

## LA ARGENTINA, WHERE? FASCINATION AND SCOPIC FILIATION IN *O SENSEÏ* (2012) AND *ÔNO-SENSATION* (2019)

Fernando López Rodríguez

*Equipe danse, geste et corporéité. Laboratoire Musidanse. EA1572.*

*Université Paris 8-Saint Denis*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1855-6766>

[lparra.fernando@gmail.com](mailto:lparra.fernando@gmail.com)

**Fecha de recepción:** 21/03/2025 / **Fecha de aceptación:** 06/06/2025

### Abstract

This article describes two contemporary choreographic pieces—*O Senseï* by Catherine Diverrès (2012) and *Ôno-Sensation* by Pauline Le Boulba (2019)<sup>1</sup>—that are inspired by Kazuo Ohno's *Admiring La Argentina* (1977), itself a response to Antonia Merce's flamenco legacy. The study introduces two original theoretical concepts: scopic filiation, which describes the affective and creative gaze of the spectator-turned-artist, and a floral theory of gesture transmission, which posits the migration of gesture as a transformative and embodied process. Methodologically, the article adopts a hybrid form of academic writing and «stream of consciousness», rooted in phenomenological and corporeal observation of dance through video documentation and archival materials. The article explores how admiration can become a fertile gesture of creation and how inherited gestures reappear—often transformed—across time and space.

**Keywords:** Antonia Mercé, Kazuo Ohno, Scopic Filiation, Gesture Transmission, Phenomenology, Contemporary Dance.

<sup>1</sup> The first version of this text was written in 2019: nowadays, Pauline Le Boulba's artistic name is «Pauline L. Boulba».

## LA ARGENTINA, ¿POR DÓNDE?: FASCINACIÓN Y FILIACIÓN ESCÓPICA EN *O SENSEÏ* (2012) Y *ÔNO-SENSATION* (2019)

### Resumen

Este artículo describe dos piezas coreográficas contemporáneas —*O Senseï*, de Catherine Diverrès (2012), y *Ôno-Sensation*, de Pauline Le Boulba (2019)— inspiradas por *Admiring La Argentina* de Kazuo Ohno (1977), a su vez una respuesta coreográfica a la figura de Antonia Mercé. Se introducen dos conceptos teóricos originales: la filiación escópica, que describe el impulso creativo activado por la mirada afectada del espectador, y una teoría floral de la transmisión gestual, que propone la migración del gesto como un proceso transformador y encarnado. Metodológicamente, el artículo adopta una forma híbrida de escritura académica y «flujo de conciencia», anclada en la observación fenomenológica y corporal de piezas a través de vídeo y materiales de archivo. Se explora cómo la admiración puede transformarse en gesto creador y cómo los gestos heredados reaparecen —transformados— a través del tiempo y el espacio.

**Palabras clave:** Antonia Mercé, Kazuo Ohno, filiación escópica, transmisión gestual, fenomenología, danza contemporánea.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article continues a line of research I began in previous works, where I explore the scenic genealogy between Antonia Mercé, La Argentina, and Kazuo Ohno. In «H2-Ohno: Auto-ethnografía de un proceso creativo en danza» (López Rodríguez), I trace the process of creation and research that led to the development of the solo piece *H2-Ohno* (2014), based on documentary material about Antonia Merce's trip to Tokyo in 1929 and the performance attended by Kazuo Ohno—an experience that would profoundly shape his artistic path. This article analyzes the aesthetic and artistic decisions made in the composition of the piece, based on the available historical archive.

In «Gestos de ida y vuelta» (López Rodríguez), the focus shifts to the potential impact that La Argentina had on Ohno's future work—not only as an academic dancer of stylized Spanish dance, but also as a performer of variety shows, danced pantomimes, and other popular stage formats of the early 20th century. These lesser-studied aspects of Antonia Merce's career nonetheless resonate with the kind of scenic work Ohno would develop decades later in his choreographic tribute. The notions of «scopic filiation» and the «floral theory of gestural transmission» presented here emerge as a natural development of these previous investigations.

This text takes on this previous research to analyze two creations fruit of the historical path of Antonia Mercé, La Argentina, who became an artistic inspiration figure: *O Senseï*, by

Catherine Diverrès (2012) and *Óno-Sensation*, by Pauline Le Boulba (2019)<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, and beyond the specific analysis of these pieces, a theoretical proposal is laid out on the way certain figures in the History of Dance, in different ways and following what we will call a «scopic filiation», become forces of creativity for viewers-artists and audience members who will eventually become artists. In the words of Pauline Le Boulba in her thesis-creation: «the singularity of this piece [*Admiring La Argentina*] lies perhaps in the fact that it also grabs me. When it comes to dancing K. Óno's passion for the flamenco dancer, I have to admit that it also affects me» (158)<sup>3</sup>.



Fig. 1. *O Senseï*, by Catherine Diverrès (2012). Photo: Elian Bachini.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE CHOREOGRAPHIC PIECES

The following analysis is based on two fundamental elements: repeated views of recorded videos and the texts written by both artists recounting their creation processes and that appear, in the case of Diverrès, in the online press dossier, and in the case of Le Boulba, in her unpublished thesis-creation.

<sup>2</sup> These two choreographic pieces have been described with varying degrees of depth, due to their different durations of the pieces and the greater amount of available material on the creative process and artistic decision-making in the case of Le Boulba.

<sup>3</sup> «La particularité de cette œuvre tient peut-être au fait qu'elle me saisit à son tour. S'il s'agit de danser le saisissement—celui de K. Óno pris par la danseuse de flamenco—j'observe qu'il me contamine à mon tour».

The use of stream-of-consciousness writing in this article is intentional and rooted in my experience as a dance researcher and practitioner. It mirrors the improvisational attention I exercise as a mover and positions the writing body in dialogue with the visual and kinesthetic memory of the pieces analyzed. This method enables a phenomenological and affective engagement with the works —watching not from a distance but from within a porous and trembling viewer-body. It is, in this sense, an embodied epistemology. My intention has been to follow the artists' poetics as close as possible in my writing, which in both cases shifts between personal story and descriptions of the sensations, emotions, and images that Ohno produces in them. This has led me to adopt a different kind of writing than the one I used in the analysis of the pieces on Antonia Mercé and Kazuo Ohno mentioned above: it has been equally thorough but based on what we could call —following the categories used in literary creation processes— «(free) stream of consciousness». I personally use this technique as an improvisation exercise in dance: both fully aware of what is happening around me (in this case the piece I am watching) and fully immersed in the psycho-physical sensations of my body, in a state of changed awareness. Furthermore, I have been careful to use gender-inclusive language —as Le Boulba does in the French version of her thesis— in my own text.

