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## The Aristocratic City: The Dance Aesthetic of Dorothee Gunther and the Political Legacy of Francois Delsarte

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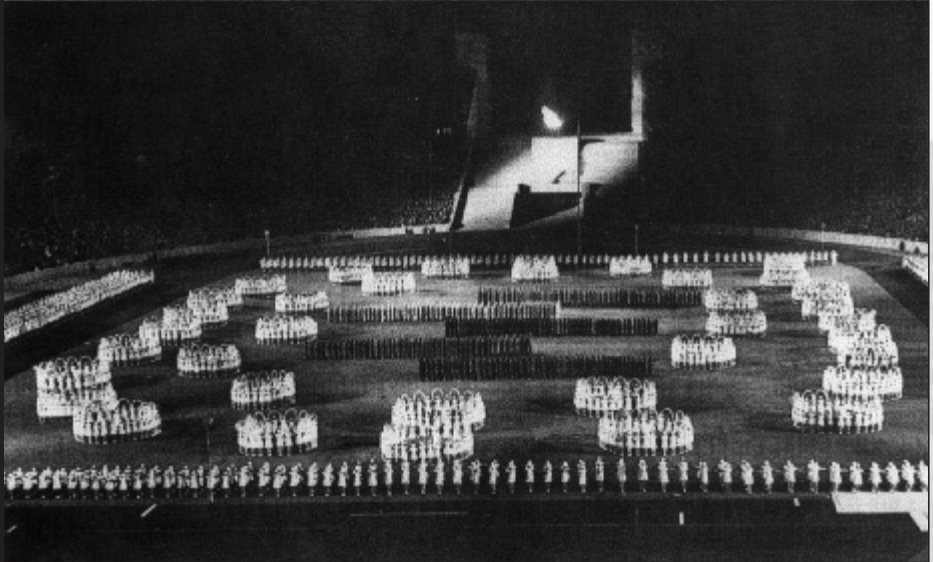
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# THE ARISTOCRATIC CITY: THE DANCE AESTHETIC OF DOROTHEE GÜNTHER AND THE POLITICAL LEGACY OF FRANÇOIS DELSARTE

Karl Toepfer

*The Delsartean philosophy of movement adapted to the currents of modernism because some female disciples of Delsarte succeeded in translating the master's ideas into a modernist idiom compatible with new political and cultural realities. These disciples grasped an underlying principle of the Delsartean system: a body is "free" to the extent that the meanings of its movements can migrate across contexts, that its movements can determine a context as much as a context defines its opportunities for movement. An especially provocative, successful, and even mysterious integration of Delsartean philosophy into modernist performance culture appeared in the work and pedagogy of the German theorist of movement education Dorothee Günther (1896–1975), whose own system for developing body consciousness through movement awareness operated on behalf of a new, feminist, aristocratic political sensibility that proposed to free female bodies from the constraints of different political contexts by creating an almost autonomous social organization, the "aristocratic city," capable of preserving its members' privileged, emancipated status in any political context, even Nazism.*

The political legacy of the "system" for producing bodily communication in performance devised by François Delsarte (1811–1871) is complex and deserving of attention to manifestations in modernism that have so far eluded consideration. Here I examine the effect of Delsartean thinking in developing a unique, innovative, and controversial strand of aristocratic aesthetics within the feminist body culture of Germany during the Weimar Republic. On the

**Deutsche Reigen at the 1936 Berlin Olympics**, choreography by Dorothee Günther. The picture above records a rehearsal for the performance. *Images from Mueller and Stöckemann, Jeder Mensch ist ein Tänzer, 1993, p. 179.*

one hand, reaching fulfillment in the United States, the Delsartean system of bodily signification is easily associated with the formation of democratic institutions in a young country insofar as the system conveyed the idea that it was 1) the revelation of a “universal” communication language which was “understandable” to all categories of audience; and 2) “accessible” to almost anyone who wished to learn it, which is not to say that all classes of people participated in the educational practices of the system. While the communication language was supposedly accessible to any spectator of it, mastery of the language as a performer remained a practical possibility only for persons allowed to circulate within gentrified sectors of society. Because it purported to describe a gestural code that transcended any context and allowed a body to be “understood” in any environment, the system was especially appealing to women, who saw in it an opportunity to free their bodies and identities from the constraints, from the “contexts,” from the images of their sex that circumscribed their lives intolerably. Delsarte’s ideas made them aware of the expressive power of their bodies. On the other hand, the appeal of the system arose from its promise of class mobility to its students. While it did not strive to cultivate individual expressiveness, the system nevertheless elevated those who practiced it by linking superior moral character to the masterful performance of particular gestures, poses, and movements. The system simultaneously made its practitioner more desirable, more refined, and more remote as a representative (or impersonator) of an upper class sensibility.

The aristocratic pretensions embedded within the moral philosophy of the Delsartean system probably achieved their most successful articulation in the work of his ardent disciple, Genevieve Stebbins (1857–?), an actress, who became a teacher, theorist, and writer and included some dance in her performances. She promoted the idea that female bodies could be educated to signify the purity and nobility of spirit identified with classical works of art (Ruyter 1999, 89–113). But as modernist aesthetics spread throughout the twentieth century, Delsartean ideas of performance lost credibility, if they were not repudiated altogether. For example, the “realism” advocated by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) stressed the importance of the performer’s emotional connection to an imaginary character and of an empirical approach to any representation of “life”: Performers should “build” performances from observations of the life lived by a character beyond the stage and the story, and they should find within themselves an emotional connection to their observations that made their performances “believable” to audiences (Stanislavsky 1949).

Expressionism, emanating primarily from Germanic culture during its glory years from approximately 1906 to 1924, offered an entirely different direction: the performer should discover “inner” sources of truth that expose a profound conflict between Self and World and release repressed regions of identity from their imprisonment within “natural” or given forms (including

bodies), an approach elegantly summarized in the assertion by Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) that the purpose of performance is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange (143–145). At any rate, the “isms” defining modernism promoted the power of “new” aesthetic experiences to amplify the individuality of the performer and the spectator. By 1900, Delsarte’s ideas seemed un-modern to many educators and performance professionals insofar as his system was all about respect for traditional (if not archaic) codes of signification that merely insulated both performers and audiences from “life”—from both the world and the self. Stanislavsky offered perhaps the most systematic and vigorous critique of codified bodily expression. After all, Delsarte’s notion of a “universal” gestural code was an elaborate extension of a French inclination toward codification in all matters that, at least in relation to bodily communication, had already and long ago achieved perhaps its most refined articulation in the self-consciously insular regulation of ballet culture. Indeed, what was “universal” (meaning “traditional,” a code word for venerating a politically conservative “understanding” of “the world”) if it was not also insulated from external pressures, from fashion, from some urge to change the meaning or circumstances of “life”?

It is, however, a mistake to assume that Delsartean philosophy failed to adapt to the modernist current. Some female disciples of Delsarte succeeded in translating the master’s ideas into a modernist idiom compatible with new political and cultural realities. These disciples grasped an underlying principle of the Delsartean system: a body is “free” to the extent that the meanings of its movements can migrate across contexts, that its movements can determine a context as much as a context defines its opportunities for movement. An especially provocative, successful, and even mysterious integration of Delsartean philosophy into modernist performance culture appeared in the work and pedagogy of the German theorist of movement education Dorothee Günther (1896–1975), whose own system for developing body consciousness through movement awareness operated on behalf of a new, feminist, aristocratic political sensibility.

Günther’s vision of an urbane, aristocratic society evolved out of her desire to create a school that would supersede the academic communities which had educated her. One might even say that her image of an aristocratic society was above all a school pervaded by the erotic aura of a highly idiosyncratic and complex pedagogy for moving bodies in relation to space and to each other. She was born in Gelsenkirchen, Germany in 1896, but spent her childhood in Berlin.<sup>1</sup> At first, she studied to become an artist, attending art schools in Dessau and Hamburg. In 1916–1917, however, she worked as an intern for a stage director at the Hamburg State Theatre, and as a result she became much more conscious of bodies as dynamic, kinetic forms. Classes in nude drawing at the art school made her aware of how “unorganic” modern bodies had become through the suppression of expressive movement (Günther 1962, 220).

