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# NIJINSKY'S IMAGES OF HOMOSEXUALITY

## THREE CASE STUDIES

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The Dancer<sup>1</sup>

I know that I am in a light dream  
Moving and divinely tormenting myself:  
I dance over glossy stairs  
Which lead up and down through wide halls.

I glide unveiled on naked feet,  
Manifold lights train my rocking gait,  
My body bends playfully in the sweet  
Sensation of the waves and my limbs' desires.

And my eyes look all around me  
Where, down there, stand many hundred men  
Staring upwards with ashamed mouths,  
Lasciviously gazing at my alluring charms.

I dance on past their long gazes  
Pulsed by a confident vital momentum.  
I know that I rule hundreds of destinies  
As my body leaps, white, like the waves.

The walls expand. The stars shine  
through, icy. Space and time are obliterated.  
And the whole world's manhood, united round me,  
surges through the round tail of my sexual fruition.<sup>2</sup>

E.W. Lotz

This expressionist poem, probably written in the first few years of the 1910s, grapples with one of the most delicate yet intriguing themes of dance history. *The Dancer* is centrally concerned with the destabilisation of the conventional representation of masculinity through male display, nudity, same-sex desire and homosexuality.

Its author, Ernst Wilhelm Lotz, was a typical exponent of German literary expressionism at the beginning of the 20th Century. Born in West Prussia, he fell like many of his comrades at the front in the first few months of the First World War. The Expressionist circles Lotz belonged to were vehemently opposed to many tenets of bourgeois culture: its mores, conformism, authoritarianism, outmoded educational ideals and the practices of rationalisation and mechanisation, to name but a few. These artists' works, which rejected both factual naturalism and the aestheticised nature of impressionist art, were often related to themes of dance, sexuality and the primitive.<sup>3</sup> Bourgeois culture tended to see dancers as sexually unrestrained, and often regarded their apparently overt sexuality as decadent; by contrast, expressionists frequently advocated dance as a form of free self-expression. In his 1979 monograph *Dancers and Doers*, for instance, Wolfgang Rothe examines numerous expressionist poems that almost invariably treated dance as a tool of liberation from the limitations of an earthly (bourgeois) existence. Moreover, in the wake of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy – a major influence on early 20<sup>th</sup> century literary, performing and visual artists alike – expressionists projected a utopian ideal of a new human being characterised by intuitional, instinctual and corporeal qualities, as opposed to hitherto favoured assets such as cognitive thought and rationality. The dancer was regarded as an eminently suitable figure to incorporate these new qualities and therefore became an icon of expressionist art.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of this, Lotz's zeal to depict the subject matter of the queer male dancer in a literary text is unusual, given the fact that stage characters in the first half of the century, both in ballet and in modern dance, were frequently enmeshed in what Sally Banes termed the marriage plot,<sup>5</sup> a socially sanctioned pattern of heteronormativity to which most authors who treat dance as a motif also adhere. *The Dancer*, with its provocative departure from the accepted manner of male presentation, in particular its last stanza suggesting sexual intercourse among men, may be a response to the growing awareness of the spectacle of the male dancer, a trend inaugurated by Diaghilev's famous *Ballets Russes*. It may also have been influenced by a more general socio-

political trend – the homosexual liberation movement, which gained force at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; and by the nascent field of Sexual Science, which I shall address presently.

Dance, as a corporeal and expressive art form, is perfectly suited for the enactment of gay, lesbian, or – to use a more inclusive recent term – queer identity. On this note, Judith Butler refers to bodily practices as those which mark genders as distinct. She maintains that whereas

forms of sexuality do not unilaterally determine gender, a noncausal and nonreductive connection between sexuality and gender is nevertheless crucial to maintain. Precisely because homophobia often operates through the attribution of a damaged, failed, or otherwise abjected gender to homosexuals [...], and because the homophobic terror over performing homosexual acts, where it exists, is often also a terror over losing proper gender [...], it seems crucial to retain a theoretical apparatus that will account for how sexuality is regulated through the policing and shaming of gender.<sup>6</sup>

Gender performativity, that is the process whereby individuals are compelled, by repetition, to embody inapproximable gender norms of ‘proper’ masculinity and femininity, militates against homosexuality. Differently sexed bodies are forced, under social pressures, to assume their respective genders, and to cite the norm through which they are established as viable subjects. Consequently, people with a male sexed body are supposed to embody a male gender, and express a sexual desire for the opposite gender, while rejecting and suppressing possible erotic interest in their own.

Criticism of the dimorphic division of humans into males and females with clearly distinct identities, and of the exclusive scheme of sexual difference, had already been uttered by the German Magnus Hirschfeld, the foremost researcher in early sexual science and closeted homosexual. In his treatises on sexology, for instance his weighty *Homosexuality of Men and Women* (1914), Hirschfeld introduced his theory of “sexual intermediaries”,<sup>7</sup> which contended that the categorisation into male and female is fictitious, as there is in reality a huge diversity and variety of sexualities. The bisexual disposition of humans, which he grounds in the fact that we develop from a gamete combining elements of both male and female, such that both sexes possess at least rudiments of the respective other sex’s distinct physiology, led him to argue that it is only normal that humans should possess homosexual tendencies. Hence, there is no ‘absolute’ woman who

only displays female characteristics (in terms of sexual organs, physiology, sex drive and mental attributes); neither is there a man who is exclusively male in all respects. Rather, most people are sexual variants who have, to differing extents, both male and female traits.

Most forms of stage dance operate alongside authorised gendered and sexual lines of discourse, and have thus accumulated the force of what Butler terms performative acts.<sup>8</sup> As Burt claims, “the traditions and conventions of mainstream theatre dance are formed by and reinforce a normative heterosexual, male point of view, marginalizing and suppressing alternative sexualities”.<sup>9</sup> Gay or lesbian dancers and choreographers have often preferred to pass as straight, in order to evade the social sanctions applied to homosexual, or queer, identity. This has often been manifest in their employing a gender-specific repertory of movement, for instance jumps and turns displaying male prowess; and the embodiment of emotions ascribed to men, such as aggression, highlighting the nature of heterosexual identity.

However, not all choreographers and dancers followed this ritualised repetition of norms. On the contrary some used the fact that, to paraphrase one of Butler’s main arguments, the citational practice of gender and sexuality is not fully determining, to make dance (and in particular the queer male dancer) a site of resistance. Dancing, in particular when nudity or homosexual connotations are involved, can challenge the normalising constraints of conventional masculinity, and provide sites of instability for masculine identity. Precisely because the male dancer can present a transgression of regulatory norms, he has the potential to destabilise and collapse boundaries and to withstand binary gender and sexual stereotypes.