This methodological note on the overlap between the process of watching the pieces and the bulk of the writing process is by no means trivial given that it is an attempt to come up with a genealogy of the choreographic analysis process and describe the state of the researcher's writing body, their literal «epistemological position»: in my case, feeling the ground vibrate or shake (I often write on trains and planes), my cervical spine bent in front a laptop screen, and speeding across the keyboard to write what I have seen and the structure of the act of seeing by the instant, an exercise not too far from Antonia Mercé's fingers tapping on the castanets.

If my point here is to analyze two pieces by two audience members (Diverrès and Le Boulba) «affected» by *Admiring La Argentina*, which is in turn the choreographic creation of another audience member (Kazuo Ohno) «affected» by Antonia Mercé's dance, then it seems essential to describe my corporeality as a viewer watching the creations of these two French choreographers, bearing in mind also that the process of watching and analyzing these pieces is profusely fed by my previous experience as a creator-researcher whose body and writing have been «kidnapped» by Ohno and Mercé (in this chronological order).



Fig. 2 (left). Kazuo Ohno in Argentina Sho, 1977.

Fig. 3 (right). Tatsumi Hijikata supporting Kazuo Ohno. Photo: Naoya Ikegami.

### 3. *O SENSEI*: TRIBUTE, ECHOES AND THE SPECTRAL GESTURE

It is possible to pay tribute to Kazuo Ohno though attempting to revisit his own path in relation to La Argentina is by no means possible. Or maybe it is? It would be a rather crazy temptation<sup>4</sup>.  
(Diverrès)

Diverrès reveals a temptation not to embody Kazuo Ohno's or Antonia Mercé's dance, not even Merce's dance as seen by Ohno. Her temptation is related to revisiting (re-walking?) a perceptive path, that of a viewer who becomes an artist after seeing La Argentina dance (or rather as they see her dance?). Thus, shifting from temptation to consummation, Diverrès appears dressed in a black suit, her figure standing out on a white square cut in turn on the black background of the stage. It reminds me of Magritte's *Portrait of Edward James* (1937), though I have to admit that many things, maybe too many, remind me of Magritte. The background music mixes what could be the sound of an electric guitar with a woman screaming. It is not clear what she says, if she's actually saying something. Her shadow is cast behind, like the reflection of the faceless man in the painting by the Belgian artist. Is the dancer unmoved by the screams we hear? Then there is silence and she dances: she hugs herself, she strokes her face with one hand then the other, she releases an invisible weight from the nape of her neck, she contracts and expands. Her walk reminds me of the fast and homogeneous steps of Noh

<sup>4</sup> «Rendre hommage à Kazuo Ohno serait possible mais on ne peut en aucune façon tenter de revisiter le chemin que lui-même a fait concernant La Argentina. Quoique?... ce pourrait être une tentation, un peu folle!».

plays, but this is perhaps an interference of the Japanese imagery I associate the piece with, simply because the piece is a tribute to a Japanese dancer. Diverrès claims in the press dossier:

Emmanuel Serafini [director of Avignon *Les Hivernales* Festival between 2009 and 2016] has gracefully given me freedom to perform the theme of Asia, and in my case specifically, the theme of Japan, which in a sense liberated me from the dangers of «homage», and I'm grateful for that. However, the Japan I have experienced is intrinsically linked to Ohno. And it was a profound, radical revolution of my entire being<sup>5</sup>.

Indeed, Diverrès saw *Hommage à La Argentina* in Paris in June 1981, and such was the aesthetic impact the performance caused on her, that she decided to go to Kamihoshikawa (Japan) to study with Ohno in 1982 and 1983. Her piece from 2012, two years after Ohno's death in June 2010, is based not only on her viewer-dancer experience but also on her student-dancer journey that led her to study with the master (*sensei* in Japanese), following the energy of the aesthetic impact of Ohno's piece on her. Diverrès must have somehow sensed the Japanese artist could accompany her on the radical transformation she felt she needed.

The «homage danger», in the words of Diverrès, could be explained taking into account not only the nature of this type of events, but also the etymology of the word «homage», which refers to feudal times (the Middle Ages and certain uses that extended into the Ancien Régime) and is related to the initial step in the ceremony by which a vassal declared himself to be his lord's «man». It also refers to the whole ceremony and the inherent concepts of vassalage and *infeudation*, and by extending this meaning, to any oath involving obligatory compliance, and to acts of submission, veneration, and respect (Lajo 103). What does it mean to pay homage in dance, other than our fascinated or contemplative gaze at those we see dancing? What is the relationship between Diverrès' present gesture, Ohno's close gesture, and Mercé's distant gesture? Is there a submission link there, or any other type of link? Did Mercé's gesture and in turn Ohno's involve a claim for future vassalage or creativity permission *based* on their choreographic proposal? Did Mercé's gesture possess the legal nature of an «aesthetic contract» or the permissibility of an «artistic passport» to travel to new and unknown places, or maybe to create them?

<sup>5</sup> «La délicatesse d'Emmanuel Serafini a été de me laisser libre de l'interprétation autour du thème de l'Asie et, en ce qui me concerne, du Japon; en me libérant d'une certaine manière de l'exercice périlleux de "l'hommage" et je l'en remercie. Cependant, il n'y a pas de Japon vécu pour moi sans la présence d'Ohno. Et ce fut une révolution profonde, radicale, de tout mon être».

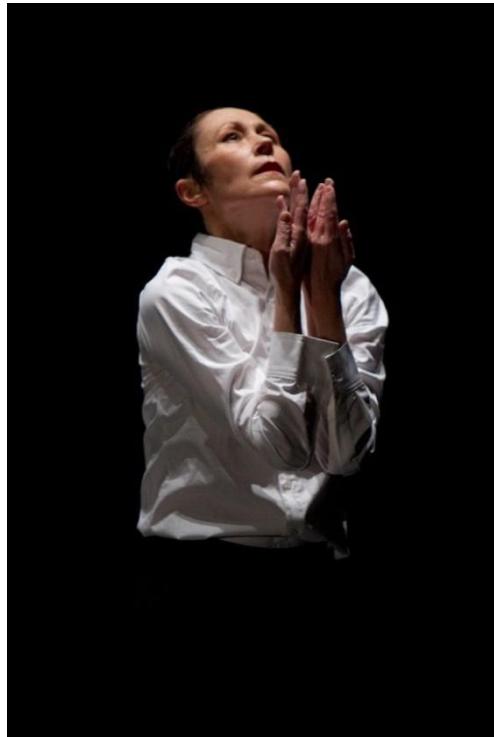


Fig. 4. *O Senseï*, by Catherine Diverès, 2012. Photo: Elian Bachini.

