

Lucy Weir

Primitive Rituals, Contemporary Aftershocks: Evocations of the Orientalist 'Other' in four productions of "Le Sacre du printemps"

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Primitive Rituals, Contemporary Aftershocks: Evocations of the Orientalist ‘Other’ in four productions of *Le Sacre du printemps*

Lucy Weir
University of Glasgow
Lucy.Weir@glasgow.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper situates the original choreography of *Sacre* as a basis for an ongoing exploration of non-Western themes in modern dance, a persistent fascination with the Orientalist ‘Other,’ before exploring the versions choreographed by Wigman, Bausch and Graham in chronological order of their first performances. In analysing different interpretations of the same score, two themes become apparent: first, that this piece heralded the birth of Modernism in classical dance performance, and second, that the driving anti-classical, anti-traditional rhythms that characterise the piece communicate an enduring interest in primitive aesthetics. Accordingly, this discussion takes Nijinsky’s *Sacre* as a starting point in re-evaluating the influence of primitivism and Otherness on contemporary dance, and represents an early indication of the significance of the Saidian, non-Western ‘Other’ in shaping the evolution of avant-garde dance.

Keywords: *Le Sacre du Printemps*; Nijinsky; Stravinsky; primitivism; dance.

Introduction

On 29th May 1913, the collaborative efforts of composer Igor Stravinsky, choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky and artist Nikolai Roerich came to a head with the Paris premiere of their ballet, *Le Sacre du printemps*. This event has become an undisputedly significant moment in the history of Modernism; since Nijinsky’s ground-breaking choreography was premiered to an unsuspecting Parisian audience in 1913, *Sacre* has been staged by a wide variety of classical and contemporary choreographers across the world, including Maurice Béjart (1959), Kenneth Macmillan (1962), and Glen Tetley (1974), and continues to appeal to modern dance-makers, with new versions including Sascha Waltz’s

2013 *Sacre* celebrating the centenary of the work's premiere.¹²⁰ Outside of the Western dance framework, Butoh choreographer Min Tanaka devised several versions of the theme, including an abstracted meditation on the subject matter, set to a new score by Minoru Noguchi (1990), which was later reinterpreted as a collaboration with the Russian Seasons Dance Ensemble in 1998.¹²¹ While the original choreography was essentially 'lost,' falling into obscurity after only seven performances, a re-imagining of Nijinsky's score is now widely available as a result of Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer's 1987 reconstruction, a laborious effort that, notwithstanding its controversial reception from some quarters of the dance community, has now become part of the Mariinsky Ballet's repertoire.¹²²

Three of the most influential choreographers of the twentieth-century – Mary Wigman, Martha Graham and Pina Bausch – each devised their own versions of Stravinsky's canonical score, and this article seeks to explore stylistic and thematic parallels in responses to this work after Nijinsky. Wigman and Graham both choreographed *Sacre* late in their respective careers; Wigman's was to be one of her last large-scale works (staged in 1957), while Graham's adaptation was first shown in 1984, when she was almost ninety years old. Bausch's renowned version of 1975 is now viewed as emblematic of her aesthetic as a choreographer in postwar Germany, shattering theatrical boundaries and pushing her dancers to the limits of their physical capabilities. Nijinsky, Wigman, Graham and Bausch all shared a common desire to find new ways to bring to life an ancient, primitive ritual through the medium of dance on stage. The ritualistic elements of primitivism inherent in Stravinsky's score have a timeless quality, an enduring appeal for dance makers seeking to challenge existing boundaries of form and structure.

This paper situates the original choreography of *Sacre* as a basis for an ongoing exploration of non-Western themes in modern dance, a persistent fascination with the Orientalist 'Other,' before exploring the versions choreographed by Wigman, Bausch and Graham in chronological order of their first performances. In analysing different interpretations of the same score, two themes become apparent: first, that this piece heralded the birth of Modernism in

¹²⁰ A further list of choreographers is also given in S. Jordan. 2014. The Demons in a Database: Interrogating "Stravinsky the Global Dancer." *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol. 22, no. 1 (Summer, 2004): 57-83.

¹²¹ For an in-depth analysis of Tanaka's 1990 *Rite of Spring*, see my forthcoming article: Mapping Nijinsky's Cross-Cultural Legacy: Min Tanaka's *Rite of Spring* (1990), in C. & M. O'Mahony & O'Mahony, eds. *Revisiting the Rite*. High Wycombe: Rivendale Press, publication scheduled for January 2015.

¹²² A detailed description of the reconstruction can be found in M. Hodson. 1996. *Nijinsky's Crime Against Grace: Reconstruction Score of the Original Choreography for Le Sacre du Printemps*. Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1996.

classical dance performance, and second, that the driving anti-classical, anti-traditional rhythms that characterise the piece communicate an enduring interest in primitive aesthetics. Accordingly, this discussion takes Nijinsky's *Sacre* as a starting point in re-evaluating the influence of primitivism and Otherness on contemporary dance, and represents an early indication of the significance of the Saidian, non-Western 'Other' in shaping the evolution of avant-garde dance.

Predominantly a work of literary scope, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) has become the cornerstone of much academic research into the non-Western world. His work underscores the ways in which Western imperial powers cemented their place on the world stage through subjugation of the East; in this respect, the Middle Eastern states represent his conception of 'East,' and Britain, France and the United States as 'West.' Said's interpretation of what the Orient has come to represent in the Western imagination also indicates its inherent potential of menace, a factor that comes to encompass a broad sweep of the non-Western world, including the former Soviet Union. Said asks:

*How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self-congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression (when one discusses the 'other')?*¹²³

In this paper, I will argue however that Nijinsky's use of the 'primitive' runs counter to Said's argument, demonstrating that his choreography, and by extension, the canon of works created in the wake of *Sacre*, integrate the concepts of the primitive and the rational through the aesthetic experience, an action that is in itself wholly transgressive. Nijinsky's work is posited as 'anti-classical' ballet, and *Sacre* in particular is presented as a precursor to the development of contemporary dance technique in both Europe and America. His groundbreaking choreography set in motion an ongoing trend in modern dance for exploring ritualised primitivism in performance. Accordingly, Nijinsky's work not only represents a forerunner to Wigman, Graham and Bausch's versions, but also to the subsequent stages of dance history these women represent. Underlying and driving this conception is the interest in the elemental, primordial 'Other.' Thus, Nijinsky's *Sacre* becomes a precursor not just to Wigman, Graham and Bausch's adoption of the same theme, but also to what they represent in the history of modern dance more generally.

¹²³ E. Said. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books: 325.

Nijinsky's *Sacre du printemps* (1913)

As Eksteins has noted, there are varying and occasionally contradictory accounts of the first performance of *Sacre*, some of which confuse happenings from subsequent showings; yet it must be acknowledged that even these assorted variations of events present similar descriptions of the audience's collective shock and unrest.¹²⁴ Numerous witnesses maintained, for instance, that the audience began reacting against Stravinsky's music even before the curtain was raised.¹²⁵ Split into two acts ("The Kiss of the Earth," which takes place in the day time, and "The Great Sacrifice," at nightfall¹²⁶), the ballet tells a simple narrative: that of a pagan sacrificial rite, in which a virgin is martyred to Yarilo – a god of fertility – to guarantee a good harvest, thus ensuring a secure future for her tribe. Roerich's long-held interest in the rituals of Russian pre-Christian culture underscored his designs for the ballet,¹²⁷ the plot of which he put together with Stravinsky at Talashkino, a progressive art and design studio at the estate of Princess Maria Tenisheva.¹²⁸ The melodic lines of the score were drawn from rearrangements of traditional Russian folk music.¹²⁹ Nijinsky's contribution to the dramatic Modernism of the piece came in the form of a new vision of ballet choreography, inverting the beauty and illusionism of classical dance in favour of turned-in feet, bent legs, and caricature-like grotesquery. His movement vocabulary was erratic and sharp, mirroring its musical accompaniment.

Stravinsky's score was written for a larger orchestra, requiring an expanded percussion section, and featured long passages played at loud volume as well as heavy use of syncopation. The off-beat rhythms and atonal elements of the music generated difficulties in rehearsal with the dancers – Jennifer Homans recounts an anecdote featuring a furious Stravinsky barking orders at the rehearsal pianist, who simply could not keep up with the music's demanding

¹²⁴ M. Eksteins. 1989. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. London: Black Swan: 32 – it should be noted that while the premiere was indeed controversial, the ballet received a number of curtain calls and was performed seven times subsequently, both in Paris and London.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 34.

¹²⁶ Berg, S.C. 1985. *Le Sacre du Printemps: A Comparative Study of Seven Versions of the Ballet* [PhD thesis]. New York University: 2.

¹²⁷ Jane Pritchard states that Roerich was "an active archaeologist," with a particular interest in shamanism and Slavic fertility rituals. Pritchard. 2010. *Creating Productions*. In J. Pritchard, ed. *Diaghilev and the Golden Era of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929* [exh. cat. Victoria & Albert Museum]. London: V & A Publications: 77.

¹²⁸ J. Homans. 2010. *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*. London: Granta: 309.