Though Butler cautioned us against regarding cross-gendered identifications as the determining paradigm for conceptualising homosexuality (since, in fact, many cross-dressers are straight),<sup>10</sup> such identifications are surely a principal means of expressing unorthodox sexuality. As Desmond has pointed out, sexualities must be declared and made visible on stage through markers of dress, movement and other cues. Homosexual identities can be affirmed by assuming expressive codes associated with the opposite gender: “The ‘swish’ of a male wrist or the strong

strides of a female can, in certain contexts and for certain viewers, be kinesthetic ‘speech-acts’ that declare anti-normative sexuality”.<sup>11</sup>

The choreographers and dancers of Diaghilev’s Paris-based troupe *Ballets Russes*, which was founded in 1909, were pioneering in their attempts to transform the art of dance within the realm of ballet, and to emphasise the erotic physicality of the male dancer. During the nineteenth century the ballerina had taken centre stage, and female dancers were the primary focus of male artistic and indeed erotic attention. Now, however, male dance was to gain a much stronger footing. Most of the protagonists in the ballets created under Diaghilev’s patronage were men. On an aesthetic level, this shift was intricately entangled with the quest for radical innovations as regards plot, repertory of movement, musical accompaniment and stage design.<sup>12</sup> The attempt to render ballet a modern art form sought to make it less balletic, and to abandon old-fashioned 19<sup>th</sup> century theatricality. Diaghilev co-operated with several representatives of modern dance and visited Dalcroze’s school in Hellerau in 1912 twice with Nijinsky.<sup>13</sup> His choreographers adopted many features from modern dance, for instance integrating stridently innovative elements of movement which enriched ballet’s limited kinesthetic repertory.

Yet, what makes Diaghilev’s approach to dance so significant in our context is his establishment of a link between the male dancer and homosexuality, giving way to a new, gender-atypical treatment of movement. Burt has persuasively argued that although male dancers were discredited by nineteenth century bourgeois audiences, the prejudice against them was not simply on grounds of their actual or perceived homosexuality.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the discomfort with male dance reflected a lack of empathy on the part of members of the audience who simply could not identify with the way men were presented on stage. One reason why physical display is problematic for men is given by feminist theory: bodily expressivity is normally theorised in conjunction with femininity. Numerous psychological accounts of the human genesis, for instance Julia Kristeva’s,<sup>15</sup> suggest that because non-verbal expression is linked to the maternal body, boys have to distance themselves from corporeality in order to be integrated into the

paternal, verbal realm of the symbolic. The rejection of corporeality, with its linkage to the female gender, is thus a vital injunction in the process of becoming a man.

Diaghilev's artistic associates and dancers choreographed ballets which strayed outside the heterosexual paradigm, embracing the eroticisation of the male dancer. Because gay choreographers, in the 1910s and 1920s, were largely forced to remain in the closet, the queer codings of their ballets were often not easily decipherable. Their works contained a double meaning. While they seemingly addressed a straight audience with reference to subject matter and other cues, their choreographic strategies enabled spectators who knew the code to read the underlying 'queer' message.<sup>16</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, homosexuals often emphasised their ability to recognise each other instinctively, constructing a common sign language which included specific code words, behavioural patterns and fashion items. Owing to these secretive signals, which served the purpose of establishing their identity, they were often likened to freemasons, and much time and effort was invested by medics and other professionals into deciphering their codes. This clandestine behaviour was in fact quite essential, as in most countries homosexuality was still a criminal offence and, more generally, led to marginalisation and discrimination.

It was against the background of considerable hostility to overt homosexuality, then, that Diaghilev initiated an astonishing shift in ballet audiences. Rather than attracting wealthy men who regaled themselves by selecting their mistresses from among the ballerinas on stage, Diaghilev's performances were frequented by a much more mixed audience: avantgarde artists, women, and considerable numbers of male homosexuals. A contemporary critic noted that "the *clientèle* of the Russian Ballet may now be distinguished by the beautiful burgeoning boys",<sup>17</sup> while in the eighth volume of the *International Journal of Sexology*, Anatole James writes that:

From the very outset, the Russian Ballet appealed enormously to most homosexuals. There was something in its sensuousness and gorgeous colouring that made a tremendous appeal. Whenever the Ballet was in London the theatre was crammed with homosexuals, and soon its appeal spread to the humble class of would-be 'artistic' males.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, Garafola has produced ample evidence to suggest that postcards, drawings and photoalbums were circulated in selected elite homosexual cliques, often in limited editions, depicting male members of the company in an overtly erotic manner.<sup>19</sup>

The following subsections will examine the crucial role that Nijinsky played in the constitution of a new gendered and sexual identity for the male dancer. I shall focus on three ballets devised for, or choreographed by, him: *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, and, lastly, *Legend of Joseph*, the libretto of which was written by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. These ballets shed light on Nijinsky's experiments with differing gender and sexual identities, ranging from effeminacy in *Spectre*, through pronounced masculinity in *Faune* to boyish innocence in *Legend of Joseph*. In addition to examining Nijinsky's roles in these ballets, I shall also discuss the status that women were accorded.

## I NIJINSKY AND HOMOEROTICISM

Nijinsky was hailed as a god of dance – acknowledged not only by dance critics, but also by numerous writers from a variety of countries. Dance was a very fashionable subject for authors at the time, because many of them saw the 'mute art' of dance as an aesthetic alternative to the declared bankruptcy and limitations of their own medium, namely verbal language. They deemed the latter incapable of expressing the authentic elementary and affective experiences of human beings, primarily due to its arbitrary and socially determined nature. Hofmannsthal, the co-librettist of *Legend of Joseph*, was a key exponent of this so-called 'crisis of language', and wrote several essays to this effect.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, ballet has traditionally been connected with poetry and prose; most narratives are based on fictional texts, and this is indeed true of the Ballets Russes' works whose inspirations included Gautier's 'choreographic poem' *Spectre*, Mallarmé's *Faune*, and Kessler's and Hofmannsthal's libretto for the *Legend of Joseph*. Interestingly,

Fokine maintained that “dancing is the poetry of motion”<sup>21</sup>, postulating a new ideal of beauty, opposed to the academic formalism and bravura technique of much contemporary ballet.

The wide-reaching tribute paid to Nijinsky by prominent authors proves significant as, in striking disproportion to literary texts on female dancers, research produces only very sparse literary material on male dance in general. While this is doubtless due, in part, to Nijinsky’s unique stage persona which impressed upon authors, another reason may be located in his status as a symbol of homosexual culture.

There seems little doubt that Nijinsky’s homosexual affairs were primarily opportunistic, as Hewitt<sup>22</sup> attests. According to Nijinsky’s own candid diary notes, he regularly visited female Parisian prostitutes even during his relationship with Diaghilev. However, it is not Nijinsky’s actual sexual orientation that stands in question here but rather the way in which he was marketed, to use a modern term. It is notable that his display of his physique and various unusual representations of gender, which will be discussed below, were framed by specific recurring iconographic details regarding stage setting and props. Garafola points out the linkage between Nijinsky’s posturing as an object of homoerotic desire, and “the feathers, fabrics, and props that serve as fetishes; [...] the artifice of the surrounding scene”<sup>23</sup>. In other words, Nijinsky’s stylisation as an erotic object, delivered through his movement repertory, was underpinned by an arsenal of artificial images. Ludwig Rubiner’s 1912 poem *The Dancer Nijinsky* captures some of this atmosphere:

My space is like a sloping wire which I grasp.  
 Up! Freedom from this dirty world’s circle of lights,  
 and everywhere the odour of old plush and whore-like soap.  
 Far away, in the dark tank, chains of foreheads swing up and down.

Up! Glass stairs descend from the air. My arms are thin. I press  
 My toes together. Then green lamps, cuffs and violin strings sink beneath.  
 And above me, red, unreachable, fly the hairs of my foolish wig.  
 Hands up! Breathing folk squeal in the dark. You have sucked in my air!

