

SPRING IN WAR TIME: POST-WAR EFFECTS ON BAUSCH'S

LE SACRE DU PRINTEMPS

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Pina Bausch's 1975 *Le Sacre du Printemps* begins with a woman laying face down on a peat-covered floor, separated from the dirt by a thin piece of red material. While Stravinsky's introduction to the "Adoration of the Earth" floats over the audience, she begins to stir and caress the ground beneath her as if just regaining consciousness. Was she dreaming? Is she regaining consciousness after a beating? The blood-red "pool" suggests the latter. Other women, clad in transparent calf length slips scurry past her then stop abruptly. The dancers are apologetic as they run to their positions, bowing and covering their faces with their slips, ashamed and pleading. They multiply: one, two, four, more. The audience perceives their growing numbers. Throughout the dance, they all interact with the ground, staining their once clean linens, a symbol of their impurity. From the first sound, the audience is engulfed in a dim, dark, brooding place, warm yet stark.

Bausch's *Le Sacre du Printemps* is one of many Rites staged since the hotly-debated premier of the Vaslav Nijinsky/ Igor Stravinsky original in 1913. According to dance scholar Susan Manning (1991), over 160 professional productions have been

catalogued, one-third of them German (p. 129).¹ Bausch's work is, perhaps, the most famous of those versions. Is there a particular reason why Germany has a special bond with the material? While many scholars, among them the UK-based choreographer and writer Ana Sanchez Colberg and the US-based performance studies scholar Karen Mozingo, have focused on gender roles and violence against women while studying Bausch's work, I take a different approach, focusing on Bausch's work in relationship to the political and cultural environment of 1970s Germany. I see Bausch's many-layered *Le Sacre du Printemps* in relationship to the German zeitgeist between 1940-1975, as reminiscent of World War II atrocities and reflective of the growing awareness of the war and its implications for young Germans in the 1970s.

"The Augurs of Spring": Methodology

While studying Bausch's version of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (which I will refer to as *Sacre* throughout the remainder of this paper), I was initially drawn to the relationships between the females and males, especially their interactions and the choreographer's gender choice for the Chosen One. I searched for other versions that cast the role of the Chosen One as a male, and found references to Glen Tetley's work, which was also conceptualized and choreographed in Germany. Bausch and Tetley's interpretations of *Sacre* were created quite closely in time, both premiering in Germany late in the Cold War. Tetley's version for the Bavarian State Opera Ballet in Munich took to the stage in 1974; Bausch's company, Tantztheater Wuppertal, presented her work for the first time in 1975.

¹ I imagine this number has/will change drastically due to the upcoming centennial celebrations of *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 2013 and the many festivals around the world that pay tribute to this milestone.

The zeitgeist of the 1970's was such that dancers were breaking out of the traditional mold to establish a new style of German modern dance, tanztheater.² According to Bausch biographer Royd Climengaga (2009), the taboos of German political culture were beginning to dissipate, allowing Germans to discuss their role and responsibilities during WW II. Tackling politics through dance was becoming important in order to be considered relevant as an artist (p.14).

Rather than pursuing a comparison of Tetley and Bausch in this paper, I explore the relationship between Bausch's work and the Germany zeitgeist. In addition to careful observation and analysis of Bausch's choreography, I have learned portions of the work in order to better understand its embodied messages. While appreciating the leaps of imagination necessary in placing myself within Bausch's dance, while learning the movement alone in a Canadian dance studio, the rhythms and tension of the female and male roles I learned helped me understand the divided landscape of Bausch's dance. In two sections of this paper, I describe the sensations that arose while dancing in hopes to bring the reader closer to the athletic and emotional difficulty of the original work. In addition, I have explored existing literature, especially Climenhaga's Bausch biography, critiques of Bausch's works, and cultural histories of 1970s Germany. As subheadings, I have used the titles of sections of Stravinsky's score, but not used in order. Like Bausch's dance, which did not strictly follow the established scenario, I hope to point to the recurring themes of many Rites--the gathering of opposing groups, the preparation of the Chosen One, the sacrifice--but in a way that reflects the progress of Bausch's dance and the meanings I find in it. In doing so, I nod to performance studies scholar Noémie Solomon whose article "Conducting Movement: Xavier Le Roy

² More information on the establishment of tanztheater will be included later on in this paper.

and the Amplification of *Le Sacre du Printemps*" uses the major sections of the score as subheadings.