¹²⁹ Gardner, H. 1993. *Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen Through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi*. New York: BasicBooks: 206.

tempi and constantly changing time signatures.¹³⁰ It is claimed that, during the first performance, the audience reaction drowned out the orchestra, adding further pressure to dancers already struggling with an awkward score and unfamiliar movement style, and leading to Nijinsky being forced to stand on a chair in the wings, calling out instructions and musical counts to the dancers.¹³¹ Eksteins is, however, rightly tentative in his discussion of this scenario, pointing out that it could equally have been a result of the difficulty of keeping time to Stravinsky's odd rhythms, taking into account the nature of this new and disjointed choreography.¹³² Yet, as Berg comments:

*Even the conductor of Le Sacre du printemps was bemused by the complex nature of the score's rhythmic structure. Realizing the music would present hitherto unprecedented problems for both the choreographer and the dancers (to say nothing of the musicians), Diaghilev and Nijinsky decided to employ someone from Emile-Jacques Dalcroze's school in Hellerau, near Dresden, to help both the dancers and the choreographer cope with the difficulties of Stravinsky's score.*¹³³

This "someone" was in fact Marie Rambert, the Polish-born dancer who was to establish Britain's first ballet company. Rambert came to dance through exposure to Isadora Duncan, and both studied and taught at Dalcroze's school of Eurhythmics.¹³⁴ In an attempt to make the musical score more manageable for this classically trained collective, Rambert was employed to teach the Ballets Russes dancers the Eurhythmics method.¹³⁵ Indeed, Diaghilev, along with Nijinsky and Roerich, even went as far as to visit Dalcroze's Eurhythmics school at Hellerau in 1912¹³⁶ – a point when the young Mary Wigman was training to become a certified Eurhythmics instructor at the same institution.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Homans 2010: 310.

¹³¹ Rambert, M. 1972. *Quicksilver: The Autobiography of Marie Rambert*. London: Macmillan: 64. Sokolova also recalls that in addition to Nijinsky instructing from the wings, "we could see Diaghilev too, walking up and down, holding his head. We must have been a lovely picture for the audience, racing around, jumping, turning, and wondering when the whole thing was going to collapse." L. Sokolova [ed. Buckle]. 1969. *Dancing for Diaghilev: The Memoirs of Lydia Sokolova*. London: Murray: 44.

¹³² Eksteins 1989: 35.

¹³³ Berg 1985: 77.

¹³⁴ Homans notes that, while Rambert and Nijinsky spoke Polish to one another, and despite her best efforts to make the score more comprehensible, rehearsals for *Sacre* were largely disastrous. Homans 2010: 310-311.

¹³⁵ B. Nijinska, I. Nijinska & J. Rawlinson, eds. 1981. *Bronislava Nijinska: Early Memoirs*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 452, 454-455.

¹³⁶ T. Levitz. 2004. The Chosen One's Choice. A. Dell'Antonio, ed. *Beyond Structural Listening: Postmodern Modes of Hearing*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 84.

¹³⁷ Müller, H. 1986. *Mary Wigman: Leben und Werk der großen Tänzerin*. Weinheim: Quadriga Verlag: 23-25.

Nijinsky's outright and aggressive negation of the elements of classical ballet heralded the beginnings of Modernism in European dance; he stripped away the ethereal artifice of ballet and turned the dancers' legs inwards, their stomping feet a notable precursor to Wigman's percussive early solo dances, even anticipating Graham's use of parallel feet, and piercing, violent jumps. Nijinsky's *Sacre* represents not only the first choreographed version of Stravinsky's score set, but also a key moment in Modernist dance history. Its anti-ballet elements were not popular among company members who were the first to dance Nijinsky's work; Rambert recalled in her memoirs that the dancers were deeply uncomfortable with the "very stylised movements" they had first experienced in his *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912); nonetheless, the choreographer required classically trained dancers to embody his new dance vocabulary.¹³⁸ When observing the reconstruction of his original choreography, it is clear that in devising this new technique, Nijinsky broke absolutely with traditional ballet form. Throughout, the dancers' legs are never turned out, but always held in parallel or twisted awkwardly inward – a decidedly more difficult position to maintain when landing jumps or moving across the stage.

In terms of costume, Roerich's interest in Central Asian and Caucasian design was clear to see. The dancers of Nijinsky's *Sacre* were costumed in brightly coloured, patterned fabric, a heavy material that hung loosely over the body, quite distinct from traditional ballet dress. The women sported long, thick braids of hair, and all dancers wore tall hats. On closer inspection, this vision of an ancient Russian tribe bore striking resemblance to elements of folk dance and traditional dress of Central Asia: the headwear was strikingly reminiscent of traditional Kyrgyz hats (known as *kalpak*); the fabric of the clothing similar in colour and pattern to Uzbek dress; and braided hair was also a feature of classical Uzbek dance (Ferghana dance in particular tends to feature a special cap or 'crown' and long braids of hair). This curiosity with 'Russia's Orient' had previously been explored in other ballets; for instance, it has been recorded that Roerich bought Uzbek fabric in St. Petersburg markets for the Ballets Russes production of *Prince Igor* (1909),¹³⁹ but Roerich was not alone in his interest in Caucasian design. Leon Bakst, a designer and long-time collaborator with the Ballets Russes used traditional Georgian design in some of his costumes, Central Asian and Caucasian dress and ornamentation thus augmenting the 'Oriental' appearance of the Modernist choreographies.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Rambert 1972: 55.

¹³⁹ S. Woodcock. 2010. Wardrobe. In Pritchard 2010: 143.

¹⁴⁰ C. Jeschke, U. Berger & B. Zeidler, eds. 1997. *Spiegelungen: die Ballets Russes und die Künste*. Berlin: Vorwerk 8: 122.

Ramsay Burt makes the valid point that, “what was important for Nijinsky and Stravinsky was not the authenticity of the source material but the meanings it evoked in a dislocated modern context, and the expressive impact they could achieve through its use.”¹⁴¹ He also underlines the fact that Stravinsky himself was an immigrant, having left Russia after 1909, and that Nijinsky had been living in exile in Western Europe also; thus the concept of *Sacre* representing the ‘Russian soul’ both in terms of its score and its movement is perhaps slightly naively nostalgic. In the Saidian sense, where Russia is arguably part of the European concept of the Orient, ‘Orientalised’ Russia nonetheless has its own Orient. After all, “the physical expression of the Orient manifests itself in Bakst’s costumes, Fokine’s choreography and the particular presence of leading dancers like Nijinsky and Ida Rubenstein.”¹⁴²

The Orientalised ‘Other’ can be seen an exotic, inscrutable, potentially dangerous, yet sensual and fundamentally unrecognisable concept to the Western mentality. Said posits the idea that the Oriental world is inevitably read as inferior to the West, in need of education and general ‘improvement’ by the superior worldview.¹⁴³ Maintaining a distinction between the Western and Eastern worlds has been an important facet in upholding this illusion of superiority; that is, underlining the otherness of the Other indicates a necessity for translation, for ‘bettering’ the unrecognised. For Said, this distinction is what generates the “inhuman” aspect of Orientalism:

*For that is the main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism. Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?*¹⁴⁴

He asserts that by “polarising” West and East even further through the terminology of “us and them,” we reduce the humanity of both sides of the Orientalist coin. One particular key term of distinction between the Western and Orientalised worlds is “rationalism” – this extends into the realm of ‘primitivism,’ an assumption that Western, educated, or ‘First World’ philosophy is dominated by rational thought, whereas the Oriental world is inherently irrational, by implication backwards, primitive in nature as well as in attitude. Yet, Nijinsky’s ‘primitive’ on-stage domain generated a completely new way of composing dance, a transgressive and completely modern interpretation of a primeval world.

¹⁴¹ R. Burt. 1995. *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. London: Routledge: 89.

¹⁴² Jeschke, Berger & Zeidler 1997: 124.

¹⁴³ Said 1978: 40-41.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 45.

With his *Sacre*, Nijinsky took primitivism in dance performance to a new extreme by forcing a company of classically trained dancers to revert completely from ballet to a primordial form of movement. His dancers were enacting a ritual not through ballet mime, but using a new movement vocabulary based on ancient principles rather than academic Western dance forms, albeit within a Western setting.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, by choosing ritual movement as his subject matter, Nijinsky was capable of exploring a new movement style that would not have been possible through the lens of narrative ballet. This work serves as a precursor to Modernism on the ballet stage, but also as an ongoing source of inspiration for choreographers exploring non-Western rituals.

Mary Wigman's *Sacre du printemps* (1957)

The effects of Nijinsky's brutal revision of classical technique were far-reaching and, despite the onset of the First World War, discussion of the controversy continued long after the curtain had fallen on *Sacre's* premiere. Not all responses were positive, however; in an editorial for the short-lived journal *Schrifttanz*, Ernst Kállai wrote about the over-dependence on non-classical movement or technique in the early days of modern dance, stating: "There is far too much symbolism overloaded with ideas and not enough direct, lyrical or dramatic musicality in dance. Maybe there is a fear of falling back into the pure enjoyment of music as is the case in classical ballet."¹⁴⁶ There was an ideological split between proponents of classical ballet and those of the emerging modern dance, something that the ongoing experimentation of the Ballets Russes sought to bridge; yet, in discussing the training regime of the Ballets Russes – deeply rooted in formal, classical dance – Joseph Lewitan claims:

*When forward looking directors, painters, composers, conductors, ballet masters and dancers work together, and they all master their traditional skills, the result is bound to be modern. And, if necessary, movement sequences in the manner of Mary Wigman (*Sacre du Printemps*) emerge easily without the need for specialised training¹⁴⁷*

Mary Wigman (born Carolyne Sofie Marie Wiegmann in 1886), the eldest child of a solidly middle-class Hanover family, came to dance in her early twenties – a relatively advanced age at which to begin intensive training. In her late teens, Wigman was profoundly influenced by a performance of the Wiesen-

¹⁴⁵ Berg 1985: 177.

