Dance on the Page, Poetry on Stage: 
Encounters between Modernist German Poetry and Dance

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Abstract

This dissertation examines themes of identity, kinesthetic empathy, movement and rhythm, materiality, and corporeality in texts and performances, past and contemporary, that stage encounters between German-language modernist lyric poetry and dance. While prominent traditions of scholarship look at the intermediality of art forms as a defining feature of modernism, dance has received significantly less scholarly attention than other art forms. This is particularly remarkable given the fact that many modernist authors were drawn to dance and that the writings of early modern dancers repeatedly called for the establishment of dance as an art form level with music and poetry. Dance of the early 20th century and the field of dance studies offer literary and cultural studies a unique system of knowledge production, by which I mean practices that contribute to the development and circulation of new concepts and methods. By taking an interdisciplinary approach to examining instances of dance in modernist German poetry, this project aims to provide insight into why the dancer was such an attractive subject for poets as well as to highlight the gaps and tensions between dancing and writing.

With the trope of dance in lyric poetry as a point of departure, I bring well-known dance poems and less commonly discussed poems of the period into dialog with the theories of poetics and theories of modern dance that emerged during the early part of the 20th century. In an effort to further work against a text/performance dichotomy, the final chapter undertakes a study of contemporary choreographic works of the past few decades that stage a modernist poetic text. Combining analyses and close readings of poetry, poetic theories, archival materials, performances, and theoretical conversations that intersect literary and dance studies, the project seeks to broaden the ways in which people view and discuss the role of dance in and for modernist German poetry as well as poetry within contemporary dance performances. An interdisciplinary look at the modernist dance-poetry intersection demonstrates that many questions and concepts of interest to modernists receive renewed or continued attention today.
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Introduction

Danser: est-ce remplir un vide?
Est-ce taire l’essence d’un cri?—
C’est la vie de nos astres rapides
prise au ralenti.¹
--Rainer Maria Rilke

To dance: to fill a void?
To conceal the essence of a scream?
It is the life of our rapid stars
captured in slow motion.²
--Rainer Maria Rilke

Despite their inherent medial differences, poetry and dance repeatedly intersect in writing and in performances. In the lines above, we not only find an intersection of the concept of dance with lines of poetry penned by one of the best known German-speaking modernist poets but an example of the ways in which dancers, poets, and their artworks engaged with one another during the early part of the 20th century. In 1913, a year after he had heard of her performances, poet Rainer Maria Rilke became acquainted with the German modern dancer Clotilde von Derp³ at her mother’s house in Munich. He would develop a lasting friendship with her and her Russian dance partner Alexander Sacharoff, who would later become her husband. Rilke was not only a friend but also an admirer of von Derp, with whom he occasionally took in other genres of art like a theatre

¹ Along with these verses, which he penned in an issue of Valéry’s poetry, Rilke wrote: “À Clotilde Sacharoff - au jour de Ste Clotilde - admirativement, amicalement depuis toujours: R (Paris, ce 3 juin 1925)” (Peter 139).
² Translation my own.
³ Clotilde von Derp was a stage name for Clotilde Margarete Anna Edle von der Planitz. In the 1910s and 1920s, she was lauded as one of the premiere German modern dancers of her time.
More than once, Rilke presented von Derp with poetry by contemporary German- or French-speaking poets. Inscribed in one such gift—an issue of Paul Valéry’s magazine containing his poetry cycle *La dormeuse*—were the lines of poetry above, a dedication to Clotilde handwritten by Rilke in French. These lines, together with well-known poems, essays on art, and some of his musings in letters to Clotilde, provide evidence of Rilke’s fascination with and contemplation of the art of dance beyond his acquaintance with a particular dancer or performance. Valéry’s presence in the equation represents yet another intersection of dance and poetry, to which I turn more attention in the first chapter; Valéry wrote on dance and poetry and is often paraphrased in the analogy: poetry is to prose as dancing is to walking.\(^5\)

The friendship and mutual respect shared by Rilke and the Sacharoffs continued and continues to resonate throughout the 20\(^{th}\) century and today. In addition to scholarship by Germanist Klaus W. Jonas and by dance scholar Frank-Manuel Peter, the 2014 documentary about the dancers uses a quotation from Rilke as its title—*Poeten des Tanzes – Die Sacharoffs* (Tinbergen). It is relevant to the study of the intersection of dance and poetry with other arts, as evidenced by Rilke’s interest in and engagement with the art of dance.

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\(^4\) Their correspondence has been well-documented and translated into English by Klaus W. Jonas and documented in *Die Sacharoffs: Zwei Tänzer aus dem Umkreis des Blauen Reiters* (2002)—a bilingual volume published by Frank M. Peter and Rainer Stamm.

\(^5\) Valéry writes extensively about walking versus dancing in his essay “Poetry and Abstract Thought,” and his most concise statement of the analogy occurs after asking readers to consider a small child who learns to walk and talk around the same time and develops in his faculties from there. In his translation of the essay, Charles Guenther offers more accurate equivalent to Valéry’s oft-paraphrased sentiment: “So just as with *walking* and *dancing*, the opposite types, *prose* and *poetry*, will be placed and distinguished in him” (223, emphasis in original).
modernist poetry and dance that Rilke saw von Derp and Sacharoff as poets in their own medium—thus demonstrating that he viewed the creation of modern dance and modernist poetry as processes akin to one another. A further resonance of the relationship between the Sacharoffs and Rilke is the legitimizing function of Rilke’s words for audiences today. While the use of such literary prestige to draw attention to dance can be seen as positive, the fact that the names of several poets of the era are recognizable to the most German speakers while prominent dancers of the era are hardly known by either a general or academic audience also demonstrates the stature of literature in contrast to dance while also highlighting the limitations of the dance medium to reach a wide audience.

Though originally written to an admired dancer and friend, Rilke’s four lines in French to Clotilde von Derp have since been published within his collected works and cited in scholarship, yet it is often treated in passing as an example of his correspondence and engagement. A close reading of the quotation with attention to resonances with the broader discourses surrounding literature, dance, and modernism reveals similarities between the two art forms and a framing of dance as quintessentially modernist in the eyes of Rilke. The first line of the dedication starts as a definition would; the infinitive of the verb ‘to dance’ is followed by a colon. Dancers and dance scholars of the early 20th century frequently sought to define, not only via their movement style but in writing as well, what dance is or should be. Similarly, essays on the lyric genre often involved defining. Rilke’s verse can thus be framed as an extension of this modernist impulse to renew art forms and define them anew. How Rilke defines dance—in form as well as in words—is telling. He begins with two questions, repeated gestures of approximation and interrogation. Is it… ? This act of questioning, like the act of defining, resonates with
modernity, its constant questioning, and its break with tradition. Arriving at a statement, the verses do suggest what dance is, but the progression through questions to a statement emphasizes process over answer; he performs the act of seeking to define.

Each potential definition of ‘to dance’ also touches on at least one theme emblematic of modernism: a sense of emptiness, a scream, the celestial, and a reaction to the increasing pace of life and its technologies. Confronted with the chaos of modern life and the destruction caused by the First World War, modernists wrestled with emptiness and uncertainty. To dance in this era could be to fill or attempt to fill a void. The enigmatic character of modern life created an anxiety perhaps most memorably captured by Edvard Munch’s “The Scream” (1893), an icon of modernity. A fascination with the primitive as well as the often-cited universal nature of the language of dance are echoed in the essence of a scream that dance may be attempting to conceal in Rilke’s verse. Many artists sought to find new ways to get at the nature or essence of things and people, and for some, dance offered this.

A marked pause in questioning inverts the questions into a statement as the quatrain comes to a close: to dance is to capture in slow motion the rapid movement of our stars. This densely packed couplet touches on the celestial, the swift pace of our lives, and the possibility or desire to suspend the fleeting. I will return to the theme of the celestial in dance and poetry in the second chapter; it is found across poetic and modern dance styles. Whether related to the harmony of the spheres, relativity, or metaphysical conceptualizations, stars and other heavenly bodies circulate through many types of modernist poetry, including dance poems. The speed of the stars as well as the notion of catching them in slow motion, relate to the frenetic pace of modernity, images of city life
and technology, and the continued development of media technologies that capture moments or movements: photography, chronophotography, and film. The idea of capturing something in slow motion can also be connected to dance’s ability to create heightened presence; though an art form often defined by its ephemerality, dance provides a new way to experience human bodies in motion and in relation to one another while exploring concepts akin to those found in modernist poetry. This dedication along with more conventionally published forms of dance poetry of the time period engaged with dance as a medium that encapsulated the embodied, dynamic, ever-moving qualities of the period, fraught with the impulse to break with tradition and define itself anew.

As demonstrated briefly via the dedication in verse from Rilke to Clotilde von Derp, theories and themes from both art forms in the early 20th century resonate with each other. Modernist lyric poetry shares with modern dance a focus on form, a plurality of schools or movements responding to a traditional aesthetic, a non-narrative structure, and attention to temporal and spatial dimensions. Furthermore, both art forms address the modernist attention to the human body and to the individual within society. A focus on embodied behaviors was something that was prevalent across many facets of cultural production and everyday life in the early 20th century. Many questions and concepts that interested the modernists receive renewed or continued attention today. Kinesthetic empathy, for example, was first articulated in the late 19th and early 20th century. Over the last 10 to 15 years, prominent dance scholars as well as psychologists interested in movement therapy have increasingly turned their attention to empathy and kinesthetic empathy.
While prominent traditions of scholarship look at the intermediality of art forms as a defining feature of modernism, dance has received significantly less scholarly attention than other art forms. This remains the case despite the fact that many modernist authors were drawn to dance and that the writings of early modern dancers repeatedly called for the establishment of dance as an art form level with music and poetry. Though dance is also used as a metaphor in the writings of the early 20th century, many poets and visual artists depict dance as dance, experimenting with bringing movement into their respective media. In the sections that consider dance poetry or dance in poetry, I am thus primarily concerned with how writers write dance and what dance offers modernist poets beyond its figurative use to represent something else. I aim to provide insight into why the dancer was such an attractive subject for poets as well as highlight the gaps and frictions between dancing and writing.

Dance of the early 20th century and the field of dance studies offer a unique system of knowledge production, by which I mean practices that contribute to the development and circulation of new concepts and methods. In dance, this knowledge is primarily constituted by movement practices that are then performed, taught, and theorized. It thus emphasizes corporeality, the ephemeral quality of performance, and the meeting of practice and/as theory. This project examines themes of identity, kinesthetic empathy, movement and rhythm, materiality, and corporeality in texts and performances, past and contemporary, that stage encounters between modernist lyric poetry and dance. Each of these terms could be worthy of its own study, but when allowing myself to experience these texts and performances as well as their resonances with each other and other cultural phenomena, the aforementioned themes all surface and intersect in
numerous ways. It thus becomes difficult to consider the role of kinesthetic empathy or materiality without considering corporeality, identity, and how movement works. By investigating how reciprocal discourses of the evolution of modern dance and various veins of modernist poetry intersect with and inform one another both in the way in which dance was written in German poetry of the 20th century and the way in which dance performances, past and contemporary, incorporate poetry, I examine the continuities, frictions, and nuances of encounters between dance and poetry.

Integral to this project are a few working definitions that help to sketch out the parameters of this intersection: dance poems, dance, and modernist dance. When discussing the poems relevant to this study, I often term them dance poems or dance poetry. By this I mean poems that relate significantly to dance or take dance as their focus. Many such poems are identifiable by their titles, as they employ a word related to dance, the name of a famous dancer, or a similarly clear indicator. Several relevant poems are anthologized in Gabriele Brandstetter’s Aufforderung zum Tanz. Geschichten und Gedichte (1993); others appear in special issues of journals or were penned by dancers and exist in archival materials. Though such poems may sometimes be interpreted as metaphorical, most of them treat dance as dance, whether or not that dance can also represent another event, action, or experience.

I choose to consider dance broadly, including dance performance, social dance, and most other situations in which a dancing subject would call their action dance. What I consider dance involves the performance of rhythmical sequences of movement. The dance need not be performed on a stage or by a person with particular training, though many instances of dance in poetry do refer to stage dance. Similarly, I choose I use the
term *modernist dance* rather than modern dance, expressionist dance, or other
designations in order to consider the broadest range of social and artistic dance practices
of the period. In doing so, I follow in what Kate Elswit masterfully accomplishes in her
*Watching Weimar Dance* (2014): examining a broad range of dance practices, her
analysis of audience reception of dance in the Weimar Republic disrupts the notion that
German *Ausdruckstanz*, practiced by dancers like Mary Wigman, should be regarded as
representative for German dance of the period. Within my own study, I regard the dances
performed by the likes of Mary Wigman, Isadora Duncan, Vaslav Nijinsky, Josephine
Baker, the Wiesenthal sisters, club-goers, and many others as different in style yet
relevant. Their choreographies, and even their improvisations, may not fall under what is
generally considered *modern dance* or *expressionist dance*; they are all, however,
modernist in their own right, and as much as they differ from one another, they are
similar in their general temporal moment and their breaks with traditions.

Monographs on the intersections between dance and modernist literature have
appeared in English, language and area studies, and more recently, in the field of dance
studies. In the late 60s and early 70s, several scholars of German, English, and American
literature studied the trope of dance within the poetry of certain poets for whom dance
was a prominent theme. Dietgard Kramer-Lauff’s *Tanz und Tänzerisches in Rilkes Lyrik.*
(1969) traces the presence of dance throughout Rilke’s oeuvre, performing close readings
of Rilke’s poetry. Kramer-Lauff analyzes not only the image of dance in various poems
but also the formal elements of the poems that possess a dance-like quality. Audrey T.
Rodgers’s *The Universal Drum: Dance Imagery in the Poetry of Eliot, Crane, Roethke,
and Williams* (1979) discusses the diverse types of dance imagery as a means of
expressing the “transcendent” experience. The study posits dance as a means for poets to explore ritual and reach beyond logic during a time of alienation. She acknowledges, as many in the field do, that the impulses of modern dance and modern poetry were similar in their attitudes toward the past, “reality,” and a desire to break from tradition while reaching back to more primitive traditions.

Edited volumes like Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen’s *What is Dance?: Readings in Theory and Criticism* (1983) contain essays that address dance by authors such as Mallarmé, Valéry, and Kleist and provide a foundation for a dialog between dance and literary studies. Alongside these texts in translation, Copeland and Cohen have articles by dance scholars, including Frank Kermode’s “Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev.” Ellen Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy’s *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (1995) brings together scholars from the fields of dance studies and literary and cultural studies to explore the intersection of two fields often seen as divergent. These volumes draw on writings by dancers, choreographers, philosophers, and authors to explore theories of dance and moving bodies within texts from a broad range of epochs; they mark a shift towards an increasingly interdisciplinary approach.

Gabriele Brandstetter’s *Tanz-Lektüren: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde*, first published in 1995, initiated a scholarly trajectory in Germany of bringing the emerging discipline of dance studies into conversation with cultural and literary studies that continues to gain momentum in the United States and Europe. Her influential work was recently republished in an expanded edition that was translated into English in 2015 under the title *Poetics of Dance: Body, Image, and Space in the Historical Avant-Gardes*. Brandstetter uses a broad range of textual genres, images, and
archival materials to present dance as a form of discourse and to analyze images of bodies, movement, and the development of dance education from the “Kulturkrise um 1900” through the Weimar Republic. Predominantly analyzing visual cues and language, Brandstetter makes compelling cases for the visual signs that connect dance, literature, and theatre in first decades of the 20th century, drawing on key pieces of theoretical writing by the likes of Derrida, de Man, and Mallarmé.

In the past decade, several books in German, English, and French studies have examined new facets of the intersections between dance and literature. In her monograph *Dances of the Self in Heinrich von Kleist, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Heinrich Heine* (2006), Lucia Ruprecht turns to both canonical and less known texts of the 19th century to explore concepts of dance and subjectivity. English dance scholar Susan Jones recently published *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (2013). Jones, like many others, reaches across languages and borders to bring together dance and literature exemplifying a range of modernist motifs and resisting the reduction of modernism and dance to any singular narrative. Many small chapters form case studies that consider related authors and dancers or dance styles and repeatedly broaden the ideas of what constitutes movement and the modernist aesthetic.

Appropriate the field of dance studies, intersections between dance and literature have not only taken place within scholarship but also on stage. A traditional staging of literature via dance was the storybook ballet, but beginning in the early 20th century, dancers incorporated poetry and other non-narrative texts in their performances. During the last several decades, contemporaneous with the trend of engaging with past dance works within contemporary dance performances that Yvonne Hardt identifies in her
contribution to New German Dance Studies (217), several German or Germany-based choreographers have staged modern poetry within dance performances that range from ballet to tanztheater to variété to conceptual dance. Though choreographers have engaged with poetic works on stage for at least a century—several examples of the staging of poetry alongside dance can be found in the Dada cabaret scene around 1919-1921—the trend to reconstruct or cite well-known modernist dance works together with the increased attention to medial possibilities on stages in German dance make the contemporary German stage particularly ripe for staging modern poetry within dance productions. The modernist poems clearly resonate with choreographers and present an opportunity to translate poetry to an audience that experiences it off the page. The collaborations of poets and choreographers, past and present, result in a fusion of artistic disciplines that could broaden concepts of reading, writing, and movement. Ideally, it also broadens what constitutes scholarship.

This dissertation focuses specifically on dance’s intersection with poetry—lyric and experimental. It brings well-known dance poems and less commonly discussed poems of the period into dialog with the theories of poetics and theories of modern dance that emerged during the early part of the 20th century. It investigates how discourses pertaining to the evolution of modern dance and modernist poetry intersect with and reciprocally inform one another—both in the way dance was written in German poetry of the 20th century and the way in which dance performances, past and contemporary, incorporate poetry. In an effort to further work against a text/performance dichotomy, the final chapter of the dissertation undertakes a study of contemporary choreographic works of the past few decades that stage modernist poetic texts. This analysis of contemporary
performances, which present a range of aesthetics as they engage with texts on stage, introduces a new conversation into the area of dance and literature, specifically into German and Austrian Studies. Combining analyses and close readings of poetry, poetic theories, archival materials, performances, and theoretical conversations that intersect literary and dance studies, the project seeks to broaden the ways in which people view and discuss the trope of dance in poems as well as poetry within contemporary dance performances.

The first chapter considers the recurrent trope of dancing afire in modernist dance poetry, essays on dance by poets and choreographers, and in dance performances. In a range of different poems, instances of dancing afire evoke moments of kinesthetic empathy and are also often tied to the identity of the dancing body. Modernist writings on dance and the experience of a dance performance, written by modern dance pioneers as well as philosophers, provide comparisons and insights into how the tropes in these poems resonate with explorations of fire in dance writings and performances across genres and styles. Taking Rilke’s well-known dance poem “Spanische Tänzerin” as a starting point, I also consider how a variety of canonical and less-known dance poems employ dancing afire as a means of conveying the multisensory, embodied experience of dancing afire and/or witnessing such an act. The close readings and broader analysis aim to give insight into the way fire allows an expression of multiple layers of the inherently interpersonal experience of dance—as dancer, audience member, or another subject position—while tying concepts of kinesthetic empathy and identity to the modernist epoch.
An analysis of the discourse of dance throughout the expressionist literary journal, Der Sturm, a publication most often studied in terms of its literary circle, various artistic movements, particular contributors, or the founder Herwarth Walden, forms the second chapter. Attention to the discourses and forms of art that engage with dance shows that contributors to Der Sturm, representing several movements and styles, considered dance an important part of discussing and theorizing culture and the arts in the early 20th century, especially in regards to an evolving concept of rhythm as vital to all art forms.

Though I argue that the publication of August Stramm’s avant-garde poetry in Der Sturm in 1914 and 1915, which included his poem “Tanz” (“Dance”) (15 April 1914), marks the beginning of a more unified poetics of movement in the “Wortkunst” of Der Sturm, an approach that Walden and others championed, dance was the focus of reviews, performances, and literary pieces throughout the life of the journal, published from 1910 - 1932. A case study of Der Sturm, with special attention given to the virtually unknown female poet and dancer Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup and the poet and dancer Willy Knobloch who danced with Anita Berber under the stage name Sebastian Droste, demonstrates the centrality of movement and rhythm to Expressionism. In short, beyond being a common trope in poetry, dance provided a new way to frame the ideal of a poetic style.

Encounters between modernist poetry and dance are not limited to the page. A brief interlude bridges the second and third chapters, making a transition from chapters that center on poems to the final chapter that considers contemporary dance performances. Beginning with one of the most famous examples—Nijinsky’s L’Après-midi d’un faune based on Mallarme’s poem of the same title—the interlude traces, via touchpoints, intersections of poetry and dance on the dance stage. Examples reach across
several decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century. Recent performances that incorporate the poetry of Georg Heym, Rainer Maria Rilke, Kurt Schwitters, and other prominent poets feature very different types of choreographies, yet all demonstrate the continued resonance and relevance of modernist poetry. This interlude thus marks a shift in the primary focus from the written text to contemporary dance performances and helps to contextualize the final chapter of the dissertation.

During the past few decades, several well-known choreographers and performers have staged works about early and mid-20th century modernist poets and their poetry. Pieces like Jacalyn Carley’s *Ernst Ernst – Jandl Gedichte vertanzt* (2003), *Ursonate* (2007), Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s *Tanztheater* piece *C------H. Jandls Zunge* (2010), Carsten Clemens’s *Heymweh* (2010), and Dominique Dumais’s ballet *Rilke* (2012) offer examples of such works that employ varying styles of dance movement and staging. In addition to spoken text, each work features written text on surfaces such as papers, projections onto screens, and props inscribed with text. Taking a closer look at the presence of text on the contemporary dance stage, the third chapter explores the materiality of texts in several contemporary dance performances and draws upon Robin Bernstein’s concept of a “scriptive thing” to propose a theory of how various choreographic works stage pieces of text in different material forms and how the text as thing performs with the moving bodies.

More simply, I explore how placing choreography on stage with physical or audible manifestations of a text or text fragments produces a new experience of the text and its dance. The non-conventional use of media in *C------H. Jandls Zunge*, the frequent dissonance in *Heymweh*, and the metaphysical elements of *Rilke* allow audiences to
experience the different veins of modernist poetics embodied on stage. The material form given to the texts along with the way performers engage with them on stage create an aesthetic that can resonate with or question the viewer’s notion of the poetry. This challenges audience members to experience poetic texts not as permanent and stable works of art, but rather as ephemeral and unstable events.

Turning back to modernism, this recognition of the ephemeral and the instability of everyday life which catalyzed a break with tradition across the arts could be considered definitional to the period. At the end of his essay “Über die Kunst,” in which he states that a work of art can exist without its creator, entering the world as an independent thing of beauty (28-29), Rainer Maria Rilke speaks of the homelessness of the artists in their own epochs; they are those who came to early—Zufrühgekommene (33). Biding his/her time, the artist described by Rilke hopes for an afterlife through his/her work, a time to be and resonate. The concluding image in “Über die Kunst” depicts this artist incongruent with his time as a dancer.

Und der Künstler ist immer noch dieser: ein Tänzer, dessen Bewegung sich bricht an dem Zwang seiner Zelle. Was in seinen Schritten und dem beschränkten Schwung seiner Arme nicht Raum hat, kommt in der Ermattung von seinen Lippen, oder er muss die noch ungelebten Linien seines Leibes mit wunden Fingern in die Wände ritzen. (34)

And the artist remains this: a dancer whose movement breaks against the confines of his cell. What he lacks room to express via footsteps or the limited swinging of his arms, emerges from the fatigue of his lips;
otherwise, he must use his wounded fingers to etch the yet unlived lines of his body into the walls.

Confined to a cell, in which he had no proper space to move freely, the artist as dancer finds expression in his/her moments of fatigue. The final, striking clause of the essay leaves an image of uncontainable creative expression and pain.

Considering the intersections of dance and poetry contained in the chapters that follow, this passage has a dual resonance. In this theoretical essay on art, like in his poetry and the poems and theoretical texts of many of his contemporaries, Rilke presents dance as not only akin to other art forms but as a relevant and relatable means of aesthetic expression. The significance of dance to modernists, often referred to as “die neue Tanzkunst (the new art of dance)” in the early 20th century, is further emphasized by the image of movement breaking against the confines of a cell. In the eyes of Rilke, modernist dance was both of its time and ahead of it. It is a universalizing gesture different from the all too common refrain of dance being a universal language practiced by all cultures; here, the universality belongs to avant-garde artists, who are, in essence, dancers. The final act of etching recalls the act of writing, yet this writing is more physical than cerebral; quite literally, it is “une écriture corporelle”—the expression used by Mallarmé for the (figurative) bodily writing he saw in dance (“Ballets” 111).

Further resonance with the intersections of dance and poetry explored in this project is found in the idea of this dancer as the artist who is incongruent with their time. In his own eyes, Rilke was once trapped in a movement-restricting cell. As the artist as dancer, he had to then scratch what he could not live out into the walls; he had to write
with his body into a structure that will outlast him, giving his art the possibility of resonance in a time ripe for its movement or words. Throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, numerous choreographers—professional and amateur—have turned to his poetic works, letters, or prose as inspiration for a dance performance. In addition to enjoying international notoriety as well as the attention of numerous translators and scholars, Rilke’s art continues to cross genres and resonate with artists and audiences. Dance, the medium that provided modernist poets with a new way to think about poetry, art, and corporeal experiences, has since continued to offer new ways to experience poetry. On the page or on the stage, the intersection of dance and poetry presented and presents an opportunity to experience embodied poetic expression as well as to explore how the impulses of modernism that produced innovations across art forms continue to resonate today.
Dancing Afire: Modernist Expressions of Identity and Kinesthetic Empathy

These are the rare moments in which, completely carried beyond yourself and removed from reality, you are the vessel of an idea. In these rare moments you carry the blazing torch which emits the spark jumping from the “I” to the “We,” from dancer to spectator. This is the moment of divine consummation, when the fire dances between the two poles, when the personal experience of the creator is communicated to those who watch.6

--Mary Wigman

Whether the consumption by flames, the jump of a spark, the bearing of a torch, or a multiplicity of such manifestations, elements of fire repeatedly appear in the dance writings, visual artworks, and choreography of the early 20th century. The simultaneous acts of dancing afire and bearing witness to the event, which are performed either by multiple bodies or by one in the same, carry several overlapping meanings that, when examined across contexts, provide insight into modernism’s transformative conceptualization of dance as a multisensory, physically perceptible performance that resonates with spirituality as well as with the embodied identities of the dancers and spectators. This chapter explores manifestations of the intense modernist engagement with both subjectivity and corporeality that are visible in dance and rendered perceptible by poetic dance writing via the trope of dancing afire: identity and kinesthetic empathy.

As identity involves both self-perception and categories applied by others and society, and empathy necessitates at least two beings, both can be viewed as types of intersubjectivity inherent to the experience of dance, for the dancer as well as the spectator. What I wish to explore about the recurring element of fire in modernist dance

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6 This epigraph comes from Wigman’s “Lecture in Zürich (1949),” which was originally written in English and appears in The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings, edited and translated by Walter Sorell.
and poetry is the way that the qualities and perception of fire are used by a range of
dancers and poets to make explicit and perceptible the way that dance connects
individuals to their identities and to others. In the context of our broader understanding of
modernism, a dance afire can simultaneously embody several aspects of dance that
touched on interdisciplinary interests and a deepening engagement with the place of the
individual in society: nationalist and origin narratives, expanding concepts of gender and
sexuality, bodily movement as essential to human development, and the concept of
empathy in art and psychology. All of these themes repeatedly surface and intersect in the
poetry that features dance and fire.

Poetic manifestations of dancing afire, to which I give most of my attention
during this chapter, are not the only type of artistic expression to explore fire in the
context of modernist bodies. Prominent dancer-choreographers like Loïe Fuller (1862-
1928) and Mary Wigman (1886-1973) created fire dances\(^7\) that exemplify two very
different strands of early modern dance: Fuller’s free dance paired with lighting
experiments, which were embraced by symbolists\(^8\), and Wigman’s Ausdruckstanz (often
translated as “Expressionist dance”). Perhaps one of the most widely known examples of
the connection between modernist dance and fire, one still staged today by prominent and

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\(^7\) Fire dances, in this European context, differed from fire dances performed with actual
fire as rituals and as entertainment for tourists in Aztec, Polynesian, or Balinese cultures
as well as from what is often known as poi today. Fire dances of the modernist European
context were figurative expressions of fire, interpretations of the dance experience as
associated with fire, or a dancing as if afire.

\(^8\) French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who engaged with dance in his poetry and other
writings, lauded Fuller’s work in his Divagations, framing her dances with silks and light
as an embodiment of symbolism (Sommer 394).
internationally known companies, is *The Firebird* of the Ballet Russes in 1910. The presence of the relationship between fire and dance in the writings and performances of these influential and aesthetically diverse dancer-choreographers demonstrates the reach of this intersection across modern aesthetic impulses and cultural origins—a quality also visible in the various poetic manifestations of dancing afire.

Performed predominantly as a solo across Europe from 1896 into the 1920s—beginning not long before and continuing during the time that many poems featuring dancing afire were written—Loïe Fuller’s stagings of her “Fire Dance” provide examples of performances, in which a dancer-choreographer combines movement, costume, and lighting to present her dancing body seemingly engulfed in flames. In her biography on Fuller, Ann Cooper Albright frames these fire dances as highlighting a struggle with light and darkness; as journalist and poet Jean Lorrain expressed: Fuller became flame against the darkness rather than being consumed or destroyed by it and was often depicted as smiling while she performed (70). This mélange of expressions amidst a transformation

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9 Founded by impresario Serge Diaghilev in 1909 in Paris, the Ballet Russes was home to principal dancers Anna Pavlova and Vaslav Nijinsky. In 1910, choreographer Michel Fokine’s *The Firebird*, composed by a young Igor Stravinsky and based upon the Slavic folk tale, premiered at the Paris opera. Though a ballet that bore similarities to traditional narrative ballets, Stravinsky’s score broke with tradition, and the choreography incorporated folk dance movements as well as barefoot dancing, marking a departure from classical ballet.

10 Loïe Fuller hailed from Illinois, became well-known in the United States and Europe in the late 19th century, and performed on both continents during the first few decades of the 20th century. Many scholars frame her dance style as pre-modernist, and she is best known for her experiments with lighting and flowing silk costumes. Emerging as soloist two decades after Fuller first came to Europe, Mary Wigman is widely regarded as a pioneer of expressionist dance (Ausdruckstanz). Both dancer-choreographers challenged classical notions of dance, had their writings on dance published, and attracted the attention and admiration of poets and visual artists of their periods.
into flame—exuding joy surrounded by a consuming force—demonstrates the plurality of sensations and emotions that Fuller saw as definitional to her dance: “the human body should, despite conventional limitations, express all the sensations or emotions that it experiences” (70). Whether performing her well-known and often-cited fire dance or other choreographies, Fuller connected this expression of sensations, which she defines as the resonance in the body in response to an impression, to the reception of an idea, via her movements, by a spectator. This attention to reception as quintessential to experiencing dance was shared by Wigman and other prominent modernist figures across art forms. In poetry and in performances, the intersections of dance and fire occur at a moment of intense experience on the parts of the dancer(s) and the audience, the poet or lyrical I and the reader.\footnote{The intersubjectivity at work in the reading of a poem, either aloud in performance or as a “solitary act” is best framed as triangular, as a distinction exists—following the distinction made during the time period at stake in Margarete Susman’s 
\textit{Das Wesen der modernen deutschen Lyrik} (1910)—between the subjectivity of the poet and the subject, or I, of the poem. In the case of Fuller, and often Wigman as well, dancer and choreographer, roles akin to the lyrical I and the poet, are united and embodied in a singular dancer-choreographer. Yet if one considers that a choreography is embodied differently in each performance by the same or a different dancer, this relationship also becomes triangular.}

The epigraph that introduces this discussion proves especially helpful in exploring the function of dancing afire, which intersects with both the spiritual and relational. In Wigman’s “Lecture in Zürich” (1949), in which she addressed students at the end of a summer school, Wigman aims to provide insight into the creative process as she experiences it, placing the dance as higher than the dancer, who functions as a vessel. At the end of the lecture, Wigman highlights moments that extend beyond the creative
experience and professional success, attributing these moments to the gods. In order to describe these experiences, which extend beyond the dancer’s reality, Wigman makes use of several references to fire. Most striking in her account is the implication of the audience (“spectator”). A 1990 documentary, narrated by Mary Wigman herself, used the concept of dance as the moment “when the fire dances between two poles” as its title, marking it as a significant conception of dance and Wigman’s legacy. This expands the significance and perception of dancing afire beyond the dancing subject, a dimension also present for Fuller and poets of the time.

As Gabriele Brandstetter rightly argues in her foundational and highly-lauded monograph *Tanz-Lektüren: Körperbilder und Raumfiguren der Avantgarde*, fire in dance writing and performances often symbolizes a transformational moment or metamorphosis—an idea which is certainly captured in Wigman’s conception. Yet the flames on the page or stage also nod to the sensible transmission of movement and ideas, capture emotive qualities, and/or strike a chord with elements of dancers’ identities. In Wigman’s dance writings, we see a multifaceted conception of fire that starts with a moment of transformation or transcendence but also involves the relationship between the dancer and spectator rooted in a physically perceptible as well as conceptual experience. It is this transmission and the identities involved within it that I wish to examine within dance writings, themselves a mode of creating and transmitting experience.

Evoking Empathy: Modernist Fire and Dance

Fire, related paraphernalia, and the act of burning recur repeatedly in poems about
dance and dancers, both male and female. Much like the triangular intersubjectivities of the dancer, choreographer, and audience or the lyrical I, poet, and reader mentioned earlier, another triangular relationship exists within a dance poem: the lyrical I, the dancing body, and the spectator. A consideration of this relationship as well as the identities of each as individuals, shows the way in which fire, in various forms, embodies categories of identity as well as the act of transmission taking place in the dance performance and reception thereof. Often, the roles occupied within writing and performance, observer and observed are associated with particular genders, sexualities, and cultures, linking the intersubjective elements of experiencing a performance and inhabiting an identity.

While the most well-known example of a modernist poem that features dancing afire is undoubtedly Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin,” which presents a lyrical-I’s third-person observations of a female flamenco dancer whose dance becomes fire, poems by his contemporaneous yet lesser-known female poets Margot Starke and Francisca Stoecklin both present male dancers as emitting flames and make use of the second person. These poems along with further examples challenge an understanding of dancing afire that is singularly gendered, sexualized, or ethnically-coded. I suggest that though these categories and others play a role in the use of the concept of fire, dancing afire can be understood as framing an experience that is inextricably bound to subjectivities and therefore implicates identities.