Diverès molds the air as if it were clay, and her hands suddenly acquire a central role, as in Kazuo Ohno's dance. The density and expressiveness in Ohno's hands and fingers movement emerged perhaps from his desire to convey Mercé's rich hand movement, who would overexpose them by playing the castanets or through the flamenco dance twisting. In Diverès, however, her small finger remains upright while her wrist turns, unlike what happens in flamenco dance, where the thumb is the only «soloist» within the choral movement of the other fingers.

The dancer crosses the space, or rather lets the space cross through her, with an enquiring look that wonders through the dark stage. This sequence is interrupted and Diverès starts a brief rhythmic foot work in five-beat little hops. Is Diverès doing a *zapateo* or is it just me who sees in those hops an exercise close to Spanish dance and flamenco? Am I hallucinating? Maybe there are too many phantoms in this piece —Mercé, Ohno— and so one starts seeing invisible things, things that are really not there?

I see Ohno in Diverès' sailing hands, in her spine arching backwards, in her facial expression, at the limit between surprise and fright. I feel I want to see Ohno through the dancer, as if she were transparent, her body a palimpsest unveiling the body signature of an absent being. I feel, for some reason, that nothing else matters to me. Anything that does not remind me of something (of Ohno or Magritte) does not matter to me: all that which is, perhaps, the only thing «inherent» to the dancer's subjectivity. I feel I'm being terribly unfair to her. It is as if I could only want the absent, the dead. Academy has trained me in this. In loving what is not

there anymore, what perhaps never was but that we can imagine much better than the actual present.

Diverrès combines short and dry gestures with long leg extensions and fluid arm movements until she gives her back to the audience on the left corner of the stage and takes off her jacket. She returns to the centre of the stage in a white shirt and shows the palm of her hands while piano music is heard. The relationship with music in this piece is curious: at first it seemed the artist was waiting in silence to then start dancing and only now does the gestural communion with music (a piano melody) happen. The gestures are large and solemn: hands and arms are raised and draw big circles, curves, spirals. The music stops and Diverrès keeps dancing until she goes off stage.

An image, superhuman in size and appearance, of a being dressed in a kimono is projected on the white square in the background. It could be Ohno, or a new invocation carried out by someone else. I wonder to what extent is it necessary or interesting to manage this «not knowing»; to what extent does knowing who is dancing behind that screen enhance or reduce my aesthetic experience: does the audience at the theatre know? Chin stuck on sternum and spine curved, the dancing being lets its hands hang forward like dead leaves on the edge of a tree branch about to fall. The kimono is long and the artist moves it as like a *bata de cola* [flamenco dress]. «Like a *bata de cola*», again an interference (or a contribution?) from my own flamenco imagery.

The artist closes her/his arms as if rocking a baby and speeds up the movement to a spin. It returns to a bent back and to a much slower tempo. Diverrès is onstage again, this time in a black kimono, as if from behind the screen. She moves through the stage in centripetal circles and then comes to a halt and breaks the vertical position kneeling down, like a screw turning on itself to go through the ground. She stands up. Under her black kimono we glimpse a shiny red cloth that the artist drags like a frill of this *bata de cola* that does not leave me. She carries a frill made of red sequins, I carry flamenco. I remember my friend, the *bailaora* Paca Rodríguez, would say: «I see flamenco in everything, even hanging the laundry in the patio is flamenco to me» (López Rodríguez 00:36:15). Flamenco is a powerful perceptive filter, as are the «purple glasses» of feminism.

Finally, Diverrès comes centre stage, on her knees and her back to the audience, to the sound of Bach/Gounod's *Ave María*<sup>6</sup> also used by Ohno in his 1977 piece. An echo of what she herself could have seen in Ohno's piece in 1981. Diverrès takes off the black shawl from her shoulders. Someone, maybe Diverrès herself, sings the *Ave María* in an (intentionally?) unpleasant way. The dancer gets rid of her kimono like a black chrysalis, touches the floor and

<sup>6</sup> This *Ave María* reveals a new authorship overlap; it is a musical palimpsest built with the melody by the Romantic composer Charles Gounod (1818-1893), superimposed on Prelude n.º 1 in C major, BWV 846, from Book I of J. S. Bach's (1685-1750), *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, composed 137 years before.

then resumes vertical position, bathed in a shiny red colour that contrasts with her shocked face, revealed to us when she turns to the audience.

The artist starts moving with her back bent and in slow, dense movements to the sound of recorded clapping. The air could be water and the dancer could be swimming under it. The expression on her face changes. She seems to be smiling at times. Diverrès does a circular couple dance with herself, one arm up and her other hand on the opposite shoulder, as if dancing with the dead and gone. But the dead don't dance and she is on her own. The first notes of the *Ave María* sound again and with them the slow cracked movement reminds us once more of the absence of Ohno. The back is bent again, verticality crumbles. Again the hands and the micro-movements of the head that make me feel the presence of Ohno as a spectre communicating through cracking joints. The artist silently disappears and the piece ends.

If this piece was created when Kazuo Ohno died with the urgency of a funeral, what kind of ceremony was it? What loss are we commemorating here? Ohno's or his gestural legacy? Who or what is crying for Ohno in this piece? Is it Diverrès, the master's student and mourner? Are the dead's gestures also buried with their body? Would this be an act of artistic desecration? Would this even matter? Do homages comfort us in our loss or are they closer to what Freud would call «repetition compulsion» (Laplanche and Pontalis 439-446)<sup>7</sup>, a compulsive repetition of past painful scenes? Do we invest our lives, and somewhat lose them trying to keep the dead alive? Who will take upon keeping us alive when we ourselves are gone forever? Who will desecrate the columbarium of our gestures to bring them back to the spotlight? Is that why we need disciples who repeat, to the point of boredom and extenuation, our rep-ertoire, our R.I.P.-ertorie? *Requiescat in pace*, the gestures that should rest?



