
Displaced/Displayed - Surviving Dance in Exile

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Displaced/Displayed: screen-dance installation (Bath Spa Media Wall April 2018) Artistic direction & research: Thomas Kampe; Editorial direction Manuela Jara ; Choreographic research and direction: Carol Brown. Sound artist Russell Scoones. Video Artist: Meek Zuiderwyk; Video Assistant: Freddie. Errazo ; Dancers of The New Zealand Dance Company: Carl Tolentino, Lucy Lynch, Chris Ofanoa , Katie Rudd. The project was supported through Bath Spa University and University of Auckland

Geliebte Emmy *Bogota, 8 August 1938*
Heute bekam ich deinen lieben Brief vom 16.VIII. Gottlob, dass du draussen bist. Gottlob, dass dein Mann nicht mehr in der Hölle ist ! Ich atme auf, denn ich hatte um dich im inneren meines Herzens

schon Angst. [...] Meine Leute, Lotte und Karli und Schwester, sind alle in Paris. Karli hat unter toi toi toi eine Arbeitskarte für ein halbes Jahr gekriegt und hat eine Anstellung bei einer Aktiengesellschaft gefunden. Selbstverständlich genügt sein Gehalt, aber nicht um drei Menschen ernähren zu können. So brauche ich dir nicht erst zu sagen wie sehr ich auf das Geld von F. angewiesen bin. Es ist immer das Gleiche: erst ist man erlöst in Freiheit atmen zu koennen, aber gleich darauf melden sich die Lebenssorgen. Falls Gisa , Anita usw nicht für die F Revue genommen werden, könnte ich sie vielleicht nachkommen lassen, denn vielleicht dauert unsere Tournee länger, und die Mädels wollen nicht mehr länger bleiben. Die Glücklichen können in ihre Länder nach Hause reisen. Ich aber verliere durch mein längeres Ausbleiben die Einreisemöglichkeit nach Frankreich. Es ist furchtbar, aber ich muss eben um jeden Preis Geld verdienen. Grüße Liesl, ihren Gatten und ihre Eltern herzlich von mir.

Es umarmt dich in inniger Liebe unter tausend sehnsüchtigen Grüssen deine Frau Gerti

displaced/displayed is the title of a screen dance installation presented at the symposium *Beyond Forgetting 1938-2018: Persecution/Exile/Memory* in Coburg in 2018. It draws on the legacy of Viennese choreographer Gertrud Bodenwieser (Vienna 1890 – Sydney 1959) and her dancers within a context of global transmission of dance knowledge through crisis, diaspora and exile. Bodenwieser was forced into exile from Europe after the Austrian *Anschluss* in 1938, via Colombia and New Zealand, to work for a period of 20 years in Australia where her work was seminal for the development of Modern Dance culture. The installation coincides with the 80th anniversary of Bodenwieser's enforced exile from Europe and celebrates the possibility of a nearly lost avant-garde to remain.

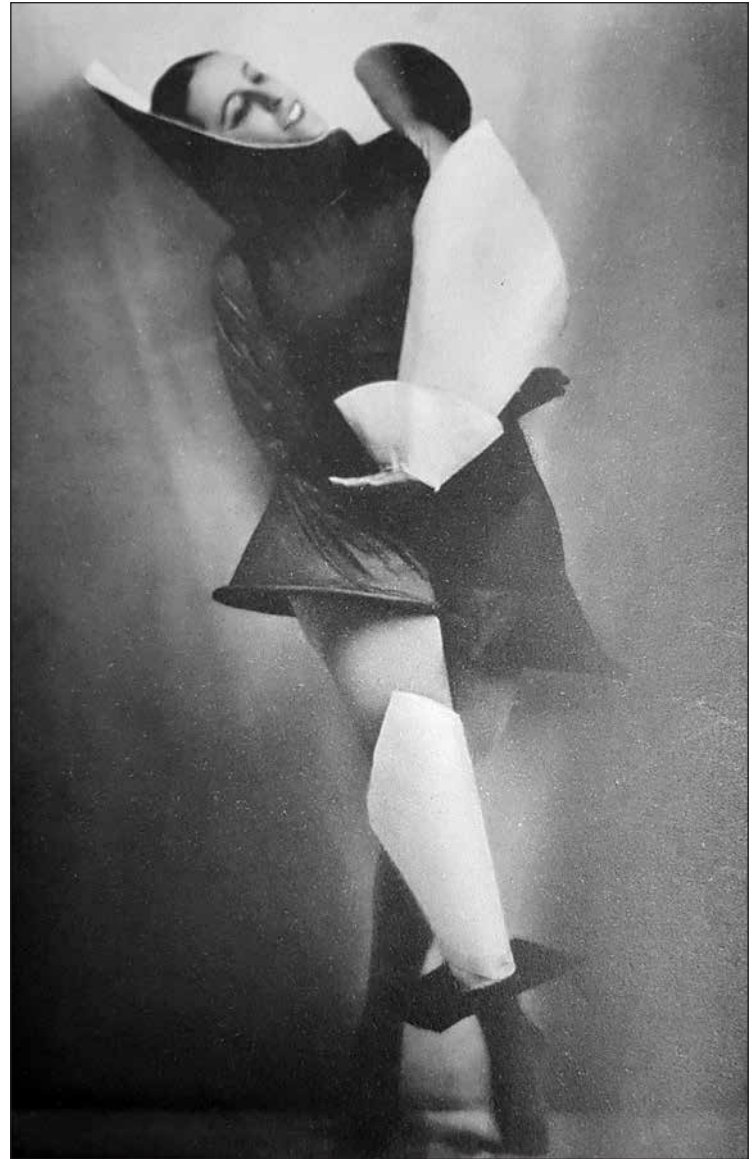
As an ecstatic-somatic project of choreographic re-vitalisation it builds on artistic research undertaken by the author and choreographer Carol Brown between 2014 and 2019 ('Releasing the Archive', Auckland, Berlin, Hannover, Bath, Tel Aviv and Theatermuseum Vienna) in collaboration with The New Zealand Dance Company and international dance-exile scholars and dance organisations. The installation draws on video footage of choreographic material developed through experimental studio processes and on the reactivation of archival material drawn from the work of ex-Bodenwieser dancers Shona Dunlop-McTavish, Hillary Napier and Hilde Holger. The installation plays with practices of displacement, doubling and fragmenting of recorded material to echo and honour the labour of lost modernist dancers and dances of exile. How does dance survive displacement? How did radical European Jewish Modern Dancers cope with persecution and exile?

