tion similarly focused dancers' attention on physical physics, yet the active engagement of bodies, one with another, defied the traditional sense of bodily boundaries, reorganizing the dancers' sense of self as the product of the ongoing interactive process.

As sport, contact improvisation developed a spectacular body responsiveness, one that attracted an unusually large number of men into the practice. Dancers passed through or arrived at precarious positionings, defying gravity and charting whole new trajectories for bodies' pathways in space that resulted in breathtaking solutions to momentary physical dilemmas. At the same time contact improvisation shared with sports a workerlike ambiance, devoid of drama or pretense, in which dancers simply focused on the task at hand. They performed with the gusto of athletes and pursued a similar dedication to collaboration yet without the competition that goal-oriented structures encourage. Nor did contact improvisation segregate male from female participants, preferring to approach all bodies as similarly abled. Some of the most sensational moments in contact performances occurred when traditional gender roles in dance were contested or reversed.

As a sociality, a shared sensibility for public interaction, contact provided a focus for group activities, and it served as model for communal living and sharing, group decision making, and the sharing of power. As the number of people practicing contact increased, numerous local and regional organizations sprang up as well as a regularly published national journal, Contact Quarterly, that collected impressions and insights into contact as well as announcements for upcoming events. Many practitioners of contact used the form as an organizing force in their lives, traveling from one group of improvisers to another, sharing the dance and their lives. The following letter to Contact Newsletter, predecessor of Contact Quarterly, shows the way in which contact suffused and almost became a lifestyle for many:

Entering my contact year number three and living in the midst of what often seems to be the west coast center for contact improv. Number 224 here at the artists' warehouse called Project Artaud is a single large room with loft, kitchen, shower, 14 foot ceiling and large open floor space. . . . John LeFan, his three year old son Krishna, and I share the space . . . often we share it with others, too. Seamus and Gail from Vancouver have both crashed here at different times ("contact contacts"); Mary from Minneapolis has been here for the past ten days during her SF visit; Storm, Shanti and others from Santa Cruz contacting have spent hours and nights while passing through. Bill Jones from Binghamton stopped in one afternoon to share some incredible dancing during his SF vacation; we look forward to many more guests. . . . This space has become a central meeting ground for business transaction. Mangrove eats and discusses here, is interviewed here, watches videotapes here and parties here. The Bay Area Contact Coalition formed initially for presenting Focus: 9/76 (a teaching workshop) has spent many hours. . . . Last evening Roger Neece from the Boston improvisational company TA YU showed a small gathering a video of his company's performances; Curt showed a video of a Santa Cruz Re-Union performance. It was wonderful to feel the energy and exchange across the continent.76

A perpetuation of late 1960s values of spontaneity and community, groups of contact improvisers lived together, visited other such groups, and mixed dancing with the other activities that comprised their daily lives. Contact's emphasis on sensitivity, spontaneity, and going with the flow of events inspired many dancers, and they worked conscientiously to bring these qualities into their general conduct.

Contact improvisation reflected the communitarian values of the late 1960s, as well as the period's sexual tolerance and feminist concerns; yet it preserved the chasteness of the modern dance tradition. Like Cunningham, contact improvisation gave equal value to all parts of the body. All sections or joints contained an equivalent potential for moving, even as they moved differently. Cunningham's approach, however, segmented the body and cast its parts into spatially and temporally coordinated locations, whereas contact improvisation charted sequential pathways of touch across the entire body. As a result Cunningham's partnering work took on the appearance of highly unconventional ballet: female dancers, usually erect or cantilevered off the vertical but referring to it, constructed idiosyncratic shapes and maintained these
shapes as male dancers, using inventive holds, moved them to a new location, and then all reconfigured as discrete self-propelling entities. Even the duet between Neels and Solomons, the placed quality of both bodies, their vertical carriage even in the horizontal plane, resembled a pas de deux occurring at an odd angle.

In contrast, contact improvisation brought literally every part of the body into moving contact with another’s moving body. Bodies passed back and forth across breasts, genitals, and buttocks, and because of the improvisational nature of the practice, it was not at all uncommon for two dancers to come to rest with one’s head in the other’s crotch. Yet the explicit sexual connotations of this pose were either denied or treated as an irrelevant detail. All parts of the body mattered most as momentum-creating surfaces. Dancers or audience members might chuckle at the physical pairing that fulcrum physics, not desire, had momentarily produced, but dancers’ focus and next physical initiatives soon restabilized attention on the ongoing exploration of the kinetic and tactile, but not sexual, potential of the body. The body adventurously mingled with any and all other bodies, yet the logic of sexual desire were never engaged. The democratic distribution of function to all body parts and regions dismantled the necessary hierarchies of erotogenicity.

The polymorphous perversity of the contact-improvising body was strikingly evident in the androgynous equality with which women and men partnered each other. Techniques, developed in contact improvisation for guiding momentum and for mutual participation in the perpetuation of that momentum, enabled small, structurally more fragile, bodies to lift and support much larger bodies. Neither size nor sex intervened as a factor that influenced how two bodies might move together. The body’s sexual but never sexual promiscuity was also powerfully articulated when dancers of the same sex sustained intimate contact. Opposite-sex duets, common in modern dance and ballet, gestured romance and desire while instantiating limits beyond which bodies might not move toward that desire. Same-sex duets seldom occurred, partially because of the intimations of homoerotic desire they might generate. A radical departure from both ballet and modern conventions, contact improvisation featured both same- and opposite-sex pairs reveling in their proximity and using a single choreographic strategy—a noncerogenized body focusing on the physical experience of weight and momentum—to deflect any presumptions of romantic or sexual attraction.

Nowhere was the arresting allure of this polymorphous body more clearly developed than in performances by Mangrove, an all-male company formed in San Francisco that organized concerts and workshops from 1975 to 1980. Mangrove’s life spanned a critical period in the development of contact improvisation, as it consolidated vocabulary and technical skills and generated more proficient and professionally oriented dancers who began to form companies devoted to the presentation of the form or to its use as a primary source for choreographic invention. Founded by four men—John LeFan, Byron Brown, Curt Siddall, and Jim Tyler—each with considerable training and experience in professional theater and dance, Mangrove quickly garnered visibility and professional success, presenting more than 250 performances throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe in the five years of its operation.

