Restaging Hysteria: Mary Wigman as Writer and Dancer

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In 1925, as Mary Wigman was becoming increasingly well known as the leading proponent of *Ausdruckstanz*, the critic Rudolf von Delius wrote a celebratory monograph on the dancer.[1] One passage describes his reactions while watching the twenty-eight-year-old Mary Wigman dance in 1914: "Wer war das? Ein Mensch, eine Frau? Ich wußte nicht recht. Doch wohl ein Dämon. Irgendwie schien sie mir dem Bergwasser und der Felsenwucht näher verwandt als den Menschen" 'Who was that? A person, a woman? I wasn't sure. Certainly a demon. Somehow she seemed more related to a mountain stream and a cliff outcropping than a human being' (32). While the mystical undertones and demonic power of Wigman's dance were for Delius a reason for veneration and wonder, her detractors took issue with the dancer's version of femininity, which they found far too ambiguous and disturbing. Whereas Delius awarded Wigman and her dance genius with the ecstatic appellation "souveränes Weib" 'confident woman' (32), Wigman's American contemporary Ted Shawn criticized what he perceived as a lack of eroticism in her dance and the resulting loss of gender-specific expression, thus making her dance inappropriately "masculine" (Schreier 179). By tapping into the irrational, the demonic, and the physical through her dance personae, Wigman upset many of her spectators' expectations with regard to dance as an aesthetically pleasing displace of female beauty.

Contributors to a volume of essays *Dance, Gender, and Culture* (1993) repeatedly make reference to the fact that dance has traditionally been identified as a feminine art (Copeland 140,

Sanchez-Colberg 151, Sayers 166). In his essay, Roger Copeland describes nineteenth-century ballet as a primarily visual art created by a male choreographer, resulting in the objectification of female dancers (139). The ensuing balletomania or overblown veneration of the ballerina can be seen as the result of an art that allows only a visual relationship between the performer and audience, rendering the female dancer an erotically charged though ultimately unattainable and immaterial fantasy.

Feminist critiques of dance history recognize the fin-de-siècle as an important turning point for women in dance. Early pioneers of modern dance such as Isadora Duncan and Loïe Fuller took an important step away from conditions created by balletomania by performing dances they themselves had choreographed and by attempting to arouse a kinesthetic experience, rather than a purely visual one, between the audience and the performer (Copeland 140). That is, the spectator actually feels the physical experiences of the dancer's body through his or her own (Manning, *Ecstasy and the Demon* 29). Duncan, the early leader of free dance, a precursor to Wigman's *Ausdruckstanz*, distanced herself from the nineteenth-century ideal of the ethereal, unreachable ballerina, replacing this image with an earthier, though still essentializing concept of eternal Woman. Although Duncan consciously sought to emancipate women through dance (Peters 3-4), she was unable to resolve the lingering spectatorial relationship between the male audience and the female performer (Schreier 179).

Susan Manning stresses that Wigman's dances of the 1920s, by contrast, challenge any notion of femininity, such that her dancing personae appear androgynous or asexual "rather than overtly feminine" ("Feminism, Utopianism, and the Incompleted Dialogue of Modernism" 106), while all of her early group dances involved only women, with one woman—most frequently Wigman—as leader ("Feminism, Utopianism, and the Incompleted Dialogue of Modernism" 106). This gender ambiguity appears to arise out of Wigman's oft-repeated dictum that the performing and creating dancer must necessarily split from herself, thereby creating a second de-personalized other. The vo-

