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Lynn Garafola's Biography of Bronislava Nijinska – A Personal Challenge

To Jack Anderson. In loving memory.
With his writings on Bronislava Nijinska today's world-wide high esteem of the choreographer's œuvre was founded.

Bronislava Nijinska's biography had long been anticipated – since one had been able to follow Lynn Garafola's gradual approach to the subject. The first signs of the American dance researcher's involvement with the Nijinsky/Nijinska theme were already visible in the 1990s, and these were followed by numerous other publications.[1] The ultimate proof that this body finally merge into a whole was the amazing "Kiev-piece", which the author presented in 2011. Garafola had also first explored this topic – the very important Kiev years of Nijinska – in essays on Russian dance modernism. Oxford University Press then published the book in 2022. The author called her more than 650-page examination of the – female – key figure of the twentieth-century ballet simply "La Nijinska". It consists of 16 chapters and is sub-titled "Choreographer of the Modern".

Although Garafola's undertaking was thus open to public scrutiny, its successful conclusion is deeply impressive in terms of the author's courage, commitment and perseverance. All the more so to myself having written a Nijinska monograph in the 1970s, and having had thus devoted several years to this outstanding personality of dance.[2] Thus, I am to some extent familiar with the subject of "Nijinska", know the extreme difficulties involved in writing about it, and above all have experienced the working conditions of the seventies, which, compared to today, seem like drudgery. However, although the materials to be examined were still in Nijinska's personal archive at the time, thus barely accessible to the public, a very personal portrait of Nijinska nevertheless emerged.

It was only after Nijinska's death in 1973 – in 2023 we were commemorating the 50th anniversary of her passing – that the Nijinska materials became the property of the Library of Congress in Washington. They now are also the most important basis of the present book. It is probably due to these performance documents and notes, and above all diaries,[3] that a biography of this personality is possible after all. In this context, special thanks are due to Dina Odnopozova, who – as stated in the preface – translated this diary from Russian into English, as well as a myriad of pages from notebooks. I am convinced that the key to understanding Nijinska as a person and as an artist lies in these notes. The lifelong activity within her own cultural space – albeit being transferred to a foreign country – was decisive for the émigré culture to which Nijinska belonged all her career. This is followed by the question of the form, nature and change of such a culture – an important set of themes that is taken up repeatedly by Garafola as well as in the following.

Garafola's book succeeds in this by no means easy endeavour: It conveys the choreographer's position as a central figure in international ballet in twentieth century. And it shows grandeur,

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[1] See Lynn Garafola's biography, including her publications, lectures and exhibitions at https://barnard.edu/profiles/lynn-garafola (accessed January 2024).

[2] The dissertation was completed in 1974 and submitted to the Department of Theatre Studies at the University of Vienna as a PhD thesis. In accordance with Austrian university practice, the work is accessible to everyone, but not published.

[3] Nijinska herself used these materials for her book "Early Memoirs". It was published 1981, translated and edited by Nijinska's daughter Irina and Jean Rawlinson, by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.

even when one does not quite share some of the views presented. In that case, one is inspired to reflect on fundamental questions of stage dance in the previous century. “La Nijinska” also proves to be immensely readable. This even includes the large number of footnotes, which are not only read with sheer delight, but are also proof of how broadly anchored the author wanted her topic to be.

The present remarks do not represent a book review in the strict sense, but rather an – admittedly one-sided – dialogue with the author, in which comments are made in response to her statements and assessments. The sequence of the comments mainly follows the 16-part sequence of the book and is introduced in each section with a quotation of Garafola, which is then discussed. Occasionally, however, a rarely addressed topic concerning the cosmos of Nijinska is brought up. The literature on which the author relies is mostly based on her own publications that have appeared on the subject and its thematic frame over the decades.

The book’s 16 chapters are:
1. Nijinska’s Apprenticeship / 2. Amazon of the Avant-Garde / 3. Back from the Future / 4. Where Is Home? / 5. *Les Noces* / 6. *Les Biches* / 7. *Le Train Bleu* and Its Aftermath / 8. A Freelance Choreographer / 9. Globalizing Modernism / 10. Les Ballets de Madame Ida Rubinstein / 11. A Choreographer for Russia Abroad / 12. Les Ballets Russes de Bronislava Nijinska / 13. On the Road / 14. In Wartime America / 15. The Final Act / 16. Resurrection

1

“1908 ... she became a member of the corps de ballet of the Maryinsky Theater, home to the Imperial Ballet and Imperial Opera.” (Garafola, Preface XVI)

To recount Nijinska's career means not only to write a story about the adherence to the idea of “Imperial Ballet”, but also about the departure from it. This requires reconsidering the way in which it was abandoned. Garafola leaves the description of the training in St. Petersburg and the first assignments to Nijinska herself, letting her narrative begin just where Nijinska’s “Early Memoirs” end.[4] However, the influence of these early years is present, directly as well as indirectly, throughout the book. Hence, Nijinska's insistence on the training in the school of classical dance is also vividly conveyed, when Nijinska uses the “Imperial School”, starting from herself as a trained dancer, but employed in a modified way in her creations; when the teacher Nijinska demands rules, orders and hierarchical thinking from her students; when she herself applies the compositional means familiar to her from Marius Petipa, modifies them or rejects them; when she uses the various role types of dancers brought in by Petipa in a different way; when she changes his concept of the work and renounces a libretto; when she negates Petipa's structure of the work and sets something else against it. All these topics as well as Nijinska's newly found work forms remain in focus throughout the book.

2

“... willfully unremembered or diminished by the accurate but demeaning sobriquet ‘Nijinsky’s sister’” (Garafola, Preface XXII)

Over Nijinska's career, and even more over her private life, lies a shadow that obscures the glory to which she is actually entitled. Garafola is not reluctant to name the very reason.

[4] See footnote 3.

Weighed down by her brother – first by his stardom, then by his illness – the artistically immensely versatile, innovative, and sparkling, and at the same time uncompromising and critical Nijinska succeeds only later in stepping out of the halo of Vaslav.

In this regard, the first years of the artistic existence of Bronislava Fominichna Nizhinskaia, born in 1891 in Minsk, can be summarized – somewhat pithily and reduced to mere facts – as follows: her brother already attracts attention with his talent during his studies (at the ballet school of the Maryinsky Theatre), whereas the younger sister shows promise. As a member of the ensemble (of the Maryinsky Theatre), the brother is already assigned important roles, and while Bronislava dances in the corps de ballet, the brother is already a partner of the leading ballerinas; he also arouses the desire of high-ranking personalities of St. Petersburg society. His sister is not considered very attractive, but because of her brilliant dancing technique – and perhaps because she is the brother's sister – she is granted solos. An up-and-coming young choreographer – Michel Fokine – succeeds in creating a reform work with “Le Carnaval”. The essence of the roles created for the siblings in this work is movement without posing. Fokine now achieves – already for the Ballets Russes – the next coup. He is able to further elaborate Nijinsky’s dance uniqueness insofar as he completely ignores the order of the dancers' role types and conceives his parts solely guided by Nijinsky's aura and his dance characteristics. His provocatively genderless role designs fascinate (artist) crowds. In the creations for Bronislava, orders are maintained, and Nijinska shifts between the existing role types virtuously, but with little attention. The brother becomes increasingly famous due to his distinctiveness; he finally enjoys causing a scandal at the Maryinsky Theatre. He leaves the safe position at the theatre, and the sister follows him. If the brother shows his moods, the sister compensates. If she can no longer do this due to pregnancy, the brother suffers tantrums; if the brother leaves the Ballets Russes, the sister does the same. Unfortunately, he is now unable to accomplish the necessary task to form his own group, so the sister takes care of this. However, when the brother decides he is incapable of dancing, the sister is unable to do it for him. Initially, it looks as if the war that has broken out and the separation of the siblings will put an end to this well-rehearsed back and forth, which expands Nijinsky's fame and restricts Nijinska's activities. But the brother's arm extends far. Now in Petrograd, Nijinska wants to continue working for her brother; she wants to found a school to train dancers for Vaslav who will meet his standards. Moreover, in the absence of her brother, she begins to make choreographies. While her brother is traveling again as a member of the Ballets Russes, Nijinska, at first still as the wife of the dancer Alexander Kochetovsky, takes up an engagement in Kiev in 1915. The next catastrophe ensues: Just as Nijinska's father – born in Poland and together with his Polish wife (also a dancer) engaged as dancer and choreographer in Kiev – once left the family, so it subsequently happens with her own husband – Kochetovsky takes his leave. Finally, the sister, although offered an important position in Moscow, rushes to Vienna. Her presence might hopefully be a healing shock to the brother. This is not the case. Nijinska will have to provide for herself, her mother, her daughter, and her son for the rest of her life. Pleasantly unadorned, yet resolutely on Bronislava's side, Garafola recounts all these events, pleasantly critical of Vaslav, rightly mentioning his wife only in the most necessary cases.