I fall. You want me in your warm holes, you bitches!  
 Rugs, boards, turn like long worms! I stand still, in the midst.  
 Hostile seats in a box, swimming in the murky circling abyss.  
 Drowning in the distance, sleepy lights on tall theatre curtains.

My fists rotate. You sit somewhere. Your brain will spurt.  
 You are speeding, pale, through the dark and the glow of the lights, like monkeys in fearful branches.  
 You are flying, circling, far away from me. I am floating on the tips of my toes.  
 The silence circles like bowls of white sky. Light! There sits a crowd, pale and silent.<sup>24</sup>

The poet and cultural critic Rubiner was an important figure in expressionism and contributed to one of its main periodicals, *Der Sturm*. Originally from Berlin, where he associated himself with the avant-garde scene, he moved to Paris in November 1912 and stayed for most of 1913. Here, he met artists such as Marc Chagall and undoubtedly saw Nijinsky perform.

The artificiality of the stage world Nijinsky inhabits in this poem is palpable (“wig” “green lamps”, “plush”, “stage curtains”); indeed, Rubiner lends it a slightly repulsive and hostile, albeit fascinating, atmosphere. The poem’s message is ambivalent: Rubiner possibly sought to dissociate Nijinsky from the hostile crowd – elevation, symbolised here by a jump, was a popular metaphor for triumph over, and liberation from, what expressionists viewed as our ‘incarcerated’ life in bourgeois society.<sup>25</sup> In an almost mystical sense, the jump distances the dancer from earthly happenings, allowing for a greater closeness to God. On the other hand, it is made clear that descent follows ascent (“I fall”), and there are also several subtle allusions to ‘earthly’ sexuality throughout the text.

In the same way as the homosexual component of Nijinsky’s performance on stage is perhaps not immediately recognisable, the homoeroticism of Nijinsky’s image in the poem cannot be instantaneously grasped from the lines quoted. The erotic allusions are largely encapsulated within images of spectatorship, and disclose their more pointed significance only in isolation from the context in which they are placed: “up and down”, “breathing people squeak in the dark”, “spurt” in the ejaculatory sense. The centre of the poem contains an allusion to anal sex: “you want me in your warm holes, you bitches”.

Indeed, the poem may appear to draw on two usually dissociated spheres – the sexual and the religious – with the latter being implied by the dancer’s possible ‘salvation’ from the hostile crowd. The dichotomy between them may be reconciled, however, if we reflect that both the metaphorical ‘ascent’ and sexuality offer ecstatic types of experience. Ecstasy, a state transcending ordinary consciousness,<sup>26</sup> provided a possible escape route from the petty bourgeois thinking that the expressionists so much loathed. It was a key notion in expressionist artistry which could supposedly be achieved through various means, notably religion, dance and eroticism. Indeed, quite often in expressionist lyrics, these are referred to in the same breath.<sup>27</sup>

Nijinsky’s association with decorative and ornamental items and props, on postcards, on stage and in this poem, is significant, in that it seems to reflect the tastes of turn-of-the-century homosexual men – at least if we believe Hirschfeld. Invoking one recognisable discourse of homosexuality, which we might call the camp tradition, he noted that sitting rooms furnished or designed by homosexuals, with their “colourful curtains, wallpapers and covers, their knick-knacks, little pictures and ribbons”,<sup>28</sup> often remind us of a lady’s boudoir. This suggests that such decorative items were widely-used signals connoting homosexuality, which, in a theatrical setting surrounding Nijinsky, might well have been seen as homoerotic fetishes.

One reason for the fact that such literary portrayals of Nijinsky are unparalleled by any other male dancer can be found in what Sally Banes termed the “Russianness” of the Ballets Russes.<sup>29</sup> Nijinsky’s association with Russia branded him as an uncivilised, instinctual, exotic, semi-carnal and sexually liberated being. The Western European view of the company is perfectly expressed by this excerpt from a poem entitled *The Russian Ballet* by Alfred Kerr. Kerr was a theatre critic and editor of the journal *Pan*, which levelled criticism at the traditional cultural politics of the Wilhelminian Reich, and published articles on poetry, music, and the visual and performing arts.

Aiming, squinting, eyeing, lurking,  
Coiling, ducking in herds,  
Are they animals? Are they peasants?  
Are they Russians? Are they Tartars?

How they snarl, strut, flirt,  
 Fur-coated in long boots;  
 Storming forwards like lightning,  
 With Nijinsky at the head.

The guest in the front row; astonished he sees  
 The genius of the Muscovites.<sup>30</sup>

While many modern Western European dancers were eager to avoid blatant sexual connotations in their dances, the *Ballets Russes*, who epitomised exoticism, could explore unorthodox sexualities and subversive gender attachments more freely, without experiencing the social constraints imposed on other European nationals. The image of Russia as non-Western and vaguely associated with the Orient meant that Russians were ascribed a more liberated sexuality; Oriental countries were regarded not only as manifesting unbridled sensuality, but in particular as playgrounds of same-sex love. The more exotic the location or country, the stronger the association with eroticism. Orientalism and Greek antiquity in particular formed part of the homosexual discourse<sup>31</sup> and were indeed marketed successfully in the repertory of the *Ballets Russes*. The members of the company were even considered to represent a different grade of humanity which enabled them to assert a new identity for the male dancer by recourse to formerly unacceptable styles of movement. It should also be noted, however, that France, their main workplace, was one of the few countries where homosexual behaviour was not treated as a punishable offence.

One strategy by which the *Ballets Russes* denaturalised deployment of gender identity, without thereby compromising tradition too mercilessly, was by locating on-stage protagonists in non-earthly, or mythical, spheres. The transfer of ballets into contexts which eluded the reality of the audience killed two birds with one stone: it satisfied the hunger of the bourgeoisie for the extraordinary, and allowed the choreographer to experiment with unusually gendered movement codes in the relatively safe haven of artistic exoticism.<sup>32</sup> This applies to all three ballets discussed below: *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* with its mythological context, *Legend of Joseph* which takes recourse

to a biblical tale, and *Le Spectre de la Rose*, in which Nijinsky danced the leading title role of the Spirit of the Rose. In the following sections, I shall demonstrate how Nijinsky conveyed various dominant images of sexual unorthodoxy.

## II *LE SPECTRE DE LA ROSE*: EFFEMINACY

Androgyny, the blend of male and female attributes, was the hallmark of Romantic and other epochs' artistry, but was conceived in a way that forbade women access to the higher realm of artistic genius. Christine Battersby, who dedicated a monograph to the problem of *Gender and Genius* (1989), argued that ideas of genius and artistry were often associated with androgyny; however, the androgynous artist in the Romantic and post-Romantic era was, biologically speaking, exclusively male. Whilst feminine traits, such as passion and intuition, were praised as a *conditio sine qua non* of a "true" artist, femaleness (the biological sex) was rejected; "It is only his soul that is 'feminine'".<sup>33</sup>

Nijinsky, endowed with a stunning technical ability and displaying postures and gestures formerly ascribed to the female sex, such as grace and sensitivity, presented a style of dance that clearly transgressed conservative notions of masculinity. The bourgeois art theory, by associating feminine traits in a male artist with the notion of genius, provided the perfect frame into which Nijinsky's work could be fitted without questioning his potency as an artist, or a man. The praise for his genius had not only the function of acknowledging his accomplishment as a dancer, but foremost and above all, it served to legitimate his oddly effeminate movement repertory.