cabulary Wigman employs to define this splitting process and to name her dances—for example *Hexentanz* (*Witch's Dance* 1914, 1926), *Ekstatische Tänze* (*Ecstatic Dances* 1919), *Tanz des Dämons* (*Dance of the Demon* 1921)—borrows from a tradition of mysticism.[2] Although Wigman never uses the word hysteria to refer to this experience, the dancer, born in 1886, did come of age in a time dominated by discourses concerning hysteria, gender identity, and the body. Sigmund Freud and other pioneers of psychoanalysis draw a historical connection between witchcraft and possession and the medical diagnosis hysteria (*Standard Edition* 41).[3] In their collaborative work *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud's colleague, Josef Breuer, identifies St. Theresa as "the patron saint of hysteria" (*Studies on Hysteria* 232).[4] *Studies on Hysteria* came close on the heels of Freud's work with Charcot, whose late nineteenth-century descriptions of hysterical women perceived in them a tendency to "dance" and "perform." First published in 1893, Freud's studies of hysterical female patients reveal an understanding of non-narrative, non-linear behavior as a principally female malady related to her problematic relationship to her own sexuality (*Standard Edition* 51), which in psychoanalytic discourse is described in terms of lack. Hysteric patients, Freud stresses, can be identified by a characteristic splitting of consciousness:

> [T]he splitting of the consciousness which is so striking in the well-known classical cases under the form of "double conscience" is present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria, and that a tendency to such a dissociation, and with it the emergence of abnormal states of consciousness (which we shall bring together under the term "hypnoid") is the basic phenomenon of this neurosis. (*Studies on Hysteria* 12)

Women in particular, according to Freud, are susceptible to hypnoid states characteristic of hysteria: "They [the hypnoid states] often, it would seem, grow out of the day-dreams which are so common even in healthy people and to which needlework and similar occupations render women especially prone" (*Studies on Hysteria* 13).

Similarly, Otto Weininger, writing in his influential 1903 study *Geschlecht und Charakter* (*Sex and Character*), recognizes

the connection between hysteria and mysticism, however, he takes
Breuer to task for his assessment of St. Theresa as "die
Schutzheilige der Hysterie" 'the patron saint of hystria' because,
he asserts, women are incapable of religious thought and beliefs
(372). The morality of religion is foreign to women, thus the "hys-
terical" experience of the female mystic is directly related to sexu-
ality: "Die weibliche Mystik ist [...] eine sanft verhüllte Sexualität"
'Feminine mysticism is . . . a delicately veiled form of sexuality'
(370). Weininger understands hysteria as "die Verleugnung der
eigentlichen Natur des Weibes" ' the denial of the actual nature of
woman,' that is, women are constantly in the process of denying
their natural inclinations toward "Kuppelei" 'matchmaking' when
they unconsciously (or helplessly) adopt the ideas and morality
of men (in denial of their own nature) (357). He observes in
hysterical women the tendency to embody contradictions: "Sie
sind, von da gesehen, abnorm keusch, von dort aus betrachtet,
enorm sinnlich" They are, on the one hand, abnormally chaste,
on the other hand enormously sensual' (360). Weininger calls
the one tendency toward extreme morality a part of "jener
Pseudopersönlichkeit" 'such a pseudo-personality,' explaining the
observed "gespaltene Person" 'split personality' of the hysteric
(360). This splitting is only possible where no personality exists
to begin with, as is the case for women. For Weininger, the
"Frauenrechtlerin" 'suffragette' (the New Woman embodied by
Duncan and Wigman) represents one such example of the hys-
teric, who is afflicted with this female malady because she denies
her true nature (8). Additionally, Weininger's categorization of
the feminine and the masculine points to a radical rift between
body and soul, in that he associates the feminine (W) with the
body, sexuality, and physical excess, while aligning the mascu-
line (M) with morality and the soul and an idealized incorpore-
ality. Strikingly, Weininger's discussion of bisexuality further
supports his notion of strict separation of the masculine and the
feminine. He writes:

> Trotz allen sexuellen Zwischenformen ist der Mensch am Ende
> doch eines von beiden, entweder Mann oder Weib. Auch in dieser
> ältesten empirischen Dualität steckt . . . eine tiefe Wahrheit, die
> sich nicht ungestraft vernachlässigen läßt.

