An American Perspective on Tanztheater

Susan Allene Manning

At a symposium of German and American modern dance held last fall at Goethe House New York, Anna Kisselgoff, chief dance critic for *The New York Times*, turned to Reinhild Hoffmann, director of the Tanztheater Bremen, and asked in exasperation, "But why aren't you more interested in dance vocabularies?" Hoffmann did not answer but instead turned to Nina Wiener, a New York choreographer, and asked, "But why aren't you more interested in the social problems seen in a city like New York?" Weiner did not answer.

This incomplete exchange—two questions that received no answers—summarizes the divergence between German and American modern dance today. While American choreographers generally emphasize the inherent expressivity of pure movement and consider narrative or representational subject matter beside the point, new German choreographers reverse these priorities and consider subject matter far more important than the formal display of movement values. In other words, the new German choreographers are no more interested in exploring "dance vocabularies" than their American counterparts are in engaging "social problems."

With few exceptions, critics follow the inclinations of their national choreographers. Hence the New York critics by and large dismissed the *tanztheater* (literally "dance theater") featured as part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival last fall. The same critics who praised American postmodern choreographers for challenging received definitions of "dance" criticized Pina Bausch, Reinhild Hoffmann, and Mechthild Grossmann because their works were not "dance." And even though critics conceded that the works of Susanne Linke exhibit dance interest, they still criticized her solos' overt content. (Gerhard Bohner, whose *Triadic Ballet*, 1977, received its American premiere at the Joyce Theater, generally escaped the critical polemics that embroiled his female colleagues, perhaps because his work was not burdened with the "Next Wave" label.)

The German critics are no less chauvinistic than the Americans. They too defend their own modern dance tradition by criticizing the dominant style on the other side of the Atlantic. Jochen Schmidt, dance critic for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and a participant in the Goethe House symposium, once compared the "depth" of tanztheater with the "lightness" of American postmodern dance and concluded that "the American art of lightness [may] all too quickly [become] an art of insignificance" (1982:13).

1. Hans Pop and Josephine Ann Endicott in Bausch's The Seven Deadly Sins *(1976): "role-playing as self-consciously theatrical." (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

Although German and American modern dance have always defined independent traditions, the divergence between the two traditions has not always been as great as it is today. Although choreographers like Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss, and Martha Graham developed distinctly different styles of modern dance, they were united in their refusal to separate the formal values of movement from the social import of dance. In fact, modern dance originated in Germany and America from the double impulse to not only establish movement as a self-sufficient means for expression but also to subvert and perhaps transform dominant social values. At first modern dancers connected the formal and social impulses in utopian terms. They believed that the experience of dance could free energies within the individual and within society, energies that could lead from personal to cultural renewal. Modern dancers later turned away from such utopian visions and staged their social critique through sympathetically portraying marginal social types or enacting agitprop parables. They believed that dance should confront the viewer with aspects of social life demanding reform. But whether utopian or confrontational, modern dance in Germany and America took its social mission as seriously as its formal mission.

After World War II modern dance lost this sense of its dual mission, for clear socio-political reasons. After 1933 National Socialism appropriated

ausdruckstanz, (literally "dance of expression"), as modern dance was known in the '20s, and made it serve ideological ends, as in the opening-night spectacle for the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games staged by Wigman, Gret Palucca, Harald Kreutzberg, and others. After the war ausdruckstanz never regained its earlier stature, in part because of its Fascist ideological taint. To Germans it seemed unsuited to the new era of postwar recovery, an era that preferred the supposedly untainted classicism of ballet. Yet, in actuality, the Nazis had promoted ballet as requisite training for professional dancers and an appropriate public diversion. Even so, as West German cities vied to found ballet companies of international stature during the '50s and early '60s, they built on the foundation laid by National Socialism. Ironically enough, ballet at the time seemed a refuge of internationalism, classicism, and formalism.

While West German dance took refuge in ballet during the early postwar years, American dance adopted an increasingly formalist credo. Ballet choreographers followed the example of George Balanchine, and modern dancers that of Merce Cunningham, as both idioms enjoyed the security of America's newfound cultural and political dominance. Choreographers no longer struggled to fuse formal values with social import. Rather they gloried in technical virtuosity and formal experimentation and play. American critics responded by orienting their writing more toward description and less toward interpretation.

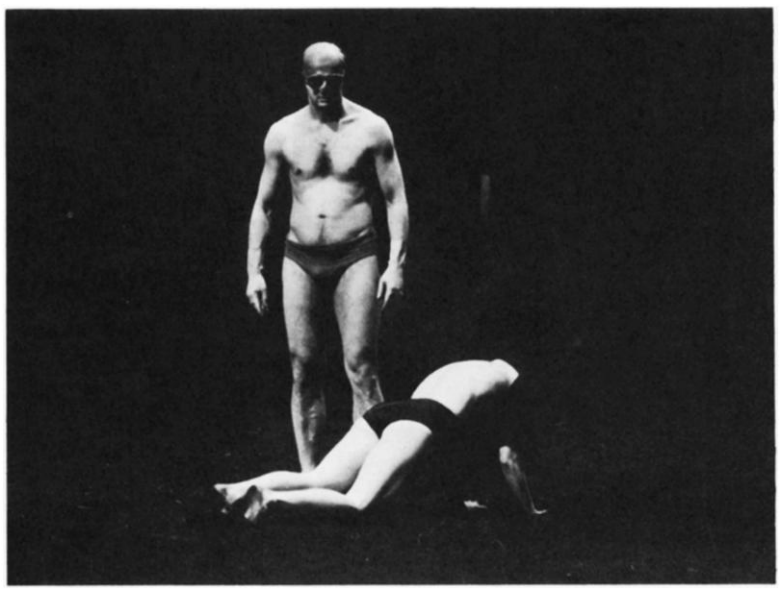
Beginning in the late '60s, stimulated by the youth upheavals of the 1968 period, young German choreographers reacted against the formalism of German ballet and of American dance. In fact, they associated the ballet boom with the postwar era's relentless Americanization, and they wanted to break its hold if only for that reason. So they reached back to the traditions of ausdruckstanz and intermingled influences drawn from experimental theater and, surprisingly, from American modern dance. Indeed, tanztheater shows the simultaneous rejection and integration of

2. Unresolved images of gender in Bausch's Bluebeard *(1977). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

American influences, a paradox that serves as an apt metaphor for cultural relations between West Germany and the United States in the '80s.

Perhaps even more surprising is the paradoxical relationship between tanztheater and German ballet. While tanztheater choreographers explicitly negate the principles of classical and neoclassical ballet, they generally work with ballet-trained dancers in companies within the municipal repertory system. Because tanztheater choreographers are dependent on the repertory system's patronage, they must accept its orientation toward ballet. They both resent this orientation and exploit the values of their dancers' daily discipline.