3

“[Nijinska] experienced the transformative power of the Russian Revolution and created her greatest work under the continuing influence of its avant-garde.” (Garafola, Preface XV)

Even before the world turned all eyes to Ukraine as of 2022, Garafola had focussed in detail on the dance events of this country around 1920, her interest being: Nijinska's stay there from 1915 to 1921. Here, too, Garafola had considered the subject from all sides, not only in essays, but also being physically present in the area.[5]

Nijinska's stay in Kiev, her artistic environment, and the theoretical foundation developed there and formulated in writing prove to be standard-setting and ground-breaking for her future work. This, sufficiently known, much discussed and commented on, is given surprising shape and contour by a Ukrainian project completed in 2021, but not presented in the "West" until 2023. This production will be discussed in the following – in excursus form – because it strengthens my assessment, which differs from that of Garafola: the closer examination of this performance sharpens the perception of Nijinska's much-cited "Moderne"[6] and raises the question of whether one can speak of only one "Moderne" with regard to dance. And as a consequence, it might clarify the question of which "Moderne" we are actually dealing with in Nijinska's work.

The production in question is called "Bronislava Nijinska Dance Reconstruction" and is directed by Viktor Ruban and choreographer Svitlana Oleksiuk.[7] The team from Kiev, who, as they have recounted, also sought advice from Garafola during their work, gave guest performances in the summer of 2023 in Hellerau near Dresden – a place that once proudly called itself the "Laboratorium der Moderne" and which is closely associated with the work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze.

The choice of format, an episodically constructed lecture-performance is entirely convincing in this enterprise; a dance carpet marks the setting, and a screen for projections encloses the dance space. Clothes racks positioned to the side look like cubist two-dimensional relatives of Picasso's managers from "Parade". With this kind of presentation, the various layers that determined Nijinska's activities of that time, in addition to the artistic surrounding space, can now be presented simultaneously and equally. The more than a dozen "Nijinska evocations" or "miniatures" shown now present themselves as a kind of dialogue or interaction with the very special sources: Nijinska's sketchbooks, spatial plans, floor paths, step lists and notes, which Claudia Jeschke calls "Choreo-Graphien".[8] They are now placed in dialogue primarily with those visual artists of the Kiev period in whose thinking and actions Nijinska was largely

[5] In November 2017 Garafola gave a lecture in Lublin, Poland (about 100 km away from the Ukrainian border), entitled "Amazon of the Avant-Garde on a Global Stage". It goes without saying that Garafola sees in Nijinska an essential member of these actually painting Amazons. A year later, she discussed Nijinska and her work at the America House in Kiev.

[6] Note from the translator Stephanie Schöberl on the handling of some German terminology in this essay: Since the translation of some dance-specific German terms is tricky and often misleading, a few terms will remain in German. Among them the German "Moderne". In German – in a dance-historical context – this word covers the very modernism that developed in Central Europe (also) as a counter-movement against ballet. Thus, the term does not include "ballet modernism". German synonyms for "Moderne" are "Freier Tanz" or "Ausdruckstanz". The latter are also not translated. One section of the multi-part movement of the "Moderne" of dance ("Tanzmoderne") is expressionistic. Therefore, the term "expressionistic dance", often used in English for the whole movement, is misleading. The same is true for other terms such as "Körperbildung". This means training the body according to its natural possibilities, whereby the focus is on the body in its "totality".

[7] See Hanna Veselovska and Viktor Ruban, "Reconstructing the Glorious Past: Bronislava Nijinska's School of Movement". In: "Theatralia", vol. 25, no. 2, 2022, pp. 203–222. – The dancers were: Olha Vidisheva, Diana Hebre, Olha Kebas and Viktoriia Khoroshylova, Music: Yana Shliabanska, design of set and costumes: Bohdan Polishchuk, lighting design: Yevhen Kopion.

[8] See Claudia Jeschke, "*Les Noces* – Repetition : Variation : Transformation. Bronislawa Nijinska als Choreo-Graphin", in: Thomas Hochradner (ed.), "Zur Ästhetik des Vorläufigen", Universitätsverlag Winter, Heidelberg 2014, pp. 105–117.

anchored.[9] There is a painting from that era reminiscent of the vibrancy found in icons, such as those by Vadim Meller. In these paintings, the artist skillfully captures Nijinska's dynamic choreographic language using similarly dynamic figures. Newly devised forms, ideas of space, and stylistic peculiarities, as well as certain individuals give the "new" Nijinska pieces their structure. Among them is the "leading figure" of the Kiev years, Alexandra Exter, whose later collaboration with Nijinska while in exile had its origins here.[10] Compositional components also come from the spoken theatre of the time, such as that of Les Kurbas. The movement material is combined with motifs from Nijinska's "School of Movement", i.e. with written text, which is performed along with text passages from Nijinska's letters. All these levels intertwine not only organically, but also complementarily. Wilfully unemotional and with cool deliberation, at times improvisational, four female dancers execute their sequences of steps and configurations, the movement vocabulary alternating between plastic three-dimensionality and flatness in accordance with the experimental phase of the time.

The miniatures are mostly plotless, but sometimes feature narratives, such as the "Duet Nijinska–Exter", in which graphics, photographs, and gestural material are related to one another and cinematic procedures are used. In "Doll", Nijinska's solo "La Poupée", created for herself in 1915, a dancing doll is additionally manipulated with ropes and rods. At times, an attempt is made to recreate Nijinska's emotional state, her reasons and motives at the time of creation. In terms of movement, there is a reliance on graphic lines, dynamics and statuesque quality – characteristics that would later become central elements of the choreographer's work. Furthermore, there are configurations that, tightly packed together en face and two-dimensional, refer to Nijinska's later celebrated choreographic language.

The means used here – they are those that Nijinska used throughout her life – come almost exclusively from the compositional reservoir of the Tanzmoderne. Thus, the question immediately surfaces: in which "Moderne" is Nijinska anchored? That of "Freier Tanz" or that of ballet?

4

"In Kiev she opened the School of Movement, which became the center of her artistic explorations ... she worked with avant-garde theater directors and painters." (Garafola, Preface XVII)

The form and movement language of the described miniatures, mostly refer to Nijinska's central demand: "The dance language must be pulsating with movement." Thus, movement was her first interest, both in terms of the dance performance and the choreography itself. Movement is then also at the center of her thesis paper, which appeared in German in 1930,[11] but which, according to Nijinska's own statements, had already been written in Kiev in 1920

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[9] Artists of every genre and gender – painters, theatre- and film people, composers, choreographers, lighting designers, photographers – molded Nijinska's life at that time; common to all was their dissatisfaction with old educational systems.

[10] Exter emigrated in 1924, three years after Nijinska. The following year they collaborated on six ballets, which were performed by Nijinska's own ensemble on a tour through England. As early as 1924, an imaginary reunion of the two artists occurred in Vienna at the "International Exhibition of New Theatrical Techniques" organized by Friedrich Kiesler at the Konzerthaus. In the section "The New Russian Stage" was an exhibition of a scene model and figurines by Exter for "Salome" (1917, Tairov's Moscow Chamber Theater). Nijinska was represented by scene models and figurines by Marie Laurencin for "Les Biches" and Georges Braque for "Les Fâcheux" (1924, Diaghilev's Ballets Russes).

