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SPANISH DANCE MODERNISM BETWEEN ETHNOGRAPHY, PERSONALITY, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: VIEWS OF LA ARGENTINA FROM ABROAD

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Abstract

This article compares critical receptions of the Spanish dancer Antonia Mercé Luque, La Argentina, in France in 1928 and the United States in 1930. Expatriate Russian dance critic in Paris André Levinson praised La Argentina as an exemplar of Spanish classical dance and of Spanish national character. Expatriate scholar of Spanish literature in New York Federico de Onís extolled her dance as iconic of the Spanish national character but without arguing her classical vision. The comparison allows us to see the fragility of the idea of national identity itself as translated into movement and to understand it as the result of a critical reception that itself is displaced from national origins in a diasporic sense.

Keywords: Spanish Dance, National Identity, Modernism, Transnational, Orientalism, Reception.

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DANZA ESPAÑOLA MODERNISTA ENTRE LA ETNOGRAFÍA, LA PERSONALIDAD Y LA IDENTIDAD NACIONAL: VISIÓN DE LA ARGENTINA DESDE EL EXTRANJERO

Resumen

Este artículo compara las recepciones críticas de la bailarina española Antonia Mercé Luque, La Argentina, en Francia en 1928 y en Estados Unidos en 1930. El crítico de danza ruso expatriado en París, André Levinson, elogió a La Argentina como un ejemplo de la danza clásica española y del carácter nacional español. El académico expatriado de literatura española en Nueva York, Federico de Onís, ensalzó su danza como icónica del carácter nacional español, aunque sin argumentar su visión clásica. La comparación nos permite ver la fragilidad de la idea de identidad nacional cuando se traduce en movimiento, y entenderla como el resultado de una recepción crítica que, a su vez, está desplazada de sus orígenes nacionales en un sentido diaspórico.

Palabras clave: danza española, identidad nacional, modernismo, transnacional, orientalismo, recepción.

It is well known to dance scholarship that in the first half of the twentieth century dance and national identity were thought to reflect one another whether it be in the dances of the modern dance soloists, the ballet companies, or those specializing in the so-called ethnic dances for the stage[1]. Across this array of possible artistic modalities through which dance established itself as a modern art, we can note that the idea of dance expressing national character in movement was equally valid for the modernist invention of new dance vocabularies (for example, Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, Michio Ito, to name a few) and for avant-garde conceptions of ballet style (such as Les Ballets Suédois or Les Ballets Russes). But it also applied to representations of ethnic identity through traditional dance that used to be called folkloric (in the work of Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and La Argentina, among others). However, such production for the stage often devised ways to stylize and modernize the source materials that had first been discovered in ethnographic research and/or transmitted through informants. Hence, the large overlap between these endeavors thanks to which a classically trained dancer such as La Argentina undertook ethnographic research while producing highly theatrical solos as well as full-length ballets for her dance company that might be considered modern and even

[1] For example, in the 1930s Lincoln Kirstein commissioned a new repertoire for the company Ballet Caravan to establish an indigenous American ballet and distance it from Russian ballet. To do this he modeled the ballerina after the Hollywood movie stars who he thought the North American public would identify with. The modern dance of Martha Graham, on the other hand, was thought to show an essential connection between danced movement and national character and this could be seen in her «Americana» works beginning with *American Document* in 1939.

modernist (Murga Castro, «Los Ballets Espagnols» 139-180). More importantly, the meaning of embodied national identity was likely to vary depending upon where artists travelled to perform their work and how critics and thinkers—frequently displaced persons themselves—received them abroad. As dance scholarship presently turns its attention increasingly to dancers and dance companies that crossed national boundaries and thus to international exchange rather than to the national identity of dance artists *per se*, the question of how national identity was configured in and through danced movement in the interwar period is now viewed as a more complex phenomenon than was previously assumed.

In this article, I compare two critical receptions of the Spanish dancer Antonia Mercé Luque, La Argentina, one emanating from Paris in 1928 and the other from New York City in 1930. I shall focus on the terms in which the same dancer was thought to reflect national identity in different geographical locations at around the same time. Here, the point is not so much that the dancer crosses borders but that her reception is determined in locations other than the nation itself —Spain— by persons who are themselves displaced. The dominant Parisian voice was that of expatriate Russian dance historian and dance critic André Levinson (1887-1933)[2]. In 1928 Levinson published a book, *La Argentina. A Study in Spanish Dancing*[3]. A compilation of reviews written over the years, it was also clearly a celebration of La Argentina by a critic whose main concern was the rebirth of French ballet. Despite the use of the term exotic with its derogatory connotations we also see in Levinson's prose the convergence of the modern, the classical, and the folk in one dancing body, all held together as if by the envelope of the national.

