

CHOREOGRAPHING THE BORDERLINE

DANCING WITH KRISTEVA

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In this essay I investigate Kristeva's conception of dance in regard to the trope of the borderline. I will begin with her explicit treatments of dance, the earliest of which occurs in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, in terms of (a) her analogy between poetry and dance as practices erupting on the border of *chora* and society, (b) her presentation of dance as a phenomenon bordering art and religion in rituals, and (c) her brief remarks on dance gesturality.¹ I will then follow this latter movement to the 1969 essay "Gesturality," to critically examine where Kristeva situates the powers and limits of gesture (and thereby dance) in relation to language.² Next, I will move to the later text, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, where the image of dance figures prominently in what I will term Kristeva's joyful re-choreographing of Freud's text *Totem and Taboo*.³ I will also see how her treatment of dance links more directly to Kristeva's feminist concerns, insofar as she understands the process of choreography as a kind of maternal function neglected in most psychoanalytic thought.⁴

Kristeva opens *Revolution in Poetic Language* by defining her focus as the process or production of language as opposed to the finished product, a process laid bare by a poetic discourse that is itself a "shattering of discourse" which "can display the productive basis of subjective and ideological signifying formations—a foundation that primitive societies call 'sacred' and modernity has rejected as 'schizophrenia'."⁵ This linkage of poetry and art to religion or the sacred should be noted, because it is one to which I will return throughout my investigation. Not only modern poetry, but various other types of discourse, "fragmentary phenomena" from "the arts, religion, and rites" play this shattering role according to Kristeva's analysis. "Magic, sha-

manism, esoterism, the carnival, and 'incomprehensible' poetry all underscore the limits of socially useful discourse and attest to what it represses: the *process* that exceeds the subject and his communicative structures. . . . We shall call this heterogeneous practice *signifi-cance*."⁶ The most important aspect of "signifi-cance" to understand is its dual modalities: the semiotic and the symbolic.

As is frequently the case with creative philosophers, it is difficult to find a clear and concise explication of these two crucial concepts in Kristeva's writing. A near-infinite number of allusions, illustrations, metaphors, and extended discussions, but no definitions; for this reason, turning briefly to the secondary literature seems warranted. Kelly Oliver characterizes the semiotic as "drives as they make their way into language; associated with rhythm and tone, nonreferential."⁷ The semiotic is the body becoming mind, soma meeting psyche, the process that generates reference without itself being referential. The symbolic, in turn, according to Oliver, is the "position of judgment that makes reference possible; associated with grammar and syntax, referential."⁸ The symbolic is a kind of break in the semiotic production of signification.

Put differently, the semiotic is the natural bodily process that infuses the symbolic's artificial, intellectual product. The semiotic is productive, creative, self-multiplying, and possesses a kind of temporal, musical ordering function. The symbolic is organizational, editorial, self-unifying, and possesses a kind of spatial, architectural ordering function. The semiotic is the fire in the symbolic blood. The process character of the semiotic makes it impossible to freeze it into a sufficiently immobile state for analysis; this is probably the main reason Kristeva never offers a

simple definition of it. Additionally, the editing function of the symbolic makes it difficult, but not impossible, to see the semiotic flow at work; opportunities arise, for example, in language at its most creative, as in poetry.

It seems that dance, taken in three different senses of the word, could be understood to belong essentially to the semiotic, the symbolic, and the borderline between them, respectively. First, in the broad sense of rhythmic human movement, dance resonates with the semiotic modality of language as spontaneous expressive bodily motion. This is also where one could locate the process or activity of choreography, in which the choreographer physically moves in space, drawing on her kinesthetic awareness, bodily memory, and imaginative projections of her bodily schema, perhaps also moving with a partner or a group of other dancers. Second, in the narrower sense of a premeditated sequence of movements—i.e., professional choreography qua product (as opposed to choreography qua kinesthetically guided process)—dance exhibits the symbolic modality of language in the fully articulated rules, steps, phrases, and directions of a given composition. And, finally, in the historical act of a person channeling her energy into the basic step of the Latin rumba, dance crosses the borderline of the semiotic-symbolic as the rising of the soma's spontaneous motion to the psyche's structured choreography.