Fig. 5. *Óno-Sensation*, by Pauline Le Boulba, 2019, Photo: Vincent Ducard.

<sup>7</sup> Following Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, repetition compulsion would be an «unconscious and incoercible process, by virtue of which a subject actively places themselves in painful situations, thus repeating old experiences, without remembering their prototype, but on the contrary, with the very vivid impression that it is something fully motivated in the present» (68).

#### 4. *ÓNO-SENSATION*<sup>8</sup>: QUEER ARCHIVE AND EMBODIED REVERBERATIONS

This is my cave. My audience cave. Gestures, dances, videos, photographs, sounds and materials appear on its wall. It is a spring storing the memories of performances I have seen. It is a resting place where I feel well. There are people too. «Lesbian-friendly» ghosts. In some places this jumble of «things» has become a crust of sorts. This crust is edible. It melts in the mouth. This mix of objects, presences, and edible materials draws a cartography of my affections. I am quiet in my cave. Lying down, I smoke an e-cig, I dream. I trust the images. I interpret the signs. I explore. I yawn loudly. My eyes open and close. Permanent dance. My cave is covered in images waiting to be awakened. All asleep, they look at me. I hear noises from the bottom of my cave. They must be TDOAAE or J.J., my partners who live here. We are organizing something this evening. A screening of videos found on the crust<sup>9</sup>. (Le Boulba 119)

Le Boulba's piece opens with the screening of this text, in French and in English, on one of the two «screens» building the stage scene —the one closer to the audience. However, it is not a screen in itself, and the aesthetics is not that of a «lecture presentation», but rather the white linoleum on the floor has been lifted by its end to create two wave crests that support the screening. The floor, where the audience-dancer is curled up, ruffles and connects the high and the low creating a horizontal dimension of the space that seems to be part of a carefully thought dramaturgical plan:

Softness is part of the core of the device I want to start. With Jean-Marc Segalen, in charge of lighting and stage design, I work to create a space that highlights a contemplative state. The space is empty and covered by a white linoleum. Two ends of the carpet rise up like waves. A big one and small one. These waves become the support for the projection of the text and two videos. These waves are a space of comfort and warmth<sup>10</sup>. (325)

Indeed, this quasi-oceanic atmosphere does not create in me —curiously enough— a sensation of cold and infinity, but one of intimacy and comfort. I perceive the extent to which this comfort comes from a slow tempo that is not imposed upon me, that does not force me to jump from

<sup>8</sup> As seen in piece title, Le Boulba has opted for spelling «Óno» as opposed to the one I have used in this study, «Ohno»; both spellings refer to Kazuo's surname, our Japanese artist.

<sup>9</sup> «Ici c'est ma grotte. Ma grotte de spectatrice. Sur le parois, des gestes, des danses, des vidéos, des photos, des sons et des matières. C'est un lieu-ressource qui stocke, des souvenirs de spectacles que j'ai vus. C'est un lieu-réconfort où je me sens bien. Il y a des gens aussi. Des fantômes lesbian-friendly. Par endroits, cet amas de "choses" c'est transformé en une sorte de croûte. Cette croûte peut se manger. Ça fond en bouche. Un vrai délice. Cet agencement d'objets, de présences et de matières comestibles, dessine une cartographie de mes affects. Dans ma grotte, je zone. Vautrée, je vapote, je rêve. Je fais confiance aux images. J'interprète les signes. J'explore. Je bâille fort. Mes yeux s'ouvrent et se ferment. Danse permanente. Ce serait quoi la danse d'une spectatrice? Ma grotte est tapie d'images qui n'attendent que d'être réveillées. Toutes endormies, elles me regardent. J'entends du bruit au fond de la grotte. Ça doit être TDOAAE ou J.J., mes copines qui vivent ici. On organise un truc ce soir. Une projection de vidéos retrouvées dans la croûte».

<sup>10</sup> «La douceur est justement au cœur du dispositif que je souhaite mettre en place. Avec Jean-Marc Segalen qui m'accompagne aux lumières et à la scénographie, nous travaillons à créer un espace qui souligne un état contemplatif. L'espace est nu et recouvert d'un tapis de danse blanc. Quelques lains de tapis sont relevés comme des vagues. Une grande et une petite. Ces vagues deviennent des supports de projection pour du texte et deux vidéos. Ces vagues sont des zones de réconfort et de chaleur».

one phrase to the next, allowing me to rest in each word, savour the images they evoke, make room for the emerging thoughts to set like snow. This delicate phrasing will be also translated into a calm tempo through the whole piece, with silences between the different scenes, blank spaces that the audience could use to write, to stretch, to yawn like Pauline in her cave.

The contents of the text on the screen describes the space we are seeing; a space that is the metaphor of another one, psychic rather than material in nature and to which we are invited. It described, as Plato's Cave<sup>11</sup>, as a place where images circulate, thought they seem less a reflection of reality than a reality in themselves. Le Boulba describes herself as a viewer in search of her dance, that she seems to find in the small dance of her eyelids, in the involuntary gestures of her relaxed body.

The artist shows us silent images of *Admiring La Argentina*, probably from *Tango de las flores*, part of the second act in Ohno's piece. Once the sequence is over, a final phrase appears on the screen-wave before the music starts: «Fragments of *Admiring La Argentina*, a piece by Kazuo Óno. Have you seen it?»<sup>12</sup>. Pauline Le Boulba is a viewer in search of her dance, but she addresses the other viewers to include them in a piece which is at the same time the result of a search process and the search device itself.

The journey inside a piece created by another person makes me redefine my memories as a viewer, I find myself in search of my aesthetic experience before Óno's dance. My viewer dance. I travel the stage as if I were in my audience cave. I remember other dances I associate with Óno's. I think of Stephen Thompson dancing a piece by Trajal Hallel at the Pompidou one night that literally subdued me. Some performers open our imagination to the point of giddiness when we see them onstage. Maybe that is why we are mostly seated at the theatre, to avoid collateral accidents.

I am a collateral accident and my path as an artist draws all the falls and the all the vertigo caused by others' gestures. I say to myself this could be the words of Jill Johnston<sup>13</sup>. (321)

Like Kazuo Ohno watching Antonia Mercé's dance and Le Boulba watching Ohno's dance, we now find ourselves watching Pauline's dance, which takes us not only to twirl in performances contained one inside another but also to wonder about our perceptive dynamics paying attention at the same time to that which—in terms of transcendental phenomenology—we could call «noematic structure» and «noesis structure»: here the choreographic piece is the

<sup>11</sup> Allegory described in Book VII of *Republic*.

