

Joanna Szymajda

**I'm Your Private Dancer:
Pop Culture in Choreographic Practice**

www.polishtheatrejournal.com

Publisher:
Theatre Institute in Warsaw
Theatre Academy in Warsaw

Joanna Szymajda

I'm Your Private Dancer: Pop Culture in Choreographic Practice

For some time now, contemporary dance and pop culture have been in a relationship of osmotic symbiosis. These relations have at least two dimensions. First, both sides have drawn on the other's codes and aesthetics, with a view to adding to what they have to offer. The second dimension has to do with the change of status of contemporary dance as a practice which, on the one hand, calls ballet's elite nature into question, and on the other, places itself by and large outside the scope of pop culture. This mutual relationship deserves to be examined carefully – if we fail to do so, we'll be at a loss to grasp the gist and the dynamics of major phenomena emerging on the contemporary-dance scene, including (perhaps predominantly) in instances where dance no longer safeguards its autonomy, striking up intriguing alliances with other performative-arts genres, not least experimental theatre.

Even from its earliest stages, the modernist evolution of the dancing body owed a good deal to what were then the realms of pop culture: cabarets, music halls and nightclubs. While dance had been frowned on initially at the famous Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, Berlin's nightlife was the domain of Valeska Gert, among the most underrated multi-artists of the first half of the twentieth century. In *Traffic*, *Sports*, *Circus*, *Boxing Match* and *Variété*¹ – Gert's dance solos from the 1920s – she focused her attention on various manifestations of the fledgling urban mass culture, offering findings from her analysis of sorts within a satirical, grotesque-heavy convention. Gert also combined cabaret, dance, theatre and film – the first medium to become a vehicle for pop-culture codes on a mass scale.

Images of the big city also featured in the first film made with dance in mind: *Entr'acte*, a short by René Clair that was screened during the intermission of *Relâche* (1924), a production by Francis Picabia, choreographed by Jean Börlin for the Ballets Suédois. Fernand Léger saw *Relâche* as counterpoising what he termed 'obsolete ballet', praising the production's modern means of expression: its use of lights and music-hall-style composition. This was a time when the music hall, previously classified as 'cheap entertainment', graduated rapidly to the status of a *tout Paris* diversion – not least because it was such a darling of the avant-garde.

1 Gabriele Brandstetter, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*, trans. by Elena Polzer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 372.

The Tiller Girls, a cabaret ensemble that was hugely popular in the 1920s, provided not only a space for the emancipation of the female body (albeit an ambiguous one), but also the most famous example of unison group dancing, a phenomenon philosophers found fascinating even then – ‘Das Ornament der Masse’, the well-known 1927 essay by Siegfried Kracauer, includes references to the ideal ornamental line: the Tiller Girls’ collective choreography.²

In Paris, at Folies Bergère, the popular Belle Époque cabaret, the American actress and dancer Loïe Fuller made her debut. Also appearing at the Folies Bergère was Josephine Baker, the emancipated black performer consciously playing on her ‘exotic’ background. Baker’s performances were choreographed by a number of celebrities in the field, including George Balanchine (*Paris qui remue*, the 1930 production presented at Casino de Paris, and *Ziegfeld Follies* in 1935.³). Baker owed a good deal of her success in Paris to Rolf de Maré, patron of the Ballets Suédois. The Ballets Suédois, founded to counterbalance the Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghilev, were slightly more ‘daring’ aesthetically, including direct references to modern urban life. *Skating Rink* (1921, choreographed by Jean Börlin) explored negative aspects of living in a metropolis: the monotony and anonymity of existence, depicted through references to typical pastimes of the period, including the eponymous skating, popular dances and silent films. Rolf de Maré had an exquisite sense of the advantages of the coexistence of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ aesthetics. When the Ballets Suédois turned out to be financially unviable, he announced that the company’s name would be changed to Opéra Music-Hall des Champs Élysées. This obviously entailed a fundamental change in the repertoire, which would resemble the music hall in terms of genre, while matching opera when it came to quality. This had been the context for the introduction of popular and ‘exotic’ dances and, above all, Baker’s ‘African’ solos to the repertoire. Baker had already had a fair measure of success on Broadway,⁴ and what’s more, she brought the Charleston and jazz in general into vogue in European bourgeoisie circles – in other words, features of American pop culture.. That atmosphere of nascent popular culture and its natural environment, the modern metropolis, was made manifest in numerous works by early modernists.⁵ Dancer and choreographer Kurt Jooss, having made use of the *dance macabre* – a medieval ‘pop culture’ theme – in his famous work *The Green Table* (1932), went on that same year to found the tellingly named ballet *Die Großstadt von Heute* [The Contemporary Metropolis]. Vaslav Nijinsky daringly introduced the sports theme as a metaphor for social games by presenting the Ballets Russes dancers in everyday sportswear for the first time (*Games*, 1913), and by presenting the audience with choreography which made direct reference to playing tennis, incorporating the so-called turkey trot, a popular dance at the time, another genre stemming from African American culture. Similarly, Bronislava