Günther soon became a student of the Vienna-based American physician Bess Mensendieck (1864–1957), who sought to promote a modern, emancipated image of female beauty through an instructional method that combined nudity with the healthy, idealized performance of commonplace actions, such as lifting a heavy box or placing a jar on a shelf (e.g., Mensendieck 1931, 96–123). Mensendieck had been a student of the American advocate of “harmonic gymnastics,” Genevieve Stebbins, who zealously endorsed Delsarte’s idea that the body reveals the moral status of the person: “To each spiritual function responds a function of the body. To each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act” (qtd. in Stebbins 1902, 420). But Stebbins was not an uncritical disciple, for she did not entirely accept Delsarte’s belief that his system was the revelation of a divine order that moved people closer toward God (*Delsarte System of Oratory*, 449–50). Indeed, she detached the Delsartean philosophy from any religious idea of “moral character” and instead emphasized the belief that “the beautiful” and the morally upright “naturally” entailed each other. Stebbins’s notion of “harmonic gymnastics” proposed to educate female bodies to achieve idealized (“classical”) poses and movements that signified the elegance, grace, poise, and voluptuousness associated with a refined, upper class female identity. Mensendieck also sought to teach women how to move with aristocratic beauty, but her thinking was much more daring and original than that of Stebbins or Delsarte, and, because of her medical training, she further asserted that a body was not beautiful if it was not healthy. In 1896, she began photographing herself nude while performing numerous simple actions in an idealized manner, and these pictures formed the basis for her enormously successful book, *Körperkultur des Weibes* [Body Culture of Woman] (1906). Nudity was essential to getting the student to look at the body, not costumes or environments, as the foundation for a healthy and beautiful female identity. She perceived the nakedness of the moving body as a sign of civilized refinement and the basis for a new and exquisitely sophisticated urban society; nudity for her did not connote, as it tended to do for most of those responsible for German *Nacktkultur*, greater closeness to nature nor a revelation of some buried, “primitive” level of being. Nakedness was an “elemental” device in “harmonizing” the body with practical actions in an advanced civilization [fig.1]. For Mensendieck, nudity perfected Stebbins’s ambition to detach the idea of “moral character” from the religious interpretation that Delsarte imposed upon it. She quoted Nietzsche and Goethe, not religious texts, as authorities who inspired her, and she reduced the concept of moral character to the performance of postures that were “correct” and beautiful because medical science had determined their superior healthiness. She linked nakedness to the signification of moral integrity, to a scientific perception of self, which was the foundation for seeing the “elemental” forms of movement in daily life that defined the capacity of a body to project an aristocratic identity. But the “harmonizing” of “elemental” poses and




Figure 1

**Bess Mensendieck performing an exercise that will help women achieve a “correct” synthesis of physical and spiritual well-being.** Mensendieck promoted awareness of all parts of the female body, including the nose, the hair, the mouth, the toes, and insisted that such awareness was most acute in relation to the most commonplace movements, such as walking, bending, reaching, and kneeling, which all required their “correct” performance. *From Mensendieck, Körperkultur der Frau, 1906, Figure 31.*


movements actually meant that the aim of instruction was to affirm the authority of types and typologies to produce powerful group identities rather than unique individual identities.

Günther supplemented her mastery of the Mensendieck method with the study of movement theories promoted by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) and Rudolf Laban (1879–1958). The Swiss Dalcroze advocated a pedagogy that sought to direct students toward the formation of a new European society strengthened by an acute awareness of bodily freedom, health, and expressiveness. His teaching involved the application of an elaborate typology of rhythmic units or tropes that could be combined or recombined into an almost infinite variety of synchronized and yet improvised group movements [fig. 2]. From Laban, however, Günther most likely learned that powerful group identities did not depend on synchronization of movements from external rhythmic cues in the


music nor even on any music and synchronization at all. Laban’s most famous student, Mary Wigman, saw movement as the basis for revealing the unique personality or individuality of the dancer, and her group compositions were engaging to the extent that they dramatized her anxiety about the power of a group to efface the individuality of a solo dancer. For Günther, movement education had little to do with developing unique personalities and much to do with creating unique group identities governed by the subordination of bodies to a typological or “elemental” (as she called it) system of signification. Dalcroze saw the formation of a sophisticated society as dependent upon a teaching method that transcended any particular context; Laban, a turbulent, restless figure whose choreographic imagination lacked a strong image of modern urban life, had considerable difficulty envisioning society as anything



Obr. 92.





Obr. 93.



Obr. 94.


181.

Hudební skladba čís. 42.  
 Rytmus: 3/4  atd.  
 Útvar: Zástup.  
 Základní postavení: Stoj zánožný levou, skrčit upažmo, předloktí vzhůru.  
 I. 6 rychlých drobných běhových skoků kupředu, paže vydrží ve skrčení upažmo, předloktí vzhůru, začíná levá, 6 skoků do stoje spatného (obr. 94).  
 II. 3 výskoky snožmo na místě, se současnými potlesky do dlaní.  
 Opakuj dle libosti.



182.

*Doprovody (klopení, převracení, otevření a srovnání rukou, hmitání paží).*

Hudební skladba čís. 39.  
 Rytmus: C  atd.  
 Útvar: Rozstup.  
 Základní postavení: Stoj spatný, předpažit.  
 I. 1. skrčit upažmo před prsa.  
 2. třít vpřed.  
 3. skrčit před prsa.  
 4. třít vpřed, ruce vztyčit.




Figure 2

One of hundreds of exercise diagrams for Czech instructors of the Dalcroze method of rhythmic gymnastics in Volume 1 of *Zaklady rytmického telocviku Sokoleskeho 1928*, p. 227, an enormous treatise compiled by the Sokol teachers organization and probably the most complete description of the Dalcroze method ever published.



more than a powerful cult inspired by a mysterious teacher. Günther was unique in identifying a modern, cosmopolitan society, not with a new teaching ideology nor with a new teaching personality, but with a new type of *school*.

From 1919 until 1923, Günther taught anatomy, movement drawing, and cultural history at Mensendieck schools in Berlin, Breslau, Hamburg, and Munich. In 1924, she founded her own school in Munich, which provided teacher education in the areas of “gymnastics, musical rhythmic education, dance body education, and modern artistic dance.” Even in her own school, however, Günther never actually taught movement or choreography, but always only anatomy, drawing, and cultural history. Her great skill was as an administrator and educational theorist. She knew how to set up collaborations, partnerships, teams, groups. Dance was always subordinate to gymnastics in her pedagogic system, but unlike Mensendieck, Günther focused on relations between music and movement, indeed to such a degree that no other school could claim to provide such a rigorous unity of music and movement. By the mid-1930s, the Günther school enrolled about 200 girls and 60 women “seminarists” (teacher-training students). The course of study was two years, with each year beginning in mid-September and ending in mid-July. The cost was 800 marks per year. Within the school, Günther was a somewhat aloof, authoritarian figure, inclined toward a dry, detached, even prim style of management, which nevertheless inspired considerable warmth of feeling toward her. She commanded the school without inserting herself into all aspects of the student’s education, as was the case, for example, in Mary Wigman’s school in Dresden, where Wigman never hesitated to plunge into movement performed by her students.<sup>2</sup> Wigman formed her image of communal identity above all through performance that she could choreograph, whereas Günther saw her school as the image of the society she wished to inhabit.

Günther also began her long collaboration with the composer Carl Orff (1895–1982) in 1924, when she did choreography for his adaptations of the Monteverdi operas *Orpheus* and *Tanz der Spröde* [Dance of the Brittle Ones] (Orff, *Dokumentation* II, 23; Orff, *Dokumentation* III, 10–15). Her career evolved in conjunction with a complex set of collaborations, first with Orff, then with the musical instrument maker Gunild Keetman (1904–1991). In 1928, she began another long collaboration with the astonishingly beautiful choreographer and dancer Maja Lex (1906–1986), who eventually became the most complete theorist of Günther’s pedagogical method. The Günther school merged with the Berlin school of Bertha Trümpy in 1933, when the Nazis forbade foreigners to own educational institutions in Germany; Trümpy, a student of Wigman, was Swiss. In 1933, when Orff withdrew from teaching at the school, Hans Bergese (1910–2000), a student of both Orff and Günther, took over the percussion instruction and collaborated with Keetman

on the musical pedagogy of the school. In 1938, with help from the city of Munich, Günther moved her school from the Luisestrasse to a more prestigious building on the Kaulbachstrasse near the English Garden in the central part of the city. The state granted subsidies to the Günther school from 1931 until 1944, when the Nazis confiscated the Munich school for use as a military headquarters. Allied bombs destroyed the school in January 1945. In 1948, a former student, Baroness Myriam Blanc, invited Günther and Lex to live with her in a sumptuous villa she owned near Rome. Lex returned to Germany in 1953, when Liselotte Diem invited her to teach at the new Sports Academy in Cologne, but Günther remained in Italy until her death in 1975, and it was really Lex who took responsibility for preserving Günther's movement thinking within German dance culture. Lex managed to codify many of Günther's ideas through her collaboration with Graziella Padilla (b. 1939) on the three-volume treatise *Elementarer Tanz*, (Elementary dance) which did not reach publication until 1988, two years after Lex's death.