As for the relationship among these three categories, because that which straddles the border between two fields by logical necessity inhabits the space of both, I mean to suggest that dance's being a borderline practice means that, in its multiple aspects, it is essentially both semiotic and symbolic, though neither exclusively. Insofar as dance is an art, and since Kristeva explicitly associates the semiotic with the arts, and since, as I will show below, there is no pure semiotic independent of the symbolic which it infuses for Kristeva, it seems probable that she would be comfortable with this categorization. What is novel in our analysis is the emphasis placed on dance in its multiple aspects as extremely difficult to associate with either the semiotic or the symbolic to the exclusion of the other.

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According to Kristeva, "the dialectic between [the semiotic and symbolic] determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called natural language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and symbolic."⁹ Mathematics, on this model, is almost purely symbolic, while music is almost purely semiotic. But, according to Kristeva, "because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both."¹⁰ She also clarifies that there is no pure semiotic or poetry chronologically before the symbolic; the semiotic is simultaneous with its production/interruption/destruction of the symbolic. "The semiotic that 'precedes' symbolization is only a *theoretical supposition* justified by the need for description."¹¹ In other words, the semiotic/symbolic distinction reveals itself to be a merely functional one that attempts to isolate one important aspect of language (i.e., the semiotic) that is largely obscured by a more visible aspect (i.e., the symbolic). It is important to note that the distinction is only functional, so as not to reify the semiotic into a kind of thing that one could find in a pure state, say of surrealist poetry. The semiotic is everywhere, rarely visible, never independent, and in no way an entity in itself; it is, instead, the constant birth of the body into language.

The seat of the semiotic modality of signifi-ance is the "*chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated . . . as rupture and articulations (rhythm), [it] precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality."¹² Kristeva cites Plato's usage of the word in the *Timaeus* as an inspiration for her own choice, which suggests the possibility of examining briefly John Sallis's extensive, meticulous treatment of it in his work on the *Timaeus*. Sallis argues that although the word *chora* essentially lacks any clear, specific meaning, there are nevertheless several images that clarify its meanings, including that of the "receptacle," "nurse," "matrix" and "the country" (as opposed to the city.)

He also describes it as that in which things come to be, that which makes room for another. It also "moves" the traces or powers it supports, "grants an abode," to something, and "is itself in movement" which includes "sway[ing] unevenly."¹³

In its aspect as (a) nursing, (b) a space of support for the other, and, especially (c) movement, one can detect the *chora's* kinship to *choreia*, origin of the English word choreography—etymologically "the art of dance" or "the writing of dance."¹⁴ But before elaborating on these three aspects, it might be helpful to note, from the perspective of a professionally-trained choreographer, that the scope of choreography includes not only systematic, formalized movements in a completed piece, but also informal dancemaking and even (perhaps especially) extemporaneous, spontaneous, serendipitous movements of the choreographer and/or other dancers. The rules or algorithms of choreography begin most often with quasi-regulated movements.

First, like a nurse, which provides the material ground and lifeline for the infant, connecting it to the world (and like the *chora*, which provides the semiotic foundation to the law-like organization of the symbolic) choreography provides the necessary material to turn the person into a dancer. This is especially true in virtue of the fact that choreography, again, almost always begins with (at least) the choreographer's body moving in physical space. Formal routines are generated by the embodied imagination of a dancer according to the functional capacities of a human body. Further, in group dances with elaborate formations, the concrete embodiment, including height, weight, body shape, and (often) attractiveness of the individual dancers influences the design of those formations.

It is worth emphasizing that this nursing aspect is also the place in Kristeva's thought where dance most closely intersects with her feminist concerns. Choreography as nursing is a kind of maternal activity, a loving coordination of the dancer's movements into a desired form. Thus dance is not linked directly to the feminine for Kristeva, as it is for many thinkers in terms of the predominance of female dancers in the history of performing arts in the West, but indirectly

through the maternal-feminine guidance of the choreographer as nurse. Although a full analysis is beyond the scope of this essay, one could also suggest that choreography as nursing could be understood as a kind of "maternal function" that is the precondition for the paternal function she takes up from Lacan.

