of the exhibit, the work was coupled by massive slogans written on the walls, composed of the words of Goebbels, Hitler and other prominent Nazi officials. On one wall was written, “You see around us the monstrosities of madness, of impudence, of inability, and degeneration. What this show has to offer causes shock and disgust in all of us.”\textsuperscript{128} The lack of order coupled with the eerie language on the walls was supposed to denote the chaotic nature of the work and demonstrate a clear distinction of what was considered degenerate based on the “didactic order” in which it was arranged.\textsuperscript{129}

At the time of the exhibition, Goebbels, known to be an excellent if vehement orator, gave a speech to remind the German people that the artistic prowess of Germany had fallen into the wrong hands. He said that “German art, liberated by the forces of the people and paying tribute only to a concept of individual freedom that quickly led into intellectual anarchy, got lost in the thicket of the whirlwind of modern civilization and soon became only an experiment, a game or a bluff,” and that the Nazi regime “[did] not wish to constrain artistic-cultural development but to encourage it.”\textsuperscript{130}

As a counterpoint to the clear disavowal of degenerate art and the so-called promotion of Nazi art, “desirable art” was displayed in a separate room in the exhibition.
in Munich. The artistic development that Goebbels spoke about was represented through standardized German imagery that was less inherently and overtly political.

Therefore, acceptable artwork included themes of a strong, united Germany, portraying physical and mental strength, an emphasis on the family, the import of community, and the superiority of the Aryan race. Works involving German peasants and artisans became popular, and art conveying images of women and mothers were often promoted as well, to represent the familial ideal and the promise of women raising strong German families.\(^{131}\) The German quality of art was obvious, and presented a social rhetoric that privileged German strength and capability above all. Artists were supposed to contribute directly to the goals of the regime; contention of any sort was quickly quelled. However, one area of artmaking that presented a particularly divided opinion and narrative was the expressionist movement and *Ausdruckstanz*.

Artists unknown. The first poster reads “Support the assistance programs for mothers and children.” The second depicts strong German soldiers. German Propaganda Archive. 1939-1945.

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\(^{131}\) Goggin, “‘Degenerate’ vs. ‘Decent’ Art,” 84, 86.
The Question of Ausdruckstanz and the Governance of Dance in the Third Reich

The Expressionist movement proved to be a point of contention for the regime. Expressionist fine art was considerably more controversial, because of its influence from African art and tendency toward primitive impulses. By 1934, there was much confusion about the “official attitude” of the regime toward the Expressionist movement. \(^{132}\) Joseph Goebbels is known to have felt that the work of the Expressionists was subhuman as early as 1924, and Hitler recognized the freedom of expression of the Ausdruckstanz and other modernist movements as dangerous to a totalitarian regime. \(^{133}\) Still, some officials saw the work as inherently German and Nordic in nature because of its Gothic roots. Goebbels at first saw the spirit and chaos of “Expressionism as analogous to the spirit of Nazi youth.” \(^{134}\) Others saw Expressionism as a spiritual force that expressed the vigor and vitality of the German character, while others felt that the revolutionary nature of expressing the whims of the inner-self demonstrated German decision-making and inner power. \(^{135}\) Of course, Expressionism represented the many ideals that were considered degenerate under most definitions of Nazism – an interest in the self, versus the collective, a negation of the socially-accepted standards of French ballet, and a complete overhaul of definitions of what the body was capable of expressing.

Much of the artistic tradition of the early twentieth century involved deep self-inquiry, and an exploration of both the dark realities of the inner self and a keen interest in otherworldly ideas. This fascination with aspects of the occult remained one of the explicit points of tension for the regime, as some Nazi officials felt that mysticism and

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\(^{132}\) Barron, *Degenerate Art*, 12.

\(^{133}\) Ibid, 12.

\(^{134}\) Ibid.

\(^{135}\) Goggin, “‘Decent’ vs. ‘Degenerate’ Art,” 88.
religious or spiritual connection to something beyond this world was completely anathema to the Nazi sensibilities, while others believed these connections related to their almost above-human belief in themselves. Ultimately, Expressionism in the visual arts did not receive Hitler’s blessing, but in dance, an official stance against Expressionism was never overtly expressed.136

However, the expressionist values of Ausdruckstanz had to be manipulated to convey Nazi ideology.137 The regime recognized that the new dance ideology could accommodate the leading German dancers because their dance had already privileged willful and primitive impulses that resonated with fascist ideology, an often-cited link between Expressionism and National Socialism.138

These so-called “primitive impulses” could be directed toward arriving at a desired Nazi representation of German personhood. The Nazis realized that they could manipulate the ideals of the inner self that were touted through Ausdruckstanz and reorganize them into expressing the most important facets of their German identities – power, force, and will among them.

Ausdruckstanz served a unique position in this discussion of what German culture should demonstrate, and what should comprise its many elements. The question of Ausdruckstanz and its place in German culture needed to be relegated to a specific governing body. Goebbels was involved with the establishment of the Reich Culture Chamber, through which the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda had been created. The Reich Culture Chamber would function as the governing body that

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136 Barron, Degenerate Art, 12.
138 Ibid, 218.
would decide and dictate what constituted acceptable art making under the regime’s qualifications.\textsuperscript{139} A subset of the Reich Culture Chamber was the Reich Theater Chamber, which had seven sections governing the fine and visual arts under the regime. Departments IV and X were responsible for administering dance and directing dancers and choreographers under the regime.\textsuperscript{140} The departments were to submit art reports to Goebbels that were meant to refrain from critical analysis and allow the art to speak for itself (which ultimately proved completely hypocritical, as degenerate artwork was described as art that was too open-ended).\textsuperscript{141} The German Dance Yearbook, which was published in 1937 and served as the reigning Nazi document for oversight for the arts, describes the Theater Chamber as follows:

\begin{quote}
The Reich Theater Chamber administers with exclusive competence all dancers and dance affairs including lay dance and physical dance training. It cares for the training of the young and regulates admission to the professions of dancer and dance teacher. It supervises all institutions of dance instruction, administers examinations and tests, determines the methods of examination and establishes the regulations governing schools and teaching.\textsuperscript{142}
\end{quote}

By establishing complete dominance over all aspects of dance administration, and most importantly, controlling the specialized training that young dancers received, the Reich effectively coopted the dance field with one important regulation. At first, performers had to declare membership with the chamber to continue practicing their profession, but membership quickly became more and more restricted.\textsuperscript{143}

However, the administration of dance under the regime was never explicitly clarified, and it remained jumbled without a clear leadership structure for most of its

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\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 79.
\textsuperscript{141} Strathausen, “Nazi Aesthetics,” 10.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid, qtd. \textit{German Dance Yearbook}, 23.
\textsuperscript{143} Bendersky, \textit{A Concise History}. 
existence. To attempt to establish clarity and unity in leadership, Fritz Bohme, one of the foremost advocates and critics of dance in Germany at this time, advocated the creation of an eighth section dedicated solely to dance administration, or what he called “a chamber of arts for movement,” rather than subsuming it within the Reich Theater Chamber. Bohme had written to Goebbels on November 8, 1933, urging him to proclaim dance a fully established art-form. Bohme recognized the powers that dance could have in disseminating the German message, and felt that it should be treated as a form of high art so that it could accordingly make the commentary necessary to attract and convince Germans to support the ideals of the regime. Bohme wrote that “there is no international dance form that is above race. When dance is so cultivated, it attacks the roots and the authentic expression of a people.” He believed that allocating specific power and access for dance could elevate its status in supporting the regime’s goal of German unity. However, due to the lack of centralized leadership surrounding dance, and a divided opinion over which dance forms were acceptable, arguments and haphazard decisions were constant within the Reich Theater Chamber. Thus, an eighth section for dance was never created.

In an attempt to assert control, the Ministry released a statement that “all theaters within the territory of the Reich are subject to the direction of the Reich Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda and its respective minister with a view to the fulfillment of their cultural objectives.” “Cultural objectives” referred to

144 Karina and Kant, Hitler’s Dancers, 95.
145 Ibid, 94.
146 Kant, “German Gymnastics,” 17.
147 Karina and Kant, Hitler’s Dancers, 83.
the furthering of the Nazi agenda through art, and the dismissal and removal of artists and dancers who were not racially fit under Nazi policy.

Artists who were not seen as racially fit were artists who were not of Aryan descent – Jews, non-German dancers, and anyone who did not have “pure” Aryan or Nordic ancestry. The regime took up Bohme’s claim and declared that dance was an overt “race question” – movement should expressly convey the messages of the regime by literally promoting its ideology through the idealized, perfect body of the Aryan dancer.148 Dancers and choreographers had to establish ariernachweis, or proof of Aryan racial origins, to work under the regime.149 However, it seems that Aryan artists adhered to Nazi guidelines of their own volition. They wanted the regime’s blessing and legal approval. Bohme later wrote: “Even the dancer must first be self-aware as a German human being and deeply embedded in the National Socialist movement, not just outwardly but inwardly as a whole person in will, thought and feeling.”150

Dance artists recognized that their careers and their livelihoods would only be protected if they abided by the ideals of the Nazi agenda. Still others dissociated from any forms of movement that were deemed unfit by the Nazis. Just as most German laypeople did not fully agree with the ideals of the Nazi regime, the strong manipulation and scare tactics that the regime enforced served as a tool to influence choreographers to follow suit or endure consequences. Mary Wigman, however, proudly proclaimed her allegiance to the regime without being forced. Wigman removed at least five Jewish and

148 Ibid, 102.
149 Ibid, 83.
150 Ibid, 37.
non-Aryan dancers from her company.\textsuperscript{151} Notably, both Laban and Wigman echoed the sentiments of the regime in their own ways, of their own volition, rather than through coercion.

\textit{Laban and Wigman: Arbiters of the Nazi Aesthetic?}

Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, as we came to understand in Chapter 1, served as the founders and most important figures in the \textit{Ausdruckstanz} movement. Under their guidance and continued success both choreographically and ideologically, the dancers and choreographers of \textit{Ausdruckstanz} garnered international attention for their ability to convey emotion and their assertion that dance was more about emotional expression than pleasing aesthetics.

In most dance scholarship, the nature of the relationship between \textit{Ausdruckstanz} and the Nazi regime is contested – some argue that Laban and Wigman were vehemently opposed to the oppressive regime’s tactics, and some argue that they agreed with the restrictive policies for which Nazis advocated and followed the rules, not through threats of coercion, but of their own volition. It appears that at least in the case of Laban, the latter is undoubtedly true.\textsuperscript{152} Dancers wanted to establish and consolidate their position under the Nazi rule, and were unafraid of working against one another, in the name of the German people, to prove their loyalty and share their innovative ideas with the regime.

Laban was appointed the ballet director of the \textit{Staatsoper} (State Opera) in Berlin in 1930, consolidating his importance in the German dance scene and the absolute gains


\textsuperscript{152} Kant and Karina, \textit{Hitler’s Dancers}. 
in public perception of expression and experimentation that were made in terms of moving away from ballet and toward modern dance.\textsuperscript{153} His success with the founding of the Tanzbühne Laban in Hamburg in 1920, and later, the Choreographische Institut Laban in Wurtzburg in 1926, catapulted his leadership abilities and made him a viable candidate for this position.\textsuperscript{154} As previously mentioned, Laban briefly embraced ballet before rejecting it, so it seemed only fitting that he would eventually be promoted to such a prestigious position in the dance world.\textsuperscript{155} The fact that a leading member of the \textit{Ausdruckstanz} movement was promoted to such a coveted position as one of the most influential leaders in the arts in Germany proved that the tables had turned, and that German culture was at once more varied and nuanced than before. Laban’s movement choirs, involving many people in synchronicity demonstrating a collective goal, eventually became the basis for many of the mass rallies and propaganda tactics of the regime – an example of the cooption and manipulation that was rampant from Goebbels and his henchmen.\textsuperscript{156}

However, once he was appointed, structural issues caused many challenges for the theoretical, conceptual Laban to succeed. Laban directed the ballet from 1931 to 1934, but his known ego stood in the way of allowing him to make the changes he wished to make; he wanted the ballet to be more expressive, more experimental and more encompassing of what he believed to be a German identity: one of power, strength and emotional conveyance.\textsuperscript{157} Victor Gsovsky, the well-known and generally beloved

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{154} Maletic, \textit{Approaches to Semiotics: Body-Space}, 9, 17.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{157} Kant and Karina, \textit{Hitler’s Dancers}, 14.
\end{footnotesize}
ballet master of the *Staatsoper*, immediately clashed with Laban’s strong and radical approach to governance; Laban unceremoniously fired him when their differences proved too challenging to overcome. Laban also fired many of the soloists and most of the corps de ballet (the ensemble section of the company) citing political differences, as many of the ballet dancers were more progressive than Laban and they disagreed with his modes of handling the *Staatsoper*.¹⁵⁸

![Photographer unknown. Laban with members of the Berlin *Staatsoper*. The State Opera Stock Photos. 1934.](image)

Another issue that Laban faced was his preference for dancing barefoot. One of the quintessential aspects of traditional ballet was the long lines that were created from women dancing *en pointe*, or with ballet shoes fitted with a wooden block on which dancers would literally dance on their toes. Elongation, elevation, and feats of the human body created a spectacle that balletomanes adored. Laban wanted to abolish that

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.
hierarchical nature of dance and bring it back down to Earth, privileging gravity and the dancers’ connection with both one another and the floor beneath their feet.\textsuperscript{159} This dichotomy between bare feet and pointe shoes enraged both audiences and dancers, and led to much unrest in leadership and performance for the \textit{Staatsoper}.