Unlike Wigman or Laban, Günther did not emphasize the mystique of the teacher as the primary educational influence on the student, nor did she establish performance as the central educational experience of the student. Her focus was always on the school as the controlling force in the formation of consciousness. Yet her idea of the school was largely abstract and dominated by curriculum (cf. Haselbach 54–59; Kugler 2002, 44–47). The physical environment of her school was neither auspicious nor innovative from an architectural or design perspective, judging from descriptions and photographs of it (Morawa 27–32). A Spartan austerity seems to have prevailed; she invested primarily in instructional materials and library books rather than comfortable amenities. The school for Günther was above all an institution (rather than a precise place) in which abstract pedagogic theories achieved their application within a class. A set of pedagogic principles and classroom activities defined the school, which then produced a powerful notion of communal identity that sustained an enduring network of personal friendships. In this sense, Günther's idea of a "school" extended well beyond the physical dimensions or "context" of instruction, as indeed it did after her emigration to Italy, even though, aside from her absorption of the Trümpy school, she had no inclination, as did Laban and Mensendieck and even Dalcroze, of building a network of schools dedicated to her method. Her aristocratic sensibility encouraged a perception of "school" identified with exclusivity of experience.

Günther herself regularly published her ideas in the 1920s and early 1930s, but her most ambitious writing did not appear until 1962, with the publication of *Tanz als Bewegungsphanomen* [Dance as movement phenomenon]. In this work, Günther adopted an anthropological perspective to show how "elementary" principles of movement prevailed across different

cultures and different historical eras. She made frequent reference to the dance cultures of ancient and so-called primitive peoples, not because she believed these peoples were by definition more qualified to represent “elementary” conditions, but because she wished to demonstrate that even the most refined society does not transcend the elementary principles; it only perfects them. For Günther, the elementary or dominant motive for dance, solo or group, is to experience ecstasy and to communicate ecstatic experience (Günther 1962, 95–113). Ascribing such a precise value and function for dance allowed Günther to build a pedagogic system around two fundamental assumptions. 1) What needs to be taught above all is a vocabulary of movement “elements”(like words) that can be recombined, constantly, to produce different meanings (as sentences); the study of meanings assigned to specific configurations of movement is not an important pedagogic task. 2) The application of elementary principles of movement achieves highest expression, not through dance performances for audiences, but through the formation of an exclusive community or society as exemplified by the school itself. While Günther and Lex were responsible, through the Tanzgruppe Günther, for some extraordinary dance performances, including especially Lex’s *Barbarische Suite* [Barbaric Suite](1930) and Günther’s spectacular choreography for the gigantic *Deutsche Reigen* [German Round Dance] at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, the two women remained devoted to Mensendieck, Dalcroze, and even Delsarte in their belief that the prime application of movement education was in the creation of a new, beautified, and feminized social reality, in which the performance of the most ordinary or functional gestures acquired a heightened aesthetic value that signified the immanence of an ecstatic social order.

Günther’s system of elementary movement forms involved the thinking of Carl Orff as much as it did the ideas of Mensendieck, Dalcroze, and Laban. Orff’s *Schulwerk*, first published between 1930 and 1935, became a hugely popular method by which school children could learn about myriad “elemental forms” of music and how to combine the forms to make music in groups (Orff 1976). A set of elemental musical forms might include ostinato, arpeggio, melody in triplets, inverted phrasing, 3/4 rhythm, crescendo, or metallic timbre; these forms achieve communicative value through their combination with other forms, and because the forms are so numerous, the combinatory possibilities are immense. Günther saw how the identification of elementary musical forms could move the study of movement beyond the need to synchronize the body with external rhythmic units or an external controlling “pulse.” But it’s possible also that she was an influence on Orff, for her *Gymnastische Grundübungen* [Rudimentary Gymnastic Exercises] had appeared in 1926, by which time she was operating her own school governed by her own pedagogic system.

Günther used her skill at drawing to explain elementary forms of movement. She devised an elaborate table of elementary movement categories (Günther 1962, 30–31) [fig. 3]. Each movement category entailed an elementary performance mode, which required specific parts of the body to move in particular ways, which she illustrated with a sequence of stick figures that revealed the rhythmic relation between body structure and movement structure [fig.4]. The drawings, as a sequence, indicate that movement conforms to an internal, bodily rhythm. Thus, the performance of an elementary movement like walking, kneeling, rising, leaping, or grasping involves *seeing* how particular body parts function to produce the form of elementary movement. This approach urges the student to move away from the desire to embody imaginary “characters” and toward the image of a body whose expressive power is not dependent on a specific narrative context. The great advantage of the system is that it gives its users tremendous freedom to construct very complex narratives through a process of combining elementary movement forms. And yet the performance of such narratives does not require extraordinary virtuosity of movement within individual performers. For example: one may join a kneeling movement to a bowing movement in linear fashion [fig.5], and then reverse the order of the movements and join them to a rocking movement [fig.6]. The addition of another dancer adds an extraordinary degree of complexity when both dancers perform the same movements but not at the same time nor in the same order nor even at the same tempo [fig.7]. As a group includes more bodies, it defines itself through its capacity to include more elemental forms or more complex concatenations of them [fig.8]. For Günther, group identity did not depend on what movements “signified”; indeed, the whole point of movement education was to move beyond the idea that movements should “refer” to something imaginary or elsewhere. One might even say that the elemental form of an aristocratic worldview or educational theory lies precisely in this notion that movement is “about” the power of bodies to define reality, some precise physical intersection of time and space, rather than to find a place within reality. Günther’s pedagogy embedded a bold implication: Movement that does not extend the application of performance beyond any given context entails low status and is the emblem of an *inferior* magnitude of power. The more detailed the context for performance, the more the performance submits to the authority of an illusion, a fantasy, a thing imagined rather than realized. Of course, an aristocratic sensibility cannot exist without insisting upon the exclusivity of its domain and the inferiority of those excluded. The stick figures never appear in any context because the elementary forms can operate in any context. The *Grundübungen* limited itself to fifty exercises. It did not describe all elementary movement forms, nor did it even attempt to

Figure 3

Dorothee Günther's Table of Elementary Movements Preceding Movement Education from *Tanz als Bewegungspänomen*, 1962, pages 30–31.

<b>Infant movements</b>	Bending Stretching Raising Sinking							Inclining Turning	
<b>Transition to upright bearing</b>	Sitting Standing Falling	Crawling Creeping		Rocking				Sprawling	
<b>Development of fundamental movement modes</b>	Coiling Rolling	Walking	Running	Leaping	Jumping	Swinging	Turning	Pushing	Pulling
<b>Unfolding functional forms</b>	Tumbling (somersault)	Hovering Balancing Climbing	Shifting to any possible direction	Sprinting Braking	Leaping deep, wide, high	Juggling Tossing Striking Throwing	Circling	Thrusting Lifting	Supporting Bearing

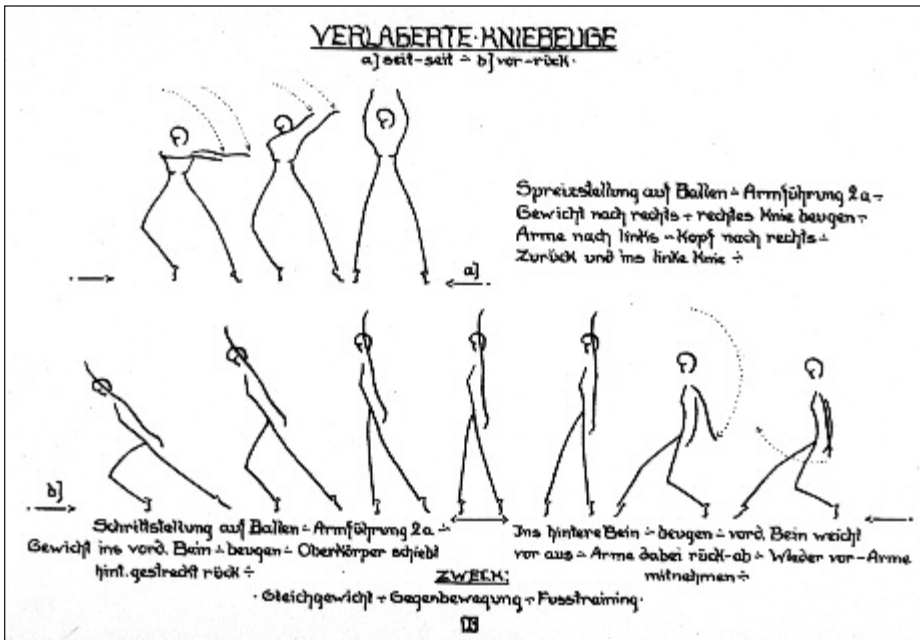


Figure 4

**Kneeling movements** from Günther, *Rhythmische Grundübung*, 1926, p. 32, a more expressionistic treatment of the diagram device than appears in Figure 2.

