The ballerina's phallic pointe

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Pillant, quivering with responsiveness, ready to be guided anywhere, she inclines towards him, leaving one leg behind, ever erect, a strong reminder of her desire. As he promenades around the single pointe on which she balances, the leg lifts higher and higher. They pause at the moment her breast bone appears about to break. Arms in a wide V connect to his supporting lunge. The leg, a full 180 degrees vertical, looms behind them, white-pink, utterly smooth, charged with a straining, vibrant vitality.

Then, she floats impetuously away from him. His gaze following her, his arm gestures a pathetic desire. As the music builds to its climax, she reaches the corner and turns back towards him. The emollient rush of her body into his outstretched arms results in yet another stiffening: she holds decorously rigid as he lifts and swirls her in a circle above his head. Her delicate tensility allows her to dwell there high in space, a proud ornament, a revolving bowsprit.

If we have seen it once, we have seen it a thousand times, this generic sequence that resembles pas de deux in Swan Lake, Jewels, The Ballet of the Red Guard, that can be found in the repertories of the National Ballets of Canada, Taiwan, South Africa, Cuba, the Philippines, Australia, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil. . . . We have interpreted this phrasing of two bodies as a sequence of abstract referents, a culmination in the striving towards physical refinement and purification that originated in Renaissance European court codes of bodily civility. These bodies celebrate a breathtaking physical accomplishment. They dance out an ethereal realm of perpetually vanishing perfect forms.

But they are also desiring bodies, bodies that turn away from and rush back towards one another, bodies that touch one another, that strive together delicately and fervently in front of other bodies who, from their anonymous location in a darkened auditorium, desire them as well. And they are gendered bodies. Even when costumed in the most unisex unitards, she wears pointe shoes, and he wears ballet slippers. She elaborates a vast range of intricate coordinations for legs, feet, arms, and head, while he launches into the air, defying gravity in a hundred different positions. She extends while he supports. She resides in front and he remains in back. She looks forward as he looks at her. She touches his arms, hands, and shoulders, whereas he touches her arms and hands and also her waist, thighs, buttocks, and armpits.

And these two bodies, because of their distinctly gendered behavior, dance out a specific kind of relationship between masculine and feminine. They do more than create an alert, assertive, solicitous maimness and a gracious, agile, vibrant womanliness. Their repeated rushes of desire—the horizontal attraction of bodies, the vertical fusion of bodies—do more than create unified sculptural wholes that emblematize the perfect union of male and female roles. He and she do not participate equally in their choreographic coming together. She and he do not carry equal valence. She is persistently put forward, the object of his adoration. She never reaches out and grasps him but is only ever impelled towards him, arms streaming behind
in order to signal her possession by a greater force. He longs for her and moves with alacrity to support her from behind or at her side, yet he dances as though she were a dream, an hallucination he can long for but only momentarily handle. She is the registering of his desire. She is attraction itself which he presents for all the world to see.

The world sees more and more of her as ballet, taken up by former colonies in the Pacific and Latin America, and also in China and Japan spreads across the globe. Strong contend for a universal standard of physical achievement in dance, ballet, with its pedagogical orderliness and clear criteria for excellence, promises a homogenizing medium for the expression of cultural difference. It offers a global aesthetic whose universal claims enable each community to particularize itself while at the same time assuring each community's access to the status of a world player of the form. Annual Ballet Olympics, by conflating distinctions between sport and art, extend an invitation to all to participate in this single aesthetic enterprise. Video, a medium well-suited to the documentation of ballet's aesthetic ideals — extended bodily lines and clear shapes — transports images of balletic bodies around the world. This First World export contains in its historical repertoire numerous images of the hitherto exotic populations that are now adapting its aesthetic as their tradition. Yet in the abstraction of contemporary ballet, little residue remains of the foreign Exotics — the colorful, sensuous settings, or the tempestuous, irresistible women and aggressive, voracious villains — that moved the nineteenth-century ballet plots forward through their combination of evil and sexual impulses. Today's ballet, a sanitized geometry, emphasizes physical discipline and dedication. Rather than offering a travelogue through real and imaginary worlds as it did in the nineteenth century, contemporary ballet provides a seemingly neutral techne through which intensities of cultural or psychological ambience can be projected.

In these landscapes of virtuosity, both her and his bodies bear the marks of colonization and colonial contact. They stand against Indigenous forms of dancing as bodies estranged. The sheer excitement of their physical endeavor, however, galvanizes viewers in proud and enthusiastic response. Both he and she dare to accomplish so much and dare to mask the effort necessary to make their bodily shapings, rhythmic phrasings, and complex exchanges of weight appear so effervescent. Both she and he sweat to make the choreographer's vision manifest just as they erase their faces of the tension inherent in their exertion and modulate the energy through their limbs so as to render their labor effortless in appearance. Perspiration marks slowly appearing around armpits, groins, abdomens, or backs only make the masking of their effort more miraculously convincing.

But if these two dancing bodies share a dedication to artisanal perfection, they do not enjoy equal visibility. In their joint striving, they construct two unequal forms of presence. He fades away behind or beneath her in their duets, becoming an indispensable assistant, the necessary backdrop against which she sparkles. And even though he asserts a compelling presence in his solos when the full power of his aerial dexterity is revealed, in the end, even in their bows, he remains upstage, orchestrating, enabling her performance, but also channeling all attention towards her. She, like a divining rod, trembling, erect, responsive, which he handles, also channels the energy of all the eyes focused upon her, yet even as she commands the audience's gaze, she achieves no tangible or enduring identity. Her personhood is eclipsed by the attention she receives, by the need for her to dance in front of everyone. Just as he
conveys her, she conveys desire. She exists as a demonstration of that which is desired but is not real. Her body flames with the charged wantings of so many eyes, yet like a flame it has no substance. She is, in a word, the phallus, and he embodies the forces that pursue, guide, and manipulate it.

Now this is a naughty thing to propose. Why revile the delicate and flexible grace, the superb celebration of feminine physicality that these women display by connecting it to the sexual politics of the phallus? Why not give male and female dancers an egalitarian future, regardless of their past, at the moment where ballet enters the late twentieth-century global stage? The answer rests on the series of gendered bodies developed historically within the ballet tradition over the past two hundred years. Whether visible in reworked versions of the classical masterpieces—Giselle, Swan Lake, Coppélia, etc.—or merely in the vocabulary and style of the dancing, the weight of these past bodies presses too hard upon contemporary ballet to allow a nongendered reception of its meaning, or even to allow for the dismissal of gendered content as a superfluous formal feature analogous in impact only to that of an irrelevant cliché.

At this moment of ballet's global visibility, the labor of historicizing its gendered meaning is more crucial than ever. The ballerina-as-phallus provokes an analysis of the performance of both feminine and masculine desire. It forces an inquiry into the classical routings of the female viewer's attention: either she must look through the eyes of the male dancer at his partner in order actively to assert attraction, or she must empathize passively with the ballerina as an object of male desire. Both these mappings of her participation as viewer are subverted by a masculine logic that traffics women to sustain various forms of male hegemony. The ballerina-as-phallus likewise problematizes the male viewer's gaze: his point of identification on-stage is an effeminate man, a man in tights, through whom he must pass on his way to the object of fascination, or on whom he can focus within a homosexual counter-reading of the performance. The global context of ballet performance, the remarkable homogeneity of ballet productions regardless of cultural context, and the prevalence of ballet technique as a form of physical training, regardless of the aesthetics of the choreographic tradition—modern dance, jazz, experimental or ethnic—mandate a consideration of all these gendered identities.