¹⁴⁶ V. Preston-Dunlop & S. Lahusen, eds. 1990. *Schrifttanz: A View of German Dance in the Weimar Republic*. London: Dance Books: 16-17. – original text taken from Kállai, 1931. *Zwischen Kulttanz und Varieté. Schrifttanz*, vol. 4, no. 1 (June, 1931): 2.

¹⁴⁷ Preston-Dunlop & Lahusen 1990: 92-94 – original text taken from Lewitan. 1929. *Das Diaghileff-Ballett*, *Schrifttanz*, vol. 2, no. 3 (August, 1929):2 59.

thal sisters in Berlin.¹⁰ In 1908, she observed a demonstration of Emile-Jaques Dalcroze's Eurhythmics method, and two years later enrolled at his school at Hellerau in order to study rhythmic gymnastics. Here, Wigman was introduced to the music of Stravinsky and Arnold Schönberg, as well as the work of Expressionist artists such as Oskar Kokoschka.¹¹ However, Dalcroze's technique clearly did not represent the freedom of movement Wigman had hoped for, and, in the summer of 1913, she took her friend Emil Nolde's advice and sought out Rudolf Laban at Monte Verità. In her own writings, she refers to this event as, "the first pilgrimage," an indication of the quasi-religious atmosphere Laban was already cultivating at his remote school.¹³ From this point onward, Wigman was to develop a dance technique of her own which was, like Laban's, a distinctly anti-ballet tradition; in addition to performing bare-foot and placing a particular emphasis on improvised movement, she experimented with dances performed to spoken word accompaniment, percussion, or even in silence.

Throughout the Fascist period, no choreographer in Germany approached the theme of Stravinsky's libretto; indeed, by the advent of the Second World War, much music of the various enemies of the state was banned outright, more specifically, that which was deemed Modernist or primitivist.¹⁴⁸ Theodor Adorno wrote: "In the Third Reich of countless human sacrifice, *The Rite of Spring* would not have been performable, and whoever dared directly to acknowledge the barbarism of the ideology's modus operandi was dropped and disgraced."¹⁴⁹ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Wigman's treatment of the work came well after the close of the War. Her *Sacre du printemps* (sometimes styled in German as *Frühlingsweihe*) opened on 24th September, 1957, at the Städtische Oper in West Berlin, featuring a combination of her own, *Ausdruckstanz*-trained dancers – Dore Hoyer danced the principal role of the Chosen One – and classical dancers of the Oper.¹⁵⁰ The festival also marked the first meeting between Wigman and Martha Graham, the latter performing her solo work *Judith* (1951) at the same festival.¹⁵¹ While Wigman would not

¹⁰ D. Howe. 1985. *Manifestations of the German Expressionist Aesthetic as Presented in Drama and Art in the Dance and Writings of Mary Wigman* [PhD thesis]. University of Wisconsin-Madison: 44.

¹¹ Müller 1986: 22-27.

¹³ M. Wigman. *Aus Hellerau* AdK. Berlin, Mary Wigman-Archiv, no. 529.

¹⁴⁸ Jordan 2004: 64.

¹⁴⁹ Adorno, T. [ed. & trans. Hullot-Kentor]. 2006. *Philosophy of New Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 112.

¹⁵⁰ S. Manning. 1991. German Rites: A History of Le Sacre du Printemps on the German Stage. *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 14, no. 2/3 (1991): 141.

¹⁵¹ I. Partsch-Bergsohn. 1994. *Modern Dance in Germany and the United States: Cross Currents and Influences*. Chur: Harwood Academic Press: 129.

have seen Nijinsky's original work, as a young student at the Dalcroze school, she would almost certainly have read critical reviews of and responses to the controversial 1913 work, and, by the mid-1950s, its reputation as a seminal moment in the development of modern dance was assured; Béjart's infamous interpretation of the score came only two years after Wigman's premiere in Berlin.

As Partsch-Bergsohn has noted, Wigman's early work was "deeply rooted in ritual,"¹⁵² but this tendency remained with the choreographer and is evident in her later pieces. Partsch-Bergsohn further points out that Wigman's approach to the *Rite of Spring* was that of "a mature artist," coming to the end of her career and taking on a large and immensely challenging project, producing "a very abstract" choreography for Stravinsky's score.¹⁵³ It is unfortunate that Wigman's *Sacre* was never recorded on film; however, the piece exists in a series of choreographic notes and photographs documenting the rehearsal process and final production. Based on close examination of the surviving documentation, this section will explore the themes of Wigman's *Sacre* as far as can be determined without the benefit of recorded moving footage.¹⁵⁴

One striking feature of Wigman's *Sacre* was its strong resemblance to Martha Graham's eponymous dance technique. Deep backbends and 'flocking' ensemble images represented the ecstatic element of Wigman's ritual. Hers was a sharp, angular piece, with frequent use of flexed hands and feet. As is perhaps almost a tradition of postwar choreographies of *Sacre*, Wigman's version alluded to no particular culture or point in time.¹⁵⁵ Throughout her notes, particularly in the first collection of choreographic manuscripts, Wigman referred frequently to turning motions (*drehen*), and circular movements and formations (*Kreis*). Diagrams generally indicated clockwise movement, or movement into the centre of the circular formation. The choreography itself also revolved around circular patterns of movement, reflecting the oval platform of the stage.¹⁵⁶ Wigman's choreographic manuscripts for this piece number a total of eight volumes of sketches and notes; the drawings in particular are primarily composed of twirling dots and circles, but also depict a circular stage, circular notation of the individuals on the stage, and colourful

¹⁵² *Ibid.* 11.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* 11.

¹⁵⁴ Descriptions and analyses are derived from the Mary Wigman archive at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, including photographs, personal essays, letters and diary entries, and Wigman's extensive choreographic notes for the composition of *Sacre*. Unless otherwise indicated, please note that all translations are my own.

¹⁵⁵ Manning 1991: 141.

¹⁵⁶ S. Manning. 1993. *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 236.

sweeps of pencil to denote clockwise or anticlockwise choric movements around the stage. The constant reiteration of circular, rotating motion gives an impression of hypnotic, mesmeric dance. Thus, the choreographic spectacle became a kind of rhythmic, ritualised performance, the dancers working themselves into a trance-like state through these endlessly repeating circular movements.

Wigman's Chosen One wore a red dress, while the rest of the cast's costumes were rather sober and minimalist in design, with the women in simple long dresses, and the men clad in tights with a band of fabric worn across the chest. Following her selection as sacrificial candidate, Wigman's Chosen One was crowned by the community elders; similarities can be drawn between Wigman's piece and Bausch's version, in which the sacrificial victim was effectively 'crowned' with the red dress after being selected. Further aesthetic parallels can be drawn between Wigman and Martha Graham's work; several photographs that show Dore Hoyer being bound with a rope are eerily similar to Graham's Chosen One. Even Wigman's choice of costume for her male dancer – a simple loincloth – bore similarities to the dress of Graham's male chorus.

Hoyer's ecstatic backbends were equally Graham-like in appearance, contradicting the impression that the ritual's victim was entirely unwilling in her role. The elder, named in Wigman's manuscripts as *der Weise* ("the Sage"), was, in this production, a woman. In assorted archival images, she stands behind the victim holding a crown; these photographs give the impression of a kind of Pentecostal rite, with the chorus holding the Chosen One aloft, an image that reflects the very last bars of Nijinsky's original choreography. These photographs are highly reminiscent of Graham's 1940s 'Americana' works such as *American Document* (1938) and *Appalachian Spring* (1944), but also her so-called 'Greek' pieces, in particular *Cave of the Heart* (1946) and *Night Journey* (1947). The body shapes – backbends, spiralling of the back, and flexed hands – were strikingly similar to Graham's style, and the costumes and stage design – simple loincloths for men, flowing robes for the women, austere settings and props – equally so.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of costume, however, were the skullcaps Wigman used to crown her female dancers, from which trailed long strips of fabric strongly reminiscent of braided hair. Archive photographs show the women in headdresses, complete with flowing straps of material that closely resembled thick braids of hair. The similarity with Nijinsky's dancers is striking. Wigman's own interest in Sufi or 'dervish' dance was likely piqued by her teacher, Laban, and there is perhaps a reflection here of this early interest in

Middle Eastern mystic culture.¹⁵⁷ Even more interesting, however, is the parallel with Uzbek Islamic dance elements in Nijinsky's choreography. In constructing a primitive, unspecified fertility ritual in dance, both Wigman and Nijinsky appear to have looked towards similarly non-Western cultures. A basic understanding of pan-Islamic visual culture would not have been unusual in Wigman's case, considering the European enthusiasm for exotic treasures of the Middle and Far East throughout the first half of the twentieth-century. However, it is undeniably curious that, more than forty years after Nijinsky's infamous unveiling, Wigman sought to plough the same aesthetics, and produce a version of *Sacre* that appeared to borrow from the technique of her contemporary Martha Graham, while styled in the same Central Asian-inspired costume of her predecessor Vaslav Nijinsky.