[11] The circumstances that led to the publication are discussed below.

with the subtitle “Theory of Choreography” and, according to Garafola, was already being contemplated in Moscow in 1918.

“Movement,” it says, “is the main element of dance, of its plot.” In the introduction, this is immediately followed by the demand: “The modern choreographic school must introduce movement into dance technique, establish the theory and mechanics of dance,” because, according to Nijinska, just as color is the material of painting and sound the material of music, movement is the material of dance. “Only in movement does rhythm live. Movement sets the body in action.”[12]

These apodictic sentences correspond to the demands of the time. They arise (though not solely) from the immensely complex Russian contemporary dance community, which can be divided into at least two parts: on the one hand, into a “free” movement that, in the wake of Isadora Duncan, wants to form a “Moderne” far removed from ballet; on the other hand, into an advanced ballet movement that tries to reform the order of the “old” school. In addition, there were radical innovators working on a classical basis. What they all have in common – including Nijinska – is the call for new instructional systems. Since the dance of Duncan was based more on intuition than on a body technique that could be passed on in a school, people – initiated in Russia by the “Künder der Moderne” Sergei Volkonsky[13] – turned to Delsartism and the rhythmic movement of Jaques-Dalcroze as a basis for something new. In respect to Jaques-Dalcroze and his teachings, Nijinska harbored a repeatedly articulated strong aversion, which can perhaps only be explained psychologically. The explanation for this is probably that the rhythm teacher used by Sergei Diaghilev for Nijinski's work on “Le Sacre du printemps” – Miriam Ramberg, alias Marie Rambert – interposed herself between the sister and the brother. (Rambert's relationship with Nijinska is discussed below.)
Nijinska is part of this process, which was also taking place outside Russia (especially in Central Europe), and this also physically, because she was involved in the creation of Nijinsky's “Le Sacre du printemps” – a work that was formative for Nijinska insofar as it was associated with a high degree of movement imagination. It may have seemed exemplary to her how the brother succeeded in infusing both the solo of the Chosen One and corps-de-ballet passages with movement. In his review of the Paris “Sacre” rehearsals in May 1913, Volkonsky gives testimony to this. (Since Nijinska was pregnant at the time, Maria Piltz had taken the role of the Chosen One). Volkonsky writes:

“Two elements stand out from his [Nijinsky's] plastic work: the rhythmization and the stylization of the movements. Anyone who reflects a little on the value that movement represents in terms of an artistic material must realize that only these two elements guarantee artistic movement. Movement must be subordinated to the musical beat, to the nuances of its rhythmic drawings, and it must be subordinated to the known, fixed canon of expressiveness.”

And Volkonsky's observations, made in the face of the rehearsals, concerning the “intentional pervasiveness of every movement, the absence of emptiness, the fullness of every moment”, might be the starting point for one's own. It called for movement to combine the old steps of ballet. “The element of dance is the movement and not the pose”, was Nijinska's credo. Expression should not come from a narrative, but from the steps themselves. Accordingly, the

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[12] See Bronislawa Nijinska, “Von der Bewegung und der Schule der Bewegung”, in: “Schrifttanz”, a quarterly edited by Alfred Schlee, Wien 1928–1931, reprint with an epilogue by Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, Olms, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 1991, issue I, April 1930 pp. 3–6, here p. 3.

[13] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, “Der Rhythmus als Basis der russisch-sowjetischen Theateravantgarde”, in: Barbara Aufschnaiter, Dunja Brötz (ed.), “Russische Moderne Interkulturell. Von der Blauen Blume zum Schwarzen Quadrat”, Studienverlag, Innsbruck 2004, pp. 176–188.

subject “Expression of Movement” was taught at her school. The fact that this subject was part of the curriculum of the Central European “Tanzmoderne” leads us again to ask in which “Moderne” Nijinska is anchored.

5

“She was an architect of twentieth-century neoclassicism…” (Garafola, Preface XV)

Political events not only caused Nijinska's Kiev school to fail – it existed for only two years – but she herself also considered it pointless to remain in what was now the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The events surrounding her arrival in Vienna and her reunion with her ailing brother, have been recounted in detail by myself in an edition of “Wiener Tanzgeschichten” (www.tanz.at, February 11, 2017). In the few months – May to September 1921 – that Nijinska was in Vienna, she danced with Vladislav Karnecki – a member of the Kiev Opera and repeatedly of the Ballets Russes – in her own choreographies at the dance etablissement “Moulin Rouge” from August 1 to mid-September.[14] “At the final rehearsal,” it is reported, she danced “before a parterre of artists, critics and connoisseurs” who “unanimously described her performance as a declared sensation.” One sees in her solo “a puppet dance that is probably the most accomplished in mimicry and technique.” On September 10, she participates in an evening in the Sophiensaal for the benefit of famished people in Russia. In mid-September Nijinska leaves Vienna to work for the Ballets Russes. This moment is to be considered the beginning of her world career. [15]

Although Garafola now traces what is to happen step by step, she too struggles to do justice to the singularity of “Les Noces” (1923).[16] It is certain that here, too, “the brother” immediately appears in comparison, since like his choreography for “Le Sacre du printemps”, Nijinska's “Les Noces” is a work whose origins are difficult to determine. In Nijinska's conception of the work, the very complex interaction with the music stands out; this results from the de-literarization of the texts. In this way, the dramaturgy is solely of a dance-musical nature, the events being limited to the stations of the wedding ritual. In her conception, Nijinska is now able to combine two worlds, both of which she represents as a specialist: on the one hand, the world of the classical-academic style – although in already modified form –, as she had applied it in her contributions to “The Sleeping Princess” (1921) for the Ballets Russes; on the

[14] Nijinska is still remembered in Vienna from the Ballets Russes guest performances in 1912 and 1913 at the Court Opera, where she had danced Papillon in “Le Carnaval”, the Polovetsian Girl in “Polovetsian Dances”, Mazurka in “Les Sylphides”, the Ballerina in “Petrushka” and a Nymph in “L'Après-midi d'un faune”, among others.

[15] Alexander Kochetovsky had had an engagement as guest dancer at the Vienna State Opera since November 1920 – even before Nijinska's stay in Vienna. Thereby a most remarkable incident occurred. He danced the solos “Haidarma”, a Crimean Tatar dance (music: Alexander Spendiarov), and “Trepak" (music: Anton Rubinstein), which originated from the couple's repertoire, as interludes in Josef Hassreiter's Pantomimic Divertissement “Atelier Brüder Japonet”. In February 1921, he embodied Negro Masud in the premiere of Nicola Guerra's staging of “Scheherazade”, made for a tour of Spain by the State Opera Ballet. Furthermore, in December 1920, an evening of dance performed jointly by Kochetovsky and Nijinsky's pupil Annie Lieser was announced at the Vienna Konzerthaus.

[16] The remarks on “Les Noces” are based on the related article written by the author together with Thomas Steiert for “Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters”. See Carl Dahlhaus and the Research Institute for Music Theatre of the University Bayreuth under the direction of Sieghart Döhring (ed.), “Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters”, entry: Bronislawa Nijinska, “Les Noces”, vol. 4, Piper, München/Zürich 1991, pp. 432–436.

other hand, as an exponent of Russian “Moderne”, which she brought to the stage in Stravinsky's “Mavra” and “Renard” (both in 1922), also for the Ballets Russes.