However, the most important and positive change that Laban enforced in the structure of the ballet was the general overthrow of the traditional ballet ensemble consisting of the prima ballerina, ballerinas, coryphee\(\text{s}^{160}\) (or soloists) and their male counterparts, plus the corps de ballet.\textsuperscript{160} In this sense, the Prussian tradition for the ballet company structure that had existed for centuries was broken, and created opportunities for further freedom in company configuration. No longer were dancers confined to their one role in the hierarchy; shifts in order and power could be made easily and often, and decisions about who would dance where and in what role could be made more fluidly.

Other advances that Laban made shifted German public perception of the role of dance in society. He established a dance archive that was to be attached to the \textit{Staatsoper}; until this point, dance documentation, both in Europe and otherwise, was scant.\textsuperscript{161} By initiating the creation of a dedicated space to preserve dance history was a declarative step in maintaining the importance of dance and in its preservation as a vital art form. Laban also advocated for the creation of a German Dance Theater under the governance of the Reich Culture Chamber.\textsuperscript{162} This dream was never realized, but demonstrated Laban’s interest in legitimating dance on a grand scale.

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\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 17.
\end{flushright}
Despite his failures in the Staatsoper, Laban succeeded in demonstrating to the Nazis his own innovative prowess in turning the field of dance into a reputable form through which the regimes’ messages could be conveyed. Once he had earned the regime’s trust, he was appointed the director of a training camp for young dancers in Rangsdorf.\(^{163}\) There, he attempted to convince the dance community at large of the import of the National Socialist ideology. He believed it could connect to the message of both Ausdruckstanz and link its power to the emotional possibility achieved through dance. This is perhaps the clearest example of the National Socialist cooption of the messaging of Ausdruckstanz to further their own fascist message. They recognized the power of having Laban on their side, convincing both young and established dancers of the importance of the Nazi ideal and that the expressionist means of conveying emotion was a perfect conduit for this demonstration.

Laban’s steady ascent in the cultural sector of the regime was facilitated by Propaganda Minister Goebbels’ decision to see the Ausdruckstanz movement as a vital medium through which to convey the National Socialist message. Goebbels chose to believe that modern or Expressionist dance was in nature a true expression of Nazi ideology.\(^{164}\) It was also important that Laban was perhaps less radical than some of his counterparts in the movement. Rather than translating scientific findings into mysticism, as Wigman did, Laban preferred exploring intuitive understandings of natural phenomena. His lack of interest in the occult certainly helped his case.\(^{165}\) So, too, did his racist leanings. It presumably helped Laban that he had written extensively on the

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{164}\) Ibid., 25.
\(^{165}\) Ibid., 31.
inferiority of blacks and non-European dancers.\textsuperscript{166} Laban became obsessed with advancing the idea of dance “for the white race.”\textsuperscript{167} He wanted to portray what he felt were only the most exquisite and ideal bodies onstage to convey Nazi messaging.

Laban was responding to a racial purifying initiative across art forms that the Propaganda Ministry spearheaded to ensure clarity and success across the German cultural sectors. Goebbels situated dance in the context of the broader “race question,” one of the most sinister and important components of the Nazi agenda. Dancers, just as the rest of the important figures in the regime, were supposed to represent the purest of the Aryan race. Interestingly, Laban was Austrian, as Hitler was, but still he chose to adopt a German identity and serve as the leader of the German dance form. At first, this was apparently enough of a declaration of Aryan and German identity for the regime to allow for Laban’s continued presence and leadership in dance.

In fact, the regime acknowledged that it truly needed the guidance and direction that Laban possessed to give German dance a specific intention and purpose. Rudolf Cunz, the desk officer for dance in the Propaganda Ministry, relied on Laban’s knowledge of the field and interest to guide his own decision-making about the form.\textsuperscript{168} Though Cunz went on to wield great power in the Propaganda Ministry, he owed much of what he knew to Laban’s example. Laban applied his concept of the movement choir, to adopt the principle of the \textit{gemeinschaftanz}, or the “community dance.”\textsuperscript{169} In community, Laban believed, the dancers of Germany could pay homage to a higher power, in this

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 99, 35.
\textsuperscript{167} Carole Kew, “From Weimar Movement to Nazi Community Dance: The Rise and Fall of Laban’s \textit{Festkultur},” \textit{Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research} 17.2 (Winter 1999), 86.
\textsuperscript{168} Kant and Karina, \textit{Hitler’s Dancers}, 46.
\textsuperscript{169} Carole Kew, “From Weimar Movement,” 78.
case Adolf Hitler, while also working toward the betterment of the German people while harnessing its potential.

Laban also used his power to distance himself from his disciple, Mary Wigman. Though he appreciated and supported her work, he publicly proclaimed that Wigman’s work and approach to dance should not be the only one.\(^\text{170}\) So began Laban’s long and tumultuous inner battle over the place of Ausdruckstanz in the Nazi regime, and in general, as the reigning dance form in Germany at the time. Laban had of course played a major role in defining Ausdruckstanz and smashing the boundaries and hierarchies within the dance world through his free approach to movement. Yet, as he grew more conservative and more enamored of the Nazi ideal, Ausdruckstanz and its connection with mysticism and the occult became questionable for Laban.

Laban’s internal questioning of this relationship unveiled a deeper challenge for the regime: defining what cultural realities defined Nazi Germany and who could represent those ideals. The goals of the regime were clear; establishing German superiority both physically and mentally through an explicit emphasis on the Germany community remained paramount, and were to be stated clearly through the “New German Dance,” the proposed Nazi dance aesthetic. As an attempt to explore this question further, regime officials, with the guidance of Laban, organized a German dance festival, called the Deutsche Tanzfestspiele, in Berlin from December 9 to 16, 1934.\(^\text{171}\) At this time, Ausdruckstanz still represented a “site of conflict, where the state’s forcible

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 90.
\(^{171}\) Buch and Worthen, “Ideology in Movement,” 216.
imposition of aesthetic canons and political values was still in negotiation with the available forms of dance and music and with the artists that employed them.”¹⁷²

In this festival format, Laban and his contemporaries were given the opportunity to use the values and aesthetics they had developed during the Weimar era while replacing and reshaping the free frameworks in which they worked to abide by Nazi principles. Laban was accustomed to planning dance events on a large scale; he hosted his movement choirs, spaces in which movement was explored on a grand scale and with deep introspection and discussion on its values, in 1927 in Magdeburg, 1928 in Essen and 1930 in Munich.¹⁷³ However, true to the Nazi interest in quelling conversation, the discussion aspect was removed entirely from the festival. The dance that was presented was simply accepted as the ideal of German dance, and no room for interpretation or possible challenge was initiated. The festival marked the first declaration by the Nazi regime of the importance of codifying their style of a German dance aesthetic, and using it for a very particular, propagandistic purpose.

To further aid the importance of establishing clarity about what German dance embodied, Otto von Keudell was appointed as the Ministerial Head of the Performing Arts under the Propaganda Ministry in 1935. Assisted by the broad power the Ministry gave him, Keudell endeavored to simplify the sociopolitical connotations that dance had encompassed during the Weimar era, and instead sought to refocus it toward a less complex, nearly quaint end.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, 1935 also marked a shift in Nazi policy toward an even more rigid and standardized form of dance. On September 16, 1935, in a public speech, Goebbels denounced the use of the words “cult” and

¹⁷² Ibid.
¹⁷³ Kant and Karina, Hitler’s Dancers, 76.
¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 220.
“mysticism,” ideals that had been revered in Ausdruckstanz and were inherent in much of the work that Wigman and Laban created. With the important distinction between the cultic and the didactic dance in mind, Keudell focused on restructuring the German dance ideal prior to the 1936 Olympic Games, which were to be held in Berlin. The Games would prove to the world how Nazi Germany’s cultural identity manifested.

Laban, Wigman, and their contemporary Dorothee Gunther, were invited to represent the German people and present works that displayed the value and ethos of German dance on the international stage of the opening of the Olympic Games. The months leading up to the Olympics would ultimately serve as the final moments in which Laban wielded the power and importance with which the Ministry had bestowed him. His interest in Das chorische kunstwerk (the choric work), or creating massive works on a large scale with many dancers, was his final contribution to the scope of German dance at the time.

Laban had prepared a piece called Vom Tauwind und der Neuen Freude (Of The Spring Wind and The New Joy), which used over 1,000 dancers from 32 countries and was planned on a massive scale. The work was scheduled to be presented on July 31, 1936, just before the opening of the Olympics, to inaugurate the Dietrich-Eckart open-air theater in the Olympic complex.

However, the work exemplified the internal battle Laban faced between using dance as a tool for expressive communication versus a tool for political propaganda and a demonstration of ideology. Upon seeing the dress rehearsal of the performance,

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176 Ibid., 89.
177 Kew, “From Weimar Movement,” 73.
178 Ibid., 79.
Goebbels wrote in his diary that Laban’s work was “a bad, contrived and affected piece. I forbid much of it. It is all so intellectual. I do not like that. It goes around dressed in our clothes and having nothing whatsoever to do with us.” Goebbels censored the performance and Laban quickly receded from public view. Yet other reports of the piece say that Laban was so demanding and specific about his intentions for the performance of his work that he was dismissed – perhaps this was how the regime informed the public of his dismissal from the ceremony.

Ultimately, Laban fell out of favor because he relied too heavily on principles from scholars like Friedrich Nietzsche, whose writings provided ample examples on the use of the communal and the collective for both guidance through dance and through ideology, but whose ideals were considered sinister by the regime. Moreover, Laban was unwilling to choreograph his pieces directly as the Nazis wished, and paid more attention to the artistic integrity of the work than its reverence of Hitler and the ideals of the regime. Goebbels noted that understandings of the work were left to the audience and that it was not didactic or obvious enough. Individualized interpretation, of course, was anathema to the goals of the Nazi regime in general. Therefore, Laban receded into the annals of German dance history. By banning Laban’s large work on a massive scale, Goebbels effectively ended Laban’s reign over the German dance world. Laban’s ban also defined the German aesthetic, at least in practice – community was upheld, individual interpretation was dangerous. By 1937, when the Entartete Kunst exhibition was mounted, Laban had left Germany for England, where he remained until after the

180 Kant and Karina, *Hitler’s Dancers*, 60.
end of the war, and the Nazis had come closer to solidifying an aesthetic for their new dance.

