among Brazil's poor and disenfranchised in the early 1970s. What unites these two essays is that they both describe moments of theatre activism that culminate in a failure of seemingly radical politics—a failure that ultimately precipitates an arguably more radical confrontation with the governing hierarchical dynamics of the activists' own subject positions.

For Edmundson, that confrontation involves a recognition of how her work as a U.S. theatre activist working among former children soldiers in Uganda (a literally vanquished vanguard), rather than transforming the world, tended to reinscribe "the existing order... dividing the world between Northern benefactors and Southern victims." For the members of the Living Theatre, as Rosenthal notes, that confrontation came with their arrest and imprisonment while trying to work among Brazil's poor and disenfranchised, and it resulted from the realization that the very U.S. passports that they denounced in works like Paradise Now! protected them while their Brazilian colleagues were tortured and, in at least one instance, murdered. Indeed, the privileged status granted through their passports may very well have fueled the hostility and brutality unleashed on their Brazilian comrades.

Somehow amid these failures, we find trace elements of vanquished vanguards. Rosenthal writes at length about Judith Malina's decision, after her release from prison, to censor her own journal entries so as to protect activist/artist friends in Brazil who might be compromised and endangered by the publication of her writing. Acknowledgement of that self-censorship, even four decades later, points to the historical shadows where the vanquished and the vanguard coexist, only tenuously protected from the risks they incur in the blending of politics and art. Their history is that of a vanguard vanquished but not defeated.

Notes

2

From Italy and Russia to France and the U.S.: "Fascist" Futurism and Balanchine's "American" Ballet

Patricia Gaborik and Andrea Harris

Two actors create geometric spatial patterns. They utter "tête-tête" or "fifflf!" rhythmically, repetitively, mechanically, they move their arms forward, their torsos stiffly back and forth. Others rotate their arms like levers, over and over, from the shoulder socket. Moving as a single unit, they mimic a rotary printing press.

A man propels himself through space; he jars his pelvis forward and lunge, his foot in forced arch. He arches so far that his back is parallel to the floor below. He chases three women, who shift into one hip, the lines of their torsos echoing the precise angles of the set while they dance, first classical, then music-hall steps. Their marionette doubles drop from above. Colorful geometric flats swirl to transform the scene through which they dance. Shadows and cinematic projections play.

Six men in metal and plastic jump, bend, twirl. Personifying "ruler, triangles, and circles," they come together into a rigid double line; lungen, forced arches, and extended arms in front, forward bends in back, they form a car. It carries the lead dancer to his lover, a cat changed into a woman. In shiny satin and plastic cones for tutu and ears, the dancer-cat is multiplied in triplet on the set: translucent plastic complexes, large, black rectangles with circular eyes, a big toy cat, too. The dancers move through and with their geometric world as exuberant lights set the industrial materials of costume and set in motion.

Geometrical spatial patterning, Onomatopoeia. Simultaneity. Multiplied, mechanical bodies. Interpretation of human and environment. Emulation of the cinema and music hall. We are in the realm of
Futurist performance, and the pieces described above represent diverse manifestations of the Futurist experiment. The first, Giacomo Balla’s 1914 Macchina Tipografica, was the painter’s first attempt at theatrical production. An embodiment of early Futurist machine idolatry, its goal was the human imitation of a modern machine. The second, Le Marchand de Coeurs, one of the ballets staged by Enrico Prampolini’s Théâtre de la Pantomime Futuriste, opened in Paris in 1927, extolling the virtues of the machine age in a total theatre that would “abandon mimicry in design – because this is merely superficial – and [to] enter into the domain of architecture – because this is concerned with depth.” The third is La Chatte, created by Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes in 1927. It fused the Futurist visions of the other two pieces, creating architecture out of dancers while devising choreography and bodies infused with synecdochic dynamism and mechanical power. Its choreographer was George Balanchine.

This isn’t to say that you’ll find references to Futurism in scholarly works on Balanchine, nor characterizations of him as a Futurist choreographer. For U.S. dance scholars, Balanchine “Americanized” ballet with a bold and original neoclassicism marked by speed, dynamism, athleticism, plotlessness, and vocabulary from popular culture. This style has come to be seen as quintessentially American, personifying the spirit of democracy and expression “American character at its best.” Yet, these trademarks characterized Balanchine’s style long before he arrived in America. Moreover, they were less innovations than emblems of a broader modernization of ballet in Paris, one entwined with Italian Futurism, a trend in which Balanchine took part when he joined the Ballets Russes in 1924.