She now combines both aspects with the pulsating movement that is one of the outstanding achievements of the “Sacre” choreography. Moreover, Nijinska no longer separates gestures that convey content from mere dance; she thus creates a new work form. “Les Noces” also has other characteristics in common with “Sacre”. As a ritual, it is the Christian counter-image to the pagan “Sacre”. The sole content of the ritual is the depiction of the state of the couple, which had to step out of society. As her brother did in all his ballets, Nijinska also creates her own principle of movement for “Les Noces”. It is influenced by the mode of representation of religious art, which was also a preferred subject in the Russian avant-garde. The “en-face" representation of the society shown as groups, whose aspiring posture comes from the classical school, is oriented on the religious models, but without returning to the presentational character of the nineteenth century ballet. The “opening” to the front becomes rather the isolating demarcation of the choreographic group formations; the stage becomes the venue of the ritual. The spatial paths of the predominant “patterns” of rows and circles result from the principle of movement. Making full use of the depth of the stage, the dancers move back and forth in rows parallel to the ramp or bend sideways in chains towards the alleys. Another group form is of “clusters”, blocks separated by gender, in predominantly symmetrical formations. The “pyramids”, piled up from dancers' bodies, appearing completely static and yet pulsating with movement, open and close the individual scenes. The movement material used is sparse and consists of running, stomping, and jumping as well as “walking on pointe”; it is interwoven with alienated folk-dance elements, such as autonomous movements of the upper and lower halves of the body. The movement sequence is determined by the collectively led action-bearing corps de ballet and derives its tension from the juxtaposition of groups and individuals. The completely isolated couple, in their social function as “victims” at the mercy of society, forms the passively persisting opposite pole to the active group.

It seems to be a bit too early to follow this assessment with a definition of Nijinska's understanding of her “Moderne”. In this context, however, it would be worth considering why Edwin Denby, of all people, as dancer and critic anchored in Central European “Tanzmoderne”, was able to give the most convincing assessment of “Les Noces”.

6

“Approaching the danse d’école through the prism of modernism not only gave her choreography its distinctive flavor but also expanded the lexicon and syntax of classical technique, above all in the area of female virtuosity.” (Garafola, Preface XX/XXI)

It was probably only a matter of time before ballet would also embrace the trend of “neoclassicism”, which was particularly thriving in France. It was clear that the Ballets Russes and its decision-makers, including their assistants, would advocate it. But that Nijinska, who was not at all fashionable, would take this step was not to be expected, especially after “Les Noces”. The fact that this style of “neoclassicism” has remained internationally valid to this day, however, seems almost paradoxical.

With the slogan “Vive le néoclassicisme!” from the preface to the second edition of the “Garçonne”, Victor Margueritte gives his book, which he speculatively calls “roman de

mœurs", a motto that could equally be that of "Les Biches".[17] For neoclassicism is not merely considered a stylistic device here, but an attitude towards life that corresponds to the spirit of the times. An integral part of this is the discussion about a new type of woman, a theme that the ballet also addresses. Whereas the book does not really deal seriously with the life portrait of this new woman, the choreographic realization of the libretto, which at first glance appears to be meaningless, exposes this very spirit by means of its own frivolity. Thus, the libretto reveals through a highly artistic and allusive wickerwork combining the levels of reality of the novel, contemporary life, and the stage. Designed as a satirical-ironic look at fashionable society and its attitude to life, "Les Biches" was not only a self-portrayal of this society, which had become the target group of Diaghilev's repertory policy in the 1920s, but also of the artists involved and their aesthetics.

This is supported not only by Marie Laurencin's scenery, but also by the costumes with their "fabric dramaturgy", whereby velvet, lace, and other materials each emphasize different character studies. The Garçonne's costume also became a prototype for a ballerina's costume because it leaves the legs uncovered, thus enabling new kinds of step combinations; moreover, it redefines the female dancer's body as a vehicle of expression. Accordingly, Nijinska also uses classical language, which, however, is not to be interpreted as a turning back. Although one could have assumed that the choreographer had parted with the "danse d'école" after "Les Noces", Nijinska now uses it in a new way. She does this primarily by abolishing the principle of movement coordination that evolved in the nineteenth century, the codified interplay between head, shoulders, torso, arms and legs. Nijinska disassembles this order into its "individual parts" and puts them together independently of one another, sometimes asynchronously. Soon, new forms of port de bras, épaulement, and "walking on pointe" emerged, this time used as an alternative to the pas de bourrée. Nijinska's already familiar compositional device of clustering is used here to characterize the young men. The inclusion of subject-related ingredients perhaps derives from those music-hall motifs used in Soviet avant-garde productions, for instance.

Looking at Nijinska's choreographic style for "Les Biches", we come to the conclusion that this is a form of "Moderne". Whether this has the same roots as those used in "Les Noces", however, may be called into question.

7

"Through her career as a freelance choreographer, she also played a crucial role in the international dissemination of ballet modernism." (Garafola, Preface XV)

In retrospect, it seems extremely odd that Diaghilev allowed Nijinska to simply depart after these two highly successful ballets. Garafola vividly describes not only this, but also the following years until 1930, characterized by almost hectic activity. This very often proved to be extremely disappointing for Nijinska. On the one hand, because she failed with her own ventures, which had only come about with the greatest effort, and on the other hand, because she had not been able to achieve the success she deserved with her numerous creations. The companies and houses for which she worked were: her own Théâtre Choréographique

[17] The remarks on "Les Biches" are based on the related article that the author (together with Noël Goodwin) wrote for "Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters". See: Carl Dahlhaus and the Research Institute for Music Theatre of the University Bayreuth under the direction of Sieghart Döhring (ed.), "Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters", entry: Bronislawa Nijinska, "Les Biches", vol. 4, Piper, München/Zürich 1991, pp. 436–438.

Nijinska, the Paris Opéra, the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, the Ballets Ida Rubinstein, a soirée for the Vicomte de Noailles, and Anna Pavlova's company, the Olga Spessivtseva Ballet, as well as the Opéra Russe à Paris and the Vienna State Opera. Through touring – in Vienna also with Ida Rubinstein's ensemble – she became more and more a household name, which, however, was interpreted variably. This depended on the place where a particular ballet was performed, the reception in France being basically positive. In Central Europe or Buenos Aires, the assessment could well be different, because the success or failure of a work was closely related to the assessment of ballet traditionally developed in a given cultural area.

This was also true of the Ballets Russes themselves. Whereas in France, and especially in the Anglo-American world, people were of the opinion that the work of the Ballets Russes was the necessary step out of the nineteenth century, Central Europe had a completely different take on the matter. The judgment of Hans Brandenburg – admittedly an ardent partisan of the "Tanzmoderne" in Central Europe – sounded quite different. The performances of the Russians would once more prove that ballet was dead; the performances were nothing else "but spooky phantoms, with which a lifeless fantasy haunted human brains". What remained was just "whitewash above graves, a façade in front of a mausoleum." Thus, Brandenburg's verdict, an opinion already uttered in 1913, became the general view in Central Europe by the 1920s.[18]

The success of "Le Carnaval" in Berlin, where the work was performed in 1910 and 1912, was due to other reasons.[19] One of them was that Nijinsky, who danced the Harlequin in 1912, was regarded as an "Ausdruckstänzer" rather than a classical dancer. Another example of the reception of the Ballets Russes in Germany dates from 1924, when the ensemble gave a guest performance in Chemnitz, among other places.[20] On October 6, 1924, the "Chemnitzer Tagblatt" printed an extremely interesting review, signed by one H.M., of Léonide Massine's "Le Tricorne": "(…) the drop scene, painted by Picasso, rises, expressionist music challenges expressionist dancing – and now we may be amazed how a Russian National Ensemble – if not directly ʽoverwigmans' – certainly takes out Mary Wigman easily and smoothly. There is no ballet on point, there is nothing metaphysical, no well-brought up higher daughters gliding and wiggling across stage. Here they go the whole hog: bodily expression up to the grotesque, stylised up to the brutal, the rhythms emphasized in palpable crassness, and, quasi alongside – behold the unprecedented singular finale – the Wigmanesque ʽPolyphony' of dance movement. And – all the time: music, music that has been made visible." [21]

Originally from Kiev, where, as we saw, the Russian avant-garde, largely fed by Central European "Moderne", was very present, Nijinska may well have taken note of these differences. To what extent she admitted to herself that she even carried these different characteristics within herself is not recorded. That this was indeed the case, however, is attested not only by the works created for the Ballets Russes up to that time, but also by at least two creations of those years: "Holy Etudes", which was revived again and again under various other names and can be seen as a spiritual counterpart to the pagan "Noces", and the first version of "La Valse". In both works there are compositional means that come from both "camps" of the "Moderne", that of Central European "Tanzmoderne" and that of ballet

[18] Hans Brandenburg, "Der moderne Tanz", Georg Müller, München [1913], p. 94.
[19] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Interlude classique. Sergei Diaghilew im Kaiserlichen Berlin", in: Claudia Jeschke, Ursel Berger, Birgit Zeidler (ed.), "Spiegelungen. Die Ballets Russes und die Künste", (=Documenta Choreologica, Leipzig), Leipzig 1997, pp. 93–104.
[20] The performed ballets were: "Le Tricorne", "Les Sylphides", "Polovtsian Dances", "The Good-Humoured Ladies", "Scheherazade", "Petrushka" and "Aurora's Wedding".
[21] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Chemnitz, for example. The Ballets Russes in Germany", unpublished lecture.

modernism. Thus, one could conclude, Nijinska was anchored in at least two variants of “Tanzmoderne” in her first successful phase as a choreographer.