But there is also a promise in the naughtiness of the ballerina-phallus, the promise that all monsters afford, to forge from the cataclysmic energy of their aberrant parts a new identity that meets the political and aesthetic exigencies of the moment. The ballerina is, after all, guido, magnetically magical. An object of revulsion while under feminist scrutiny, she nonetheless enchants us. Perhaps, via the ballerina-as-phallus, her power can reconfigure so as to sustain her charisma even as she begins to determine her own fate. Perhaps the ballerina-as-phallus can even reclaim for ballet, long viewed as a neutral parade of geometrized forms, a certain sensual and even sexual potency. But first, the ballerina-as-phallus must be fleshed out, provided an origin, a history, and an anatomy.

Sometime early in the middle of the nineteenth century, in Paris, city host to the most lavish and sustained achievements in theatrical dance of any European capital, choreographic and narrative elements congealed so as to form that distinct genre of spectacle, known as the Romantic ballet, whose imprint haunts the aesthetics of contemporary ballet performance. Two ballets from this period, La Sylphide (1832) and Giselle (1841), survive in the repertoires
of many ballet companies and retain immense popularity. More significantly, the Romantic ballet celebrated the principle of distinct vocabularies for male and female dancers—the dainty and complex footwork, the developés of the leg and extended balances for women and the high leaps, jumps with beats, and multiple pirouettes for men. It rationalized the new technique of pointe work which added a strenuous precariousness to the female dancer’s performance. And it encouraged new conventions of partnering that incorporated new codes for touching, for support, and for the achievement of pleasing configurations. Up until the end of the eighteenth century the pas de deux had placed great emphasis on male and female dancers performing alongside one another or travelling separately designated pathways in mirrored opposition. These dancers shared a common vocabulary of steps performed with distinctive styles stipulated for male and female dancers. By the time of the Romantic ballets partnering included sections of sustained, slowly evolving shapes where male and female dancers constructed intricate designs, always with the male dancer supporting, guiding, and manipulating the female dancer as she balanced delicately and suspensefully in fully extended shapes. And the divergent vocabularies for male and female dancers symbolized a difference between the sexes far greater than the distinct styles of eighteenth-century performers.13

These duets paired a noble if confused male lead with one of two female character types: the supernatural creature or the exotic foreigner. Sylphs, naiads, and wills offered an enigmatic ephemeral beauty, dream-like, vaporous, incomparably light. Gypsies, Creoles, and other Orientalist characters constituted the sylph’s pagan counterpart. Rapturously sensual, unabashedly suggestive, these heroines after innumerable obstacles eventually consummated their romantic attachments, whereas the sylph’s unequivocal Otherness usually led to tragic conclusions. In either case, the male lead indulged his longing attachment to her, seeking her out, adoring her, and partnering her with solicitous mastery.

These two female character types helped to solve the ballet’s greatest dilemma, growing in intensity since the later decades of the eighteenth century, to integrate the equally pressing needs for a coherent plot and for the display of virtuoso dancing. The ballet plots typically orchestrated one kind of solution by always including festivals, weddings, or celebrations, occasions where dancing would practically take place, as part of the action. But the female leading character played an even more crucial role in the balancing of drama and spectacle. As some form of exotic, whether foreign or supernatural, her character could easily be construed as one predisposed to dancing. Or even better, dancing might figure as the character’s very mode of being in the world. Rather than a walking, talking, gesturing person, she knew best how to float, gambol, suspend, and disappear. As a dancing being, she could easily embody both the necessary passion-filled responses and the repertoire of classical steps. Her pressing desire to dance thus facilitated an easy transition from story to spectacle and back again.

The tragic ballets like La Sylphide and Giselle, depicting the impossible love between man and sylph (La Sylphide) or between prince and peasant (Giselle), used the separate vocabularies and stereotypic character types to greatest advantage. Their heroines symbolized not only love lost, but also dreams unrealized and unrealizable. The sylphide, one of a band living in the forest, represented the ideal blending of abstraction and sensuality, a ravishing sensibility, no longer found in the mundane actions of the real world. Giselle offered the beguiling spontaneity
of an innocence untainted by the sterile and tedious codes of aristocratic (or urban) civilization. Upon her tragic death she transformed into a will, yet another variety of enchanted being, defined as a girl "who loved to dance too much," and who on her wedding's eve, at the height of unconsommated sexual arousal, died. The wills appeared to mortals in the forest at night and lured unsuspecting men into a dance that could only end in their death from exhaustion. Like the sylphides, the wills enticed men with their voluptuous ways and then vanished.

The spectacle created by low-level gas lighting and elaborate flying machinery for these tulle-skirted supernaturals offered both optical indefiniteness and opulence. Viewers witnessed mirage-like forms dissolving, vanishing, escaping the mortal with such softness. The sprites' world exuded a ravishing melancholy that transcended diversion and referenced truly lost hopes. The sylphide's death after her mortal lover had removed her wings carried a moral and aesthetic significance comparable to the great literature of the Romantic period. Giselle's poignant and miraculously successful efforts to protect her beloved prince from the rapacious wills resonated with a kind of hope and courage that transcended her specific moment.

Yet the success and durability of these ballets derived not only from their powerful scenarios and sumptuous spectacle, but also from the plentiful opportunities for virtuoso display. Celebrations for the impending wedding in *La Sylphide* showed off the skills of a large corps de ballet and several soloists. The witches' dance that opened Act II proffered the high leaps and jumps as well as the contorted acrobatics that audiences adored. Giselle's village commemorated the harvest with a danced celebration, and the wills in Act II danced Giselle's initiation, the death of the gamekeeper Hillarion, and their pursuit of the prince. These scenes staged group precision at complicated steps and traveling patterns along with dazzling individual expertise. The disposition of dancers in space and the sequencing of dances within these scenes always orchestrated a hierarchical display of skills, contrasting corps de ballet with soloists in ways that revealed as they confirmed the very training process that built a great dancer.

The drive to develop new levels of competence at dancing can be traced to the consolidation of the ballet lexicon with its specification of positions, steps, and variations at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Dancers had endeared themselves to audiences for generations by developing some new proof of their dexterity and grace. What distinguished the early nineteenth-century quest for virtuosity was a new conception of bodily responsiveness evident in the training procedures for dancers and also in the high expectations for skill at social dancing and the approach to physical discipline taken in the nascent physical education movement. By the early nineteenth century, dancers no longer studied individually a regimen designed specifically for their physical type and inclination, but instead attended large group classes where they learned standardized sequences of exercises with designated shapes to which all bodies should conform. The pedagogical goal of these classes, informed by the science of anatomy, was to develop the body's strength and flexibility so as to enable more turns, higher leaps and leg extensions, and longer balances. The social dance repertoire reflected a similar concern with expanding physical achievement – more complicated rhythmic patterns, beats of the foot, jumps, and shifts of weight. At the various balls and fetes where social dancing occurred, this quest for virtuosity signaled a body that functioned less as a medium for communication than as a showcase for accomplishments. The very fact of the emergence of
a new discipline of physical education corroborated this conception of the body-showcase by identifying a set of exercises for the sole purpose of developing bodily strength and equilibrium. In the eighteenth century many activities including dance had claimed a healthy body as an added benefit for those who pursued them. Now, the body had a thing-ness that required maintenance in and of itself. A hundred years earlier dancing had constituted a meta-discipline that prepared the body to execute gracefully all actions whether those of sports, warfare, or the daily behaviors of proper social comportment. Now, the practice of theatrical dance, like the regimens of physical education or social dancing, implemented a body that was isolated by and contained within the specific program of exercises it pursued.

If the physical demands of virtuosity leached from the body any connection to a signifying sociability, they did not de-sexualize it. Rather, the objectification of the body accomplished in these physical regimens rendered it a more neutral and compartmentalized receptive for an abundance of sexual connotations. Yet, in the same way that codes of partnering put the female body forward for the viewer's delectation, so too, her body bore the vast majority of all sexualizing inferences. Newspaper critics described and compared female dancers’ body parts in excruciating and leering detail. An immense literature of gossipy pamphlets sprang up that recounted as a kind of biographical profile the amorous liaisons and sexual escapades of female dancers. The disdainful yet salacious tone, the suspicion of prurience in these publications, distinguishes them from the more modest literature summing up the glamour and power of eighteenth-century ballerinas. Even the definition of the “will” as the girl who loved to dance too much implied a transparent conflation of dancing with sexual intercourse that extended to the ballet generally. Thus the ballet, even as it danced out an ethereal world of idealized enchantment, also proffered lovely ladies, scantily clad, engaged in a blatant metaphor for sensual and sexual actions.