In 1928-1929 and 1929-1930, La Argentina was touring the United States when Federico de Onís (1888-1966), a Spanish philosopher and scholar of literature influenced by Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset, invited her to perform at Columbia University in New York City. Onís had come to New York from the University of Salamanca in 1916 to take up an academic position at Columbia University where he founded *La Casa Hispánica* in 1930 and promoted the study of Hispanic culture in New York at the graduate level[4]. La Argentina's performance at Columbia brought the Spanish intelligentsia abroad into her orbit. In addition to Onís, the poet Federico Garcia Lorca, Professor Angel del Rio (1901-1962), and the painter Gabriel Garcia Maroto (1889-1969) were also present at this performance. Federico Garcia Lorca was still in residency at Columbia where he was writing *Poeta en Nueva York* after having left the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid in 1928. Dr. Angel de Río was also a Professor of Spanish literature at Columbia University and an expert in the poetry of Lorca for whom he wrote the introduction to the English edition of *Poeta en Nueva York*. Gabriel Garcia

[2] La Argentina was familiar to Paris audiences because she began performing there in 1910 and as of 1921 undertook her major productions at the Paris Opera and the Opera Comique with her company Ballets Espagnols (Murga Castro, «Embodying Spanishness» 12-17).
[3] The only other contemporary figure to whom Levinson devoted a book was Serge Lifar.
[4] For a biographical sketch of Onís, see Howard Young. Lorca also wrote an «Elogio de Antonia Mercé, La Argentina», which I return to at the end of this essay.

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Maroto, publisher, painter and writer, was also a friend of Lorca. These four prominent Spanish artists and intellectuals soon after published a book inspired by the Philosophy Hall performance, *Antonia Mercé, La Argentina*. I focus here on the reception of La Argentina's Philosophy Hall performance in 1930 as reflected in this book[5].

The Spanish thinkers in New York were influenced by *el regeneracionismo* and the idea expressed by Ortega y Gasset that Spanish national identity had to be invented (Álvarez Junco 174-175). According to Ortega y Gasset's 1918 definition of modernism as the dehumanization of art, modern art does not represent anything. Instead, it presents us with a purely aesthetic experience. In dance, the equivalent to this idea is contained in the notion that we do not see the dancer as necessarily representing another human being—a character, for example—but instead as presenting us with an aesthetic sensation. Concerning the prominence of the aesthetic, La Argentina's dances, despite their local colour, also involved a certain visual sweep and geometrization of movement, enhanced by her costumes that followed and accentuated the angularity of certain gestures. This is suggested in Ninotchka Bennahum's discussion of La Argentina's «plastique» (67). The question is how does aesthetic sensation become transformed into a symbol of national identity, or perhaps better, into an allegory of national identity in motion?

1. Paris

Here we are possibly in need of some background to the terms of the analysis: folklore, classicism, modernism. The idea that dance can reflect national identity emerges from three possible overlapping focal points. Regional folkloric identities undergirded a portion of La Argentina's repertoire and so national identity could be imagined from this perspective as a composite of local and regional identities in dance and song: the nation as a collection of diverse ethnicities. The study of European folklore was coming into vogue exactly at this time spurred by the work of Arnold van Gennep and the rise of the social sciences. This could foster a Herderian concept of national identity as founded on a romantic conception of the people as the basis of the national, a conception of national identity that historian José Álvarez Junco has qualified as «primordial», that is, based on a shared language and culture. It was this conception that Lorca evoked through «duende» in song and dance able to reveal «El espíritu oculto de la dolorida España» in terms of a «verdadero estilo vivo… creación en acto» (García Lorca 172-173). Another aspect of La Argentina's repertoire emphasized the more classicizing Bolero School. The influence of the Bolero School on La Argentina's dancing—in which her classical dance training shone through—might be considered the pretext for a more «statist» conception of national identity, as Junco has called it, through a classicizing consciousness of academic skills. The state itself would generally be credited with an academic conception of art transmitted through national academies. Every academy is juridical and territorial. This was of

[5] It is perhaps worth noting that there is no stage in Philosophy Hall so that the performance must have taken place in a spacious meeting room on the ground floor to the left of the main entrance and for a largely invited audience.

great interest to Levinson given his enthusiasm for French classical ballet as an essentially national style. He imagined the body of La Argentina as a battleground between indigenous and classicizing forces. But, of course, he did this from a particularly French point of view according to which Spain was not fully European but instead exoticized as other.

