1995

Grotesque costume in dance performance

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GROTESQUE COSTUME IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Theater Arts

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

By

Amy Elizabeth Zsadanyi-Yale

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ABSTRACT

GROTESQUE COSTUME IN DANCE PERFORMANCE

By Amy Elizabeth Zsadanyi-Yale

Grotesque costumes in dance performance are the least recognized form of costume practice in the performing arts. Previous examples of costume designs in the performing arts focus mostly on images of beauty and "idealism." This thesis explores various photographic evidence of costumes in dance performance which focus on unusual, ugly and unidealistic images. By evaluating pictorial evidence, it becomes possible to define the meaning of the word "grotesque" and to apply different aspects of the definition in a way which creates specific, identifiable characteristics of costume design that produce a grotesque image. By creating categories of grotesque costume practice through research of various choreographers and their unusual costume choices a better understanding of the purpose, meaning and significance of grotesque images can be reached.

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INTRODUCTION

Because dance is the performance of body movements, and costumes are used to decorate the body, the way a costume is created, how it lays on the body, and the silent messages a costume represents are most relevant in dance performance. Unfortunately, the emphasis of past research about costume elements in performance has been primarily on dramatic performances, operas or musical theatre. In dance performance, research on dance costumes focuses on familiar grand ballets. Usually the topics covered within the subject of costume focus on how to design a costume, how to construct a costume or who the designers are. Little has been said as to what the costumed image signifies or how a costume is used to enhance, bring attention to the body, complicate body movements, change or distort an ideal image. Costumes in dance performance receive the least amount of recognition of all the performing arts especially in regard to costumes that encourage a non-idealistic, unattractive, or unusual image, which is associated with the grotesque. Because past research fails to acknowledge and explore costumes of the grotesque in dance performance, I intend to explore the odd, unusual, ugly and grotesque images created through the use of costumes in dance performance.

Costumes are used as part of a total vision created to relay a particular text to the audience members. Costumes serve as external signifiers of a greater message which lies within the performance piece itself. Because the meaning of a performance is not always evident to the spectator, costumes are used as a means of translation to help better understand the statement/message of the performance taking place. In addition, costumes serve as artistic visual elements to help keep the audience interested in the performance. However, costumes can sometimes alter the meaning of the given text, intentionally or sometimes unintentionally, most particularly in dance performance, and more interestingly when a costume presents itself as a grotesque image. It is important to understand why it is that ugly, unusual or odd images are more controversial than beautiful ones. Also, why is it that particular images become categorized as ugly, odd, unusual or grotesque? What is it that makes grotesque costumes grotesque and why are these costumes less recognized through research and performance? Who is responsible for the birth of the "grotesque image" and what is the purpose or "signification" of the grotesque image being seen? These are only a few of the questions that need to be answered when exploring the world of the grotesque and most importantly the grotesque costumed images which cover the dancing body in dance performance.

The motive for exploring grotesque images through costume design, besides answering the above questions, is to discover why it is that people participate as audience members by watching an image that may surprise and shock them, or possibly upset their ideals of beauty. What elements draw a person to become entranced with grotesque images? Why do some people continue to watch these performances and how does one's culture play a role in the acceptability of grotesque images in dance performance through costume design choices?

The first part of this thesis will briefly examine the theoretical view of the "grotesque" in art and literature through Wolfgang Kayser's book, The Grotesque in Art and Literature. This view will provide a historical perspective as well as serve as a building block for further exploration of the definition of the word "grotesque." Next, a cultural perspective of "grotesque" versus "ideal" will be defined to help better understand the differences between the two. Once "grotesque" has been re-defined, different modes of grotesque will be established and identified as specific characteristics which make up a grotesque image through costuming in dance performance.

Second I will concentrate on German fascination with the "grotesque," particularly in connection to dance and costume, with emphasis on how costume is used in dance performance to hide or conceal the body in a manner which creates an unusual

or distorted image separating the grotesque from the ideal. This section will examine different categories of costume design used to create a grotesque image such as the use of masks and face make-up in relation to the different signs it conveys to the audience members. In addition to what messages are conveyed when the face is covered, this part of the thesis will also explore how fabric is used to cover the body as well as how color, and weight create specific effects--the ultimate result being a "grotesque" image. Within this chapter, costumes that complicate, or change the bodies capacity to move easily will be examined as well. Photographic examples of work from various choreographers/artists will be used to establish different forms and styles of grotesque or unusual costume practice. Different dance groups, dance movements and grotesque art movements will also be used as visual evidence to help better understand the fascination of the grotesque image in dance performance and the connection between costumes and the meaning of the text of a specific dance piece.

Part three will continue to deal with grotesque and unusual images in dance performance through costume, but place focus on revealing the body through nudity, sexual identity and the grotesque. Pictorial examples will be examined to show how the body itself can become a costume through expression, gesture or with body paints. This chapter will also examine how minimum costume can distort,

mutilate or change the body image. In addition, emphasis will be placed on how costume accentuates gender and sexualization--relaying uncomfortable or unusual sexual messages through a grotesque costumed image. Also the subjects of gender reversal, asexual and bisexual images through costume will be explored as well as the use of phallic symbols.

Next there will be discussion of how to identify a community of grotesque in relation to a dance company's choice of stylistic aesthetic costume. In this chapter, I will concentrate on how grotesque costume elements can separate dancers into dance groups based on movement in juxtaposition with costume choices, implicating a grotesque style. Briefly, this chapter will touch base with the deeper, darker side of dance images in regard to the "grotesques" connection with subjects such as death, spirits, demons, aliens and any unusual abnormative costume image that disturbs the spectator but draws interest to the dance piece encouraging the grotesque to become a normative "ideal."

Finally, I will briefly examine the connection between "grotesque" and what it means to different cultures. This last chapter will reveal how various degrees of grotesque are acceptable, or non-acceptable for costume in dance performance in different cultural/ethnic backgrounds. In addition this may shed some light as to why the "grotesque" is more prominent in some cultures than in others.

CHAPTER 1

Defining Grotesque

"Grotesque" is difficult to identify without a proper definition. Karl Flögel wrote the book Die Geschichte Des Grotesk-Komischen in 1779 and Wolfgang Kayser wrote his book, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, in 1966. Both books open the doors to a new perspective on particular styles of dance, art, theatre and literature. Although both books present some sufficient examples of what "grotesque" represents, they are only the building blocks for more in-depth research. Because "Grotesque" is found in many different forms in art/performance art, it is important to first examine the history of prior research of the meaning of the word "Grotesque."

In Wolfgang Kayser's book The Grotesque in Art and Literature, the meaning of the word "Grotesque" is defined in several ways. Kayser bases his idea of what grotesque is from visual examples of several art pieces and dialogue/passages from literature of different writers. The various examples of art and literature explored include several different cultures and styles, yet all examples have one thing in common; they are "grotesque" in some particular way. Before a current definition of the word "grotesque" is defined, it is first necessary to examine the definitions of

"grotesque" that are already established in Kayser's book. Kayser begins his book by talking about the history of the word and its meaning.

According to Kayser, the word "Grotesque" derived from the Italian words "La grottesca" and "grotesco." From these words (shortened) came "grotta" meaning "cave."¹ The word "grotta" was used as a reference to a particular style in art in the late fifteenth century. "Grotta" as "Grottesco" art pieces were recognized by the following characteristics: Monstrous forms; unfamiliar images, oddly shaped leaves or stems, combined figures--half human, half animal, as well as a mixture of plant, animal, human life which confuses natural order.

By the word grotesco the Renaissance, which used it to designate a specific ornamental style suggested by antiquity, understood not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one - a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid.²

In the sixteenth century the term "Sogni dei pittori" meaning "dreams of painters" was used to refer to the "dissolution of reality." Artists painted visions of a different world; "the stuff that dreams are made of."³

While the fascination with unusual figures in art continued to evolve in Italy, it also became apparent in other countries. In Germany the word "grotesque" became

associated with "monstrous fusion of human and non-human elements."⁴ These elements include devils, monsters and frightful images. In France the word "grotesque" was associated with "Spiritual essences," and later seventeenth-century French authors referred to the word grotesque as also signifying something that is "silly, bizarre or extravagant."⁵ With this additional description of what grotesqueness in art reveals, the well known "Caricature" style of many artists was also regarded as a new type of grotesque. Therefore, the definition of grotesque evolved into a more complicated meaning. The Grotesque in art and literature served a secondary purpose. Besides exploring the unknown, non-human aspects of life, death, dreams and other worlds, the grotesque became a device used to distort reality. Art primarily was a visual representation of the beautiful or "ideal" things in life, but the grotesque now represented the opposite. In fact, the grotesque took the "ideal" and transformed it into a non-desirable image that attempts to destroy that which is thought to be beautiful.

If caricature, with its imitation of distorted and distinctly ugly reality and its exaggeration of actually existing disproportions, was a genuinely creative form of art, the very basis of the hitherto accepted esthetics--the principal of art as an imitation of beautiful nature or as its idealization--was put in jeopardy; for caricature did the very opposite.⁶

Grotesque art in the true sense made a conscious effort to upset its spectators: "...the sole intention of provoking laughter, disgust, and surprise..."⁷

These characteristics were found repeatedly through Kayser's research leading him to describe two types of grotesque "fantastic" and "satiric." Kayser ends his book by saying:

In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. And thus we arrive at a final interpretation of the grotesque: AN ATTEMPT TO INVOKE AND SUBDUE THE DEMONIC ASPECTS OF THE WORLD.⁸

This interpretation is prevalent, but I feel that the definition of a grotesque image is much more complicated, complex, and not as specific as Kayser implies.

In order to achieve a "grotesque" image, there must first be an "ideal" image established. There cannot be one without the other because it is the familiar-pleasant vision that is "beauty" as we have learned it to be. The "ideal" means beauty or a desire to strive for/achieve an image which is considered beautiful by a particular culture. Specific characteristics establish a beautiful image according to messages sent to the spectator particularly translated by the media. With the images encouraged through film, television, magazines and billboards, certain standards of what is or is

not desirable are established, which shape our conception of what is ideal and therefore become a given text in images produced in dance performance. On the other hand, grotesque images encourage a variety of new perceptions of what is thought to be beautiful.

Based on pictorial/visual evidence with 20th century, Western/Eurocentric influenced images, the ideal reflects particular characteristics. They are as follows: The body image is always represented as fit, lean, athletic, muscular or sexy. The movements encouraged for women are flexible, graceful, pleasant, sometimes erotic images. As for men, strong, muscular, above all "masculine"--athletic images are produced and emphasized in dance performance. Another important attribute for achieving the "ideal" is to specifically distinguish sexual differences: Men represent men--look unmistakably like men, dress like men, pose like men. And women look like women. Basically women wear skirts and men wear pants. Gender should always be obvious and specific. "Sexualization" is acceptable if the dance images represent "socially acceptable" relationships between the produced images; that is erotic, decorated images that glorify a woman's body or that accentuate a man's masculine features, as well as encourage heterosexual relationships. The end result, if the characteristics are followed, produce the "ideal" image (by the standards represented as we have learned) achieving a feeling of comfort, beauty and therefore

the images become a pleasure for the spectator to watch. For example, Figure 1 represents the "ideal" image in dance performance according to the characteristics listed above. First the costumes put on the body accentuate the gender of the dancer. Figure 1 is a very basic example of gender identification by both the costume worn and accentuation of the male/female body. In the photograph, two ballet dancers are dressed in white. The male is in a costume which resembles a tee shirt, belt and pants. Although he wears a leotard which clings to his body, unlike regular street pants, the image signifies male dress. Because the dancer's costume does cling to the body, his masculine anatomy becomes obvious, emphasizing his muscular build. The female dancer wears a costume which signifies "female" because of the simple addition of the skirt. Her costume clings to her upper torso exposing her long thin arms and neck as well as emphasizing her breasts. The flowing fabric of the skirt worn indicates a "flighty" femininity associated with the female gender and bringing more focus to her long thin legs as well. Like the male dancer, her physique indicates a female anatomy. In relation to the costumes worn, the movement of the dancers bodies also indicates gender. The male dancer remains stable and "earthbound" indicating stability as well as strength, whereas the female dancer's body is lifted upward (and on one foot) towards the sky

Figure 1. This image represents the "ideal" as we have learned it to be. The body is fit and lean, the costumes worn in the dance exemplify the distinction of the male and female gender: Pants signify male, skirt signifies female with emphasis on the anatomy. Caçonne, Suzanne Farrell and Peter Martins. From Haggin, B. H., Discovering Balanchine. (New York: Horizon Press 1981) plate 118.

reflecting a frivolous, less stable, more dependent image with the outreach of her arm to his. One important characteristic of the "ideal" is gender affirmation. It is important for some spectators to be able to identify the gender of the performer on stage, and even more so if the body isn't presented clearly. "Even the denial of sexuality through, for example, costume, which hides sexual identity, may paradoxically make the spectator contemplate the essence of that which is absent."⁹ Costume does at times "hide" or cover the sexual identity of the dancer, but the ideal image more often reflects it specifically in one way or another. Also, the interaction between the male and female bodies is considered a normative relationship according to the "ideal."