In the crowning of Balanchine as the American ballet master, his modernist influences have been given short shrift; his early career in Russia and Europe remains marginalized, and what has been done focuses on the émigré’s “Russian roots.” But Italian Futurism had a significant impact on Balanchine’s work – not simply because of its ubiquitous influence on the modernist avant-garde but due to a series of collaborations and cross-fertilizations that remains unexplored until now. This is not simply a historiographic omission, but an indication of the limits of the paradigms underpinning scholarship on Futurism, theatrical and dance modernism, and larger questions about performance and politics in the twentieth century and beyond.

Futurism came to Balanchine through two routes: the Russian and the Parisian. In 1912, the Union of Youth, whose patron Levky Zheverzheyev would later become Balanchine’s father-in-law and friend, published Russian translations of Italian Futurist manifestos and, in 1913, produced Mayakovsky, Kruchenyk, and Malevich’s “First Futurist Theatre Performances in Russia.” When F. T. Marinetti gave lectures in Moscow and St. Petersburg in early 1914, he sparked debate among such luminaries as Malevich, Larionov, Mayakovsky, and Meyerhold (whom he had met the year before in Paris). As a budding choreographer, Balanchine breathed the “intellectual oxygen” such members of the avant-garde brought into the post-Revolution Soviet dance school. Shortly before he left for Paris in 1923, the Factory of Eccentric Actors (FEKS) invited Balanchine to work with them. Inspired by the Italian Futurists’ “Variety Theatre Manifesto” (published in Russia in the teens), FEKS freely mixed genres, threw in the Charleston, Charlie Chaplin, and acrobatics, and intermingled cinematic and live action. The Futurist spirit fathered by Marinetti had wed itself to the Soviet cause. In short, even before Balanchine left Russia, his world was Futurist.

Balanchine’s compatriot, the Ballets Russes, had been in Paris since 1909, and its relationship with the Futurists was established almost as long ago as that, for in those pre-war years, Futurism spread its shockwaves far and wide. Serge Diaghilev and Igor Stravinsky (who had seen a Futurist concert in London in 1914) began to build a Futurist-Ballets Russes “alliance” that would become a major factor in the Futurist influence on Balanchine. In the months leading up to the spring 1917 season, Diaghilev and cohort (including Stravinsky, choreographer Léonide Massine, Jean Cocteau, and Pablo Picasso) settled in Rome. They spent afternoons in the Futurists’ studios, evenings in Rome’s sumptuous hotels or rehearsing their dances in the underground foyer of the Caffè Faocaglia. One evening, Balla organized an impromptu production of Macchina Tipografica for Diaghilev, who considered producing it that season. Ultimately, he opted instead to commission Balla’s designs for Feu d’artifice and those of another Futurist, Fortunato Depero, for Le Chant du Rossignol (which, however, never made it to the stage). On April 12, Feu d’artifice premiered at the Teatro Costanzi. The next day, Massine’s private art collection was exhibited on site with works by Picasso, Fernand Léger, the Futurists Balla, Carlo Carrà, Gino Severini, Depero, and Ballets Russes scenographers Mikhail Larionov and Natalya Goncharova (also in residence in Rome).

Balla’s stage design for this three-minute and fifty-second piece was comprised of wedges, rectangles, cones, arcs, and spirals that were lit from inside and out. For the first (and only) time in a Ballets Russes production, there were no dancers, the human body replaced by lights and shadows flickering on and off in accompaniment to the music, creating
an expression of ever-changing dynamics to the statics of the stage." This spectacle might be considered a presentation of the universe Balla and Depero described in their 1915 manifesto, where the goal was to find abstract equivalents for all the forms and elements of the universe [...] to shape plastic complexes which we will set in motion." Here, geometric shapes animated with light created the illusion that the entire stage was alive with electric motion.

Such characteristics – a fully dynamic stage space; an emphasis on technology, mechanization, and geometric angularity; the loosening of narrative structure in favor of the kinetic potential of form – were central to the reshaping of the Ballets Russes' appearance and character at the time, which critics noticed. The May 1917 edition of Pierre Albert-Birot's *SIC* proclaimed in its title, "Ballets Russes. Cubistes et Futuristes." In an article entitled "Futurist Explorations," Pierre Lerat declared that Balla "will remain the first to have forged the path; and for this he ought to be the one, in the future, ordained as the great artist and innovator." Later dance scholars have acknowledged Futurism's impact on the Ballets Russes, particularly in the choreography of Massine, as summarized here by Lynn Garafola:

If Diaghilev did not remake the Ballets Russes in the image of Futurism, his contact with the movement certainly altered the company’s counterpoint. [...] Through his choreographic Galatea, Massine, he would incorporate into ballet the dynamism and angularity advocated by the Futurists, along with the impersonal performance style, discontinuous narrative, and studied incongruity that became trademarks of Ballets Russes modernism.