8

“A conductor, Krauss was in his late thirties; he had met Nijinska in Buenos Aires and was determined to shake up the Opera’s venerable ballet troupe, on which Diaghilev’s revolution in ballet aesthetics had left few traces.” (Garafola, p. 278)

As much as Garafola is interested in carefully embedding Nijinska's activities, which happened in many places, into the respective surrounding space, one cannot avoid noticing – in very many publications of authors of the Anglo-American cultural area – that the Central European space as its own and distinctive place of dance and choreographic activities does not exist as an other – own – cultural sphere.

This is not solely a matter of overlooking, forgetting or neglecting developments, circumstances or facts in certain countries, but no more or less a lack of awareness that this space exists at all as a possible place of its own artistic dance creation. Since her text repeatedly includes minor remarks in this regard, one is at first inclined to overlook them, also because one could be of the opinion that Central Europe does not play a decisive role in Nijinska's biography. However, being of the opinion, that Nijinska's work reflects the development of all cultural spheres of Europe and that her ballets were often performed in Central Europe even after her death, the absence of the Central European sphere in the thinking of Anglo-American dance researchers should be discussed in more detail. All the more so since in this respect Garafola's text contains some astonishing statements.

Two examples may illustrate this (the first one given here, the second later, in relation to the work of Alfred Schlee and Nijinska’s last stay in Buenos Aires). In connection with Nijinska's 1930 engagement as ballet mistress at the Vienna State Opera, it is explained how this came about. One of the driving forces was the then director of the Vienna Opera, Clemens Krauss.[22] Nijinska had probably accepted this engagement against her better judgement. Although she was well aware that Vienna was fundamentally different from Paris or London as far as cultural taste was concerned, and that the city had hardly any Russian émigré culture, Nijinska had probably accepted Vienna's offer after difficult negotiations because it offered security over a longer period of time.

Describing the situation, Garafola remarks: “A conductor, Krauss was in his late thirties; he had met Nijinska in Buenos Aires and was determined to shake up the Opera’s venerable ballet troupe on which Diaghilev’s revolution in ballet aesthetics left few traces.” (p. 278) This remark is based on the assumption that it was a logical goal for those responsible at the opera to model their own ballet repertoire on that of the Ballets Russes or to include the most famous ballets of this ensemble in their own program. Nevertheless, this was not the case. There was a certain interest in the guest performances of the Ballets Russes, but this interest was directed more towards the music than the choreography – ballets by Stravinsky, for instance, were very much taken into account and were also endeavoured to be performed. However, none of the Central European opera houses or three-section theatres – there were about 100 of them – strove to present them in their original choreography, not least because

[22] Clemens Krauss was the son of the well-known mime of the Vienna Court Opera Ballet, Clementine Krauss, who later in her career became a director.

they were not interested in the dance style of a ballet classic shown by the Ballets Russes. It was customary for the choreographers engaged by the theatres to produce their own versions.

Nijinska also planned to release ballets by Stravinsky in Vienna. However, she changed her mind. After her successful first work, the choreography to “Schwanda, the Backpiper” (music: Jaromir Weinberger), she left Vienna and returned to the Parisian emigrant world of “Russia Abroad”.

9

Of Other Cultural Spheres (Oberzaucher-Schüller)

As mentioned before, it is to be lamented that in “La Nijinska” the Central European sphere as its own and distinctive place is hardly present.[23] This concerns not only the events of the twentieth century, but also the period before it, but is particularly painful for the period from 1900 to 1938 with its especially rich dance creation.[24] However, this also extends to the years after 1945. The “cultural policy” of the occupying powers that now began is certainly comparable to a colonization process; it was also responsible for the fact that there was no consideration of reconnecting with the dance scene prior to 1933. This was due to the fact that all four occupying powers, albeit with different accents, were devoted to classical ballet. The representatives of the “Tanzmoderne” who had survived the war were now once again forced into back rooms, as they had been under National Socialism. It was not until the 1980s that the independent scene, which has since flourished again, began to gain strength. The development of the “Freier Tanz”, which Jewish representatives brought to their new homelands, especially to Israel, Australia, and England, was remarkable. There, Central European “Tanzmoderne” was able to develop freely and can still be found in the work of some artists today.[25]

With respect to the interest of the Central European sphere in the Ballets Russes, it is worth recalling a statement by Diaghilev: “[…] devant Berlin, je suis come un collégien qui est amoureux d’une grande dame et qui ne trouve pas le mot pour la conquérir.”[26] And we know that Diaghilev was not to hit upon these words until 1914, and although the Ballets Russes also made frequent guest appearances in German-speaking countries in the 1920s, it is not known whether Diaghilev was still interested in finding conquering words during this time.[27]

By the time of the first Berlin guest performance of the Ballets Russes in 1910, the course had already been set for an independent Central European dance scene.[28] This free scene – free

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[23] There are, of course, a few exceptions. Susan Manning and Karl Toepfer are representative of them.
[24] The National Socialists' bold aesthetics, which leaned toward classical ballet, destroyed this scene. See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, “Dramaturgie und Gestalt des ‘Deutschen Balletts’. Versuch über eine nationalsozialistische Gattung”, in: Thomas Steiert, Paul Op de Coul (ed.), “Blickpunkt Bühne. Musiktheater in Deutschland von 1900 bis 1950”, Dohr, Köln 2014, pp. 251–277.
[25] See the numerous publications in the series “Wiener Tanzgeschichten” of the author on the internet platform www.tanz.at about family Ornstein, Gertrud Bodenwieser, Gertrud Kraus, Hilde Holger and others as well as their “heirs”, like Royston Maldoom or Ohad Naharin.
[26] Statement by Diaghilev in: Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli (ed.), “Harry Graf Kessler Tagebücher 1918–1937”, Insel, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, p. 624. Prior to 1914, there was a large fan community of the Ballets Russes, among them was Kessler, who made it as far as a collaborator (“Josephs Legende”, 1914).
[27] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, “Chemnitz, for Example. The Ballets Russes in Germany”, as in footnote 21.
[28] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, “Interlude classique. Sergei Diaghilew im Kaiserlichen Berlin”, pp. 93–104.

institutionally as well as of the ballet aesthetics of the nineteenth century – was already beginning to establish itself. This scene was so successful in the interwar period – outside the large houses – that its activities endangered the existence of the still operating ballet ensembles of the opera houses; these could only be saved by bringing representatives of this free scene into leading positions in the opera houses. In Berlin these were Max Terpis and Rudolf von Laban, and in Vienna Sascha Leontjew and Margarete Wallmann. This development applied to the whole of Central Europe, i.e. to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. The National Socialists' seizure of power – in Germany in 1933, in Austria in 1938, and in the Czech Republic and Poland in 1939[29] – put an end to the flourishing free scene.