Mangrove’s success signaled a movement away from the early utopian vision of dance as a way of life and into the capitalist marketing of dance as a way to make a living. One of its founding members, Brown, wrote the description of life at Project Artaud quoted earlier that captures the community-based ethos of the practice. Yet as Mangrove began to construct itself as a dance company, other San Francisco Bay area members of the contact community resented its insularity and willingness to make money through the form. This reaction reflects the extent to which some contact improvisers saw the form as a way of life and a model for life outside capitalist economic structures. Still, Mangrove perpetuated many of contact improvisation’s communal values, replacing the hierarchical organization of the dance company, its choreographer and dancers, with an egalitarian model based on collaborative choreography. And it presented a new vision of masculine identity, far more open, sensitive, and process oriented than other staged versions of typical male behavior.
Mangrove’s male bodies collided delicately, careened gently, stopped to sense the moment, and then responded wholeheartedly to another’s initiatives. Rather than butt into or outmaneuver one another, these bodies mutually constructed an ongoing flow of dance. The dancers did not shape themselves; no pointed feet, extended legs, or curved arms appeared on the dance floor. Such cultivation of the body would have looked artificial and pretentious next to these sweating, deft athletes. Representative of the general male participation in contact improvisation, Mangrove combined astonishing physical daring with a sensuous vulnerability.

Aware of the social and even political ramifications of this vision of manhood, Charles Campbell of Mangrove declared:

It’s clear to me that we are exploring new personal/political/artistic ground for ourselves, as men gently (and aggressively) supporting each other in a non-hierarchical collective improvisational process, and sharing that process in performance, from a position of vulnerability and humor and fear, too. . . . It’s all about us as people and as men finding the “people things” which happen in our process of coming into contact.77

Not only was the performance a collective display of decision making in process, it also expanded dominant prescriptions for masculine comportment to include new forms of interaction, new ways for men to make contact with one another. Instead of competing, they exuberantly pursued collective goals. Instead of a controlled willful use of the body, they displayed the loss of control and its attendant embarrassments, tediums, and unanticipated triumphs. Instead of bodily insularity and stilted protocols of touch, they showed men in contact with one another’s full physicality, treating other bodies playfully, respectfully, and empathically.

Yet nothing in this repertoire of initiatives and responses constructed or alluded to homoerotic desire. Mangrove’s mission, like that of contact improvisation generally, focused on establishing realms of physical intimacy other than sexual. Still, Mangrove’s rendition of a polymorphous sensuality bore a striking resemblance to the premises on which the French sexual theorist Guy Hocquenghem based his definition of homosexuality. Pursuing to its most radical conclusions Kinsey’s continuum between homosexual and heterosexual identities, Hocquenghem asserts that “homosexual desire, like heterosexual desire, is an arbitrary division of the flux of desire, an ‘arbitrarily frozen frame,’ in an unbroken and polyvocal flux.”78 According to Hocquenghem, human sexuality generally operates across the same broad spectrum of physical possibilities that Mangrove represented in danced form. Mangrove, however, represented the closeted rendition of that physical spectrum, whereas Hocquenghem articulates the “out” version of the same spectrum, replete with its revolutionary political implications.

Published the same year that Steve Paxton commenced work on contact improvisation, Hocquenghem’s manifesto, *Homosexual Desire*, embodied the critical energy generated by Stonewall, the social upheavals, student revolutions and political protests of the late 1960s, and the rise of deconstructionist and other poststructuralist theoretical orientations. Implementing a politics that Kinsey could not have imagined, Hocquenghem charges that homosexuality functioned as a category devised by heterosexual culture to repress its own homosexual desires and to control family and other capitalist economic structures. Using the anus in symbolic opposition to the phallus, Hocquenghem argues that an anal sexuality would obliterate differences between public and private, and social and individual—differences that the phallic organization of sexuality promoted and upheld:

Ours is a competitive society: competition between males, between phallus bearers. The anus is excluded from the social field, and the individuals created by the rule of the bourgeoisie believe that everything revolves around the possession of the phallus, the seizure of other people’s phalluses or the fear of losing one’s own. Freud’s reconstruction merely translates and internalizes this pitiless rule of the competitive hierarchy. You build between by castrating others; you can only ascend to genitality by trampling over other phallus bearers on the way. You are a phallus bearer only if you are recognized as such by others. Your phallus is constantly threatened: you are in constant fear of losing a phallus which was
difficult to win in the first place. No one ever threatens to take away your anus.79

Where the phallic organization of power complements capitalist economic structures in its emphasis on competition, its organization of the family, and its vertical hierarchies of power, an anal-based sexuality, a “sexual communism,” disperses power horizontally and unproductively, leading to a playful, nonoppositional communality.80 Mangrove manifested these playful and noncompetitive homosocial relations, even as it denied a sexual dimension to those relations.

Hocquenghem’s antiphallic critique brought into question the very assumptions of progress on which Ellis’s conception of homosexuality had been based.81 The homosexual male, rather than a deviant version of masculinity, now held the promise and power to move society, not forward but into new configurations of pleasure and production. Like Mangrove’s dances, made on the spot and for the moment and with no enduring market value, human sexual and societal relations should proliferate promiscuously without ever building toward profit. Like Mangrove’s dancing bodies, the sexual body was capable of innumerable revitalizing contacts. Neither the expressive instrument of an autonomous subject as in Shawn’s choreography nor a reservoir of physical permutations as in Cunningham’s dances, contact improvisation’s body, responsive but also generative, proved the endless seminal potential of human interaction.

Seminal but not fecund, the body for Hocquenghem as well as Mangrove, decidedly a male body, nonetheless stood for all human corporeality. The anus, an apt metaphor for theorizing male homosexuality, offered little to the lesbian social body, yet for Hocquenghem it stood as the sign for a revolutionary reexamination of all homosexuality, regardless of gender or race. Likewise, contact improvisation, in its pursuit of the androgynous and polymorphous body, denied differences between the sexes while tacitly privileging certain masculine attributes: women were most successful when they showed unusual physical strength, but men were not praised for their softness but for their combinations of strength and daring with grace. Even the pedestrian aesthetic of the practice, while seeming to invite a full range of participants, tacitly asserted a masculine ethos, contrary to the feminine decorousness and pretentiousness of other dance forms. Contact’s pedestrian sensibility helped Mangrove’s dancers to secure their masculinity, thus guarding against still-prevalent allegations of effeminacy while seeming to represent all men.