Garafola does not extend her discussion beyond 1917, but historian Valerian Svetlov suggests these qualities persisted into the 1920s. Massine himself credited the Futurists for their impact on his choreography. A striking example of Futurism’s influence on his work is the interrelation between plastic form and movement. Classical ballet had long blended movement phrases with suspended poses, such as the ballerina’s ability to end a chain of pirouettes with a balanced *arabesque* on *pointe*. But whereas such poses served to spotlight the dancer's virtuosity and line, Massine turned his attention to motion and plasticity as energetic dualities. In his 1919 essay, he explains, “I believe that in the art of ballet we must strive to reach a synthesis of movement and form,” and distinguishes himself from previous Ballets Russes choreographers precisely by this new fusion of motion and stillness.

Massine’s insistence on the play between motion and plastic form as a working, analytic principle, his dancers moving with sudden, explosive bursts and spurts, is a choreographic echo of the Futurists’ notions of the dynamic potential of plastic forms.

Though the aesthetic elements we have discussed here – compacting and speeding up the dance phrase; emphasizing dynamic movement over narrative, representation, or psychological characterization; more angular and geometric movement forms – are said to characterize Balanchine’s neoclassical “innovations” with their uniquely American stamp, such practices defined the Ballets Russes’ art when Balanchine joined the company. And, given his experience in Russia, most of this was unlikely to surprise him. Moreover, in the “Futurist city” (as Marinetti called Paris), Balanchine’s dance floor was one among many.

Enrico Prampolini, who earned a reputation as a great theatrical innovator, was the chief exponent of Futurism performance in the 1920s. Since the days of the first Ballets Russes/Futurist collaborations in 1917, Prampolini had admired Diaghilev, noting that the new avant-garde aesthetic in Russian choreography could not be fully explained without the participation of Picasso and the Italian Futurists. Ten years later, the Italians realized their own Futurist ballet theatre, and, indeed, when the Théâtre de la Pantomime Futuriste had its Parisian début, the ongoing kinship between its work and that of the Ballets Russes and Ballets Suédois was not lost on anyone: “Nothing looks more like an Italian triangle and square than a Russian or Swedish triangle and square,” the *Excelsior* critic quipped.

Prampolini sought to incorporate dance into the total theatre aesthetic that he, an architect-scenographer, had begun to devise as early as 1915 in the Futurist Scenography and Choreography manifesto. Prampolini’s choreography strove to set an entire stage in motion: centrifugal bodies, exuberant lighting, and electromechanical architecture would harmonize to produce a “choreoplastic” “dynamic” rather than “static” scene. The interpenetration of man and machine described in the “Multipled Man and the Reign of the Machine” manifesto underpinned Prampolini’s theatrical vision. “Hence, we must prepare the imminent and inevitable identification of man with motor, facilitating and perfecting an incessant exchange of intuition, rhythm, instinct, and metallic discipline.” This new man, “constructed for omnipresent velocity,” would extend his will beyond himself, become a ruler over time and space, and “continuously become a better aviator.”

What better aviator than a skilled dancer? The Pantomime Theatre aspired to a new genre in which “all the scenic elements converge in
the dynamic exaltation of rhythm and the orchestration and interpenetration of visions in freedom.” Space-turned-actor (“attore-spažio”) and man-turned-aviator would together produce these visions in, and of, freedom, with a “mechanization of gesture and rhythm that is no longer contained in the decorativism of the human figure, but spins and explodes through to the edges of the scenic environment.” What must have attracted Prampolini to dancers was that their athleticism and skill could create a sensation – spiritual, kinetic, material – of harmonized movement between man and environment.