10

"In April 1930 the journal 'Schrifttanz' published her treatise 'On Movement and the School of Movement'." (Garafola, p. 279)

In the following, we will talk about a personality who found his way into Garafola's book, but not acknowledged accordingly to his significance, the man responsible for the publication of Nijinska's thesis paper: Alfred Schlee.[30] He did this in the journal "Schrifttanz", which he edited and which was published by the music publisher Universal Edition in Vienna. The later world-famous "publisher of musical Moderne" and director of the Universal Edition was at this time a close collaborator of Laban, and as such the organizer of the highly important dancers' congresses in Magdeburg in 1927 and Essen in 1928. Schlee also cultivated close contact with visual artists, some of whom – Georg Kirsta[31] and Oskar Schlemmer – designed illustrations for "Schrifttanz", which focused on discussing the modern scene. In 1928, the then-called "Laban Kinetography" had been put on paper there for the first time – certainly also with the help of Schlee.[32] In this context, it should be pointed out that one does not get a correct impression of the journal from the "Reader's Digest version" of the journal edited into a book by Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Susanne Lahusen.

The journal "Schrifttanz" had no intention to provide only a glimpse of "German Dance" or the dance of the "Weimar Republic" as the subtitle of the book implies; the editors did not limit themselves to the political periods or geographical borders. Knowing the artistic characteristics of that cultural sphere, they addressed those who might be concerned. The issues offer an excellent insight into the Central European "Tanzmoderne" around 1930, a time when the "expressionist phase" of the movement was already over. Events of the classical scene are definitely mentioned, albeit only in passing.

Schlee and the publishing house had, in part, advocated the development of a notation because they hoped that a notated ballet could be included in the publishing range like a musical score. It is well known that these wishes could not be realized. In accordance with the immense importance of Schlee, not only for the Central European "Tanzmoderne" of the 1920s and 30s, he will be discussed in more detail.

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[29] Hungary took a different political path.
[30] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Ein Musikverleger mit Tanzvergangenheit. Zum 90. Geburtstag des Musikverlegers, Dramaturgen und Labanmitstreiters Alfred Schlee", in: "tanzdrama", issue 18/1992, pp. 8–10.
[31] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Georgi/Georg/George Kirsta. Von der Ukraine nach Wien und London", www.tanz.at, "Wiener Tanzgeschichten", June 2, 2022.
[32] The 1991 reprint of "Schrifttanz" is by no means to be understood as a reply to the "Schrifttanz" version published in 1990, edited by Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Susanne Lahusen (Dance Books, London).

Born in Dresden in 1901, Schlee had experienced his first contacts with body movement at the Neue Schule Hellerau, where he had not only studied, but also taught percussion.[33] At first mainly interested in music, he had taken piano lessons with Erwin Schulhoff, amongst others. Schlee comes increasingly into contact with dance- and theatrical circles. Around that time, he frequently "looks in" at the Wigman School in Bautzener Straße, Dresden, and sometimes serves as pianist there. 1925 brings his first engagement to a theatre, in Gera.[34] Yvonne Georgi, a disciple of Wigman, head of the dance ensemble there, also gives recitals; Schlee is not only her musical advisor, but also her pianist at those performances. In the following season, Schlee is dramaturg in Münster, and there becomes part of an already legendary leading team.[35]

In 1927, he is called to Vienna by Universal Edition and while editing "Schrifttanz", Schlee himself is writing numerous articles on dance which are published in many national and international magazines. He works as a pianist a few more times: at the International Choreographer's Competition in Paris in 1932 he plays the music for Schlemmer's "Triadisches Ballett",[36] and at the 1933 Warsaw International Dance Competition he accompanies Ruth Abramowitsch[37] (playing his own compositions), and she receives the first prize. At that time (between 1932 and 1938) Schlee is the Berlin Universal Edition representative. His withdrawal from the dance scene around that time seems to have something to do with the political situation back then.

11

"... especially in its Anglo-American variant." (Garafola, Preface XXIV)

In the context of Schlee's work, a second example, capturing Garafola's exclusively Anglo-American perspective on dance, seems even more glaring. The remark relates to Nijinska's last stay in Buenos Aires in 1946, in which Margarete (she called herself Margarita in Buenos Aires) Wallmann is mentioned. Here, a characterization of this choreographer of great merit is given, culminating in the remark that Wallmann's productions for Buenos Aires were a "knockoff of Ballets Russes classics such as Massine's *Le Tricorne* and *La Boutique Fantasque*, and even Ashton's *Les Patineurs*." (p. 420) However, it should be noted that for Wallmann[38] as a serious representative of Central European "Tanzmoderne", "Le Tricorne"

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[33] The following lines are taken from a lecture given by the author on October 4, 2008, on the occasion of a Laban Congress at the Berlin Academy of Arts. The lecture was a tribute to Ann Hutchinson Guest, who was present and celebrating her 90th birthday at the time.

[34] The phase of development of "Ausdruckstanz" had already been completed by that time. It was supported by "progressive" theatre people like Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard, Carl Ebert and Walter Bruno Iltz, who considered movement to be the most important innovation for new theatre. The "takeover" of the ballet ensembles of the opera houses by "free dancers" had already started.

[35] Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard was managing director, Rudolf Schulz-Dornburg musical director, Hein Heckroth artistic adviser and manager of the decoration department, Kurt Jooss and Jens Keith responsible for the dance company.

[36] Schlee was pianist already at the rehearsals in Berlin. Schlemmer, who taught in Breslau after having left the Bauhaus, had designed the cover for the "Blätter des Stadttheaters", which were edited by Schlee from Vienna. In Paris Schlee was not only pianist but also responsible for the lighting. See also: Dirk Scheper, "Oskar Schlemmer. Das Triadische Ballett und die Bauhausbühne" (=Schriftenreihe der Akademie der Künste, vol. 20), Berlin 1988, p. 230; Frank-Manuel Peter, "Oskar Schlemmer und der Tanz", Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, Wienand Verlag und der Autor, Köln 2023, pp. 223–230.

[37] At the Warsaw competition, the dancer had appeared as Ruth Sorel.

[38] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, "Margarete Wallmann – Glamouröse Bewegungsmoderne", www.tanz.at, "Wiener Tanzgeschichten", April 27, 2017. Wallmann was no stranger to the USA. Ted Shawn, who apparently

was not a ballet by the choreographer Massine, but by the composer Manuel de Falla. Further, "La Boutique Fantasque" was not a work by this same choreographer, but music by Gioachino Rossini arranged by Ottorino Respighi, and "Les Patineurs" not Frederick Ashton's ballet but rather the famous ballet scene from Giacomo Meyerbeer's "Le Prophète", which, for as long as the Jewish composer was still being performed, was presented throughout Central Europe.

12

"... floodgate of ancestral memories ...'How great my heart feels here!'" (Garafola, Preface XXIII/XXIV)

After the Vienna adventure, Nijinska resumed her production- and guest activities for numerous ventures in November 1930, as described vividly by Garafola. Nijinska rarely succeeded in her goal of maintaining her own ensemble, usually working from offer to offer. However, as one of the leading forces of the extremely productive Ballets Russes successor companies in the 1930s (together with Massine), she does not lack opportunities to be artistically active. Nijinska's most significant works after leaving Vienna are: for Max Reinhardt in Berlin in 1931, for Opéra Russe à Paris in 1931, for her own Théâtre de la Danse Nijinska in 1932, Ballets Russes sous la Direction de Bronislava Nijinska in 1934, and for the Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo in 1935 and 1936. Most of these projects originated in Paris, while the Markova-Dolin Company, for which Nijinska worked in 1937, was based in London and organized tours from there. Furthermore, in 1933, besides collaboration on a film, there is a second engagement at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and in 1935 work on the Hollywood film "A Midsummer Night's Dream" directed by Reinhardt.