The following text uses archive material - personal letters and newspaper reviews - to give an insight into the complexities and vulnerability of Gertrud Bodenwieser's journey through exile, and gives voice to a legacy of nearly forgotten European dancers, including Bodenwieser company members Emmy Steininger-Taussig, Melissa Melzer and Magda Hoyos-Brunner

An Unconditional Austrian

Gertrud Bodenwieser was born Gertrud Bondi into a Jewish Viennese stockbroker family – father Theodor Bondi (Prague 1848 - Vienna 1895), mother Marie Bondi, nee Tandler (ca 1859 – 1917). Vienna had been a centre of emancipated European Jewry since the 1782 *Edict of Tolerance*, with more than two-hundred thousand Jewish citizens in 1923. While Silverman (2012) proposes that after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire Jews were at the forefront of cultural modernisation of Austria, Dalinger (2019) also suggests that the majority of Modern Dancers in Vienna were of Jewish origin. Silverman suggests that at the collapse of the Austrian Empire assimilated Jews who had identified themselves as the ideal "unconditional Austrian" citizens (Bloch cited in Silverman 2012:6), were in danger of falling victim of increasing "socially constructed categories of Jewish difference," which served for a renegotiating of power relations in the emerging Austrian First Republic (ibid.).

In this essay I argue that a repeatedly performative affirmation of the "unconditional Austrian" forms part of a survival strategy of the choreographer Gertrud Bodenwieser, particularly during her early tours of Australia in exile after 1939. Gertrud Bondi changes her name to Bodenwieser as early as 1915 when she appears publicly as a dancer with character dances for a charity concert for war victims in the Konzerthaus of Baroness Anka von Bienenrth, the wife of Austrian prime-minister Richard von Bienenrth.¹ Bondi had been a ballet student of Court-Opera Mime Carl Godlevski, and moved and performed amongst aristocratic circles before the end of WW1, while she was already praised as being part of a new modernist dance avant-garde next to Grete Wiesenthal and Gertrude Barrison (Oberzaucher-Schüller 2019). Bodenwieser presents her first full length evening of dances in Vienna on 5 May 1919, during the exhibition of the *Neuen Vereinigung für Malerei, Musik und Graphik* (New Union for Painting, Music, and Graphics) in the French Hall of the Konzerthaus. Her work is being reviewed



Gertrud Bodenwieser

as groundbreaking by Alfons Török: "(...) new, unconditionally new was everything the artist offered: here we saw for the first time emerge in dance what has become owned by the young ones in painting, poetry and music: a complete departure from all traditions and the sincere quest for new, entirely personal values of expression" (cited in ibid; translated by TK).

Bodenwieser is part of the artistic elite in a post-war Vienna, that seeks to renew itself through an emancipated yet nationalist republican identity, while maintaining an aristocratic sugar coated image of delirious Viennese Waltzes. In 1919 she begins to teach at the *Neue Wiener Konservatorium* and opens her own private school with classes for adults and children in the basement of the *Konzerthaus* in the heart of Vienna. In 1920 she is appointed as Professor for Dance at the *Staatsakademie für Musik und Darstellende Kunst* and begins to tour Austria, Germany and Switzerland. In the same year she marries Jewish theatre director Friedrich Rosenthal.² By 1921 she performs in the *Grosses Konzerthaus* hall with her first *Tanzgruppe* of dancers trained by herself, including Gisa Geert, Hilde Holger, Hede Juer, Melitta Pfeiffer, Lisl Rinaldini and Marion Rischawy. Many of her students and company members during the 1920's and 30's are Jewish – including Trudl Dubsky, Hilde Holger, Hanny Kolm-Ex-

iner, Gertrud Kraus, Stella Mann, Jeannett Rutherford, Steffi Stahl, the Suchinsky sisters, and comedian Cilly Wang. By 1926 she performs with an enlarged ensemble in the prestigious Vienna *Volks-theater* in Oskar Kokoschka's expressionist avant-garde drama *Der Brennende Dornbusch*. She performs in works directed her husband Fritz Rosenthal, expressionist theatre director Karlheinz Martin, and works with Jewish director Max Reinhardt.