Whereas aforementioned examples all feature a dancer becoming or bearing flames, Paul Zech’s “Sommerabend im Park,” which first appeared in Der Sturm in 1910 and has since been frequently anthologized as an example of modernist poetry, contains a
torch flame that becomes a dancer: “Und Fackelglut steigt breit von den Altanen, Wogt und verschwistert sich in vagem Sinn / Mit Ruß und Rauch und wird zur Tänzerin (And the glow of a torch rises up and outward from the terrace, / Billows and conjoins faintly / With soot and smoke and becomes dancer12)” (5-7). The reciprocal and metamorphic relationship between the dancing body and fire highlights the movement and radiant qualities of both. The experience of dance or a fire, either as the moving matter itself or the witnessing of it, involves not only an observable movement in time and space but also an energy perceived physically. In other words, another function of fire in dance writings is to evoke the experience of kinesthetic empathy.

As Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason state in the introduction to their volume on kinesthetic empathy, the term itself, though increasingly common across disciplines, is a difficult concept to delineate. The term kinesthesia, which refers to “sensations of movement and position,” (18) proves easier to define and carries a history that links it both to prominent modernist artists drawn to dance as well as to the development of modern dance itself, particularly in the German context.

The term ‘Einfühlung,’ translated into English as ‘empathy’ by Edward Titchener in 1909, was first used in its modern sense of projecting oneself into the object of contemplations by Robert Vischer (1872) and was later promoted by Theodore Lipps in his writings on aesthetic experience (Lipps 1920, 1923). […] In Vischer’s and Lipps’ writing on aesthetics,

12 Dancer (Tänzerin) is feminine here: female dancer. I also chose not to include an article before dancer in the translation due to the ambiguity of “zur” (to the, to a) in the German.
kinesthetic sensation was considered an intrinsic part of empathy (19).

Rachel Corbett’s recent biography on the friendship between Rainer Maria Rilke and Auguste Rodin addresses this emergence of the term empathy via the German *Einfühlung*, which she views as key to how Rilke and Rodin understood one another, pointing out that the concept came from the philosophy of art: it provided an explanation of why certain works of art move people, and the term eventually appeared in important psychological texts, linking several fields and practices (ix). This empathy or *Einfühlung*—a literal “feeling into”—could be ascribed to aesthetic experience as well as social and interpersonal interactions, both of which are arguably at work within the act of dancing.

Though she does not mention dance among the art forms that introduce her

13 Rilke and Rodin’s well-documented history began when Rilke traveled to Paris in 1902 to interview Rodin for the biography he was commissioned to write. He ended up staying in Paris and served for several years as Rodin’s secretary. In his artist’s biography, Rilke identified a movement quality present in Rodin’s sculptures: “Als Rodin diese Maske schuf, hatte er einen ruhig sitzenden Menschen vor sich und ein ruhiges Gesicht. Aber es war das Gesicht eines Lebendigen, und als er es durchforschte, da zeigte sich, dass es voll von Bewegung war, voll von Unruhe und Wellenschlag. In dem Verlauf der Linien war Bewegung, Bewegung war in der Neigung der Flächen, die Schatten rührten sich wie im Schlaf, und leise schien das Licht an der Stirne vorbeizugehen (When Rodin created this mask, he had before him a man who sat quiet with a calm face. But the face was that of a living person and when he searched through it, he saw that it was as full of motion, as full of unrest as the dashing of waves. In the course of the lines there was movement; there was movement in the contours of the surfaces; shadows stirred as in sleep and light seemed to softly touch the forehead)” (*Auguste Rodin* 25; 32). The movement of the sculpture Rilke beholds in the description is also captured in many of his Dinggedichte, many of which appear in his *Neue Gedichte* along with “Die Spanische Tänzerin.” Rodin, like Rilke, not only sought to imbue his art with movement but was also inspired by dance and prominent dancers of the period like Loie Fuller, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Isadora Duncan, who wrote of her encounter with Rodin in her autobiography, during which he ran his hands over her body “as if it were clay” (*Duncan* 75). She would come to consider him a teacher and friend.
discussion of empathy and its importance to art of fin-de-siècle Europe, Corbett later offers direct connections between dance and empathy. Like Reynolds and Reason, Corbett traces a line from Vischer to Theodore Lipps. The former’s concept of “muscular empathy” struck a chord with Lipps “who once attended a dance recital and felt himself ‘striving and performing’ with the dancers” (22). Lipps engaged with and wrote about both psychology and art, and Rainer Maria Rilke, a poet frequently cited in work on dance and poetry, was one of the artists who attended his lectures on aesthetics during Lipps’s appointment the philosophy department at the University of Munich before the turn of the century (23). This encounter during a formative time in Rilke’s development helps solidify the importance of both movement and empathy to his aesthetic. It is thus unsurprising to find dancing afire, which I interpret as both connected to the identity of the dancer and an apt expression of kinesthetic empathy, in his poetry.

Multiple connections also exist among the development of the concept of empathy, the role of kinesthetic sensation, and modernist dance. Reynolds and Reason offer the American example of John Martin, the inaugural dance critic of the New York Times who served in this role from 1927-1962 and penned several well-known books on modern dance (19). In his The Modern Dance (1933), Martin refers to “kinesthetic sympathy,” which he views as an audience member’s response to the dancer’s movements when witnessing non-representational dance (12). Martin differentiates this

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14 This idea of striving and performing with dancers comes from Lipps’s 1903 text Einfühlung, innere Nachahmung und Organempfindungen. In the above quotation, Corbett is using Max Schertel and Melvin Rader’s translation of Lipps found in A Modern Book of Esthetics: An Anthology (1935).

15 An example of such scholarship is Dietgard Kramer-Lauff’s monograph Tanz und Tänzerisches in Rilkes Lyrik (1969).
response from “muscular sympathy” that one experiences when witnessing pantomimic movements that are representational and for which the purpose is understood. Though Martin was primarily concerned with American modern dance, he was also keenly aware of the developments in German modern dance and discussed Ausdruckstanz in the section following his reflections on sympathy. On both continents, modern dance was not only redefining dance but also providing a new frame for the relationship between dancer and spectator—a relationship often present in dance writings of multiple genres. The difference between the “muscular sympathy” of indexical pantomime and the “kinesthetic sympathy” of non-mimetic dance is of particular interest when exploring modernist dance poetry, as lyrical dance poetry most often seeks to capture the experience of a dance rather than to simply represent it or capture meaning or a unified image of the dancing body. More broadly, empathy rather than sympathy lends itself to an understanding of poetry as related to and enacting poiesis—a making or bringing into existence. The aim of poetry, as articulated by many poets and theorists, is not only to convey but to create experience. For those who observed, wrote, and performed dance during the modernist period, the immediacy of its experience presented a particular challenge or calling.

A Quintessential Modernist Dance Afire

Fire evokes an embodied multisensory experience. When a poem features a

16 Though Martin was widely regarded as a prominent American dance critic, he was also well aware of the developments of German modern dance, citing them in his 1933 monograph. The placement of his discussion of German expressionist dance directly after his reflections on kinesthetic empathy also help to establish links across art forms and cultures.
dancer who dances afire, the experience of the observer of the performance is communicated to the reader who likely knows fire to be something felt, seen, heard, and smelled. Furthermore, fire is in constant motion, defined by a process of reactions fed by the very oxygen that feeds moving bodies. For early 20th-century readers as well as for readers today, the types of experiences of fire resonate with the multisensory and polysemic experience of witnessing or creating dance: fire can light the way as it does in “Sommerabend im Park,” warm someone, destroy something, threaten, play a role in ritual, or evoke any number of heightened human states. Though dance may not often be associated with destruction, many dancing women of European literature and film, especially those of the modernist period, play the role of the dangerous femme fatale. In other cases, rather than destroying, there is a fierceness to dance, an intensity that pushes boundaries in terms of art form and new experience. In terms of the haptic experience of fire and its relationship to empathy, it involves a warmth and comfort yet also a fine line before it could become dangerous, or at the very least, unsettling.

Before turning to lesser-known poems that incorporate dance and fire, I would like to take a close look at Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin,” found in his Neue Gedichte (1907), since it provides a reference point widely known to writers and scholars of his

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17 Examples of dangerous dancing women from canonical works of the turn of the 20th century include the title characters of Frank Wedekind’s Lulu plays—Erdgeist (1895) and Die Büchse der Pandora (1904)—and Oscar Wilde’s Salomé (1891), as well as Heinrich Mann’s barefoot dancer Rosa Fröhlich in Professor Unrat (1905). All three works also inspired other media: films, operas, dance productions, and plays; in other words, the dancing femme fatale created in writing would find her way to the stage or screen where her moving body could be witnessed.
time as well as today.¹⁸ In addition to the reception of Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte*, the poem is also likely to have resonated with cultural experiences of his contemporaries and others throughout the first several decades of the 20th century, as Spanish dance gained much popularity during this time. In his comments about La Argentina’s recent dance performances featured in the magazine *Der Tanz* in December 1927/ January 1928, Joseph Lewitan remarks that Germany seems to be fascinated with Spanish dance ("Deutschland hat anscheinend eine Faszination mit dem Spanischen Tanz") (25). He also evokes light and fire in his descriptions of her dances, giving special praise to her dance of fire. Particularly noteworthy are the words with which Lewitan closes his appraisal of La Argentina, as he places her as well as her style of dance among the elite artists and art forms of the period: “Als Vertreterin wahrer Tanzkunst wird die große Spanierin, wie die große Russin, uns stets willkommen bleiben” (“As an exponent of true dance artistry, the great Spanish dancer, like the great Russian dancer, will ever be welcome here”) (25). Lewitan was not articulating a new phenomenon. About 20 years prior to this assessment by Lewitan, Rilke penned his account of Spanish dance, which clearly resonated with contemporary readers and writers alike. Numerous artworks of the first decades of the 20th century also bear the name “Spanische Tänzerin,” exploring the art form and practitioners across many visual media.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rilke frequently turned to dance in his poetry and theoretical essays. His “Spanische Tänzerin,” though the most obvious dance poem, was not the only poem to evoke dance in his 1907 volume. *Dinggedichte* like “Der Ball” and “Der Panther” employ dance in their engagement with objects or animals in a way that connects a choreographed movement pattern to nature.

¹⁹ Examples include pieces titled Spanish Dancer – or Spanische Tänzerin, when printed or exhibited in German—by Pablo Picasso (1901) and Natalia Gontcharowa’s (1915), which come from different styles, countries, and media.
In Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin,” the poetic speaker presents a close observation of the female flamenco dancer whose dance turns to flame as the spectators, which include the speaker, take in the performance.

Spanische Tänzerin

Wie in der Hand ein Schwefelzündholz, weiß,

eh es zur Flamme kommt, nach allen Seiten

zuckende Zungen streckt -: beginnt im Kreis

naher Beschauer hastig, hell und heiß

ihr runder Tanz sich zuckend auszubreiten.

Und plötzlich ist er Flamme, ganz und gar.

Mit einem Blick entzündet sie ihr Haar

und dreht auf einmal mit gewagter Kunst

ihr ganzes Kleid in diese Feuersbrunst,

aus welcher sich, wie Schlangen die erschrecken,

die nackten Arme wach und klappernd strecken.

Und dann: als würde ihr das Feuer knapp,

nimmt sie es ganz zusamm und wirft es ab

sehr herrisch, mit hochmütiger Gebärde

und schaut: da liegt es rasend auf der Erde

und flammt noch immer und ergiebt sich nicht -.
Doch sieghaft, sicher und mit einem süßen
grüßenden Lächeln hebt sie ihr Gesicht
und stampft es aus mit kleinen Füßen. (463-464)

Spanish Dancer

As in the hand a sulfur match flares white
and sends out flicking tongues on every side
before it bursts into flame—: in that ring
of crowding onlookers, hot, eager, and precise
her round dance begins to dart and spread.

And all at once it is entirely flame.

With a glance she sets her hair ablaze
and whirls suddenly with daring art
her slender dress into this fiery rapture,
from which, like snakes awakened,
two naked arms uncoil, aroused and rattling.
And then: as if she felt the fire grow tight,
she gathers it all up and casts it off
disdainfully, and watches with imperious
command: it lies there raging on the ground
and still flares up and won’t surrender—.
But unwavering, assured, and with a sweet
welcoming smile she lifts her face
and stamps it out with rock-hard little feet. (Snow 191)

In the midst of the movement, the dance, which is compared to a match in the opening line, becomes a flame. The suddenness of this act is emphasized by its location in the single line between the first and third stanzas. Remarkable in the line that marks the transformation to fire is the pronoun “er,” referring to the dance rather than the dancer. This distinction between dance and dancer, the flame and the vessel, is akin to the idea of the dancer as torch-bearer in Wigman’s lecture and in other dance poems that refer to a dancer as a “Fackel (torch)”. The fire happens in the moment of performance that necessitates a moving body, and in most cases, an audience. The emphasis thus falls on the embodied experience of a performance that, though many may experience the moment as spiritual, physically connects the dancer and spectator.
In the case of the moving body observed in this poem, the ethnicity\textsuperscript{20} and gender of the dancer are marked from the outset by the title. The daring artfulness of her movement (“gewagte Kunst”) allows her to become so near to nature that the fire finally appears to be too close. She seizes control and casts it aside. Though the dance in this poem turns to fire in the passion and energy of the movement, the Spanish dancer maintains agency and the ability to stamp out the flame at the end. In contrast to the wild and captivating image of the flame with the arms like snakes, the dancer standing still at the end of the poem has a sweet smile and small feet. When she moves, her dance takes the form of fire, conveying a power. Once the dance concludes, she returns to the diminutive, feminine position and is no longer afire.

Not only the descriptions but also the formal elements of “Spanische Tänzerin” capture the forceful, fiery quality of the dance and the sounds of fire and dance. The poem does not merely offer an image of dance akin to fire but creates the multisensory experience of it. “Zuckende Zungen streckt -:” (3) sounds like a match being struck to ignite a fire as both the poem and the dance begin. The syncopation of the alliteration together with the velar sounds also evokes the tapping of shoes during folkloric ballet; the rhythm and sounds of the text blur the aural differences between the natural element of fire and the style of dance. The alliteration of the h in “hastig, hell, und heiß” (4) recalls the soft sound of a hissing flame or a dancer moving swiftly through a space in a large, flowing skirt. The repetition of couplet rhymes in lines six through fifteen forms a steady

\textsuperscript{20} I use “ethnicity” here rather than nationality because the dance performance would have been recognized for its cultural content and style—as well as assumptions made about clothing style, skin color, and hair color—rather than the birthplace or citizenship of the dancer.
and strong rhythm of the dance, and the difference in rhyme scheme at the beginning and end of the poem mark the slower beginning and the abrupt end of the pattern that comprises the dance.

In this final stanza of the poem, at the end of which the dancer stamps out the flame with the traditional final pose of her dance, the strength and demeanor of the dancer confronts the power of the fire. Even after it is thrown to the ground, the fire burns: “da liegt es rasend auf der Erde / und flammt noch immer und ergiebt sich nicht -.” (15-16). The dance that turned to flame, though no longer one with the moving dancer, maintains its untamed existence, not surrendering until it is stamped out. The carefully controlled form of the poem and the wild movement of a flame seem to contrast one another, yet the training and choreography employed by a dancer in a live, physical performance that draws in the audience in an ephemeral experience mimics such tension.

From the title of the poem, the dancer in this case is marked as a female Tänzerin, and several dance poems in the early 20th century carry titles with the gendered nouns Tänzer or Tänzerin. In contrast to the wild and captivating image of the flame with the arms like snakes, the poem ends as the dancer stamps out the flame with her small foot and stands still at with a sweet smile. The viewer or reader encounters a young woman; the description of her physical presence, build, and expression resonates with dance reviews of young soloists, most often female, found in early 20th century dance and theater journals. In his reviews of modern dance soloists’ performances (Tanzabende), Joseph Lewitan, dance critic and founder of Germany’s premiere dance magazine Der Tanz in 1927, frequently assesses a dancer’s physique and/or technique separately from her expression, style, and temperament. When describing dancers’ physicality, Lewitan
often treats the body in fragmented segments, discussing strengths or weaknesses of legs and arms separately and frequently remarking that modern dancers could use more work on their technique. This mirrors the fragmentation of the body in many dance poems as well as the contrasting ways that different aspects of a dancer’s style or temperament are treated in the poems; gender is often directly or indirectly addressed. In one set of reviews from October of 1927, the gendered nature of dance and dance criticism generally are further underscored when Harold Kreuzberg, the only male dancer reviewed in this particular section, is referred to as manly, strong, and talented while the development of his dance is characterized as an uninterrupted ascent amidst more critical reviews of women, their technique and their temperament (Lewitan 26-28).21 Though the tone of Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin” remains uncritical, gendered aspects echo voices of its time: the wild and captivating temperament on display in the middle of the poem gives way to a delicate, smiling feminine figure. The fire thus arises from the movement and captures the multisensory and empathic experience of her dance.

Variations

Another well-known modernist poet captivated by Spanish dance, in particular that of La Argentina, was Paul Valéry, who opens his 1936 essay “Philosophy of the Dance” by telling his readers that they must listen to a few (of his) observations on dance

21 The exception to this pattern of reviews is Mary Wigman, whom Lewitan praises as enthusiastically as Kreuzberg albeit very differently. Whereas Kreuzberg is manly, and therefore human, Wigman’s dance is referred to as other-worldly and superhuman, placing her beyond the gendered discourse of male and female and into the spiritual realm.
before experiencing “the moment of the miracle” (55).

Before Mme Argentina captivates you and whirls you away into the sphere of lucid, passionate life created by her art: before she demonstrates to you what a folk art, born of an ardent and sensitive race, can become when the intelligence takes hold of it, penetrates it, and transforms it into a sovereign means of expression and invention, you will have to resign yourselves to listening to a few observations on the art of the dance by a man who is no dancer (55).²²

Valéry’s description of Mme Argentina’s race as both ardent and sensitive repeats the common modernist refrain of the artistic and sensual Southern European²³ while remembering Rilke’s poetic rendering of the Spanish dancer as both imperious and sweet (“herrisch” and “süß”). The view of dance as coming from a particular folk or race gestures toward the primitivist and nationalist tendencies of the period while reinforcing the idea that particular forms of embodied expression are often framed as inextricably linked to the identity of the body that creates the performance. A further connection to Rilke’s poem is forged by the use of “ardent,” which comes from the Latin ardēre, to burn, and though primarily used both in English and French as passionate or figuratively fiery, the archaic meaning of burning exists across languages.²⁴

After approaching his question of “What is the dance?” through a comparison

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²² This is Ralph Manheim’s translation of Valéry’s essay, which first appeared in Vol. 13 of The Collected Works (1964).

²³ Thomas Mann’s works are probably best known for this trope as contrasting the more calculated, bourgeois Northern European, though it is not unique to his œuvre.

²⁴ Valéry refers to the “création de la sensibilité d’une race ardente” in the original.
between what compels movement of animals and humans, Valéry again evokes the idea of dancing afire, presenting a flame as an alternate way to conceive of the dancing body. This example of an “intense consumption of a superior energy,” identified by Valéry as that which sustains dance, implicates both bodies—the body afire and the individual or corporate body of the audience (69). Valéry then elucidates how dance affects the body, referring to the philosopher observing the dance (“our philosopher”) in the third person: “He also notes that, in the dance, all the sensations of the body, which is both mover and moved, are connected in a certain order— that they call and respond to each other, as though rebounding or being reflected from the invisible wall of a sphere of energy within the living being” (69). Though referred to as an “outrageously bold expression” in the sentence that follows, this astute observation tracks with the link between the use of fire as a way of theorizing a dancing body and kinesthetic empathy seen in Rilke’s poems, dance criticism, and other texts. As “both mover and moved,” a dancing body exists within a field of energy, upon which it both exerts and receives force. In order to make such an observation, the philosopher and his body would also be bound up in this sensible experience, while the call and response of sensations indicates a multisensory mode of perception commonly recognized and poetically approximated in dance writings.

Despite this concentration on sensations, Valéry—again via “our philosopher”—will go on to frame dance and the dancing body as disconnected from its surroundings and concerned only with the ground and itself. This tension between an embodied experience that is physically perceptible and the other worldliness of a dance that can captivate and indeed transport dancer and observer exists across many dance texts of the period, including those that employ dancing afire. In some cases, fire seems particularly
apt at capturing this form of expression that is both other-worldly and embodied because of its use in things like spiritual and ritual practices that seem to connect another world or realm and this one. For Valéry, the dancer’s existence in another world, in which the dance is not performed as a means to an end but an expression of an inner life. Dance enacts *poiesis* without leaving the physicality of the here and now. For Valéry, this type of action found in dance can be generalized to all forms of art, and the first type of art he names is the poem which aims to create a state of mind (72). What a poet does, he concludes by way of a question, is an intellectual dance. And with this, he comes full circle, returning the reader to “art itself, to the flame, to the ardent and subtle action of Mme Argentina” (74). The “Philosophy of the Dance,” itself conceived of as a philosophical dance in thoughts and words, begins and ends with a dance afire or at least with a promise and allusion hereto. And this dance afire, which Valéry both admires and finds pleasure in, is born of intelligence and sensibility.

Remarkable in Valéry’s philosophical essay linking dance, poetry, and various aspects of dancing afire is the slippage among different pronouns used to refer to the philosopher/observer. From the beginning, the third person singular feminine pronoun *elle* refers to the observed dancer—a stereotypical male-female dichotomy of male observer and female object of observation. The female noun *danseuse* appears when referring either to La Argentina or to the generic dancer observed by the philosopher; the philosopher, in contrast, is referred to with masculine pronouns. Though the gender of

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25 In one section of the essay, the male noun *danseur* appears twice. The first case references Nietzsche’s tight-rope dancer (“son danseur de corde”). When Valéry refers to the necessary complexity of explaining the dance when one is not a dancer, (“Mais quand on n’est pas un danseur…”), he again employs the male form (6). I read this as equivalent
these two figures implicated in the dance remains stable, the point of view of the observer shifts throughout: after using the first person to address readers using *vous*, the speaker transitions to using the first-person plural *nous* to elucidate the differences between the utility of acts performed by humans compared to animals when they experience excess energy (66-67; 4-6). The speaker thus adopts the reader into the first-person position and forms an alliance that identifies the reader most closely with himself, a male observer and philosopher of an embodied art form different from everyday life. After confessing (in the first person) that he has given the listener a lot to think about, the main point of view transitions through the impersonal “one” (*on*) to the third person singular masculine (67; 6). When written as a noun phrase, Valéry employs ‘my philosopher’ and ‘our philosopher.’ Referring to the speaker in the third person after opening with the first person creates distance by making the discourse more impersonal while also separating experience of being captivated by dance and writing a philosophy of the dance. Especially in the original French, the third person also reinforces the gender dynamic of male observer and observed female. The philosophical dance is a reflexive dance, which begins with the philosopher posing a question to himself; it is also a dance of distance, observed and analyzed by its choreographer as it unfolds.

After several pages of philosophical contemplation, the point of view returns to the first person; the transition is marked by the contrast between the utility and goals of the practical world and the realm of dance: “As we have said, dance is the complete

to the male philosopher not being a dancer, which does not change the male-female dichotomy referred to above.

26 Where two sets of page numbers are given, the first page number refers to the English translation, while the second cites the French text.
opposite (Mais nous avons dit que la danse, c’est tout le contraire)” (71; 10, emphasis mine). From this point onward, third person most often refers to the dance or the dancer while the first and second person is used for the speaker and addressees. The philosophical dance circles back to the point of view of experience, of direct address. In the final paragraphs, the speaker—having asked the listeners to wait to be captivated—turns the audience over to Mme Argentina ("the flame") (74).

In several dance poems that feature fire, the relationship of the bodies, connected in the multisensory experience of energy, can be further understood through the forms of address, the subject position of the lyrical I, and the corporeal qualities ascribed to the dancers. Though well-known examples support scholars’ assertions that the lyrical I in the position of audience member or viewer in a dance poem is most often assumed by a male poet as seen in examples by Rilke and Valéry, Margot Starke’s poem “An Zaia, den sizilianischen Tänzer auf Lipari,” first published in the art magazine Der Querschnitt in 1924 and Francisca Stoecklin’s poem “Der Tänzer,” first published in her first poetry volume Gedichte in 1920, provide striking counterexamples. In her article “Verwandelter Körper, verwandeltes Ich: Tanzgedichte von Else Lasker-Schüler, Gertrud Kolmar, Nelly Sachs und Christine Lavant,” Yasmine Inauen rightly asserts that the dance poems of well-known female poets often present a lyrical I as a dancer, contrasting this to the common subject position of the man as observer of the female body or of social dance, naming Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin” as the most well-known example of this phenomenon (215); however, she does not take into consideration minor poets of the period whose works often appeared in smaller presses or male-dominated literary journals.
Stoecklin, encouraged in her literary aspirations by Rilke and the more prolific as well as more widely published of the two female poets, penned a poem in which a lyrical I addresses a male dancer whose dance opens the heavens. Not only does Starke’s poem, like Stoecklin’s, invert the gendered roles of viewer and dancer/viewed, but the poem conveys explicit desire paired with the young dancer’s (“Jüngling mit knospendem Blute”) danger and sexuality: “Küßte er mich, wär ich tot-- / Tot vor Lust und Qual (Were he to kiss me, I would be dead -- / Dead from desire and agony)” (27-28). Similar to depictions of dancing women, this male dancer walks the fine line between youthful object of affection and *homme fatale*.27

Zaia’s youth, allure, and ability to move lightly on his feet are qualities often assigned to female dancers of the period. Such characteristics together with the repeated images of flames and the Southern European nationality remember Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin,” often regarded as the most famous example of the gendered position of male as spectator in modernist dance poetry. Both poems also evince a fascination with the exotic frequently found in modernist literature as well as in the reception of dancers like La Argentina and Josephine Baker. Reading Starke’s poem against Rilke’s reveals similar motifs as well as less common gender dynamics in

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27 The 1935 placement of Starke’s poem under the slightly modified title “Auf einen Tänzer der liparischen Inseln” in the homoerotic Swiss journal *Schweizerisches Freundschafts-Banner*, printed from 1933-1936 by the Schweizerische Liga für Menschenrechte (the Swiss League for Human Rights), not only underscores the poems potential of subverting gender norms by using it to queer the modernist dance poem. It is noteworthy that Starke’s name appears as “M. Starke” under the poems title—eliding her first name, which could serve to mark gender. The poem, which opens the 1 July 1935 issue, is followed by an article “Üeber Homosexualität” by Kriminalkommissar Dr. Kopp, Berlin.
Starke’s poem. Because “An Zaia, den sizilianischen Tänzer auf Lipari” was first published in *Der Querschnitt*, a publication that concentrated on highbrow literature, art, and cultural criticism with intellectuals and academics comprising the target audience (Esau 875-876), it is likely that a number of the readers would have been familiar with Rilke’s poem, published in 1907 in the volume *Neue Gedichte. Erster Teil*.

As Rilke’s poem does, Margot Starke’s dance poem identifies the gender and nationality of the dancer in its title. This explicitly links the verses that follow to the intersectional identity of the observed dancer: prior to any descriptions, movements, or stylistic elements, the bodies and movement are gendered as well as marked as southern European, and for the early 20th-century German context, exotic. In contrast to universalizing gestures of other poems and many dance essays of the time, the titles imbue the dancers, and with them their spectators, with a place and the socio-cultural associations that accompany it. The element of fire, as well as references to sexuality and desire in Starke’s poem, evokes a combination of physical and emotional sensations experienced by someone in proximity of the dance and dancer.

Despite this similarity of containing aspects of identity in the titles, the two poems differ from the outset in terms of address. Whereas Rilke’s poem presents a third-person poetic account of an observation from the spectator’s position, Starke’s poem is addressed to a Sicilian male dancer Zaia. She has not only inverted the expected gender roles of observed and observer but addresses the poem directly to the object of her observations and attraction. Though poetically less sophisticated than other dance poems of the era, its presence within a journal issue that also contains a drawing titled “Ball (Zeichn.)” by H.F. Bieling that plays with non-heteronormative gender roles and female
desire in a social dance scene, underscores its subversive potential as a counterlyric to the writings of Rilke, Valéry, and other male observers of the female body.

An Zaia, den sizilianischen Tänzer auf Lipari.

Wenn du im Tanze dich neigst,

Jüngling mit knospendem Blute,

Mit dem rankenden Leibe zum Licht,

Den aufjauchzenden Gliedern der Schönheit,

Wenn du im Tanze dich hebst

Weit von dem Boden der Schwere,

Ein Lächeln der strahlenden Gottheit,

Ein zartstreicheldnder Windhauch des Himmels,

Liebe ich dich wie das Meer,

Das mich hinschleudernd packt und vernichtet,

Und bin so — ein Herzschrei des Todes —

In deinem Blute ertrunken.

Ach, dein Haar, wie schwarze Flammen,

Zaia, mein Tänzer der Glut,

Schlagen gekräuselt wild zusammen,
Verwirrt, wie dein südliches Blut.
Sonne und Regen nicht meidet
Stolz dein Haupt im freien Leben;
Du bist ein König, der schreitet,
Wenn leicht sich die Füße heben.

Märchenbuchgeheimpisvoll,
Wundersames Grau,
Machen deine Augen toll
Manche sanfte Frau.
Schlangengleich, zinnoberrot
Zieht dein Mund sich schmal.
Küssste er mich, wür ich tot —

Tot vor Lust und Qual.
Und du bist wie das Meer, das sich selber nicht kennt:
Sumpfgrollende Tiefe, hellspringende Flut,
Und du bist wie die Flamme, die himmelwärts brennt:
Urewiges Leuchten, unlöschbare Glut.

Bist wie die Natur, eine göttliche Dichtung,
Impuls des Gefühls, eine Laune der Zeit,

Erhebung der Schönheit, Ekstase, Vernichtung,

Meine singende Freude, mein Herzeleid! (Starke 177)

To Zaia, the Sicilian Dancer on Lipari.

Whenever, in dance, you curve forward,

Youngling with burgeoning blood,

With your body climbing toward the light,

And the jubilant limbs of beauty,

Whenever, in dance, you rise

Far beyond the pull of gravity,

A smile of the beaming deity,

A gentle caress of wind from the heavens,

I love you like the sea,

That grips and destroys me swiftly,

And thus I am – death’s bosom outcry –

Drowned in your blood.

Oh, your hair, like ebony flames,
Curls that lash about wildly,

Tousled, like your southern blood,

Zaia, my dancer of fervor.

Proudly your head does not evade

The sun and rain of a life of freedom;

You are a king who strides,

Whenever your feet rise slightly.

Fairy-tale-mysterious,

Wondrous gray,

Your eyes drive many a

Delicate woman mad.

Snakelike, vermilion,

You draw your lips in tightly.

Were he to kiss me, I would be dead –

Dead from desire and agony.

And you are like the sea, that does not know itself:

Depth of rumbling morass, bright and bounding tide,

And you are like the flame that burns heavenwards:
Eternal shining, indelible glow.

You, like nature, divine poetry.

Impulse of emotion, an infatuation of the time,

Exaltation of beauty, ecstasy, destruction,

My singing joy, my heartache! 28

The meditative, rhythmic repetition that recurs throughout the poem, the first example of which is the opening “Wenn du im Tanze dich neigst” (1) repeated with slight variation in the fifth line, lends the experience of the lyrical I a ritual quality. The rhythm and echo of such lines seem to undulate like the sea and flames compared to the dancer and enveloping the I. A spirituality, both similar and different from the sense evoked by Mary Wigman’s “moment of divine consummation, when the fire dances between the two poles” (170), is further underscored by references to deity, the heavens, and eternity. Whether spiritual or philosophical, writings of dancing afire repeatedly emphasize the otherworldliness of the moment of taking in the dance, a moment that captivates and acts upon the spectator as an embodied figure implicated in the act of the dance.

Fire also plays a more physical role, connected to the body of the dancer. The beginning of the second stanza is reminiscent of the hair of Rilke’s Spanish dancer, ignited with a glance. Here the glow or fervor (“Glut”) of the dancer alludes to the flame motif seen in dance writings of the period as well as to the passion expressed throughout the poem. Here, the motif is always presented in the form of a simile, directly

28 Translation my own. Subsequent poems without a cited translator are also my own translation.
acknowledging the comparison, perhaps signaling a different corporeal awareness. When
the flame is mentioned again in the final stanza of the poem, the glow is inextinguishable,
and rather than coming to a controlled close as Rilke’s Spanish dancer does, this poem
builds at the end in a climax of beauty, ecstasy, and destruction. The snakes grafted onto
the dancer’s body in the second and third stanzas also bear semblance to the Southern
dancer of Rilke’s poem while underscoring the shared qualities of the poems: dances that
are exotic, alluring, and potentially dangerous.

In addition to the verses and images that echo elements from “Spanische Tänzerin,” Starke’s “An Zaia” draws on numerous characteristics usually assigned to
women, and in some cases, specifically female dancers. The connection to nature,
specifically to the wind and ocean, occurs most often with female figures, fictional and
living. Well-known female modern dancers like Isadora Duncan drew upon the
movement of the waves for inspiration in her dancing. Furthermore, the lightness and
beauty mentioned in the first stanza are qualities lauded in articles about female dancers.
The ideal present in the lines “Wenn du im Tanze dich hebst / Weit von dem Boden der
Schwere,” represents ideas about female dancers, often ballet dancers in particular, that
some of the modern dancers worked against by using gravity to play with the ideas of
falling and weight.

The repeated notion of death coupled with his beauty builds perhaps the most
striking treatment of Zaia in this poem. Multiple times, the lyrical I warns of the potential
danger of the dancer: if he were to kiss her, she would be dead. In the line following this
declaration, she describes the death as one of desire and torture. The female observer and
speaker has encountered in the Sicilian dancer an homme fatale. The dance afire again
figures as both desirable and deadly, warming and sustaining yet also dangerous and all-consuming. When one dances afire, the result is not just metamorphosis but a palpable connection between the dance and the spectator. Whether the sensations experienced by the implicated bodies kindle sexual desire, awe, reverence, or another reaction, observing and later writing dance is an embodied act that heightens senses of identity and experiences of kinesthetic empathy.

The Swiss poet Francisca Stoecklin, who socialized with Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, and their friends and was supported literarily by Rilke, whom she also knew personally, also penned a poem about a male dancer as a part of her first volume of poems published in 1920. In contrast with Starke’s poem about a specific dancer with a name and place of origin included in the title, Stoecklin’s title follows the more typical use of a generic title: “Der Tänzer.” Despite the title, the poem’s location within the cycle “Liebe,” which is dedicated to her husband Harry Betz and contains several poems that address a love, indicates that this poem also addresses a particular “you.” With numerous poems written with the female “Tänzerin” as part of or the entire title, this poem lends itself to reading against poems focused on the female dancing body together with Starke’s poem “An Zaia.” Both poems use the second person pronoun du to address a male dancer—a practice more often associated with a male I’s address of a female dancer.

Stoecklin’s poem begins with stillness: the dancer stands. In this stillness, the lyrical I beholds the dancer’s tall stature and light face. As the dancer begins to dance, he ignites and grows while gesturing in prayer to the heavens. The poem closes with heavens answering the dance by opening to “our longing [Unserer Sehnsucht]” (34). The
dance does not come to an end but acts as an opening that encompasses both the dancing subject and his adoring observer.