Prampolini’s formulations aimed not to replicate but to embody the spirit of the machine; as Cinzia Sartini Blum has pointed out, Futurism’s valorization of energy and discipline, its rejection of psychology, was part of a new, empowering relationship with the mechanized world. Its violence was compensatory, an extreme attempt to resolve the anxieties of life in this new environment. Subjugation to or envious imitation of the all-powerful machine, but channeling a machine-like spirit to redouble human potential. Prampolini, Ivo Pannaggi, and Vinicio Baladini identified in the machine a font of physical and spiritual inspiration: “We feel ourselves made of steel, We are machines, too, we are mechanized. We Futurists call on the machine to break away from its practical function, to rise up to the spiritual and disinterested life of art, and to become a fertile inspiration. [...] to give over its spirit, and not its external form.” Dance, in which “muscular audacity and resistance” were celebrated, the limits of the body overcome, offered rich potential for this superhumanization of the body.

The Pantomime Theatre, which premiered twelve pieces at the Théâtre de la Madeleine on May 12, 1927, staged this relationship between man and machine. Its first season was relatively successful, though Prampolini himself only considered a handful of the pieces “Futurist” enough to be presented again on tour in 1928. Nonetheless, some ballets moved in the right direction, stripping away the gigantically geometric Futurist universe, leading to a distillation of Futurist principles – the movement of man through space as if he were one with it, the multiplication and incarnation of a machine-like spirit, the perfection of geometric form in set as well as dancer, replication of the modern world’s rhythms.

The description of Prampolini’s choreography as a “compromise associating elastic plasticity with the rhythm and neurosis of modern times,” of “grottesca, expressionist, classicizing, and Futurist stylization,” underlines the extent to which Futurist principles still propelled avant-garde dance in the 1920s. In any case, Prampolini’s clear preference was for an aesthetic best associated with Futurist mechanization, as the Impeto’s French correspondent reported after visiting a Pantomime rehearsal: “Every now and then he would say, ‘Hei! Let’s start over!’ [...] You, accentuate those movements, which have to happen in fits and starts, like a marionette! Arms up higher!” Other dancers looked on, he reported, warning up an absolutely necessary given the agility required of the movements. Testimony, reviews, and production photos from the first and second seasons reveal Prampolini’s attempts to create all-encompassing stage pictures, where light, shadow, body, and music worked together to produce the vision and sensation of movement. Going beyond early Futurist fixation on geometric objects, Ruggero Vasari reported, Prampolini “abstracted and mechanized” objects, which for him included dancers, for in the end his real goal was to glorify the God of the stage. Movement.” Futurist dance was moving away from reproducing machines on stage, to instead taking inspiration from the machine, striving to embody its power.

This was the moment of the so-called “return to order” spearheaded by Jean Cocteau and Prampolini’s compatriot Massimo Bontempelli, who from Paris in 1926 launched the Novecento, a type of ultramodern literary classicism that called for “new myths for the modern age.” Prampolini seems to have been attracted by this notion, for the Pantomime’s stage was populated with a myriad of characters, from satyrs and nymphs to ideal women and their marionette doubles, from Japanese soldiers to a princess-turned-tortoise, from salamanders battling the gods to liquor bottles come to life. These characters danced and pantomimed in front of cinematic projections, within and around rotating geometric flats. They passed under phallic ladders and through tree-valves into industrial cityscapes. Magnificent colored lights and shadows played around them as their marionette imitations, intertwined arms, popped hips, and pas de deux combined not simply to give the impression of a frenzied, electric world but to transport that world into the fragile one of gesture and dance, as one critic marveled. While too little evidence remains to fully analyze the Pantomime Theatre’s choreographic practices, Prampolini clearly combined German Expressionist dance, musical movement vocabulary, machine-like motion, and pantomime with a total-theatre design in order to utilize dance to fullest potential. Balanchine would do the reverse: utilize Futurist concepts to dance’s fullest potential.

As noted, the Ballets Russes had already been transformed by its collaboration with the Futurists. As he shared the choreographic helm with Massine from 1925 to 1928, Balanchine’s work displayed the Futurist
bent that had become part of the company’s signature. One of his first pieces was an entr’acte inspired by Marinetti’s Le basi, in which the curtain was raised only high enough to see the dancers’ feet. A little wonder then that, during this coming-of-age period, critics described characteristics in Balanchine’s choreography similar to those in Massine’s work with the interwar Ballets Russes, as well as those found in Prampolini’s choreography: a whole-stage dynamism, “rhythmic pantomime,” technological elements like “dancing backcloths,” “pictorial gymnastics” and grotesque and angular movements, a “wild exaggeration and mockery of the classical school.” Despite a critical tendency to sideline the early works as “less familiar Balanchine,” Ballets Russes dancers Alexandra Danilova and Alicia Markova point to the continuity between the European and U.S. phases of his career, insisting that Balanchine’s early ballets, particularly Le Chant du Rossignol (1925) and La Chatte (1927), are integral to understanding his evolving choreographic style.