2 Ramsay Burt, *Alien Bodies. Representations of Modernity, ‘Race’ and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 84-101.

3 Burt, *Alien Bodies*, p. 4.

4 Burt, *Alien Bodies*, p. 75.

5 Burt, *Alien Bodies*, p. 22.

Nijinska referenced playing tennis – this time as the symbol of an emerging social class – in *Le Train Bleu* (1924), a production with a libretto by Jean Cocteau. Nijinska introduced jazz pieces to the works she completed for Le Théâtre Chorégraphique de Nijinska, her short-lived company (the blackface duet – white dancers in make-up appearing as black people – in *Jazz*, a 1925 choreography to Igor Stravinsky's *Ragtime*, for example). In addition, Nijinska staged a production in the spirit of the music hall for the Paris Opera Ballet (*Impression de Music-hall*, 1926). Circus had been another major pop-culture inspiration for choreographers: one example was the Ballets Russes' famous *Parade* (1917), choreographed by Léonide Massine, with stage design and costumes by Pablo Picasso.

From an entirely different perspective, attempts to turn dance into a mass practice that were made in the early twentieth century are another interesting phenomenon. Derived from the theoretical bases of Émile Jacques-Dalcroze's eurhythmics and Rudolf Laban's mass choirs, such attempts served political ends, not least in Germany, where they were put to use both by socialist movements, gaining momentum at the time, and by officials of the early Nazi Party. Socialists and communists in Germany regarded dance as an art with the potential to make a mass impact, capable of providing currency for the political and ideological message of collectivism.⁶ The dancer and choreographer Hans Weidt, known for his anti-fascist views, founded his company in a disused factory, recruiting non-professionals (former labourers) for his ensemble.⁷ Rudolf Laban's involvement in creating the mass choreography for the 1936 Berlin Olympics made for another famous case, with Laban severing his links to the Olympics at the last moment and fleeing to England. The works of Jenny Gertz, a student of Laban, and an activist in the Communist Party of Germany, featured labourers, and called for the proletarian masses to 'break free from their oppressors'.⁸ Similar trends of taking the working class as a reference point, with calls for dance practice to acquire a political character, can be found in the American modern-dance movement, specifically in its initial stages. In those earliest days of modern dance, the New Dance League, with close links to workers' movements, and the New Dance Group, whose aesthetics alluded to actual problems faced by the working class, were both active in the US.⁹ It seems paradoxical, however, that the main strands of modern dance, which had renounced the elite nature of classical ballet in its early stages, would end up as yet another classical form: in the end, despite turning to sources of American culture including native American culture, modern dance became a demanding and elite form, performed by the white middle class, with the white middle class in mind. A similar paradox holds true for the postmodern movement, which would emerge later: drawing on the quotidian, going out into streets and parks while analysing

6 Laure Guilbert, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich. Les danseurs modernes et le nazisme* (Brussels : André Versaille Éditeur, 2011), pp. 101–104.

7 Guilbert, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich*.

8 Guilbert, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich*.

9 Mark Franko, *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 109–145.

natural movement failed to make new dance into a mass or even popular practice.