Der Tänzer.

Du stehst,

Eine steile Fackel.

Hell ist dein Gesicht.

Rein

Wie eine Blüte,

Wie eine Taube,

Wie neugefallener Schnee.

Leise rühren sich die Finger,

Heben sich die Hände,

Breiten,

Weiten sich die Arme

Der Unendlichkeit.

Langsam,

Schwer von Demut,

Leiden,

Inbrunst,

Neigt sich

Dein verzückter Körper,

Deine Seele.
Gibt sich gläubig der Musik.
Gibt sich allen Menschen.
Gibt sich Gott.
Innig biegen sich die Knie,
Schreiten,
Tanzen schwebend
Deine zarten Füße.

Du brennst,
Eine steile Fackel.
Deine Arme,
Deine königlichen Hände
Wachsen betend,
Betend in den Himmel,
Der sich strahlend
Unserer Sehnsucht
Öffnet.

The Dancer. 29
You stand,
A proud torch.

29 Though translated as dancer for brevity and style, the German word “Tänzer” indicates a male dancer.
Bright is your face.
Pure
As a blossom,
As a dove,
As new fallen snow.

Quietly the fingers move,
The hands rise,
Unfold,
The arms stretch
Infinity.\textsuperscript{30}
Slowly,
Weighty with humility,
Suffering,
Fervor,
Your rapturous body,
Your soul
bows.
Surrenders faithfully to the music.
Surrenders to all people.

\textsuperscript{30} The German “Der Unendlichkeit” translates more directly as “of infinity” and is used as a genitive construction such that it can be read as applying not only to the outstretched “arms of infinity” but also to the fingers and hands in the first two lines of the strophe. This is difficult to preserve with English syntax without use of the adverb infinitely.
Surrenders to god.

Your knees bend dearly,

Stride,

Your delicate feet
dance suspended.

You burn,

A proud torch.

Your arms,

Your regal hands

Grow in prayer,

Praying into the heavens,

That radiantly

Unto our longing

Open.

In contrast to the sexual heat brought forth by Zaia’s dance, this dancer’s fire evokes reverence. Purity, an attribute most often ascribed to femininity, is not only directly mentioned but underscored with a series of three similes. A second triad in the second stanza links this purity to spirituality and humility as the dancer gives himself—body and soul—over to the music, to all people, and to God. While the spirituality found here and in other poems by Stoecklin does not figure prominently across many dance poems of the period, the isolation of body parts and their movements throughout the second stanza, the agency given to these body parts through the recurrent use of reflexive
verbs, and the universalizing gesture of surrendering to all people transcend poetic styles, authors, and dancing subjects.

The stillness of the opening lines has given way to the movement of fingers, hands, and arms until the dancer’s feet dance, leading to the transformation at the beginning of the third stanza: “Du brennst, (You burn,)” (27). The dancer-as-torch of the second verse returns, this time a bearer of fire; the act of slowly and humbly beginning to dance bridges the standing and burning of the first and last stanzas. Fire imagery and the torch also appear in other poems of Stoecklin’s “Liebe” cycle, adding context to the dancer afire. The inaugural poem of the cycle, “Dem Priester meiner Liebe (To the Priest of my Love),” contains the lines “Du bist die Fackel, / Die sich weisend aus dem Dunkel bäumte, / Als mich das wilde Leben fast erschlug. (You are the torch, / That reared up to show me out of darkness, / When the wild life nearly struck me down)” (5). As in “Der Tänzer,” the object of the lyrical I’s love appears as a torch; though different in quality, the fire bearer in both poems brings redemptive power and a spiritual presence. The interplay of light and dark as well as religious references recur throughout the cycle, qualities Olga Brand identifies as typical of Stoecklin, who frequently employs contrastive pairs and juxtaposition (126). Fire presents itself as something emitting from either the lyrical I or the you. Viewed in the context of the “Liebe” cycle, the poem “Der Tänzer” stands out as the longest of the poems and differentiates itself stylistically with its freer form and varying line lengths. Dance seems to have imbued the otherwise uniform spirituality and meditation on light with movement and a poetic openness akin to the final line of the poem, the heavens’ response to our longing: “Öffnet” (35).

In addition to poems about male dancers, female poets of the early 20th century
also wrote dance poems about the female dancer from the subject position of observer, with examples of a more distanced \textit{I} and one that addresses the dancer. Bess Brenck-Kalischer’s poem “Die Tänzerin,” written in 1913 and published in her 1917 volume \textit{Dichtung}, presents observations of a female dancer that center around movement and drive rather than the body and visual elements of the dance. The poem begins by offering why the subject dances: she must. Compelled both intrinsically and by the strong rhythm, the dancer of this poem embodies power rather than conventional femininity or gentleness, providing a further example of the ways female authors of dance poems engage in gender-norm-bending poetic practice.

\begin{verbatim}
Die Tänzerin.
Denn tanzen muß sie.
Dem tollen Rad verflochten
Gliedert sie Chaos
Schwendet Quellen,
Stampft zuckende Krater.
Im Drang
Des großen Taktes
Tanzt sie Gestirne.
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
The Dancer.
Because dance she must.
Intertwined with the great wheel
She orders chaos
\end{verbatim}
Burns clear wellsprings,
Stamps tremoring craters.
Compelled by
The strong rhythm
She dances heavenly bodies.

The brevity and tightness of the poem and its lines, framed by the invocation of the verb *tanzen* in the first and final lines, reflect the intensity of the woman’s dance. At its core, dynamic, present tense verbs drive three lines that are mimicked in form by the final verse on the dance as a whole: “Tanzt sie Gestirne. (She dances heavenly bodies)” (8). Rather than capturing the individual movements of the dance or focusing on isolated parts of the dancing body, Brenck-Kalischer portrays the power of dance to provide order, create fertile ground, and leave its mark. Like other poets, she turns to the element of fire in the middle of the poem: “Schwendet Quellen, (Burns clear wellsprings,)” (4). Compared to previously mentioned instances of fire in dance poems, the verb “schwenden” indicates the specific practice of burning a field in order to make it arable. Dance’s ability to do this implies a newness that can be attributed to the liveness of an event as well as the novelty of numerous dance styles coming into being during the time period of the poem. The wells or sources are burned clear for new life in the act of the dance fueled by the compulsion of the rhythm. Rather than focus on the audience’s

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31 Heavenly bodies figure frequently in dance poems, a trope treated in more detail in the next chapter. For example, the poem “Der letzte Stern” by Else Lasker-Schüler features what Wolfgang Rothe terms a cosmic dancer (“kosmischer Tänzer”) in his Tänzer und Täter: Gestalten des Expressionismus. A close reading of this poem appears in my “Writing the Ephemeral: Expressionist Poetics and the Dancer’s Presence and Disappearance” in Bewegungsfreiheit. Tanz als kulturelle Manifestation (1900-1950).
experience of the dancer-turned-fire, this poem presents the fire of dance as a method of revitalization—a message that echoes the calls for new dance forms during the first several decades of the 20th century.

Dancing afire simultaneously involves all bodies present at the very moment of performance—regardless of whether that moment of combustion occurs in a formal or every day context. Reading across examples of poems that feature dancers afire elucidates what fire offered those seeking to render the experience of dance and the associated kinesthetic empathy poetically while also providing insights into the intersection of dance, spectatorship, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. The perception of fire—its warmth, danger, intensity, and transformative potential—connects people to each other as well as to their multifaceted identities. For early 20th-century poets, employing fire as experience rather than merely as visual image allowed poets to invite readers enter into the embodied experience of the dance while also pointing out the physicality of poetry. For readers of the time and today, during times when new technologies led to a faster paced life and less dependence on both the community and fire in everyday life, fire was taking on a new role of connecting the individuals with one another: the “spark jumping from the ‘I’ to the ‘We’” intensified the experiences of identities and kinesthetic empathy. In modernist dances afire lie perceptible, life-affirming intersubjectivities.
Movement and/as Rhythm: the Nexus of Dance and Poetics in Der Sturm

Die Bindung der Kunst ist aber ihre Bewegung. Der Rhythmus.
--Herwarth Walden

But the bond of art is its movement. The rhythm.32
--Herwarth Walden

Dance, the performance of rhythmical sequences of movement, afforded artists of the expressionist avant-garde a medium for conceptualizing artistic ideals, in addition to being a frequent subject of artworks. When Herwarth Walden, the art critic, publisher, and author who founded the famous expressionist periodical Der Sturm, penned the above words in an essay, he framed his discussion of the art of the period as inextricably connected to the central concepts of movement and rhythm. Walden draws this connection, among other places, in his essay “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung,” which opens the August 1918 issue and appeared the following month in the book Expressionismus: Die Kunstwende, a collection of theoretical essays also published by the Verlag der Sturm. A closer look at the essay offers insight into the fascination with and connection to dance displayed in the works by poets and other artists of Der Sturm. Walden begins his critique of traditional poetic practice by stating: “Das Material der Dichtung ist das Wort. Die Form der Dichtung ist der Rhythmus (The material of poetry is the word. The form of poetry is rhythm)” (66). For Walden, writing poetry with “das Begriffliche” (the conceptual or the abstract concept) as your writing material involves

32 This epigraph is taken from the 1918 essay “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung” (67). Unless otherwise noted, English translations are my own. In several cases, in an attempt to keep with the principles of Sturm-Kreis poetics elaborated throughout the chapter, I have favored the form of the translation over the clarity of the content. Block quotations are translated in the footnotes.
arranging concepts and ideas in order to express something, and he argues for word art that favors the individual words as materials. Through rhythm, these words as materials are set in relationship to one another in order to render visible, to grapple with the incomprehensible. Walden stresses the need to move rather than be moved and speaks of the logical relationships of the word-bodies [“Wortkörper”] and word-lines [“Wortlinien”], which create the unity of a poem that is its expression. This call for active rather than passive movement is central to an understanding of expression and Expressionism that is multisensory, not merely reduced to emotions. Though the word ‘dance’ does not appear in this particular essay, he does call on poets to move and to allow the words to move with one another in rhythm, in other words, to dance.³³

Arriving at a precise understanding of Walden’s definition of rhythm and how he connects it across various art forms presents a challenge, as he equates it with movement, with the form of poetry, and with the life of the visible or invisible. Following this logic, the form that this rhythmic poetry must take is movement. Rhythm is what frees poetic form from stasis. It is also sensible and pervasive. Furthermore, rhythm spans art forms as a common and central feature of poetry, dance, and music, and though the visual arts are less often included in theoretical discussions of dance or poetry, members of the Sturm-Kreis also identify rhythm and movement at work in the visual arts. Though

³³ In another essay discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Walden clearly articulates the connections among dance, movement, and art. He equates dance and movement with the succinct statement: “Tanz ist Bewegung (Dance is movement)” (“Shimmy” 50). He continues with the assertion movement is a prerequisite of all artistic expression, which echoes the epigraph. Thus, many instances of the word Bewegung (movement) in theoretical essays, especially when linked to rhythm, can be understood as a connection to dance.
rhythm does not belong exclusively to poetry at the exclusion of prose, it is more prominent in poetic writing than in other genres, and poetry dominates the other literary genres featured in Der Sturm. Lest the concept of rhythm seem all-encompassing, Walden makes clear that consistent, uniform rhythm is not rhythm but rather meter, a quality of traditional poetry from which he wishes to distance himself and the Sturm-Kreis poets. Form should not be closed, or fixed to a countable, recurrent pattern, but set in motion through and as rhythm. Drawing on the writings of Walden and some of his contemporaries, what I call rhythm embodies not only the visually, audibly, and haptically sensible patterns and tempos of a work but also that which courses through it and is emitted from it. The ideal of rhythm, for the avant-garde artists of Der Sturm and dancers alike, inhabits the body, drawing upon and creating a form of embodied knowledge. These qualities bring together dance and the poetics of Der Sturm.

After a brief overview of the presence of dance throughout the twenty-two year history of the expressionist periodical and the artistic outlets that preceded its establishment, I will draw on the concept and practice of Wortkunst to outline the establishment of what I call a ‘poetics of movement’ for the Sturm-Kreis. Poetry that not only demonstrates aspects of this poetics of movement but also takes up the theme of dance allows for an examination of the concept of dance in content and form—the

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34 In his discussions of poetic writing, Walden almost always uses the term Dichtung, which can be used literature or fiction more generally, though it sometimes refers exclusively to poetry. Walden’s use of verse from well-known poets to support his ideas further underscores that his use of Dichtung favors the lyric genre; however, a look at the dramas produced by August Stramm and others reveals a similarity in the form to the poetry. Generic boundaries are further blurred by some essays published in the Sturm, such as Kurt Liebmann’s “August Stramm,” which I will refer to later in the chapter.
division of which becomes less pronounced within the experimental poetics of the *Sturm-Kreis*—and presents new ways of writing dance in an era that saw dance poetry emerge from many theoretical schools. A close look at the poetry and essays by the virtually unknown female dancer and poet Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup, together with images and reviews of her dance performances, provides a compelling cross-medial case study of the ideals set forth by Walden and his contemporaries. These ideals provided grounds for experimentation rather than realization and were not shared or employed by all poets featured in the journal in the same manner. As such, a broader look at the scope of dance poetry in *Der Sturm* allows for a more nuanced examination of the practice of the poetic rendering of dance.

Dance in *Der Sturm*

While most studies of *Der Sturm* have focused on its literary circle, various artistic movements, particular contributors, or the founder Herwarth Walden, attention to the discourses and forms of art that engage with dance shows that contributors to *Der Sturm*, representing several movements and styles, considered dance, as an art form, abstract concept, and socio-cultural practice, an important part of discussing and theorizing culture and the arts in the early 20th century. In addition to its role in the broader theorization and participation in the avant-garde arts scene, dance offered practitioners of various art forms, among them poetry, a novel way of experiencing and articulating their artistic program. Though I argue that the publication of August Stramm’s avant-garde poetry in *Der Sturm* in 1914 and 1915, which included his poem “Tanz” (15 April 1914), marks the beginning of a more unified poetics of movement in
the “Wortkunst”\(^\text{35}\) of *Der Sturm*, an approach that Walden and others championed, dance was the focus of reviews, performances, and literary pieces throughout the life of the journal, published from 1910 – 1932. Moreover, even before establishing *Der Sturm*, dance and dancers were included in Walden’s efforts to promote art.\(^\text{36}\)

In 1903, Herwarth Walden established the “Verein für Kunst” with the main purpose of supporting authors. The Verein offered over 100 events between 1904 and 1912, many of them *Autoren-Abende* at which authors read from their works or the works of other authors (Chytraeus-Auerbach 29). In her research on the Verein, Chytraeus-Auerbach points out that the variety of programming, which included readings, lectures, music, theater, and dance, reflects Walden’s efforts to spread his cultural engagement across all areas of artistic production and establish the Verein within the cultural scene of Berlin (31). During two separate events in the 1911-1912 season, the dancer Getrude Barrison gave a reading from Peter Altenberg’s works and performed her own dances.\(^\text{37}\)

An article by Alfred Döblin, which appeared in the October 14\(^\text{th}\) issue of *Der Sturm* in 1911, praises Barrison’s performance of Altenberg’s works and indicates that this was

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35 *Wortkunst*, or Word-Art, is a term used by the *Sturm-Kreis* for the literary style they propagated as the ideal, replacing poetry, prose, lyric, and other terms bound in particular traditions. Poets should be *Wortkünstler* (word-artists). The neologism emphasizes its artistic quality and use of the word as the material.

36 This inclusion of dance among the arts occurs relatively early in the efforts of dance critics, choreographers, and dancers to assert dance as equal to music. While writings as well as the inaugural Tänzerkongress in 1927 indicate that many dancers still saw a need to fight for a voice in the 1920s, dance was part of the discourse, literature, and visual art from the first issues of *Der Sturm*.

37 Getrude Barrison gave vaudeville dance performances with her four sisters beginning in 1895 and performed in Vienna for two decades. She danced in Vienna’s Cabaret Fledermaus, where she encountered important fin-de-siècle literary figures like Peter Altenberg (Amort 118-119).
not the first time Barrison had given readings or dance performances, though it is unclear whether the previous performances he saw were sponsored by the Verein (646).

Like Döblin’s early essay and other works—for instance his “Die Tänzerin und der Leib,” which appeared in the second issue of Der Sturm—poetry, prose, reviews, essays, and images of artworks created with a variety of visual media use dance to theorize artistic experience and to engage with concepts of the body, space, and rhythm. Like Döblin’s early essay and other works—for instance his “Die Tänzerin und der Leib,” which appeared in the second issue of Der Sturm—poetry, prose, reviews, essays, and images of artworks created with a variety of visual media use dance to theorize artistic experience and to engage with concepts of the body, space, and rhythm. Several of the authors and visual artists featured in the journal, on Der Sturm’s postcard series, and in gallery events like Alfred Döblin, Else Lasker-Schüler, Gino Severini, and Alexander Archipenko are and were known for their more frequent engagement with dance and dancers as subjects in their works. In July of 1926, Herwarth Walden published a special issue of Der Sturm on the topic of “Tanz und Plastik,” which contained visual art, poetry, and an essay on dance. Two years later, issues of Der Sturm featured Rudolf von Laban’s address “An die deutsche Tänzerschaft,” as well as a report about the outcomes of the second Tänzerkongress in Essen in 1928. Though taken as a whole, the diverse texts do not offer a unified poetics of dance within Der Sturm, they do

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38 Döblin’s “Die Tänzerin und der Leib,” first published in the second issue of Der Sturm in 1910, is one of several prose pieces featuring a dancer to appear in early issues. The linear narrative style stands in stark contrast to later poems and expressionist dramas featuring dance, but the work’s discord and prominence of the body course through pieces spanning many years and genres.

39 The first Tänzerkongress took place in Magdeburg in 1927. At the second in Essen over 1000 dancers, dance students, teachers, and dance scholars came together for a series of talks and performances on the current state of dance in Germany and Europe. One of the main goals stated in reports on the conference was to discuss how to work together for the advancement of dance as an art form (“Der Tänzerkongress” 1-2). Reports, transcripts of talks, and critical pieces appeared in newspapers and in journals devoted to dance, theater, and/or the arts.
highlight ways in which dance was at work within experimental poetics, the theorizing of ideal art forms, and disciplines of the body.

In the inaugural issue published in March of 1910, the essayist and critic Rudolf Kurtz states in an essay “Programmatisches” that the purpose of the magazine is not to entertain the public but to destroy the German intelligentsia’s comfortable worldviews using what they dismiss as immature art and “Spielerei (playing around)” (2). The critique echoes the commonly cited conflict between generations and styles of art and frames the problem as a stagnation that keeps the intelligentsia from the freedom to move [“Freiheit der Bewegung”] and from embracing the experiential possibilities that dance and movement offer. More than once, Nietzsche is invoked: “und einer der wenigen ebenbürtigen Nachfahren jenes Geschlechts, Nietzsche, predigte einem dumpfen Ernst zwecklos die frohe Botschaft des ‘Tanzes’ (and one of the few worthy descendants of this human race, Nietzsche, futilely preached the happy news of the ‘dance’ to the dull and serious)”(2). Dance in Nietzsche’s work provides a freedom, lightness, and a way of thinking. It is noteworthy that as Kurtz and his contemporaries drew upon Nietzsche’s ideas in articulating their artistic values for Der Sturm, as Nietzsche was likewise highly regarded and read by modern dance pioneers in the US and Germany, such as Isadora

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40 In a note at the end of this article, Kurtz does state that the views in the piece are his own and those of some of his close friends but should not be understood as those of his coworkers. Despite this disclaimer, the tone of other pieces in subsequent issues suggests that quite a few artists and contributors share similar views. Kurtz’s footnote does, however, keep with the fairly inclusive nature of Der Sturm, which despite being most often labeled “Expressionist” is difficult to align strictly with any singular style or movement.
Duncan and later Mary Wigman, who responded to his ideas in their writings and choreography.

Early issues of *Der Sturm* also included pieces about well-known dancers of the period such as the piece “Die Schwestern Wiesenthal” by Austrian author Otto Stoessl in the issue appearing on May 26, 1910. The article focuses largely on the qualities of their dancing as well as references to performances for which no specific date or location is given. Unsurprisingly, Grete Wiesenthal receives the most attention and highest praise with Stoessl describing her as dancing “wie der Genius der Leidenschaft selbst (like the genius of passion personified)” (99). Read alongside later articles that bring dance into conversation with poetry and music, this response to dancers who embodied a desire to develop a new form of dance, while at the same time being less experimental than other modern dancers of the time, offers important insight into why dance became a productive means for thinking about experimental poetics of the time. Addressing how one should view the Wiesentals’ dances, Stoessl suggests:

> Es ist nicht zu fragen: was meint sie, was sieht sie, was will sie bei dieser Musik? Auch der Tanz ist, wie die Musik, sein Zwillingsgeschwister, kein begriffliches Werk, er arbeitet nicht mit Gedanken, wenn er gleich eine Welt von Gedanken erlöst und erweckt, er entbindet Vorstellungen nicht von begrenzter Deutlichkeit, sondern von ahnender Fülle und schwebender Unsagbarkeit (99).

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41 It should not be asked: what does she mean, what does she see, what does she intend with this choice in music? A dance, like its twin music, is not a conceptual art form. It does not work from thoughts, even if it awakens and frees a world of thoughts. It does not give birth to explicit concepts but to intuitive abundance and floating ineffability.
Though the section that follows this instruction not to ask about the intended meaning or vision of the dancer attributes the source of this dance to qualities like enigmatic drives or instinct and a secretive sense of rhythm of the dancer, rather than clear ideas, essentializes the female dancing body in a problematic way, potentially drawing a separation between the thinking and instinctually moving subject, the designation of dance as non-conceptual [“kein begriffliches Werk”] and as communicating the unsayable bears semblance to aims of Sturm-Kreis poets who looked to dance and movement as both subjects and conceptual framework for their writing. Presenting the art form of dance as akin to music, a common move by dance theorists seeking to elevate the art form and authors alike, also works against the notion of dance as completely separate from the intellect, as music was a well-established and respected art form among intellectuals from many schools of thought. I will return to and expand upon this connection between emerging concepts of dance and poetry and “das Begriffliche,” a key term for Herwarth Walden when he began articulating his idea of a poetics, in a later section of this chapter. Attention to the discourse around dancers and how to view or interpret their art form sets the stage for discussions of avant-garde Wortkunst that emphasizes rhythm and movement.

In addition to the texts of various genres, an engagement with dance and movement as artistic subjects, elements of works, and methods of artistic production presents itself in the visual art works that grace the covers and pages of Der Sturm. Their presence not only underscores the mission of Walden, his gallery, and his publishing house to promote all forms of art but also reveals patterns across media. Like the dance writings, visual works feature dance across forms, from different movements, and
throughout the life of the journal. For example, Ludwig Kirchner’s woodcut “Tänzerinnen” appears on the cover of the September 1911 issue, and the cover of the February 1929 issue features Wassily Kandinsky’s “Graphische Darstellung einer Tanzstudie.” The latter issue features a second work of Kandinsky’s, which engages directly with a dance photograph of well-known dancer Gret Palucca that beats the title “Tanzstudie.” Kandinsky’s “Graphische Darstellung der nebenstehenden Studie” follows the photo and presents a line drawing of Palucca’s movement.

Explicit instances of dance that clearly depict dancers or bear titles that refer to dance juxtapose works that convey a quality of movement and body-like figures. Johannes Molzahn’s “Zeichnung” (August 1918) and Paul Fuhrmann’s linoleum cut “Vom Stock gedruckt” (June 1923) provide two examples of such works. Both pieces feature repetition of geometric forms and animalistic or humanesque bodies moving in space rendered either two- or three-dimensional. They appear amidst poems by Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup, Kurt Liebmann, and other practitioners of the Sturm-Kreis Wortkunst in the 1910s and 1920s, demonstrating the way movement courses through the themes and techniques of the art forms brought into conversation in the spaces and pages of *Der Sturm*.

Towards a Poetics of Movement: *Der Sturm-Kreis*

The freedom to move, which was idealized by many artists of the early 20th century and which Kurtz underscored in his programmatic essay, took on a new form of poetic expression with the publication of many of August Stramm’s poems in 1914 and 1915. In an article entitled “August Stramm,” which appeared in *Der Sturm* in February
1921—five and a half years after Stramm died in the war—the poet and art historian Kurt Liebmann, whose own poetic style discussed later in this chapter developed according to Stramm’s model, describes what Stramm does in both his poetic and dramatic texts. The brief article is as dense as the dramas and poems it discusses and repeatedly turns to concepts of movement, rhythm, and dance in its explanations, providing insight into the conception of the importance of these ideas for expressionist poetics of the Sturm-Kreis.

The first section of text, from which the above quotation stems, concerns the incomprehensibility of Stramm who is described as transcending time and material. His freed word-creations have taken on a form and power of their own and throw themselves into a dance. This concept of nameless or the indescribable bears semblance to the ineffability that Stoessl praises in Grete Wiesenthal’s dance. In various forms, dance provides artists and poets a conceptual framework for how to get at what is beyond

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42 He gave ineffable movement to the fettered and indescribable. He flourished, he glowed, he broke the cosmos of his oeuvre free of itself and fell apart. Fell in to the arms of the earth upon which he shone. The person was. The art is. The power of freed word-plunges, the limitlessness of a rescued form dive flawlessly, boundlessly into allness and dance. The crystalline curve of the word-figure that floats up does not buckle before the opening eyes of the I-beatified feeling.
words. In the case of poetry or *Wortkunst*, the complexity lies in the challenge of getting beyond words with words. For several major and minor figures of the *Sturm-Kreis*, as we will see in the analyses that follow, the keys to achieving this ideal were movement and rhythm; in other words, to imbue words with freedom and let them dance could produce what artists and critics saw in the dancers. For Liebmann as well as for other major and minor literary and cultural figures, the *Wortkunst* of August Stramm provided an example of this ideal.

A repetitive gesture of separation that distinguishes Stramm from tradition follows the above quotation, recurs in each of the four segments, and underscores the view of Stramm’s short literary career as a meaningful locus of poetic development for his fellow artists. In each instance, Liebmann turns first to what the work does not do before explaining what it does. Rarely is the answer concise, demonstrating a quality that is difficult to contain or define. Present, however, in the concluding thoughts of each of the four segments addressing Stramm and his works is dance. The words of Stramm’s dramas, Liebmann claims, are engaged in many different movements and actions, which he collectively refers to as “Der Tanz der Worte (the dance of words)” (42). A closer look at the verbs used reveals that the nature of this dance is multifaceted—violent, sensual, haptic, visual, and audible. Figures in the dramas are likewise engaged in powerful movement, dancing like swords that mince each other. Turning to the love poems “Du,”

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43 This strategy is not unique to Liebmann; rather, it reflects and adherence to and alignment with the larger *Sturm-Kreis* practice. Volker Pirsich has identified the *Wortkunst* theory, as articulated by the main theoreticians of the group, as a “negativ formulierte Ästhetik (negatively formulated aesthetic),” (246) defined largely via what does not belong to their concept of art.
Liebmann describes Stramm as being pulled into another type of dance: “Von purpurn weltkreisenden Rhythmen gezogen sank Stramm in die Tänze des Du, Qual und Lust eines Liebesschicksals von allem Persönlichen entschlackend (Drawn by crimson rhythms circling the earth, Stramm sank into the dances of you, purging the agony and passion of romantic fate of everything personal)” (42). In contrast to love poems of famous authors of several epochs, Stramm’s poems address the female gender itself, driven by pulsing, instinctual rhythms. The movement of the simultaneously threatening and live-giving dematerialized body culminates in a dance of the subjects, the I and you, which becomes outer space. This heightened moment of dissipation echoes the conclusions of the previous two sections, which end in aether and deliverance.

Liebmann calls the final dance mentioned in his tribute to Stramm the dance of vision, which he holds up before concluding the essay with what resembles a dynamic, forceful dance executed by Stramm and words: “Bezwungen zwang er den Rhythmus. Gehorchend befahl er dem Wort. Er sah den Anfang der Bewegung. Und wirbelnd erlöst stürzte Bewegung in Schauer masslosen Werks (Overcome, he compelled the rhythm. Obedient, he commanded the word. He saw the beginning of the movement. And the movement plunged, whirling and freed, into the shivers of the oeuvre beyond measure)” (42). Neither Stramm nor the rhythm and words are in complete control of the movement that comes out of the work of creation and shows up across his works. Taken together, these elements of Liebmann’s analysis, which spans Stramm’s oeuvre, demonstrate the centrality of dance, movement, and rhythm to conceptualizing Sturm-Kreis poetics and poets, as the central figures of Der Sturm often venerate Stramm’s work as a model. Like the essay itself, the dance of these Sturm-Kreis poets, which is at once violent, sensual,
and transformative, is a repetitive gesture aimed at declaring what they are not while demonstrating their complex self-definition. These concepts are not isolated characteristics of Stramm’s writing or metaphorical descriptions; rather, they course throughout early 20th-century writing and surface repeatedly on the pages of Der Sturm as subjects and as poetic praxis.

The poem “Tanz” is one of the first poems of Stramm’s to appear in the literary and arts magazine Der Sturm in April of 1914, and it is one of his earliest remaining poetic works. In the 1926 special issue titled Tanz und Plastik, Stramm’s “Tanz” is the first text and directly precedes an article entitled “Tanz und Tanz oder Kunsttanz und Tanzkunst” by the actor, poet, and essayist Rudolf Blümner. The essay does not represent an occasional engagement of Blümner with the broader theories of expressionist art; rather, he played a central role in the cultivation and symbiosis of multiple art forms, and Sturm scholars consider him one of the three leading theoretical voices of the journal together with Walden and Lothar Schreyer (Pirsich 86). In a piece that reflects back on the pivotal members of Der Sturm, his friend and collaborator Schreyer refers to him as “das Gewissen des Sturm (the conscience of Der Sturm)” (“Der getreue Zeuge” 78). The reprinting of Stramm’s poem in the issue places it in conversation with the essay that is primarily an attempt to define dance and what counts as the art of dance—a common goal of dance essays at the time.

Before arriving at a numerated list of what constitutes dance, Blümner engages in a critique of the traditional categorization of various art forms as either “darstellend” or
“nicht darstellend”⁴⁴ Though the aesthetic division he criticizes only considers painting and sculpture as belonging to the “darstellenden Künsten (representational arts),” he claims that pre-expressionist poetry and dramatic arts would fall under this rubric as well due to the connection to meaning and representation. Getting to the heart of his complaint, he states: “Der Fehler war nur der, daß man ausschließlich der Musik und dem Tanz die Möglichkeit und die Fähigkeit, nichts (nichts Positives) darzustellen, zutraute, jeden anderen Künsten aber völlig absprach (The mistake was this: one believed only music and dance to possess the possibility and capability to represent nothing (nothing positive) and completely denied all other art forms of the possibility)” (Blümner 52). The expressionism in the art forms previously deemed “darstellend”, Blümner claims, takes hold of the right to not represent or portray; this also opens up the possibility that dance and music can be representational. Though Blümner makes a case for the rejection of this type of categorization, he clearly favors “nicht darstellende Kunst” (non-representational art): “An sich ist keine Kunst ihrem Wesen nach darstellend, sondern eine rhythmische Komposition der Erscheinungs- oder Klangformen (In principle, no art form is inherently representational but rather a rhythmical composition of the form of appearance or sound)” (52). With this statement, Blümner blurs the old aesthetic boundaries among the arts, albeit not before making a case for his own categorizations and definitions. In relation to Stramm’s poem, this essay suggests that expressionist poetics enact the ideal type of art seen in dance. Because the expressionist poetics of the Sturm-Kreis favor

⁴⁴ Today, the term “darstellende Künste” typically refers to the performing arts with “bildende Kunst” referring to the visual arts. Blümner’s terminology defines art based on its representational quality.
abstraction over realistic representation, the poetry written by Stramm and his contemporaries can be seen as released from the drive to document that is often cited as the response in writing, filming, and other media to the disappearance or ephemeral nature of dance: dance exists in the here and now of performance but only has afterlives when mediated. The expressionist poetics employed by Stramm demonstrate a type of writing towards its limits, a writing along the ephemerality of disappearance.

Stramm’s poem “Tanz” belongs to his earliest poems, and though it was published twice within Der Sturm, Stramm excluded it from the collection Du / Liebesgedichte, published by Walden in 1915. Stramm scholar Jeremy Adler sees the poem as potentially fitting the subject of the volume, though imperfectly, but makes the case that the length of “Tanz,” which with its 101 lines is significantly longer than any other poems of the collection, “would imply a significance not justified by its actual quality” (124). According to Adler, Stramm honed his style after penning “Tanz,” and Adler offers a critique of the poem that centers on its treatment of dance as a theme: “Though often powerful, Tanz fails, not least because of a discrepancy between the actual dance it evokes and the wider theme, the ‘dance’ of life” (124). A closer look at Stramm’s poem is nonetheless important to a study of the intersection of dance and the poetics of the Sturm-Kreis for two main reasons. First, in 1914, when “Tanz” was first published, Stramm was beginning to develop his experimental poetic style; here, the way that Stramm rendered dance poetically provides insight into how movement and words

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45 Wolfgang Rothe also interprets the dance hall scene in Stramm’s poem, among other literary engagements with dance, as a metaphor for life—a theme that he connects to Nietzsche (88). The dancing philosopher of Also sprach Zarathustra inspired numerous authors and dancers of the early 20th century, promoting dance as a mode of thought.
were beginning to intersect in his creative process in terms of both content and form.

Secondly, Stramm was and is a highly influential figure of Expressionist poetry; his poems were praised by Walden and served as a model for others in the *Sturm-Kreis*. Both Stramm and movement occupied a central position for artists of *Der Sturm*. Furthermore, I view the “imbalance between specificity and generality” perceived as a weakness by Adler as appropriate to the context of dance as a dynamic event with many elements in motion that can be experienced in detail or from a zoomed-out vantage. Such choices in Stramm’s poetic exploration of dance are likely fortuitous, as it is not clear that he had much knowledge of dance, though movement, as I will explore more in depth later, plays a central role in many of his dramas and poems.

In all of his poetry, Stramm experiments with the materiality of language, stringing verbs together in the infinitive, using neologisms to create new experiences, and favoring free, quick rhythm over metrical verse. Focusing largely on these formal elements in his analysis of Stramm’s poetic style, Andreas Kramer identifies different tropes of movement as central to the subjectivity and experiences of the poems and cites Alfred Döblin’s 1915 letter to Walden about Stramm’s style and place within contemporary poetry (38). Despite convincing readings of the poems and a concentration on movement, which I also see as fundamental to Stramm’s *Wortkunst*, it is nonetheless surprising that Kramer does not include a reading of or even mention “Tanz,” in which the fluidity identified by Döblin and explored in Kramer’s analysis takes on another dimension—the writing of dance in addition to a rhythmic, dancing style of writing.