> Despite all variety of manifestations of human sexuality, human beings are essentially one of both, either man or woman. Even in this, the oldest empirical duality, there lingers . . . a deep truth which cannot be forgotten without serious consequences. (98)

However improbable Weininger's ideas might seem to readers today, they were in fact responsible for influencing the thought and writing of artists and intellectuals well into the early part of the twentieth century.[5] One must understand Wigman's ideas and those of her contemporaries as a reaction to the "Bankrott des männlichen Ideals" 'bankruptcy of the masculine ideal' (Luft 78) represented by Weininger and his generation.[6]

The second important current *en vogue* during Wigman's formative years was the *Lebensreform* movement. Although the movement included a broad variety of political leanings, "spanning the entire . . . spectrum from Communism to National Socialism" all of these branches emphasized strengthening of the body, healthy living, and a return to a state of harmony with nature (Kaes, Martin, and Dimendberg 673). While Weininger's example represents the ultimate articulation of repression in response to an era filled with contradictions concerning gender and sexuality, the founding of the artists's colony at Monte Verità in Switzerland in 1900 serves as an example of an attempt to break free of these conflicts. The colony—Wigman's artistic school and home from 1913 to 1919—promoted free-love, vegetarianism, and community.[7] A new relationship to gender and sexuality figured prominently in the philosophy of the *Lebensreform* movement. Wolfgang Gräser, a proponent of the movement, wrote in 1927 ("Body Sense: Gymnastics, Dance, Sport") in praise of the "new corporeality"that appeared to do away with the "anxious separation of the sexes" (qtd. in Kaes, Martin, and Dimendberg 684). This desire to achieve a merging of differences also represents a dominant philosophy in *Ausdruckstanz*, another facet of the body culture that promised to transcend the fragmentation of body and soul experienced by early twentieth-century Western cultures (Brandstetter 205).

This concern with body and soul rests at the very heart of early twentieth-century Expressionism. Within the word expres-

sionism and the movement itself is the implication of turning one's self inside out. The contents of the soul (anger, sorrow, lust, rage, love) become the created object or text, a representative for the artist's subjective feeling state. A similar philosophy underlies Wigman's expressionist dance. As Susan Leigh Foster states: "For . . . Wigman, dance was less a material manifestation of spirituality than an expression of the relationship between movement and a full range of psychological events, including the unconscious" (152). But the process of dance creation is markedly different from the visual arts or literature because the creating and performing artist's body is not only the source of the emotion, but also the instrument of and the site of its expression. Thus the creating and performing dancer experiences a split within herself as creator and creation, both of which paradoxically must re-merge in one place—the artist's body and person. The ambiguous gender representation Wigman's critics and fans alike perceived in her dances echoes assessments of the hysteric defined by the previous generation of intellectuals and described by Schuller as follows: "Der hysterische Körper tritt aus der Eindeutigkeit der Repräsentation heraus, was zugleich bedeutet: die Hysterika begehrt auf gegen eine repräsentationistische Verfaßtheit ihres Körpers" 'The hysterical body departs from the unity of representation, which means: the hysteric rebels against a representational composition of her body' (184). Wigman, whose cultural milieu was saturated with the conflation of woman, sexuality, hysteria, and dance, appears to participate in an act of duplicity in that her body rebels against the notion of gender unity. In this sense, Wigman revisits the feminine hysterical split traditionally associated with dance, but subsequently reauthors this split as a feminine power by mastering (or mistressing) both creation and performance. The choice of the word "reauthor" also refers to Wigman's written texts, which serve as a rationalizing counterbalance to the dance itself, becoming an assertion of the choreographer's will and consciousness. Wigman's writing, in particular her poetry, represents a personal act of self-definition. Walter Sorell perceives in her writing an impulse similar to the one behind her dance creation, that is, the need to give rhythmi-

cal form to a deep and symbolic experience (*Mary Wigman: Ein Vermächtnis* [*Legacy*] 270). At the intersection of writing and dance, Wigman is able to redefine performance and choreography (or authorship) both as more fluid realms of expression.