Bodenwieser is surrounded by the Viennese arts avant-garde including expressionist painter Felix A. Harta and Jewish photographer Madame D'Ora (Dora Kallmus), and familiar with developments in European Modern Dance. Her private school is also a registered Laban School, and airbrushed images of her naked dancing young students are featured in Rudolf Laban's key books on gymnastics and dance. As a pedagogue, Bodenwieser establishes an interdisciplinary dance syllabus at the Staatsakademie, which incorporates cultural and historical studies, gymnastics, Modern Dance, improvisation, music and visual art. She is highly educated, articulate and *en-vogue*.

"How can you have forgotten what they did?"

In her essay *Migration and Memory: The Dances of Gertrud Bodenwieser* (2010) Carol Brown, who had received her initial dance training with Bodenwieser-dancer Shona Dunlop MacTavish (1920-2019) in New Zealand, states her unease in uncovering Bodenwieser's double identity of simultaneously being "a radical artist" and "a pioneer of modern dance in Australia" in exile after 1939. Brown reflects on the pressures of commercial touring in exile in Australia which left Bodenwieser without familiar cultural context. She describes Bodenwieser as steeped in European emancipatory and avant-garde traditions, yet who seemed "to arrive at a kind of manufactured desire, performing Europeaness as a crowd pleaser" (2010:6). We can interpret Bodenwieser's position of a cultural outsider in Australia through the lens of an "ethics of vulnerability" (Gilson 2014).

From 1938 until 1940, Bodenwieser worked continuously under vulnerable conditions of exile, which challenged existential and economic survival and cultural placement for both herself and her company collaborators. A letter from her exile in Bogota in 1938, Colombia reveals her anguish about her own and her beloved ones' displacement: "Beloved Emmy. Today I got your dear letter from the 16. VIII. Thank God you're outside. Thank God that your husband is no longer in hell! I breathe deeply, because I feared for you in the depth of my heart. [...]" (Letter 20/08/1938 [transl. TK]). The letter also gives an insight into Bodenwieser's financial situation, and her ability to manage the company's complex professional affairs across the Atlantic with the help of her dancer and rehearsal manager Emmy Steininger-Taussig.

We have a follow-up tour that will take us 7-10 weeks through Colombia. We hope we get the money, because until now we still cannot get the return travel money from the mayor's office. This is South America! Mr. Fischer promised me in Paris £ 4 per week, if he would employ us. Please do your best, dearest Emmy (and I know how you would like to help me), so he gives me the money, if not all, then a part. If my dances will be recreated, you have to tell him that they are protected by copyright, and I make conditions for their use. I would ask for at least £5-6

per week for their use. [...] I ask you not to make Mr. Fischer angry, because I do not want to ruin it with him, and yet to get as much as possible from him for me? If Fischer gives the promised money, please collect everything for me.

My people, Lotte and Karli and sister are all in Paris. Karli has a working permit for half a year - toi toi toi - and found employment with a stockbroker. Of course, his salary is sufficient, but not to feed three people. So, I do not need to tell you how much I depend on the money of Fischer [...]. If Gisa and Anita, etc. are not taken for the F [Fischer] Revue, maybe I could let them follow, because maybe our tour lasts longer, and the girls do not want to stay longer. The lucky ones can travel home to their countries. But through my prolonged absence I lost the right to re-migrate to France. It is awful, but I have to make money at all cost (ibid).³

In exile Bodenwieser worked under the pressure of being a persecuted and displaced Jewish woman in a largely anti-semitic world. Much of her aesthetic choices of performing an imagined and sugar-coated "Europeaness as a crowd pleaser" (Brown 2010:6) were based on tactics of economic survival, and a masking and doubling of her Jewishness with imaginaries of a romantic gone-by Vienna danced by a troupe of largely tall and blonde women.

The contradiction between Bodenwieser's purist and radical vision in her writing and in her pedagogy, and the creation of often light-hearted, eroticist and affirmative dance works that feed into popular escapist entertainment industries can be already found in her work in Europe in the 1920's. In an essay published in the *Dancing Times* in England in 1926 Bodenwieser sets out an avant-garde ethos in her work that aims to break with dominant Western dance aesthetics of the past: "The old, one-sided image of beauty will be completely destroyed. Grace, which used to be seen as the essence of dance, is an absolute restriction of the body and reduces it to niceties and prettiness. Today, we reject this restriction. [...] We see a movement as beautiful when it is expressive and full of character. Conventional modes of performance do not satisfy us any more - these seem to us concerned with external appearance, superficial and empty."⁴

While such passionate texts appear in her educational writings and at times in program notes, interviews in newspapers particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, reveal a very different world view. Though her dance-dramas refer to human conflict in allegorical ways, Bodenwieser's work generally blanks out the harsh social realities of Europe between the wars - rising unemployment and inflation, and increasing poverty, hunger, social unrest and increasing political radicalisation and a growing violent antisemitism find very little resonance in the affirmative art world of Bodenwieser's dances. The main exception here is her dance drama *Die Masken Lucifers* (The Masks of Lucifer) first performed in 1936 in Vienna. Bodenwieser's biographer Marie Cuckson suggests that "this dance drama came as a prophecy of what the future would be if mankind continued to allow the trend of events in Europe to continue" (cited in Bodenwieser 1960: 13).