The circular quality of “Tanz” fittingly echoes a ronde dance, a style of folk dance that authors and contemporary choreographers alike subjected to conceptual variations
and a trope that recurs in other dance poems of the era. In addition to the cyclic quality of the poem and the dance form it references, Stramm’s “Tanz” was planned as part of a poetic cycle that would bear the title “Kreis (Circle)” (*Alles ist Gedicht* 12). I am printing the lengthy poem below in its entirety, because it is important to my reading that readers experience the way its language and form direct a reading. 46 Introduced in smaller pieces, you lose a sense of fluidity and drive that creates movement, the dance.

> Milchweiche Schultern!
> Augen flirren, flackern!
> Blond und schwarz und sonnengolden
> Taumeln Haare, wirren, kampfen,
> Schlingen Brücken,
> Brücken!
> Hin
> Und rüber
> Taumeln, Kitzel,
> Bäumen, saugen,
> Saugen, züngeln,
> Schürfen
> Blut

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46 This close reading also appears the essay “Writing the Ephemeral: Expressionist Poetics and the Dancer’s Presence and Disappearance” in *Bewegungsfreiheit: Tanz als kulturelle Manifestation* (1900-1950) (2017).
Schweres, lustgesträubtes
Blut!

In die Wunden
Hüpfen Töne,
Sielen, bohren,
Wühlen, quirlen,
Fallen kichernd,
Schwellen auf und fressen sich,
Gatten, gatten, schwängern sich,
Bären Schauer
Wahnengroß!

Hilflos surren um die Lichter
Mütterängste
Nach den Kindern,
Die sich winden,
Winden, huschen
Vor den Tritten,
Die sie packen,
Ihre glasen, sichten Leiber
Schinden, scharren,
Pressen, schleudern,
Tückisch abgemeßne Lüste
Jagen unter Brunstgestöhne,
Brunstgeächze
Und
Gekrächze!
Durch die Wirrnis
Durch die Flirrnis
Blitzt Verstummen!
Jäh zerflattern,
Drängen gellend
An die Decke
Sich die Töne,
Klammern, krallen
Scheu verwimmernd
Am Gebälk!
Glotzen nieder,
Wo mit Wuchten
Schlorrt das Keuchen,
Schlappet
Ringsum an den Wänden
Seinen ungefögen Leib,
Unzahlmäulig
Zuckt und schnauft!
An die angstzerglühnten Herzen
Reißen flammend hoch die Lichter
Ihre hetzverstörten Kinder,
Die in Irren, Wirren
Zitternd
Ob der ungewohnten Ruhe
Ab sich tasten
Und sich streicheln
Gegenseitig
Hell von Staunen,
Daß sie leben noch,
Sie leben!
Zagig finden sie das Lächeln,
Fluten leise, fluten, fluten,
Reichen summend sich die Hände,
Werden warm
Und
Schwingen Reigen!

Da
In Peitschlust, Streitdurst, Quälsucht
Vollgesogen
Vom Gebälke
Stiebt das Gellen!
Schrillt unbändig,
Überschlägt sich,
Purzelt, flattert,
Springt und stöbert,
Federt, pumpelt auf
Das Untier,
Das
Mit tausend Füßen aufschreckt,
Trippelt, trappelt,
Trappelt, gravidelt,
Gell gedrängelt
Von den Tönen,
Die zerrasseln,
Niederprasseln,
Peitschen, schlagen, fiebern, kosen
Und im Wirbel
Wringen, wiegen
Schwelles,
Blaßhellrotes Fleisch!

Milchweiche Schultern!
Augen… (10-11)
The poem begins with and circles back to “Milchweiche Schultern! (Milkwhite shoulders!)” (1, 101), an emphatic glimpse as the next element moves by and disappears. The eyes flicker and hair whirls as a part of a series of nouns and verbs that tumble forth. The body or bodies are fragmented and fleeting. The blood at the end of the stanza is a mark of a once present bodily presence. This trace left behind the frenetic motion indicates a violence to the body, but the origin of these marks is unclear and caught up in the always passing, always disappearing moment of movement. The strings of verbs in the infinitive or third person plural, like we see in the first stanza, often have no clear subject or have a subject that is caught in a disappearance as the verbs continue:

“Taumeln, Kitzel,/Bäumen, saugen,/Saugen, züngeln,/Schürfen (Tumbling, titillation,/Rearing, sucking,/Sucking, licking,/Scraping)” (9-12).47 The movement, often violent physicality, and disappearance are present linguistically as several words could be nouns or verbs and have multiple meanings none of which gives a singular, clear image of the movement it indicates. The fleeting images, sounds, and associations fade into one another and the repetition of words only enforces the instability of possible meaning, as the action repeated has no clear referent. In the two stanzas that follow, the movement continues with the rapid rhythm established early on and sound takes on a more prominent role. Not only do verbs, many of them onomatopoetic, convey sounds but the “Töne (sounds)” engage in their own movement, hopping into wounds, burrowing,

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47 The infinitive forms used in Stramm’s poem better correspond to English forms such as “to tumble;” I have chosen the present participle here in order to eliminate the repetition of “to,” while preserving the trochaic rhythm of single words denoting movement.
twirling, falling, blurring the boundary of perceptibility. The sounds move, change, and disappear in this cacophony of ephemeral poetics.

Near the end of the fourth stanza, a body is present: “Ringsum an den Wänden/Seinen ungefährn Leib./Unzahlmäulig/Zuckt und schnauft! (All around on the walls/his untamed body/myriad-mouthed/twitches and snuffles!” (54-57). Yet this presence of a body is also complicated by its shapelessness and impossible presence around the walls. Furthermore, this Leib is the object of the action of the heavy breath; this decenters, both literally and grammatically, the place of the present dancing body. The tension in the poem increases with the neologisms like “unzahlmäulig (myriad-mouthed)” and “angstzerglüht (smoldered-apart-with-angst)” breaking open the boundaries of grammar and semantics like the boundaries of the aforementioned body. These neologisms also perform an erasure that reveals a multiplicity; the word has no singular referent but bears parts of a potential meaning in its constituent parts as well as the trace of what it does not. As Jeremy Adler remarks in his afterward to Stramm’s texts, neologisms transmit a unique experience (354). As such, this experience of “Tanz,” like dance, is in constant motion, ephemeral, and fading.

In the fifth stanza, the frantic tempo slows and the adverbs zagig (hesitantly) and leise (softly) build a contrast to the angst and frenzy. The stanza ends with a communal round dance, a dance that constitutes the form of the poem and also simultaneously gestures to a past while disappearing in movement into a future. The quiet humming of the Reigen is broken by the staccato “Da (There)” (76) that forms its own line in the following stanza. This moment of arrest collapses into sound and wild movement. The momentary calm disappears revealing a beast that seems to again disappear, at least in its
wild form with the repetition of the softer sound and fragmented body of the “Milchweiche Schultern.”

Whereas most of Stramm’s poems end with an exclamation or a full stop, “Tanz” comes to a close, or perhaps an opening, with an ellipsis that follows the repetition of the first line and a half of the poem. The punctuation continues the poetic dance of the ephemeral, indicating an omission or absence as well as forward motion. The close of the poem that is both cyclic and entering into disappearance, an end that is not finite, further underscores the complexity of this violent and sensual dance. Culminating in the ellipsis, the poem performs what Kurt Liebmann calls repeated attention to in the aforementioned essay “August Stramm”: the many multifaceted dances of Stramm transform and take on another material quality, becoming ether, experiencing a sort of release or redemption, and/or turning into space. Poetry like Stramm’s does not attempt to document nor grasp a unified representation of dance but to embody, explore, experience the elusiveness of both language and dance.

Viewed in the cultural context of Germany before, during, and after the first World War, parallels can be drawn between the formal elements of Stramm’s poetics and elements of modern dance, often designated “die neue Tanzkunst” (the new dance). Dance pioneers seeking to break free from the confines of classical ballet and to explore the expressive capabilities of dance in new ways, experimented, as Stramm did with questions of materiality (of the body and/or of movement), the stringing together of movements (verbs) into choreography, and creating new movement vocabularies. Dance writings of this time period, by choreographers and critics alike, also repeat the ideas of
“Leib gewordener Rhythmus (rhythm become body)” and a desired “inneren Rhythmus (inner rhythm).”

The dynamism Kramer identifies in Stramm’s poetry as well as in his relationship to Expressionism belongs not only to Stramm, but also to Der Sturm and its larger circle. After his poetry appeared in Der Sturm, Stramm’s poetic style became a model for many writers of the Sturm-Kreis; the enthusiastic reception and adoption of his poetics have prompted some scholars to speak of a cult of Stramm, yet it should be noted that one does not see an immediate shift, nor do all Sturm poets adopt a such a style. It is also unclear to what extent the Wortkunst-theory was shaped or influenced by Stramm’s poetry and how much of a role Herwarth Walden played in refining Stramm’s style during their friendship and then correspondence during the war. Stramm, perhaps due to his life being cut short by the war, never articulated his poetics, yet the roles of movement and materiality are undeniable, and essays published by Walden between 1918 and 1922 further support an ideal of poetics for the Sturm-Kreis with rhythm and movement at its core.

Walden’s essay “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung” (1918), highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, outlines key elements of Wortkunst, drawing a distinction between Schriftsteller (writers) and Künstler (artists, including authors and poets), Schrift (writing) and Kunst (art, including literary art), with Dichtung (poetry) ideally belonging to art (Kunst): writers, as opposed to artists, arrange words into concepts rather than concentrating on capturing each word and combining words to form the rhythm of a piece. In order to make his point about the lack of rhythm he sees in poems that adhere to a strict metric formula, Walden presents a poem of three quatrains in tetrameter with
varying rhyme schemes. He deems the rhythm and thus the movement of the poem measured, and after presenting his analysis of the assertions within the poem, Walden reveals that the three stanzas actually come from three different preeminent poets, demonstrating the interchangeability of the metrically-bounded strophes of master poets.

In addition to a freedom from metrical feet, Walden favors words over phrases or sentences as the material of poetry and returns to the role of movement in the concept of *Wortkunst* near the end of the essay: “Jedes Wort hat seine Bewegung in sich. Es wird durch die Bewegung sichtbar. Die einzelnen Wörter werden nur durch ihre Bewegung zueinander, aufeinander, nacheinander gebunden. Nichts steht, was sich nicht bewegt (Every word inherently possesses its own movement. The word becomes visible through movement. Via their movement, individual words are bonded to each other, on top of each other, and one after another. Nothing stands that does not move)” (67). Poetic art is realized through privileging the word and allowing them to move in relation to each other in rhythm. Walden calls for the poets of *Wortkunst* to be active, to move rather than simply be moved, to render sensible. Poetry that follows with Walden’s poetic ideal and bears similarities to Stramm’s example appears on the subsequent pages of the issue; one such poem is by Kurt Liebmann, another theoretical voice for *Der Sturm*, the author of the essay titled “August Stramm,” and the director of the experimental Expressionist theater “Die Sturm-Bühne”: “Roter Tanz Kreuz Bären Ich.”

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48 The style, vocabulary, and dance of Liebmann’s poem are similar to Stramm’s poetry, displaying the rhythm and dance that Liebmann writes about in his article on Stramm. I will return to this poem later in the chapter.
In his essay “Kritik der vorexpressionistischen Dichtung,” published in three parts from October of 1920 to February of 1922, Walden again approaches the question of what type of poetic work qualifies as art. In both the first and second parts of his essay, he returns to dance and movement, in addition to rhythm, in order to explain the ideals of Wortkunst. The first part of the essay, which is divided into three numbered segments, opens with the statement: “Kunst offenbart sich durch die Gestaltung des Materials. Man muss also Material und Gestaltung untersuchen, um festzustellen, ob ein Werk Kunst ist oder nicht (Art reveals itself through the composition of its material. One therefore must consider the material and the composition in order to determine whether a piece is a work of art)” (98). We know from other writings on Wortkunst that the material Walden refers to is the word. The emphasis on arrangement can be attributed to Walden’s identity as a composer, and it also bears semblance to one way of conceptualizing the act of choreography; Gestaltung will again become prominent in his dance piece “Shimmy.”

After taking issue with the value placed on famous personages like Goethe, he presents his aim: to promote the unmediated recognition and understanding of the essence of art. This insight can be cultivated independent of well-known names, which Walden states he uses merely as examples.\footnote{In both this essay and his “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung,” two such examples are Goethe and Heine, due to their place in literary history. Not only does he use an amalgamation of stanzas from their poems to illustrate his point in “Das Begriffliche,” he also references Goethe’s concepts of “gegenständliches Denken (objective thought)” and “gegenständliche Dichtung,” by including discussions of “gegenständliche Dichtung,” which he sees as mediated, and the unmediated “ungegenständliche Dichtung” as a part of his theory of what makes poetry art (67). In the third segment of part one of the “Kritik der vorexpressionistischen Dichtung,” Walden returns to the lack of immediacy in Goethe’s poetry, claiming that Goethe described rather than writing: “Er schrieb nicht, er beschrieb” (99).} In the final segment of part one, Walden emphasizes
that words and not language comprise the material of verbal art and turns from a critique to the ideals for a written work of art, drawing on dance as a parallel form.

Die Zusammenstellung der Wörter, ihre Komposition, ist das dichterische Kunstwerk. Wörter sind Klanggebärden. Die organische das heisst optisch gegliederte Gestaltung der Gebärden ergibt das Kunstwerk Tanz. Die organische das heisst phonetisch gegliederte Gestaltung der Gebärden ergibt das Kunstwerk Dichtung (100).\(^5\)

In the quotation above, the parallel is constructed in content and form, mirroring the importance of Gestaltung (composition) as it is articulated. The use of the term Klanggebärden (sound-gestures) to refer to the compositional elements of poetic works emphasizes the multisensory and performative aspect of poetry as well as the importance of movement: the words arranged on a page create a poetic work composed of sounds that move. Further parallels with dance, particularly its non-narrative genres, can be identified in Walden’s assertions that the emotional impact of a work of art depends upon the person taking it in [“dem Aufnehmenden”] and that the meaning of the work is ambiguous [“vieldeutig”]. The concentration on movement, both figurative and literal, emotional and physical, circles back to rhythm—“das Wesen jedes Kunstwerks (the essence of each work of art)” (100).

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\(^5\) The combination of words, their composition, constitutes the poetic work of art. Words are sound-gestures. A dance that is a work of art is made up organically, that means through the arrangement of visually articulated gestures. A poetic work of art is made up organically, that means through the arrangement of phonetically articulated sound-gestures.
In the second part of his essay, Walden again utilizes his technique of combining stanzas of various authors’ poems to make a point about poetics and meter. The departure point of this part of his essay deals with the problematic questions of Jewishness and artistic value, which Walden treats with a sarcastic tone as he discusses Heinrich Heine. Additionally, this part of the essay extends Walden’s critique of traditional verse and again connects rhythm and movement as he advocates a move away from meter. Nature is the dominant element in the six stanzas combined from poems by five poets, and according to Walden, in poems achieved by the mechanical counting of the syllables in a line, nature becomes the object of the song and is not artistically present. The goal is not a mimetic description of an object but the making visible of said object through rhythm as well as the arrangement of and relationships among words of a poem. The notion that movement and rhythm are present in the patterns and processes of motion in nature [“Bewegungsvorgänge der Natur”] and are capable of producing excitement is not only part of Walden’s critique of art but is also found in schools of various leading modern dance practitioners of the early 20th century period. In 1917, modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan wrote of how nature such as the movement of the waves inspired her, and from 1912-1914, Rudolf von Laban established a dance school in Ascona where students like Mary Wigman and Susanne Perrottet studied and performed dance, music, and speech in connection with nature. On Monte Verità, numerous artists and intellectuals from across different fields and aesthetic movements came together in a utopian community. From the nature-poetry-movement connection of the second part of the essay, Walden turns in the third and final part to drama, namely Schiller’s Jungfrau von Orleans in his critique of meter, art, and the value of words over statements in the
creation of art, thus extending his theory of *Wortkunst*, including the ideas of movement and rhythm dominant in the first parts of the essay, to drama as well as poetry.

The theoretical voices of *Der Sturm*, lead by Herwarth Walden, not only referenced dance, movement, and rhythm in theoretical essays about other art forms; they also wrote pieces that focused on dance and its role in society. In the essay “Shimmy” (April 1922), Walden employs the popular vernacular dance, which made its way into European culture after it became popular in the United States in the 1910s and 1920s, to highlight a cultural shift away from strict norms of bourgeois society. The essay mirrors this shift, moving from an introduction that presents cultural ideals and their consumption in the ‘good old days’ (“der guten alten Zeit”) in an ironic tone to the latter two-thirds of the essay that focuses on the shimmy and its relationship to art and society. At the beginning of the section on the growing popularity of dance, Walden follows the remark “Der Shimmy tanzt über verblühte Kulturen (The shimmy dances across withered cultures),” which he repeats in the middle and at the close of the piece, with an important statement about the place dance had been afforded in the realm of high art: “Der Tanz wurde von der hohen Kunst ausgeschlossen oder höchstens als Einlage geduldet. (Dance was either excluded from high art or, at the most, tolerated as an interlude)” (49). This 51

The shimmy, which involves fast rhythmical shaking of the shoulders and/or torso and sometimes the hips, came from African American culture and became popular in dance halls and stage acts during the 1910s in the United States (Bryant 168). Walden was at least somewhat aware of the appropriation of the shimmy in music, as he describes American composers, similarly to European composers, as having not invented anything new but rather noticing that the “Eingeborenen, zu denen sie nicht gehörten (natives to whom they did not belong)” (50). Walden penned this essay in the same year that Ziegfeld Follies dancer Gilda Gray, one of the white female dancers who had claimed invention of the popular dance, aided in the popularization of the dance by performing the shimmy in the Follies revue as well as in Europe (Bryant 173).
assertion aligns with and, in some cases, predates calls by contemporaneous dancer-choreographers and dance scholars to recognize and promote dance as equal to art forms such as music; here, Walden not only draws attention to the treatment of dance in the artistic context of the past but also simultaneously blurs the line between high art and low art by writing about the shimmy. In his multifaceted role as a composer, writer, the founder of the journal, and an impresario of avant-garde art, Walden repeatedly includes dance among other arts, using it to frame or highlight broader cultural conversations.

After a common and not unproblematic universalizing gesture linking dance to all times, peoples, and classes, Walden turns to the task of defining dance: “Tanz ist Bewegung. Bewegung Voraussetzung jeder künstlerischen Erscheinung. Gestaltete Bewegung ist Kunst (Dance is movement. Movement, the precondition of every manifestation of art. Structured movement is art.)” (50). Movement is thus central not only to dance but to all art, and the composition of this movement is inherent to the creation of art. Further supporting dance as an independent art form, Walden follows his definitional logic to the conclusion that dance can be created and presented without music, which reverses the often assumed relationship between music and dance—a trend among prominent modern dancers of the time. As he returns to a critique of bourgeois culture centered via dance, Walden draws a direct connection between it and Wortkunst, a link most clearly associated with the poetry of Wortkunst, namely that they both fell

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52 Rudolf von Laban sought to free dance from its subordinate role to music; he and his student Mary Wigman both created and performed dances without music. A 1914 program for a performance in the Großer Museumsaal in München that featured such dances under the title Der freie Tanz – Der Tanz ohne Musik contained a text entitled “Der Tanz ohne Musik (Dance without Music),” which emphasizes the purity and reception of this new form of dance.
victims to the same basic error: the confusion of rhythm and metrics. The result for dance, according to Walden who also composed music, including music included in modern dance programs, was that the dance and the music became undistinguished and simplified the more they adhered to a strict meter that limited them. Movement was rendered dependent upon the music. The limiting relationship between dance and music rememberes Walden’s critique of writing according to syllable stress in the aforementioned essay “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung,” in which he comes to movement via a closer look at poetics. A strict adherence to measured musical and poetic traditions leads him to the second basic error: the confusion of form and formula (50).

This criticism recalls Walden’s attitudes toward pre-expressionist poetry as well as Kurtz’s claim in “Programmatisches” that intellectuals who dismiss avant-garde art as immature dilettantism are too occupied with the seriousness of the task to recognize the possible freedom.

The way in which Walden relates movement and the metric-rhythm distinction within his critique proves especially productive to further understanding the capacity of dance to help reframe avant-garde poetics and art more broadly. The shimmy, which was rapidly gaining popularity across Europe at this time, freed dance from strict meter and—Walden claims—through moving, people found a relationship to dance, which they had previously dismissed as intellectually inaccessible. In contrast, professional dancers struggled in the ballroom, because they were used to being limited by meter.53 This

53 Though it is not clear which type of professional dancer Walden refers to here, a comparison at the end of his essay between the relative difficulty of the Shimmy and the Waltz suggests that the waltz might be the specific example of a dance too bound to meter.
created a need for dance instructors to thus find a way to make the new form of dance fit for society by bringing it into academic discourse as the art professors in the academies had done with expressionism. It would follow, if the Wortkunst befell the same two basic errors as dance, that the rhythms and movements of word compositions be unlimited, freed from strictures of tradition and intellectualized high art. In addition to movement and rhythm, Walden again asserts the importance and value of composition or creation ("Gestaltung") over the idea itself. Furthermore, Walden does not see the changes in dance or in other art forms as fleeting but rather as a sweeping and lasting shift: “Es ist derselbe schwere Irrtum, anzunehmen, dass es sich hier um eine Mode handelt, wie es ein Irrtum ist, den Expressionismus für eine Richtung zu halten (It is the same grave error to assume that this is a trend as it is to consider Expressionism a movement)” (51). The relationship between people and movement changed, and this lead to a new understanding of art rooted in sensible experiences. Grasping art involves conscious perceptibility.

In both poetic and essayistic engagement with the evolving essence of an experimental Wortkunst, Walden and his contemporaries repeatedly turn to dance and the combination of rhythm and movement to articulate their artistic ideals in a way that sets them apart from the limits of the intelligentsia as well as from literary conventions of the past and present. Dance provides a mode and model of expression for the ineffable; whether high art or low art, social practice or work of art, it is a dynamic, multisensory manifestation that is not merely mimetic of a previous experience. A ‘poetics of movement’ rejects the strictures of meter and the communication of ideas; it embraces the freedom of rhythm and privileges the words, their composition, and the relationships
that take shape and move among them. The dance poems, as well as poetic moments of essays, exist as a performance of the content via form and of form via content: to render dance poetically is not to create an image or association of a performance but to choreograph words, set them to rhythms that imbues them with perceptible vitality. As modernist dance was taking root in Europe and the United States, Walden and his contemporaries saw in it an art form worthy of promotion and emulation.

“To dance is to consciously vibrate in unison with the rhythms of the universe”

Around the time he wrote the essay “Shimmy,” Walden was cultivating another connection between dance and poetry. In addition to the well-known and well-documented Sturm exhibitions and readings that Walden supported, the Verlag der Sturm facilitated solo matinee performances by the dancer and poet Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup. The *Vossische Zeitung*, which played an integral role in the publicity and discussions of dance during this period in Berlin, advertised one such performance, praising both Torrup and her pianist Smidt-Gregor. After suggesting several qualities that make Lacour-Torrup worth seeing, the writer “P.” arrives at the following summative statement. “Rasen und Beten ist in diesem Tanz, in diesen sehr geadelten und sehr entfesselten Gebärdern, Fremd-Vertrautes, Gedanke und Empfindung und ein hinreiβender Witz, der den

54 Lacour-Torrup, “Thoughts” 7.
55 Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, Obj Nr. 14398 (Scrapbook IV. von Rudolf Gebauer, S. 90). Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup, who published German poetry for *Der Sturm* and wrote essays in English as well, was born in Denmark, lived in Lausanne, Switzerland as a child, and went to school in Hamburg, Germany. She most frequently gave dance performances in Germany and the United States, eventually taking up residence in the United States after spending time traveling between the two countries.
zartesten Einfall der Musik noch im tönenden Entgleiten mit einem süßen Schnörkel der Bewegung unterstreicht, festhält, neu schafft (Racing and praying are in this dance, in these very ennobled and very unfettered gestures, foreign-familiar, thought and sentiment and a captivating wit that uses a sweet flourish of movement to underscore, hold fast to, create anew the most subtle impulse of the music as its sound still slips away).” The contrasting dynamics and the element of Fremd-Vertrautes (foreign-familiar) highlighted in this description of Torrup’s dancing suggest that different movement qualities will come together in dances that work against an even meter and predictable sequences. Lacour-Torrup’s musicality—her sensitivity to music and ability to render its dynamics, rhythms, and phrases in movement—and its transformative energy underscored by the article, a talent likely furthered by her engagement with Walden and his own compositions, were defining characteristics of her style of dance.

Though Lacour-Torrup received positive reviews in Berlin, the reviews of her performances in Hamburg and Leipzig were not favorable, with the reviewer of the Allgemeine Künstler-Zeitung in Hamburg, Wilhelm Ehlers, even acknowledging that he could not support Berlin’s positive critique. The criticism out of Leipzig prompted a response from Walden on the pages of Der Sturm, showing his personal investment in Torrup’s art extending beyond the financial support of the solo dance event by the publishing house. In the section on dance in his “Von den schönen Künsten,” he quotes sections of the review that reflect poorly on the reviewer, who in one excerpt complains
that one cannot tell if the dancer is a boy or girl, and concludes each time with his own assessment: “Jedenfalls kann sie tanzen (In any case, she can dance).”

Walden was not alone in his assessment of her talents, as evidence by reviews from San Francisco, Copenhagen, and Berlin highlighted in the book Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup Dances published in English by the Verlag der Sturm in 1923. Already in the fall of 1922, Lacour-Torrup gave several long solo dance concerts in San Francisco. Likely due to an editorial decision reflecting the connection between poetry, movement, and rhythm advocated by Walden and his contemporaries at Der Sturm, three of the five highlighted reviews from San Francisco newspapers make an explicit link between poetry and Lacour-Torrup’s dance. Whether or not reviewers possessed knowledge of her poetry, the comments bring forth a discursive relationship between the art forms and frame Lacour-Torrup as a figure moving along and producing this medial encounter on two continents.

Though virtually unknown today, newspaper articles in the San Francisco Chronicle indicate that Lacour-Torrup was well known in the Europe and the United States, billing her as a “famous dancer” with an established “international reputation.” In the early 1920s, she frequently traveled between San Francisco and Berlin, also performing in other major European and American cities, and in 1923, she served for a

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56 Lacour-Torrup’s performance on May 30th 1923 in Dresden even included pieces danced to Walden’s “Tanz der Töne” and “Sturmmarsch” (DTK Obj Nr. 14398 (Scrapbook IV. von Rudolf Gebauer, S. 90). Other choreographers also used Walden’s music for their pieces, including prominent dancer, choreographer, and theorist Rudolf von Laban, whose 1927 series Die grünen Clowns featured music by Walden among others. Von Laban also choreographed an eponymously named trio to Walden’s Sturmmarsch in 1928 (Doerr 232-233).
half a year as a member of the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she taught interpretive dance. The June 10, 1923 news article announcing this position in the *San Francisco Chronicle* referred to her in the headline as a “local dancer.” The short article in the section of the paper for “Doings in Music and Art Circles” also mentions what could be the aforementioned book on her dancing: “From the German capital comes a finely illustrated brochure of her programs, published by ‘Der Sturm,’ the group of modernists in the arts. One notes the addition to her repertoire of Herwarth Walden’s ‘Tanz der Töne’ and a ‘Shimmy’ by Brougham.” The arts community of San Francisco was therefore at least vaguely aware of her connection to the *Sturm-Kreis* and Walden himself.

Torrup’s English essay “Expressionism in Poetry,” which opened the November 1925 issue of the literary magazine *San Francisco Review* provides evidence of her reception as a poet in the United States. In this essay, Ingeborg Torrup\(^57\) takes a universalizing approach to a discussion of expressionism and expressionists, a category she claims, to which all true artists belong. The link between “true art” and expressionism echoes the call of Herwarth Walden, particularly as seen in his “Kritik der

\(^57\) This essay appears under the unhyphenated name, Ingeborg Torrup. A newspaper article published upon her foray into stage acting (she had not given up her dance career and refers to it as “the real thing in my life”) explains that she became known in the United States as a dancer under the hyphenated name and had taken Lacour, because her parents had disapproved of her dance career. Torrup then states: “But the name was too long—Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup—and I have dropped the Lacour and will forever be Ingeborg Torrup. Not even a husband can make me change that now” (Warren 11). In Verlag der Sturm publications, her name appears in the hyphenated version. The shorter version of her name also appears on a record of travel into the United States, from Hamburg to New York, is a passenger list for the Orbita from June of 1923. (ancestry.com)
vorexpressionistischen Dichtung” (1920-1922). Though Torrup’s essay is concerned with
poetry and meditates on the manifestation of expressionism in visual arts before arriving
at the primary topic, dancers are mentioned as artists in the opening sentence, and they
bookend together with poets the types of true artists considered expressionists. Her
assertions that artists have “thrown off the yoke of intellectualism” and that words are the
material of poetry both echo ideas propagated by Walden in the various Sturm essays
treated earlier in this chapter. Torrup’s “we,” used in the essay to foreground the common
knowledge of expressionism in the visual arts, now encompasses the English-speaking
readership of the San Francisco Review.

That artists have “outgrown the reign of intellectualism,” a turn of phrase that
refutes criticisms of immaturity on the part of the avant-garde while framing
intellectualism as subjugating, comes together with an emphasis not only of emotion but
also of the concrete and the physical. Torrup draws attention to the creative power of
embodied knowledge: “After all, we know only what we have experienced by means of
our senses” (179). Though she does not mention her own dance experience or directly
mention dance as an art form beyond the opening sentence, her experience of creating
dance in addition to poetry granted her access to embodied artistic experience without
words, which as she states in a later point in the essay, pose a particular challenge to the
artist due to their seemingly inextricable link to thought. Torrup does not go so far as to
expel thought from the realm of art but insists that an artist should not rely solely on
thought or literary ideas.

This dual-identity as dancer and poet, in both Germany and the United States, is
further underscored in a review by Redfern Mason in the San Francisco Examiner, in
which Mason draws on the well-known lines of John Keats to convey the effect of her
dance on the audience: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, this is all / Ye know on earth, and
all ye need to know” (Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup Dances 8). These two verses are the final
lines of Keats’s poem “Ode to a Grecian Urn” and its citation evokes the modern dance
pioneer Isadora Duncan, who hailed from San Francisco, drew on poets for inspiration,
and taught her dance students, the “Isadorables,” to recite these very lines of Keats’s ode
(Daly 36). Mason had not only praised Duncan’s dances in his articles for the Examiner a
few years earlier but also served as her manager for six weeks at her request.58 By citing
Keats in his review of Torrup, he employs verse to draw a connection between the two
dancers, placing the former within a prominent legacy of American and European
modern dance. Though both dancers were also writers with a fondness for poetry, this
connection between an expressionist and Duncan, whose legacy unlike Lacour-Torrup’s
has endured, appears unusual. The photographs of Lacour-Torrup published among the
reviews in Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup Dances underscore this link, as she appears in a
Duncanesque tunic dress. This invites us to read the book’s layout as well as its
publication in English as a performative gesture by Verlag der Sturm to claim a lineage
that places their dancer and poet, as well as her impresario of sorts, Herwarth Walden, in
the footsteps of Duncan. Furthermore, the resonances established within the reviews,

58 A brief article appearing in the section entitled “The Spectator” of the weekly Town
Talk addresses a “most preposterously silly rumor” that Redfern Mason and Isadora
Duncan had eloped, citing Mason’s maturity and piety. The article clarifies the potential
source of the erroneous claim by stating: “Redfern Mason is enamored of Isadora
Duncan’s art. And Isadora Duncan is enamored of his appreciation. So she asked him to
become her manager.” Not wishing to leave the paper, Mason took a leave of absence.
(“Redfern and Duncan”).
images, and publications by authors and editors on both sides of the Atlantic suggest that the separation of Duncan’s dance legacy from German expressionist dance was motivated not by lack of similarities but by the desire to establish a nationalist narrative of modern dance.

Another review of the same weekend of performances in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, furthers the identity of Lacour-Torrup as dancer and poet when it refers to her choreography as a “reading”:

Take for example her reading of a Chopin nocturne, in which the body is scarcely shifted from one spot on the stage, denoting the essentially static rhythm of that particular poetic form, which the surface rhythms and emotional values are expressed through the torso and arms (8).

Modern dance is thus framed as a medium with which one can corporally render the content and form of the music. The attention to both “static rhythm[s]” and “surface rhythms” by the dancer and reviewer reveals the centrality and complexity of rhythm. The movement of her body within the space exemplifies the layers of rhythm present in the music, a layering present in Lacour-Torrup’s poetic formulation of dance as well.

This relationship drawn among music, dance and poetry bears similarity to Lacour-Torrup’s own ideas put forth in her essays “Thoughts on the Dance,” which opens the Verlag der Sturm book containing the reviews and photographs, and “Expressionism in Poetry.” In the former essay that pays tribute to Walden’s ideas about art, expression, and rhythm, Lacour-Torrup defines the nature of music and dance in relationship to one another. Following a breakdown of the different types of nature- and musical-rhythms, she asserts: “It follows that music is the audible manifestation of motion, organized by
man in accordance with the cosmic laws of motion. These cosmic laws of motion are perceived by man through his senses, through his body” (5-6). In her essay on poetry, she concludes her discussion of expressionism in the visual arts by asserting that these cosmic laws belong to the domain of “all the arts.” Art reveals the very cosmic laws that animate it. Having drawn a connection between visual arts and poetry, Torrup then links the material of expressionist poetry—the word—to musical rather than literary composition. The surface and static rhythms identified by a reviewer of her dance bear resemblance to her ideas about the construction of lines and the musical values of consonants, vowels, and accents: “Poetry is music” (181).

Lacour-Torrup not only promotes these links among the cosmic, rhythms, and motion in her essay but also presents their interrelationship in her poem “Tanz,” one of several pieces of Lacour-Torrup’s poetry to appear in issues of Der Sturm in 1923 and 1924. “Tanz” and her other works mirror the style typical of Sturm-Kreis poets who followed the example of August Stramm; however, what proves especially striking when read in the context of her other works and her work as a dancer so attentive to the physical expression of music’s poetics is the absence of the dancer’s body. Though not a

59 Though by no means unique, neither in the history of poetic theory nor in the modern discourse around poetry, the link Lacour-Torrup makes between poetry and music deserves mention, as it serves as an indication of how she views her own musicality as both dancer and poet.

60 Volker Pirsich lists Lacour-Torrup among poets of the third generation of Sturm writers who published for a short time and did not exert a strong influence on the journal (73). In a literary journal and circle that boasted few female voices, her presence as an artist practicing multiple forms, as Walden and leaders of the avant-garde did, is notable. Another dancer-poet, Willy Knobloch, appears among the handful of second- and third generation poets that make the list of minor voices in Pirsich’s monograph. I will briefly turn to his work later in the chapter.
singular occurrence, this absence is unusual. With the exception of the child mentioned in line 5, a person whose role and place within the dance remains unclear, the named bodies in “Tanz” are limited to celestial bodies.