Similarly, contact improvisation claimed a universal and natural physicality, even though with very few exceptions its practitioners were white and middle class. Participants did not contemplate any connections to the African American forms of improvisation in music, poetry, or dance that were developing contemporaneously. Black male break dancers, for example, improvised a social critique on pedestrian street corners, collectively presenting individual solutions to crises of gravity, momentum, and anatomical structure and using citation to satirize and triumph over oppressive social figures and forces. Rather than probe the similarities and differences between these distinctive approaches to improvisation, contact improvisers aligned themselves with the white post-Cunningham and -Judson avant-garde and rationalized their choreographic initiatives as an expansion of that tradition. They thereby sustained the whiteness of modern dance even as they began to infuse it with a masculine aesthetic.

Chaste as their performances were in tours across the United States, Mangrove always returned home to San Francisco, a city of unparalleled activism around gay and lesbian rights, with one of the largest gay populations in the country. Here the company’s playful physicality could easily be seen to summon up the endless pleasures of pre-AIDS gay sexual culture. Undoubtedly, Mangrove’s novelty and popularity, not unlike Shawn’s all-male company, derived in part from its intervention into the female-dominated profession of modern dance. Yet, where other than San Francisco could an all-male company enjoy such sustained support?

SWANNING ON STAGE

Matthew Bourne’s choreography emerges in the wake of contact improvisation’s widespread success in both Europe and the
United States. However, unlike the internationally acclaimed choreographers Bill T. Jones or Lloyd Newson, who draw heavily from contact improvisation’s principles for touching and sharing weight, Bourne prefers social dance formats for staging relationships between dancers. All three choreographers have created evening-length pieces that work with narrative elements and build characters, and all three use various strategies for creating critical distance from their choreographed stories. Bourne’s work is distinctive in its evocation of nostalgia, constructing the dappled elegance of England’s upper crust in the 1930s as in *Town and Country* (1991) or the technicolor glamour of jejune Americans in the 1950s as in *Deadly Serious* (1992). Characters in these dances have no authentic relationship to an expressive self. Pastiche from film, literary, and dance references, they cite multiple movement vocabularies, adopt multiple poses: they are serious one moment, ironic the next, ingenuous, stereotypical, and consummately mobile.

Gay male figures abound in Bourne’s work, cast in roles that probe the delights and difficulties of homoerotic relations. In *Town and Country* the covert attraction between two upper-class gay men transforms into the ostentatious flirtation between a young man and woman in a seedy bar served by the two gay men, who now pose as their waiters. The heterosexual couple flaunts their privilege as the gay men close their attraction. In *Deadly Serious* four men dance out vivid depictions of stereotypic masculine poses and gestures from 1950s movie stars, dissolving boundaries between heterosexual and homosexual masculinities as Peggy Lee sings “Mr. Wonderful.” In *Spitfire* (1991) four men dressed in underwear come on to one another with seductive glances and gestures while following the contours of the famous romantic ballet *Pas de quatre*. Yet none of these relationships approaches the amorous involvement, the dedication to one another depicted between Swan and Prince in *Swan Lake*, an attachment remarkable for its intensity and for its extraordinary popularity and acceptability among a mainstream audience. How and why does this evening-length dance achieve its success?

Near the beginning of Bourne’s *Swan Lake*, the royal family arrives at the ballet to see a depiction of exactly what his piece is not: a camp send-up of the generic romantic ballet. Bourne’s theater-within-a-theater is replete with magical butterfly creatures that look like male dancers in drag; a vain and conniving sylph; a dorky woodsman who does the sylph’s bidding; and surreal monsters whose threatening gestures and eventual demise advance the minimal narrative. They grind through the steps, exaggerating virtuosity, pantomimed passion, and the tedious repetition of phrases. Audience members familiar with the renowned all-male ballet company Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo might presume that Bourne’s recasting of the swans as male will yield the kind of *Swan Lake* that the Trocadero produced: a satiric, cross-dressed rendition of the original story. Bourne cleverly comments on these expectations by containing them within the miniature theater while developing the main action through meaningful glances between Prince, the Queen, and the Girlfriend.

Who is this Prince? He first appears as a boy, sickly, uninterested in his royal obligations, yet obedient, complying docilely as the large staff bathe and dress him for yet another round of public appearances. He craves his mother’s affection, but she coldly rebuffs his pleading gestures. As an adult he comports himself with a regal bearing, yet beneath this decorous veneer his identity crises rage. Drowning his sorrows at the Swank Bar, lowlife pimps and pushers cruise around him, and his girlfriend parties with other men. Eventually booted from the bar for his boisterous yet ineffectual troublemaking, he witnesses the Prime Minister paying off the Girlfriend but not her rejection of the money. Dejected, deceived, and with no hope of a reciprocated affection, he arrives at the lake ready to end his life.

Act I’s choreography constructs this characterization of the Prince through contrasting, action-filled scenes that present a newsreel-like documentation of his life. Within this whirlwind of activities, pantomimed dialogue blends easily with the crisp buoyant regimen of the royals as well as the leering looks of bar customers. Vivid scenery and costumes amplify the effect of abundant realism. The bed in which the young prince lies with his toy swan turns around to become the balcony from which he and his mother wave to their admiring citizens. On one of their jaunts the
Queen commemorates an Andy Warhol portrait of herself and then a new sculpture, a sweating, male nude, which the Prince cannot help but give a second glance. Such tongue-in-cheek excess offsets the sentimentality of the music, revitalizing its ability to convey the Prince’s increasingly urgent apprehension that he cannot fit the mold already constructed for him. His final soliloquy, lyrically carving the space with sweeping arcs of arms and legs, expresses the poignancy of his futile search for other values, other meanings in life.

