American female modern dance choreographers have created thousands of roles for women. Much writing has provided structural analyses of their dances but not of the roles they created for women. The discussion has also ignored important contributions that female mentors have made to the creation of images of women. This essay develops a method for categorizing the roles that women have made for and of each other in the six generations since the beginning of American modern dance at the turn of the twentieth century and points us toward a future direction.

Images of Women

Myths often portray the world as balanced between harmony and discord. The various images of women and men within these myths tend to emphasize positive or negative character traits. In developing a parallel framework for harmonious and discordant images, six categories emerge which can be used to discuss roles female choreographers have made for women in American modern dance.¹

Harmonious mythic visions of women in 20th century American modern dance generally fall into three types:

1. **goddess/priestess** — representing the enlightened magical world demonstrated in acts of vision and healing;
2. **ancestress/mother/teacher** — symbolizing a continuous thread of physical and spiritual knowledge; and
3. **virgin/wife** — embodying the chaste physical world and affirming cultural norms.

¹ Many of the ideas explored in this essay were first framed by the author in a paper presented at the American Dance Guild conference in June, 1989. Although there is no attempt in this essay to gauge whether positive or negative images dominate in the work of female modern dance choreographers as a group, further research in this area would be useful.
Dancing Female

These three images of women are mirrored by their counterparts presented in the following discordant mythic visions:

1. \textit{witch/devil/madwoman} — representing the dark magical world and serving as a psychic or spiritual threat;
2. \textit{warrior/martyr} — symbolizing the rational world and posing an intellectual or societal threat; and
3. \textit{temptress/whore} — epitomizing the carnal physical world and implying a physical or sexual threat.

An additional category, the nonmythic, human, female figure evolves from choreographers’ shifts away from narrative and toward matters of symbol and structure. This change in orientation, which first appears in the early ‘60’s, is linked to and reflects changes in the American political, social, scientific and technological climates and to changes in dance performance practice. Nonmythic women have also been portrayed by female choreographers as both harmonious and discordant.\footnote{Much redefinition regarding performance practice was initiated by a small group of New York dancer/choreographers who emerged from a composition workshop sponsored by Merce Cunningham and taught by Robert Dunn from 1960–64. These choreographers became known as the Judson Group because their first performances were held at Judson Church in lower Manhattan. The term postmodern dance first began to be used in reference to their work.}

Since the inception of modern dance, new choreographic generations have emerged every ten to fifteen years; the ways that women are portrayed changed with each generation. During the first and second generations mythic women are most prevalent. In the third generation, they start to share the stage with nonmythic figures. In the fourth generation the balance shifts; many fourth generation choreographers and dancers present themselves as pedestrian human scale “characters” concerned with doing rather than performing and informing rather than entertaining. The prevalence of non-mythic women continues in subsequent generations.\footnote{Dance historian Judith Lynne Hanna describes the model fourth generation women introduced in the following way: “New guises of women in dance show them as more complex than virgin or whore taking on roles of stature, as human, (rather than supernatural) partners with and physical equals to men, guiltless protagonists rather than pawns of gods and men, antagonists confronting inner fears and thoughts, victims confronting their identity in a social order that resists change, women bonding and exploring romantic encounters with other women, in gender role reversals, or blending as asexual, and as fulfilling multiple roles.” Hanna, Judith Lynne. \textit{Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire.} Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 202.}
First Generation (1900–20’s)

Three American women, Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller and Ruth St. Denis, prepared the climate for what later became known as modern dance and were the primary mentors for the succeeding generation. All three evidenced an independence of mind in their creative processes as well as in their life styles. Elizabeth Kendall points to the breadth of their influence when she writes: "Their dances turned instantly into powerful physical metaphors for what most women in the civilized world deeply wished and feared for themselves: freedom to try out modes of being beyond domestic duty. This effect made Loie, Isadora, and Ruth torchbearers of modernism. Europeans especially acclaimed them because they seemed to be what they danced — independent, eccentric, and unafraid."4