Reading and listening to “Tanz,” the elements of repetition, varying line length, alliteration, and assonance work together to create a unique sense of rhythm, which comes together with the prominence of celestial bodies to embody Lacour-Torrup’s claim that “To dance is to consciously vibrate in unison with the rhythms of the universe” (Thoughts 7).

Rast die schwinge Sonne schalle Räder
Sonne Singen
Sonne Tönen Schwingen
Sterne
Sterne greifen Kinde
Lachen hüpfen
Springen hüpfen blanke Sterne
Spritzen
Funken schnellen trennen suchen suchen
Einen einen
Reigen schreiten wiegen
Wiegen wiegen schneller
Laufen laufen
Schwingschwang
Sterne
Sterne jagen Sterne
Sprung
Und Fassen
Sonne Singen
Reigen
Dreht die glänze Scheibe Mond der Fahrt

The title of Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup’s poem “Tanz” presents a singular noun without an article, signaling an engagement with an abstract term or a broader concept rather than with a particular instance of dance. Presenting the reader with rhythms, fleeting images, and series of motions, the unusual syntax and repetition in the poem resist both representation and interpretation. Yet the repetition of the sun and stars as the dominant nouns in the poem invoke a dance of the cosmos, an image common in modern poetry. This poem’s cosmic dance performs a double gesture across time, evoking the Pythagorean harmony of the spheres while also calling to mind the contemporary conversations surrounding Einstein’s theories that transformed conceptions of space and time. Dance, as many including Lacour-Torrup indicate, takes place in and across both of these dimensions: “Music happens in time, the dance happens in time and space” (“Thoughts” 6). Furthermore, its presence can challenge contemporary conceptions while

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61 This keeps with titles of many of her other poems as well as with a general tendency seen in the titles of stylistically similar poems published during the 1910s and 1920s in Der Sturm. Lacour-Torrup’s other poems in the July 1923 issue bear titles comprised of a single singular noun or gerund: Klage, Leiden, Ahnen, Angst. Her poems “Tanz” and “Vorfrühling,” the latter of which appears in a subsequent issue, carry the same titles as poems published by August Stramm in 1914 and 1915. Other poets, who subscribe to the poetics promoted by Herwarth Walden, also frequently title their poems with single words, often though not exclusively, nouns.
paying homage to the past. Likewise, when prescribing a way to write a new type of
poetry, Walden did not turn to a new concept when suggesting that rhythm is that which
bonds art forms. Rhythm is often ascribed to traditional dance practices of non-Western
cultures and surfaces in primitivist explanations of the differences between the ideal and
the Western traditions.

Torrup’s cosmic dance opens with motion (*rast*) at its outset, and this motion is
imbued with speed and an emotive quality. The movement continues as the line
progresses with two verbs functioning as adjectives: “Rast die schwinge Sonne schalle
Räder.” The use of verbs in the adjective position of the noun phrases performs a dual
function. Grammatically as well as semantically, an action takes the place of an attribute;
in essence, it demonstrates textually a feature of dance—the use of movement to create
an impression or explore a concept. Following her conception of expressionistic poetry,
“schwinge” and “schalle” along with the prevalence of infinitive verbs could be seen as
“purer material” or “unadulterated words,” which exist as sensual and emotional
experience rather than abstraction. This technique of using a verb form in an adjectival
position privileges the word over the phrase while also answering the call of Walden in
his “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung” to move rather than be moved, to act rather than
describe how you are acted upon. The final line of the poem also makes use of a verb as
adjective, “die glänze Scheibe Mond.” The first and final lines share another unique
element that sets them apart from the other lines: they begin with a verb conjugated for
the third person singular nouns. Moving from day into night in a cyclic pattern that
mirrors the cycles of the celestial bodies of the text, “Tanz” commences and ends with a
clarity not present throughout the short lines laden with infinitive verbs and plural nouns.
The movement of the sun in the first line, *schwingen*, recurs several times throughout the poem and is mirrored in the use of *schalle*, which refers to acoustic oscillations (Schwingungen). This use of *schwing* and *schalle*, as opposed to the available adjectival forms *schwingende* and *schallende*, also maintains an even, trochaic rhythm. A series of trochees, a rhythm rarely interrupted by moments of suspension signaled by a break in the rhythm through a spondee or a line of a single, accented syllable, keep time as the lines vary in length, moving in and out along the page, visually producing horizontal fluctuations complemented by the vertical movement of the capitalization. Though most of the poem adheres to trochaic rhythm, the combination of trochees with varying line lengths, use of repetition, and orthographic choices gesture toward the shift from meter to rhythm—a rhythm that is movement—advocated by Walden and other *Sturm-Kreis* members. The dominance of this type of foot also bears a connection to dance, as the other term for a trochee, a choree, comes from the Greek adjective χορεῖος, “pertaining to a dance” (“choree, n.”). The first break in the steady rhythm that courses through the poem occurs with the spondee forming the fourteenth line, the neologism “Schwingschwang,” which performs the suspension quality of the swinging motion. The dance continues with a second, shorter moment of suspension three lines later with “Sprung,” which is followed by the only line to begin with an unstressed syllable; the poem then comes to a close with the final lines keeping the trochaic rhythm. Together with this trochaic undercurrent that keeps time, the repetition of words and sounds adds to the rhythm and turns of the *Tanz*. While some words are repeated in series, sustaining a moment in the poem, others like “Sonne,” “Sterne,” and “Reigen” recur in various lines creating an auditory and visual echo, glimpses of the same image or
movement embedded in various constellations. The first time “Reigen” occurs, ushering in the center line of the 21-line poem, assonance adds another layer to the rhythm by forming a sound pattern that is then turned into another as the indicated movement direction shifts from forward to rocking: “Einen einen / Reigen schreiten wiegen / Wiegen wiegen schneller” (10-12).

At its core, this dance is a being danced by a group of (celestial) bodies. Not only is the Reigen placed at the center of the poem, ushered in by a repetition of the only use of an indefinite article (“Einen einen”), the cyclic forms and rotation that accompany the motion and rhythm of the first line bring the round dance or Reigen to mind from the beginning. Like the presence of the cosmos, the centrality of Reigen performs a double gesture toward a past and a contemporary change in traditional conceptions; additionally, the ronde was evoked in Stramm’s “Tanz.” An old form of social or folk dance, the ronde also enjoyed popularity in literature and visual art of the early 20th century, traversing the boundary between high and low art, social and artistic dance. Furthermore, Reigen was a concept taken up by Rudolf von Laban and other contemporary choreographers who sought to redefine modern dance and inaugurate “Die neue Tanzkunst.”

Of the six poems that Lacour-Torrup published in Der Strum, her poem “Tanz” distinguishes itself as the freest in form, with the fewest number of phrases and statements. Whereas her other poetry mixes more conventional syntax with the strings of nouns or verbs reminiscent of Stramm’s poetry, “Tanz” primarily consists of such strings and repetitions with many infinitive verbs flowing one into the next, creating a movement phrase with words as the material. In Torrup, we see a practitioner of both art forms, in which freedom from the formulaic, rhythm, and movement embody the avant-garde
ideals set forth by Walden and his contemporaries. In her poetry, dance, and essays, she gestures toward Walden’s writings and music, connecting the concepts of rhythm and movement across artistic media. “Die Bindung der Kunst ist aber ihre Bewegung. Der Rhythmus (But the bond of art is its movement. The rhythm.)”

(Dis)continuities in the Dance Poetry of Der Sturm

Although Herwarth Walden and Ingeborg Lacour-Torrup emphasize aspects of connection and universality among the arts with rhythm and movement playing a central role, a survey of the dance poems appearing throughout the journal’s tenure reveals diversity in the poetic treatment of dance. As such, the ideas put forth in this chapter as well as in the project as a whole, are not meant to portray a continuous development, but to highlight encounters, nexuses, and deviations in the network of dance and poetry. Many of the tropes, subjects, and styles of poems found in Der Sturm bear similarity with the broad range of German-speaking dance poetry published in various journals and poetry volumes during the first several decades of the 20th century. Examining the range of these poems serves to situate the analogous theories and styles found in Sturm-Kreis poets and those who followed the direction of Stramm or Walden within the broader discourse of Der Sturm and of dance writings in general.

In April of 1914, Alfred Richard Meyer’s poem “Die Barfußtänzerin Käte Fischer (The Barefoot Dancer Käte Fischer)” appeared in Der Sturm. Appearing around the time of Stramm’s first published pieces, this poem’s aesthetics do not adhere to nor approximate in some ways the poetic principles introduced by Stramm and Walden. Formally, as well as in content, visual aspects of the poem are dominant: line lengths
form a repetitive pattern through the four stanzas while the audible rhythms are largely
dictated by traditional syntax. The poem also belongs to a type not uncommon across
many contemporaneous journals—poems about a particular dance personality, most often
a woman. Nonetheless, Meyer’s poem presents an unusual example of this type of
poem, begging the question as to its seriousness.

Laß mich im tiefen Tal

deiner firmenweißen Zehen,
über die das Rampenlicht Alpenglühn schminkt,
zwerghaft ein Kletterer sein.
Ich verspreche dir auch, ohne Eispickel und Bergstock zu kommen.

Laß mich im Miroir

deiner goldgefaßten Nägel
einziger Voyeur sein. Hier bin ich! Dort bin ich!
Spiegel um Spiegel zeigt mich.

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62 Poems written in admiration of or dedicated to a dancer also appear in poets’
correspondence and diaries. Mary Wigman, Grete Wiesenthal, and Isadora Duncan were
frequent subjects and recipients of such poetic attention by German admirers. After
appearing in Der Sturm, Meyer’s poem “Die Barfußtänzerin Käte Fischer” appeared
under the title “An Käthe Fischer” in a collection of poems “Tanzplakatten” within his
book Der große Munkepunke (Hoffmann & Campe Verlag 1924). The Tanzplakatten
include poems with titles of dances, places with connections to dance, and dancers,
among them “Valeska Gert.”

63 Meyer published a combination of humorous and more sincere poetry in Der Sturm. In
Performing Femininity: Dance and Literature in German Modernism, Alexandra Kolb
presents a compelling reading of Meyer’s poem “Valeska Gert,” demonstrating Meyer’s
ability engage with dance more earnestly. The poem, while writing in a “fairly
traditional” style, employed Gert’s central elements of montage and interruption (186).
Jetzt konvex, jetzt konkav bin ich bald dorisch bald jonisch ein Tempel.

Laß der Lawinen Staub,

den Samum auf mich losstürmen!

Ich halte mich schon an dem einzigen Härchen fest,

das kein Depilatorium

aus der dunklen Schlucht deiner linken großen Zehe konnte entfernen.

Laß mir als Trunk den Quell,

der von oben duftig rieselt,

wenn du dann im Beifall des Publikums dich neigst.

Laß mich – verstatte mir nur

dieses einzige Mal Edelweis, Enzian pflückend – Tourist sein! (7)

With the exception of the line in which he refers to her bowing before the applauding audience, the poem does not portray the dancer’s movement, only her body and more than anything, the observer’s plea to visually admire her while navigating the landscape of her body. The male I quite literally objectifies Fischer, taking pleasure in her physicality and equating her to a force of nature. The lyrical I addresses Fischer and asks to be a voyeur of her and finally a tourist.

The concept of tourism together with the references to a simoom (north African or Arabian peninsular sandstorm) and different types of Grecian architecture allude to exoticized dance cultures or modern dance that draws upon the art and traditions of ancient Greece. While evoking a connection to nature, the references to the valley, the
mirror, and the avalanche together with the description of himself as “zwerghaft (dwarflike)” place her at a distance or on a pedestal of sorts. The female body, depicted as massive and of nature, does not dance; in essence, it is a dance poem stripped of movement. Whether taken at face value or as an ironic treatment of traditional dance-nature poems and/or poems written in adoration of female artists, Meyer’s poem stands in stark contrast to Stramm’s “Tanz” and accompanying poems that appear just two weeks after “Die Barfußtänzerin Käte Fischer,” highlighting the type of departure seen in Stramm’s poetics while demonstrating the variety of dance-related poetry in the early years of Der Sturm.

A different iteration of a poem combining dance and nature tropes appears in the July 15th 1916 issue. Kurt Heynicke was a frequent contributor of poetry to the journal, and his poem “Tanzlied”—a dance song of nature and the progression of the seasons—offers an example of poetry that embraces some of the freer form and rhythms of Sturm-Kreis ideals while still often operating at the phrase or idea level rather than privileging words as materials. With its syntax and emphasis on nature, “Tanzlied” also serves as a fairly typical example of Heynicke’s poetic style.

Lilien an deine Füße,
Birkenblättertanz im Mai.
Tropfensingen im Sonnenwiegen
Leuchtkäfer reigen die Sommernacht.
Gleitende Sonne auf rotem Dach
glitzernder Gang die Gassen entlang.
Aehrenwiegen im Abendwinde
Hüften reifender Frauen mit Herbst.
Schlafentgegen verblühtes Blatt
Staub am Fuß
sachthinüber in den Schnee. (47)

Across a swath of authors and poetic schools of thought, the *Tanzlied* was a relatively common poetic subject of the time. What differentiates this particular *Tanzlied* from many of the *Tanzlieder* of the early 20th century is the lack of stanzas and an even meter. Though not as free in form as the dance poems of some of his contemporaries, Heynicke’s “Tanzlied” does seem to embrace the call to free oneself from limits of strict meter and create a rhythm that moves, in particular through strings of consonance or assonance and stress patterns that repeat in places but also change frequently. Traditional dances would not pair well with this particular poem. Again, we see the presence of *reigen*, here as the action of lightning bugs, and the cyclic nature of the poem that moves through the seasons and also starts and ends with the dancer’s feet. Attention to individual body parts of moving bodies resembles an aspect of several dance poems, both of *Der Sturm* and more broadly. Like Meyer’s, Heynicke’s poem uses the second person, but the latter poem addresses a dancer in a much different way. In contrast to Meyer’s use of a name in the title of his poem and a repetitive plea to open each stanza, Heynicke’s poem uses only possessive adjective “deine (your)” to refer to a dancer’s feet in the first line; this unspecified address and the attention on nature rather than the body in a majority of lines could serve to universalize this dance song of the seasons.

Universalizing gestures, many more overt than this one, are seen throughout the essays about art, poetry, and dance presented earlier in this chapter; dance was often seen as a
universal language and a practice universal to all cultures, often with a primitive origin. I would thus situate Heynicke’s “Tanzlied” as more in line with some of the modernist ideas around dance in Der Sturm than with the experimental poetics that employed dance and movement.

In October of 1918, series of poems by both Adolf Allwohn and Lothar Schreyer appeared in Der Sturm, with each series including a dance poem among poems on themes of nature, death, suffering, and human conditions. The two poets, though both contributing a number of poems to the journal and featured several times in the same issues, vary significantly in their backgrounds, and to an extent, in their treatment of dance. While Schreyer is consistently one of the more experimental poets as well as a leading theoretical voice in the Sturm-Kreis, incorporating movement into his theater practices as well as his poetics, the theologian Allwohn has a somewhat less opaque style, though not consistently, and predictably makes more frequent use of religious tropes. Allwohn’s poem titled “Tanz” presents a dance out in nature, danced around a sea at night; this, like other poems recalls elements of a Reigen, a dominant motif for dance poem of Der Sturm.

Nacht um blauheimliche Seen zu tanzen
Rote Nelken rote
Der spitze Wind knistert die Scheiben Kraus streichelkraus
Das Dunkel hat die Läden Schwarz geladen
Nacht zu tanzen
Licht zu tanzen rote Blüten trillerleise falleblaue tiefe Brüste weit
Kuß ich

Handlos klettert die Bäume blind
Weiβ flittert den Himmel
Traum spritzt die springen Wellen knister leer
Raum rauschen kneen Kopf
Schwer weiten Blut blau

Allüber tanzen tiefen Gott (91)

Similar to the dance poems of both Stramm and Lacour-Torrup, the images of this poem appear and fade as new, sometimes incompatible images replace them. The semantic clarity of the lines varies and synesthesia creates a new, difficult to grasp sensuous experience. Repetition, in the form of assonance or consonance as well as on a semantic level, appears like an echo at various points throughout the poem, with the first instance of semantic repetition in the second line: “Rote Nelken rote (Red cloves red)”. This and other echoes reveal the weight given to the word as material, exploring different forms, as Walden and others often do in their essays and poetry: “Der spitze Wind knistert die Scheiben Kraus streichelkraus / Das Dunkel hat die Läden Schwarz geladen (The great wind rustles the panes curled caress-curly⁶⁴ / The darkness stored the stores with black)”

⁶⁴ The word “Kraus,” also appearing in the compound “streichelkraus” presents a challenge to translation, which is complicated by the complex blend of sensory impressions and images in the poem. It is unclear from the grammar of the line whether the capitalized “Kraus” is a result of elision (Krause, f.) and means ruffle or frizz or should be equated with the adjective “kraus,” despite capitalization. The latter could thus be translated in many ways including curly, frizzy, or—in the figurative sense—confused; most often, the word denotes messy curls and can be used pejoratively. Given the neutral tone of the poem and the frequent use of nature elements in the poem, I have chosen the terms that are most often paired with plant terms to indicated curled leaves.
(3-4, emphasis my own). In addition to the use of repetition, Allwohn makes occasional use of adjectival neologisms like *streichelkraus* and *trillerleise* (trill-quiet), a strategy employed by Stramm to convey the multisensory and seemingly indescribable. Within dance poems, this recalls the frequent association of the art of dance with the ineffable in *Sturm* essays and dance texts of the period. The recurrent pastoral settings of these dances, together with the celestial settings of Lacour-Torrup’s and others’ dance poems, again call to mind the artist retreat, Rudolf von Laban’s dance school, and festivals on Monte Veritá, Ascona.

Lothar Schreyer’s “Tänzerin” appears as part of the next set of poems in the same issue. Unlike the poems of Stramm, Allwohn, and Lacour-Torrup, which bear the identical title “Tanz,” this poem’s title signals an engagement with the female dancer rather than the more abstract term, another common approach to writing dance in the early 20th century. Schreyer’s poem differs, however, from many poems focused on a female dancer, as it is neither an ode to a particular performer nor a closed representation of a dance performed by her, though it borders on the latter. The dance differs from expectation, in that the dancer does not remain fixed on a stage or in a particular, observed setting. Lines like “Mädchenhaut / Fängt Dich der Knabe / Nie (Girl’s skin / The lad catches you / Never)” (10-11) indicate a youthful dancer caught up in an actual or metaphorical chase. Together with the final lines of the poem “Fort / Hin (Away / From here)” (18-19) this imbues the female dancer with an elusive quality.

The performative quality combined with descriptive elements detailing both the figure and her movement creates a character or type, a move that can be linked to Schreyer’s role at the Sturm-Bühne. In theater writings and in performances, movement
played an important role on the expressionist stage, with Schreyer and others advocating for dance or eurhythmic training for actors and lamenting the fact that many actors and actresses could not move well. In the course of the poem, Schreyer’s female dancer moves, engages another, and disappears. The poem itself is also visually performative, moving in and out and then tapering off on the page.

Schenkelnackt
Schwankelbrust
Ringe hell Haare hell Fuß
Kinderschoß
Hüftenhauch
Fangen die Spitzen der Zweige
Knospen die silbernen Glocken
Lippen Du
Locken Du
Mädchenhaut
Fängt Dich der Knabe
Nie
Hältst Du den Knaben
Nie
Wehen die Flügel
Fort
Fliegen die Sterne
Fort
The fragmented presentation of the dancer’s body in the beginning of the poem recalls the opening of Stramm’s “Tanz,” which presents glimpses of body parts as they move quickly in the dance. Both poems pair parts of the female body with qualities or movements often affording each part only a word or short line before moving onto the next: Schreyer’s dancer moves with both a “Schwankelbrust (Swaying-chest)” (2) and “Hüftenhauch (Breath-of-hips)” (5). The jump from the leg to the chest or the shoulder to the eye contributes to the movement of the poetic experience by quickly shifting focus, gliding over what lies between.

Schreyer’s use of composite neologisms further echo’s Stramm’s poetics and his portrayal of moving bodies in his “Tanz,” but whereas Stramm’s bodies are imbued with more chaos and violence, “Tänzerin” portrays the female as reduced to the seductive or otherwise gendered aspects of her body—her legs, chest, hair, hips, and lap. Despite a concentration on particular features of the female dancer’s body, one that repeats the all too common trope of the male poetic gaze observing and praising the moving female body, a shift is evident in the writing of a female dancer when compared to the previous example by Alfred Richard Meyer, “Die Barfußtänzerin Käte Fischer,” or even Rilke’s
quintessential dance poem “Spanische Tänzerin.” The former an address to a dancer and the other a depiction of a dance that turns to flame and then comes to a close, both poems contain more traditional poetic syntax and use simile and metaphor when talking about the dancer’s body. In Schreyer’s “Tänzerin,” several body parts are presented in compounds that pair them with a descriptive quality; the body is quite literally imbued with these elements as the lyrical I takes inventory of the body’s qualities. The poem resists, as do poems by Stramm and Lacour-Torrup, a unified image of a dancer moving in space, creating instead movement itself.

This resistance of a clear image of the dance or dancer as well as a verbal performance of movement appears in three dance poems by Willy Knobloch in the first and fourth issues of Der Sturm in 1919, among the poet’s earliest contributions to the journal. Knobloch, like Lacour-Torrup, performed as a dancer during the same years he wrote and published poetry, though as a dancer, he was and is known by his pseudonym Sebastian Droste. His Sturm-poetry appears from 1919 to 1922 under his given name, the use of which is most likely attributable to the timing of the initial publication in the journal. His volume of poetry, photographs and drawings, Die Tänze des Lasters, des

65 Walden and his contemporaries writing for Der Sturm certainly read and corresponded with Rilke, though Rilke’s poetic style differed from that of the expressionists and others published in the journal.

66 Most well-known for his collaborations with dance partner Anita Berber and rarely discussed individually, Sebastian Droste also appeared as a dancer in several films and was a member of Celly de Rheidt’s ballet troupe, a female erotic dance group that performed in many Berlin cabarets, prior to his work with Berber. When referring to Knobloch/Droste as an artist, I will use whichever name appears in the publication or scholarly discussions of the poetic or dance work in question.
Grauens und der Ekstase (1923, Dances of Vice, Horror, and Ecstasy\textsuperscript{67}), created in collaboration with Anita Berber, to whom he was married at the time, serves as an indication that he did not wish to separate his dancer and writer personae. In fact, Die Tänze des Lasters evinces a purposeful intersection of arts, as it presented dance via various artistic media, and Droste and Berber performed dances bearing the titles of the poems.\textsuperscript{68}

Although Droste’s dance style, which experimented with elements of the macabre, androgyny, and partial nudity, varies greatly from the impression given by reviews and photographs of Lacour-Torrup, the way in which the practitioners of both dance and poetry wrote dance bears stylistic as well as lexical similarity. This suggests that the expressionist rendering of dance in Wortkunst transcended particular styles of dance as well as appealing as a model to dancer-poets who wrote dance poems along with poems on other subjects. As both a male performer involved in several scandals and a known participant in the gay subculture in Berlin whose performances were disrupted on multiple occasions by police (Hergemöller 191), Knobloch / Droste also presented a different subjectivity than usually occupied by either the authors or subjects of dance poetry. Close readings of Knobloch’s dance poems in Der Sturm reveal poems that aligned with the key tenets of the Sturm-Kreis poetics while bearing unique aspects that parallel his dance style and identity.

\textsuperscript{67} Merrill Cole’s English translations of Droste’s and Berber’s collaboration were published by Side Real Press in 2012.

\textsuperscript{68} Karl Toepfer notes in his Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910-1935 that we do not know if the dance performances included spoken elements of any of the poems, though their structures aimed to convey the “voice” of the poems (88).
Knobloch’s “Tanz” appears together with his poems “Flug” and “Klage” in the April 1919 issue. The frequent use of ellipses throughout the poem is visually striking even before a reader begins the poem.

Feuerbrände reißen rote Haare
Strähnen ziehen . . . Regen . . . Regen
Triefen . . . treifen . . . wallen . . . wallen
lösen . . . fallen . . .
Sonne lacht.

Leiber kugeln . . . drehen . . . wenden
schweben . . .
lache . . lache . . gurre . . girre
Tanz kreischt auf
Ton versinkt
Brüste spritzen . . . Atem keucht
Auge lacht
Ohren zittern
Ton fällt ab . . ab und auf . . .
Wellen zittern
Rausche . . rausche . . . . . . . (8)

The repetition of punctuation that marks the absence of words elongates the movement and rhythm of the poem while also drawing the reader’s eye along to the next word or line. The varying lengths of the ellipses underscore that these moments are part of the
multisensory rhythm as much as the words and phrases. Occurring between verbs or phrases that do not seem to lack information, the dots function as a form of suspension. Given Droste’s penchant for scandal and sexually charged performances, together with what is most likely an allusion to Berber via her signature bright red hair in the first line—a frequent occurrence in the poems in their *Tänze des Lasters, des Grauens und der Ekstase*—this suspension of movement and rhythm can also be seen as a provocation, drawing the audience of readers into a controlled tease. The final line of the poem consists of a repeated onomatopoetic verb in a form that is both the first person present tense and singular imperative form: “Rausche . . . rausche . . . (Whoosh . . . Whoosh . . . .)” (16). At once indicating what the unmentioned lyrical-I is doing at the close with a word that evokes both movement and sound while commanding the addressee to do the same; the movement and effect of the dance, at multiple places of the poem where this ambiguous verb form is used, is experienced by an *I* and a *you*, resonating with both. With this, the line leaves the reader with a soft sound that trails off while also calling to mind the state of rapture or ecstasy [“Rausch”].

The body, in fragmented form, plays a more prominent role than in Lacour-Torrup’s “Tanz,” and the parts of the body perform in unconventional ways: they are loud, messy, and shaking. Yet the body as a whole and the dancing subject remain elusive in the multisensory dance that shrieks. The *Wortkörper* themselves are dancing together with the fragmentary bodies. Attention to the verbs, particularly the infinitives, reveals a common movement language and rhythm between Knobloch’s and Lacour-Torrup’s word-dances: the movement oscillates, turns, hovers, rises and falls. This movement language and its rhythms course through the poems, bringing together a conceptual dance
with the poetic form. And though Knobloch also employs ellipsis in other poems, including “Klage,” which appears on the page following “Tanz,” no other poem contains as many, and they rarely separate individual verbs; “Klage” contains only three ellipses, all occurring at the end of a line with two at the end of a stanza. The ellipsis, with its suspension, guiding movement, and teasing quality, thus appears to have a uniquely dominant role in his dance.

Like Schreyer and others, Knobloch also turned his poetic attention to the female dancer; his poem “Tänzerin” opens his series of poems, which also includes “Südlicher Tanz” in the July 1919 issue.

Recke Kobold Deine Arme
Recke Strecke
Biege Breche
Wirbel Blume
Suche Suche
Arme huschen
Binden schlangen
Fangen Jauchzen
Sonne Du . . .
Deine Arme
Sprudeln singen
Rasen Springen
Hüpfen Knien
Fallen Schweben
One element that makes this poem’s Tänzerin stand out from other poems that focus on the female dancing body is the moniker “Kobold (sprite⁶⁹)” in the first line. By referring to the female dancer as a Kobold, Knobloch complicates the feminine stereotype of a dancer while imbuing her with an unpredictable and even malicious quality. A Kobold, often invisible, also has the ability to appear among humans in various forms, a potential link to the costume and gender play in which both Droste (Knobloch) and Berber engaged. A playfulness presents itself in the formal aspects of the poem as well as in the figure of the Kobold. The imperative verbs evoke a sense of engagement between a voice and the dancing figure. Nouns like “Wirbel (whirl)” evoke movement as well, while “Blume (flower)” seems to masquerade as another imperative, matching the rhythm and ending of the verbs; it is followed by the ambiguous “Suche,” which works as either a noun or imperative. The use of verbalization with “schlangen” literally changes a noun into an action; throughout the poem, there is a blurring of nouns and verbs grammatically and orthographically. The playfulness of the Kobold as well as Droste’s own penchant for traversing boundaries are enacted in the pace, semantics, and language of the poem.

The use of the second person, common to this type of poem, appears in several forms, from the imperative forms in many of the first lines to the mentions of the dancer’s arm to the line “Sonnen Du . . . (Suns you . . .)” (9). The rhythm and construction of this line are similar to the lines of Schreyer’s “Tänzerin”: “Lippen Du / Locken Du (Lips you / Tresses you)” (8-9). Leading up to this ninth line, the rhythm

⁶⁹ A Kobold is a German mythological household spirit that is both larksome and impish but can become spiteful when angry.
unfolds in a series of trochees with imperative and infinitive verbs dominating, driving the poem’s and the dancer’s movement. The ninth line then differentiates itself in rhythm with the “Du,” following this break with the suspension of the ellipsis that characterizes the dance style of Knobloch’s previous dance poem. The only other word that breaks the trochaic rhythm is the final “Aus (end; off),” a word frequently used as a stage direction at the end of a piece or scene; the dance ends and the dancer disappears as quickly as it began.

Knobloch’s “Südlicher Tanz” takes a different approach to a dance poem, drawing on imagery, scents, and movement associated with animals moving through a dark jungle, as the first line introduces: “Raubtieraugen grünen Urwaldsnächte (Predators’ eyes turn jungle nights green)” (1). Though large parts of the poem read like the experience of the multisensory elements and movement of a jungle, presented as a metaphorical dance, the occasional presence of the pronouns “Ich” and “Du” following infinitive verbs or plural nouns ending in –en like the verbal infinitives, as we have seen in other poems by both Schreyer and Knobloch, together with the final lines of the poem: “Schatten / Nachten / Du und Ich . . . (Shadow / Nightfalling / You and I . . .)” (51-53), suggest a duet performed in a way that evokes the jungle world rendered sensible in the poem. This ambiguity surrounding the essence of a “southern dance” provides yet another example of the enigmatic character of Knobloch’s poetry, his own dance experiments, and a feature of dance and Wortkunst compared and celebrated in Walden’s theoretical essays. In this poem, as in his other dance poetry, Knobloch employs techniques common across major and minor Sturm-Kreis poets: series of verbs, here most often in the infinitive, a blurring of grammatical forms, attention to movement vocabulary
as well as the movement of words in the poem, and multisensory elements of the dance. In both Lacour-Torrup and Knobloch (Droste), we see practitioners of both art forms, whose works embody freedom from the formulaic, rhythm, and movement—the avant-garde ideals set forth by Walden and his contemporaries. In print and on stage, rhythm and suspension create dances that grapple with that which eludes representation.

Freer in form and content than poems by either Stramm or Lacour-Torrup, Kurt Liebmann’s “Roter Tanz Kreuz Bären Ich,” appearing in the same September 1918 issue as Walden’s important essay on Wortkunst poetics “Das Begriffliche in der Dichtung,” presents a violent dance in a chaotic constellation of images and actions. A few years later, in the aforementioned essay “August Stramm” (1921), Liebmann would draw attention to dance elements in his veneration of Stramm’s works, which clearly served as a model to Liebmann. In addition to boasting the most experimental style and content of a dance poem found in Der Sturm—to the extent that its inclusion here interrogates the boundaries of the label ‘dance poem’—the poem also stands out for its length; at 181 lines, it is nearly double the length of Stramm’s “Tanz.” Yet if we take the title at face value, it is a dance, a red dance [“Roter Tanz”] that features an I, you, and bodies—male and female, whole and fragmented, addressed and observed—moving, bleeding, and cacophonous in a seemingly ever-changing environment. There is a violence in the images and actions that bears semblance to Stramm’s “Tanz” as well as other poems of the period; blood frequently recurs, especially at the end of the poem. This dance begins with a “Qualfetzschrei (Anguishshredscream)” (1), a word that reflects the uniqueness of the primal scream, and movement ensues. Within this word, in which newness and
primeval meet, lies the common modernist double-gesture to a past and an avant-garde present common in the works of poets like Stramm, Liebmann, and Lacour-Torrup.

Like its inaugural neologism, “Roter Tanz Kreuz Bären Ich” presents a poetic engagement with dance that simultaneously pushes the boundaries of the dancing poetically while enacting, in content and form, numerous features that unite practitioners of the *Sturm-Kreis* poetics of movement. The repetition of sounds, images, words, and word types plays a dominant role in the rhythms of the poem, embodying the idea that the rhythm of a dance or poem is both multilayered and multisensory. Present participles, adverbial and adjectival, as well as the prefixes zer- and ent- repeatedly recur, often in series of verbs grouped closely to one another, with the first occurrences happening close to the beginning of the poem:

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Qualfetzschrei
palmauf
spiralend ästelnd
würgt Röchel platzender Himmel
Splitternd überwölbt
und
steilt
zerrasselt Sterne Sterne Sterne
fetzt zerfetz
und hetzt
zerwirrt zersprüht
und
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With the exception of the occasional use of “zer-” in Stramm’s “Tanz,” in which two of the three verbs used in combination with zer- appear in “Roter Tanz Kreuz Bären Ich,” the emphasis on these prefixes is particular to Liebmann’s poem. The prefix zer- does perform an aspect that takes a different form in other dance poems: fragmentation or disintegration. In the beginning lines alone, the vast array of types of this fragmentation or disintegration emphasizes the role of the multisensory using uncommon words or neologisms, also seen in other Sturm poems: we encounter, among other examples, the auditory clatter of “zerrasselt” (8), the chaotic motion of “zerwirrt” (11), and the visual and likely haptically perceptible “zerglühe” (14). Constant movement and sound is further found in the recurring present participles like “spiralend ästelnd (spiraling branching)” (3); the sense of continuous motion is underscored by Liebmann’s frequent use of the participle where other Sturm-Kreis poets favor the infinitive verb. In general, Liebmann’s poem stands out for its manipulation of language in ways that favor not just the word as material but morphemes that recur and create their own layer of meaning as they echo throughout the poem.

Noun-triplets, as seen in the eighth line of the poem above, as well as doubles like “Glocken Glocken (Bells bells)” (158, 165) form another type of repetition—trochaic pulses that briefly suspend the movement and images: “Knieen laß flehen im Marmor mich wölbenden Stirntempels / Strahlen Strahlen Strahlen speeren auf / und (Kneeling let me beg in marble of the arching frontal temple / Rays rays rays spear out)” (29-31,
emphasis my own). A majority of the repeated words refer to emitted sounds, light waves, or bodies, connecting the auditory, visual, and physical via the gesture of repetition, repeated in different iterations. The sense of suspension created through these repetitions is enhanced by the use of common words in the pairs and triplets as opposed to the frequent neologisms and unusual usages and compounds throughout the poem. The novelty of the poem’s language that begins with the opaque title and the first line reflects the ineffable quality many artists saw as inherent to dance as well as the attempt to express this ineffability verbally.