Most striking about La Chatte was the set, created by Russian sculptors Gabo and Pevsner, a series of transparent plastic circles, cones, curves, hemispheres, and rectangles supported by shiny metal frames. Glossy black oilcloth augmented the set’s reflective quality. Three images of the cat—a vertical structure with a box-shaped head and arched plastic tail, a large, dark rectangle with two circular eye-holes, and a furry toy cat who peeks out of one of these circles—echoed the human ballerina-Cat, whom Gabo dressed in similar high-tech materials: a plastic skirt over her classical tutu, plastic leggings, and a transparent bonnet with two large conical projections as ears. Production photos show the dancers manipulating and passing through the set pieces. As they danced, rays of light glinted off their costumes, tracing the lines of their movement through space and transforming them into “mobile components complementing and interacting with the set.” Reviewers were struck both by the ballet’s “inauguration of the era of constructed décor” and the dancers’ achievement of Balanchine’s “plastic” creation. Movement and design worked together to set the entire stage to shimmering motion.

As Nesta Macdonald points out, the Ballets Russes’ interest in the scenicographic use of high-tech materials, dynamic lighting, and cinemagraphic effects explored eleven years prior in Balla’s Feu d’artifice is revealed again in La Chatte. Further, the ballet demonstrates the development of early Futurist efforts to shatter the static stage, as here, the dancers’ movements serve as the catalyst for scenic dynamism. Whereas, in Feu d’artifice, the stage was mobilized by the play of electric lights on static forms, in La Chatte, the energy produced by the human body in motion is the force that unites costume, set, and dancer and brings the total stage to life. That is, La Chatte epitomizes the machine-spirit and interpenetration of man and environment, going beyond even the wartime Futurists’ achievements.

“The metamorphosis wrought by M. Diaghilev, his choreographer, and scenic designers is wider than that from cat to lady,” wrote one critic. “They have transposed the young man, his companions, and their background into a mathematical pattern. The dancers move as though they belonged to a theory of ballistics.” London Vogue cheered, “This new choreography [...] invites us to admire the machinery by which man achieves the plenitude of power, suggesting rather than materialising the infinite possibilities of which that machinery is capable.” These effects were produced in part by amplifying the athletic physicality of the classical vocabulary—the Cat’s pyrotechnic leaps and tours en fâé— as well as by bodies counterbalanced in architectural structures—six dancers forming a large pyramid, for example. However, critics had noted the use of such acrobatic, music-hall conventions in Balanchine’s, as well as others’, choreography for years. In these accounts of La Chatte, they describe something more significant: performers’ bodies transformed into machine-like entities. In a way that echoed Prampolini’s call for Futurist performance to physically capture the spirit of the machine, Balanchine drew its essence into his choreography.

This distillation of the Futurist machine aesthetic into the dancer’s body to produce a more dynamic stage space is the exact characteristic that U.S. ballet critics take to be quintessentially “American.” Not long after Balanchine’s migration to the U.S., his fast, spatially expansive, dynamic, and powerful ballet, freed from the constraints of narrative or representation, was said to symbolize the American “pioneer urge for speed, progress, and change.” Lincoln Kirstein, the impresario who brought the choreographer to the U.S., proudly designated “our classicism (in the American Century)” in mechanical terms: it “is measured by syncopated, interrupted, discontinuous rhythms, and serial forms; its ‘shapes are abrupt, asymmetrical; and, in its movement qualities, ’[does] have a trip-hammer beat; the whole body finds a piston’s pulsation.” As recently as 2008, Alistair Macaulay wrote of how the Balanchine dancer’s rhythmical precision, “blazing energy,” and “ful了一些 audacity” were “startling to European eyes and an embodiment of American character.” The Futurists’ vision of mechanized man, streamlined, superpowered, and tuned to the rhythms of modernity, is, in this discourse, transmuted into very loaded notions of “American.”
Balanchine’s dancers strove for greater mastery of space through evermore virtuosic bodily control. Heightening discipline, compounding energy, continuously taking up more space in less time, they internalized the empowerment that the spirit of the machine could bring to man. Nowhere is this more evident than in Agon (New York City Ballet, 1957). Balanchine said Agon was “more tight and precise than usual, as if we were controlled by an electronic brain.” As Kirstein describes it:

Impersonalizations of arms and legs into geometric arrows (all systems “go”) accentuates dynamics in a field of force; dancers are magnetized by invisible commands according to logical but arcane formulas. Agon (whose name is the Greek word for “contest”) evokes an edgy, agitated feeling in part through the counterpoint of music and movement, but largely because the ballet continuously fractures, rebuilds, and refractures spatial configurations. The dancers are like atomic bundles of energy, human incarnations of Balthus and Depero’s “essential force” lines of speed” that manipulate and reconfigure the viewer’s perceptions of the space.