Capitalist marketing strategies initiated in the early nineteenth century supported and enhanced the objectified dancing body and the commodified female dancer. They pitted one ballerina against another in intensive, objectifying advertising campaigns and opened up backstage areas where wealthy patrons might enjoy the company of dancers before, during, and after the performance. Rather than evaluate a performance within the context of a given genre, or even character type, viewers were encouraged to focus on female stars with merciless comparative scrutiny. The progressive segmentation of the body occurring in physical education, anatomy and the new science of phrenology further supported the fascination with isolated parts of the female dancing body. Poorly paid dancers and insubstantial government support left the institution of dance vulnerable to exploitation, both sexual and specular.

If the female body quietly endured the evaluation of viewers, it nonetheless repelled their gaze through its demonstration of ephemerality itself. As it danced through the exotic trappings of these productions, it conveyed a sumptuous ethereality that rendered viewers mute. Unable to grasp the beauty that vanished as it moved, viewers succumbed to gossip about the dancers, to criticism of their physique, or to rhapsodic evocations of dance's inexpressible loveliness. No translation into words of choreographic action or its danced execution seemed possible. Although eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century choreographers had written the scenarios of their ballets for the program and for publication, choreographers skilful at the conventions of this ephemeral ethereality could no longer be expected to write, much less to contrive, the plots
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for ballets. A scenarist was now called upon to formulate the storyline which the choreographer then evoked through danced action. Nor could any form of notation preserve this action. Like the unattainable love it typically portrayed, choreographic form left its only trace in the bodies that had performed it.

The ballet's evanescence, its reputation as decorative and pleasurable entertainment, aligned it with a host of feminine attributes. Dancing in general accentuated the moderated and flowing use of the body uniquely suited to women, and it provided the nurturing guidance necessary during that romantic and most feminine moment in one's life, late adolescent courtship. The concern with physical presentation, with mannerly and decorous behavior grew out of a uniquely feminine sphere of influence. Theatrical dance, now dominated by female dancers and by female characters, offered a delightful treat more than an edifying experience. Artistic endeavors likewise became feminized within a public sphere dedicated to political and economic governance. Of all the arts, dance, with its concern for bodily display, its evanescent form, and its resistance to the verbal, distinguished itself as overwhelmingly feminine in nature.

The harder-edged bodies, the abstract geometries, the athleticism found in today's productions do not substantively alter the surround of cultural and aesthetic issues, inherited from the nineteenth century, that continues to define ballet today. If not globally, then at least in the United States and Europe, the countries that have exported ballet, the divide between classical steps and representational gestures, the quest for virtuoso display, the division of labor along gender lines, the reputation of dance as non-verbal diversion – all these features remain central to ballet's identity. Despite the security of the choreographic validity of exquisite physical forms, the menacing question of what the ballet is about still looms large. To the extent that the choreographer aspires to represent any facet of human feeling, interaction, or drama, some vocabulary, whether pantomimic or modernist must be deployed. And its gestures must somehow reconcile with the basic ballet vocabulary and with the mandate to present virtuoso dancing. Ballet training, more painful and demanding than ever, produces the audacious and rapturous brilliance that consistently motivates audiences to interrupt the performance with their applause. Even in the most avant-garde companies, distinct vocabularies for male and female dancers endure. Where the ballet vocabulary has blended with modern, jazz, and postmodern movement traditions so as to blur stylistic and lexical distinctiveness, the pointe shoe with its attendant demands on the female dancer survives to assure viewers of the genre. Despite a recently acquired respectability for the male dancer, ballet continues to be conceptualized as a feminine art, especially when compared with music, painting, or poetry. It is dominated by women, even though men hold key artistic and managerial positions. It lacks the permanence of an accessible notation system, and seems sublimely incapable of translation into words.

What no longer endures of the nineteenth-century tradition, (or is it merely glossed over?) is the blatant sexual inflection of the ballet, its extraverted signaling of gender identity and sexual desire. Today's audiences seem not to view the exposed crotch of the ballerina in arabesque promenade as genitals. They do not view the moment where her thighs slide over her partner's face as she descends from a high lift as oral sex. Nor do they see her gentle fall onto
her partner's prone body as copulation. The formality of balletic bodily shape and line dominates all coding of body parts and conventions of touching. Nineteenth-century audiences likewise accepted the aestheticized coding of body parts that the ballet had developed, even if many men sat in the front row in order to peek up the dancers' bloomers. Still the nineteenth-century productions broadcast the synthetic possibility of spectacle as simultaneously physical, sexual, glamorous, romantic, and aesthetic. To sort through to what has been lost or somehow transformed in contemporary ballet requires a return to Romantic period performances with specific attention to their vectoring of the viewer's desire.

Renowned critic Jules Janin provided this assessment of ballet's structuring of desire in 1844:

The grand danseur appears to us so sad and so heavy! He is so unhappy and so self-satisfied! He responds to nothing, he represents nothing, he is nothing. Speak to us of a pretty dancing girl who displays the grace of her features and the elegance of her figure, who reveals so fleetingly all the treasures of her beauty. Thank God, I understand that perfectly, I know what this lovely creature wishes us, and I would willingly follow her wherever she wishes in the sweet land of love. But a man, a frightful man, as ugly as you and I, a wretched fellow who leaps about without knowing why, a creature specially made to carry a musket and a sword and to wear a uniform. That this fellow should dance as a woman does – impossible! That this bewhiskered individual who is a pillar of the community, an elector, a municipal councillor, a man whose business it is to make and above all unmake laws, should come before us in a tunic of sky-blue satin, his head covered with a hat with a waving plume amorously caressing his cheek, a frightful danseuse of the male sex, come to pirouette in the best place while the pretty ballet girls stand respectfully at a distance – this was surely impossible and intolerable, and we have done well to remove such great artists from our pleasures. Today, thanks to this revolution which we have effected, woman is queen of ballet. She breathes and dances there at her ease. She is no longer forced to cut off half her silk petticoat to dress her partner with it. Today the dancing man is no longer tolerated except as a useful accessory.

Janin succinctly observed the alignment of masculine identity with a public domain and of feminine identity with a private domain and the inevitable destinies of male and female performers within such an alignment. Male dancers, so chunky and thick on the one hand, so dangerously effeminate on the other, should be banished from the stage. These "frightful danseuses of the male sex" only contaminated, through their doubly failed performance of gender, the viewer's rightful access to the "pretty dancing girl." Her mission and message, utterly obvious according to Janin, was to lead the viewer through the "sweet land of love." Her body, through the act of dancing, would reveal treasures of beauty and sensuality unavailable in any other context.

Although fashion in the early nineteenth century had created all women a kind of spectacle, theatrical dance constituted one of the few cultural events that framed women, and specifically women's bodies for view. As public personages, the details of their daily lives
Infused their identities on-stage with prurient intrigue. Their participation in a market economy — buying the claque's applause and publicity from critics like Janin, selling sexual privileges in order to pay for dance classes — was familiar public knowledge. Among the aging aristocrats and business tycoons who could afford to "contribute to their careers," the dancers were referred to as fillies who could be mounted, re-mounted, or exchanged for a new mount. Still, they maintained a kind of dignity that even Janin's demeaning tone could not deny them, one that derived from their expertise at dancing and their dedication to a life in the arts.