Second, choreography is a kind of space of support for the other in that it supports the natural inclinations of the human body with its formal structure. In other words, a choreographer does not merely imagine a place in the routine where the dancer will spin thirty-six times simply because that would be impressive; rather, an implicit awareness of what is possible for the human body—and often, for one particular body, as choreographers frequently design dances with particular dancers in mind—pre-determines which formal possibilities will be explored.

And thirdly, choreography has as its essence a formalization of human movement; in other words, it is not just a static or rigid structure, but one which sways with that which it sways.

With regard to two other elements of Sallis's analysis, choreography can also be thought of as treating the space of the body as possibility for movement, the body which acts as the "country" [*chora*] to the soul's "city." This analogy would suggest an understanding of human being in which (1) the mind or soul is the capital, the source of executive, political power for the human being; (2) the current regime in the city's administration is that of dance choreography; and (3) the body constitutes that which is governed in its production of natural resources for the flourishing of the mind under the administration of the art of dance. From a different direction, Rickert discusses McEwen's analysis of the ancient Greek *polis* as "'a surface woven by the activity of its inhabitants'" through ritual processions "much like the dance 'weaves' the dance floor."¹⁵ In other words, the movements of the mind through the body, metaphorically rendered as citizens traveling into the country, are constitutive of both the mind and the body; the city is what it is only in traversing its boundaries.

At the end of this discussion, Rickert also refers to the *chora* as "the matrix or mother of all

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becoming."¹⁶ Linking his last sentence of this section in Rickert's essay to the section's title, "Dances with the *Chora* Before Plato," choreography can be thought of as the matrix [*chora*] in which each possible movement of the human body finds its systematically ordered home. I am suggesting, in summary, that the *chora*—as locus of the semiotic, and thereby the semiotic *simpliciter*—is kindred to dance, and especially to the embodied process of the art of constructing it.

Kristeva goes on to associate the *chora* with kinesis (a central concept in her essay on gesture, including dance gestures), which supports the linking of the *chora* with choreography and dance. "The *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm . . . the kinetic functional stage of the *semiotic* precedes the establishment of the sign."¹⁷ The movement of the drives sets up and underlies the signifying of verbal or written language. What art form could be better than dance to symbolize this process-modality of discourse?

I will now return to the issue of the semiotic in general, focusing on its religious connections. Kristeva notes that "poetic language and the mimesis from which it is inseparable, are profoundly a-theological."¹⁸ This does not mean a strict opposition, however. Poetic language and its mimesis (which, as we have seen, includes magic, the carnival, and, arguably, by implication, dance) "are not critics of theology but rather the enemy within and without, recognizing both its necessity and its pretensions."¹⁹ They are not the anti-theological pure opposite, but the a-theological complicit counterpart. Poetry makes religion possible, and this making possible is even a necessary movement, but the origin is irremediably impure and irreligious. More specifically, poetic language and mimesis function as "protectors against [the sacred's] posturing."²⁰ Beneath every theological positing is the semiotic movement of the dancing poetic, the polyvalence of which is captured by Kristeva's dictum that "musicalization pluralizes meanings."²¹ The tones and rhythms of practices such as dance

open up new windows in discourse, allow in diverse semantic breezes.

Kristeva insists that these semiotically fecund religious rituals and sacrifice do not constitute an absolute break or pure chaos entering the symbolic social order. Rather, "a certain practice accompanies sacrifice. Through, with, and despite the positing of sacrifice, this practice deploys the expenditure [*dépense*] of semiotic violence."²² The practice is like the schema or procedure that regulates the discharging of the semiotic into the symbolic in an ordered way in the sacrifice. "This practice is the representation that generally precedes sacrifice; it is the laboratory for, among other things, theater, poetry, song, *dance*."²³ For dance to be listed among other art forms as an (at least) syntactic phenomenon is uncommon in Kristeva. It is also interesting that, while dance is described here as a diachronic result of ritual, Kristeva will later emphasize dance as an integral, synchronic part of the ritual. In this way, by belonging to both sides of the ceremony, straddling the border between sacred catalyst and artistic byproduct, dance can be thought of as a kind of borderline practice.