In contrast, the grotesque image follows none of the above standards, but does have one particular rule: nothing is too extreme--it's okay to not enjoy the vision being seen, different mediums of aesthetics are acceptable. As Kayser suggests through his research, the grotesque explores the "darker" aspects of the world, which are recognized initially as less ideal. The grotesque image strives to undermine the ideal encouraging different means of desire. A grotesque image often reflects that which is not the ideal or is usually viewed as an image that is less desirable. Obese, ugly, unfit bodies or deformed images are included among that which is desirable. Clumsy, awkward or violent body movement is viewed as an expression of a desired style of dance, even

if it is not "beautifully ideal." Sexual identity is not restricted to particular modes of costuming such as gender specific costumes. Gender is not obvious in many instances. Grotesque costuming is often associated with distorted or disfigured images and exaggerated phallic symbols. The focus becomes that which is unrealistic, imaginary, monstrous, demonic, frightful images, or those which we may not understand such as other worlds, alien figures, and even death. Some grotesque images are quite pleasurable to experience, other grotesque images gain pleasure through uncertainty, shock or harshness. Either vision presents interesting images which fascinate and stimulate, often leaving the spectator of the experience in a state of limbo creating an unpredictable response. Figure 2 exemplifies a "non-ideal" image in comparison to Figure 1 for many reasons: First the dancers are covered in such a way as to disguise the male or female anatomy. Gender is not specific indicating an androgynous or asexual society. The body movements are not pleasant or graceful but awkward, clumsy and almost ridiculous. Also, the arms are covered indicating a mutilation of the body or possibly wings creating a half bird-half human image. The dancers' faces are the same pale white color as well as their head/hat pieces which present a non-attractive image in respect to what is considered "beautiful." All of these characteristics disrupt the ideal as represented in Figure 1 creating a new image which will be

Figure 2: This photograph represents a non-idealistic image through costume. Body type and gender are non-specific, producing an image that represents another species. The body movement is awkward, and the costume choice imitates wings. Imago, Alwin Nikolais (1963). From Percival, John. Experimental Dance. (New York: Universe Books, 1971) plate 44.

now regarded as "non-idealistic" or "grotesque" from a pictorial aspect.

As a result of photographic examples of the ideal in comparison to the non-idealistic image, and Kayser's research on the grotesque in art and literature, the collaboration of the two help shape a current definition of "grotesque." This produces the guidelines for an image to be considered "grotesque." They are as follows: Grotesque costume in dance performance is a vision/image created by body movement in congruency with costume, which brings discomfort to the spectator by calculated destruction of a defined set of standards which meet our expectations of the ideal. A "grotesque" image is produced to upset the spectator's expectations of the ideal body image, interpretation of beauty as it is learned, or disrupt pleasant visions as well as explore subjects that are considered frightful, monstrous, evil or unknown. Images that are grotesque create tension, distort, and attempt to disrupt one's perception of that which is believed to be desirable. The major difference, however, between Kayser's definition, and grotesque costume in dance performance is this; costumed images in dance performance which promote "grotesqueness" are animated, tangible and somewhat dangerous; therefore they become a reality for the audience whereas art and literature only represent "grotesqueness" as a figure of the imagination because there is the canvas or pages of the book, which keep

the spectator "safe" always reminding them that what they are experiencing is fictional.

Within the realm of the grotesque in dance performance, however, the costume is used to identify particular modes of grotesque in the dance piece taking place. These modes are a result of different categories of costume design, the categories are used in different ways to produce characteristics of grotesqueness. There are four specific modes of grotesque created through the use of costume in dance performance: Tragic Grotesque, Comic Grotesque, Fantasy Grotesque and Morbid Grotesque.

Tragic grotesque is an image which produces empathy or an emotional bond between the spectator and vision seen, resulting from a tragic event--disfiguration, or horrific vision. Tragic grotesque is a mode of grotesque that is most often difficult to identify because the costume characteristics are subtle and sometimes not as flamboyant as other modes of grotesque costume characteristics. The important characteristic of a tragic grotesque costume image is that the image is most always a human being who suffers from some kind of body disfiguration or trauma. An obvious tragic grotesque image would be something such as a bleeding hand or a large scar on the face. A less obvious tragic grotesque image would be an image of one who suffers from some kind of mental or emotional trauma. The costume characteristic may be something as small as diagonal lines

across an A-line skirt. However small or less obvious the characteristics be, the sign conveyed is one of imbalance, melancholy, paranoia or confusion which then may cause the spectator to become genuinely concerned for the image on stage. When the image is a dance figure, then the dancer's movement can reinforce the costume characteristics or contradict them, leading the vision into a different mode of grotesque. Figure 3 is a very good example of a tragic grotesque image in dance performance. The costume is very simple and the make-up is plain but used to accentuate dramatic features of the character such as hollow cheeks and dark circles under the eyes to indicate a kind of sadness. The dancer uses facial expressions which appear disturbing to the spectator, and sometimes the image may be disfigured. Because this particular dance piece has a well-known story line it is easy to develop some kind of emotional bond with this character.

When the dancer's body movements contradict the costume worn, many times the vision will appear as funny, ridiculous or sarcastic. For example; when an image appears as tragic grotesque mode with a disfigured face and only one arm, but leaps joyfully around the stage, then there is a conflict of signs. Logically the two do not go together, therefore the tragedy of the grotesque image becomes an irony and suggests some comical element to the vision. The dance piece titled "Rote Groteske" choreographed by Gertrude Liestikow in 1914

Figure 3. "Tragic Grotesque" Produces an emotional response from the spectator due to the appearance of a costumed image, as a result of a tragic event. Petrouchka, Nijinsky. From Kirstein, Lincoln. Nijinsky Dancing. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975) p. 108.

is an excellent example of a comic grotesque dance costume. Although the dancer's appearance does not suggest tragedy, it appears odd and the movements in relation to the costume are contradictory. The dancer appears as a bird-like image, not as a graceful bird but more like a waddly duck. However, the movements are balletic with interludes of harsh bold movement. The hands and legs are yellow, the hands have claws, the feet appear to imitate webbed duck feet and the face is completely covered. As for the body, it is colored orange-red and the dancer wears tights covered with a short simple tunic. The emphasis of the costume is on the feet, hands and face. Elements used through costuming cause these body parts to become the focus. This particular image falls into Kayser's definition of "Grotesque." According to his research part-human/part-animal characteristics automatically indicate a grotesque image. However, the costume combined with the choreography produce an oddly comical image, therefore it can easily be identified as the mode of comic grotesque clearly distinguishing it as a different image from tragic grotesque. In addition, a comic grotesque image will evoke laughter which is associated with pleasure or happiness, so comic grotesque costume images in dance performance are different from other modes of grotesque because it is less intimidating for the spectator to watch regardless of how unusual the image seen may be. Comic grotesque is a costume which encourages laughter because of

its exaggerated, unusual, or unsexy image sometimes to the point of ridiculous.

Although comic grotesque costumes evoke laughter and are a pleasure to watch they aren't the only mode of grotesque that can produce a pleasurable experience. Some forms of fantasy grotesque are a pleasure to look at because of the outrageousness of the costumed image. Fantasy grotesque is a costume that creates images not found in this world such as monstrous, demonic, asexual, alien, or imaginary creatures. The initial "awe" of the image when it appears on stage is that which produces the pleasure of the experience. Figure 4 shows a photograph of Triadic Ballet. When a dancer uses a costume in a dance piece to help create the vision of the dance, or when the costume contributes to the dance movement itself, pleasure is also experienced by the spectator. In other instances, when a fantasy grotesque image is less "fairy tale" oriented and more monstrous related, the initial "awe" still remains except the experience provoked is not so much pleasure but fear, shock or possibly repulsion. Figures 4 and 5 both represent different kinds of fantasy grotesque costumes. Fantasy grotesque is the type of image most likely to take advantage of using costuming to create a particular image. Figure 4 represents a fictional society due to the extreme use of shapes, color and style of costume. Because these creatures represented are not a vision of the basic human figure, they are considered possibly from another

Figure 4: "Fantasy Grotesque" Extreme use of costume to create a fictional society from another world which often produces a positive, pleasurable, feeling. Triadic Ballet, Oskar Schlemmer (photo anon.). From Dirk Schepler, Das Triadischen Ballett. Berlin: Akademie der Künste, figure 1.

Figure 5: "Fantasy Grotesque" Image considered dark or ominous because it represents the unknown, which is associated with Kayser's reference to the "darker" forces of the world. Herodiade, Peter Darrell, (Paul Hindemith). From Percival, John. Experimental Dance. (New York: Universe Books, 1971) plate 43.

world. This particular image depicts a playful and delightful world compared to other fantasy grotesque images. For example, Figure 5 represents an alien/demonic creature which is associated with the "unknown." Because it portrays an "unknown world" or mysterious image, the vision also is considered evil. Images which are not fully understood can create tension or anxiety among the spectators watching the dance performance.

Morbid grotesque presents an image which resembles unpleasant subject matters such as death, destruction, blood, gore or mutilation of the body. These characteristics are always seen in combination with convulsive, spasmodic, jerky body movements which indicate some kind of physical disorder. A morbid grotesque image in many ways is a "spectacle of horror," much like that of thriller-horror movies but more subtle. The result of the performance on the spectator is the experience of the "thrill" associated with the horrific vision, that causes the spectator to feel enjoyment. Figure 6 is a form of a morbid grotesque style of costume in dance performance. The image produced is created mostly due to a seizure-like pose of the body. The awkward disfigured poses, the pale faces with rolled back eyes, open mouths and tattered clothing suggest a decaying--death oriented theme. In addition, the people lay on train tracks indicating that they await, almost welcome, brutal death. Because of this association with the ugliness of death, the image seen is

Figure 6: "Morbid Grotesque" Extreme awkward movement and posed deformation, decay and death represented by costume choice and body movement. Choreographed by Uno Man. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *21,000 Leagues, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, face plate.

very disturbing, unattractive, as well as scary. Destruction, death and decay are all a part of the non-idealistic images associated with reality, and morbid grotesque will often recognize, as well as challenge those issues. Images such as skulls, pale faces, fixed expressions or mutilated body parts, such as gouges, blood, seizure-like expressions and spasmic body movements in torn, shredded, minimal or scant clothing, are often common elements of morbid grotesque costumes. When an image such as this is present on stage engaging in a joyful dance, the image becomes even stranger. Morbid grotesque is easily identified through costumes in dance performance because of their repulsiveness, but when a morbid grotesque image moves like a clown on stage, the image can no longer be identified as strictly morbid. When viewing Figure 6 it is easy to label the image as morbid because, although the dance is odd and the image produced is disturbing, the image definitely shows no indication of the ideal in a beautiful perspective, but the image does represent an ideal in the "grotesque" perspective. Figure 6 is probably the mode of grotesque which causes the most unpredictable responses, with the exception of nudity. Each situation, however, instigates different levels of discomfort, depending on each spectator's reaction.