Isadora Duncan (1878–1927), 'mother' of modern dance, is the most widely known of the women in the first generation. Historically her revolutionary life style was as significant as were her choreographic contributions. Isadora’s images of women are most heavily concentrated in three of the categories mentioned above: virgin, ancestress/mother/teacher and warrior/martyr. Virginal images appear in Isadora’s earlier work such as “Chopin Waltzes” in which bounding skips and open arm gestures capture the lightheartedness and innocence of adolescence. Discordant images are prevalent in her later dances such as “Mother Etudes” and “Marche Slave” in which the performer’s wide stances and strides emphasize a downward thrust of energy while her clenched fists pound the ground forcefully in frustration.

The second innovator, Loie Fuller (1862–1928), worked in both narrative and non-narrative forms using techniques which led dance historian Sally Banes to call her the foremother of the postmoderns. Banes notes that a number of Fuller’s choreographic concerns did not reappear until the 1960s. Among these were an avoidance of virtuosic dance technique, narrative, and the projection of emotion.5 Her dances did not represent particular women, but were an evocation of the feminine element in nature, as their titles indicate: “Serpentine”; “The Butterfly”; and “Fire Dance’. Fuller’s imagery did not rest on a complex vocabulary of steps but was achieved through sparse phrases supported by a masterful use of props, costumes and lighting. Many of her images were virginal in their intent; certainly they were dominantly harmonious.

---


The last of the three, Ruth St. Denis (1877–1968), sought inspiration from other cultures. She reveled in their myths, their movement, their music, and their attire. In the way that a play gives an actress license to explore behavior which she might not exhibit or sanction in daily life, many of St. Denis’s roles presented women outside her own experience and that of her audiences. The roles she created for herself in “Nautch” and “Incense” demonstrate her personal preference for the oppositional archetypes of temptress and goddess. The soloist in “Incense,” through the use of weighted walks, fluid arm gestures and a penetrating focus, presents a simultaneously mysterious, sensual and spiritual image of a woman engaged in a private yet powerful ritual.

Second Generation (1930–50’s)

Two principal choreographers of the second generation, Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey, staged characteristically American revolts against the edicts of their common foremother St. Denis. Gradually, each of these women developed an individual choreographic style which was supported and illuminated by a technique for training dancers. Each also created resonant images of women within particular dramatic contexts.

Choreographically, Graham (1894–1991) began by rejecting the ornate, exotic, and mystically vaulted characters of her mentor, Denishawn. Her early works, such as “Primitive Mysteries” and “Heretic,” explored interactions between the individual and the group. As the technique upon which she based her work became more codified and her company more established and more inclusive of both sexes, Graham's choreography turned away from the spare clarity of these early pieces and moved toward full and intricate restatements of classic mythic narratives, with particular attention to Greek heroines. The clear distinction between her mythic heroines and those of St. Denis lay in the way Graham shaped her dances. She molded the action from the emotional reaction of an individual woman, whereas St. Denis often presented more generalized visualizations of literary themes.

In the course of her career Graham dealt with each of the six mythic categories. The character of Medea in her “Cave of the Heart” is a witch/madwoman; the woman in “Errand into the Maze” is a warrior/martyr; Mary Magdalene in “El Penitente” is a temptress/whore; she of the ground” in “Dark Meadow” is a goddess/prophetess; the ancestress in “Letter to the World” is a ancestress/mother/teacher; and the bride in “Appalachian Spring” is a virgin/lover/wife.

Medea’s role in “Cave of the Heart” and Jocasta’s in “Night Journey,” Graham’s retelling of the Oedipus myth, are two examples of discordant
visions that represent a warning and imply a moral from which the observer may benefit. The magnitude of Graham's choreographic contribution to the establishment of mythic females is noted by Deborah Jowitt when she writes: "Before Graham, few defined the female dancer as passion-driven, yet intellectually complex; fated, yet capable of choice. In creating a theatre of the mind where modern women and men jousted with their archetypes for the illumination of contemporary society, she construed herself as both celebrant and priestess, bringing western theatrical dancing as close to ritual as it has ever come."  