As a variety of public woman, female dancers nonetheless bore the burden of spectacularizing expectations for their performance, and they were subject to strategies of containment that controlled their effect on public life. Their bodies, morselized by training and by the viewing gaze, were described as "Nordic," or "gangly," or "with the legs of a gazelle." These terms belied not only the compartmentalization of the body but also the conflation of body parts with characterological attributes. Dancers no longer aspired to represent realistic characters on-stage. Instead, their bodies' parts stood in for various states of being — love, longing, wickedness, pathos, nurturance, dementedness, etc. And these states lined up along axes defined by ethereality and fleshliness, abstinence and rapaciousness, pitey and succor. Their physique's natural inclination to evoke these states mattered more than their skill at acting. Thus even as they captured the public's eye with their willingness to put the body on display, their skills were minimized in favor of their natural physical endowments.

In the plots for ballets, female characters uniformly served as the desired personage, and they also registered the bulk of the pathos — in scenes of lamentation, madness, or delight. Male characters' longing overwhelmed in magnitude and intensity any reciprocal gestures the female characters might proffer, yet they also stood by with incapacitated stoicism as the objects of their desire became seized by the torment or ecstasy that the plot produced. Female bodies, absorbent of the feelings and conflicts circulating through all the story's characters, trembled with sexual and emotional fervor. Their solos, the rewarding climax of any scene, were the ones all other bodies watched. Using their exceptional prowess at dancing, these women could express what no other bodies could. Dancing occurred at the site of these bodies as both an indescribable event and an expression of the indescribable.

If these female lead characters gave their male counterparts the dispassion necessary, as Janin observed, to govern, they also sustained male sexual potency. The separation of the dance vocabulary into gendered parts placed female soloists as the central and final object of the specular gaze, yet allowed the male character to remain in control of this charismatic object. The choice and development of female characters likewise worked to preserve male sexual superiority. The willis, for example, through their challenge to men's sexual endurance, augmented and bolstered male sexual capacity. The few who "died" at their hands in no way undermined the enhanced reputation for sexual prowess that the willis' existence secured for all men. Other Orientalist and pagan female characters functioned in a similar if less dramatic way. Their renowned sensuality and sexual forwardness reflected directly and positively onto the male character whose inclination it was to pursue and master them.

Scenarists invented a remarkable number of female character types who could assure a potent yet stoic male identity, and these types functioned similarly, in their use of gender-specific vocabulary, in both tragic and comic plots. Although they filled the stage with
their voluptuous variations, these female leads never achieved a strong or profound sense of identity. In the tragedies, the point at which they would begin to develop characterological depth most often coincided with the story's demand for the explosive registering of feeling. In that display of pathos, the body was frequently undone. Once their function—as the mark of that which was not male—was jeopardized by the impending need to know them more intimately, the plot wiped them out. All that remained were the endlessly duplicated minor ballerinas, the corps de ballet, who, because of their massive number and routinized action, posed no threat of a palpable personhood. In the comedies, heroine and hero would eventually unite, yet the plot and the casting of characters gave little depth to either. Neither lead encountered any substantive conflict through which personality could be revealed. And the fast-paced encounters, extrications, and flirtations that composed the action could only be seen as plays of appearance, especially since a large number of the male parts were played by women.

The popularity of the female travesty dancer grew in tandem with the individuation of masculine and feminine vocabularies of dance movement in the early nineteenth century. A common role in boulevard and variety-show productions from the turn of the century, the travesty role made its way into the Opera in the 1820s. Although the seriousness of tragedy continued to demand a male lead character, the frivolity of comedies and divertissements increasingly called for female dancers in the male roles. Reviews complimented the travesty dancer on her skillful partnering and her graceful ability to display the female lead's talents. They praised her shapely legs, well revealed by the men's pantaloons she wore. Her presence, perfectly acceptable, even desirable because the two bodies worked so well together, signaled no intimation of homoerotic possibility, no sense of illicit, much less scandalous, behavior. It rested upon, even as it advertised more widely than ever before, a tradition of travesty that since the early 1800s had seen no possibility of or “any affecting consequence” in the love of one woman by another.

The travesty dancer through her blatant burlesque helped to subdue the charismatic power of the female lead. She also seemed to solve, through its elimination, the problem of the effeminate male. Especially in the comedies where true suffering and unbearable consequences never appeared on stage, the male dancer's leaps and turns, ever more, his decorous gestures and gaudy costume gave his gendered identity an uncomfortable ambiguousness. The tragedies' plots also tainted him with the same wimpishness. In La Sylphide circumstances rather than an act of will caused him to abandon his fiancée and follow the sylphide into the woods. In Giselle he stood by aghast and watched as his peasant-love, now cognizant of his treachery, danced herself, by fits and starts, to death. Thus the feminized context of the ballet with its exploration of bodily, sentimental, and opulent aesthetics left little room for a man to move.

It left a great deal, however, for him and for the male viewer who identified with him, to look upon. First, there was the spectacle of the female corps de ballet, all those similarly dressed bodies moving in unison like merchandise lined up on a shelf. He could savor the knees of one, the neck of another, engulfed in a glorified female sensuality that required no commitment and no obligation. Then, there were the ballerinas, the ones most desired, most sought after, whose individual physiques and talents inspired different varieties of erotic reverie. Through identification with the male lead, he could likewise adore her, partner her, and
possess her. Or if the male lead was played by a woman, her body added yet another kind of feminine form, one that summoned up the voyeuristic erotics of two women dancing an amorous duet together. The whole organization of balletic spectacle presumed the primacy of the male heterosexual viewer whose eyes would be satisfied by a display of voluptuous feminine forms.

But how did the synthesis of choreography and plot guide his desires? As specified in the scenarios and also in the dancing itself, the dominant message in all the ballets amplified upon the desirability of heterosexual coupling. Male and female characters always united or else failed, tragically, to unite. Where the leading couple was successful, the narrative drive towards their union reverberated, in its images of progress and expansiveness, with the promise to realize a new society. At the same time, it affirmed in the procreative unit the secure foundation of the nation. Father passed daughter along to her new husband, ensuring simultaneously the perpetuation of the lineage and male control over it. The female character, even when she asserted a preference for spouse to which her father eventually capitulated, served to mark the exchange between men. The male viewer, identifying with the male lead, confirmed his own sensitivity to and mastery over woman and story. And he participated tacitly in the exchange of women among men by witnessing the heroine’s transfer from father to husband.

Where the leading couple failed, the impediment could be traced to the impossibility of achieving union across class or blood lines. Here male characters accumulated a misguided and tormented persona, stoic, pathetic, but also autonomous. The number of introspective moments performed off-stage built up a character in deep conflict. He alone suffered the agony of the antagonism between social proprieties and deepest desires. He alone danced out that agony with the ballerina—the perfect representation of the impossibility of resolving that conflict. This autoerotic display engulfed all other characters’ identities. Even the ballerina was recast as a dream-like conjuration of his torment-filled fantasies. Did the sylphide really exist, or was she simply a symbol of the unrealizable aspirations that divided his soul? This power to summon into being all the facets of his desire and the conditions of their impossible fulfillment imbued the male character with a kind of self-sufficiency that again proved his superiority. Through identification with this hero, the male viewer could nurture his own fantasies using feminine forms to stand in for all impediments and solutions to his happiness.

And what if a woman played the role of the male lead? The popularity of the female travesty dancer in enacting these heterosexual scenarios and her reception as recorded in the press point towards additional, mutually reinforcing trajectories of desire for the male viewer. The anxiety provoked by the effeminate male dancer resulted not only from a sensuality and decorativeness entirely inappropriate for the male position in society, but also because it referenced a homoerotic aesthetic. The heterosexual valuing of sexuality and sexual preference that dominated both public and private domains, forced an interiorization of homosexual desire and a closeting of same-sex social and sexual practices. Since male interest in grace, lightness, and physical appearance was prohibited as unmanly, any male enactment of these values could easily be construed as homoerotic expression. By insinuating the female body into the male character, the homoerotic connotations of the performance were preserved without any compromise to male superiority. Her travesty garb was material evidence of the conventions of closeting through which male homosexual desire was sublimated. This type of closeting worked to facilitate male bonding, whether in a homosexual or heterosexual context.
The "man" who was not himself invited the erotic attachment of both male sexual orientations. The homosexual male viewer could fantasize the two women as standing in for men, while the heterosexual male viewer could risk the fantasy with no consequences to his reputation. The entire stage thus became a closet for the exercise of male desire.