Working with a score as challenging and monumental as Stravinsky's was certainly no easy task, something that was evident in Wigman's correspondence around the time of taking on the commission. In a letter to Margaret Erlanger dated 5th March, 1957, Wigman described rejecting the request to choreograph *The Rite of Spring*, claiming:

*This Sacre is a somewhat murderous task! ... I have been listening to the recorded music so often already, but have not yet found my way through it – how am I ever to get the dancers to know it? So here I am, nervous, frightened, and excited, as always before the real jump into the whirlpool!*¹⁵⁸

In a subsequent letter, dated 6th June 1957, Wigman referred to *The Rite of Spring* as, “my hell and heaven, my adoration and exasperation – I can't tell you how next to impossible it is to shape, to form it from the point of a dancer's vision.”¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, she cited her main problem as working with classically-trained dancers, rather than any specific issue with the score itself. Wigman claimed her appointed dancers “have hardly any feeling or predilection for character, style, rhythm, and form I have to impose on them.”¹⁶⁰ The choreographer's own copy of the score (a 1926 orchestral reduction for two pianos) is marked throughout with her own notes and sketches, most of which rather tellingly focus on tempo (*Takt*) and rhythm; curiously, however, the *Danse Sacrale* section has comparatively few notes from Wigman herself, fur-

¹⁵⁷ Laban alleged that his interest in dance was first aroused by observing Sufi Muslim ‘dervish’ performances – for more information on this, see J. Hodgson. 1988. *Mastering Movement: The Life and Work of Rudolf Laban*. New York: Routledge: 52-53.

¹⁵⁸ W. Sorell, ed. & trans. 1973. *The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press: 182.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 182.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 182-183.

ther evidence that so little is known for certain about this crucial aspect of the piece.¹⁶¹

Following the premiere, Wigman wrote to Pola Nirenska to describe her struggles and eventual success over the piece:

*In my whole life, I had never fought and struggled as I did with *Le Sacre*. And then suddenly, during the last rehearsals I saw that something good would come out. The immense and unbelievable success was a miraculous answer to my many doubts and bitter depression during the time I worked with the ballet company of the Städtischen Oper here. Dore Hoyer was wonderful as the Chosen One!*¹⁶²

The work was well received, and both Walter Sorell and Hedwig Müller have referred to Wigman's *Sacre* as the last great success of her career.¹⁶³ Gabriele Fritsch-Vivié cites one contemporary reviewer who commented that Wigman had proven *Sacre* was "not a ballet, but a cultish dance-act that is not about pirouettes and gestures, but line and rhythm."¹⁶⁴ Wigman's ritual sacrifice was more calm than Nijinsky's, less of a violent assault on the victim, and ending on an almost celebratory note; that the female victim was selected by a group of elder priestesses and crowned as part of her sacrifice suggests a positive retelling of the reality of human sacrifice. While the victim was hardly a willing participant in the rite (she was forcibly separated from the male partner she had chosen, before being bound with rope), she went to her death with less evident fear than Nijinsky's knock-kneed, trembling heroine.

The narrative of *Le Sacre du printemps* tells the story of a human sacrifice for the greater good of the community; in the original version, to guarantee a good harvest, but Wigman's ambiguous setting highlighted the purifying nature of the ritual. Manning has drawn a link between Wigman's victim and Wigman herself, who allegedly felt a victim of circumstance in the turbulent National Socialist era. Perhaps, then, Wigman's spring sacrifice stands for a purification ritual in the reflective years following the Second World War, the *Stunde Null* period. Yet, in many ways, this piece also reflects the decline of *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance) in Germany. Wigman had increasingly fallen out of favour in the postwar years (likely an uncomfortable legacy of her

¹⁶¹ According to Tamara Levitz, Wigman and Hoyer had argued over this final dance and no lasting description, in words or images, has survived to indicate how it would have appeared – Levitz in Dell'Antonio 2004: 106 (footnote 81).

¹⁶² Reproduced in W. Sorell. 1986. *Mary Wigman: Ein Vermächtnis*. Wilhelmshaven: F. Noetzel: 241.

¹⁶³ Sorell called Wigman's *Sacre*, "einer der großen und letzten Triumphe, die der Mary Wigman in der letzten Phase ihrer Schaffenszeit große Genugtuung brachte." Ibid. 241.

¹⁶⁴ Anonymous critic, cited by G. Fritsch-Vivié. 1999. *Mary Wigman*. Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag: 126.

years spent continuing to work under National Socialism), and accordingly, *Ausdruckstanz* was less visible in German theatres, replaced by a dominance of classical dance throughout the 1960s.¹⁶⁵ In a 1987 conference on dance, theatre and the *Stunde Null*, former director of the Cologne Dance Archive Kurt Peters argued that *Ausdruckstanz* had been “cut short” not just by the resurgence of ballet in Germany, but also by the introduction of Graham technique, which he saw as reflective of a burgeoning youth interest in American culture.¹⁶⁶

In this context, Wigman’s *Sacre* takes on the characteristics of both a healing ritual in the immediate postwar years, but also serves in a historical sense as a paean to the *Ausdruckstanz* movement with which she had been so closely identified in the earlier part of the century. Even the German language title of Wigman’s *Sacre*, “*Frühlingsweihe*,” differs in definition from the standard German translation (particularly used in referring to Bausch’s piece), “*Frühlingsopfer*.” The use of the term “*die Weihe*,” according to Duden, indicates a “(religious) ritual act by which someone or something is sanctified in a particular way or at the service of a god; consecration.”¹⁶⁷ Thus, the emphasis is on religious or spiritual ritual, as opposed to the more visceral implication of sacrifice inherent in “*das Opfer*:” “In a ritual act, the sacrifice or surrender of something or someone to a divinity.”¹⁶⁸ The ritualistic or even sublime experience was deeply ingrained in Wigman, who recognised its rich potential for artistic inspiration. The creative process threatened to overpower the artist, who was the receptacle of inspiration and compelled by this unseen force to construct. Having explored the concept of *Sacre* as an early purification ritual by a German postwar choreographer, this chapter now turns to another German’s vision of the same score. As shall become clear, however, where Wigman’s ritual was subtle and ultimately celebratory in nature, Pina Bausch was to take a completely different approach.

¹⁶⁵ S. Manning. 1987-88. Wigman, Balanchine, and Rock ‘n Roll Conference. *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Winter, 1987-88): 54.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 54. In a separate discussion, Manning has also argued that, ‘Staging *Le Sacre du printemps*, Wigman had come to terms with the ballet boom that otherwise rendered her choreography marginal.’ Manning 1993: 241.

¹⁶⁷ “(Religion) rituelle Handlung, durch die jemand oder etwas in besonderer Weise geheiligt oder in den Dienst Gottes gestellt wird; Konsekration” definition taken from Duden Online.

¹⁶⁸ “In einer kultischen Handlung vollzogene Hingabe von jemandem, etwas an eine Gottheit” definition taken from Duden Online.

Pina Bausch's *Le Sacre du printemps* (1975)

Philippine 'Pina' Bausch was born in 1940 in Solingen, West Germany. The youngest child of her family, Bausch effectively grew up in her parents' café, quietly observing patterns of human behaviour from an early age.¹⁶⁹ After her childhood ballet training, Bausch studied dance at the Folkwang School in Essen, the centre of progressive arts training in the country. Her primary teacher was Kurt Jooss, thus demonstrating the direct lineage of Wigman and Laban's *Ausdruckstanz* to Jooss' *Tanztheater* in the development of Bausch's own brand of dance theatre. Here, students learned ballet alongside other artistic pursuits; ballet was preferred over *Ausdruckstanz* at this institution, as it was in Germany more broadly following the end of the war.¹⁷⁰ Following the completion of her studies at Essen in 1959, Bausch was awarded a DAAD fellowship to study at the Julliard School in New York City for a year, where she was exposed to Graham and Limón techniques, studying under Anthony Tudor.¹⁷¹ She performed with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet Company as well as Paul Taylor's New American Ballet. Thus, Bausch's professional training spanned the Atlantic gap in contemporary dance styles, and, unlike Wigman and Graham, Bausch never sought to erase classical ballet from her own dance format. It was an enormously significant period of upheaval in artistic development; Bausch's time in New York coincided with the eruption of post-modernism in dance, theatre, performance and visual art.

Bausch's *Le Sacre du printemps* has become part of the canon of twentieth-century dance.¹⁷² The piece was conceived as the third part of a trilogy of dances, an evening headed *Frühlingsopfer*, following two other works – *Wind von West* ('Wind from the West') set to Stravinsky's 'Cantata' of 1952, and *Der zweite Frühling* ('The Second Spring').¹⁷³ Bausch's version of *Sacre* was most readily noted for its dramatic stage setting, in which the choreographer cov-

¹⁶⁹ S. Murray & J. Keefe, eds. 2007. *Physical Theatres: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge: 78.

¹⁷⁰ Manning 1993: 228. Royd Climenhaga also notes that, while the postwar government made significant handouts in funding the arts, favour fell largely with classical or more traditional forms of expression, and that "modern dance was often overlooked in favour of ballet." R. Climenhaga. 2009. *Pina Bausch*. London: Routledge: 8.

¹⁷¹ In an interview with Glenn Loney, Bausch stated that while she, "never saw Mary Wigman nor Harald Kreutzberg [perform, I] certainly saw Martha Graham, and I studied Graham technique." G. Loney. 1985. I Pick My Dancers As People. *On The Next Wave*, vol. 3, no. 1-2 (October, 1985): 17.

