

CROSSING THE BORDERS OF GERMAN AND AMERICAN MODERNISM: EXILE  
AND TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE DANCE WORKS OF VALESKA GERT,  
LOTTE GOSLAR, AND POLA NIRENSKA

DISSERTATION

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By

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## ABSTRACT

“Crossing the Borders of German and American Modernism: Exile and Transnationalism in the Dance Works of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska,” focuses on three German dancers who fled into American exile as a result of Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. Valeska Gert’s exile cabarets created a multiracial and transsexual space in which her own exile and artistic identity could take shape. Lotte Goslar used clowning and fairy tales to subvert conventional images of women in dance and theatre. Pola Nirenska used dance to renarrate her history and connect her to the larger community of Holocaust survivors.

Though a handful of established dancers in German dance history, like Mary Wigman or Gret Palucca, have received the attention of scholars since World War II, the careers of many exiled dancers have not been studied. Scholars have studied the contributions of some of the major women in American modern dance—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey—but their careers do not reveal the full history of women in American modern dance. Both American and German dance scholarship has developed within the boundaries of a constricted idea of national and artistic identities, resulting in the omission of artistic influences that flowed in both directions over the Atlantic.

Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska’s artistic strategies situated them at a unique juncture between several polarities within the modern dance community: dance versus theatre,

German versus American modernism, national identity versus transnational identity, content-based choreography versus design-based choreography, improvisational techniques versus codified techniques, and popular versus concert. All three women pushed the boundaries of American and German definitions of dance and subverted the nationalist representations of race and gender that were integral to both dance traditions. My study is a social and cultural history which integrates perspectives from multiple theoretical disciplines including feminist autobiographical theory, cultural theory, theatre studies, and dance analysis. Through archival research, interviews, and critical analysis, I examine the choreographic works, writings, photographs, and videos that document their artistic lives in exile and reveal a major—but as yet undiscovered—aspect of modernist art and its international traits.

For AnnaSofia,  
so that she may know all things are possible.

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## FIELDS OF STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

### Modernism, Women, and Exile

*I decided to write a “Collage of My Life,” a collection of fractured pieces . . . I wrote the manuscript three times, with four carbon copies. I thought, it is too short. I wrote it again, 80 pages with three carbon copies. Still it seemed too short. Then I wrote 120 pages with five copies. I forgot to number the pages . . . the manuscript fell from my desk, the pages slid onto the rug, and other pages became mixed up in the hundreds of pages of the manuscript. I couldn’t find the connections anymore. I had to write everything again . . . I want to remain.*  
(Gert, 15)

Dancer and actress, Valeska Gert (1892-1978), wrote this passage during her post-exile years in her cabaret, *Ziegenstall*<sup>1</sup>, on the German island of Sylt. Her life had been uprooted multiple times as a result of World War II, and her words make her struggle for permanence and presence during and after exile painfully clear. She raises several themes common to the autobiographical narratives of women in exile: the desire to create a record of one’s history and life, the determined attempts to begin life anew, the rebellious struggle to define the significance and length of one’s life and work, and the ability to create connections where continuity has been destroyed. Gert’s autobiographies

and dances provided a sense of continuity, permanence, and identity preservation during a period of extreme upheaval and disconnection.

When Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, many people, including dance artists like Valeska Gert, lost their professional positions. The Nazi government systematically expelled racial, social, and artistic “deviants” from civil, governmental, educational, legal and medical professions. Some dancers tried to remain in Germany by working with private ensembles and organizations, but many chose to leave. According to the research included in the *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration*, at least 120, probably more, dancers emigrated (Guilbert-Deguine n.p.). The first wave of exiled dancers occurred in 1933, after the April Laws caused many dancers, choreographers, and dance educators to lose their professional positions. After the Nürenberg Laws of 1935, many of the Jewish choreographers and dance educators, who had taken work in the private sector, left. The third wave of emigrants fled after the pogroms of 1938, just before war erupted and the borders closed. The majority of them were Jewish, and a small number were politically engaged, leftist dancers.

Depending on their professional contacts, access to visas, and transportation options, the dancers fled in diverse directions, including England, the United States, Israel, Sweden, France, Argentina, Mexico, India, Cuba and Palestine. The dancers who left Germany had already begun careers in Germany before 1933; in exile, they continued, despite many obstacles, their artistic commitment to modern dance. In the United States, some were helped by artistic leaders and companies, but many had to

begin anew, often in the face of significant difficulties. Exile for many dancers proved to be a major act of recreating self and art.

One of the shifts that feminist research has brought to German exile studies since the mid-1990s is the consideration of exile not only as a time of isolation and hardship, but also as a time of profound growth and creativity. For many women, whose roles in Germany had been restricted to marriage and raising children, exile presented the opportunity for discovering new coping mechanisms and strengths. Historian Renate Posthofen writes that, for women artists, the creative work of their professional lives often provided a sense of continuity between their German past and exile present:

At home in a state of displacement, the woman in exile fulfills several tasks. Her . . . work achieves an existential function under the conditions of exile. The process of [art] as a creative task to deal with one's life experiences represents both an important and a necessary continuity in life, which helps the [artist] to forget the loneliness and despair in exile—if only temporarily. The [artistic] reality becomes the author's imagined homeland, she herself in turn becomes a symbol of her homeland in exile. (93)

My dissertation focuses on three women dancers, Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska, who emigrated from Germany to the United States as a result of Hitler's rise to power in 1933. I have selected them because their careers provide a microhistory for the struggles and contributions of exiled dancers in the United States.

Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska shared some similarities in their artistic careers: their commitment to modern dance, their involvement in solo dance, and their blending of dance, theatre, and mime. Their works confounded both American and German audiences. For each of these women, professional dance provided a sense of purpose and continuity in exile; however, they also faced significant challenges. To

overcome these obstacles, they employed different strategies to continue their artistic work with varying success: Gert chose cabaret; Goslar created a circus format for her company; Nirenska established her company in a region outside of New York and Los Angeles. After the war, Goslar became an American citizen and stayed in the United States, but toured Germany with her company. Gert returned to Germany, and Nirenska committed suicide in the United States, decades after the war ended.

Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska's artistic strategies in exile situated them at a unique juncture between several dialectics within the modern dance community: Germanness versus Americanness, national identity versus transnational identity, dance versus theatre, content-based choreography versus design-based choreography, improvisational techniques versus codified techniques, and popular versus concert dance. Their works pushed the boundaries of performance disciplines and the nationalist tendencies of modern dance history, making Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska fall on the "other" side of what counted as "serious" modern dance for various reasons: their use of improvisation, their integration of theatre and pantomime, their use of parody, the contexts in which they danced, their German identity, and their political candor. Similarly, when they returned to Germany to live or tour, they also fell outside of the bounds of the postwar "Zeitgeist," as it had developed in different directions during their absence. Using an interdisciplinary approach including theatre, exile, dance, and autobiographical theory, I show how each dancer used her creative work to reconstitute her life as transnational—simultaneously German and American—thus subverting the nationalist tendencies of German and American modern dance.

## **Disrupting a history of women's representation**

Women in exile are shaped by the circumstances of their lives, but often the discontinuities spur them toward a new configuration of their self-identity. In *Composing a Life* (1989), Mary Catherine Bateson writes, “Composing a life has a metaphorical relation to many different arts, including architecture and dance (4). In the very act of creating, the woman artist creates a gestalt of who she knows herself to be over time. Often the rhetorical strategy of narrating oneself intersects with an interruption of the traditional representations of women that have circumscribed a woman's experience. Sidonie Smith writes “Autobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity, and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance” (Smith, *Subjectivity* 156). Rather than viewing autobiographical practice as an inherent part of women's creativity, I see autobiographical acts as moments or processes of restaged power—instances in which women artists define their relationship to established aesthetic movements and negotiate a position of subjective power.

In studying Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska's work, I am interested in how their dance practices helped them to compose not only a life, in spite of discontinuities and disruptions, but also how their practices engaged with a larger history of representations of women in dance and theatre. Gert and Goslar's continuing practice of solo performance and Nirenska's return to solo choreography were not a sign of their failure to succeed or develop, but were survival strategies for their dance practice in times of extreme discontinuity. They used solo dance as an active strategy for interrupting the hegemonic patterns of theatrical and dance representations of women. Their

autobiographical writings and their dances were autobiographical acts that informed each other to create a performative “gestalt” of their “selves,” thus placing themselves bodily at the nexus of several disciplinary histories that would erase them. The next sections explore the significance of histories of autobiographical theory, dance modernism, and exile for understanding the lives and works of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska.

### **Theoretical framework**

Although the theoretical field of women’s autobiographical narratives has grown, few publications have extended the theoretical investigation to autobiographical performance. In their anthology *Auto/biography and Identity* (2004), Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner write:

Very few publications have looked at autobiographical writing in relation to women actors' or other female theatre workers' lives, the analysis or representation of self in a professional or national context, and the relationship between autobiography as evidence and historiographical practice. Nor have actresses' autobiographies been used in more general investigations of gender and autobiography which, considering the relative volume of performers' autobiographies to non-performers' works, is perhaps surprising and may reflect the perceived particularity of the actresses' public/private self. (2)

Discussions of autobiographical practices in performance have mostly focused on works since the 1970s. As Lesley Ferris writes in “Cooking Up the Self: Bobby Baker and Blondell Cummings ‘Do’ the Kitchen” (2003), most of the better known women's autobiographical performance pieces began in the 1970s and proliferated after the mid-1980s, including works by Karen Finley, Deborah Hay, Holly Hughes, etc. (186).

Dance scholarship has also claimed post-modernism as the age of self-narratives in dance performance, including works by choreographers like Bill T. Jones and Meredith Monk. This timeline is misleading however, if we take into account a larger range of modernist women's performance and a wider view of what autobiographical performance or life narrative might include. Valeska Gert's creation of her bar in New York, interfaced with her autobiographies and her nightly performance pieces, shows that modernist performance has more continuity with post-modern performance than previously thought.

As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write in their groundbreaking anthology, *Interfaces: Women/Autobiography/Image/Performance* (2004), women's autobiographical practices have expanded during the last century to encompass textual, visual, material, and performance modes. Often these strategies, "situate the body in some kind of material surround that functions as a theater of embodied self-representation" (Smith and Watson 5). These narratives may function traditionally, as a memoir, autobiography, or self-portrait, or they may contain references to subjectivity that are vague, dispersed, or atmospheric. Overlapping strategies serve to position the woman artist as a resistant subject, and to engage the social and cultural formations of concepts like "woman," "artist," or "modernism:"

Thus, it is essential to expand the concept of visual autobiography as self-portraiture to include visual, textual, voiced, and material modes of embodied self-representation. These self-referential displays at the visual/textual interface in hybrid or pastiche modes materialize self-inquiry and self-knowledge, not through a mirror for seeing and reproducing the artist's face and torso but as the artist's engagement with the history of seeing women's bodies. (Smith and Watson 7)



In my study, I focus not only on Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska's autobiographies or interviews, but also on their dances, created venues, and styles as strategies for disrupting the conventional categories of modernist dance, the historical representations of women in dance, and the traditional expectations of women in daily life.

### **Solo dance as a women's movement**

Women's art, especially when infused with autobiography or issues of subjectivity, has traditionally been criticized based on two assumptions: that women's subjective or autobiographical artistic practices are "personal" and not "universal," and that women's focus on self-representation is self-indulgent or narcissistic. Both of these views have had a profound impact on the historiography of modern dance. As numerous dance historians have written, modern dance began as a women's movement. With the first public dances by Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Maud Allan, Ruth St. Denis and their contemporaries, modern dance redefined women's professional possibilities and created new representations of women onstage. Whether modern dance's impetus lay in rebellions against the nineteenth century formalism of ballet, the nineteenth century romantic revival of Greek cultural images, or the New Woman pictured in contemporary newspapers and on the theatrical stages, the image of a solo dancer in a flowing tunic dancing with bare feet through the wide space of a stage or the gardens and seaside represented freedom and progress for women in both Europe and the United States.<sup>2</sup> In *Prime Movers: The Makers of Modern Dance in America* (1977, 2000), historian Joseph Mazo writes, "This image, because it was so at odds with the traditional ideal, was

particularly important for women to have before them as an alternative to the decorative, inconsequential stereotypes that had preceded it” (10).

The dominance of women in early modern dance is unusual compared to other art disciplines. What began with Isadora Duncan’s generation continued well into the 1930s and 1940s both in Europe and the United States. Not only were the representations of women strikingly different from those of ballet, but women running dance companies and making choreographic statements about societal issues were revolutionary. In spite of a few successful male dancers like Charles Weidman and Harald Kreutzberg, “the image of the [1930s] modern dancer that stuck in the public's mind tended to be female—a bony, barefoot woman whose long, severely cut dress made the high kicks of ballet infrequent and molded her body into a single fervent gesture, thrusting in dynamics, angular in design” (Jowitt, *Time* 151). Historians Jack Anderson and Marcia Siegel, in their survey studies of modern dance agreed. Marcia Siegel begins her discussion of the modern dance canon in *The Shapes of Change: Images of American Dance* (1979) with works choreographed by women: from Doris Humphrey, *Air for the G String* (1928), *Water Study* (1928), *Life of the Bee* (1929); from Martha Graham, *Lamentation* (1930); from Helen Tamiris, *Negro Spirituals* (1927). Siegel’s inclusion of Graham's *Lamentation* is interesting because it is the only solo. Siegel wrote that she included it because it expressed the essence of lamentation rather than the person experiencing it. In other words, she included it because it was non-representational (Siegel 23-24).

Siegel’s emphasis on the separation of the essence of an emotion from the representation of the woman feeling it as evidence of modernism is a common concern

among dance scholars.<sup>3</sup> Criticisms of Isadora Duncan's dances from contemporary male critics focused on her emphasis on personal expression and her "inability" to universalize the themes of her dances. This criticism soon became one of the defining tenets of the next wave of modern dance in both Germany and the United States. In his first book, *The Modern Dance* (1933), which defined the aesthetic and mission of American modernist dance, John Martin wrote "although the modern dance has not gone as far to the left as bio-mechanics . . . it has laid great emphasis on the externalization of the dancer's intention and the reliance not upon the personal feeling of the moment, but upon the metakinetic power in the movement itself to carry over to the spectator" (99). Martin's view overlooks Duncan's own perception of what she intended with her dances. In *Time and the Dancing Image* (1988), Deborah Jowitt writes that in her solos:

It's clear she was trying to suggest the action *as it might have been envisioned by the chorus*, thereby giving the picture a heroic impersonality and magnifying herself into something more than a solitary woman dancing for an audience. It could be said that in doing this, she presaged the abstractions of early modern dance, in which the dancer would eschew impersonation and equate her own persona with universal human feelings. (89)

Duncan felt that her dances captured the energy and expression of a group dance, enlarging her presence and increasing the reach of her dancing. She saw dancing as endowing her with a power to send her inner impulses outward, extending the projection of her inner self into the public realm.

In *Spreading the Gospel of Modern Dance* (1997), Lynne Conner revises the historiographic criticism of self-expression into a different configuration:

I define the boundaries of the modern dance movement in the United States using two criteria: (1) the rejection of the solo dance movement's romantic idealization

of past cultures and movement aesthetics in favor of a modernist agenda in which dancing and dance-making became a part of the zeitgeist of 1920s New York City; and (2) the eventual turn away from the solo dance figure in favor of a group dynamic, which in turn promoted separate understandings of the choreographic (creative) and performance (interpretive) functions. Both criteria were essentially political, calling into question the very nature of dance and culture and the responsibility of the dance artist in relation to her culture. (90-91)

Conner's argument stresses the progression of the "solo dance" movement to the "modern dance" movement as a progression away from interpretive dance and toward formal choreographic structure. Her emphasis on choreographic form echoes Martin's earlier advocacy of the creation of works of art independent of the personalities of individual dancers and their companies (Martin, *Introduction* 263). Deborah Jowitt writes that with the generation of Humphrey, Graham, Tamiris—and one might add Wigman—the group served as an extension of the artistic vision of the soloist (Jowitt, *Time* 189). This seems to imply, as did the emphasis on a progression from self-expression to form, that the solo female dancer was not satisfactory as an artistic vision or a signifying theatrical stage presence.

The emphasis on the progression from solo to group choreography as a sign of artistic maturity is evident in the inclusions and omissions of many histories of modernist dance. By 1946, John Martin touted the third generation of modern dancers, in which he included one man, José Limón, and five women, Valerie Bettis, Sybil Shearer, Eleanor King, Jean Erdman, and Iris Mabry. While Martin extolled the promise of Limón's group dances, it is interesting to note that his praise of most of the women was for their solo dances. He mentioned their group dances as future developments to come in their choreographic maturity (Martin, *The Dance* 142-143). Jowitt's chapter "Group Spirits," in

*Time and the Dancing Image*, which focuses on the shift to depictions of the individual against the group in Graham and Humphrey's group works, reflects another approach of viewing these dances in light of socialism and the emerging Left in dance. While I agree that those connections are significant, I believe they obscure what otherwise is a predominantly female group and a homosocial image conveyed through the dances. Repeatedly, the concerns of the universal or group mass override the concerns of gender in the minds of the historians.

The duality between self-expression and metakinetic power in Martin's theory is linked to the dualities of solo dance and group dance. Duncan's legacy—dance as a women's movement—becomes too easily subsumed by arguments about romanticism or claims that she failed to establish a repertory. What is structured as a progressive modern dance history that moves from self-expression to formal choreography, and solo dance to group dance, interestingly becomes a progression from women to men in the modern dance canon. By 1966, in Selma Jean Cohen's edited volume, *The Modern Dance: Seven Statements of Belief*, only two (Pauline Koner and Anna Sokolow) of the seven choreographers included are women. The men included were José Limón, Erick Hawkins, Donald McKayle, Alwin Nikolais, and Paul Taylor (Cohen 3-14).

### **Dance modernism and subjectivity**

Modern dance is unusual among art forms in that most of its primary founders were women, which as Mark Franko writes, considering the sexist nature of constructions of modernism, “begs the question of how modern dance found itself allied with modernism at all” (ix). Franko’s *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (1995) argues

that women and men in modern dance did take varying stances in relation to sexual politics, and that these stances manifested themselves through modes of expressivity. These modes of expressivity were instrumental and became embedded within historical definitions of modernism in dance history. While Franko's study highlights the differing aesthetics of leftist dancers against the pioneer-based modernist dance canon, Ramsay Burt's *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity* (1998) critiques the modern dance canon's focus on abstract modernism as its defining aesthetic, arguing that modernist dance did not constitute a single, universal, aesthetic language, but that varying aesthetic responses to modernity in the early twentieth century fall under and add to our understanding of modernist dance practice. Both authors echo Bonnie Klime Scott's assertion in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1990) about women's modernist practice:

We suspect that women and modernism is not the aesthetic, directed, monological sort of phenomenon sought in their own ways by authors of no-famous manifestos . . . and perpetuated in new critical-formalist criticism through the 1960s. Modernism as caught in the mesh of gender is polyphonic, mobile, interactive, sexually charged; it has wide appeal, constituting a historic shift in parameters. (4)

Widening the scope of modernist studies to include interdisciplinary and non-canonical works may allow us to understand better the phenomenon of modernist dance as a women's movement by considering the diverse choreographic and performance responses of women to modernity.

Scholars in literary and visual arts traditions have criticized literary and visual art historians for their failure to address the characteristics of women writers and artists, consequently omitting numerous practicing women writers and artists from the modernist

canon.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, several dance historians have begun to reevaluate modern dance in light of the revisions of modernism that have taken place in other disciplines. In locating the beginning of modernism in dance, there are two traditional schools of thought, clearly noted by Lynne Conner in *Spreading the Gospel of Modern Dance*. The first view cites Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis as the “forerunners” of modern dance, claiming that their work broke from traditions of ballet and provided a continuous transition to the “founders” of modern dance (Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Hanya Holm).<sup>5</sup> In contrast, John Martin believed that “modern” dance arose as a rebellion against both classical and romantic forms of dance, placing Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Ruth St. Denis outside of modernist dance due to the classical and romantic characteristics of their work (Martin, *The Modern Dance* 4).<sup>6</sup> Much of the dissent over the historical periodization of modernist dance centers around the duality of expressivity versus abstraction.

Dance historians Sally Banes, Marshall Cohen, Roger Copeland, David Michael Levin, and Stephanie Jordan have used Clement Greenberg’s definition of modernism as abstraction from the visual arts to define modernism in dance. Greenberg’s theory that modernist art must “undergo a process of Kantian self-criticism—using art to establish the limits of art—is an account of modernism as a progression from one generation of modernist practitioners to another, each reacting against the aesthetic paradigms of their predecessors and working toward a goal of pure abstraction” (Burt 14). This aesthetic definition of modernism has supported John Martin’s attempt to separate Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Loie Fuller into a category of romantic or expressive dance. In

contrast to Martin's view of modernism, they also categorize Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey and other contemporaries as pre-modern, due to their use of narrative and reliance on other art forms such as music, visual art, and theatre. For instance, Sally Banes has written in *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (1980) that modernism in dance did not occur until Merce Cunningham and Judson Church (Banes xiv-xv).

Several historians, including Ramsay Burt and Mark Franko, have critiqued Banes' claim. Susan Manning responded to Banes' argument by arguing that modernism occurred in dance throughout the twentieth century, and that modernism certainly included the works of Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. Ramsay Burt linked the progressive historical narrative of modernist dance to the political movement of the United States from policies of isolationism to internationalism:

As a result of the Second World War, the United States changed its policy from isolationism to an internationalist stance that was informed both by the commercial logic of opening up international markets and the political objective of combating international communism. American definitions of modernism developed by Clement Greenberg lent support to the export of American visual art and modern dance as the most advanced art of the most advanced country of the free world<sup>7</sup> . . . . While modernism thus became associated with internationalism, nationalism became associated in many people's minds with extremist brands of populist politics, and in particular with the racist basis of German nationalism under the National Socialist regime. (12)

Greenberg emphasized artistic autonomy because he believed artists must distance themselves from other art forms to protect their work from the corruption of politics or the market: "Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself" (8). Thus, the distancing of modernist art from narrative, subjectivity, and content made it a useful



commodity in the post-World War II era. For modern dancers who struggled economically and politically against ballet and popular dance venues, this stance also granted modern dance artists a niche and avant-garde position against the power of more conventional dance forms and institutions. Gay Morris argues that concerns about the autonomy of modernist dance supported the rise in abstraction, or objectivism that emerged in the work of Merce Cunningham and subsequent generations. The separation of modern dance from a reliance on narrative, representation, or politics thus became an accepted part of the periodization of modernism in dance.

In *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics*, Mark Franko cites scholars' tendency to tell the story of modern dance as a progression from spontaneous expression to the marginalizing of expressive intent:

One easily imagines Isadora Duncan expressing herself, Martha Graham formalizing emotional expression into a set of movement procedures, Merce Cunningham organizing bodily movement into new configurations without expressive intent . . . . Modernist accounts of modern dance history thus perform the telos of aesthetic modernism itself: a continuous reduction to essentials culminating in irreducible "qualities." (ix)

Instead of seeing the modernist narrative in dance as one of successive aesthetic confrontations, Franko suggests that changes in movement styles reflect an internal critique of bodily expression found within the movement.<sup>8</sup> Dancers were choreographing new emotive positions in response to pressures of gender, race, and class.

Franko argues that internal critiques of expression reveal modernist dance's varying responses to difference, particularly issues of gender and class.<sup>9</sup> He resituates

early modern dancers Duncan and Graham within the context of the women's movement and socialist movement of the early twentieth century:

Externally, Duncan refuted, as did New Woman novelists of the 1890s, "the general separation of public and private spheres" (and the relegation of women to the latter).<sup>10</sup> Her career as a self-producing female soloist effectively challenged the separation of public and private spheres that immured women in the confines of domesticity. That is, by choosing dance as "woman's place," she inevitably raised the issue of woman as subject, of feminine subjectivity. Duncan's subjectivity was unstably positioned on a threshold between privacy and publicity because her dance was an act of public display unveiling hidden nature as prior to or intrinsically outside society, from elsewhere by definition. (Franko 2)

Frank argues that Martha Graham's impassivity in performance can be seen as a response to critiques of Duncan's emotionality (146). He links Cunningham's rejection of subjectivism to gender issues as well, supporting the idea that the retreat into abstraction reinforced the private/public divide that Duncan had challenged (Franko 83).

Cunningham's retreat into abstraction may have provided a welcome removal from narratives of heterosexuality without revealing his gay identity during a time when McCarthyism was at its height.<sup>11</sup>

Gay Morris supports Franko's analysis, arguing that abstraction, or objectivism, allowed a new avant-garde to rise in modern dance without attracting scrutiny for political content: "Here one might ponder how successful objectivism would have been if modern dance's need for a new vanguard had not intersected with Cold War constraints: in part, it may have been the idea of secrecy engendered by the Cold War that channeled practice and reception in an objectivist direction" (201). Morris devotes two chapters in *A Game for Dancers* (2006) to African-American modern dancers and Jewish-American dancers' attempts to create alternative modernist dance approaches that reflected history

and values of their communities, as well as the significance of those concerns for all communities.<sup>12</sup> Yet the dancers' works were often criticized as overly expressive, overly representational, overly technical (or lacking in technique), and too personal or autobiographical. Modernist dance moving toward abstraction excluded alternative articulations of modernist dance from the progressive narrative.

The conservative backlash of the 1950s forced what had been a feminist modern dance movement to favor abstraction as a way of taming the powerful roles of women onstage, as well as the “emotionally” expressive “feminine” power of dance. I argue that the progressive reduction of subjectivism in modernist dance was also a progressive masculinization of the modernist narrative. By the 1950s, the vanguard of modern dance had been re-choreographed to reflect a predominance of male objectivist choreographers (Cunningham, Hawkins, Nikolais) and the marginalization of both subjectivism and women from the modernist avant-garde.

### **Dance modernism and nationality**

As discussed earlier in their anthology, *Autobiography and Identity*, Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner called for needed studies of self-representation in national contexts. My study addresses their call, as well as the need for transnational studies of modernist dance, which both American and German historical narratives have failed to document. As a result of this gap, the scholarship of dance history has omitted the complicated artistic exchanges and influences that flowed between Germany and the United States. Dance historian Susan Manning has argued that both German and American historical narratives have constructed nationalist, formalist histories that omit

the influences of working conditions, cultural differences, and interdisciplinary practices among significant dancers in each country (Manning, *Mary Wigman* xv-xvi). Though a handful of established dancers in German dance history, like Mary Wigman or Gret Palucca, have received the attention of scholars since World War II, the careers of many exiled dancers have not been studied. Scholars have studied the contributions of some of the major women in American modern dance—Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey—but their exceptional careers do not reveal the full history of women in American modern dance.

At the time that Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska emigrated to the United States, the American modern dance movement was just gaining ground. German dancers like Valeska Gert, especially those involved with political content, often found themselves outside of the tastes of American audiences. When Mary Wigman toured her version of *Ausdruckstanz* (expressionist dance) in the United States in the early 1930s, many in the American dance community criticized her reliance upon solos at the expense of a more sophisticated use of group choreography (a false notion based on the works chosen for the tour). They criticized her celebration of neither beauty nor femininity, and her lack of technique. American modern dance pioneer, Doris Humphrey, wrote, "We must remember that German dancing is not for us. We must not copy in this country if we are to develop. Imitation is at once our greatest talent and our greatest vice" (14). In the early 1930s, American modern dancers were still establishing modern dance against the tradition of European ballet, and they sought to develop a dance form that reflected American culture.

German dancers who succeeded in the United States often assimilated their dance style to fit American tastes. Hanya Holm, a former Wigman dancer who had opened a branch of Wigman's school in New York, was slowly accepted into American modern dance as she changed the name of the school to the Hanya Holm Studio and adapted the Wigman technique to better fit the American aesthetic. Dance critic John Martin wrote, "In [Holm's] hands the admirable Wigman technique is in no danger of becoming just another imported orthodoxy but is already undergoing processes of adaptation, both conscious and unconscious, to free its potentialities in a new environment . . . . If there are any other foreign influences at work [in American modern dance], they have been thus far singularly ineffective" (Martin, *America Dancing* 171). As Susan Manning writes in "Ausdruckstanz Across the Atlantic," the Wigman technique was based on improvisation, while American modern dance technique became increasingly centered around the development of codified technique and dance vocabularies (1). The dancers who stressed dance over politics became known as the pioneers of American modern dance: Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm. The techniques became entrenched in the American dance aesthetic as the four pioneers taught at the annual summer dance program at Bennington College, and as their students gained posts in universities across the country. The nationalization of American modern dance in opposition to German *Ausdruckstanz* was further intensified by Wigman's controversial compliance with the Third Reich.

Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska's works pushed the boundaries of American and German definitions of dance and subverted the nationalist representations of race and

gender that were integral to both dance traditions. Their stories disrupt the current narratives of German and American dance history by showing alternative performance traits and strategies: Valeska Gert's exile cabarets created a multiracial and transsexual space in which her own exile and artistic identity could take shape; Lotte Goslar used clowning and humor to subvert conventional images of women in dance and theatre; Pola Nirenska employed dance to renarrate her history in a way that connected her to the international community of Holocaust survivors and served as a site for communal memory that transcended national borders. By focusing on these three German dancers who crossed German and American borders and aesthetics, I show how modernist dance in both countries developed transnationally. I place these three dancers in our histories of modernist dance, and thus revise our historical narratives.

### **Exile**

With the exception of research on Helene Weigel and Lotte Lenya, whose prominence is partially attributable to their marriages to Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, studies on exiled German women in theatre are scarce. Katrin Sieg's *Exiles, Eccentrics, Activists* (1994) fills a gaping hole in the literature on theatre history by examining the lives and work of Else Lasker-Schüler, Erika Mann, and Therese Giehse, particularly their exile years. Sieg's study is also one of the only studies to consider dancers Valeska Gert and Lotte Goslar in the context of exile history. Similarly in dance history, most studies of early German modern dance focus on the major pioneers, Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban, overlooking the work of exiled women like Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska.