This theory perhaps veiled the fact that androgyny was also one of the predominant behavioural characteristics by which homosexuality was labelled, recognised and categorised at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Magnus Hirschfeld, for instance, divided homosexual men into two groups under the somewhat vague headings of 'personal peculiarities': the virile and feminine

homosexual respectively. Although both subgroups make out approximately 50% of gay men, it is predominantly effeminacy that has come to mark a man as homosexual, or ‘invert’; even Hirschfeld concedes that the homosexual’s psyche is normally constituted by a “peculiar mixture of male and female tendencies”.<sup>34</sup>

Though I am unaware of any written proof that Diaghilev and his entourage actually read Hirschfeld’s texts, there is circumstantial evidence that they were at least familiar with the undertakings of the researcher and gay activist. Hirschfeld had lived in Paris in his youth and was a very prominent public figure in Germany. Diaghilev might well have known of him through one of his key artistic collaborators in Germany and Austria: perhaps Hofmannsthal, Strauss or Kessler who mentions Hirschfeld in his Diary.<sup>35</sup> As early as 1897, Hirschfeld founded the *Scientific Humanitarian Committee* which aimed at overturning the much-debated §175, the article of the German penal code that criminalised homosexual behaviour. A petition was launched against this law, ultimately unsuccessfully, despite more than 5,000 signatures having been collected by 1907. The list of signatories reads like a ‘who’s who’ of German public life, incorporating the most prominent Germans of this era; among them Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, many expressionist artists, leading theatre directors, dance critics, and Harry Count Kessler.<sup>36</sup> It would appear highly unlikely that Diaghilev was ignorant of such a major enterprise. Moreover, in 1919, Hirschfeld co-wrote the homosexual liberation film *Anders als die Andern (Different from the Others)*, starring among others the well-known German modern dancer and actress Anita Berber.

One of the ballets which drew attention to Nijinsky’s androgyny was *Le Spectre de la Rose* which premiered in 1911 in Monte Carlo. The plot is simple and highlights a subject matter of heterosexual eros. A young, unmarried girl returns from a party, sinks, exhausted, into a sofa, and falls asleep. The Spirit of the Rose appears on stage, performs several artistically and technically demanding steps and engages with the girl in a short, tender *pas de deux*. He finally exits from the scene with a spectacular jump out of the window. The girl wakes up.

A remarkable feature of the ballet's plot is its departure from a common convention – exemplified by works such as *La Sylphide* – of depicting spirits as female.<sup>37</sup> Nijinsky's spirit is male, which enabled him to assume attributes formerly ascribed to the female sex, such as unearthliness, softness and fragility. For this role, Nijinsky wore a pink body-stocking covered with rose leaves, and an equally tight-fitting, feminine-style hood, also decorated with leaves. The girl – danced by Karsavina – wore a white dress which drew inspiration from Biedermeier fashion.

The role emphasised Nijinsky's celebrated androgyny.<sup>38</sup> No doubt his portrayal of a spirit, and cross-dressing on stage, contravened expected performances of gender. This is underscored by his display of effeminate movement which is intertwined with powerful masculine leg and footwork. Garafola rightly observes that “masculine in the power of his leaps, feminine in the curving delicacy of his arms, he emitted a perfume of sexual strangeness”.<sup>39</sup> Michel Fokine, the choreographer, was instrumental in constructing Nijinsky's androgynous stage image. It was under his tutelage that Nijinsky danced some of his most ambisexual roles: the ‘poet’ in *Les Sylphides*, the Golden Slave in *Schéhérazade* (remarked upon as “feminine”<sup>40</sup> by Benois), and the Harlequin in *Carnaval*.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Fokine commented upon Nijinsky's “lack of masculinity” and consequently found him “unfit for certain roles”.<sup>42</sup>

Whereas Nijinsky adhered to traditional displays of flamboyant male prowess through his high *jetés en l'air* and *tours*, with which he conformed to expectations of a male style of dancing and male gender norms, his use of his arms flouted the norm that imposed, onto bourgeois men, a strict vocabulary of movement. In contrast with the straightforwardness of flat hands and straight arms, corporeal signs which signify conventional masculinity, Nijinsky clearly enacted a reinscription of the male dancing body through unusually curved arms and fluttering, extended fingers; exceeding the ordinary rounded fifth position of ballet. Several scenes of the ballet directed the spectators' attention to the title-role's soft and tender, delicate arm movements, for instance when he caresses the girl while standing behind her armchair. Hirschfeld argues that in

many (presumably 'feminine') homosexuals, the whole movement repertory is reversed and likened to that of the opposite sex. Hence, while it is a male characteristic to use angular arm movements, a male homosexual would be "feminine-gracious"<sup>43</sup> and use "round" arm movements.

Another scene depicts Nijinsky in a devout, pleading gesture on his knees. In romantic and classical ballets, the male hero's gentlemanly posturing on his knees strove for dramatic emphasis, signified admiration of the ballerina, and sought to present her to the audience. By contrast, the Spirit buries his face in his hands, like a woman in mourning, while his open hands and tilted head signal a degree of vulnerability and accessibility usually associated with femininity.

Many of Nijinsky's typical gestures and postures, such as curved arms and broken wrists, evoke connotations of heterodox sexuality and are coded, in Western societies, to mean 'gay'. Queer identity relies on the rejection of that central tenet of essentialism, the stability of sexuality and gender identities, and the acknowledgement instead of the constructedness and performativity of gender. Nijinsky's blurring of the gender line demarcating female and male may entail a criticism of the compulsory regime of orthodox sexuality, foreshadowing Butler's claim that heterosexuality operates in part through the stabilisation of gender norms. Camp or effeminate behaviour can thus embody an oppositional signifying practice, and may, as Gere puts it, "serve as a conscious strategy of defiance for gay men, or for men who do not want to conform to rigid notions of masculinity".<sup>44</sup> Choreographing and dancing against the grain, that is against the internalisation of gestural codes and, in Butler's words, the "identitarian categories of sex",<sup>45</sup> made Nijinsky, and his choreographers, the forerunners of a new avantgarde strand of dance which provided a social critique on behalf of the male dancer, and queer identity in particular.

### III *L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE*: VOLUPTUOUSNESS

Nijinsky's own choreographies do not appear to carry the same androgynous message as some of Fokine's works. Like the previous ballet, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, Nijinsky's own and now legendary choreography which premiered in 1912 in Paris, is ostensibly grounded in a heterosexual scheme. Similarly, his second piece *Jeux*, which features one male and two female dancers involved in a game of tennis, seemingly conveys a heterosexual plot. However, Kirstein has rightly pointed out that Nijinsky's works were highly sexually charged: "in *Faune*, adolescent self-discovery and gratification; in *Jeux*, homosexual discovery of another self or selves; in *Sacre du Printemps*, fertility and renewal of the race".<sup>46</sup> Moreover, from Nijinsky's diary we not only learn that much of his thinking revolved around sex; he also comments explicitly upon the sexual nature of his first two pieces:

[...] these ballets were composed by me under the influence of my life with Diaghilev. 'The Faun' is me, and 'Jeux' is the kind of life Diaghilev dreamed of. [...] Diaghilev wanted to make love to two boys at the same time and wanted these boys to make love to him. The two boys are two young girls, and Diaghilev is the young man. I camouflaged these personalities on purpose [...].<sup>47</sup>

In the case of *Jeux*, it was evidently deemed inappropriate to convey a storyline revolving around a homosexual 'threesome', underscoring the fact that the choreographer had to encode his work to avoid injuring early 20<sup>th</sup> century sexual and theatrical conventions. As for *Faune*, things are not quite so clear-cut. But if we take Nijinsky's identification with the Faun at face-value, and consider that he was at this time engaged in a liaison with Diaghilev (indeed, his diary mentions that Diaghilev taught him to despise sex with women),<sup>48</sup> then he may well have conceived this role as promoting his own desirability to men, and to Diaghilev in particular.

