4 The baroque body

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Baroque dance developed from the late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century court ballet, *ballet de cour*, and survived into eighteenth-century opera ballet until it was eventually displaced by the dramatic innovations of Marie Sallé and Jean-Georges Noverre.[1] Although it disappeared entirely from European stages with the emergence of the nineteenth-century romantic ballet, the baroque made a return in the twentieth century through a series of "baroquisms" in modern dance and ballet, as well as through historical reconstructions of a scholarly and theatrical nature. There is evidence of a serious attempt to reconstruct baroque dance as early as 1910 in Germany.[2] The creation of original or speculative baroque movement languages, however, was more prevalent until mid-century. Modern dancer Alexander Sacharoff, for example, choreographed and performed solos such as *Au temps du grand siècle/Pavane royale* in 1919, and Kurt Jooss choreographed *Pavane on the Death of an Infanta* in 1929.[3] Oskar Schlemmer was influenced by early seventeenth-century burlesque ballet costume design in his experimental *Triadic Ballet* (1922). Bronislava Nijinska choreographed *Les Fâcheux* for the Ballets de Monte Carlo in 1924 and danced the male lead herself.[4] Martha Graham choreographed *Imperial Gesture* in 1935 and José Limón choreographed *The Moor's Pavane*, based on *Othello* with a Henry Purcell score, in 1949. In all of these cases, something understood as the marker of period style was incorporated into a twentieth-century concept of dance modernism.

The baroque could easily seem the natural domain of classical ballet even if choreographers had no specific knowledge of historical dance; for example, the Stuttgart Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty* in the 1970s skilfully used the contrast between seventeenth- and nineteenth-century ballet costume to convey the two worlds of the narrative. George Balanchine's *Agon* (1957) was inspired by François De Lauze's 1623 dance treatise *Apologie de la danse*; I have seen performances of *Agon* where the early seventeenth-century influence is indicated explicitly by period bows performed in intervals to the main dances. But, for the most part, the baroque body is not visible in *Agon*, although doubtless still present by virtue of musical reference.[5]

Baroque dance can also seem the domain of modern dance in that it preceded and was radically different from classical ballet. Unlike classical

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ballet, the legs are never lifted high in the air, and the foot is often flexed at the ankle rather than pointed. The arms do not trace airy, expansive *port de bras* above the head but contained half circles in front of the chest and not higher than shoulder level. Supple hand rotations starting at the wrist ornament these circular arm movements. Jumps do not soar through the air but are more like hops. In general, one could say that baroque dance blurs the distinction between classical ballet and modern dance while remaining a historical style in its own right. As the polarity between classical and modern softened by the latter half of the twentieth century, baroque dance became more visible as a viable contemporary performance option. No matter what technical skills the dancer starts with, baroque dance technique is not easily mastered. Being highly cerebral, musically complex and often counter-intuitive, it demands special study.

Although full-length seventeenth-century ballets are rarely, if ever, integrated into the repertories of major ballet companies and modern dance companies present only historical reconstructions of twentieth-century choreographers, by the mid- to late twentieth century baroque dance technique became the domain of dancers specialising in period style. Such specialisation was possible because of dances surviving in the period notation of Raoul Auger Feuillet and Pierre Rameau.[6] In the United States, Wendy Hilton analysed the notation and translated it into performative terms.[7] In 1976 Catherine Turocy and Ann Jacoby formed the New York Baroque Dance Company, which staged full-scale productions of the eighteenth century and brought baroque dance to a worldwide audience (see Fig. 7). In the 1980s, French dance scholar Francine Lancelot also cracked the code of Feuillet notation. Her dance company Ris et danceries, founded in 1980, also toured internationally.[8] Lancelot taught this material to modern dancers and ballet dancers who incorporated aspects of it into contemporary choreography. Former company member Christine Bayle founded L'Eclat des Muses in 1983, and Beatrice Massin's Fêtes Galantes was founded in 1993. Both companies, based in Paris, as well as the New York Baroque Dance Company, still perform today, as does Marie-Geneviève Massé's Compagnie L'Eventail.