3. Bausch's Bluebeard *(1977): "Bausch shows men and women locked into power plays and obsessive patterns of physical and emotional violence." (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*



4. In Bausch's Gebirge *(1984), Josephine Ann Endicott repeatedly lies down before Jan Minarik and pulls up her shirt so he can slash a red X on her bare back. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

5. *Bausch's* Kontakthof *(1978): "women in old-fashioned formals and high heels become sex objects and sexual victims." (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

Pina Bausch has evolved the most distinctive and the most internationally-known form of tanztheater. Directing the Tanztheater Wuppertal since 1973, she has evolved a large-scale, improvisational performance mode that long ago transcended its specific sources in her training with Kurt Jooss at the Folkwang School (1955-59) and her studies at Juilliard in New York (1960-61). Like her contemporaries in theater, Bausch combines a visually rich production style with techniques drawn from Stanislavski and Brecht, and the result approaches Artaud's idea of a theater of cruelty. Her performers employ Method principles, infusing their interactions with the intensity and pain of remembered experience. At the same time they employ alienation techniques, undercutting the spectator's sympathetic identification by presenting their role-playing as self-consciously theatrical. The result is a performance that simultaneously distances and engages the spectator. This push and pull leaves many spectators exhausted by the end of the evening, overwhelmed by the emotional complexity of the experience. Bausch's theater of cruelty effects a peculiar catharsis, for the experience of the work leaves spectators drained, but with no sense of resolution.

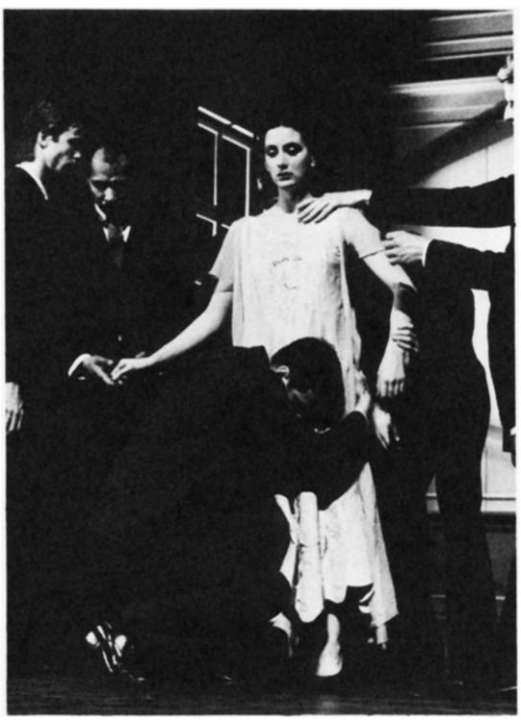
Especially unresolved are the images of gender roles and sexual relations. Bausch shows men and women locked into power plays and obsessive patterns of physical and emotional violence. For instance, near the beginning of *Bluebeard* (1977), Beatrice Libonati lies on her back, clutching Jan Minarik's head on her stomach, and drags the two of them across the floor strewn with dead leaves. Near the end Minarik reverses the action and drags Libonati across the floor, her body rigidly bloated by layers of dresses. In *Gebirge* (1984) Josephine Anne Endicott repeatedly lies down before Jan Minarik, pulling her skirt up over her head so that he can draw a red X on her bare back. But even when he stops marking her back, she continues to prostrate herself before him. In Bausch's works moments of tenderness and humor only occasionally relieve the ugliness of male-female relations.

The women, often dressed in old-fashioned formals and high heels, become sex objects and sexual victims, while the men, often dressed in black tuxedoes, become sexual oppressors. At times the images reverse: men become the victims and women the victimizers, or the men dress in drag and become narcissists, competing with the women to become sex objects. The images of masculinity and femininity are never idealized, for Bausch presents no independent yet caring women, no strong yet sensitive men. Rather she frames the images of gender roles in the boundary zone between reality and fantasy. The men and women onstage suggest both the projections of unconscious desires and the real-life analogues of battered wives, numb whores, and sexually confused men. Hence Bausch's theater functions both as psychological projection and as reflection of reality.

Bausch's distinctive mode of tanztheater emerged in the mid-'70s. Strikingly, its characteristic form evolved together with its characteristic

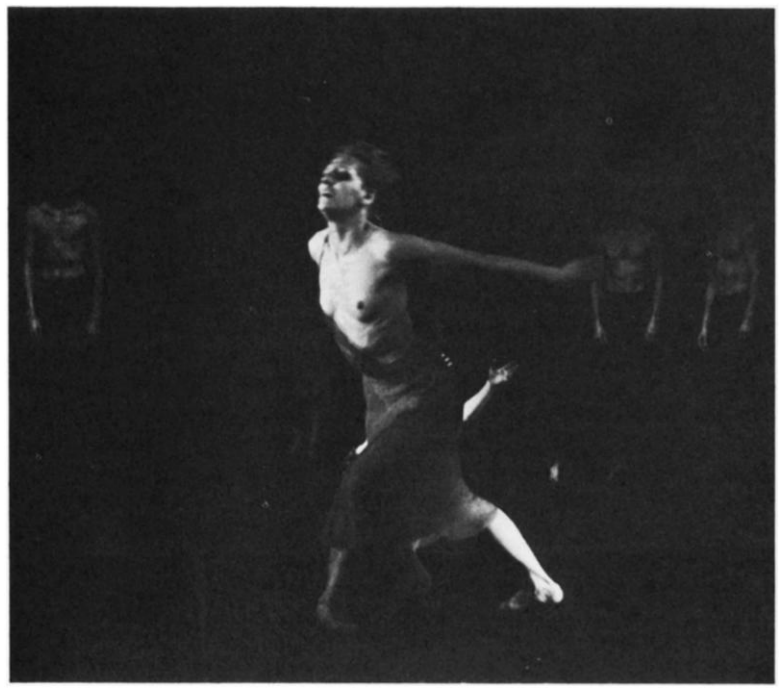
6. Meryl Tankard is tweaked, twitched, and tugged at by men in tuxedoes in Bausch's Kontakthof *(1978). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