¹⁷² Choreographic excerpts from Bausch's *Sacre* are regularly taught as part of the curriculum in European dance schools and conservatoires. In an interview with Royd Climenhaga, Bausch stated that auditions for the company featured both classical repertoire and prospective dancers learning a phrase from *Sacre* – Climenhaga 2009: 49.

¹⁷³ R. Schulze-Reuber. 2005. *Das Tanztheater Pina Bausch: Spiegel der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer: 103.

ered the sprung dance floor with earth, soon turned into mud by the perspiration of her exhausted dancers. By the end of each performance, the dancers were covered in filth and their laboured breathing was strikingly audible; despite the performers' and choreographer's collective background in classical training, Bausch's *Sacre* was perhaps the furthest contemporary dance technique departed from a balletic rendering of the subject matter. Gone was the illusionism associated with classical dance, and instead the audience was confronted with a cast of highly skilled dancers pushed to the absolute limits of their physical capabilities – they broke the final ballet 'taboo' in confronting the audience with their total exhaustion. Working in this way, Bausch carried on a tradition established with Nijinsky's choreography of the *Danse Sacrale*, the final section of Stravinsky's score; in the 1913 version of the ballet, this closing dance of death was held to be one of the most physically demanding sections of the ballet repertoire.¹⁷⁴ Even Massine adopted this tendency towards excess; dancing in the premiere of his first version of the ballet, Sokolova recalled that she "collapsed" at the last note of the music behind the stage curtain.¹⁷⁵

Bausch's *Sacre* opened with a woman lying facedown on a red dress, caressing the material in a trance-like state.¹⁷⁶ The red fabric stood in stark aesthetic contrast to the female dancers in their nude shift dresses, flitting around the stage with an avian quality to their movements. As one dancer held the dress at arms length, there was a dawning group realisation that the dress represented something threatening. The dancer dropped it to the floor, the women gathered together in a tight formation, and as the music erupted into a heavy, percussive rhythm, the ensemble moved in repetitive cycles, throwing their heads back, beating their clasped arms against themselves, and bending their knees in deep, heavy pliés.¹⁷⁷ This was the first movement sequence to underline the primitive, ritualistic elements of the score in Bausch's choreography, and after a number of repetitions, the dancers' heavy breathing was already audible. It was compulsive movement, creating the impression that some external force was driving the group, almost akin to mass possession, and initiated by gradual recognition of the sacrificial nature of the red dress.

With this *Sacre*, Bausch took the limits of physical performance to a new level. The audience could only sit and observe as the dancers worked themselves into a hysterical, muddy frenzy; helpless to intervene, the effect on the specta-

¹⁷⁴ Berg 1985: 181-182.

¹⁷⁵ Sokolova 1960: 164.

¹⁷⁶ Descriptions of Bausch's choreography for *Sacre* here refer to a recording originally produced for German television channel ZDF (directed by Pit Weyrich, 1978), as well as excerpts observed during a company rehearsal in Wuppertal on 1st September 2011.

¹⁷⁷ In ballet terminology, 'plié' refers to a bending of the knees.

tor is uncomfortable and intense, coming to an end with the collapse of the Chosen One once she had danced herself, effectively, to death. Norbert Servos has alluded to the peat-covered stage floor as a “battlefield,”¹⁷⁸ a point made all the more interesting when taken in context alongside Eksteins’ analysis of Nijinsky’s choreography as portent of Modernism in the shadow of the First World War. Similarly, Gabrielle Cody writes, “by all accounts, *The Rites* became a frightening ritual of male dominance which turned the culminating fertility dance into a predatory and terrifying form of erotic warfare.”¹⁷⁹ Servos discusses the manner in which the heavy soil worked against the dancers, making their movements increasingly laboured, creating not just an impression of exhaustion through their mud and sweat covered bodies, but an audible exhaustion the audience was able to hear in their increasingly ragged breathing. As Servos points out, this was not an impression of physical tiredness, but a very real, visceral exhaustion.¹⁸⁰ Costume played a major role in this effect – the women clad only in thin, flesh-coloured dresses, almost like nightgowns, and the men bare-chested. Their bodies were clearly on display, though the effect was not of sexual titillation, but quite the opposite; the proximity to the dancers’ raw flesh added to an overall sense of overexposure and exhaustion. Like racehorses, every twitch of their lean muscles was visible to the audience – again unlike ballet, the dancers are completely exposed, and the physical and emotional toll exerted by Bausch’s choreography is uncomfortably plain to see. As Birringer has observed, one of Bausch’s unique choreographic skills was the very simple notion of putting everyday “rituals” on-stage, and in doing so, leading the audience to become acutely aware of their role as spectators, even voyeurs.¹⁸¹

Sexuality was, however, quite clearly present in Bausch’s *Sacre*. In one section of ensemble dancing immediately following the selection of the sacrificial victim, the female dancers leapt into the arms or onto the shoulders of their male partners (who are seemingly chosen at random, this time by the women). In this repeated sequence, the men held the women around their waists, while the female dancers contorted themselves in the manner of frantic, ecstatic sexual coupling. It was short, wild and uninhibited, also rather soulless, cold, and even violent with regard to the treatment of the women. This duality of representing male/female relationships was without doubt one of Bausch’s most recognisable reference points, yet in this piece this section was only one small example – indeed, the spectator could well read the entire performance

¹⁷⁸ N. Servos [trans. Morris]. 2008. *Pina Bausch: Dance Theatre*. Munich: K. Kieser: 37.

¹⁷⁹ G. Cody. 1998. Woman, Man, Dog, Tree: Two Decades of Intimate and Monumental Bodies in Pina Bausch’s Tanztheater. *TDR: The Drama Review*, vol. 42, no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 120.

¹⁸⁰ Servos 2008: 37.

¹⁸¹ J. Birringer. 1991. *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 136.

as an exploration of the connection between sex and death. Here again was a connection to Martha Graham; the twisting, pulsating bodies were not dissimilar in appearance to the contraction and release of Graham's technique. In a 1999 review of *Sacre*, Michaela Schlagenwerth called Bausch's impression of gender roles "slightly anachronistic," drawing a link between the frenetic impulses of the cast and elements of German *Ausdruckstanz* of the 1920s, linking to Bausch's predecessor Mary Wigman.¹⁸²

There was little joy in Bausch's ritual; instead, the audience observed the stark, animalistic response of her 'tribe' to their duty in sacrificing a member for the good of the community. Yet this ferocious episode of sexual congress was not the "mass rape" Banes has identified in Nijinsky's choreography.¹⁸³ Rather, the image of sex Bausch presented was one of aggressive necessity; ecstatic movements were contradicted by the evident exhaustion in the facial expressions and bodies of the nameless mass of dancers. Schlagenwerth asks, "What other piece has this dichotomy of strength, brutality, power and gentleness, calm and devotion, as irrevocably linked as that of Pina Bausch, in this, her thirteenth work for an ensemble?"¹⁸⁴ Like many critics observing Bausch's work, Birringer has read this piece as a play of gender roles – it should be noted that this is not uncommon in exploring *Sacre* generally, after all, the selection of a female virgin for the purpose of a fertility ritual is hardly gender-neutral subject matter. However, while Birringer claims that, "the ritual dance was constantly repeated-to the point of total exhaustion-as a central metaphor for the well-rehearsed behavior of men following the rules of society and selecting women as sacrificial victims, even as the women themselves envision and anticipate the selection,"¹⁸⁵ narrowing the focus of analysis to purely gendered lines in fact misses a great deal of the surrounding influences on Bausch's early work, and it seems misguided to analyse this piece without taking into account the postwar German perspective.

According to Manning, the programme notes accompanying the premiere of Bausch's work reflected a desire on the part of the choreographer to "return to the motifs of the original libretto."¹⁸⁶ As has already been indicated, by 1975 the score had been adopted by a great number of choreographers worldwide. In Germany, Wigman's elaborate staging had received positive reviews, and thus a tradition had been well established in revising Stravin-

¹⁸² M. Schlagenwerth. 1999. Nicht eins, nicht zwei sein können: Pina Bausch gastiert mit *Frühlingsopfer* und *Café Müller* in Berlin. *Berliner Zeitung* (25th September 1999): no pg.

¹⁸³ S. Banes. 1998. *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage*. London: Routledge:102.

¹⁸⁴ Schlagenwerth 1999.

¹⁸⁵ J. Birringer. 1986. Pina Bausch: Dancing Across Borders. *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Summer, 1986): 92.