But if the travesty dancer showed a "man" who was not himself, she equally showed a woman whose pretense posed no threat of uncontrollable sexual appetite or uncontrollable passion. Where the female ballerina embodied an explosive charge, the travesty dancer's appearance invoked only perverse delight. Her crossing-over diffused the power of the ballerina and also provided the perfect wrapping for the ballerina as eroticized commodity. She purveyed the ballerina/commodity to the spectator, functioning neither as a member of the patriarchy nor as a menacing "will." Her transgressive and revealing garb exacerbated the desire to possess the ballerina at the same time that it authorized the sale. Thus the ballerina and her inverted double, the travesty dancer, gestured towards four complementary features of the patriarchal order: as desired mate within the heterosexual union, she fulfilled the procreative half of the social contract; as spectacularly charismatic fantasy, she proved the self-sufficient superiority of the male character; as the entity of exchange within a homosexual or heterosexual male economy, she ensured male potency and rationalized their entitlement to governance; and as the fetishized promise of sexual acquisition, she ordained male capitalist competition within a society of consumption.

All of these readings foreclosed the possibility of a feminine expression of desire whether heterosexual or homosexual. The strict division of labor that placed woman in a purely reproductive function required of her appearance in public the complete eradication of her desire's expression. The heterosexual viewer could only identify with the female leads as objects of a masculine desire. The woman interested in same-sex erotic attachment would necessarily labor so intensively to read against the dominant choreography of desire that she might well have left the theater in search of working-class productions whose eclectic offerings included vicious satires of "high" art successes and also a great range of hyperbolic enactments of gender and sexuality. On the Opera stage, however, the only resistance to the foreclosure of feminine desire took place through the act of vanishing, or disappearing in the act of performing the feminine function. Yet this strategy of vanishing looked exactly like the vanishing that established her charismatic identity. The male viewer thereby controlled both homosexual and heterosexual viewing privileges at the expense of two kinds of "men" who were not themselves - one who dressed like them and another who was entirely concocted by them.

Gone, for the most part, are the complicated stories and the dozens of distinct characters, and certainly the travesty dancer no longer figures as a genre of leading character in contemporary ballets. Instead, when male and female leads extend an arm towards one another and begin their *pas de deux,* this expansive sweep gestures the full statement of their desire to be together. This is how, for example, the audience knows that Balanchine's Apollo has chosen Terpsichore over the other two muses, that he cherishes her expertise at fitting movement to the architectural structure of the music over prowess in drama or poetry. But aren't all three muses versions of the charismatic ballerina whose powers of inspiration secure even as they challenge male authority? Doesn't Apollo sit to the side and evaluatively admire their dancing
thereby guiding the audience’s gaze towards them? Doesn’t he drive them as prancing horses pulling his chariot up into the sky to meet his destiny as god? Don’t their legs fan out behind him as protective aura, decorative armor, radiant testimony to his glory?

The legs. The ballerinas’ legs. Sheathed in unblemished nylon from high hip bone to pointe shoe, most often a distinct color and texture from both skin and costume, they seem at times almost detached from the rest of the body. Their astonishing straightness, length, and the flexibility of hip and thigh muscles that permits their extreme separation from one another contrast with the supple, softly flowing arms and arching torso. Then the pointe shoe, a recapitulation of the leg’s length and line, forms a slightly bulbous tip at the end of the ankle’s thinness. So much of the choreographic focus goes to the articulation of these legs and feet, how the direction they take will establish a certain tension between mobility and precariousness. The tiniest, fastest steps across the floor on pointe (the bourrée), the balance on pointe with one leg extended high to the side then sweeping to the back, the turns in place or traveling—all these moves show her standing on so little. She becomes so insubstantial yet so resilient. Straight legs float in space; bent legs open out into straight legs; legs turn soft in order to accomplish some ornamental foot gesture, then re-lineify to point out the lines across the stage space that extend beyond them, to pronounce the precise angle that separates them from one another. In this moment of re-erection, they reveal the creation of the abstract line running from pelvis to toe that draws the musculature to it. The power of these legs springs from their fleshly realization of an abstract ideal.

Nineteenth-century reviews of the female dancers, iconographic representations, costuming—all established the erotic pre-eminence of the ballerina’s legs. Breasts or butts, physical features associated with motherhood, garnered no attention. The legs, unveiled for the first time, indicated a kind of sexual access to the dancing body even as they reflected awareness of the ballerina’s “non-natural” status as a non-childbearing character. These late twentieth-century legs, however, do not glow in the same way. Emblazoned in theatrical space rather than coyly shimmering under a translucent skirt, their allure augments as they mutate from stiffness to pliability, from precision to effortlessness. They celebrate vital physical vigor and, at the same time, the triumphant quest for rational form.

The legs belie the phallic identity of the ballerina. They signal her situatedness just in between penis and fetish. She looks like but isn’t a penis. Her legs, her whole body become pumped up and hard yet always remain supple. Both the preparation, the dipping motion that precedes the etched shape, and the graceful fade from an extended pose show deflation, but always on its way to re-inflation. She never twists or contracts. Her sudden changes of direction and shifts of weight, always erect, resemble the penis’s happy mind of its own, its inexplicable interest in negligible incidents. Yet, clearly, she is not a penis; she is a woman whose leg movements symbolize those of a penis.

She attracts like but isn’t a fetish. Her charisma comes from no single or identifiable source. She synthesizes strangely dissonant elements—legs with whole body, beauty with athleticism, physicality, and rationality. Although some may hoard her used pointe shoes or focus fixedly on the proportionate lengths of her arms and legs, she resists the alienated
severing of part from whole necessary to create a fetish. Her whole body and performance persona, despite the extremes to which they have been cultivated, remain intact.

She enacts desire and the inevitable loss of the object of desire. She is there and then elsewhere, in his arms, then running to the other side of the stage, in a given shape then transforming to another. A perpetual mutating of form, she attracts, invites, beckons and then disappears. To lose her is to lose that which is desired above all else, the Imaginary, that pre-verbal, womb-ish world of sound, light, and movement. Her every move promises recuperation of that world and, in the very same gesture, shows its vanishing.

She gives figure to signification. In her, the chaos of body transmutes into rational form. The years of bodily disciplining have refurred fleshy curves and masses as lines and circles. Geometric perfection displays itself at both core and surface. Bodily shapes present one stunning design after another, notable for their silhouette and also for the interiorized configuration of lines running parallel to the skeleton around which the musculature is wrapped. Via this geometry her movements turn mess into symbol.

Supporting, underlying, founding this phallic identity is the ballet's perpetual upward thrust. The choreographic and stylistic demands of ballet take the weight of the body and make it disappear into thin air. Everything lifts up, moves towards height rather than depth; everything gestures out and up, never in, never down. This obsessive aeriality reinforces the erection of the penis-like ballerina. It helps transform movement into the void of space, thereby facilitating dancing's vanishing and confirming its rational principles. By gesturing upwards into the realm of abstraction itself, the dancing proves its fraternal relation to music and mathematics. Its grammar, evident in its geometry of forms, manufactures Pythagorean equations.