7. Ed Kortlandt in drag with Silvia Kesselheim in Bausch's The Seven Deadly Sins *(1976). (Photo by Ulli Weiss)*

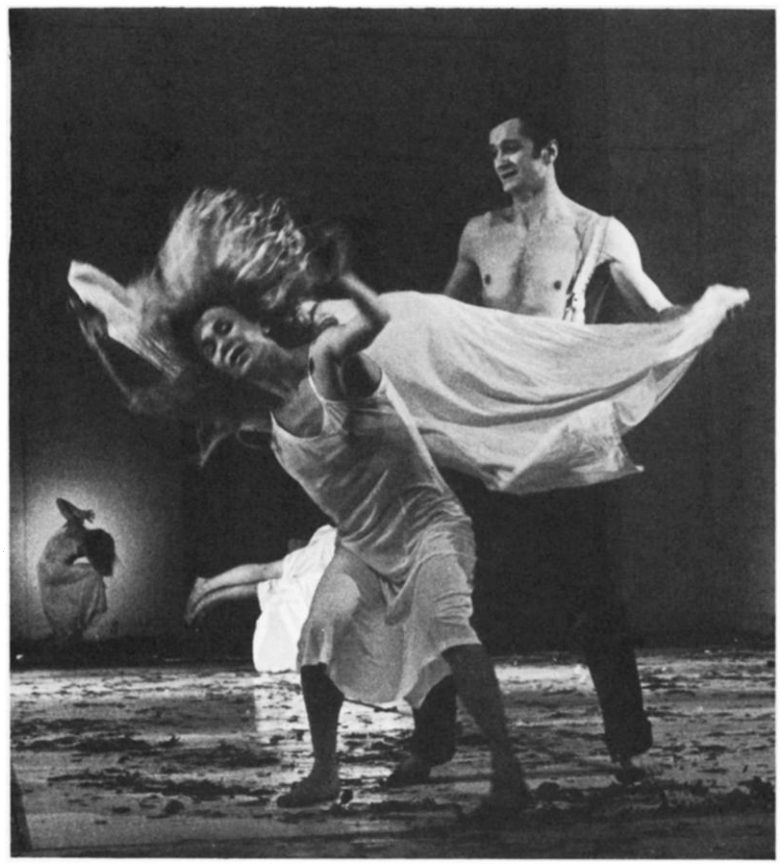


8. Bausch's The Rite of Spring *(1975). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

9. Bausch's The Seven Deadly Sins *(1976). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*



10. Marlis Alt in Bausch's The Rite of Spring *(1975), which presents clear distinctions and tensions between the sexes. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*



11. Bausch's 1980 *(1980) represents her mature mode. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

12. The floor of Bausch's Bluebeard *(1977) is strewn with dead leaves. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

subject matter. Although Bausch had shown choreographic daring from the time her first work premiered in 1968, she did not push her dance structures beyond the limits that traditionally define choreography until the mid-'70s. At that same time gender roles and sexual relations became her primary focus.

In earlier works Bausch respected the traditional limits of choreography by setting dance to a continuous musical score. Hence *Afterzero* (1970) and *Actions for Dancers* (1971) were set to music by contemporary composers, Ivo Malec and Günter Becker respectively. A triumvirate of dances set to classical compositions followed: Wagner's "Bacchanale" from *Tannhäuser* (1972), Gluck's *Iphigenie on Tauris* (1974) and *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1975). During the same period other works, namely *Fritz* (1974) and *Ich bring dich um die Ecke . . .* (1974), moved toward a fusion of dance and theater. Bausch's performers began to not only execute choreographed movement sequences but also to play theater games, to sing and tell stories, and to project shifting character roles.

The Rite of Spring (1975) and *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1976) marked the transition to Bausch's mature mode. Although both used familiar scores, neither was limited to the score that titled the work as a whole: in *The Rite of Spring* Bausch set the titled score as the third part, following the first two parts set to other Stravinsky compositions, and in *The Seven*

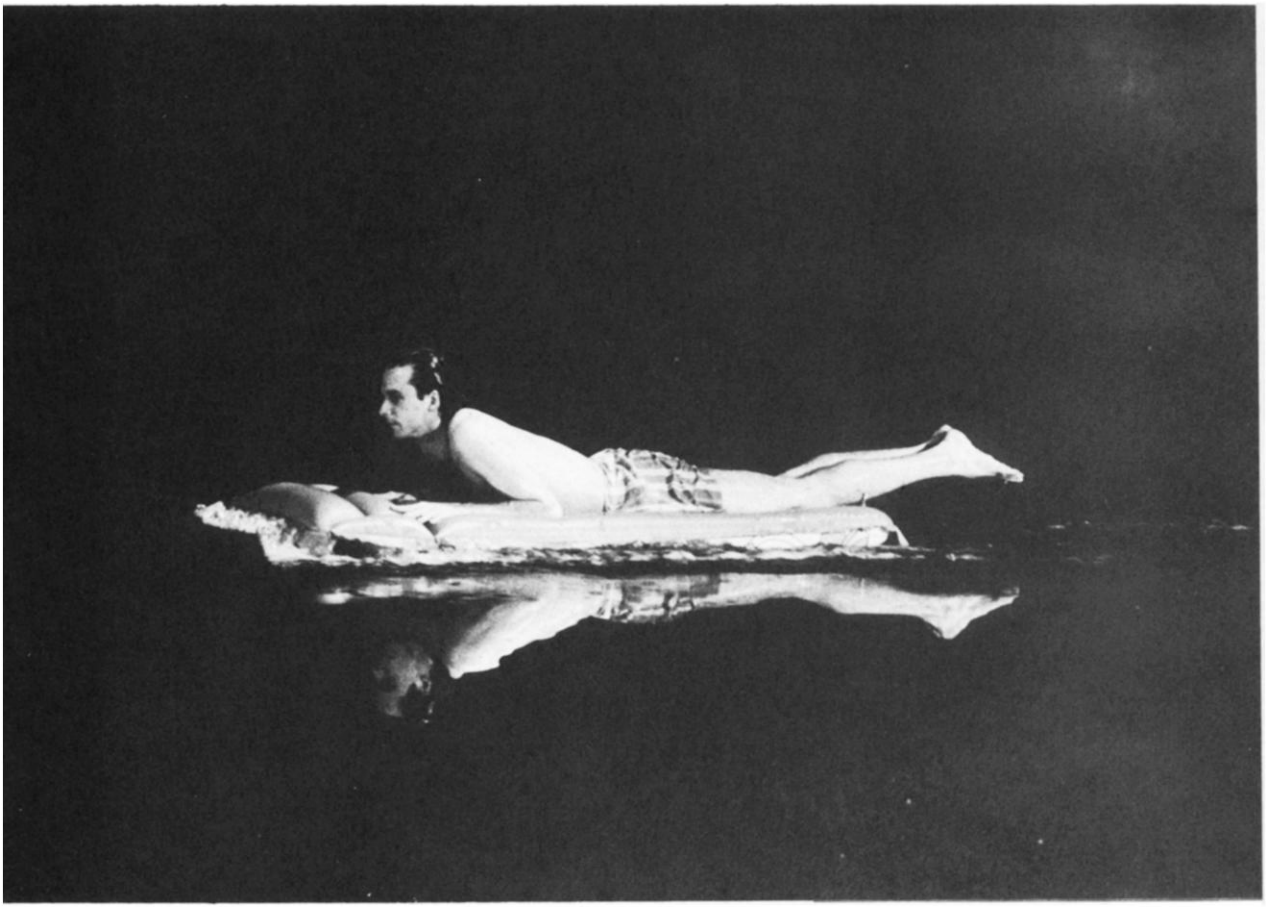
Deadly Sins she set the titled score as the first half, followed by a collection of other Weill songs under the subtitle "Don't Be Afraid." Thus both works sprawled beyond the duration and unity imposed by a continuous musical score. As Bausch developed her fusion of dance and theater, she left behind live orchestral accompaniment and substituted a collage of recorded music, the dancers' own voices, the sounds of their moving bodies, and silence.