The Austrian author Hugo von Hofmannsthal, in his poignant essay *Nijinsky's Afternoon of a Faun* (1912), summed up the plot as follows:

The Faun asleep, the nymphs nearby. He awakes, approaches them: an animal of the forest, half shy, half greedy. They are startled, flee. A part of a robe, a scarf, a sash, lost by the youngest, the prettiest, stays behind. He plays with it, animal-like, tenderly, carries it into his hiding place, lies down. In the performance the same

simplicity and rigour. Each gesture in profile. Everything reduced to the essential, compressed with an incredible force: postures, expressions, the most fundamental, the decisive.<sup>49</sup>

By contrast with *Le Spectre*, the male protagonist cannot justifiably be called a she-man: Nijinsky's Faun lacks the overt feminisation of his spirit, especially in terms of his style of movement. Whilst in ballet, the immaterial qualities of central characters were frequently signified by their appearing weightless, the movements of the Faun are focused downwards. He walks deliberately, hardly lifting his feet, with abrupt, profiled turns and angular gestures which, despite the lack of bravura steps, display male strength and enormous tension.

Although both Faun and Nymphs are strikingly atypical of classical ballet in terms of movement and dress – the former wears sandals, while the latter are barefooted – the ballet clearly emphasises the spectacle of the male body. While the nymphs' rather bland, tunic-like robes do not reveal any body contours, and their gestures are not especially attention-grabbing, the Faun's athletic physique is featured so as to suggest near-nudity; he is dressed only in a body-stocking with patches of dark colour connoting fur.

The situational context of the ballet – its embeddedness in mythology and a bucolic backdrop – allowed for an innovative and heterodox portrayal of masculinity. This was not a triumphant celebration of male rationality, but portrayed man, quite in keeping with the anti-civilisatory tendencies of the time, as a figure of nature bearing instinctual and affective traits, rather than cognitive and culturally-imposed ones. The ballet's vision of antiquity reveals the influences it received from Nietzsche's 'materialist' aesthetic, which broke with the previously-held philosophies of rationalism and idealism. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of historical writings such as those of the renowned German archaeologist Winckelmann, Greek art and culture were seen as being characterised by harmony, ideal beauty, proportion and simplicity. Nietzsche, however, sparked a radical view of Greek antiquity which was no longer bound to idealistic concepts such as the true and the good, but emphasised instead traits like animality, intoxication, and sexuality.<sup>50</sup>

One of Nietzsche's best-known books, *The Birth of Tragedy*, presents his famous dichotomy of the Dionysian and Apollonian. The former, named after the Greek god of wine, was a symbol of the aesthetic principle of intoxication, ecstasy, music and significantly dance. His book is largely populated by forest daemons, notably Pan (the Greek equivalent of the Roman god Faunus) and satyrs – the wild companions of Dionysus. Satyrs were creatures who combined human and equine properties, and who came to be – and often still are – conflated with fauns who have both human and goat-like attributes. They are central to Nietzsche's reconception of the Greek tragedy, symbolising his projection of a new superior human being that embraced notions of ecstasy and nature, rather than emphasising cognitive traits. Indeed, the satyr is proclaimed to be "musician, poet, dancer, seer of spirits, all in one person".<sup>51</sup> The material and sensual traits of the mythological Faun figure in Nijinsky's ballet seems to reflect this image of man, dissociating as it does from idealist and serene, classical notions of art. Nijinsky was certainly acquainted with some of Nietzsche's ideas, as they were widely disseminated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and indeed Nietzsche's name appears several times in Nijinsky's diary.

Unlike renowned examples of (in)famous seducers in world literature and dance, such as the Vicomte de Valmont in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, or *Don Juan*, the Faun does not embark on a craftily engineered plan of intrigues to gain his objects of desire. Indeed, he hardly exerts any mental or physical control over the nymphs, who retreat one after another, leaving him behind a scarf as his only prey. Apparently, the nymphs' main function is to display the Faun's innocent sensuousness and voluptuousness, rather than to pose themselves in a sensually enticing way. His half-open mouth, head tossed backwards in a voluptuous gesture and his hip pushed forwards invoke an image of intense eroticism and arousal, rendering the Faun, rather than the female characters, the object of public erotic delectation.

Bearing in mind the social conventions of the time, the choice of theme – youthful sexual awakening – as well as its mode of portrayal, were extremely daring. The ballet was the sensation of the season, and received mixed reactions from a shocked public. The Faun's hedonism, his

growing arousal and the autoerotic act in the closing tableau (which Hofmannsthal, in his account, deliberately concealed) turned the public's expectation of a ballet, and especially of its constructions of the male sex and gender, upside down. The final movements convey the Faun's orgasm while lying on the nymph's scarf – an interesting twist as onanism was condemned almost as strongly as homosexuality.<sup>52</sup>

Hence, though the underlying story of this ballet is heteronormative, it in fact provided a display of male beauty and promoted desire for the male body, presenting it in an overtly erotic manner. In contrast with *Spectre*, the emphasis in this piece is on the masculine attributes of the protagonist, and it is precisely the work's 'natural' masculinity that permits multiple readings. Clearly, it may have attracted the female gaze insofar as it eroticised the spectacle of the male body, albeit in a non-conventional fashion. But it certainly also permitted a homosexual reading, perhaps presenting the virile species of homosexual identity, as listed in Hirschfeld's taxonomy. The gestures Nijinsky performed with his arms and hands at the end of the piece (presenting his open palms) which are often connoted with homosexuality, and the dress's phallic symbol – the tail on his leotard connoting an erect penis – indicate that the work may have addressed a gay audience. The fact that Nijinsky's sister Bronislava danced the role of the leading nymph might point in the same direction, for as his sibling she was unlikely to be seen by spectators as competition in their erotic longing for the male lead.

More generally, the figure of the Faun featured largely in early 20<sup>th</sup> century gay homoeroticism, and was considered an icon of homosexual imagery. This probably owed much to the fact that the Faun (Pan, in Greek mythology) was famous for his sexual prowess and allegedly also had sexual relationships with young boys. The ancient Greek expression "to honour Pan", meaning homosexual activity,<sup>53</sup> probably originates from this myth. The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles holds a collection of gay erotica by Wilhelm von Gloeden, an expatriot German and gay photographer of international repute who settled in Sicily in 1878, where he photographed young Sicilian men in unashamedly erotic poses. Among these pictures is a 1905 photograph of a young

Italian man in a Faun outfit, entitled *Il fauno gigante*. The American-born artist and photographer Fred Holland Day also used this motif – his *Marble Faun* (1896), in the collection of the Royal Photographic Society, depicts a youthful male nude holding his flute, and *On the Glade* (c. 1905) shows a photograph of a young man caressing a stone statue of Pan. The Cambridge-educated, bisexual British writer Alistair Crowley wrote a poem entitled *Hymn to Pan* (probably around 1913) which contains outright homosexual allusions.<sup>54</sup> And indeed the Faun, and in particular Nijinsky's version, still seems to hold attraction for homosexual men in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An Internet search would provide evidence that a number of gay saunas carry the name of Faun or Pan, and a gay dating club on the web names Nijinsky as one of their icons, commenting on the final scene of *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* with the remark “nice afternoon!”<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, by presenting the ultimate picture of homoeroticism within the confines of a story based on a heterosexual plot, Nijinsky's Faun admits of both gay and straight interpretations, constructing a manly stage persona whose homoerotic undertones can nevertheless be read between the lines.