An interesting counterpoint to Levinson's views is provided by Paul Valéry's essay «Philosophy of the Dance», which the poet read at a performance of La Argentina in Paris in 1936[6]. In this talk Valéry spoke of La Argentina creating an autonomous time and space within which her dances take place. «This detachment from the environment, this absence of aim, this negation of explicable movement, these full turns (which no circumstance of ordinary life demands of our body), even this impersonal smile—all these features are radically opposed to those that characterize our action in the practical world and our relations with it» (Valéry 206). Valéry's theme of the purposelessness of dance which he applied to other dancing as well is a variant of his notion of dance as «pure metamorphosis». With Valéry modernist stylization veers into an area akin to abstraction and somewhat allied with Ortega's notion of the dehumanization of modern art: It becomes enigmatic. Modernism could therefore turn out to be a more flexible and less doctrinaire concept than it is often assumed to be because it contained popular and classical elements in the realm of the stylized theatrical gesture. This is, in fact, what I shall argue. In this connection, Georg Fuchs's notion of re-theatricalization is crucial to understanding the operations of modernism on varieties of traditional movement material and to the very conception of modernism itself if it is to be understood in properly theatrical terms. I argue in what follows that only an aesthetic experience which can be described as modernist—enigmatic, fragmented, or contrapuntal, and anti-representational—is adequate to account for La Argentina's impact and its relation to the portrayal of Spanish national identity in dance.

La Argentina's movement vocabulary is derived, as Idoia Murga Castro has explained, from a variety of sources: the bolero school, flamenco, and folkloric and regional dances. Levinson organizes these sources under the aegis of a classicism achieved through La Argentina's revival of forms that had fallen into theatrical disrepute. Hence, in the case of La Argentina, re-theatricalization has several meanings. First, it refers to the salvaging of materials for the stage that otherwise would not be considered stage worthy. Secondly, re-theatricalization refers to the transformation of these movement materials discovered through ethnographic research into a stylized form that becomes theatrical on stage in an inexplicable way. Thus, Levinson's claim for La Argentina's classicism relies on the idea of a triumph over the vernacular by form. Yet, the variety of styles and vocabularies to which La Argentina has recourse cannot be resolved into the formal principles of the bolero, which dates to the

[6] Valéry's talk was pronounced on March 5, 1936, and first published as «La Danse, Conférence de M. Paul Valéry», in *Conferencia* 30me année, n.º 22 (1936). It has since been anthologized as one of his most important dance essays. For more on this text, see Franko («The Dancing»).

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eighteenth century[7]. For this reason, it must be considered as modernist and, in this way, a new creation of the idea of Spanish national identity in movement.

Fig. 1. Poster without text designed for La Argentina by Lakovleff (1932). Courtesy of Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Another aspect of Levinson's discussion centres on the phenomenon of the modernization of her sources. La Argentina's movements created trace lines in space and left the memory of distinctive shapes that were decidedly modern, as many attempts to capture her movement in drawings and on the spot caricatures indicate. Endowing gesture with line is a modernist procedure and when folk materials become stylized to enter the category of art as universal expression the resulting trace can be identified as «classical», that is, as typical of the essential characteristics it evokes. To posit this modernized aesthetic of the folk as an expression of the national spirit of Spain, however, Levinson had to understand the folk material in the hands of La Argentina as classical in two senses. First, it could be grasped stylistically in formal terms as autonomous; secondly, it derived from the people and therefore drew upon an anonymous wellspring of movement that could be identified with a national, or in the language of that period, racial spirit. To some degree, this was what La Argentina did with her folk sources as she herself explained: «En cuanto a mí, pretendo haber realizado la fusión de dos danzas: la española y la llamada "moderna"» (Mercé 405). Murga Castro analyses the kinds of references

[7] See Suárez-Pajares.

to Indigenous dance that conditioned the reception of her work in terms of an exotic representation of Spanishness.