**Wigman’s Rise and Fall Under the Nazi Regime**

Wigman, like her mentor Laban, experienced a surge in choreographic power and an influence that extended broadly both within dictatorial Germany as well as throughout the rest of Europe. Wigman played a pivotal role in helping the regime attempt to create a balance between “modernism, the avant-garde, and mass culture,” ideas that Hitler and his comrades hoped to hone and cultivate into a distinct German aesthetic.\(^{183}\) Wigman, once the champion of solo expression in her own right during the golden era of *Ausdruckstanz*, then “shifted attention away from the personality of the dancer and toward the suprapersonal energies of the dance.”\(^{184}\)

The regime, of course, was wary of the overt expression of the individual, and instead encouraged its prominent choreographers to manipulate the individuality that *Ausdruckstanz* represented to fit the Nazi mold: individuality in terms of German unity, rather than individuals expressing their inherent feelings. Wigman’s dances in the late 1930s and early 1940s recalled German romanticism; they told stories about struggle and triumph, and generally followed a linear narrative. This was a clear distinction from some of Wigman’s earlier work in which she eschewed music in favor of silence as well as circular narration. During the Nazi era, Wigman once again turned to music to aid her choreographic processes.\(^{185}\)

\(^{184}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{185}\) Ibid., 144.
Wigman’s own company had dissolved in 1928 amid personal financial struggle, but she was given a variety of dancers to work with under the auspices of the regime. She had been known for her authority and austerity in the studio; students internalized her leadership and used it as a guiding force instead of a dictatorial force to resent.\footnote{Ibid., 137.} Under the regime, Wigman’s leadership style changed in two important ways. First, she began to embody an obviously feminine perspective in her dances. As a soloist during the Ausdruckstanz movement, Wigman had performed not as man, woman or human, but as a spiritual being that defied gender binaries. During the Nazi era, she began to portray womanhood as it represented major facets of the familial ideal that the National Socialists valued.\footnote{Ibid., 140.} This was a distinct turn away from the feminist leanings she had previously portrayed, and a clear step toward gender roles and the sphere of domesticity.

The Nazis valued the idea of woman as mother and familial arbiter, and thus Wigman began to explore the role of “woman as wife and mother, woman as mourner of the dead, [and] woman as heroic martyr” in her own performance practice.\footnote{Ibid., 170.} She wore dresses in performances that showed off her figure, and began to accept being portrayed as a female symbol, rather than an agender dance icon. In January 1934, she had debuted “Dance of Silent Joy” under the umbrella program “Women’s Dances,” in which she showcased an animated facial expression and an overt use of her hands, both of which were thought to exemplify feminine traits.\footnote{Manning, Ecstasy and the Demon, 167.} By establishing herself as an explicitly female performer who represented the ideals of motherhood and matronly qualities, Wigman only solidified her place in the regime’s dance canon.
In 1936, Wigman received her invitation to develop choreography to showcase the physical prowess of Germany as they hosted the Olympic Games in Berlin – in the end, of course, only Gunther’s and Wigman’s were presented. In 1935, Wigman had written a declaration in support of fascist aesthetics called *Deutsche Tanzkunst* (German Dance Art), to ensure her acceptance by the regime. The piece that she choreographed for the opening of the Olympic games, set to be performed the day after Laban’s largescale work, proved to be a massive declaration in support of the Fuhrer. *Olympic Youth*, as it was titled, involved 10,000 performers in front of an audience of 100,000 spectators.\(^{190}\) The piece was “like a magnified and distorted version of Renaissance and Baroque court entertainment…[and] explicitly celebrated a mythology on display while implicitly celebrating the presence of a monarch, the Führer who reviewed the work from the stands.”\(^{191}\)

The piece was a success from the regime’s point of view, as it demonstrated rigidity, obedience and a clear homage to Hitler and his brethren. Though Laban’s banned piece had supposedly reflected these values, Wigman succeeded at presenting them through unity, rather than Laban’s disparate individuality. Curiously, Wigman never received another commission from the Nazi regime after her success with *Olympic Youth*.\(^{192}\) There is some dispute in dance scholarship over when exactly Wigman fell out of the regime’s favor, but it is generally accepted that her continued employment and collaboration with Jewish dancers led to her demise.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Wigman’s fall is the way she situated herself after the end of the war. In her diaries from the 1950s, she continued to portray

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 194.
\(^{191}\) Ibid., 195.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 202.
herself as a victim of the regime and erase her collaboration with Nazi individuals, though the historical record proves her commitment to both Hitler and the fascist aesthetics that her Ausdruckstanz choreography was manipulated to demonstrate.\(^\text{193}\)

Regardless of her attempt to distance herself from the Nazi name, her work during the war years proves a need to impress the Nazis, to adapt her work to their mission.

**Dance in the Later War Years**

There exists very little scholarship about dance under the Nazi regime after 1940. Laban and Jooss had fled Germany for England by 1937, and Wigman had retreated to Leipzig and quietly continued her dance practice without performing. It seems that as the regime became more stringent when their power began to wane, and the possibility for a toppling of the regime became imminent, their stronghold on the arts tightened. However, it seems too easy to simply accept this dearth of information and continue moving forward. For historians to simply assume that the arts did not thrive under the regime, rather than to look more deeply, is a safe if not irresponsible way of approaching this history. It seems necessary to continue digging to unearth some of the realities about dance during this period, as it seems that most of the arts managed to survive, if quietly and on a very low budget, through the end of the war.\(^\text{194}\)

Dance scholars later discovered that all documentation of dance between 1940 and 1945 was archived at the *Potsdamer Staatsarchiv* with little fanfare, and was only discovered by accident in the 1980s.\(^\text{195}\)

\(^{193}\) Ibid., 208.

\(^{194}\) Potter, *Art of Suppression*, 36.

been somewhat codified and standardized under the name of the National Socialist regime, seemed to cease to exist in the public sphere. Art became a threat to the unity and sanctity of the regime, and thus was hidden from the public eye in the early 1940s. The only remaining mention of dance that was publicly noted involved regulations on dance taught in schools. The *biologisches tandenken und Rassen – und Erblehre* (Biological methods for dance analysis knowledge about the influence of hereditary facts) were enacted to further winnow who could study and practice dance, and which “races” were genetically suited to its study. Of course, Aryans were found to be the only people worthy of this endeavor. With that decree, dance as a form of public entertainment slowly receded into memory, as the dancers and choreographers who had fought to remain relevant for so many years under the regime were quieted and quickly declared either obsolete or dangerous. Laban was later accused of engaging in a homosexual affair, and Wigman’s continued association with Jewish artists became increasingly problematic.

Following the United States’ entrance into the war and the liberation of the concentration camps in 1945, the regime fell, and with it, its policies about degenerate art. Germany, and most of Europe, lay in shambles; the idea of a vibrant German culture became an artifact of the past. However, once the dust settled and the remnants of the regime fell out of the present and into the archives, dancers and choreographers began to tiptoe out of the shadows. They were ready to return more fiercely and controversially than ever, spurred by the rigidity and destruction of the creativity that the Nazis had enforced.

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196 Ibid., 146.
197 Ibid., 145.
Ultimately, the Nazi officials that created their austere policies about art and art-making paved the way for a reentry, a reclaiming of dance and art by those who were silenced and censored during the war, as well as some who were coming of age in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was these choreographers who redefined the German dance aesthetic and made Germany a serious contender in the international dance scene.
Chapter 3
Tanztheater, Pina Bausch, and the Reclamation of Dance in Germany

“The implication is clear: Pina Bausch began where Mary Wigman left off.”

Post-War Stirrings: The Revival of Dance in Germany

The Second World War left an indelible mark on the lives of Europeans – families had been decimated, homes had been destroyed, and large swaths of the population had been viciously and systematically wiped out. The violence wrought by the Nazi regime was unprecedented; millions of people had been murdered for their minority identities, a generation of children had only known warfare, starvation, and dire times as their daily norms. With the elimination of vital aspects of European culture and severe limitations placed on those who could work and thrive, so too did European cultural endeavors seemingly cease to exist. By the end of the war, Europe lay in ruins both physically and metaphorically – cities were turned to rubble, and the general tenor among Europeans, and Germans in specific, was somber, grieving and destitute.

By 1942, the divisions of what would become free West Germany and Soviet-occupied East Germany, or the German Democratic Republic, were already being drawn. Germany was to be divided into four zones: what would become East and West Germany, parts of Poland, and parts of the Soviet Union. West Germany, the area in question for dance production, covered 53 percent of the total area that was being divided among the war’s victors, while East Germany claimed only 23 percent of the

198 Manning, Ectasy and the Demon, 26.
total area. This large, almost amorphous area became a hotbed for political subversion and artistic responses to the ravages of the war. There is little written about the arts in East Germany; it is likely that most artistic freedom and creation was quelled by the rigid and stringent policies of the Communist regime there. However, in West Germany, the story of the development of a German dance aesthetic continued. As citizens began to recognize the possibilities that existed within West Germany and the secrecy, isolation and destitute existence that East Germany represented, waves of migrations began to occur from East to West Germany. By 1952, the border between West and East Germany was sealed indefinitely, limiting both human contact and the exchange of ideas between each side. When the Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961, virtually all contact and migrations ceased for the next 30 years.

Ten years earlier in 1942, grandiose artistic ventures among Germans had been swept out of the public eye by Joseph Goebbels and his Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda. By the end of the war, the regime had so strongly limited the arts that most were relegated to work in private homes, away from the stern glare of the regime. Yet, in dance in particular, certain collaborators quietly and traditionally practiced the form that they had cultivated for decades while the regime turned a blind eye and worked on standardizing its systems of genocide and oppression, which were operating in full-swing by the early 1940s. Ausdruckstanz maven Mary Wigman moved to Leipzig in 1942 after her continued success under the Nazi regime ended tacitly; her choreographic creation for the 1936 Olympic Games opening

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200 Ibid., 1771.
ceremonies in Berlin was applauded, yet she was not invited back by the regime to create more works.

In 1942, Wigman was invited to direct the dance department at the Conservatory for Music and Dramatic Art in Leipzig, which she did without question; with her choreographic endeavors halted, the only possibility for her to continue her creative work was through teaching the form she had spent a lifetime cultivating and codifying.201

When the Conservatory was bombed in 1944, Wigman wanted to continue to serve her students (she had developed a small but devoted following over those formative two years) and began to teach in her small apartment.202 By the end of the war, Wigman’s talented students had outgrown the space of her small Leipzig home. These students had been sustained by her care, compelled to feel purposeful through Wigman’s powerful direction amid the chaos and terror of the war, and were prepared and honored to continue dancing under her direction. Wigman relocated to West Berlin with the intention of reestablishing her school, where she continued to teach until 1957.203

Rudolf Laban and Kurt Jooss had continued to teach in Dartington, England – Jooss had fled there with his partner Sigurd Leeder after the poor reception of his work The Green Table in 1933, and Laban joined him soon after his own work had been censored by Goebbels in 1937.204 The Jooss/Leeder School of Dance at Dartington Hall enjoyed a strong and positive response throughout the United Kingdom, and toured

201 Ibid., 222.
202 Ibid.
203 Ibid., 226.
204 Partsch-Bergsohn, Modern Dance in Germany and the United States, 138.
under the name Les Ballet Jooss.\textsuperscript{205} The company was considered a “modern” ballet company, and the overwhelmingly positive response toward it represented a continental shift in the perception of dance at the close of the war.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Europeans were prepared for a rejuvenation of the dance form through a return to entertaining forms of leisure – that is, the opposite of high art. The expression inherent in \textit{Ausdruckstanz} had caused something of a revolution before the war; yet after the war, it was seemingly too emotional and too risqué for audiences to appreciate its intent. Therefore, ballet reappeared in West Germany in full force. The light, calm, unemotional aspects of the dance, the familiarity of the linear shapes, and the regal nature of the costumes and the music were a perfect compromise to allow West Germany to slide back into the realm of the performing arts. Of course, there was an immense fear of producing and supporting work that was overtly political, and ballet succeeded in avoiding these connotations.\textsuperscript{206}

There is little written about the ballets produced during this era; perhaps the dance critics were still fearful that their writing would be considered grounds for arrest or punishment. Still, the emphasis is clear – ballet reigned, and Expressionism, at least for the moment, was pushed to the side. However, there was a clear opportunity for new choreographers to emerge and revive the traditions that had differentiated German dance before the devastation of the war.

\textsuperscript{205} Partsch-Bergsohn, “Dance Theatre from Rudolf Laban to Pina Bausch,” 16.