¹⁸⁶ Manning 1991: 145.

sky's work. Bausch, however, made her mark not through a traditional rendering of the score – though it ought to be noted that, aside from her operatic works such as *Orpheus und Euridike* (1975), *Sacre* stands alone in her repertoire as a notated, choreographed piece. In terms of its depiction of the subject matter, Bausch's choreography shifted from a pre-established narrative, as Manning has pointed out:

*Bausch departed from the elevated tone of Wigman's Sacre and rejected her predecessor's interpretation of the final sacrificial dance as an heroic act. Wigman's staging never questioned that Dore Hoyer represented Woman and that Woman represented endurance and self-sacrifice. In contrast, Bausch's Sacre questioned why a woman invariably serves as the victim of social violence – "The original libretto as if viewed from afar" – and when so viewed, the social ritual that frames the woman as victim became shockingly clear.*¹⁸⁷

Bausch claimed that her original intention was to maintain the possibility that any of the dancers could have been selected as victim, but the complexity of the final solo meant that in practice this would have to be predetermined. This concept is reflective of Graham's later choreography, wherein the victim appears to be picked quite at random. In her own words:

*The starting point is the music. There are so many feelings in it; it changes constantly. There is also much fear in it. I thought, how would it be to dance knowing you have to die? How would you feel, how would I feel? The Chosen One is special, but she dances knowing the end is death.*¹⁸⁸

In a 1994 interview with Fernandes, dancer Ruth Amaranthe described the sacrificial solo as follows:

*The whole solo is a progression. In that moment it is more startling – "what is happening?" – a mortal fear of death. It is as if no more blood were left in your brain... Her interpretation is strange. The sacrificed could even feel honored and have some calmness. But in Pina's version, she wanted to show this instinctive fear of death.*¹⁸⁹

Where Wigman's ritual was relatively subdued, and ultimately almost celebratory, Bausch's was brutal and relentless, leaving the audience emotionally drained and the dancers physically exhausted. There was an impulse in

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 146.

¹⁸⁸ A. Riding. 1997. Using Muscles Classical Ballet Has No Need For. *The New York Times* (15th June 1997): no pg.

¹⁸⁹ C. Fernandes. 2001. *Pina Bausch and the Wuppertal Dance Theater: The Aesthetics of Repetition and Transformation*. New York: Peter Lang: 117.

Bausch's movement that was almost inhuman, animalistic in its unremitting repetitions. I observed a company rehearsal in Wuppertal on 1st September 2011, and throughout, the utter exhaustion of the two dancers alternating the role of the Chosen One was plain to see; in a setting devoid of an audience, there was no acting, or playing to the camera, rather the extreme strain on the body of these experienced company members was clear. Removed from the theatre context and without an audience, it could clearly be seen that even the dancers "marking"¹⁹⁰ movements were physically drained by the unrelenting changes of direction and speed of movement.

Like Wigman, Bausch was a German choreographer working in the postwar artistic landscape, one fraught with difficulty in accurately and sensitively expressing responses to the horror of recent history. In her *Sacre*, however, Bausch opted to explore the sacrificial ritual in an empty, almost apocalyptic landscape. Her dancers emoted true terror once the confusion around the mysterious red dress had lifted, huddling together for security before joining together en masse to perform a celebratory yet joyless choral dance. As the score progressed and the dancers' thin costumes became ever more soiled, the overall appearance of the massed performers began to resemble a group of concentration camp inmates. They were a nameless assembly – slender, weary bodies and fearful expressions – clad in identical yet stained, ragged clothing. They performed the movements as though compelled by some dreadful unseen force, exhibiting palpable relief when a sacrificial victim was chosen. The bare stage setting contributed to this, the blankness of the space beyond the earth-covered floor implying a form of primordial emptiness, as well as resembling some kind of muddied prison yard. The starkness of the stage, with its lack of decoration beyond the muddy floor, added to the primitive, elemental setting; a 'zero hour' of sorts, where the dancers act out what Rika Schulze-Reuber has called "a ritual of earth-worship."¹⁹¹ It is not surprising that one German critic called this piece, "a death dance."¹⁹²

The legacy of the Second World War was evident throughout Bausch's early choreography, demonstrated by themes of violence that have come to characterise much of her oeuvre. More recent critical responses perhaps better comprehend the complexity of Bausch's work, delving beyond the surface shock value of her early reviews; for instance, Simon Murray and John Keefe observe that, "for Bausch pain is the corollary of living, loving and desire. It is also an existential condition born out of the monstrosities of fascism and the

¹⁹⁰ In dance terminology, "marking" choreography refers to the act of rehearsing movement with an emphasis on keeping to appropriate time or spatial limits, without giving a full performance of the movement.

¹⁹¹ Schulze-Reuber 2005: 105.

¹⁹² R. Michaelis. 1997. Tanzangst. *Angstanz. Die Zeit* (6th June 1997): no pg.

Holocaust.”¹⁹³ For many young Germans of Bausch’s age group, collective anger was directed at the so-called “generation of perpetrators,” and much visual and performance art that emerged from this conflict was designed to be a complete break from the pre-war lineage. As Moishe Postone puts it so succinctly, “people can acquire mastery of the present only when they are able to master their past, rather than being mastered by it.”¹⁹⁴ He expands on this, arguing that the weight of the Nazi past meant that traditional methods of ‘coming to terms’ were rendered effectively useless.

*Although the German student movement shared many features with its counterparts in other Western countries, it also, very self-consciously, involved a repudiation of the Nazi past and of the degree to which elements of that past continued to inform the present. The conflict engaged in by the students and other young people was, of course, also generational – but the generation of parents was one that largely had supported the Nazi regime.*¹⁹⁵

Bausch’s desire to demonstrate a palpable fear of death, of consequence, was a distinct shift from the almost celebratory ritual of her predecessor, Wigman. The two women belonged to separate generations that, in postwar Germany, shared an uneasy relationship: Bausch was a part of the same generation of young people seeking answers to difficult questions about the recent past, some of whom went as far as to ask their parents to admit responsibility for what had been allowed to happen under Nazism; Wigman, on the other hand, was a member of this parental generation, accused (whether explicitly or implicitly) of collusion and sympathy with Fascism. This split can be illustrated by comparing the two very distinct versions of *Sacre* choreographed by these women; where Wigman’s piece formed an attempt at atonement, Bausch’s was angrier, more urgent, and in this sense, characteristic of her generation’s questioning worldview.

Martha Graham’s *Rite of Spring* (1984/1985)

One of the most influential and prolific American choreographers of modern dance, Martha Graham was born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1894, and raised in a strictly Presbyterian household. Her father was a staunch believer in the importance of education for his children, regardless of gender; thus, it was only in her late teens that, instead of pursuing academic study, Graham

¹⁹³ Murray & Keefe 2007: 70.

¹⁹⁴ M. Postone. 1990. After the Holocaust: History and Identity in West Germany. In K. Härms, L.R. Reuter & V. Dürr, eds. *Coping With The Past” Germany and Austria After 1945*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press: 233.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 236.

resolved to become a dancer. In April 1911, she attended a performance by the Denishawn Company on their tour of the west coast of the United States, and was struck by the Orientalist sensuality of the multi-part dance, *Egypta*.⁵³ The next summer, Graham appeared in an amateur dance recital in Santa Barbara, playing the role of a “geisha girl” in a piece entitled *A Night in Japan*.⁵⁴ She enrolled at the Denishawn School of Dancing and Related Arts in 1916, several years after first seeing Ruth St. Denis perform in Los Angeles.⁵⁵ Following her graduation from the school, Graham remained with the Denishawn Company, under the joint leadership of Ruth St. Denis and husband Ted Shawn, until 1923. On departing from the company, she joined the Greenwich Village Follies, where she danced for a further two years. Having established a reputation for herself in New York’s Lower East Side avant-garde art scene, in 1925 Graham established her own school, teaching a new vocabulary of movement that laid the foundations for her own codified dance technique. Taking the principles and basic structure of classical ballet, Graham devised a modern dance method that began with exercises seated on the floor, and improved the dancer’s flexibility through the contraction and release of the spine and spiralling movements of the back. Graham technique, as it is now commonly known, departed from ballet convention in the dancer’s acknowledgment of the power of gravity; that is, this new technique allowed the Graham dancer to fall and rebound off the floor, in direct opposition to the upright, illusionistic nature of classical dance.

The ritualistic qualities of Graham’s choreographies derive from her desire to explore psychology through movement, and a deep belief in the innate honesty of movement as opposed to the vagaries of language. Hers was a very theatrical dance form, however the instruction of Graham technique is incredibly detailed, carefully considered, and is in fact quite dry in comparison to the high theatre of her stage work. Graham’s *Rite of Spring* was one of her last complete choreographies. However, while she was approaching ninety years of age when taking on the project, this was not her first experience with dancing Stravinsky’s score; she had turned down the opportunity to devise a version for American audiences in Leopold Stokowski’s 1930 production. Graham explained her decision, rather bluntly, as follows:

Stokowski had come with his wife, Evangeline, to see some things that I did at the Roerich museum, and they were very stark, naturally, because I was in what I call my ‘long-winter-underwear period,’ very lacking in seduction – you know, charm... It was at a time when he was completing

⁵³ E. Stodelle. 1984. *Deep Song: The Dance Story of Martha Graham*. London: Collier Macmillan: 10-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 12.

⁵⁵ A. Helpen. 1994. *The Technique of Martha Graham*. Dobbs Ferry: Morgan Press: 7.

*Sacre, but he said, 'I don't think you have the experience to do the choreography.' I said, 'No, I haven't. I have absolutely no experience to handle groups of people. I'm still searching, still finding things.'*¹⁹⁶

Following this exchange, Leonide Massine was instead appointed as choreographer, and Graham danced the role of the Chosen One. Massine had already choreographed a new version of the score ten years earlier, almost acting as a surrogate for Nijinsky, and would have provided Graham with a more detailed understanding of the 1913 work than either Wigman or Bausch could ever have experienced.¹⁹⁷ However, Massine and Graham were rumoured to clash throughout the production stages, but Graham's Modernist technique was seemingly the factor that singled out her performance from the other (classically trained) dancers.¹⁹⁸

While Massine's impression of the piece was quite distinct from that of his predecessor – he sought an alternative synthesis between music and movement, rather than adhering rigorously to the score's time signatures in the style of Nijinsky¹⁹⁹ – the young choreographer was similarly influenced by elements of Russian folk art, something he had been exposed to through working with the Russian Neo-Primitivist artists Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov. This collective espoused a fusion of folk and abstract art, acting as a link in the gap of the Russian avant-garde between the Cubo-Futurists and Constructivists. Prior to starting work on *Sacre*, Massine had been engaged with choreographing the ballet *Liturgie* (1915) with Lydia Sokolova as principal dancer, and set and costume design by Goncharova. Massine had never seen Nijinsky's *Sacre*,²⁰⁰ and developed his first version on Sokolova.²⁰¹ A decade later, it was Martha Graham who was to be his admittedly more troublesome choreographic muse.