Enter the swans. Like their predecessors, the sprites, nymphs, sylphs, and wills that populated nineteenth-century ballet stages, these swans exude an uncanny Otherness. Half bird, half man, their head and arm gestures, suggesting a swan’s darting beak or curving wing, emerge briefly and then disappear into fulsome leaps, gliding runs, and arcing turns. With languorous sinuosity a wavelike impulse crosses their bodies, only to explode into sharp shifts of posture and weight. At the moment of fullest extension the rib cage will jut out, a leg pull in, unsettling their bodies’ vulnerable openness. Then they dart, then gallumph, then balance delicately, and, with intricate precision, swirl into a new pathway, gathering a new momentum. Their costume, with its stiff corsetlike waistband, highlights the musculature of the torso, the softly rippling sequentiality of movement across arms, shoulders, and back. Their shaggy pants, enhancing the dynamism of their weight changes, the height of their jumps, appear comic one moment, noble the next.

This extraordinary synthesis of opposing qualities does not, however, account fully for the swans’ Otherness. Their foreignness and charisma grow out of a series of reversals in which they miraculously contravene their aesthetic heritage. First, they are not female, not feminine, and not effeminate. Their bold, strong motions, the size of their jumps, the distances they cover quickly, all pronounce their maleness. Unlike the choreography for the traditional corps de ballet, which erases individual identity, these swans aggressively affirm their individual existence on stage. Each approaches the Prince inquisitively and directly, and each performs the unison phrase with idiosyncratic flare rather than with the faceless anonymity of the female corps. Where the swan maidens of the original Swan Lake had endured the magical spell of the evil Von Rothbart, helpless, mute, and unable to extricate themselves from their predicament, these swans live happily in their world apart, needing no rescue. Although their bodies open into positions of exquisite vulnerability, they never collapse into the camp exaggeration of feminine gestures.

Second, these swans do not perform ballet, nor do they execute the well-known choreography of Act II, even though Bourne has created a solo for Swan to the Swan Queen’s adagio, a duet for Swan and Prince to the famous pas de deux, and a hilarious quartet to the well-known music of the pas de quatre. The swans’ vocabulary controrts classical ballet stipulations for bodily geometry. Hips raise with legs; torsos duck and undulate; legs rotate inward and frequently extend at 45-degree angles to side front or side back. Where the ballet vocabulary constantly presses up and away from gravity, in order to inhabit the aerial, the swans give into gravity, then surge up out of its depths on curving pathways reminiscent of the modern dance choreographer Doris Humphrey’s fall and rebound. In their duet Prince and Swan do not observe the traditional gender roles assigned to their parts in ballet. Both carve through space along the same arcs traced out in the Prince’s earlier solo, performing increasingly in unison during the course of the duet. Each lifts the other, their faces passionately close to one another. Their only difference, marking swan from human, occurs in the manner of their touch: Swan never grasps the Prince but instead supports and guides him with forearms alone, a gesture reminiscent of wings. Throughout, all the swans sweat profusely, revealing, rather than obscuring, the labor through which their spectacular presence is achieved.

Finally, the swans are not worldly. They dissemble all other characters in the piece and in the worlds of ballet and modern dance. Unlike the reserved erectness of the royal entourage in Act I, the swans indulge in the weightiness of their motion. Unlike the swaggering strides and swishing hips of the glitterati at the Prince’s ball in Act III, the swans uphold a fiercely Platonic solidarity. Like Shawn’s male dancers, they seldom touch, yet their
athleticism is imbued with a sensual grace that Shawn could not have dared to construct. Menacing and captivating, calculating and alluring, weighty and ethereal, they conjoin the kinds of oppositional attributes ascribed to the nineteenth-century ballerina Marie Taglioni or that may have been achieved in the early works for an all-female cast by Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. Yet those women represented the dark and troubled territory of the psyche, whereas these men dance their way out of a fairytale book, transforming childhood images of magical creatures into a virile and noble reality.

The swans offer up these transcendent possibilities to the Prince, and he leaves their world with a new sense of identity and purpose. However, courtly life and his mother's cold yet wanton ways begin to undermine his new resolve. The arrival at the ball of the leather-clad lady's man who nonetheless bears a striking resemblance to Swan erodes completely his unstable composure. He seizes a gun, his mad confusion creating chaos in the ballroom. A shot rings out. Although it is the Prime Minister who has fired the Girlfriend who has intercepted the bullet, Prince is carried away, convinced that he is a murderer. Returned to his bed after extensive medical treatment, the swans seep out from under his bed. Rather than the fraternal harmony created in their earlier appearance, they now swirl aggressively around Prince and then turn on Swan, who has dared to desert them for a mortal human. Their vengeful attack on the couple engulfs Swan and leaves Prince dead. His mother rushes in, truly distraught, as Swan cradles the boy Prince, pieta-like, in his arms, hovering in an eternal realm high above the bedroom scene.

Everything about this dance—the Prince's search for a more meaningful identity, the Otherness of the swans, the sensual encounter and then persecution of the couple—points to the homosexuality of the romance between Prince and Swan. And this homosexuality is portrayed sympathetically if tragically. Prince is neither a narcissist nor effeminate, the two models for insufficient evolutionary development implicit in the sexology of Ellis's time. Nor is the distribution of his homosexual and heterosexual tendencies such that he merely prefers the company of men, as Kinsey's research might suggest. Instead, something deep within him is satisfied and nurtured by his visit to the swans. The daring union across species of Prince and Swan proves the depth of their attachment while it demonstrates the profound prejudice against this kind of coupling. Their homosexual union could thrive only in a world apart. Where the Prince of the original Swan Lake failed to register the difference between good and evil and as a result committed both the Swan Queen and himself to their tragic fate, here Prince's resolve faith, although shaken by the vulgar wanninizer in black, survives to serve as the vehicle for their final union.

Not only is the union between Swan and Prince rendered with empathy and understanding but their togetherness intimates a utopian resolution of oppositional categories. Prince is both sensitive and dutiful, Swan both cognizant and sexual. Each sutures together the kinds of contradictory attributes on which Prince's world thrives. Rich and poor, governors and governed, male and female—all callously demarcated, all driving the machinery of the state in Acts I and III—disappear in the swans' enchanted kingdom. In their place the swans offer an egalitarian society that blends labor with pleasure, the rational with the sensual. The swans participate equally in the construction of their world; no hierarchy of skills or placement in space singles out one over another. Swan is not so much their leader—he does not direct or protect them as the Swan Queen in the original Swan Lake—as the eccentric who becomes fascinated with a mortal. Together, the swans playfully and masterfully inhabit their world. They cavort, then pause to explore the sensuousness of movement's traversal across the body, then they conquer space, aggressively launching themselves into the air or across the stage. What continually astonishes in this celebration of a sensual identity is that these are male dancers, their masculine musculature and agility imbuing the movement with sufficient rectitude to secure its maleness.