To understand what makes a costume "grotesque" in dance performance, it is important to identify specific

characteristics of costume design which can be associated with a grotesque image. Common motifs through choices made in grotesque costume design that are easily identified are as follows:

Horns are used in various cultures to express a part-animal/part-human image, demonic creature or evil being. The shape is always pointed, sharp and often twisted. Sharpness indicates that the horns are dangerous and can cause harm. Horns are also associated with animals, mostly aggressive, powerful and potentially dangerous animals such as bulls and rams. Because horns come from animals, when a human figure wears horns, it suggests that they are not human as we identify a human to be, but something tainted, super powerful or possessed. Claws also represent the same messages as horns in most cases and often are found together. On the other hand, unicorns wear a golden horn and are considered a magical creature but technically are categorized as fantasy grotesque because the image is imaginary, representing a creature from another world. In Western society, crosses are another motif which represent power, good or bad, the power comes from another source often outside of reality known as "earth." Wings are sometimes used to create a fantasy grotesque image when exaggerated or used on a human figure. Whether the creature represents good or evil does not matter; all grotesque images are not specifically one or the other. Wings simply support Kayser's half human-half animal theory.

When wings are put on a body, the person is no longer considered simply "human."

The color black is often used for two reasons; to represent evil or to indicate a "dark quality." Although black is interpreted differently with each culture, primarily in Western societies it is associated with seduction, death, sadness and success. Because black is a very powerful color it is used extensively in costume design, most particularly when creating fantasy creatures such as vampires, witches, evil sorcerers or rulers. These images are repeated in other modes of performance art. Black is often used in tragic and morbid grotesque costumes. White is associated with purity, light and angels, which relates to some fantasy grotesque images, but on the other hand, white is also the color of bones which are associated with death and decay. Red is a lively, passionate color, and can be used to produce a horrific bloody vision, most particularly in morbid grotesque costumes, or a beautiful red poppy which is attractive but poisonous. Although these characteristics are important when identifying grotesque images, the point is that "grotesqueness" goes beyond the simple motifs and color association, particularly in dance performance. It is odd combinations of movement that are a result of, or a contrast to, the dancer's costume, as well as the costume itself, that encourage a grotesque image. Different colors, motifs, makeup and unusual texture combinations are what help

distinguish the different modes of grotesque costume in dance performance.

Different characteristics of costume design which do not produce an ideal image, but take one ideal image and change one aspect of it through the use of costume, cause the image to transform into the realm of the grotesque. For example, using different textures of fabric can change a beautiful ballerina into an awkward clumsy figure. Instead of a skirt made of a flowing feminine fabric it could be constructed out of sheets of plastic. The dancer's movements may remain the same, but the dance becomes a different dance due to the change in costume. First, the skirt will not flow or move as it is intended, with the dancer. Due to the texture of the plastic, the skirt is now stiff, slick, shiny, reflective, and "robotic." A skirt made of a texture such as plastic contradicts the fluidity of the dancer's body movements, as seen in ballet, producing a less ideal image. In addition, the weight of plastic in comparison to chiffon fabric causes some constrictions of the dancer. The leg may not be able to be lifted as far and leaps are more difficult to achieve gracefully.

Further exploration of texture choice can be used to support the idea that some textures are considered less "ideal" or beautiful than others. Another approach through costume design would be to use elements such as cardboard, paper or metal to create a grotesque image. When a costume

is constructed out of textures other than fabric, the image tends to move further into the realm of the grotesque. The texture of a costume in dance performance is not just a visual stimulus but it automatically affects the dance movement. Combinations of odd textures and ideal dance movement create an unusual image because it logically does not belong together. Also, when costume is constructed out of a material other than fabric to create "clothing" then the image suggests that the person is not human or comes from another world other than the one that is familiar to the spectator.

Another characteristic of costume design often associated with comic grotesque is gender role reversal through costume choices which then produces an unacceptable image; for example, men wearing high-heeled shoes and bows in their hair. This image becomes comical because it is not considered ideal or normal. It is considered grotesque because it distorts the "norm." Costumes which discourage a dancer from moving freely can also provoke laughter and instigate a comical grotesque image.

Alien figures whether they are human in form, animal, monster or plant life represent the fantasy grotesque most always. Characteristics of costuming used to create this type of image rely heavily on the actual fabric and design, as well as unison between dancers on stage if more than one dancer exists within the dance piece. Unusual geometric

shapes used for the body or odd facial features created through the use of makeup or a mask play a big role when producing a fantasy grotesque image. Whether the costumed image produced suggests a specific mode of grotesque or simply represents an odd combination of costume choice, fabric, color, body focus, shape exaggeration or deformation, the image will always encourage feelings of imbalance, mystery, tension or discomfort.

CHAPTER TWO

Producing a Grotesque Image Using Masks, Fabric and Unusual Devices

Evidence of past images of grotesque costume in dance performance is very limited and most likely not labeled as "grotesque." There are however, some important influences in the creation of grotesque costumes in dance performance, particularly in Germany around the early to mid part of the twentieth century. Instead of identifying certain images as "grotesque," it was most likely referred to as "expressionistic" or "modern," but not all dance pieces considered expressionistic or modern qualify as "grotesque." In order for a costume to qualify as "grotesque" it must contain one or more of the characteristics as stated in Chapter 1.

Germany had no consistent classical or traditional type of dance at the end of the nineteenth century, therefore was open to the birth of a new style of dance that was introduced by a man named Rudolf von Laban. Although Laban's influences lie mostly in dance style and body consciousness, he experimented with dance in a way which influenced his pupil Mary Wigman. "He experimented by crossing traditional boundaries between art media, between performance and experience, between theatre and nature, between ritual and

dance as art, and between the spiritual and the physical."¹⁰ Wigman used his "Romantic" ideas along with the ideals set forth by the Dadaists. Together the two produced dance styles referred to as "'The New German Dance,' 'Modernes Tanz,' 'Absoluter Tanz,' 'Freie Tanz,' 'Tanz Kunst' and 'Bewegungskunst.' . . . The name remaining is 'Ausdruckstanz,' meaning 'Expressionistic dance.'"¹¹ As a result Mary Wigman developed her own type of dance which is very much separate as it is connected to "Ausdruckstanz."

Wigman is one of the most prominent influences in dance performance in the early to mid 1900's in Germany, and designed her costumes as well as choreographed her dances. Mary Wigman was often referred to as "the founder of German expressionistic dance."¹² Wigman had a style in her choreography as well as costume choices which stood out from other artist's. The difference between Wigman and Laban lies within Wigman's visual concepts which caused costumes to become a focal point or marriage, so to speak, of her dance performances. Wigman's style captured a new realm of experience that did not follow any one category of dance style that had been identified before. She was fascinated with the way fabric moved with the dancer, and most particularly, she was intrigued with the use of masks.

'Why should a dancer use a mask?' she said,
'Always when his creative urge causes a split
process in him when his imagination reveals
the image of a apparently alien figure, which
compels the dancer to a certain kind of

metamorphosis. The mask never ought to be an interesting addition or decoration, it must be an essential part of the dance figure born in a world of visions and transported as if by magic into reality. The mask knows dance figuration and horror--it constantly changes during the dance, it breathes and lives like a living face within its frozen form.'¹³

The Witch Dance performed in 1926 is one of Mary Wigman's most outstanding "Grotesque" pieces of work. Costumes together with the awkward choreography display a very hypnotic, possessed image. The dancer's body is covered in an old brocade cloth described as "exciting, wild and barbaric."¹⁴ Because extant photos of this particular costume are black and white, color information is available only through written description by Mary Wigman, through taped interviews of Wigman or by reviewers. As explained in the video When the Fire Dances Between Two Poles, the fabric for the Witch Dance is a copper-red colored background with a shimmering gold and silver weave. The design is "bold" and "traced in black." Wigman was "hypnotized by the brocade and after adding the mask, she felt the two belonged together."¹⁵ However, the interesting result of her combination is that the fabric is very lively and beautiful, whereas the expression on the mask is more subdued and unpleasant. The following figures, Figures 7 (a,b,c,d,e,f) are a series of photos which show the process of movement as well as costume of Wigman performing the Witch Dance. In combination with the weight of the fabric, mask and floorbound body position,

Figure 7a

Figure 7b

Mary Wigman's Witch Dance exemplifies how the grotesque combines beautiful objects (such as the fabric of the costume) and the ghostly mask, with odd, less desirable body movement. Sechs Phasen a. "Hexentanz II" (1926). Photograph by Charles Rudolph, Dresden. From Bach, Rudolf. Das Mary Wigman Werk. (Dresden: Carl Reissner Verlag, 1933). plates 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

Figure 7c

Figure 7d

Figure 7e

Figure 7f

Contradicting aesthetic choices are used when producing a grotesque image.

the dance is extremely disturbing. Wigman's movements are jerky yet calculated and somewhat violent; the only parts of her body that are visible are her hands, arms, feet and sometimes legs. Although Wigman's costume does not blatantly contain characteristics of an animal or "alien figure" her movement and mask's bland-ghostlike expression suggests a demonic image which is associated with grotesqueness. The image produced is not one associated with "beauty as we have learned it" early on in dance performance experiences of traditional balletic form. Instead the mask imposes a "non-living" permanent expression on the face which creates one constant emotion, causing the image to appear surreal. A more extensive use of the mask in Wigman's works is exemplified in the same video, when the dancers are all uniformed in black leggings and long-sleeved shirts. The main focus of the dancers is on the masks that they wear, along with their hands and feet. Each mask is pale-white with its own separate expression on it. Again the choreography is very calculated and deliberate. In this dance it seems as if the dancers are almost in slow motion, yet the movements aren't always slow. Covered faces, staring masks and contradictions produce mixed messages leaving the spectator unsure of how to react to the performance taking place. Even when a vision is not attractive in a beautiful sense, attraction is produced because the image is unusual. Masks are always grotesque because of the fact that they hide

something, someone, someface behind them. This produces contradictory responses among spectators. Sometimes it causes the spectator to experience some discomfort not knowing what's underneath the mask, while others experience pleasure. The mask never twitches, blinks or reacts. Its purpose is to create tension and draw attention to the one expression it holds. Because the use of mask complicates the dancer's ability to see as clearly as usual, the mask actually affects the choreography of a dance piece. This may explain why some of Wigman's choreography developed into a particular "style" for some of her works.

Because masks are used to create an image of one specific facial expression and cover the true facial expression of the dancer wearing the mask, the mask causes the costume to reflect a non-living aspect of the dancing image. A mask can resemble a sad, happy, frightened, excited, or horrified expression, but, whatever the expression is, it remains constant, unlike a living person's face which always changes. When using masks as a device to achieve a grotesque costume in dance performance, certain emotions are acknowledged by the characteristics of the facial expression of the mask, which can be easily identified by the spectator. Sadness is achieved most successfully when the eyes appear droopy, or tearful and the edges of the mouth are turned downward. Happiness is recognized through facial signs such as an obvious smile (upward lifting of the mouth),

raised cheeks, and content eyes. A frightened expression is accomplished when the eyes appear big and wide, with lifted eyebrows and a wide open mouth, indicating a "gasp" effect. Other facial expressions which are relayed by masks are melancholic, excited, or horrified expressions. Melancholy is a more subtle expression which is often harder to identify than the others. The face is serious, showing little reaction with no specific signs of sadness or happiness. An excited image is an exaggerated version of happiness when the motive which encourages the expression is good and a horrified expression is a result of a more exaggerated quality of a frightened expression. Age is expressed by the excess of folds on the face as well as how much particular parts of the face "droop." By exaggerating the size of different aspects of the face, such as the nose, eyes or a mustache, the image can become comical or caricature. Although facial expressions are human, "life" suggesting signs, it is the un-natural "stillness" of the mask that causes the expression to suggest an "unhuman" quality of the image. This is one reason why a mask can be considered as a device for creating a grotesque image.

Some modes of grotesque are related to non-human characteristics, and contradicting images. Masks are "frozen expressions" combined with the dancer's moving body, creating a contradiction in itself. Because the two are opposites, the "frozen expression" and the moving body, the image gives

the spectator a feeling that some other force controls the dancer. The force can be related to a spell or trance, which is signified through static, slow, calculated movement and blank non-affected facial expression; evil or spiritual intervention, whose characteristics are identified by an extreme lusty expression--evil often represented by slanted eyes, raised eyebrows, possessed grin; a "puppet master," or a force of nature, which is indicated mostly by given text of the dance piece. Whatever expression exists on the mask, it most often appears to be controlled by something else, therefore the image is disturbing, confusing and odd in content in the eyes of the spectator viewing the dance performance. At the same time, however, it is also thrilling. The image is thrilling for several reasons, first of all, the basic sign conveyed by wearing a mask is that of secrecy, mystery and power. A mask suggests that there is more to the expression than meets the eye. Another message relayed is that the spectator is seeing something that is not what it appears to be, and therefore desire is created. This is because desire is connected to the unknown. Initially the spectator watches the image to be entertained, but continues to watch because there is an attraction to the grotesque image; to know what is unknown and see what lies beneath the mask. In addition, the desire is also to understand and experience in some way the "moment" of the dance piece which

suggests that the image is transformed into a "more or less" than human form.