The specificities and peculiarities of baroque dance technique gained greater public exposure when Lancelot staged her baroque-derived choreography, such as *Quelques pas graves de Baptiste* (1985), for the Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris. Similar exposure for the idea of reinvention occurred when Mikhail Baryshnikov danced Leonid Jacobson's *Vestris* (1969) or when Beatrice Massin choreographed for the film *Le Roi danse* (1999). Other dancers currently working with baroque reconstruction and reinvention on the concert stage include Linda Tomko, Sarah Edgar and Patricia Beaman. While reconstruction attempts faithfully to reconstitute the original choreography, reinvention takes liberties with the historical sources.[9]

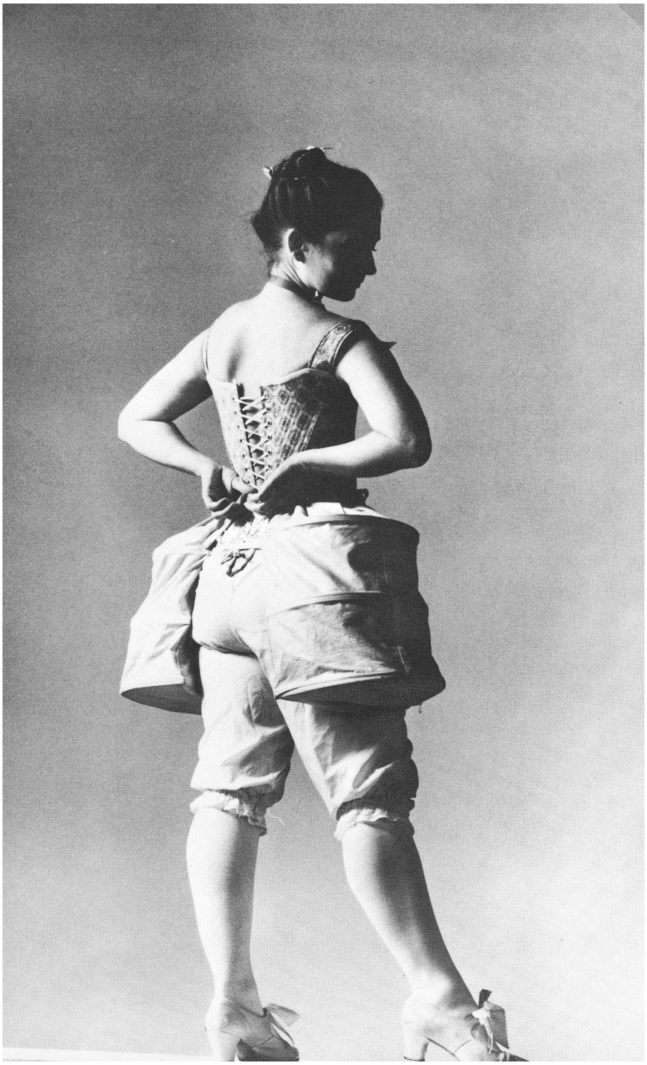

Figure 7 Catherine Turocy, Artistic Director, The New York Baroque Dance Company.

Another important aspect of twentieth-century choreographic creativity is research into early modern performance practices.[10] Baroque gesture is a key area of such research; the technique of baroque gesture is not identical to the arm and hand movements of baroque dance, nor is it the pantomime of nineteenth-century ballet, but rather a form of dramatic action that bridges theatre, dance and opera and has links to rhetorical delivery. The scholarly presentations of baroque dance reconstruction at conferences such as the Congress on Research in Dance and the Society of Dance History Scholars frequently focus on variants in notated dances. Such presentations are in their way extremely erudite and aimed at specialists. In some cases, the knowledge required to stage responsible reconstructions makes