Widely acclaimed as a performer, appropriately praised as a theorist and teacher, and frequently cited as a mentor, Doris Humphrey's (1895–1958) mark as a choreographer does not have the breadth and depth of Graham's. Her work focuses almost exclusively on two mythic types: the woman as ancestress/mother/teacher and the woman as virgin/lover/wife. The former is clearly seen in the eldress figure of "Shakers" while the latter is evident in the three female figures of "Day on Earth." Although discordant female figures are present, for example the matriarch in "With My Red Fires," the emphasis in Humphrey's mature work is on women of harmony. This is not surprising when one considers her concern for socially relevant and redeeming choreography. Her own words, written about her piece "New Dance Trilogy," speak to her intent: "In almost the entire dance world I had seen nothing but negation. Anyone could tell you what was wrong, but no one seemed to say what was right. It was with this mental conflict that I approached "New Dance" first, determined to open up to the best of my ability the world as it could be and should be: a modern brotherhood of man."

Third Generation (1950–present)

Graham, Humphrey and other members of the second generation distinguished themselves as choreographers, performers, and teachers and did so with almost holy zeal. They were a hard act to follow. As a result, many third generation choreographers have concentrated their efforts on analyzing and integrating the massive excavations of their mentors. Some have built images in the dramatic narrative tradition and have focused on the mythic. Others have moved toward work which arises more directly

---


from probing questions about dance structure. By applying movement discoveries generated from structural experiments to narrative contexts, a few have extended the boundaries of that form.

Mary Anthony, Pearl Lang, May O’Donnell, and Anna Sokolow all began their choreographic careers under Graham’s mentorship and used the Graham vocabulary to their own ends. The work of Anna Sokolow, born in 1910, is reflective of the urban American experience at midcentury. The female figures of “Rooms” and “Dreams” typify the kind of women one finds throughout Sokolow’s work. These women are alone in some desperate circumstances. One appears to relive an intimate affair, another to struggle with suicide, a third trio is caught in an innocent and unattainable daydream. In “Dreams,” her meditation on Nazi concentration camps, the women run the gamut from the young and impressionable child to the whore.

Sokolow’s women anticipate the nonmythic. Many of the themes she developed during her career exhibit a grim view of humanity and draw heavily from raw emotion. She has said: “You see, for me there’s an emotion-motion-emotion cycle in choreographing. I’ll feel an emotion — maybe in a piece of music — and I’ll feel a movement. I’ll give it to the company. Then when they do it, it speaks back to me. It produces an emotion in me. Then I can go on to clarify and build the form and images. To me, emotion and motion are synchronous. Often I don’t really know what a dance is about until I’m well into it.”

As audience members we are invited to draw a direct parallel between the dancers’ experiences and our own. If the women depicted in Graham’s dances are roused to action by thought, Sokolow’s women act and react intuitively. They are human lovers, teachers, madwomen, visionaries, and whores. These characters provide fertile examples for younger choreographers who have seen Sokolow as a mentor and been inspired by the vulnerability and resilience of her characters.

Far from the dance “hub” of New York and in the midst of the West Coast personal growth movement, Anna Halprin, born in 1920, began to broaden the definition of performance and performer. Halprin’s early works, called ‘happenings’, were often riotous collages. Throughout her career she has forged new choreographic performance forms. Acting principally as a director and teacher, Halprin has developed ceremonies in which boundaries between doers and watchers blur; all are participants and all are witnesses. Her rituals involve a community in individual and group process and its participants explore the full spectrum of harmonious/discordant and mythic/nonmythic roles. Halprin’s work seems

---

to suggest that we can gain strength, perspective, and balance in our lives by embracing all of the voices which exist within us.