#### IV LEGEND OF JOSEPH: SEXUAL INNOCENCE

Many of the Ballets Russes' productions laid emphasis on the spectacle of the queer male dancing body, effectively revising the underprivileged position and status of the male dancer. My analyses of *Le Spectre* and *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune* illustrated that in these works, female dancers trigger the action by posturing as erotic baits for the male lead, only to remain relatively passive figures within the framework of the plot. The heterosexual frameworks of these ballets are then deployed to foster male eroticism. In *Legend of Joseph*, by contrast, the interaction between the male protagonist Joseph and his female counterpart, Potiphar's wife, is shaped by an unambiguous misogynist dimension, based largely on the ballet's libretto. In what follows, then,

in addition to analysing the male dancer's role, I shall also enquire into the status of the female protagonist.

The libretto of *Legend of Joseph* was the product of a co-operation between Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Count Harry Kessler, and was dedicated to their common friend Serge Diaghilev in 1912, two years before the ballet's realisation on stage. It consists of a synopsis of the plot by Kessler, together with the main body of the text, in fourteen scenes, written by Hofmannsthal. Richard Strauss, who only eventually and reluctantly accepted the offer,<sup>56</sup> was commissioned as the composer. From the initial planning stages of the ballet Nijinsky was designated both as choreographer and as principal male dancer. However, it all turned out differently when Nijinsky got married, which both surprised and wounded his former lover Diaghilev and led to his dismissal from the company. Looking for a gifted male dancer to replace Nijinsky, Diaghilev's choice fell upon a hauntingly beautiful Russian, Léonide Massine.

*Legend of Joseph* is an adaptation from the book of Genesis of the encounter between Joseph, who had been sold to the wealthy Egyptian Potiphar as a slave, and Potiphar's wife, a rich and deceitful woman who, after her unsuccessful attempt to pervert and seduce the charming yet sexually inexperienced boy, seeks to take revenge on him but incurs the wrath of God. This is an intriguing example of a homosexual pretext, as it combines an erotically charged, Oriental location (Egypt) with a well-known religious theme. It thus challenges – albeit implicitly – the Christian view of homosexuality as a sin akin to heresy and idolatry, and does so by redeploing a major scene from the Old Testament as a backdrop for a homosexual image of the central character. To some extent its plot mirrors the social constellation of *Schéhérazade*: the relationship between a young boy, inferior in rank, and a powerful female protagonist. While Joseph's dominant biblical role as an interpreter of dreams is rather submerged, the ballet sets out the contrast between the two main characters and their respective worlds. Joseph is featured, both in the libretto and in the ballet, as a god-fearing and innocent shepherd boy:

He comes from the desert, a shepherd boy, the son of a prince. He is graceful, wild and stern. His figure is childlike and fresh, nothing about it should appear sweet or soft [...]. And because he is still half a child, an aristocratic child, he is attached to the habits of his people; he still carries “the colours of his house”. In this respect he is devout. But his piety is not Christian, not ascetic and intellectual, like that of Jochanaan. For the custom which is alive in him is the custom of the shepherd; it comes from the bright, free desert.<sup>57</sup>

Hence, while it is explicitly pointed out that Joseph should not be portrayed in a soft, androgynous manner, it is Joseph’s fresh and innocent appearance that exerts an irresistible magic on Potiphar’s wife. Diaghilev made sure that her attraction to Joseph was credible to the public by trusting the most dazzling dancer he could find with the role: a photograph of the ballet captures Massine’s beauty. This gives rise to the suspicion that Diaghilev was interested in promoting Massine, like Nijinsky, as an image of intense eroticism; while Fokine, the choreographer, already had a proven track record of characterising his male protagonists in ambisexual ways.<sup>58</sup>

By featuring an innocent, handsome boy, *Legend of Joseph* projects an image of homosexuality which differs both from the straightforwardly effeminate spirit and the ‘butch’ Faun. It might have been tailored to accommodate the fact that, according to Hirschfeld’s estimates, almost half of male homosexuals (called “ephebophiles”) are attracted to adolescent youths between the ages of 14-21 years; Joseph, according to the Bible, was 17 years old at the time. Diaghilev himself, of course, was attracted to boys half his age. Although there is no indication in the ballet of Joseph’s own sexual preferences, the seduction scenes, in which he is stripped to the bare essentials of clothing, provide plenty of opportunity to display his immense boyish attractions and almost certainly would have made him alluring to a gay audience.<sup>59</sup> Whether Hofmannsthal or Kessler supported the ballet’s unorthodox display of masculine half-nudity cannot be said with certainty. It seems unlikely that Hofmannsthal took an interest; Count Kessler, probably a covert homosexual, might well have been keen on furthering this image, although there is no proof that he actually did impact on the choreography. Of course it cannot be denied that the Joseph figure probably held an appeal for women too; this is even enshrined in the plot, as Potiphar’s wife

cannot suppress her desire for him. Arguably, the eroticisation of the male body invariably appeals to heterosexual women and homosexual men alike.

In Potiphar's wife, by contrast, Kessler and Hofmannsthal portray a world of extreme wealth, pompousness and decadent arrogance, which can possibly be discerned, on a poetological level, as a swan song of the contemporary era of decadence and aestheticism. The ballet's libretto parallels, and in fact exceeds, the Testament's hostile perspective on Potiphar's wife as the incarnation of sin. She assembles a whole catalogue of vices and wrongs, such as adultery, deceit, attempted torture and murder, limitless luxury, lasciviousness, arrogance and a noticeable lack of human emotion:

This woman has hitherto been locked into power, beauty, saturation as into an armour. She does not feel anything, love anything, live anything. Nothing is of any taste or appeal to her. She is also without yearning, without compassion, but inwardly dead like a dark, cold lake which no ray of light has ever warmed.<sup>60</sup>

In *Legend of Joseph*, Joseph's rejection of Potiphar's wife's erotic passion and sexual advances marks the turning point of the plot, and triggers her frenzied acts of revenge and retaliation. Hofmannsthal describes this scene as follows:

Naked from the shoulder to the hip, he stands in front of her. She sinks, as though blinded by his nakedness, to her knee, crawls towards him [...]. In vain: he will not bend down towards her [...]. Then she reaches up in front of him, looks at him for an instant full of hatred and disdain and pounces on him to strangle him, just as she had abruptly extinguished the lamp a while before. She grabs hold of his neck with both hands [...]. Her face expresses deadly hatred and wild arousal.<sup>61</sup>

Kessler and Hofmannsthal draw on an abundant image repertory to depict Potiphar's wife being seized by fits of hysteria and malicious outbreaks of violence, which are enmeshed with sadism and the will to eliminate Joseph. Possessed by demons and likened to a witch, her image is diametrically opposed to that of the innocent and loyal hero. She incorporates the classic stereotype of the *femme fatale* as someone who inflicts a crushing wound upon a man, and is even potentially capable of murder, as a result of her all-determining sexuality. The female 'vamp' can also serve, however, as an erotic object for the titillation of men; hence she is often

simultaneously portrayed as a morally degenerate agent while being exploited as a sexual commodity.<sup>62</sup>

Tellingly, Potiphar's wife's attempts to destroy Joseph are ultimately unsuccessful, and in the finale, Joseph's enticing innocence gains victory over his female counterpart. In contrast to the biblical model, where Joseph is locked away in a dungeon for many years while Potiphar's wife presumably continues her exorbitant life-style, in the ballet he is led away by an archangel. Adding yet another violation of God's commands to her impressive catalogue of misdeeds, Potiphar's wife ends her role by committing suicide, propagating the stereotypical image that female sexual lust and unfaithfulness must ultimately be punished.