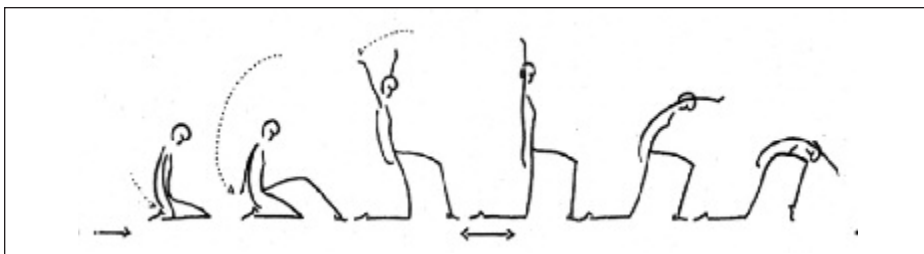


Figure 5

**Kneeling and bowing movement** from Günther, *Rhythmische Grundübung*, 1926, p. 19.

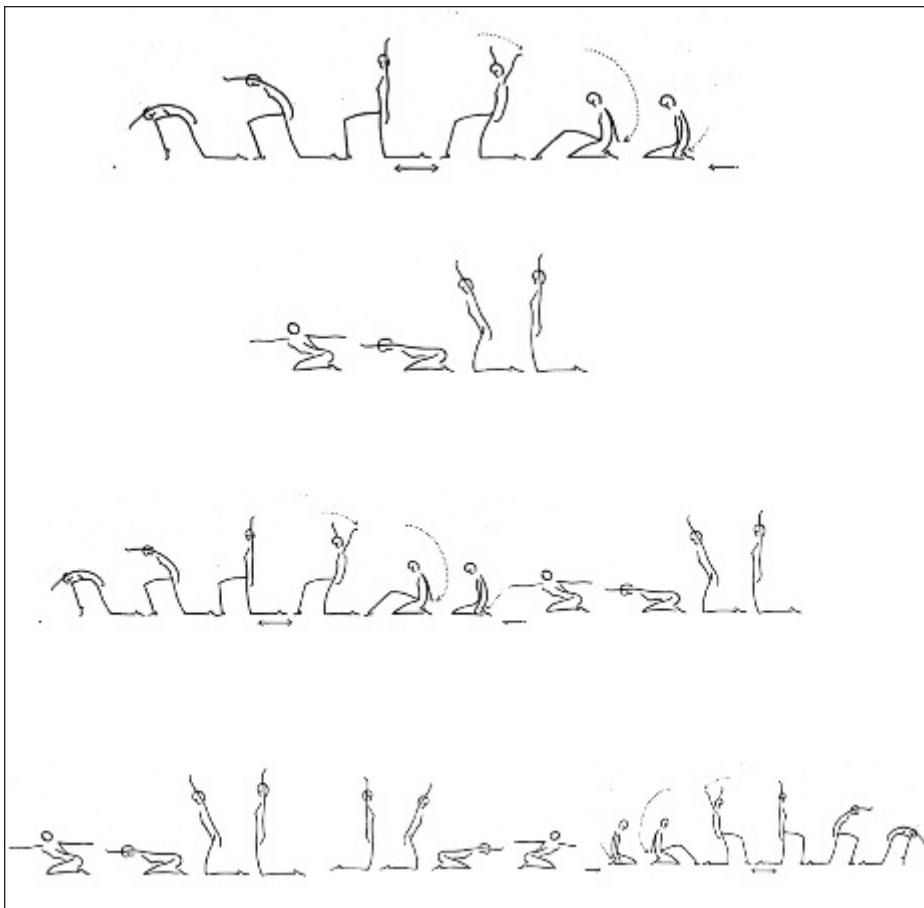


Figure 6

**Kneeling and bowing reversed with rocking movement added.**

Compilation derived from separate drawings in Günther, *Rhythmische Grundübung*, 1926.

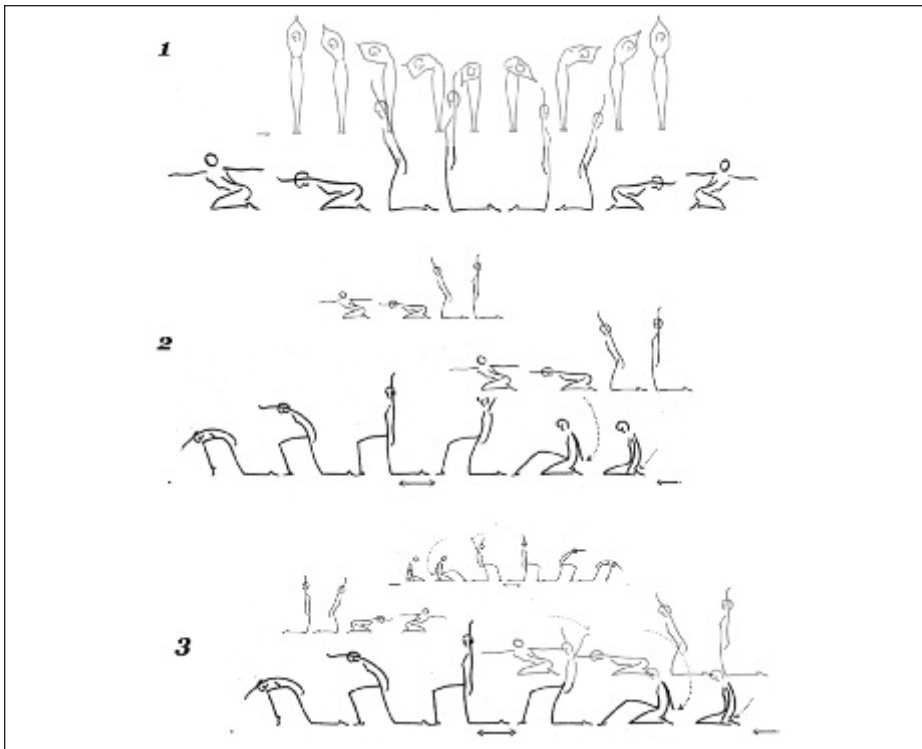


Figure 7

**Combinations of elementary movements with multiple dancers.**

Compilation derived from figures in Günther, *Rhythmische Grundübung*, 1926.

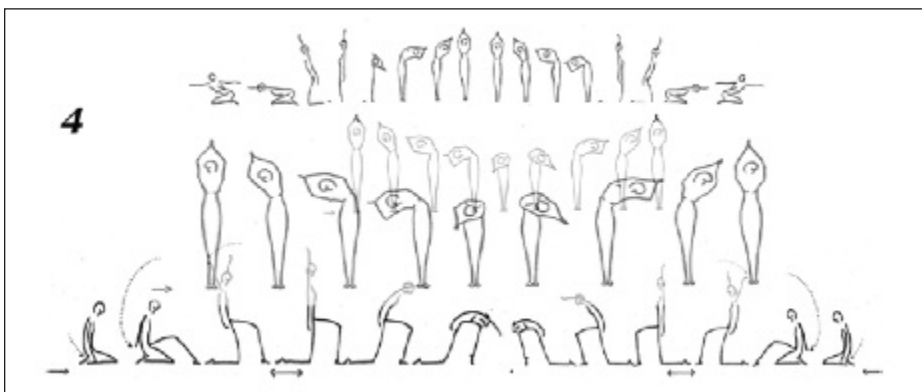


Figure 8

**Complex concatenations of elementary forms in a group.**

Compilation derived from drawings in Günther, *Rhythmische Grundübung*, 1926.

show possibilities of combining elementary forms. Either task would result in a book of enormous proportions. Moreover, Günther's book did not address at all relations between music and movement, although her thinking in relation to this theme was astonishingly original.

With Orff and Gunild Keetman, Günther developed a program for integrating movement education with music-making, so that performers alternated between the roles of dancer and musician. Keetman designed and built musical instruments used by the students, including recorders of various sizes, xylophones, marimbas, several sizes of hand drums, tambourines and gongs of various sizes, and bells (Ronnenfeld 99–104). Indeed, the making of the instruments by the students was as much a part of their musical education as music-making and dancing. The Günther students also made such prominent use of kettledrums that performance on these beautiful, copper-parabolic drums became a memorable scenic element of Günther choreography [fig.9] (Orff, *Dokumentation* III, 191). In any case, performance of the orchestral accompaniment was as much a part of the choreography as the performance by the dancers, and dancers and musicians exchanged places during pieces as well as between pieces (Orff, *Dokumentation* III, 135–152). Keetman apparently composed most of the music for instruction as well as for public performance, so her compositions developed out of improvised classroom exercises that addressed a particular problem of music-movement relations. The creation of choreography that included the music-making further advanced Günther's ambition of expanding the contexts in which aesthetic movement could occur. The integration of music-making with dance movement did not evolve in theatres, but in classrooms, studios, corridors, yards, gardens, and terraces—within the school complex as a whole (cf. Kugler 2002, 241–269). But this determination to expand the contexts for aesthetic movement, to encourage the performance of elementary forms “everywhere,” also brought into question the way people observe dance, as is evident from the photo documentation of the school published by Kugler (2002) and Abraham and Haft (1986), and in the third volume of the Orff *Dokumentation* (1976). The spectator assumed a dynamic identity in relation to performance, insofar as performance migrated across performance spaces or did not fit into an “appropriate” context. A sort of photographic choreographic sensibility emerged with the spectator expected to view the performance from different angles [figs.10], and Lex eventually became preoccupied with the impact of film and video to shape choreographic imagination. But the integration of music and movement implied the general integration of bodies and things, which meant that Günther's aesthetic relied heavily on the manipulation of props, such as swords, staffs, cymbals, batons, tambourines, and other instruments, particularly wood flutes, whose performance while dancing invariably conveys a mysterious and even eerie Pied Piper image. Costuming also conformed to a typological mode of thinking.