"By *reproducing signifiers*—vocal, gestural, verbal—the subject crosses the border of symbolic and reaches the semiotic *chora*, which is on the other side of the social frontier."²⁴ Using the signifiers of ritual, including the "gestural" ones that are the province of the borderline art form of dance, the subject is able to cross the border between semiotic and symbolic, structure and process, judgment and drive, to reach the *chora* semiosis that choreographs the symbolic. "this deluge of the signifier . . . so inundates the symbolic order that it portends the latter's dissolution in a dancing, singing and poetic animality."²⁵ Yet another borderline, that between human and non-human animal, along which for dance to move.²⁶

As I have already noted, Kristeva also uses laboratory metaphors to elucidate the function of the semiotic. One of these figures for poetic language as creative source, specifying the laboratory into the pharmaceutical, is "the crucible," a tool consisting of a space in which various ingredients are pulverized into a new unity. "Going through the experience of this crucible exposes

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the subject to impossible dangers: relinquishing his identity in rhythm, dissolving the buffer of reality in a mobile discontinuity.²⁷ Like a dancer surrendering to the pulse of her music, in fact exactly like that, the ritual participant loses her own discrete, symbolic identity in the pure semiotic process. "Equivalents" of this process, Kristeva writes, "can also be found in nonverbal arts that are not necessarily modern. Music and dance, inasmuch as they defy the barrier of meaning, pass through sectors within the signifying process which, though fragmentary (since there is no signified, no language), obey the same lines of force induced by the productive device of signifiante seen in texts."²⁸ This passage is worth extended attention.

First, what is the "barrier of meaning" here, and how do dance and music defy it? It seems likely that Kristeva is referring to reference, the way a signifier attaches to a signified. To focus on the example of dance, Kristeva seems to be suggesting that it signifies nothing—remember from above, "since there is no signified, no language"—and therefore instead merely shows itself without any need to refer. Granted, the sentence from which that quote is taken, includes the word "inasmuch," but the context invites a strong reading of "inasmuch" as "almost entirely."

Granted, this is a striking difference from Kristeva's conception of the signifying power of other artforms, such as painting and poetry, in which their semiotic power creates a multiplication and destabilization of meaning, but does not breakdown meaning altogether. But Kristeva is concerned here specifically with the notoriously most abstract (music) and perhaps most concrete (dance) of artforms, in which meaningful reference seems most difficult to achieve. And if Kristeva were resisting an overly homogeneous or unified understanding of music and dance's significations, as opposed to resisting their ability to signify at all, it seems she would have been careful to offer an at least somewhat nuanced or tentative statement, instead of the bald "no signified, no language." However, to think that dance is incapable of representation seems a problematically inadequate conception. The dancer playing the role of Clara in *The Nutcracker* express-

ing her joy at receiving her new toy through leaps and turns, and the Argentine Tango as socio-political commentary on late nineteenth century life for the destitute of Buenos Aires, seem obvious counterexamples.

Second, dance is characterized as "fragmentary," a word Kristeva will later use to describe the psyche of the borderline analysand. She claims that dance, as she understands it, lacks a signified, and thereby lacks language. Again, in various kinds of dances, specific physical movements, series of movements (phrases) or characters (in narrative dance forms) indeed signify certain ideas, emotions, historical individuals, etc., so the surface claim seems, if not outright false, then at least inadequate. It is also surprising that Kristeva, given her privileging of dance in other arenas, would deny it the status of language, even if only that of a kind of circular language, modeled on the inherent rhythms and cycles of the body, a kind of biofeedback-loop language.²⁹

This implicit criticism of dance as linguistically disabled or unfit appears again in the text in a description by Kristeva of psychic dysfunction. "If, through a defusion of the drives or for some other reason, *rejection* as the bearer of the drives or, more precisely, their negative discharge, is accentuated, this discharge uses the muscular apparatus as a passageway for discharging energy in brief spurts: pictorial or dancing gesturality may be ascribed to this mechanism."³⁰ Not some kinds or instances or sources of dancing gesturality, but dance gesturality simpliciter. In other words, when all else (i.e., verbiage) fails, and if the drives derail from their customary channels, one can witness direct somatic discharge of the drives through the limbs of the body—but only, for some reason, in "brief spurts." Dancing gesturality thus seems, for Kristeva, to be what happens only in the case of a kind of breakdown or malfunction of the symbolic.