The ballet's overall sexual message is subtle and multi-layered. The *femme fatale* allows for the male gaze, while Joseph's youthful appearance almost certainly held an appeal for heterosexual women. However, the appeal to a homosexual audience may be seen as underlined by the fact that while (female) sexuality is depicted as corrupt, Joseph, who represents male sexual attractiveness, is the blessed recipient of divine approval. Indeed, the topic of favouritism runs through the whole story. Joseph was not only his father's favourite son, but also honoured by Potiphar with a privileged position in the household, and indeed favoured by God with special abilities and charisma. This theme might well have been used to offer a pure and almost blessed image of homosexuality which starkly contrasts with its general conception in contemporary society.

## V CONCLUSION

The analyses of these ballets have shown that the works of the early *Ballets Russes* elided the traditional divide between male and female ways of dancing, sparking both audiences' and contemporary authors' interest in the male dancer's unorthodox erotic presentation. Male dancers in particular were liberated from the restrictive idiom of academic ballet. Their experimentation with new themes, innovative costumes and vocabularies of movement left an imprint on the male

body which resisted “regulatory practice[s]”<sup>63</sup> of gender and sex. I have discussed how the surpassing of the conventional male gender, through the depiction of effeminacy in *Spectre*, virile voluptuousness and arousal in *Faune*, and innocent beauty in *Legend of Joseph*, enunciated a male homosexual ideology, offering various distinct images of homoeroticism.

If ballets produced under Diaghilev’s patronage in the 1910s provided a relief for the male dancer from the normalising constraints of conventional masculinity, their impact on the ideology of the female dancer is not so clear-cut. Diaghilev certainly promoted a natural female body without the constraints of pointe shoes and some of the artifice associated with the cult of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ballerina, and shifted the spectator’s (whether male or female) attention from the charms of the female to the male dancer. Yet, the female’s position remained clearly marked: she had to posture as the passive object of male desire, as in *Spectre* and *L’Après-Midi d’un Faune*; or if, as in *Legend of Joseph*, she incarnated sexual knowledge and transgressed the boundaries of female gender and sexuality, her fate was to be punished. Hence, while Diaghilev’s works exposed the naturalised status of heterosexuality and homophobic strategies, they did not lead to a true liberation of both genders. Many sexual scientists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among them Hirschfeld, believed that the feminist and gay liberation movements would, and should, have a stimulating influence on each other, fostering mutual aims; the surmounting of old prejudice and a greater degree of social inclusivity. However, the failure to emancipate both the male and the female dancer limits the extent to which Diaghilev’s work can be seen as socially subversive in this respect.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The German title *Der Tänzer* implies that the dancer in question is male.
- <sup>2</sup> Ernst Wilhelm Lotz, *The Dancer (Der Tänzer)*, in: E. W. Lotz: *Wolkenüberflagt*. (Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1916), 8. The translations of the poems and passages from other literary texts are my own.
- <sup>3</sup> In the realm of visual art, artists were similarly attracted to these motifs. The members of *Die Brücke (The Bridge)*, a famous association of visual expressionist artists (among them Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Emil Nolde) often used dance, eroticism and the exotic and 'archaic' nature of indigenous, in particular African, cultures, as themes of their works.
- <sup>4</sup> In particular in the widely-read *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1891), Nietzsche expounds on the concept of the new human being as a dancer. He also construes dance, with its specific characteristics such as contingency and transition, as a model for a new language and an innovative way of thinking.
- <sup>5</sup> Sally Banes, *Dancing Women. Female Bodies on Stage*. (London/New York: Routledge, 1998), 5.
- <sup>6</sup> Judith Butler, *Critically Queer*, in: S. Phelan (ed.), *Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*. (New York/ London: Routledge, 1997), 23.
- <sup>7</sup> See in particular Chapter 19 of Magnus Hirschfeld's opulent book, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* (orig. title: *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*), (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 2nd edition, 2001).
- <sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge, 1990), 173, 177.
- <sup>9</sup> Ramsay Burt, *The Male Dancer: Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities*. (New York/London: Routledge, 1995), 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. (New York/London: Routledge, 1993), 235.
- <sup>11</sup> Jane Desmond. Introduction. Making the Invisible Visible: Staging Sexualities through Dance, in: J. Desmond (ed.), *Dancing Desires. Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*. (Madison/Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 6.
- <sup>12</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the modernisation of ballet initiated by the *Ballets Russes* see Lynn Garafola, *Diaghilev's Ballets Russes* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), in particular 3-143.
- <sup>13</sup> Regarding Dalcroze's impact on Nijinsky, see Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, 'Beginnings of modern choreography. Vaslav Nijinsky and Émile Jacques-Dalcroze' (Anfänge der modernen Choreographie. Waslav Nijinski and Émile Jacques-Dalcroze), *Tanzdrama* 52/3, 2000.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Ramsay Burt, op.cit., p.14.
- <sup>15</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Translated by Margaret Waller. (New York: Columbia University Press 1984).
- <sup>16</sup> An interesting article on the strategy of the dual address to gay and straight spectators in works by American modern dancers is provided by Susan Manning, 'Coding the Message', *Dance Theatre Journal* 14/1, 1998.
- <sup>17</sup> Farjeon, H. 1928. Seen on the Stage, *Vogue*, 11 July 1928, 48.
- <sup>18</sup> Quoted in Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective. Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West*. (London/New York: Routledge 1986), 135.
- <sup>19</sup> See Lynn Garafola's incisive article on 'The Sexual Iconography of the Ballets Russes', *Ballet Review* 28/3, 2000.
- <sup>20</sup> The most famous among them is called *The Lord Chandos Letter*, which reflects on the inadequacy and shortcomings of verbal language. See *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden: Erzählungen, erfundene Gespräche und Briefe*. VI. 7. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), 461-472.
- <sup>21</sup> Cyril W. Beaumont, *Michel Fokine and His Ballets*. (New York: Dance Horizons, 1981), 23.
- <sup>22</sup> Andrew Hewitt, *Social Choreography. Ideology as Performance in Dance and Everyday Movement*. (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2005), 176.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.75.