Her summer workshops in creative process, established in 1959, encouraged this search for new ideas. Through them she served as a mentor to Trisha Brown, Simone Forti, Meredith Monk, and Yvonne Rainer. All of these fourth generation artists acknowledge Halprin’s influence on their approaches to dance making. All are strong directors; each has moved away from traditional dance to develop an individual movement style. Writers Barry Laine and Eleanor Rachel Luger suggest that Halprin and Monk have “succeeded in developing movement pieces that rise from and manifest their womanliness. ...both are able to bring the audience into their own, personal, female point of view — Halprin by generating creative scores out of her feminine perspective, and Monk by constructing theatre pieces that present women in various aspects of living.”9 Halprin’s work in bringing dance closer to daily experience clearly looks forward to that of her successors.

Fourth Generation (1960–present)

As the mythologizing of female characters which is prevalent in the first three generations disappears, new orientations arise. Beginning with the fourth generation, images of women often serve choreographic structure. We are presented with nonmythic human females: bodies moving in space who happen to be women. Often dancers’ abilities to present the structure are more significant than their individual gender as they do so. Trisha Brown’s early equipment and accumulation pieces, Lucinda Childs’ cool and complex geometric pathways, Laura Dean’s Sufi-like spinning are dances which focus on the choreographic structure rather than on individual characters.

Both the choreographic and performance styles of Trisha Brown, born in 1936, have had a strong impact on choreographers in succeeding generations. The fluidity, complexity, speed, and slipperiness of Brown’s most recent work is characterized by some as more feminine than the linearity of her early pieces such as “Walking on the Wall.” However, even in earlier works like “Glacial Decoy” and “Opal Loop” she was building toward the looser use of the spine which is so common in her most recent material, “Foray Forêt” and “Another Story as in falling.” While gender is not foregrounded in Brown’s work, women and men both emerge as fully present beings. Both sexes exercise their physicality, mental acuity, sensuality,

and emotional/spiritual knowledge through dance. Through their enactment of Brown’s complex structures a variety of nonmythic archetypes are revealed.

The work of Meredith Monk and Senta Driver also presents images of emotionally and physically powerful women. From early dances like “16 Millimeter Earrings” to “Education of the Girlchild” and “Quarry,” through more recent works such as “Games,” Meredith Monk has developed dance/theatre pieces in which nonmythic women explore a variety of experiences, ages, and relationships among women and between women and men within associative dreamlike structures. Monk has called “Education of the Girlchild” “a humanist piece in that each of the seven women was such a remarkable character that it showed women beings in a positive way.” Part of the power of Monk’s work comes from its blend of contemporary subject matter with ritual forms. In “Education of the Girlchild,” she describes her group as “a heroic matriarchy of ancient women” performing as enlargements of themselves.

Senta Driver, whose company was in existence from 1970 until 1991, celebrated role equality for women and men. In building her dances she asked company members of both sexes to explore and reveal their strength and their vulnerability. Driver pointed to the affinity between her work and that of her symbolic mentors Graham and Humphrey in a 1986 interview: “They had a lot of values we could profitably look back to and resume. Weight. Mass. Size — size for women. There’s no flesh anymore... There was a kind of physical and emotional passion, then.” Driver’s pioneering effort in having women lift men during the 1970’s, as well as her emphasis on weighted movement and unisex partnering, all paved the way for many of the ensemble practices which we accept as the norm in the 1990’s.

Both Monk and Driver challenged traditional limitations regarding images of dancing women in their work. Monk built works around particular women and the interactions of a wide variety of female archetypes. Her performers use a gender-neutral movement vocabulary. Driver emphasized upper body strength and total body weight/momentum. Women in her choreography also regularly assume assertive roles.