Clearly, Wigman's described process of depersonalization can be understood not only within the context of a mystical surrender to a muse, but also within Wigman's contemporary cultural context, emerging from a negatively gendered understanding of the unconscious and hysteria and moving toward the desire to heal a perceived split between body and soul. This investigation of the way Wigman narrates and/or poeticizes (and thus legitimizes and affirms) the out-of-body experience of dance—coded as a feminine experience in the generation previous to Wigman— through writing builds upon the research which sees within her dance a "feminist subtext" (Manning, "Feminism, Utopianism, and the Incompleted Dialogue of Modernism"105). While fin-de-siècle Western culture described dance as feminine, i.e. dark and irrational, it assigned writing, by contrast, to the realm of the masculine, i.e. brilliant, rational, and ordered.[8] As Elizabeth Bronfen argues, writing "presupposes the life of the author, a signature and a position in culture" (404). For the female writer, this act of authorship creates an impasse because her very femininity is culturally constructed as lack and as absence of being, thus the female author takes part in an act of duplicity by "repeat[ing] *and* resist[ing]" this cultural construct (Bronfen 404).[9] Bronfen argues that the woman writer is the duplicitous hysteric because she both believes in and rejects the fictitious creation of the feminine (405.).[10] Wigman creates the "revolutionary" (cf. Schuller: "begehrt auf" 'rebels') ambiguity of unclear gender representation by participating in this act of duplicity in her art. Her writing about dance—a form of looking at herself—exhibits parallels to Bronfen's proposed model in that her texts submit to certain cultural icons of women and dance, while at the same time they attempt to assert a new understanding of a more varied and psychologically complex femininity through dance.

In a study on dance and gender, Janet Wolff reminds her readers that the late 19th-century ideal—as promoted by Duncan—of dance as free and freeing ignores the necessarily close alliance between language and dance. Choreography must rely upon (rational) language and on structuring principles. Despite Wigman's claim that dance "defies capture in the spoken or written work—because it has no need for words," she wrote often about dance, in particular about the creative process as it is experienced by her body (*The Language of Dance* 19). In the prose-poem "Die Tänzerin" 'The Woman Dancer' (1930), Wigman articulates kinesthetic opposition as a requisite for dynamism in dance. In the last section of this five-part prose-poem ("Der Raum" 'Space'), the female dancer experiences space as a "Gegenrichtung" 'Opposing Direction' that forces her to encounter herself: "[E]in Spiel, auf und nieder, vor- und rückwärts, Selbstbegegnung, Kampf im Raum um den Raum: Tanz. Leise zärtlich und heftig wild" 'A game, up and down, forward and backward, self-confrontation, struggle in space for space: Dance. Quietly tender and fiercely wild' (Wigman qtd. in Sorell, *Mary Wigman: Ein Vermächtnis* 282). As the dancer feels this opposition in her own body, she recognizes her ability to form the space at will. Thus, in her encounter with space as a separate entity, the dancer embraces its opposing pull to create dance.

The ecstatic quality of this experience is echoed in the four preceding sections of "Die Tänzerin." Wigman repeatedly refers to various states of losing control as an element of dance and dance creation. For example, in the second section, entitled "Das Drehen" 'Turning,' the dancer creates a welcome state of suspension and feeling of unity with "dem Element" 'The Element' by entering into frenzied circling around her own center:

> In der Mitte des Raumes dreht sie sich mit Schritten, die klein, schnell sind, um sich selbst. Schneller werden die Schritte, höher die Streckung auf den Spitzen, stärker die Spannung des Körpers. Rasend im Schwung dreht sie sich um den eigenen Mittelpunkt. Plötzlich geschieht das Seltsame: sie hebt sich über den Boden, steht still in der Luft, ruhige Schwebe.