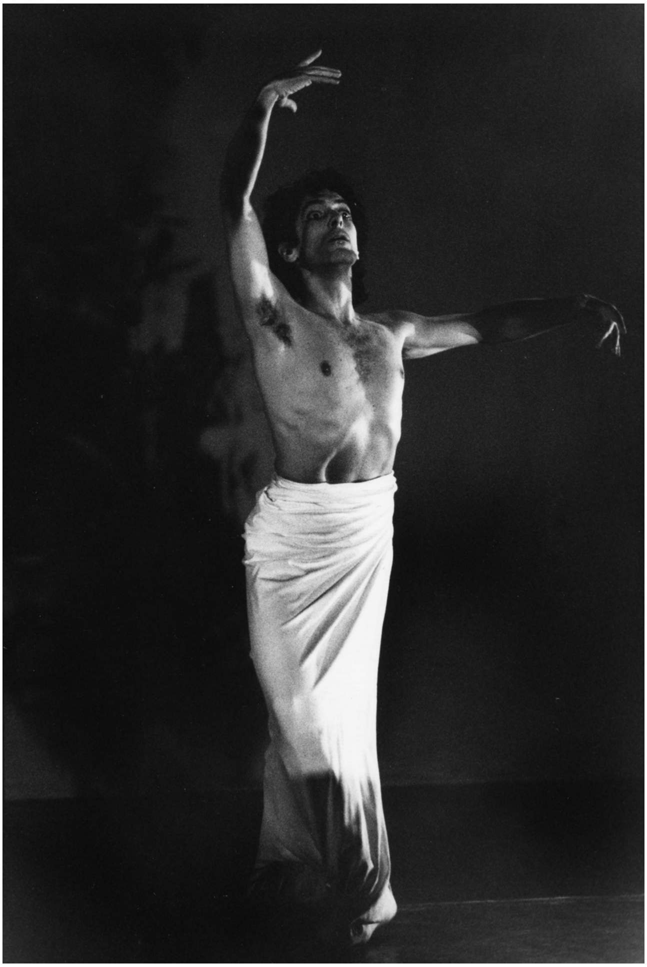

Figure 8 Mark Franko in *Le Marbre tremble.*

demonstrations appear to be a strictly academic exercise. Reinvention, on the other hand, treats historical materials – technique, music, costume and scenarios – as springboards for the development of new work that can speak to a contemporary public but is also anti-modernist. Klaus Abromeit's L'autre pas company in Berlin has experimented with the juxtaposition of baroque and everyday movement. The commitments of pedestrian movement of the late 1950s and 1960s are here transformed into a historicisation or historical relativisation of contemporary experience. Works by François Raffinot such as *Caprice* (1988) bring baroque technique into contexts that are wholly reinvented, thus implying that the creative premises of another era apply to contemporary experience. Mark Franko's *Le Marbre tremble* (1986) for his company Novantiqua set in motion the caryatids of Pierre Puget through choreographic interpretation and photographic projection (see Fig. 8). The idea behind the piece was that of a baroque slave figure – Puget's models were galley slaves – exploring physical suffering by applying baroque visual art to dance. Recently members of Catherine Turocy's New York Baroque Dance Company presented experimental works ("post-modern baroque") based on the baroque technique and theatrical conventions contrasted with their contemporary analogues. Choreographic reinvention is the outcome of the authenticity debates that also took place in musicological circles during the 1980s.[11] According to these debates, despite rigorous efforts to determine what was "historically correct", no one interpretation could ultimately be authoritative. Unlike the modernist adoption of the baroque, these works are post-modern in that they reflect critically their own means and ends.