Twyla Tharp, born in 1941 and a major choreographic force in this generation, alternates between works which concentrate on abstract

---


structures and those in which characters and stories serve as the motivation for structure. In writing about “As Time Goes By,” her 1973 work for the Joffrey Ballet, Tharp points to her awareness of gender representations: “I have always felt that one of the things dance should do — its business being so clearly physical — is challenge the culture’s gender stereotypes. Because almost all ballet choreographers have been male, most of the major roles have been written for women. In excluding women from its power center, the ballet world has forfeited the roles for men as kings that women might create. In “As Time Goes By,” Larry (Grenier) was the soft one, Bea (Rodriguez) the firm one, yet Larry’s vulnerability had everyone longing to support him, while Beatriz’s drive was a relief.” Images of powerful women continue to figure in Tharp’s later work. The complex choreographic structure and rigorous technical demands of Tharp’s piece “The Catherine Wheel” revolve around a central heroic female warrior figure (originally danced by Sara Rudner) who exhibits harmonious qualities as she drives the action of this commentary on ‘family’ life in the chaotic nuclear age. More recently Tharp has created a work for herself and several male dancers entitled “The Men’s Piece.” This work incorporates romantic and isometric male/female duets in which Tharp claims and celebrates the mother in herself.

**Fifth Generation (1970–present)**

Fifth generation women come of choreographic age in an atmosphere which is dominated by structural approaches to making dances. In this generation the nonmythic human female remains a vital force. If second generation choreographers created women of grand dimensions in the tradition of the classic Greek theatre, and those in the fourth generation contributed visions dominated by women as technically adept workers, fifth generation choreographers begin with the woman as worker and clothe her in a particular female archetype.

The full archetypal complement begins to reemerge, but this time cast in flesh. Second generation vocabularies and characters presented steely, competent women unassailable and unreachable in body or spirit; a distance was established between observer and performer through dramatic didacticism. In the fifth generation physical and emotional boldness is accessible to the audience through a movement vocabulary drawn from daily life and through spoken text which arises from life experience. If

---


second generation choreographers were lecturing to us in a formal and foreign tongue, fifth generation choreographers translate movement language more colloquially in order to engage us in a dialogue. The former asked us to look up to mythic female archetypes, the latter ask us to look at them as human females.

The combination of movement and words begin to address us with directness. In such works as San Francisco-based Margaret Jenkins’s “Shore Birds, Atlantic” and Washington D.C. choreographer Liz Lerman’s “Docudances I, II, and III” one of the tasks for women and men is to migrate between representing themselves and assuming other personae. While Jenkins’s character types may be drawn from literature and are often generalized, Lerman’s arise from specific responses to daily events. Her performers confront us with the realities of our social and political systems and comment on them. “Anatomy of an Inside Story,” a collaboration between Lerman and her associate artistic director Kim Boyd, is a recent example. Lerman says of this work, “We use many different methods to find the movement for these intense family stories about growing up Black and female in this country. But finally I view the movement as not illustrative of the language at all, rather as a motor that keeps the dancer going. There is no way that Kim could tell the stories without the dancing, and probably no way the audience could hear them either. The dancing is a kind of ever-present witness, soul, or just in-the-present experience for the dancer and audience as she recounts a painful, sometimes glorious, sometimes funny, past.” Lerman employs mythic images and archetypes in her multiracial, multigenerational company and uses them to challenge audiences and preconceived notions regarding age, race, and physical ability.

Developing stories and investigating female characters is also a concern of Blondell Cummings, who for a number of years was a member of Meredith Monk’s group, The House. In her 1991 duet “Omadele and Giuseppe,” a barrage of movement images gathered from a wide variety of vocabularies are added to the audio-taped ‘thoughts’ of the woman and man in the piece. Simultaneously a questionnaire, to which the audience is asked to respond, is seen in projections and spoken on tape. This rich montage reaches out to us, posing questions about women and also about common prejudices related to race, age, and class. Cummings is extending the dialogue by creating archetypal images of both harmonious (priestess, mother and wife) and discordant (madwoman and warrior) archetypes.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{15}\) Lerman, Liz. "By All Means Possible," Movement Research Performance Journal. No. 9, Fall/Winter 1994/95, p. 4.