Desire causes a spectator to be drawn into the grotesque dance performance. Although a grotesque image is not desirable in the realm of the "ideal" or beauty as we have learned it, it becomes desirable because it is less acceptable in the realm of the "ideal." Regardless of whatever mode of grotesque costume design is chosen, desire is always the motive behind the spectator's reason for participating, or continuing to participate by watching the performance taking place. However, the spectators may not completely understand why they continue to participate. Curiosity is connected to desire as well as experimentation and rebellion. Human nature desires to experience that which is less acceptable or even dangerous as well as obtain any new experience which has not yet been introduced. Danger, or entering into a world of new experience is exciting for the spectator because of the simple fact that they do not know what to expect.

Another tool of costume design used to produce a grotesque image is using fabric to cover the body in such a way that it causes the dancer to become impaired or take on a form which suggests a non-human image (such as an extraterrestrial creature, animal or robot) a supernatural image (such as sorcerers, or monsters) or a ridiculous image such as clowns or caricatures. Again, the image produced

strives to rebel against the ideal. Costume dictates movement. When fabric impairs a dancer to move properly or beautifully (gracefully) it causes the dancer to move awkwardly, clumsily or minimally. Because dance is primarily associated as a beautiful art through movement of the body, when the body is hindered by the costume, it changes the spectator's perception. This causes the dance to be viewed as less "ideal" on a level which becomes more grotesque than beautiful. Although fabric can complicate the dancer's ability to move, producing a less ideal image, it also creates new challenges for the dancer, encouraging a more interesting, exciting and exhilarating performance. The spectator is no longer simply "comfortable" watching a dance performance, but is forced to relate to the dancing image on an increased intellectual level. This experience is repetitive in grotesque costumes in relation to the dance performance. The artistic choices aren't always explainable, but are chosen for the experience or moment of the dance piece. In other instances, there are specific reasons why particular costume choices are made. These questions have yet to be answered. However, when one part of the body is hindered by the costume itself, then the focus is intensified either on that particular body part, or on the one which moves with more freedom. The dance experience then changes because the spectator is forced to look at the dance performance/image from a different point of view. When the

entire body is covered and cannot be seen at all, then the spectator is forced to look at the object which moves outside the body that controls it from inside the costume. In this particular situation, the fabric becomes the primary source of movement rather than the arms, legs, head or any one body part. Experimentation with materials and structure as a vehicle for movement creates images that the human body is unable to achieve. As a result the image seen becomes an entity of its own, drawing more attention to the movement of a form. Instead of focusing on the movement of the dancer's body, the object/costume becomes the vehicle of manipulation. Movement now becomes a result of limitations within the constraints of the costume. The body inside the costume is not free to express its capacity of movement but must move with the ability of the garment. This particular form of "grotesque costume" is used as a dramatic device in dance performance often encouraging a comical grotesque image, an abstract non-human image or a "superhuman" vision. The next series of photos represent different categories: (1) How costumes can complicate movement. Figure 8 is a photograph of Wigman's dance Tanzmärchen. The costumes in this photo show contrasting figures, some move freely and others are hindered by their costume. The dancers in white cannot move to the extent as the other dancers because the arms are covered completely. The central figure in white has problems with leg movement due to the way the fabric is wrapped around

Figure 8: Tanzmärchen Tanzmärchen is an example of how a costume can produce a grotesque image by imposing physical constraints upon the dancer which causes the movement of the body to change. Das Werk, Mary Wigman (1925). Press Photo, Berlin. Choreographer, Mary Wigman. Dresden. From Bach, Rudolf. Das Mary Wigman Werk. (Dresden: Carl Reissner Verlag, 1933). plate 42.

the legs, and the ability to see is difficult due to volume and weight of fabric around the face. It is this kind of constraint of a costume which challenges the dancers' ability to move, encouraging a grotesque image. (2) How costumes draw focus to particular body parts. In Figure 9 Yoko Ashikawa uses makeup to draw attention to the face. Instead of using makeup to "beautify," it is used to somewhat disfigure the face by imitating scars on the temple and lower lip. The teeth are also blackened, to appear rotted. In addition to the suggestion of deterioration, the face is covered with white makeup, eyes rolled and tongue thrust upward. The rest of the costume is a bland tunic. The face is the emphasis. (3) How the costume becomes the dancing image. Alwin Nikolas' dance Allegory exemplifies how the body becomes "effaced" when completely covered by a super-structure that is no longer body specific. Figure 10 displays an image that is neither male or female. The image shown does not appear human, but as an abstract object. Because the "body" of the image isn't one that is familiar to the spectator, gender or body physique cannot be identified. Within each vehicle, as Nikolais calls it, a person moves inside the object to create a dancing "image" that is no longer an image of a dancing body. The image created in this particular dance uses color and shape in juxtaposition with concise patterns of movement to draw attention to the dance. The costume is now the dancing image.

Figure 9: This photograph exemplifies how makeup is used to cause the face to appear scarred and disfigured, therefore bringing focus to the face, instead of other parts of the body. Choreographed by Yoko Ashikawa. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *Intimacy Plays its Trump*, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, p. 18.

Figure 10: This figure represents how the costume is the dancing image/object not the dancing body. Allegory, Alwin Nikolais. Photograph by David S. Berlin. From Martin, John. John Martin's Book of the Dance. (New York: Tudor Publishers, 1963) p. 175.

Besides being a great innovator in the use of the mask to produce grotesque images, Wigman also relied on the textures of fabric as well. For example, in her dance "Storm Song" the costume "swelled," flowed upward into the air and produced "clouded images."¹⁶ The purpose of "Storm Song" was to create a "gloomy, terrifying, ghostly" feeling.¹⁷ She used costumes in her choreography to "intoxicate" the audience; to create a vision that wasn't beautiful, but mysterious and supernatural. Grotesque images sometimes relay a message of surrealism, or a kind of disassociation from that which is familiar. A very accurate description of Mary Wigman's works is written in an article by Armun Knab. Her costumes are described extensively by the reviewer:

The first dance is called Ceremonial Figure. An orange crinoline, a severe eastern mask. Conscious, capricious movements, minimal life, an awakening figure, the East is near...In the second dance, Dream Figure, a climax has already been reached. The dance appears like an exotic flower, grey on the outside, a deep red, the colour of pain, trying to burst from the inside, in between a body the colour of ivory. The face, distorted by pain, the eye burning, is the embodiment of human suffering. Sometimes we are no longer reminded of human form, grey leaves move like ghosts, the material of the costume seems to be driven by its own impulses.¹⁸

Again, Wigman's costume choices are referred to as ghost-like, non-human, painful and distorted. None of these descriptions is associated with beauty as we have learned it, except possibly some non-human figures. Pain does not represent pleasure; however, there cannot be one without the

other. In Knab's review, further description is made about Wigman's dance costume. "The Ceremonial Figure of the third dance presents an unforeseen change; we see a green and golden cloak, trailing behind her, and beneath it we see a short, black tunic costume. In this dance, too, the body is an almost invisible force inside the voluminous garment reaching for infinity."¹⁹ This example shows how the costume itself is the dance figure being seen. The body is no longer the object of movement, the costume becomes the object of movement. Without the representation of a person-body, the ultimate image revealed is once again associated with mysterious--supernatural or possibly evil forces because, that which is "unknown" or not understood is not usually considered the "norm," therefore it becomes grotesque. Further on in the review of Wigman's dance performances, the Witch Dance is described as "reminiscent of Japanese Ghosts, . . . a terrifying mask, . . . a satanic-non-human instinct seems to inspire the gestures."²⁰ Most of all, Knab says, "Horror becomes rational form."²¹ This comment suggests that the grotesque image becomes ideal. Mary Wigman is described as one who "does not merely use the body as a form of beauty in motion," but "She also exploits the expressive character of her costumes. In her world we do not find beauty for its own sake, nor Greek ideas, but the demonic, the dark side, the terrifying, springing mostly from oriental sources."²² This statement is interesting because Wigman does produce

grotesque images through her costume choices but they tend to also contain "oriental influences." The association of viewing another culture as strange or different apparently affected Wigman's costume conceptions when creating grotesque images. Again, that which is unknown, such as other cultures or that which is not understood is characteristic of a grotesque image, at the same time, though, hints of beauty, in Wigman's costume choices such as color and floral motifs signify that sometimes beauty can be deadly and therefore become grotesque.

Kurt Jooss is another innovator of grotesque dance and grotesque costume. Although most of his works introduce a freer, less traditional form of ballet, few of his costume choices graduate towards the grotesque. These particular pieces stand apart from the others. The Green Table (1932) is one piece that disturbed many spectators of its time. "The Green Table is a story of war, and treats its subject with honesty, clarity and a lack of romanticizing which, far from stressing the sordid and the gruesome, underlines the real-life events from which the work is stylized and gives them a cathartic quality which shakes the heart, and at the same time, clears the mind. Outside the Theatre of Spoken drama this is possibly the first time that war has been treated imaginatively, yet in an adult way, on the stage."²³ In this particular dance, Jooss, like Wigman, puts together an odd combination. Figure 11 is a photograph of the

Figure 11: Old, white, wrinkled masks represent the death and decay of a society. The Green Table, Kurt Jooss. Photograph by Renger-Patsch. From Coton, A.V. The New Ballet: Kurt Jooss and His Work. (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1946). p. 96.

"Negotiators" in Green Table. The dancers wear old wrinkled masks which appear pale, almost deathly looking, containing small patches of hair on the head in different places on each mask. The men are dressed impeccably, in contrast to the withering, decaying images the masks suggest. Crispness of the suits, shiny metals worn around the neck and diminishing faces signify a decaying of a society - there is always a price involved.

At the curtain's rise we see gathered at the table the ten negotiators clad in formal black and wearing grotesque masks; they suggest by means of these false-faces every sort of professional political type: here are the studios, the unworldly, the priest-like and the dreamer, the procounsul, the man-of-fashion and the intriguer...They smile, persuade, flatter, argue, then rage at one another. They threaten and gesticulate wildly with harsh, puppet-like movements which stress the unreality of the emotions to which they pretend.²⁴

Jooss strived for a different style, a new ballet, but there are just a couple of instances when his images cross over the boundary into the world of grotesque. The Green Table continues to be a prominent image. "The dance movement unfolds within a series of six episodes beginning with the collaboration of forces, to the battle and eventual triumph of death. Here is Death presented starkly, Death as medieval man knew him, the figure of the 'Danse Macabre,' the grinning skeleton whose scythe will cut away all men's loves and hopes, fears and ambitions."²⁵ It is the choice of movement,

in contrast to Jooss's direction of costume choice, designed by Hein Heckroth, that encourages a grotesque image.

Although some of the dance movements are described as "Harsh--puppet-like," the image is not completely odd until the masked faces stare out relaying a message of slow deterioration. Like Wigman, Jooss chose to use the mask as a form of expression that only a mask can accomplish. The bare face sometimes is not capable of representing the appropriate image. A human ever-changing face, even with all the help make-up can offer, does not produce the same eeriness, placidity or strangeness that a mask produces. Also, the dramatic effect of the mask is most often much greater than that of a made-up face. The wrinkles, creases, frowns, smiles, as well as all other facial features are intensely prominent and permanently fixed. As a tool or device in performance, especially dance performance--when the body moves, the mask proves quite effective. The distance from the spectator to the image seen on stage becomes increasingly more intimate and the intimacy is part of the reason the spectator experiences discomfort or exhilaration.

Figure 12 is a photograph of a series of masks designed by Sigurd Leeder for a projected dance called Dance of Death, to be choreographed by Jooss. These intense expressions exemplify the point that masks possess a quality separate from the human face. First of all, the eyes are always unrealistic regardless of the artistry of the designer

Figure 12: Masks produce a particular frozen expression that the living/everchanging face is unable to convey. Masks from the projected Dance of Death, Costume Designer, Sigurd Leeder. Photograph by Münster 1927. From Coton, A.V. The New Ballet: Kurt Jooss and His Work. (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1946). p. 86.

because of the fact that they cannot move. In this particular instance, like most others, there simply are no eyes. The absence of eyes becomes very bothersome for some spectators. Lack of eyes, dark cutout sunken eyes, or blank white colorless eyes signify immediately a zombie-like quality. These are eyes which never blink or close. They appear unaffected, entranced, and as if they can see far beyond "human" eyes.