Scholars who have conducted important research into the aesthetics and politics of baroque dance include Françoise Christout, Margaret M. McGowan, Rudolf zur Lippe and Mark Franko.[12] In the background of these and other studies lies the link between court ballet aesthetics, rituals of state and early modern subjectivity. Court ballets were created for specific state occasions and were thus imbued with allegory, diplomacy and intrigue. Research has shown how baroque dance enables a reflection on spectacle and power, the early modern performance of gender and the relation of self-fashioning to political absolutism. Giovanni Careri has given special attention to the relation of the numerous seventeenth-century ballets based on Tasso and the development of modern subjectivity and affectivity.[13] These topics, like choreographic reinvention, create a bridge between seventeenth-century ballet and contemporary cultural criticism. Spectacle during the reign of Louis XIV, for example, was an extension of his political power; thus the notion of the spectacular in itself continues to suggest power relations. In some ways, vanguard scholarship has been more influential on baroquist reinvention than on academic reconstruction. William Forsythe's *Artifact* (1984), largely inspired by baroque dance, was among other things a conscious attempt to create a hyperbolically spectacular ballet through choreographic geometries.[14] At the same time, the spoken word in this piece was used to explore the theme of the fold, which clearly suggests and refers to Gilles Deleuze's[15] influential theory of the baroque based on an analysis of the writings of German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz. The early modern engineering of state power as a spectacle – an idea whose relevance to contemporary life has been demonstrated by Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*[16] – has also been the subject of important research on representation and power by Louis Marin, Stephen Orgel and Jean-Marie Apostolidès.[17] The antipathy for expression in post-structuralist theory and a concomitant interest in surface finds its analogue in the baroque's rejection of psychological depth. From the perspective of aesthetics, a renewal of interest in allegory in the 1980s also brought baroque aesthetics to the fore in a number of areas.[18]

An interesting focus of recent scholarship to emerge from this trend is the dancing king's body itself: the cross-dressed king and the king in the role of the hermaphrodite extends thought on the performativity of power to the realm of sexuality, gender and dance in the early modern setting.[19] How can the king, who represents patriarchal authority in the body politic, represent sexual ambiguity on stage? Again, one can note the contemporary resonance of baroque dance, not just because it suggests pastiche or the post-modern recycling of historical styles, but also because it pre-dates psychological motivation in the performance of unconventional sexualities and transgression, thus bypassing bourgeois morality while remaining fundamentally anti-modernist.[20] Mark Morris's *Dido and Aeneas* (1989), performed to the music of Henry Purcell's opera, is a good example of modern dance riding the wave of the baroque music revival while evoking the story of love and death in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.[21] Morris himself played the cross-dressed roles of Dido and the Witch. While the choreography does not reflect early modern performance practices, it is a baroquist work. It is unusual in that the most interesting choreographic passages are performed to the *recitatif* that was usually reserved for a more rhetorical presentation, while the set pieces traditionally reserved for dancing are markedly less interesting. That is, the dancing invades the domain of gesture and Morris uses deaf-mute sign language as his methodology.

The desire to find an alternative to the narrative embedded in psychological motivation that has characterised much modern dance and contemporary ballet since the 1940s, as well as an alternative to post-modernist formalist abstraction since the 1960s, has transformed our view of baroque and baroquist work from a specialised historical exercise to a provocative theatrical experiment. The non-modern became appealing and fascinating and we might call it the post-modern archaic. This is a different gesture from that of assimilating tradition in the interest of overcoming subjectivism as, for instance, in the works of T.S. Eliot. However, the baroque revival also complicates facile notions of the post-modern by rethinking modernism through the lens of the early modern. In this sense, the return of the baroque in the twentieth century could be considered a modernist project.

German artist Oskar Schlemmer's interest in dance developed out of his enthusiasm for the tradition of classical ballet and his belief that baroque costume design counteracted two trends of early twentieth-century dance modernism: nudity and the fluttery veils of the ballerina. Schlemmer sought formal innovation in choreographic movement based on a re-conceptualisation of the human form that led him to the idea of the *Kunstfigur*, the art-figure or artificial figure. This idea was largely influenced by early seventeenth-century French costume drawings. Court ballet, for Schlemmer, was "free of constraints and thus predestined to furnish time and again the starting point for a theatrical Renaissance".[22] Schlemmer was perhaps the most influential artist to assimilate baroque stylistics to the modernist project of aesthetic innovation. Interestingly, he is now considered a progenitor of post-modern performance art. Thus, one can say that the baroque is a cultural space of cohabitation between modernism and the post-modern. All this would not be possible without the substantial preliminary research on court ballet prior to the twentieth century. In the mid-nineteenth century Paul Lacroix and Victor Fournel collected and published many court ballet libretti, which contain accounts of the action of the song lyrics (*récits*).[23] The music for much of this song repertory survives in the *Philidor* collection,[24] but the dance music, for the most part, does not. The baroque music revival can be traced back to the Bach revival of the early and mid-nineteenth century; the most important event was surely the performance of the *St Matthew Passion* by Johann Sebastian Bach in the Singakademie Berlin on 11 March 1829 under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. The Bach revival may have awakened a similar curiosity of bibliographers and theatre historians for the nineteenth-century research into court ballet texts.[25] But the cultural production of the late Renaissance and early seventeenth century, which is often thought of as pre-baroque but no longer Renaissance, remained largely hidden. Musicologists had long neglected the music of this earlier period.[26] French court ballet was also characterised by an extravagant costume culture from the workshops of Daniel Rabel in the early seventeenth century and Jean Berain in the later seventeenth century.[27] The interdisciplinary nature of performances and their elaborate production values conspire to make court ballet a challenging form to revive in the contemporary dance world. This is perhaps why the work of reconstruction began with the dance technique itself.