"Dance of the Earth": A Description

Naked feet run along an unconventional stage that is covered in ankle deep peat moss. A mixture of balletic, athletic and weighted movements stem from the women's center as they enter the stage. Their transparent slips barely cover their bodies as they squat down to the floor and caress the soil. Stravinsky's score abates, and they suddenly become aware of a thin, red stole that rests softly on the black earth. Bare chested men present themselves, and the women scatter. No eye contact is made between the men and women. The women pass the material around while the men continue to dance in a group using only their torsos; no arm movements accompany their jolts and hops. Does the absence of the upper appendage movement point to their lack of allegiance to their duty? The men begin to intimidate the women, now using eye contact and handling their frail female frames. Sweat and dirt gather on their skin, male and female alike. One woman is chosen to wear the cloth, exposing her breasts, shame, fear and emotions. One male, her captor, is responsible for her care now. She clamors for help, pleading with her peers, stumbling over her own long extremities. No one can bear to look at her; no one offers his or her assistance. Everyone is frozen in fear for their own lives, and out of their own guilt. Once she has been chosen, there is solidarity between the sexes and they assemble to watch from afar as she dances herself to an emotional and compelling death. Her male captor lies on the peat with his arms outstretched to the heavens, as if asking for forgiveness.

"Evocation of the Ancestors": Isolation and Germany

Isolation plays an important role in most versions of *Le Sacre du Printemps*: Nijinsky, Bausch, Wigman and Tetley all rely on it. The isolation felt in German culture between the beginning of the War in 1939 and reunification in 1990 is echoed in Bausch's stage community which, as British dance historian Ramsey Burt describes, is being ripped apart at the seams (1995, p. 143). The Bausch men, active but limited in their movement, are reminiscent of Nazi soldiers doing their duties. I am reminded of stories of German soldiers, for example the memoir by Johann Voss (2002, a pseudonym) who, in *Black Edelweiss: A memoir of combat and conscience by a soldier of the Waffern-SS*, recounts stories about soldiers who did not believe in Hitler's Aryan race, but were terrified for their own lives and those of their families and so carried out atrocities against Jewish people. Under occupation by the Allies, Germany was divided into democratic West Germany and communist East Germany, leaving families separated from one another for decades. This was especially apparent in Berlin where, after 1961, the wall separated the already divided Germans. The Bausch men might also be soldiers in East Berlin with orders to keep escapees clear of the wall.

The women on Bausch's stage are torn from one another. They are a community, but they will betray one another in order to free themselves. The group takes comfort in numbers. After being confronted by the males, the females retreat as a group. Does this make them reliant on each other or are they merely using the groups as a place to hide as fearful teens do in high school? They don't want to be alone, so they join a group, any group, so as not to be picked on. The isolation that many people

feel during their teen years resonated with me while I watched Bausch's dancers tear away from one another, bending, panting, flailing and gasping.

While Sanchez-Colberg interprets the repetition of movement in Bausch's *Sacre* as reflective of a cycle of violence and abuse; I see it also as a nod to communist East Germany during the Cold War. The movements of the dancers are dictated, done in unison and the Chosen One is isolated from them. Whether there is separation by sexes, groups or individuals, the isolation of those who are not engaged in the repetitive movement is very apparent and important to the effectiveness of the choreography.

For years, the world was hesitant about Germany, due to constant reminders of the suffering of Jews at the hands of many Germans. Although Germany was re-united in 1990, this isolation was manifested to me nearly a decade later in 1999 when a German exchange student came to live with my family. He dealt with many questions about what 'his people' did, confirming the isolation of Germans dealing with the actions of previous generations. The aftermath of WW II and the isolation of Germany during the Cold War made for an interesting backdrop. How did it affect Bausch's choreography?