The Romantic ballet, its choreographic conventions and its narratives, prepared the ballerina for just this phallic destiny. The same principles of desire and loss, the same charismatic glow now evident in the movement sequences themselves, originally manifest in the danced plot. Whether as sylphide or gypsy, the ballerina embodied an unattainable desire. Dance style allotted her elusive ethereality or unguernable vitality. The plot often contrived her character so as to enable the displacement of the phallic attachment onto race or class. The ballets danced out the impossibility of love through a representation of the impossibility of non-permissible love, love that transgressed class and racial or inter-species boundaries. As a fragment of the imagination, as in the sylphide, or as an independent and volatile gypsy, she augmented male sexual potency just before she vanished. Or if she passed from one male partner to the next, she lubricated the exchange of their sexual power. When those partners were played by female dancers, female bodies whose lack of a penis could arouse no fears of castration, then the ballerina sexualized commodity exchange. Her body, fetishized both on- and off-stage, offered itself up to the viewer from the same abstract distance as that from which the burgeoning capitalist market offered its goods. In the absence of a castrating father or castrated mother, the ballerina floated as freely from obligation as all purchases procurable within a monetary medium. She danced out the erotics of acquisition under a system that measured all objects with a common symbolic denominator. In all these mutually reinforcing roles, the ballerina conferred phallic power upon male viewers by enacting their scenarios and appearing as their fantasy projection.
Between the Romantic ballet and her late twentieth-century descendant, two events of enormous choreographic significance intervened that have influenced the ballerina's phallic inheritance. First, at the beginning of the twentieth century, women as soloists who choreographed and performed their own dances began to occupy the stage, appropriating the phallus for themselves. Unpartnered and refusing to realize any choreographic vision other than their own, they detonated the classical stage and its sexual politics. Earthbound, preoccupied with flow from core to peripheral body and back, rather than from body out into space, they claimed "natural" physical processes rather than rational aesthetic tradition as inspiration for their movement choices. Yes, they were gazed upon, but they did not die at the end of their dances. Instead, arms plunging upwards and legs shooting down into the ground, they stood proudly, thereby collapsing the phallus into themselves, becoming the phallus themselves. Their charisma resulted in part from their ability to capitalize on and, at the same time, disrupt the sexual economy of viewing to which their audiences were accustomed. Their ascendance to the stage was partnered by a second major choreographic change—the premier of the gay male dancer.

The ballet tradition's uneasy relationship to these choreographic initiatives has yet to be assessed, and it deserves a kind of consideration that space here does not permit. However, one ballet, Fokine's Petrouchka, suggests itself as a model for the kind of prescient story of ballet's initial response to the modern dance aesthetic. Opening on the hubub of a mid-nineteenth-century Russian fair, Petrouchka introduces an ancient wizard-like puppeteer whose mysterious allure charms the populace into attending his small theater. The curtains are drawn back to reveal three puppets: the exotic, brutish Moor; the mechanical, virtuoso Columbine; and the contorted, sincere Petrouchka. In this brief display Petrouchka's love for Columbine enrages the Moor and they burst the boundaries of the theater only to be restrained by the discontented puppeteer. Petrouchka, banished to his private cell, acts out the mournful tale of his unrequited love and his frustrated incarceration at the hands of the puppeteer. Then in his own cell the Moor, in the midst of worshipful devotion to a coconut, is visited by Columbine, who kicks and pirouettes around him in an effort to attract his attention. Having finally succeeded by sitting on his lap, she is annoyed to see Petrouchka enter. His further entreaties towards Columbine enrage the Moor, and their frantic chase spills out into the street, where, much to the crowd's dismay, the Moor kills Petrouchka. The wizard, exhausted and irritated, shoves his way through the concerned onlookers to demonstrate that Petrouchka is only a puppet, a bag of straw which he yanks from the ground with terrifying authority. Dragging the puppet back to his theater, he closes for the night. But as he begins to exit the stage he suddenly sees the apparition of Petrouchka, gesturing menacingly from the rooftop above the theater. Overwhelmed with fear, he runs out as Petrouchka persists in a melancholy yet taunting laugh.

This ballet presented an almost transparent critique of czarist Russia with Petrouchka, standing for the pathetic commoner, struggling under the czar-puppeteer whose portrait hung in his tiny room. It could equally be construed as one of the first renderings of modernist subjectivity: man, no longer noble or good, and woman, no longer a goddess or a whore, acted out the destinies that Fate had provided. Alienated from their means of production, they performed their small dramas whose impact only resonated in the hollow laugh of a ghostly
afterlife. I want to propose a third interpretation, one which sees in the puppeteer the choreographer Fokine who recognized that he was working at the faultline of an enormous aesthetic rupture. Captivated by the dancing of Isadora Duncan only a few years earlier, he cannily appraised what the ballet tradition had to offer: the exotic and lavish trappings of other-worldly places that activated desire (the Moor), and the virtuoso yet mechanized vocabulary of spectacular dancing (Columbine). Petrouchka represented the new expressivist agenda as proposed by Duncan with its radical overhauling of the very conditions under which vocabulary, subject matters, and viewing experience might be constructed. Fokine, inheritor of the ballet tradition that had choreographed the law of the father, could only respond by running from the ominous threat of aesthetic rebellion.

Yet Petrouchka, played by Nijinsky, introverted and pathetic, lacking all erectness, and dominated by a controlling male partner, represented the inverse of the female choreographer who had assimilated the phallus. Clearly identified as homosexual in an age that had recently recognized homosexuality as a category, his performance in Petrouchka and other ballets constructed an entirely new character type — the male performer as queered phallus. Deviant yet magnificent, always cast in the role of the exotic, Nijinsky specialized in a serpentine, even contorted bodily shaping combined with the highest leaps ever made. It was he who died or vanished at the end of Fokine’s ballets, and who came back like a queer male “will” to haunt the stage at the end of Petrouchka. Nevertheless, Nijinsky went on to choreograph three ballets that self-consciously staged the same patriarchal dynamics on which the ballets of a century before had been founded: the autoerotic supremacy of the male position in L’Après midi d’un faune; the female as sacrificial object of exchange among men in Le Sacre du printemps; and the sexualized encounter as commodity in Jeux.

Thus Petrouchka forecast the ballerina, always the vehicle for a male choreographic vision, as estranged from the feminist response of modern dance, and it also predicted the gay male choreographer/performer easily insinuated into the stable patriarchy of the ballet and the volatile sociology of modern dance. Petrouchka also portended a division of labor between ballet and modern dance in which ballet no longer provoked empathic connections to its danced characters so much as to the superbly moving beauty of its form. Modern dance, by contrast, explored the authenticity of human feeling whether embodied in identifiable characters or in movement qualities. As in the character of Petrouchka, the growing gay male presence in both traditions remained entirely closeted thereby submerging any distinctive homosexual aesthetic deep within musculature of the tradition. The leggy, anorexic, hyper-extended ballerina issued from this matrix of aesthetic concerns.

But what if Petrouchka’s poor puppeteer in his panicked exit from ballet’s dilemmas were now, almost a century later, to run headlong into the ballerina-as-phallus? Would she machine-gun him down with her pointe shoes, or, better yet, trade them in for combat boots? Would she “out” all the gay male choreographers, viewers, and critics — those “frightful danseuses of the male sex” — who have consistently ignored her plight? What kind of a deal could she make? How might she mobilize to secure a choreographic place for her female body and a narrative space for her feminine desire? Could she somehow contribute to both terrify and enchant his fleeting figure so as to short-circuit the traffic in women? Could she take inspiration from the gender failure of the nineteenth-century male dancer and the courage of the female
dancer to create a new identity, dangerously ambiguous or constantly changing that would elude the viewer's grasping gaze? Could she collaborate with the choreographer/puppeteer on a movement lexicon that would enable her to dance on the graves of Lacan as well as Freud and thereby teach them a new move or two? These are the questions, I believe, that those seven-year-old girls must ask as they draw their hair back into a bun, pull on their pink tights, and head downtown in Hong Kong, Havana, New York, Buenos Aires, Sydney... for their weekly class.