Along with a vogue for historical reconstruction from other periods of dance history and the revival of baroque music in the 1980s through an intense concentration on period instrument performance, the performance of baroque dance was internationally well received during that decade. The apogee of the baroque revival is said to be the lavish Arts Florissants production of Lully's *Atys* (1987), perhaps because the economic resources expended on this production evoked the riches available to court performance in the baroque period itself. It would be hard to duplicate such production values in further work. (In reality there was not a lot of baroque dancing in the production; the high point was Jean-Christophe Paré's solo as Morpheus.) Possibly for this reason, the baroque music revival has continued to flourish because it does not depend on production values that are so onerous to sustain. If dance, on the other hand, is to progress beyond what it has already demonstrated about vocabulary and performance style to work as persuasively with the reconstruction and/or reinvention of the entire stage space, enormous resources will have to be dedicated to it. As scarce resources are currently devoted to work that is most obviously new and innovative, this is a difficult proposition to sustain.

Nevertheless, baroque dance, art and music catalysed experimental choreography during the 1980s, the decade of twentieth-century dance that should be called "baroque". Baroquist aesthetics and its offshoots resonated with the post-modern recycling of historical styles. Yet, it was really not about random sampling or an equalisation of choreographic languages, but instead a way to reflect allegorically on movement and identity. But, coming after the dance boom of the 1960s and 1970s, interest in baroque dance also reflected a greater sophistication about the history of dance itself in the Western tradition. This was due in part to reconstructions of historical modern dance starting with the work of Isadora Duncan that began to take place in the early 1970s. Although there is always the possibility that it can be read as anti-democratic royalist nostalgia it also has the effect of revealing an unusual arsenal of theatrical movements, costume and make-up. It has a sociological connection to the financial excess and irresponsibility of the Reagan era, a time when even dance believed itself to be a big business. The powers of defamiliarisation in baroque dance rival its historical connotations. The idea of the baroque as a brand of post-modernism, an anti-modernist gesture without a classical model or an extension of modernism through the absorption of the past in the generation of new forms, was prevalent in the visual arts as well as in dance of the 1980s. Connections of the baroque to anti-normative or non-classical aesthetics made it a cultural rendez-vous of 1980s choreographic culture throughout Europe and America. One of its appealing effects was an assumed artificiality that counteracted high seriousness without falling into the other extreme of indifference.

The vogue for the baroque did not extend much beyond the 1980s and early 1990s, however, and allusions to this style are now less frequent on the ballet and modern dance stage. As French choreographers came of age during the 1990s, baroque or baroquist choreography may have become perceived in France as less relevant to the contemporary focus as a sine qua non of choreographic creativity. Once the interest in the baroque was characterised as antiquarian, its pertinence decreased and its venues dwindled. Also, with the funding crisis of the early 1990s, which particularly affected dance, resources on both sides of the Atlantic have been consecrated to preservation over performance. Paradoxically, the emphasis on heritage preservation in the dance world as a result of decreased funding has served to displace the role of historical reconstruction in live performance. International dance festivals seem less eager to programme dance reconstructions of any period. It is also likely that the baroque project as a whole missed its true mission as an anti-normative response both to classical ballet and to high modernism. As such, both reconstruction and reinvention remain unfinished projects. The baroque body is by definition a phantasm.