It is evident through Kayser's research that some art movements, as well as some art subject matter, did present evidence that grotesque has existed for quite a long time. However, it is not clear as to how much effect art movements had on dance performance or, more importantly, the costumes in dance performances. It was not uncommon in particular instances for some artists to also design costumes for the stage. One example of an artist/costume designer would be Picasso. Because he had a very prominent art style, his costume designs are easy to identify. The vision Picasso creates through his costume design, from artwork to costume, seems to become "grotesque." His art characteristics are almost always geometric and exaggerated, often creating some kind of odd or almost caricature image. Many times Picasso's visions show twisted bodies or limbs giving the impression of disfiguration of the human body--most particularly women. In other instances, Picasso uses shapes to create the image of man. Figure 13 is an example of one of Picasso's paintings

done around 1915. It is called "Harlequin," an oil painting. The image clearly represents a man standing and smiling. However, the geometric shapes in large and small sizes, put together cause the image to become distorted. Looking at the painting is like putting a puzzle together. This was typical of artists during this time, to create a painting for other reasons besides for the sake of "beauty." Much like grotesque costumes in dance performance, there seemed to be a rebellion against the "ideal." Artists wanted to explore other forms of "beauty" and create new images; images that dealt with non-realistic, non-beautiful, repulsive or unusual visions. Another important aspect is that artists wanted to create visions that were unfamiliar to the spectator, and so the canvas became a place of experimentation as well as new experience. In 1917 Picasso designed a costume for the production Parade. The character is called the "French Manager." Figure 14 is a photograph of this character. The similarities between the costume built for Parade in 1917, and the painting "Harlequin" are remarkable. If the hand holding the walking stick wasn't showing and the crossed legs weren't obviously real legs, the vision would appear to be a painting. All the features of the image, the geometric shapes, flattened, cartoon-influenced face and body, as well as the odd proportions of body-head, limbs and torso suggest an attempt to produce a "walking" Picasso art piece. Regardless of how specifically the costume design resembles

Figure 13:
One example of how art
may have affected images
produced by grotesque
costumes. Pablo Picasso,
Harlequin, 1915, oil on
canvas. From Menaker
Rothschild, Deborah,
Picasso's Parade: From
Street to Stage.
(London: Sotheby's
Publishers, 1991) plate
104, p. 134.

Figure 14:
Pablo Picasso Costume
Design from Parade "The
French Manager" (1917).
From Menaker Rothschild,
Deborah, Picasso's
Parade: From Street to
Stage. (London:
Sotheby's Publishers,
1991) plate 103, p. 134.

some of Picasso's paintings, it produces an unusual image which suggests that this character's costume represents a stiff, non-realistic character. Also, the costume obviously restricts ability to move in the person who wears it; therefore, the character can appear awkward, clumsy and most likely funny. These characteristics of movement cause the meaning of the dance to become a living cartoon or farce.

Picasso's creation represents an abstract approach to costume design. The comparison of the painting and costume in this instance shows them to be similar in style because the same artist created both images, and Picasso in particular had such a prominent style it seems hard to separate one from the other. However, the purpose of the comparison is to show how visual and performing arts often strived to produce an image that represented something more than just a beautiful picture. Like grotesque costumes in dance performance, the images in art began to take on similar characteristics. However, there does not seem to be a strong enough correlation to suggest one is responsible for the emergence of the other. Experimentation is a part of all kinds of art, and it appears that the age of "modernism" or "expressionism" became perhaps a time when artists felt most comfortable or less inhibited to try new ideas, even if they were less acceptable or unheard of.

CHAPTER 3
Exploring Sexual Identity, Gender Roles,
and Nudity through Grotesque Costuming

Because dance is the movement of the body, it would seem impossible to avoid bringing gender or sexuality into focus; however, there have been several attempts through costume design choices that attempt to avoid gender identification. The primary goal is to create an asexual or unisex image. An image such as this in many instances can be identified as grotesque because once an image is non-gender specific the vision is no longer considered "human." A "human" as we have learned is gender specific--either male or female, and possesses gender specific sexual organs. Regardless of whether or not the image acquires a human shape, if the figure's gender is not obvious, then the image is perceived as odd or from another world. One way to achieve a unisex image in a dance is to depersonalize the dancers by dressing the men and women exactly the same. By doing this, a sense of uniformity is established that is communicated to the audience. Alwin Nikolais experimented with costumes to create non-gender specific images in dance. His approach to creating a unisex image through costume choices can be identified as mildly grotesque. Nikolais makes the first step towards creating an alien community by dressing his

dancers uniformly. Figure 15 is a photograph of his dance company performing "Kaleidoscope." The dancers' bodies are completely covered except the feet, face and hands and the costumes are almost exactly the same. In this particular image the silhouette and line of the costume remain the same, but there appears to be color variations of the garments worn. Although costumes of this sort still emphasize the shape of the body suggesting male or female, it is because the garments are uniform in relation to the uniform movement that the overall image suggests a community of unisexuality. New meaning is brought into perspective by a unisex image. The spectator becomes concerned and wonders what the uniform image represents if not "a man" or "a woman." When an image such as this reveals "sameness" as the dominating factor of the dance, the dance appears more mechanical and controlled, much like some of the dance pieces that incorporate masks as costume choices. Both images produce a science fiction, alien society; societies not familiar to the spectator. When questions are proposed regarding gender or sexuality, tension increases and the spectator often becomes concerned about lack of gender specificity in the costume. Are the dancers conveying a bisexual image, homosexual image, or an asexual alien form? In some instances, it is important for the spectator to be able to identify the gender of the dancing image. When gender is unclear through costuming choices, the meaning of the dance piece becomes controversial and the

Figure 15: A sense of unisexuality is created when dancers wear identical non-gender specific costumes. Kaleidoscope, Alwin Nikolais. Photograph by David S. Berlin. From Martin, John, John Martin's Book of the Dance (New York: Tudor Publishers 1963) p. 174.

"controversy" of sexuality and lack of specific gender is what causes the image to become recognized as grotesque.

Although Figure 15 suggests a sense of unisexuality, the figures dancing are still "body" specific, and therefore if the spectator wants to know the gender of the dancer, it is not that hard to figure out, when intentionally looking. The costumes cling and accentuate male/female traits minimizing the degree of grotesqueness associated with unisex/alien figures. However, the pointy alien headpieces and circles attached to the feet are what characterizes the image as strange. Another more effective example of a unisex image conveyed through grotesque costume would be Alwin Nikolais' dance Galaxy. Figure 16 shows the dancers in costume all in black with white face masks. The masks are effective in this instance because all the expressions are identical and it is more difficult to distinguish gender under the dark solid color leotards. Similarities of Galaxy and Kaleidoscope are the unison of costume which suggest a "clone" Society--again associated with an alien world. The costume choices of Galaxy are visibly more disturbing because of the prominence of the white, almost glowing masked faces, causing the bodies of the dancers to practically disappear. In addition, the figures manipulate big white rectangles that appear to be illuminating, as to add to the unusual quality of the dance image.

Figure 16: Another example of how costume choices produce an image of a "clone society. Galaxy, Alwin Nikolais. From Percival, John. Experimental Dance. (New York: Universe Books, 1971) plate 46.

A third example of a unisex image is displayed by Figure 17 through Paul Taylor's dance 3 Epitaphs. In this particular dance the dancers are costumed in black, similarly to those in Nikolais' Galaxy but the faces are completely covered obliterating any indication of the "face." Instead of representing a society of aliens or a science fiction society, the images appear to be creatures of some sort. The images keep the basic human shape but gender isn't apparent, nor are any human qualities associated with a face. This image encourages grotesqueness because of the strange non-human aspects of the head piece worn; a lumpy black head shaped with big holes or "eyes" on top of them. In addition to the costume, the bodies are moving strangely, one leaping like a frog, others saggy, with "droopy" arms dangling like dead branches. The head hangs down on some of the dancers and remains up on two others. It is difficult to know where to focus as a spectator because there is no eye contact whatsoever of facial expressions to represent emotion. In all of the unisex costume examples there remains one common trait, although each costume is clearly different. Every "body" suggests systematic movement, and there appears to be a lack of emotional response or interaction among the dancers on stage. Body posture of the dancers takes on a similarity and attitude indicating they are from the same "community."

Figure 17: This image suggests an Alien Society through body posture, leaping movement and defaced costume. 3 Epitaphs, Paul Taylor. From Percival, John. Experimental Dance. (New York: Universe Books, 1971) plate 54.

This is the main connection recognized when relating the movement to the costume. The dancers who show their faces have blank expressions, the dancers who wear masks have blanker expressions because any indication of liveliness is drained and the figures in the dance 3 Epitaphs have no facial expressions at all, causing focus to be drawn somewhere else. Perhaps the white dots, eyes or whatever they are meant to be are the "expression." Of course it is important to not forget about the rest of the body other than the face. When the face is covered such as it is in 3 Epitaphs, then it is expected that the spectator would look at the other parts of the body for other expression. In this instance, the spectator is forced to notice the expressionistic ability of the dancing image in different ways.

Because gender is such a dominating image in dance performance, when it is experimented with through costume design choices, it becomes an issue of "disturbing nature." Of all the types of performing arts, dance performance is the one that presents gender and sexuality most clearly and openly compared to other forms of live performance. Ideally gender is established through the body and can be identified immediately by the spectator. When gender is not apparent through the body, as a result of the costume, the dance causes some curiosity, anxiety and tension, therefore often

producing a grotesque image, most particularly when the feminine and masculine features are reversed through gender specific clothing. What happens when gender specific costumes are reversed? The immediate reaction is to laugh because the "ideal" has been disturbed and is not as it should be; as we have learned boys and girls to be. Immediately from birth, gender differences are established by the way a baby is dressed. The garments on the body represent the gender of the child.

Societies have specific ways--including dance--of sending messages of sexual identity, and showing us ways to discriminate ourselves as male or female. Thus in the United States visual markers are pink for female and blue for male babies. Later follow skirts and curls for girls and pants, ties and short hair for boys. The clothing industry broadcasts gender by a full code of design details: round collar for a girl; pointed, never scalloped, edges on a boy. For appliqués, trains and soldiers for boys, no flowers or butterflies.²⁶