Throughout many of the ballet’s twelve short movements, multiple groups of dancers, executing precise, repetitive, identical movements, dart across the stage at sharp angles. Although they move in canon, their uneven rhythm creates the effect of gears moving in opposition. As more and more dancers join the groups, the bodies multiply and dynamism intensifies. Dancers fly through space with expansive leaps, lunges, and lurches, but sudden freezes, abrupt reverses, and syncopated, staccato isolations constantly interrupt these forward-driving propulsions. Even as clusters of dancers join together in sculptural shapes, such stillnesses shatter almost instantly, sending bodies scattering through space like “the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope” (an interplay of plastic form and motion reminiscent of Massine). At moments, the frenetic pace slows to showcase the classical vocabulary, but even here, archetypal academic positions, transformed into ever-shifting formal patterns of triangular passes and right-angled arabesques, emphasize the body’s geometric and mechanistic capacities. As women step boldly onto pointe, one leg slicing to full extension in a single beat, the classical movements “turn their limbs into force vectors.” Male dancers suddenly and repeatedly propel into the air, taking off without any noticeable preparation to hover for an instant like a photograph captured in real time. Dancers leap, jump, lunge to the floor, rise, extend their legs, and balance on- and off-center like bullets, defying gravity and time, their limbs rebounding in constant motion. This choreography, which activates the entire stage space, not just the dancers on it, realizes Prampolini’s “attore-spazio” vision, in which the stage space itself comes alive. Prampolini and Balanchine, it seems, both worshiped the god of movement.

Kirstein, the theoretical proponent of American neoclassicism, arguably initiated the explicitly politicized discourse that would make Balanchine into the mastermind behind the new American ballet and turn his neoclassical style into the “legitimate reflection of a democracy.” The choice of a future ballet style, Kirstein wrote, “ultimately depends […] on which political or economic system has the best bet in America.” Comparing Balanchine’s dances to IBM computers in their “streamlined metal boxes” and attributing the “athleticism, speed, extrovert energy, the reckless dynamism in its syncopation and asymmetry, and as well a kind of impersonal mastery” of his style to “the force of the rhythm of New York,” Kirstein places the capitalist production of America’s democracy at the heart of his formulation. From the sleek design of the world’s most modern technological commodities to the pulse of Wall Street, Balanchine’s ballets had all the qualities that made the U.S. distinct from its others: Europe’s fascists and Russia’s communists.

The critical establishment of Balanchine’s ballet as emblematically American was a radical aesthetic shift in U.S. ballet history that emerged in tandem with the post-Second World War rhetoric of liberalism, which centered on the belief that the American free market system represented a successful form of capitalism that could solve social problems through increased production and economic growth. Unlike the Futurists’ answer to the unsettling changing world around them, this rhetoric was in part compensatory, responding to the communist threat by offering an optimistic notion of the revolutionary power of the American free market. In sharp contrast to the distrust of big business in the Roosevelt era, corporate America was now seen as the impetus for individual liberty at home and in the world.

“Our ballet style [… is] beginning to assume the tone of our time, the character of our place, and the features of our people,” stated Amberg in 1949, indicating these uniquely American traits as its “native dignity,” “intelligence,” “uninhibited rhythm,” “bodily self-confidence, and youthful stamina.” Moreover, while their response to the chaos and uncertainty of modern life was not lost on critics, the sense of conflict in Balanchine’s ballets is transformed into harmony, order, and
innovation. Despite the dancers' endless "whirling, lunging, striking out [. . .] tugging the stage this way and that," writes Jowitt of Agon, the whole "resolves as boundless symmetry." In 1959, Kirstein stated that Balanchine's neoclassical ballet "magnifies the meaning of liberty in disciplined dancing." Twenty years later he theorized American ballet's new "policy" as one in which the dancers' advanced "speed and control," "level of efficiency," and ability to move together as if one "body of interchangeable soloists" created "a democratic corps de ballet [. . .] without hierarchical status or fixed table of organization which could demonstrate celebrity, muscularity, interplay of sportive action." Turning "constructs of stressed extreme movement" into the very "meaning of liberty," neoclassical ballet resolved modernist anxiety into metaphors of a society running smoothly as an assembly line, its well-tuned individual parts cooperating for an efficient, productive whole. Not unlike Balla's Macchina Tipografica.  