In their synthesis of so many opposing categories, the swans do not take on an androgynous sexual neutrality. Rather, they are sexually charged creatures who occupy simultaneously the positions of desiring subject and desired object. Where formerly a fe-
male character was required to focus the objectifying gaze of the masculine viewer, now male figures perform that function. Entering into the swans’ world, Prince is introduced to the pleasures of looking and being looked at. Both Swan and Prince enjoy the gazes of one another, surrounded and supported by the reciprocal gazes of the other swans. Their erotics of looking are further enhanced by the fact that the traditional relationship in ballet between the female corps de ballet and the masculine gaze of the viewer has been radically altered by the use of a male corps.

Yet this mutual fueling of the desiring machine never mounts the critique of capitalism that Hocquenghem and contact improvisation had envisioned. Although the swans elaborate an egalitarian vocabulary of motion and gesture, theirs is not a dance that everyone can share. Their exclusive virtuosity never references the pedestrian, never gestures toward a continuum between their spectacular achievements and the movement potential of untrained bodies. Where contact improvisation had assiduously embraced such a continuum, the swans luxuriate in the splendid trappings of a supercharged theatricality. Their bodies glisten not only from the work and pleasure of dancing but also from the theatrical packaging of their achievements. Through their flamboyant style, their audacious gaze, the handsome costumes and dramatic environs, the swans provoke the viewer’s desire to possess them at the same time that they merchandise their movement. Their presentation contains no Marxist critique, nor does it ask viewers to participate communally in the making of the dance’s meaning. These swans carry no residue of 1970s political aesthetics. They dance out identity in the 1990s.

In the utopian image they construct, the charged yet enigmatic erotics they concoct, these creatures articulate a queer identity. They illustrate an embodied version of queer theory as it developed during the 1990s in dialogue with earlier approaches to sexuality. Unlike Ellis or Kinsey, each of whom in a different way attempted to neutralize prejudice against homosexuality through scientific explanations of its unavoidability, queer theory embraces a homosexual orientation both as an enabling reality rather than pitiable inevitability and as a critical place from which to assess the workings of heteronormative cultural values. Like the swans who charge the disrespected categories of male dancer and female corps de ballet with a new charisma, queer theory appropriates the derogatory term for the male homosexual used frequently in the 1950s and 1960s and gives it a new theoretical and political potential. In interventions such as those conducted by Queer Nation in response to the AIDS crisis, the term queer has catalyzed the disenfranchisement experienced by homosexuals and directed it toward protest against antihomosexual discrimination and also toward the establishment of new kinds of positive images of gays and lesbians. Queer scholarship has formulated analogous strategies for assessing homophobic prejudice and policy as it has operated in philosophical, social, and literary theories and even in the organization of the academic institution. As Michael Warner in Fear of a Queer Planet explains, “The preference for queer represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simply political interest—representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal. For academics, being interested in queer theory is a way to mess up the desexualized spaces of the academy.” Drawing on Foucault’s scrutiny of the categorization of sexuality and the function of such a category for the perpetuation of state power, queer theory has even interrogated the heterosexual underpinnings of the production of knowledge.

In its brief history as a term affirming homosexuality, queer has expanded beyond the representational confines of gay and lesbian identity to embrace the possibility of a coalition among all social constituencies oppressed by the regime of the “normal.” Like Bourne’s vision of Swan, queer has come to signify a coalition politics that transcends race-, gender-, sex-, and class-specific kinds of discrimination. Like the swans, who cite numerous traditions and playfully locate themselves adjacent to but not within the traditional confines of narrative (both inside and out), so too queer theory presumes a fluid and changeable conception of identity that crosses traditional political boundaries between minoritized groups. Scholars who question slippages in the term’s usage chal-
challenge queer's social agenda in this ambitious yet vague inclusiveness. These scholars' critiques of queer elucidate the queer status of the swans and help explain the mainstream popularity and charisma of Bourne's Swan Lake.

First, the discipline of queer theory has come under attack as a pseudocoalition, promising inclusion of all minoritized groups yet consistently focused on support of issues and advocacy for white middle-class gay men. The swans embody just such an ambiguous agenda. Their courageous habitation of the denigrated female role universalizes their white male bodies and depicts an imagined community without social discord. Yet no African or Asian bodies integrate their swanery, nor do lexicons of movement that signify ethnic identity weave into their (white) modern dance movement. Thus even as they represent a world beyond prejudice, a world tolerant of difference, the swans constitute a remarkably homogeneous ensemble. Sustaining the traditional performance of whiteness in modern dance, Bourne's choreography uses the absence of racial and ethnic signifiers to moderate the display of sexuality so as to secure his aesthetic goal of a transcendental identity for the swans.

Second, queer theory's championing of a queer "lifestyle" has failed to account for global capitalist economic structures that find in the queer community as currently constituted an ideal market for commodified queer images and products. Although the market's ability to commodify sexual orientation enhances class divides and erodes the public sphere, focusing attention on the individual consumer and reducing opportunities for collective organizing, queer politics has not resisted assimilation into the market, nor do the swans. Insofar as dance can ever construct a marketable product, Swan Lake does so. In its carefully crafted integration of pantomime and virtuoso dancing, and in contrast between the witty precision of the court and the soulful sinuosity of the swans, it reinscribes the aesthetic hierarchies that earlier postmodern choreographers, in the name of a danced politics, had broken down. For $45 per ticket, viewers can feast on the visual and kinesthetic splendor they purvey at the same time that they are moved by the story of an impossible gay male love. Susan Bordo observes that in advanced capitalism two contradictory impulses compete in the structuring of individual identity:

On the one hand, as producers of goods and services we must sublimate, delay, repress desires for immediate gratification; we must cultivate the work ethic. On the other hand, as consumers we must display a boundless capacity to capitulate to desire and indulge in impulse; we must hunger for constant and immediate satisfaction. The regulation of desire thus becomes an ongoing problem, as we find ourselves continually besieged by temptation, while socially condemned for overindulgence.