The Stravinsky and Weill works also introduced Bausch's characteristic subject matter. While earlier dances like *Afterzero* and *Actions for Dancers* had made little distinction between the sexes and instead focused on images of debilitated bodies—according to Jochen Schmidt, both men and women looked like "the leftovers from some war or atomic catastrophe. . . . members of some deformed thalidomide society" (1984:14)—*The Rite of Spring* and *The Seven Deadly Sins* presented clear distinctions and tensions between the sexes. While the Stravinsky work comprised three choreographic variations on the theme of antagonism between the sexes, the Weill work staged two alternate visions of male exploitation and female self-degradation, visions that challenged any simplistic interpretation by showing women dressed as men and men dressed as women. With *The Rite of Spring* and *The Seven Deadly Sins* Bausch had found her form and her subject matter.

The works that followed—including *Bluebeard, Kontakthof* (1978), *Arien* (1979), *1980* (1980), and *Gebirge*—charted the contours of Bausch's mature mode. Interestingly, this mode juxtaposes two extremes of scale—the monumental and the intimate. These dances comprise huge assemblages of fragments and push the performers' and spectators' endurance beyond the usual limit of a two- to three-hour performance broken by one or two intermissions. Everything about the works is monumental—their duration, the size of the theater space opened to the back walls of the opera house, the 20 or more dancers always onstage, and the sprawling, multi-focused, chaotic quality of the stage action.

Yet at the same time a definite intimacy characterizes the works, an intimacy that results from the use of improvisation as part of both the choreographic process and the performance structure. Never alone onstage, performers are always interacting and responding to one another and to the stage environment. They constantly shift from one role to another, and yet, paradoxically, each dancer projects a coherent identity. The performers seem more like people with widely varying body types, accents, and personalities than like dancers. Throughout Meryl Tankard seems clownlike, Monika Sagon demure, Sylvia Kesselheim shrill, Dominique Mercy sunny, Lutz Förster aloof. Especially when the performers break the proscenium, spectators feel an intimate connection with them as people. This sense of intimacy contradicts the works' monumental scale.

Each work creates an environment often defined through distinctive floor coverings—dead leaves in *Bluebeard,* water in *Arien*, grass in *1980*, dirt in *Gebirge*. As each work progresses, the dancers mark and are marked by their environment. Their hair becomes entangled with dead leaves, their clothes become waterlogged, their skin becomes smeared with dirt. They bring on objects and then discard them—chairs, pieces of clothing, toys. Other objects appear on their own accord, like the miniature frigate and the hippopotamus in *Arien*, and add to the accumulation of things onstage. The environment is constant—remaining essentially



13. & 14. A stage floor of water defines the environment of Bausch's Arien *(1979). (Photos by Gert Weigelt)*

15. Isabel Ribas Serra and Hans Dieter Knebel in Bausch's 1980 *(1980) in the midst of a grass floor. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

the same at the end as at the beginning, except that it becomes worn, littered, used up.

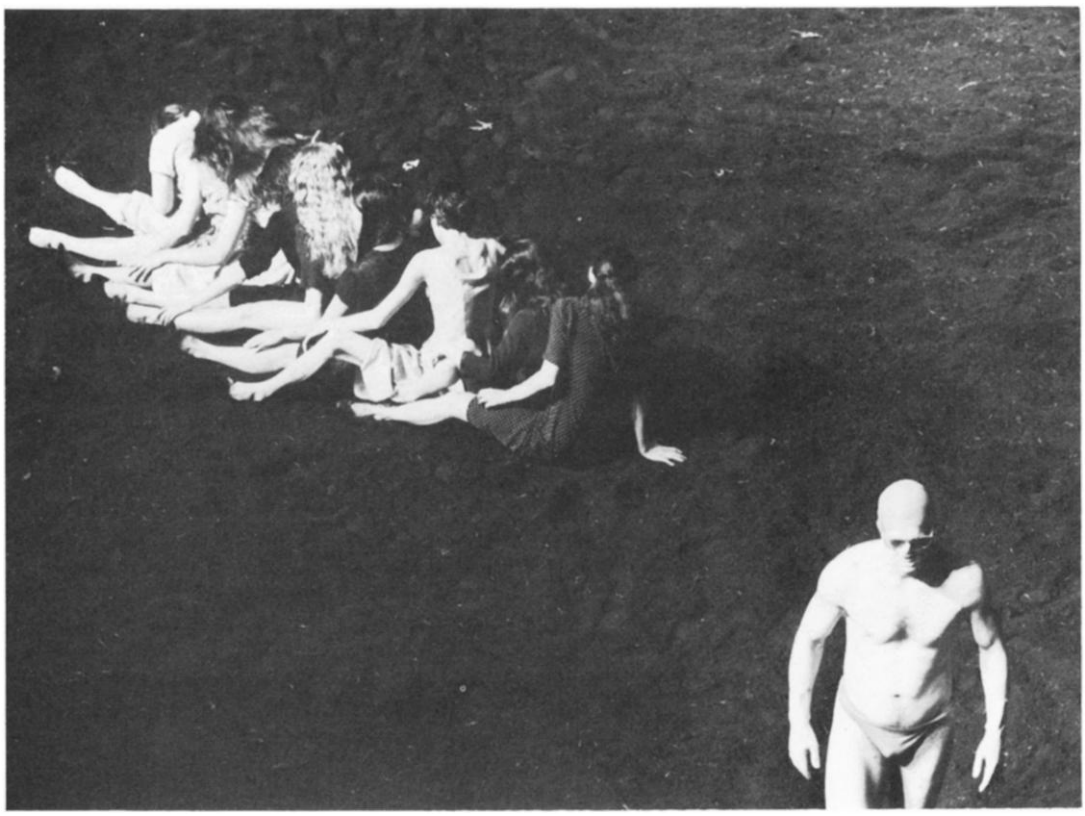
Discarded costumes often appear among the stage debris. In fact, constant costume changes mark the performers' shifting roles, suggesting that the performers' roles are like costumes to be put on and taken off at will. The performers often dress and undress onstage, frequently assisted by one another. Even when they change offstage, they often reenter still adjusting their undergarments, zipping their last zipper, or buttoning their last button. At times the performers, usually the women, are forced into layers and layers of costumes. This happens to Libonati in *Bluebeard*, when Minarik dresses her in the Victorian gowns cast off by the other women; to a row of seated women in *Arien*, when the men doll them up with make-up and odd pieces of clothes; and to Keselheim in *Gebirge*, when Minarik wraps gauze around her, covering even her face. The women become paralyzed by the layers of clothes, paralyzed by the signals of gender identity.

Costume changes are only one of the motifs that recur from work to work. Indeed, Bausch's works are like miscellaneous assemblages of motifs that keep reappearing in transformed guises. There are children's games (duck-duck-goose in *1980*, musical chairs in *Arien*) and social rituals (the dinner party in *Arien*, the funeral and formal good-byes in *1980*). There are images of food and of eating. In *1980* performers enter with plates of jello, and Kyomi Ichida throws her piece into the air and catches it on her plate like a juggler, while Grossmann shakes her piece of jello and then her breasts; in *Gebirge* Minarik makes a sandwich of his hand and offers it to a spectator. There are endless line-ups, processions, and take-offs on beauty contests. In *1980* one woman has a row of men drop their drawers, exposing their buttocks to the audience, while she walks in front of them inspecting their genitals; later the women line up, a man walks down the line inspecting the jiggle in their breasts, and ultimately a quarrel breaks out as to who has the best-looking leg; as *Kontakthof* begins, the performers one by one come downstage, show their various profiles, and bare their teeth. There are images of narcissism and self-display. In *Kontakthof* Dominique Mercy and Anne Marie Benati sit across from one another and with adolescent self-consciousness strip to

their undergarments; in *1980* the performers expose all varying patches of skin as they sunbathe.