In spite of the number of dancers who found refuge in exile, only two publications treat their work within a context of exile studies. Lillian Karina and Marion Kant's *Hitler's Dancers* (2003) documents some exiled dancers lives, though most were ballet dancers and information is from memory or interviews with surviving acquaintances. Christine Hoffman's "Deutschsprachige Ausdruckstänzerinnen und ihre Emigration" (1993), tracks many exiled women dancers, including the years they entered exile and their paths through refuge countries. Yet even with the publication of these studies, exile studies and modern dance history have continued to marginalize the work and experiences of exiled women dancers.

Of the documented exiled women dancers, I have chosen Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska for their emigration to the United States, their marginalized positions in relation to the modernist dance canon, and their interdisciplinary approaches that combine dance, theatre, and autobiography. My study also seeks to broaden dance history's tendency to focus on New York as the defining community for dance modernism. All three dancers began their first years in the United States in New York City. Gert remained in New York (with summers in Provincetown). Pola Nirenska and Lotte Goslar left New York for Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, respectively. I have also chosen these three dancers for their differing experiences of exile and the depth of understanding they can provide for the intersections of gender, performance, and exile in relation to the development of modernist dance.

As I wrote in an earlier section of this chapter, although the choice of creating autobiographical narratives may be revolutionary in intent, it may also serve as a

negotiative strategy during times of discontinuity. For some women, autobiographical narratives created a vehicle for coping with the daily realities of exile. In studying the works of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska, I am interested in how dance served as an autobiographical and revolutionary act of self-agency, through which exiled modernist women in exile chose to choreograph and write themselves into self-defined representational existence.

### **History of exile: 1933-1945**

In order to place the lives and work of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska in historical context, it is important to have an understanding of the historical events surrounding their emigration. Between 1933 and 1939 in Germany, over 400 anti-Jewish policies were legislated, creating what historian Karl Schleunes has called “the twisted road to Auschwitz” (109). As a result of the September 1933 dismissal of artists by the Nazi Ministry of Culture, Valeska Gert was no longer able to perform. Pola Nirenska, having just returned with Mary Wigman’s company from their tour of the United States, was dismissed along with other Jewish dancers from Wigman’s company. Lotte Goslar, who was half-Jewish, continued to perform in Germany through 1933. In 1934, she joined Erika Mann’s Peppermill Theatre, essentially choosing for political and ethical reasons not to return to her homeland.

Employment regulations were followed by the Nuremberg Laws in 1935. Officially the “Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor,” it prohibited sexual intercourse or marriage between Jews and “Aryans”<sup>13</sup> (Kaplan 16). Valeska Gert, who had been romantically involved with an “Aryan,” actor Aribert Wäscher, and married to



an “Aryan,” Helmuth von Krause, finally chose to leave Germany in order to protect them. By 1936, ads in Jewish newspapers often included searches for future spouses willing to emigrate. Valeska Gert was one of the exiles who sought a marriage of survival. She married British citizen, Robin Anderson, in 1936, thereby securing a British passport and a safe haven in England. Goslar and Nirenska emigrated as single women, though both dancers married once in exile. All three dancers were exceptions in that their dance careers provided them with the autonomy, connections, and financial independence to leave Germany.

By 1939, the goal of the Nazis was to create a Jew-free economy in Germany. In 1938, the occurrence of “Crystal Night,” or the November Pogrom, left at least 100 Jews dead, and more than 1,000 synagogues, businesses, and homes destroyed. More than 30,000 Jewish men disappeared to concentration camps (Kaplan 16). Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska spent transitional years in countries that would not be their final destination. Valeska Gert traveled between England, France, and Germany for three years before settling initially in England and finally emigrating to the United States in 1939. Lotte Goslar performed in Zürich, Prague, and Holland from 1934 to 1937, before landing in the United States. Pola Nirenska performed for two years in Poland, Austria, and Italy until the spread of Nazism across Europe drove her into British exile in 1935. She finally emigrated to the United States in 1949.

The years of exile for German refugees from Nazi oppression are generally defined by the February burning of the Reichstag in 1933 and the official “call back” of exiles in 1949. Historians have defined two general waves of emigration. The first wave

included politically active and anti-Nazi intellectuals who left between the burning of the Reichstag in February 1933 and the public book burning in May 1933. Those who left early tended to remain focused on a return to their homeland, and many spent their exile years expecting and hoping for an early demise for Hitler's government. The second large wave of emigrants left between the boycott of Jewish businesses in spring of 1933 and the November Pogrom of 1938. Most exiles who left Germany as part of the second wave feared direct bodily harm or death and entered exile having already lost the hope of returning to their homeland. The second wave of exiles adjusted more willingly to the culture of their new countries. The historical boundaries for the definition of exile, however, are more complex than the boundary dates of 1933-1949. Some exiles, like Lotte Goslar, returned to other European countries, but not Germany. Some dancers, like Lotte Goslar, did not respond to the call in 1949 because they did not want to return to the Soviet-occupied east Germany.<sup>14</sup> Some, like Valeska Gert, who did return, felt like exiles in their own country. Vital connections and parts of their former lives had been altered or obliterated, and they no longer felt a part of their homeland.

Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska's experiences encompass the significant problems of historically defining the German exile period: When does exile become simply a change of culture and nationality? For instance, Lotte Goslar claims that she left Germany by choice, although her political affiliation with the Peppermill Theatre would have made it impossible for her to return. She became a United States citizen in 1948, eleven years after her arrival. How long must one be away to be termed an exile? Valeska Gert left Germany in 1933 and returned in 1949. In contrast, Pola Nirenska left

in 1933, but never returned to live in Germany or her homeland of Poland. She became a United States citizen in 1956. Must one be forced by violence from one's homeland in order to be considered an exile? Can Lotte Goslar's experience of choosing to leave Germany be compared to Valeska Gert and Pola Nirenska's forced exile? Once one returns to Germany, are the exile years over? Even after Gert returned to Germany in 1949, she felt alienated and forgotten. Indeed for many who did and did not return to Germany, the feeling of being in exile never ended.

### **Convergence: women, modernism, and exile**

The period of 1933 to 1945 forced modernist artists and women into a time of turbulent change, their fates directed by powerful political forces and the luck of available visas. The narratives of modernist dance and of exile history became intertwined, and the history of women within both narratives was obscured. In this section, I discuss the problems of documenting women's contributions within exile history and the realities of exile for modernist women dancers.

Exile history developed after World War II and was pursued hesitantly in Germany. Most early research focused on male intellectual exiles, often dubbed the "illustrious immigrants," including Albert Einstein, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, Erwin Piscator, and George Grosz (Quack 1).<sup>15</sup> In contrast, significant research on women's experiences in exile did not begin until the late 1980s. In November 1991, the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C. held a scholarly conference focused on women in exile, which with the publication of a special issue of *Exilforschung* dedicated to

women exiles, became a landmark development in research on the lives of women refugees.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from the obvious political and canonical reasons for the omission of women from exile history, the experiences of women have been challenging to document. Women writers had difficulty finding publishers in exile, and many changed genre in order to publish. For example, playwright Christa Winsloe, who wrote the controversial play *Gestern und Heute* (filmed in 1931 as *Mädchen in Uniform*), wrote mostly novels and an occasional film script during her exile. Most writings by women were in the form of memoirs, often documenting everyday life and not attracting the interest of historians. Many single women did not write memoirs, perhaps due to having no dependents for whom they felt it was important to preserve documentation of their daily history. Valeska Gert and Lotte Goslar are both interesting exceptions, in that they wrote autobiographies and autobiographical articles, in spite of having no dependents. Others who had intermarried often failed to leave behind memoirs, or left them in archival collections unrelated to larger exile collections, and thus, were harder for scholars to locate.

In 1933, *Statistische Handbuch des Deutschen Reiches* numbered employed Jewish actors and dancers at 703. Of the dancers, the majority were women (Guilbert-Deguine 1104-1105). Although the dance community included women and men, the number of women affected by employment restrictions was greater due to the higher number of women in the field. Jewish dancers lost their positions with the Ministry of Culture after the September laws of 1933 forbid their employment.<sup>17</sup> Some dancers found employment in the private sector, but lost their jobs in 1935 and were forced to

emigrate.<sup>18</sup> After the November pogrom of 1938, dancers who had found work refuge with the Jewish Cultural Organization were forced to leave.<sup>19</sup>

Once in the United States, exiled dancers found a challenging economic situation. Most of the country was still recovering from the Great Depression, and most refugees arrived with no financial support. German exiles were allowed to take very little money with them when they left the country. United States refugee aid organizations, including the National Refugee Service, the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, the National Council of Jewish Women, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped exiles secure employment, find schools for their children, find living arrangements, and connect with doctors and other service agents (Quack 6).

Women who had been employed before emigration were often forced to settle for odd jobs and menial work, yet they improved their working situations rather quickly. In a 1946 survey, almost half of all exiled women were working (Quack 7). Employment did not always mean, however, that women were able to succeed in their original professions. For example, women writers had immense trouble finding publishers and agents in exile. Many also found that they needed to switch genres in order to find an audience for their work (Schmeichel-Falkenberg 85). Dramatists Christa Winsloe, as mentioned earlier, and Hilde Rubenstein shifted from writing plays to writing prose (Schmeichel-Falkenberg 87). Erika Mann's Peppermill Theatre flopped with its 1937 debut in New York City because of the language gap between her German-speaking actors and American audiences. Lotte Goslar succeeded beyond that debut as a soloist, because the humor of her work did not depend on language for its effect. Pola Nirenska also succeeded within

her own field because her dances were nonverbal. Gert circumvented the issue of language by creating a cabaret atmosphere in which multiple languages were the norm and were responsible for its international atmosphere.

Many exile memoirs written by women attribute their adjustment and success in exile to the help of other immigrants, relatives, aid organizations, or American benefactors.<sup>20</sup> Valeska Gert made her early cabaret successes with the help of acquaintances who had seen her perform in Europe. Her Beggar's Bar became a magnet for European exiles, and her staff included Kadidja Wedekind.<sup>21</sup> Lotte Goslar found connection with Maria Piscator at the Dramatic Workshop of the New School for Social Research. Goslar's early solo performances were also supported by patron Russell Potter. Pola Nirenska performed her first American debut with the help of Jan Veen at the Boston Conservatory. Both Lotte Goslar and Pola Nirenska's careers in the United States were substantially helped by Ted Shawn, and Nirenska found a powerful mentor in Doris Humphrey.

Women exiles who achieved stability and success in exile also found themselves carrying the responsibility of helping friends and family leave Germany or get out of prison (Schmeichel-Falkenberg 88). Goslar, like many exiles, spent many years helping secure visas and supplies for friends still in Germany. Many of her artist connections eventually came to the United States:

Hans Sahl came and so did Voskovec and Werich. When I had left their Liberated Theater in Prague to join Erika Mann in America, we had made plans in case they were endangered by a fascist occupation. They would send me a bogus telegram that meant that they had to leave their country, and I would try to secure them some engagement, which at that time was the only way to get exit permits. Any

job would do as long as they could get out. At that time I was under exclusive contract to William Morris, Jr., and when the telegram arrived, I went to him. Through his immediate action the two—together with their composer Jaroslav Jeseek could come to the USA. (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 55)

Feminist historians have noted that overall, women tended to adjust more easily to exile than men. Women seemed less reluctant to take menial jobs to provide for themselves and their families, and less attached to their national identities as Germans. Both Valeska Gert and Pola Nirenska washed dishes in restaurants during the early days of their exile. Gert also did some nude modeling to make ends meet. Women often possessed more skills for navigating the daily realities of exile and making connections in their new communities.

The ability of women to adapt to exile with less resistance is evidenced by the low number of suicides committed by women exiles. Pola Nirenska, who committed suicide over fifty years after her emigration to the United States is one of the rare exceptions. As I discuss in chapter three, Nirenska's death was perhaps precipitated by the prominence of her husband, Jan Karski, in the remembrance of the Holocaust, which resurged in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s with the building of the United States Holocaust Memorial. The revisiting of painful memories was, for her, destructive rather than cathartic. For men, however, the numbers tell a different story:

Consider some of all the famous names we know, only among writers, whose lives ended in suicide during Hitler's regime. It began in 1935 with Tucholsky; other examples include Walter Benjamin, Alfred Wolkenstein, Walter Hasenclever, Ernst Weiss, Ernst Toller, and Stefan Zweig.<sup>22</sup> We also remember the writers who died by their own hands even after the Second World War, such as Klaus Mann, Primo Levi, Paul Celan, Jean Améry, and Peter Szondi—to name just a few and only those best known. It is a remarkable fact that we find no women among them. The greater ability of women to adapt to hard and strenuous

conditions, the flexibility to change their way of life if necessary, and strong feelings of responsibility for others may be part of the explanation for this surprising fact. (Schmeichel-Falkenberg 89)<sup>23</sup>

Historian Schmeichel-Falkenberg also writes that men were more ready to return to Germany after the war, especially if their professions relied on language (90). Valeska Gert is an interesting exception to the trends for women exiles, as she chose to return to West Germany in hopes of reestablishing the vibrant cabaret life of the 1920s Berlin scene. She performed as a guest artist in several Berlin theaters, and opened two cabarets, *Bei Valeska* and *Hexenküche*, which both closed after being unsuccessful. Other returning dancers included Bruno Arno, Lisa Czobel, Viktor Gsovsky, Lotti Huber, Kurt Jooss, Erika Milee and Heinz Rosen in West Germany, and Jenny Gerz, Ilse Loesch und Hans Weidt in East Germany. In the 1950s, Annie Sauer was one of the last to return (Guilbert-Deguine 1110-1111).

## **Methodology**

My study is a social and cultural history, which integrates perspectives from multiple theoretical disciplines including feminist theory, cultural theory, theatre studies and dance analysis. During my research, I examined source materials in the archival collections of Valeska Gert (Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung at the Universität zu Köln), Lotte Goslar (the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division, the Los Angeles Public Library's Turnabout Theatre Collection, Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung at the Universität zu Köln, and the Deutsches Tanzarchiv in Cologne, Germany), and Pola Nirenska (Library of Congress in



Washington, D.C). Each of the collections contained correspondence, photographs, video documentation, choreographic notes, and publicity and administrative materials from the dancers' careers.

Accessing video documentation for the dancers' work was challenging, as only the Lotte Goslar Collection contained a large collection of video footage. The Pola Nirenska Collection at the Library of Congress holds some videos of her work, but at the time of my research, the entire video collection was misplaced during an institutional move from the Washington, D.C. facility to a new facility in Culpepper, VA. As of the writing of this dissertation, the Nirenska videos are still missing. I was, however, able to see video footage in the personal collections of Rima Faber and Jan Tievsky, who danced with Pola Nirenska during the 1980s. Choreographic notes from all three women's careers were few. The only existing notated score was for *Clapping*, a work Lotte Goslar choreographed during a California residency in 1971.

My archival research was enhanced by interviews with former dancers and friends of Pola Nirenska and Lotte Goslar. Rima Faber, Jan Tievsky, Liz Lerman, Sharon Wyrriick, Laura Schandelmeier, and George Jackson shared their memories of Nirenska from the 1980s and 1990s. Naima Prevots, who danced with Nirenska's company in the 1960s also added significant information to my understanding of Nirenska's career. Lance Westergard generously shared his experiences with Lotte Goslar's artistic and rehearsal process. Because Valeska Gert was significantly older than Goslar and Nirenska, I was unable to interview surviving acquaintances or dancers.

Throughout the chapters, I have included a brief overview of each dancer's career, and highlights of their time in exile. Because critical studies of all three dancers are few, I have concentrated my discussion around themes critical to the dancers' creative work in exile. Although detailed, comprehensive historical studies of Lotte Goslar and Pola Nirenska have yet to be written, extensive discussion of their career timelines is outside the scope of my project. It is my hope that this dissertation will encourage future comprehensive biographical documentation of their dance contributions. German to English translations throughout the dissertation are my own, unless otherwise noted.

### **Outline of chapters**

In the Introduction, I have mapped the history, theories, and creative strategies particular to women in exile and established a theoretical base for examining the work of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska. Chapter One explores the ways Valeska Gert's work functioned to embody a concept of Otherness that changed throughout the Weimar period, the early years of the Nazi regime, her exile in the United States, and her return to Germany. Beyond deepening insight about her work, Gert's daily experiences of exile offer valuable information about how tensions of nationality, gender, and ethnicity intersected in the exile experience. I show how the local spaces of the Beggar's Bar and Valeska's served the development of a multiracial, queer, transnational community in which her own exile identity could take shape. Chapter Two investigates Goslar's use of clowning as a transgressive strategy reflective of her newly developing identity in exile—in particular how she used humor to subvert conventional images of women in dance and theatre, while also creating a performance strategy for exploring experiences of exile.

Chapter Three explores how Nirenska's work serves as a site of both individual and cultural memory, allowing Nirenska to "renarrate" her history in a way that connects her to the larger community of Holocaust survivors. The concluding chapter assesses the potential for the dance works of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska to map out an aesthetic reflective of women's exile experience for dance. The chapter considers how such an aesthetic might reshape the historiographic narrative of the mimetic split between modernist dance and the work of theatrical, political dance artists like Gert, Goslar and Nirenska. I also explore the contributions of their work to an understanding of women's autobiographical performance practices and their role in the shaping of new identities in exile.

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<sup>1</sup> Goat stable.

<sup>2</sup> Ruyter, p. 15, and Kendall, p. xiii. For more information on the social history of modern dance, see Jowitt, Maynard, Siegel (1985), and Wood. For more reading on women and the burlesque stage in the nineteenth century, see Allen and Grimsted.

<sup>3</sup> The marginalization of women in theatre based on a conflation of autobiography and performance is discussed in detail in Lesley Ferris' *Acting Women: Images of Women in Theatre* (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Miller, Cristanne. *Cultures of Modernism : Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, & Else Lasker-Schüler: Gender and Literary Community in New York and Berlin* (2005). Meskimmon, Marsha. *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (1999). Deepwell, Katy, ed. *Women Artists and Modernism* (1998). Gambrell, Alice. *Women Intellectuals, Modernism, and Difference : Transatlantic Culture, 1919-1945* (1997). Scott, Bonnie Kime, ed. *Refiguring Modernism* (1995). Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity* (1995). Scott, Bonnie Kime, ed. *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1990).

<sup>5</sup> This argument was formalized by Don McDonagh in *The Complete Guide to Modern Dance* (1976).

<sup>6</sup> This argument was first articulated by John Martin in his lectures on the modern dance in the early 1930s.

<sup>7</sup> See Orton and Pollack, 1985.

<sup>8</sup> Franko explains in more detail: "The 'internality' of these critiques displaces modernist scenarios of rejection and purist reformation because new positions regarding emotion were being manipulated but not

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reduced beyond recognition. They were altered as if from within, critically restylized. The notion of internal critique pertains to what Remo Guidieri and Francesco Pellizzi have called the definition of an old identity in a ‘modern’ context” (Franko xi; Guidieri and Pellizzi 67).

<sup>9</sup> Theories of expressivity in performance have been explored most recently in literature on theatre and affect. For more information see: Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect* (2004); Ducey, Ariel. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (2007); Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002); and Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Ardis, Ann L. *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 121.

<sup>11</sup> Support for Franko’s argument that Cunningham’s abstraction functioned as a “closet” for his homosexuality is also found in Sue-Ellen Case’s *Performing Science and the Virtual* (New York: Routledge, 2007) and John Katz’s “John Cage’s Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse,” in *Writing Through John Cage’s Music, Poetry, and Art*. Eds. David W. Bernstein and Christopher Hatch. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 41-61.

<sup>12</sup> Morris discusses the dilemma of modernist aesthetics for dancers like Anna Sokolow, Katherine Dunham, Donald McKayle, and Talley Beatty (Morris 87-166).

<sup>13</sup> While I acknowledge that “Aryan” is a falsely-constructed term, I use it here to describe the historical events and categorizations that affected Valeska Gert and her loved ones.

<sup>14</sup> While some dancers, like Lotte Goslar, chose not to return to East Germany, many exiles did return due to their leftist or socialist beliefs. For more information about German exiles choosing to return to East Germany, see *Sojourners* (1995) by John Borneman and Jeffrey Peck.

<sup>15</sup> See Krohn 1993 and Heilbut 1984.

<sup>16</sup> In 1995, a new reference listing over 200 exiled women writers, *Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen im Exil 1933 bis 1945 (Dictionary of German-Speaking Authors in Exile 1933-1945)* was edited and published by Renate Wall. Subsequently, a number of edited anthologies and scholarly studies about women in exile have appeared: Patrizia Guida-Laforgia’s *Invisible Women Writers in Exile in the U.S.A.* (1995), Elke Frederiksen and Martha Kaarsberg Wallach’s *Facing Fascism and Confronting the Past: German Women Writers from Weimar to the Present* (2000), and Sybylle Quack’s *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees and the Nazi Period* (1995).

<sup>17</sup> The first wave of Jewish dancers entered exile in the spring of 1933, not long after first months of anti-Semitic violence: Tile Rössler and Fred Coolemanns, assistants to Gret Palucca and Mary Wigman in Dresden (let go in April 1933); Kurt Jooss and ensemble: Karl Bergeest, Lola Botka, Klaus Didelot, Edgar Frank, Heinz Heckroth, Frida Holst, Elsa Kahl, Wilma Kamrath, Maria Kindlova, Mascha Lidolt, Hans Müller-Kray, Rudolf Pescht, Claire Rosing, Aino Siimola, Werner Stammer, Ernst Uthoff, Elisabeth Wartmann in September 1933; Sigurd Leeder, with some teachers and students from the Folkwang School in Essen in Summer 1934 (Guilbert-Deguine 1105).

<sup>18</sup> Jewish choreographers and teachers who had been working in the private sector included: Eugenia Eduardova, a former dancer with Maryinski Theater in St. Petersburg who had opened a ballet school in

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Germany; Irmgard Bartenieff, a student of Rudolf Laban; Gertrud (Truda) Engelhardt, the director of the Berlin Wigman School; and Paula Padani, a graduate of Wigman School in Dresden (Guilbert-Deguine 1106).

<sup>19</sup> Sixty-one dancers had found employment in the Jüdisches Kulturbundes Deutschland after 1933 including Ruth Anselm, Katja Bakalinska, Else Dublon, Nelly Hirth, Hannah Kroner, Erika Milee, Mia Pick, and Marianne Silbermann (Guilbert-Deguine 1106).

<sup>20</sup> Many exiled dancers found connection within the exiled or German immigrant communities of their destination countries: Artur Michel with Aufbau; Else Dublon with the Hanya Holm Studio; Veronika Pataki with Workshop of Stage - Screen and Radio and Max Reinhardt; Edwin Demby and Cläre Eckstein with Erika Mann's Peppermill Theatre; Hannah Kroner with the Immigrant Jewish War Veterans (Guilbert-Deguine 1109-1110).

<sup>21</sup> Kadidja Wedekind (1911-1994), the daughter of German dramatist Frank Wedekind, emigrated to the US in 1937. She performed in New England theaters and worked for "Voice of America," before returning to Germany in 1949.

<sup>22</sup> Kurt Tucholsky, German journalist and writer overdosed on sleeping pills in 1935, after struggling with chronic illness. Walter Benjamin, German philosopher and literary critic, overdosed on morphine in 1940, while trying to escape from the Nazis. Alfred Wolkenstein, German writer, committed suicide in a Paris hospital in 1945. Walter Hasenclever, German writer overdosed on barbiturates in 1940 in a French prison camp, in order not to be taken by the Nazis. Ernst Weiss, Czech writer and physician, committed suicide in Paris in 1940, when Nazis invaded the city. Ernst Toller, Prussian writer, hung himself in his New York hotel room in 1939, after losing his family in the Holocaust and facing financial failure. Fearing that Nazism would conquer the world, Stefan Zweig, Austrian writer, committed suicide with his wife in Brazil in 1942.

<sup>23</sup> Klaus Mann, German writer, overdosed on sleeping pills in 1949. Primo Levi, Italian writer and chemist, committed suicide by throwing himself down the stairs of his building in Turin in 1970. Paul Celan, French poet, drowned himself in the Seine in Paris, also in 1970. Jean Amery, Austrian essayist, overdosed on sleeping pills in 1978. Péter Szondi, Hungarian literary scholar and philologist committed suicide in Berlin in 1971. These names represent only a few of the exiled writers and artists who committed suicide after having survived the Holocaust.

## CHAPTER 1

### “A Live Girl”: Performing the Queer Space of Exile in Valeska Gert’s Cabaret

*Sometimes I feel as if I am buried alive.*  
(Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 144).<sup>1</sup>

The desire to continue dancing and living and the longing for connection drove the artistic life of Valeska Gert (1892-1978) through her early years as a young dancer and actress in the Weimar Republic, her exile years running and performing in cabarets in New York and Provincetown, her return to Germany in 1948, and the final years of her cabaret, *Ziegenstall*, in Kampen. Throughout her life, Gert felt that her contributions to dance history had been ignored. At the age of 81, from her remote cabaret in Kampen on the German island of Sylt, Valeska Gert wrote in her final memoir: “Why do I write? Nothing has ever moved and excited me like thinking about the past. I want to remain. For that reason I have danced, bellowed, sung; for that reason I have acted; for that reason I have written.” (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 17-18).<sup>2</sup> In contrast to many women, especially women dancers, who went into exile, Valeska Gert wrote four autobiographies between 1930 and 1973: *Mein Weg* (1930), *Die Bettlerbar von New York* (1950), *Ich bin eine Hexe* (1968), and *Katze von Kampen* (1973). Although published before and after her years in exile, the last three autobiographies reflect on her experiences leading up to

and during exile. In addition to her memoirs, Gert also wrote multiple articles for newspapers and journals, documenting her philosophy of dance and theatre and her creative process. Her writings survive alongside the few remaining images of her work as an example of what exile made possible for women artists.

Exile for women, including Gert, was often a time of immense growth, opportunity, and agency. In her autobiographies as well as her dances, Gert described exile as a simultaneous struggle against death and a time of rebirth. Throughout her career, Gert used her solos to disrupt the representational economy of women's bodies and the history of women's representation in dance. In spite of the hardship of exile, she continued to perform radical solos in her cabaret spaces, creating a transnational environment that transgressed boundaries of public and private, national aesthetics, and conventional sexuality.

**“A spark in a powder keg”**

*They said it was a bad thing for a girl of a respectable family to go into theatre—that I should never get a husband if I persisted in being eccentric.*  
(Gert, “*The Thing I Do*”)

Gert's willingness to go into exile alone stemmed from a rebellion and independence cultivated in her childhood years. Like many other modern dancers, such as Mary Wigman and Pola Nirenska, dance represented for Gert a rebellion against the conventional expectations for young women and a vehicle for finding her own agency. When she was not dancing outside, she found private spaces in the house where she could move: “In the dark living room, I danced before a tall mirror; some light entered from the dining room. I turned, swayed, and lost all self-consciousness. The movements came by themselves. I did not have to do anything; they flowed out of my body. I was in ecstasy”

(Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 61).<sup>3</sup> Those early dance experiences tapped into Gert's desire to stretch beyond the boundaries of herself, to let movement flow from inside to outside without constraint.

In contrast to the feeling she had when dancing, Gert's childhood was plagued by anxiety over eternity and death. At night, her anxiety grew until she could not sleep: "I was anxious, pent-up, until suddenly a tension in me exploded. Suddenly I saw starkly, clearly and explicitly, that I must also die, not just other people. I will be gone, completely gone for all time, forever. Life is short and the afterlife long, long . . . . I screamed in horror like an animal" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 26)<sup>4</sup> Her anxiety over the inevitability of death revealed an early understanding of the downfall of representation for women. Dolls repulsed her because she knew they were dead, and she once asked her nanny to help her buy a "small live girl" instead of a doll. She only played doctor with dolls, since it allowed her to pretend that she could heal or save them. Gert was finally calmed as she experienced her first acting and dance lessons: "When I began to dance and act, I felt: this is my salvation. I grabbed a piece of the beloved reality that is not real; the real is only eternal change. I formed a gestalt" (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 22).<sup>5</sup> Gert had discovered the power of performance and the ability to shape her own representation as a "live girl."

Gert's mother loved the arts and influenced her early years by providing opportunities for Gert to explore her passion for dance. When Anna Pavlova performed in Berlin, Gert begged her mother to let her go. Her mother bought two tickets, and Gert went with Else, her childhood friend. Gert found Pavlova beautiful. After the



performance, they waited at the stage entrance to meet her, and when Pavlova appeared, she smiled magically at Gert and shared flowers from her bouquet. She gave Gert a lily-of-the-valley, which she pressed and kept in her diary. "Pavlova was my third love" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 61). As much as Gert's mother supported her interests, Gert's father appeared indifferent or denied them. Gert's father disapproved of theater and performing. When her mother went to the theater or variety shows, he accused her of being too pleasure-seeking and said she should stay home with the children. Gert's mother, however, ensured that her daughter had access to dance lessons, by enrolling Gert in ballet classes at the opera house. Gert loved it and soon became the best student in her class.

Gert's dance debut was in a February 1916 performance with Rita Sachetto in Blüthner-Saal. Gert made her own costume of orange silk, pulled tight at the waist. She wore Turkish-style pants and a bright blue band at her throat. She powdered her face white, which would later become her trademark, and danced barefoot. Her performance parodied the flowing blue and pink costumes of the other dancers and the conventional female roles depicted in their dances:

I burned with desire to destroy this sweetness. I wore orange-colored harem pants. I sprang out of the wings with exuberance. The same movements, that I had danced gracefully and softly during rehearsal, I now exaggerated wildly. With giant strides I stormed across the stage, swung my arms like a huge pendulum, splayed my hands and twisted my face into wicked grimaces. Then I danced sweetly, much more sweetly than the others. I can also be sweet. The audience groaned with complacency. But in the next moment they got another slap in the face. The dance was a spark in a powder keg. The audience exploded, as I withdrew with a fresh grimace. They rioted, whistling. The modern dance satire was born. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 71)<sup>6</sup>

In her autobiography, *Die Bettlerbar von New York*, Gert represents her performance of *Tanz in Orange* (*Dance in Orange*, 1916) as an igniting force that pierces the audience and incites its explosion. Her energy exceeds the bounds of the proscenium stage, and she contradicts all expected images of young women.