In ballet dance costume, women wear tutus and men wear (pant-like) leotards. It is unusual to see a man in a dress or even more unusual to see a man dancing in a tutu. However, it is more acceptable for women to wear pants. Pants on women are associated with positive images representing a liberated, modern, strong, independent woman, but a dress on a man suggests a weak, less masculine, less serious, less competent man, according to the idealistic image of man. Most often this type of image is rejected, laughed at or is not taken seriously. Although it would seem that specific garments worn on the body should have nothing to do with a

perceived life style, they do. Anything that strikes an audience/spectator as unusual then becomes categorized as abnormal, grotesque and often not acceptable. In the ballet performance The Hard Nut (1988), an adaptation of the classical ballet The Nutcracker (1890), choreographer Mark Morris attempts to step out of the "ideal" by including men in a dance usually performed by women only. (video, The Hard Nut) This experiment brings men into the famous sugarplum fairy dance wearing classic, standard sugarplum fairy costumes. Morris integrates men and women wearing identical garments identified ideally as female specific costume: toe shoes, tights, a tutu and a shimmery "crop" top exposing the abdominal area. The arms are uncovered and each dancer wears an identical hat with the hair tucked in, so that only the face is exposed. Some of the dancers are also bare legged as well as barefoot. At the beginning of the dance it is not noticeable that there is a gender difference, but merely an image of many tutus (women) dancing about the stage. The costume becomes the first signifier for identifying gender. After studying the dance more carefully, it becomes noticeable that some of the dancers do not move as gracefully/femininely as others, so the focus is placed on these particular dancers. Immediately it is apparent that they are men, not women. A common reaction would be "why aren't they wearing pants?" A reaction such as this is due to the gender-specific identities learned through idealistic,

societal dress codes. However, the feminine costume alone is not what conveyed an awkward image. The movements performed by the male dancers were very feminine as well, but with as much effort the male dancers put into the dance, it was not the same image as that of the female dancers. Because the male anatomy is different from female anatomy, the movements look different, even though they are the same. The male dancers weren't as flexible, graceful or fluid with the choreography given as the females were. Also, some of the men did not wear tights so body hair on chest, legs and under the arms was very obvious in comparison to the women. The image conveyed awkwardness. In addition, the costume choices made in this dance suggests that the "Sugar Plum Fairy" image is often interpreted as female. Because of this stereotype, the male dancers wearing standard "Sugar Plum Fairy" dress are looked upon as "more feminine men," or men associated with a deviant lifestyle, especially in ballet. Prancing, pointing toes and performing pirouettes, in congruency with wearing a tutu, are translated as female signifiers in dance. When men take on these movements with the addition of the costume, tension and conflict arises, often confusing the audience/spectator. The ambiguity of the male image created in this dance sends signals which deconstruct the accepted idealist identities given through dress codes to males and females at birth. In an instant an uneasiness sets in, and insecurity of one's own identity becomes questionable. Why

is it unattractive to many to present men in an image similar to women? Possibly the concept of complete equality is a threat to either sex. Identity isn't as clear, or specific, and therefore it encourages the possibility of losing what little identity one possesses through gender specific signifiers such as dress and gesture. Also, frowning on men who possess feminine qualities suggests that women have always been viewed as less significant individuals than men. Figure 18 is another example of the tensions created when men wear "Feminine Costume." This dance is titled "Callas" by Reinhild Hoffmann. When costumes present a man as having feminine attributes, he becomes categorized as a "wimpy" or weak man. Because of the continual fight of women proving to be man's equal, femininity is often viewed as a regression in representation rather than a quality or natural human characteristic. Any signification of man graduating towards femininity indicates a demeaning of his character instead of a quality admired. This attitude has held precedence in society for so long that a self-consciousness of external appearance has become part of the dominating factor involved when creating images in dance. This attitude implies that the "ideal" for men is not to dress in any way which may suggest femininity. Because of this, the gender specific cycle continues in many types of performance, particularly dance performance. Gender reversal through costume becomes

Figure 18: By dressing men in costumes which are identified as "feminine" dress, the idealistic notions of gender specific clothing are disturbed. Callas, Reinhild Hoffmann. Theater Bremen (1983). From Schmidt, Jochen. Tanz Theater in Deutschland. (Berlin: Propyläen, 1992) p. 137.

more of a farce than an acceptable mode of dress, therefore producing an awkward-grotesque image.

One possible way to alleviate the conflicts produced through gender specific costumes, most particularly the encouragement of gender oriented grotesque costumes in dance performance, would be to analyze the body with minimum or no costume. By eliminating the "costume" the tensions or attitudes created through costume imagery disappear, and are no longer a preoccupation of the viewer, and by minimizing the costume, the image presented returns a more specific focus. When introducing the almost nude or completely nude body on stage, new tensions arise, as well as a different perspective of grotesque costume through body gesture develops. Displaying the body nude, as in bare minimal garments in an open atmosphere, such as in a performance, on a stage, in front of possibly hundreds of people, creates an ambivalent feeling. The audience members often do not know how to react, and a sense of self-consciousness sets in. The self-consciousness may be associated with recognition of their own gender, as well as sexuality or sexual preference or may have nothing to do with any of these issues except the fact that some societies are not used to interaction with nudity on a more "social" level. Instead, nudity is associated with intimacy and privacy, most particularly when gender specific body parts are evident such as breasts or a penis. When clothing is worn at a minimum, these body parts

are most likely always to be covered. Why is it that the legs and hands aren't covered and the rest of the body revealed? Grotesque costume takes the liberty to address this issue and explore it.

First of all, nudity in itself is an issue, therefore nudity is most always associated with controversy, tension and awkwardness regardless of how pleasant the image seen may be. Also, nudity is always somehow associated with grotesqueness for many spectators due to the uncomfortableness that they experience through their own lack of exposure and opportunity. In addition, nudity is also a very personal issue in which there are several different views on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of when, where or how nudity should be displayed in performance. With consideration to the debate that nudity presents, the conclusion is that nudity can be used as a form of costume to promote a grotesque image in dance performance.

Dance is the performance of body movements; therefore, nudity is in itself a kind of costume. It is not a costume in the sense that it is made up of garments that are worn over the body to cover it, but a termination of all other meanings that exist when the body is covered with fabrics. Nudity forces the audience to look at the dancer for what he/she really is, male or female, making no mistake. There are no questions about gender due to ambiguities some costume choices may present. Sexuality becomes more of a focus,

because the genitals are apparent, and uncovered. The movement performed by the dancer draws attention to particular body parts, and the human body is viewed more carefully as a "body" rather than an image signifying other identities through the costume work, such as alien beings or ghostly creatures. Nudity represents itself as a kind of costume because of the additional meanings it relays to the audience other than gender. By presenting the body nude the preoccupation of images created by clothing are eliminated and a new kind of image is introduced. When revealing the body completely, the immediate message conveyed is one of total freedom from constraint, because clothing in one way or another constrains the body from movement. Besides representing a freedom of movement, nudity also introduces an attitude of rebellion against society. Society inflicts ideals and attitudes which in return create dress codes, therefore clothing is a type of "external social constraint."²⁷ By eliminating clothing, the ability of freer movement of the body in performance suggests to the audience a release of the imposed constraints of society. At the same time, as mentioned before, the "release" provokes a feeling of self-consciousness on the part of the spectator. Also, watching nudity is associated with negative connotations in several societies.

Past research shows that the nude body is used as a tool for significations (much like costumes). Karl Toepfer's

article "Nudity and Modernity in German Dance, 1910-30" examines different types of nude dances of the Weimar Republic modern dance world. In this particular research several examples of nude dance groups, as well as individual nude dancers, use movement of the naked body to relay the messages throughout the dance piece. The nude body expresses itself in many ways. Ideally it is represented as a sign of "modernity," as an "ideal of good health, beauty and strength" (revealed through nakedness) as a sign of "athletic prowess," and "nature" as well as one of "desire." (Toepfer; various terms taken from article.) In contrast, a nude dancing body that does not follow the description of the "ideal" could be regarded as a form of grotesque. Dancers who reveal their bodies nude rely on movement to represent costume or "attitude." When a dancer poses in such a way that distorts the natural form of the body and causes the body to appear deformed, the image no longer appears as a unaffected "nude" body. Instead the awkward, ungraceful movement implies a costume of grotesqueness through gesture. In addition, an unfit body that does not portray "athletic prowess" or good health is not considered beautiful, as beauty is revealed through idealism.

An example of how nudity and minimal costume can create a grotesque image is shown by Figure 19. The dance is Homage to Kandinsky, with Min Tanaka and Mai Juku. The woman in this particular photograph is shown completely nude wearing

Figure 19: Grotesque costume often produces tension or shock. Nudity in any form for many spectators is controversial. Choreographed by Min Tanaka and Mai Juku. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *Homage to Kandinsky, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, p. 107.

only a pair of large black shoes which appear to be men's shoes. Across from the woman a man is seen fully clothed, but without shoes or socks on. The physical appearance of the woman is ideal in that her body shape is slim and appears athletic from a dancer's perspective, however, the pose in which her body is seen encourages a less than ideal image. Instead of careful, graceful movement, the dancer twists her body, clenches her fists and bends her legs in such a way that draws attention to her nude body. Her facial expression is aggressive. The fact that she only wears large men's shoes and nothing else contributes to the strangeness and symbolism of the image. It appears that possibly the shoes were taken off the man at some point in the dance and then put on by the woman. The man is very disturbing to watch because he appears disoriented. His clothes are somewhat messy, hair uncombed and he is barefoot. The dancer walks as if he is a zombie or possibly injured. His pose suggests slow, difficult movement. His face is unexpressive and rice is coming out of his mouth, as well as is all over the floor. Because the woman wears men's shoes and the man is barefoot, the statement of the image suggests that the woman is controlling the man. Her power lies within her nakedness. The man becomes her victim, looking helpless, hurt and ill.

By establishing gender roles in dance through costume, and revealing the body through nudity, the emergence of sexuality then comes into focus. One cannot be present

without the other."...Dance often displays a person's sexual appeal, provides stimulating fantasy or foreplay, and communicates information as a prelude to encounters that lead to mating."²⁸ This display of sexuality in dance is encouraged by the way the body is decorated. By wearing makeup, jewelry and various accessories in addition to clothing, attention is placed on particular parts of the body. When this display of decoration becomes noticed by another, the vision becomes a kind of sexual promotion. Dance in itself intensifies sexuality because the body is the performance; however, what is worn on the body becomes part of the image promoted. In most instances when promoting sexuality the body is usually decorated with attractive things that encourage an idealistic look of what makes one beautiful. In contrast, when producing a grotesque image of this sort, the body is decorated in such a way that it is not considered beautiful or attractive in an idealistic manner. There are grotesque images that strive for "beauty," but the beauty is one that is applied in a different more extreme way, therefore causing the image to reflect a distasteful, unusual form of beauty.

A good example of how the body promotes sexuality through grotesque costuming is Figure 20. This photograph shows three men covered from head to toe in gold metallic paint. The gold paint decorates their bodies in a way that suggests a celebration or beautification of the naked body.

Figure 20: These costumes represent a grotesque perspective of sexuality. Choreographer, Akaji Maro. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *Solo from Book of Five Rings, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, p. 85.

In addition, bracelets adorn the wrists and ankles. The face is also painted with black and silver that produces elongated eyebrows, nose and eyes suggesting a devilish or god-like image. The "clothing" worn is very minimal, consisting of painted gold rope and cloth wrapped around the men's genitals, with erect penises strapped on the body. Much like other grotesque images, the movement performed by the dancers is awkward, almost barbaric in this instance, emphasizing very sexually suggestive movements. The hips appear to use a thrusting motion as if the dancers are celebrating some kind of "manhood"-fertility dance. Although the dance implicates beauty through the gold decoration, it instead encourages tremendous discomfort due to the enlarged, erect penises, which become almost the center of attention in this particular dance. As a spectator, it is difficult not to focus on the penis and the fact that all the dancers are men. The discomfort is a continual experience due to the fact that it is hard to keep from staring. Also, the relationship of the male dancers is not clear so questions of purpose among the dancers arise. Are the dancers decorated to attract the opposite sex, each other, or do they represent another entity dealing with sexual desire/sexuality? The true purpose is confusing to the spectator, and this is what controls the spectator's desire to keep watching the dancing image.

Another similar example of how sexuality is promoted/revealed through grotesque costume is exemplified by Figure

21. This image is very similar to the previous figure in that the dancers are male and their bodies are also covered with gold metallic paint. Another reason for similarity is that it is the same dance group. However, these dancers bodies are upside down in a handstand position, legs propped up against a wooden frame, which enables them to move as the other dancers. Again the primary focus is on the male dancers crotch area. This particular costume is less revealing but more exaggerated and vulgar than the previous figure shown. Besides the gold body paint, the actual costume is a piece of hair-like material strapped over the genital area with a large phallic object attached suggesting a man's penis. There is a cord attached which indicates the red glowing ornament is electrical or possibly lights up. The concept of this costume choice again emphasizes male sexuality. However, it is difficult to determine exactly what the motive is behind the costumed image. Clearly there is a "shock" factor involved when introducing an image such as this one in performance. Regardless of how beautiful gold metallic is or how it may reflect light and shadows in such a way as to emphasize body contour, as well as a statuesque look, the combination of the phallic piece, disrupts what little beauty the shiny, worthy gold represents. Gold is associated with riches, wealth, beauty and success, indicating a positive perception and adornment of the human body. In contrast a big hairy, awkward, ugly object hangs

Figure 21: Odd combinations of costume choices such as gold painted bodies and exaggerated phallic symbols are prevalent in Butoh Dance costumes and can be regarded as grotesque. Choreographer, Byakkosha. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *Skylark and Lying Buddha, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, p. 95.

intrusively from these men's sexual organs relating a negative message in relation to the rest of the painted body. It is this type of contradiction that encourages confusion and reaction from the spectator. The phallic costume piece, which covers the men's body as it does, associates sexuality, in this instance, as barbaric and unidealistic, therefore provoking a grotesque image of sexuality.