At the end of March 1938, immediately after the German *Anschluss* and annexation of Austria, Bodenwieser travelled with her



Bodenwieser tour 1913

husband to Paris where he had found work with a radio station. Rosenthal declined the invitation to travel with his wife to South America, since he could not speak Spanish and the separation between him and his wife for touring reasons had been a normal event in their married life. Neither of them envisioned that in 1940 Rosenthal would be arrested by the Gestapo while trying to escape from France to Spain, and later to be murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. "Never heard of again" as Emmy Steininger put it.⁵ Bodenwieser only found out about the death of her husband through the Red Cross in 1950.

Bodenwieser resigned from her position as Professor shortly after the German Anschluss of Austria. While Renner (1981) suggests that Bodenwieser left her post for political reasons, it is clear that she resigned as a racially labelled persecuted Jewish woman. She initially seeks leave until the end of the academic year 1938, but resigns immediately when she left the country with her husband. Her letter of resignation from 29/03/1938, written from exile in Paris reads: "I hereby declare, that I resign from my teaching post at the Academy for Music and Performing Arts, and finally renounce from all further payment as from the day of my possibility to emigrate to a foreign country. Gertrud Bodenwieser" (Renner 1981:49; translation TK).

It is worth noting that the a newly installed acting director of the *Staatsakademie* sent a letter to the passport office of the Vienna police, inquiring about the exact date "when permission to Frau Bodenwieser-Rosenthal was granted to leave Austria?"⁶ The acting director of the STAK, as letter calls the *Staatsakademie* in new Nazi-jargon, wants to know this date in order to stop paying tax for the former employee, and signs the letter with "Heil Hitler". Perhaps it is no coincidence that he uses the name Rosenthal – a common Jewish name in Austria and Germany in that time – in this letter, to prove his eager party loyalty.

Through the support of the family of one of her students, Magda Hoyos-Brunner, and her agent Patek, Bodenwieser had arranged to be part of a 3-month tour of Colombia for a company of seven fairly inexperienced dancers and her musical collaborator Marcel Lorber for the autumn 1938. This coincided with the plans of Viennese cabaret artist and comedian Hugo Wiener who had been asked to cast mixed entertainment programme for the 400 year celebrations of the founding of the city of Bogota. Bodenwieser

immediately found herself as part of a touring entertainment programme, the *Revista Vienesa*, with a visa to leave Austria. Wiener, who had been humiliated and harassed by Nazi soldiers in Vienna describes his own and his sister's desperation at the moment when the offer for the Colombia tour appeared: "We saw no other escape than suicide. We would have to take our parents [who are 75 and 80 years old] with us. My sister begged me to wait another night. It is not easy to kill your father and mother who you love. Perhaps there was some help? There it was." (Wiener, in Sedlak 226)