Given this workload, it was certainly not only patriotic considerations that made Nijinska enthusiastic about the project Les Ballets Polonais – a patriotic, French-tinged enterprise. For "Bronisława Niżyńska", the Polish-rooted Russian[39], the offer of a leading position in a Polish ballet that was to be founded was extremely appealing. The external reason for founding such an ensemble was the Paris World's Fair of 1937, which in its very title, "L'Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne", also demanded artistic standards. This, according to the organizers, was an essential part of the identity of a nation, and of Poland in particular. The decision-makers, who have to find the dance representatives for their country, are representatives of poetry and theatre, that is, personalities from outside the ballet world. Nevertheless, Jan Lechoń, a poet working at the Polish Embassy in Paris, knows that ballet is the dance form that has the highest status in France. For this very reason, however, it is overlooked – perhaps deliberately – that modern, i.e. non-classical, Polish dancers are among the leaders in Central Europe. This is evident from the success that the Poles celebrated at the International Dance Competition in Vienna in 1934. Alongside the initiator Lechoń was the theatre maker and founder of the Teatr Polski, the director Arnold Szyfman, as well as Leon Schiller, who at least had a certain affinity for dance, having been a member of the jury of the Warsaw competition in 1933. The fact that the Poles wanted to come up with something very special in Paris is apparent not only from the choice of Nijinska, who was actually resident in Paris, but also from the fact that they did not want to operate with the traditionally classically oriented ballet of the Teatr Wielki, but rather to present something new. In connection with the planned guest performances, which, after Paris, were to travel to

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felt threatened by "German Dance" all his life, invited Wallmann, understood by him as an extension of Mary Wigman, to teach with him as early as 1930.

[39] Nijinska spoke Polish with her mother, who had lived constantly in her daughter's household since Kiev.

London, Germany, Poland and finally even to the USA, we can probably consider this a charm offensive with a political background, since the threat from the Germans was constantly increasing. Friendship with other states was thus to be cultivated and consolidated. (The invasion by Germany of September 1939 was not to be long in coming).

In November 1937, the new ensemble made its debut in Paris. The choreographies for the novelties shown were all created by Nijinska.[40] The set designers and composers were all Polish. In the five ballets created for the ensemble, Nijinska mainly fulfilled the initiators' wish to allow enough space for "characteristic" Polish dances. The most outstanding creation of Nijinska is "Chopin Concerto" to Chopin's E minor Piano Concerto. The work, which had a mixed reception at the time is one of the first examples renouncing a narrative and concentrating entirely on the mood and emotional area of the music, but based on classical step repertoire. It derives its structure from the contrast of the block-like corps de ballet and the fast, sharp step sequences of the two soloists. In his review of the 1938 Berlin guest performance, Karl Pfauter calls the step material used "Neuklassizismus",[41] a very remarkable choice of words for a German in those years. In contrast, let us quote an official commentary by the country's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, on the guest performance. Just before the National Socialists invaded Austria, a year before their attack on Poland, Goebbels reveals the image of women that was so important to him and shows his ignorance of the status of stage dance at that time, for which he himself was responsible: "German Opera House in the evening. Polish National Ballet for W.H.W. [the Winter Relief Organization] under the protectorate of Lipski [Polish ambassador in Berlin] and myself. Beautiful women who dance well. However, what they dance is mostly literature. Which we have overcome long ago. To some real caterwauling. Not an elevating thing. But still: the audience claps out of courtesy."[42]

13

"... she unfailingly began the day teaching class before rehearsing and choreographing." (Garafola, Preface XIX)

In October 1939, another escape is made, this time from Europe to the USA, under somewhat different omens. Once again, the first work commissioned to Nijinska is the revival of a classic. The intention of the production of a new "La Fille mal gardée" for the Ballet Theatre obviously pulls in two different directions: on the one hand, revision of the musical basis, where it is crucial to free the music of Peter Ludwig Hertel from all added supplements; on the other hand, the revision of dance passages and restoration of mime passages, which only make the traditional narrative ballet into a whole.[43]

In addition to her other tasks, however, the founding of a school is of utmost importance to Nijinska. She sees the directing of such a school, the teaching of a daily class, not only as her preferred work, but also as a kind of mission that "they", the ballet-interested Americans, have entrusted to her. Moreover, she sees the classroom – and this she shares with many ballet professionals – as her real home. The orders, rituals and hierarchies of the Imperial Ballet,

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[40] The creations were: "Concerto de Chopin" (music: Frédéric Chopin), "La Légende de Cracovie" (music: Michał Kondracki, the composer was awarded a gold medal for his ballet), "Le Chant de la terre" (music: Roman Palester), "Apollon et la belle" (music: Ludomir Różycki) and "Le Rappel" (music: Bołeslaw Woytowicz).
[41] In: "Der Tanz", vol. 11, 1938, issue 1, pp. 9–12, here p. 11.
[42] Cited from: Ralf Georg Reuth (ed.), "Joseph Goebbels Tagebücher 1924–1945", Piper, München/Zürich, 2. ed. 2000, vol. 3, 1935–1939, January 28, 1938, p. 1187.
[43] In this context, it is interesting that the Ballet Theatre showed this ballet in London in 1953.

carried forth here into a new era, are determinative not only for professional but also for private life. Nijinska's Hollywood Ballet School, run as a “little academy”, soon becomes a center of instruction and “open” training.

The details of how the traditional is handled or used differ, of course. Famous in this context are Nijinska's classes (“Not for beginners!”, states Richard Adama) and her way of choreographing. In terms of conception and choice of music for a new work, although always well prepared, Nijinska seems to choreograph from her own dancing ability, which distinguishes her significantly from George Balanchine, for instance, who often seems to start from the dancing peculiarities of very specific dancers. However, Nijinska shares a very important characteristic with Balanchine: movement is one of the first concerns of both choreographers. Nijinska's students Maria Tallchief and Allegra Kent are examples of how movement can be taught (by Nijinska) and used (by Balanchine).

14

“Emigration transformed her.” (Garafola, Preface XXI)

In the context of Russian emigration, Garafola explores the extent to which twentieth-century ballet history “in the West” consists of the activities of Russian companies, and how far the work of Nijinska is able to challenge this narrative. She writes: “Nijinska’s career deserves attention … because it challenges the familiar grand narrative of twentieth-century ballet history in the West, which begins with Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, continues in the 1930s and 1940s with the Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo directed by Colonel Wassily de Basil and the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo led by S. J. or Serge Denham, and culminates in the Royal Ballet and the New York City Ballet.” (Preface XX)

Regarding this statement, it should be noted that Nijinska certainly went her own way, but always belonged to the émigré culture. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that this quotation relates once again solely to the Anglo-American sphere. Here, however, we want to address another topic related to emigration. The question is: Why were the émigré Russian choreographers – with one exception – not able to continue their great successes during their generally longer stay in the West? This applies to Michel Fokine, Bronislava Nijinska, Léonide Massine, and to a certain extent to Mikhail Mordkin, Adolph Bolm and Boris Romanov. The exception is George Balanchine.

The tracing of Romanov’s émigré biography is to help substantiate a theory related to the subject matter. A native of St. Petersburg, Romanov (1891–1957) received his training, like Nijinska, at the ballet school of the Maryinsky Theatre and was then a character dancer at the Maryinsky Theatre. He choreographed “La Tragédie de Salomé” (music: Florent Schmitt) for the Ballets Russes in 1913 and Stravinsky's opera “Le Rossignol” in 1914; shortly afterwards he was part of the Petrograd avant-garde. In 1921, he fled to Berlin and founded the ballet company “Russian Romantic Theatre” there with Yelena Smirnova and Elsa Krüger. The name of the company already indicates that he deviated from his original progressive choreographic line during these years. The ensemble developed into the center of a – conservative – Russian art in exile and was probably also intended as a counterpoint to the Ballets Russes. A ballet commissioned by him to music by Sergei Prokofiev is worth noting: “Trapez” premiered in Gotha in 1925 during a tour of the Russian Romantic Theatre. Romanov had to admit to himself that although he was able to book some good engagements for himself (Milan's Scala, Teatro Colón Buenos Aires, Metropolitan Opera New York, and he also choreographed for Opéra Russe à Paris, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, Ballet

International and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo), he was no more than a vicarious agent of a ballet world wending his way through the fading magic of the word "Russian" and the need for financial success. As a consequence, he was weighed down by that continuously overpowering, increasingly conservative émigré world. Romanov found no new home, neither in the private nor in the artistic sphere, and certainly not an artistic guiding figure who could have pointed him in a new direction.