Figure 9

**Kettledrummer-dancers in the Tanzgruppe Günther.**

*From Mueller and Stöckemann, Jeder Mensch ist ein Tänzer, 1993, p. 153, photo by Siegfried Enkelmann.*

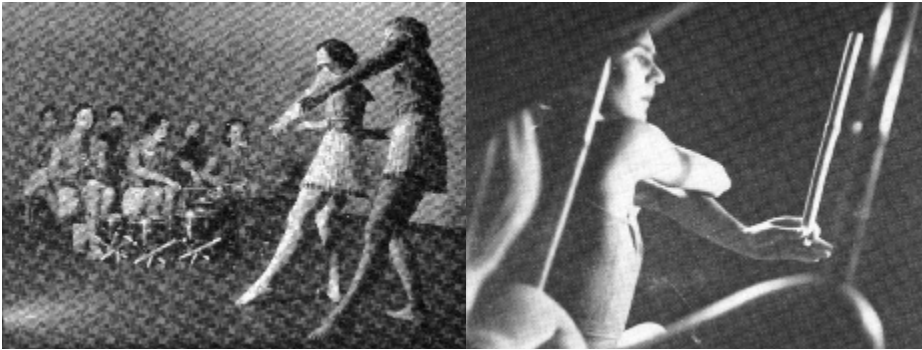


Figure 10

**Dancer-musicians of the Tanzgruppe Günther seen from unusual spectator viewing positions.**

*From Abraham and Haft, Maja Lex, 1986.*

The costumes for her students consisted of tunics, short skirts, or dresses that evoked archaic Germanic styles peculiar to the centuries before 1000 A.D. [figs.11, 12]. These costumes, which she sometimes designed herself (Haselbach 51–52), functioned as uniforms that produced the unusual effect of seeming both intensely feminine and militaristic at the same time. It may be that Günther saw such costumes as designating an “elementary” historical realization of aristocratic female being. At any rate, with these Teutonic garments, she linked the modernity of her pedagogic method and the emancipation of female bodies to a historical archetype that transcended the need to situate movement within a specifically modern context other than her school itself. However, the Mensendieck legacy of nudity in movement education and Günther’s interest in nude imagery of movement apparently



*Figure 11*

**Group dance with swords by the Tanzgruppe Günther, around 1932. From *Abraham and Haft*, Maja Lex, 1986.**



*Figure 12*

**Tanzgruppe Günther dancers in pseudo-archaic costumes, mid-1930s. From *Abraham and Haft* 1986.**

remained a part of the Günther school pedagogy. Maja Lex took nude photographs of the students at the beginning of their education and then after 14 months to show the effect of the Günther pedagogy on the expressive power of their bodies (Padilla 79).

Probably the most successful artistic representation of Günther's method was Lex's choreography for *Barbarische Suite*, which premiered, with tremendous success, at the Munich Dance Congress of 1930. In collaboration with the composer, Gunild Keetman, Lex designed the work as a complicated assemblage of elementary movement forms that made no reference to an imaginary world fashioned out of a storytelling impulse. "Barbaric" in this instance was synonymous with "elementary," the naked disclosure of forms whose beauty did not depend on a story to verify their communicative value. As Günther herself remarked in a 1931 article for *Schrifttanz*, *Barbarische Suite* was "not programmatic" and was not the expression of a "barbaric imagination" nor an effort to imagine a barbaric experience. The piece, she said, arose out of Lex's ambition to create a dance work that was "free" of the "fantasy worlds" that pervaded contemporary dance. For Lex, the main objective of the piece was not to "express something," but to show a "ceaseless movement dynamic" that animated all parts of the body with "unending variation." It did not matter if some people apparently suggested that, because it did not treat movement as the expression of an imaginary life, the piece was not dance, for a more important task was to reveal the life, the motivating power of movement forms themselves: "Just as wave after wave rolls in, rises, crashes, and gathers again, the primal element of ceaseless movement becomes the primal-barbaric [*Urtyp-barbarisch*]." The piece emerged from an improvisatory interaction between choreographer, composer, and dancers. Dancers and musicians exchanged roles, with each dance in the suite performed by six to eight dancers while the orchestra consisted of four or five musicians. The orchestra played a strange assortment of instruments, including four types of wood flutes, two large kettledrums and one small kettledrum, a bass drum, a snare drum, a Chinese drum, a tambourine, a "shell drum," three woodblocks, three Chinese temple blocks, castanets, bamboo sticks, four gongs, cymbals, various rattles, several xylophones, and twenty other wood, rubber, and metal noisemakers, including a broom. But the choreography included the performance of the music. The suite encompassed five distinct dances, beginning with "Driving Rhythms," which involved six dancers, who "rolled right and left" in two rows toward "the center," before forming a single row whose "pushing" movements unfolded in "always new variations." These movements alternated between "aggressive bouncing" and "springy" undulation; this tension apparently caused the single row to break in two again. The second dance, the "Staff Dance," presented Lex "alone," but "next to her" were two "sitting dancers" who pounded rhythms with bamboo "staves." When Lex stood up, the

staff beaters clapped their hands, while the orchestra accompanied and incorporated the foot rattles. Lex moved slowly and deliberately with her bamboo staff, to evoke an aura of “panther-like calmness and readiness to pounce.” However, Günther’s language never reaches further into metaphor or narrative imagery than this reference to “panther-like.” She describes each dance as a set of abstract relations between movements (“bouncing”), emotional qualities (“springy”), quantities, and geometric forms (“rows”). Here is how she describes the third dance of the suite, “Kettledrum Dance,” which follows an “ABA form” and involves eight dancers:

The kettledrums take the center of the performance space and their voices are likewise composed into the orchestra. Two rows push from the sides toward the drums; the pulsating rhythm quakes and intensifies with each tonal shift, until each row thrusts a dancer to a drum and the other dancers form an ostinato, surging, pressing block. The two drum dancers in an echo rhythm leap wildly with each exchange [of dancer-drummers]. The rhythm freely expands and reverts [to its original pulse] by the end, just like the group, the entire dance. (Günther 1931, 35)

The fourth dance, “Canon,” inspires similarly abstract language, but the emphasis here was on how “the triangle form controls the whole.” The five dancers stressed the use of arm movements in relation to kneeling movements to produce a “dynamically detached ornament” within the ABA structure. The final section, the “Leaping Dance,” was a “*furioso* for eight dancers” that consumed “the entire space.” Two diagonals of dancers wearing foot rattles, through a sequence of leaps, turns, and thrusts, collided and became entangled in a central ball, then split up and assumed a mood of “stamping expectation,” while watching two dancers “from the corners” perform increasingly bigger leaps. But the climax was “*not* the tutti from the accompanying orchestra,” but the complete takeover of the accompaniment by the sound of the rattles on sixteen feet. The piece concluded with the image of “stamping expectation” before a dancer poised to leap and at the same time in a dramatic state of rest. Elizabeth Selden (1888–?) regarded *Barbarische Suite* as the most beautiful example of the “absolute dance” toward which she thought the modern, “free” dance should aspire:

The “Barbaric Suite” moved swiftly along the keen edge of absolute rightness; one step to the right and it became too mechanized—Tiller-girl drill; one step to the left, and it ran dangerously near the ordinary, “primitive,” stamping orgy. But it kept well away from both. Such a perfect union of greatest precision with utter physical abandon is a most unusual feat. The rhythms employed were, throughout, physical, not musical or mechanical rhythms, yet they appeared as an entirely impersonal element, so highly stylized was the space pattern. The space pattern, in turn, was not mere frigid geometricalization; the movement never lost its closeness to life.... (Selden 1935, 106)

Even though the dancers wore Viking-style tunics that left their legs naked, no one could see in the dance the projection of a fantasy, a coherent story. A social, cultural, erotic, or historical context for the action was utterly absent, and Günther's references even to the physical context for the movement provide no sense of the space she imagined for the dances. And yet the piece was hardly lacking in emotional excitement, considering its great popularity during the early 1930s (Padilla 86). Drama resulted from the perception that an alluring, aristocratic, female group identity emerged out of a power to accommodate a basic, intense conflict between elementary forms of movement and music-making. The body achieved its "identity" as the instrument for mediating and accommodating the conflict; this identity was "fullest" when the body (and then the group as a whole) was able to unite both movement and music within itself. Here the power of a woman did not depend on her ability to adapt to a "role," to realize a fantasy of herself, but on her ability to make "naked" the tension between abstract forms that defined her identity. Freedom meant the power to move independently of external pressures (or pulses), to accompany one's self, so to speak, without any determining context. In this sense, the cerebral, aristocratic female group was "barbaric," capable, as Günther suggested, of creating and mastering "upheaval."