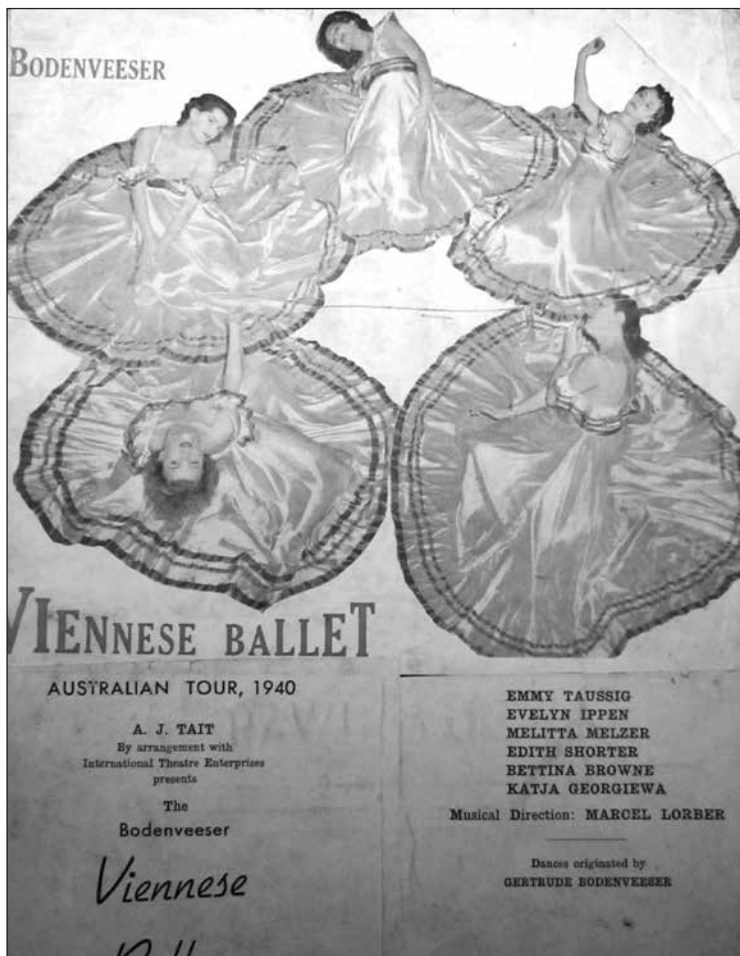
Bodenwieser had already planned an Australian tour of her *Vienese Ballet* company while living in Paris in May 1938, and had asked of Emmy Steininger to cast dancers and rehearse dances in Vienna for both tours of Australia and Colombia. Agent Clifford Fischer in London had asked for the most experienced dancers for the England and US tour of *Folies D'Amour Revue*. She continued the organisation of this tour all while working with her less experienced group in Colombia. Bodenwieser toured her semi-commercial works and surrounds herself with loyal dancers she had trained already in Vienna, and other exiled collaborators to create an imagined homeland of a lost Europe in an Australia that seemed nothing but culturally provincial and strange to her. Most notably the dancer Emmy Steininger-Taussig – then named Towsey – and the Jewish-Polish born photographer Margaret Michaelis (1902-1995) who had worked in the studio of Madame D'Ora in Vienna. After the departure of other Vienna Dancers, and of her long standing pianist and composer Marcel Lorber, she was joined by the Jewish pianist Dory Stern (1912-1990). Stern was a graduate of the Vienna Music Academy and, like Bodenwieser, had fled from Austria when the Nazis came to power in 1938. In a letter sent to Lorber in 1953, Bodenwieser vehemently rejects the thought of ever returning to Austria or Europe: "How can you have forgotten what they did?"

Dunlop MacTavish (1987), and company dancers Magda Hoyos-Brunner (2009) and Eileen Kramer (2012) describe Bodenwieser as a traumatised woman. Hoyos tells the story how a frightened Bodenwieser visited the Viennese Brunner family after the 1938 Nazi-Anschluss, sobbing in desperation, and begging her mother to support the possible tour to Colombia, where Magda's father was Austrian General Consul (Hoyos [2004] in Sedlak, 2009). In a letter sent from Colombia to her close friend Emmy Steininger, dated 6th December 1938, Bodenwieser confides "I am incurably wounded." Kramer (2012) describes Bodenwieser sobbing violently "in bitter tears" in the dressing room during the Australian tours. Dunlop-MacTavish talks about Bodenwieser's consistent fear while living in Australia, her nightmares, and a soul-destroying guilt about the death of her husband.

Double Dancing

It is pertinent to see that early public reviews in Australia in 1939 and 1940 never mention why Bodenwieser left Vienna in the first place. Her exile is mostly described as an exciting and exotic international tour – "packed with drama" – as Bodenwieser is quoted in the Daily Telegraph on 1st of September 1939 – the day of the Hitler's invasion of Poland and the beginning of WWII. The same newspaper describes her as: "Daughter of an old Austrian family, Madame Bodenwieser was born in Vienna and had her early

training in the traditional art of Ballet" (ibid). Her position as refugee, persecuted for her Jewish cultural background disappears, carefully shielded in a marketing campaign for a new expressive modern dance. In November 1939 the same newspaper enabled Bodenwieser to distinguish her work as of the "ultra-modern and streamlined" type, contrasting strongly the more formal "Russian style". The terror of World War II, and surely her own tragic journey, are indirectly addressed in a sharpened version of earlier writings when Bodenwieser is quoted that her dance also deals with "terror, madness, bitterness and struggle" and aims "also at provoking thought", through a combination of "lyric, epic and dramatic dances."⁸ Was she aware of the growing escalation of the Nazi terror against Jews, who by now had been forced to wear Yellow stars in the German-occupied Warsaw?



Viennese tour 1940

As Australia joins the war against Germany, the tour of the 'Bodenwieser Ballet' is portrayed as a display of innocent feminine spirituality. Yet, the Sydney Herald of November 27th of 1939 features a large image of Bodenwieser's dance drama *The Masks Of Lucifer*, highlighting themes of 'Intrigue, Terror and Hate, the very evils which are abroad to-day [sic].' At the same time, a great amount of the review focuses on the spiritually emancipatory educational *Ausdruckstanz* values this new dance practice promises to the modern individual: '[...] because modern life tends to encourage repressions, [...] this dance, expressing the deep things of life, serves to free the soul' (ibid).