- <sup>24</sup> Ludwig Rubiner, The Dancer Nijinsky (Der Tänzer Nijinski), in: G. Benn (ed.), *Lyrik des expressionistischen Jahrzehnts. Von den Wegbereitern bis zum Dada*. (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1955), p.119.
- <sup>25</sup> Wolfgang Rothe, *Dancers and Doers (Tänzer und Täter. Gestalten des Expressionismus)*. (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1979), 60-69.
- <sup>26</sup> Ecstasy stems from the Greek work *ekstasis*, to stand outside oneself.
- <sup>27</sup> A good example is the expressionist poem *To the Memory of the Dancer Angelique Holopainen* by Kasimir Edschmid, in which the “madonna-like humility” of the Finnish dancer is directly associated with “blind ecstasy” and “the curves of her thighs”. *Neue Jugend 1*, 1916-1917, 147.
- <sup>28</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, op.cit., 166.
- <sup>29</sup> Sally Banes, Firebird and the Idea of Russianness, in: L. Garafola/N. van Norman Baer (eds.), *The Ballets Russes and Its World*. (New Haven/London: Yale University Press 1999).
- <sup>30</sup> Alfred Kerr, 1991. Russian Ballet (Russisches Ballett. Theater des Westens), in: A. Kerr: *Werke in Einzelbänden*, vol. 2. Ed. by H Haarmann and G. Rühle. (Frankfurt: Fischer 1991), 194-196.
- <sup>31</sup> Tobin, in his essay on ‘Semiotics of Sexuality’, analyses a variety of discourses used to define homosexual identities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the orientalist and the hellenistic, he claims, are two of the dominant traditions; Robert Tobin, ‘Semiotik der Sexualität. Zur Entstehung eines deutschen Diskurses der Homosexualität im 19. Jahrhundert’, in: B. Prutti / S. Wilke (eds.), *Zur Semiotik und Lektüre von Körpern in der Moderne*. (Heidelberg: Synchron Wissenschaftsverlag der Autoren, 2003). Christopher Balme’s and Claudia Teibler’s essay examines the *Ballets Russes*’s relation to the discourse of Orientalism: ‘Orient at the Volga’ (Orient an der Wolga. Die *Ballets Russes* im Diskurs des Orientalismus), in: C. Jeschke/U.Berger/B. Zeidler (eds.) *Spiegelungen. Die Ballets Russes und die Künste* (Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk. 1997).
- <sup>32</sup> See also Lynn Garafola, op.cit., 2000, 76.
- <sup>33</sup> Christine Battersby 1989. *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics*. (London: The Women’s Press, 1989), 7.
- <sup>34</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, op.cit, 165.
- <sup>35</sup> Harry Count Kessler, *Tagebücher (Diaries) 1918-1937*. Ed. by Wolfgang Pfeiffer-Belli. (Frankfurt: Insel, 1961), 578.
- <sup>36</sup> A later version of the petition can be found on the Internet at [http://www.schulencity.de/Sexus\\_Paragraph\\_267.html](http://www.schulencity.de/Sexus_Paragraph_267.html) (accessed 27 October 2006).
- <sup>37</sup> The libretto of *La Sylphide* is based on a novel by the French author Charles Nodier, in which, interestingly, the sprite is represented as the male protagonist. The fact that the librettist of *La Sylphide* chose to invert the roles is significant, as it shows that the ballet was deliberately framed so as to ascribe the essential elements of the principal role, frailty and otherworldliness, to women, rather than men.
- <sup>38</sup> Several critics have discussed the androgynous nature of Nijinsky’s stage presentation – for instance Nancy van Norman Baer in her essay on “The appropriation of the feminine” (Die Aneignung des Femininen. Androgynität im Kontext der frühen *Ballets Russes*, 1909-1914), in: C. Jeschke/U.Berger/B. Zeidler (eds.), op.cit. – but many of them overlook the fact that androgyny was only *one* of the several images of Nijinsky’s unorthodox erotic presentation, as I shall demonstrate.
- <sup>39</sup> Lynn Garafola, op.cit., 1989.
- <sup>40</sup> Quoted in Peter Ostwald, *Vaslav Nijinsky. A Leap into Madness*. (London; Robson Books, 1999), 42.
- <sup>41</sup> See Burt’s section on “Nijinsky’s heterodox roles in Fokine’s ballets”, in Ramsay Burt, op.cit., 84-87.
- <sup>42</sup> Michel Fokine, *Memoirs of a Ballet Master*. Transl. Vitale Fokine. Ed. by Anatole Chujoy. (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1961), 155-156.
- <sup>43</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, op.cit., 154.
- <sup>44</sup> David Gere, ‘29 Effeminate Gestures: Choreographer Joe Goode and the Heroism of Effeminacy’, in: Desmond, J. (ed.), *Dancing Desires. Choreographing Sexualities on and off the Stage*. (Madison/Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 2001), 364.
- <sup>45</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York/London: Routledge 1990), 32.
- <sup>46</sup> Lincoln Kirstein, *Movement & Metaphor. Four centuries of ballet* (London: Pitman, 1971), 199.
- <sup>47</sup> Vaslav Nijinsky, *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*. Unexpurgated edition. Transl. Kyril Fitzlyon. Ed. by Joan Acocella. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 206-7.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 111.

<sup>49</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Reden und Aufsätze I*. Ed. by B. Schoeller (Frankfurt: Fischer 1979), 510.

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)*, (Leipzig: Kröner, 1930), 554-555.

<sup>51</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Transl. Ronald Speirs. Ed. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45.

<sup>52</sup> There are several scholarly books that examine masturbation from a historical viewpoint; see in particular Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex. A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003), and Jean Stengers, Anne van Neck, *Masturbation. The History of a Great Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> See the website on *The Death of Pan*, <http://www.xs4all.nl/~hleach/comp/voc/Pan.htm> (accessed 8 November 2006).

<sup>54</sup> For instance, he writes “Give me the sign of the Open Eye / And the token erect of thorny thigh [...] / And I rave, and I rape and I rip and I rend / Everlasting, world without end / Mannikin, maiden, maenad, man / In the Might of Pan” (see <http://www.infont.demon.co.uk/crowley.htm>, accessed 31 October 2006).

<sup>55</sup> See <http://www.circa-club.com/wordpress/?cat=1> (accessed 29 October 2006).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. A. Jefferson 1969. Richard Strauss and the Ballet, *The Dancing Times* 59/70, 1969, 355.

<sup>57</sup> Count Harry Kessler, in Hugo von Hofmannsthal 1979. *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Ballette und Pantomimen*. Ed. by B. Schoeller. Frankfurt: Fischer 1979), 92.

<sup>58</sup> See also Joan Acocella’s account of Fokine’s ballets in her introduction to the unexpurgated edition of Nijinsky’s diary, op.cit., in particular XXXIII.

<sup>59</sup> More recent versions of the piece have proliferated this constellation. John Neumeier, for instance, who revisited the ballet in a 1977 production with the Vienna Staatsopernballett, also chose a remarkably handsome young dancer (Kevin Haigen) to interpret the role of Joseph, while Potiphar’s wife was danced by the (black) dance legend Judith Jamison.

<sup>60</sup> Count Harry Kessler, in Hugo von Hofmannsthal 1979. *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Ballette und Pantomimen*. Ed. by B. Schoeller (Frankfurt: Fischer 1979), 94.

<sup>61</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *ibid*, 115f.

<sup>62</sup> Carola Hilmes, in her book on *The Femme Fatale*, examines the main characteristics of this image. See *Die Femme fatale: ein Weiblichkeitstypus in der nachromantischen Literatur* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1990).

<sup>63</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, op.cit., 44.