NOTES

1 This is the argument that has been made in the classic dance history books such as Lincoln Kirstein's The Book of the Dance: A Short History of Dancing or Walter Sorelli's The Dance Through the Ages.

2 For a comprehensive analysis of conventions of partnering in the ballet conducted in the context of a comparative study of ballet with modern dance and contact improvisation, see Cynthia Novack's Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture.

3 Novack and Ann Daly are among the first to launch an inquiry into gendered roles in dance. See also Daly's "The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers."

4 The whole history of ballet's migration from Europe begs to be written. I want to allude to the coloniellist implications of this migration here, yet it lies outside the bounds of this essay to undertake a full history or even to probe the relevance of postcolonial theory to the global dissemination of ballet.

5 The initial apprehension of this potential identity for the ballerinas came from my attempt to understand the full impact of nineteenth-century innovations in ballet technique and vocabulary. As the argument in the text indicates, the separation of the ballet lexicon into distinctive vocabularies for male and female dancers occurred seemingly in tandem with a marked increase in the popularity of the travesty dancer. These three performance roles suggested a set of oppositions and contra-distinctions that could be mapped onto the Greimasian quadrangle. According to Fredric Jameson whose work on Greimas can be found in The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971–86, the fourth location on the quadrangle reveals the hidden ideological content of the entire system of relations. The quadrangle as I have been able to develop it reads as follows:
Another kind of answer might result from an inquiry into ballet's structuring of expression, as compared, for example, with that of opera. In *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*, Wayne Koestenbaum identifies opera's special expressive power as a product of its communication via the ear:

The listener's inner body is illuminated, opened up; a singer doesn't expose her own throat, she exposes the listener's interior. Her voice enters me, makes me a "me," an interior, by virtue of the fact that I have been entered. The singer, through osmosis, passes through the self's porous membrane, and discredits the fiction that bodies are separate, boundary, packages. The singer destroys the division between her body and our own, for her sound enters our system. I am sitting in the Met at Leontyne Price's recital in 1965 and Price's vibrations are inside my body, dressing it up with the accoutrements of interiors. Am I listening to Leontyne Price or am I incorporating her, swallowing her, memorizing her? She becomes part of my brain. And I begin to believe—sheer illusion—that she spins out my self, not hers, as Walt Whitman, Ancient-of-Days opera queen, implied when he apostrophized a singer in "Out of the Creole Endlessly Rocking": "O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me, O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease persevering you . . ." I follow a singer towards her climax, I will it to happen, and feel myself "inside" when she attains her note.

(Koestenbaum 1992, 43)

Koestenbaum argues that this ability to create interiority is partly responsible for the attraction of gay and lesbian audiences to the opera. Elizabeth Wood and Terry Castle (among others) affirm and expand on Koestenbaum's assertion with their proposals.
that the quality of the voice, its sonority, flexibility, and its resonant "low notes" as a source of attraction for lesbian listeners. See Wood's essay "Sapphonic" and Castle's "In Praise of Brigitte Fassbaender (A Musical Emanation)." Gays and lesbians have attached themselves to the voice's production of song, to the operatic spectacle, and to the diva for distinct yet sometimes overlapping reasons. They read into and against the grain of the performance so as to find systems of values that resonate with the complex status of their sexual and social identities in contemporary society. But where the body serves not as the site for the manufacture of expressive signals and instead as the very subspace expressed, the opportunities of empathic connection to the performer proliferate differently. No one minds the corpulent, awkward bodies that produce those luminous sounds in opera; the sounds themselves are what excite. In ballet, however, the bodies are what matter, and identification with the dancing body, especially the ballet body, is far less likely to establish the kind of inferiority for the viewer that the voice can.

7 Here I am referring to Gayle Rubin's famous article "The Traffic in Women." Her essay was one of the first in what has become a sustained critique within feminist theory on the role of the woman as the most fundamental category of goods exchanged within a culture.

8 Koestenbaum eloquently describes the gay male experience of identifying with the diva during her performance at the operas. I suspect that the ballet performance functions similarly in that the gay viewer ignores the obvious heterosexual thrust of the narrative, and differently, in that neither male nor female dancer serves as the exclusive focus of his attention. Rather, it is the generalized climate of physical and sensual grace which the ballet offers that makes it so popular among gay men. Significantly, whereas the opera also boasts a strong lesbian following, the ballet holds little if any interest for the lesbian viewer. One of the goals of this essay is to theorize this difference.

9 Here I am alluding to Donna Haraway's exploration of the opportunities for political resistance offered by the Cyborg in "Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's," and by the Monster of "The Promises of Monsters."

10 For an excellent overview of the Romantic ballet in its cultural surround, see Eric Aschinger's "The Beautiful Danger: Facets of the Romantic Ballet."

11 Here I am referring to the shift from a one-sex/two-gender model to a two-sex/two-gender model outlined by Thomas Laqueur in Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud and eloquently summarized in this description of male and female essential differences:

Les prédispositions particulières de l'homme et de la femme sont telles, que le
premier, ayant la force en partage, semble né pour commander et être obéi. Par là
il doit être sujet à des passions plus violentes que la femme, qui, faible, douce et
soumise, ne semble crée que pour aimer et consoler, obéir et plaire. Par
conséquente l’attitude de l’homme doit être noble, fière et impérieuse; sa pose
pleine de fermeté, la rectitude du tronc inaccessible, et la position de la tête fixe;
tandis que la position de la femme doit être timide, remplie de mollesse et
d’agrément, tout chez elle est souple et onduleuses; sa tête, mollement penchée, a toute la candeur de la pose enfantine.

Dans les fonctions ordinaires de la vie, l’homme est plus froid; il est d’une
sensibilité plus profonde que la femme au milieu des grandes influences; s’il
emploie le geste, c’est toujours avec une superieure d’expression et
d’expression, surtout pour la manifestation des sentiments énergiques. La
femme, dont les idées sont plus nombreuses et plus nuancées, les mouvements
plus souples et plus faibles, emploie des gestes variés et sans énergie.

Dans la démarche et l’expression, l’homme, dont la taille est moins
balancée et l’attitude plus ferme, se meut avec plus de force et d’aplomb que la
femme; sa démarche prend un caractère de virilité et de résolution; son regard
est ferme et méditatif; sa dictée, énergique, positive et régulière; sa voix,
sonore, impérieuse et sans éclat. Chez la femme la démarche est légère et
délicate; son regard plein de douceur, de sensibilité et de finesse. Donc d’une
sensibilité dont les modifications sont infinies, elle parle souvent avec excès,
presque toujours d’une manière agréable; son élocution est gracieuse et
brillante; sa voix, douce, jolie et claire; sa respiration, active et variée, prend un
caractère particulier en conséquence des déplacements qu’elle fait épouser aux
seins.

(B*** and Ball 1846, 41–2)

12 This description is taken from the published scenario for the ballet Guerche, ou les
meris, by Yerney de Saint-Georges, Théophile Gautier, and Joan Corely.

13 Carlo Bilotta describes the new pedagogy in his Traité élémentaire, théorique et
pratique de l’art de la danse.

14 An account of the changing priorities for social dance practice is provided by
Jean-Michel Guilherme in his La Contredanse et les renouvellements de la danse
française. A more detailed analysis of social dance practices is given in Sarah
Cordove’s “Poetics of Dance: Narrative Designs from Stet to Maupassant.”

15 In Le Corps redressé: histoire d’un pouvoir pédagogique Georges Vigarello provides
a powerful and convincing history of the changes in pastoral pedagogy and bodily
comportment from the seventeenth century to the present.

16 Louis XIV’s original charter for the Academy of Dance specifies dance’s contribution
to the arts of war and theatrical entertainment. A host of dancing manuals from the
early and middle eighteenth century reiterate dance’s value as a foundation for proper
demeanor, attractive appearance, good health, and success in all endeavors.