Expressionism Returns: The Early Years of Tanztheater

The early years after the Second World War became a breeding ground for ballet companies and lavish performances in West Germany. That was partly because the groundbreaking efforts of the Ausdruckstanz dancers and choreographers from decades earlier “had smoothed the way with [their] rejection of the academic style.” There was a clear opening and possibility for a resurgence of the themes expressed through Ausdruckstanz: internal emotion, connection to a spiritual other, and perhaps, down the line, an overtly political, self-aware expression that only bodily movement and physical connection to others could accurately portray. The German dance aesthetic could be revived and set on a new course, but with a more modern bent. This opportunity made possible the proliferation of universal themes of emotional availability through dance that could transcend countries’ borders, and in addition, to continue to define the German dance aesthetic.

Jooss and Laban returned to Germany in 1949, following the global success of Les Ballets Jooss and Laban’s quiet but mighty following of dancers in England and Germany. Jooss settled once again in Essen, and took over as director of the Folkwangschule. Laban continued to produce works in Leipzig and Berlin, but soon became more famous for his work on dance notation. (This was an ornate system of symbols and characters that Laban invented to track and remember movements. The system was ultimately adopted around the globe as the international language of dance). These Ausdruckstanz leaders’ celebrated return marked a societal shift in the German conscience – people were ready for the old guard and their themes to return. Laban’s emphasis on the divergence and convergence of space and time and Jooss’s distinctly

207 Ibid., 19.
anti-war, pacifist, and bold works served as an inspiration and starting point for new choreographers who were prepared to continue the tradition.

Some of the first choreographers to break from the ballet tradition after the war began to experiment with some of these Expressionist themes. Hans Kresnik, based in Bremen, established himself as an astute choreographer, and more importantly, a radical artist. His work was created as critical social commentary; for the first time since the 1930s, Germans were exposed to nuance and the subversion of norms through dance.²⁰⁸ Gerhard Bohner, another of Kresnik’s radical group, was a modern choreographer, drawing specifically on the ideals of line and shape propagated by the Bauhaus movement.²⁰⁹ These choreographers were among the first to stray from the rigidity and structure of the ballet that was historically advocated for and presented on the German stage, and instead provided glimmers of what dance could be if it were once again expanded beyond angularity and austerity.

Susanne Linke was among the next generation. She wrote, “I hope that the rhythm and the ‘swinging’ of modern dance, as well as Ausdruck [expression], which we have always insisted upon in Germany, will be preserved.”²¹⁰ Linke recognized the power that the style of Ausdruckstanz had granted to those who practiced it. Of course, it even garnered the attention of Goebbels and his Ministry during the war. Linke recognized the immense opportunity that awaited choreographers who were willing to pick up where Wigman, Laban, Jooss and their contemporaries left off. Soon after, a female choreographer was poised to elevate German dance to an international status that it had never experienced. Her name was Pina Bausch.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 25.
²⁰⁹ Ibid., 25.
²¹⁰ Ibid., 30.
Pina Bausch: The Rise of Germany’s Dance Sweetheart

Phillipine “Pina” Bausch was born in Solingen, Germany to a middle-class family on July 27, 1940. As a child, she was enrolled in dance lessons, and she studied all forms of dance, but particularly ballet, throughout her adolescence. When she was in secondary school, Bausch began to study at the Folkwangschule under Kurt Jooss, where she was eventually promoted to soloist with the Folkwang Ballett.\(^\text{211}\) In 1960, Bausch was selected to study at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, where she studied with greats such as Antony Tudor, José Limón, Anna Sokolow, Alfred Corvino, Margaret Craske, Louis Horst and La Meri – each a dance pioneer, each working on a fusion of dance styles to define what dance could be in the post-war period.\(^\text{212}\)

In 1962, Bausch was invited to collaborate on a joint effort between the Metropolitan Opera and a young Paul Taylor, a choreographer who would become one of the most commercially successful American dancers of the twentieth century.\(^\text{213}\) Bausch, unlike her predecessors in Ausdruckstanz, had immense, varied and international dance training. She was exposed to the most innovative, talented and renowned choreographers of the day, and was given great opportunities both within Germany and in the United States. Thus, she became a much sought-after figure once she returned to Germany after her collaborations in the United States.

In late 1962, Bausch became a soloist and choreographer for the Folkwang Ballett, which was still directed by Jooss.\(^\text{214}\) By 1969, she took over for Jooss as Director,

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\(^\text{211}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^\text{212}\) Ibid., 3.
\(^\text{213}\) Ibid., 4.
\(^\text{214}\) Ibid., 4.
and renamed the Ballett the Folkwang Tanzstudio. Bausch, though heavily reliant on ballet in both her own technique practices and later in her choreography, was adamant about expanding the characterization of all forms of dance under the umbrella of ballet. She was interested in the possibilities that lay within a renaming of the form, of the numerous ideas that could be tapped into with dancers who were trained in fields other than dance, such as actors or musicians, and the general idea that dance was not hierarchical. Bausch truly believed that dance was something that could be accessed by both the dancer who had been trained professionally and the dancer who had just begun. Of course, these ideas were not new – much of the roots of what eventually came to be known as Tanztheater were borne out of ideas honed by Bausch’s teachers, Jooss and Laban.

In 1973, Bausch found herself at the crossroads of opportunity. She had been at the Folkwang Tanztheater for nearly 10 years, continuing Jooss’s distinct and often subversive combination of ballet technique with social commentary, and was ready to redefine her relationship with dance under new auspices. She recognized that her training and intellectual capacity made possible the opportunity for creating the next phase of German dance – of defining it under similar, but slightly updated terms. Her many experiences both within Germany and in the United States had given her a nuanced and fresh perspective on pushing the binary of what was considered dance. Bausch wanted to explore individual stories to emphasize the universality yet also the uniqueness of the human experience. Taking from Wigman’s initial exploration into expression and what movement can be when removed from the context of the literary canon, Bausch was prepared to do what Wigman could not entirely master. This “reduction of dance to the
narrative of the body reinvigorates the project of Wigman and *Ausdruckstanz*, the ‘emancipation’ from the constructs of industrialized society, the constraints encoded in ballet. *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater* dramatize the ‘unfulfilled desires’ the body experiences in modern life.”

Bausch was ready to literally pick up where Wigman had left off; she was on the verge of creating a dance style that was more politically engaged, but could also reflect the sociopolitical climate of both West Germany at this point and other democratic countries that were responding to the effects of world war across the globe.

At the beginning of that year, she moved to Wuppertal, a small, industrial town in the northwest of Germany, and established the Wuppertal Tanztheater – what would become the most celebrated and renowned German dance company of the second half of the twentieth century. With the consolidation of the company, Bausch solidified the creation of German *Tanztheater* as West Germany’s premier, subversive, and ground-breaking art-form. Through Bausch’s strong connections within both the dance and theater worlds and the prowess of the large, diverse company that she created from the ground up, Bausch would choreograph and set more than forty evening-length works, performed worldwide, in many different iterations. Of course, Bausch could not have morphed *Tanztheater* into its final, standardized iteration without the advent of *Ausdruckstanz*, and the unique development of expression and ideology that it provided. This German dance aesthetic, which had been framed by the lack of inhibition and freedom of exploration of the *Ausdruckstanz* movement, served as Bausch’s foundation to build upon. Bausch’s *Tanztheater* served as the new, updated version of that specific German dance aesthetic; not only did it paint the German individual as provocative,

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radical and socially engaged, it also reflected the political climate of the day. These universal themes of radicalism and rebellion characterized German political and artistic engagement in the post-war period, and allowed for Bausch to both revolutionize the artform and engage a new variety of audiences worldwide.

**A History of Tanztheater, its Hallmarks, and its Origins in Ausdruckstanz**

_Tanztheater_, or “dance theater,” became perhaps the most revered German dance form in the country’s history. With the leadership of Pina Bausch and her contemporaries, the form, known for its self-deprecating, subversive, radical and eclectic sensibilities, grasped at the hearts of dancegoers around the world. These patrons of the arts were ready to embrace a dance form that was less about aesthetic continuity and more about the invocation of emotion, politics, and the breaking of societal norms – a step away from the proverbial German dance aesthetic and toward a more ubiquitous, didactic evocation of emotion. However, _Tanztheater_ was an extension of the themes that were explored in _Ausdruckstanz_, as emotion and expression were two of the most important tenets in each form.

In fact, Kurt Jooss coined the term “dance theater,” as he characterized his own early work under that moniker. As he wrote about his early ballets before he was forced to flee Germany,

“Our aim is always the dance theatre, understood as form and technique of dramatic choreography, concerned closely with libretto and music and above all with the interpretive artists. In school and studio, the new dance technique must be developed toward a non-personal objective tool for the dramatic dance, the technique of the traditional classical ballet to be gradually incorporated.”

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Jooss’s ideas about dance theater served as a foundation for Bausch’s work with the Wuppertal Tanztheater. The idea of “dramatic” choreography was later echoed in Bausch’s own invocation of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, French playwright Antonin Artaud, and American playwright Samuel Beckett and their own discursive theater works. The sociopolitical elements that Bausch explored were echoed by Brecht’s creation of “epic theater.” A particularly relevant component of “epic theater” is the idea of Gestus, or an emphasis on a “complex and many times contradictory combination of both body actions and word as a ‘socially significant gest,’ not illustrative or expressive.” Gest also translates as “gist,” or the main or essential part of a matter.

This Gestus ideal gave Bausch the opportunity to explore sociopolitical themes through her work, both literally and figuratively, and attempted to demonstrate the spirit or the crux of those ideas in much of her choreography. Another important aspect of epic theater that Bausch relied upon is that the actors essentially announce what is going to happen before it happens onstage. By presenting a very didactic narrative, Bausch could establish a trajectory that was clear, yet also easy to diverge from.

However, most Bausch critics point chiefly to her use of Brechtian vocabulary, arguing that she relied too fully on his theory without enough acknowledgement of other formative figures in the development of her own choreographic style. Another important figure in the German artistic canon that Bausch referenced is Richard Wagner, one of the most renowned composers in German history, known for his exceptionalist,

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219 Ibid., 3.
anti-Semitic rhetoric. However, Wagner’s influence on art-making is substantial; he composed the idea of a total work of art, which Wigman had relied heavily upon in her work for the Nazis. The concept of this total work of art is all-encompassing and covers many aspects of both emotional connection and artistic spirituality. Bausch, in turn, “rejects a totalizing Wagnerian vision in favor of a dialectical theatricality.” Bausch was not afraid to use Wagner as a direct opposite to further characterize her work as politically radical, while also using Wigman’s reliance on him as a point to stray from.

Bausch, like Brecht, delighted in shattering the illusion of theater by exploring the art of theater onstage, while also breaking boundaries through her examination of specific sociopolitical themes. Artaud, one of her earlier influences, wrote on the “frenzied” body, an idea that Bausch continuously presents through both sexualized subversion and gender politics in her work. Frenzy, or chaos, is something that Bausch’s work explores in a direct, explicit way, rather than in a parodic way.

One of the clearest situations in which Bausch explored these ideals of dialectical theater and chaotic bodily awareness was through her continued exploration of gender. Bausch consistently worked with subverting the ideals of women as objects and men as subjects, a common trope often explored in ballet and more traditional forms of dance, and she occasionally switched the narrative to view men as objects and women as subjects – a distinction and declaration that was rarely seen before Bausch’s reign. An example of this is in Bausch’s piece Café Müller, in which she places a horizontal line of men at the front of the stage without shirts, performing generally feminized gestures such as smoothing their hair, assessing their figures in profile, and inspecting their own

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223 Ibid., 322.
224 Ibid., 326.
225 Ibid., 323.
faces. By placing men in this typically feminized role, Bausch makes a commentary on the gendered nature in which we view dance, in how we are taught to value our bodies, and the way in which we often derive our self-worth from others’ approval of our appearance.

She also explored the idea of gender as both an expressive mode of communication through movement, and as a purely performative means of expression. Therefore, she often dressed dancers in evening wear to establish a hyper-sexualized, extremely clear distinction between genders to highlight this possibility of expression through communication. Scholars have argued that perhaps Bausch’s interest in subverting and critiquing gender binaries arose out of an interest in exploring the common reality of German Christians collaborating with Nazis, followed by their denial of their participation in this genocide. So, too, was Bausch commenting on the Nazis’ irreversible destruction of the German ethos by exploring limp figures onstage, unable to carry themselves upright.