The reader may wonder at this point if Kristeva might have a conception of two different kinds of dance gesturality, one productive and one dysfunctional. However, aside from the brief passages already quoted, there are no other explicit treatments of dance in Kristeva's philosophical corpus. Most of her references to dance,

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in fact, consist simply of the word "dance" included in a series of forms of art or dimensions of religious ritual. With regard to both art and ritual, dance gesturality would seem to be most of all the expression of the intentions of the choreographer, not the more improvisational movements of informal or social dancers, who are entirely absent from Kristeva's writings. This absence is significant because we seem to need a direct, non-pathological infusion into linguistic expression of bodily drives in order to resist an all-pathological reading of her account of dance gesturality. But in the case of mental illness, as we have observed above, the infusion is pathological. And in the case of professional choreography, one (non-choreographer) body's drives are chained to the linguistic expression of another (choreographer) body—i.e., the body of the creator and the body of the expresser are not the same body. (There are, of course, cases of a choreographer choreographing a piece for herself alone, but the immediacy of drive to expression in such cases would be compromised.) A social, informal, improvisational dancer—like a certain kind of hip-hop or swing dancer—on the other hand, would seem to offer a clearer example of non-pathological productive infusion, inasmuch as his movements are often executed immediately as they appear in his embodied imagination. But no such dancer, and no explicit account of productive dance gesturality, is to be found in Kristeva.

To recap our progress thus far, I have observed (1) that Kristeva associates the arts and religion with the semiotic dimension of language, and casually notes dance's presence in both. I have argued that dance deserves a privileged place among the major artforms and in the structure of religious ritual because of its myriad connections to the semiotic, the symbolic, and the border between them. (2) Kristeva's associates her central semiotic concept of the *chora* with kinesthesia. I have argued that the centrality of kinesthesia for dance among the artforms further supports our argument for its privileged place among the semiotically-rich arts. (3) Kristeva seems indirectly to support our emphasis on dance's semiotic dimension by undermining its sym-

bolic, signifying capacity, denying it the status of language and attributing its gestural language to the pathological breakdown of verbal language. I have argued that this creates a tension in her thought on dance in light of her valorization of the symbolic power of other arts such as poetry and painting as well as that of dance-involved religious rituals.

To get a better understanding of Kristeva's treatment of gesture, of which dance seems for her to be a sub-species, I now turn to her 1969 essay of the same name. Kristeva begins "Gesture: Communication or Practice" by stating that Western thought has historically shown a marked bias in which "all *gesturality* is presented as mechanical, redundant in relation to the voice, the illustration or duplication of speech, and so visibility more than action, what Nietzsche called 'accessory representation' rather than process."³¹ From this perspective, all non-verbal movement is inferior because it is only the (verbal) product which is of inherent value; using the later language of *Revolution*, the symbolic has been privileged absolutely over the semiotic. However, in modern semiotics, according to Kristeva, "a tendency is establishing itself more and more clearly towards tackling semiotic practices *other* than those of verbal languages" which includes "non-phonetic semiotic practices (script, graphics, behavior, etiquette)."³² What is at stake in this trend is an attempt to "revise the very notion of language, understood no more as communication but as production."³³ This would be an understanding of language more sensitive to its semiotic mode, where poetry and dance disturb the static structure of linguistic-social code.

For Kristeva, gesture is particularly well suited to this process-emphasis. "Gesturality, more than phonetic discourse or the visual image, can be studied as an activity in the sense of a *spending*, of a productivity anterior to the product, and so anterior to *representation* as a phenomenon of significance in the circuit of communication."³⁴ More specifically, gesture accentuates how communication happens, how the story is told, the work that goes into any communication. "Gesture transmits a message... but more than this message already there, it is—and

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it can make conceivable—the *elaboration* of the message, the *work* which precedes the constitution of the sign (of the meaning) of communication.”³⁵ Similarly, of all the major art forms, literature, music, visual art, architecture, etc., one could argue that dance is the most reliant on the *how* as opposed to the *what*, insofar as it operates through the most restricted medium, particular human bodies (compared to all possible words and word fragments for poetry, for example.)