After the Sachetto performance, Gert was hired to dance between films at Ufa Theater-Nollendorfplatz.<sup>7</sup> For a week, she performed her solo, *Tanz in Orange*, and a duet, *Golliwog's Cakewalk*, with Sidi Riha, wife of famous expressionist painter Erich Heckel. Gert's dances puzzled her audiences, who wondered if her performance constituted dance or theatre. Gert maintained that her style was unique, and she was pleased by comments that she danced like a "strange animal." (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 71-72). Her grotesque caricatures and movements became known in Berlin as the "Gert genre."

### **The "Gert genre"**

*If I were a woman, I would shoot her. Bang. Out. Because she is a dangerous one. Because with just a few steps, she exposes the secrets of feminine fighting technique....Gert is—one can't say it any other way: a wonderful beast. (Peter 119)*<sup>8</sup>

Valeska Gert's career as a dancer and actress in early 1930s Germany had reached a remarkable level of success. She had built her reputation as a solo dancer and actress in the 1920s with dance performances in theatres and cabarets, as well as in films. Her solos combined dance and theatrical elements to depict characters from all walks of life, often exploring the reality of Berlin's downtrodden and disempowered: a prostitute, a wet nurse, a streetwalker, death, a fortuneteller.

During the Weimar years, before her exile, Gert saw herself as part of the new modern dance movement, separated from “forerunners” Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller. Gert criticized Duncan’s generation for their classical aesthetic, which was inspired by ancient Greek statues and friezes. Gert opposed the harmonious movements pursued by Duncan: “Modern dancers are not harmonious. They are the confused children of our times. For this reason Duncan’s “classical” dance had no inner truth. Duncan was a romantic dancer and not a classical dancer, because she longed for another time, that no longer exists and never will exist” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 81).<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Gert felt that Alexander Sacharoff and Mary Wigman were part of a change in the dance aesthetic, but that both Sacharoff and Wigman still danced an aesthetic of pseudo-classicism, rather than modernism:

In Munich Alexander Sacharoff modernized the pseudo-classical dances by taking the unbroken lines and breaking them. He danced “precious” . . . . Wigman danced pseudo-classical movements with dynamic energy. She stamped her legs and pushed her arms. The bodily effort was enormous. The floor of the stage shook. Her audience was stunned, not from the dances, but from dust, that she blew over them. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 81)<sup>10</sup>

Gert wanted her dancing to reflect the modernity of the 1920s, as well as the people of her time: “I did not want to dance these vacuous movements that had nothing to do with me or my times. I wanted to represent people and the many-colored gestures and movements of daily life” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 82).<sup>11</sup> Gert’s solos reflected the realities of street life in Berlin, which she distanced through satire, fragmented movement, and grotesque gestures.

Gert's most famous solos, *Kanaille* (*The Prostitute*, 1915-1916) and *Die K upplerin* (*The Madame*, pre-1925), focused on ruptures between the public and private discourses of women's sexuality in the Weimar Republic. Diane Howe writes, "Her *Kanaille* was considered improper for a decent audience, because it was about the pleasure and the insane, dark suffering of lust" (204). Historians have written much about Gert's solos and their commentary on the specific problem of German prostitution in Weimar cities, but what is striking about Gert's description of the *Kanaille* is her focus on the women's movements, expressions, and experience:

Provocatively I wiggle my hips, lift the very short, black skirt, show white thigh flesh over long, black silk stockings and high-heeled shoes. (A scandal at a time in which dancers, if they were not dancing ballet, hopped barefoot across the stage.) I am a sensitive prostitute, moving softly and lustfully. My very white face is almost covered with strands of black hair, they fall over my forehead, almost to scarlet made-up mouth. The chin disappears in a red scarf that lies loosely around the neck. I sink slowly in the knees, open the legs wide and sink deeply. In every spasm, as if bitten by a tarantella, I twitch in the air. I swing back and forth. Then the body relaxes, the spasm releases, the bounces become ever softer, ever lighter. The intervals become longer, the excitement wanes, still one last twitch, and I am again on the Earth. What had the man done to me? He used my body, because I needed money. Miserable world! I spit contemptuously, stepping to the right and to the left, then wandered off. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 47-48)<sup>12</sup>

Gert's representation of *Kanaille* differed with each performance. The moods of her prostitute altered between enjoyment, disgust, indifference, resentment, and predatory glee. Gert connected the economic exploitation of the prostitute to the limited sexual education of bourgeois women, exposing the link between sex and power and its consequences for women's bodies: "There wouldn't be such a demand for them if the bourgeois woman knew more about love and eroticism. As it is, the prostitute is almost as ignorant as her bourgeois sister, but at least she has the advantage of separating physical

things from these sentimentalities mistakenly called love” (Gert, "Than by the Dynamic" 6). Gert's *Kanaille* contradicted the historical representations of prostitutes in Weimar, which most often depicted the women as commodities or symbols of the vices of urban life. Gert subverted these common images by highlighting the performance choices of the prostitute. She flipped the power of the exchange by choreographing her prostitute's altering indifference with a direct gaze at her male client and at her audience. She exposes female sexuality as performance, and in the case of prostitution, work. As Marsha Meskimmon writes in *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (1999), such representations link the prostitute to the larger group of working women, who in spite of being caught in a system of exploitation, retain some agency in their workday lives (24-25).

In *Die Kupplerin*, Gert danced as an aged madame, who no longer trafficked her own body, but dealt in the bodies of other women. In her writings, Gert emphasized the professional stature of the madame: “When the street walker grows old she stays in her profession. She is no longer able to execute her profession, she brings others together . . . . I showed a few typical movements of the procuror, how she makes her business, the joy of having achieved it and her drunkenness” (Gert, "Than by the Dynamic" 7). Gert's representation of working women coincided with her own discovery of performance as a profession both on the concert stage and in cabarets. Many women were prominent in Weimar cabaret life: Trude Hesterberg owned the Wilde Bühne in Berlin; Erika Mann ran the Peppermill Theatre in Munich and in exile; Rosa Valetti ran her own cabaret; Kate Kühl, Gussy Holl, Blandine Ebinger, Margo Lion, Annemarie Hase, Claire Waldorf,

Therese Giehse, and Trudi Schoop all became successful cabaret performers. Sieg argues that cabaret's exclusion from "high art" gave women a space where "no one was looking" and where they could carve out new performance and work opportunities: "The cabaret's suspension between artistic experimentation, political agitation, and mass entertainment created a unique site of cultural production, especially for women" (Sieg 65). For *Ausdruckstänzerinnen* (women expressionist dancers), whose dances were often brief, concentrated solos, slipping into the cabaret format was not difficult. Gert had performed in cabarets in Berlin before her exile, but in New York, she became for the first time, a cabaret owner.<sup>13</sup> In the United States, Gert shifted from focusing on her own performance career to supporting, and shaping the performances of the staff in her cabaret.

Gert's ability to practice her own profession in the theaters of 1930s Berlin was soon interrupted. In 1933, Joseph Goebbels released a pamphlet titled, *Das erwachende Berlin*, including Valeska Gert's photo prominently among other figures in German theater and film. The August edition of *Monatschrift für die gesamte, geistige Bewegung des neuen Deutschlands, Völkische Kultur* claimed, "The stage of the future seems to be safe, if one simply strikes the last fourteen years out of the German theatrical past" (Nufer 132).<sup>14</sup> In September 1933, after the April Laws had been established, the Nazis excluded Jews from the Chambers of Culture, and from the art, film, music, literature, and journalism professions. Gert writes:

German Jews suffocated in a flood of poisonous and mean racial slurs. Hitler barked on the radio, Göring piped, und Goebbels cried soapily mendacious.... The threatening swastika flags, the dangerous, tight, black uniforms of the SS, the plump, loud, steps of the SA, the headings in the *Völkischen Beobachter* and in *Angriff*, one couldn't escape them. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 79)<sup>15</sup>

When Gert showed Goebbels' pamphlet to her husband Helmuth, he no longer allowed her to leave the house. Soon he became so fearful and uncomfortable that they divorced. With no husband, and no possibility of performing in any theatres or cabarets, Gert was left in limbo. In 1935, The Nuremberg laws were established, prohibiting sexual intercourse or marriage between Aryans and Jews (Kaplan 581). Gert no longer felt safe visiting her lover Aribert Wäscher: "Love between Jews and Aryans was declared 'racial defilement'" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 80).<sup>16</sup> Gert decided to leave Germany so that she no longer endangered her loved ones.

Valeska Gert left Germany in 1933 when performance opportunities outside of the Jüdisches Kulturbund began to dwindle. She spent the first few years of her exile on tour in Europe and the United States, performing in London, Paris, and New York. Her first marriage to Helmuth von Krause was unable to withstand the strain of her absence and the growing danger of their interracial marriage. In 1936, Krause encouraged Gert to marry British admirer Robin Hay Anderson, in order to obtain a British passport. From 1936 to 1939, Anderson helped arrange performances as Gert toured, returning intermittently to an increasingly dangerous Berlin. After a performance in London, a journalist from the *News Chronicle* asked Gert about the political situation in Germany. Despite the journalist's promise not to publish her remarks, "On the next day, there appeared in three newspapers, what the Nazis called "Gruel fairy tales," with my name and photos of me" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 82).<sup>17</sup> As Gert's Jewish heritage put her in increasing danger, she used her ability to travel to secure a visa, to help her brother

escape to Paris. In December 1938 after a run of performances at Raymond Duncan's theatre in France, an American manager invited Gert to perform in New York, offering a roundtrip ticket, contract, and five hundred dollars.<sup>18</sup> Gert realized the extent to which Germany and Europe had changed. In 1939, Gert fled Europe, bound for New York aboard the *Isle de France* (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 90).

### **American exile**

*I lived in slums and had an incomparable feeling of freedom and independence, that could only be matched by love and the ability to create.*  
(Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 64-65)<sup>19</sup>

Although Gert's representations of working women onstage defied conventional roles for women, her personal life in Germany had been conventionally dependent on her husbands and lovers. Her experiences in exile would soon challenge her to grow in new ways. When Gert arrived in the United States, she did not know how to earn money, make professional connections, or make use of institutions like the New School for Social Research or the National Refugee Service. Gert writes,

In Germany, I had lived an animalistic life. I only went in the theater or in concerts, occasionally in the cinema. I was shuttled back and forth by my husband and Wäscher. I retreated into myself, in order to explode on the stage. I did not know how much money my husband earned and if he even earned anything. I did not know what Wäscher earned. I did not know how much I earned. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 96-97)<sup>20</sup>

Upon Valeska Gert's arrival in New York, she was at the mercy of managers for her promotion and support. The next day, she received news that her manager had died from a heart attack after his young wife left him. Her second manager, after arranging for her



to learn the American forms of modern dance and giving Gert money for new clothes, became suddenly ill and died.

Gert reached out to Salka Viertel, a friend in the exile community in Hollywood, and decided to leave New York and traveled cross-country by bus.<sup>21</sup> Gert's hopes for work in Hollywood, however, were not fulfilled. As she met with emigrants who already had positions in entertainment, her appearance became a hindrance to her search for a job:

I thought that in Hollywood one could wear what one pleased. Ja, look, whoever has not yet arrived must be "well groomed." Only later is one allowed to be extravagant. I had fallen down in the bus, because it rocked so. My legs were beaten, I wore a thick bandage. You could see it through my pants. I had a sun burn, my face was swollen, my eyes blinked like a tiny baby pig. When Walter Wanger saw me, he folded his papers together and said: "You are not the type." I was out quicker than I got in. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 95-96)<sup>22</sup>

As Gert's appearance brought closed doors, so did her proclivity to speak her mind, "...in my embarrassment I said loud things that one should not say. 'I do not like American actors; they look like graphic postcards' . . . . Lubitsch<sup>23</sup> was angry, and here I was again quickly thrown out" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 96).<sup>24</sup> With no luck in Hollywood, Gert returned to New York and began to search for work.

In New York, Gert unsuccessfully applied for jobs at Macy's and Woolworth's. Advised by someone to go to the National Refugee Service for financial help, Gert was granted \$7 per week. Because she had a British passport, she was classified as "stranded" rather than emigrant, making her eligible for very little money. She rented a room for \$4 per week, leaving only \$3 for food and other necessities. In spite of her poverty, Gert remained optimistic. She improved her English by reading political books in the library,

swam daily, and bought the *New York Times* and cheap meals with money left from her rent.

In New York, Gert found a dance audience unprepared for her satiric dance theatre works. She was engaged for a series of four Sunday evening performances beginning October 6, 1940 at the Cherry Lane Theatre. The program included works from her German repertoire: *Boxen (Boxing)*, *Das Baby (Baby)*, *Der Tod (Death)*, *Die Kupplerin (The Madame)*, and *Coloratura*. She embodied much of what the American modern dance community had already rejected: the Germanness of *Ausdruckstanz*, the reliance on solo dances, and the elevation of theatrical content over technique. Critics' comments caught her in a web of conflicting expectations. *Der Tod* was praised for its timeless universality, but most critics missed its sly subversion of conventional stagings of women. In the solo, Gert stood onstage in a plain black dress. She stepped slowly, steadily as if approaching death at the rhythm of her horrified breathing. Her hand clenched slowly, repetitively before finally relaxing as she expired: "It wasn't any very extraordinary kind of death, definitely not an execution as the title at first suggested, but sentence had been passed before the dance began and in the first movement the woman knew she was dying" (C. np). A condemning parody, *Der Tod* staged the inevitable death of women in theatrical representation. In *Die Bettlerbar von New York*, Gert's description of the solo is strikingly similar to *Kanaille*:

I leaned my head back. Shoulders, arms, hands, the entire body spasmed. I resisted with all of my strength. Senseless. I stiffen, seconds-long I stand motionless, a column of pain. Then I give up. Life drains slowly out of my body, very slowly it relaxes. The pain falls away, the mouth softens, the hands loosen,

the shoulders let go, the arms fall. The face smoothens . . . the head falls forward, the head of a doll. All life is gone. I am dead. (80)<sup>25</sup>

In *Kanaille*, the prostitute is in charge of her representation and performs it on the street for money. In *Der Tod*, the actress also performs her death, usually predetermined by male playwrights, for money, but does it onstage. Her performance echos the many deaths of female protagonists found in theatre, including Sophocles' *Antigone*, Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Diaghilev's *Rite of Spring*. Gert's parody is of the pre-sentenced death the actress portrays, while her choreography reveals the agency within the actress' performance.

In spite of the positive reception of *Der Tod*, critics warned "there is an odor of nostalgia for something that used to be in a place we used to call Europe . . . Gert needs to master a repertory of American subjects" (Review of Valeska Gert performance 1940). Other critics commented, "Although she was born in Berlin, Miss Gert offers no German sketches. Either she hasn't the heart to do it, or she feels it wouldn't go over in New York just now. On the whole, we found her a disappointment, but it is possible that she may yet adjust herself and her program to what must be, to her, a bewildering audience" (Waldorf n.p.). Another critic called her "a stubby, but sensual Boris Karloff<sup>26</sup> with a splendidly formed head, wild black hair [and] a way of affecting with her hands and face that would frighten small children to an early grave" (Peter 83).<sup>27</sup> Unable to find an artistic niche in New York City, Gert decided to move to Provincetown, Massachusetts.

## Provincetown

*It is the point that lies closest to Europe.*  
(Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 7)<sup>28</sup>

Gert found a more familiar setting for her adjustment to America in Provincetown. She rented a room in the shed of an older couple, Herr und Frau Enos for \$25 per month. Gert painted the walls blue, and gathered a bed, table, chair, and kerosene stove. There were broken windows, so she took the panes out and enjoyed the fresh air at night. Every day Herr Enos brought fish home, which she cooked, smoked, or made into fish soup. In her autobiography, *Die Bettlerbar von New York*, Gert follows the first two chapters describing her arrival in New York and Provincetown with a chapter about her birth. Gert's structure for this memoir contrasts with the typical coming of age narrative in her first autobiography, *Mein Weg*, which was written before her exile. Later banned by the Nazis, *Mein Weg* was divided into two sections. The first chronicled her youth and significant influences, and the second section described her development as a dancer and performer. *Die Bettlerbar von New York* departed from this traditional autobiographical structure by using a nonlinear narrative, which symbolically represented her United States exile as a second birth, and connected Provincetown to memories of her childhood, reflecting the ease and joy she had felt during vacations with her family by the sea. Gert's joy surfaced once again as she improvised and created a home in Provincetown.

While in Provincetown, Gert met an aspiring actor named Irving, who told her of a job washing dishes for thirty cents per hour, eight hours a day. Gert was excited to take the job, as it was a "classic beginning in America for everyone who wants to become a

millionaire" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 10).<sup>29</sup> The next day, Gert went to The Moore's and accepted the job. That night, Gert was so excited she hardly slept: "Will I do it well? Until now, I had only performed evenings of dance in the largest theaters of Europe. I had never washed dishes. My husband had spoiled me. He had kept the house together with our maid. Before washing dishes, I had just as much anxiety as before a performance" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 10).<sup>30</sup> The next morning, Gert began her job with gusto: "I was possessed, as I had been possessed earlier by dance. It does not matter to the possessed, by what she is possessed. She is possessed by everything she does" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 11).<sup>31</sup> The pay was low, however, and Gert made only \$2.40 in a full shift. She wondered if she could find better work. "I had begun with dishwashing, as is standard in America. It was time for me to move up."<sup>32</sup> Gert decided not to return (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 12).

Hans Hoffmann, an expressionist painter from Munich, was seeking nude models. He had a painting school in Provincetown and taught abstract painting. He hired Gert for one week. She would sit for three hours each morning and earn \$12.50 for five days. She was so successful that an older painter offered her two-hour sittings in the afternoon at a dollar per hour. That afternoon, Gert went to the Art Association, where the old painter charged people 25 cents per hour to paint nudes. Stools stood in rows like in a concert hall, and a tall podium was at the front. Gert was nervous. She changed behind the curtain, and when the crowd had arrived, the painter called her in (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 12-13).

At the afternoon nude modeling job, Gert was instructed to change positions every five minutes. She changed into poses from all of the theatrical roles she had played:

the schoolmistress out of *Diary of a Young Girl*, Puck from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Zoe from *Nana*, Mme. Peachum from *Threepenny Opera*, the waitress from the Czech film, *Washerwoman*. Then she performed poses from her dances: "a saint with folded hands and gaze directed toward heaven, a collapsed, humble prostitute, a piece of misery"<sup>33</sup> (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 14). The audience was astounded. When Gert grew tired, she turned her back on the audience. Gert quit the afternoon modeling job after one day, but she continued the morning job for a second week, since it was more private with only twenty-five students.

Gert's reputation in Europe preceded her, even in Provincetown. At the beach, she met a man, Myron, who had seen her perform at the Comedie des Champs Elyseés<sup>34</sup>: "The audience fought over your dances: some screamed that it was the new surrealist dance, the others pummeled their heads . . . . You stood on the stage and yelled: "You are idiots!" And then things really went wild, they destroyed the theater" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 14).<sup>35</sup> Myron insisted that Gert should perform in Provincetown, and introduced Gert to the owner of the White Whale, Frances Bell. Bell hired her without requiring an audition. She was a hit, and the bar was so full when she performed, that people had to reserve seats in advance. Tennessee Williams, who regularly saw her performance, encouraged Gert to open a cabaret in New York.

### **Beggars Bar: Woman as Cabaret Owner**

*Somewhere far down in a dark street in Greenwich Village there is suddenly a blue and red light and steep steps into a cellar and a small door—inside, well that's hard to describe. Inside there is a woman in a flaming-red suit leading you into a Paris-tinted, conspiracy-whispering small room with low tables, with Picasso on the walls and surrealist speeches resounding from the*

*stage. . . a corner of genuine Europe, Paris, if you wish, or Vienna or Budapest.*” (L., n.p.)

Although exile had disrupted Gert’s life in profound ways, her summer in Provincetown opened new possibilities and helped her regain her power as a performer. After returning to New York City, Gert opened the *Beggar’s Bar* on the corner of Morton and Bleecker Streets in Greenwich Village in 1941. She painted the walls of the cellar bar black, leaving it for guests to add their own graffiti, and furnished it with mismatched tables and makeshift chairs. Gert hired waiters and staff who doubled as singers and performers (including Kadidja Wedekind, Tennessee Williams, Maria Collm, Sada Gordon, and Judith Malina),<sup>36</sup> and often the distinguished patrons would give impromptu performances. Gert writes, “people came from across the country to see this strange bar and its strange artists” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 151). Gert’s pianists included Erwin Strauss and Oskars Sohn (Bindol, n.p.). Entertainment had an international flair: Sonja Wronkow sang in five different languages; Maria Collm in four; a waiter performed Hindu-inspired dances. The *Beggar’s Bar* attracted a fascinating diversity of clientele from theater and film: Judy Garland and Vincent Minelli, Simone Simon, Fredric March, Patsy Kelly, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Richter, Walter Mehring, and Katherine Dunham’s dance troupe, among others.

Gert’s bar served as more than an escape from the failure of her dances with American audiences; like many immigrant businesses and cultural centers, *Beggar’s Bar* enabled Gert to “transform [her] current place of residence by ‘placing’ her identity, that is, by inserting [her] belonging into [her neighborhood] and creating local ties” (Ehrkamp

346). Gert developed her dance satires to include poems and songs, and at times, she would open an evening with satirical commentary on New York, the political situation, or other controversial subjects. She presented old numbers like *Das Baby*, *Coloratura*, *Japanischer Schauspieler (Japanese Actor)*, and *Tragedienne Francaise (French Tragedienne)* alongside new numbers influenced by America, like *Coney Island*. Theorist Ayse S. Caglar writes: “We might see [such] places as sites and stages where taken for granted scripts of (ethnic, national, etc.) belonging are challenged, and alternative participation in imaginative social life are imagined and negotiated” (609). For Gert, Beggars Bar provided an opportunity to reimagine her own identity as a German Jewish emigrant, a performer, and a woman artist; yet she also faced challenges as a female cabaret owner. As she struggled to find investors, one woman’s attorney warned Gert, “Whoever runs a nightclub stands with one foot in jail. This industry is run through with gangsters and racketeers” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 115).<sup>37</sup> Another man, a policeman inspecting the bar, “was speechless. Nightclub owners look different. They are business people, who roll thick cigars in the corner of their mouths and throw fake money at the police. And there I stand a castaway creature, an artist, who paints her walls herself. It cannot get any worse than that. Scandalous!” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 117).<sup>38</sup> As Gert had choreographed her own solos and representations onstage, now she created her own performance context.

Securing space for Gert’s bar was financially challenging. One of Gert’s Provincetown friends, Irving, had introduced her to a female painter, who was willing to finance the cabaret. The painter agreed to give Gert \$300, once she found a space.



Immediately, Gert consulted a real estate agent on Grove Street, who showed her a basement property on the corner of Morton Street and Bleecker Street on the edge of Greenwich Village. The place had been a prosperous night bar ten years earlier: "The main room was clear-cut, wonderfully proportioned. I knew, here I will have success. Success depends largely on the measure of a space" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23).<sup>39</sup> The property reminded Gert of European cabarets: "The bar was very old. The walls were rough lime and reminded me of *La Bollée* on the Boulevard Michel in Paris, where Oscar Wilde spent many evenings. He had scratched his name in the sand-lime wall. I had never seen in Berlin or anywhere such a perfectly cut space. I loved it at first sight" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23).<sup>40</sup> Left from the entrance, in the corner stood a small stage, next to a wobbly piano. To the right was the bar, and behind it a mirror. From there went a hall to the cloakroom and into the rustic kitchen. The kitchen floor was made of stone and had a drainpipe. "Hearth, gas oven, fryer, grill, two electric refrigerators, everything was provided" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23).<sup>41</sup> Next to the main room was a second, smaller room with benches along the walls. Then came the toilets. Marjorie, the painter, negotiated \$30 per month, with the stipulation that Gert and she would be responsible for all repairs. She told Gert to bring her workers the next day, and she'd sign the contract.

Gert had to pull a crew together immediately. She gathered a group of friends from Provincetown and Berlin, but the next day, Marjorie backed out of her promise (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 24). What followed was a series of potential financiers. A rich doctor who was a friend of a friend agreed to consider financing the bar. He gave her \$50 in advance and told her to search for a second financier to join as partner (Gert, *Die*

*Bettlerbar* 25). At a concert by the tap dancer, Paul Draper, Gert met a graphic artist from Berlin, who recommended Karl Nierendorf, the former financier of the Katakombe cabaret in Berlin, where Gert had performed occasionally. She called Nierendorf, who was now in New York. He visited the bar and gave Gert \$200. She got the license for the cabaret and restaurant for \$135 (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 26).

The difficult task of cleaning the bar, acquiring all of the necessary licenses, and stocking the bar with furniture, equipment, food, and drink gave Gert an opportunity to gain survival skills that had been denied her in Germany. She got the key to the bar and claimed the space as her own: "By candlelight I cleaned and swept up the spider webs . . . . Now I had to scrape up money to buy paint" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 25).<sup>42</sup> Gert took the \$50 from the rich doctor to Consolidated Edison and begged them with a \$20 deposit to turn on the electricity. She bought black enamel paint and painted the walls. Gert and Irving bought supplies in the Bowery, where there was a row of shops selling new and used restaurant equipment and supplies. Gert wrote, "I named the cabaret "Beggar[']s Bar, because I had begged for everything in it" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28).<sup>43</sup> A French guest painted dancers on the black walls, and cancan dancers in blue, yellow, and red on the mirror behind the bar (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 33).

Gert received the cabaret license from the police, and filed it with the police station in Charles Street. The next day, a letter from the station notified her that the neighbors were protesting the opening of her nightclub in Morton Street. When Gert received the list of protesting neighbors, she knocked on every door and tried to plead her case. Almost all said the same thing, "The constable told everyone, 'All are protesting

against the nightclub. Do you want to be the only one left out?" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 29-30).<sup>44</sup> Only two women objected. One explained, "A few days ago a drunk man came out of the bar and molested a young girl." Gert rebutted that only she was in the bar, and she did not harm a young girl, and she was not a man. The other woman cried, "We don't want this respectable street spoiled by such a bar. It will only bring more death and murder" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 29-30). On the day of the hearing, however, no neighbors showed, and Gert received the cabaret license. Gert put a metal sign at the entrance announcing that the bar would open.

Because of World War II, many things were unavailable to serve in restaurants. In the Beggars Bar, Gert served only cheap coffee, sandwiches, and knackwurst with potato salad. The ABC board had refused to issue a Gert liquor license because she did not have a bona-fida restaurant. In order to pay her employees, Gert washed dishes and did the cleaning herself (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 33). The first night, Gert brought in only \$7.50. Gert's waiters had attempted to hire two bathroom attendants, but none of their friends confirmed. That night all of their friends filled the bar and received free food and drinks. After her opening night, Gert was left with no staff and no audience (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 31-32). For the second night, Gert called the Intelligence Bureau: "There is a new cabaret on Morton Street. The owner is German, she is always stalking sailors and soldiers . . . . She must be a Nazi spy" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 32).<sup>45</sup> Next she called the narcotics division: "You must send someone to Morton Street. Opium cigarettes are being smoked there" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 32).<sup>46</sup> Next she called all of the different bureaus. Each one sent at least two officers in plainclothes. That night the bar was full.

In spite of the hardship, Gert's bar soon became famous. First came the painters and poets—the painter Didi Model and Oronzo, the poet Maxwell Bodenheim and Rose Guildoe. Officers came, who had heard of Beggars Bar from French soldiers in Casablanca, English merchant marines, and Canadian pilots. Gert wrote, "The Park Avenue people appeared in sable and ermine. It seemed their designers were John Frederic and Walter Florell. Theatre and film artists came: Simone Simon, Frederic March, Victor Jory, Mary Brian, Patsy Kelly, Beverley Roberts, Billy Holiday, Joan McGraggen, Judy Haidon, Maxine Sullivan, the Katherine Dunham Troupe, James Light, June Havoc. And Judy Garland said: "The Beggar Bar is the only cabaret in New York that is worth seeing" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 105).<sup>47</sup> Gert's bar was also frequented by young artists at the beginning of their careers. Tennessee Williams would recite his poetry. He needed money, and became one of Gert's waiters (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 36).

### **Beggars Bar as Gert's jungle**

*All of my cabarets are true expressions of me. I gave them each full expression, in which they languished, and I always find an excuse to throw them away. . . . The authorities treated me miserably. It was related to the many false accusations, that always occurred with my cabarets. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 97)<sup>48</sup>*

Gert writes that the Beggar's Bar was her jungle, the only space she had in exile in which she could envision herself as a predator. The power she gained through her performances of womanhood, Jewishness, and Germanness enabled her to invert the public and private spheres. Her life in Germany had been about performing on external, public stages, where she performed ruptures between the public and private, like *Kanaille* and *Die Kupplerin*. In both solos, the private realm of women's bodies and sexuality

became part of the public realm of the economy. By emphasizing the women's performative power and professional work, Gert also embodied a disruption of the commodification of women. With the Beggar's Bar, Gert invited the public into a representation of her private sphere.