The catalog continues: performers play word games, monologize, tell stories. In *1980* Benati tells the story of her father dressing her as a child and often forgetting her underpants; later the dancers shout out three-word associations with their country of national origin; in *Arien* performers play a game substituting the name of a body part for the blank in a sentence. Two men or two women perform a turn together, as in *Kontakthof* when Tankard and Endicott appear in party frocks and dance girlishly. In *Gebirge* Förster and Mercy dance a soft-shoe number. Authoritarian director/choreographer figures appear. In *1980* Minarik functions as a master of ceremonies; in *Kontakthof* he wanders around with a clipboard inspecting the technical equipment while Endicott and Sagon instruct the others like ballet mistresses.

Needless to say, the disparate images come together in different ways for different spectators. For me the parts of *Gebirge* remained fragments and never coalesced as a whole. Minarik as a monster man, Kaufmann wearing a red woman's bathing suit and heavy red lipstick, pine trees hauled onstage and then carted away—these incongruous juxtapositions seemed like a bad dream of a Bausch work, designed to confound and bore the spectator. Yet the various images of *1980* and *Kontakthof*, probably no less disparate than those in *Gebirge*, came together for me and resonated around an ineffable center. The theme of play seemed to anchor *1980*—the children's games, the physical self-display of the sunbathers, the magician's display of skill, the role-playing of Tankard as the dotty



16. In Bausch's Gebirge *(1984), the stage set is distinguished by its dirt floor. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

English tourist and Grossmann as the punk screaming "fantastic." The work seemed to equate theatrical play and social play: we play at roles in life, especially at gender roles, just as performers play at roles in the theater. This same double reference to theatrical and social realities seemed to anchor *Kontakthof,* except that it cut sharper and deeper than in *1980*: just as performers take on roles vis-à-vis the audience, we take on roles vis-à-vis one another, and in both instances role-playing involves a mixture of pleasure, self-disgust, resentment, and desperation.

This is not to say that Bausch's work can be reduced to the theme of role-playing. Indeed, her works deliberately defy any single, reductive interpretation, even as they demand to be interpreted. This paradox of interpretation also appeared in the works of modern dancers between the wars—Wigman, Jooss, Graham, and others—and appears in the works of the generations of George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham. Bausch's fusion of dance and theater, however antithetical to current modes of American dance, does not place her outside the tradition of modern dance, for she revitalizes its tension between the denial and the possibility of interpretation. Although Bausch, like her American contemporaries, breaks the essential connection the earlier generation effected between dance's formal values and its social import, she continues the tradition by recasting the paradox of interpretation. Violating one aspect of the tradition while reworking another, Bausch pushes the evolution of modern dance in a new direction.

Bausch exerts a pervasive influence on the second generation of tanztheater choreographers, especially on those who have worked directly with her, such as Reinhild Hoffmann and Mechthild Grossmann. Hoffmann studied at the Folkwang School with Jooss and Bausch from 1965 to 1970. She later directed the Folkwang Studio from 1974 to 1977 before she took over the Tanztheater Bremen in 1978, at first in tandem with Gerhard Bohner and since 1981 alone. Grossmann worked as an actress in Bremen, Stuttgart, and Bochum before joining Bausch's company in 1979, having first worked with her in 1976 on *Don't Be Afraid.* Gross-

17. Jan Minarik and Josephine Ann Endicott at her makeup table in Bausch's Arien *(1979): performers' roles are like costumes and makeup—to be put on and taken off at will. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

mann has pursued independent theater and film work while maintaining her affiliation with the company. In varied ways the works of Hoffmann and Grossmann echo Bausch.

At the Goethe House symposium Hoffmann noted that the images of violence betwen men and women in tanztheater were often intended as symbols of violence between other oppositions such as ideologies or nations. But this level of reference was not apparent in the work she premiered at the Next Wave Festival. Curiously, *Callas* (1983) takes for granted the assumptions of tanztheater, yet the work subverts the mode by presenting only its form and not its content. The characteristic devices of tanztheater become Hoffmann's subject, rather than the world at large.

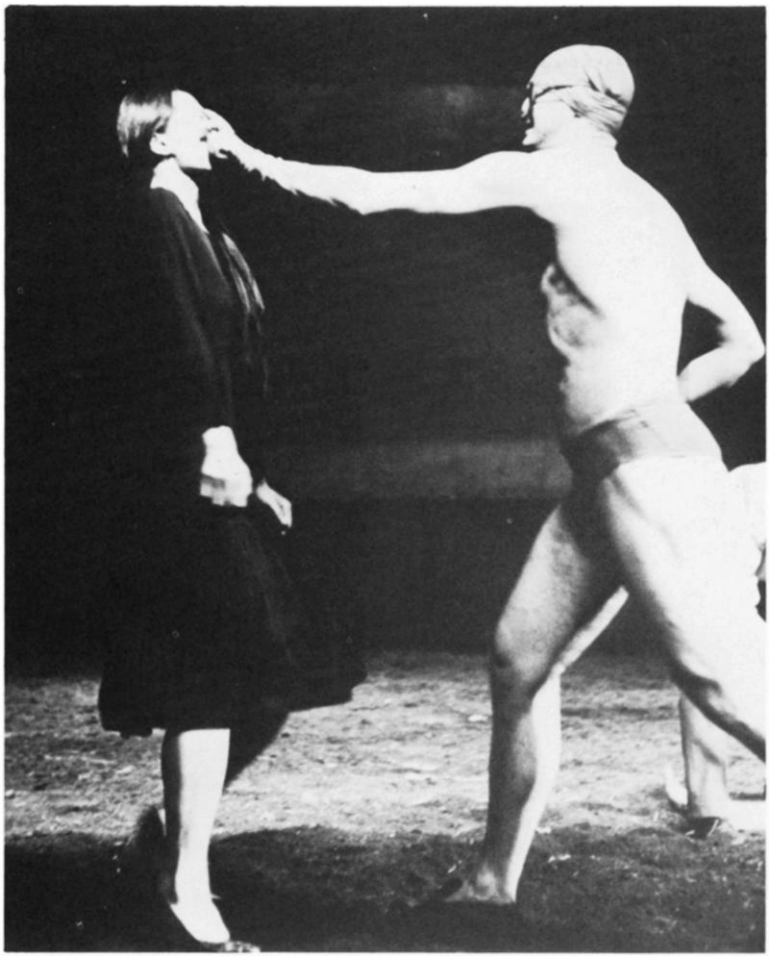
Set to a series of arias recorded by Maria Callas, *Callas* is more formalized and more self-referential than Bausch's work. Hoffmann displays her choreographic control by clearly structuring the work into eight titled sections, each built around the use of a specific set of props. Unlike Bausch's work, *Callas* does not show motifs overlapping and doubling back. Nor does it evidence the improvisational energy characteristic of Bausch's work. Hoffmann's dancers exhibit a more uniform body type and seem more anonymous than Bausch's dancers. Hence they appear less like individual personalities the spectator comes to know in the course of a performance. The dancers remain firmly behind the proscenium and do not intrude into the audience's space. The stage for *Callas*, curtained and carpeted, suggests a theater foyer. Hence *Callas* refers to itself as theater rather than to an environment half-fantastical, half-real. The title, the accompaniment, and the set suggest self-reflexive comment, though the comment's point of view escaped me.