\(^{16}\) Postperformance discussion, Bryn Mawr College, February 4, 1993.
Some fifth generation choreographers who began their careers working independently have recently moved on to establish cooperative groups. The mission of the Women’s Performance Project, based in Minneapolis and convened by Diane Elliot in 1990, is to explore the healing potential of performance by developing and performing original ritual/dance theatre. Working improvisationally, Elliot and the other members of the group, Susan DeLattre, Margie Fargnoli, Rebecca Frost, and Erika Thorne, employ techniques which range from traditional modern dance and acting to contact improvisation and body-mind centering work. In speaking about the content of their collaborations, Elliot points to a shifting emphasis: “Initially, we were dealing with the effects of abuse, not only sexual and physical, but also the subtler abuses which produce feelings of not having the freedom to be fully physical to express ourselves sexually and otherwise. We are now engaged in another phase of the healing process, letting go and empowerment. Our current work explores our connection with the earth — how we are cut off from it by cultural strictures, racism and fear and hatred of our own bodies.” While images of women created by the members of the Women’s Performance Project vary, their work generally emphasizes harmony. Groups such as this one hark back to their mentors of the 1960’s, collaboratives such as the Grand Union. Interests in cooperative process and in dance which is socially or politically motivated continue to grow in the work of the next generation of women.

Sixth Generation (late 1970’s/early 1980’s–present)

Sixth generation female choreographers reiterate and extend premises concerning the nonmythic human female which were introduced in the fourth and fifth generations. Women of athletic prowess, conversant in a variety of dance techniques, span a continuum of theatrical forms from ballet, through improvisation, to the evolving and idiosyncratic vocabulary of social dances such as hip-hop. Female warriors reappear in this generation; warriors for whom physical power is as significant as were emotional and intellectual power prior to the fourth generation. This aggressive physicality sometimes gives vent to a darker view of humanity and thus a new interpretation of the witch/madwoman.

Discordant images of both men and women increase. They regularly appear in the work of Karole Armitage, who began her professional career as a ballet dancer and later spent five years in Merce Cunningham’s Company.

18 Ibid.
While comfortable with ballet vocabulary, she clearly has been influenced by modern and postmodern practices. She positions the ballerina as simultaneously in and out of control by creating off-balance extensions, and challenging jumps and beats. In Armitage’s dances the pointe shoe is used aggressively in explorations of sex and violence. Her “Paradise” and “Go Go Ballerina,” created in the mid-1980’s, dramatically underscore the heroism of her women and their unapologetic use of their partners.

In both the second and the sixth generations, characters and relationships drive structure. However, in contrast to the second generation in which characters are removed from our experience, sixth generation characters and relationships are drawn directly from actual twentieth century daily life. Increasingly, that daily experience includes an acknowledgment of ethnicity. The work of Jawole Willa Jo Zollar and her company Urban Bush Women deals with women’s vulnerability in general, and women of color more specifically. The company celebrates the strength of a community of African-American women (“Girlfriends” and “Lipstick”), asks questions about the mutual responsibilities between individuals and communities (“Praise House”), and explores the many roles a woman of color constructs or has constructed about herself in urban, Western society (“Heat”).

Even as the incidence of violence in daily life has escalated dramatically during recent years, much dance work reflects cultural tension in its use of physical violence. The choreographic discord which arises in this generation evokes both a psychic and bodily shock in the viewer. Certainly, the intent behind assaultive messages varies; some of the violence expressed seems dangerous and gratuitous. In other choreography, the conscious and blatant juxtaposition of assault and vulnerability has pushed the limits and potential social influences of dance as an art form. The duets “Ties That Bind Parts I and II” by Johanna Boyce deftly mix aggression and tenderness while exploring a reconsideration of gender and sex roles. Each of these duets explores relationships between women; the first is based on two sisters and the second on two lovers. Boyce invites us to reconsider the gamut of female images as well as to accept how they operate in our own lives.