Bodies, corporeal and celestial, as well as the elusive spaces they inhabit are caught up in a dance, in powerful movement that is both ecstatic and destructive. The poem, its subjects, and the often-fragmented bodies move through diverse places from space, to nature, and the city, all complicit in the creation of the soundscape and movement. These places overlap, moving through or alongside each other, blurring boundaries as their inhabitants perform sounds and movements typical of those in other places:

Arme Arme zerren sternende Kugeln
Kugeln zischen kieselnde Kreise
Um Flattertürme bogen zwitschernde D-Züge
Autos überkugeln
Tuten Bersten Wiehern
Wimpelnde Hähne wirren Plätcherlüfte

70 The series of two or three repeated nouns in the poem contain words with two syllables with one exception—“Durst Durst” (141).
The circular dominates the motion and objects of this section of the poem with animal sounds ushering forth from modes of transportation, and nearly everything implicated in the few lines performs unexpectedly—elements part of the confusion of the dancing city [“… Wirnis tanzender Stadt” (87)]. Yet the city is not the only dancing place amidst the moving bodies. As the poem courses on, the chaos of the city flows into continued destruction, a repetitive flame motif, and bodies that fall and flounder, and we encounter a dancing space or room: “Seelenlohe armt tanzenden Raum (Blaze of the soul grasps dancing space)” (127). Concrete imagery tumbles into the abstract as spaces transform and move as quickly as bodies pass through them. The I and you repeatedly resurface, individually and together, amidst the tumult; they splinter, bloom, crawl, and climb with the you appearing in stillness multiple times as its own line.

A final feature of Liebmann’s poem reminiscent of Stramm’s “Tanz” is the cyclic gesture of the repetition of the first word and line “Qualfetzschrei” in the fourth to last line before the poem and movement come to a close:

Qualfetzschrei entblättert
steint
Du Wir
Ich. (178-181)

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71 Here, the chaotic city—a common motif of Expressionist art—meets a dance afire not entirely dissimilar from those examined in the first chapter. The intersubjectivity felt and enacted by the bodies and personal pronouns of the fiery, racing poem, evokes kinesthetic empathy on the part of the reader caught up in the performative poem.
Whereas Stramm’s poem fades to an end with an ellipse, the movement of this poem comes to a full stop, as the inaugural scream loses its leaves and turns to stone. The subjects are named once more, united by a “Wir (we)” that only appears in the penultimate line; the cacophonous and chaotic “Roter Tanz” brought the I and you together. Liebmann’s poetic experiment, which appears among other stylistically similar poems by Schreyer and Allwohn, performs one extreme iteration of the explosion, expansion, and movement the Sturm-Kreis expressionists sought. It interrogates what it could mean to operate without limits on form, to favor the word or indeed parts of words above ideas, and to compose movement, presenting examples of the “Gewalt befreiter Wort-Stürze (power of freed word-plunges)” that he praises in his essay on Stramm’s works published a few years after this poem.

In addition to its place as the subject of many poems throughout the history of *Der Sturm*, dance figures in a number of other expressionist poems and dramas, for example in the fourth act of August Stramm’s *Geschehen*, in which dance not only plays a prominent role with emitters of light [“Strahler”] dancing among *he, she, and stars* but is included among the subjects as “Reigen (round dance)”⁷² In addition to the presence of dance within the piece, movement and performance quality were essential to expressionist dramas of Stramm, Schreyer, and their contemporaries, with stage directions often outnumbering the spoken words of scenes; this demonstrates yet another

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⁷² Lothar Schreyer, the leader of the Sturm-Bühne who includes the fourth act of *Geschehen* in his essay on the writing of expressionist dramas “Die Wortgestalt,” calls the drama an impossibility for the contemporary theater (357). Schreyer prefaces this comment by acknowledging that this play had never been staged; until 29th of March 2014, when *Geschehen* premiered in Münster, this held true.
way in which movement and dance figured central to the thematic content, the methodology, and the theories underpinning the *Wortkunst* of the *Sturm-Kreis*. Dance, most frequently as the verb *tanzen*, also frequently appears in poems on various subjects: war, humanity, love, art, nature, and others. Kurt Liebmann’s “Arenarot” (April 1921) provides one example of how of poems feature dance among the series of infinitive verbs within a poem that is not necessarily about dance:

hüfte Schellen
röten
rauchen
würgen
höhen
sternen
tanzen
schlingen (64-71)

The title of the poem as well as the verbs that indicate movement or actions associated with the body evokes a sense of spectacle. As it stands alone as a line in a series of verbs, the interpretation of the type of dance happening takes shape from the verbs around it as well as from nouns or pronouns that may indicate a dancing subject. Beyond the shimmy in the dance halls, dance had caught on in nearly every arena with poets evoking the performance of rhythmical sequences of movement in many contexts.

Tracing the presence and poetics of dance, particularly in “dance poems,” throughout *Der Sturm* draws forth recurrent tropes of the cosmos, nature, suspension, fragmentation, and a double gesture toward primitive or ancient cultures and an avant-
garde present. Such tropes as well as a move away from artistic traditions and rigid structure embody characteristics of the contemporaneous development of modern dance and the popularization of new social dance styles, cultural manifestations that appeared among the poetry and essays on the pages of *Der Sturm*. Dance and poetics of the period clearly resonated with one another as artists practicing a range of forms turned to dance not in an effort to represent its movement but to embrace the freedom to move that could potentially express the ineffable surrounding them. Reading across diverse examples highlights the specific poetics at work in the type of *Wortkunst* called for by Walden and *Sturm-Kreis* poets, as the poems demonstrate the possibilities of creating movement through the arrangement of word-bodies. The varying line lengths and frequent use of series of infinitives not only privilege the word over the thought or statement but also create a sense of movement in the visual layout as well as the reading experience with repetition, ellipses, and shifts in established rhythmic patterns embody suspension. The frequent use neologisms employed by many *Sturm-Kreis* poets demonstrates another method of letting the word be the primary material of the art form and imbues the language with a sense of fluidity and flexibility, the possibility for movement that can express that for which the standard language does not suffice. The dance poems of *Der Sturm* vary in their style, poetically performing suspension, circular motion, variable rhythms, fragmentation, and connections of the past and present in disparate ways; yet most of the non-representational dance poems of the avant-garde journal embrace the call to compose word-art free of stricture that allows for the experience of movement and rhythm.
Rhythmic Vitality in Dance and Lyric Poetry

Whereas Herwarth Walden draws upon dance and movement to establish the centrality of dynamic, sensuous rhythm for ideal expressionist Wortkunst, the poet Paul Zech employs his knowledge and appraisal of dance writings to critique dance performances, arriving at conclusions that bear similarity to the discourse Walden promotes and thus demonstrating the resonance and relevance of Walden’s ideas beyond the relatively small circle of Sturm-Kreis writers. In an unenthusiastic review, “Die arabischen Tänze der Yve und Vera Landrin,” written for Der Sturm in 1912, poet Paul Zech praises and quotes from Lasker-Schüler’s dance in the mosque in Die Nächte der Tino von Bagdad as a point of comparison and positive counterexample when critiquing the Landrin sisters’ lack of vitality and soul: “Schön frisierte Bildlichkeit ist das ganze Ereignis. Nicht mehr (The entire event is beautifully groomed imagery. Nothing more)” (170). According to Zech, the sisters dance “photographically,” suggesting a lack of life and movement.

In the final two paragraphs of the review, after describing what the dancers did and did not accomplish in their interpretations, Zech again turns to literature, specifically lyrical poetry, to clarify his critique as well as an overall assessment of the value of such dances. Showing his clear preference for Lasker-Schüler’s mode of writing dance, he remarks that the dances of the Landrin sisters could not even be construed as a recasting of Rilke’s “Spanische Tänzerin”—the Spanish element in which he criticizes as assimilated feeling [“assimiliertes Gefühl”]. This comparison is not only relevant in the context of dance reception and questions of orientalism in performances and texts of the early twentieth century but draws a line in the sand between the high modernists and the
expressionists. At stake are the vitality of feelings and the quality of the experience. The value of such dances, according to Zech, bears semblance with the translation skills of mediocre poets attempting to render Chinese and Persian art. Absent from such attempts is the rhythm of the Eastern soul [“Rhythmus der morgenländischen Seele”]. Rhythm, here, as in the poetic and dance theories circulating Der Sturm, is vital. It embodies not only the patterns and tempos of a work but also that which courses through it and is emitted from it. Form and rhythm, whether on stage or confined to the page, entail movement and engage the senses.

Movement and the art of dance not only provided compelling subjects for writers and visual artists of the early 20th century, they also became the very medium for a new way of poetic thinking. Dance and movement embodied a choreographic approach to “Wortkunst,” the ideal poetics of the Sturm-Kreis. Walden saw in dance a companion to poetry that had movement and rhythm at its core and yet was also vulnerable to similar limitations of traditional grammar, meter, and convention. The hesitance of the intelligentsia to embrace new forms of art becomes apparent in the response to the avant-garde as well as in the repeated gibes at these conservative intellectuals by contributors to Der Sturm. Reading the essays and poetry of Der Sturm with attention to the connections between dance and poetic thought gives us a more fine-grained understanding of the debates surrounding new art forms in the early 20th century. The aesthetic ideals of the Sturm-Kreis and the debates they ignited resonate with contemporaneous developments in German dance and shed light on conversations across artistic media in and around expressionism and related movements intent on embracing a freedom to move. “Die
Bindung der Kunst ist aber ihre Bewegung. Der Rhythmus (But the bond of art is its movement. The rhythm.)” (Walden “Das Begriffliche” 67).
“Ein Geschenk für Sie (A gift for you).” The quiet and succinct phrase gently pierced the solitude of the reading room in the Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln. A hand then placed a mail band on the table where I was working, and the archivist left the room, returning, I assumed, to the recently-delivered mailings. “Tanz ist leibhaftige Lyrik (Dance is lyric poetry in bodily form)” (see fig. 1). I understood the gifting gesture as an acknowledgement of my niche research interest floating around in the “real world” and tucked it away for safe keeping in what was slowly becoming my personal archive of my archival work.

I do not know what the translucent wrapper of the Staatsballett Berlin once held, but in an era in which an international resurgence in the interest in poetry has been documented\(^73\), the company clearly and definitionally linked dance and poetry, much like

\(^{73}\) Several German cities have recently instituted annual poetry festivals, and a 2019 article in Die Welt about the new festival in Frankfurt am Main, an especially meaningful location given the city’s role as the host of the world’s largest trade fair for books,
poets, theorists, and dance critics of the early 20th century had done a century prior. In addition to a conceptual overlap acknowledged in various forms and genres of writing, dancers and choreographers have engaged with poetry in their works throughout the past century. The relationship between German poetry and dance—explored predominantly by means of poems and poetic theory in the first chapters of this work—was and is reciprocal. The framing of dance as poetry and poetry as dance is, I would argue, born of modernism yet still present today in many forms, including an advertisement.

Though intersecting with German culture through a performance and its resonance rather than the country of origin of the artists, Vaslav Nijinsky’s 1912 performance of Stéphane Mallarmé’s “L’Après-midi d’un faune” represents one of the most widely known examples of dancing a modernist poem in the early 20th century. He was also not the only well-known dancer of his time drawn to Mallarmé’s symbolist aesthetic; in 1936, Clotilde Sacharoff (née von Derp) created a solo “Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune” after spending time studying Mallarme’s poem in depth and eventually feeling unsure as to whether an audience could accept a woman in that role. Sacharoff had also danced another “Faune” to Debussy’s music with someone singing Verlaine’s text during the performance.

Identifies a “Lyrikboom” that has taken place over the last ten years. In the United States, this 21st century trend is supported by data from the National Endowment for the Arts’ 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), which noted a peak in poetry reading across demographics over the 15-year life of the survey (Iyengar).

74 Nijinsky was not only the subject of dance reviews and scandals in German-speaking publications; German-French poet René Schickele wrote a “Widmung an den Tänzer Nijinski,” which appeared in a monthly literary journal in 1913, clearly referencing the performance of the aforementioned poem: “Befreie uns, strahlender Faun, du! Springe, (Free us, you radiant faun! Leap,)” (1).
As mentioned briefly in the chapter on *Der Sturm*, several dancers and choreographers associated with the expressionist avant-garde performed poetry through dance, and some of this began during their dance training. Rudolf von Laban founded a dance school in Zurich in 1915, which he sold to one of his students, Suzanne Perrott, three years later. One of the five divisions of the school was the “Abteilung für Tanz, Ton und Wort (Department for Dance, Sound and Verbal Expression).” Though predominantly an institution for training dancers, many of whom went on to have professional careers in Germany and other countries, students were instructed in how to recite texts and speak from the stage. Performances during the school’s recitals consisted of a mix of dances, declamation, and music with some numbers incorporating poetry and dance together.\(^{75}\) In 1917, Mary Wigman, then a student of Laban’s who would come to be one of the best-known German dancers of the 20th century, danced to Felix Beran’s poem “Tanz der Lust” as a part of the Zurich event “Tanz und Melodie im Wort.”\(^ {76}\)

Dadaist performances also incorporated trained dancers, who often wore masks and costumes that obscured contours of the body: in opposition to many of the dance theories surrounding US and German modern dance, dance in Dada was not about individual expression and form. Sophie Tauber, like Mary Wigman a student of Rudolf von Laban’s on Monte Verita in Switzerland, danced to Dada poetry in the Cabaret Voltaire. In her article “Sex and the Cabaret: Dada’s Dancers,” Ruth Hemus discusses the underrepresented role of dancers in Dada and states, with relation to Sophie Tauber’s

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\(^{75}\) The end of semester recital on June 27, 1917 included a “Tanz nach Gedichten” by Elsa von Stegmann, a student not known today (citation).

\(^{76}\) The estate of Käthe Wulff, housed at the Deutsches Tanzarchiv Köln, contains documentation of this performance and its reception.
performance: “Words, usually confined to the pages of a book, were broken into sounds, transferred into the space occupied by the performers, and contributed to the creation of new performance experiences not dulled by visual, linguistic and aesthetic sets of conventions.” (99) The irreproducible and non-narrative qualities of modernist dance presented avant-garde movements like Dada with a new aspect of performance that could be easily divorced from conventional language.

The aforementioned examples are just a few documented examples of modernist dance of various styles incorporating poetry in dance performances. Like the poems presented in the first two chapters, they demonstrate a broad resonance between the two art forms, whose practitioners were prolific in the first several centuries of the 20th century. Often, the modernist dances of poetry featured the works of contemporaneous poets. As the 20th century unfolded, dance audiences witnessed a continued engagement between dance and poetry, though the prevalence of such performances waxed and waned, with dancers taking up poems of their contemporaries as well as modernist poems.

Though isolated examples of dance and poetry on stage likely exist between the 1940s and the 1970s, archived and/or reviewed performances of poetry through dance seem to gain traction again in the 1980s. On December 19th, 1987 in the Keller Theater of Leipzig, a ballet program “Tanz und Lyrik” celebrated the 70th anniversary of the October Revolution. In the 1980s and 1990s in Berlin, American choreographer Jacalyn Carley, whose work I discuss in the final chapter, frequently choreographed works that explored poetry and dance. Carley’s website notes the influence her piece to Kurt Schwitters’s Ursonate had on the German dance scene in Berlin: “Her choreography to
‘Schwitters Ursonate’ put the young *berliner tanzfabrik* on the radar at the time, catapulting the new company into the spotlight in Germany” (Carley “Choreography”). Her works using Ernst Jandl’s poetry remained in her company’s repertoire for many years. Looking at the ephemera of the late 20th century shows that, much like the arts and theatre journals of the first decades of the century, the playbills of dance performances from the 1980s through the 2000s contained many poems. Similar to poems in the journals, they were not always directly related to the dances but placed alongside typical program elements, residing in the same performance space as the dance—in these cases in the hands of audience members rather than upon the stage embodied by dancers.

Reviews and articles in newspapers of the early 21st century also evince a continued engagement with poetry on the dance stages of German-speaking cities as well as a lasting conceptual connection between the two genres like that seen on the mail band pictured at the beginning of this interlude. In a 2006 review in *Die Welt*, the late, well-known dance critic Jochen Schmidt touches on both an intended performance of “Dichtung” as well as the conceptual link between poetry and dance, concluding that though the young choreographer Marco Goecke attended more to his own aesthetic than his director’s prescribed topic of “Dichtung,” Goecke had presented a non-literary poem: “ein Gedicht der Körper (a poem of the body)” (“Gedicht der Körper”). At the 39th annual cultural festival Duisburger Akzenten in 2018, the Tanzwerkstatt Ulla Weltike collaborated with British choreographer Royston Maldoom and the Duisburg

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77 In contrast to Goecke, Ed Wubbe, the director of the Rotterdam Scapino-Ballet, did directly engage with poetry, presenting a piece accompanied by the voice of Hans Magnus Enzensberger reading his “Andenken an den prägnanten Moment.”
philharmonic to present two pieces on war. The soundscapes of both pieces bore a connection to poetry: the first, “Verklärte Nacht,” was danced to the epinomous Schönberg piece based on a poem by Richard Dehmel, and the second, “Tryst”—likewise an orchestral composition based on a poem—began with three poems by Rose Ausländer (Hoddick). Whereas these two 21st-century examples highlight engagements with German-language poetry, performances located in German-speaking countries have also engaged with poetry from other languages and cultures, demonstrating that a conventional understanding of the poems is not seen as necessary for the audience.78

Whether the poems are of the body, spoken as part of the soundscape, or present in another way, they repeatedly take stage along dancing bodies, creating a multisensory, multimodal, and multigeneric experience for audience and dancers alike. In addition to the types of pieces that incorporate a previously published poem into a dance production or use dance to reflect on literature, several artists have moved towards productions that invite direct collaborations between poets and dancers, some of which allow the creation or improvisation of pieces to be witnessed in real time. Contemporary poet and dancer Martina Hefter and choreographer Ingo Reulecke’s collaborative project Bewegungsschreiber. Dichtung trifft Tanz (2012), which premiered at Dock 11 in Berlin, presents four pairs of poets and dancer-choreographers who collaborated on a work that stages poetry, dance, and their interaction—conceptually a subversion of normative ideas.

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78 Choreographer and ballet director Goyo Montero’s debut at the helm of the Nürnberg Ballet Ensemble incorporated a number of songs and poems in different languages including lyrics from Spanish singer-songwriter Joaquín Sabina and American Bob Dylan; the title of the piece, “Benditos Malditos” (Gesegnete Verdammte),” stems from a Sabina poem. Though the playbills contained translations of the poems, audience members did not have access to synchronous subtitles during the dance. (Kusch).
of dance, poetry, and practitioners of either. The Dock 11 website presents the project as resulting in “ein Neues, Drittes, jenseits der Gattungen (a new, third form, beyond genres).” This impulse to explore and move beyond generic boundaries, allowing art forms to collide, influence one another, and create something new, can be traced back to modernism. One hundred years later, such encounters endure and take on new forms.

This interlude is by no means an exhaustive account of the intersections of dance and poetry on the dance stage, and its inclusion in this study is meant to provide touchpoints along the journey of such fruitful encounters rather than a thorough history. Poetry, not only in the European context, has long been danced, and I believe it will continue. The early decades of the 20th century appear especially productive for exploring this intersection of genres, and by including contemporary performances of modernist poetry into this study of modernist encounters of poetry and dance, I seek to examine the resonances and relevance of such art works today. Examining performances that incorporate poetry allows us to ask questions in a bi-directional and relational manner: How do poets render dance poetically? and How do dancers embody or perform poetry?

Performance necessitates multiple bodies; so does reading. Though the bodies are perhaps asynchronously present, reading and writing is an embodied experience that involves multiple beings. By placing both genres in the same frame, upon the same stage, or together on the page, we become attentive not only to the content within them but the essence of them—the how in addition to the what. How do dancers and choreographers engage with modernist poetry on stage and what can that tell us about the text, dance, and the experience of both?

In pursuit of answers to this and other questions, the final chapter will examine
several contemporary dance performances from the last several decades, following up on ideas I’ve presented in this interlude. Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s 75-80-minute long Tanztheater piece C------H. Jandls Zunge (C------H. Jandl’s Tongue), which premiered in April 2010, opens the chapter and acts as an introduction to considering the material text on stage. Though Austrian poet Ernst Jandl belongs to a later period of European modernism than most of the poets, dancers, and others included in this study, performances of his works are relevant for both their broad appeal to several contemporary choreographers as well as the relationship of his poetics to several predecessors examined in this study. The chapter centers on performances of works by three quintessential modernist poets: Georg Heym, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Kurt Schwitters. Carsten Clemens’s heymweh (2010/2011), Dominique Dumais’s ballet Rilke (2012), and choreographies of Kurt Schwitters’s Ursonate by Jacalyn Carley (1980 / 1989) and at the Akademie der Künste (2007) present different approaches to staging poetry through dance that, when examined alongside one another, highlight how placing poetry on stage in various forms challenges audiences and scholars alike to confront the materiality and agency of the poetic work.

Writing about performance, especially with attention to the bodies on stage, the material text, and the audience, presents a challenge not present when writing about the written word; the reader does not have access to the experience of the artwork. In order to approximate (or perform) placing the reader/audience member within an experience, though necessarily mediated through my own perspective and particularities of language, I introduce each of the pieces without formal or conventional introduction. While I acknowledge that the performance cannot be recreated, I hope this method at least signals
a different context, a mediated experience that calls you to be attentive to the materiality of various media and art forms within performances.
A dark stage anticipates the event of a dance performance. “Ein Mensch… ja ja…” (‘A person … yes yes… ‘). As the lights come up slightly, the first perceptible movement comes not from a dancing body but from a series of white m’s that begin to appear in rows across a dark screen. Visible only through the rows of m’s, a mouth creates different shapes, facial expressions, sounds, and words. The imperfect alignment of sound and movement unsettles any potential assumption that the sounds originate from the mouth, which is literally mediated through the symbolic representation of a phonetic sound. This synchronous exploration of the isolated letter m and the video of the isolated mouth continue with a few short phrases interspersed into the opening sequence. A lit stage eventually reveals two male performers, one seated downstage atop a table and the other underneath a second table in the fetal position; the second performer will eventually reveal that a piece of paper is affixed over his mouth, preventing comprehensible speech. After removing the paper from his mouth, he loudly pronounces “ich” (‘I’), as the same word appears on the lower right-hand corner of the screen: “ich.”

As Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s 75-80-minute long Tanztheater piece C------H. Jandls Zunge (C------H. Jandl’s Tongue) unfolds, dancer Boris Nahalka, who begins seated on the table with an arm draped over his head, and actor Bernd Lindner engage in several games, monologues, and vignettes with various texts and sequences of movement, some

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79 The opening words of C------H. Jandls Zunge, performed in April of 2010 at the Theaterhaus Stuttgart, come from a recorded track. From the beginning of the performance, one is confronted with mediatized voice and language. This translation and subsequent unattributed translations are my own.
serious and some humorous. Repetition and variation are prominent features of the choreography and the texts. The texts, most of them spoken by Lindner, come from Ernst Jandl’s poetry, essays, and lectures, as well as from the *Telefongespräche mit Ernst Jandl: Ein Porträt* (*Telephone conversations with Ernst Jandl: A Portrait*), a series of short prose pieces published posthumously by Jandl’s editor Klaus Siblewski, who composed the book from notes taken during conversations with Jandl. Most scenes also involve two tables and chairs in various configurations. Pieces of paper are often present on stage, involved in many different segments of the performance that present dances with text.

These segments, which involve material and medial forms of texts, are enacted by both the dancer and the actor and point to a poetics of language manipulation and its materiality. The first piece of paper on stage doubles as a surface for language and a barrier of it, as it is taped over Lindner’s mouth at the beginning of the piece. Instead of remaining silent while the paper is there, he speaks through the paper, producing muffled sounds; these sounds are accompanied by the whooshing sound that dancer Nahalka makes as he lunges and sweeps his arms. Piles of paper on the table engage the performers in both predictable and unexpected dances. The papers are read, sorted, and used for staging the act of writing. The papers are also pressed one by one to the dancer’s forehead as a solo performed by Erdmann-Rajski is projected on the screen, used as a pillow by Lindner, and used in a dance-game in which Nahalka hops from paper to paper, avoiding stepping on the floor until he arbitrarily interrupts the game and runs around the grid he has carefully created. Rules of the dances with text are enacted and broken, and
this engagement with material text is both playful and serious. The performers dance along Jandl’s poetics.

The screen, where letters and/or bodies appear and move in several scenes, dissolves for audience members the boundaries between the textual and corporeal, literally filtering the movement of the body, at times through language. After Nahalka performs a playful dance of prances and rolls across the floor on the diagonal as Lindner performs pieces of several works including “Otto Mops,” a row of the word ‘ja’ appears across the screen and begins moving to a waltz, forming an X. The text dances in patterns as the music’s tempo changes, distorting the sound. The sound of crumpling paper can be heard before a voice recording, also distorted, asks: “du spreken deuts?” (‘Does you speak Jarman?’) The stage is still dark, but the presence of a body is visually perceptible in that it blocks some of the letters projected on the screen. The waltz continues before loud sounds bring it to a close as the series of “ja” return to a line and fade.

The audible and haptic materiality of text, which contrasts with the visible movement on the screen, takes on a prominent role at the end of the piece with the copulating paper—a concept presented in the *Telefongespräche*. Nahalka enters the stage with a large paper bag of slightly crumpled papers, begins to disperse them across the stage, and leaves more paper in one area, creating a pile. Lindner then enters from the upstage corner, already clutching several papers to his chest. He starts to pick up papers as Nahalka spreads them out on the floor, working against each other in their interactions.

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80 This question comes from the poem “an einen grenzen” in which Jandl writes in an accent and grammar of a guest worker speaking German (271).
with the large increasing amount of paper. Once Nahalka has spread several large bags of paper stage right, he sits with his arms wrapped around his knees as Lindner sits in the pile on stage, picks up a piece, and says: “Ob ich schon mal von kopulierendem Papier gehört hätte? Nein? Auf seinem Schreibtisch findet das ununterbrochen statt. …” As the scene continues, Lindner searches in the pile, puts glasses on and reads aloud as Nahalka slides across the floor, less encumbered by paper than his co-performer, and then poses again before continuing to move. With a shift to operatic music, the dance becomes larger with floorwork, extensions, and turning jumps interspersed with moments of stillness. Lindner continues to engage physically with the pile of papers, searching, picking pieces up, and placing one down his shirt. He speaks a final piece of text, ending with “Küss die Hand, gute Nacht,” (‘Kiss the hand, goodnight’), and as the dance comes to a close, both performers are rolling in the papers, surrounded by them, and gesturing toward going to sleep within the materiality of the text.

Despite the act of going to sleep upon the paper as well as the blackout and applause that follow it, this closing scene does not conclude the presentation of the text on stage. After Nahalka and Lindner take their bow, a coordinated performance of a short and well-known Jandl poem performs the final word, a presentational gesture: “spruch

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81 As Lindner sits amidst the papers, he recites passages like this one from Siblewski’s *Telefongespräche* on 19.5.2000, created from notes taken during conversations with Jandl (183). The “I” in the quotation refers to Siblewski, and the words spoken by Lindner on stage vary slightly from Siblewski’s text.

82 This quotation appears as both part of the title and the closing sentiment in the epilog of editor Klaus Siblewski’s Jandl biography. The epilog is a printed conversation between Siblewski and Jandl about aging (“Ein Gespräch übers Altern”), at the end of which Siblewski asks Jandl about a wish. Jandl expresses the desire experience the pleasant feeling that comes from telling someone the salutation he learned as a child from his mother: “Küß die Hand, gute Nacht.”
mit kurzem o / ssso.” (‘Saying with a short o / ssso.’)  
This brief encore performance opens the door on what might have felt like a close, the resting within and upon a text; the sleep has been revealed as transitory and temporary. In doing so, it points to the potential for a text to be experienced again and anew through a performance, for it to move among and through bodies on stage long after it was first uttered or recorded on the page.

Performing the ‘Thingness’ of a Staged Text

The range of material and medial forms of the texts at play in Jandls Zunge gestures toward Jandl’s range of techniques that explore the material qualities of poetic language and underscores the potential embodied in the text as a material object. Though Ernst Jandl wrote and published poetry in the second half of the 20th century and belongs to a different epoch than the other poets discussed in this and preceding chapters, the way in which Erdmann-Rajski’s piece employs various media to stage the texts provides insight into the dynamic and changing relationships among language, media, and movement that we examined at the outset, making it an apt entrance into a discussion of the material text on the contemporary dance stage. Furthermore, by bringing the staging of modernist tests into conversation with an analysis of dance pieces that engage with Jandl’s texts, in which I will engage at the end of the chapter, I want to highlight the

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83 The single-line poem “spruch mit kurzem o,” written in 1964, appears together with “c---------h” in Jandl’s Sprechblasen (Gesammelte Werke 305).
84 From this point forward, I will use the abbreviated name Jandls Zunge to refer to Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s work C------H. Jandls Zunge.
intriguing similarities between dancing Jandl and performing the modernist aesthetics at work within the other pieces.

As discussed in the preceding interlude, several international choreographers working in Germany have staged German poetry within their dance works during recent decades, creating a new space of textual and corporeal resonance for modernist poetry. Unlike a play or libretto intended for others to perform on stage, poetry, which was not necessarily written for the stage and certainly not written for moving bodies, calls for a different, more unconstrained approach to bringing texts to the stage. In the context of this project, what I call a “staged text” is simply a text of any genre that appears, tangibly or intangibly, within a performance. For a choreographer and/or performer, drawing upon a poet’s texts for a dance work thus raises the conceptual as well as pragmatic question of how the text will physically and/or ideationally inhabit the stage. An examination of both the materiality of the poetry on stage and the perceptibility produced by its physical form reveals that our relationship to texts is multisensory and experiential. Such performances thus disclose a complex interplay of corporeal and discursive knowledge of texts overlooked by conventional approaches to literature on or off stage.

The performances of Carsten Clemens’s heymweh (2010/2011), Dominique Dumais’s ballet Rilke (2012), and choreographies of Kurt Schwitters’s Ursonate by

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85 There are a few historical as well as contemporary examples of poetry or other non-dramatic texts written expressly for dance performance, some of which I discuss in other chapters. The difference between such works and the performances discussed here is that the authors of poetic works written for dance often simultaneously occupy the role of choreographer and/or performer.
Jacalyn Carley (1980 / 1989) and at the Akademie der Künste (2007) all stage poetry within a dance performance, beginning with spoken lines emitted from a performer, who is either just entering the stage or not (yet) visible. As these performances unfold, the audience and dancers experience—from their differing yet interrelated perspectives—poetic and other texts in different sensual, medial, and material forms. The frequent dissonance and mixing of genres and art forms in _heymweh_, the metaphysical elements of _Rilke_, and the performance of the textual score of the _Ursonate_ allow audiences to experience the different strands of 20th century poetics embodied on stage. Placed on stage in contemporary dance works, texts otherwise fixed and bound to the page enter into the dynamics of performance and can, thus, appear in multiple material or immaterial forms.

The manifestations of texts on stage are evidence of a relational sensibility: the text plays a physical as well as conceptual role in the performance. When these performances prompt us to pay attention to the material qualities of the text and the way people physically as well as intellectually engage with them, we become attentive to the questions of how we experience a text and what co-constructs that experience rather than only considering the content. The agency of the material manifestations of the text, its ‘thingness,’ can be analyzed using a variation on Robin Bernstein’s concept of the _scriptive thing_, which relies on thing theory’s central premise that things, in contrast with objects, have the ability to assert themselves in interactions with humans. For Bernstein,

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86 The media archive of the Mime Centrum Berlin contains a video recording of a performance entitled _Die Ursonate_ at the Akademie der Künste on January 14, 2007. The choreographer and performers are not named on the recording or in the catalog.
who examines archival artifacts asking how humans perform race with material culture, a “scriptive thing” hails a person and “broadly structures a performance while simultaneously allowing for resistance and unleashing original, live variations that may not be individually predictable” (“Dances with Things” 101). For Bernstein, the word script signifies a moment of becoming—the dramatic narrative becomes movement and movement becomes narrative (89). In performances that place poetic texts on stage, there is indeed a two-way dynamic between text and movement. Unlike the artifacts that Bernstein analyzes from the archive, what I call text-things within dance performances are created, as a part of the artistic process, for the staging of poetic texts. Whereas “thing theory” or new materialism often rely on a distance between the thing placed into the world, the interaction or performance with it, and analysis of this interaction, the text-thing within a staged performance exists in a collapsed temporal and creational moment, as it was created for the performance. The text-thing is given choreography and/or conceived with choreography in mind, yet it also plays an active role in determining moments of the performance as it physically engages the bodies of performers. Furthermore, its very manifestation bears witness to the preexisting text-as-thing, most often in the form of a book, which calls for the creation of one or more particular types of thingness. As such, the material form comes from a dynamic relationship between the text and reader-performer acting upon one another. Placed on stage, a text-thing participates in the choreography, a choreography structured according to its thingness.

87 I echo Bernstein’s and others’ use of the term “to hail” here and at other points to refer to a constitutive call issued by a thing or performance. When a thing “hails,” it calls an individual or group to pay attention while also granting subjectivity.
which allows for variations. The way in which texts are present on stage is important both to our understanding of particular performance as well as the broader relationship between text and performance because the dances performed by texts and artists foreground a dynamic engagement with text that is simultaneously physical and intellectual.

In order to better understand the way a text-thing works on stage, let us think about a common interaction with a thing in which all theatergoers have participated. Preceding most performances, audience members receive a program. The familiarity of a program and how to use it together with the specific design of a particular program co-construct a physical and mental interaction with an audience member. As audience members, we bring with us expectations of what we will find in the program and the type of reading called for by different program sections. Having performed the motions before, we also have knowledge of how one physically engages with a program—taking in the title, opening the page to scan the information inside, glancing at particular sections before the performance and during intermissions. Yet we do not determine the movements and rhythms of the interaction alone; rather, the genre and form tell us that sections can be scanned. The layout, order, and types of sections included help to constitute the dance with the program as our eyes and hands move across the pages, adjusting their speed and direction of movement according to what they encounter. In the performances discussed here, after engaging in a familiar dance with a text-thing from their seats, audience members witness interactions between performers and text-things that shape the particular yet variable experience of the dance performance and the texts with which it engages.
Many performances that stage poetic texts present the text in multiple forms that all play a constitutive role in the event of the performance. A text-thing might have actual text printed or projected upon it, like the screen in *Jandls Zunge* where lines from “c------ ----h” appear while the audience hears typing sounds: “c - - - - - - - - h / c - - - - - - - - - h / ic - - - - - - h.” In other material forms, the text-things might only imply the text or leave open the possibility that the printed text could be on it. The papers that Nahalka sorts and presses one by one to his forehead present a possibility of printed text, and I include them in my definition of text-thing whether or not they bear the printed text. Regardless of the actual presence of printed material, papers and books indicate text, as they belong to the act of reading, an experience recognized by the audience, which is at once corporeal and cognitive. As such, they exist on stage as text-things and call us to respond in particular ways. As something we often encounter in a material form in our everyday lives, a text on paper or within a book is a thing that hails its readers to perform certain behaviors: a book cover is opened and pages are turned; a paper is held at an appropriate distance with the letters facing a direction that allows one to read. Audience members carry these individual yet common kinesthetic experiences of the act of reading into a performance space where the performers and texts behave in expected or unexpected ways. The material forms and dances of the texts can resonate or create dissonance with the expectations carried into the performance space, and in doing so, they demonstrate their ability to assert themselves.