The work echoes images from Bausch—the cross-dressing, the high heels and old-fashioned evening gowns, the violence between men and women. Although the images are original and not simply derivative, they seem hollow, for they refer only to their own theatricality. In the first section, "At the Opera," both male and female performers appear in long red evening dresses, carrying forms shaped like torsos dressed in formal

18. Jan Minarik wraps gauze around Silvia Kesselheim in Bausch's Gebirge *(1984). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

19. Who has the best-looking leg? Bausch's 1980 *(1980). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*

20. Josephine Ann Endicott (left) and Meryl Tankard tug on their constraining underwear in Bausch's Kontakthof *(1978). (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*



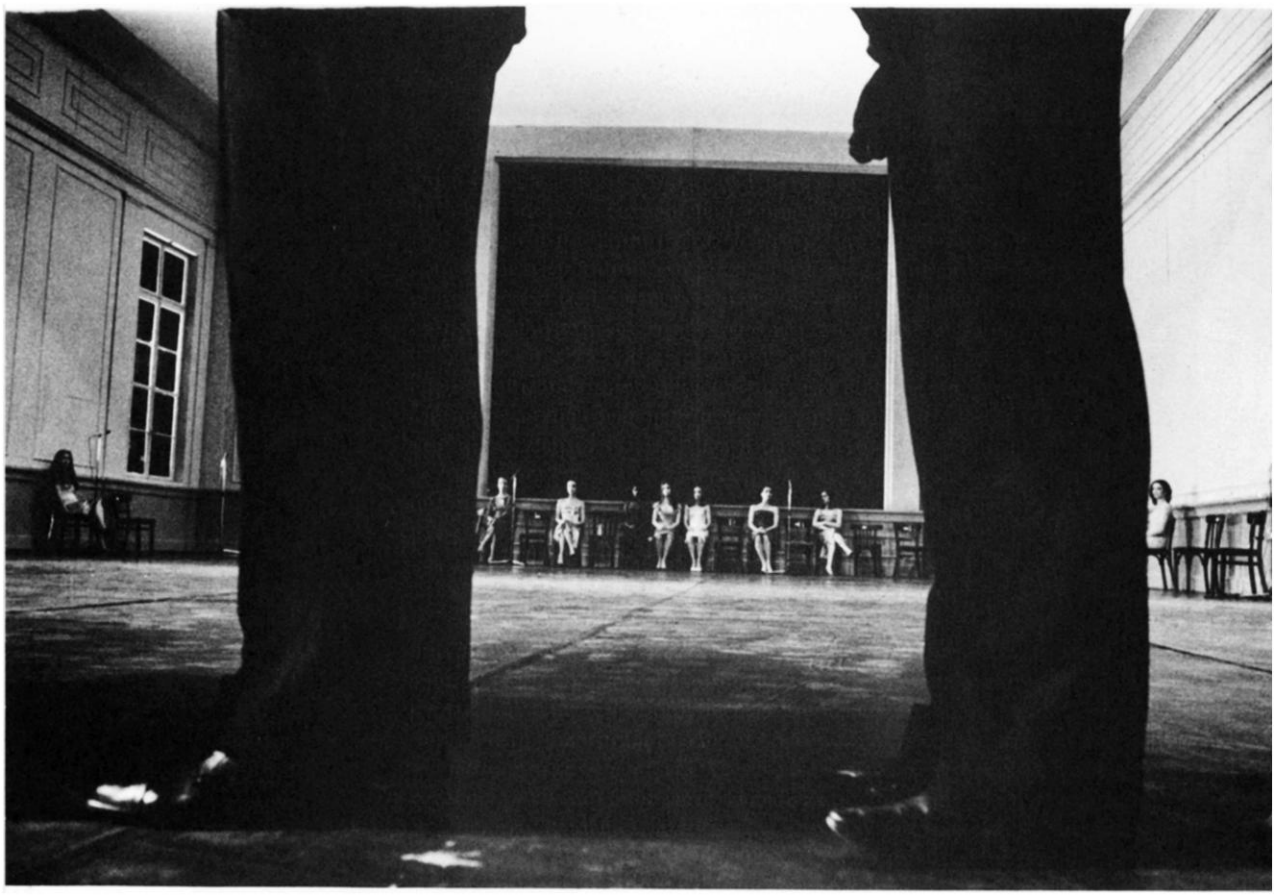
21. In Bausch's Gebirge *(1984), Jan Minarik plays a "monster man" and Kyomi Ichida one of his victims. (Photo by Ulli Weiss)*

attire. The dancers promenade these forms as if holding invisible partners. Later the forms become theater seats, and a man and woman lose and find one another within the seated crowd. In "Two White Women" a woman paints her shoes red, and then the red paint smears her white dress and a runway of white paper, as her alter ego, also dressed in white, flits around her. In "Taming" the men crack whips at the women, and later the women respond by cracking whips at the men. Men carry a cutout of a grand piano on their backs in "Grand Piano," and they hold cutouts of dress forms and mirror the movements of the women in "Doll and Mirror." In "Table" a woman walks over a table created by a long length of cloth pulled taut by the other dancers, presumably guests at her dinner party. In "The Fat Singer" men stuff balloons into the underclothes of a woman wearing only a fur coat, and in "Swing" a woman with a stool affixed under her dress sits in semi-darkness as a metronome ticks, and a young girl swings on and off stage. Whereas Bausch shows the process and struggle of creating tanztheater, Hoffmann takes its aesthetic for granted as the dominant mode.