Another manifestation of the modern nature of early twentieth-century dance was its natural ability to move freely between the realms of theatre, opera, cabaret and music halls. Even the famous Ballets Russes and Anna Pavlova's company performed at less-prestigious venues. Things weren't much different in America: the Denishawn company, the first professional US modern-dance company, performed at vaudeville and commercial theatres on Broadway. Even the choreographer Martha Graham was not spared. Hanya Holm, a student of Mary Wigman, who would found a school in New York City based on Wigman's technique, also choreographed musicals, including *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *Camelot* (1960).

Things were not much different with fledgling modernist dance in Poland, then in a period of intense growth. The Polish actress, choreographer and ballet dancer Loda Halama's career developed between Warsaw's Morskie Oko variety theatre and the Wielki Theatre–National Opera. For the dancer, choreographer and teacher Tacjana Wysocka, her work with light repertoire (at Warsaw's Qui pro Quo Theatre, where her company appeared in variety shows, combining those with more ambitious offerings of the Tacjana Wysocka Ballet) almost cost Wysocka a place in the history of dance, to the extent that her outstanding performative and educational achievements were overshadowed by her career as a cabaret artist.¹⁰

Thus, in the early twentieth century, the distinction between popular and artistic dance was somewhat blurred, as both genres were undergoing broader social change, as an overall modernist turn took place. Nonetheless, differences existed, even if they were articulated at a different level than would be the case with postmodernism, or is the case today. In other words, the pop culture of the time was incorporated into early modernist dance but was seldom commented on. In postmodernism and in contemporary trends, that commentary would become an inherent part of the work.

2.

At present, dance has no fixed place on the bipolar axis of high art and popular culture. Everything depends on the strategy taken by the choreographer. When it comes to the canons of 'mass' culture or 'entertainment', some choreographers fit in perfectly, without having to give up on displaying their excellent dance techniques. Such has been the modus operandi of such companies and artists as Compagnie Käfig (making use of the conventions of hip-hop and other popular styles) and Phillippe Decoufflé (his CV includes the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympics opening ceremony, the 2007 Rugby World Cup opening ceremony and a production at the Crazy Horse in Paris in 2009, and he takes freely from French pop culture, predominantly songs and circus). These artists very deliberately emphasise the carnivalesque aspect of dance, while applying

10 Jagoda Ignaczak, 'Tacjana Wysocka. Artystka niepokorna', in *Polskie artystki awangardy tanecznej*, ed. by Joanna Szymajda (Warsaw: Instytut Muzyki i Tańca, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2017), pp. 64–81.

classic means of theatricalisation. Another group of choreographers refuses to renounce the traditional notion of art as the supreme value and the artist as medium: thus theirs are, by self-proclamation, works of high art. Some choreographers, representing the so-called conceptual movements, attempting to contest the division into high art and popular culture, place themselves between those two.¹¹ One paradoxical example of this tendency is postmodern dance choreographers who initially rebelled against the elite nature of modernist dance, choosing 'the everyday' as their major inspiration – yet some of their productions have been so abstract as to be incomprehensible to the average audience member.

At present, we are observing a return of some of the phenomena peculiar to early modernism. As in the early twentieth century, the choreographers of today, fascinated with society in transformation, make references not just to fluid social relations, but also to the urban 'subconscious': nightclubs, subcultures and non-places.¹² The renowned London-based DV8 company, founded in 1986, was shaped around such themes: the decision to take up socially sensitive issues, such as disability and homosexuality, has led DV8 to create some of the popular productions of the new wave of British dance. Similarly, new French and Belgian dance from the late 1970s and early 1980s referenced pop culture as one of its inspirations. Régine Chopinot's fascination with boxing and fashion shows (*K.O.K.*, the 1988 production which had Chopinot choreograph a boxing bout, and *Le Défilé*, with costume design by Jean-Paul Gautier); also deserving of mention are an interest in circus (and, later, in hip-hop and *parcour*) shared by Decouflé, Joseph Nadj and François Verret. The style of the Belgian company Ultima Vez, brought together by Wim Vandekeybus, has been shaped on one hand by the frenetic aesthetics of circus acts, and on the other by rock music and cinema. Not even Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker, a choreographer known for her minimalist tastes, has managed to avoid a dalliance with pop culture. *Rosas danst Rosas* (*Roses Dances Roses*), the 1982 debut of De Keersmaeker's company Rosas, introduced new ideas of physicality and the body to the stage, which at the time were as yet undomesticated in Europe, with the dancers creating a sort of emancipated eroticism with simple yet extremely precise choreographic techniques and with movements borrowed from everyday life. In stretched T-shirts and straight skirts, they anticipated the early days of girlie culture, though their performances had nothing in common with models of femininity promoted by popular culture. In this context, the case of the American star Beyoncé must be mentioned, whose

11 See Bel on his *The Last Performance*, recorded and translated by Joanna Warsza, http://www.obieg.pl/text/jw_tlp.php, accessed on 21 August 2007.