In her autobiography, Gert describes the bar as if it is her body. She writes, the building inspector "knocked on the ceiling with a stick and made a pensive face. What is wrong now? My heart stood still. He knocked like the doctor, when he checked my heart. Would he find a disease? Why was he silent? The silence is unbearable. Finally he opened his mouth: 'Get three ventilators, or you won't get a license'" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28).<sup>49</sup> The inversion of public and private continued in her furnishings. Gert covered the lampshades with chiffon from her costumes. One shade was half blue, half green. Another shade was red with white spots, another red and green, and another red and blue: "I upended the lampshades over the lightbulbs and switched the light on. It looked surrealistic. The ghost lamps stood out softly from the black walls" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 25).<sup>50</sup> When audiences entered the bar, they entered a representation of Gert's dancing body, clothed in costumes just as Gert appeared onstage. Irving gave Gert an old mattress, which she covered with a red oilcloth cover she made, and used it as the front row for the audience. In the next days, numerous inspectors came by the bar, and Gert was in constant fear that she would never get the cabaret license (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 27). An ABC Board inspector came and eyed the mattress suspiciously: "What does this mean? A kissing and necking society?" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28-29).<sup>51</sup> Gert explained the people in the back rows would see the cabaret performance better if the front row

reclined. Gert was denied the alcohol license. By combining images of Beggar's Bar as her performing body with signifiers of sex and intimacy, Gert embodied her own transgression of American performance conventions and acceptable images for women artists. She inserted her body into Greenwich Village and invited the public inside.

### **Beggars Bar and queer space**

For four years, the Beggar's Bar functioned as a queer space in that it set up a "parallel world, filled with possibility and pleasure" which functioned as an intervention in the dominant American and heterosexual culture (Tattelman 24). The furnishings of Beggars Bar were mismatched and the space uncategorizable:

I panhandled everyone I knew. No one was safe from me. Soon I had a colorful collection of bridge, kitchen, night and restaurant tables—big, small, four-cornered, round, not one matched any of the others. The chairs fit together just as badly. That gave me an idea for my new style. Nothing shall match in my bar, not the glasses, not the cups, plates, and not the artists. On the tables, I lay the colorful remains of oilcloth—all colors and patterns that I could scrape up. Then I stood colorful candles on them. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28)<sup>52</sup>

Although her cabaret was a haven for German exiles, the audience also included other Europeans and Americans. Gert chose songs and performances that drew from multiple national cultures. Gert wrote, "I sang parodies in English, French and German. During the entire war, I had played a Berlin type, the *Berliner Ackerstraße*. I wanted to know, what would happen, if I spoke German in Paris or French in Germany" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 34).<sup>53</sup> Gert advertised her cabaret in the German-speaking immigrants' paper, *Der Aufbau*, and in the cabaret's programming, she responded to the diverse cultural backgrounds of her audiences. For instance, when Esmerelda, a singer she hired through the Refugee Service sang sentimental German songs, Gert encouraged her to sing French

songs instead, because no one would understand them. Gert's bar maintained an international, cosmopolitan atmosphere.

As Gert noticed the diversity in American life that frequented her bar, her audiences were simultaneously attracted to her otherness, and the space became one of cultural contact and exchange:

When "blacks" were in my New York Cabaret "Beggars Bar," I immediately noticed the reaction. The atmosphere sizzled. They responded in a lively way, except when they did not understand the words. I sang my *Berliner Type* with a Berlin dialect, and in spite of that, everytime, when a Negro entered the "Beggars Bar" he said: "Please, do the *Berlin Girl*." (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 71-72)<sup>54</sup>

In the Beggar's Bar, Gert developed her dance satires to include poems and songs, and at times, she would open an evening with satirical commentary on New York, the political situation, or other controversial subjects. Her *Berlin Girl* was a typical example of Gert's cabaret dance theatre:

Already in bed in early morning,/when the man from across the way  
Got up to get dressed,/ I looked through the blinds  
And I became crazed,/ by the sight of him so naked. . . .  
Nothing to it, squeezed the air out of him,/ until he died, the craven jerk.  
Soon after that I was put into prison,/ 13 years kept behind bars. . . .  
Come, we won't be broke for long,/ come, oh come, over to my side.  
Come, I'll kiss you, you sweet cadaver,/ until you're fed up with the feed.  
Everyone should die on me,/ so that nothing goes to waste! (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 72-73)<sup>55</sup>

In the *Berlin Girl*, Gert reverses the male gaze through her portrayal of a young woman who is aroused by watching her male neighbor through the blinds. The young woman kills him, and the lyrics express a desire and hunger for possession not usually attributed to female protagonists. Gert's Beggar's Bar reflected a similar power reversal, in that Gert as proprietor controlled her own gaze at her audience. She invites audience members

into her lair, devouring them even as she performs for them. The bar became a site for Gert's renegotiation of power as an emigrant and a woman artist.

Just as Gert's performances resisted conventional images of women, Beggar's Bar also resisted conventional mores of sexuality. The performers and audience members represented a wide range of sexual identities and infused the bar with an atmosphere of acceptance. Gert told Brecht, who she met often in the US, that many gay audience members came to the Beggar's Bar, and that they made a better audience than heterosexual audiences (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 77). Tennessee Williams and his partner were audience members before Williams began working as one of Gert's waiters. In his memoir, Tennessee Williams wrote: "There was a singer who was either a male or female transvestite, I've never known which . . ." (Williams 71). That Gert's bar served as a popular site for gay and African-American patrons is evidenced by the attendance of the Katherine Dunham troupe, which as noted in Susan Manning's *Modern Dance, Negro Dance*, was a vibrant part of the gay community in 1940s New York City (157). Within this diversity existed a lively exchange between audience and performers, with one role often crossing over to the other: "Sometimes one number followed another blow after blow, sometimes we left the performing to the guests. And then we listened. They were certain to return soon, those who sang successfully or played a Boogie-Woogie on the piano" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 87-88).<sup>56</sup> The mixing of cultural aesthetics, languages, and diverse ethnic, gendered, and sexual identities created a world that defied the systematic extermination of people Gert had experienced in Germany, as well as the nationalist patriotism that often troubled her attempts to integrate into American society.



## **Beggars Bar: Closed**

*Hitler wiped out my home, my friends, and my work. Now my work is snuffed out a second time. . . . I am condemned to sit unemployed in New York. The soldiers are returning from the war. They will find my cabaret closed. I cannot participate in the excitement of freedom, I am closed out of the loop. I sit apart again and belong to nothing and no one! (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 114)<sup>57</sup>*

The increase of gangsters causing trouble in the bar foreshadowed more trouble to come. Gert soon lost the Beggars Bar for serving Eierkognak in her Beggar Sip without a license: “The "Beggar Sip" was made of Eierkognak and coffee, the Eierkognak was made of eggs and a small percentage of alcohol. It could no longer be sold without a license, and I had not known that” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 111).<sup>58</sup> Gert had not realized the laws had changed six months earlier (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 106).

After the Beggar Sip incident, the police took away Gert's cabaret license, leaving her only the restaurant license. Gert opened again that night in order to explain to her guests why the cabaret must end. Gert danced from table to table, telling the story. A policeman warned her a performance was forbidden, but said he would not arrest her: "I went from table to table, told a few crumbs here and stirred up the curiosity there. I left the first table in suspense, until I came back and continued the story. I gave a prohibited performance” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 108).<sup>59</sup> Gert was crushed, however, by losing all that she had created with the Beggar's Bar:

I woke at night from anxious dreams. I could not comprehend that my Beggar's Bar had been taken away. It had become my child. I had created it from nothing and fought for it like a lion. It had been murdered. It is not only murder when a person is killed. Bureaucrats and incompetent lawyers may destroy art—something very human. Because that was my cabaret. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 113)<sup>60</sup>

The loss of the bar left Gert struggling to decide where to go and what the next phase of her life should be. When World War II ended, she longed to return home to Berlin, but it was not yet open to returning exiles. As powerful as performance was for Gert, it could not fully overcome the displacement of exile.

### **Return to Provincetown**

*The war came to an end. Berlin was bombed to the ground. I felt it with every nerve. I grew up with this city. I was only half-heartedly in America. Soon there would be freedom. Then I will return to Europe. I love this thickly-settled continent, on which people are so close to one another, that an electric circuit developed, which was called "atmosphere."*  
(Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 105)<sup>61</sup>

After the Beggars Bar closed, Gert left for Provincetown. In May, Gert opened her cabaret, Valeska's, in a waterfront studio with a kitchen, shower room, bedroom, and a large atelier. Gert decided the cabaret would be "bright and not demonic like the Beggar's Bar in New York" (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124).<sup>62</sup> She painted the walls in a light palette: "pink lightbulbs threw a raspberry sheen on the light blue."<sup>63</sup> She wrote the menu "strewn at large" across the wall (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124).<sup>64</sup> She made stools from empty nail barrels, and hired a Portuguese gigolo to make tables. She traveled to New Bedford to buy dishes for the cabaret. Gert fashioned a stage out of two crates that floated in from the water: "I built a light framework out of wooden poles, across which I thumbtacked blue and yellow paper. On the paper wall, I stuck photos and newspaper clippings. That was the stage backdrop. Right and left of the stage, I stood three small barrels on top of each other, and on the top ones I stood three candles. That was the

lighting.” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124).<sup>65</sup> A local gave Gert the piano from her bed and breakfast. With a piano, Gert could open the cabaret

Gert’s program included performances that had become popular in the Beggar’s Bar: “Esme sang chansons from the *Bal Musette*. Pumpernickel did her *Gay Nineties* in a low-cut evening dress, a huge feathered hat over her sharp old woman’s face . . . .And then I told the story of the *Strange Journey of Professor Blitz*.”

The Professor and his wife cannot stand the torments of the damned any longer. They too belong to the possessed; they have gone much too far. A volcanic eruption blows them upwards. Like two soap bubbles they hover above the entrance to Hell. A gust of wind seizes them and pulls them across meadows, fields, and woods, until they reach their own country and land in the midst of their friends, who have been waiting for them. (Senelick 274)

Gert performed her solo, *The Strange Journey of Professor Blitz*, during her exile years in her cabarets in New York City and Provincetown, Massachusetts. Although it was written in the 1920s, well before the Nazi rise to power in Germany, the outer space orbit of Professor Blitz and his wife embodied the displacement and longing for return that characterized Gert’s life in exile. In the narrative, Professor Blitz and his wife orbit the moon on a couch, surviving on sardines, whisky, and gin. After trying to escape their predicament by leaping onto a meteor, the couple crashes into the sea and lands in hell. Gert’s hell is filled with artists, politicians, whores, money-grubbers, cyclists, jockeys, and a myriad of other types. The inhabitants of hell are condemned to the endless repetition of compulsions: the cyclist cycles until he is emaciated; a young girl licks ice cream until she is exhausted; a drunken man imbibes until liquor spurts from his head.

The inhabitants are condemned to the performance of their desires and an abundance of unstructured time.

In her New York cabaret, the Beggar's Bar, Gert performed *The Strange Journey of Professor Blitz* along with *Interview with a 90 Year-Old about Hitler*. During her exile years, the orbit of Professor Blitz and the fate of the people in Hell served as metaphors for the flight from the Nazis (an unending circling of Europe) and exile in a foreign land (the fall into hell). Like hell's inhabitants, exiles lived in a state of unstructured time, condemned to repeat the actions of their daily lives in spite of profound loss. Gert described in her memoirs: "How we longed for the tiny country in Europe. We all wanted to return after the war" (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 80-81).<sup>66</sup> Gert's problems with neighbors and the police continued in Provincetown. Gert's cabaret was forced by the authorities to close at 11pm because neighbors had complained about the noise, while other bars were allowed to remain open until 1am (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 126-127).

In 1947, Gert lost her second cabaret, *Valeska's*, in Provincetown, under pressure from neighbors and legal problems. In her memoirs, Gert writes that losing both bars was due to her misunderstanding of the laws and their application to her cabaret. After losing the case in New York because of her powerlessness to find a good attorney, she attempted to defend herself in the Provincetown case. Her lack of understanding of the American legal system caused her unknowingly to indict herself in court. When she refused to pay the fine, she was held in contempt of court and spent a night in jail: "The Beggar's Bar had been the last convulsion. The circle was closed. It began in Provincetown, and it ended in Provincetown. My ensemble had disbanded. Everyone

worked elsewhere. And I had also disintegrated. I stand again at the beginning and must fight for and create a new life” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140).<sup>67</sup> Regulars from her cabaret gained her release, but soon former friends approached her on the streets of Provincetown and asked her to leave, sparing them future fights to defend her against the neighbors, who were trying to run her out. In March of 1947, Gert returned to Europe and began the arduous task of securing a visa for Berlin.

### **Return to Berlin**

*Now the war has been over long enough. I finally want to return to Berlin.  
I want to die where I was born. And I long for a magnificent time for art.  
It will certainly come, just like it did after the first world war.  
(Gert, *Die Bettlerbar*)<sup>68</sup>*

After the war ended, Gert began to receive letters from Germany: “My husband wrote a tired letter from Erling, but his house was still standing, he was planting vegetables. He believed Germany had committed an instinctive suicide, because it no longer fit in the modern world” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140).<sup>69</sup> Of others, Gert wrote:

My poet wrote from Berlin. His letter sounded foreign, almost hostile. He asked: “You want to build what here? What? What from?” He had nothing to eat, nothing to wear. Before the siege of Berlin, his apartment had been bombed, but he could continue work with friends in a familiar neighborhood. Robin, my second husband, wants to become a monk. Cousin Albert had to work for the Nazis in a powder factory. They beat him until he died. Aunt Elly died on the street. My friend Lilly from my Schiller circle was gassed in Auschwitz, my school friend Else returned lame from Theresienstadt.” (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140-141)<sup>70</sup>

In 1947, Gert returned to Europe in spite of the warnings. She opened cabarets in Paris and Zurich, where she spent a year and a half waiting for a visa to enter Berlin. In December of 1948, she entered Germany through Baden-Baden, and secured a six month

visa from the Americans. As she entered Berlin, an officer handed her a list of all of her relatives who had been gassed in the concentration camps. Out of her entire family, only she and her brother had survived.

Gert's return to Berlin did not bring an end to hardship: "I was one of the first emigrants, who returned. For two days I was interviewed and photographed from morning until night" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 202).<sup>71</sup> The media attention soon gave way to the realities of returning to Germany. Her husband, Anderson, would not see her. Wäscher would only agree to meet her in the company of two other women, making it clear that their relationship had ended. During her exile, another family had moved in to her house in Kampen. Most of her belongings were destroyed or missing, and she lost the legal battle to regain the house: "Many people say: If I could begin my life over again, I would do everything differently. That is not possible. I know, because I have started over so many times. . . . inevitably everyone must always make the same mistakes, as many times as they begin a new life. We call that fate" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 185).<sup>72</sup> If Gert's view of fate holds any truth, the legal issues that arose when she opened new cabarets in Berlin and Kampen were eerily reminiscent of her experiences in the United States. Although her first cabaret in Berlin had wonderful patrons, they soon left Berlin as it became more dangerous, and Gert's bar was overrun by another cabaret owner. After finding a new location, she opened a second cabaret called Hexenküche, but soon legal problems would trouble her again, "One day, without being notified, my entertainment tax was tripled. I was classified under strip-tease business" (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 213).<sup>73</sup> Unable to pay the higher tax, Gert was forced to close the cabaret.

Gert opened her final cabaret, *Ziegenstall*, in Kampen in 1950, which she ran until she died in 1978. After her exile years, Gert found that her beliefs about dance and theater had changed: “How beautiful is a self-made ramshackle hut. So much nicer than the factories, that call themselves theaters. Nothing, nothing of the atmosphere, the magic and the magnetism from the Weimar years remains . . . . Theater is now just antiquated, museum pieces” (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 203).<sup>74</sup> Upon her return to Germany, Gert was invited to perform a couple of times in formal theatres, but she felt out of place. She preferred simple performance spaces. She found that cabarets were secondary in post-war Germany: “Whoever owns a nightclub, is devalued” (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 202).<sup>75</sup> Gert found herself isolated from political West German performers, because she did not speak out against Communism. The times had changed. In her cabaret performance, *Der Remigrant (The Returning Emigrant)*, Gert embodied everything that the Germans wanted to forget:

If you return from America,/ people in Germany scream hurrah.  
You will be dragged on the radio,/ all are positively inclined toward you.  
Interviewers pounce upon you,/ interrogate you until your head is empty.  
They photograph you all over the place.  
But that changes very quickly./First you were hot, now you're getting cold.  
All the love is soon gone,/ you are just a piece of dirt.  
It becomes clear to you,/ Respect was just a matter of form.  
Every past bureaucrat/ is, compared to you, a god.  
Therefore, returning emigrant, expect struggle not luck,  
Germans go two steps forward and one step back.  
(Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 206-207)<sup>76</sup>

Valeska Gert's exile experience did not end with her return to Germany. Just as she and her work had functioned as the other to Nazis in the 1930s and the other to Americans during her exile, her identity as remigrant formed the Otherness for post-war Germans.

As a woman, Jew, German, and dancer forced into exile during World War II, Valeska Gert's life and work offer valuable information to both exile and dance literature. Through her dances depicting the struggles of women and her courage in creating her own cabaret spaces in order to continue performing and survive in exile, Gert pushed the boundaries of representation in dance and challenged both German and American visions of what women could accomplish. Through her artistic work, she questioned the otherness of her Jewish identity in her German homeland, and the otherness of her German identity in the American dance community and American culture. As a returning exile in post-war Germany, Gert's work remembered the realities of the many emigrants who fled German persecution, including those who never returned.

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<sup>1</sup> Manchmal fühle ich mich wie lebendig begraben. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 144)

<sup>2</sup> Warum ich schreibe? Nie hat mich irgend etwas so bewegt und erregt wie der Gedanke an die Vergänglichkeit. Ich will bleiben. Darum tanzte ich, darum gröhlte, sang ich, darum spielte ich, darum schreibe ich. Vielleicht, dachte ich, liest jemand meine Bücher, wenn ich tot bin, und vielleicht liebt er mich. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 17-18)

<sup>3</sup> Im dunklen Wohnzimmer tanzte ich vor dem großen Spiegel, etwas Licht schien aus dem Eßzimmer hinein. Ich drehte mich und wiegte mich und verlor jedes Bewußtsein von mir. Die Bewegungen kamen von selbst, ich mußte nichts dazu tun, sie flossen aus meinem Körper. Ich war in Ekstase. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 61)





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<sup>12</sup> Herausfordernd wackele ich mit den Hüften, lüfte den schwarzen, sehr kurzen Rock, zeige weißes Schenkelfleisch über langen, schwarzen Seidenstrümpfen und hochhackigen Schuhen. (ein Skandal in einer Zeit, in der die Tänzerinnen, wenn sie nicht Ballett tanzten, barfuß über die Bühne hüpfen.) Ich bin eine sensitive Hüre, bewege mich sanft und wollüstig. Mein sehr weißes Gesicht ist fast ganz von schwarzen Haarsträhnen bedeckt, sie fallen über die Stern, fast bis zum knallrot geschminkten Mund. Das Kinn verschwindet im roten Kragen, der locker um den Hals liegt. Ich sinke langsam in die Knie, öffne die Beine breit und versinke tief. In jähem Krampf, wie von der Tarantel gestochen, zucke ich in die Höhe. Ich schwinde auf und nieder. Dann entspannt sich der Körper, der Krampf löst sich, immer sanfter werden die Sprünge, immer weicher, die Abstände werden länger, die Erregung ebbt ab, noch eine letzte Zuckung, und ich bin wieder auf der Erde. Was hat man mit mir getan? Man hat meinen Körper ausgenutzt, weil ich Geld haben muß. Miserable Welt! Ich spucke einen verächtlichen Schritt nach rechts und einen nach links, dann latschte ich ab. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 47-48)

<sup>13</sup> Gert had briefly owned a cabaret called The Cabbage Head in Berlin before exile, but it was not open for very long. Beggar's Bar was her first significant experience of cabaret ownership.

<sup>14</sup> Die Bühne der Zukunft scheint gesichert zu sein, wenn man einfach die letzten vierzehn Jahre aus der deutschen Theatervergangenheit streicht. (Nufer 132)

<sup>15</sup> Die deutschen Juden erstickten in einer Flut von giftigen und gemeinen Beleidigungen. Hitler bellte im Radio, Göring röhre, und Goebbels schrie seifig verlogen . . . Die drohenden Hakenkreuzfahnen, die engen gefährlichen schwarzen Uniformen der SS, die plumpen lauten Schritte der SA, die überschrieben im Völkischen Beobachter und im Angriff, man konnte ihnen nicht entgehen. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 79)

<sup>16</sup> Lieben zwischen Juden und Ariern wurde «Rassenschande genannt.» (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 80)

<sup>17</sup> Am nächsten Tag stand in drei Zeitungen das, was die Nazis «Gruelmärchen» nannten, mit meinem Namen und mit Fotos von mir. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 82)

<sup>18</sup> Raymond Duncan was the brother of famous dancer, Isadora Duncan.

<sup>19</sup> Ich wohnte in Slums und hatte ein unvergleichliches Gefühl von Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit, das sich mit dem von Lieben und Gestaltenkönnen messen konnte. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 64-65)

<sup>20</sup> In Deutschland hatte ich ein animalisches Leben gelebt. Ich bin wieder in Theater noch Konzerte gegangen, nur ab und zu ins Kino. Ich wurde von meinem Mann und von Wäscher vorwärts oder rückwärts geschubst, ich ruhte in mir selbst, um auf der Bühne zu explodieren. Ich wußte nicht, wieviel Geld mein Mann verdiente und ob er überhaupt etwas verdiente, ich wußte nicht was Wäscher verdiente, ich wußte nicht, wieviel ich verdiente. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 96-97)

<sup>21</sup> Salka Viertel (1889-1978) was an actress and screenwriter, and was married to film director Berthold Viertel.

<sup>22</sup> Ich dachte, in Hollywood kann man sich anziehen, was man will. Ja, Kuchen. Wer noch nichts erreicht hat, muß sehr «well-groomed» sein. Erst später kann man sich Extravaganzen erlauben. Im Bus war ich hingefallen, weil er so geschaukelt hatte. Meine Beine waren aufgeschlagen, ich trug einen dicken Verband. Man sah ihn durch die Hosen. Ich hatte einen Sonnenbrand, mein Gesicht war geschwollen, die Augen blinzelten wie kleine Schweinsäugelchen. Als mich Walter Wanger sah, knickte er zusammen und

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sagte: «Sie sind nicht der Typ.» Ich war schneller draußen, als ich drin gewesen war. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 95-96)

<sup>23</sup> Ernst Lubitsch was a German-Jewish film director. Lubitsch emigrated to the United States in 1922 and became well-known as a Hollywood film director.

<sup>24</sup> In meiner Verlegenheit sagte ich lauter Sachen, die man nicht Sagen darf. «Mir gefallen die amerikanischen Schauspieler nicht, sie sehen wie Ansichtspostkarten aus. » . . . Lubitsch war böse, und auch hier war ich schnell wieder draußen. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 96)

<sup>25</sup> Ich biege den Kopf zurück. Schultern, Arme, Hände, der ganze Körper verkrampft sich. Ich wehre mich mit aller Kraft. Sinnlos. Ich erstarre, sekundenlang stehe ich bewegungslos, eine Säule des Schmerzes. Dann gebe ich nach. Das Leben weicht langsam aus meinem Körper, sehr langsam entspannt er sich. Der Schmerz fällt ab, der Mund wird weicher, die Hände löschen sich, die Schultern lassen los, die Arme fallen. Das Gesicht glättet sich, es ist sehr ruhig geworden, fast leblos . . . der Kopf fällt herunter, der Kopf einer Puppe. Alles Leben ist aus. Ich bin gestorben. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 80)

<sup>26</sup> Boris Karloff (1887-1969) was born as William Henry Pratt. He was an English actor who emigrated to Canada in the 1910s and became best known for his role as Frankenstein in the 1931 film, Frankenstein.

<sup>27</sup> Einen stämmigen, aber sinnlichen Boris Karloff mit einem prächtig geformten Kopf, wildem schwarzen Haar [und] einer Art, ihre Hände und das Gesicht zu beeinflussen, die kleine Kinder zu (frühem) Tode erschrecken würde. (Peter 83)

<sup>28</sup> Es ist der Punkt, der am nächsten zu Europa liegt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 7)

<sup>29</sup> Natürlich will ich Teller waschen. Das ist der klassische Anfang in Amerika für jeden, der Millionär werden will. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 10)

<sup>30</sup> Werde ich es gut machen? Bis jetzt hatte ich nur Tanzabende in den großen Theatern Europas gegeben. Teller hatte ich noch nicht gewaschen. Mein Mann hatte mich sehr verwöhnt. Zusammen mit unserem Mädchen hat er den Haushalt gemacht. Vor dem Tellerwaschen hatte ich genau so viel Angst wie vor einem Tanzabend. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 10)

<sup>31</sup> Ich war besessen, wie früher vom Tanzen. Dem Besessenen ist es gleichgültig, wovon er besessen ist. Er ist von allem, was er macht. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 11)

<sup>32</sup> Angefangen hatte ich mit Geschirrwaschen, wie es in Amerika üblich ist. Es ist Zeit, daß ich aufsteige. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 12)

<sup>33</sup> Eine Heilige mit gefalteten Händen und zum Himmel gerichteten Blicken, eine zusammengesunkene, vorkommene Dirne, ein Stückchen Elend. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 14)

<sup>34</sup> The Comedie des Champs Elyseés was the Paris theatre known for the scandal surrounding the debut of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913.

<sup>35</sup> «Das war der tollste Theaterskandal, den ich ja sah, » sagte er. Das Publikum kämpfte um ihre Tänze: die einen schrien, das ist der surrealistische neue Tänze, die anderen schlugen ihnen dafür die Köpfe ein. Ivan

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Goll, der Schriftsteller, blutete für Sie. Und Sie stellten sich an die Rampe und riefen: «Vous êtes des idiots!» Und dann ging es erst richtig los, sie zertrümmerten das Theater. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 14)

<sup>36</sup> Actor, writer, and director Judith Malina (1926- ) later became known as one of the founders of The Living Theatre.