Although Rolf de Maré and Jean Cocteau championed the importance of vernacular dance to ballet classicism in the 1920s, Levinson's sole contribution to this trend is to be found in his reception of La Argentina[8]. The idea of folk expression as itself constitutive of the classical once filtered by a modernist formalism generated an interesting variation on Levinson's theorization of French ballet neoclassicism. The way Levinson extracts himself from the impasse of a proper national identity that can be apprehended as exotic is of particular interest to me here[9]. He, unfortunately, does not escape certain racist-tinged views of ballet in his comparisons with African-American performance. The basis of my comparison of the two critical receptions of La Argentina resides, therefore, in the use of the term classical as applied to interwar performance that was clearly modernist while also drawing upon research into folkloric forms. Why must the concatenation of these terms call up the national, let alone the racial? We are in a certain sense touching upon the convergence of race theory, ethnic studies, and dance in the first half of the twentieth century. Even in the most vanguard theatrical dance of the interwar era, these contexts were apparently unavoidable and to some degree interchangeable[10].

Levinson revels in the apparent spontaneity of La Argentina's depiction but in the final analysis, he is convinced that everything she does is the result of a calculated art. «She has captured the inner tumult and reduced it to form. She handles her emotions with the same sagacity as a chemist handles an explosive» (Levinson 58). While such formalism is adequate to an expression of national identity precisely because it foregoes highly specific individual expression, which cannot of itself be imagined as permanent and transferable to others, Spanish nationalism is also potentially exotic material for Levinson because it is received as such in France. Whereas conservative commentators saw the aesthetic expression of French national identity as eminently rational, Spanish national identity for these same commentators was emotionally turbulent. What is particularly interesting to me about Levinson's discourse is that if La Argentina embodies Spanish national character when she dances, then such character veers between the dramatic (as in dramatic character) and a formalism proper to a classical and classicizing logic that itself is considered to be the product of an official national history. My analysis of his rhetoric focuses on this problem and the way he attempts to resolve it.

Nationalism in relation to Spain is more complex than French nationalism for Levinson as its classicism emerges as the result of a struggle. André Levinson acclaimed the dancer's classical expression of Spanish national identity but also imagined it as a subaltern to French

[8] See Franko (129-179).
[9] I shall pursue this question with particular attention to critical language and thereby propose a form of dance history driven by the rhetorical analysis of dance criticism.
[10] This racialization of dance recalls the work of the German dance historian Curt Sachs who was the contemporary of Levinson.

identity. National identity is a unifying concept and therefore lends itself to treatment by aesthetic modernism, where traits can be stylized and rendered in the process somewhat abstractly or at least dictated by formal concerns. In some sense, formalism creates a distance between an idea and a historicized body representing this idea. In his writing, Levinson grasped La Argentina by manipulating the notion of classicism. In so doing he identified La Argentina as classical but understood it the other of (French) classicism and this tended to ally her with a universal category of non-Western otherness. To do so he identified Iberian dance as Oriental:

> The movement of the Oriental dance is concentric—the knees are combined and bent in; the circling arms embrace the body; everything is assembled and converges to the centre —while the movement of the dance of Western Europe (the most perfect expression of which is to be found in the traditional classic dance) is just the opposite— the body of the dancer being extended the arms and legs turned outward, the torso being freed and the chest being put forward. (Levinson 35)

With this aesthetic theorization, Levinson engenders a binary, or what he calls an antinomy and antithesis, of European dance vs. the other into which category he inserts «the Arab dancer» and the Bayadère as well as the Spanish, whom he calls Andalusian. «It seems clear», writes Levinson, «that the splendors and the miseries, the glory and the decadence of the Spanish dance have been determined by the uninterrupted duel between the East and West, the burning ardours of the Moor and the austerity of the Castilian mind» (34). In sum, the dance displays «the mutual interpenetration of the races, the dual nature of Semite and Aryan». Levinson adds to the Moorish influence the Jewish to imagine the Spanish dance as «an eternal battlefield» (34). Here, her classical dance training comes to her aid: «She has much of the sweep of the classic dancer, for she has that training modified by Spanish principles» (54). Those principles are, for Levinson, likened to a fluid that circulates in her veins almost causing her pain. «She bears in her the intoxicating poison, but also the antidote, rapture and poise, folly and wisdom, the Maenad and the Muse» (78). It is in this sense that the dancer herself is a battlefield and the dance a battle in which the European influence gains the upper hand. La Argentina is classical despite herself because she is in a struggle to overcome herself.