"Glorification of the Chosen One": Bausch's Development

Pina Bausch was born in Germany in 1940, in the midst of the Second World War. According to German dance critic Norbert Servos, Bausch danced from a very young age and joined the Folkwang school in Essen at the age of fourteen where she studied under Kurt Jooss (2012, p. 1). Throughout her life Bausch was a shy person, only expressing herself fully through dance. There were things that she longed to say that language did not allow; only movement had the vocabulary that expressed her

thoughts. According to biographer Climenhaga (2009), her reticent demeanor as an adult was intentional. Not only was she shy, but her lack of descriptions allowed audiences to dream and connect in their own ways (p. 40).

Living through WW II and the Cold War, Bausch was steeped in conflict and isolation. Only the final decades of her life were spent outside of a battleground. Born in the middle of WW II, Bausch had an innate understanding of conflict from a very young age. In her 2007 Kyoto prize acceptance lecture, she recollected bombings and being shipped off to her grandparents where she would be safer in larger shelters (2007, para 1).

There is very little written on Bausch's childhood before the age of fourteen when she began training with Jooss, but inferences to the material she studied can be made by inspecting the educational system of the time. Since there is no confirmation as to which elementary school she attended before dancing at Essen, I began to research German post-war textbooks. These would provide information on how she was educated about what she lived through. Contrary to my initial expectation that the facts of the war would have been suppressed, the texts went into detail about the horror and destruction wrought by the war including, according to Brian Puaca, (2005) a scholar who studies educational reform in Germany, Germans as victims (p. 126). Texts also skimmed over the notion that the German populace had a role in any war crimes. There was no acknowledgement that although Hitler and the select few in power gave orders, low-ranking soldiers in the Third Reich were direct participants in the atrocities. It was not until decades later, when Bausch choreographed *Sacre*, that texts would begin to reflect the role that individual Germans played in the genocide and to acknowledge that

inaction was equivalent to action. There was inference in fine art of the time that the new generation held a grudge toward their elders' inability to stand up for human rights, and a guilt that attached itself to Bausch's generation (Mozingo, 2005, p. 103).

Following the war, the Rhineland region of Germany was occupied by American allied power for approximately two months and then came under British authority. Soon after the Cold War began, Wuppertal (her, choreographic home), Essen (her educational home), and Solingen (her birthplace), were part of a democratic and relatively free world. This free and democratic way of life, as well as Bausch's later links to the United States allowed her subsequent choreographic work to push beyond the concepts of war and isolation that are present in *Sacre*. She was able to express herself without the hesitation of some of her counterparts who were under Soviet power.

In 1960 she received a scholarship to dance at Juilliard in New York City, and studied and worked with Paul Taylor, Antony Tudor and Jose Limon. She was isolated from her home during years of great turmoil in Germany when the Berlin wall was erected. Not only was she separated from her continent, her culture and her country but portions of her homeland were being divided into two and used as a battleground. The choreography that followed, *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Kontakt*, was affected by this isolation felt throughout her maturation as a human, a German, and an artist.

According to Mozingo (2005), Bausch's early works were rooted in her German heritage where she kept her audience and their collective cultural knowledge at the forefront (p. 98). Her commitment to Germany is seen not only by her years of service to her local theatre in the industrial town of Wuppertal, but also the fact that she

was a founder of a new, specifically German-born dance style. From the influence of Kurt Jooss' *Austruckstanz* and Bausch's penchant for the theatrical, came *tanztheater*. Confirming this theory is a quote from German dance critic Jochen Schmidt (1990, p. 40), which is also cited in Bausch's biography:

She not only deserves much of the credit for the unexpected ascent of the West German dance theater to one of the three major forces of New Dance in the world – alongside America's post-modern dance and Japan's *Butoh* – she engineered it almost singlehandedly. It's not mere presumption to say that her aesthetic sway in the world of contemporary dance is greater than that of any other choreographer today (Climenhaga, 2009, pg 19).

Many have written about her avant-garde work as theatrical performance, rather than dance. They are works of performance art that could not be held in one category. It is unlikely that she made a conscious decision to create a new style. It is more probable that she focused on expressing her mantra: "what moved her". Still, her dedication to building German culture and performance identity can be seen in her early choreography and the establishment of *tanztheater*.