<sup>37</sup> Wer einen Night-Club führt, steht mit einem Fuß im Gefängnis. Dieses Gewerbe ist mit Gangstern und Racketeers durchgesetzt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 115)

<sup>38</sup> War sprachlos. Besitzer von Night-Clubs sehen anders aus. Es sind Geschäftsleute, die eine dicke Zigarre im Mundwinkel rollen und mit Trickgeldern für die Polizei um sich werfen. Und da stehe ich verworfenes Geschöpf, eine Künstlerin, die ihre Wände selbst anstreicht. Schlimmer kann es gar nicht kommen. Skandal! (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 117)

<sup>39</sup> Der Hauptraum war klar geschnitten, wunderbar proportioniert. Ich wußte, hier werde ich Erfolg haben. Erfolg hängt stark von den Maßen eines Raumes ab. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23)

<sup>40</sup> Das Lokal war sehr alt. Die Wände waren grob gekalkt und erinnerten mich an «La Bollée» am Boulevard Michel in Paris, wo Oscar Wilde viele Abende zugebracht hat. Seinen Namen hat er in die Kalkwand gekratzt. Nie hatte ich in Berlin oder irgendwo einen so vollkommen geschnittenen Raum gesehen. Ich liebte ihn auf den ersten Blick. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23)

<sup>41</sup> Herd, Gasofen, Brattische, Grill, zwei elektrische Eisschränke, alles war vorhanden. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 22-23)

<sup>42</sup> Bei Kerzenlicht fegte ich und nahm die Spinnweben ab, überall krochen große Schwaben und Kellerasseln . . . Jetzt muß ich Geld auftreiben, um Farbe zu kaufen. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 25)

<sup>43</sup> Ich nannte das Lokal Beggar Bar, denn ich hatte alles zusammengebettelt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28)

<sup>44</sup> Der Schutzmann hätte ihnen erzählt, «Alle protestieren gegen das Nachtlokal, wollen nur Sie sich ausschließen?» (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 29-30)

<sup>45</sup> Da ist ein neues Kabarett in der Mortonstreet. Die Besitzerin ist Deutsche, sie pirscht sich immer an Matrosen und Soldaten heran und horcht sie aus. Sie ist bestimmt ein Nazispion. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 32)

<sup>46</sup> Sie müssen jemandem in die Mortonstreet schicken. Da werden Opiumzigaretten geraucht. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 32)

<sup>47</sup> Die Park Avenue erschien in Zobel und Hermelin. Es erschienen ihre Modisten John Frederic und Walter Florell. Es kam Theater und film, Simon Simone, Frederic March, Victor Jory, Mary Brian, Patsy Kelly, Beverley Roberts, Billy Holiday, Joan McGraggen, Judy Haidon, Maxine Sullivan, die Katherine-Dunham-Truppe, James Light, June Havoc. Und Judy Garland sagte: «Die Beggar Bar ist das einzige Lokal in New York, das anzusehen sich lohnt.» (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 105)

<sup>48</sup> Alle Lokale sind echte Expressionen von mir. Habe ich sie ausgelebt, welken sie dahin, und ich finde immer einen Vorwand, sie wegzuworfen. In Berlin lief ich aus der Hexenküche weg, ohne nachzudenken, ohne sie zu verpachten oder zu verkaufen. Die Behörden hatten mich miserabel behandelt. Es mag mit den

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vielen Verleumdungen zusammenhängen, die es immer um meine Lokale gibt. Dabei sind das eher Heilsarmeeveranstaltungen. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 97)

<sup>49</sup> Er klopfte mit einem Stock die Decke ab und machte ein bedenkliches Gesicht. Was ist nun schon wieder los? Mein Herz stand still. Er klopft wie der Arzt, wenn er mein Herz untersucht. Ob er etwas Krankes findet? Warum schweigt er? Die Stille ist unerträglich. Endlich öffnet er seinen Mund: «Besorgen Sie drei Ventilatoren, sonst bekommen sie keine Lizenz.» (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28)

<sup>50</sup> Ich stülpte die Lampenschirme über die Birnen und knipste das Licht an. Es sah surrealistisch aus. Die Geisterlampen hopen sich zart von der schwarzen Wand ab. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 25)

<sup>51</sup> Was bedeutet das? Kuß- und Neckgesellschaften? (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28-29)

<sup>52</sup> Ich brauche Tische und Stühle. Alle Bekannten bettle ich an, niemand ist vor mir sicher. Bald habe ich eine bunte Sammlung von Bridge-, Küchen-, Nacht- und Restauranttischen, große, kleine, viereckige, runde, nicht einer paßte zum anderen. Ebenso schlecht paßten die Stühle zusammen. Das gibt mir die Idee zu einem neuen Stil. Nichts soll in meinem Lokal zueinander passen, nicht die Gläser, nicht die Tassen und Teller und auch nicht die Künstler. Auf die Tische legte ich bunte Reste von Wachstuch, alle Farben und Muster, die ich auftreiben konnte. Dann stellte ich bunte Kerzen auf. Kerzenlicht schmeichelt Frauengesichtern. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 28)

<sup>53</sup> Ich sang Parodien auf Englisch, Französisch und Deutsch. Während des ganzen Krieges hatte ich eine deutsche Type gespielt, die *Berliner Ackerstraße*. Ich möchte wissen, was passiert wäre, wenn ich in Paris Deutsch oder in Deutschland Französisch gesprochen hätte. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 34)

<sup>54</sup> Erst in Amerika merkt man, daß die Neger ein komplettes Volk sind. Es gibt alle Typen . . . Waren «Schwarze» in meinem New Yorker Cabaret «Beggar Bar» merkte ich es sofort an der Reaction. Die Atmosphäre zischte. Sie reagierten lebendig, selbst wenn sie die Worte nicht verstanden, meine *Berliner Type* sang ich mit Berliner Dialekt und trotzdem, jedesmal, wenn ein Neger die »Beggar Bar« betrat, sagte er: «Please, do the *Berlin Girl*. » (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 71-72)

<sup>55</sup> Schon im Bett des Morgens früh,/wenn der Herr von vis-á-vis  
aufstand, um sich anzusehen,/ kiekt ick durch die Jalousien  
und ick wurde janz varrücket,/ wenn ick ihn so nackt erblickt....  
Nitsch, der drückt ihm ab die Luft,/bis er starb, der feige Schuft.  
Bald darauf wurd ick varknackt,/ 13 Jahre injesackt....  
Komm, wia sind noch lang nich pleite,/ komm, o komm an meine Seite.  
Komm, ick küß dich süßet Aas,/bis du üba hast den Fraß.  
Alle sollt ihr an mia sterben,/ imam rin in det Vadeerrrrrrbennnn! (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 72-73)

<sup>56</sup> Wir spielten von abends neun Uhr dreißig bis drei oder vier Uhr früh, Silvester die ganze Nacht durch bis in den Tag hinein. War ich nicht auf den Podium, dann traten Esme, Winny, oder Mme. Pumpnickel auf. Ich improvisierte Art und Reihenfolge der Songs je nach Menge und Eigenart des Publikums. Manchmal folgte eine Nummer der anderen Schlag auf Schlag, manchmal überließen wir das Auftreten den Gästen. Und nun hörten wir zu. Die kamen bestimmt bald wieder, die mit Erfolg ihre Lieder gesungen oder am Klavier einen Boogie-Woogie gespielt hatten. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 87-88)

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<sup>57</sup> Einmal hat Hitler meine Heimat, meine Freunde, mein Werk vernichtet. Nun ist mein Werk ein zweites Mal vernichtet worden. Was soll ich tun? Weiter prozessieren? So ein Prozeß kann Jahre dauern. Bis dahin verlaufen sich alle meine Gäste. Der Krieg geht zu Ende. Ich will nach Berlin, ich will dort ein Kabarett machen. Berlin ist meine Stadt, und da gehöre ich hin! Noch aber kann ich nicht fahren. Ich bin verurteilt, untätig in New York zu sitzen. Die Soldaten kommen aus dem Krieg zurück. Sie finden mein Lokal geschlossen. Ich darf die Erregung des Friedens nicht miterleben, ich bin aus dem Kreislauf ausgeschlossen. Ich sitze wieder abseits und gehöre zu nichts und zu niemand! (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 114)

<sup>58</sup> Der «Beggar Sip» bestand aus Eierkognak und Kaffee, der Eierkognak bestand aus Eiern und ein par Prozent Alkohol. Er darf nicht mehr ohne Lizenz verkauft werden, und das hatte ich nicht gewußt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 111)

<sup>59</sup> Ich ging von Tisch zu Tisch, erzählte hier einen Brocken und wühlte da die Neugier auf. Den ersten Tisch ließ ich in Spannung zurück, bis ich wiederkam und weitererzählte. Ich gab eine unerlaubte Vorstellung. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 108)

<sup>60</sup> Nachts wachte ich aus Angsträumen auf. Ich konnte nicht fassen, daß man mir meine Beggar Bar genommen hatte. Das war mein Kind gewesen. Ich hatte es aus dem Nichts geschaffen und wie eine Löwe darum gekämpft. Man hatte es gemordet. Es ist nicht nur Mord, wenn man einen Menschen tötet. Bürokraten und unfähige Anwälte dürfen Kunst zerstören und—etwas sehr Menschliches. Denn das ist mein Kabarett gewesen. Die anderen Nightclubs gehören Gangstern. Ihnen passiert nichts, denn sie kennen die Tricks. Aber mich verfolgt und zerstört man. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 113)

<sup>61</sup> Der Krieg ging zu Ende. Berlin wurde in Grund und Boden gebombt. Das fühlte ich mit jedem Nerv. Ich bin mit dieser Stadt verwachsen. Nur mit halbem Herzen bin ich noch in Amerika. Bald wird es Frieden geben. Dann gehe ich nach Europa zurück. Ich liebe diesen dicht besiedelten Kontinent, auf dem jeder dem anderen so nahe ist, daß sich ein elektrischer Stromkreis bildet, den man «Atmosphäre» nennt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 105)

<sup>62</sup> Ich will Kabarett in meinem Studio machen. Es soll heiter sein und nicht dämonisch, wie die B.B. in New York. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124)

<sup>63</sup> Rosa Glühbirnen warfen einen Himbeerschein auf das helle Blau. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124)

<sup>64</sup> kreuz und quer (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124)

<sup>65</sup> Wir eröffneten. Esme sang Chansons aus dem Bal Musette. Pumpernickel machte eine «Gay nineties» im ausgeschnittenen Abendkleid, einen großen Federhut über dem pfiffigen Altweibergesicht. Ich war knallrot angezogen und hatte einen giftgrünen Schal um den Hals geknotet. Ich karikierte eine Sängerin, die, solange sie lebt, immer den gleichen Song singt: Ich ließ sie aufblühen und verwelken. Und dann erzählte ich die seltsame Reise von Professor Blitz. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 124)

<sup>66</sup> Wie sehnten uns nach dem klitzekleinen Land in Europa. Alle wollten wir nach dem Krieg hinfahren. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 80-81)

<sup>67</sup> Die Beggar Bar hatte die letzten Zuckungen getan. Der Kreis hat sich geschlossen. In Provincetown fing sie an, in Provincetown hörte sie auf. Auch meine Mitarbeitergruppe löste sich auf. Jeder arbeitete woanders. Und auch ich habe mich aufgelöst. Ich stehe wieder am Anfang und muß mir ein neues Leben

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erkämpfen und gestalten. Wie schwer das Leben auch ist, es ist sehr süß. Von frühester Kindheit an wußte ich, daß es kurz und daß es Kampf ist. Ich war gewappnet. In mir kristallisiert sich der Wunsch: Ich will neue grotesk-fantastische Filme gestalten. Ich muß Kraft sammeln. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140)

<sup>68</sup> Jetzt ist der Krieg lange genug vorüber. Ich will endlich nach Berlin. Ich will sterben, wo ich geboren bin. Und ich sehne mich nach einer großen Kunstzeit. Sicher wird sie kommen, genauso nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg. (Gert, *Katze von Kampen* 83)

<sup>69</sup> Mein erster Mann schreibt aus Erling einen müden Brief, aber sein Haus steht noch, er pflanzt Gemüse. Er glaubt, daß Deutschland instinktiv Selbstmord verübt hat, weil es nicht in die moderne Welt mehr paßt. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140)

<sup>70</sup> Mein Dichter schreibt aus Berlin. Seine Briefe klingen fremd, fast feindselig. Er fragt: «Du willst hier aufbauen? Was? Wovon? » Er hat kaum zu essen, er hat nichts anzuziehen. Seine Wohnung ist einen Tag vor der Einnahme Berlins ausgebombt worden. Aber er kann die gewohnte Arbeit mit Freunden in gewohnter Umgebung fortsetzen. Robin, mein zweiter Mann, will Mönch werden. Vetter Albert mußte für die Nazis in einer Pulverfabrik arbeiten. Dann schlugen sie ihn tot. Tante Elly ist auf der Straße gestorben. Meine Freundin Lilly vom Schillerkränzchen wurde in Auschwitz vergast, meine Schulfreundin Else kam gelähmt von Theresienstadt zurück. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 140-141)

<sup>71</sup> Ich war eine der ersten Emigranten, die zurückkamen. Zwei Tage lang wurde ich von Morgen bis zum Abend interviewt und fotografiert. (Gert, *Die Bettlerbar* 202)

<sup>72</sup> Viele Menschen sagen: Könnte ich doch mein Leben noch einmal anfangen, ich würde alles anders machen. Das kann man nicht. Ich weiß es, weil ich so oft angefangen habe. Jeder Mensch stößt auf dieselben Menschen und auf dieselben Situationen . . . So muß jeder Mensch zwangsläufig immer wieder die gleichen Fehler machen, so oft er auch sein Leben von neuem beginnen würde. Das nennt man Schicksal. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 185)

<sup>73</sup> Eines Tages wurden, ohne daß man mich benachrichtigt hätte, meine Vergnügungssteuern auf das Dreifache erhöht. Ich wurde unter die Strip-tease-Lokale eingestuft. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 213)

<sup>74</sup> Wie schön ist solch ein selbst hergerichtete Bruchbude. Wieviel schöner als die Fabriken, die sich Theater nennen, nichts, auch nichts ist von der Atmosphäre, dem Zauber und dem Magnetismus von früher übriggeblieben, als noch der Schauspieler und nicht Dekoration oder Regisseur das Wichtigste waren. Theater sind überholt, Museumstücke. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 203)

<sup>75</sup> Wer ein Nachtlokal besitzt, wird in Deutschland abgewertet. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 202)

<sup>76</sup> Kommst du aus Amerika,/ schreit in Deutschland man hurra.  
Du wirst ans Radio gezogen,/ alle sind dir sehr gewogen.  
Interviewer fallen auf dich her,/ man fragt dich, bis dein Kopf ganz leer.  
Fotografiert dich kreuz und quer.  
Doch das ändert sich sehr bald./Erst war dir heiß, jetzt wird dir kalt.  
Alle Liebe ist bald weg,/ du bist nur ein Stück Dreck.  
Es wird dir klar,/ Respekt nur Formensache war.  
Jeder einstige Hajott/ ist gegen dich ein Gott.  
Drum, Remigrant, erwarte Kampf statt Glück,  
Deutsche gehn zwei Schritte vor und ein gehn sie zurück. (Gert, *Ich bin eine Hexe* 206-207)

## CHAPTER 2

“Her Finger Defiantly Raised”: Fairy Tales and Clowning in the Work of Lotte Goslar

*How sweet it is—success, applause, good reviews—friends coming backstage to tell you you’ve never been better—strangers saying, “Where have you been all my life?” In spite of the fact that you know full well it could not have been all that good.”*  
(Goslar, *What’s So Funny I*)

Lotte Goslar’s autobiography, *What’s So Funny? Sketches from My Life* (1998), begins with a self-portrait of Goslar as clown. Drawn in pen, Goslar stands in a loose-fitting gown, with bulbous shoes protruding from under the hem. In her right hand, she holds a heart, while another heart is safety-pinned to the left bosom of her gown. She leans backward, her left wrist flexed coquettishly. Her nose is long, reminiscent of Pinocchio, and she glances mischievously out of the corner of her eyes at the reader. Her raised eyebrows convey the notion that she is flirtatious and that things are not as straightforward they seem.

In the first chapter, “How Sweet It Is,” Goslar begins with the above quotation, which suggests that success is at best an illusion. She describes a Chicago performance, in which she was astounded to receive a standing ovation and give fifteen curtain calls. Only near the end of the curtain calls did she step downstage enough to see the audience clearly and realized the ovation was for the exiled Czechoslovakian president, who was



standing in the balcony. Goslar also knowingly created illusions. On tour in Italy, Goslar's manager had publicized her company as the "Balletto di Hollywood," creating an undue sensation. When the company arrived at the theatre, the square was full of young men waiting to see the Hollywood beauties. Goslar asked one of her attractive young dancers to step out of the car first, while Goslar followed with her suitcase. The crowd roared, and the illusion was complete.

By opening with clown self-portraits and reflections on mirages of success, Goslar's autobiographical representation embodies the role of clowns in theatre. Like the clown, Goslar represents herself as both inside and outside of the narrative. An unreliable narrator, she continues the autobiography as a series of small sketches from her life, interspersed with commentary on her self-narrative, such as sections on aging and visual sketches entitled, "Road Signs," that frame the sections of the book. Ever the trickster, Goslar disrupts a straight reading of her self-narrative, suggesting that what lies underneath the clowning may not be so funny after all. For Goslar's narrative also begins with an acknowledgement of herself as exiled clown by including Arthur Kaufmann's oil painting, *Die geistige Emigration (The Intellectual Emigration, 1938)*.<sup>1</sup> Goslar is the thirty-first of thirty-eight pictured German artists and intellectuals who emigrated to the United States pictured in the painting, and one of only six women represented.

Throughout her career, Goslar employed clowning and fairy tales to create a feminist disruption of the reception of romanticism and tragedy in German and American representations of women in dance. This chapter considers how Goslar's use of clowning and fairy tales articulated her transnational exile identity and created a feminist alternative to the modernist narratives of both German and American dance. By drawing

on autobiographical, theatrical, dance, and exile theoretical approaches, I will show how a transnational understanding of modernist dance reveals a modernist sensibility in her work, one that expands former definitions of modernist dance and our understanding of dance history. I approach Goslar's work as a form that not only reflects her artistic work, but also the autobiographical and narrative dynamics of her exile identity. As she traversed the boundaries of German and American cultures—both social and artistic—she also traversed the disciplinary and gender boundaries of modernist dance forms.

### **Clowns and fairy tales**

*Love, friendship, decency, courage still exist. Even today. One cannot deny them altogether. Just as it would be invalid to deny the vast supplies of hate, greed and hypocrisy. It still makes sense to pursue the one and fight the other. But to do that one must be an optimist.  
For instance, a clown.  
(Goslar, *What's So Funny* xvi)*

As a theatrical figure, the clown plays a significant role in representation. Usually appearing at significant points in the narrative of a play or performance, he is poised between involvement in the narrative and “calculated distance” from the narrative (Videback 2). He appears as a mediator, guiding and influencing the audience through his non-realistic role in the performance. The clown often disrupts the narrative, illuminating the deeper meanings of the story and at times expressing what the world of the play makes inexpressible. In *No Kidding* (2003), Donald McManus writes that the modernist clown, in particular, also embodies the “contemporary tragic impulse” (11), transcending both genre and theatrical convention. Thus, the clown in the twentieth century serves as a fitting icon of modernism (23-24).<sup>2</sup>

Although female clowns in theatrical history are rare, in fairy tales, “fool” characters are often figured as female.<sup>3</sup> The comedic, unassuming old crone, mother goose, or fairy godmother is commonly represented as a wise fool, one who guides the protagonist and mediates between the tale and the reader, in spite of her seeming gullibility. Thus she exposes the deeper meanings of the fairy tale and points the way toward an alternate reality.

Because American modernist dance proponents strove to exclude narrative in favor of essential formal elements, few studies of narrative genre have been applied to modernist dance. Most ignored are studies of comedic narrative forms. As a result, many modern dancers choreographing in a comedic vein are often miscategorized as something other than modernist: revue, cabaret, pantomime, mime, clowning—in short, as popular artists instead of high artists. In spite of her contributions of choreography to the repertoires of companies including the Hartford and Joffrey Ballets, Goslar was most often publicized as a dance-mime or clown. Goslar’s clowns represented optimism in the face of staggering pessimism and freedom from confined narratives of female sexuality.

Goslar’s approach to dance, even in her early years with the Palucca company, was a rebellion against expected female roles and behavior: “Girl dancers wanted to be beautiful and pretty but I wore a big nose and big eyebrows because I liked to. I just found it ridiculous, too much prettiness. I had a sense of satire about it” (Vrtacek n.p.). In later works, Goslar used fairy tales to create worlds of possibility for women in dance, as well as to expose the “fairy tale” entrapment of ballet narratives for women.

## American and German dance narratives

As I discussed in the introduction, narratives of modern dance have been based on a historiography of reduction and rebellion, with a progressive elimination of extraneous components of dance (theatrical, musical, etc.). Paradoxically, many of the modern dancers began to use narrative during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The critical discussion around the increase in narrative at that time was linked to a belief that narrative would compromise the modernist dance movement's position as an avant-garde art form. At the same time, American modernism was moving away from improvisational dance (German) and toward building codified movement vocabularies and techniques that were modernist. Improvisational and expressive dance styles were less valued in the historical modernist progression than systematic and abstract styles.

In *A Game for Dancers* (2006), Gay Morris writes that as the American political scene shifted in the 1940s, many American choreographers began to include narrative in their works: "However, as much as dancers attempted to combine two existing forms into a new one, both on paper and on the stage, they were ultimately working against modernist prescriptions" (27). The most well-known attempts were tragedies, such as Martha Graham's *Night Journey* (1947) and *Cave of the Heart* (1946), Jose Limón's *The Moor's Pavane* (1949)—all works that were eventually accepted into the modernist canon due to their metaphorical treatment of psychological themes found within the narratives. Like the plays of modernist playwrights such as Ibsen, these dances can be seen as problem dances that address the situation of women by exposing the fates of women in tragedy. Yet, they also reinforced those fates.

## **Tragedy and romanticism in modernism**

In *Women, Modernism, and Performance* (2004), Penny Farfan discusses the reaction of feminist artists across disciplines to conventional modernism, and their failure to find within it “a viable alternative to the conventional feminine roles that have been prescribed for [women] or the terms to imagine new roles that would make possible [women’s] survival” (1). Farfan questions use of women as tragic subjects, since usually the: “nature of the tragic misstep or error in judgment—the hamartia—that leads to their reversal of fortune may be said to be gender-inflected, relating to their incursions into the male-dominated realm of public life” (103). For modernist dancers, like Isadora Duncan, whose artistic achievements of kinaesthetic freedom created positive steps for women, the tragic historical narratives of their lives and careers often served to further support the myth of the tragic woman artist. Duncan’s accomplishments are often overshadowed by the sensationalism of her unconventional life and tragic death. For Wigman and her contemporaries, the myth of the tragic 1936 downfall of *Ausdruckstanz* may be a double bind comparable to Duncan’s: while mythologizing the pioneer dancers who stayed in Germany during the war, it also creates a tragic narrative based on the myth of their errors in judging the consequences of Nazism.

### **German dance narrative**

In *Valse Very Triste* (*Very Sad Waltz*, 1959), Lotte Goslar dances optimistically against a group of dark-clad, tragic, modern dancers. She raises her finger in the air in a sign of affirmation and resistance, even as she is buried among them. It is “a gesture, that everyone understands as they want: as an expression of the will to survive, as insurgency against the absurd, as the manifestation of a principle of hope” (Schlodder n.p.).<sup>4</sup>

Described by critic Polaczek as a Puck amidst angels of death, Goslar's resistance to tragedy points a finger at the very paradox of *Ausdruckstanz*:

Inside is also a small artistic *Vatermord*: In the fluttering black symbolic figure is easily seen the character of Harald Kreutzberg<sup>5</sup> (perhaps in his self-choreographed solo dances like *Tod*, like *Henker*). The fatal mixing of irrationality and suggestion, claim of artistic autonomy and still astoundingly plain need for representation adjusted to national socialist stylization, as Kreutzberg wrought perhaps in *Waffentanz* to music from Werner Egk for the Olympic Games 1936, is simply overcome—through ridicule. (Polaczek n.p.)<sup>6</sup>

Since World War II, historians have narrated the story of *Ausdruckstanz* as one of individualized expression that was halted by the Nazi regime because its philosophical tenets conflicted with the Nazi aesthetic. Until Susan Manning, Marion Kant, and their generation of dance historians questioned the downfall of *Ausdruckstanz* pioneers and revealed the number of dancers whose careers continued after Hitler's rise to power—including Mary Wigman, Rudolf Laban, and Harald Kreutzberg, the *Ausdruckstanz* narrative was one of a fall from grace and a movement pressed into inner exile.

Ironically, the abstracted expression of the individual served to support the Nazi aesthetic and its dark romanticism aided in the glorification of German soldiers.

*Valse Very Triste* begins with melancholy music, as a male dancer enters in black unitards and a cape. He shrugs, shakes his head, walks dejectedly. The dancers enter, dressed in black dresses or unitards and writhing under a black shroud. Goslar, dressed in white, frees the dancers and attempts in vain to raise their spirits. The dancers resist her and continue their angular, weighted movements, percussive contractions, and flexed foot gestures, as Goslar points repeatedly toward the sky. The dancers counter her with downward gestures, pathos, and shrugs of despair. The male dancer collapses in

depression and tries to pull Goslar down with him. Although Goslar, too, is buried eventually by the cloth, on the last trill of the music, she frees her hand and points it triumphantly toward the sky (*Choreography by Lotte Goslar; Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus*, 1984; *Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus* 1989).

Another critic compared the “sad dancers” of *Valse Very Triste* to Martha Graham’s dancers, asserting that Goslar “illumines the fear and aggression-dimmed modern dance atmosphere of a Martha Graham” (Regitz, "Tanzen bis in den" n.p.).<sup>7</sup> The comparison, alongside the comparison to *Ausdruckstanz* and National Socialism, underscores the similarity in the aesthetic vision and appearance of German and American modern dance, as well as the service of the dance forms to a nationalist agenda. Dance pioneers Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey tackled serious and tragic themes with their dances, while the few comedic voices like Charles Weidman were caught in the shadows. American modern dancers opposed the rise of fascism and criticized the compliance of German dancers like Wigman, yet they simultaneously advocated for dances based on a romanticized American past and frontier spirit as the basis for an indigenous modern dance. Goslar’s message in her upraised finger against the very sad “waltz” expresses her resistance to the overarching narratives of German and American dance history: “Lotte Goslar alludes to the sad gestures of the rest of the ensemble, in which she tirelessly raises her pointing finger to a tiny point of light, as she already lies buried under a black shroud, her finger still defiantly raised” (Schlodder n.p.).<sup>8</sup> In addition to her defiance against nationalist narratives of German and American dance, Goslar’s finger also points to her struggle against the closed narratives for women in the modernist representations and tragic genres of theatre and dance.

## **Historiography of Goslar's work**

In her dissertation, "*Grandma Always Danced*": *The Mime Theatre of Lotte Goslar* (2002), Annette Thornton divides Goslar's dances into two categories—dances employing a comedic approach and dances focusing on choreographic craft: "Either she parodied classical ballet in *La Chasse* [The Chase] and *La Donna della Dondolo* [The Dangling Woman], and satirized the angst of the *Ausdruckstanz*-inspired dancers in *Valse Very Triste*, or she created dances that demonstrated a love of dance and also a sharp command of choreography" (202-203). Within these two larger categories, Thornton identifies four sub-categories of Goslar's work: "pieces where narrative is primary, those that explore a certain theme or emotion, those from a distinctive female point of view, and dances that are for the pure love and joy of movement" (194). While Thornton's categories are helpful, I feel that they simplify Goslar's work and reify the separation of craft or abstraction from content, and dance approaches versus theatrical ones.

Other published studies of Goslar are mostly biographical and partial in their examination of Goslar's life and work. Beate Schmeichel-Falkenberg's article, "Aufforderung zum Überleben: Lotte Goslar und das Exil" (1993), is a biographical account of her career through her exile. In spite of Goslar's mixed German, gypsy, and Jewish heritage and leftist political leanings, Schmeichel-Falkenberg includes Goslar among those exiles who left Germany by choice. Katrin Sieg's *Exiles, Eccentrics, and Activists* (1994) acknowledges the danger faced by Erika Mann's Peppermill Theatre and leans toward an interpretation of Goslar's exile as forced, though perhaps not in the beginning. Her study focuses solely on Goslar's performances with the Peppermill



Theatre and her identity as a cabaret and grotesque dance artist. Marianna Vogt's master's thesis, *Lotte Goslar: A Clown Between Borders* (2007), questions Goslar's exile identity, asserting that because Goslar remained employed throughout her seventy-year career and was never homeless, she never experienced the effects of exile. Her thesis focuses on Goslar's identity as European, existing between nations as much as she existed between the aesthetic categories of dancer, cabaret artist, mime, and clown. Vogt's emphasis on Goslar's liminality evades the reality that she did have clear national ties as a citizen throughout her life, having been a German citizen before exile and becoming naturalized as American in the 1940s. Her status as exile was also semi-forced in that during the years after her emigration, she would have been unable to return to Germany due to her mixed heritage and her involvement with the Peppermill Theatre, the Ping Pong cabaret, and the Liberated Theatre. All of the studies miss what was significant about Goslar's clowning—her use of the clown figure to disrupt and call into question the representations of women across the performance genres of dance, cabaret, and theatre.

### **The power of childhood fairy tales**

*Thinking back to my childhood now, I see myself always 'moving.' In the hallway of our home I secretly 'danced.' Running back and forth between the huge armoires and swinging my mother's gauzy handkerchief, I believed myself to be a fairy or a lovely nymph . . . My secret imagination grew into the direction: clown and fairy tale.* (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 13)

For Goslar, the use of dance to express and create her own artistic voice was connected to her love of fairy tales and imagination. Critic Mildred Norton likened Goslar's work to that of Lewis Carroll: "An audience of otherwise sensible folk stepped through the looking glass last night to meet those deft and delirious creatures that people the world of Lotte Goslar" (Norton n.p.). Thornton writes that "Goslar was often

described as having a childlike spirit, and in interviews she would sometimes admit to growing up in a fantasy world influenced by "German fairy tales, the woods and little creatures. [She] felt a kinship with strange people—gnarly sort of people—and with wild animals and plants and bugs" (Deitch n.p.). Fairy tales also held a beloved place in German culture. German romantics of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries treasured the stories enriched by dreams and the imagination. Yet the romantic revival of fairy tales during the early twentieth century supported the Nazi claiming of classic fairy tales as a particularly Aryan product, and thus held a troubled place in the shaping of national memory for Germans (Warner 410). Tales by the Grimms brothers, Hans Christian Andersen, and Bechstein were idealized, while artistic fairy tales (*Kunstmärchen*) were denounced (Zipes 139-141).

In Goslar's childhood, dance and movement were strongly connected with fairy tales and magical creatures. Goslar was born in Dresden to a bourgeois, but liberal, family. The youngest of four children, she had three older brothers. Although they teased her often, she felt protected by them and playing with them nurtured her tomboy personality (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 5). Goslar's father was a procurist at a large bank in Dresden. Goslar remembers her father as a tall and pale man, serious and loving with a coal black beard. She hardly saw him due to his weekly work schedule, but on weekends he would take Goslar and her brothers on trips to the forests or mountains. At home, Goslar's father played the piano, and each night Goslar would fall asleep to her father playing Schubert, Beethoven, Scarlatti, or Mozart. Sometimes, he took the family to philharmonic concerts (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 5).

Goslar was very close to her mother, who had a mischievous joy for life and passed that outlook on to her daughter. She would tell Goslar that “When something bad happens to you—like you break or lose something—tell yourself it’s bad, but ask yourself: Is it that bad? Most of the time you’ll find it isn’t.” She encouraged Goslar to celebrate each day, telling her, “Everyday is Sunday,” and that she could wear her finest dresses every day of the week. She made up games to play with Goslar that focused on resourcefulness and creativity, like “Fun without Money” and “Dominos with Cheating” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 5). Certainly her mother’s playfulness inspired her own imagination and ability to see the positive things in life. Her mother helped her draw colorful flowers under the furniture for the cat’s appreciation and built secret castles in the living room: “As she peeked with me through an imaginary curtain, a fantastic world would open up where anything was possible. I found out right then and there that I didn’t have to own everything I liked. In my imagination I could go much further than in reality” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 6). Because her family had little money for performances, the only theatrical performance Goslar remembers seeing is “Puss in Boots.” She loved his rebelliousness and relished in his refusal to “cow-tow to the king” (Goslar, Interview by David Sears). Her favorite scene was the one in which Puss in Boots dances before the King and kicks him. Goslar thought that Puss in Boots had kicked him in the nose, and she loved his “freshness.” She found resilience in the power that seemed to come with movement and creativity, and she was often inspired by mischievous or resilient characters.

Although Goslar’s inner life was playful and romantic, darkness seemed to loom over her family’s life. When she was three years old, Goslar’s six year-old brother Walter

died. Her father took her to say goodbye: “I lean over and reach for Walter’s hand. It is ice cold, and I drop it. It flops down, dangling. And suddenly I know what death is” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 8). Goslar’s father died shortly after her brother. Ironically, he was promoted to Director of the bank only shortly before he died, but the letter did not arrive until after his death. Without her father, the family’s financial reality changed significantly. They could no longer afford a live-in maid. Food was more scarce than it had been. True to her mother’s spirit, the family found creative ways to deal with the losses and hardship. When meat was available, her mother made “Schiebewurst,” made of eighty percent turnips and twenty percent meat: “We each got one slice of Schiebewurst which we put on the edge of our turnip bread close to our nose, and as our lips advanced on the bread, we still had the Schiebewurst to transfer to the next piece of bread—if there was one” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 12). Finding ingenious solutions to daily struggles became a valuable skill that enriched Goslar’s creative life.