Günther never published a comprehensive theory that encompassed these complexities of her thinking about relations between movement, music, space, and the body itself. This task she left to Lex, who spent over fifty years compiling *Elementarer Tanz*. However, Lex lacked the theoretical imagination capable of articulating the power of Günther's aesthetic. She used the same figure drawing technique as Günther to illustrate movements, perhaps with much greater precision than her teacher [fig.13]. And she described in much greater detail the relation of movement to space by indicating the direction of elementary movements, the distance covered by a movement, and the way in which elementary forms operated as motifs or sequential units within a large choreographic structure and a zone of performance capable of tremendously complex group configurations. She devoted considerable space to arm and hand movements and showed the dramatic appeal of keeping arms and hands in tension with each other as well as in competition with the legs for attention to dance expressivity. But her discussion of relations between music and movement, though very detailed, scarcely moved beyond Dalcroze's exercises for synchronizing bodily movement (mostly steps) with metrically calculated rhythms. She made only cursory allusion to the peculiar sound world that Keetman's music created for Günther's students in the 1920s, and she acknowledged the integration of music and movement merely by listing ways in which the body makes sound, such as clapping, stomping, finger snapping, breathing. Lex and Padilla said nothing about costuming, props,

4/4

R vor L vor R vor  R rück L vor

5 4 3 2 1 AP

1 2 1

Bogen mit rechtsstehendem Partner

3/4  R L R | L R L | R L R | L R L |

vor rück vor

Bogen mit linksstehendem Partner

3/4  L R L | R L R | L R L | R L L |

vor rück vor

2. Verengung und Erweiterung des Kreises – kurvig

2.1. Verengung durch spiralförmige Reduzierung der Peripherie

Figure 13

Diagrams of elementary movement forms in *Maja Lex*, *Elementarer Tanz*, 1988.

or spectator positioning. Nor did they move beyond simply identifying elementary forms to offer any theory for combining, configuring, or sequencing elementary forms into narrative structures; they merely remarked that it was possible to combine forms. In addressing teachers of young people, the authors seem to assume that their writing must avoid all philosophical complexity regarding the “meaning” of their pedagogy. In contrast, Günther, in *Tanz als Bewegungsphanomen*, at least argued that the point of identifying and mastering elementary forms was to move the body toward ecstatic experience. The most impressive feature of the treatise was the section on elementary forms of group movement (“Die Anpassung”), in which Lex saw the movement of bodies in terms of elementary geometric forms, the circle, the spiral, and the curve, and their manifold arabesque variations [fig.14]. This utterly abstract, geometrical approach enabled Lex (and Günther) to map out the direction and “flow” of multiple moving bodies as if they saw the action from high above, overhead, and from a position that the actual spectator never enjoyed. It is remarkable that this incredibly detached way of designing group movement nevertheless produced choreography that captivated audiences throughout Germany, especially at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where the *Deutsche Reigen*, choreographed by Günther, entailed an enormous, ecstatic flow of group movement involving 2500 female dancers whose bodies moved according to a monumental, swirling design of metamorphosing, intersecting, and meshing circles, spirals, curves, and coils [fig. 15]. But Günther used the same technique for the group choreography she did for the Handel operas staged with much success by Hanns Niedecken-Gebhard (1889–1954) in the 1920s.

Nevertheless, the question remains: to what extent did Günther’s method benefit from the Nazi regime or function to advance the ideals of Nazism? Günther joined the Nazi Party in May 1933 (Haselback 60); Lex also joined the same year (Padilla 89). It is not clear to what extent Keetman was actually a member. Günther expected her to join and arranged for her to receive a membership card, but Keetman never acknowledged receipt of the card, and it seems that Günther paid for Keetman’s membership dues (Ronnenfeld 107). Orff never was a member of the Party. After the Nazi takeover, he detached himself from Günther’s school, although he continued to collaborate with her on productions for the Nazis and he and Keetman intensified their partnership in preparing the Orff-Schulwerk. Günther claimed that in early 1933, the Nazis intended to shut down her school unless she developed a closer relation to the Party (Haselbach 60). Orff’s teaching was one problem for the Nazis: he was involved with a Munich lay performance group accused of “communist tendencies” (Haselbach 59). Keetman’s wood flute music was considered anti-Teutonic. Most disturbing of all was the emphasis in the school on “primitive” music-making that involved so many percussion sounds and instruments (Sonner 232). Both Orff and

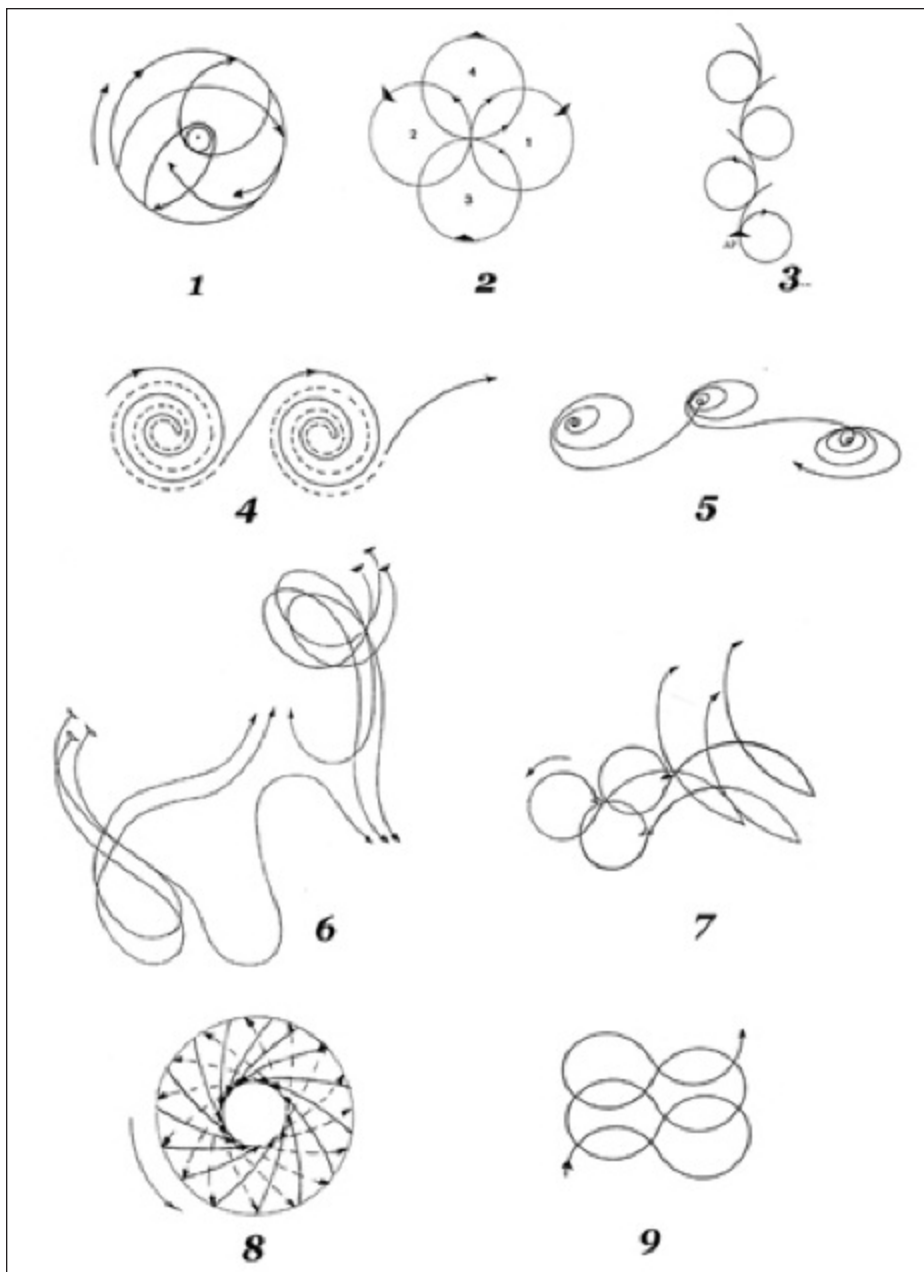


Figure 14

**Elementary wave, spiral, coil, and circular movement forms according to Maja Lex**  
*in Lex and Padilla, Elementarer Tanz, 1988, as if the spectator were high above the dancers.*





Figure 15

**Deutsche Reigen at the 1936 Berlin Olympics**, choreography by Dorothee Günther. The right picture records a rehearsal for the performance. Images from Mueller and Stöckemann, *Jeder Mensch ist ein Tänzer*, 1993, p. 179.