"Ritual of the Rival Tribes": Male and Female Roles

Bausch's work is compelling because of its theatrical flair and emotionally charged movements. After seeing it for the first time, I wondered why the woman had to die. Why not the man? If the female possesses the body in which the life cycle begins, shouldn't the rite of passage be a cycle of life and rebirth instead of death? Some might argue death is a part of the cycle and is thus necessary for the cyclical form. In my own imagined version (which has yet to be choreographed), the female would be reborn to

better symbolize the newness of life, the pain and struggle that females endure to repopulate (the sacrifice) and the ability we have as women to be reborn through our children. Bausch did not identify herself as a creator of feminist dance, often asserting, according to Sanchez-Colberg, that she was somewhat offended by the accusation (1993, p. 152). But as Sanchez-Colberg suggests, “Whether or not she [Bausch] uses the term feminism to name her work is irrelevant.”

La Feminine

Bausch’s dancers are flawed, and slightly awkward. They do not possess the traditional bodies of dancers normally seen in professional companies. According to Valerie Briginshaw, British dance scholar, they are open with their flaws and fragmentations (1993, p. 112). Not thought of as limitations, Bausch’s dancers use their unique bodies and personalities to their advantage as performers. In *Sacre*, Bausch’s dancers move spastically as if trying to outsmart death, pleading for their lives and hoping that someone else will be the Chosen One. The following is a description of my emotional and physical sensations, which lead me to a better understanding the work from within.

I stand up slowly, close my eyes and take the position of the Chosen One standing alone, in front of my peers. In the music I sense urgency and foreboding as my head falls back and forth, circular, dead and sick. I feel the bones in my neck twist and rotate slowly.

I feel my peers coming up behind me. Pulsating. Pushing. Volunteering me. I sense fear. My fingers freeze while I plead with myself: “If I’m still, they can’t see me.” Tears well up as a pair of hands grab me from behind, thrusting strong digits into the

fleshy part of my arms. Stumbling forward I am coerced into each step as this strong figure places me where he desires. He walks me through my peers, as if to make an example of me. He gives me one last look as my peers stare back at me with frightful, sorrowful eyes as if to say they are sorry it had to be me.

Finally, I'm set free. I walk forward with trepidation and suddenly see my death. I recoil clutching at my clothes, protecting my soft middle. For a fleeting moment, I ponder the worse of the two options: death or an oppressed life. But as I feel their eyes boring into my back, piercing my shoulder blades and heating my neck, I know that death is inevitable. With vigor, I break and collapse to the floor, bruising my right knee and feeling a dull pain in my wrist. I taste the dirt on the floor as I hit my mouth. I spring to life, fighting back.

Every movement emanates from my center with a throbbing that I can't control. I'm wild and flailing; reaching left, circle-gather with my right side. Recoil, then throw myself up and down saying yes and no simultaneously with my body. This is my internal conundrum. I keep fighting then slink back. Repeat. Stretch my arms out from my heart, feeling the muscles in my biceps stretch as I plead for my life and return to my inner struggle.

Stop.

My shoulders feel connected to my ears, elbows right and left, muscles tense throughout and eyes transfixed.

I just remembered to breathe.

Huuuuahhh.... huaaaah... huuuuaaaahh...

I run backward in case they will catch me if I am too still. Maybe there is a chance I could still get away. I feel the slap of my right hand, hot on my left thigh, trembling, flailing, kicking, contorting, literally dancing for my life. My head is dizzy, my neck, sore and my breathing, labored. I pull back into my stopped position with shoulders past my ears and I fall to the floor in a huffing, sweaty mess. My head is spinning and tears begin to fall.

Many other scholars see depictions of violence against women and while I agree, I also see a political world of war that Bausch knew as a child. These feelings of isolation are human, not gender specific. Sanchez-Colberg likens the females to victims, while the males are aggressors (1993, 155). By presenting the plight and burdens of females as a gender, the audience can relate to female struggles: puberty, maturation, and having the burden/joy of incubating and giving life, but humans of either gender can relate to the idea of isolation in war time, in their schools, or in their families.