12 The category of non-place (*non-lieux*) has been proposed by the French sociologist Marc Augé as the opposite of the anthropological category of place, shaped by individual identities, the complexity of language, local references and the informal rules of operating within it. *Non-lieu* is effectuated in passages, transit and crossing boundaries: falling into this category are airports, shopping malls, railway stations and tourist villages – but also refugee centres. See Nick Kaye, *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 9–12. For instance, productions by the French company Gens d'Unterpan are organised in nightclubs and similar venues, while the duet Heine Avdal-Yukiko Shinozaki created a series of performances in hotels, supermarkets and public offices.

verbatim copying of excerpts from *Roses Dances Roses* choreography in her 'Countdown' drew focus for copyright infringement.

3.

In the works described above, manifestations and products of mass or pop culture are regarded as a sort of choreographic material, a resource that choreographers can draw on in their quests for new movement-related values. However, some contemporary dance artists go further than that. For them, pop culture is a kind of 'language', a meta-semantic message or instrument applied in order to modify the situation of the reception of movement.

Salsa becomes such an instrument in Emanuel Gat's work. The dance style provided the Israeli choreographer with a basis for his own version of *The Rite of Spring* (2004). Gat often talks about his fascination with pop culture, from films by Alfred Hitchcock and Quentin Tarantino to American hip-hop. His *Rite of Spring* makes use of a company-wide version of salsa, popular in Tel Aviv in the late 1980s, and different from the couples dance. For six months, Gat's ensemble worked with an Israeli instructor to learn group salsa.¹³ The reintroduction of folk dance (with salsa regarded as one) into the context of the tale of a primeval myth yields unexpected results. Soft movements and the smoothness of choreography, on the part of a production which includes dancing salsa, run counter to the score's rhythmicity and musical accents (at times in Gat's production, as in Nijinsky's version, dancers seem to dance against the music, following the complicated steps of collective salsa, independent of the music's rhythmical indexes). Yet Gat makes no changes to the basic deep structure of the ritual: it's a game, dominated from the outset by the unspoken fear that the loser will become the Victim, and the loser will be a Woman.¹⁴

Gisèle Vienne, also taking *The Rite of Spring* as her starting point, references the structure of ritual in her recent work *Crowd* (2017). In the piece, the French choreographer alludes to techno: the culture of mechanically generated electronic music, which in its earliest days stood on one hand for the fear of an unspecified catastrophe, and on the other for the joy of being able to witness the advent of the cyber era (this was particularly evident in accessories characteristic of the techno movement). By deconstructing the hedonist aesthetics of a vintage techno party, Vienne examines social relations, constructed and deconstructed in time with a crowd's slow-motion, co-ordinated gestures, saturated with symbolic violence. Every now and then, some 'elect one' attempts to break away from the throng. Thus, Gat's and Vienne's practices depict pop culture as the realm which took over the social functions related to ritual and to myth-creation.

Another example of dance being cast as a semantic net for the structure of a production is the Brazilian choreographer Bruno Beltrão's use

13 Theodore Bale, 'Dancing Out the Whole Earth: Modalities of Globalization in *The Rite of Spring*', *Dance Chronicle*, 31.3, 2008, pp. 324-369.

14 Joanna Szymajda, 'Wokół mitologii Święta wiosny – Niżyński, Béjart, Gat', in Święto wiosny. *Dwie perspektywy*, eds. Marta Szoka and Tomasz Majewski (Łódź: Akademia Muzyczna w Łodzi, 2014), pp. 145-157.

of hip-hop (including the 2009 production *H3*). Here, it has nothing to do with the carnivalesque and hardly anything to do with the spectacular. Hip-hop is regarded as a signal referring the audience to a specific social and economic reality. It's daring of Beltrão to put to use procedures of conceptual dance (exposing the structure, purifying the language of movement of surplus spectacular effects) – and this unexpected pairing enables him to reveal

hip-hop's previously unknown potential, and redefine the genre's social connotations, placing it within a different set of references.