<sup>12</sup> «Des rushs d'*Admiring La Argentina*, une pièce de Kazuo Óno. Tu connais?».

<sup>13</sup> «Ce voyage dans l'œuvre de quelqu'un d'autre vient redéfinir mon souvenir de spectatrice, je suis à la recherche de mon expérience esthétique face à la danse d'Óno. Ma danse de spectatrice. J'arpente le plateau comme si j'étais dans ma grotte de spectatrice. Je me remémore d'autres danses que j'associe à celle d'Óno. Je pense au danseur Stephen Thompson dans une pièce de Trajal Harrell qui, un soir à Pompidou, m'avait littéralement subjuguée. Il y a des personnes au plateau qui ouvrent nos imaginaires à un point qui en devient vertigineux. Peut-être pour ça que la plupart du temps nous sommes assis·e·s au théâtre, pour éviter les accidents collatéraux. Je suis un accident collatéral et mon parcours d'artiste dessine toutes ces chutes et tous ces vertiges subis et éprouvés face aux gestes des autres. Je me dis que ça pourrait être une phrase de Jill Johnston».

object of study («noema») and the method to study the mind that perceives and conceives the object («noesis») (Husserl 85-86, 96). In *Ôno-Sensation*, this duality becomes particularly evident, as the artist explicitly positions herself as both a viewer of previous images — fragments of *Admiring La Argentina* — and as a subject generating a new experience from that perception. The choreography is constructed not only from archival material, but from the way that archive affects, alters, and questions the viewer's body and gaze. The piece thus becomes an exercise in embodied phenomenological reflection: dance is perceived simultaneously as object (*noema*) and as a means of activating a dancing consciousness (*noesis*).

Within this reflective interplay, Le Boulba makes it clear that she does not approach the archival work simply to analyze or reproduce it, but rather to be affected by it, allowing this affect to reorganize her own creative gesture. Perception is no longer a path to representation, but a path to transmutation: movements are not copied, but translated, reformulated, displaced by a body dancing its own condition as viewer. This operation reveals not only the layers of aesthetic influence, but also the deeply personal and embodied nature of the gaze as a choreographic force.

By dint of watching, rewinding, pausing, and fast forwarding, I have found pleasure in roaming down the piece as I would roam down the streets. I have taken my time, I have wandered around. In a state of contemplation before this archival footage, I drift. It is like watching a movie or the vastness of the see. I swim at times in total frenzy. Kazuo Ôno's solo sequences are like waves. I write descriptions of what I see, of what I feel. I name the gesture embraced by my corporeality<sup>14</sup>. (Le Boulba 192)

---

<sup>14</sup> «À force de visionnages, de marches arrière, de pauses et de marches avant, j'ai pris un certain plaisir à me balader dans l'œuvre comme je me baladerais dans la rue. J'ai pris mon temps. J'ai flâné. Pensive face à ces images d'archives, je divague. Comme devant un film ou devant l'immensité de la mer. Je nage parfois en plein délire. Les séquences du solo de Kazuo Ôno sont comme des vagues. J'écris des descriptions de ce que je vois. De ce que je ressens. Je nomme le geste accueilli dans ma corporéité».



Fig. 6. *Ôno-Sensation*, by Pauline Le Boulba, 2019, Photo: Vincent Ducard.

We hear the *Toccata and Fugue* by Johann Sebastian Bach, the second musical appearance by the baroque composer in this text. This constitutes the first sound reference to *Admiring La Argentina* —Kazuo Ohno entered the stage from the theatre seats to the sound of this music; also first sound reference in *Ôno-Sensation*, when Le Boulba starts moving: lying on her back on the stage, she slowly raises her arms (she moves like an insomniac), places them on her thighs, and stands up as the music fades. She drags herself with her back to the audience, reaches for a hat, and puts it on her head. It looks like the cloches that were in style in the 1920s and that Antonia Mercé also wore for *El Garrotín*<sup>15</sup>. I am aware of the fact that I see in one dance (Pauline's) many dances (Ohno's and Mercé's mainly, but also Diverrès' and my own), and that I read Le Boulba's piece both as stage result (thanks to the video) and as a creative and research process (thanks to her thesis):

The Toccata and Fugue in D minor is heard through the first seconds of *Admiring La Argentina* and it becomes a warm up ritual. I am totally carried away by the sound of the organ and my imagination expands to write a dance for the hands, for the fingers (hanging my fingers in space, keeping my body hanging from a finger, touching the air with my hands, etc., are exercises I do on a regular basis)<sup>16</sup>. (320)

Le Boulba's notebooks reveal that the first musical moment in her piece is associated with a warm up process. If the text projected on the screen-wave was the entry to the piece, to enter a «viewer state» —and ultimately to warm up the perception tract—, the Toccata allows the

<sup>15</sup> Family movie donated to the Filmoteca Nacional Española by Carlota Mercé.

<sup>16</sup> «La Toccata et fugue en ré mineur résonne dès les premières secondes d'Admiring La Argentina et devient un rituel pour m'échauffer. L'orgue me fait complètement planer et ouvre mon imaginaire pour écrire une danse des mains, des doigts (accrocher mes doigts dans l'espace, suspendre mon corps par un doigt, caresser l'air avec mes mains sont des exercices réguliers)».

dancer-viewer to enter a «dance state» not prepared in advance, it starts with the piece itself: process and result meet again.

Pauline is kneeling down. A spotlight duplicates her shadow creating a trio figure that lies in calm. After a brief interruption, the Toccata sounds again and Pauline stands up, her back still to the audience. Is the dancer-viewer resisting the audience gaze? She has a solid presence. A new phrase appears on the screen: she covers her face with her hands and plays with her fingers. Le Boulba's hands spread like fragile tree branches. At times they swim, fumble, explore, and knit the air. Her head falls and her back slowly folds forwards, backwards and then, flexibly, forward again. It seems as if Pauline were danced by something other than herself, maybe by one the phantoms that we «know» are with her on stage. The music stops and the movement continues on.