During portions of Bausch's work, many of the men and women do not use their arms, but had them lying close at their sides. Is their lack of arm movements expressing their limited ability to help one another? The Jewish people were all in the same situation, forced out of their homes and away from their families, unable to help one another, which I found reflected in the females in Bausch's work. All they could do was try to protect themselves and try to make it through. Maybe they would be saved, but it would mean that they couldn't risk being the Chosen One. There is always fear in being isolated. You might remember your bubbling stomach when called on in elementary school to give a presentation in front of your peers. Everyone is staring at you, and you begin to feel pressure on your shoulders and sweat on your palms.

Bausch's dancers were always asked to draw upon their emotions and experiences to create work together: maybe something as mundane as isolation in a classroom or something as extreme as the isolation of war and abuse. Dancers are usually very empathetic, allowing them to draw upon emotions of a collective memory, which in this case, I believe to include the political realm. The dancer's stake in the politics of this role is seen in the following quote from Mechtild Grossman, one of Bausch's company members, captured in a profile by scholar Carol Martin (1986, pp. 104-105): "Politics is not simply what governments do. It is what each person does by the way he or she lives her or his life. If the people in the 1930's [had] stopped obeying, fascism would have never had a chance" (quoted in Mozingo, 2005, p. 103). From this quote we can glean that the generation of Bausch's company dancers were also affected by the war, how it harmed their German pride and human pride. The understanding is such that females of the new generation feel guilt and shame by their elder's helplessness and inactivity (Mozingo, 2005, p. 103). According to Mozingo, the ability to blunt the force of the war would have begun in the home, where the female holds more power than is realized in the family structure.

Le Masculin

After thinking deeply about the females, I shifted my focus to the males. I interpreted their tied down appendages as an internal conundrum for the males/soldiers. Are they reflecting a restrained version of soldiers going about their duties because they don't believe fully in the genocide of a race? Are they afraid of what they are doing? Or what they have done? Or what might happen to them if they don't comply with their orders?

The males in Bausch's *Sacre*, seem unfeeling and lifeless, with no purpose in attacking the women, they seem to just be going through the motions of a directive. I interpret the men to be members of a society in which they realize they are not at risk, as the ritual sacrifice is for "others": females, foreigners and those who are not of pure blood. Many scholars have provided evidence to support the woman's victimization argument, but I suggest that Bausch embraced the world that she knew while growing up, a world always devastated by some sort of war, conflict or devastation which skewed the views of so many of her German brothers. The following expresses my efforts with the male role, which brought me closer to building my thesis on the male perspective.

I stand behind her, while her body trembles. I try not to pay attention, so I can do my job. My posture is tall and extended; I can feel each muscle stretch across my chest. I am rigid. My hands do not hang loosely at my sides, but instead are tensed as if ready to catch her, wanting to help her. My strong hands grab her sinewy shoulders as I direct her to the others. Perhaps someone else will take her place. She trembles, I sweat as I herd her along. It is my duty. My steps are deliberate, heel toe, heel toe, heel toe. I feel the breeze against my skin as others dart past, averting their eyes. The group begins to close in on us, their eyes filled with fear and anxiety, yet my feet continue in their dutiful way, heel toe, heel toe, as I grind the dirt beneath my feet. My shoulders begin to sag as I realize the fear in her eyes. I turn her away from the group to try to ease her fear. I push her away with trembling fingers, my wrists recoil and my heart sinks. As she stands isolated from the group, chosen and terrified, I cannot lower my hands. The tension in my hands grows. I deeply want to help her but I am paralyzed. There is a

moment of calm. I am hit hard by a slap of guilt. I have condemned her. I have done this. I am a traitor. My guilt emanates from within me, my shoulders begin to give way, my head lowers as I crouch to the floor and skim my hands over my knees for support. I feel out of breath and lower myself to the soft peat, vertebrae by vertebrae until my head gently touches the ground. I have failed her and the guilt is too much. I reach up for forgiveness, knowing that I cannot take back what I have done. Traitor. Guilt overtakes me.