The swans solve this dilemma magnificently. Virtuoso soloists, the swans are a consumer's delight, yet they also absolve us of our consumer guilt because they are performing the important cultural labor of explaining a gay sensibility.

And for this reassuring yet strange magic they work, we admire them. Their magical charm, however, is achieved at great cost. Not only does Swan Lake erase racial and ethnic difference but it erases women almost entirely. Bordo continues: "We would thus expect that when the regulation of desire becomes especially problematic (as it is in advanced consumer cultures), women and their bodies will pay the greatest symbolic and material toll." Swan Lake exacts this toll by eliminating the female corps de ballet, the site where female labor was displayed if trivialized, and by retaining only the most stereotypic of female character types: the cold and wanton mother, the bimbo girlfriend, and the sexually promiscuous and ambitious princesses. At the same time it incorporates feminine features into the masculine bodies of the swans, reinvigorating patriarchal authority and endowing the male body with a new seductiveness. Erasing any anxieties that the presence of the female body might have provoked concerning corporeal spontaneity, frailty, fleshiness, or unknowability, the swans cement the bonds of the homosocial world in which white male dominance is ensured. The final image of the dance sums up this new world order: the failed mother weeps over her son's corpse, while the transcendent swan replaces the maternal figure of the pietà, righteously condemning the feminine as he carries the Prince into the global capitalist future.
But, no, this is not fully accurate for, after all, Swan, attacked by his cohorts, has likewise transmigrated from his world to another. He does not represent the queer corporate body of the swans’ wedge. But does he, instead, articulate a gay politics? Deviant, like the Prince, he is gay bashed by his own kind. And this is how the closet in Bourne’s Swan Lake operates. Both the causal relationship between homosexuality and inadequate mothering that the dance depicts and the attack on Swan by his fellow swans issue from a framework of heteronormative assumptions about gay life. Prince’s homosexuality, created by the seductive mother’s failure to respond to his oversensitive neediness, is represented as a psychic maladjustment that finds resolution only in death. Swan’s choice of Prince, which ignites the instinctual fury of the flock, transforms the swans’ gay men’s society into the hate-filled mob of straight men that has terrorized gay men for centuries. Homosexuality is thus rendered deficient and pathetic on the one hand, unpredictable and bestial on the other.

Where, initially, Bourne’s retelling of Swan Lake seems to garner sympathy for the gay couple at the female character’s expense, placing gay and feminist agendas in opposition, closer examination reveals that the dance conveys neither a gay nor a feminist politics. Both the patriarchy and the closet benefit from its postmodern choreography. Little wonder, then, that Bourne, a gay man, has always claimed that the dance moved beyond the historical specificities of gay politics, and little wonder that Swan Lake will tour the world as renowned exemplar of global capitalist cultural achievement. But to imagine the “corps de ballet” that offers a non-racist, nonexist, nonhomophobic alternative is no easy task. At least Bourne has prompted us to imagine the possibility.

OPENING OPEN CLOSSETS

Why choose to discuss Bourne, a British choreographer, over, say, Bill T. Jones or David Rousseve, American choreographers whose work wrestles openly with issues of race and sexuality? I chose the choreographic projects discussed in this essay specifically to track the simultaneous development of whiteness, masculinity, and closeted sexuality in modern dance. A piece such as Bourne’s marks a crucial stage in that development, promising to demolish the closet while shoring up its compromised architecture. Bourne’s work also gestures toward the emerging transnational status of modern dance as it, like ballet, begins to circulate globally (with the American Dance Festival opening in Moscow and contact improvisation’s vocabulary entering the repertoires of countless dance companies worldwide). Within this global economy of modernism, Bourne’s is the kind of closet that sustains the history of closeted homosexuality in dance, one of the most remarkably open closets of any profession.

The genealogical approach of this essay has worked to uncover epistemological changes in that open closet during the twentieth century. Both Shawn and Ellis, for example, postulate an autonomous bounded self that encloses either a normal or inverted sexuality, whereas Cunningham and Kinsey organize the person as a set of semiautonomous parts whose behavior, sexual and otherwise, takes place along a continuum of possibilities. In Mangrove’s and Hocquenghem’s protéan playful dynamics, individual identity is constantly reconfigured as the product of changing relations with others, while Bourne and queer theory stage identity as series of performances that reference other performances. Each of these theories of identity, in turn, projects a distinctive closeting of homosexuality. Understanding the choreographic strategies through which these closets retain their structural integrity and their openness may help us to place them on stage and to examine their representational operations alongside the dancing they formerly contained.

NOTES

I want to thank Philip Brett, George Haggerty, Jane Desmond, Jacqueline Shet Murphy, and Tirza Latimer for their insightful readings of drafts of the essay.

1. For the first London production, many swans retained torso and armpit hair, although for the video and the Los Angeles production many seem to have shaved.


6. Admittedly, the comparison of one American choreographer who draws upon a common choreographic heritage even as it displays distinctive regional and national elements. Bourne, for example, trained at the Laban Center in London with Bonnie Bird, an American dancer and dance educator.


9. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explicate the multiple influences on Duncan’s and St. Denis’s artistic initiatives. For an excellent overview of Duncan’s work, see Ann Daly, *Done into Dance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), and for a lucid biography of St. Denis, see Suzanne Shelton, *Divine Dancer: The Biography of Ruth St. Denis* (New York: Doubleday, 1981).

10. Duncan, in particular, used class-based evaluations of artistic genius to explain her performances. See Daly’s cogent analysis of Duncan’s rhetoric in *Done into Dance*. The role of class values in relation to the entire history of modern dance deserves far more serious consideration than I am able to give it here.

11. Although Duncan is reputed to have had at least one lesbian affair—with the famous Louie Fuller—she seems not to have fathomed Whitman’s homosexuality.