Perhaps this exploration of gender through the lens of recent German trauma was a means to explore the complete transformation of those who either supported the Nazis or joined their ranks, shape-shifting from proud German citizens into cowardly, obedient people dealing with serious internal struggle. This play on gender roles seems to have been an attempt to reconcile, or at least further question and complicate, the cognitive dissonance that was inherent in so many Nazi soldiers and supporters. Feeling one way and behaving another, or performing a gender or sexual identity that differs

226 Ibid., 323.
from one’s biological makeup, can translate into the same sorts of feeling and understanding.

In addition to subversions of gender, Tanztheater employs an overt and almost exhaustive use of repetition to convey meaning, emotion and political agenda. Along with reinforcing the choreography that Bausch put forth on her stages, repetition was also used to unsettle or reconstruct the aesthetic backgrounds of both the dancers and their audiences. Repetition had always been a tool for reinforcement for choreographers, but Bausch exploited the use of repetition for these purposes of general discomfort, distortion and a break in the standard of what was considered aesthetically pleasing in dance. As one critic noted, Bausch’s use of repetition “awakens” audiences from the general trance-like state that watching dance can enforce. However, another critic noted that this particular repetition actually “alienates” audiences by presenting something that is nearly incomprehensible to register as a complete work. Even without a consensus on how repetition achieves a disavowal of traditional performance tactics and how that resonates with audiences, it is clear that Bausch’s work subverts a standardized narrative that can usually be traced along a particular trajectory in dance.

To further complicate this phenomenon, Tanztheater often exemplifies a non-linear, non-narrative, sometimes circular structure, with no clear beginning, middle, or end. Bausch relies on distinct imagery, often manipulating variations of tableau, to achieve a sense of narrative arc, rather than by a complete framing of a path. Due to this

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228 Fernandes, Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Tanztheater, 26.
231 Deborah Jowitt, “Please Do it Again, Do It Again, Again, Again…” The Village Voice, July 3, 1984, 137.
varied structure, Bausch’s work constantly rearranges and recontextualizes itself with each passing moment, keeping the audience guessing about what is happening and what world they are becoming immersed in.\textsuperscript{232} Further, it is rare in \textit{Tanztheater} works for the choreographer to elaborate on the meaning behind the work.\textsuperscript{233} Bausch almost never explicitly commented to either critics or audiences about the meaning behind the work – she was interested in their personal interpretations and the life experiences they brought to viewing her company’s performances, rather than dictating an emotion or idea for the audience to explore.

Bausch also relied on an eclectic combination of dancers. Like Jooss, her mentor, Bausch’s own training in ballet led her to require her dancers to take ballet class each day immediately prior to their eight-hour rehearsal.\textsuperscript{234} Though her choreography rarely relied on technique and physical acumen, she felt the form served as a necessary training mechanism for her dancers. Bausch often cast dancers who were far older than most professional dancers of the day, some who had spent lifetimes working in other arts fields or even outside of the arts. Bausch was far more interested, as she said, in what moves people, rather than how people move.\textsuperscript{235} Perhaps the range in age and ability of Bausch’s dancers contributed to the varied, sometimes controversial, and always surprising reactions of the audiences.

One of the hallmarks of Bausch’s continued success was the profound relationship that she maintained with her dancers. As her longtime collaborator Ruth

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{233} Christopher Bowen, “Everyday a discovery: Interview with Pina Bausch,” \textit{Stagebill}, Cal Performances, October 1999, 99.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Glenn Loney, “I Pick My Dancers As People”: Pina Bausch discusses her work with the Wuppertal Dance Theatre,” \textit{On the Next Wave}, October 1985, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Bowen, “Every Day a Discovery,” 102.
\end{itemize}
Amarane noted, “Meeting Pina was like finding a language.”\textsuperscript{236} Many of her dancers have commented that in rehearsal, Bausch mostly watched and barely spoke, taking in the experience of the dancers without providing much direction.\textsuperscript{237} The direction came in the initial creative process, where, even then, Bausch mostly provided guiding suggestions. She said, “All you can do is hint at things. Even when I use words, it has less to do with the words themselves, than with just…evoking something. And I believe that’s where dance comes in again.”\textsuperscript{238} This affirmation demonstrates Bausch’s belief that dance can illuminate the innermost feelings of a person, and to perhaps mock and mimic aspects of the human experience that deserve commentary. To further explore Bausch’s choreographic effect and process, it is necessary to analyze some of her works and their influence on audiences, German and otherwise.

**Bausch’s Works and Their Impact on German Dance and European Art**

Though Bausch’s career spanned more than four decades, she was most prolific from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, a period during which she created her most famous works.\textsuperscript{239} *Bluebeard: on listening to a tape recording of Béla Bartók’s opera “Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”* (1977), *Café Müller* (1978), *Kontakthof* (1978), and *1980: A Piece by Pina Bausch* (1980) represent the range and totality of Bausch’s expressive work, as well as the political environment and progressive climate of the era.

\textsuperscript{236} Donata and Wim Wenders, *Pina: The Film and the Dancers* (Berlin: Schirmer and Mosel), 2009.
\textsuperscript{238} Wenders, *Pina: The Film and the Dancers*, 255.
\textsuperscript{239} Kate Elswit, “Ten Evenings with Pina: Bausch’s “Late” Style and the Cultural Politics of Co-Production,” *Theatre Journal* 65.2 (May 2013), 217.
Bluebeard: on listening to a tape recording of Béla Bartók’s opera “Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”

is set to the score of the original opera of the same name, which follows the story of a pirate who has a penchant for murdering his many wives. Bausch’s piece tracks the plight of Judith, Bluebeard’s wife who attempts to avoid this fate. In the 1977 work, which is often counted as the first of Bausch’s most magnificent, haunting, perhaps eccentric dance theater works, the choreographer used the order and structure of the original opera to define the context through which she allowed the tale to unfold. The opera’s original stage directions appear as sections of choreography, so the work retains most of the ideas of the original opera because Bausch relies on the order and those important directive cues.

Bausch, in a typically subversive approach, unveils the first half of the story, but the second half of the story is told as the first half in reverse, with gender roles completely switched. Therefore, the piece progresses forward while at the same time moving backward. The set is staged as the remnants of a baronial hall, with traces of fine furniture and artwork, but essentially completely barren with slight reminiscences of a life that was once filled with grandeur. A man with a heavy coat and bare feet sits near a tape recorder, playing the score, and serves as the character of Bluebeard. A woman dressed in pink, lying on the floor, plays Judith, his strong-willed wife. At the halfway mark of the work, Judith takes control from Bluebeard, and in effect switches places and roles with him, demonstrating female power and authority in a way that was rarely seen on stage in the 1970s. Therefore, Judith, a name with Jewish connotations, demonstrates

241 Ibid., 1.
242 Ibid., 3.
that through a feminist vision of the circumstances, a different outcome of the story is possible. Through this move, Bausch reinforced and enhanced the dramatic structure of the opera by telling the tale in a new, poetic, and powerful way. The repetition, the retrograde action and, of course, the reversed gender roles, served as a prominent starting point for her work as she moved forward into even more subversive, political, and generally uncharted choreographic territory.

Repetition was found across the spectrum of Bausch’s works. In Café Müller, one of the two masterworks she created in 1978, Bausch turned her stage into an abandoned restaurant. The walls were bare, and looked perhaps as if someone had quickly torn down the artwork that had adorned them. Chairs and tables were strewn about, appearing as if someone had left the restaurant in a hurry. The work begins with a lone woman slowly entering from the ragged entrance to the restaurant, costumed in a white, ethereal dress. She clings to the walls, seemingly not wanting to be seen but also clearly representing a loss of some sort. This role was always danced by Bausch herself.

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243 Ibid., 10.
244 “Café Müller by Pina Bausch,” L’Arche Editeur, Jildy Sauce, September 2010.
She dances with her eyes closed for most of the work, adopting a sleeplike and dreamlike aura that permeates. This effect implicates the other dancers’ interaction with both one another and with Bausch. It seems as if she is watching over the lives and existences of the other dancers around her, “absorbing into her pores every single detail of the emotionally stunted behavior around her – just as she has absorbed the life around her to create her work.”

Dancers dressed in nightgowns begin to appear, performing solos influenced by the grace of ballet but through a series of drop swings and extension of their limbs, display true desperation. Female dancers also put their hair, worn down, in front of their face, placing great distance between the audience and themselves. Male dancers weave in and out of the stage, moving furniture, looking

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longingly at the women moving in abandon around the stage. Continuing her favored use of repetition, the work contains a sequence in which one man places a woman in another man’s arms, limb by limb, and then walks away. The man holding the woman lifts her up and promptly lets her fall to the ground. This sequence repeats many times in a row, perhaps demonstrating the fleeting nature of love. Later in the work, a variety of dancers enter the space in a frenzy, throwing furniture about and performing a variety of sweeping arm motions and sequences that travel quickly across the space, set to the deep-throated singing of a male opera singer. The work ends as the dancers slowly leave the stage, the lights fading, leaving the restaurant abandoned once again.

This piece suggests the difficulties of the world, such as violence and desertion, and translates them onto bodies telling those stories onstage, sometimes in ultimate despair. Critic Herve Guibert wrote that Café Müller leaves the viewer “with the heart wounded and bandaged, bathed in an emanation of tears.” Curiously, there is little written about Café Müller. It seems to be regarded as one of Bausch’s more convoluted works, and left to be interpreted to the viewer.

On the other hand, Kontakthof, Bausch’s other work from 1978, is often regarded as perhaps her most influential and groundbreaking piece. The work has been repeatedly reviewed, restaged and reinterpreted. Kontakthof, roughly translated as “Courtyard of Contact,” is Bausch’s most minimalist work, though Café Müller ranks as a close second. The work is structured like a three-hour dating game, set to a variety of love songs.

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247 Loriti, YouTube.
248 Jildy Sauce, “Café Müller by Pina Bausch.”
Rolf Borzik, Bausch’s husband and collaborator who also designed the barren restaurant of Café Müller, created the minimalist set, located in an abandoned social hall.  

*Kontakthof* was one of the first pieces in which Bausch relied on gestural sequences to attempt to achieve an emotional response from the audience. For example, one section of the work is derived entirely from small acts of spite between couples – flicking the ear, poking the arm – exchanging punishments that reflect tropes of old married couples. She continued to play with gender stereotypes in this piece – in one section, a woman is continually poked and prodded by a variety of male dancers who come forward and touch her without her permission, eventually picking her up and shaking her, almost as if she is a doll. This sequence demonstrates the male gaze on the woman, and tackles it by performing it to excess and exaggeration.

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251 Mackrell, “Kontakthof.”
Kontakthof also challenges the audience through direct aesthetic choices. A female dancer walks to the front of the stage and stares at the audience for more than a full minute, and then pushes her hair back off her forehead, places her hands out in front of her, and looks at her figure as if staring at her reflection in a mirror. This sequence is difficult to watch. It feels as if the audience has come across an intimate moment that should be kept private. However, the dancer is also almost daring the audience to watch her, to let her revel in overtly feminine and overtly sexualized gestures, as a means of reclaiming those as empowering and general practices manifested through dance.

Bausch also used Kontakthof as a means for experimentation with a variety of casting structures. In addition to the usual large band of dancers that she often relied upon, Bausch also produced the piece with a cast composed entirely of senior citizens.

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253 Ibid.
(people aged 65 and above) in 2002 and then again at BAM in New York in 2010. In another iteration, the work was set on teenagers with no previous dance experience (the process was documented through the famous documentary, *Pina*). Perhaps *Kontakthof* became the most famous and lasting of Bausch’s works because it was very malleable. Bausch used diagonal crosses, very slow movements, and regular pedestrian motions like touching the hair and smoothing the skirt. Each of these relatively simple aspects allowed for the work to be translated and transposed onto bodies that were both ripe with age and green with youth.

The last of the works that should be considered in the three-year period through which Bausch created her most prominent legacy is *1980: A Piece by Pina Bausch*. The piece, in the typical Bausch aesthetic, is predicated on the interpretation of childhood games that express life as a precursor to death, as an homage to Rolf Borzik, who died early in 1980. More than four hours long, with more than 20 performers, the work is a masterpiece of emotion, structure and stamina. Grass and sod line the stage (grass later became a fixture of Bausch’s works as a stage floor). To entertain the audience, tea is served in the aisles, and dancers perform acrobatic and rope tricks both onstage and off.