On stage, the text-thing literally becomes the dance partner, and the style of interaction performs a double gesture toward the text and toward the dance, by employing movement as a form of commentary on the poetics while also existing as a performance
in the here and now. The dance-game staged within *Jandls Zunge* provides an example of this double gesture. The playful yet serious way the dancer establishes a set of rules and movement patterns, which are then interrupted, functions both as a common element within the choreographic work and a translation into movement of a significant feature of Ernst Jandl’s poetics. If we view a text as a thing that both hails a person and can be molded, interacted with and set into motion on a stage amidst performers, then the assumed stable power of the text becomes decentered while taking on a new thingness that can divulge relationships with human actors past and present. As a dynamic material thing on stage, the text is constructed from concepts of the poetics and also engages the bodies on stage and in the audience in a dance by calling forth particular types of movements and citations. This challenges audience members to experience poetic texts not as permanent and stable works of art, but rather as physically present things amidst moving bodies and as unstable events.

In considering the thingness of a material text on stage within performances, it is striking that both Bernstein and Bill Brown in his article “Thing Theory” employ “dance” and an “invitation to dance” as metaphors for what things do and how we engage with them. Bernstein, who emphasizes the element of dance in the title of her article, repeatedly turns to the verb “dance” as well as the act of inviting as distinguishing behaviors that imbue thingness: “An object becomes a thing when it invites a person to

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88 In a conversation with Carl Paschek following his Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics in 1984/85, Jandl distinguishes between play (‘Spiel’), which he acknowledges as present when writing a poem, and playing around (‘Spielerie’), a criticism he rejects. Poetic rules of play, for Jandl—and he applies this concept not only to his own works but also to those of poets past and present—are thus flexible yet not directionless. This possibility of play, he contends, is present for the author as well as for the reader.
dance” (70). Dance, as an action verb and concept, animates a thing and comes with prescribed steps as well as the expectation for variations, resistance, and stylization, making it an apt medium for thinking through Bernstein’s concepts of thingness. A thing engages in and invites movement. Brown, in contemplating the simultaneous reducibility and irreducibility of things and objects, states: “Although the object was what was asked to join the dance in philosophy, things may still lurk in the shadows of the ballroom and continue to lurk there after the subject and object have done their thing, long after the party is over” (3). That things remain in a ballroom after the dance implies that an invitation has an afterlife and that the dance produces a resonance, a quality sought by many artists. For the choreographers whose works are considered in this chapter, the text-things created for the stage have literally been invited to be part of the dance. Their presence, together with the use of dance as a way to think the theory of things, reminds us that our encounters with them are dynamic, two-way negotiations through which and from which all bodies-as-things and things-as-bodies bring and then carry forth the corporeal resonances.

At stake in the attentiveness to the thingness of an object is not only the ability of a thing or text-thing to assert itself within our interactions with it, but also a reframing of the relationship between the archive and repertoire and the respective types of knowledge they produce. Different types of things that called and call for particular behaviors can be found in an archive, and in some cases, interactions between people and things have been archived—as Bernstein demonstrates in her reading of photographs, in which people engage with a cultural artifact. Such photographs have captured an instance of a repertoire. Diana Taylor, who calls for attention to live, embodied practices, defines the
repertoire as “the ways peoples produce and transmit knowledge through embodied action” (24). In order to take part in the transmission of this knowledge, one must be physically present. Though Taylor does not see the archive and the repertoire as binary, she does acknowledge that they are often conceived of as binary with the written and archival as the dominant. Yet recent scholarship has also sought to expand the concept of the archive to include embodied practice, often framing performance and/or the human body and memory as alternative archives. Performances that bring together text and performance produce encounters between traditional and alternative conceptions of archives, and in doing so, they challenge the status and role of a text as well as the ingrained text-performance dichotomy.

Traditionally, the term archive points to a collection of documents, ephemera, media, and/or artifacts while also referring to the institution or space where such collections are stored. Recent scholarship, such as Hal Foster’s “An Archival Impulse,” looks beyond the physical institution and expands the concept of an archive to consider how concepts of the archive as well as an impulse to archive are at work in contemporary art. Foster considers particular artworks archival, because they make use of informal archives yet also create them. As evidenced by the works considered in this chapter as well as the recent choreographic reenactments of 20th century dance pieces discussed in dance scholar Andre Lepecki’s work, contemporary visual artists are not alone in their engagement with the past and with concepts of the archive. For Lepecki, who wishes to separate the mode of archival work in dance re-enactments from the

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89 Hal Foster coins the term “archival impulse” to talk about a common drive among contemporary artists who create the installations he discusses.
psychoanalytic terms present both in Foster’s work and in the work of performance art scholar Jessica Santone, the re-enactment of a dance allows the dancer’s body to become “an endlessly creative, transformational archive” that produces difference (46). Whereas the dancers who perform re-enactments become a dynamic archive as they study and actualize past choreographies, the dancers in works that incorporate poetry become archives of both the movement and text, often speaking parts of the text on stage. They take part in the systems of transmission.

Despite differences in their conceptions of the impetus behind archival works, Foster and Lepecki both invoke the concept of a call, which echoes an aspect of thingness. Foster, for example, differentiates archival art from databases by noting the way that the fragmentary materials of the archival art installations “call out for human interpretation” (5). The works possess potential and ask the audience to engage with them, granting those passing by a choice. Entering the archive, these bodies become part of an archive that is no longer confined to a particular place. The concept of a “call to archive” assigns the pieces, art installations, choreography, and dance re-enactments, a voice and an ability to appeal. Works, on stage or as installations, are dynamic archives that invite interaction and interpretation, as I have argued that text-things do within dance performances.

Bernstein makes the point that the call by Diana Taylor to shift focus from written to embodied culture with her concept of the script, positing that “scriptivity” […] calls into question the very model of archive and repertoire as distinct-but-interactive” (89). The simultaneity of the concepts of archive and repertoire that Bernstein sees in an archived photograph of a woman interacting with a caricature cutout occurs, I argue, not
only within the text-things of dance performances but in the human bodies on stage as well. Whereas the thingness of the staged text allows a written text, often juxtaposed with the concept of performance, to participate in a dynamic moment that enacts, recalls, and creates embodied knowledge, the vocal performances and bodily movement on stage among text-things display the body as archive. Bodies-as-archives alongside text-things blur the boundaries between the discursive and the performative, producing an experience of and with texts that draws upon and creates multiple forms of knowledge. Within contemporary dance performances, the presence of the text—material and immaterial—simultaneously places bodies and texts in the role of archive and repertoire. The bodies and things involved in these contemporary performances of modernists texts act as vessels for two types of knowledge: the archival knowledge of written texts and artifacts and the embodied knowledge of dance, gesture, and the acts of reading and writing.

An iteration of this simultaneity occurs when performers recite or read aloud poems and other texts within a dance work. In each performance mentioned above, one or multiple performers speak parts of the texts while on or off stage. If the speaker does not hold a physical script of some kind, the text is projected into the space in an immaterial or at least intangible form. The texts have been committed to memory and are thus located within the mental archive of the performer’s body. In the case of more canonical or popular texts, like certain poems by Jandl, Heym, Rilke, and Schwitters, the typical audience members attending a performance in Germany likely possess some level of familiarity with the texts, and thus are in effect archives of the texts who bring along
embodied knowledge, which is then activated and shaped by the performance. In addition to what occurs during a performance, the audience also encounters texts in expected or unexpected material forms, such as the screens and papers in Erdmann-Rajski’s *Jandls Zunge*.

The concept of text-thing plays a crucial role in the development and reception of modernist sensibilities, I argue. In order to better understand how text-things illustrate these sensibilities while also challenging our notions of the text as a stable entity relegated to a library or archive, we will look at case studies that present descriptions and analyses of the presence of text-things within four particular instances of modernist poetic texts on the contemporary dance stage. Each case study begins with a description of the beginning of a performance, as these opening sequences establish an aesthetic. Though I acknowledge that I can only offer a mediated view of these moments, I hope that these introductions help to set the stage for a richer understanding of the way text-things operate within and across the performances, reframing concepts of modernist texts and the knowledge they produce. Examining the moments within contemporary dance where the archive enters into performance and the repertoire inserts itself into discourse reveals how these dance works enact a hybrid form of knowledge production possible where text and dancers share the stage. The material forms called forth by and thus created for each performance as well as the dances they perform with the bodies on stage

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90 It is impossible to ascertain what a typical audience member would know or have experienced; however, when considering the potential encounters with texts present during a performance that incorporates poetry, it is important to acknowledge that the performers are not the only bodies in the room that carry in them an archive of texts.
shape the corporeal-mental experiences of poetic texts and demonstrate the productive power of dancing text.

Clutching the Text: heymweh – eine konzertante performance

Words slowly emitted from a dark stage: “Meine Seele… ist… eine Schlange / die ist schon lange tot / … “ (‘My soul … is … a snake / it is already long dead / …’).91

The tenebrific opening lines from Georg Heym’s poem “Meine Seele” usher in the performance. As the music begins, three pools of light appear on the stage to reveal the three performers. None of them look out toward the audience as the intensity and dissonance of the music build. The female dancer-choreographer moves slightly and then stumbles in a circle. The sound, movement, and words join together to produce a discordant yet engaging effect.

Carsten Clemens’s heymweh – eine konzertante performance, performed at the Theater unterm Dach in Berlin in late 2010 and at the Schaubühne Lindenfels in Leipzig in early 2011, is a collaborative multimedia performance in which music, dance, and the vocal performance of Georg Heym’s poems, letters, and diary entries are all interwoven to form a bizarre world that is both abstract and biographical. Actor Carsten Clemens directed and performed the piece in collaboration with choreographer Ambra Pittoni and bass player Miles Perkin. In heymweh, most of the texts are recited from memory and do not visibly appear on stage. The bodies of the performers have become repositories of the

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91 The punctuation I have used here reflects the delivery of the lines on stage in heymweh. Heym’s “Meine Seele” (‘My Soul’) does not contain the ellipses, and each of the first two lines ends in a comma (501).
texts that are not only by Heym but also letters to him from his publisher Ernst Rowohlt. Though Clemens contributes the majority of vocal performances in the piece, all three performers speak, and no one voice consistently presents the texts of a single figure or genre. Fragments, poems, and letters fill the space in voices that are male and female, voices that have German, Italian, and Canadian accents. The styles of the performances also vary from calm to frantic with vocal styles shifting during pieces; the pieces converge to form a concert of text, music, and movement without a single discernable genre. The multi-vocal, hybrid quality of *heimweh* reflects the oeuvre of a young poet whose work is similarly resistant to fixed categories or a singular aesthetic.

In a diary entry from July of 1910, the young, early expressionist poet Georg Heym (1887-1912) wrote: “Ich glaube, daß meine Größe darin liegt, daß ich erkannt habe, es gibt wenig Nacheinander. Das meiste liegt in einer Ebene. Es ist alles ein Nebeneinander (I believe that my greatness lies in my recognition that there is little connected causality [“Nacheinander”]. Most things lie in a single plane. Everything is in a spatial relationship [“ein Nebeneinander”])” (140; Timms 120). As Edward Timms points out in *Unreal City: Urban Experience in Modern European Literature*, Heym uses terms from G. E. Lessing to challenge the notion that spatial relationships belong to the realm of the visual arts whereas poetry is governed by time and is causally connected (120). By taking up terms from Lessing’s seminal aesthetic essay *Laokoon*, Heym both troubles the notion of the poetic experience as causal and sequential, proposing instead a fragmented spatial relationship, and indicates less separation of art forms’ domains, a common idea in the early 20th century and one that lies at the heart of many poetic engagements with movement and dance. In *heimweh* and other stagings of modernist
poetics, the audience experiences a performance of this veritable “Nebeneinander” (or ‘next to one another’) in terms of a spatial relationship. The texts and text fragments of different genres are not performed in chronological order, according to their moment of origin. When narrative moments do occur, they exist among and are interrupted by movement sequences or recitations of texts that undo notions of sequential logic. The bodies and the texts they know and recite construct an often-frenetic physical world. The body as primary medium of the text echoes the intense subjectivity and interiority of the inaugural words *meine Seele* while the physical and vocal delivery of the pieces of text, sometimes accompanied by cello music or other sounds, create a complex multisensory network. On stage, the juxtaposition of types of artistic expression and the intensity of the multisensory experience of a fragmented world evokes aspects of early expressionism.

At one point during a series of oral performances of poems and diary entries, a material text becomes part of the work, and the audience can hear the familiar sounds of worn pages being leafed through and soft rustling between clutching hands that are perhaps searching or nervously fidgeting. In the dim lighting, it is difficult at first to discern the precise material form of the paper object in the hands of Clemens, who stands center stage. In the midst of a performance that emphasizes the auditory through its use of sound dynamics, creation of dissonance, and the subtitle of “eine konzertante performance,” the audible entrance of the material text places it as an actor and source of dynamic dissonance among the other performers. This moment echoes the beginning of the piece, as a voice and text pierce the darkness, making the poem’s presence known through sound before soft lighting reveals a constellation of bodies.

The lights come up slightly, Clemens stands in the center of a dark stage with
worn papers in his hands. This shift from the segments of the performance that incorporate memorized poems, diary entries, and letters to the vignette with Clemens holding papers draws attention to the relationship between the physical text and the performer, as body of the performer is no longer the only visible vehicle of the texts. In contrast to the stylized concert of recited texts that surround this moment in the performance, Clemens’s voice, facial expressions, and sideways glances convey unease, unsteadiness, and nervousness as he reads the well-known city poem “Die Dämonen der Städte.” As he reads and moves nervously, he loses the light on stage and shifts awkwardly to find it again, appears to gain confidence as his delivery grows louder and more energetic, and then becomes unsure at the end and disappears with an apologetic posture. The performance with the paper, the material text-thing, is a recognizable piece of repertoire and awakens the kinesthetic imagination in the viewer. The dance with the rustling paper is likely familiar one: isolated on an actual or metaphorical stage, a performer called upon to stand and deliver a piece of text shifts about, producing movements and sounds that may betray his/her subjective experience. The “how” of this performance divulges a particular relationship to the text as one of anxiety, a central affect in Heym’s epoch and oeuvre also present in the poem being performed.

By presenting a poem that has become one of Heym’s best known works as a nervous vocal performance and a material artifact, two temporalities intersect and challenge each other. The audience members, likely familiar with Heym’s enduring reputation as a great poet of expressionism, witness an imagined recreation of a reading
that occurred when the famous poem was yet unpublished.\textsuperscript{92} Following the reading, all three performers stand in a line on the stage, which is now lit in a red tone; Perkin holds his bass. Using one leg at a time, each performer executes a different movement before the isolations devolve into movement with the entire body at varied tempos from pose-like to frenetic. Their vocabulary of movement also changes; as soon as a pattern or movement gains recognition and specificity, the gesture is broken and replaced, creating instability for the audience. Moments later and once alone again downstage, Clemens speaks again, introducing a diary entry that documents an actual event cited by the performance with the text-thing: “8. Juli 1910: Ich las gestern im Neopathetischen Cabaret am Hackeschen Markt einige Gedichte vor, die sehr beklatscht wurden. Doch plötzlich schien es mir, als sähen mich aus der Tiefe des Saals lute Tiere an. Und die Ochsen saßen ganz vorn und blökten mich an. Wenigstens ging es ohne Sprachfehler, wovor ich die größte Sorge hatte.” The inclusion of the date without an address renders the genre of the piece of identifiable as a diary entry, a first-hand account. The worry mentioned in the quotation, which recalls the uneasy shifting and pauses of uncertainty in Clemens’s performed reading in the spotlight, indicates that the citation is physical as well as a verbal, although the audience cannot know whether the citation has been altered in some way.\textsuperscript{93} The potential for modification is highlighted by the fact that a live

\textsuperscript{92} Heym’s “Die Dämonen der Städte” (‘The Demons of the Cities’) first appeared in print in 1911; he wrote and performed a reading of it in 1910.

\textsuperscript{93} Though an audience member attending a live performance of heymweh would not have means to judge the felicity of the diary entry, a comparison to the published entry within Heym’s \textit{Dichtungen und Schriften} reveals the addition of “am Hackeschen Markt,” presumably inserted to lend context to the location, and two elisions: “7.7. Ich las gestern in dem Neo-Pathetischen Cabaret einige Gedichte vor, die sehr beklatscht wurden. \textit{Aber wenn das der Ruhm ist. – Ich weiß}, plötzlich schien es mir, als sähen mich aus der Tiefe
performance necessarily contains variations, which destabilizes the textual material and assumptions about genre, creating an uncertain and dynamic relationship to the text that mirrors the performance with the text-thing.

Placed within a performance that brings together literary works, diary entries, and letters in a concert of spoken word, music, and dance, the vignette of a poetry reading collapses the independent status of the poem text gained over time and presents it as new in the moment of nervousness of being received by an audience. The audience that witnesses this anxious delivery cannot unknow the poem. The material text created for the performance gestures back to an irrecoverable time of coffee house and cabaret performances by unsure young poets who, as Heym often noted in his diary, do not know the way (“Der nicht den Weg weiß”\textsuperscript{94}). The presence of moving bodies is figuratively and literally upsetting. What is upset is the position of authority often afforded to the written text. Clemens, Pittoni, and Perkin perform the body of work, a body of work both by and addressing the poet Georg Heym.

A little over three quarters of the way through the \textit{konzertante performance}, dancer-choreographer Ambra Pittoni steps up to the microphone and announces: “Mary Wigman, 1913, Hexentanz.” Following the title, which some audience members will recognize as one of Wigman’s best-known works, Pittoni walks upstage into the lighting

\textsuperscript{94} Heym’s final diary, which he began several weeks before his death, bears the title \textit{Tagebuch des Georg Heym. Der nicht den Weg weiß}. 

*des Saals lauter Tiere an. Und die Ochsen saßen ganz vorn und blökten mich an. Ich dachte, sie sind zu gut für Euch, viel zu gut. Wenigstens ging es ohne Sprachfehler, wovor ich die größte Sorge hatte*“ (Parts omitted from the \textit{heymweh} performance in italics, 139).
and sits with her knees up and her left arm stretched into the air. Stating the year echoes the oral re-citation of diary entries and letters performed within heymweh, for which the written and spoken dates mark the temporal moment of composition, the physical act of writing. The use of 1913, rather than the year of the first performance (1914), marks the year Wigman debuted as a professional dancer and thus signals the choreographic process. The presence of the date also clearly identifies the dance as coming into being after Heym’s death on January 16, 1912, meaning that the link between the choreography and Heym is constructed by the performance rather than motivated by a historical event or encounter. Placed within the collaborative work, Hexentanz takes part in the creation of the complex concert of texts and bodies on stage.

The Hexentanz segment resonates with the nervous performance of “Die Dämonen der Städte” in several ways, including in the use of figures associated with mysterious powers and a liminal existence. A title, articulated by the individual performer of the work, precedes both of these performances. The announcement of the title calls the dance into being within the larger work, marking its presentation as separate from the

95 Wigman is also credited as a choreographer at the end of the archived video recording of a heymweh performance at Theater unterm Dach in Berlin.

96 There is a discrepancy in scholarly works and films on Mary Wigman, which vary in their use of 1913 and 1914 as the year of the choreography of Hexentanz I. Wigman, at the time still using her given name Marie Wiegmann, performed the piece as part of her choreographic debut in on February 11, 1914 (Manning 15). Regardless of whether the piece came into being in the weeks leading up to the debut performance or in the previous year, the act of dating and the use of a year that falls near the beginning of the choreography’s existence but after Heym’s death perform important functions within the contemporary performance. Archived video clips of Wigman’s performances of Hexentanz II, the reconstruction of the work in 1926, which also appear within films such Mary Wigman: Mein Leben ist Tanz, contain the same segment of her work that Pittoni performs, further supporting the statement of “1913” as a temporal gesture toward a moment of genesis rather than a citation of a source.
movement that belongs solely to heymweh. In contrast to the other movement on stage that may or may not evoke a particular repertoire and that belongs as a choreography to the performance at hand, this dance segment gestures explicitly to an existing piece of choreography97, a dance text with an author/performer. The announcement of Hexentanz and the dance segment that follows, a corporeal citation, also bears thingness. In order to be physically present on stage, the Hexentanz requires the material of a body, a body with which it then enters into a dynamic relationship. In much the same way the type of text-thing we have been discussing physically engages the bodies onstage while also being acted upon by the same bodies, the choreography acts upon the dancer as the dancer’s body allows it to manifest on stage. The lighting of one area of the stage while a member of the trio performs a solo with the others to the side or offstage entirely draws attention to the citational nature of the performance. The mask, an accountrement frequently worn and danced with by Wigman in her Hexentanz is absent from this staging, and at one point during her 2010 performance, Pittoni puckers her lips and fixes her gaze to form her face into a mask-like pose as she dances. Together with the performance of the Hexentanz segment, this action presents the moving body as a thing within the performance and collapses the archive and repertoire of modernity into a simultaneous event.

Thus, in its use of Heym’s texts, the layering of artistic forms and genres, the presence of the text as thing, and the citation of Mary Wigman’s Hexentanz, Clemens’s

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97 The connection between dance and a written or pre-designated sequence of movement is already inherent in the word choreography, from the Greek χορεία (dancing) + -γραφία (writing) (“choreography, n.”).


*heymweh* performs a multisensory ‘Nebeneinander’ across time and space, tracing what Heym saw as his signature concept with bodies, sound, and things. Through performance, *heymweh* confronts the audience not only with a physical and acoustic response to poet’s oeuvre but also with the text itself, as a tangible dance partner. In addition to taking in the sights and sounds of a piece unfolding in time, when we witness movement on stage, we experience kinesthetic resonance: a physical empathy with the bodies on stage that produces in a two-way exchange of energy in the moment. This resonance with the bodies on stage draws the audience in to the physical experience of the reader-text engagement on stage. The presence of a text-thing in the performance within the performance allows the text itself to not only be performed but to participate in the physical exchange of energy, a palpable resonance of the present moment that continues after the proverbial curtain has closed. Such an experience draws attention to the multisensory aesthetic of early expressionist poetics as well as to the multisensory nature of reading or otherwise engaging with poetry, an experience often reduced to sight and/or sound.

Physical and Metaphysical (Textual) Spaces: *Rilke*

WER, wenn ich schrie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel Ordnungen? und gesetzt selbst, es nähe einer mich plötzlich ans Herz: ich verginge von seinem stärkeren Dasein. Denn das Schöne ist nichts als des Schrecklichen Anfang, den wir noch grade ertragen, und wir bewundern es so, weil es gelassen verschmäht,
Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders? And even if one of them pressed me suddenly to his heart: I’d be consumed in his stronger existence. For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we can just barely endure, and we stand in awe of it as it coolly disdains to destroy us. Every angel is terrifying.

[...](Snow 5)

As the ballet *Rilke* begins, the dense, penetrating opening lines of the first elegy, spoken from off-stage by actor Jacques Malan fill the theater as a dancer performs a solo on a mostly dark stage, his body and movement reflected down into the dark floor. Initiated by his head, the dancer’s movement is slow and grounded in plié as he bends his torso and melts to the side, before reaching in a lunge, turning, and lunging again as he reaches out in another direction. A silent scream with arms extended down and fingers wide echoes the opening question. A gesture of bringing the left hand up in front of his face accompanies the phrase “uns zu zerstören” (‘to destroy us’), connecting the

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98 Excerpts from each of Rilke’s ten *Duineser Elegien* appear on the pages following the music selections for the elegies in the program for the ballet Rilke, which consists of two acts, each featuring five of the elegies in order. The beginning of the first elegy, also spoken as part of the performance appears within the program, along with the … lines and the end.
concealment of the part of the body associated with a subject’s visible identification with destruction. Upstage and overhead, an angel figure walks slowly; to the right, dancers from the ensemble are barely visible but do not yet move. Although these other bodies are present, the staging and movement direct focus to the single male dancer as the lyrical I of the poem invokes the first-person plural, linguistically forming an intimate connection with the others present. This “wir” demonstrates the power of the event of the dance performance that incorporates spoken poetry to work on and with the text, creating a live, shared experience of inhabiting the “wir” of the elegies as they unfold in a mélange of movement, sound, and architecture on stage. The poem, accompanied after several lines by the sound of wind, provides the sound for the beginning of the dance until the orchestra begins the first movement of Alban Berg’s *Violinkonzert*, which carries the fitting subtitle “Dem Andenken eines Engels.”

Premiering one year after the premiere of *heimweh*, this much different performance of modernist poetry took the stage at the Nationaltheater in Mannheim. Dominique Dumais, the assistant choreographer of the Kevin O’Day Ballett, brought Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* to the stage in the ballet *Rilke*.99 The dancers, soundscape, and set create symbolic moving images and scenes of the complex poetic cycle, interweaving them with elements of Rilke’s life.100 The sequence follows that of the ten elegies in

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99 The ballet ensemble is comprised of 11 soloists, which reflects a choice to present a more contemporary take on a premiere company—a relatively small group of soloists working alongside one another as opposed to the traditional, hierarchical structure of principal dancers and a corps de ballet.

100 The women in scenes of the ballet serve as one example of the biographical aspects, as they allude to the numerous female artists who surrounded Rilke throughout his life (Steinel 11). As female figures also inhabit the poetry, such as the mother and girl of the third elegy, the poetic and biographical worlds do not exist apart from one another;
Rilke’s cycle, a poetic ensemble of poems written and arranged to be experienced as a set. The physical space, created by innovative set designer Tatyana van Walsum, includes video projections of nature images onto gauze curtains or translucent screens and a glossy black floor that reflects the dancers’ bodies into a space not typically visible. The rectangular prism of the traditional, proscenium stage expands into a dimension below the floor, doubling the dancers’ images and investing them with metaphysical dimensions while the curtains and panels create depth that allows multiple realms to coexist. Not only do the dance genre, the emphasis on the visual, and the venue itself stand in contrast to staging of heymweh, the interplay of spoken text and text-things on stage also enact a different modernist aesthetic that comments both on the poetics of the elegies and on the relationship between the text and its audience. Despite these differences, which make us keenly aware of the multifaceted styles and theories of poetics developed during the early 20th century, comparative analysis of these performances reveals striking similarity in the contemporary reception and presentation of the early modernist poets and their works.

Unlike the spoken text in heymweh, the opening line and subsequent segments from the elegies spoken from offstage between parts of the orchestral score have an ethereal quality, making them part of the atmosphere and space. The words seem to surround the dancers and audience, issuing forth from the sound system’s suspended speakers. The reading from offstage, together with the sound of wind and the deep black planes that create different realms for dancers within the ethereal set design, also evokes the well-known story of the creative origins of the Elegies, which was recorded in the rather, they are interwoven on stage, blurring the boundaries between inner and outer world, poetic and personal space.
memoir of his patron and friend Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe. Contemplating a response to a business letter during a stay at the Castle Duino near Trieste, Rilke heard a voice through a fierce wind. He recorded these words in his notebook along with a few other lines (Snow 639-640). The audience in the Nationaltheater, like Rilke one hundred years before, does not see the figure uttering the words. The separation of spoken text from a visible performing body (a feature we have already seen in works like “heimweh” and “Jandls Zunge”) establishes a relationship to the lines of text that is orphic, creating for the audience the physical experience of receiving poetry from an unknown, invisible source. The familiarity of the first line of the elegies to a German audience allows for this experience of the beginning of Rilke to simultaneously exist as something novel and culturally resonant; this duality bears similarity to the potential experience created during the performance of Heym’s “Die Dämonen der Städte” within “heimweh,” despite a somewhat different affective quality. While being immersed in the sound of the inaugural line that permeates space and bodies produces a new, potentially unfamiliar experience that gestures toward a reported embodied experience of the poet, many audience members likely will have had previous encounters with this line. Both works re-perform a poet’s experience with a well-known text, thus the familiarity allows the words to resonate within the personal, embodied archives of memory possessed by the audience. The text-thing in heymweh, like a program held by an audience member, allows Clemens to engage in a concrete and rather pedestrian citation of a recognizable piece of repertoire, in which the movement of the body enacts an iteration of a poetry reading. The corporeal sensations are accessible. With the exception of the silent scream, the movement of the dancer during the first elegy does not cite a repertoire familiar to
audiences. Instead it emphasizes the uniqueness of the performed experience and gives Rilke and his *Duino Elegies* a singular status. The spatial and temporal relationships created and evoked by the two instances of vocal performance accordingly indicate the nuanced ways in which poetics and archival knowledge, when placed on stage, help to choreograph a textual dance that in turn communicates a particular relationship to that text.

As the title of a short text about the elegies indicates in the program, the ballet engages with the “Rilke, vor genau 100 Jahren.” Rather than simply commemorating a great work or author, as some works do, the ballet *Rilke* premiered 100 years after the beginning of Rilke’s work on the Duino poetic cycle, which he began to draft in January 1912. The choreographic work in the Nationaltheater Mannheim, which premiered on January 27, 2012, thus marks and presents itself as a genesis, a setting in motion. In heeding the call to dance with the poetic text one hundred years after a different dance commenced, the dancers engage with the physicality of a work that carries past and present within it, allowing both dances to resonate for the audience in images, sounds, and bodies.

Amidst the figures dancing on the stage, most of them unnamed types present in the *Duino Elegies* —the Angel, the Mother, the Girl, the Doll, and others—one dancer performs the part of Rilke (Köhl). The placement of this figure within the work highlights the particularly intense relationship between Rilke and his elegies, a cycle that took ten years to complete while Rilke waited for inspiration. He saw the elegies as the culmination of his œuvre (Zagajewski ix). The poet’s physical presence on the stage locates him in the liminal space of waiting between beginning and completing his
Elegies; the dancer moves quite literally amidst the text and among different times. The words of the elegies are audibly present at various parts of the ballet, accompanying scenes that correspond to the poems with their images and themes. Spoken by Malan as part of the soundscape, they surround and move with the dancers performing on stage. In this way, the poem also takes stage as a text-thing. A boulder wrapped in script confronts the dancer in the role of Rilke, who dances with it, pushes it up the dark incline of the set like Sisyphus, and later climbs atop it while other company members surround and hold it. The words written in a spiral on the surface of the boulder come from the beginning of the sixth elegy. As indicated in the program, the sixth elegy opens the second act of the ballet and carries Dumais’s heading “Helden.” The act of rolling this text-thing boulder up the ramp recalls the myth of Sisyphus and the eternal punishment of rolling a stone up a hill only to have it return to the bottom before reaching the top. Rilke’s elegy does not invoke Sisyphus by name, nor does it mention a boulder; it does, however, contain the following lines in reference to the hero, a figure Dumais highlights in the heading of this section of the ballet:

Wunderlich nah ist der Held doch den jugendlich Toten. Dauern
ficht ihn nicht an. Sein Aufgang ist Dasein; beständig
nimmt er sich fort und tritt ins veränderte Sternbild
seiner steten Gefahr. Dort fänden ihn wenige. Aber, (21-24)

\[101\] From the vantage point of an audience member, it would be difficult to tell what the writing actually said, if anything recognizable. A photograph on page 12 of the program, which zooms in on the scene in which several dancers surround Rilke atop the boulder with the angel on the raised platform upstage, reveals words from the first several lines of the sixth elegy, giving a specificity to the text-thing that likely requires a mediator or privileged position to see.
Oddly, the hero resembles the youthful dead. Permanence does not concern him. Ascent is his existence; time and again he annuls himself and enters the changed constellation of his unchanging danger. Few would find him there, but Fate, (italics in the original, Snow 37)

The phrase “Sein Aufgang ist Dasein (His ascent is being)” (22) resonates literally and figuratively with the well-known statement of Rilke’s third poem of his Sonnets to Orpheus: “Gesang ist Dasein (Singing is being)” (7). For the Orphic poet, singing is being; for the hero or hero-poet of the Duino Elegies, ascent is the quintessential act. Though not limited to the myth of Sisyphus, the heroic act of persistent ascent in the face of danger is captured in the myth and the performance on stage within the ballet.

    As the audience, we witness the thing on stage inscribed with the elegies as bearing great weight and caught up in a constant process of labor. The dancer’s body cast as the poet’s performs the repertoire that activates the kinesthetic imagination of audience members who have conceptual, though likely not corporeal, knowledge of the arduous act. The physical citation of the well-known myth of Sisyphus again gestures to the mythic status often given to Rilke and his poetry. At the same time, the physical grappling of the dancer as Rilke with the text-thing\textsuperscript{102} indicates the text’s ability to forcefully exert itself on the author while also performing a double gesture temporally.

\textsuperscript{102} One could refer to this boulder as a prop—an object used within a play or film—and it is indeed this. In choosing to refer to the boulder as a thing, I wish to recognize and call attention to its ability to exert force upon the dancer and play an active role in the way the performance unfolds.
The strenuous dance with text-thing unfolds in the performance as it cites the long and labored process of creation associated with the *Duino Elegies*.

The text-wrapped boulder the dancers move with, against, and upon materially presents the text outside of its status as canonical, finished product and into a physical relationship to be grappled with by author, performers, and audience. The use of antique *Kurrentschrift* as the script on the massive sphere evokes a past temporality, while also pointing to another aspect of the physical and non-static relationship, the corporeal act of writing or inscription. The very name of the script emphasizes continuous movement, as it is a *Laufschrift*, a term derived from the Latin *currere*, to run. Part of the choreography, Rilke’s elegies exist in the performance as a thing caught up in human struggle, even in its afterlife. In another scene, the boulder performs a metaphysical dance when the angel ascends it, echoing the genesis myth of the *Elegies* as well as the angel’s recurring role as a dominant figure within the poetic cycle. Both the angel and Rilke mount the boulder with arms extended to the sides while other ensemble members support it, each performing the movement demanded by the boulder, which as we have seen is a text-thing in the sense that the text is physically present upon the surface of an object that engages bodies in a dance. The individual dances called forth by the text-thing bind the Angel and Rilke together as subjects constituted, in part, by the various types of ascent evoked by the text-thing.

In the ballet *Rilke*, the *Duino Elegies* function in a way that is atmospheric,

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103 *Kurrentschrift* was the German script taught in schools and used during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Archival materials show that Rilke used this script to write letters, facsimiles of his literary works, and inscriptions within books given as gifts.
embodied, and physical. They comprise part of the soundscape, inhabit the memories of
the dancers and audience members, and appear as text-thing on stage with dancers and in
the hands of the audience. Together with movement in and through a space that, through
staging and set design, presents a world both physical and metaphysical, the text exists as
part of and creates the “Weltinnenraum”—Rilke’s neologism for his complex concept of
space in which the outer world moves in and through us. This concept, which many
scholars regard as central to Rilke’s œuvre, appears only in the fourth strophe of his
posthumously published, untitled poem “Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen,”
written in 1914. A close reading of the poem reveals the poetic relationship between

_Weltinnenraum_, movement, and thingness.¹⁰⁴

> Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus allen Dingen,
> aus jeder Wendung weht es her: Gedenk!
> Ein Tag, an dem wir fremd vorübergingen,
> entschließt im künftigen sich zum Geschenk.
>
> Wer rechnet unseren Ertrag? Wer trennt
> uns von den alten, den vergangnen Jahren?
> Was haben wir seit Anbeginn erfahren,
> als daß sich eins im anderen erkennt?