An undated article from the same 1939 tour, phonetically titled "Bodenveeser Ballet - Admirable Performance", details an ex-

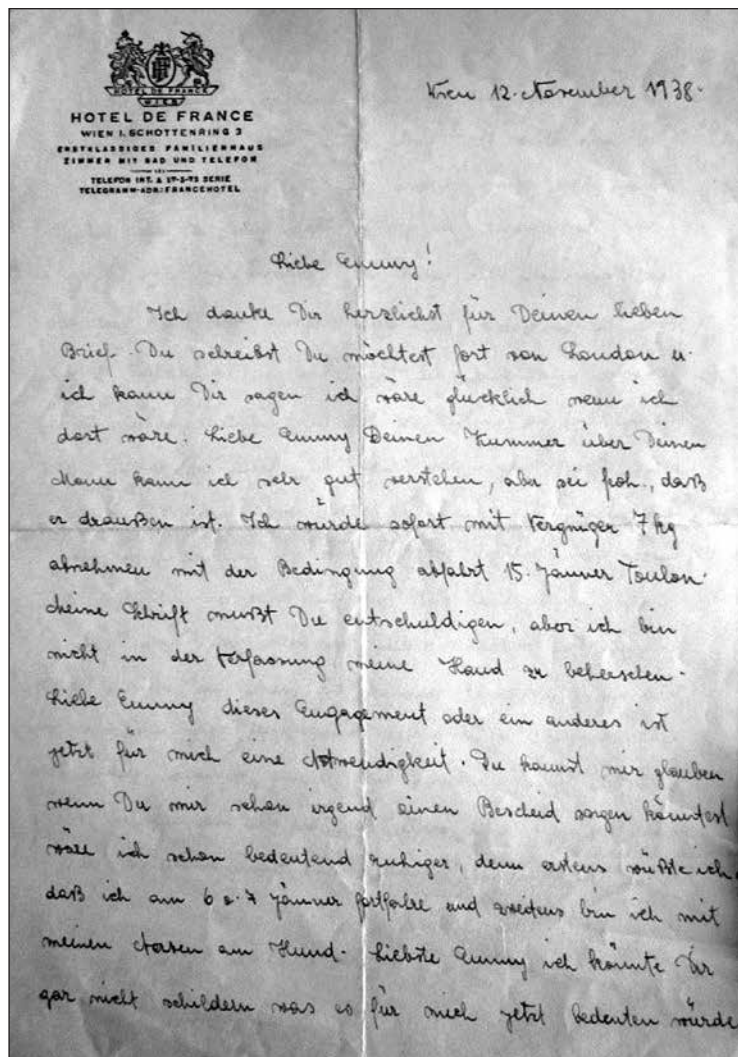
perimental coup de theatre featuring impressive improvised performances of the dancers that involved audience participation to meet the sentiment of an Australian cultural context: "A series of improvisations last night tested their resources in an interesting way. Members of the audience were asked to call subjects, and so the girls embarked, unprepared, on *Trees in a Bushfire*, *Six Dancing Dolls*, *A Beseeching Child* and *a Good Fairy*. There was nothing conventional or softly sentimental about this. All the performances had vigour, originality, imagination, and unfailing discipline. Marcel Lorber was a dependable pianist".⁹ If the Jewish refugee woman continued to stay in hiding, the modernist avant-garde-dancer tentatively had arrived in Australia and found a new home. The news *Magazine PIX* of 13 April 1940 features a large picture of dancer Emmy Steinger in a heroic posture echoing *Superwoman* titling the page as "Dancing to Words" - There has been no limit to queer accompany for dancing; but in the latest style it has all gone talkie - Let PIX show you how the g r a c e f u l [sic] Emmy Taussig dances to the rhythmic beat of now music, but a beat of a poem read aloud". Right below sit the headlines "Inside the Nazi Prize Court" and "Special map of the Oil Front". The photo-article shows several photos of a serious and assertive Taussig interpreting lines of war poems by Elisabeth Lambert. The dancer is described as linking the "visual reality of the dance to words of a poem [...]. Her art is lifted at once from abstract form-rhythms to the beautiful and concrete interpretation of the poet's philosophy. [...] words and pose combine to deliver [the] profound message of Elisabeth Lambert's poem." This experimental work embodies a philosophical avant-garde war effort in provincial Australia: "We make our own heavens



Steinger PIX 1940

and hell, is the lesson." Emmy Taussig interprets the line: "Hell is the sharp ache of Hunger."¹⁰

By 1940 a Brisbane newspaper tentatively mentioned the refugee reality of some of the dancers in the Bodenwieser Ballet for whom "Australia seems to be their first love, and since their beloved Madame Bodenveeser [sic] has found sanctuary in this country, their hearts warmed to it still more."¹¹ The reviewer explicitly mentions details of Bodenwieser's forced exile, but places this in the context of the artist fleeing a dictatorship which suppresses the free individual. "Madame Bodenveeser was discovering in common with many of her compatriots, that Vienna, under the heel of dictatorship, was not place for the gentle in heart, whose mission in life was the encouragement of the arts" (ibid). The review uses Bodenwieser's work concerned with liberating the modern individual as a propaganda piece against the repressive conformism enforced by the Nazi regime in Europe. We find no mentioning of Bodenwieser, her pianist Marcel Lorber and her dancer Melitta Melzer, "a charming blonde from Vienna" being racially profiled and persecuted, and exiled as Jewish in Nazi Austria."¹² Dunlop MacTavish describes a secretive meeting with dancer Melitta Melzer who is not allowed to frequent an "aryan" cafe in Vienna in May 1938, where Melzer is desperate to find a way to leave the country. The destitute dancer was later able to join the six Bodenwieser Ballet dancers in Australia, but had not been able to join them on SS Maloja from England in February



Melitta Melzer's letter 1940

1939, due to "passport difficulties in Vienna" (Lawson 2011).¹³ She arrived a week later in Melbourne.