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254 The Contemporary Program Performance Video, Pina Bausch Excerpts, July 19, 2003, Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival.

1980 serves as its own version of the Broadway musical “A Chorus Line;” performers step forward and tell stories of their past, though the stories are more ordinary, like childhood fears, rather than the more extravagant and performative monologues of “A Chorus Line.”

In one vignette, a woman and a man come into the spotlight, the woman putting on lipstick and kissing the man’s face again and again. At other moments, a woman warns of standing alone in the dark, and later, there is a cacophony of voices discussing their childhood fears and wants and dreams, all on top of one another.

At another moment, echoing Bausch’s signature play with gender, a woman playfully undresses a man, flashing smirks and grins at the audience, letting them in on her promiscuous task. The piece is a continued series of vignettes that pushes the limits on what is considered dance - through speech, direct audience interaction, and continued stillness - while re-envisioning its emotional and physical capabilities.

256 Ibid.
Music also plays an important role in the work – “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” plays at the end of the work, and the Willow song from Othello returns throughout. Bausch uses music not as a complement or even as a means of driving the action, but as a sort of memory, an opportunity to evoke emotion or nostalgia.

The most important aspect of 1980, though, is Bausch’s overt and clear continuation of the establishment of freedom of identity that Rudolf Laban established in his dances 50 years before. As Anna Kisselgoff noted in her New York Times review:

A psychologist in the audience noted that many of the physical movements in Miss Bausch’s works are textbook examples of movement performed by schizophrenics. Whether this background is academically or instinctively absorbed, Miss Bausch is certainly a spiritual descendant of Rudolf von Laban, whose theories about movement in relation to time and space affected not only early German modern dance but efficiency studies in factories and current movement therapy.

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259 Ibid.
Bausch operated on the basis of Laban’s trio of time, space and sound in all of her choreography. Perhaps subconsciously, Bausch’s work serves as both a reminiscence of the era of Ausdruckstanz, and also a modern interpretation of that important trilogy that Laban established and Wigman manipulated many years before. Bausch’s instruction at the Folkwangschule under Jooss’s tutelage certainly provided her with the expression and emotion that represented the ideologies of the Ausdruckstanz leaders.

**Bausch’s Legacy: German Dance Today and The Memories of Ausdruckstanz**

and Tanztheater in the German Cultural Conscious

Following a nearly five-decade career and 44 evening-length works, Bausch suddenly and tragically died in 2009 after a short, aggressive battle with cancer.²⁶⁰ Lutz Forster, Bausch’s longtime dancer and eventual collaborator, had taken over direction of the Wuppertal Tanztheater by this point, and he is still in charge of its direction today.

Throughout Germany’s incorporation of modern dance into its cultural lexicon, the nation often sought its own definition of “German dance.” The main problem, throughout the advent of Ausdruckstanz and the consecutive deliberate return to ballet was that this definition was impossible to attain. Germany did not truly establish a widely-accepted idea of a “German” style; it did adopt the mentalities and ideals of Laban, Wigman, and Jooss, but it was never able to maintain its footing as a standardized ideal on the international dance stage.

Perhaps the reason that Bausch’s Tanztheater was so beloved, and remains a fixture of Germany today, is that through her idiosyncratic, eccentric interpretations of dance and its offshoots, Bausch established a German aesthetic sensibility that her

predecessors vehemently and extensively sought. By incorporating the emotion and freedom of expression that were inherent to the establishment and proliferation of *Ausdruckstanz* and the linear ballet training that Jooss and his colleagues at the Folkwangschule insisted upon, Bausch had the means to fuse the freest parts of dance with the more technical aspects of the genre. She formed a master style that was both emotive, expressive, and even socially aware.

Bausch was not afraid to explore possibilities in movement, and was also fearless of risk factors (some dances involved nakedness onstage). Mostly, Bausch was not concerned if audiences *liked* her work. She did not look toward a favorable outcome, but rather a production of emotion, some sort of evocative response that left audiences thinking and feeling, no matter if they absolutely abhorred the work they had seen or if they were enamored of it. Bausch broke the barrier of making beautiful dances, and with it, the assumption of what dance was and what it should be.

Today, Bausch’s legacy rings across the dance world. She is taught in celebration in university dance history courses, her work is continually restaged by both the Wuppertal Tanztheater and other companies worldwide, and she is one of the sole figures associated with the postmodern dance movement whose legacy is still prominent. Bausch took the innovative foundations of groundbreaking Laban, exploratory Wigman, and pragmatic Jooss, and seized upon the opportunity to bring Germany out of its despair and into a new era of true feeling and understanding of the human experience by telling stories through bodies onstage. This was her own version of the continuation of the German dance aesthetic. Bausch famously said, “Dance, dance! Otherwise we are
lost.\textsuperscript{261} With her integration of German dance across history, and with the continued proliferation of her impressive legacy, we are not lost. Bausch found us, across the world, when we most needed to be saved through dance. We can only hope that her legacy will continue to bring people out of despair and into self-reflective spaces of support and joy to find their own means to be free.

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\textsuperscript{261} Wenders, “Pina: The Film and the Dancers.”
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The first three chapters of this thesis establish and ground an analytical argument of the creation of the German dance aesthetic and its later manifestation as one of universality and transcendence beyond Germany. Chapter 1 explored the rise of the Ausdruckstanz movement, the first step in this search for aesthetics, in conjunction with other Expressionist art movements, and situates this rise within the context of the instability and newfound freedom provided for by the Weimar Republic. Chapter 2 tracked the leading Ausdruckstanz choreographers’ decision to manipulate their choreography to fit with the Nazi agenda, while also demonstrating the continuing regulations and restrictions set for dance and physical training by the Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda and the Reich Theater Chamber that continued to define the German dance aesthetic. Chapter 3 followed the trajectory of Pina Bausch and her creation of Tanztheater, singlehandedly reviving German dance and imbuing it with political awareness, subversion, and humanity.

Yet, this German dance aesthetic is best seen and manifested through bodies. Because there is little footage or photography from the Ausdruckstanz and Nazi-sponsored movement, the search for this German dance aesthetic is in part a guessing-game. Therefore, it became necessary to attempt to recreate this movement as part of the research for this thesis. However, Bausch’s work has been heavily documented, and through working backwards, we can attempt to find the threads that link these movements across time.

To attempt to embody and physically realize the movement concepts that each of these choreographers sought, Part II of this thesis will explore two choreographic
iterations that were created as part of this research process. The first piece attempts to understand the movement that Wigman and Laban created, and the second piece reflects and responds to Bausch’s evocative works. By expanding the search for a German dance aesthetic from the page into the dance studio integrates a level of corporeality into this research that will further define its success. Working with bodies, in addition to reading and writing, has assisted this search for the creation and continuation of a German aesthetic in dance.
Chapter 4

The Thread Across Time: Choreography as Embodied Research

*Writing as Dancing, Dancing as Writing*

I have completed this thesis under the joint auspices of the History and Dance departments at Wesleyan; therefore, a major facet of my research was conducted outside of the archives and within the dance studio, choreographing and exploring in the mode of German dance that I explored through my written research process. A key tenet of the Wesleyan Dance Department curriculum enforces the idea that choreography is research, and that this research is crucial to the development of internal histories, bodily realities and ideas that can only be manifested through physical exploration. Therefore, it was necessary to combine facets of history and dance, of historiographic analysis and performance theory, of text and choreography, to attempt to achieve both a bodily and intellectual command of this question of the German dance aesthetic.

To attempt to understand the trajectory of German dance in the twentieth century, which I have laid out in my first three chapters, I sought to embody each of the styles of dance that influenced this distinct, sometimes obscure path in the development of German dance – the early origins of Ausdruckstanz, the tension between Expressionist dance and ballet, and, finally, the culminating physicality and reclamation of joy inherent in Tanztheater. Through reading and writing, I could draw the analytical and theoretical thread between movements, across decades, and through different social phenomena, of the heart and soul of a German dance aesthetic. However, it was through my work with and on bodies that I could fine-tune and arrive at the realization that these forms were truly connected across both space and time.
The dancers with whom I worked were each classically trained in various forms and each at first unfamiliar with German dance. Each demonstrated to me the clarity through which Laban, Wigman, Jooss, and later Bausch relied on the example of their predecessors to hone and cultivate their own version of the great German dance. I was also chiefly concerned with approaching this research as my German forebears did – entirely through the body. Though Laban initially relied on Kandinsky’s writing, he and Wigman learned and innovated mostly through improvisation with their own bodies, and through teaching and guiding others through their own transformative dance practices.

Leading others through the choreographic process served as my own embodiment of Laban and Wigman’s Expressionist practices. I am not a “technically” trained dancer; that is, I did not study ballet until my senior year of high school. The teachers at the dance studio that I attended as a child did not believe in the rigidity and discipline required for ballet, much like Wigman and Laban. I studied jazz, and more rigorously, tap dance, rather than spending my afternoons in pointe shoes. My lack of ballet training has contributed to a variety of difficulties for me as I have pursued dance both in an academic setting and in an extracurricular one. I am not particularly flexible, and I am not the most graceful or fluid dancer. However, I have been fascinated with the gravity required in modern dance since before I knew what to call the form. My body, stronger and more solid than more typical ballet figures, fits easily into the rhythms and improvisations of modern dance.

My love for tap dance contributes regularly to my subconscious awareness of rhythm; it is nearly impossible for me to dance without responding to a beat. I contribute this background to this thesis because I hope that it will demonstrate that I have approached the choreography from much the same vantage point as Wigman and Laban
did. They came to dance later in life, and studied and honed their own techniques despite the socially-accepted forms of ballet at the time. Though I started dancing at age five, I did not pursue what are often considered more “serious” forms of dance (modern and ballet) until my later years of high school, which, for a dancer, is quite late. As I have progressed through the dance major at Wesleyan, I have become aware of the varied definitions through which “dance training” can be categorized, and have used that idea to cultivate my rehearsal and research processes.

Therefore, my choreographic process mirrors my German predecessors. I started from a similar juncture as Laban and Wigman, but I echoed Bausch because I am working with dancers who have all studied ballet rigorously and only later in their training have ventured into more modern and abstract forms of dance. This harmonious combination of methods from the figures whom I have chosen to illuminate in this thesis has only strengthened my belief in these German choreographers’ intentions and awareness of their clearly connected, mostly linear trajectory of dance styles throughout the twentieth century.

**First Choreographic Iteration: bound//in ecstasy (Fall 2016)**

“The New German Dance is not the result of a predetermined program. It takes its mark from the new creative personalities who through unremitting struggle have given it the unity of form and content.”

-- Mary Wigman

I began research for this thesis in May 2016 in the Archives at Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Massachusetts. While perusing videos and a plethora of dance history sources on figures like Wigman and Laban, I tried to imagine how I would choreograph a work that would complement my paper. I knew that my dance needed to take a historical perspective, and so I decided that my process would reflect a parallel
trajectory across history; as I wrote and rewrote the historiographical analysis of German dance, so too would I choreograph my work to mirror this trajectory. I recognized early that my first semester choreography would track the rise of Ausdruckstanz and the deliberate descent into Nazism, and my second semester choreography would lift modern dance out of the shadows and restore the form through the work of Tanztheater. I then recognized that I wanted to work with the same dancers over the course of this research process, and observe how they embodied each style through history, as their muscles began to retain the movements of each style as they came with me on this journey of exploration and discovery. One dancer wrote to me after the process ended, “The best part of working on this project for a year was getting to know the dancers I was working with really well. By the end of the process, I had a clear idea of how each of them moved and how each of them could relate to one another.”

I also knew that, aesthetically, I wanted the second piece to literally begin where the first one ended, to demonstrate even more clearly the connection between genres, between dancers, among past, present and future.