A metal instrument hangs from the sky and the dancer's arms touch it so that a second sound breeze is heard. Pauline disappears behind the screen. Piano chords: we hear a song in a slightly distorted voice and new slow-motion images of Ohno dressed as La Argentina appear on the screen-wave. Pauline reappears and now we know that she is the singer. It is a love song: «Do you know her name?» she repeats:

I write love songs. One of them is for Antonia. The lyrics are kitsch and sometimes naive. There is no irony, however. I update my reception to the demands of my time. Universal basic income and medically assisted procreation, for example. The song allows me to softly send messages [...]. I find it equally necessary to intertwine Óno's and La Argentina's stories and my own with my ghosts<sup>17</sup>. (325-326)

Le Boulba speaks to the audience about Stendhal Syndrome in relation to *Admiring La Argentina* and describes it as a too strong release of pleasure-related hormones. Le Boulba talks about the frequent mentions of La Argentina in Ohno's diary, not only as a leading light in Dance History, but also as an emotional referent: he dreams of her, looks for her, sees her everywhere, he bows to her grave in Neuilly and tells once and again of that first time when he saw her dancing and how impressed he was. A spell. When something, a dance, leaves a mark on us, we forget virtually everything and we are left with fragments, flashes, sensations. These remains are invented places, she says.

Le Boulba describes *Admiring La Argentina* as a piece contained in another piece, like a «love letter danced with our feet» (qtd. in 173)<sup>18</sup>: Ohno loves Antonia. He loves her light, her

<sup>17</sup> «J'écris des chansons d'amour. Une qui s'adresse à Antonia. Les paroles sont kitsch et parfois naïves. Pourtant aucune ironie dans cet acte. J'actualise ma réception avec les revendications de mon époque. Le salaire à vie et la P.M.A (procréation médicalement assistée) par exemple. La chanson me permet de faire passer des messages en douceur [...] Il m'est tout autant nécessaire de faire croiser l'histoire entre Óno et La Argentina qu'entre moi et mes fantômes».

<sup>18</sup> I refer here to a passage of Kazuo Ohno's diaries, on page 173 of Le Boulba's thesis: «Don't write a love letter with your brain. Write it with your every limb; write it straight from the heart. Your loved one is right there beside you, conversing with you as you write each stroke. It doesn't matter what you write it with, so why not write a

fire. Ohno is a woman who loves another woman, says Le Boulba: «full stop». They are a lesbian couple. Lesbian couples are a good thing. Indeed, lesbian couples are necessarily a good thing, continues the viewer-artist. Although I was captivated by Pauline's work from the first phrase, it is at this point when I decide to write about it.

Ôno used to say that after his death, once his body had been cremated, his ashes would walk by La Argentina's side. I say Ôno is a lover. I ask myself on the effect of his cross-dressing in me. When I see him in his dress and make-up I say to myself this is a woman who loves another woman. Thus, to me, Ôno's piece becomes a lesbian tale<sup>19</sup>. (324)

A new song: «Antonia, come closer, come to me»: in this role play we had seen Ohno became in turns Merce's lover-watcher and «Mercé in flesh and blood», and now we watch as Kazuo-Antonia becomes Pauline's lover. A new text is projected on the small screen-wave on the back left corner of the stage and I feel I am on the verge of drifting into multiple writing directions<sup>20</sup>:

Someone snores by my side, everyone is asleep. We have recovered. We have eaten well. Grilled crust. Melted crust. The fire cradles us. Lying down, I look at the stars. They shine here and there. They wink at each other. Dwellers willing to communicate with each other. Or maybe deep. Pores open. My femur heads are now antennas. A comet goes by and explodes. I see letters and shapes that are foreign to me. Unknown sensations. I become a succulent plant and I can think of nothing but you<sup>21</sup>.

The text looks like a choreography score that describes not only the lying down position of the dancer but also her gesture (looking), what she is looking at (the stars), and what she is looking

---

love letter with your foot. What a letter that would be! I want to see you dance like as though you were writing to your lover. Even though we mightn't grasp everything you say, reading such a letter will engulf us with a sense of gratitude and thanks for the help you've offered us. A love letter written with body and soul—that's the dance I long to see». K. Ohno and Y. Ohno, *Kazuo Ohno's world from without and within*, 260-262.

<sup>19</sup> «Ôno qui disait qu'après sa mort, quand son corps aura été incinéré, ses cendres marcheront à côté de La Argentina. Je dis qu'Ôno est un lover. J'interroge aussi ce que me fait son travestissement. Quand je le vois avec sa robe et tout son maquillage je me dis que c'est une femme qui aime une femme. En cela, la pièce d'Ôno devient pour moi un conte lesbien».

<sup>20</sup> The Spanish word «ola» [wave], always makes me think of Rocío Jurado and her song *La séptima ola* («esa soy yo») [The seventh wave, «that is me»], and in my desire to write a manifest titled «Seventh Wave Feminism», which would follow the fourth wave, which we still seem to be surfing. This is part of a «delirium», which is beyond description, interpretation, and over-interpretation inherent to mind dynamics, whose importance in this text, given its subject, is important to highlight.

<sup>21</sup> «Ça ronfle à côté de moi, tout le monde s'est endormi. Repu·e·s. On a bien mangé. Croûte grillé. Croûte fondue. Le feu nous berce. Allongée je regarde les étoiles. Ça brille par endroits. Ça clignote à d'autres. Des habitant-e-s cherchent à communiquer. Ou des champignons. Ouvre les pores. Mes têtes de fémur deviennent des antennes. Une comète passe et explose. Des lettres jaillissent pour former des choses que je connais pas. Sensations inconnues. Je deviens plante grasse et ne pense qu'à toi».

Given my dependence on the audiovisual support, I cannot read the first two sentences of the text as the camera makes a slow sweep from one corner of the stage before aiming at the screen. I obtain the words by asking Pauline directly after some epistemological hesitation on my part: should I give an account in this text of my experience as a viewer, admitting therefore what it means to analyze a piece with the limitations (and advantages) of video support? Or should I complete this experience with the information obtained through other means to ensure the «omniscient» point of view of one who has access to more than one source)?

at mentally suggests her (winks, communication attempts, champignons...). Pauline is back on a dark stage, carrying a roll of luminous cable which makes her look like a shiny insect in the middle of the night. The lights fade in and fill the space with pink and mauve stains. Pauline kneels down and addresses the audience again. Although her words are inaudible in the video, I ask her directly about it: «Recently I lost someone I loved very, very much. The conversation ended though I wrote songs for her. This is her t-shirt. This is her hair. This is her water-bottle. This is her music»<sup>22</sup>.