2. New York

Whereas Levinson formulated La Argentina's achievement as an alternative classicism, Onís, himself a Spaniard, hailed La Argentina as a poet who conveyed a personal vision of Spain. For Onís, it could not be taken for granted that Spanish identity be represented on the stage because movement based on the idea of national types would be caricature. Instead, he envisaged La Argentina's use of rhythm to be the most significant aspect of her art:

> Para entender cualquier cosa Española tendríamos que sentir y explicarnos el ritmo interno y original que la anima, y llegaríamos así a encontrar los elementos esenciales y permanentes del ritmo español que late en todos ellos. (Onís 42)

Onís's conceptualization of national identity as momentary and uniquely personal has no need to engage, as does Levinson, with form or mimesis. It is more gestural and rhythmic in nature and evinces a *savoir-faire* based on the gait of a person. Moreover, it becomes embodied in multifarious ways by many individuals because the privileged form of Spanish dance is the solo. Onís in fact contrasts the sameness of execution found in the corps de ballet with the solo.

> Si tratamos de imaginarnos la forma más común y típica del baile anglosajón, recordaremos una serie de muchachas todas iguales que hacen con máxima precisión y uniformidad los mismos movimientos; en cambio el baile español lo imaginaríamos como lo vemos en la Argentina, como una sola persona que se mueve con máxima libertad y que al parecer hace lo que le da la gana. El baile anglosajón, como el sport, los negocios, la política, la moral, la religión anglosajones, es esencialmente social; el baile español, como todas las manifestaciones de la cultura Española, es esencialmente individual. (45)

Onís sees Spanish nationalism as a concept indivisible from the individual. It is interesting to note that Onís distinguishes Spain from the Anglo-Saxon world, thus implicitly making France Anglo-Saxon, whereas Levinson distinguishes Spain from Europe, thus placing it in the Oriental category. For Onís, the aesthetic movement expression of national identity in France is fundamentally social whereas in Spain it is individual. Spanish dance, in other terms, is not dictated by form but by individual gestural content. Whereas for Levinson, music is secondary to the body itself in the dances, for Onís, rhythmicity is the quality that generates a sensation of community through which the conceit of the Spanish emerges as such. It is for this reason that dance must be a distraction or diversion without a purposeful end, an idea which suggests the thought of Valéry.

Onís moves on from his discussion of rhythm to the idea that walking is the fundamental action of Spanish dance wherein its aesthetic can be grasped: «El simple andar constituye en España un espectáculo de máxima emoción artística» (47). Walking is a human action that permits comparison between peoples. It is therefore of the order of a gesture that can communicate the imaginary of national character without itself expressing social organization of any kind. Although the walk can be analyzed in formal terms—for Onís it is the accent on the lift of the foot that is crucial—the quality of this gesture is fundamentally different from Levinson's criterion of expansive versus concentric movement.

Onís sums up the essential traits of Spanish dance as embodied by La Argentina from the perspective of the aesthetic qualities her dance displays that are also definitive of a national character:

> Individualidad, libertad, impulso hacia arriba, gestos inesperados y contradictorios, dramatismo y ternura, gracia y violencia, todo sujeto a un ritmo interno al que siempre se vuelve como en las libérrimas canciones españolas, constituyen el alma de España que vemos encarnada en la Argentina cuando baila. (48)

Levinson viewed La Argentina's dancing as engaged in a struggle with herself to liberate the very possibility of embodying national character, which demanded a classical expression understood as the dominance of aesthetics over personality. Onís, on the other hand, attributes very personal qualities to such an expression, yet also depersonalizes the symbolic process by understanding it to transpire in the body rather than in the personality as a battleground between East and West.

Lorca's «Elogio» follows a logic like Onís's when he calls her art «personalísimo» (469). Lorca characterized La Argentina's New York performances as «recién nacido, inseparable de su cuerpo y que nunca más se podrá repetir» (Lorca 469). Uniqueness and unrepeatability are recognizable qualities of modernist creativity frequently evoked in relation to North American modern dance of the 1930s. La Argentina's Parisian success seems to have been more dependent upon the idea, at least for Levinson, that she was a divided subject, one that had to overcome her indigeneity to achieve the classical identity essential to any national tradition. Her success in New York City, on the other hand, acknowledged her place within the modernist spirit of that time wherein personality, indigeneity, and nationality all converged. The difference with Levinson is that they did not converge at a formal level or at a level conflictual with form but at a rhythmic level.

In his chapter «Sugestiones Plásticas del Baile de La Argentina», Maroto argues for the importance of rhythm wed to plastic suggestions of the dancer's body. Her dance in its rhythmic and plastic as well as gestural scoring brings the performing body into a compelling relationship with the deepest level of transcendent identity: «el alma más alma de España» (Maroto 19). This kind of transmutation of the most physical into the most spiritual has something decidedly magical about it.