The English word *gesture* derives from the Latin *gerere*, literally “to carry.” Dance, at least according to the commonsensical understanding according to which it consists entirely of human bodies in motion, as it is nothing other than the carrying of the human body in self-conscious ways, is clearly the art form that draws most on *gesture*. In other words, dance, perhaps because it is forced to by its medium being limited to the human body, carries the carrying of *gesture* furthest. Revisiting our earlier discussion of the etymology of choreography, one could say that choreography, in its movement of providing a nurturing space, draws on the “carrying” of *gesture* in order to carry [*gerere*] the semiotic into the symbolic.

Kristeva valorizes this trend toward *gesture* as a movement away from a kind of modal hegemony of the vocal, which she describes as the “necessity” of moving “towards a ‘way out from speech.’”³⁶ This is a striking comment from a descendant of Freud, origin of the “talking cure” of psychoanalysis, and a practicing psychoanalyst herself. Turning to ethnological support for this valorization of physical movement as signification, she references the mythology of the Dogon culture. According to the Dogon, “the finger of [the goddess] Amma creating the world in *showing* it.”³⁷ In other words, indexing for this culture is the very force of creation itself, which shows up in the etymology of the goddess’ name, “Amma,” which in their (verbal) language, “means ‘opening’, ‘extension’, and ‘bursting of a fruit.’”³⁸ (270).

Generalizing these observations, Kristeva claims that what is anterior to “the semiotic system” is “a *gesture of demonstration, of designation, of indication of action* in relation to ‘con-

sciousness’ and idea. Before the sign—this ‘before’ is a spatial and not a temporal anteriority . . . [there is] a practice of *designation*, a *gesture* which shows not to signify, but to *englobe* in one and the same space . . . ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and practice.”³⁹ Like the *chora*, *gesture* as “englobing” sweeps what will have been signified into a nurturing space of proximity or nearness, “includ[ing] them in an *empty relation* of an *indicative* but not signifying type.”⁴⁰ Before something can signify, it must be shown.

Put differently, Kristeva suggests that semiotics “leave *structure*—and try to reach what is not structure, what is not reducible to structure or what escapes it completely.”⁴¹ Kristeva christens this “basic function—indicative, relational, empty” as *anaphora*.⁴² *Anaphora*, literally a “carrying back,” is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, associated with poetic repetition, grammatical substitution, and the ritual of mass. *Gesture* is a carrying whose anaphoric function is the carrying back of the process of signification, and “constitutes the ground – or the stratum – on which a process unfolds.”⁴³ Kristeva is careful to note, however, that hers is not a reductive analysis of *gesture*. “We are far from defending the thesis—current in certain studies on *gesture*—that would see in *gesture* the origin of language.”⁴⁴

However, much more than merely denying *gesture* the heady title of foundation of language, Kristeva also denies it two other humbler attributes that would seem to belong to *gesture* naturally. First, she claims that *gesture* is “an *impersonal* mode because it is a mode of productivity without production.”⁴⁵ It seems, however, that at least the subject of the showing and the context in which the showing takes place, can be, at least in some circumstances, personal. It would be difficult to maintain that, when the dancer reveals his body in a slow, rising motion to a theater full of spectators, for example, that this is an impersonal *gesture*. Simply put, indication presupposes a potentially personal indicator.

Secondly, Kristeva argues that *gesture* is “spatial—it leaves behind the ‘circuit’ and the ‘surface’ (because such is the topological zone of ‘communication’).”⁴⁶ Is Kristeva really arguing

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that gestures are essentially incapable of communication? The act of showing, at the very least, reveals the subject (or show-er) of the showing to the show-ee as one who or that which shows, that which has the ability (and perhaps also willingness) to show—and this seems to communicate at least something about the show-er to the show-ee.

It also seem strange given Kristeva's aesthetic inclinations that she mentions dance by name only once in an entire essay devoted to the subject of gesture. It occurs in reference to a brand new sub-field of the (at the time of her essay) almost brand new field of gesture analysis, namely "set-quality activity." The purpose of this area of inquiry is to "analyse behavior in games, charades, dances, theatrical productions, etc."⁴⁷ Combining this relative invisibility of dance with her later denial of linguistic status to "dance gesturality," one begins to suspect that there is at least a neglect of, if not a bias against, dance in Kristeva's thought, which is surprising given her diagnosis of this same bias in the history of Western thought earlier in the essay. It is also somewhat surprising given her much more positive treatment of dance in the much later *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*. It is with a brief analysis of this treatment that I close my investigation.