This brief confession tints the space in a funereal shade: we knew Pauline was dancing with ghosts (Kazuo's and Antonia's), but we did not know she would summon her own. Thus, trivial elements such as a t-shirt and a water-bottle are transfigured into ritual objects that express the absence of their owner. What do these objects do exactly? Are they a remembrance of the absent person or do they invoke her? Are they a communication channel with the person gone or are they there to reconcile with absence? What is the dance, what are the gestures to bid farewell?

The dancer lies down again by the luminous cable roll, drinks from the plastic water-bottle and pours its contents on her head, as if watering herself. She stands up and dances in silence. Her gaze goes to the palm and back of her hands, hanging in the air. Her hands look like strange beings with a life of their own. They hang like amphibian legs. Pauline swims again, she grubs the air, touches her face and her body. Suddenly a heavy thud cuts the silence. The fluttering continues and new music is heard. Pauline sings a third love song, kneeling down by the vine of light: «teach me to cry with my feet». The light fades out and the light nest remains bright, like a coil of thoughts, a metaphor of all those ideas that us viewers will have to uncoil, maybe, after the applause.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

### 5.1. *Scopic filiation*

The two choreographic proposals analyzed here are indirectly linked to Antonia Mercé, through Kazuo Ohno's body and movement in *Admiring La Argentina* (1977). In both cases a process of «scopic filiation» seems to be under way, in which the artists-viewers feel a creative drive rooted in an «aesthetic shock» caused by Ohno's piece.

Two different moments in time converge in the «scopic filiation» concept, and both coincide in the strange causal chain of creative processes. The first is the moment of aesthetic shock experienced by an artist-viewer (Catherine Diverrès) and by a viewer-artist (Pauline Le Boulba). What in psychoanalytical terms we could call «scopic drive» or «gazing drive» is

<sup>22</sup> «J'ai récemment perdu quelqu'un que j'aimais très, très, très. Que j'aimais beaucoup. La conversation s'est arrêtée alors je luis écrits des chansons. Ça, c'est son tee shirt. Ça, c'est ses poils. Ça s'est sa gourde. Ça, c'est ses cheveux. Ça, c'est ses yeux. Ça, c'est son dos. Ça, c'est sa musique».

activated in both cases, a notion created by Jacques Lacan in his 1964 *Seminar XI*, in which the author distinguishes between drive and biological needs. As opposed to the latter, a drive does not aim to reach its objective but rather to sustain its own tension gravitating around the object: the pleasure of gazing lies only on the repetitive movement of desire in itself. Following Lacanian psychoanalysis, drive paths are structured by three grammar voices: active (to look), reflexive (to look at oneself), and passive (being looked at). This form of scopic drive, however, rather than triggering a desire for sexual appropriation of the dancer, seems to start a process halfway between a desire of identification with the artist («being like him, dancing like him») and a desire for creative channeling (sublimation?) by creating a new piece.

For Diverrès, the impact of seeing *Admiring La Argentina* live in 1981 prompted her to go to Tokyo through 1982 and 1983 to immerse herself in Ohno's kinesthetic wisdom. Only after his death in 2010 did Diverrès feel a desire to materialize her experience of the Japanese master's work and teachings in a tribute piece in gratefulness for him. The case of Le Boulba is totally different given that she sees his work through archive videos, and perhaps because the artist was not alive by then, it did not inspire in her a desire to identify herself with the Japanese dancer (which would have led her, for example, to study with other Butoh artists or to go to Japan, as Diverrès did, to study with Yoshito Ohno, Kazuo's son). The piece seems to awaken in Le Boulba a direct desire to explore creatively the impressions the piece left on her and channel them through a new production, as Kazuo Ohno did after seeing Antonia Mercé dance at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo in 1929, a performance that was, without his being aware of it, his «artistic baptism» as a dancer: his career would start after Mercé's performance, as a sort of trans-body «encore» of the artist that would continue through Kazuo Ohno's whole life.

The second moment in time that covers the notion of «scopic filiation» is retrospective in nature (or «inverted», in the words of Lenclud (110-123) guided by Pouillon<sup>23</sup>) and is related to the explicit link in these two artists' pieces (*O Sensei* and *Ôno-Sensation*) with that aesthetic shock moment, which is presented with the auratic nature of primal experiences.

The aesthetic impact caused by *Admiring La Argentina* appears not only as part of the story that recounts these artists' creative process but it rather constitutes the core of the pieces, which stage elements less related to the piece «in itself» than to the impact experienced, though it is true that none of these artists restrict themselves to nostalgic gloating; they offer the creative fruit of something that germinated in that specific moment when another person was

<sup>23</sup> «In all societies, including ours, tradition is a “retroprojection”, a formula that Pouillon explains in these terms: “Nosotros escogemos aquello por lo que nos declararnos determinados, nos presentamos como los continuadores de aquellos a los que hemos hecho nuestros predecesores”. [We choose that for which we declare ourselves determined, we present ourselves as the continuators of those whom we have made our predecessors] (1975:160). Tradition constitutes an “inverted filiation”, instead of parents begetting children, parents are born of children. It is not the past that produces the present but the present that shapes the past. Tradition is a process of recognizing parenthood».

dancing and they were watching, just like Ohno watched as Mercé danced, thus creating a *mise en abyme* of creative processes and their scopic filiations.

### 5.2. *A floral theory for gesture transmission*

This article proposes a «floral theory» of gesture transmission, as an alternative to linear or hierarchical models such as genetic, pedagogical, or archival transmission. The floral metaphor implies that a gesture can germinate in unexpected bodies, places, and contexts, sometimes decades later and mediated by indirect sources such as recordings or traces. Gestures, in this model, are not replicated but transformed: they blossom into new forms, shaped by the soil where they take root. Rather than seeking fidelity to an original form, this theory values the deviation, the mutation, the affective resonance that prompts a new gesture. Like pollen traveling across fields, the gesture is not inherited by blood or lineage, but by emotional, aesthetic, and perceptive kinship. In this way, Le Boulba's and Diverrès' works are not derivative but generative: they are blooms from the spectral seeds of Ohno's dance, which in turn bloomed from Mercé's ephemeral flamenco. Far from being nostalgic copies, these choreographic gestures bear the mark of difference and desire. The floral theory acknowledges the transformative agency of those who receive a gesture and embody it anew, often far removed from the original referent. It reclaims admiration not as passive repetition but as an active, creative, and embodied act of transmission.