14. Phyllis Grosskurth substantiates the popularity of Ellis’s book and provides a good overview of its relationship to Ellis’s oeuvre in her biography of Ellis. See Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 316. In the foreword to her second edition of *The Dance of Life*, Ellis summarizes Victorian attitudes toward dance as dismissive, acknowledging that during that period dance had been regarded only as “gay and trivial, even tending to immorality” (Ellis, *The Dance of Life* [New York: Modern Library, 1929], ii). As he claims in his introduction to Ted Shawn’s *The American Ballet*, Ellis was a long-term dance enthusiast, and he believed that dance deserved new consideration (Ellis, introduction to Ted Shawn, *The American Ballet* [New York: Holt, 1926], xi). Influenced by the works of Duncan and St. Denis as well as Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes, Ellis launched into *The Dance of Life* decades after his path-breaking studies of human sexuality as a way to examine life’s vicissitudes and to extend his liberal attitudes toward sexual behavior into other aspects of social life. Even though Ellis aspired to ennoble dance, his analysis, synthesizing anthropological literature, histories of bodily comportment, and his own observations, raises racist and colonialist cultural presumptions about the intrinsic connection between dance and sex.

15. Ellis cites Edmund Selous (“Zoologist, December 1901) as the author of this hypothesis (Ellis, *Dance of Life*, 34).

16. Ellis is here quoting Dr. Louis Robinson, who places chimpanzee dances and Pavlova on a single continuum (Ellis, *Dance of Life*, 43).

17. Ibid., 44.

18. Ellis invokes the Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest for his claim that the best dancers are the fittest mates (Ellis, *Dance of Life*, 44–45).

19. Ellis writes: “The dance is the rule of number and of rhythm and of measure and of order, of the controlling influence of form, of the subordination of the parts to the whole” (Ellis, *Dance of Life*, xi).

20. Ibid., 47.

21. “From this point of view we may better understand the immense ardour with which every part of the wonderful human body has been brought into the play of the dance.” Ellis writes, “The men and women of races spread all over the world have shown a marvellous skill and patience in imitating rhythm and measure to the most unlikely, the most rebellious regions of the body, all wrought by desire into potent and dazzling images” (Ellis, *Dance of Life*, 46).


23. Ibid., 43.

24. Ibid., 44.

25. Ibid., 46.

26. I believe that Ellis’s recitation of anthropological findings reflects accurately the general assumptions about dancing, the body, and sexuality within the discipline during that period. In some of the cases he cites, however, Ellis presses far beyond the connection between dance and sexual desire. The renowned anthropologist Alfred C. Haddon, for example, observed that among the Torres Strait islanders young women formerly looked upon the most accomplished...
headhunters as the most desirable husband, and more recently they looked to the most accomplished dancers. But he makes none of the sensationalist connections between cannibalism, sexual arousal, and courtship that are implicit in Ellis’s phrasing of the observation. Furthermore, Haddon describes in great detail a number of ceremonial dances in which he makes no mention of sexual arousal whatsoever. See Haddon, Head-Hunters (London: Watts, 1932), 88 and throughout.

27. Ellis, Dance of Life, 55.
28. Ibid., 46, 55.
29. Ibid., 57.
30. Ibid., 54.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 57.
33. Ibid., 55.

34. Ironically, Ellis’s investigation of sexuality emphasized dance’s ability to imbue participants and viewers with tumescence in order to challenge theories of imitating these and other processes, such as of sexuality based on “evacuation” and to shift focus to the processes, such as various aspects of human life. Ellis implicitly contested the hierarchy of brain and body, and social and species evolution, through which sexual behavior was constructed as part of human experience. Although Ellis’s stance undermines such hierarchies, they continue to circulate around and through his work, and they are dazzlingly evident in the tangle of evidence Ellis quotes concerning the nature of dance.


36. See Tomko, Dancing Class.
37. Shaw arranged several subsequent visits with Ellis and even took his all-male dance company to meet Ellis when they were on tour in London in 1934. See Walter Terry, Ted Shaw: Father of American Dance (New York: Dial, 1976) 107, and Ted Shaw and Gray Poole, One Thousand and One Night Stand (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), 263.

38. Terry, Ted Shaw, 107.

39. Shaw recollects that in 1916, the University of California Board of Trustees voted to reverse the long-standing policy barring dancers, and in a subsequent motion at the same meeting, approved an invitation to Ruth St. Denis to perform at the Berkeley Greek Theatre. The pageant St. Denis and Shaw created for that amphitheater also played in San Diego and the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. According to Shaw: “Everywhere the hit number was the Pyrrhic Dance, the first number I ever choreographed for an all-male ensemble. Pyrrhic dances, which date from ancient Greece, originally were part of military training and symbols of victory. My interpretation was not a revival of the Greek classic form but an attempt to capture the spirit of the original.

“Sixteen men dancers, leaping and jumping with power, muscles, and virile strength, created an impact that thrilled the pageant’s audiences and won paragraphs of newspaper praise. Many years elapsed before I formed my own group of men dancers, but after the reception of the Pyrrhic Dance I always had in the back of my mind plans, choreographies, and dance themes suitable for men dancers” (Shawn and Poole, One Thousand and One, 63–66).

40. Ibid., 258.


42. Space does not permit a more extensive discussion of Shaw’s complex relationship to African American dance and dancers. For example, he taught his Negro Spirituals to the African American choreographer Charles Williams, whose company performed them. See John Perpener, “The Seminal Years of Black Concert Dance” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1992). At the same time, Shaw campaigned stridently against tap dance, which he associated with African American culture.

43. Shaw believed that Negro music as distinct from dance was notable for its spirituality, and he choreographed one of his most popular suites to a set of Negro spirituals. See Shaw, American Ballet, 21. For an excellent description and analysis of the workings of race and sexuality in Shaw’s Negro Spirituals, see Susan Manning, “Danced Spirituals: The Performance of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in American Modern Dance, 1930–1960,” in André Lepecki, ed., Moving Ideologies: Interventions in Dance Theory, History, and Politics (forthcoming). Manning argues that before World War II, the white dancing body represented all races as part of its aesthetic mission to express universal human concerns, whereas African American dancers were frequently found lacking according to white standards. After the war African American choreographers achieved prominence but only as representatives of specifically African or African American cultural values. White choreographers, by contrast, remained unconstrained by any expectations regarding their subject matter or approach. The argument I make here complements Manning’s analysis.

44. This evening-length work included four solos for Shaw, each depicting the archetypal figure that corresponded to that section’s social organization: shaman, poet-philosopher, politician-demagogue, and creative artist.