Nonmythic visions of both harmony and discord are also being applied to questions of sexuality. In Pat Graney’s piece “Faith,” her Seattle-based company of women worked collaboratively to evoke images of female beauty, strength, sensuality, and reverence. Amy Pivar’s 1991 “NOT A CONFESSION (A True Story)” is a strident and compelling response to rape and abuse. Other sixth generation choreographers apply their work in various body therapies to redefinitions of the dancing female. Barbara Mahler in a 1992 solo entitled “In My Dreams” explored societal notions
of the ‘perfect woman.’ Using good and bad witch archetypes, Mahler confronted our culture’s fear regarding women who are ‘out of control.’

Victoria Marks uses group process in developing her dances, which intermix physical fearlessness and group empathy. Offering positive images of individual women and of interdependent communities as in “A Last Place” and “Acts of Omission,” she layers disparate images of combat and comfort, isolation and community, harmony and discord.

Towards the Seventh Generation

Technology has had a strong impact on the work of the sixth generation but will continue even more strongly to influence the next. Computer animation programs, sound equipment, theatrical lighting, video and film expand possibilities for choreographic creation. Up to the present, video has produced the most marked results in creation and performance. Increasingly, choreographers use video technology to blur and cross borders between disciplines. Yvonne Rainer’s and Twyla Tharp’s early experiments with film and video explored how concerns related to structure in dance and film/video might intersect. Other choreographers have focused on ways that film/video technology can support new conceptions of female archetypes. During the late 1980s Minneapolis-based choreographer Wendy Morris collaborated with videographer James Byrne on a videodance cycle in which an ancestress figure’s relationship to earth, air, fire, and water were realized using the video medium.

Even choreographers for whom video is not an integral part of the creative process are making images of women which are altered by technology. A variety of computer graphic animation programs now exist which enable choreographers to create movement sequences and play them back, watching small figures ‘dance’ on the monitor’s screen. Emerging virtual reality and holographic technology have the potential to extend these graphic simulations into interactive performance environments. Our actual physical selves can dance with others whose gender can be constructed by us and which we can vary from one ‘performance’ to another. How do these systems challenge our conceptions of dancing women? What opportunities do they provide for re-presentation? What influence will differences in cultural perspective and experiences have on the ways women use these systems? We are just beginning to discover a host of artistic, intellectual, emotional and visceral questions which result for those whose choreography

employs these technologies as well as for performers and audiences who interact with them. Each collaboration provides us with new opportunities for creating, seeing and understanding images of women in dance.\textsuperscript{23}

Conclusion

As the twentieth century opened, Isadora Duncan’s hope for the scope of female choreographic vision was ambitious. Now, in the last decade of the century, the work of six generations shows that her hope was not misplaced. Female choreographers continue to break new ground, influenced by and reacting to their historic mentors but producing their own individual harmonious and discordant figures. The dances of female choreographers are affected by their mentoring relationships, the society in which they live and the choices they make regarding the content of and venue for their dances. Increasingly, issues of race, gender, age, and class inform the choices choreographers make. While nonmythic images of women will continue to dominate in the immediate future, we may see a reemergence of the mythic. New images of mythic women will be strongly influenced by cultural perspectives, social and political concerns, feminist theory and technology. The generational model presented in this essay suggests one way to continue to analyze female roles even as we expand our choreographic “tools” and become increasingly aware of the need to create inclusive communities of artists and audiences.

Bibliography

Books

\textsuperscript{23} Since 1987 the author has been using the computer animation system Lifeforms (developed under the direction of Professor Thomas Calvert at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia) as an aid to choreography and to the teaching of undergraduate courses in dance composition.


**Articles and Reviews**