In the middle of the space, she turns with steps, which are small and quick, around herself. The steps become faster and faster, the stretching upon toe-tips ever higher, ever stronger the tension of the body. In a frenzy, she lets herself be swayed, as she turns around her own center. Suddenly, something strange happens: she lifts herself above the floor, stands still in the air, peaceful state of suspension. (280)

The kinesthetic experience of floating allows the dancer to separate from herself and then merge with and become "Teil der schwingenden Weltkörper alle, Symbol" 'all part of the vibrant world-body, symbol' (280). Also in the fourth section, entitled "Der Kreis" 'The Circle,' the dancer experiences a loss of self-control. But in contrast to the body- and soul-expanding experience of "das Drehen," here the dancer is possessed by a demonic power: "Sie verlor die Macht über sich. Von fremder Gewalt gejagt, rasen die Füße den qualvollen Kreislauf" 'She lost control of herself. Pursued by a foreign power, her feet hurtled about in an agonizing circular flow' (281). Characteristically, the opposing force is experienced as a separate being (like space), forcing her into a hypnotic state of perpetual motion. In both instances, the dancer eventually recognizes the opposing forces to her "selbstgeschaffenen Wahn" 'self-made mania' and succumbs to the necessity to destroy this state of suspension (281).

"Die Tänzerin" implies that the experienced oppositions of movement occur within the dancer herself, making her body the site of opposing desires. In other writing, Wigman frequently emphasizes the necessity of separating from one's self both in the act of creation and in surrendering to the internal power of the dance itself when performed. Her essay "Die Schule" 'The School' (before 1933) explicitly articulates splitting as a part of dance creation and performance. The essay, which describes the three stages of development every dancer must undergo, identifies the "*Spaltungserlebnis*" 'experience of splitting' as the core of the second phase (Wigman qtd. in Bach 33). As the dancer becomes aware of the body's potential as an instrument, she must go through a phase of deliberate disembodiment, in which the body becomes a separate tool of expression. Wigman's significantly

titled *The Language of Dance* variously addresses the conditions necessary for experiencing the *Spaltungserlebnis*. Using vocabulary borrowed from a tradition of mysticism, the dancer describes the development of a muse-like relationship to herself in which she is able to "accept and bow to"the creative power (Wigman 15). In this moment, the dancer becomes a separate being, an instrument of "the universal, super-personal" (Wigman 10), which is experienced as a welcome "deliverance from the burden of the all-too-personal" (Wigman 38). Thus the creative process is experienced as a moment of separation from the self.

"Tanzender Körper" 'Dancing Body,' written in 1916, represents one of Wigman's attempts to capture this split in a poetic form. One of the most interesting aspects of this poem is the female subject's relationship to the mirror.[11] As she watches herself dance, she affirms the sensuality of her female body:

> Im Spiegel dort das Bildnis meines Körpers.
> Nackt.
> Geschwungene Linien, weiche Kurven
> atmen Sinnlichkeit.
> Ein Frauenkörper . . .
>
> In the mirror there the image of my body
> Naked.
> Bowed lines, soft curves
> breathe sensuality.
> A woman's body . . .
> (qtd. in Sorell, *Mary Wigman: Ein Vermächtnis* 270)

Then the parts of the subject's body serve to measure and confidently fill the dance space. By the end of the poem, the mesmerizing effect of watching herself evolves into her awareness of the body as a separate instrument of dance:

> Geheimnisvolle Wandlung!
> Demütig neige ich mich vor dem
> tanzgewordenen Körper
>
> Mysterious transformation!
> Humbly I bow before the
> Body become dance. (271)