I chose to work with five capable dancers: Cara Bendich, Gui Gui Comins-Sporbert, Kira Fitzgerald, Katie Lowen and Sophie Miller. Cara, Kira, Gui Gui and Katie grew up dancing at alternative studios; each took ballet, but each was invested in modern dance and innovative choreographic practice. One trained at the Joffrey School of Ballet and was on track to dance professionally before deciding to pursue college, where she found modern dance and the Wesleyan Dance Department; one performed Hawaiian dance and trained in ballet and modern simultaneously; and one started out in modern dance and found ballet later in high school. I purposely chose to work with dancers from

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Sophie Miller, email to choreographer, 9 April 2017.
a variety of beginnings, with a variety of abilities. To reflect the work of Wigman and Laban, who gathered and trained dancers from all over the geographic and talent map, I needed to work with dancers who moved differently, who grew up in different places (Hawaii, New York, and Connecticut), and who would bring different perspectives, different approaches and different movement styles to the rehearsal process.

My earliest inspirations for the fall semester process were Mary Wigman’s two iterations of Hexentanz (Witch Dance), which I considered thoroughly in Chapter 1 and which I consider to be her seminal work and the breakout, defining piece of the Ausdruckstanz movement. In that one short piece, Wigman introduced an entirely new set of parameters through which to make dance: nakedness; circularity in relation to angularity; dancing against rather than to the music; music that was dissonant; themes of ecstasy and eeriness; and being seated rather than standing upright. Wigman managed to defy nearly all the defining characteristics of ballet, and it seems, deliberately intended to challenge those norms.

Once in the studio, I realized that I wanted to clearly establish this war between the ballet denizens of the old guard of Germany, and the new, innovative figures who pushed Ausdruckstanz to the forefront of the arts throughout Europe. At our first rehearsal, we discussed the idea of creating the piece with a trajectory in the shape of an inverted parabola – beginning with the humble stirrings of the movement out of ballet, the movement’s distinct rise and then swift decline into a militarized regime. The dancers each choreographed solos that they felt best embodied their own movement style, that felt comfortable in their bodies and that they were comfortable to perform on their own. Once they had each performed these short solos, each dancer taught her respective solo to the group, so that each dancer could understand the movement capabilities and
inclinations of the other dancers. They could then decide whether to use the others as a constant to respond to and against, or to attempt to embody and replicate another’s movement. I felt that this process reflected what I imagine was a transfer of power between Laban and Wigman – one learning the other’s movement style and concept of dance to later respond to it and use it as an example. As another dancer wrote, “It felt as though we were balancing the importance and prominence of the group and the individual.”

Early in the process, I established a writing practice for my dancers. We began each rehearsal with a brief free-write about a topic that I posed to them. Some important topics that we explored were:

“Choose a time when you rebelled against something. How did you feel? What did you do?

What drove you to do it? Was it against something that you had been doing for a long time?

What made you decide to change?”

“What is something that you have borrowed from someone else? Have you realized that you have done this? Will you admit that you are influenced by it? Do you know if someone else has borrowed something that you do?”

I wanted the dancers to bring their own voices and bodies to this important question that we were exploring together – what did it feel like for Laban, Wigman and Jooss to rebel against the ideals of ballet and establish their own styles of dance? What happened when they were influenced by their predecessors? Did they give credit where credit was due? In this way, we began to have conversations about the ethics of

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263 Laurel Qinxian Comins-Sporbert, email to choreographer, 9 April 2017.
264 Sonya Levine, Choreography Notes, September 13, 2016.
establishing new dance movements – when to take from the past and when to create in the present.

We began to have other conversations about the aesthetic differences between fluid movement and angular movement. All my dancers are fluid movers, they have difficulty if imposed with any sort of restriction on their movement, and they prefer to move in unfettered abandon rather than in measured, short spurts. We often returned to the solos they created at the beginning of the rehearsal process, movement scores that they felt encapsulated who they were as movers, and I imposed certain restrictions on those phrases. For example, one dancer covers a lot of ground when she moves, often making sweeping brush strokes across the floor. I told her to perform her solo in place, with as much angularity and non-fluidity as possible. Another dancer generally performs bold, quick movements, striking the floor or punching the air with accented strength. I asked her to perform her solo softly, without accented moments, and with as little fanfare as possible. As the piece developed, the initial solos and the restricted solos, as we began to call them, became a recurring motif.

I was also interested in the morphing process that German dance underwent from the early to mid-twentieth century, from the rise of Ausdruckstanz into the rapid and sinister descent into the Nazi regime’s brutal and genocidal tactics. We explored a variety of exercises that I termed “dance telephone.” The dancers stood in a line with their eyes closed, one dancer improvised a short phrase, with another dancer watching her. Then the dancer who was watching performed, to the best of her ability, the improvised phrase of the dancer she had been watching, and the dancer behind her watched that performance, and so on. Each dancer performed from memory the movement of the person they watched, until we reached the last person, whose movement often varied
greatly from the first person’s. I wanted to explore and demonstrate the similarities and
differences of movement across time, of movement on very different body types, and
how our memory and perception of events can change and shape-shift through both
spatial and temporal perspectives.

To draw that line further, I wanted to demonstrate the distinct tension that
existed between the Nazi regime and the Expressionist dancers it influenced. From the
outset, we created a marching sequence that appeared throughout the entire length of
the piece, either with each of the dancers performing it, or some performing more free-
form movement while others marched and acted as guards, presiding over the events of
the dance with watchful eyes and the knowledge that the militaristic, communal aspects
of the dance that the Nazis perpetuated would prevail over the individuality and
expression of the *Ausdruckstanz* dancers.

I also decided to use both live and recorded music. I asked violinist Rachel
Guetta and violist Bridgid Bergin to play a concerto by German composer Oskar
Rieding at the opening of the piece, to remind the audience that the dance emulated
European tendencies. Halfway through, as the tension built, the musicians left the stage
and Julia Wolfe’s piece “Cruel Sister” echoed throughout the theater. Her piece also
utilizes string instruments, but with a more modern, eerie spin than the full-bodied
sound of classical music. This dichotomy between music choices was meant to further
challenge the audience’s perception of the work, and constantly remind both the dancers
and the audience that certain aspects of the world they had created, like the music, could
change in an instant.
Finally, I wanted to explore the idea of ecstasy in *Ausdruckstanz*, set forth by Susan Allene Manning in much of her research on the life and career of Mary Wigman.\(^{265}\)

Ecstasy is defined as a state of overwhelming emotion, or rapturous delight.\(^{266}\) In Chapter 1, I explored the otherworldly qualities and interest in the occult that the *Ausdruckstanz* leaders explored, and I wanted to bring that sort of magic sensibility to my own work. I titled the piece “bound//in ecstasy” with the intention of maximizing on the phrase’s double meaning. I wanted to express the idea of being constantly immersed in a state of rapture, but also explore the concept of being physically manipulated and bound by a set of guidelines on how one can move or live. These two concepts ultimately drove the many iterations of the piece, and the way my dancers and I approached the choreographic process.

\(^{265}\) Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon*.

The piece begins with a spotlight on the strings. A melody rings out into the space as three dancers begin marching in a single-file line far upstage, back and forth from one wing to another. A soloist emerges downstage, and performs a phrase filled with abandon, passion and a clear break from the rigidity of ballet that came before it. At the outset, I wanted to establish to the audience this tension between the rising Nazi threat (the marching dancers), and the free, Expressionist inklings of the Ausdruckstanz dancers (embodied through the dancer’s evocative solo).

Another soloist stands directly in front of the violinist and violist, almost challenging them while also contributing to the sensuous quality of their rhythms. The dancers march diagonally now, downstage toward the audience, establishing a prominent
and distinct sense of urgency, perhaps positing the idea that time is running out for freedom of expression.

The dancers’ costumes also reflect a combination of a typical German aesthetic, a militaristic appearance, and an attempt at freedom. They are all dressed in the same costume to produce an aura of uniformity – a tight black turtleneck and a stretchy denim jumpsuit, a contrast from one to the other, further establishing this line. Their hair is pulled back into tight braids wrapped around their head, reminiscent of early images of German girls from the countryside. Their lips are painted red to highlight the paleness of their faces in the warm, low light – everything about these opening moments with the dancers should put the audience at some sort of unease, wary of what is to come.

The piece continues with a frantic trio, who appear to be trying to keep up with the music while also holding their ground, resembling the Ausdruckstanz figures being pulled along by the tug of Nazi aesthetics while trying to maintain the expressionist roots they had so deeply established. The other two dancers suddenly appear, and all run directly at the audience, their gaze straight ahead, either crying for help for salvation or inviting their audience further into their dystopic world. Two dancers perform a duet at the climax of the piece; one embodying a trained, precise ballet dancer, the other embodying a sort of deformed, angular, sharp dance, without the grace of a ballet dancer. The other three dancers come back in, marching faster and faster, until they devolve into a run, out of which each performs the solo she had constructed in rehearsal months before.

What follows is an increasing attention to order, detail and unison. As one dancer wrote to me, “the aesthetic of the piece involved sharp and precise movements
throughout.” The dancers perform a short gestural phrase that returns throughout the end of the piece, followed by a long sequence in which they use arm swings, quarter turns, half turns and full turns to direct the audience’s attention to their formation, their gaze and their connection to one another. Finally, a quartet performs their gestural phrase on the side of the stage, as the fifth dancer performs her free solo, grasping at the last hope of the Ausdruckstanz movement before it is removed entirely. Quickly, the quartet envelops her, the whole group, and the Ausdruckstanz movement, descending deeply into the shadows.


The end of the piece was meant to leave the audience with a sense of doom and despair, wondering what would happen to these dancers who had been entrenched in a reality they had never expected. The piece mirrored history, and paralleled the way in which the Ausdruckstanz leaders we channeled created their own work – under increasingly restricted and austere conditions.

267 Katie Lowen, email correspondence with author, 5 April 2017.
Second Choreographic Iteration: found/in frenzy (Spring 2017)

“I am less interested in how people move than in what moves them.” – Pina Bausch

As I began to conceptualize the process for my spring choreography, I knew that Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater would be the heart and soul of the work, with a modern spin. I quickly recognized that the piece would be directly influenced by Bausch’s interest in exploring the concept of the frenzied body, her subversion of gender roles, and her continued discovery of what love means when played out through bodies onstage. To achieve this, I realized that I needed to pull together a larger cast than I had during the fall semester, as Bausch often worked with casts numbering more than 40 dancers.
I asked the five dancers whom I worked with in the fall, as well as Sammi Aibinder, Rachel Davis and Bria Grant. I wanted to capitalize upon the close connections my dancers had made with one another and myself so that we could begin the process in the studio without delay. The three dancers I added to my work bring their own sensibilities and specific movement qualities to the piece – personality and individual flair were important in this half of the process. One dancer is trained in ballet but is willing to experiment with other forms, and has a striking performance presence and an expressive face; another dancer spent years en pointe and I wanted her expertise, as well as her ability to blend in with the group; and the third dancer exudes strength and power; she jumps high and covers ground, and I wanted her as a contrast to the other dancers. Paralleling Bausch, I was certainly interested in the aesthetic qualities of the dancers, but also in the ideas behind their movement.

To establish this concept-based movement practice, I cultivated a writing process from the outset with my dancers so that their creative processes were grounded in thoughts and ideas that they could articulate through one medium (writing) and could then be applied to another (dancing). I was immediately interested in exploring Bausch’s often-used concepts of representing ordinary life experiences onstage. At our first rehearsal, I had my eight dancers engage in four rounds of what I called “speed dating.” I used this as a tool for the dancers to get to know one another, but also to think quickly and articulate their thoughts in a rapid-fire manner, an approach that I would later use throughout my rehearsal process. Some questions I asked included:

“What is your most distinct childhood memory?

What does being in love mean to you?

Do you have an image of a married couple in your mind? Describe it.
Each question proved challenging to answer, but gave the dancers the opportunity to quickly become comfortable and immediately begin to explore Bausch’s concepts. Each dancer made a solo from their writing and conversations about these questions. I paired four dancers together at a time and invited them to teach their solos to one another, ultimately stringing them together to make a long phrase performed in these quartet groupings. These quartets became the bedrock of the piece.

The following rehearsals further developed the ideas of bringing ordinary activity to life – recalling childhood memories became paramount to much of the movement of the work. Through this vein, repetition also became key; Bausch’s incessant and almost exhausting use of repetition inspired me to encourage my dancers to perform the same movements repeatedly, almost to the point of excess. This contributed to a distinct sense of fervor and almost chaos through the length of the work.