Günther constantly used the word “primitive” to identify origins of elemental forms, which, however, they located in the body, regardless of its cultural affiliation, rather than within cultures themselves. Indeed, in 1937, *Die Musik* published an article critical of the Günther school for its “descent” into “primitivity,” its absorption of alien influences from Asia, and its indifference to a distinct Germanic harmonic tradition. What enfeebled and tarnished the Günther aesthetic was the lack of racial consciousness, a failure to see that the purpose of music and movement was to “purify spirit and instinct” (Sonner 233). The curriculum in music and movement at the school nevertheless remained unchanged after the Nazi takeover, and the concept of elementary forms, which the Nazis identified with primitivity and impure modes of improvisation, remained the guiding pedagogic principle. Günther modified her course in cultural history to accommodate racial theory prescribed by the Nazis. But it is apparent that Günther sought to achieve more than mere compliance with Nazi ideology; she sought to impress the Nazis; she wanted to convince the Nazis that her aesthetic was the revelation of a profound, uniquely Germanic and feminine idea of communal movement and organization. In *Tanzgemeinschaft* [Dance community] (1936), she proposed that dance was an expression of “the people” and national identity insofar as bodily movement unfolded as a highly disciplined production of mass spectacle, a huge “festival” of bodily coordination. She and her Tanzgruppe Günther participated in major Nazi-sponsored dance spectacles in 1934, 1935, 1936, and 1939, and the dance company toured Germany with much success throughout the 1930s. When Günther absorbed Trümpy’s Berlin school in 1933, she conformed without hesitation to Nazi policy that required the school to exclude all Jewish students and teachers. Her collaborations with Niedecken-Gebhard further aligned her with Nazi ideology, for he was

the master producer-director for Nazi mass spectacles. She was, however, never as intense in her enthusiasm for the Nazi program as, say, Jutta Klamt (1890–1970) or Heide Woog (?–?) or Lotte Wernicke (1904–?) (see Mueller and Stöckemann 152–184; Toepfer 259–260). She was not one to produce passionate, Expressionistic dance narratives about the struggle of the “people” to discover their great leader and overcome the great enemies of the nation: capitalism, Judaism, cosmopolitanism, and communism. It is doubtful that her school, with its focus on the ecstatic power of elemental fusion of music and movement, could have survived at all in Germany if she had not accommodated the regime to the extent that she did in performance, which was largely to impose nostalgic, *volkisch* [national] historical dresses upon her dances during the performance of gigantic round dances (*Reigen*) and to proclaim the value of dance as an expression of national will. Moreover, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels was not eager to see Maja Lex become a star, because he considered her “type” of beauty too “dark” to represent satisfactorily the Aryan ideal of physical beauty [fig.16]. Probably the most one can say about the political dimension to Günther’s method and its prototypes in the work of Mensendieck and Dalcroze is that while typological thinking allows one to “transcend” all contexts, it also facilitates one’s ability to fit into nearly any context, although Dalcroze’s ideas went into eclipse during the Nazi era simply because he was not German. It would seem that Günther’s method did little to put its students in a critical relation to social reality and almost nothing to release the subversive energy of fantasy. For her, dancing was not about dreaming; it was about the power of group movement to appropriate space; it was about the power of bodies to dominate any space they inhabited; it was about the dynamic, transformative condition of an ecstatic group. The pedagogy did not insulate students from applying it on behalf of dangerous ideologies, but one could say the same thing about the principles of English grammar or the “rules” of classical ballet. Indeed, Günther’s thinking achieved a very appreciative response in the United States through the work and writing of Elizabeth Selden, who consciously linked dance to the expression of a liberal (democratic) political perspective insofar as dance was the projection of a distinctly “inclusive” American sense of society. For Selden, dance was American to the extent that it was “absolute”—that is, constructed out of abstract, elemental forms rather than out of peculiarly American narratives, themes, or subjects, which she called “naturalism,” an anachronistic, inert, and un-modern source of inspiration for dance (Selden 1935, 176–183). And she even adopted Günther’s use of stick figure drawings and schematic diagrams to identify elemental movement forms that made dance “free” and “absolute” [fig. 17], although the extreme geometrical formalism of her own choreography made her

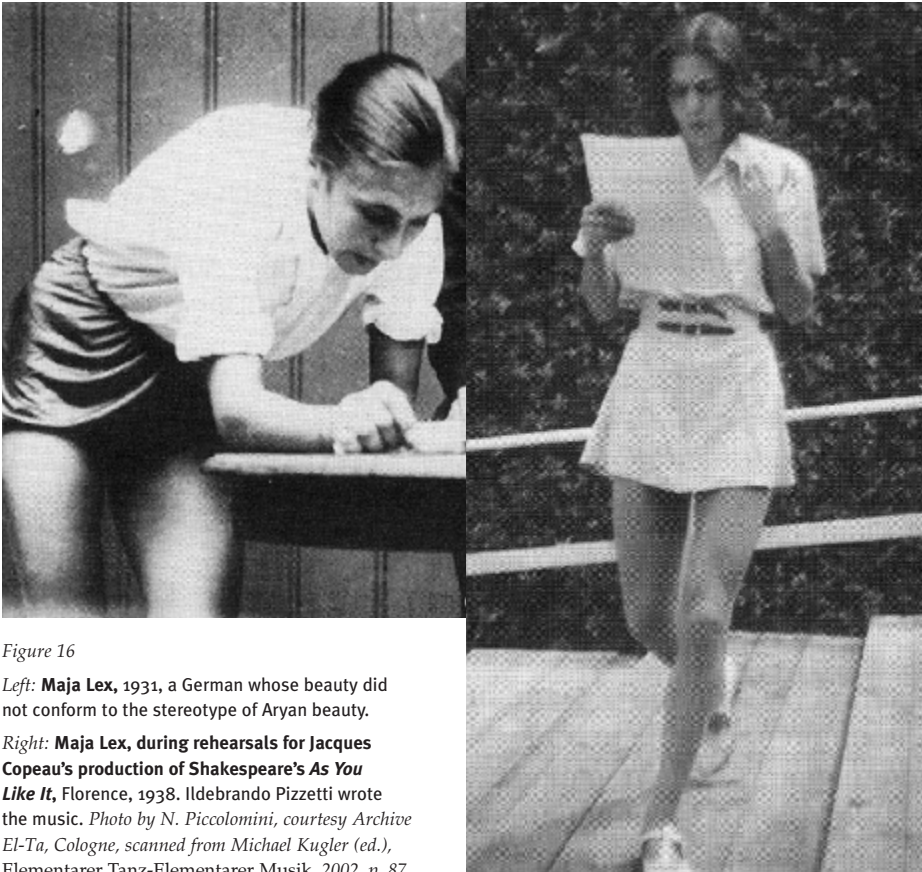



Figure 16

*Left:* **Maja Lex**, 1931, a German whose beauty did not conform to the stereotype of Aryan beauty.

*Right:* **Maja Lex**, during rehearsals for Jacques Copeau's production of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, Florence, 1938. Ildebrando Pizzetti wrote the music. *Photo by N. Piccolomini, courtesy Archive El-Ta, Cologne, scanned from Michael Kugler (ed.), Elementarer Tanz-Elementarer Musik, 2002, p. 87.*

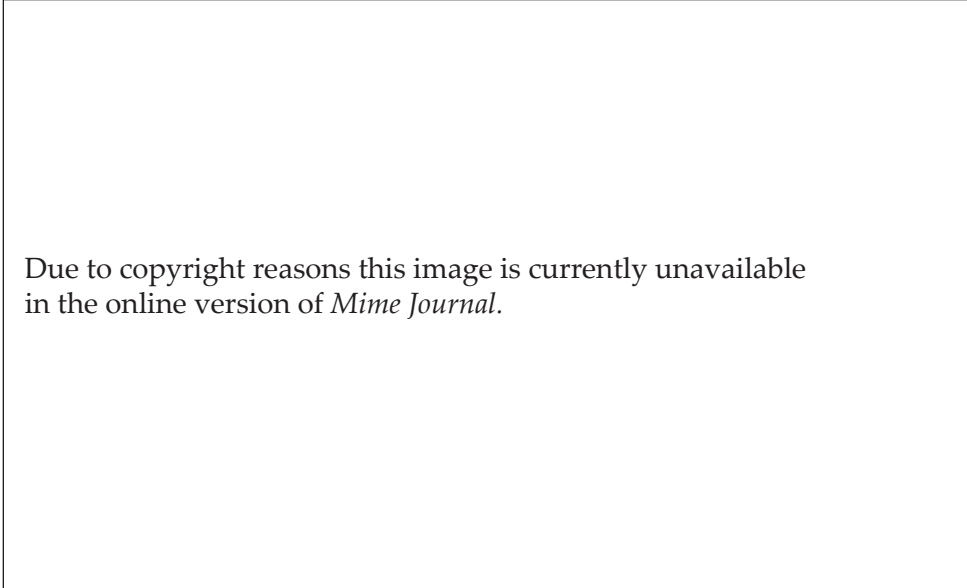
dances seem far less ecstatic than Lex's and much closer to Stebbins's view of female performance as a sequence of poses [fig. 18].