She is aware of the split between self and reflected self created by the mirror, thus able to control it. Wigman uses the split to reclaim a portion of herself, and the ordering principles of language are the vehicle for this transformation. Although the subject fragments her body by naming the traditionally erotically charged parts of the body (arms, hands, legs, breasts), she nonetheless controls the gaze. This female body is viewed by the self, allowing greater opportunities for female spectatorship, as the female reader can identify with the female subject's agency, rather than re-experiencing her object status. She is able to avoid the gaze of the (male) audience by creating a looking relationship between self and reflected body. Indeed, Wigman's publicity shots, dance studies, and surviving film clips further serve to illustrate her relationship to the viewing audience. She rarely acknowledges the viewer; she most frequently casts her eyes downward. But rather than representing the usual iconography of compliance and shyness, Wigman's downcast eyes signify a turning inward to the self. Though the poem "Tanzender Körper" represents a more measured recreation of the dance experience, in other texts Wigman frequently describes working herself into a frenzy (reminiscent of hysteria) to achieve a state of release. One such example is her description of the genesis of *Hexentanz II* (*Witch's Dance*) in 1926 in which a mirror also plays a central role in splitting and then in self-definition:

> In dieser Nacht konnte ich um nichts in der Welt einschlafen. Da sprang ich aus dem Bett. Ich begann zu tanzen. Ich improvisierte wild, bis ich nicht mehr konnte. Auf dem Weg zurück zum Bett, ging ich an dem dreiteiligen Spiegel vorbei, wo ich meine Kostüme ausprobierte. Wie ich so vorbeiging, sah ich eine Kreatur darin. Eine Schulter und eine Brust waren nackt. . . . Ich ließ mein Haar so wild wie es war. . . . So entstand der *Hexentanz*. Etwas sagte in mir: "Ah, da ist es, was dich gequält hat!"

> The particular night I couldn't fall asleep for anything in the world. So I sprang out of bed. I began to dance. I improvised wildly until I couldn't anymore. On the way back to bed, I passed by a three-paneled mirror, where I tried on my costumes. As I walked by, I saw a creature in the mirror. One shoulder and a breast were naked. . . . I left my hair wild just as it was. . . . This is

how *Witch's Dance* came to be. Something in me said: "Ah, that is what has been tormenting you so!" (249)

A film clip of *Hexentanz* shows the dancer seated on the floor, wearing an expanse of glittery patterned cloth, which is secured at the neck and drapes down over the front of her body.[12] A dark wig of unruly hair covers her head and the features of her face are transformed by a mask that imitates and freezes her real face in an uncanny fashion. Percussion accompanies the dance. At times is falls silent, at other times it accompanies her frenzied motion with increasing intensity. The opening phases of the performance are punctuated by moments of relative calm and controlled gestures. The intensity of the dance builds with the increasing volume and speed of the percussion, as the seated dancer grasps her ankles and propels herself in a circle by lifting and raising her feet from the floor. As she turns, she reveals a bare and relatively vulnerable back. Still photos of the dance and the description detailed in Bach's book suggest that the dancer does eventually change from a seated position to raise up full height, hands raised over her head in a threatening gesture. John Mueller's description of *Hexentanz* based on the same film clip refers to Wigman's persona as an "it," providing further evidence of gender ambiguity perceived by many Wigman spectators: "[T]he hands and arms claw ... the air, the body drag[s] menacingly toward the camera on its haunches" (96).

In another account, Wigman, however, points to the creation of a specifically female persona while creating *Hexentanz*:

> [T]here she was—the witch—the earth-bound creature with her unrestrained, naked instincts, with her insatiable lust for life, beast and woman at one and the same time.
> I shuddered at my own image, at the exposure of this facet of my ego which I had never allowed to emerge in such unashamed nakedness. But, after all, isn't a bit of the witch hidden in every hundred-per-cent female, no matter which form its origin may have? (40-41)