Fokine, Massine, and Nijinska fared similarly, albeit on higher levels. Unwilling and unable to get acquainted with a new homeland and without a guiding figure who was able to see events as a whole, they were able to develop themselves further, but this path always stayed within a certain framework. Balanchine was quite different. Agile and adaptable, he instinctively trusted a stranger who was not actually a professional: Lincoln Kirstein. The two named the school they founded the School of American Ballet, and thus Balanchine also addressed his new anchorage. While his Ballets Russes colleagues cultivated the ever-diluting Russianness, Balanchine was still creating masterpieces in his seventies. One may speculate what works Fokine, and Massine, but above all the energetic Nijinska might have been capable of, had they found their own "Kirstein".

15

"There was no shortage of women who choreographed in the ballet idiom, but few worked for elite institutions or enjoyed the privilege of authorship." (Garafola, Preface XVIII)
"... the story of a major artist who was also a woman." (Garafola, Preface XXIV)

Tracing the life of a woman inevitably entails the gender theme, and for Garafola it remains relevant throughout the book. Already in the introduction, she laments the lack of creative female dancers in the nineteenth century. In this context it must be stated that the structure of ballet is very much based on patriarchal systems, which in the training itself never promotes the students' own creativity, but is based solely on a receptive attitude on the part of the students.

The situation is quite different in the Central European, Russian and American "Moderne". Here, doing one's own thing is not only encouraged but also demanded from the very beginning. The consequence is that a high percentage of the choreographers of the "Moderne" as well as of the contemporary non-classical scene are women. The American, and even more so the Central European scene of the interwar period as well as today's scene, bear witness to this.

Within the cosmos of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, Nijinska was the only female choreographer. Garafola believes that Nijinska did suffer disadvantages at the Ballets Russes because only of her gender. "Far more egregiously than Diaghilev," the author continues, "de Basil used Nijinska, sabotaging her company in 1934, dangling promises of commissions that fell through, and unceremoniously dumping her when she had served his purpose" (Preface XXIII). It should be noted that Nijinska faced competition in the ballet scene in the USA, especially from Agnes de Mille and others. In terms of ballet history, it should be added that despite the predominance of female representatives of the "Moderne", Central Europe also had female ballet practitioners who defined the post-war Classic – at its forefront Tatjana

Gsovsky in Berlin, who, however, also had an aesthetic foothold in the non-classical "Moderne".

16

"Yet Nijinska was central to this history ... she choreographed both plotless and semi-plotless as well as modernist narratives, offering a highly original approach to ballet aesthetics, composition, and technique." (Garafola, Preface XX)

Nijinska's workload after the Second World War was by no means reduced. As time went on, this gradually changed, but she still belonged to the firmly established figures of the American and European ballet scene. From her side, too, interest in creative work had by no means dried up. Quite the contrary; she not only accepted an engagement with what was perhaps the largest touring company at the time – the Grand Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas – but also did pioneering work for a newly founded company, the Center Ballet of Buffalo under the direction of Kathleen Crofton.

In addition to the novelties, which she continuously released to a considerable extent and which were increasingly mood- and emotion-oriented musical interpretations, there were now revivals of her own works, which as time went on were increasingly used to evaluate her work per se. Garafola thankfully addresses this in detail, recalling, the critics active in the USA and England after 1945. The fact that she had already done this in the same way for Nijinska's European activity in the interwar period goes without saying; that she limited herself to French and English critics was to be expected. In this context, the question also arises as to why important revivals of "Les Noces" and "Les Biches" are simply missing from the lists at the end of "La Nijinska", which are per se highly welcome.

Of the French-language reviewers, André Levinson stands out in a negative way, his openly displayed hostility towards Nijinska being immediately apparent. His passionately slating reviews accompanied Nijinska until his death in 1933. Levinson, a promoter of the idea of "Imperial Ballet", sees Nijinska, somewhat exaggeratedly, as a stooge of Soviet propaganda, which he, as an increasingly conservative émigré, fights to the utmost. Of the French, Fernand Divoire has greater vision than his compatriots, the English remaining endeavoured. In this context, the "German" Joseph Lewitan should also be mentioned, who found the difficult path between the different facets of the "Tanzmoderne" of the time with his considered statements in the journal "Der Tanz", which he edited in Berlin.

Among the critics from the Anglo-American world who have discussed Nijinska's work since the early 1940s – again mainly male – there are outstanding personalities. It is not at all surprising that John Martin and Denby are singled out here, for both, coming from the "Tanzmoderne", instinctively note Nijinska's Central European "Moderne" as the basis on which her work is also founded. Martin did this as a propagator of American modern dance, being so interested in developments in Central Europe that he travelled to Laxenburg near Vienna to interview Rosalia Chladek,[44] the winner of the second prize in the highly regarded 1932 Paris Dance Competition, for the "New York Times" (September 25, 1932). It was in

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[44] See Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller / Ingrid Giel, "Rosalia Chladek. Expression in Motion", K. Kieser, München 2011, pp. 49–51. – In the book "Edwin Denby. Dance Writings", edited by Robert Cornfeld and William Mackay in 1986 the term "Körperbildung", which is so important for the Central European "Tanzmoderne", is incorrectly translated as "physical development" (p. 17).

Laxenburg that Denby studied in the 1920s and became acquainted with the “Körperbildung” that gave the “Tanzmoderne” its physical basis and now served him as a means of analysing the work.[45] Denby's reflections on “Les Noces” are among the most outstanding appraisals of this masterpiece, not least because of his knowledge of the functions of the body. Anatole Chujoy occupies a special position as chronicler and encyclopaedist. Like Chujoy, Lewitan was ultimately an emigrant to the USA Kirstein honoured the couple Lewitan and Eugenia Eduardova with a memorial plaque in the School of American Ballet.

In contrast to Martin and Denby are those American critics who were particularly concerned with being in the limelight themselves. These include Walter Terry, whose writing (for example in his assessment of “Les Noces”) obviously conceals calculation. The disturbing lines of Arlene Croce (Garafola, pp. 479–480) are different again. Her reflections on Nijinska's physical appearance are not only deeply offensive; they consequently question their own seriousness. Jack Anderson’s article “The Fabulous Career of Bronislava Nijinska” which appeared in “Dance Magazine” in August 1963 played a crucial role in the Nijinska reception. It not only acquainted a new generation with Nijinska’s work, but laid the foundation of today’s world-wide appreciation for the choreographer.

Probably the most important assessment of Nijinska – and at the same time the one that supports the opinion expressed in this essay – that Nijinska was anchored in two stylistic directions of the “Moderne”, comes from Rambert. When the choreographer was rehearsing “Les Biches” for the Royal Ballet in 1964, Rambert asked to be allowed to attend the rehearsals. Fifty years after assisting brother Vaslav in his work on “Le Sacre du printemps”, she writes: “When I asked to come to the rehearsal, it was … to see you demonstrate.” Rambert continues: “Everything in the way you move is so interconnected, wide, and deep. I haven’t seen this in anyone, except Vaslav. I doubt it exists nowadays. Today, everybody knows how to do everything, but there is no richness in the movement. In your voice one can hear all the harmonies – you know, like the notes that resonate when the main one has ended …” (Garafola, pp. 466–467)

With this statement, Rambert proves two things. On the one hand, Nijinska had succeeded in actually realising the demands for cross-step movement that she had once formulated in her Kiev thesis paper. On the other hand, it underpins the thesis that was formulated here. Nijinska's œuvre is not only anchored in a single “Moderne” – that of ballet – because since her Kiev period she had carried with her essential compositional means of Central European “Tanzmoderne”. It is the intertwining of these two facets of “Moderne” that makes her work so distinctive.

Garafola's compassionate assessment of Nijinska's final years is well shared: “As she approached her eightieth birthday, she felt that nothing remained of her passage through decades of ballet history.” (Garafola, Preface XV). This rather depressing remark is countered by an initiative of the Royal Ballet: On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Nijinska's death, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the premiere of “Les Noces”, the English company offered the event “The Legacy of Nijinska” in November 2023. And in Central Europa, in the season 2023/24 the Zurich Opera House presented a revival of “Les Noces”. So the work of the great choreographer lives on!

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[45] See Edwin Denby, “Über die seelische Rückwirkung der Gymnastik”. In: “Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Pädagogik”, April 1929, pp. 222–228.