Melzer sent a letter from the *Hotel de France* in Vienna to Emmy Steining in England on the 12 November 1938, asking her to help her escape Austria, at a time when the repression against Jews in Austria and Germany violently escalates during and after the *Kristallnacht* events. She excuses her inability to control her shaky handwriting and asks Steining who had the task to cast the tour with a small group of most experienced dancers, to confirm a tentative offer that had been made to her earlier. "You write that you would like to leave London, and I can tell you that I would be so happy if I could be there. Dear Emmy, I understand your sorrow about your husband, but be glad he is outside now. I would happily loose 7kg, if the message was departure 15 January Toulon."

Steining had managed to get her Jewish husband a stagehand job with the *Revista Vienesa* tour of Bodenwieser's second company. The twenty year old Melzer addresses her own desperate situation swiftly:

Dear Emmy, this engagement [she uses the French term for a job in the theatre], or any other one is a real necessity for me. You can believe me that I would be a lot more peaceful if you could tell me something, because then I knew that I would leave on 6th or 7th of January, and because I am with my nerves like a dog. Dear Emmy, I cannot tell you what it would mean to me get out and earn some money? Do you know what it means to not support yourself anymore? Frau Gerti would know it as she has lived through this herself. [...] If nothing happens with these commitments, dear Emmy, I ask you if you could maybe get me a job with your director. It might sound harsh, but what shall I do?¹⁴

Such desperate experience stands in stark contrast to reviews of the early Australian tours in 1939 and 1940 which, again and again, describe her as the blonde "veritable embodiment of traditional Viennese Joie de Vivre."¹⁵ Could it be that the highly competent dancer Melzer, was deliberately performing Bloch's "unconditional Austrian" to shield herself from further possible discrimination? Another review describes her as "a real Viennese beauty, the blonde Melitta scores her greatest triumph as the Madonna in *The Christmas Song*, a number comprised mainly of miming."¹⁶

As a reader I am alerted by the description of this "miming" – is Melzer, or are indeed the whole Bodenwieser Ballet and their choreographer, miming a cultural identity that shields them from possible anti-semitic discrimination, potential further persecution of themselves or their families abroad, or from their own personal trauma? Is the persecuted blonde Jewish refugee dancer with no possibility of returning to her home country performing a staged "triumphant" crypto-Judaic conversion to a Mother Mary in an ultra-Christian narration?

Did the Modern Dance company's conversion to deliver a set of crowd-pleasing narratives including the Christian nativity story performed in Tasmanian springtime, serve to ensure the company's survival in unpredictable circumstances? Would the exposure of Frau Bodenwieser as the Jewish Frau Rosenthal have stood in



Melitta Melzer 1940

the way of establishing a new professional grounding in Sydney? Jan Poddebsky (2019) suggests that the arrival and potential stay of Bodenwieser and her pianist Marcel Lorber in Australia in 1939, after the South American tour and a brief stay in New Zealand, was indeed problematic and fragile - note the description of Bodenwieser as Rosenthal here:

According to official records dated 12.10.39 Snider and Dean Theatres Ltd 'who had arranged for Gertrude Rosenthal to visit this country for the purpose of giving performances at certain theatres under their control' changed their mind and wanted to be 'relieved of their responsibility'. A further letter dated 13.10.39 states that Bodenwieser and Lorber had exhausted all avenues of obtaining engagements and that attempts to set up a school in Sydney 'were extremely remote'. It would seem that they were perilously close to losing their privilege (sic) to stay in Australia. It seems that Vera Matthews came to the rescue by sharing her studio space so that Bodenwieser could begin teaching.¹⁷

It appears that Bodenwieser's Jewish heritage, and perhaps notions of her enforced exile, stayed a guarded secret shielded from young Australian dancers who worked with her in the late 1940's and 1950's. Barbara Cuckson (2019), in a private email, describes the shock of ex-company member Elaine Vallance, who had danced with the company in the 1950's, to hear that Bodenwieser was described as "Jewish choreographer" in a research project by German dance maker Jochen Roller in 2014.¹⁸

Conclusion

Gertrud Bodenwieser is exemplary for an educated Jewish modernist woman of "enormous drive and courage" (Cuckson 2015) who subscribed to humanist emancipatory ideals of equality and

freedom from cultural repression and of personal expression, and to twentieth century arts avant-garde forms of cultural experiment and innovation. In this search for a better, morally liberated and more just world she was not alone, but in good company of numerous other progressive and assimilated European Jewish-born citizens of the time, all of them persecuted or exiled from Europe – be that the choreographer Valeska Gert, the writer Hannah Arendt, the director Max Reinhardt, or the vastly influential Sigmund Freud. Before and during her exile, her work as a choreographer and professional company director depended on commercial agents "who exerted a certain amount of pressure on her to include in her programme dances that coincided with the popular idea of artists from Vienna, especially the Viennese Waltzes."¹⁹ Continuing to dance in exile, and therewith offering employment for her dancers, while coping with the terror, hostility and vulnerability of persecution and exile was a heroic balancing act of double dancing between radical and escapist culture. This included an erasing of any visible trace of a public Jewishness through a mimed and displayed Austrian authenticity of her displaced dancers.