The inclusion of hip-hop, rap, tango and salsa into Ohad Naharin's recent work for his Batsheva Dance Company, as it turned out, carried an extremely powerful message. *Venezuela* (2017) is a production permeated with political communications – with popular culture appearing in a similar role. Danced until the performers are almost out of breath, repeated ad nauseam in their perfection, tango and salsa sequences convey a lack of choice: we don't create popular culture, it creates us, constraining us and holding us captive. Because the music changes (from Gregorian chant to Bollywood hits) while the choreography stays the same, audience attention can focus on the touchline between choreography and music, where both emerge as manifestations of the same control and power.

The turn towards hip-hop or *parcours* demonstrates that contemporary dance is perpetually searching for a style which, derived from the sphere of popular practices and transformed with the use of contemporary choreographic instruments, would remain spectacular while also being 'ennobled', elevated to the status of 'high culture'. Present-day theatre is seeing the triumphant return of twerking (adapted from the New Orleans's 1980s independent scene) and of voguing, a dance which has been gaining popularity since the 1960s in clubs of Harlem and the African American drag-queen community. Thus voguing, for example, is used as the main reference point in *(M)imosa*, the 2011 production by the collective of Cecilia Bengolea, François Chaignaud, Marlene Monteiro Freitas and Trajal Harrell, which has the artists wondering what would happen if voguing dancers met the pioneers of postmodern dance. After all, the two trends developed in the same city and at the same time, but within disparate cultures.

Pop culture appears as a sort of meta-context in Jérôme Bel's productions, predominantly in his acclaimed *The Show Must Go On* (2011).¹⁵ Nineteen popular songs form the structural core of the piece, their titles arranged into a set of sequences which might as well belong in a piece of theoretical dance writing. 'Come Together', 'La vie en rose', 'Material Girl', '(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction', 'I Like to Move It', 'Let's Dance' – traces of the commonplace fantasy of an artist's thrilling life are quite easy to find in this sequence, which also offers an elegant, discreet commentary on the status of a professional dancer or a dance company, with their efforts to perpetually be at the peak of their own capabilities. By contrast, 'Imagine', 'The Show Must Go On', 'I'm Your Private Dancer', 'Every Breath You Take (I'll Be Watching You)' and 'I've Got the Power' make

15 The analysis of *The Show Must Go On* and *Big in Bombay* is abridged and edited from descriptions in Joanna Szymajda, *Estetyka tańca współczesnego w Europie po roku 1990* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013), pp. 75–77 and pp. 91–92.

reference to the structure of the production, and strictures in force there. About ten non-professional dancers appear in *The Show Must Go On*; a DJ sitting on the brink between stage and audience spins subsequent songs; those taking part in the production sometimes dance, as if at a party, freezing at other times in utter stillness.

Bel is extremely precise as he plays with meanings generated by this sparsely outlined situation. During 'Imagine', house lights go off – a sign for the audience to use their own imaginations. During 'La Macarena', the cast reproduce that same choreography, well known from the popular video – as if they had been set in motion by an invisible force. By contrast, when 'I Want Your Sex' is playing, performers simply stand at the proscenium, facing the audience. As it very quickly turns out, each song is a powerful stimulant to audience members' individual and collective memories. The structure of the production is pervaded with conceptual irony, playing with perceptions and theatrical principles. The audience take no satisfaction in observing the virtuosity of movement – they aren't even given the opportunity to do so, as there's nothing exceptional to see in the production, apart from a phantom of dance, a certain kind of matrix: the machinery of theatre, with its codes and principles, shaping the behaviour of both audience and performers on stage almost unconditionally, emerging as just such a matrix. It's telling that an audience's response to *The Show Must Go On* is usually very spontaneous: they act as fans would during a concert. The source of this response is people's subconscious attitude to pop culture, which they recognise as the realm of quotations, a sort of programme based on domesticated, globalised 'consumer-friendliness'.¹⁶