Unlike models based on heredity, pedagogy, or archival reproduction —where the gesture is transmitted linearly or by fidelity to an origin— the floral model proposes a non-linear, affective, and transformative logic. In this view, gestures are not passed down intact like genetic traits or mimetic molds, but rather travel as seeds: fragmented, invisible carriers of affect and memory that lie dormant in bodies and reemerge unexpectedly when conditions are fertile. However, the metaphor extends beyond the seed. A floral theory also emphasizes cultivation. The artists who receive these gestural seeds are not mere containers or vessels; they are gardeners. They care for these seeds, nourish them with their own experiences, contexts, and sensibilities. The gesture, once inherited, grows, mutates, and flourishes in new forms —shaped by the soil of the artist's body, the climate of their cultural references, and the water of their desire.

In this framework, the most loyal gesture to Antonia Mercé's work is precisely that which seems the most distant from her aesthetic idiosyncrasy, from her movement stylization and her stage aesthetic. Perhaps Mercé's presence is much stronger in those who invoke her through Ohno's body than in those who imitate her «faithfully» through photographs and videos.

Talking about a piece means also to expose the nostalgic, even melancholic layers that cover us. Remembering the effects of a piece in ourselves is perhaps an attempt to fight against nostalgia

and transform it in something else. In emancipatory and collective forces that we can share and transmit<sup>24</sup>. (Le Boulba 323)

As Le Boulba insightfully observes, the process of self-analysis and clarification of what happens to us when we see a dance piece is essential not only to show our readers the way our perspective is constructed but also to show ourselves the dynamics of our thoughts: the idea associations, our focus of attention and the correlative absences, the over-interpretations and the delusions. This is the only way to solve the creative artistic and scientific paralysis that admiration can lead to, without which Kazuo Ohno would not have created *Admiring La Argentina*, Catherine Diverrès *O Sensei*, Pauline Le Boulba *Ôno Sensation* or myself this text.

This theory allows us to think of choreographic history as an orchard of temporalities: not a museum of fixed forms, but a field of transformation, where aesthetic experiences are composted, reactivated, and pollinated by the gaze and body of each new viewer-artist. Under this paradigm, admiration becomes an active force of creation, not a passive act of reverence. It is in this loving attention that the gestural legacy of artists like Mercé and Ohno continues to grow—sometimes wildly, unpredictably—always with the possibility of surprise.

## REFERENCES

Diverrès, Catherine. *O Sensei*. Press Dossier, 28 Dec. 2010. *Compagnie Catherine Diverrès*, [http://www.compagnie-catherine-diverres.com/portfolio\\_page/o-sensei/](http://www.compagnie-catherine-diverres.com/portfolio_page/o-sensei/). Accessed 17 November 2019.

Foster, Susan Leigh. «Coreografiando la Historia», 1995. Translated by Antonio Fernández Lera. *Lecturas sobre danza y coreografía*, edited by Isabel de Nevarán and Amparo Écija, Madrid: Artea, 2012, pp. 13-29.

Freud, Sigmund. *Obras Completas*, vol. XXIII. 1938. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1976.

García Collado, Francisco José. *Análisis del concepto de deseo en Platón, Freud y Lacan frente a la crisis del sujeto contemporáneo*. Ph.D. thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 2013. [https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/130921/FJGC\\_TESIS.pdf?sequence=1](https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/130921/FJGC_TESIS.pdf?sequence=1). Accessed 10 November 2020.

Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas relativas a una fenomenología pura y una filosofía fenomenológica*. México: FCE, 1997.

Lajo Pérez, Rosina. *Léxico de arte*. Madrid: Akal, 1990.

Lacan, Jacques. *Séminaire XI: les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*. París: Editions du Seuil, 1973.

Laplanche, Jean and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis. *Diccionario de psicoanálisis*. Madrid: Paidós, 1996.

<sup>24</sup> «Parler des œuvres c'est aussi exposer les strates nostalgiques voire mélancoliques qui nous enveloppent. Se remémorer les effets d'une œuvre sur soi c'est peut-être tenter de contrer des états nostalgiques et de les transformer en autre chose. En des forces émancipatrices et collectives à partager et à transmettre».

Le Boulba, Pauline. *Les bords de l'œuvre. Réceptions performées et critiques affectées en danse*. Practice-based Ph.D. thesis, Dance Department, Université Paris VIII – Vincennes-Saint-Denis. Presented at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, 24–25 Oct. 2019. Unpublished text and video.

Lenclud, Gérard. «La tradition n'est plus ce qu'elle était... Sur les notions de tradition et de société traditionnelle en ethnologie». *Terrain*, n.º 9, 1987, pp. 110-123.

López Rodríguez, Fernando. «H2-Ohno: *Auto-etnografía de un proceso creativo en danza*». *Acotaciones: revista de investigación teatral*, n.º 43, 2019, pp. 257-275.

López Rodríguez, Fernando. «Gestos de ida y vuelta». *Música oral del Sur*, n.º 17, 2020, pp. 439-448.

Mansó, Carlos. *La Argentina, fue Antonia Mercé*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Devenir, 1993.

Navarro García, José Luis. *Historia del baile flamenco*, vol. II. Sevilla: Signatura, 2009.

Pagès, Sylviane. *Le butô en France, malentendus et fascination*. Pantin: Centre National de la Danse, 2017.

#### DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Divèrres, Catherine. *O Sensei. Numeridanse*, 2012, <https://www.numeridanse.tv/videotheque-danse/o-sensei?s>. Accessed 10 November 2020.

López Rodríguez, Fernando. *¿Funcionarios del Arte? Los tablaos flamencos en Madrid*. Documentary film. Université Paris 8-Saint Denis, 2018.

Mercé, Antonia. *Antonia Mercé La Argentina Performance at the Imperial Theatre, Tokyo, 1929*. Performance program. Antonia Mercé Archive, Fundación Juan March Library, Madrid.

Mizohata, Toshio. *Conference on the Creative Process of the Piece*. Conference presentation. Tokyo: Spanish Embassy in Japan, 14 Feb. 2019.

Ohno, Kazuo. *Admiring La Argentina*. Performance documentation. 1977. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, and the Spanish Embassy in Japan, Tokyo.

Picq, Charles. *La Argentina at Maison de la Danse de Lyon*. Video. *Numeridanse*, 1986, <https://www.numeridanse.tv/videotheque-danse/la-argentina?s>. Accessed 17 November 2019.