CHAPTER FOUR

Identifying Images of Communities of Grotesque Costume in Dance Performance

When grotesque costumes are presented in a group such as they often are in Butoh dance, or as they are from examples of Alwin Nikolais' work, the impression given is one of "community." A community of grotesque costume in dance performance can happen when a number of dancers come together in the same or similar costume, involved in systematic or communal movement obtaining distinctly grotesque characteristics which indicate that there is a sense of belonging to a specific/special group. Often the image presented suggests a cult-like experience because of the exclusiveness of the style in costume, and movement, which is what separates these dancers from other groups, causing a community to form.

The message related in communities of grotesque costume in dance performance is very powerful, as there is power in numbers often suggesting combat; an army of grotesque figures invading the calm space and ground in which they dance upon. Authority, exclusiveness, and rebellion are represented through posture of the negotiators as the dancers move and converse in Jooss' The Green Table. Referring to Figure 22 it is obvious that the dancers are all from the same society

Figure 22: "The Gentlemen in Black" display a "community of grotesque through costume similarities and communal movement. The Green Table, Kurt Jooss. From Coton, A.V. The New Ballet: Kurt Jooss and His Work. (London: Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1946) p. 92.

of grotesqueness. Their costumes are their "badge" of identification and their synchronized movements suggest a union rather than a variation of individualism. In addition the masks worn by the dancers in this instance, create a unison of style and similarity of facial expression.

Another example of a community of grotesque costumes in dance performance is the characteristics associated with Butoh dance. Figures 23 and 24 are photographs of two separate Butoh dance groups and the similarity of both costume and movement style. In both figures the similar characteristics are: white painted bodies or faces, rolled back eyes, some shaved heads, and spasmodic body movement. These elements are common among the Butoh costume, therefore separating these images by an associated stylistic choice of costume which not only causes the image to be identified as "Butoh," but as a community of grotesque costume practice as well. Much Butoh dance involves groups of people, and grotesque images, however, this is not true for all Butoh dance pieces. The association and acknowledgment of the unusual suffering and death related overtones in Butoh dance and costume is what draws these images into another realm of existence; the Butoh Community; a community which explores elements of grotesque nature through dance and costume choices. However, this dance group exemplifies qualities which encourage a stylistic aesthetic combination that is exclusive to Butoh dance only; whereas Jooss and Wigman's

Figure 23: Butoh Dance produces qualities through dance movement and costume choice which segregate it into its own community of grotesque. Choreographed by Uno Man. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *21,000 Leagues, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, face plate.

Figure 24: Common characteristics of Butoh Dance costume: white painted bodies, shaved heads and rolled back eyes. Choreographer, Dai Rakuda Kan. Reprinted with permission. Ethan Hoffman, *The North Sea, Butoh: Dance of the Dark Soul*, Mark Holborn, ed., Aperture, New York, 1987, p. 35.

dance style is consistent, but their costume choices aren't always controversial in relation to movement, therefore a grotesque community is not always the result.

A group of dancers possessing qualities that encourage unusual, ungraceful, ridiculous, or odd combinations of body movement in juxtaposition with bizarre, abnormal, unidealistic costuming in a way that provokes a fragmented, unpredictable response--threatening the spectators' level of pleasure--is considered a community of the grotesque. The main differences between communities of grotesque costume and an individual grotesque image is this: The more figures that exist, the greater the impact that the image begins to represent the norm. Communities of grotesque images possess expansive power, therefore, the combination of images that exist, produce different results which lead to the visual intensity of the grotesque community. As there are different modes of grotesque images such as tragic, morbid, comic and fantasy, there are also different categories of grotesque communities. These categories are: Nude Grotesque; Dichotomies of Movement and Costume; Semi-Cross Dressing and Cross Movement; and Exact, Systematic Movement and Identical Costume.

Nude Grotesque Communities are groups of dancers who do not wear costumes or who may wear very minimal accessories. The dancers use distorted body movement and strained facial expressions to produce the grotesque image. If a group of

five dancers danced nude, one being a fat, 300 pound woman attempting balletic movement, another two being men standing on their heads with legs spread, and the last two (male or female) squatting with their heads between their legs sticking out their tongues--rear ends toward the audience, the image produced is grotesque. The five dancers are all creating a unified grotesque image because it is the presence and individuality of each grotesque movement with each separate physical body that produces a grotesque connection between dancers, creating a grotesque harmony.

Dicotomies of Movement and Costume create communities by presenting groups of dancers wearing idealistic costume choices dancing grotesque movement, or groups of dancers wearing grotesque costume choices dancing idealistic movement. This type of community depends upon combination choice. For example, a group of ten men dancing in Swan Lake to the same choreography but wearing huge beaks on their faces and big duck feet, would instantly cause the dance to take on a grotesque community form.

Semi-Cross Dressing and Cross Movement communities are groups of dancers who strive to dance like or appear to be the opposite gender. As mentioned previously, in Morris's The Hard Nut, the men dressed like the women Sugar Plum Fairies but did not take it as far as they could to look like women. The message relayed was not that they wanted to be women, but that Sugar Plum Fairies always wear tutus,

regardless of gender. Because of the presence of gender differences in comparison to the classic Sugar Plum Fairy image, the vision suggests the Sugar Plum Fairies to be a grotesque community, through semi-cross dressing.

Exact, Systematic Movement and Identical Costume: When a large number of dancers possess grotesque dance movement characteristics and unusual modes of costuming while performing together, an obvious image of community occurs. This type of grotesque community is easy to identify and often deals with mysterious, alien societies.

All of the categories of communities of grotesque are representative of individual-specific communities within the larger realm of the concept of grotesqueness.

Communities of grotesque often suggest that an authority figure is in control or has taken possession of a group--much like many powerful leaders of countries and armies, or corrupt religious leaders who control large numbers of people. In some instances, the association with negative or bad experience causes the image of grotesque communities to become a threat, or pose danger on to the spectator. Other situations, such as Oskar Schlemmer's "society" of futuristic beings in the Das Triadische Ballett show a community of grotesque costumes which encourage a delightful effect to its spectator. Although each figure in the Das Triadische Ballett, as seen in Figure 25 has a different costume, the similarity in style, color, texture and total concept in

Figure 25: This group of dancers wear costumes which indicate they come from a "different society" producing a futuristic community image (photo anon.) Triadic Ballet, Oskar Schlemmer. From Dirk Schepler, Das Triadischen Ballett. Berlin: Akademie der Künste, p. 15.

relation to the movement of the entire dance piece suggests that these figures go together and co-habitate together.

Additional examples of communities of grotesque costume in dance performance are commonly identified in many of Alwin Nikolais' works. Nikolais repeatedly uses groups of dancers, dressed in identical costumes, performing systematic, identical movement. Sometimes it is even difficult to distinguish men from women. His examples go beyond the idea that a community of "grotesque costumes" is dependent on belonging to a specific group through costume and movement similarities, but that a community of grotesque costume is exact, unified costumes and movement, as well as non-gender specific. Nikolais also establishes communities of alien societies through the use of grotesque costume techniques. Aesthetically, Nikolais presents a style of dance which can be identified as his own, but it is primarily the costume choices which encourage unfamiliar images identified as communities of grotesque.

Another instance when a community of grotesque can be identified through costume in dance performance would be Figure 26. This figure is from Totentanz II by Mary Wigman. Although previously grotesque costume was identified in her Witch Dance, the difference is that in this instance, Wigman has created a community of "Ghostly" figures through her costume choices and movement. All the figures are wearing blousy, draped, folds of sheer, flowy fabric which covers the

Figure 26: Again, groups of dancers wearing similar costume, which sets them apart from the "norm" produce a community of grotesque. Totentanz II, Mary Wigman. From Bach, Rudolf. Das Mary Wigman Werk. (Dresden: Carl Reissner Verlag, 1933) plate 43.

body, except the hands and feet. The hair is covered with a veil and the face is hidden by a mask. All the figures wear white, pale, illuminating masks which hold similar sad, frowning expressions. The primary source of movement is with the arms and hands. Movement style alone suggests an association of communication between members of the grotesque community.

Each image of a community of grotesque costume practice moves in its own way in relation to the constraints of the costume worn. In Wigman's dance the masks and arm movement create visual elements which can be identified as the obvious characteristics of a community of grotesque, whereas a community of the grotesque can be identified through Nikolais' dances when the dancers wear unitards, dance in unison and imitate an alien society. In comparison, Butoh dance, can be identified as its own community of grotesque costume in dance performance based on the repetitive characteristics of spasmodic body movement, white painted bodies and rolled back eyes, as mentioned before. However, when all the different grotesque images are combined on stage, they do not form one specific community of grotesque. The images are exclusive to their own individual characteristics that create the community of grotesqueness in which they live.

Besides costume and movement being a factor of determination of community style, text and mode of grotesque

also contribute to the identity of the community. For example, Wigman's grotesque community in the dance Totentanz II, emulates a tragic grotesque image because the expressions of the masks are serious, concerned and sad, as well as suggest a ghostly almost "on the verge of death" reaction. The community has been affected by something which causes the images to react through movement with representation of costume. Oskar Schlemmer's Das Triadische Ballett creates a comic/fantasy grotesque community through the use of costumes. All the figures' costumes are colorful, outrageous and very enjoyable to watch based on the sometimes comical movement due to the limitations the costume imposes on the dancer. On the other hand, the Butoh figures representing communities of grotesque, suggest a very morbid grotesque community indicating references to death and the process of dying through convulsive, life resisting movement. Although each dance group as well as costume choice is different, the exclusiveness of the costume choice and style of movement are what segregate each mode of grotesque and dance groups into each community of the grotesque. All of these examples are a result of the influence of the stylistic choreography given by their creative leaders. Each choreographer or group mentioned strove to separate from traditional ballet or idealistic notions of how beauty is represented in dance. It is evident that there is a strong connection between their stylistic aesthetic choices and the formation of a grotesque

community because each style is its own community of dance to begin with. It is the addition of the costume which transforms the dance style into an unconscious level of "risk taking" from an aesthetic perspective. To be a group of female dancers wearing long white dresses dancing to Wigman's choreography of Totendanz II produces a different feeling than when the gloomy masks are worn. The movement "style" may be the same, but the encouraged response changes, as well as the "stylistic, aesthetic." Costumes affect style and are a major aesthetic component in dance when producing grotesque communities.

Many examples of grotesque costume in dance performance dwell on the subject of death, demons or spirits of evil nature. What is it that draws so much interest to these subjects? After viewing various photographs of grotesque costumes that present images with death, demonic or evil overtones, it is apparent that the reasons are many. Fear is a primary reason for exploring these issues through costumes in dance performance. Anything that speculates the meaning of death or what it is to experience death, or a demonic creature must also come to terms with the fear associated with the experience. Ugliness is also another aspect of dying. The body ages, decays and therefore is not the young, beautiful life giving image that is idealized through life's journey. Growing old, approaching death is often a dreaded part of life, not a celebration, at least in the United

States. Death is stigmatized as an unattractive, undesirable image and therefore is not welcomed as much as other, less fearful images. By addressing death through grotesque costume in dance performance, the spectator is forced to analyze and re-evaluate the fact that death is a part of the life process. Demonic images address fear of the unknown as well as death, but are not a reality for the spectator the way death is. As for the meaning behind these kind of images it is not clear. For each individual spectator, each image represents different meaning and experience. From one perspective, by exploring death and what it "may" represent through grotesque costume eases the tension of accepting that which is undesirable, according to idealistic notions, and puts it into its own realm of desire through the experience of performance.

Regardless of the image created as a result of grotesque costume, it often confuses dance with meaning. Figures such as Wigman's Witch Dance combine beauty of fabric choice with stagnant, harsh movement, as well as an eerie, ghostly, possessed expression imposed on the mask worn by the dancer. The message conveyed confuses the dance because of the fact that the combination of beautiful, aesthetically pleasing fabric does not suggest ghostly or demonic overtones the way the mask and body movement does. The message conveyed through the dance could mean that witches are beautiful, or that beauty is a tool of evil, therefore creating a witch.

Another example of how the grotesque confuses meaning would be relevant when viewing images where men dress in standard women's costume, such as they did in The Hard Nut and dance with sincerity as the women dance. The confusion begins immediately: are the men striving to be women's equal or are they poking fun at women in dance? Do men desire to wear women's clothes or simply want to be recognized for their artistry as a dancer not a specific gender who is dancing.