It would seem that the aesthetics proposed by Constanza Macras, the Argentinian choreographer working in Germany with her company Dorky Park, is radically different from those advanced by Bel. Macras' productions are immense undertakings, permeated with humour and the grotesque, frenetic extravaganzas of symbols and communications. They could be regarded as theatrical illustration of the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman's well-known argument for 'liquid modernity'. Right from its opening scene, *Big in Bombay* (2005) confronts audiences with ludicrous situational and character combinations: Mickey Mouse appears alongside the singer Jacques Brel, a white bear alongside a female Viking, with a narcissistic dance instructor, a gangster, a Lolita and a couple copulating compulsively, all thrown in for good measure. Macras is inspired by a plethora of theatre, musical, film and dance aesthetics. Indian, ballroom and contemporary dance, are all interwoven in *Big in Bombay*; each performer is characterised in a thoroughly individualised manner, while portraying more than one 'character'. The artificiality of the performance is further highlighted by exposing the backstage, where dancers change costume. The mood becomes a bit more meditative in the performance's second part, which can be regarded as an explication of the first part. Isolation, along with loneliness and the fear of it, are voiced in this section by a character in a video. The seemingly platitudinous contention that it

16 Johannes Birringer, 'Dance and Not Dance', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 27.2, 2005, pp. 10–17 (p. 15).

feels lonely to be part of the contemporary world is redeemed by a stark contrast involved in the transition from tumult to quietude.

In the end, the audience hasn't moved so far away from intuitions Bel might well recognise as his own. What we see are dancing bodies, not accumulating signs of mass culture so much as being unable to assimilate any one of them, as 'substitute identities' on offer in the complex catalogue of globalized culture turn out to be transient and fragile. In *Big in Bombay* by Macras, as in many of Bel's productions, fear of death, nothingness and emptiness is the supreme category, putting the entirety of discourse in order. The difference is that Macras covers up with the grotesque, excess and chaos – the very things Bel strives at all costs to expose.

The young Polish choreographer Marta Ziółek takes entirely different approach: self-ironic, but not given to rejecting realities of mass culture.. In her work, Ziółek based in Warsaw, deconstructs codes of pop culture while affirming their use. As with Bel, one cannot but recognise oneself (at least in part) in the mass of symbols and meanings used to construct the choreography, as if it were one enormous meta-quotation. The originality of Ziółek's works rests in their composition, but not in its component parts (a conscious decision on the choreographer's part). She confronts audiences with the question of whether any originality, other than that of palimpsest or transformation, remains possible. Ziółek suspends the distinction between signifier and signified, as that which is signified no longer refer to anything but itself. Cheap glamour, kitsch emotion, movement as a cultural code – nothing in mass culture can be for real, excepting mass culture itself. Ziółek rejects conceptual-dance aesthetics practiced by choreographers including Xavier Le Roy, whose 1998 production *Self Unfinished* can be regarded as an attempt to win the body back from mass-culture codes, a quest for 'pure' body, unburdened by shams of socialisation or consumptionism.

Ziółek does the exact opposite: she celebrates consumptionism as the contemporary human's inevitable predilection, laying bare the machinery of consumption, making use in the process of the entire scope of the means of theatrical expression. This is what her choreography for the 2016 production *Zrób siebie* [*Make Yourself*] (premiered at Komuna// Warszawa in May of that year) is like: it's a production about pop culture which has itself become a part of it, while also being a significant statement in the debate about the increasingly random nature of the identity-shaping process in the contemporary world.

4.

Contemporary dance, as an art stemming directly from experience since the modern era, cannot be indifferent to pop culture (a modern invention, after all). Dance's early modernist openness to themes taken from popular culture seems obvious when we bear in mind the dynamics of change and the range of entirely new aesthetics then taking shape. Today, however, after more than a century of experiments, there's been a change in expectations that choreographers face. Pop culture, and its relations with society, has become sufficiently complicated for such complications to be reflected in the aesthetics of a production that might be keen to reference pop culture. Pop culture produces its own rules and

knowledge, its own axiological and cognitive framework, and knowledge of these is vital to an ability to consciously operate from signs of pop culture.