In response to her childhood losses, Goslar began collecting things she found, like pieces of string, broken hairpins, and bent nails. She kept them on her toy shelf. She also developed a fear of losing her mother, and would tiptoe into her room at night to be sure she was still breathing (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 6-7). It was on an outing with her mother, that Goslar became aware of the strangeness of the world. Her mother had crossed into the red-light district by mistake, and the prostitutes screamed at her for bringing a child into the street: “I didn’t know what it all meant, but I can still see the chalk-white faces with the screaming, blood-red lips and the wet cobblestones. It was very frightening, and from then on I knew that outside of our nest at home, there was another unknown and very dangerous world” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 7-8). The death

of her father caused Goslar to retreat, as people around her family tried to offer monetary support. Not feeling comfortable with handouts, Goslar withdrew into her fantastical imagination and her love of dancing.

### **Modern dance as fairy tale**

*Suddenly, with tremendous impact, the up-to-now so beloved fairy tale panorama was torn open. An utterly new world confronted me. Modern Dance! I hadn't even known it existed. Plain, simple, unadorned . . . The only thing that connected this new world with my former one was the same exhilaration, this joy of dancing, that—it seemed a thousand years ago—had made me chase as a lovely nymph through the hallway at home.*  
(Goslar, *What's So Funny* 13)

Goslar's artistic world expanded when she began studying modern dance. She had learned of Gret Palucca during school, when two students, who had been studying with Palucca, danced a gymnastic étude (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 13). Goslar knew that Palucca had danced with Mary Wigman and was intrigued. Modern dance connected her fairy tale imagination to her love for kinesthetic sensation. Goslar decided that she must study with Palucca. Her aunt, however, gave her a gift of a layman's course at the Wigman School. Goslar was in heaven. Although the Wigman School was not a great fit for her, Goslar "ate, slept, dreamed, bicycled modern dance. Without any money (which meant without music; I couldn't afford a pianist or even records), I invented my first dance: *In the Green Light*, a rather lugubrious, deadly serious affair. Something was clearly wrong. Where on earth was the joy of dancing?" (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 13-14). Although Goslar studied at the Wigman School, she hardly ever saw her.

Goslar asked Palucca for a scholarship to the school. Palucca responded by inviting her to the studio to audition: "White walls, a huge black Blüthner grand piano

and behind it a painting by Mondrian: fields of primary colors, nothing else. This—I knew instinctively and immediately—this is my world” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 14)! Goslar auditioned privately for Palucca, dancing the solo, *In the Green Light*, that she had choreographed at the Wigman school. Halfway through the audition, Goslar broke down and ran out in embarrassment: “It became the big turning point in my life, my first encounter with real greatness. Through her—Palucca’s—presence alone, I suddenly knew, as clearly as light, what was true and what was fake” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 14). Palucca did call Goslar, and invited her into her company based on her natural talent. Goslar rehearsed with the company and on her own, determined to keep up with the advanced dancers in the company. She was inspired by Palucca’s solo performances: “Anyone who has never seen Palucca dance cannot even imagine her. To someone who does not know what a storm is or a sunset or the ocean, it is impossible to explain what it is all about . . . it was the confirmation of everything I was striving for. Everything that was important and valuable to me came together in this incredible artist” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 14-15). Goslar’s connection to Palucca continued into her exile, and memories of Palucca’s teachings nurtured the ongoing development of her career.

Goslar’s years with Palucca were stimulating not only for her dance technique, but also for her development as a young woman and artist. She rented a ballroom space in the villa of two spinsters: “There were four very tall mirrors, one in each corner, two of them facing each other across the room. My couch was placed in front of one of them, so that when I was lying in bed, I could see myself reflected many times, getting smaller and smaller and smaller . . . I danced and I danced and I danced” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny*

17). For the first time, Goslar had her own space in which she could dance until the wee hours of the night.

Soon Palucca invited Goslar to play percussion for her performances, and Goslar's name was added to the posters. Along with new attention, Goslar gained access to Palucca's circle of acquaintances. She accompanied Palucca to Bauhaus performances, where she met and socialized with Klee, Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, Gropius, and Breuer. The years with Palucca were also stimulating socially, and opened Goslar's artistic experience to the wider interdisciplinary circle of Dresden artists. Her friends would gather with her in her studio apartment after rehearsals for conversation and dancing: "We all huddled together on the floor and on the single couch to listen to our idols, Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong, on my decrepit record player. Sometimes we sipped some inexpensive wine . . . . Or we improvised wild tangos all across the huge studio. We were free and strong and happy (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 18). Sometimes on those evenings, Goslar and her friends would attend the Dresden "Artist Balls," dressed in wild costumes. One year Goslar won first prize for going as *Femme Fatale*, and Otto Dix tied for first place with his costume.<sup>9</sup> The balls inspired Goslar's fanciful characters: "I was always hiding behind an invented character who did the flirting, not I. Obviously I was growing up into a world of make-believe and phantasy and I think it is typical, that the best of my disguises later became dances for the stage" (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 18). Familiarity with Dresden's artistic elite provided artistic connections early in her career.

### **Dancing innocents**

During the 1920s and 1930s, German women dancers found themselves at the junction of the New Woman, physical culture, and the blossoming of *Ausdruckstanz*.

Like Gert, as I wrote in chapter one, many young women rebelled against the wishes of their parents and pursued the freedom of movement through training in *Ausdruckstanz*, Eurythmics, or gymnastics. The popularity of dance as an avenue for women was not limited to Germany, but extended throughout Europe and the United States. Images of Isadora Duncan's students, Laban's students, and Eurythmics students reflected the desires of women for crossing into public space, moving with athleticism and grace, and finding sensual freedom. Through her combination of the unaware female fool from fairy tale narratives with dance, Goslar critiqued the inherent romanticism that lay underneath women's pursuit of freedom through dancing.

In *Waltzmania* (1939), Goslar called on a history of mesmerism in German fairy tales such as the Grimm's Brothers' *The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes* and the waltz dances of Austrian *Ausdruckstanz* pioneer, Grete Wiesenthal. In his 1948 study of the waltz, Mosco Carner writes, "with the reaction in the first three decades of our century against romanticism, the waltz was considered outmoded and has often been made the subject of musical parody" (69). Goslar accomplishes a double parody with *Waltzmania* by referring not only to the music, but also parodying the reliance of *Ausdruckstanz* on elements of a romantic nationalism. Thus, she parodies both the waltz and *Ausdruckstanz* from within their own established forms.

The solo was a parody of dancers who become carried away by the strains of a Strauss waltz, particularly *Blue Danube*. Suddenly "the romantic one-two-three of the waltz tempo turns into the young woman's nightmare, as the power of the dance overtakes her and she cannot stop dancing. The music ends and the lights fade as the young woman frantically tries to stop her anguished dance" (Thornton 84). Goslar's



*Waltzmania* also included a feminist critique in its reference to the narrative of *The Worn-Out Dancing Shoes*. In the Grimm's fairy tale, a king promises the hand of one of his twelve daughters to the first man who can determine how they wear out their dancing shoes each night. A poor soldier, returned from the war, pretends to fall asleep and discovers that the twelve princesses escape their room each night to a magical realm below the castle, where they dance and drink wine with many suitors until their shoes are full of holes. The soldier betrays the princesses by disclosing their revels to the king, who then gives the eldest daughter to the soldier as his prize (Paradiž 146-149). Thus, Goslar links the ecstasy and perceived women's freedom of *Ausdruckstanz* to the ecstatic dancing and mesmerism of the fairy tale, suggesting that what appears as freedom quickly becomes a narrative trap.

A similar dancing trap occurs in Hans Christian Andersen's tale, *The Red Shoes*, in which a young girl, Karen, becomes enamored with her red dancing shoes and wears them everywhere (to her mother's funeral, church, and her confirmation), ignoring piety and proper decorum. While in church, her thoughts are overcome by the lure of the red shoes. She wears them to a dancing ball, but once she begins dancing, the shoes take over and she is unable to stop. Condemned by the villagers and her family, she dances through day and night. Maria Tatar writes, "the moment of Karen's deepest personal degradation and social disgrace comes when she is in perpetual motion, a socially disruptive nomadic figure unable to remove the shoes that signal her pride" (Tatar 213). Exhausted but unable to stop dancing, Karen asks the village executioner to sever her feet. He makes wooden feet for her, and she retreats to her room to sit and pray for penance. In her

stillness, she merges with a brilliant angel who visits her room, and her soul flies to heaven.<sup>10</sup>

In a later solo, *A Walk in the Woods* (1946), which was choreographed in the United States, Goslar parodied the fairy tale figure of Little Red Riding Hood, who is sent into the woods by her mother to take a bottle of wine and a piece of cake to her ailing grandmother. In the Grimms fairy tale version, *Rotkäppchen* (1812), the mother instructs her daughter, “Be nice and good and give her my regards. Be orderly on your way and don’t veer from the path, otherwise you’ll fall and break the glass. Then your sick grandmother will have nothing” (Brüder Grimm 78).<sup>11</sup> The Grimm’s version of the tale reinforced a bourgeois code of sexual behavior for young girls. Straying from the straight path through the sensual temptations of the forest invites the hunger of the wolves, ready to pounce on the young girl’s innocence. There is also an implication that the breaking of the glass and spilling of the wine represents the girl’s loss of virginity, which depletes the strength of the grandmother. Thus, the young woman betrays the generations of women who precede her.

In Goslar’s solo, *A Walk in the Woods*, a woman enters the stage with prances and coupé hops. She switches into a polka-like dance, is distracted by something offstage, and exits to see what it is. When she returns to the stage with the same polka dance, she returns without her shawl. The solo continues with each exit and return involving more lost clothing—her hat, scarf, belt. Each exit and return happens more quickly, and the woman’s dancing grows looser and more reckless. Her ponytail becomes disheveled. On the last note of the music, after her last exit, her dress flies from the wings (*Lotte Goslar’s Pantomime Circus: Children’s Show*). Annette Thornton describes Goslar’s costume

manipulation for the dance, symbolizing the young woman's sexual unraveling: "the young woman's dress dissolves into a state of "un"-dress. . . . The more she takes off, the greater her desire, until finally she runs off stage, with a sexy shoulder shimmy, throwing her petticoat back on stage in time with the last chord of the music" (Thornton 219-220). Before first foray into the "woods," the dancer is curious and coquettish. Her demeanor shifts from interested to lustful, to dreamy as the dance progresses (*Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus* 1989). What is offstage becomes most important—the thing she wants that is rendered "offstage" or "out of the public eye." Her passion, sexuality, curiosity, and freedom from formal expectations is represented as the thing most longed for. In Goslar's version, it is not the ambush of the wolf or the authoritative presence of mother and grandmother, but the woman's awakening desire that becomes significant. As a shift from formal dancing to free movement, the solo also implies the exit of women from the fairy tale world of ballet into the sensual world of modern dance.

### **Birth of the clown**

*Compassion is largely a matter of imagination. It is the artist, then, and certainly the clown, who should be most capable of compassion. How can he insist on his funny turns when the whole world is on fire? There is only one answer: He is born with his bells. His optimism and courage are his weapons. (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 123)*

Even as Goslar was learning Palucca's dance style and accompanying her concerts, her own artistic voice was growing restless. She began secretly to choreograph her own dances. Although her emerging style differed significantly from Palucca's, Palucca was a supportive mentor for her work: "I was amazed. What I loved about Palucca's art was the abstraction; what came out of me was foolishness, clownerie, theater. I was bewildered, but couldn't stop . . . . Only later did I fully realize how great a

guiding spirit she was. Not to be like her, but to be as true as she in my own way, that was the great goal (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 15). Goslar's relationship with Palucca was to be the longest-lasting artistic influence in her life. Even through the exile years, Palucca and Goslar corresponded. From Palucca, Goslar gained the courage to develop her own artistic voice and a profound simplicity of craft.

Lotte Goslar's first clown character, developed during these years, was her solo, *The Disgruntled*. Goslar writes:

Different audiences have seen him as a symbol of different concerns; some political ones as rebellion against whatever; children's groups as a sort of Poltergeist; and, I was told, that he became the pinup-picture of an English squadron in World War II. For me he was none of that in particular. He was just angry. Nonsense angry. I thought that nonsense-angry is funny. Stupid is funny. It can be laughed away." (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 21)

For the solo, Goslar wore a large nose, bags under her eyes, pointed eyebrows, and a large frown. The clown runs onto the stage and in a spiral, step-hopping and galloping. He stops, grows taller, then performs a marching goose-step from left to right and back. He takes a break and performs a "Charleston," then sits and stomps his feet. He rises, side galloping and stomping from stage left to stage right and back, then moves in a circle to center stage. He plants his feet squarely and stares at the audience (*Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus: Children's Show*).

In *The Disgruntled*, Goslar masks her gender with makeup and costume, subverting the male gaze and offering a critique of the ugliness and anger rising in German culture. The goose-step clearly references the Nazi marching style, while also portraying it as silly childish stomping. She breaks the marching with a Charleston excerpt—an ironic choice given that popular social dances and jazz were forbidden in

Nazi culture. The baggy gown and clown face also resemble the mask and gown of Mary Wigman's *Witch Dance* (1926). The clown's circling, seated, stomping recalls Wigman's similar movement, creating a parody of the earnestness and anger of Wigman's solo.

In *Witch Dance*, Mary Wigman sought to embody the *gestalt* of "witchness." Her costume consisted of a brocade cape with an Orientalist pattern and she wore a mask that was a distorted version of her face with elongated eyes. In the clip of the solo that survives on video, she sits on the floor in a cross-legged position, clasping her knees with her elbows and shoulders lifted.<sup>12</sup> She sways and claws at the floor with her twisted hands. At times she stomps her feet, rotating her body in a circle on her sitz bones, then draws her knees together, sends her elbows akimbo, and snaps her head with a percussive clap of the accompaniment. Her own description of the solo envisions herself as demon: "Like a giant, the red and gold, phantom-like figure rears up in the space. Now it leaps around in a circle, the right foot is thrown out, the hands of the speeding arms perform a kind of spurting action . . . . Now comes a sudden, wild jump outwards . . . . it is as if something invisible were being severed with eerie industry, again and again."<sup>13</sup> At the end of the dance, she falls back to the ground, resuming her first sitting postures, then snapping her head up to stare into the audience. As Susan Manning writes in her critical biography of Wigman, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, the use of Wigman's mask and cape to hide her feminine figure, the exploration of her demonic sense of "otherness" as a woman, and her direct gaze at the audience, subverted the male gaze in theatrical dance and countered the aesthetic of beauty and verticality found in ballet. Lotte Goslar's *The Disgruntled* achieved a similar

intervention in the representation of femininity, while doing something that Wigman's dance could not accomplish—the pointed criticism of fascist arrogance and anger.

In Goslar's later career, after emigrating to the United States, her clown-inspired critique of power extended to the world of dancers. In *Child Prodigy*, the child rebels against the traditional training of young female ballerinas, whose bodies are often disciplined into control by male balletmasters and directed by male choreographers. The dance critiques the gendered power imbalance of the ballet world, as well as the training methods employed. The child prodigy delights in creating her own steps, freer and more dynamic than the structured steps of the balletmaster, and flaps her wings like a fairy gone wild. Through imagination and impishness, she reverses the control of the dance teacher as well as the "implied" male gaze of the audience. German critic Polaczek agreed, "Aggressive disturbance is found in *Child Prodigy* . . . the (dancerly) wonder child, is actually an outspoken angry reversal and exaggerated joke, that objects to the naked horror of blind parental pride and star-belief" (Polaczek n.p.).<sup>14</sup> She will not be contained within the ballet form.

Goslar's *Child Prodigy* (1944) presents a balletmaster, named Boris Ptrochekovich, and his reluctant child prodigy, who refuses to perform. An MC announces: "People often ask, how did Lotte begin to dance? A wonder-child . . . she studied in Dresden with the great Boris Ptrochekovich." The ballet master enters in a flourish of leaping runs, *pirouettes*, and *changements*. He *pas de chats* to the wings to introduce his charge, who refuses her entrance. He drags Goslar onstage, and she immediately hides behind the curtain. When she finally comes out from behind the curtain, she is distracted by the audience and waves at the people. Boris claps, and she

tromps around the stage as an awkward, independent toddler in oversized ballet slippers and ribbons crossed over sagging black tights. She wears cardboard wings covered in tin foil on her back, which she flaps wildly by pulling a string at the front of her costume as she runs from the ballet master, who tries to cajole his rebellious student into dancing. The balletmaster interrupts her, and she performs a small step, step, step, hop, then returns to her gleeful running. As the balletmaster begins to demonstrate her part, she runs at him, flapping her wings menacingly. The ballet master stomps. Goslar stomps back. He claps; she claps excitedly. The balletmaster collapses and beats his fists against the floor; Goslar pummels him with gusto. He rises and chases her, wagging his finger. As he looms over her, Goslar peers at his finger, pokes it with her nose, and bites it. The piece ends with Goslar taking a final delighted run around the stage, while the balletmaster limps off (*Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus* 1984). Goslar also set this piece with a woman as the balletmistress Miss Aurora. She enters wearing white veils, and gets caught in them. Miss Aurora dances her part, leaps across the stage to get the child, claps three times, and nothing happens. The piece is similar with slight changes or additions. The teacher tries to fix Goslar's bow, but Goslar flaps her away. When Goslar bites Miss Aurora's finger, she wraps it in her veils (Choreography by Lotte Goslar 1976).

According to Thornton, Goslar performed this piece for 40 years. As she aged, the image of the dancer deepened—containing a suggestion of the child “in the present” as well as the “woman she will become” (213). Goslar added size to the age contrast by having her tall male dancers perform the balletmaster against her own 5’3” body. Goslar’s parody reversed the hierarchical structure of ballet training: the young, small female child rebels against the demands of the proud, virtuosic, large balletmaster by

refusing to perform his steps. The beginning of the piece shows the balletmaster taking up the entire stage and commanding the audience's attention, yet as soon as Goslar enters, he is unable to control her. She steals the audience's gaze, runs around him on the stage, and by the end, she has spatially taken his place, in spite of her diminutive stature and child status.

### **Exiled clown**

*This is the essence of all fools. Here, in a few lines, was "Yes," the soul of the clown, portrayed as a silly, tinkly, and vulnerable vehicle on ridiculous, impractical wheels. Sporting a cheerful little flag and armed with outlandish gadgets, "Yes" moves confidently into battle against the horrible monster "No," a fortress merciless and strong, brutal and invincible—a stupid and eternal power. (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 124).*

Hitler came to power in March 1933, the same year Goslar danced at the Skala in Berlin. She had signed a contract to return in January 1934, but when Hitler became Chancellor, she was dancing in Prague and decided not to return to Germany: "I had always felt more European than specifically German, and my life had been without roots anyway. So it was not the loss of my 'Heimat' (fatherland) that concerned me, but the fact that many of my friends started to be harassed—and soon persecuted" (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 25-26). Goslar broke her contract with the Skala and returned to Berlin to collect her belongings. She describes a Nazi march in the street and the mindless fervor of the public that occurred as she said goodbye to her bourgeois landladies: "I will never forget the instant transformation of the two Fräulein, who a moment before had smiled sweetly at me and now were turning into wildly panting furies, moaning and gasping for breath and screaming in the tempo of the marchers: 'Heil Hitler! Heil Hitler!'" (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 25-26). Goslar gathered her things and began her journey into exile.



For several months, Goslar danced at the Ping Pong cabaret in Amsterdam, one of the anti-fascist, literary, political cabarets that sprang up across Europe. In January 1934, Erika Mann invited Goslar to join her Peppermill Theater in Zurich.<sup>15</sup> Goslar danced with the Peppermill until September of 1935 in Switzerland, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Belgium and Luxembourg. At the premiere of the new show, Goslar performed three numbers she had done on the big stages of Berlin. The realities of exile were difficult for the Peppermill performers. They only had limited permits to stay and perform in each country. In order to fulfill longer stays, they had to exit the country and return a few days later. Sometimes certificates of “good conduct” from the German consulate were required in order to obtain visas. Because the passports were all stamped with the place of employment (The Peppermill), getting past the consulates was a matter of luck: “We heard more and more about the atrocities in Germany, sometimes from some daring underground people who had crossed the borders . . . . we were unsure about how much longer we would be tolerated by the countries we visited. But in spite of it all, our spirits were high. We were whistling in the dark” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 30-31). Sometimes audiences proved to be wells of animosity for the Peppermill artists. The group was attacked by Swiss Nazis in 1935 in Zurich. The Nazis had bought out the front of the house. A friend of Erika’s warned her about the group, so she planted her own audience members who were willing to fight: “Chairs, ripped apart, were used as weapons, and there was tear gas and shooting . . . as a result the Peppermill was forbidden in Switzerland (and later in Holland) . . . . It showed how difficult it was to fight fascism even from outside Germany and how much more dangerous it must have been to oppose

Germany from within” (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 31). Goslar returned to Prague and joined the Liberated Theater of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich.<sup>16</sup>

In 1937, Goslar was invited by Erika to rejoin the Peppermill in New York for an American debut. The debut flopped: “the actors, including the great Therese Giehse, did not speak English fluently, and the themes of many songs and sketches were not really interesting to New York audiences. Also, America was still quite "isolationist" (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 51). Other issues affecting reception of the performance were issues of categorization. Although the Peppermill was a literary cabaret, the performance had been publicized as a musical. Literary cabarets were a European phenomenon, and American audiences were not familiar with the genre. The issue of language did not affect Goslar, however. For the next ten years, every American engagement Goslar received was initiated from the Peppermill performance. Goslar made quick connections with influential producers. She was engaged for a three-year tour of her solo concerts across the United States, which enabled her to stay. Goslar began making works influenced by American life, and interspersed them with solos she had performed while in Europe.

As a result of the unsuccessful Peppermill opening at the Chanin Theater in 1937, Goslar was invited to join the cabaret-like Turnabout Theatre in Los Angeles.<sup>17</sup> At the Chanin Theater, the three Yale Puppeteers, who founded Turnabout, had been in the audience. Excited by Goslar’s performance, they had asked her to join them, but the California state curfew for “enemy aliens” at that time prohibited Goslar from being away from home after nine at night. By 1943, the curfew was lifted and Goslar joined the Turnabout Theater, where she would perform for the next ten years (Goslar, *What’s So Funny* 71).

In 1942, before joining Turnabout Theatre, Goslar had suffered a dry year. She had engaged Paul Schiff, an emigrant and head of the former *Suddeutsche Konzertdirektion*, as manager: “Mr. Schiff died before he could become active in my behalf, and I had to learn a lesson I was not prepared for: in America, although you don't have to give up when you are down, you can't feel secure when you are up. In spite of all the acceptance I had found in this country, I had to prove myself all over again” (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 65). Lotte Lenya and Hans Sahl<sup>18</sup> helped Goslar secure a nightclub gig to help her through that year. Goslar knew her solo *Little Heap of Misery* could be performed in a small space, so she thought it would be perfect for the performance. A theatrical portrait of the existential restlessness of exile, *Little Heap of Misery* was inspired by Goslar's long time friend, Hans Sahl: “In a way this dance is an abstraction, a march of doom, starting from nowhere and after a slow progression of failures vanishing into nowhere. There is neither a beginning nor an end to his eternal unnecessary woe” (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 67-68). In the solo, Goslar enters with a pillow. She pauses and turns her face to the audience, wrings her face into a grimace, shakes her head, and sobs. She plods a bit more, then plops her pillow on the floor, lies down, and tosses and turns in different positions. Finally she stands, puts the pillow on the back of her neck, pulls the blanket up to her chin, and the pillow falls off. Goslar swooshes the blanket with a large gesture of futility, walks off with the same shrug and stepping gesture as her entrance, grimaces as she shakes her finger at the audience and sobs, then exits (*Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus* 1956; *Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus*, 1984).

Goslar's clown characters were Brechtian by no small circumstance. Brecht gave Goslar the narrative *Circus Scene* as a gift for choreographing scenes in his play, *Galileo*.

Brecht had included only a clown and a lion in the scene, but Goslar split the lion into four men. She wanted the lion to be powerful, more than a lion—a lynching power, or Nazis. The men made up the head, two flanks, and the tail. Their different shaped tunics gave the lion-like illusion. After cornering the clown up the ladder, they break apart and become a lynching power, out to kill him. She created an audience that witnessed the events and were seated onstage by the lion ring. Goslar never danced the clown because she always wanted an acrobatic male dancer to perform the role. The clown, after having been ridiculed and terrorized, kills the lion by biting him. He slowly looks at real audience and swings the whip as if to say, “you are next.” The piece is about what people do to each other (Goslar, *Interview with David Sears*).

In a 1976 production of the piece, there is a howl, and the audience appears onstage, dressed in tan and gray, with head coverings. The ringmaster wakes the clown, as the audience jeers and cheers from the side. The people shift, alternately standing and looking. The lion enters, runs in a circle, and swishes its tail. The lion follows the clown slowly and deliberately, then lies down and rolls on its back. The audience pokes at the lion. They rush around the ring, push the clown toward the lion. The small clown paws toward the lion, trying to intimidate it. On a drum beat, the lion breaks apart into four men. They pursue the clown, forcing him to climb up the scaffolding. The tail becomes a whip. The audience claps. The tail makes the clown dance by whipping him. There is a screeching sound as the head comes after the clown and paws at him. The crowd claps and jeers. The clown hangs from the scaffolding and loses his pants. The lion backs off, reforms, lies down, and swishes its tail. The clown throws his cap, looks at the crowd and the lion, then crosses the ring, and bites the lion's neck. The lion writhes and dies. The

clown steps over the body of the lion, takes the whip, swishes it, and shows his now evil face in the spotlight as the audience cringes behind him (*Clowns & Other Fools* 1976; *Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus* 1984). Goslar's choreography expresses a resistance not only to the brutality of the lion, which suggests the power of Nazi fascism, but also the mob violence of the crowd, which recalls Goslar's account of her landladies' pro-Nazi fervor during her last trip to Berlin before entering exile.

### **Fairy Godmothers**

*The midwife for my mother had become a friend and we would visit her in her tiny place. She was crippled by that time and obviously she was poor. But those visits were the highlights of my childhood. They were pure joy. There was always some gentle laughter and there were cookies in a big blue jar and her brown eyes were dancing with some sort of mischief. Her name was Mrs. Fuhr and I have always through my life looked for the Mrs. Fuhrs of our time. I have found them once in a while: gentle, kind, full of fun in spite of handicaps, humble—and with great dignity.*  
(Lotte Goslar, "Reflections" 23)

In fairy tales, the fairy godmother was often a figure derived from the spirit of an animal helper, who represented an absent or dead mother. The good fairy godmother watched over and provided moments of wish-fulfillment for the young girl child. Often however, fairy godmothers were represented as old crones or hags who toyed with the young girl and her romantic interest: "Godmothers acted as co-maters: they stood *in loco parentis* . . . .All these older malevolent women stand in some degree of parental or guardian relation to the young on whom they prey" (Warner 204). The fairy godmother in fairy tales was often represented as jealous and interfering in the young girl's romantic relationship with the young prince. Aligned with the storyteller, the fairy godmother's wishes can be read as reflective of the fairy tale's instructive aim for young women. Marina Warner writes, there is an "affinity between the teller who knows from the

beginning the heroine's hidden virtue and the fairy godmother who brings about her happy recognition" (216). Goslar's description of her mother's midwife explains her attraction to the godmother character, though her model was more benevolent.

*La Donna della Dondolo* [1979] is a parody of fairy tale ballets, in which Goslar is the Fairy Godmother, who repeatedly clobbers the prince and his bride over the head with her magic wand. In the beginning, a nun, dressed in white, bourreés in and finds a baby girl hidden in leaves. A fairy godmother, danced by Goslar, enters in a white tunic and blue cone-shaped hat. She blesses the baby, then whacks her with her wand. There is a break, and fifteen years later, a young man enters carrying a stuffed lamb. The nun enters, and introduces the baby, now a young lady, to the man. He gives the young lady his lamb, and they dance a romantic, swinging duet with lifts. Three dancers enter and cover the young woman in black. The fairy godmother enters and again whacks her with a wand, which breaks over the young woman's head. The young woman collapses, and Goslar exits with her broken wand. The young man dances with the young woman, but she collapses repeatedly. He catches her after every turn sequence, as she falls under the fairy godmother's spell. Another dancer enters and again covers the young woman with a black cape. The scene shifts to a tavern, where two women are stomping grapes. The young man enters, drinks three drinks, and collapses. The barkeeper pulls him upright, and he tells a bar woman of the woman he loves. Suddenly a mystical veiled woman appears on his shoulder, then disappears. The young man is imprisoned, and the young woman appears to beg for his release. "Mercury" enters and delivers a message to the jailor. The young man is released, crowned, and reunited with the young woman. At midnight, the fairy godmother appears again and whacks the man over the head with her

wand. He collapses, and all of the dancers point offstage, gesturing for Goslar to leave: “One by one, the cast points off to the left, as if to say, "Go! You are banished!" Goslar looks around, then defiantly points to the right—exactly the opposite direction—and exits, triumphantly the mistress of her own destiny” (Thornton 213). As she heads offstage right, Mercury tries to stop her, but she whacks him over the head, as well (*Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus 1989*).