To appreciate Kristeva's dance-valorizing, choreographing of the patricidal-remembrance ritual in *Totem and Taboo*, I will first offer the following sketch of Freud's original myth: "One day the brothers who had been driven out by the [alpha male] father came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde."⁴⁸ This is the Freudian story of the beginning of civilization, and of the origin of the two taboos against murder and incest. In their guilty, murderous triumph, the brothers "revoked their deed by forbidding of the totem [animal], the substitute for their father; and they renounced its fruits by resigning their claim to the women [their father had sexually monopolized]."⁴⁹ Though Freud emphasizes the guilt aspect, he also attributes "contradictory feelings" to the brothers. He also begins this story by "call[ing] the celebration of the totem meal to our help," and ends it in the same vein, noting that "the to-

tem meal, which is perhaps mankind's earliest festival, would thus be a repetition and a commemoration of this memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things—of social organization, of moral restrictions and of religion."⁵⁰

It is this celebratory aspect, "the concomitance of revolt and feast," that Kristeva emphasizes. The ritual remembrance of the murder of the father is one marked, not only by guilt and penance, but also by celebration of the powers incorporated from the father, part of "the necessity to mimic this revolt; not to reproduce it exactly but to represent it in the form of a festive or sacrificial commemoration, composed of the joy of the initial crime subjacent to the religious sentiment, to guilt, to repentance, or to propitiation." Kristeva is cautioning us not to forget that the brothers also benefit greatly from their shared crime, in that "the 'fruit' of this rebellion is the appropriation of the father's qualities" i.e., his power and privileges.⁵¹

Parallel to the "fruit" the original brothers consume through their crime is the historical "festive 'fruit' procured through the imaginary or symbolic reiteration of the rebellious act that is the sacred celebration."⁵² The sacred is also necessarily joyful, even aesthetically productive.

What Freud calls a reappearance of defiance are cathartic experiences, rituals that have one or several (religious) meanings expended in an ordered profusion of signs (chants, dances, invocations, prayers, etc.) . . . it becomes possible not only to protest indefinitely (the rite is repeated) but also to renew the rite, in a way, with the dazzling expenditures that accompany religious celebrations: dances, trances, and other festivities inseparable from the scene of the sacrifice."⁵³

Note that dance, here, constitutes a critical, "inseparable" aspect of the ritual celebration, as distinguished from its role as artistic by-product as outlined above in *Revolution*. "This reprise of the primary rebellion . . . [occurs] in a *sublimated* form (as the expenditure of festivities such as dances, incantations, rites, a crucible of what will become art)."⁵⁴ Again we encounter the metaphor of "the crucible," but this time dance is explicitly mentioned as a site of creative semiotic

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rupture. This is so because Kristeva references catharsis, i.e. the channeling of the drives into signification, which is the process of the semiotic. Ordinary language and practice are “ruptured” by a discharging of the drives which is creative insofar as the rituals are described as “dazzling expenditures,” i.e., extraordinary occurrences.

From the ground I have covered in this investi-

gation, it is clear that Kristeva’s writing is filled with dazzling expenditures on the subject of dance. And in the history of Western philosophy, that alone, unfortunately, qualifies as an extraordinary occurrence. Perhaps her work on dance, as a phenomenon on the borderline, can help us better understand both that history and her thought.