Thus multi-tier structures of meaning, not dissimilar to those produced by Jérôme Bel, are a natural phase in the dynamics of these relations. In any case, it seems that Bel deserves credit for rehabilitating pop art as choreographic material worthy of artistic consideration, as an excellent meta-instrument for exploring relations between performers on stage and audiences, in that it makes use of a set of common codes, whether accepted or rejected. Another valuable development is working one's way through political dimensions of the practice of popular dance (tango, salsa, hip-hop) as symbols of class division and the reproduction of traditional gender roles. Interestingly, not all forms of this kind appeal to choreographers: their preference appears to be for the sexier ones. Which may be why, in contemporary Polish dance, there is a dearth of productions offering, say any in-depth analysis of disco polo, that wildly popular but frequently disdained phenomenon of the Polish pop-music scene.

Above all, however, pop culture amounts to global models surpassing national identities and influencing the shape of our needs and behaviours: a global perspective at odds with individual experience, celebrating the individual at the core of contemporary dance philosophy. This may be why contemporary dance is an ideal instrument for critical analysis of popular culture, in that it uses individualised movement practice to transform what has been imposed as universal. After all, dance knows no such thing as perfect unison. What's more, the uniqueness of performance art renders the basic precondition that must be met for a phenomenon to acquire a mass quality, the reproducibility of a copy, null and void.

Also in this context is another inherent principle of pop culture: the rule of delivering unconditional pleasure. Thus do conceptual trends in dance restore culture's emancipatory and critical potential, often overshadowed in the processes of industrialization and commodification of mass production. There remains the crucial (and open) question of whether contemporary dance is capable of 'winning back' the body – which, according to codes of pop culture, is no longer a subject, not even an interface, having become but a prop for a specific lifestyle. The imperfect body, returning to a mineral, organic reality that includes experiencing weariness, is a process running counter to the final phase – virtual and image-based – of the expansion of popular culture, where we cease to 'be' our bodies, and end up but having them.

Translated by Joanna Błachnio

WORKS CITED

- Bale, Theodore, 'Dancing Out the Whole Earth: Modalities of Globalization in *The Rite of Spring*', *Dance Chronicle*, 31.3, 2008, pp. 324-369
- Birringer, Johannes, 'Dance and Not Dance', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 27.2, 2005
- Brandstetter, Gabriele, *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*, trans. Elena Polzer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)
- Burt, Ramsay, *Alien Bodies. Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998)
- Franko, Mark, *Dancing Modernism / Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)
- Guilbert, Laure, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich. Les danseurs modernes et le nazisme* (Brussels : André Versaille Éditeur, 2011)
- Ignaczak, Jagoda, 'Taczanna Wysocka. Artystka niepokorna', in *Polskie artystki awangardy tanecznej*, ed. Joanna Szymajda (Warsaw: Instytut Muzyki i Tańca, Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2017), pp. 64-81
- Kaye, Nick, *Site-specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)
- Szymajda, Joanna, *Estetyka tańca współczesnego w Europie po roku 1990* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013)
- Szymajda, Joanna, 'Wokół mitologii Święta wiosny – Niżyński, Béjart, Gat', in *Święto wiosny. Dwie perspektywy*, eds. Marta Szoka and Tomasz Majewski (Łódź: Akademia Muzyczna w Łodzi, 2014)

ABSTRACT

Joanna Szymajda**I'm Your Private Dancer: Pop Culture in Choreographic Practice**

The text attempts to analyse the nature of the relationship between popular culture and contemporary dance, both of which are an inherent part of the turmoil of the modern social revolution, and which have remained in symbiosis since their earliest days.

The first part of the article presents examples of early Modernist practices, where popular culture was a natural component (as it were) of new strands of contemporary dance; on the other hand, some modern dance artists aspired to make theirs into a mass art. Section two portrays artists who deliberately include popular culture inspirations into their style, referencing the carnivalesque origins of dance practice. A further part takes an analytical, meta-discursive approach to the theme of popular culture as a feature in the critique of contemporary society – an approach characteristic of the youngest generation of choreographers. A summary of the above analyses presents modern dance as at once restoring culture's critical and emancipatory potential – and struggling in vain to entirely avoid the danger of objectifying the body.