

FACING BACKWARDS

(A diagnosis)

By Giora Manor

Clinical Report about patient I.C.

Name: Israeli Choreography

Pathological Symptoms: Chronical fatigue, general disfunction, anemia.

Diagnosis: clinical examin. - n.a.d. in motorical system, musculature well developed, physiological functions: n.a.d., complaint probably psychosomatic. Patient referred to dept. of psych. for tests.

Psychologist's Report: I conducted in-depth interview with I.C., which revealed strong mother-figure fixation. Though in her 20's, I.C. is still emotionally dependent on one M.G., who played dominant role in her childhood and education. A.T.A. Personality Test showed that there is hardly any connection between her emotional and intellectual concerns (if any) and her creative activity. Because of this schizophrenic rift in her personality, her artistic output lacks content, does not provide any outlet for her emotions, renders her utterances devoid of relevancy. The frustration ensuing from her predicament causes her to indulge in rationalizations, makes her over-anxious about technical problems. She tends to over-emphasize superficial brilliance and has developed a paranoid tendency towards management and administrative staff. Rorschach-test: Strong tendencies to shut oneself to all innovations, fear of experimentation blocks analytical reasoning. I.C. found it very difficult to free-associate and tried to conceal her true emotions under much irrelevant verbiage.

Social Worker's Report: Examined subject's social and economic situation, and came to the conclusion that her pecuniary means are adequate, though her salary does not allow for much luxuries. I.C. maintains contacts

mainly with persons much older than herself. Has nearly no relations with people of her own age-group or younger. Has only a vague idea about and little interest in what her colleagues do or think.

As the above report shows, Israeli Choreography faces-with a few exceptions- towards the past. Most new works by Israeli choreographers are cleverly constructed, brilliantly executed, but lack the vital element of exploration and courage, and do not carry meaningful ideas relevant today. Choreographers indulge in academic exercises, rearranging ideas - spatial and philosophical - which were new and revolutionary 20 years ago. Movement - language created by Martha Graham to express symbolic drama is reshaped and the blood-red meat of her masterpieces minced and served as meat-balls.

Surprisingly, frequent visits by foreign choreographers and dance-companies in this country have not changed the situation. Probably because most of these belong themselves to the generation which was in its prime a few decades ago.

Technical improvement, most important in itself, takes precedence over creativity in Israeli dance-education. This leads to sterile so-called 'experiments', discovering nothing.

As an example, let us consider the Kibbutz Dance Company. This ensemble reached a good technical level, has a professional look and its performances are well-staged. Still, only when some relevant idea in the choreography coincides with Graham-language, as in Flora Cushman's "Cantata", their dancing becomes more than exercises in the arrangement of steps.

This 'hand-me-down' artistic language bedevils choreography not only in Israel. For instance, Robert Cohan, who was one of Graham's leading dancers and now directs the London Contemporary Dance Center (and has repeatedly worked with Israeli companies), developed a style of his own, without abandoning the basic Graham-language by concentrating more and more on the stage-craft of his productions. Sets and lighting take precedence over movement pure and simple. The dancer becomes an object for the designer. This does not mean that Cohan's works are not impressive and theatrically moving, as, for example is clearly shown in his dance "Cell". But could this piece exist apart from the set, strobe-light, flying bricks bombarding the naked hero? There is hardly anything new in the idea of this work. After all, men's isolation and exposure to violence in modern society has, it seems, been treated before.

It is a pity that the important experiments going on (mainly in America) in which choreographers try to explore new ground and to shed the confining mantle of what is called 'modern dance' are nearly unknown here.

Because of lack of space all we can do here is to list some of these recent trends in Post-Modern Dance.

"New Realism" seems an apt term for those who create dances on the basis of every-day movements like sitting and getting-up, walking and just standing still. The movement can be executed by anybody, no technical proficiency being required. These works are often performed in non-theatrical situations, in public parks, museums and on the streets. This demands a complete re-thinking of esthetic values and dance-theory.

In New Realism and Minimalism one can see the influence of developments in sculpture and painting prevalent today.

Minimalism concentrates our attention on minute changes, unspectacular movement, gradual development and change, and is therefore diametrically opposed to the dramatic method of emphasis, larger-than-life gesture and near hysterical hyper-tension dominant in conventional modern dance.

A good example of how less can be more is Rudi Perez's "Countdown", performed in Tel-Aviv by Ze'eva Cohen, in which seemingly nothing happens. A woman is sitting on a stool, smoking. She hardly ever gets up during the performance. Still this is one of the most moving pieces I have seen in a long time. It is despair crystalized, the quintessence of waiting in vain. In Perez's work the technical element is, though concealed, important, and his esthetic values are 'conservative'.