As in the poem "Tanzender Körper," the kinesthetic intensity of the dance and the mirror play central roles in providing the

necessary "Spaltungserlebnis" 'experience of splitting.' The irrational abandon created by improvising and the doubled image in the mirror reveal a different self. When Wigman writes that the witch can be found in all women, she reasserts a traditional image of the feminine as earthy, instinctual, and threatening. It would appear that Wigman encounters the same problems as Duncan, who redefines woman but does not revise the spectatorial relationship between woman dancer (the object) and the male spectator. The essentializing of Woman reinforces familiar definitions of Woman as irrational and physical. But, as Manning explains, "Wigman took as a given the female spectatorship established by the Duncanesque dancer and challenged the universalizing of the female experience implicit in that spectatorship" (*Ecstasy and the Demon* 41). Additionally, Manning demonstrates that Wigman repeatedly used a costume as a mask to conceal her specifically female body, as well as the facial mask to turn the spectators' gaze back at them (127). Manning argues that the dancer becomes degendered, resulting in what Manning calls *Gestalt im Raum* (*Figure in Space*). Wigman's writing about the mask includes a broader understanding of its transforming potential: "Sie kann Geschlecht-aufhebend und Geschlecht-betonend wirken. Sie drängt von der realistischen Ebene hinüber zum Irrationalen" 'It [the mask] can have the effect of muting or accentuating gender. It forces an encounter through the real into the irrational'(qtd. in Bach 26). I would argue that Wigman's dualistic definition of the mask occurs simultaneously, and therefore does not result in the creation of a degendered persona as Manning observes. Rather, a specifically female being flashes in and out of recognition, creating the gender ambiguity experienced by Wigman's spectators. Her dance represents both the absence and the presence of the signified, in this case the feminine.

Additionally, the combination of both spectatorial and kinesthetic experiences evidenced in Wigman's text and dance creates such ambiguity so as to upset the traditional relationship between audience and performer, thereby creating what some viewers experienced as her (hysterical) duplicity. Finally, Wigman's experience is clearly one of self-confrontation: "[T]his

facet of my ego." Being possessed by the demon becomes refigured as a personally creative strength. Through writing, the experienced hysterical split of dancing is followed by the restorative process of achieving union between the previously unrecognized parts of the self—the soul or ego seen in the mirror—and the physical experience of the body.

By assuming the roles of both performer and choreographer, Wigman occupies the ambiguous space between gendered forms of expression. Her dances' lack of clear gender identification appears to deceive the viewer, causing consternation for some members of her audience. Wigman's resultantly fragmented narrative (in search of absolute dance outside narration) seems also to mimic the twilight state of hysteria as defined by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers. As Manning asserts, the modernist philosophy underlying Wigman's dances impedes the process of communication or interpretation, creating what Manning calls "an incomplete dialogue" ("Feminism, Utopianism, and the Incompleted Dialogue of Modernism" 105). Just as Wigman perceives of the body as an instrument for expressing the soul, so too does psychoanalysis recognize the body as the site of psychological expression. Yet Wigman ultimately subverts the psychoanalytic definition of hysteria as an unconscious female malady by claiming it and reforming it as a *conscious* strength in her art. Rather than needing to resort to hysteria (in the psychoanalytic sense) as a sign of the repressed body and soul, her dances stage this so-called split, something she rearticulates as unity— reclaiming the *Mystikerin* (*Female Mystic*) as her model, the original female hysteric.[13] Through the dissociative experience of dance creation and performance, Wigman reenacts the hysterical experience as feminine strength. In writing about dance, Wigman discovers a powerful self through the mirror and through the mirroring/replicating activities of dance and writing.

Wigman combines both a form of narration and ordering through language—poetry, prose-poems—and the hysteria of dance to create ambiguity, defying gender definition by melding forms of expression that are culturally typified as male and female, resulting in a plastic and multi-dimensional redefinition

of her role as a woman and as a woman artist. Writing about the out-of-body experiences of dance and creativity allows Wigman to reorder or narrate the "hysterical" experience according to her own rules, while at the same time challenging (even her own) notion that dance is beyond language and creating in her work an ambiguous tension between spheres that are culturally encoded as masculine and feminine.