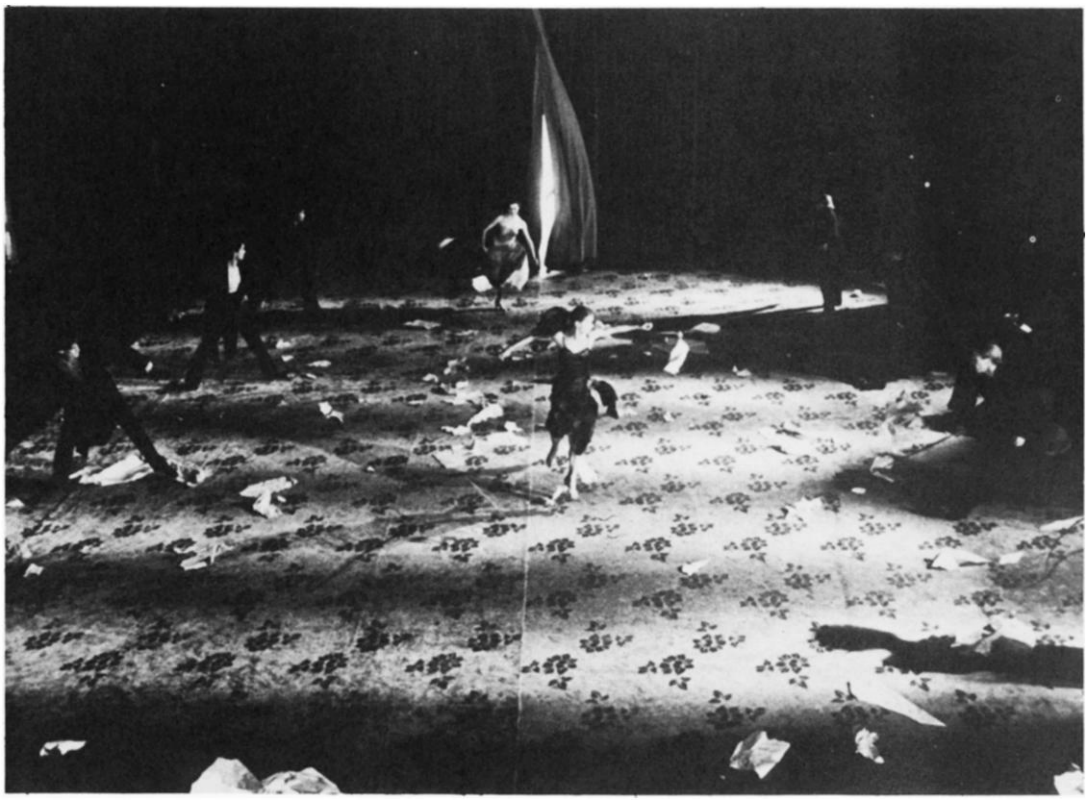
In *Where My Sun Shines For Me* (1984) Grossmann also assumes the basic principles of Bausch's tanztheater, though she internalizes them in order to reveal an unexplored aspect of the mode. She reduces Bausch's revue format to a solo form by zeroing in on costume changes as the essential structure for her series of transformations from one role to an-

other. Significantly, the highpoint of the series is her cross-dressing. In this way Grossmann explores an area that Bausch leaves relatively untouched, for male impersonators appear far less often than female impersonators in Bausch's work (see Carol Martin's interview with Grossmann, p. 98).

Grossmann impersonates a man the way a Japanese *onnagata* impersonates a woman—by seeming to embody the opposite sex not only physically but also spiritually, but without attempting to fool the spectators as a transvestite might. The high point of her performance comes when she impersonates a father reciting advice to a son while moving through a series of repeated gestures—hitching up his pants, scratching behind his ear, reaching into his vest pocket. Finally "he" strips to briefs, complete with a false penis, and assumes body-builder poses. Grossmann's male impersonation convinces even when she is nearly nude. Like an onnagata who seems feminine even offstage, Grossmann seems masculine even when impersonating women. Sitting on top of a piano and belting out a cabaret song in her low throaty voice, she exposes a generous length of shapely leg, yet something about her still reads as masculine. The overt unifying device for *Where My Sun Shines For Me* is the sun motif—as sung in the title song, as recited in a passage from *Antigone*, as drawn on the blackboard in the shape of a sun face. But the real interest of the piece lies in Grossmann's fusion and confusion of gender identity. Like Bausch,



22. Bausch's Kontakthof *(1978): double references to theatrical and social relations. (Photo by Gert Weigelt)*



23. Hoffmann's Callas *(1983) is set to a series of arias by Maria Callas and is structured in eight titled sections, each built around a specific set of props. (Photo by Klaus Lefebvre)*

Grossmann uses her tanztheater to explore the fragility and complexity of our notions of masculinity and femininity.

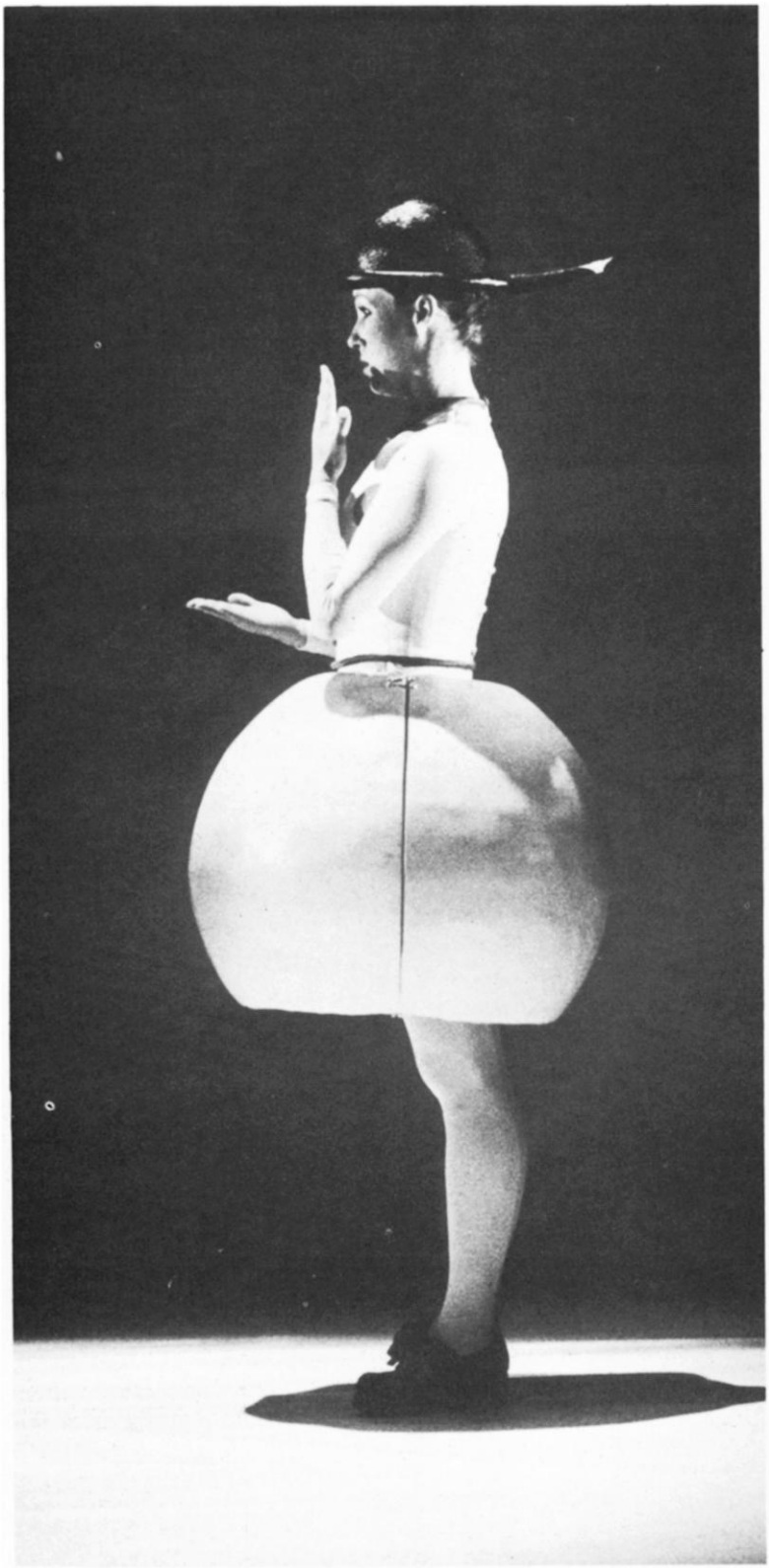
Although Susanne Linke also studied with Bausch (1968-71), her work does not show as strong an influence as Hoffmann and Grossmann's. From 1973 to 1975 she directed the Folkwang Studio along with Hoffmann. Earlier (1964-67) she had studied with Wigman and saw Dore Hoyer, the last of the ausdruckstanz soloists, perform. When she first presented her solo evenings in 1981, the ausdruckstanz influence predominated.