Goslar created her most famous fairy godmother-like solo, *Grandma Always Danced* in 1953, and performed it for the next thirty-eight years. The dance recuperates the image of the old crone by portraying her life from infant to angel. An emcee announces, "People often asked what inspired Lotte to dance. Well her grandmother always danced. She danced in the cradle, she danced all through life, and who knows, she may still be dancing somewhere." The lights come up on Goslar kneeling center stage in a large bonnet, bouncing like a jolly infant to a German folk song. She grows quickly into a stretching toddler, then skips and dances as a young, coquettish girl. She becomes a young lady, faints, then cradles two babies, one on each elbow. Soon she is herding the children, then stretching and rubbing her aching back. She becomes an old matron and shrivels, then grows feisty. Her dance begins in her hips, moves to her shoulders and grows larger as she dances and skips, shaking her finger. She exits except for her right hand, which remains visible and points resolutely towards the sky. She returns as an angel with her silver halo, looks around below her, flaps her wings, and waves to people still on earth. God tells her to stop dancing. Startled, she shrugs, "oh dear, me? . . . okay," then flutters her hands defiantly, lifting them upwards with the last trill of the piano (*Choreography by Lotte Goslar; Lotte Goslar's Pantomime Circus 1984*). Goslar

regularly ended a performance with *Grandma Always Danced*, or she included it as the last number before the finale. Her raised finger of protest against a God that would forbid her dancing recalls her re-emergence from the shrouded grand narrative of modernist dance and her consistent “yes” uttered against the “no” of Nazi oppression. As clown and fairy godmother, Goslar cracks open the patriarchal narratives of cultural history and aesthetic representation, reminding us of what is possible in the midst of unimaginable loss.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Kaufmann. *Die Geistige Emigration 1939-64*, Sammlung Kunstmuseum Mülheim. The painting is a triptych, with the crowd of emigrants spanning the three panels and standing as if for a group portrait. A swastika hangs over the left upper corner of the left panel, while the center panel shows a ship sailing over the emigrants’ heads. The third panel, in which Goslar is depicted, shows the buildings of New York City, the Statue of Liberty, and the American flag in the upper right-hand corner. As a group-portrait, the emigrants project an identity that spans the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, stretching between Germany and the United States as a tunnel of exiles.

<sup>2</sup>Examples of clowns in modernist theatre include the clown roles in Vsevolod Meyerhold’s *The Fairground Booth* and *Columbine’s Scarf*, Bertolt Brecht’s *Mann ist Mann*; and Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Act Without Words*. Clown figures in dance were also found in the works of Sergei Diaghilev, Michel Fokine, and Jean Cocteau. See Donald McManus’ *No Kidding!: Clown as Protagonist in Twentieth-Century Theater* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> In *Fools and Jesters in Literature, Art and History* (1998), Vicki Janik writes that the “most significant fool [precursor to the clown] in Western culture, Erasmus’ Stultitia (Folly) in *The Praise of Folly*, is female; but in most cases the fool is male, with a masculine pronoun referent” (Janik xiv). She adds that it is common for the dress and behavior of both male and female fools to signify sexual ambiguity.

<sup>4</sup> Eine Geste, die jeder verstehen mag, wie er will: als Ausdruck des Überlebenswillen, als Auflehnung gegen das Absurde, als Manifestation eines Prinzips Hoffnung. (Schlodder n.p.)

<sup>5</sup> Harald Kreutzberg (1902-1968) was a German modern dancer and choreographer, who trained with Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman. He became a major figure in Ausdruckstanz and toured internationally with his dance partner Yvonne Georgi.

<sup>6</sup> Darin steckt auch ein kleiner künstlerischer Vaternord: In den schwarzflatternden Symbolfiguren ist unschwer der Typ Harald Kreutzbergs (etwa in seinen selbst choreographierten Solotänzen als «Tod,» als «Henker») auszumachen. Die fatale Mischung aus Irrationalismus und Suggestion, künstlerischem Autonomie Anspruch und trotzdem erstaunlich leicht nationalsozialistischen Repräsentationsbedürfnissen sich einpassender Stilisierung, wie sie von Kreutzberg etwa im *Waffentanz* zu Musik von Werner Egk für die Olympischen Spiele 1936 getrieben wurde, wird einfach überwunden—durch Lächerlichkeit. (Polaczek n.p.)

<sup>7</sup> «In *Valse Very Triste* erhellt sie die von Angsten und Agressionen verdüsterte Modern-Dance-Atmosphäre einer Martha Graham.» (Regitz, "Tanzen bis in den" n.p.)



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<sup>8</sup> Lotte Goslar spielt gegen die triste Gestik des übrigen Ensembles an, indem sie unermüdlich den Zeigefinger zu einem winzigen Lichtpunkt erhebt und auch, als sie schon unterm schwarzen Leichentuch begraben liegt, ihren Finger noch trotzig emporreckt. (Schlodder n.p.)

<sup>9</sup> Otto Dix (1891- 1969) was a German painter and printmaker. He is considered one of the most significant artists of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*.

<sup>10</sup> Andersen, Hans Christian. Trans., R. P. Keigwin. *Eighty Fairy Tales* (Skandinavisk Bogforlag, Flensteds Forlag, 1976). Reprinted in Tatar, Maria, ed. *The Classic Fairy Tales: Texts, Criticism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999) 241-245.

<sup>11</sup> Brüder Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. In der ersten Gestalt* (Frankfurt am Main: 1962). Quoted in Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 65.

<sup>12</sup> Snyder, Allegra Fuller. *Mary Wigman, 1886-1973: When the Fire Dances Between the Two Poles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Extension Media Center, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> Susan Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Work of Mary Wigman* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 129. Translated from Rudolf Bach's *Das Mary Wigman Werk* (Dresden: Carl Reissner, 1933) 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> Es ist nicht nur—was die Sache banal machen würde—die heile Welt eines alles überwindenden Optimismus, der so blöd—wie fröhlich wäre: auch aggressive Beunruhigung findet statt *Child Prodigy* zum Beispiel, das (tänzerische) Wunderkind, ist sogar ein ausgesprochen bössartiger Umkehrungs- und Übertreibungswitz, der blindem Elternstolz und Starglauben das nackte Grauen einjagen kann: Lotte Goslar ist da, wie die College-Girls auf den Cartoons von Ronald Searle, ein Ausbund an Unbegabtheit, ins Glanzvolle gesteigert durch Hinterhältigkeit, Widerspenstigkeit und Sadismus. Ein Herzchen. (Polaczek n.p.)

<sup>15</sup> Erika Mann, Klaus Mann, and Therese Giehse founded the Peppermill Theatre cabaret in Munich in 1933. The cabaret traveled through Europe after Erika Mann fled Germany in 1936. The Peppermill's programs consisted of song, dance and theatre vignettes that blended entertainment with political and anti-fascist satire.

<sup>16</sup> The Liberated Theater was founded in Prague in 1925 by Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich. The theatre became a center for Czech clowning, which functioned as a reaction to political events and social problems. The programs were anti-fascist, and in 1939, Voskovec and Werich fled to the United States.

<sup>17</sup> Forman Brown, Harry Burnett, and Richard Brandon founded the Yale Puppeteers after Forman graduated from the University of Michigan in 1922. In 1941, they opened the Turnabout Theatre in Los Angeles, a combined puppet and revue show which attracted support and audiences from Hollywood's top performers. The theatre was arranged like a streetcar, with revolving seats between two stages. After the puppet show, audience members were instructed to "turnabout" their seats for the revue. Regular performers at the Turnabout included Lotte Goslar, Elsa Lanchester, and Dorothy Neumann. Folksinger Odetta was "discovered" and also performed at the theatre.

<sup>18</sup> Lotte Lenya (1898-1981) was an actress and singer, as well as the wife of composer Kurt Weill. Hans Sahl was a poet and novelist who emigrated in the early 1930s from Nazi Germany to the United States. He became well-known as a translator of American authors.

## CHAPTER 3

### Choreographing Absence: Memories of the Holocaust in the Work of Pola Nirenska

In her photograph, *My Spanish Skirt* (1968), Pola Nirenska captured visually the theme that encompassed her life's work in dance. A young girl stands in a shaft of sunlight on a patio. Her back is toward the camera and she gazes upwards toward the porch of a house. The porch is dark and contrasts with the full, floor-length, white lace skirt she is wearing. Her hair is windswept, but pulled back in a low ponytail. She clutches and raises the front hem of the skirt as if she has paused from her dancing to watch someone leave or in response to a call. The darkness beyond the porch suggests a familial home, and a lingering absence in the darkness. The crumpled, fallen leaves at her feet and her long-sleeved shirt suggest it is autumn. The young girl waits, poised between following the darkness or resuming her dance in the foreground.

During the years of her dance studio in Washington, D.C., exiled dancer Pola Nirenska became friends with the Schandelmeier family, who lived next door, and she had a delightful relationship with their young daughter, Laura. In 1966, Nirenska closed her studio and entered a ten-year hiatus from dancing, teaching, and choreographing. Photography became her substitute medium. *My Spanish Skirt* was a prize-winning photograph Nirenska took of Laura, which captured a sense of a poignant past and a yet unknown future. Laura became a dancer, fulfilling the prophetic image of the dancing

skirt. Lingering in the image is also an autobiographical ghost of Nirenska. Separated from her Polish family, many of whom perished in the Holocaust, Nirenska's survival hinged upon her dance career. As a dancer, she had opportunities to evade the spread of Nazism in Europe by teaching and performing in Poland, Austria, Italy, and England before settling in 1949 in the United States. As with Laura in the photograph, the attraction to the past, both known and unknown, permeated her dancing in the present. Issues of family and private life infused the public face of her dance works, bearing witness to the simultaneous absence and presence inherent in exile.

Nirenska's choreographic strategy of exilic memory and the resulting trajectory of her artistic development not only bear witness to the experiences of exile and loss, but also challenge reductionist narratives of modernist dance. Nirenska's modernism changed in response to her experience of exile at different stages of her life. As part of her process, Nirenska used solos to interrupt the aesthetic reception of her works and to created representations of women that transgressed the private and public boundaries of exile reality. She functioned as an agent of memory and postmemory, "giving narrative shape to fragments of an irretrievable past" (Hirsch 248). Choreographed with a photographic sensibility, her works created a "memory book"<sup>1</sup> for her own life as well as a site of public witness and mourning for women's experiences of the Holocaust.

### **Nirenska and the modernist dance narrative**

Nirenska lived on the edge of both German and American modernist dance because she was creating a fusion of dance and drama at a time when both movements were separating from other arts. It was also a time when German and American politics found abstract art less threatening than representational art. In her later years, Nirenska's

use of stark imagery, musicality, dramatic space, and expressivity prompted critics to write that she had returned to an old or more original form of *Ausdruckstanz* in her work. Rather than noting the fusion of German and American approaches in her process and choreography, critics responded to the characterization, angst, and darkness as a sign of an earlier time, yet critics also seemed drawn to something particular and refreshing in Nirenska's style.

As I discussed in chapter two, American modernism tends to objectify movement and separate it from human concerns rather than seeing it as always connected to the human who creates and dances it; therefore, much of the commentary about Nirenska's modernism centered on her use of characterization and expressivity. Throughout her career, in her technique, choreographic form, and expressive themes, Nirenska's work blended German and American modernism. At times her work included more of one strain than another, yet it always showed the influence of expressive dance modernists like Doris Humphrey and Mary Wigman, or visual modernists, like Käthe Kollwitz,. In relation to German and American modernist aesthetics, Nirenska's choreographic voice followed a pattern of assimilation and individuation, depending on her stage of exile.

### **The early years**

Born into a middle-class, Jewish family in Warsaw, Pola Nirenska always wanted to dance. Like Mary Wigman, Valeska Gert, and many other young women of the time, Nirenska's desires were not recognized by her family. When Isadora Duncan came to Poland, Nirenska's mother promised to take her, but Nirenska's uncle would not let her out of the house to see the performance. A rebellious young woman, Nirenska closed herself in her room for three days, and refused to eat or sleep. Finally, Nirenska's parents

slipped a passport under her door (Nirenska, *Interview by Suzan Moss*). Nirenska's father was a wealthy necktie manufacturer. After traveling to Germany for business, he brought home several dance school prospectuses for Nirenska, including one from the Mary Wigman School. After promising her father that she would use her education solely to teach and not to perform, Nirenska's family allowed her to begin studies at the Wigman School in Dresden at the age of 17, and she used her dowry to pay tuition (Simmons 2).

Nirenska studied at the Wigman school from 1929-1933. At first Nirenska felt separated from the German-speaking student body by her Polish culture and language. She struggled with Wigman's expectations: "I didn't like any kind of discipline . . . . But it was very good for me" (Lyman 6-7). At the Wigman school, students were required to broaden their dance studies with courses in outside subjects like art, religion, and philosophy. They were also required to study piano and gain skills in musical accompaniment. Nirenska studied Eastern philosophy at the Deutsche Hochschule and augmented her dance classes with percussion studies (Simmons 13-16). By her second year at Wigman's school, Nirenska was teaching percussion classes of her own. In 1932, she graduated from the Wigman school with "Best Diploma" and toured the United States with Wigman's company (Simmons 16).

When Nirenska arrived in the United States in 1949, critics had a difficult time situating her work within the boundaries they understood for modern dance. In her first American performance at the Boston Conservatory in 1950, Nirenska danced solos that had been successful in Europe, including *Eastern Ballade* and *A Scarecrow Remembers*.<sup>2</sup> Critics suggested that Nirenska would be a powerful dancer if she Americanized her technique and replaced her miming with full-bodied movement: "Miss Nirenska had

studied with such leaders of the modern dance as Mary Wigman . . . and Hanya Holm . . . but few of her basic dance motions suggest any modern motivation . . . . She fails to fall into any exact category” (*Boston Post*). In spite of the critics’ confusion, Nirenska’s artistic development continued many of the traits that encompassed both German and American modernism of the 1930s. During the 1950s and 1960s, Nirenska’s work shifted from her early *Ausdruckstanz*-influenced solos to group works that integrated the American dance styles she had learned in New York. Works such as *Concerto in D Minor* recalled the lyricism and vocabulary characteristic of Humphrey’s dances and focused on music visualization or movement rather than character and emotional expression. A shift from *Ausdruckstanz* to American modern dance was also evident in her choice of content. In 1956, Nirenska became an American citizen and was inspired to choreograph *American Folk Suite*, using traditional dulcimer music and songs. In 1969, after marrying Polish exile Jan Karski,<sup>3</sup> Nirenska closed her studio and stopped dancing.

When Nirenska emerged from retirement in the late 1970s, critics noted that her work once again resembled the *Ausdruckstanz* aesthetic of her days with Wigman. Anna Kisselgoff wrote “Nirenska’s newer works . . . referred back more to her original dance roots than the . . . pieces from the ‘60s. They were also the most powerful, and the fact that they alluded to an “old” modern dance tradition of the 30’s in no way weakened the effect” (Kisselgoff , “The Dance” C32). In an interview after her reemergence, Nirenska expressed confusion about the demand for newness and change in choreographic style: “I don’t understand anything about all of this. I don’t use much intellect in my art. I use instinct” (Lyman 9). Alan Kriegsman acknowledged Nirenska’s conviction and its role in the success of her work, “Nirenska clings to her roots, not out of any antiquarian fetish or

innate conservatism, but because she knows her own true center: she's so sure of what she's doing, and so full of conviction about its meaning, that her work feels inevitably entirely newborn "(Kriegsman, "Dances by Nirenska" n.p.). Nirenska saw herself as a modernist choreographer, although her definition of modernism differed from much of what was considered modernist in the United States throughout her career. She also saw her work as different from German modernism.

Much of the commentary about Nirenska's modernism centered on her use of characterization and expressivity, both of which were emphasized by her solo work. In her master's thesis, "Pola Nirenska: Spanning Fifty Years in Dance Influences On the Dancer and Choreographer," former dancer Stephanie Simmons attributed Nirenska's success with the solo to her personal appearance and performance attributes:

Her body, small and beautifully formed, was topped with an elegantly shaped head, a wide face with high cheek bones from her Slavic heritage, and large dark eyes framed by (very) highly arched eyebrows giving her an exotic look. Her nose was straight and strong, her mouth wide and sensuous. It was no wonder then, that her career began (and remained so for many years) with her original choreography of solo pieces for herself . . . . The solo works highlighted her face, body, and hands, and were completely synchronized with the music she hand-picked for the works. (Simmons 3)

While Simmons' assessment has some merit, in that Nirenska's stage presence greatly contributed to her early success, this view is one that has historically captured female modern dancers in a trap of anti-feminist criticism. Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, and Ruth St. Denis' performances were often conflated with their personalities, and the success of modernist dance was attributed to its separation of choreography from the dancer, as in the work of Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham. This dismissive attitude toward the solo and expressivism eventually fed into the 1950s rejection of expressionist modernism

and embrace of an objectivist abstraction in the choreography of dancers like Alwin Nikolais and Merce Cunningham. The American modernist tendency to objectify movement and separate it from the choreographer or performer contributed to a masculinization of the modernist dance narrative.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of how critics categorized her, Nirenska saw herself as a part of the generation of choreographers working in the 1940s-1960s, and she became frustrated with writers who insisted on comparing her with “old” modernist styles, like Graham and Humphrey, because she used expressive movement. Nirenska saw the blending of expressivity and abstraction as relevant for contemporary audiences. Liz Lerman explained: “She was purposeful in there being meaning . . . . She believed that pure line and pure shape and pure geometry were the tools on which she put the meaning. I don’t think she believed in them stripped away entirely . . . .She didn’t believe only in abstraction . . . . She intended dance to be more than that” (Lerman n.p.). Nirenska’s dancers identified abstract modernist characteristics particular to her work: compositional craft, use of space, angularity, intensity, contortion. She used parallel positions frequently and often used discordant movements. Jan Tievsky noted that even in Nirenska’s less innovative works, like *Concerto in D Minor*, her musicality was paramount: “In the dancey pieces, you see a lot of movement theme and variation. Very, almost Humphreyesque, in some of the work. Visually stunning, musically right on” (Tievsky n.p.). Dancer Rima Faber concurred: “Her musicality was wonderful in an age of postmodern in which dancers were creating collages with music or when dancers were, a lot of times, disconnecting from music . . . or using music as an environment instead of as an accompaniment.” (Faber n.p.). Much of Nirenska’s process was rooted in



improvisation, yet even when she collaborated with dancers for movement inventions, she always combined and set phrases with her unique gift for hearing music. Nirenska often used challenging pieces of classical music for her choreography. Liz Lerman tells her favorite Nirenska story related to Nirenska's beliefs about music and the solo, *Wounded*: "Beth brought in some feathered thing, and some little sequins. And Pola goes, "No!" "No sequins! There's only good music in this concert!" I just thought that was the absolute version of Pola and her rules. Of course we're all subject to the rules of our time, but that you couldn't have sequins and good music together" (Lerman n.p.). Good music for Nirenska could and did in some pieces include jazz, but Nirenska's commitment to modern art music reflected her modernist aesthetic.

After her 1970s hiatus, Nirenska began teaching classes at Lerman's Dance Exchange, but many of the dancers rejected Nirenska's style because of its grueling, harsh, and bound training, which had become synonymous with "old" modern dance technique. The clash with contemporary dancers continued when Nirenska moved to the Glen Echo Dance Theatre: "A lot of dancers came, tried it, and didn't stay. Over the years I lost some dancers from the [Glen Echo] company because they felt that the training was not right for their body" (Tievsky n.p.). Nirenska's technique class often began with floorwork. Dancers performed a series of bounces with curved and long backs, beginning with soles of the feet pressed together in first and then with legs in second position. The culmination was a sweep of the upper body and lifting off the floor to arch the back, supported by extended legs and one arm (Simmons 50-51). Liz Lerman described a series of bounces on the floor, "You know by then, nobody was bouncing any more, we all knew you weren't supposed to bounce" (Lerman n.p.). The bounce series

was followed by arm and leg lifts, working homo- and heterolaterally to strengthen the abdominal muscles (Simmons 50-51).

Floor work was followed by a set barre. Although the barre focused on battements, swings, and développés, it incorporated modern dance elements like body drops and hinges to change sides. Dancer Jan Tievsky still remembers the details:

It was predominantly in parallel. An awful lot of it was in forced arch and contraction. So [leg] swings were in forced arch with an abdominal contraction. 75 swings . . . your supporting leg is just dying . . . to the side, and to the back with *penché*. Then you dropped to the floor. There was always the drop to the floor, and sweeping, and you're coming up . . . and you're sweeping, and you're coming up (Tievsky n.p.).

A similar description is given by Liz Lerman: "It was an impossible technique class. I had the stamina to get through it, but I did not have the physical capacity to do what she was asking" (Lerman n.p.). Nirenska followed with stretches at the barre, encouraging dancers to push through spaces and varying tempos from slow to quick (Simmons 50-51). Lerman continues, "I don't recall it having any of that good feeling of a stretch. I just recall a massive amount of hanging over in impossible positions" (Nirenska n.p.). Following the barre, Nirenska moved to plies with upper body releases and forward and backward walks across the diagonal, which progressed from whole foot to walking in relevé. The last half hour of class involved intricate rhythmical patterns, experimentation with movement for Nirenska's choreography, and emphasis on expressivity in performance.

### **Going "deep down": the solo as portrait**

As I described in the opening to this chapter, Pola Nirenska was a photographer, as well as a choreographer. In 1965, Nirenska married Jan Karski, and in 1969, she

closed her Grant Road studio. The photograph Nirenska had taken of young Laura Schandelmeier became the door through which she continued to express herself over the next ten years. Rima Faber, also a photographer, described the similarity between choreographing and taking photos: “While you are capturing this intensification of the world through the photograph, you are, in a sense, removed and a bit protected by the camera . . . which creates a distance. It also creates a distance in time” (Faber n.p.). Composing from a visual perspective was integral to Nirenska’s choreography, especially during her period of reemergence in the 1980s. Nirenska worked from a physical distance, giving verbal directions to her dancers based on the forms she saw in their movement. In rehearsals with Dancer Sharon Wyrrick, Nirenska would use images or ideas about dramatic intent to push Wyrrick’s performance. Nirenska directed most of the rehearsal from her chair, where she often sat with her dog Corky on her lap and smoked a cigarette. Wyrrick explained: “She would just say, ‘Jump.’ You would do something, and what I began to see was that it gave her a reference point, so that she then could add on to the instruction. It seemed she got to the movement that she [wanted] . . . I don’t think she [always] had a picture in her mind. I never had that impression” (Wyrrick n.p.). The rehearsal space was one of exploration and collaborative creativity that allowed room for the dancer to be part of the process. Wyrrick describes it as a liberatory process: “It was really happening in a space that wasn’t you and it wasn’t her, but you had to meet somewhere in-between. I think I experienced for the first time in a very direct way the joining dramatic content through movement. I learned and grew as a performer” (Wyrrick n.p.). The “getting to the movement” was much like the dynamic of discovery and

framing evident in her photo of Schandelmeier, and supported her commitment to depth and character in her dances.

In group works, Nirenska often used some of her choreographic strategies from her solos, such as using a soloist surrounded by interacting dancers or stringing solos together with a common theme. She continued to use dramatic characterization and often repeated certain themes, such as a mother figure or older woman juxtaposed with a daughter or young woman (Simmons 52-53). In an interview in the 1980s, Nirenska commented on the solo form, “The solos are the most difficult . . . . You must always be with the audience. There is no hiding. You cannot stay on the surface. You have to go deep down” (Lyman 9). For Nirenska, going “deep down” meant merging the worlds of the Holocaust past with an exiled present.

### **Nirenska as agent of memory and postmemory**

Hitler had come into power by the time Wigman’s company returned from the United States tour in 1933. Wigman dismissed the company because four out of ten of the dancers were Jewish. Nirenska left Dresden and spent the year in Warsaw, teaching at The Conservatory of Music and forming a small company (Simmons 17). In an interview, Nirenska described her next contact with Wigman in 1934:

She invited me to stay with her in Dresden for the summer. I came. There was a swastika hanging outside. The secretary, who I knew for four years, was sitting in the studio in her storm trouper uniform. I was told that I could not stay with Wigman because she had another guest . . . . I stayed around for two days, hoping to see Mary, because I came from far away and I was very poor. Gretl Kurt finally said Mary Wigman wanted me to teach a summer course. I said to Gretl, ‘Mary has forgotten that I am Jewish,’ and I packed my bags and left. (Nirenska, *Interview by Suzan Moss*)

Nirenska reported that Gretl Kurt and Hans Hastings, both members of the Nazi party, later took over Wigman's school and denounced her as a Communist: "Wigman's face would change whenever she talked about them" (Nirenska, *Interview by Suzan Moss*).

Some of the Wigman dancers received compensation for their loss after the war: "Years later, in Tel Aviv, I met Katia Bakalinska. She was able to get compensation from the West German government, because she had had a two-year contract that was broken in five months. Mary signed the paper for her. There was another dancer named Bella, who ended up in a kibbutz. She also got compensation" (Nirenska, *Interview by Suzan Moss*). Not aware of the possibility for compensation, Nirenska never saw any financial recuperation for her broken contract with the Wigman company.

In May 1935, Nirenska performed at Theatre in der Josestadt, the largest theatre in Vienna. Sponsored by cultural minister of the city; her concert included twelve solos. While in Vienna for the Dance Congress in 1934, Nirenska was seen by Angelo Sartorios, the choreographer for state opera in Florence. Sartorios invited her to perform as a soloist in *L'Aida*, but she stayed in Florence for only a couple of months (Simmons 20-21). Italy was a disappointment for Nirenska, "the only opera I danced was *Aida* . . . I had to teach little kids dance who did not understand me, and I did not understand them. My classes were awful" (Lyman 7). Due to the rise of Mussolini and spreading fascism in Europe, Nirenska studied with Rosalia Chladek<sup>5</sup> in Vienna, Austria, and finally left Europe for England in 1935 (Simmons 4).

### **London exile**

A connection to a friend helped Nirenska emigrate to England in 1935. (Lyman 7). During her first years, she studied dance with Kurt Jooss and Madame Rambert.<sup>6</sup>

Most of Nirenska's performances during the years between 1937 and 1942 were with SIMA, an organization dedicated to providing entertainment for military bases in England, Scotland, and Ireland (Simmons 21-22). She also performed for the Polish government in exile, stationed in London. For these groups, Nirenska created and performed several solos based on Polish folk dances. She performed one of the dances in the West End Musical revue, *It's in the Bag*, and a mazurka in *Waltz Without End*, a musical revue based on Chopin's life and music (Simmons 23). In an interview during her later years, Nirenska remembered: "There were ballet dancers I had to work with, and it was so hard to get any spirit out of them . . . . I could never be a ballerina, because I just couldn't do an exercise. It had to have a feeling of dance; otherwise, I was not interested" (Lyman 7-8). In 1940, Nirenska learned of the death of over seventy-five members of her family in the Holocaust. For the next six years, though she performed, she did not choreograph.

In 1946, Nirenska married a British actor, and had a studio in her home. (Jackson 1). She began choreographing Ausdruckstanz-influenced solos again and performing her own work in evening concerts. Choreographed to "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" by Heynessen, *A Scarecrow Remembers* (1946-1957) portrayed a scarecrow changing into a dapper man as he remembers the life he once had. Nirenska wore a blue blouse with tattered sleeves, a dingy yellow cumberbund, black tights, gray spats over ballet slippers, and a hat. As the scarecrow, she carried a stick, which became a walking stick for the man about town. The scarecrow was an apt image for exile, being forever outside and wise from all he has seen: "As the scarecrow swayed in the wind, one became aware of the waking memories of its once emaculate youth. Then, as it began to realize its

hopeless dream, one saw the figure return to the pathetic swaying scarecrow in the autumn wind” (Review of Performance, *Pola Nirenska* 1947). In March and April of 1947, Nirenska was sponsored to perform in British-controlled Palestine, where her parents had settled and were living. She gave two performances: one in Tel-Aviv and another in Jerusalem (Simmons 24). After divorcing her husband, Nirenska left Great Britain in 1949 and emigrated to the United States.

### **A new life in the United States**

At the invitation of a member of Ted Shawn’s dance company, Nirenska arrived in New York City in the fall of 1949 (Simmons 1). She washed dishes in an Italian restaurant to earn money each night, while during the day she “immersed herself in the frenetic activity of the burgeoning world of New York modern dance” (Lyman 8). Nirenska took some Graham technique, but she felt the training did not suit her body. Nirenska developed a strong connection with Ted Shawn, who recommended her to Doris Humphrey (Jackson 2). In an interview, Nirenska explained, "I just couldn't get enough classes . . . Because I worked alone so much in England, I now had this desire for accumulating more and more knowledge" (Lyman 8). Besides studying in New York, Nirenska also gave her debut concert at the Boston Conservatory. The program included her *Ausdruckstanz* solos from England, like *A Scarecrow Remembers*, and some of her Polish dances.

Nirenska’s early years in the United States were difficult: "I didn't have any money. I didn't have any food. I weighed 105 pounds. It was a disaster. I did many things, but I just did not have any money to live or to eat” (Lyman 8). The New York dance community was competitive. Nirenska was attracted to Humphrey's composition

course, which she took twice: “She was so intelligent, so logical . . . It opened my imagination to such a degree. I still found American dance unemotional, which I did not like. But it was an expansion of technique and body, I was fascinated by it” (Lyman 8). For the next couple of years, Nirenska studied with Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, Gertrude Shurr, May O'Donnell, José Limón, and Louis Horst, seemingly acquiring the codified technique and movement vocabulary more indicative of American modern dance (Simmons 45).

For three summers, Nirenska was Humphrey's unpaid assistant at Connecticut College. She watched rehearsals of Humphrey's reconstructions being set on students and received feedback on her own choreography from Humphrey (Simmons 48). Nirenska's connection to Doris Humphrey would continue into her later career. In a letter from Connecticut College, one of Nirenska's students wrote, “One thing I noticed, especially on the day of registration, was that the mere mention of your name is a pass-word. For example: Betty Jones, during registration asked if I was certain that I belonged in the Advanced Limon class. I said that Pola Nirenska felt that I was ab . . . she didn't even listen to the rest of my sentence; she just quickly signed me up” (Garretson, n.p.). After working with Doris Humphrey, Nirenska's European dance connections helped her secure work in the American modern dance community. She was introduced to Juana de Laban by an introductory letter from de Laban's father, Rudolf Laban, and eventually began teaching at Adelphi College, where she taught dance to non-majors and performed solos on faculty concerts (Simmons 49).

