

MARK KONECNY

INTRODUCTION: PERFORMING ARTS AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Of all the artistic achievements that Russia has contributed to European and American culture perhaps the most original and most enduring is that of modern dance. The dancers and choreographers trained in the schools of the Imperial Russian theaters became the preeminent ballet artists of the beginning of the twentieth century, so popular that dancers from other countries took Russian stage names to share in the fame. The spectacle and inventiveness of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, for example, still evoke astonishment and delight and are the frequent subject of research and reconstruction. But for all their mobility and versatility, the Ballets Russes, based in Paris and Monte Carlo, never performed in Russia and it is now becoming increasingly clear that, parallel to *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Les Noces*, there was another, alternative, and highly experimental kind of dance evolving in Moscow during the 1910s and 1920s: informed by Isadora Duncan, and Jaques Dalcroze avant-garde Russian dance tested audacious ideas in the same revolutionary laboratory that witnessed Vasily Kandinsky, Vladimir Maiakovsky, Kazimir Malevich, Vsevolod Meierkhol'd, and Sergei Prokofiev.

This volume is a direct result of a symposium and workshop organized under the immediate auspices of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture (IMRC) at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles (USC), the Palaia Dance Project which brought together a group of specially invited choreographers, dancers, and scholars to conduct a theoretical and practical expedition into the development of twentieth-century Russian dance. By concentrating on the genesis and development of what is now called "modern" or "abstract" dance, the Palaia Dance Project reexamined the dynamic heritage of the Russian art of movement, especially as it manifested itself in the 1920s in the wake of the October Revolution. For the scholarly symposium each of the specialists delivered a paper on a preassigned topic (e.g., on Constructivism; or on the relationship between modern dance and time and motion studies; or on the parallels between abstract painting and abstract dance). For the physical workshop Lorin Johnson (former member of the American Ballet Theatre; currently free-lance choreographer in Southern California and a specialist in Russian culture), and a group of five dancers rehearsed and performed "Moto-Bio: Bodies in Movement," an investigation into the movements of the body in dance, gymnastics, work, narration and abstraction. In-

spired by the music, theater, painting and cinema of the Russian avant-garde, the performance was developed as an integral part of the laboratory was given publicly for the Festival "Tendopolis" at the Fabbrica Europa, Stazione Leopolda, Florence, on May 29, 2003. This special issue of *Experiment* is an edition of transactions and observations of the workshop; moreover, it is a result of the collaborative laboratory of the symposium that created a synthesis of performance and scholarly analysis.

Experiment No. 10 is divided into three integrative parts: the "reconstruction" of dance, the "theoretical" analysis of Russian dance of the twentieth century, and the international avant-garde of dance in the Russian context. The first section of the journal deals with the problems of contemporary interpretation of choreography. Lorin Johnson's articles deal with the problems of reconstruction from a choreographer's point of view. Using the experimental work of Lev Lukin (Lev Ivanovich Saks [1892-1961]) as a starting point, Mr. Johnson discusses the unique problems of presenting the avant-garde style of dance to the modern audience. His accompanying article, "Early Russian Modern Dance: Lev Lukin and the *Motobio-skul'ptury*," shows how the various accounts, choreographic notes, and photographs can be used to get a sense of the original works presented in the 1910s and 1920s. Sharon Carnicke also discusses the challenges of her reconstruction project, Igor Stravinsky's rarely performed ballet *Svadebka* (The Wedding; generally known by its French title *Les Noces*). The fourth article of this section, Marcus Levitt's "The First Russian Ballet: Alexander Sumarokov's *Sanctuary of Virtue*," is a historical contextualization of the history of early ballet in Russia.

The second section of *Experiment* is chiefly concerned with Russian culture of the avant-garde period and the primary role that dance and movement had in creating this unique aesthetic. Perhaps it is not surprising that much of the discussion in this section focuses on culture outside the traditional boundaries of the theater. The street, the auditorium, and the salon can also be considered the arena in which the performance occurs. Traditionally ballet and dance is associated exclusively with the theater or the ballroom, that is, physical spaces, buildings or rooms constructed specifically as performance space or converted to that purpose, and symbolic spaces with highly restrictive rules of behavior and movement; modernism and the revolution of art and theater meant that movement became a part of impromptu stage life. Artists, actors, directors, even factory workers, became a part of the new industrial aesthetic of the machine. The industrial age prompted artists to reexamine ritual, dance, music, sports, judicial proceedings, even societally defined etiquette in terms of efficiency as in the case of Taylorism, or to search for the deeper symbolic significance of specific movements.

The developments of technology, film and photography, allowed artists to actually see movement as a part of a sequence and gave them a greater ability to understand how movement actually worked. Automobiles, airplanes, ra-