Grotesque costume in dance performance thrives on confusing the meaning of the dance piece. It is the confusion of meanings that ignites the controvercies associated with grotesque costumed images. The congruency of costume choice and movement work best together when creating images of the grotesque. Without some form of risk taking, debate or controversy, through grotesque costume choices, the images presented would not hold the amount of interest that the images possess.

CHAPTER FIVE
An Overview of Grotesque Costume Practices
from a Cultural Perspective

Many characteristics of grotesque costumes in dance performance can be associated with the culture from which it derived. Nudity, in particular, is displayed through costuming in various degrees depending on the culture from which it comes as well as the fact that all cultures deal with anxiety of the body when presenting a grotesque image. There is also some symbolic similarity of costume design elements which show that certain characteristics or motifs displayed are common among many cultures. These symbols are most always associated with religious beliefs, rituals and traditional or stereotypical ideals. Because there are so many different cultures, the conclusion of how culture affects grotesque costume in dance performance and its degree of acceptance or popularity, is based only on the particular choreographers/designers from which information was gathered in the specific study.

Germany can be acknowledged in several ways for its contribution of choreographers and costume designers of the grotesque. Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss, Oskar Schlemmer, and Reinhild Hoffman are only some of the creators of grotesque images through costume to be considered. German artists seem

to be the most prominent innovators of grotesque costume in dance performance, and through Kayser and Flögel's research show more interest in defining "grotesque" than other cultures.

Mary Wigman played a significant part in the creation of grotesque costuming techniques in dance performance. She used two primary elements repeatedly to create a grotesque image; masks and interesting fabrics. Masks in particular intrigued Wigman and represented to her a sense of mystery and power through frozen expression that the uncovered face was unable to achieve, as well as of the oriental influence most particularly through her Witch Dance. She was interested in displaying ghostly, demonic and somnolent images through costume as well as dance movement. Wigman can be recognized most significantly for her calculated-focused dance movement in combination with drapes of flowy cloth concealing the dancer's body, drawing attention to the mask worn by the dancer. This effect is what provokes a grotesque image, separating Wigman into the category of a creator of grotesque costume in dance performance.

Kurt Jooss held similar interest in using masks as an element of grotesque costume, however his dance style was much different. Jooss strove to reform traditional ballet to a "New Ballet." The style of movement encouraged by Jooss was much more melodic--smooth and balletic than Wigman's choreography. Because of this difference, Jooss encouraged a

new twist to the grotesque, creating some equally grotesque costume pieces with less awkward, sometimes very aesthetic body movement combinations. However, it is Jooss' preoccupation with subject matter such as war and death that encourage the grotesque costumed image.

In contrast to the very intense interest in masks, death and demons, Oskar Schlemmer created a fictional society of robotic, doll-like, space-age (futuristic) images in the Das Triadische Ballett. Figure 27 is a photo of a sketch of the costumes to be built and Figure 28 is a photo of two of the finished costumes. It is hard to distinguish color from a black and white photograph, but after viewing a video, the costumes appeared very colorful and delightful (Oskar Schlemmer "Das Triadische Ballett"). The dancers ability for movement is altered due to the use of stiff-plastic and metal materials used to create the costumes. The costume is the focus, and the movement is controlled by the composition of the costume. However the geometric shapes, horizontal and spiral lines imposed on the costume suggest constant movement even when the dancers aren't moving. Schlemmer introduced a form of grotesque costume which creates a fantasy world much like the ideas of Alwin Nikolais, but uses unusual costume elements which cover the body and control movement and add a comical effect, whereas Nikolais tends to use movement (in most cases) to control the body and costume as a basis for unification. Because there are so many contributors to the

Figure 27: Oskar Schlemmer introduced a type of grotesque costume which creates a "fantasy" (robot) image. *Figurin-Plan Zum Triadischen Ballett* (1926). Photograph by Gert Weigelt. From Schmidt, Jochen: *Tanztheater in Deutschland*. (Berlin: Propyläen-Verl., 1992) p. 35.

Figure 28: Two examples of the finished costumes, done in 1977, taken from the original concept. Das Triadische Ballett, 1977. Gerhard Bohner. Choreographed by Oskar Schlemmer, with Colleen Scott and Ivan Liska; Akademie der Künste Berlin. Photograph by Gert Weigelt. From Schmidt, Jochen: Tanztheater in Deutschland. (Berlin: Propyläen-Verl., 1992) p. 102.

creation of grotesque costumes in dance performance in Germany, this suggests that the German culture is less inhibited to express new images on stage. The stage is the arena for experimentation. War, death, demons and the "unusual" are of great interest, therefore, the need to explore these issues through dance performance and costume statements become obvious.

Alwin Nikolais contributed to grotesque costumes in dance performance by introducing the idea that movement equals perfect equality and that sex difference doesn't matter. He often put dancers in full-body tights creating an equality in appearance through costume as well.

But this was 1956, when dancing in full-body tights was not common practice in modern dance. Men danced in men's clothes and women in dresses or skirts; otherwise it was difficult to get 'emotional' about them. Seeing the human form revealed in tights gave you two choices; you could either think dirty or come to grips with dance as abstraction--a very difficult choice I might add.²⁹

Nikolais continually experimented with fabric and costume choices which set him apart from other choreographers/dance groups in the United States. His constant attempt and success in creating non-gender specific (unisex) and alien images brought about much controversy challenging preconceived ideals of how men and women are presented through costume choices in dance performance.

As a dance teacher, he often came up against the brick wall of the manners and mannerisms prescribed by social mores. He hammered away at the women who retreated behind Victorian frailty and ruthlessly

imitated the male machismo. Before he could teach decentralization, he had to strip the dancer of his sexist cover. In his abstract expressionistic theatre, the men and women wore the same costumes and freely interchanged roles. . . . He also insisted that on stage his artists rise above the erogenous, and that we not carry our beds onto the boards.³⁰

Although Nikolais primarily concealed the body instead of revealing it through grotesque costume choices, the goal was not to disregard sexuality completely.

Like many other artists, Nikolais experimented with movement and the naked body on stage. However, "He was one of the first to present nude dancers on national public television. In 'Relay,' a made-for-television film produced by the BBC in London, he utilized the naked human form to create a particular effect. When it was televised in the United States it was X-rated."³¹ Nudity is an issue in which the degree of acceptance is dependent on culture. It is obvious from the rating of the film Nikolais created, that London accepted the image of nudity in dance much more freely than the United States which rated the film X-rated. The controversies associated with nudity vary, and from a cultural prospective it seems that European countries such as France, England, Italy and Germany are less inhibited to reveal the naked body in dance performance, in public, than the United States. On the other hand, Japan's reaction to one of Nikolais' dance pieces was even more extreme than the X-rating the United States gave to his film. "In Japan, the

Associated Press pondered why Nik wasn't behind bars. A performance of one of his works innocently violated Japanese law when the dancers showed pubic hair on stage. Fortunately, the Japanese police accepted Nik's aesthetics, and he managed to stay out of jail."³²

It is interesting that the Japanese have had such harsh laws concerning specifics in the performing arts when one of the most extreme forms of grotesque costume styles comes from some Butoh dance costumes. In many ways nudity represented through Butoh costume practices such as seen in Figures 20 and 21 are more revealing, offending and suggestive than a completely nude body. Some forms of Butoh Dance in many ways represent grotesqueness unlike any other dancer or dance group. Its origin is a result of native roots, culture, memory and the acknowledgment of a few dancers beginning with one man; Tatsumi Hijikata.

He was the progenitor of Butoh, and through Revolt of the Flesh, Hijikata's personal turning point, Butoh was established with all its wild juxtaposition. The body language and spectacle of Butoh had a form, born out of a particular Japanese experience, and had acquired through Hijikata the quality of universal theatre. . . . Butoh has a primordial quality. It is dark. It is generated somewhere in the lower strata of the subconscious, in the murky areas of personal pre-history. . . . Its etymology refers specifically to dance through the character bu. Buyoh is the neutral word for dance, but it has a sense of jumping or leaping, whereas toh implies a stomping. Boyoh is in the ascendant . . . leap toward the source of light. Butoh is a descent. Hijikata would often say, 'I would never jump or leave the ground; it is the ground that I dance . . .'³³

Hijikata's dance was literally called "Ankoku Butoh," meaning "black or dark dance." "The darkness referred to elements--the territory of taboo, the forbidden zones--on which light had never been cast. The dance had the subversive power of an outlawed language. This dark side also represented the under-privileged, the exploited, and the neglected, . . ."³⁴ The costumes worn in Butoh Dance most always suggest a "taboo," "forbidden" or "dark" quality to them. There is no process of "achieving beauty" through the notion of clothing and accessories.

In the midst of a culture of exceptional visual harmony, it employs a vocabulary of ugliness . . . The growth of Butoh involved a search for a form true to Japanese experience. Inevitably it entailed the rejection of elements of imitative culture, the results of the Japanese assimilation of Western style.³⁵

Although in many ways Butoh can be compared to different movements such as Expressionism or Dadaism of the Western World, it is still separate and unique in style and content. Butoh represents its own community of dancers and represents grotesqueness through costume without wearing a "costume" at all. It is the impression in Butoh Dance that to achieve "beauty"--not beauty as we have learned it, but more accurately a "beauty" that is "in the eye of the beholder," (who, or whatever the beholder may be) one must focus on the "subconscious." The body is stripped away of all "attractiveness" achieved through clothing, sometimes leaving the dancer nude. The eyes in many instances are rolled back,

revealing only the whites of the eyes--hiding the beauty of the color, the body is painted white--pale suggesting a ghostly image, and the dancer jerks and twitches with spasmodic movement. Even when the dancer's body is revealed nude, the outer flesh is regarded as the "costume of the soul."³⁶ The ultimate message relayed is that true beauty can only be achieved by distorting or avoiding all idealistic notions of what is beautiful--therefore the unusual, ugliness associated with grotesqueness is what becomes beautiful or ideal through a deep recognition of an inner spirituality. Grotesque is now the ideal.

By acknowledging both unattractiveness as well as attractiveness, as it has been learned, through movement and costume, can there be an understanding of ultimate beauty. By addressing distasteful issues such as death, decay and uncomfortable issues such as sexuality, sexual preference, as well as gender awareness encouraged through costumes, can the representation of the grotesque become a normative. According to many Butoh ideas, there is a cycle of life beginning with birth, even before birth--conception. Birth, life, decay and death are all part of the cycle, therefore, beauty cannot be fully achieved without exploring and completing the cycle. Kazuo Ottno describes the importance of the Butoh costume from extracts of The Dead Begin to Run:

Mankind has a story as does the cosmos.
Superimposed on the story of the cosmos, man's
story unfolds. Within this cosmological

superimposition emerges the path that leads from birth through maturity to death. The Butoh Costume is like throwing the cosmos onto one's shoulders. And for Butoh, while the costume covers the body, it is the body that is the costume of the Soul.³⁷

Whether or not a dancer chooses to dance in clothing, a costume or nude, the gestures of the dancer represent a costume. Because the Butoh dance style stands apart from other forms of dance it naturally draws attention to itself, and in particular its outrageous costume choices.

Although there are many distinct characteristics of what causes a costumed image to become grotesque in dance performance, there is not one specific (fixed) definition which pertains to all images. It is still very difficult to "pinpoint" an exact description. Each image created through grotesque costume in dance performance is unique in its own way graduating from tragic/morbid to comic/fantasy, to anywhere in-between the spectrum of modes of grotesque, and the level of enjoyment, thrill, discomfort or controversy the image imposes on the spectator.

Choosing grotesque costume qualities in dance performance is a controversy in itself because uncertainties are created through the response of the spectator. The reaction created is unpredictable because the grotesque is not about creating beautiful images, but suggests that "Idealistic" images are boring/stagnant, and too easy to achieve. People know what to expect when viewing an ideal image. The Grotesque invites mystery, thrill, anticipation,

and it awakens dormant, latent desires. This is what gains the spectators' interest and causes the experience to become enjoyable in its own way. Thrill is associated with watching the deconstruction of "beauty as we have learned it." The grotesque function is to disrupt, distort and confuse the spectators perception of that which is "ideal," and open up a new perspective that that which is beautiful.

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