The second half of the rehearsal process dealt with more challenging content. We began to explore what it meant to identify as a woman, as each of my dancers does, and how we were treated both as dancers in the studio and in society. We had many discussions about objectification, what it meant and how it could be used as a subversive tactic. We also discussed gender stereotypes, particularly gendered poses, and the possibility of blurring a gender binary through both movement and physical placement. We talked through Bausch’s controversial subject-object relationship; Bausch often took stereotypically objectifying movement that women would generally perform (inspecting one’s face, looking at one’s figure in a mirror, etc.), and transpose that movement onto men’s bodies. We decided on a sort of reclaiming balance of objectified movement,

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268 Sonya Levine, Choreography Notes, 1 February 2017.
through which the dancers would perform typically feminized movement but with a sense of authority and their own ideas about what made it empowering. We also incorporated a very direct, blank gaze, one that we considered to be typically male, throughout the length of the work.

The dancers developed two phrases that incorporated themes of objectification – the first was inspired by the awareness of being watched and constantly judged, and the second involved a direct attack on those who are willing to objectify others, inviting them to stare and challenge the direct, unremitting gaze of the dancers before them. We placed the phrases in opposite positions on the stage, the first far upstage and the second quite downstage to implicate the audience in the viewing process.

The other facet of this exploration of gender was our continued work with the idea of coupling and relationships. The dancers were given many writing exercises in which they were asked to comment on their opinions about and representations of married couples, relationships between friends, and interactions between longtime lovers. We questioned what it meant to be with someone romantically, and how that relationship manifests differently for couples. Each dancer was given a partner and we discussed the possibility of developing duets with the trope of the “old married couple” in mind. The duets embraced different facets of relationships – young newlyweds, older couples experiencing hardships in their relationships – but each was imbued with a very specific sense of humor, as Bausch’s choreography often created and then destroyed worlds based on something that made audiences laugh.

To accompany the dancers, I decided to use a variety of love songs, both popular and obscure, to complement the movement. Bausch often utilized operatic love songs in her work, and to follow suit, I chose very didactic love songs with a modern flare by
Lianne La Havas, Haim and Sylvan Esso, as well as an eerie ballad by Diamanda Galás, to create a driving beat and an obvious sense of flirtation and femininity.

Costuming the dancers was a difficult but rewarding process. Bausch often dresses her dancers in ball gowns and tuxedoes, foregoing typical dance attire for more formal, impractical outfits. To further work with the theme of gender subversion that we created, I decided to dress the dancers in a variety of modern bustiers and corsets in bright colors, paired with men’s tuxedo pants, in homage to Bausch’s formal wear. Thus, we androgenized the dancers’ appearances by including elements that are typically feminine and masculine, to pay reflect Bausch’s interest in gender subversion.

By working with themes of gender and everyday experiences, I attempted to carry out the themes that Wigman and Laban initially imbued in their work – feminism and identity construction through movement, specifically – to arrive at a modern piece that represented the mantras of Bausch, Tanztheater and its many German forebears and influences. As another dancer wrote, “ours was a community of a lot of idiosyncrasies and plenty of getting to know one another explicitly (in the conversations we would have responding to prompts) and implicitly (through getting to know each other’s movements, ticks and habits)...It is a community where I feel genuinely comfortable both as a collective and with each individual.”

\footnotetext{269} Sammi Aibinder, email to choreographer, 8 April 2017.
The Final Piece/Performance

The piece opens with two dancers entering the stage through the upstage curtain, appearing almost as a circus act. The fall piece ended as the dancers receded into the curtain, so this begins with them coming out of the curtain. They stare blankly at the audience for almost too long, and then proceed to primp as if they are looking at themselves in a mirror. The dancers move toward stage right as a duet and then cross diagonally to the other side of the stage rubbing their hands up their faces and then down their bodies, ending seated one behind the other, their knee raised, their faces taunting the audience with a direct, almost confrontational gaze, their fingers snapping. Three more couples enter from the upstage curtain, performing the same series of gestural moments and ending by sitting in a diagonal line. This opening section was
choreographed to reflect Bausch’s interest in representing typically feminine gestures in sort of exaggerated and subversive avenues – for example, the blank gaze rather than a seductive face, and the sensual act of touching oneself represented through a matter-of-fact and almost uncomfortable ease as compared to the driving beat of Lianne La Havas’ song “What You Don’t Do,” a contemporary love ballad.

The mood shifts as five dancers leave the stage as a trio performs a darker, fluid phrase to Diamanda Galas’s “My World Is Empty Without You.” The tone is one of loss and longing, yet two more dancers enter and hold each other’s faces, as if they are about to kiss. This juxtaposition was meant to further confuse the audience and disrupt notions of what love and lust can manifest as when demonstrated onstage. Three more dancers enter, performing a phrase that uses pendulum motions and momentum, eventually pulling each of the dancers toward the upstage left corner. They freeze there for a moment, surveying the scene before them. Here, they move as a unit, a single entity.
The piece continues in a variety of vignettes. Each couple that entered the stage at the beginning of the dance has their own moment onstage, reflecting an “old married couple” trope – flicking and scuttling around one another, representing their love but also their occasional frustration with one another. The climax of the piece comes after a section in which two dancers perform solos simultaneously, while the rest of the group performs a series of masculinized gestures – placing their hands in front of their crotch, posing with their fists in their air and their muscles flexed, and general postures of strength and power. This section was meant to represent the freedom associated with Tanztheater, while also paying tribute to Bausch’s occasional use of gender manipulation and subversion to arrive at a general message of female empowerment.
Following this section, the dancers congregate at the back of the stage in the center, staring at the audience for a prolonged period. They are directly challenging the audience to look at them, dressed partially in lingerie, and be included in the moment they are trying to create. They slowly move forward, rolling their hips in a sensual manner but with the same blank expression they have adopted for most of the piece. They arrive at the front of the stage, take three steps forward, and blow a kiss to the audience. They stare forward once again. This section represented Pina Bausch’s reclamation of dance and her reorientation of it as a feminist, empowering form.
The piece concludes with the dancers performing a phrase involving reaching, extensions and lots of traveling to the song “Coffee” by Sylvan Esso. The dancers then slowly walk forward, step off the stage, and perform a short gestural phrase for the audience. They turn around, hands on each other’s rear ends, and roll their hips as they walk back to the curtain, and back into the historical canon.
Conclusion

As I first envisioned this project in the early spring of my sophomore year at Wesleyan, I was fascinated by the possibility of positing Nazism and its aesthetics into a narrative of dance, and determining how a conversation between these two seemingly disparate ideas came into contact and affected the trajectory and the outcome of German dance in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I was also interested in how the possibility of using the same dancers in a year-long choreographic process could push this notion and further demonstrate its possibility for establishing an intimate relationship between the expressionist ideals of Ausdruckstanz, the Volk ideals of the Nazis, and the self-reflexive, subversive ideals of Tanztheater, and establishing strong links among these movements.

I wondered: how do our modern conceptions of German society influence our perceptions of the proliferation of the arts in Europe in the mid twentieth century? Did Goebbels and his Ministry place such a stronghold on dance during the war years that Tanztheater arose as a complete disavowal of that period? How revolutionary were Ausdruckstanz ideals? How did the advent of the German modern era influence and instigate the rise of nationalist and nation-state inklings both artistically and otherwise?

From both my choreographic and written research processes, I have found the clear path from Ausdruckstanz to Nazism to Tanztheater – a curiosity and attempt at innovation, of reinventing German movement to achieve a distinct German aesthetic, and then relying on that aesthetic to communicate subversive and politicized ideas more broadly - connected one dance movement to another. Wigman and Laban’s rejection of communal ideas and manipulation of his own Volk agenda to complement them
followed. Bausch’s interest in ballet, though perhaps seen as less innovative in a sense, was a smart, bold move – she was waiting for the right moment to break out on her own, but a return to typically accepted standards of beauty would allow her traction later in her career. Finally, Bausch’s distinct shift into modes of subversion, repetition, gender binary bending, and an obvious return to the freedom of Ausdruckstanz seems to serve as a final moment of creation for the German dance aesthetic – a return to Wigman’s initial, feminist work, and a further push toward greater commentary and the breaking of both gender and performance norms.

It seems only fitting that this trajectory is less linear and somewhat circular; that after the terror and destruction of the Nazi era and its blight on German history, Bausch honored her forebears by continuing their legacy of pushing the limits of dance and establishing German capability and curiosity on the international dance stage. Bausch’s death in 2009 has left an obvious opening for the next phase of German dance. Will it continue toward the path of revolution? Will it reclaim the power and freedom of the Weimar era, or take a turn in a different direction?

Currently, the most prolific German dance ensemble is Gauthier Dance – Theaterhaus Stuttgart. The company echoes Wuppertal Tanztheater in its breadth of creation and in the classical training of its dancers. The 16-person ensemble explores classic tropes – love stories, first and foremost – yet also produces innovative works such as Floating Flowers by Po-Cheng Tsai. This piece places a female dancer with a large tutu on the shoulders of a male dancer, such that the male dancer’s legs look as if they belong to the female dancer, and she looks both extremely tall and ambiguously gendered in her lower half. The work plays with conceptions of gender and strength. It is a clear example of the possibilities that Eric Gauthier and the choreographers whom he
commissions are exploring, while keeping German dance both relevant and exciting for audiences worldwide.

I leave arguing a case for further historiographical research into the artistic censure and lack of proliferation of artwork in mid-twentieth century Germany. Most historians insist that all Nazi art was inherently bad art, as its origins and influences came from fascist, totalitarian, exceptional leanings. Perhaps, though, the apparent authoritarian and centralized gubernatorial structures that our historians inform us that the Nazis created were simply misrepresented. In their place was a more decentralized authority structure with various points of rule, a system that allowed for a variety of artists to continue to create and produce art on a smaller if disparate scale. We should give art borne out of the Nazi regime its place in history – perhaps the hardship, oppression and challenges wrought by the regime truly stimulated a population to create art even more thoughtfully and provocatively. Susan Allene Manning argues that Nazi-era art focused on an effort to step away from the “neo-romanticism, life reformism and cultural pessimism of the turn of the [twentieth] century in Germany…” and instead promote “the desire to escape urban industrialization and find a life more attuned to nature, the valuing of emotion and intuition over intellect and rationality…”

This emphasis on nature and intuition perfectly defines the goals of the Ausdruckstanz dancers, and reminds us about the continuation of the movement despite the exile and fall from grace that both Laban and Wigman experienced. Dancers such as Yvonne Georgi, Hans Niedecken-Gebhard, and Jutta Klamt quietly continued the work of their predecessors in Berlin, while Wigman and Laban practiced in Leipzig and

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Dartington Hall in England, respectively. However, since the 1950s we have not allowed ourselves to look at this period without a critical eye, and perhaps locate its merit in terms of artistic creation and innovation.

My fall choreographic process reflected the possibilities that rigidity and restriction can offer an artist – in some ways, creative opportunities are more fruitful when artists can respond to specific action or directive, rather than simply creating work out of the ether. When I placed restrictions on my dancers, they had to find ways to move that were perhaps unnatural or different from movement styles that were more comfortable to them, therefore producing more interesting and less predictable movement. My spring choreographic process was a greater attempt to recreate a particularly Bauschian aesthetic, which in some ways was more challenging because rather than responding against something, we were working to recreate movement rather than redefine and replace movement conceptions, as we did in the fall.

As dance scholarship continues to grow accessible and become widely circulated beyond academic dance environments, we must continue to probe history and question who wrote it, who executed it, and who continues to perpetuate and construct specific narratives that do not allow artists’ voices and creations the reception they deserve. Historians have tended to push the arts out of history, and present only the basest facts about specific moments in cultural and social histories, avoiding referencing the often subversive and occasionally difficult art that defines eras. By giving the arts their due, we can learn about the cultural climate of specific periods, and reframe the importance of the arts in contributing to societal shifts and in documenting the political and social themes of an era. The arts give us a window into the past and the present, and if we

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Ibid., 207.
begin to document them appropriately, we can also catch a glimpse into the possibilities of the future as a means of building on missteps from the past.

I invite you to view my choreography here:

Sonya Levine’s Thesis Choreography
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