Bodenwieser's work survives in two continents – in Europe as part of a nearly lost memory of a Jewish dance diaspora culture, that must be honoured, remembered and articulated as such, and in Australia and New Zealand as a driving force of a white settler Modern Dance culture that had central European roots, and that influenced generations of dancers. Her book *The New Dance*, with foreword by Marie Cuckson, offers a *Bekentnis* – an affirmation-for Bodenwieser, against any tradition be that religious or cultural. Bodenwieser finishes her book with "a last word" to "young dancers of the future." Perhaps we can read this text as a hidden testimony that describes her own journey. Perhaps it articulates the challenges she faced in her relentless navigation through a hugely chaotic world she lived and succeeded in as a dance visionary who believed in non-conformism, progress and equality: "To have followed your convictions, undeterred by material hardships or by the encasing wall of prejudice" (1960:98).

Notes

¹ Bodenwieser herself mentions in program notes to an Italian tour in the 1930's that she had been performing publicly since 1909, though there is no evidence of that.

² Poddebsky (2019) suggests that in order to marry Rosenthal, Bodenwieser would have un-convert first again to become officially konfessionslos (without faith). We can see the marriage certificate of Bodenwieser dancer Emmy Steininger and Jewish born husband Willy Taussig (Tauszig) of 1935. Both appear as *konfessionslos* in their marriage certificate. As Bodenwieser herself, they were atheists – without faith.

³ Bodenwieser refers in the letter to her sister Franziska Bondi-Hecht, and her nephew Karl Hecht, who she managed to get visas to escape to Colombia. They arrived after Bodenwieser had left for New Zealand. Karl – Carlos – Hecht was grateful for this life-saving support, and provided his aunt with a private income after the war, until her death. The husband of Franziska, Otto Hecht was taken from their apartment in Paris by Nazi officials and subsequently killed. They returned an urn with his ashes to the family.

⁴Bodenwieser, G. (1926). *Dancing as a factor in education*. London: Dancing Times, November 1926:194. Translated from the German; cited in Dunlop MacTavish, S. (1992), *Gertrud Bodenwieser, Tänzerin, Choreographin, Pädagogin, Wien-Sidney*. Bremen: Zeichen und Spuren.

⁵Cited in Vernon- Warren 1999:101.

⁶Letter STAK 27/05/1938; Theatermuseum Wien.

⁷Exhibition *Alles tanzt: Kosmos Wiener Tanzmoderne*.

⁸*The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) Nov. 24th 1939. Courtesy of Emmy Steininger, with thanks to Barbara Cuckson.

⁹Unknown author, 1939. Courtesy of Emmy Steininger, with thanks to Barbara Cuckson.

¹⁰Elisabeth Lambert (1915 -2003), war poetry reader *Insurgence* (1939).

¹¹*Brisbane Saturday Evening*, May 25th 1940.

¹²*Viennese Ballet*, Teleradio Saturday May 18th 1940; Sydney; courtesy of Emmy Steininger, with thanks to Barbara Cuckson.

¹³Steininger-Taussig states that they had been working with London Casino Revue organised by Clifford Fischer since 1936. Lawson (2011) expands on this: "The dancers, sailing on the SS Maloja from England, had been engaged for a tour of Australia to appear in two revues staged by the Australian theatrical firm, J C Williamson. In the shows, London Casino: *Folies d'Amour*, and *Around the Clock*, the dancers performed snippets from the Bodenwieser repertoire, including *The Machine*, a version of *Demon Machine*. The Maloja arrived in Melbourne on 7 February 1939."

¹⁴Emmy Steininger Taussig estate item 117, original in German, translated by the author and Barbara Cuckson.

¹⁵*Ballet in Hobart: Originality and Artistry Please*; The Mercury; Friday April 5th 1940 (Hobart, Tasmania). Steininger archive.

¹⁶*Romantic Appeal of Viennese Ballet; Barrier Daily Truth*, Broken Hill, Monday 26th 1940. Courtesy of Emmy Steininger, with thanks to Barbara Cuckson

¹⁷Poddebksy is referring to the restaurant owner and director of the "School of Exercise" Vere Mathews, who offered her studio above her restaurant in Kings Street to Bodenwieser and her dancers as a base in Sydney as from 1940.

¹⁸Roller, J. (2014). *The Source Code – Errand in The Maze*, <http://www.thesourcecode.de>

¹⁹Steininger, E. (1976). *Working with Bodenwieser the Thirties* Hilverding Stiftung , Theatermuseum Wien[unpublished].

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This essay is dedicated to the passionate efforts of Bodenwieser scholar and dancer Jan Poddebksy who passed away on December 20th 2020 in Sydney, Australia.

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