Aleatory works, utilizing the element of chance create new patterns in each performance using set movement-phrases as building-stones. Here spontaneity serves to abolish the feeling of reproduction, inherent in stage presentation. Merce Cunningham's works, unfortunately not yet shown in Israel, belong to this category, so do Gus Solomons' dances, in which each participant receives a set of cards dictating the sequence of phrases to be danced, arranged by random choice.

Some choreographers are looking for ways to involve the spectator in participating actively in the dance. Others abandoned the search for variety and concentrate on endless repetition of one movement (Laura Dean) which creates a hypnotic trance well-known in primitive dance ("The Whirling Dervishes"). Andy De Groat, who works with Robert Wilson, creates dances based on one movement - whole turns of the body at diverse speeds - sometimes using pieces of material to create strange shapes in space. The "Multi-Gravitational" dance company harnesses the dancers to make them able to move upon walls and literally fly in space.

This list is far from complete. It is just an indication of directions in which choreographers experiment. Alas, none of this has influenced Israeli choreography.

What can be done about this deplorable state of things? Two examples may, perhaps, supply some ideas.

Diaghilev, the great impresario who vitalized ballet, did not himself create even one single dance. But he brought together writers, painters and musicians (Cocteau, Benois, Picasso, Bakst, Stravinsky, to name but a few) with choreographers. These artists presented the ballet-creators

with challenges by writing libretti for them which set novel demands. These scenarios made the choreographers abandon the well-beloved traditions of classical ballet and create new artistic means.

Merce Cunningham's revolutionary work is unthinkable without his collaboration with John Cage the musician and Rauschenberg the artist.

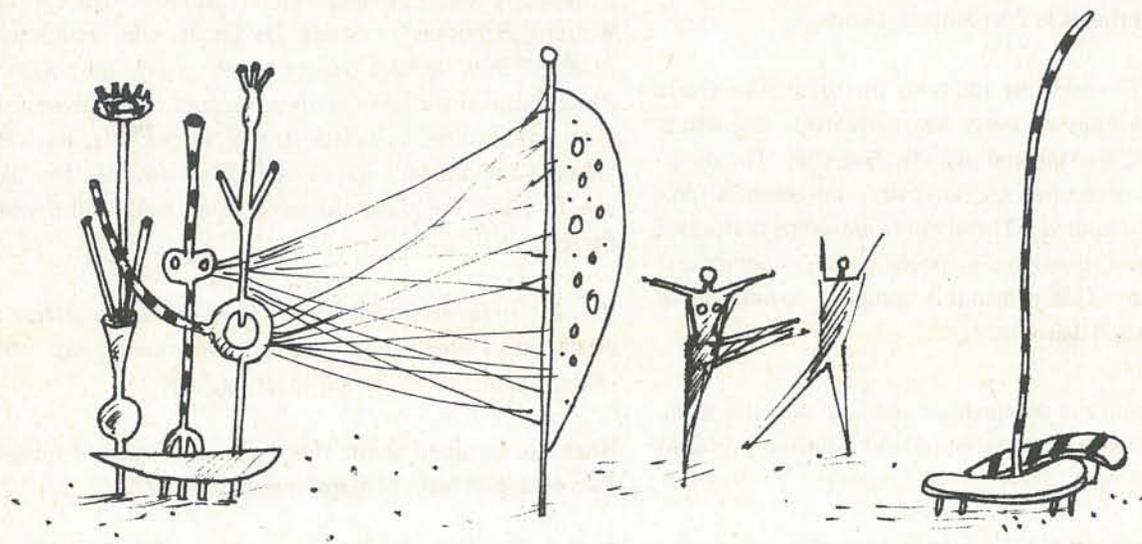
In Israel we may observe the interesting results of the joined efforts of musicians Yossi Mar-Chaim and the dancer and choreographer Rachel Kafri.

With the creation of the experimental "Bat-Sheva 2"

company isn't it time to try some such cross-pollination between the arts?

Why not commission scenarios by poets, painters and writers to be presented to the choreographers of the new company-offshoot? The time-honoured way of giving choreographers studio-time, dancers and a budget, and letting them create to their heart's content will, at best, produce more variations on worn themes in Graham-technique. One has to demand the "impossible" to stimulate thought. Such a challenge does not guarantee success, but at least it seems worth trying.

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D. Karavan 68

Danni Karavan - Sketch for "Bat-Sheva" Dance Company.

דני קרובן - גישום ללהקת "בת-שבע"