> La Argentina, manojo de poderes mágicos, suscita y unifica, tan solo con iniciar, en huidizo y expresivo escorzo, un paso de danza, unas zonas reales y poéticas de la vida española para las cuales crea su arte una atmósfera sincretizadora. (Maroto 20)

For Maroto, La Argentina operated a kind of spell or magical incitement: *una concitación mágica*. Hence, what he saw in her dancing was not so much a collective identity per se as symbolized in a series of individual portraits, but instead the very essence of a collective identity embodied by constant surprises and changes of direction:

> La Argentina es clave y resumen. En su menuda humanidad, de pobres carnes maceradas, se encierra, como en el árbol en cuyo centro los indios bolivianos dicen hallar la esencia de su ramificada genealogía, todo un mundo de incitaciones, de asociaciones, de exaltaciones de complejidad matizada, y que siempre aluden y subrayan la vida española más esencial, el alma más alma de España. (Maroto 25)

This description of a «ramified genealogy» invites us to see the plural in the singular («su menuda humanidad») and the singular in the plural («todo un mundo de...») as well as a totality

in the sequential, the unobjectifiable essence in a myriad of concrete details and constant allusive actions. Indeed, this plural simultaneity of effects constitutes itself the art of making a single body into the screen upon which the collectivity is projected by its mobile metaphoric activity making an endless series of associations successively available to the imagination. It is this vertiginous movement of accumulation countered by a sense of delay and repetition that seems to itself provide the key to understanding La Argentina's performance magic and why it should have been considered magical.

This is the obverse of Levinson's agon between antidote and poison. More importantly, it resonates with Valéry's most modernist description of La Argentina in action as:

> This being who, from her very depths, brings forth these beautiful transformations of her form in space; who now moves, but without really going anywhere; now metamorphoses herself on the spot, displaying herself in every aspect; who sometimes skilfully modulates successive appearances as though in controlled phases; sometimes changes herself brusquely into a whirlwind, spinning faster and faster, then suddenly stops, crystallized into a statue, adorned with an alien smile. (206)

The modernism of Valéry's description in its formal objectivity seems in line with the alchemy of Maroto's incantatory vision of the dancer: both assert inevitability and lack of explanation. Both privilege the idea of art as action through metamorphosis. Yet, the mechanics of the magical operation of transforming the plural into the singular and the latter's immediate reversal back into the plural stand forth more evidently in Valéry. It is paradoxically Valéry's outsider account through which one can best understand the role of rhythmicity in this process: things are not so much seen as they are seen to transform before one's eyes. This echoes in turn upon Maroto's analysis of La Argentina's «plastic suggestion» as used in concert with rhythm. It appears one cannot grasp the collectivization of disparate elements into a meaningful whole unless one accepts the very gratuitousness of the aesthetic operation. Maroto is clear on this when he explains why the dance of La Argentina is not like any other dance:

> Cuando una bailadora ha conseguido complacer nuestros sentidos visuales sin suscitar resonancias de complejidad imprevista si nos atenemos a la estricta naturaleza de la función del baile, no [ha] hecho nada. (20)

The dancer who merely performs movement fails to: «crear el estado propicio que convoca y asocia elementos de realidad diversa» (20). In conclusion, I would argue that we find ourselves here at the heart of the matter — one that cannot be explained through a dialectic of order and disorder, through Ortega's notion of the purely aesthetic phenomenon, or through the concept of magic *per se*. What La Argentina achieves is of an altogether different nature: a highly theoretical phenomenon made perceptible to the senses, wherein a multiplicity of impressions can coexist without collapsing into a false synthesis or illusory unity.

The true significance of La Argentina's dance lies in its enactment of a polarized semiotic process. If there is struggle or conflict it does not stem from the exoticism of self-transcendence; if there is magic, it emerges from a deliberately discontinuous rhythm and an unpredictably evolving plasticity; and if there is a sense of gratuity it arises from the absence of a fixed image as either origin or telos. Ultimately, her dance must be described as profoundly personal, not because of any expressive idiosyncrasy, but because it enacts an individual gesture capable of transforming its sources.

As a final reflection, I turn to Lorca's tribute to her New York performance:

> Pero tu ritmo prodigioso, tu ritmo eterno y siempre renovado irá al sitio de donde lo has cogido para venir aquí, al centro vivo donde perfil de viento, perfil de fuego y perfil de roca, hiriendo y depurándose, construyen cada día la nueva inmortalidad de España. (470)

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