Notes

1 Mary Wigman is best known as the leading proponent of *Ausdruckstanz* or German Dance, as it was called in the US, a movement that originated with her teacher and mentor Rudolf von Laban before World War I and reached its most identifiable form in the 1920s, contemporaneous with German Expressionism in art and literature. This study is concerned primarily with Wigman's early career. Issues of national identity and Wigman's involvement in fascist ideology in the later 1920s and 1930s have received ample and noteworthy attention in Susan Manning's 1995 study of Mary Wigman, *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman.*

2 Dianne Howe analyzes the various nuances of mysticism in Wigman's dance in her article "The Notion of Mysticism in the Philosophy and Choreography of Mary Wigman 1914-1931."

3 Marianne Schuller's article "'Weibliche Neurose' und Identität: Zur Diskussion der Hysterie um die Jahrhundertwende" traces the way in which hysterical symptoms, closely related to the experiences of the female mystic, became recognized as a female malady (of threatening asocial behavior) which could be treated and controlled by primarily male doctors.

4 Breuer writes: "No amount of genuine, solid mental endowment is excluded by hysteria, though actual achievements are often made impossible by the illness. After all, the patron saint of hysteria, St. Theresa, was a woman of genius with great practical capacity" (*Studies on Hysteria* 232).

5 In the introductory essay to a collection of essays on Weininger's reception, Barbara Hymans and Nancy Harrowitz write: "The impact

of Weininger's *Sex and Character* and 'On Last Things'on his own generation and the next was widespread. His slim body of work is still significant because of the extent of its influence on the most important thinkers and writers of Weininger's time—Ludwig Wittgenstein, Karl Kraus, Elias Canetti, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Hermann Broch, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence and Getrude Stein among them . . . Weininger's name is no longer a household word, but his voice is still heard in texts by familiar authors who helped form modern and postmodern culture. His text has rendered any boundaries between genere, nationality, or discipline obsolete; his influence, stemming from a work that today might be called 'popular science,' has been felt in literature, philosophy, science, and history" (5).

6 The works of Freud and Weininger, just two examples from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, belong to a much broader context of research on sexuality and gender by individuals such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Havelock Ellis.

7 In later years, Wigman wrote about her experiences at Monte Verità with quite a bit of irony, describing the members of the commune as holy disciples of Christ. She, however, was an apparent outcast, along with Else Lasker-Schüler and Marianne Werefkin, and describes the three of them as "die 'Hexen' von Endor" (qtd. in Sorell, *Mary Wigman: Ein Vermächtnis* 36).

8 Dance has been traditionally marginalized as a (feminine) art to itself and is only beginning to be rejoined in discussion with its other contemporaneous art movements.

9 Bronfen's study collects overwhelming evidence which reveals Western culture's often unarticulated association between death (absence) and femininity.

10 By contrast, Showalter sees writing as a release from hysteria for women (93). Bronfen might argue that the text (the corpus) represents another body exhibiting hysterical symptoms, whereas Showalter sees writing as a therapeutic act of ridding one's self of the burdensome symptoms by speaking out.

11 The role of the mirror in psychoanalysis should be mentioned here. Freud writes about the mirror and desire to look (scopophilia) as part of a healthy development toward the actual claiming of a love object. Lacan's mirror stage posits that a child passes through a pre-verbal phase of self-recognition. The child's perceived double, sepa-

rate from the actual self, possesses greater powers of mastery. Laura Mulvey applies this idea to cinema and the role of the male viewer to the onscreen image of woman.

12 My description of *Hexentanz* is based on the film clip included in the video *Mary Wigman 1886-1973: "When the Fire Dances Between Two Poles"* produced by Allegra Fuller Snyder. John Mueller's 1976 description of this film clip indicates that it was filmed in 1929 or 30 in preparation for Wigman's first tour of the United States (96).

13 See Schuller (181) on the link between hysteria and mysticism.

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