Despite these aesthetic affinities and historical continuities, scholars haven't looked to Futurism in their search for George Balanchine's roots. The reasons for the elision of Futurism's influence on Balanchine are many. First there are practical issues of scholarship: a study such as ours will be considered "interdisciplinary," a crossing of the border between theatre and dance. Futurism, too, is studied in parts and pockets and, relative to its literary and fine arts production (manifestos and painting, in particular), its many performance forms are marginalized, with dance-centered spectacle even more distant. Also, scholars and critics are often strikingly reluctant to work across other perceived boundaries, be they geographic, generic, temporal, or political. Yet, as Mike Sell points out, "The avant-garde has tended not to honor the kinds of categorical and institutional boundaries respected by its critics and scholars." Thinking of Balanchine, the American neoclassicist, in relationship to the Futurists requires a practical and imaginative leap over virtually all such borders.  

Of these, the political boundary is perhaps the most insurmountable because it has been legitimated by a philosophical tradition that responded to the horrors of the interwar period, persevered throughout the Cold War, and today leaves us theorizing in its shadows. The dominant figure here is Walter Benjamin, whose famous thesis, in which he contrasts the aestheticization of politics (i.e., fascism) to the politicization of aesthetics (i.e., communism), haunts contemporary criticism in diffuse and diluted forms. As Gerhard Richter puts it, "Today Benjamin's ghosts are legion. But because they are everywhere, who could speak of them?" In his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin contended that the modern possibilities of technical reproduction had destroyed the work of art's aura, detaching it from its ritualistic function and making it available for political use. Herein are multiple progressive possibilities, but great danger as well, for "the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life," and all such attempts "culminate in one thing: war." Benjamin builds his argument against fascist nihilism by quoting F.T. Marinetti as if he were fascism's ideologue and as if fascism and Futurism were one and the same: "Flat art - peret mundus," says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of "Part pour Part!" Here both Futurism and fascism are reduced to purposeless, empty destruction, and simple synonyms.  

Benjamin's ghost quietly lurks almost everywhere Futurism appears (or doesn't). One sees constantly the theoretical and philosophical welding of Futurism to fascism, and few serious attempts to make sense of the Futurist movement and its specific, complicated place in the history of the avant-garde. By reading fascism back onto all of Futurism, scholars have turned everything Futurist fascist. Futurist proclamations like, "Hunger and poverty disappear. The bitter social question, annihilated. [...] End now is the need for wearisome and debasing work" (from the "Electrical War" manifesto) are offered as propagandistic catch-phrases of a movement whose concern is, in the words of one scholar, an "amoral extolment of action for its own sake [...] Again one can see how this easily communicable ideal foreshadowed Fascism's cult of action and drive." In such Benjaminian readings of Futurism, the artistic movement is cordoned off as the aesthetic manifestation of a deviant politics, Futurism and fascism together remaining that evil other against which art of the Left will fight.  

In Benjamin's contrast between aestheticized politics and politicized aesthetics, we find a series of comfortable and ordering binaries - Left/Right, revolutionary/reactionary, subversive/submissive - that reverberate through subsequent theories of the avant-garde and development studies of the modernist period. However, when it comes to analyzing Futurism in performance, we might take to heart Franca Angeli's observation that, for the Futurists, "between the will to destruction and theatre, theatre wins," and look at what that theatre actually produced. When we think about the consecration of Balanchine's neoclassicism as "the American ballet," Benjamin's ghosts seem even more ghostly, for though Benjamin hasn't played much of a role in dance criticism,
they lurk even here. Despite the personal relationships and aesthetic congruities between Italian Futurism and Balanchine, they are neatly fixed by scholars on opposite sides of the nebulous political-aesthetic divide:

Futurism = fascist nihilism
Balanchine’s neoclassicism = capitalist productivity

By now, it should be clear that the canonization of George Balanchine as the maestro of a new American ballet form required decades of rhetorical somersaults in which artistic ideals and elements produced on the Futurist stages of Rome, St. Petersburg, Paris, and Monte Carlo, and seen, reworked, and elaborated by Balanchine before and after his arrival on the glittering streets of New York are reformulated as intrinsic to American character. Naturally, these somersaults could only be turned if the words “Rome,” “Futurist,” “fascist,” “St. Petersburg,” “constructivist,” “communist,” “Paris,” “cubist,” and “European” were first wiped from the dance floor. Otherwise, why would we not have recognized that such inherently productive, “American” qualities of society as well as dance) were the same as those celebrated by those “fascist Futurists”?