¹⁰⁴ Rilke’s attention to things (Dinge) occurs prominently in his _Dinggedichte_, which
predate the elegies and this poem. The time he spent working in as Rodin’s secretary in
Paris fostered the close observation of physical qualities. In his book _Auguste Rodin_,
Rilke writes not only about the intense observation that goes into the master’s work but
also about the movement quality of the sculptures, an aspect present in many of his
_Dinggedichte_. The things of Rilke’s world are not static.
Als daß an uns Gleichgültiges erwärmt?

O Haus, o Wiesenhang, o Abendlicht,
auf einmal bringst du’s beinah zum Gesicht
und stehst an uns, umarmend und umarmt.

Durch alle Wesen reicht der eine Raum:
Weltninnenraum. Die Vögel fliegen still
durch uns hindurch. O, der ich wachsen will,
ich seh hinaus, und in mir wächst der Baum.

Ich sorge mich, und in mir steht das Haus.
Ich hüte mich, und in mir ist die Hut.
Geliebter, der ich wurde: an mir ruht
der schönen Schöpfung Bild und weint sich aus. (italics in the original,
Hiersein ist herrlich 28)\footnote{James Blaire Leishman included an English translation of this poem in his 1977 book of Rilke poetry titled \textit{Possibility of Being: A Selection of Poems} (108-109).}

The poem begins with the assertion that things possess an agency that moves
them to reach out to us, calling the addressee to engage, to feel and think. This interaction
between thing and lyrical I recurs in the third stanza with Rilke’s use of the vocative o,
which addresses the house, sloping meadow, and sunset, things both manmade and in
nature as if they were equals of the human lyrical I. This middle stanza portrays the
interaction of these things, addressed with the second person familiar ‘du,’ and the ‘we’ as physical and reciprocal, imbuing these non-human materialities with the ability to confront a human subject as well as to embrace and be embraced. The introduction of the singular *Weltinnenraum*, which moves through all beings, follows with the next strophe. This sense of movement presents itself in the gesture of hailing that opens the poem and resurfaces throughout. The parallelisms that link the second and third as well as the fourth and fifth stanzas create a sense of formal movement with stillness present at other moments. Beginning in the third line of the poem and continuing through all but the final stanza, the use of the first-person plural ‘wir’ functions as an inclusive gesture, connecting the audience or reader with the lyrical I.

In this complex real and poetic space, the things, creatures, and images move through, dwell within, interact with, and come to rest upon the lyrical I, who became the beloved. These interactions and images resonate with the complex relationships at work within the ballet *Rilke*. On the stage of the Nationaltheater Mannheim, the *Duino Elegies* engage the bodies and space in a dance that creates for viewers a multisensory experience of the *Weltinnenraum*, a complex concept that has not only garnered much attention by literary scholars and philosophers alike but also offers a way of conceptualizing the ballet as a whole by offering a connection between the poetic and dance modes.

In her influential essay “Die phänomenlogische Struktur der Dichtung Rilkes,” Käte Hamburger states that Rilke wrote “lyric poetry in lieu of epistemology” (84). The creative act of poetry constitutes a way of knowing and a mode of expressing the experience of subjective knowledge. Though interpretations of *Weltinnenraum* vary, they encompass the experience and perception of inner and outer worlds. Central and
particular to the experience of space in Rilke’s “Es winkt zu Fühlung” is its tactile quality that includes movements and sensations (Ziolkowski 43). These sensual experiences possess a reciprocal quality, which is constitutive of a *Weltinnenraum*: the house, sloping meadow, and setting sun embrace and are embraced. They act and are acted upon within a complex sensual-spatial relationship much the same way the ballet engages the texts in a dance that resonates on stage, with the dancers, and with the audience. Having issued a call that was answered with an invitation to join in a dance, Dumais’s engagement with Rilke’s poetry thus becomes part of this world of the *Weltinnenraum* by allowing the words and physical text-things move with and through the dancer and audience. Like Rilke’s lyric poetry that presents itself as a way of perceiving and experiencing the world, the dance unfolds as a mode of creatively perceiving and experiencing the texts.

Unsettling the Score: *Die Ursonate*

As *Die Ursonate* begins, the audience in the Akademie der Künste in Berlin sees the bodies of five dancers in white costumes that cast shadows on a white backdrop. A speaker, marked by a difference in costume and the binder he carries, enters and begins the “Ursonate”:

Fümms bô wö tää zää Uu,

pögiff,

kwii Ee.

Oooooooooooooooooooooooooo,

dll rrrrrr beeee bô,

dll rrrrrr beeee bô fümms bô,
rrrrrr beeeeee bö fümmm bö wō,

beeeeee bö fümmm bö wō tää,

bö fümmm bö wō tää zää,

fümmm bö wō tää zää Uu: (Schwitters “Ursonate” 1-10).

He walks in an arc from the downstage left corner around to the back and to the
downstage right corner where a podium stands with papers upon it. As the dancers
begin to move, first individually and then in groups of two or three, it is as if the
speaker’s voice moves them like instruments in the score. Several minutes into the rondo,
the choreography plays with the idea of ventriloquizing, yet without any attempt to
conceal where the sound originates: with one “bö,” the dancers open their mouths, and on
the second, they close them without vocalizing the sound. The movement gradually
becomes more expansive with dancers transitioning from small movements and poses to
sweeping turns. As series of sounds with three and four syllables begin, dancers travel
through the space, each with a different posture and pose. Their bodies become more
visible as the color of the backdrop changes to pink and then back to grey. When the
dancers remain still during several “ää” sounds, it becomes clear that the sounds are
not (always) moving the dancers to their rhythms. At other times, syncopated syllables
evoke a turn or extension that differs in quality from the sound produced: staccato vocals

106 Though the white and light grey of the space and costumes dominate the visual
impression in the beginning of the piece and create a blank slate, the backdrop at later
points in the piece is lit with pink or blue light, varying the tone and breaking from the
washed out aesthetic at the beginning.

107 The doubling of the consonants without a space between them, as Schwitters explains
in his “Zeichen zu meiner Ursonate,” indicate a long vowel sound.
paired with elongated movement. The relationship between speaker and dancers is never clear cut. The speaker moves across the stage and faces one dancer as the others look offstage. His sounds elicit movement. In the true form of a poetic aesthetic that broke down the link between signifier and signified while playing with the sounds of language, the choreography enacts these same types of experimentation. When letters’ sounds begin to appear paired with a certain movement, such as a rolled R and articulated movements of the spine, the link is broken by a change in movement pattern. Other sections of the performance incorporate variations on a particular type of movement.

Kurt Schwitters’s 35-minute “Ursonate” or “Sonate in Urlauten,” first completed in 1926 and adapted through performances between 1926 and 1932, reached the final form in which it was published in Merz 24 in 1932. It differs starkly from the poetry of Rilke and Heym, which was at the center of the choreographic works previously discussed, in that it is a textual score intentionally written for performance. Not only did Schwitters perform his sound poem live and on the radio during his lifetime, his notes “Erklärungen zu meiner Ursonate” and “Zeichen zu meiner Ursonate” contain information about the tone or mood of various sections as well as instructions in the formal imperative (“beachten sie …”) that indicate his intention that the work

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108 Parts of Schwitters’s “Ursonate,” which he worked on from 1922 – 1932, appeared in print before its completion as well as before the publication in its entirety, with the first sections published in 1923. The first performance of the poem took place at the Sturm under the title “Porträt Hausmann” (Lach 311). The use of the word score here and throughout this section reflects the visual presentation of the “Ursonate” in the published versions; I use the term in order to gesture toward the piece’s existence between the poetic and musical genres, as it is both a sound poem and a linguistic sonata.

109 With the exception of citations from the “Ursonate” that contain capital letters, the erklärungen are printed in lowercase type, hence the use of “sie” as the second person formal pronoun.
eventually be performed by others (312-313). In dance performances of the “Ursonate,” which include the 2007 performance at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin introduced above, Jacalyn Carley’s choreographic work, which premiered in Berlin’s Tanzfabrik in 1982, and Bill T. Jones’s collaboration with Darla Villani performed at the Joyce Theater in 1996, the performer of the text stands on stage alongside the dancers to vocalize the text. Because live performance creates the soundscape for the choreography, it can be realized in a variety of ways, and given the fact that a complete recording of Schwitters’ performing his “Ursonate” does not exist, each set of performers, either live or recorded, develops a different realization—if the choreographer chooses to work with the piece in its entirety.

The specificities of the “Ursonate” text—the thingness of the text we have been discussing in the present chapter—are already inherent in root word of the title of Schwitters’s work. As a sonata, the work carries with it the expectation of a particular structure and that it is performed for an audience that can hear or both hear and see the performance. Its currency is sound. On stage, the textual score as a text-thing resonates with experiences of orchestral concerts, a type of performance with which the types of

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110 Schwitters’s “Ursonate” has received and continues to garner attention from numerous artists who work across various media, and the choreographic works mentioned above represent a small sampling of the engagements with the sound poem. Though the pieces discussed in this chapter are all group dances, soloists like Arila Siegert have also danced the Ursonate. In 1998 and 2001, the dancer-choreographer performed Ursonate at the Dessauer Weill-Fest and the Dresdner TANZherbst.

111 The performers who have presented their vocal interpretations of the work, either as a stand-alone performance or within a dance work, recount the difficulty of the piece, the use of recordings of Schwitters’s have been preserved as well as his notes, and the role his son has played in communicating how elements of the long work were once performed.
audiences that attend works in venues like the Akademie der Künste or the less traditional Tanzfabrik would be familiar. The physical score rests on a music stand or podium, and a conductor stands in front of it and coordinates, through movement, the various instruments performing the parts of the work. It hails a conductor or, in this case a speaker, to turn its pages, follow it left to right and top to bottom, and to translate it physically. It demands a corporeal performance. Since an individual usually performs this role in the “Ursonate,” the sense of score in the context of Schwitters’s work is already altered. The addition of dancers reverses the movement-sound dynamic usually present with a musical score: here, the speaker creates the sound from the score while the other bodies on stage move according the different sounds and sections. The dance becomes an engagement with the text-thing that decouples the movement from the body that holds it in a similar way that sound poems decouple letters from words. Despite this difference, the beginning sequence, costuming difference, and access to the podium establish a pattern of behavior surrounding the text-thing of Ursonate dance performances.

The speaker in the 2007 choreographic version, Die Ursonate, carries the textual score or uses it while it rests on the podium. Though the audience cannot see the letters on the page, the score is physically present and belongs to the domain of the primary speaker-performer. Though this speaker has a podium at his disposal, an object reminiscent of the place a text would remain during a speech or orchestral performance, neither the speaker nor the textual score remains confined to the podium once the Ursonate performance begins. As such, during the course of the performance, the speaker and the text itself both conform to and break from the expectations established by the well-known form of the text-thing represented here by the score. This interaction with the
textual score stands in contrast to the performance with the text-thing in *heimweh* while both instances play with expectations attached to the text as thing on stage. Whereas the speaker in *Die Ursonate* experiences a freedom to move away from the text even when the podium provides a repository for it, the vignette with the crumpled paper in *heimweh* confines the performer within a stricter sense of performance with the text, which is mirrored by the physical confines of the moment within a lit place on stage. When Clemens leaves the light in *heimweh*, he breaks the rule of the repertoire; when the *Ursonate* speaker leaves the text, it is not fraught with the same tensions. The dances with the text-things work together with expectations to produce aesthetic and affective qualities that comment back upon the poetics at hand. Despite the freedom expressed physically in *Die Ursonate*, it too possesses a form-boundedness that Schwitters purposely built into the sound poem: the sonata form with traditional rondo, largo, scherzo, and presto movement divisions. Performed within a concert, the *Ursonate*, as convention dictates, should be heard by an audience and that this audience should not applaud between the movements. Yet the audience at the Akademie der Künste did applaud between each movement, precisely because the script of a dance performance calls for this. Similarly, in at least one recorded performance of *heimweh*, the audience at the *Theater unterm Dach* does not clap at the end of the nervous performance of “Die Dämonen der Städte,” which reimagines a performance that elicited much applause. Both audience reactions constitute a sort of “break in script” if the cue is taken from the text-things on stage, and at the same time, they conform to expectations of the type of performance in which they occur, demonstrating how the dance acts upon the text as it, too, asserts itself within the space.
A further break from the expected norms of a physical score on stage during a performance occurs at several moments in *Die Ursonate* piece when the speaker enters into a physical interaction with the dancers. During the second half of the first and longest movement of the piece, the speaker has already moved away from the podium to deliver parts of the “Ursonate” in closer proximity to the dancers, thus he becomes part of the dance movement of the piece. After all five dancers engage in a movement sequence with both extensions and poses where they stand with hands on their hips, they stand still while the speaker trills an r. The recurrence of “Rrummpff tillff toooo?,” the fourth theme of the first movement, prompts a continuation of the movement followed by the dancers lifting the speaker over their heads, where he lies flat on his back atop their hands with his arms across his chest. After this lift, which further detaches him from the podium, he continues to dance with the other performers in a series of smaller lifts, during which he both lifts and is lifted. With “Rum!” four of the dancers lie on the floor and then begin floorwork in pairs; the typical speaker-dancer dynamic is, for the time being, restored.

The physicality of the speaker and his relation to the text-thing also come into play when the direction in which he projects the textual score changes. Whereas the speaker’s and dancers’ relationships to the textual score frequently return to that expected of a musical score with a conductor and musicians, there are multiple moments during which the speaker engages with a particular dancer in movement or a sort of movement-vocal dialog, as he does with one of the female dancers who comes extremely close as if the two may kiss, eliciting laughter from the audience. Yet when another relationship among the speaker, dancers, and text is introduced during part of the final movement when the dancers again lie on the floor as the lights dim, the speaker is the only one lit on
stage. This configuration accompanies the cadenza, a possible version of which was fixed in written form within the printed “Ursonate,” though Schwitters intended the solo to be varied in live performance, to ensure that the liveliness of the section would contrast with the rigid sonata form (“Erklärungen” 312). For nearly a minute and a half, the speaker performs a segment of the piece with changes in pitch and volume before turning to the dancers, which prompts a change in lighting as the dancers, still on the floor, begin to move. Though the speaker carries and performs the physical score, he still has access to a podium; thus, his performance is not rigidly dictated by the text-thing of the score and the podium as its expected place of rest during the piece. Segments of performance both reinforce and transgress expectations tied to the score and podium on stage and the repertoire usually performed with such objects. Similarly, the vocal performance of the score does not come solely from the speaker; at one point, a dancer moving as part of a group of three steps forward and sing-speaks the “Aaa” and “Ooo” from the trio of the scherzo, briefly upsetting the notions that the role of speaker is singular or that dancers are silent players. This flexible dynamic of the roles inhabited by the performers and score as text-thing comments on the status of the “Ursonate” as a textual performance piece: it exists and moves in a liminal genre space, neither entirely music nor entirely text, scripted yet flexible.

Jacalyn Carley choreographed her Ursonate in 1979/1980, the early years of the Tanzfabrik in Berlin. It was first performed in 1982 in at the Tanzfabrik and at the Akademie der Künste, then reworked and recast in 1988 as a part of the 10 year Tanzfabrik retrospective, and commissioned in 1994 for the Rauol Hausmann retrospective at the Martin Gropius Bau. Carley’s Ursonate also features five dancers and
a speaker, Martin Schurr. Though Schurr also has a script or score, he only uses it during the cadenza in the fourth movement. Like *Die Ursonate* (2007) discussed above, this piece also presents the solo section with only the speaker lit on stage. Schurr only holds a score as text-thing during this segment and performs from memory for the remainder of the choreography, underscoring that this section of the *Ursonate* highlights the variable composition of the performance text. For the majority of the piece, Schurr does not hold a script. Instead, he faces the dancers from the side or from behind them, walking to different points on the stage for a segment of movement. At the end of the first movement, he joins the dance ensemble, taking on a dual role as he continues to perform the piece vocally. The similarities between the two pieces, *Ursonate* (1979/1980) and *Die Ursonate* (2007), choreographed by different artists decades apart, reveals that the way the text as thing acts upon the dancers, choreographers, and speakers engaging with it leads to particular broad structures of performances with texts that allow for and even demand individual variations, both of which play with audience expectations that are co-constituted by performance genres and recognizable text-things.

The performance legacy of Schwitters’s “Ursonate” extends beyond Berlin and Germany to the United States. In 1996, American choreographer Bill T. Jones, who has worked with different textual genres within several dance works, staged his version of the *Ursonate*, a choreographic collaboration with dancer-musician Darla Villani danced to Christopher Butterfield’s performance of the sound poem. Reviewer Gus Solomons praised Butterfield’s impactful delivery of the *Ursonate* and emphasized the speed and

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112 During the same season, the Bill T. Jones / Arnie Zane Dance Company also performed a piece entitled “Ballad,” which was set to the poetry of Dylan Thomas.
playfulness of the piece: “All this madcap action, compositionally arranged with Jones’s customary skill, dazzles our eyes with clever patterns and groupings, while daffy grimacing and gestural semaphore tickle our taste for the absurd“ (115). A closer look at the materiality of the text and the choreography as a whole does not fit within the context of this project, which is concerned with the legacy of modernist poetic texts in the German-speaking context. Nevertheless, Jones’s work does warrant further attention, especially as it exhibits the transnational resonance of the work and the permeable boundaries of such multi- and transmedial artistic engagements.113

That several German and American choreographers have staged the Ursonate as a dance work speaks not only to the conceptual status of the work as an experimental synthesis of art forms, but also to the materiality and physicality of Schwitters’s concept of language. Poetry that engages with the malleability, physicality, and performance of language while simultaneously resisting interpretation lends itself to choreographic exploration. The compatibility of this type of poetics with contemporary dance becomes more evident when one looks at the choreographic engagement with the oeuvre of Austrian poet Ernst Jandl for whom Schwitters, among other poets, served as an example.114 During the last several decades, multiple well-known choreographers have staged Ernst Jandl’s texts in dance performances. Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s “C-----H.

113 Though the performance of Bill T. Jones’s Ursonate is the only example mentioned that was created and performed outside of a German-speaking country, the range of nationalities of the choreographers discussed in this chapter, who come from Germany, Italy, Canada, and the United States, gesture toward a broad appeal and resonance of the incorporated poetic texts.

114 For a detailed analysis of this connection, see Martina Kurz’s “Kuwitters Kinder. Kurt Schwitters’ nachhaltige Spuren in der Gegenwartsliteratur am Beispiel von Ernst Jandl und Gerhard Rühm.”
Jandls” (2010), which opened this chapter, Martin Nachbar’s “ja, ja – der dritte mann” (2003), and Jacalyn Carley’s “Ernst Ernst – Jandl Gedichte vertanzt,” a 1982 piece reworked in 1991 and performed again in 2003, each present two main performers engaged in different types of dialogical play of movement and speech. Jandl’s poetry, radio plays, and prose texts appear in various medial forms amidst dancing bodies, including recordings of Jandl’s own vocal performances. The multimedial aspects of these performances correspond with an essential feature of Jandl’s oeuvre, which includes essays and radio plays as well as sound, concrete, and body poems (‘Körpergedichte’).  

Jandl demonstrates and comments on the importance of performance as well as the material and receptive differences among media within his 1985 Frankfurter Poetik-Vorlesungen, Das Öffnen und Schließen des Mundes. After performing his poem “der mund,” he explains:

Das Gedicht sagt etwas, und es stellt es zugleich hörbar und sichtbar dar.

Es bedarf also eines hörbaren Sprechers, und es bedarf eines Publikums.

Auf Videoband bekommt jeder es ebenfalls komplett; auf Schallplatte nur

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115 These three pieces contain elements that call for analyzing them in connection with one another, but they are not the only choreographic experiments with Jandl’s poetry during the last several decades. Karin Wickenhäuser, for example, staged a piece entitled “blaablaablaa bäbb bäbb bäbbbäbb” in Pfefferberg, Berlin in 1999. Unfortunately, the archived DVD of the performance held in the mime centrum in Berlin does not have working sound, which prevents a suitable analysis of the work in conversation with the three examined here.

116 These ‘Körpergedichte’ are poems that center on the topic and performance of body parts used in the act of speaking. When written, poems like “die lippen” contain notes similar to stage directions, as only through performance can the sound and movement come together to create the visual version.
The poem says something, and at the same time, it presents it as audible and visible. It thus needs an audible speaker, and it needs an audience. On videotape, everyone gets it in its entirety; on a record, only a piece of it; and on the page of a book, much less still, yet here with the indispensable instructions as a footnote on the four phases: open, wider open, very wide open, closed (6).

The poem, one of Jandl’s *Körpergedichte* written both of and for the lips, communicates something while rendering the poem both audible and visible. Though his remarks favor media that allow the multisensory transmission of his poem, he also points out the idea that the written text offers instructions, footnotes not dissimilar to stage directions that guide the performance. Similar to Schwitters’s “Erklärungen zu meiner Ursonate,” these footnotes address a future performer of the text and issue inside knowledge for a felicitous re-performance that will nonetheless be new and different from each other instance.

Jandl’s comments refer specifically to the lectures and the performance of a poem like “der mund” within them, but his oeuvre as a whole calls for a speaker and the presence of an audience. That the poetry has enjoyed and continues to garner much popular and scholarly attention provides evidence that people have received and acted upon this invitation. Among the recipients are the choreographers who have staged Jandl’s oeuvre. Though each is presented in a different dance style, the pieces in which
an engagement occurs between Jandl’s poetry and his performed poetics highlight the texts’ essential materiality, mediality, and notion of play as central features. Text-things that appear in various forms such as a clipboard, piles of paper, or an audio speaker enact this exploration of the material features of language and its call to seriously yet playfully engage with the possibilities. When it comes to such dance performances, there are no footnotes or explanations that direct the creation of material things or the way in which dancers and speakers perform, but as Jandl states, “Das Gedicht sagt etwas” (“Das Öffnen” 6). The performers listen and invite it onto the stage.

The “And” of the Encounter: ‘Thingness’ and Modernity

Encounters with texts not only form the dance performances presented here, but also take place on stage within them. Moments with texts as things on stage do not engender stability or fixity for the written text. Rather the texts that appear in this way as concrete objects coupled with physical interactions are part of a complex aesthetic negotiation. In exploring the semantics of the word things, Bill Brown refers to its “audacious ambiguity”: it can point to something concrete while also unnamed (4). Things and our interactions with them, whether on stage or in everyday life, possess generality and specificity. The “and” inherent in the ambiguity of things makes an attention to thingness well-suited to performance and dance, media often framed as being beyond words, concerned with the embodied experience. On stages that present an engagement between dance and text, this “and” performs a series of double gestures, allowing text-things and bodies to enact archive and repertoire, pointing at once to the then and now of the text, and staging the body-as-thing and the thing-as body dancing
A further double gesture occurs in the encounter with “thingness” on stage in these performances. The dances with things and text-things on stage are, as we have seen, contemporary and yet also rooted in the modernist attention to the materiality of the world. This attentiveness to things presents itself across various strains of modernist poetics and aesthetics, and it surfaces across artistic media and within the theoretical discourse. From Rilke’s preoccupation with things and art-things that extended beyond the well-known category of his *Dinggedichte*,\(^{117}\) to the use of found materials in collages and experimentation with the materiality of language by Schwitters’s and his contemporaries, to Walter Benjamin’s consideration of things in works like *Einbahnstraße* and “Traumkitsch,” concepts of ‘things’ and ‘thingness’ that interrogate the relationships between human subjects and the thing-world not only recur within modernism but help to constitute it.\(^{118}\) The ‘thingness’ staged in the encounters with texts in contemporary dance performances that calls us to explore the corporeal as well as discursive relationships between poetic texts and moving bodies also helped to form the moment out of which such texts were born. The texts written in the beginning decades of the twentieth century help to shape reception of that epoch today. The text-things in

\(^{117}\) Already in his 1898 essay “Moderne Lyrik,” Rilke attention to the shifting relationships between poets and things, using them to differentiate between different styles of poetry. The objective realism of the previous decades trained the modern to observe the dimensions of things while in naturalism one began to speak with things rather than of things (22).

\(^{118}\) Brown also links Benjamin to his discussion of *thing theory*, drawing on his analysis of the relationship between the surrealists and the material world in “Traumkitsch”: “Subjects may constitute objects, but within Benjamin’s materialism things have already installed themselves in the human psyche” (11).
circulation on stage and in everyday life possess generality and specificity, a then and now, a place in the archive and the repertoire; they assert themselves in the “and” of the encounter.

The modernist texts of *heymweh*, *Rilke*, and *Die Ursonate* dance as things, performing myth, anxiety, and liminality between artistic media while co-creating the spaces inhabited by such texts. These elements of the performance, which are also vital elements of modernity, function not only as reflections of important aspects of modernist texts, but as a perpetuation of a sensual experience. They allow the bodies in the room (the dancers and audience) to experience, physically or via corporeal imagination, the mythic weight, the physical stress of anxiety, and the playful yet unsettled status of these texts. In the corporeal resonances produced by these encounters, the dancers and audience members experience an important component of modernism that is often overlooked—the multisensory, embodied experience of the world, its things, and its texts.

Examining the dance performances that incorporate Ernst Jandl’s text, a preeminent poet of the next generation, alongside the performances of *heymweh*, *Rilke*, and *Die Ursonate* allows for a comparison of the material manifestations of his oeuvre to those in the aforementioned performances. Such a comparison can help us to understand the various iterations of ‘thingness’ in modernity and beyond. Some text-things and the dances with them resemble the types onstage in the performances of modernist texts. The clipboard from which the male performer in Jaclyn Carley’s *Ernst Ernst – Jandl Gedichte vertanzt* performs “die klinke des pinguins” (“the handle of the penguin”) is similar to the use of the physical score in performances of Schwitters’s “Ursonate,” and like *heymweh*, Katja Erdmann-Rajski’s *C-----H. Jandls Zunge* employs paper that is seen, held, and
heard. The two Jandl performances we have discussed, as well as Martin Nachbar’s “ja, ja – der dritte mann” differ from the other performances treated in this chapter because of their emphasis on mediality, less traditional movement vocabularies, and physicality directed at fellow dancers. Though I attribute the latter qualities to the playful yet serious quality of Jandl’s poetry that explores the physicality of language and body that performs it, I argue that attention to mediality increases rapidly through the mid- and late-twentieth century, and that acceleration shapes the reception of many types of texts and performances we see. The overhead projectors, digital projectors, and sound equipment present as things on stage in the performances of Jandl’s texts highlight the new dances invited by encounters with text and multimedia.

Dance performances that incorporate poetic texts on stage in material and immaterial forms thus bring together several important developments of the last several decades: a renewed attention to materiality and engagement with thing theory, the reconstructions of modern dance works of the early and mid-twentieth century, an interest in the body as archive, and expanded attention to dance studies in the United States and Europe. The dance performances presented here reflect these discourses. The analysis of dance performances that engage with poetic texts presents an opportunity to consider the thingness of modernist poetry, its role in the repertoires and archives we carry, and how it might dance. Attention to the text-things and their assertiveness does not stabilize the works and the texts with which they engage as aesthetic artifacts, rather their analysis helps us understand poetic texts as things to be grappled with, clutched within hands, read aloud, and taken apart. And yet, regardless of form, the text-things retain a mythic quality. The physical interactions with text-things, the “how” of the
dances with text, comment back upon and open up the possibilities associated with the poetics of the texts as well as our experiences with them.
Dear Reader,
Your presence is requested.

The dance performances discussed in the previous and final chapter, like similar performances past and present that engage with a poetic text, exist simultaneously as performances with and of a text. To dance (with) a text is to perform a particular relationship to language, text, reading, and writing. By staging poetry with and alongside movement, a dance work comments back upon the writing, revealing in the process new perspectives as well as a live experience of the performed texts. The choreographers responsible for the works that stage poets’ works have responded to a call—not a call to perform an interpretation or representation of a text but a call to dance with and alongside it. In doing so, they have allowed the work, in its material manifestation on stage, to issue a different iteration of the call to dancers and audience members alike.

The materiality of the text appearing on stage as something that can invite interaction and move with and among the bodies on stage, performing for but also with the audience, frames the text not as the object of performance but as a subject among subjects, as a thing to be danced with rather than merely represented. In the context of academic discourse around literature, we often think of a text or, more specifically, a poem as something to read from the page, though coffee house readings, poetry slams, and similar events have long expanded the way some people experience poetry. Because of our relationship to reading, it does not seem difficult to posit the thingness of a text on paper or in book form in terms of its ability to hail, to provoke, and invite readers. It is a familiar dance, so familiar that we often do the steps automatically: opening the pages,
beginning with a title, allowing the form the words take to lead us, moving us through the
lines.

The difference when we see a performance that incorporates both spoken elements of a text and the text as a material thing onstage amidst moving bodies is that we become witness to and part of an experience of the text as a material thing, as a dance partner that takes on different forms in the course of the performance. When a performer sits in a heap of hundreds of sheets of paper, stands nervously clutching a text in the spotlight, pushes a textual boulder up a dark incline, or stands facing bodies while holding a physical score, their choreographed movement with the text-thing activates the kinesthetic memory or imagination, inscribing the physical interaction into the archive of the body.

As the experience of the performance produces resonance, dissonance, pleasure, discomfort, and/or questions, we are actively engaged in the negotiation of a relationship both mental and physical. Comprising part of the work’s soundscape as well as physically present on the stage, the text takes on a ‘thingness’ and exists alongside the bodies. In turn, the text’s response to an invitation to dance is to reissue that same call. That invitation extends to the performers, the chorographers, the scholars, and the spectators, with some bodies inhabiting multiple roles.

The ability to extend an invitation to dance is not limited to a material text upon the stage amidst dancers. When Sturm-Kreis poets embraced dance as a way to reconceptualize poetry or their word-art (Wortkunst), they were acknowledging such an invitation as well as extending one to their readership via their poems and essays.

Surrounded by the boom of modernist dance in the early 20th century together with an
increased societal awareness of the importance of movement for personal development and education, these artists and writers allowed themselves to be drawn into a relationship with words that was full of movement and rhythm. Similar performances that stage poetry by placing a material text-thing on stage, the poets of Wortkunst regarded words as the material of poetry. In employing this new relationship to words as a methodology in their poetic writings, Walden termed words within the poems as “Wortkörper” (word-bodies) and encouraged fellow poets to allow them movement in writing. As such, dance poems by those associated with the Sturm-Kreis not only feature dance or dancers as the subject or content of the poem but emulate dance in their form. The rhythm, line lengths, word choice, repetition, punctuation or lack thereof, and other features all help to create a sense of movement. In doing so, these poems invite readers into a different experience of poetry, one that breaks from traditions of the time in order to foreground words as material and rhythm and movement as universal qualities of ideal art forms. The way they allow words to dance on the page function as both a response to an invitation and an extension of one to readers and listeners alike.\footnote{As mentioned in the second chapter, the \textit{Sturm} hosted many \textit{Sturm-Abende}, which provided a venue for declamation, theater, dance, and other artistic performances.}

The presence of dancing afire in poems examined in the first chapter embodies another sort of call and response. Poets and other spectators of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century were drawn to the Spanish and other Southern European dancers who traveled and performed throughout Europe and the United States. The connection of fire and identity in poems about these dances and dancers thus proves unsurprising, as it conveys an inviting or even an enticing experience with another culture at a time when many were—not
unproblematically—fascinated by the exotic, the primitive, and the “natural sensuality” often ascribed to them.

Dancing afire, in poems and essays by dancers of the period, frequently conveys the kinesthetic empathy perceived by spectators and dancers alike, a concept that began to take shape in the fields of aesthetics and psychology around the same time period. Empathy itself can be framed as both an extension of an invitation as well as a sort of response to one; empathizing opens a space between two beings and creates a connection, much as an accepted invitation would. In the case of dance, perception does not only happen visually but via the body, or kinesthetically. Fire proves an apt way to poetically capture this shared sensation, as we experience it with all of the senses; it radiates and can thus be experienced bodily as poets did with dance. Beyond simply watching, experiencing the kinesthetic empathy of dance from any subject position, involves accepting an invitation to move and be moved. Dancing afire, used by lyric poets, dance critics, and choreographers alike, conveys this experience poetically.

Placing different genres in conversation with each other—on the page, on the stage, and in this project—brings together different modes of experience, from the multisensory perception of kinesthetic empathy to the attentiveness to rhythms and movements to the analysis of how works create meaning. Multimodal experiences gained relevance and attention in modernism, as poets and artists sought new ways to conceptualize embodied experiences and aesthetic aims. Experiments with multimedial performances that produce such multimodal experiences have continued through to today with dance and poetry, movement and lyric a common touchpoint.

Most scholarship chooses to focus on either performance or texts, drawing
occasionally on the other artistic genre for support the main ideas or provide examples in the name of cultural studies. Though the intersection between dance and literature has gained scholarly attention in the past years, studies rarely consider performances that stage poetry or other literary works that fall outside of dramatic traditions or the storybook ballets. Here, I chose to include analyses of both poetry and dance performances as well as their influence upon one another in order to invite readers and reflexively, myself, to consider them within the same space, alongside one another. In doing so, I hope to create the potential for multimodal experiences that ask us not to favor one mode, genre, or method over another but to allow them to act upon one another as well as their audiences. How do we experience a poem or a dance? What can an attentiveness that dance provoked in poets bring to the experience of reading?

Presence, for example, has long been recognized as important to experiencing or theorizing performance. Yet presence and kinesthetic awareness also important when reading. How often might we find ourselves as readers less than present? If our first response to a text centers less on the content or meaning in favor of the physicality of the reading experience, its sensuality, what might we discover? And the invitation can be extended in both directions: what can poetic thinking or close reading bring to participating in or studying dance? How might dancing poetry change our relationship to it? As the genre-blurring and artistic collaborations that happened in modernism continue to expand and evolve, it is my hope to see an increasingly multisensory, multimedial, multimodal approach in scholarship and teaching.

As a scholar in German studies, I see this project as an invitation—an invitation to take dance seriously, to see its place in literary studies as more than a metaphor. In doing
so and inviting others to do the same, I echo the plea issued in the early 20th century by
dancers and dance scholars to raise dance to the level of music and poetry. An earnest
academic pursuit of dance in the United States and Germany was then seen again in the
establishment of dance and performance studies programs at universities. Well-
established today in its own domain, dance does not need to remain separate from other
cultural manifestations and modes of expression. For that matter, neither does poetry. An
opportunity exists for artists, audiences, and scholars alike to move beyond the tired text-
performance or speech-dance dichotomies. And thus, as you, dear reader, engage with
texts and performances alike, I hope you will accept their invitation to dance.
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