In 1951, Nirenska joined the teaching staff at Bar Harbor Summer Dance School, where she met Evelyn de la Tour, who invited her to move to Washington, D.C., to teach



at Dance Workshop. Agreeing with Laura Schandelmeier's speculation, Naima Prevots suggests the move to Washington, D.C. was more than the result of de la Tour's invitation, "She obviously wanted very much to come to America, and she did make it. So . . . from what I remember she came to Washington partly because the competition in NY was so stiff. She didn't feel she could get very far in New York" (Prevots n.p.).

Rima Faber relates a similar story, "Pola told me that Doris Humphrey told her to come down to DC, that DC was open territory, and thought she'd do very well in DC because of that. And I said to Pola, I think Doris Humphrey wanted you out of NY. She didn't want the competition. That's my take on it." (Faber n.p.). According to Nirenska in an interview, Humphrey had advised her to leave New York, "You know the European dance . . . Now you know American dance. We need teachers like you. Get out of New York. Go teach somewhere and then you can create your own company" (Lyman 8).

George Jackson felt the pressure came from Hanya Holm. During that time, Hanya Holm was the well-known Wigman dancer in New York. Jackson felt that Holm did not want a lot of competition in New York, so she sought positions outside of New York for other Wigman dancers. Jackson thought that may have been how Nirenska took the job in Washington, D.C. Hanya Holm may not have suggested it, but the general pressure may have come from her (Jackson n.p.).

In the fall of 1951, Nirenska became co-director of Dance Workshop of Georgetown with Evelyn de la Tour; they also taught in four area independent schools: Madeira, Potomac, Beauvoir, Piedmont (Simmons 7). Nirenska's accommodations at the LaTour studio at 1519 Wisconsin Avenue—later the Georgetown Workshop—were uncomfortable, "I was living in a room in the back of the studio with a kitchen inside,

sharing a bathroom with the school and the cockroaches. I was suffering there" (Lyman 8). Nevertheless, Nirenska credited LaTour for teaching her how to teach children and encouraging her choreography by suggesting that Nirenska teach less and choreograph more (Lyman 8). Nirenska began choreographing for advanced students, and in 1956, she established her own group Pola Nirenska and Dance Company, which performed once or twice a year, often sponsored by Modern Dance Council of Washington, D.C. (Simmons 7). During these years, she choreographed her first group dances (except for few pieces in Poland), adding only one solo for herself (Simmons 52).

Nirenska became instrumental in the development of modern dance in Washington, D.C. Beyond building a student body and dance company, she also helped build an audience for modern dance. She called the local paper and convinced a critic to review her concerts. The critic, Jean Battey Lewis, later became a dance critic (Faber n.p.). In spite of its distance from New York City, Washington, D.C. was a community more open to new choreographers and dance styles. Pola Nirenska, Ethel Butler, and Erika Thimey became the leading choreographers and established the prominent dance schools in the community.<sup>7</sup> About their styles, Prevots said, "Ethel Butler was steeped in the Graham mystique. Erika was a German product, also Wigman, but the work was much more simplistic. And actually those were Pola's complaints about Wigman" (Prevots n.p.). Yet the ties to Wigman perhaps eased Nirenska's years in the D.C. area. Erika Thimey had been one of Pola Nirenska's fellow students at the Wigman School, and her presence in Washington, D.C. provided some continuity for Nirenska. The continuity was also evident in Nirenska's company. One of Nirenska's first dancers, Nicole Pearson, had been a friend in London. Pearson had relocated to Washington, D.C.,

married and had a family. She and Nirenska were very close, no doubt providing a sense of security.

During the next decade, Nirenska rejected much of the German modern dance influence and strove to assimilate the style of her American counterparts. Naima Prevots, who danced with Nirenska in the 1960s, said, “I had spoken to [Nirenska] about Wigman. In her teaching and her work when I was with her, she was not interested in being like German expressionistic dance at all. She felt she was very American” (Prevots n.p.). Prevots does connect some of Nirenska’s animosity toward Wigman during her early Washington, D.C. years to Wigman’s betrayal of her Jewish dancers after the company’s United States tour.

While Prevots’ assessment of the Americanization of a number of Nirenska’s 1960s works is accurate, her description of “lyrical” overlooks the works Nirenska created during that period which were more angular, erratic, and bound. Dances like the *Eternal Insomnia of Earth* revealed a side of Nirenska that was in stark contrast to Humphrey. The solo was choreographed before Nirenska’s hiatus, and was one of the first solos she reconstructed for Jan Tievsky when she emerged from retirement. In *Eternal Insomnia of Earth*, the dancer appears to begin seated in a curled position on a black box that fades into the black background. She unfolds herself and stretches her body, appearing suspended in mid-air. Her movements are mostly sustained and slow, with thrashing, quick movements thrown in for contrast, reflecting the restless, tortured, uncomfortable quality of the music. She tosses, turns, contorts her body into sharp angles. She appears uncomfortable, restless in her suspension (*Pola Nirenska Concert* 1982).

In the middle of the solo, the dancer stands and rotates on the box, tipping, pitching, and struggling to balance on one leg. She sits and rolls, orbiting the podium-size space: “The concept was that the earth, like all the rest of us, has inner turmoils. But the earth is locked into its orbit. It can’t leave. It has all these gravitational pulls and forces of nature that push and pull and make it what it is. The earth is trying to be itself, but unable to just spin freely because of the forces of nature” (Tievsky n.p.). The concept is abstract, and the movements support the title only in terms of being suspended and in their sharp, restless, struggling quality. Yet they also suggest a connection to Pola’s experience of exile. The dancer is alienated, almost violently “beheaded.” The struggling is that of a body no longer attached to reason, but alive only in its animal movements. The reality of the world is suspended and off-kilter, suggesting that being in exile is to exist detached from a rational, grounded place in the universe—being suspended in darkness. There is also a trace here of suspension between expressionism and objectivism. The female earth appears uncomfortable because she lands squarely in neither realm. The ending is the dancer in a back arch with legs upstage, knees pointing to ceiling. Her legs skitter side to side. She sits, crouches and turns jerkily on her sitz bones on the box. The final image is the dancer rocking back and forth on her hips . . . trapped in perpetual discomfort.

*Eternal Insomnia of Earth* showed that Nirenska’s connections to *Ausdruckstanz* and a German modernist dance aesthetic were still present, and they would emerge again in the 1980s after her ten-year hiatus from teaching and choreographing.

## Absence and presence

In 1977, Pola emerged from retirement by beginning to contact prominent dancers in the Washington, D.C. community. Her first contact was Liz Lerman:

I was teaching at the Roosevelt Hotel, and a poet named Ed Cox, who was also working with old people and poetry said, “Well I have just met this old dancer” at some party. I’m going to call her.” I don’t remember if she called me. She must have because she came to a class at the hotel, and like I said, I can hardly imagine it, because I was teaching the most rudimentary class. She sat through the class. She was very charming afterwards and she said we should get together. You know, having come to know Pola, she could easily just have been totally dismissive, but she wasn’t. We spent a little time talking and I must have visited her a few times. I don’t recall exactly how it ended up that soon I was to be her body as she slowly came back (Lerman n.p.).

Nirenska choreographed several solos for Liz Lerman, of which *Exits* was the most successful. Choreographed just before her retirement, *Exits* explored three approaches to death and recalled the intensified emotional expression and solo work of her early career. Although the solo communicates strong theatrical images of a woman dealing with death and despair, Lerman does not remember Nirenska giving her specific directions for her performance, “I don’t have a sense of her telling me why I was doing what I was doing. I was to learn later about her family and the loss she went through, but I don’t remember in the studio her saying to me, you know, ‘You’re dying, or you’re this or that,’ but she must have given me images” (Lerman n.p.). Lerman wore a costume with a long skirt and heavy braided trim, and the set included a parlor chair. The solo was set to Dylan Thomas’ poem, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.”<sup>8</sup>

*Exits* consisted of three sections that were similar, with each section intensified: “each one was more aggressively dark. All the movement was so old. It was like it was stripped-down, heavy, weighted, big, not nuanced. Although you had to have some

nuance because it was the identical thing three times, each one more” (Lerman n.p.). The first section developed from the title line of the poem. The solo opens with Lerman sitting, collapsed forward in the chair. She rises slowly and begins a series of phrases that pull away from the chair, only to return. She steps toward the audience in a stilted second position; her extended arms clap the sides of her rigidly straight legs. She spirals away from the chair, then floats backward toward it in moments of ease. Kneeling, she appears to catch tears and gaze at her reflection in her hands. The contractions return, causing her to collapse forward as she reaches for the chair to sit one last time. She falls to the floor just before the blackout (*Pola Nirenska Concert 1982*).

The second section came from Dylan’s line, “Bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.” The second time, Lerman performs the solo with a dreamy quality. The movements are gentle, languid, surrendered. She ends by rolling back to the chair and draping her upper body across the seat, as if giving in to unconsciousness. The third version is choppy and resistant, and reflects the line, “Rage, rage against the dying of the Light.” Lerman walks directly downstage. The deep knee hinge she performed with excruciating slowness in the first section is now broken into segments, and her body lurches toward the floor with each drop. She flicks away tears while skittering across the floor on her knees, and appears to pray with hands clasped at her waist. Her spinning is fierce, ending with a swift grabbing of her wrist as if slicing it. She returns slowly to the chair and stands behind it. After one last arch of her torso toward the sky, her torso drops swiftly over the back of the chair, causing her arms to swing like a clock pendulum from its fall.

*Exits* has a photographic quality. The repetitions give the impression of time being suspended, as if Nirenska were taking the image of a photograph and choreographing the possible movements preceding or following it. The chair sits eerily upstage, its presence signifying a vivid absence that is yet to come. It echoes Susan Sontag's claim that "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives headed toward their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people" (70). *Exits* reflects the simultaneous haunting of Holocaust deaths, the imagery that would emerge in her final piece, the Holocaust Tetralogy, and the coming of Nirenska's own death. For the next years, it was as if the door of memories made visible by *Exits* had opened.

Soon the strain of artistic differences facilitated a break from Lerman's studio and company. Lerman suggested that Nirenska contact Jan Tievsky, a local dancer who directed the Glen Echo Dance Theater. Nirenska called Tievsky and requested a meeting with her to discuss her company and the possibility of setting some of her work on the dancers. Tievsky describes their first meeting: "She said she was looking for a protégé, and wanted to see if I would be her protégé . . . and the company would be the company that she would set work on" (Tievsky n.p.). Tievsky had formed Glen Echo Dance Theater as a repertory company: "We did my work, and Nancy Galiotis' work, Greg Reynolds who had been with Paul Taylor, Paul Taylor (we had a work commissioned from him), we had something from the Limón company. We had a handful of in-house young, emerging choreographers" (Tievsky n.p.). Tievsky's true passion was to educate and train dancers, so Nirenska's proposal took the responsibility of choreography off Tievsky's shoulders, freeing her to attend to other aspects of the organization. Having

Nirenska as artist-in-residence also brought immediate attention to the company, which had been struggling to establish itself in the Washington, D.C. community. Nirenska taught company class once a week before rehearsals at Glen Echo. She began setting her work by reviving some of her choreography from the mid-sixties (Simmons 58).

Eventually, similar issues arose between Pola and Glen Echo as the ones that had ended her connection to the Dance Exchange: “Pola started to get a little frustrated because she was really wanting her own company. She wanted to have more control over everything” (Tievsky n.p.). Tievsky offered to produce a full evening of Nirenska’s choreography. The concert at the Marvin Theater allowed Nirenska to choose dancers both within and without the Glen Echo Dance Theater and encouraged her to begin setting solos on accomplished solo performers in Washington, D.C. Soon after that concert, Nirenska and Tievsky’s connection suffered over financial issues, and Nirenska began choreographing for independent dancers from her home.

### **Postmemory and dissonance in Holocaust performance**

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997), Marianne Hirsch writes that in the Polish community of Jewish exiles, there is a practice of creating memorial books (*yizker bikher*) to preserve the memories of communities destroyed during the Holocaust (246-247). The books include photographs, writing, and records that document life before the Nazi rise to power and the genocide of the Holocaust. A form of public mourning, the books serve as spaces of connection between memory and postmemory. Reminiscent of the memorial books, Nirenska’s most powerful work was choreographed in several stages between 1982 and 1990 as a memorial to her family members who perished during the Holocaust. Titled *Whatever Begins Also Ends: In*



*Memory of Those I Loved Who Are No More*, it did not premiere as a complete tetralogy until Nirenska was 80 years old.

The first section, called *Life* (1983), introduces a mother and five daughters. The dance begins with the family crouched around each other upstage left in a familial embrace. The youngest daughter, her dress and ponytail eerily reminiscent of the young girl in *My Spanish Dress*, pulls away from her mother and sisters. She moves downstage, then slowly turns to gaze back at the image of her family. Dressed in a plain black dress and headscarf, the mother warns her daughters of danger. She paces, frets, stirs threateningly, and hovers protectively over her family as her daughters dance, leaping and joyful. The young women move freely through the space, while the mother stays somewhat separate, her movement more weighted and static. She functions as a somber contrast to the lightness of the girls, often opposing them across diagonals of the stage. At the end of the section, one daughter grows fearful and leaves the other girls to join her downstage left. The mother carries her daughter offstage with trudging steps, as the rest of her girls watch apprehensively (*Pola Nirenska's Holocaust Tetralogy* 1990).

The second section, *Dirge* (1982) begins with an ominous drumbeat and shadows of the women crossing heavily behind the scrim. Entering upstage right, they make shallow diagonals back and forth across the stage, slowly inching closer to the audience. After the first crossing, the women huddle, echoing the opening embrace in *Life*. The youngest daughter pulls away and gazes again at her mother and sisters. The slow motion amplifies the women's desperation and grief, while also making it seem distant and removed, placing it in the realm of postmemory. They support, reach, and grasp the air as they march, emphasizing the absence already felt in the spaces between each other. The

women seem pulled by an unknown force, their frustration and fear showing in the increasing intensity of their movements as they progress. They pause in deep pliés or other moments of individual grief, before being pulled back into their journey. When they reach downstage left, the family huddles together, then stands. One by one they march slowly, resolutely offstage toward doom, fulfilling the premonition of the mother carrying her daughter offstage at the end of the first section.

By 1986, Nirenska had added a third section, *Shout*. Choreographed to Lou Harrison's *Hatred of the Dirty Bomb*, *Shout* is a solo for Sharon Wyrick, inserted abruptly within the narrative of the six women. Supported by the siren-filled music, Wyrick runs throughout the space, at times appearing to grasp the air in desperation. Her movement is thrown, slammed, and indirect, but punctuated by frozen moments of horrified gestures and silent screams. She often reaches toward or runs toward the audience, her focus direct and her facial expression terrorized. She rends her hair and clothing. Rokem writes, "in Shoah performances, more clearly than in other performances, this device serves as the basis for an epistemological critique of the events and a measure for the dialectics between the real and the fantastic" (37-38). *Shout* creates a shift from the narrative of the family to individual experience, simultaneously providing a commentary and protest to the events. Nirenska uses a radical break in the representational continuity of the family, and as Shoshana Felman writes in *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, "breaks the framework" of the piece (48). The contrast of Wyrick's flaming red and tattered costume (recalling the figure in Nirenska's early solo, *Cry*) against the realistic costumes of the family also emphasizes the break.

The last section, *The Train*, choreographed to Carl Ruggles' *Suntreader*, evolved from the mixed images of train car and gas chamber. The women huddle in fear and grief-stricken tableaux, like snapshots. They turn upstage, flattening their bodies against an invisible door, which seems to have slammed behind them. In a third repetition, the youngest daughter pulls away. This time the familial gaze is reversed as the family watches its youngest die in agony. Much of the section encompasses the breaking away of the girls one-by-one, and their frantic death solos. The movement is jerky, indirect, slashing and quivering, as each daughter struggles until she collapses. They repeat spiraling phrases from *Life*, but this time their limbs are thrown, reckless, ending in staggering and then collapse. The mother watches, then piles their bodies center stage as if reconstructing the "snapshot" embraces from the *Life* and *Dirge* sections. Again we are reminded of the simultaneous haunting of life and death in photographs. She strikes her fist and reaches upward toward a God who seems no longer there, pointing at the pile of bodies at her feet. After a final "rail against God," she collapses across the bodies of her daughters, her attempts to keep the family together successful only in death. The mother's struggle and confrontation with God echo Wyrick's confrontation of the witnessing audience in *Shout*. Nirenska remarked that the solo was an expression of her fear during the bombing of London, but the image reverberates as a moment of witness and postmemory, as well as a protest from her earlier self against the progressing tragedy.

The four sections of the tetralogy depict the destruction of the family as their space is narrowed, their path forced, and their narrative twisted toward a deathly closure. The deterioration of their lives is also marked by the transformation of their clothing. Interestingly, Nirenska's music traverses the same journey. Bloch's neoclassical concerto

is interrupted by Harrison's modernist protest and the discordant memorial of Ruggles' *Suntreader*.

In *Performing History*, Freddie Rokem describes the specific issues at stake for representations of the Holocaust in theatre: "The attempt to represent Auschwitz by aesthetic means is, as Theodor Adorno claimed, one of the most difficult moral and aesthetic issues of our time" (xii). He describes Primo Levi's view of the place of survivors as witnesses: "we the survivors, are not the true witnesses . . . we are those who . . . did not touch bottom" (xii-xiii). Thus, theatrical representations of the Holocaust are attempts to recover these witnesses and remember the past. Dance and theatre historians in turn bear witness to the exile's representations of memory. Rokem writes, "In order to create some form of narrative order in the chaotic universe of the Shoah, we have to rely on the subjective experiences which in different ways contextualize the private suffering within the public sphere in the form of some kind of testimony. This places the private suffering in a larger context. That is also the process through which the victim becomes a witness in the Brechtian sense" (Rokem 16). By inserting *Shout* within the three sections of the family's fate, Nirenska provides a moment of critical distance for the audience. Ironically, through her selection of music and the contrast of narrative and expressive movement, Nirenska creates a parallel between the impotency of the witness and the impotency of modernist artistic rebellion to halt the progress of Nazi genocide.

Nirenska's choreography coincided with several national historical events memorializing the Holocaust. Rokem writes the overlapping of past and present history is common in Holocaust theatre, "By performing history a double or even triple time register is frequently created: the time of the events and the time the play was written and

in some cases also (if this does not coincide with the time of writing of the play) the later time when it was performed” (Rokem 19). For Nirenska’s tetralogy, the dialectics between past and present were particularly striking. Two years before she began the work, Nirenska’s husband, Jan Karski, spoke before a congressional hearing in support of the establishment of a United States Holocaust Memorial. Shortly after, the hearing, Karski, who had served as a courier for the Polish underground, participated in the documentary *Shoah*. His testimonials broke a promise of silence about the Holocaust that Nirenska and Karski had made when they married, and triggered Nirenska’s creation of what later became known as the Holocaust tetralogy. Unable to bear the resurfacing memories, Nirenska became ill before the tetralogy was performed in full. Two years after the debut of the entire work, she committed suicide.

Walter Benjamin has written about historical representation that, “It’s not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation” (Benjamin, 1999). Nirenska’s work achieved this sense of constellation through its layering of representation of the past with the shock and horror of the witness’ memory, postmemory, and response. The impact of her work extended beyond her own experience and into the social realm of communal remembrance. Nirenska’s work not only embodied the memory of the Holocaust, but the trajectory of her career also embodied the path and memory of exile. It was only at the end of her life that she was able to reach back and integrate the memories and identity of her time in London during the war, which sparked the reemergence of her more *Ausdruckstanz*-influenced works.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this term from Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Nirenska's debut at the Boston Conservatory was sponsored by Jan Veen (1903-1967). A former Wigman dancer, Veen founded the Boston Conservatory Dance Program. His dance series brought many well-known figures in modern dance to Boston, including Charles Weidman, Ruth St. Denis, and Ted Shawn.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Karski was a courier for the Polish resistance during World War II. In 1942-1943, Karski reported to the Western allies and the Polish government in exile about the situation in Poland. He also reported the realities he had witnessed in the Warsaw ghetto and death camps. Karski emigrated to the United States, earned his Ph.D. from Georgetown University in 1952, and became an American citizen in 1954. He taught at Georgetown University for 40 years in East European and international affairs.

<sup>4</sup> The same trend in literature championed the third person voice and dismissed memoirs or novels written in first person, omitting many women authors from the canon and objectifying the discourse of literature.

<sup>5</sup> Rosalia Chladek (1905-1995) was considered a pioneer of *Ausdruckstanz* in Austria. She developed the Rosalia Chladek-System of movement and taught in Viennese institutions, including the Basle Conservatoire, the Hellerau-Laxenburg School, the Vienna Conservatoire, and the Vienna Hochschule for Music and Dramatic Art.

<sup>6</sup> Marie Rambert (1888-1982) was a Polish-Jewish dancer and teacher, who moved to London in 1918. She is considered a major influence on British ballet. She founded Ballet Rambert, the first British ballet company, in 1926.

<sup>7</sup> Ethel Butler danced for the Martha Graham Dance Company from 1933 to 1943. Butler moved to Washington, D.C. in 1943, where she taught and formed her own dance company.

<sup>8</sup> Choreographic notes. Pola Nirenska Collection. Box 4, Folder 4.

## CONCLUSION

*It was a sunny day and I had come from the kitchen where I had found a basket with ripe plums. I loved to eat them, but was not supposed to. Nevertheless, I had taken two and was gleefully holding one in each hand. As I was entering the next room, I saw my mother coming toward me. Behind her was an open window with light curtains softly moving. The sun made her hair look golden and she smiled. The keys she wore on a ribbon around her waist were tinkling and life was wonderful. . . . An absolute nothingness, but so very much: love, protection, mother, nest, the smell of ripe plums, mischief and forgiveness. Everything. (Goslar, *What's So Funny* 8)*

Goslar's memory of her mother encompasses the major themes that reverberated throughout the lives and works of Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska. All three women found their joy and survival in dance, like the two ripe plums gleefully savored in Goslar's memory. Each woman's life was laced with a combination of creativity and memory, and each found ways of creating new narratives through their dances, writing, and photographs. Their lives were characterized by dissonance, interruption, and loss, yet each approached the discontinuities in unique ways, reminiscent of Nirenska's three approaches to death in her solo, *Exits*. Valeska Gert danced, wrote, and created cabaret spaces to counter the feeling of being buried alive. Goslar resisted death with a slyly upraised finger and the optimistic wisdom of the clown. Nirenska followed the siren call of memory and postmemory, choreographing her own exit from the closed narrative of the Holocaust.

As Mark Franko, Penny Farfan, and Susan Manning have argued, and as the lives of Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska demonstrate, modernist dance practice, because it originated as a particularly feminist art form, needs to be considered in a broad context of feminist artistic practice, especially in its relationship to modernism. Subjectivity and its link to expression become defining concepts for how varying women artists position themselves in relation to the patriarchal narratives of modernism. Elin Diamond writes “[t]o study performance is not to focus on completed forms, but to become aware of performance as itself a contested space” in which “signifying (meaning-ful) acts may enable new subject positions and new perspectives to emerge, even as the performative present contests the conventions and assumptions of oppressive cultural habits” (Diamond 4-6). The study of dance history must incorporate an understanding across disciplinary boundaries, especially for female artists. My study responds to the strong connections between subjectivity, expression and modernist women artists. Gert, Goslar, and Nirenska used interdisciplinary approaches to fashion not only subjectivist, but autobiographically-influenced methods for their dances, which actively contested the conventional representations of women in German and American dance narratives, and which cannot be fully explained through theories of embodiment and abstraction.

Choosing to focus my dissertation on three women who were Jewish or political exiles during World War II highlights the range of possibilities that could be mapped out within modernist dance if a wider spectrum of female dancers and choreographers are included in our consideration of modernism. Sidonie Smith concurs: “Different autobiographers come at the private/public duality from different experiences of oppression, from different locales in discourse. As a result the mapping of private/public



politics may proceed to lay out different borderlines” (Smith, *Subjectivity* 160). For women exiled from Germany in the 1930s, what was private was public, and what was public had severe consequences for the private, making the terrain of self-representation for exiled women significantly different from choreographers like Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Mary Wigman.

In Chapter One, I argued that exile for Valeska Gert was simultaneously a time of erasure and of rebirth. Through her representations of working women and her appropriation of the male-dominated business of cabaret ownership, Gert disrupted the representational economy of women’s bodies and the history of women’s representation in theatre and dance. In spite of the hardship of exile, her cabarets created sites of cultural exchange that defied boundaries of public and private, national aesthetics, and conventional sexuality.

In Chapter Two, I described how Goslar disrupted the romantic and tragic roots of German and American modern dance and created feminist alternatives to conventional representations of women onstage. Through the imagined possibilities of clowns and fairy tales, Goslar exposed oppressive structures in theatre and dance. Her child prodigy, circus clown, and fairy godmother overturn the “nos” of modernism through optimism and immense courage. Her work lives on through the reconstructions and projects of the Lotte Goslar Foundation, which is managed by former dancer Lance Westergard. Although Goslar epitomized the optimistic outlook of the clown, her legacy was the underlying wisdom she passed on to her dancers: “Be sober about the profession. Think of yourself as a craftsman . . . . These are your guests in your home. If I want good steak, I go to a butcher . . . he will say, yes . . . I have this. Give what you can honestly . . . don't

make excuses” (Goslar, *Interview by David Sears*). Goslar’s simplicity, honesty, and generosity were the foundational tenets of her career, and they paved a path for over seventy years of creative output, in spite of the realities of exile.

Chapter Three argued that Nirenska combined memory and postmemory in her dances to create cultural and personal narratives after the irretrievable losses of homeland and family. Her solos reflected the dislocation and disrupted continuities of exile that haunted her experience of the Holocaust. Nirenska’s legacy lives on in several forms. After Nirenska’s death, Jan Karski established the Pola Nirenska Dance Award and Rima Faber staged a performance of the Holocaust Tetralogy at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. Jack Luminski’s Silesian Dance Theatre performs *Dirge* as part of their active repertoire. George Jackson and Rima Faber are planning to present reconstructions of Nirenska’s works in Washington, D.C. and Poland for Nirenska’s centennial in 2010. As part of the celebration, they also plan to edit selected works from her repertoire for DVD (Jackson n.p.).

Of exiled dancers, few beyond Laban and Jooss have had significant works published about them, and what is available, could benefit from a more comprehensive consideration of them as an influence on the development of dance history. A comprehensive study would be valuable for multiple fields within the arts and humanities, including dance, theatre, exile studies, women’s studies. My study suggests that some of the later developments in movement studies, like mime and performance art, gained strength and influence from the works of Weimar-era women artists who worked outside of the strict disciplinary boundaries of dance. More understanding of how

*Ausdruckstanz* supported women in using multiple forms to create new subjectivities will broaden our understanding of the range of women's artistic practices.

More research is needed to document the intertwined histories of German and American dance. Rather than setting German and American dance aesthetics against one another, we should see them as similar moments in relation to the institutionalization and codification of modern dance. Susan Manning's work "Ausdruckstanz Across the Atlantic" has begun this process, but more is yet to be done. One of the most valuable contributions for English language scholarship would be the translation of much of the German dance research that has been completed since the 1970s, as well as writings by dance artists like Valeska Gert. There are innumerable German sources that are still inaccessible to non-German-speaking dance scholars.

For dance history, a stronger emphasis, in general, needs to be placed on scholarly specialization within our field. While I believe in interdisciplinarity and the suitability of dance for interdisciplinary studies, I also see a strong tendency within higher education for dance history to be taught by predominately artistic-track professors, for whom most of their research and teaching practice is studio-based. These decisions within higher education, which are fueled by economic constraints, contribute to the lack of depth possible within students' dance history training. As long as the majority of dance history courses are taught by professors whose main training and concerns are aesthetic trends and practice-related theory (of performing, creating, and teaching), our understanding of dance history and how it informs dance practice will continue to be narrow.

Finally, my study demonstrates how a narrow understanding of modernist dance history in survey courses that focus solely on artistic movements and their craft-based or

aesthetic characteristics is problematic. To consider work solely within the bounds of an abstract, discipline-based modernism, ignores the representational struggles faced by women artists in order to become part of the artistic economy in any way other than as solely a body for consumption. We also begin to create categorizations for understanding, like modernist dance and postmodernist dance, which simply do not hold true for dance cross-culturally or interdisciplinarily. For instance, there is little difference between the work of Lotte Goslar and Pina Bausch, which shows a fluidity between modernism and postmodernism—one that suggests the understanding of modernism of the early twentieth-century was not serviceable for women artists due to issues of representation and gender. More needs to be written about how modern dance served the feminist movement, and how the historical narrative of modern dance has been one that masculinized the early feminist energy surrounding its pioneers. More work needs to be done in considering the historiography of solo dance and how its characterization mirrors the treatment of women's autobiographical writings.

I return to Lotte Goslar's memory of plums, joy, and forgiveness. Valeska Gert and Pola Nirenska also referred to dance performance as sustenance for their lives. Valeska Gert viewed herself as a predator, with dance as her means of gaining strength and vitality. Pola Nirenska languished in the luxury of dance, which provided her both escape and redemption. Liz Lerman remembered, "She used to say to me, 'Performing is like going to a banquet.' I occasionally still call her up in my mind, and go 'it's like a banquet, it's a feast, it's a feast'" (Lerman n.p.). Laura Schandelmeier agreed, "That was just one of Pola's absolute beliefs . . . you go out there and you eat it up. You enjoy it . . . enjoy what that [performance] is" (Schandelmeier n.p.). The ability to immerse oneself in

the presence of a dance moment and savor it tenaciously, in spite of unimaginable loss, panic, and despair, is perhaps the most valuable gift of the legacies Valeska Gert, Lotte Goslar, and Pola Nirenska leave behind..

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