45. The preponderance of configurations in which the dancers are touching in photos of Shaw’s choreography is misleading and probably reflects photographic technology and the aesthetic of the period. Fortunately, Shaw filmed much of his repertory in rehearsal and performance at Jacob’s Pillow during this period, and these films survive, providing a good idea of Shaw’s choreography and the dancers’ style.

46. Springfield Republican, 1934, quoted in the company’s publicity brochures for several years.

47. These quotations are taken from the documentary film made about the


49. Ellis writes: “The congenitally inverted may, I believe, be looked upon as a class of individuals exhibiting nervous characters which, to some extent, approximate them to persons of artistic genius. The dramatic and artistic aptitude of inverts are, therefore, partly due to the circumstances of the invert’s life, which render him necessarily an actor—and in some few cases lead him into a love of deception comparable with that of a hysterical woman—and partly, it’s probably, to a congenital nervous predisposition allied to the predisposition to dramatic aptitude” (Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, vol. 2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, 296).

50. Ibid., 80.
51. Ibid., 304, 310–11.
52. Ibid., 317–20.
54. Cunningham presented his first concert of solo works in 1944, accompanied by John Cage playing prepared piano pieces. Solos in that concert included *Root of an Unfocus, Triple Paced, Tossed as It Is Untroubled, The Unavoidable Memory Of, Totem Ancestor, and Spontaneous Earth*. *Root of an Unfocus and Tossed as It Is Untroubled*, described in program notes as “an externalization of a laugh within the mind,” remained in his repertory for many years.

56. Ibid., 20.
58. Cunningham describes *Banjo* thusly in program notes for concerts from this period. As part of this genre, we should also include *The Princess Zenaida and Her Entourage* (1947), and *Story* (1963).
60. Cunningham had taught ballet at the American Ballet School during the early 1940s and choreographed two duets for himself and Tanaquil Lederer entitled *Amores* and *Games*. See Yates, “Merce Cunningham Restores the Dance,” 13–17.

64. In an interview for Elliot Caplan for his film *Cage/Cunningham*, Cage comments that he worked hard to create a field within which he could continue to discover new things and to make unanticipated choices. I am arguing that this field similarly protected him as a gay man. See Elliot Caplan, *Cage/Cunningham*, dir. Elliot Caplan, prod. Cunningham Dance Foundation and La Sept, Kultur, 1991, videocassette.

65. In his interviews for Caplan’s film Cunningham adopts a resolutely androgynous stance, asking why men’s and women’s roles in dance shouldn’t be exchangeable.

66. The film is entitled *498, 3rd Ave.*, prod. Hansjörg Pauli, and is in the collection of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
67. The politics of equality implicit in Cunningham’s use of chance were acted by Peter Yates, who observes: “This makes the action by chance only a seeming accidental extension of the freedom of diversity” (Yates, “Merce Cunningham Restores the Dance,” 15).
68. For a lucid explanation of the problematic of race in Cage’s work and its presumption of universality, see George Lewis, “Improvised Music after 1950: Arthodox and Eulogical Perspectives,” *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (spring 1996): 91–122. Lewis’s analysis helped me to understand how the category of the “experimental” figured in the discourse of whiteness as a justification for the perpetuation of the universalist status of white choreography.
70. Ibid., 662.
73. This is the phrase used to represent the two in Elliott Caplan’s film *Cage/Cunningham*.
74. Cynthia Novack’s pioneering ethnography of contact improvisation serves as the basis for the analysis that follows. For background on Paxton and a detailed history of the evolution of the form, see Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990). My description of contact improvisation passes over important changes in the form as it developed from 1972 into the early 1980s, focusing instead on the form as it had coalesced by the late 1970s. For a detailed discussion of the changes, see Novack.
75. Ibid., 123.
77. Campbell is quoted in Novack, *Sharing the Dance*, 198.
80. Ibid., 39–40.

81. In his retheorizing of the concept of homosexuality, Hocquenghem made extensive use of Deleuze and Guattari’s deconstruction of Freud’s Oedipus complex, showing the connection between Oedipal and capitalist structures and arguing, fabulously, that human society should reconfigure as “desiring machines plugged into the anus” (Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 111). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this essay to establish Hocquenghem’s argument in full. I refer the reader to Jeffrey Weeks’s excellent introduction to *Homosexual Desire* for a lucid account of Hocquenghem’s relation to psychoanalytic and Marxist theories.

82. The portrait—a set of multiple, differently tinted likenesses of the queen, reminiscent of Warhol’s silk screens—was added for the Los Angeles performances.

83. Richard Dyer identifies the logic of the presumed interconnection between narcissism, the effeminate, and homosexuality as follows: “Gay men fancy people like themselves (men) rather than unlike (women), therefore, their sexuality must be an extension of their love of themselves. Or—women are naturally more narcissistic than men, and gay men are more feminine than straight men, therefore gay men are narcissistic.” Dyer traces this logic to Freud’s theory of narcissism wherein the love object of the adult homosexual male reflects not his mother but himself. See Dyer, *Now You See It: Studies on Lesbian and Gay Film* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 67. Although the Prince’s mother rejects his affection and need for affection, he is not portrayed as overly self-absorbed, nor does he perform a single effeminate gesture.


85. Noting Queer Nation’s emphasis on the individual and on the commodities that enhance a queer lifestyle, Sue-Ellen Case contrasts their interventionist approach with earlier forms of political organizing and protest based on the community: “The site of Queer Nation is not a community, a region, or even a venue . . . instead, it is embedded in ads, shopping strategies, mall demonstrations, and logos. Capitalism, corporate structures, and nationhood are resident in the basic unit of the commodity that functions as its strategy. No alternative to capitalism is imagined—only that its market forces would redirect their address toward the ‘Queer’” (Case, *The Domain- Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996], 170). For her extensive critique of queer, see pp. 150–74.


88. Ibid., 212.

89. Stephen Farber, a film critic and one of the only critics to consider *Swan Lake* as a gay male representation, makes this point in his review of *Swan Lake* from the *Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 1997, Calendar sec., p. 50.

90. At the time this essay was written, 1997, Bourne’s *Swan Lake* was on its way to Tokyo and Broadway, with untold other bookings in progress.