While I echo Sanchez-Colberg's thoughts on female victimization, after dancing a portion of the work I do not entirely agree with the males as aggressors. The men in Bausch's work come off as passive, not particularly aggressive, because they knew they were not in danger (Burt 1995, p. 143). Perhaps this is how Bausch has chosen to express her guilt and the guilt of Germans for the role they felt they played in so much destruction? While a generalization, it could also be perceived that men are more apt to mask their emotions with a strong façade as a way of coping. The shame the men feel can be reflected by their duties, as if they have no other choice but to ensure that one woman is sacrificed for the good of the community. Does this signify that the men are ashamed of their inability to break out of their set responsibilities? Or their hand in others' suffering? Or the fact that they do not have enough courage to fight for basic rights for other human beings? Where I find the shame and guilt in Bausch's work is here, where the men, covered in dirt, will always be blemished, knowing that they had a hand in other people's suffering.

"Ritual Action of the Ancestors": Blut und boden

The concept of "blut und boden" (blood and soil) was a phrase used in Nazi Germany,

developed by Walther Darré and adopted by Adolf Hitler to promote his power. Darré was a race theorist, who believed that the Germans had a right to their own land because of their pure bloodline. He believed, according to historian Clifford Lovin (1967) that the secret to maintaining and expanding German power was through land ownership and the expulsion of foreigners (p. 282). Because the Jewish people did not have their own land (referring to them as wanderers), he would not welcome them to use German soil, as it belonged to those of pure Nordic blood. To Hitler, Darré's theories extended his personal search for world domination (Lovin, 1967, p. 288). This propaganda allowed the Nazi party to take land back from the Jewish people on Kristallnacht, leaving them homeless and making it easier for the genocide that followed. In my opinion, remnants of racist propaganda are alluded to throughout this version of *Sacre*. The red dress, for example, represents the blood, and the soil, which Bausch had covering her stage was a nod to Darre's theory and, subconscious or otherwise, the war's influence on Bausch's choreography.

The accouterments of *Sacre* speak to wartime, and so do the movements that Bausch has choreographed so that the dancers look like they are tilling the soil. The sweat and dirt covered bodies look as though the performers have completed a hard day's work. As they raise their clasped hands above their heads and thrust their strong arms down, knees weighted, they give the image of cultivating the land furiously. The women begin this process at the dance's commencement, working hard and being joined only by the men when it was too late, and they could not save the Chosen One. Once again, I interpret the females as the Jewish people being forced to be slaves to their captors. Their anguish can be seen on their faces. The men, the soldiers, are

carrying out their duties, objectifying these women, raping them and making their lives a nightmare until their surrender. Once the Chosen One begins the dance to her death, the others realize what they have done. They quickly take comfort in each other and are still, realizing the part they played in others' suffering or trying to rebuild their lives after being subjected to this abhorrence. This newfound camaraderie and guilt speaks to the years of rebuilding between the fall of Hitler and the Cold War.

"Spring Rounds"

Nijinsky's original choreography as well as Roerich's scenes and costuming reflected a vernacular theme, jarring the audience in its 1913 premiere and leaving the audience to riot. Bausch decided upon emotional and very athletic movements, jarring her audience with a soil-covered floor and transparent costumes, leaving her dancers' hearts beating out of their chests and audiences conflicted. The angst and power that emanates from her work transcends borders and genders to occupy the human part of our hearts. They speak to our own insecurities and personal feelings of isolation: personal and societal, waiting to be sprung into the next chapter, cycle, or season.

I am certain that Bausch assumed a particularly German identity in her work, if even subconsciously, and that the isolation of growing up in war time and beyond had an effect on her choreographic work and the themes she chose to express. The cultural and political landscape and aftermath of war that Bausch experienced must have affected how she developed her choreography. If I, a Canadian with limited ties to Germany and forty years removed can feel the impact of the historical circumstance, surely a German choreographer who lived through these experiences would have connected with these nuances. And, of course, Bausch's young German audiences,

sitting in the opera house at Wuppertal, would have been keenly aware of their own histories.

The creation of Bausch's *Sacre* was built not just on the original Nijinsky libretto, but Bausch's working philosophy of what moved her dancers coupled with the experience of war-torn Germany as she matured. You can see the fear, isolation and conflict in The Chosen One's eyes as she dances herself to death. You can feel the red dress burning your hands. You can taste metal in your mouth as she lays face down in the pool of blood and soil. These are not only movements that are fueled by the inner performer's human feelings but are subtly molded by the choreographer and the zeitgeist in Germany from 1940 - 1975.

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