Benjamin’s equation offered hope when there was little to be found, but it has failed to stand the test of time. “The past seven decades have shown that almost none of Benjamin’s central predictions have proven to be right,” Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan admit, pointing out that the mystical aura of original art has “conquered the field of art’s technical reproduction” rather than disappearing and that film has failed to become a critical medium for the masses. In turn, it becomes difficult to accept the aesthetics-versus-politics paradigm as relevant in modern culture. Indeed, the case of Futurism and Balanchine renders his thesis untenable even for the historical moment to which he applied it—his own. In the end, the Futurism-Balanchine connection, whether its initial phase of pan-European collaboration or the later construction of Balanchine as the American ballet master, is just one of myriad pieces of history that belie the German philosopher’s claims, claims that contemporaries like Antonio Gramsci, who declared Marinetti a revolutionary, may well have contested, had they known his work.

European criticism on Balanchine has better remembered his past. In Italy and France, for instance, Balanchine is widely understood as a post-Diaghilev artist who took the modernist aesthetic with him to the U.S. Balanchine is hailed as a legendary twentieth-century ballet choreographer, but his American oeuvre is seen as the final phase of a career launched under the auspices of the Ballets Russes. His neoclassicism is, in turn, seen as a continuation of the style he developed during the appel à l’ordre of his Parisian days. In U.S. dance discourses, however, the idea that Balanchine’s neoclassical ballet is the distinctively American development of a formerly Russian imperial form remains chronic. This is a “politicization of aesthetics” on the part of U.S. dance scholars that has created a great American ballet master, but has done little to map the international penetration that made modernism, Futurism, and the neoclassical ballet the revolutionary forms that they were. Recently reflecting on Balanchine’s legacy, Alastair Macaulay speaks of the early years of the New York City Ballet, writing, “Balanchine was a classicist, a radical, a romantic, a modernist, an avant-gardist, and he also loved to watch Charlie’s Angels and Wonder Woman on television.” Quintessentially American—is that the suggestion, once again? It may be, for in the end, Macaulay’s article is a celebration of the fact that “Balanchine is now a global phenomenon.” But it seems to us that he always was.

Notes
35. Ibid., 346.
36. Ibid., 366 (our emphasis).
44. Quoted in Reynolds, *Ballet: Bias and Belief*, 200.
45. Ibid., 378.
46. Ibid., 124.
51. Ibid., 124.
55. Ibid., 242.
56. See Peter Bürger’s exclusion of Futurism from his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). One of the few to break away from the Benjaminian paradigm is Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist
3
Confessions of a Failed Theatre Activist: Intercultural Encounters in Uganda and Rwanda
Laura Edmondson

In the summer of 2004, I traveled to the town of Gulu in northern Uganda, proudly bearing an invitation to facilitate theatre workshops at a rehabilitation center for former child soldiers. These children had been kidnapped by the notorious Lord's Resistance Army, which terrorized the region in the longest civil war in the history of sub-Saharan Africa. In the heart of this warzone, I met another U.S. theatre artist, as eager as I was to contribute her skills. She had arranged for private workshops at another rehabilitation center in Gulu, which she invited me to observe. She led a group of fifteen teenage girls in a series of theatre exercises, working with them to use their body as a tool of expression. She was wearing a loose, flowing skirt, and, as she demonstrated the movements, all of us caught glimpses of her underwear. As members of a culture in which modest dress is a social norm, the girls giggled and whispered among themselves. These outbursts continued despite the obvious annoyance of the facilitator, who repeatedly requested their undivided attention. Although I’m fairly certain that the residents of Gulu did not see my underwear, the image of a white woman as ludicrous spectacle haunted my own attempts to practice activist theatre.

Activism and the avant-garde are historic bedfellows, as Matei Calinescu and Renato Poggioli show. Calinescu links the “messianic fervors” of the avant-garde to Henri de Saint-Simon’s socialist belief that artists would blaze a path towards an egalitarian society. Calinescu’s argument that avant-garde artists perceived themselves as constituting “the ‘vanguard’ in the moral history of mankind” resonates with Poggioli’s identification of activism as one of the “four moments” of