¹⁹⁶ Extract from Daniel Oliver's conversation with Graham, 19th April 1977, reproduced in D. Oliver. 1982. *Rite of Spring, First Staging in America: Stokowski-Massine-Graham. Ballet Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 68.

¹⁹⁷ In his memoirs, Massine notes that, following Diaghilev's suggestion he take on *Sacre*, he spoke with Stravinsky who, "had not been entirely satisfied with the choreography." Similarly, Diaghilev is recorded as claiming, "Nijinsky had failed because he had attempted too much at once." L. Massine. 1968. *My Life in Ballet*. London: Macmillan: 151, 152. However, according to Rambert, by 1969, "though Stravinsky had bitterly disapproved of Nijinsky's version in 1913, he had since admitted that it was by far the best rendering of his *Sacre*." Rambert 1972: 59.

¹⁹⁸ Oliver 1982: 69.

¹⁹⁹ Again Massine recalls the composer stating Nijinsky's rigid adherence to the score was "a mistake" – Massine 1968: 151-152.

²⁰⁰ Massine 1968: 151.

²⁰¹ Sokolova 1960: 159-164.

More than fifty years later, Graham created a new choreography for Stravinsky's score, one based on her own technique. Her *Rite of Spring* was first performed at the New York State Theater on 28th February 1984. Anna Kisselgoff's review of the premiere for the New York Times describes rapturous applause and "a treatment of Stravinsky's score unlike any other."²⁰² Kisselgoff went further in her praise to state: "It is a Rite that is totally elemental, as primal in expression of basic emotion as any tribal ceremony, as hauntingly staged in its deliberate bleakness as it is rich in implication."²⁰³ In 1985, Graham reworked the piece, creating a bigger role for the character of the Shaman, and altering the ending to make use of a larger ensemble of dancers. In Kisselgoff's review of this revised choreography, she observes that, "more than any other version, this 'Rite' captures the barbarism of ancient fertility rituals."²⁰⁴

Graham's *Rite of Spring* was set in an ancient impression of the American Southwest, a factor Howard Moss compared to the depiction of the Southwestern states as seen in *El Penitente* (1940);²⁰⁵ however, Kisselgoff interpreted the piece as being "a work of disturbing and modern urban tension."²⁰⁶ Robert Johnson has hinted that Massine's choreography could possibly have presupposed Graham's invocation of Native American culture, a setting that was common also to Lester Horton's 1937 version of *Sacre*. He also posits that "both Horton and Wigman, according to Berg, anticipated Béjart by emphasizing the eroticism implicit in a virgin sacrifice."²⁰⁷ Partsch-Bergsohn viewed Graham's version somewhat differently, claiming hers "celebrated the beauty of youth, particularly of her male dancers, who seemed to be the dominant element, while the sacrifice of the female, although beautifully danced, was a very free treatment of Stravinsky's theme."²⁰⁸

The Shaman character in Graham's choreography replaced the role of the wise elder in Nijinsky's original production. The figure who selected the sacrificial victim in this work was a much younger man – while this markedly dif-

²⁰² A. Kisselgoff. 1984. The Dance – "Rite," by Martha Graham. *The New York Times* (29th February 1984): no pg.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ A. Kisselgoff. 1985. The Dance – Graham's "Rite of Spring." *The New York Times* (7th April 1985): no pg.

²⁰⁵ H. Moss. 1984. The Rites of Martha Graham. *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 31, no. 7 (26th April, 1984): no pg.

²⁰⁶ Kisselgoff 1984: no pg.

²⁰⁷ R. Johnson. 1992. Review: Sacred Scandals – *Le Sacre du Printemps: Seven Productions from Nijinsky to Martha Graham* by Shelley C. Berg. *Dance Chronicle*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1992): 233. Horton was exposed early in his career, and profoundly influenced in his choreographic style, by both Native American ritual and the Japanese dance theatre of Michio Ito.

²⁰⁸ Partsch-Bergsohn 1994: 11.

fers from Nijinsky and Wigman's casting, it bears similarities to Bausch's conception, where the figure who indicates the Chosen One is a younger man. The stage design of Graham's version was notably basic – merely a raised platform with a single tree, a minimalist conception of landscape. Indeed, it was akin to Wigman's *Sacre* in the pared-down simplicity of the setting, and also to Bausch's largely empty stage. As in Wigman's interpretation, the male dancers were costumed in loincloths and bare-chested, while the Shaman was dressed in coloured robes. The men played a central role in Graham's piece; they drove the majority of the action throughout, and their choreography featured far greater displays of strength and virtuosity than that of the female dancers. For the most part, the Shaman simply presided over the action, observing from his position on the platform, but broke this almost sculptural appearance in his energetic *pas de deux* with the sacrificial victim. The key element in this work overall was its minimalism – indeed, the exposed, bare nature of this piece, in terms of both set design and choreography, was quite a departure from Graham's more traditional, highly theatrical work, epitomised by pieces such as *Night Journey*.

The dancer Bessie Schönberg claimed that Graham used Massine's choreography as a basis for her 1984 work – “the resulting *Danse Sacrale* was ‘pure Martha’”²⁰⁹ – while Anna Sokolow drew parallels between *The Rite of Spring* and *Primitive Mysteries*, as well as claiming to find, “a strong and natural connection between Graham's and Massine's movements... this ‘appropriation’ of the modern vocabulary by ballet represented a very important step for modern dance.”²¹⁰ Kisselgoff alleged in her review of the first performance that Graham's technique was modified for this piece; she referred to a raised knee with foot flexed as a motif, and remarked that, “the bodies are more twisted, more negative in resonance.”²¹¹ Graham's *Rite of Spring* was, for the most part, a quiet, meditative performance characterised by unsettling, unexpected moments – the Chosen One was picked seemingly at random off her partner's back, implying that any of the dancers could be drawn into the sacrifice. The effect was surprisingly dramatic in the context of an otherwise minimalist production. There were numerous jumps with flexed feet, but otherwise there were comparatively few visible Graham technique ‘trademarks’ in this *Rite*, with the exception of elements such as the jumps from fourth position in the last section.²¹²

²⁰⁹ S. Levy. 1987-88. *The Rite of Spring at Seventy Five*. *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Winter, 1987-88): 53.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* 53.

²¹¹ Kisselgoff 1985: no pg.

²¹² In ballet, fourth position refers to a stance where the dancer has one foot in front of the other, with the length of roughly one foot between the legs. As the dancer's legs are in turn out, it is an especially difficult position to maintain in landing jumps. It is very rare to see jumps from this

Graham's *Rite of Spring* also represented a departure from Nijinsky's choreography; as Kisselgoff has pointed out, Graham's dancers remained quite still when the music built to a major "frenzy."²¹³ At one point, the Shaman stationed his sacrificial victim in the middle of the stage and slowly circled her, tying a rope around her body that wound upwards from her feet until she was completely bound – this sequence was almost identical to the treatment of Wigman's sacrificial victim, also bound in spiralling ropes. When Graham's victim was completely bound, the Shaman enveloped her in his multicoloured cloak, before the fabric was spread on the stage before the victim; eventually, she sank to her knees and lay upon it. Polcari notes that the significance of colour in this piece indicates a shift in the "rite of passage," a theme he identifies as common to a number of Graham's works, such as *Voyage* (1953). In the case of *The Rite of Spring*, the transition of the Shaman's clothing colouring from black to green is representative of the fertility of the central ritual.²¹⁴ Similarities are evident here with the opening of Bausch's version; the fabric that holds some fateful power over the dancers, the contrast between its almost ecstasy-inducing tangible qualities and the dread it evokes.

In the Chosen One's *pas de deux* with the Shaman, the movement quality of their dance was quite sexual, reflecting once again the link between sexual pleasure and death or destruction. The role of the Chosen One in this *pas de deux* was a very passive one – she gripped onto her male partner, at one point hanging off his shoulders, reflecting the moment she was 'chosen.' This sequence leads to the final sacrificial solo; the Chosen One was held aloft centre stage, while the male dancers performed a very percussive, energetic group movement around her. The final stages of her solo involved whirling, circular movements, and she appeared fragile and terrified. This piece demonstrated some key distinctions from Wigman version, especially in terms of its overall mood; instead of dancing herself to death, Graham's sacrificial victim appeared to "seemingly [die] of terror."²¹⁵

Many of the thematic and choreographic elements of this piece represented something of a departure for Graham's signature style, if she could in fact be said to have had such a thing. As Howard Moss rather scathingly notes:

The Rite of Spring provides no opportunity for the dramatization of triumph; a human sacrifice and a primitive ordeal of renewal, it is communal, not heroic, and though it has a central figure, the Chosen One, her

position in classical dance, thus it is rather more a tendency of Graham technique.