17 Publications appearing in the 1860s that disseminated gossip about primarily female
artists include the following: Jean-Charles LaFosse, Chroniques sacrées et gaillandes de
l'opéra, 1865–1945, Anon. La Foyer de l'opéra, Anon. Le Monde d' amour, and Anon. Les Filles d'opéra et les vertus de table d'hôte.

18 The most notorious instance of this is Louis Véron who took over the Paris Opera as a private venture from 1830–33. His Mémories d'un bourgeois de Paris details the various strategies he implemented for making the Opera a profitable enterprise.

19 The most comprehensive analysis of the daily circumstances of dancers in this period is provided by Louise Robin-Chailan in “Danse et Idées d'amour du décor, 1830–1860.”

20 They also participated in more fetishizing adventures. As recounted by Margot Fonteyn for the video series “The Magic of Dance,” Marie Taglioni’s fans cooked and ate her pointe shoes following her last performance in St. Petersburg.

21 This is her Guest’s translation from his book The Romantic Ballet in Paris, 21.

22 In her essay, “The Legs of the Countess,” interpreting photos taken of the Countess de Castiglione, Abigail Solomon-Godeau raises many of the issues discussed here and provides important evidence that corroborates the mid-nineteenth-century status of women in the arts.

23 A sudden surge within French publications of gossip biographies that focused on dancers’ liaisons occurs in the 1830s and 1840s.

24 In his Petits mémoires de l'opéra, Charles de Boigne claims that Véron was a genius at publicity, repeatedly announcing that a production was close to its final performance (p. 8). He calls the mother or sister an essential piece of the ballerina’s equipment, “un membre de rigueur comme l'arroseur” (p. 10). He also observes that:

A l'Opéra l'avancement ne se donne pas à l'ancienneté, mais au chœurs. On ne gagne pas ses grâces on à les, s'un bond on saisit, on enlève le sceptre. On arrive de Londres, de Naples ou de Vienne avec un nom tout fait. Quelques fois avec un talent trop fait.

(Boigne 1857, 23)

And he compares the ballerina to a horse, remarking derogatorily that horses look good after battle but the dancer:

Après son pas, elle n’est même une pauvre après la lutte! Epuisé, haletante, presque morte, elle se soutient à peine; elle souffre comme une machine à vapeur; son visage, peint à la colle, a dédoré et ressemble à un arc-en-ciel; son courage est mouillé, souillé par la sueur; sa bouche grumace, ses yeux sont hagards, quel spectacle!

(ibid., 32)
Dancers, unlike horses, never get a vacation:

Huit jours de repos les condamnent à un mois d’entrechaux forcés. La classe de danse a remplacé l’inquisition, avec cette différence qu’à la classe, pour se faire administrer la question, les patinetes payent cinquante francs par mois et par tête. Le maître de danse est sans pitié pour ses victimes: il les presse, les tourmente, les harcèle, les gronde. Jamais un moment de repos, jamais un mot d’encouragement. Il commande et elles obéissent. Tournons nous l’écriture-t-il; et toutes de rester, tant qu’elles peuvent, talon contre talon; les genoux tendus et les pieds sur la même ligne. Cassons nous l’apesanteur-t-il; si vous voyez tous ces pieds et toutes ces mains exécuter la manœuvre avec un ensemble parfait. Il s’agit, tout en tenant la barre de la main droite, de poser le pied gauche sur la même barre, et de changer, au commandement, de pied et de main, et au milieu de ces textures, il faut soulever.

( Ibid., 35 )

25 See Gautier’s Gavrilov on Dance for exemplary instances of the masculinized female body. Guest’s The Romantic Ballet in Paris also includes many quotations from the newspapers that described dancers’ performances.

26 See Catherine Clément’s Opera, or the Undoing of Woman for a deeply moving analysis of the varieties of “undoing” for nineteenth-century opera heroines. Their fates parallel those of the ballet’s leading female characters.

27 In her article “Film Body: An Imposition of Perversions,” Linda Williams finds built into the very structure of the cinematic apparatus a fetishizing function for the female body “whose first effect is to deny the very existence of women.” Specifically with regard to the work of Maybridge, whose photographic investigations of motion help form the cinema’s origin, she claims that the threat posed by the female nude determined two strategies of containment for the female body in the photographs. Either the female subject was ensnared in a scene suggestive of a narrative, or she was reduplicated so many times as to erode any power she might have. These two strategies map easily onto the Romantic ballet’s frequently tragic fates for leading female dancers and to its reduplication of the female body to form the corps de ballet.

28 Lynn Garafola’s pioneering essay “The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth Century Ballet” provided a much-needed feminist intervention into the subject of the travesty dancer. Further historical research is required in order to understand the exact nature of their popularity and the relationship between travesty appearances at working-class theaters and at venues like the Opera.

29 One of the most famous travesty performers of the early nineteenth century was Virginie Dejazet (1797–1825) who initiated a range of travesty roles at the Théâtre des Variétés. For thirty years she played roles as “gamin de Paris, coquette, débonnaire,
This is a reference to a review from 1806 of the ballet *Las deux Créoles* whose production at the Théâtre de Porte St Martin featured a female dancer in the role of the male lead. The reviewer's response to the performance was as follows; "... and the love of one woman for another is scarcely affecting." *Journal de l'Empire*, 4 July 1806. The situation was apparently quite different in England and in the medium of drama where female travesty performers became a threat by the early nineteenth century. See Kristina Straub's essay "The Guilty Pleasures of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke" in *Body Guards*, 148-66.

Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* initiated an inquiry into the various discursive practices that work to define categories of sexual experience and sexual preference. David Halperin and others have suggested that homosexuality as a category emerges out of societal insistence on the public normality of heterosexual and the private abnormality as homosexual that occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*.

The filling of movement to the architectural structure embodied in the music is one of Balanchine's most often claimed choreographic goals.

In this four-part definition of the ballerina as phallus, I am following the general Lacanian thesis that sees in the phallus the law that divides symbolic from imaginary. The phallus's function in this capacity as it affects the experience of subjectivity and desire is worked out in Lacan's essay "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious." I am also relying on Teresa de Lauretiis's critique of the phallus in *Alice Doesn't*; Charles Baudrillard's re-assertion of the similarities between the phallus and the penis in "Penile Reference in Phallic Theory"; and Michael Taussig's explication of the relationship of the fetish to the terror in "Maleficium: Slave Fetishism".

In *The Art of Making Dances*, Doris Humphrey describes the desirable relation between dance and music as one that brings the feminine dance together with her "perfect mate but not master" (p. 132). I am proposing a different relation between ballet and her "sister" arts based on a homosocial male aesthetic economy.

For additional feminist perspectives on Pythagorean aesthetics, see Sue-Ellen Case's "Meditations on the Petriarchal Pythagorean Priestess and the Lesbian Siamese Two-Step" and Susan McClary's "Music, the Pythagoreans, and the Body".
The analysis I am undertaking here parallels and takes inspiration from Jean-Joseph Goux's "The Phallus: Masculine Identity and the 'Exchange of Women'". Goux's is a complex and elegant thesis, two aspects of which are important to the argument presented here. First, Goux works to historicize the very conception of the phallus by considering its role in "primitive" societies and in their myths and rituals, then in nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century capitalist societies, and now in a postcapitalist, postmodernist landscape. He argues that the phallus itself, our access to it, and its relation to modes of cultural production have changed distinctively in each of these periods. Second, he connects the identity of the phallus to the identity of capital, claiming for each an analogous degree of abstract functioning in relation to their respective economies of desire and material production.

One of Halperin's arguments in One Hundred Years of Homosexuality is that the separation of public and private forces a notion of homosexuality as an inverted sexuality. The resonance between Halperin's theorization of late nineteenth-century homosexuality and Nijinsky's performances is striking.

Michael Moon expands on Nijinsky's gayness in his article "Flaming Closers."

Frederick Ashton is the most notable choreographer who attempted to reach across this divide.