NOTES

1. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
2. Julia Kristeva, “Gesture: Practice or Communication?” trans. Jonathan Benthall, in *The Body Reader: Social Aspects of the Human Body*, ed. Ted Polhemus (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 264–84.
3. Julia Kristeva, *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt: The Limits and Power of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
4. Another promising intertwining of Kristeva to dance lies in the recent emergence of her theory to dance history and criticism, including Sally Banes’ well-known *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (New York: Routledge, 1998), and the work of dance critic Ann Daly. “Among all the arts in western culture, dance may have the most to gain from feminist analysis. Certainly the two are highly compatible. Dance is an art form of the body, and the body is where gender distinctions are generally understood to originate. The inquiries that feminist analysis makes into the ways that the body is shaped and comes to have meaning are directly and immediately applicable to the study of dance, which is, after all, a kind of living laboratory for the study of the body—its training, its stories, its way of being and being seen in the world.” Daly, “Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis,” *Dance Research Journal* 23 (1991), 2. Mary Margaroni addresses the issue of the maternal, including its problematic relationship to essentialism, in some detail in “‘The Lost Foundation’: Kristeva’s Semiotic *Chora* and its Ambiguous Legacy,” *Hypatia* 20 (Winter 2005), 78–98.
5. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 30.
6. Ibid.
7. This quotation is from a handout from Kelly Oliver’s graduate seminar on psychoanalysis from the fall of 2007, 4.
8. Ibid.
9. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 34.
10. Ibid., 34.
11. Ibid., 54.
12. Ibid., 35.
13. John Sallis, *On Beginning in Plato’s Timaeus* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 113–30. Nietzsche too repeatedly associates dance with the divine or sacred, particularly that of a new, light, vibrant divinity. “I would believe,” he writes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “only in a god who could dance.” Nietzsche also associates dance with speech and communication, as in the following passage from “Tomb Song”: “Only in the dance do I know how to tell the parable of the highest things: and now my highest parable remained unspoken in my limbs.” That which is most important must be spoken, not by the voice, but by the limbs. And like Lacan, Nietzsche finds deception essential to speech. “Speaking is a beautiful folly: with that man dances over all things. How lovely is all talking, and all the deception of sounds! With sounds our love dances on many-hued rainbows.” Speaking is a way of dancing that produces beautiful fictions, like the unorthodox interventions Kristeva employs as an analyst. Finally, Nietzsche suggests that dancing is not only a kind of speech, but also a kind of listening with the whole body. Consider the following passage from “The Second Dance Song” in which Zarathustra playfully addresses life itself. “My heels twitched, then my toes hearkened to understand you, and rose: for the dancer has his ear in his toes.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter

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- Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954), 41, 112, 217, 224.
14. Thomas Rickert draws on the work of Indra McEwen in referencing a passage in Book XVIII in the Iliad describing a “lovely dance” [*choros*] and “dancing-floor” [*choros*]. Rickert, “Toward the Chora: Dristeve, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40 (2007): 254.
 15. *Ibid.*, 81, 254.
 16. *Ibid.*, 254.
 17. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 36.
 18. *Ibid.*
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. *Ibid.*, 49.
 21. *Ibid.*, 52.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.*, 78; my emphasis.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Consider Kristeva’s following, more specific example of dance’s hybrid animality. “Gandharva, half-horse/half-man, is the Indian centaur enamored of music, dance, and poetry, arts forbidden to the legislator and priest. He heralds an underground economy: the facilitation of revolt and its underlying jouissance.” The centaur is an emblem of the semiotic, and as we would expect by this point, his powers are intimately linked to religion in its role as controlled channeling of the drives. “Religion gives each and every person what we might call ‘warmed-over’ fantasies, softened and nonviolent but charged with a certain aggression, which fulfill the obscure desire for pleasurable revolt and, with it, a certain horse-man quality” (Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26–27).
 27. *Ibid.*, 104.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. George Herbert Mead, similarly, categorizes speech as “verbal gesture,” a species of the genus “gesture” whose priority rests merely on the fact that speech is more immediately available to the subject (through hearing his or her own speech) than visual stimuli, thus enabling faster reactions. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 65, 69–70. However, in the example of social partner dancing, the subject also receives immediate (in this case visual) feedback from his physical movement, in that his partner’s eyes, facial expressions, and the motions of her limbs and torso register a somatic linguistic response to every somatic linguistic stimulus one produces. In other words, his partner-as-mirror accelerates somatic linguistic communication to the immediacy at which verbal gesture loses its speed-based superiority.
 30. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 154.
 31. Kristeva, “Gesture: Practice or Communication?” 266.
 32. *Ibid.*, 266–67.
 33. *Ibid.*, 267.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. *Ibid.*, 268.
 37. *Ibid.*
 38. *Ibid.*, 270.
 39. *Ibid.*, 269.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. *Ibid.*
 43. *Ibid.*, 270.
 44. *Ibid.*, 271.
 45. *Ibid.*, 272.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. *Ibid.*, 281.
 48. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950), 176.
 49. *Ibid.*
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. Kristeva, *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt*, 13.
 52. *Ibid.*, 14.
 53. *Ibid.*
 54. *Ibid.*, 15.

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