On a political level, the most ambiguous feature of Günther's pedagogy was its assumption that a group moved in ecstasy when it had no greater purpose for its movement than to heighten resemblances or affinities between bodies by imposing abstract, geometrically calculated relations between the bodies. Ecstasy was not movement toward a revolutionary image of society; it was the realization of a society that thrived according to "elementary" forms of bodily expression that have no higher purpose than to make bodies more aware of each other. But for Günther, this pedagogy remained subordinate to the idea of a *school*. In the school, one could actually make



Due to copyright reasons this image is currently unavailable  
in the online version of *Mime Journal*.

Figure 17



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Figure 18

**An image from Elizabeth's Selden's *Danse languide*, 1933, from *Selden, The Dancer's Quest*, 1935, plate 23.**  
Selden's use of "elementary forms" lacked the ecstatic power of Günther's or Lex's choreography.

an ecstatic society that moved apart from the external rhythms of life, apart from modes of repression or constraints on bodily expression that supposedly defined affinity between bodies in a “civilized” culture which even Delsarte himself may have imagined. The idea of the exclusive school, insulated from national politics and set apart from the fantasies of the repressed “masses,” is the articulation of an aristocratic, not fascist, sensibility which will find ecstasy no matter what “context” prevails for “everyone else.”

Nowadays, people are likely to view this approach to group movement as excessively abstract, lacking in feeling, and unconnected to any “real” experience of the world. It appears mechanical and indifferent to the problem of individuality within the group. But this perception overlooks Günther’s larger ambition. She saw dance itself as a “city” of aristocratic femininity, and her school, rather than any particular set of performances, was the most concrete “embodiment” of this aristocratic city. Her students were exclusively female, and although she collaborated successfully with prominent men like Orff, Niedecken-Gebhard, and even Goebbels, she pursued an image of urbanity in which men were completely absent and unnecessary. An intense homoerotic aura pervaded her school, her aesthetic, and her enduring collaborations with her students. Diversity of identity was not for her a significant “element” of urbanity; rather, urbanity was a condition by which people dissolved contexts that confined bodies and defined them excessively. And one dissolved contexts by identifying, combining, and re-combining elemental forms of movement into ever more complex configurations that could be imposed on more and more spaces. This freedom to transcend context was the basis for the ecstatic experience that was the ultimate reason for learning to dance. But ecstasy did not achieve fulfillment simply by signifying or representing it in the context of a theatre performance. Ecstasy was the result of the education provided by a school and its pedagogic system; homoerotic pleasure was likely a favored expression of this ecstatic education. For Günther, urbanity and group activity implied an intensifying closeness of (female) bodies. But bodies achieved closeness insofar as they became expressions of types within a typological organization of identity. When bodies move as types, they are more likely to become closer, emotionally, because the point of an idealizing type is to promote the value of sameness, similarity, resemblance, rather than difference, in amplifying “closeness.” A body is the expression of a type to the extent that it displays mastery of elementary forms of movement. The concept of elementary forms built on the Expressionist idea of primordial forms as the basis for articulating repressed feeling. To move bodies toward ecstasy, it was necessary to free them from contexts—that is, it was necessary to question the conditions under which movements and gestures were “appropriate.” Context determined appropri-

ateness. Typological theory postulated movements or significations that were pervasively appropriate because they applied to every context. What needed to be made appropriate or unrepressed was closeness of female bodies in an erotic mode, even if this closeness was possible only in the context of the school. But even the context of the school became amorphous after World War II, when Günther presided for many years over a mysterious villa culture in Rome, from which she guided the education of students in Germany. Günther's pedagogy revealed the astonishing adaptability of Delsartean philosophy to the era of modernism. What made the Delsartean system so adaptable was its detachment of movement forms from any physical or narrative context, from any precise location in history, geography, or culture. For many women in the early years of modernism, this power to detach forms from contexts was synonymous with superior freedom of movement and being. The Delsartean system entailed a political significance that Delsarte himself never contemplated. For Delsarte, the detachment of forms from contexts implied that the only context of concern was cosmic, the "universal" reality of a divine order manifested through the "universal" gestural code. The universal forms of bodily movement restored "beauty" to a civilization in which democratic tolerance for human commonness had prevented people from feeling a lofty spiritual destiny, from feeling close to God. The American Delsartean emphasis on poses that disclosed the "moral character" of the body performing them actually functioned to restrain the body, to domesticate it, and to purify it of unruly libidinous impulses. With Günther, however, the detachment of "elementary" forms from contexts was the basis for an ecstatic aesthetic that was free of any religious connotation. Furthermore, she showed how ecstatic education, the cultivation and refinement of libidinous impulses, could be the basis for a *school*. And the school, in turn, would become the basis for a new feminine, aristocratic society capable of experiencing an ecstatic "togetherness" in any political, cultural, or historical context. The glorification of "elementary" forms allowed this female, aristocratic society to thrive during the fantastic turbulence of the Weimar Republic (1919–1932), during the oppressive totalitarianism of the Third Reich (1933–1945), and during the conformist geo-politics of the Cold War (1947–1989). For Delsarte, typological thinking shaped "moral character" by depressing the value of perverse, individualized gestures and impulses. Günther saw how typological thinking could protect a homoerotic desire for closeness between female bodies from corruption by a national or religious or at any rate mythic fear of female ecstasy.



Dorothee Günther and Maja Lex in 1940, photo by H. Holdt, courtesy of the Orff Zentrum München.

## Notes

1 Günther, Lex, and Keetman were quite reticent about their personal lives and composed little in the way of autobiographical statements. Student recollections of them tend to focus keenly on the classroom experience of the teachers and scarcely touch upon events or anecdotes about them outside of curricular objectives, which is indeed remarkable and indicates the exceptional power of the Günther pedagogy (rather than personality cult) to control the communal and individual experience of the school. Primary sources of information about Günther appear in her own book, *Der Tanz als Bewegungsphänomen* [Dance as movement phenomenon] (1962) and especially in a book edited by Michael Kugler, *Elementarer Tanz – Elementare Musik, Die Günther-Schule München 1924 bis 1944* [Elementary dance—elementary music. The Günther school in Munich, 1924 to 1944]

(2002). In this article, most details about the lives of persons at the Günther school come from essays in this book. The work contains brief biographical essays on Günther, Lex, Keetman, Bergese, and Orff, an excellent bibliography, as well as several theoretical essays by Günther herself, by Orff, and by students of Günther. Kugler reprints the school curriculum, concert programs, and several other documents, as well as a good deal of material related to Keetman's music and the theme of unifying music and movement. What is missing from this book is any sort of critical perspective on the Günther or Orff pedagogies. Nor do any of the authors attempt to identify the historical significance of Günther's achievement or situate her in relation to a larger "context" of European or even German body culture. In his introductory essay on "Der Weg zum Elementaren Tanz und zur Elementaren Musik," Kugler makes reference to numerous things happening in the realm of European body culture and music prior to and concurrent with the activities of the Günther school, but he tends to integrate her into a broad stream of body culture themes rather than emphasize fundamental tensions within her aesthetic. Kugler provides a wider philosophical view of Orff and Günther in his book, *Die Methode Jaques-Dalcroze und das Orff-Schulwerk Elementare Musikübung bewegungsorientierte Konzeption der Musikpädagogik* (2000), although this work is not so rich in facts about Günther. Haselbach (53) remarks on Günther's great reluctance to comment on her personal life, but she observes that Günther entertained some literary ambitions that perhaps exposed her emotional life more than her pedagogical writings. In the 1930s, Günther wrote a screenplay, *Der wundersame Teppe* [The wondrous carpet] based on the Indian epic Mahabharata, and the manuscript for this unproduced project is deposited in the Orff Zentrum München. In 1946, Günther gave Maja Lex a Christmas gift of a manuscript containing a number of poems she had written in a passionate, turbulent, neo-expressionist style. This manuscript passed from Lex to Graziella Padilla.

- 2 Wigman and Günther collaborated on the 1930 production, at the Dancer's Congress in Munich, of Wigman's grandiose, complicated, antiwar dance drama, *Totenmal*. Students from the Günther school, including Maja Lex, performed with students from Wigman's school (Mueller and Stöckemann 91–92). *Totenmal* required several movement choirs to achieve its monumental effect (Toepfer 306–311; Manning 148–159). It is not clear how this collaboration was possible. While a student in Günther's school, Lex expressed the desire to study under Wigman, but Günther discouraged her, saying that in Dresden, Wigman was such a powerful teacher that Lex would never be able to find her own path to the future. But eventually Lex did study briefly with Wigman, and then returned to Günther (Padilla 80). Presumably Lex was a key figure in setting up the collaboration on *Totenmal*.



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