²¹³ Kisselgoff 1985: no pg.

²¹⁴ Polcari 1990: 27 (footnote 35).

²¹⁵ Kisselgoff 1985: no pg.

*choice is random and she is not of the slightest psychological interest. The only questions are: how is she going to be killed, and how quickly.*²¹⁶

Indeed, the technical elements of Graham's *Rite* were rather different to previous works, playing down the passion and vibrancy of her early career. Berg claims that, by the time Graham choreographed *The Rite of Spring*, her aesthetic had become "more balletic."²¹⁷ Choreographing Stravinsky's score so late in her career meant Graham had, to some extent, lost the sharpness and starkness of her early work. Yet, similarities also exist between Graham's vision and Bausch's *Sacre*, particularly, as critics have indicated, in the relationships played out between men and women. Marianne Goldberg takes a strongly gendered response to Graham's *Rite*, arguing that it was an "ongoing rape," as well as a dislocation from Graham's 1930s "feminist" works. She claims that, "Graham... has in *Rite of Spring* trapped women within a male-dominated world that destroys every possibility of their own assertion."²¹⁸ Goldberg interprets this work as promulgating the idea of male as violator and woman as violated and, accordingly, "Graham's universe divides into male power and female vulnerability."²¹⁹ Accordingly, there is a split between Graham's depiction of the virginal Chosen One as a partially willing martyr and also as helpless victim. Additionally, Goldberg has identified that the 'primitive' ritual enacted in *Sacre* is common in a more general sense to a great number of cultures, something that is underlined by its ambiguous setting.²²⁰ Although passionately argued, Goldberg's analysis focuses so heavily on gender analysis one cannot help but feel she has missed broader points raised within the choreography.

Crucially, when discussing this work in an interview, Graham related the sacrifice of the Chosen One to her own experience of making sacrifices as an artist.²²¹ In personally identifying with the Chosen One, Graham underlined the ritualistic qualities of the creative, choreographic process, implying an element of possession by external forces that compelled the chosen artist to create. Graham stated that the selection of the victim in this piece was entirely at random, and indeed could well have been danced by a male performer.²²²

²¹⁶ Moss 1984: no pg.

²¹⁷ Berg 1985: 392.

²¹⁸ M. Goldberg. 1986. She Who Is Possessed No Longer Exists Outside: Martha Graham's *Rite of Spring*. *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1986): 17.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

²²⁰ *Ibid.* 21.

²²¹ *Ibid.* 25.

²²² *Ibid.* 26.

Johnson perhaps goes some way to restore Graham's *Rite*, detracting from her critics in his observation that:

*Graham, almost alone among modern dance choreographers, developed a style perfectly suited to convey the message of Le Sacre du Printemps. Rigid, angular, and violent, with a barely concealed sadomasochistic edge, Graham's style forges the molten passions of the unconscious into steel-hard shapes. Her movements, which expand and contract from an individual's pelvic center, spring from and are directed toward the earth. The Graham repertoire abounds in sexual themes and conflicts, often centered on the dilemma or struggle of a female protagonist. Although unable to – or perhaps simply not wishing to – engage the complexities of Stravinsky's score, Graham's choreography goes straight to the heart of Sacre's subject matter. Her only true misfortune was that by 1983 her style offered no further surprises, depriving Sacre of one of its most precious characteristics as a cultural phenomenon – the ability to shock an audience with its originality, perhaps even to start a riot.*²²³

Graham's *Rite of Spring* was in many respects an unusual work, a significant departure from her standard method of practice, with long passages of minimal movement and stark bare stage setting, in contrast to the frantic rhythms of Stravinsky's music. Considering the fact that Wigman's *Sacre* was a visual spectacular, with a circular, raked stage (one that is built on a diagonal slope, rather than completely flat) filled with whirling and constant movement, and Bausch's dancers filthy and caked in mud, exhausted and struggling, the austerity of Graham's version becomes all the more apparent. Like Wigman, Graham was intimidated by the very prospect of choreographing this score, and, like Bausch, she embraced the implicit terror of the sacrificial rite. In an interview with Daniel Oliver, Graham described the primordial power of the music and the effect it had on her as an artist having to set it to movement. Her account implies a willingness on the part of the artist to submit to a higher, unseen power, and an empathy with the Chosen One at the centre of the performed ritual. For Graham, as for her choreographic forerunners, it is evident that the primitive ritualism of *Le Sacre du printemps* exerted a considerable influence:

The passionate Russian thing – whether it's Russian or whether it's primal doesn't matter, but the rite was a sacrificial one and it had nothing to do with the idiosyncrasies of ballet style or modern dance. You had to accommodate yourself to it, and the music is very, very powerful, as we all know... But Sacre meant spiritually a great deal to me and still does, and people have hounded me to choreograph it, but I've said I

²²³ Johnson 1992: 234-5.

*couldn't. It's close to me emotionally and it was a turning point in my life... Somehow one identified oneself with a central figure; you perform a sacrifice, whatever it is, and whether it's your life or whether it's giving up the extraneous things of your life for a purpose – for the necessity – it's a sacrificial act.*²²⁴

Thus, for Graham, the sacrifice in her *Rite of Spring* was even more personalised than her German counterparts; while Bausch and Wigman explored ritual barbarity and healing in their postwar German imaginings of Stravinsky's music, Graham looked closer to home in appropriating symbols of Native American culture into a sparse and rather abstract setting. Her sacrificial act related both to the primitive rituals of her colonised homeland, but also to the sacrifices inherent in choosing the life of an artist. It is all the more fitting, then, that *The Rite of Spring* was to be Graham's final contribution to an extraordinary lengthy artistic career.

Concluding Remarks

Without painstaking notation and the benefit of recording technology, the process of dance creation becomes as ephemeral in nature as religious or spiritual ritual; after all, the original choreography of Nijinsky's *Rite of Spring* was essentially lost only seven years after the first performance. Diaghilev attempted to restage the piece some years after its eight performances, a gesture that failed once it became clear that no member of the original cast was able to remember the full choreography (while some notes had been made throughout its creation, there was no full notation of the ballet on paper).²²⁵ Indeed, the fact the work did not survive in its entirety in part contributes to its timeless appeal. This infamous, inflammatory work of early Modernism in performance remains in its original state only in the words and reminiscences of audience members and dancers. Such a situation generates significant research challenges, not least the attempt to reinterpret a work that has been simultaneously so thoroughly dissected and exaggerated. Accordingly, the scope of methodological examination in this paper has focused on the primitive, ritualistic qualities of *Sacre*, in an attempt both to view the ballet from a fresh perspective, but also to draw attention to an overlooked strand of critical thinking.

²²⁴ Oliver's interview with Graham, in Oliver 1982: 70

²²⁵ Berg 1985: 199-200.

Tim Scholl has observed that Nijinsky's anti-ballet tendencies, already visible in *L'Après midi*, exemplified a kind of artistic "protest" against the traditionalism and establishment of classical dance, and that this very refutation of classicism lives on in the spirit of modern dance.²²⁶ Decades after the 1913 premiere, Wigman, Bausch and Graham each choreographed their own distinct visions of Stravinsky's score, serving equally disparate purposes. Their common interest in ritual performance and primitivism serves as a powerful connection across geographical and temporal boundaries. Where Wigman's imagining of a matriarchal tribe is abstract in its conception, parallels exist with Bausch's visceral ritual – as German choreographers in the postwar landscape, both women seem to be enacting rituals of purgation, of stripping bare and starting anew, albeit in the context of human sacrifice. Viewed in their socio-political setting, it is impossible to divorce the choice of material from their immediate and shared historical background. Graham's version took the form of a spare and stark execution of movement, recalling 'primitive' Native American rituals in order to create a new, contemporary sense of dread. She removed the excess and much of the high drama generated by the score, in favour of a slow and unsettling winding-down of the action.

The four versions of *Sacre* explored here all took place within rather otherworldly settings. Nijinsky's ballet evokes the idea of 'pagan' Russia, specifically a pre-Christian society, an almost intangible revitalising of the past. His was 'Orientalised' in the Saidian sense through its mysterious and dangerous qualities, and designed to evoke a sense of anxiety of foreboding in the reaction of the spectator. Wigman's *Sacre* inhabited an unknown, non-specific setting, providing a glimpse of an anonymous matriarchal society selecting its sacrificial victim. Graham's vision took place in a pared-down representation of the American Southwest, dreamlike in its starkness, and increasingly nightmarish as the action leads to the sacrificial rite. Finally, Bausch's version lay in no man's land, a (literally) earthy production, playing out timelessly ritualistic and tribal behaviours in its supposedly unspecified context.

The theme of ritualistic performance is significant for a number of reasons, not least because, as a commonality linking avant-garde dance movements, it espouses a desire to explore non-Western source material in increasingly radical performance practice. The reaction to Nijinsky's work mellowed over time – dance and art historians alike now recognise the first performance as one of the seminal moments in Modernist history. Similarly, the musical score is acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century composition, yet West German audiences were visceral in their responses to Bausch's peat-

²²⁶ T. Scholl. 1994. *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernization of Ballet*. London: Routledge: 78.

covered stage setting in the early 1970s, and dance critics were horrified by perceived misogynistic undertones in Graham's late choreography. Such instances indicate that the different incarnations of primitivism in *Sacre*, even decades after the 1913 Paris premiere, still maintain the ability to challenge and shock their audiences.

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