Whereas Grossmann reduces Bausch's revue format to a solo form, Linke reaches back to the solo form characteristic of Wigman and Hoyer. This form extends one central dance idea to its fullest yet most economical realization. In *Orient-Occident* (1984) the core idea is the confusion of the dancer's costume with her body. The result is that she seems creaturelike rather than human as she crosses the stage in a horizontal shaft of light. The spectator cannot differentiate the creature's limbs from her gauzy costume from her loosely-flowing hair. In *Flood* (1981) the core idea is the dancer's play with a long length of blue cloth. The cloth becomes the flood engulfing Linke, and Linke in turn dissolves her body in the free flow of energy impulses, like rushing water. Unlike Bausch, Linke does not eschew the earlier generation's emphasis on the formal values of movement.

But Linke's solos are more than nostalgic evocations of the ausdruckstanz aesthetic. Like her female contemporaries, she cannot help but explore images of gender. *Swans Weigh* (1982) presents the image of a de-

24. Linke in her solo Bath Tubbing *(1980). On one level it is a virtuosic play of forms. On another level, Linke seems like a housewife lost in fantasy. (Photo by Ridha Zouari)*

25. & 26. Bohner's reconstruction of Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet *(1977). (Photos by Gert Weigelt)*



bilitated swan who becomes progressively weaker and ultimately collapses in a symbolic death. On one level, the work ironically comments on Petipa's *Swan Lake* and Fokine's *The Dying Swan*, suggesting that today's scene distorts the swans of earlier ballets. But on another level, the solo associates the swan's debilitation with the layering of masculinity over femininity, for Linke wears an oversized black tuxedo jacket with tails over a romantic-length tutu. Her distorted movement cannot be separated from the costume's distortion of her form, and her distorted form cannot be separated from its layering of the masculine tuxedo over the feminine tutu.

Bath Tubbing (1980) presents a woman interacting with an old-fashioned stand-up bathtub. On one level, the solo is a virtuosic play between the dancer's form and the bathtub's form, requiring Linke to precisely control her weight against the weight of the bathtub. But on another level, Linke seems like a housewife lost in fantasy as she performs her daily chore of cleaning the tub. However, she never fully realizes the fantasy of the lady of the house luxuriating in her bath, for when she completely disappears into the tub, it falls over with a clank and reveals her inert form inside. Like *Swans Weigh*, *Bath Tubbing* ends with a symbolic death. In this way the two solos uncannily connect to the ausdruckstanz tradition, for Wigman's solos often ended with a symbolic death. Without presuming to recreate Wigman's aesthetic, Linke manages to reinterpret its spirit in a manner attuned to the concerns of tanztheater.

Gerhard Bohner also connects his works to the ausdruckstanz tradition. Bohner trained as a ballet dancer and performed with the Deutsche Oper in Berlin from 1961 to 1971; he also studied with Wigman in the mid-'60s. Since that time he has worked as a freelance choreographer, with longer stints in Darmstadt (1962-75) and Bremen (1978-81), where he shared the directorship with Hoffmann.

But whereas Linke reinterprets the spirit of the earlier tradition, Bohner attempts to reconstruct a lost masterpiece—Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet*, originally premiered in 1922. In contrast to Linke, Bohner presumes to recreate Schlemmer's aesthetic, but in the end he manages neither to do so nor to reinterpret Schlemmer's aesthetic in vital contemporary terms. His attempted reconstruction, set to a contemporary score composed by Hans-Joachim Hespos, involves a free improvisation on Schlemmer's costume designs. That Bohner's work fails to recreate the spirit of the original is evidenced by the divergence between the opening 12 sections and the closing "Wire Costume and Gold Balls," the only section notated sufficiently to allow for an "authentic" reconstruction. "Wire Costume and Gold Balls" shows how Schlemmer piled symmetry on top of symmetry—the geometrics of the costumes against the grid of the choreography's spatial design against the measures of Handel's music—and in so doing dehumanized the dancers. In contrast, Bohner layers the asymmetries of modern music and modernist choreography on top of the symmetries of ballet technique and Schlemmer's costumes, and the result confuses the absurdity of dehumanization with the idiosyncrasy of contemporary style. Bohner's *Triadic Ballet* attempts to humanize a work that relied on dehumanization for its effect and ends up distorting both the prewar and postwar aesthetics of German modern dance.

Perhaps the most astounding aspect of last fall's appearances by the companies of Bausch, Hoffmann, Grossmann, Linke, and Bohner was the negative response by the New York dance community, critics and performers alike. It is puzzling why so many interested Americans—and

Germans—feel compelled to take sides, why they cannot accept each other's aesthetic on its own terms. Obviously, if the American proponents of formalism and the German proponents of anti-formalism felt totally secure about their own positions, they would not react so defensively to one another. Their defensiveness suggests to me that the most vocal advocates fear that their positions are incomplete and inadequate. It is as if both the formalists and the anti-formalists sense the impoverishment of the postwar split between the social mission and formal mission of modern dance. On some level, the Americans realize that they have reneged on the early modern dancers' belief that their art could transform the dominant values of society. On some level, the Germans realize that they have reneged on the early modern dancers' belief that movement alone could become articulate.

It would be naïve to predict a synthesis of the two aesthetics, even though certain trends in the American dance world point to the possibility of a reconciliation. But these trends, like the work of Meredith Monk and the engagement of postmodern choreographers with narrative and spectacle, are not new, and they have yet to make a significant dent in the prevailing formalist aesthetic. More likely is that American dance will absorb the influences from abroad—not only from tanztheater but also from Japanese butoh—and render them as additional possibilities within the compass of formal pluralism. If that happens, American modern dance will have missed a chance to assess itself critically through the mirror of its other. Such a self-assessment might well spur the recovery of its lost sense of social mission.

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