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Dancing without Space – On Nijinsky's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (1912)

Abstract

Three-dimensional theatrical space is often taken for granted as a precondition of dance. Already in 1912, the choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky provoked much discussion with a work that seemingly turned the performance into a moving, two-dimensional picture. *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* has achieved notoriety because of the objections some contemporary critics raised against the 'immoral' behaviour of the principal character, but I argue the style of the work brought about an important shift in how dancing was conceptualised as something composed by a choreographic author.

This article discusses one particular work of art, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, henceforth *Faune*, first performed in May 1912 and quickly canonised as the modernist début of its choreographer, Vaslav Nijinsky (1889-1950). Set to the 1894 tone-poem of Claude Debussy, written as a prelude to a famous poem by Stéphane Mallarmé (1876), *Faune* became notorious for the scandal following its Parisian première. I argue that in the myth about *Faune*, the last action of the faun (often equated with Nijinsky's sexuality, the 'truth' of his mysterious self)ⁱ has acted like a veil that has hidden the rest of the work from view. *Faune* quite simply would not have caused a scandal had it fitted in with the type of erotic spectacle expected of the company that performed it, the Ballets Russes. More importantly, it would not have piqued the interest of people who usually did not involve themselves in dance had it not evoked much larger issues regarding modernism and modernity and the role of art in contemporary society.

By focusing on one concrete aspect of the work in performance – the attempt to render dancers as flat figures in seemingly two-dimensional 'choreographic picture' – I discuss 1) how contemporary reviews positioned *Faune* in relation to the rest of the repertoire of the Ballets Russes, 2) what dancers or critics saw as its innovations and failures, and 3) what these reactions tell of the cultural context of the canonisation of this work and of the Russian Ballet. I claim that the faun's behaviour provoked significant feelings of insecurity in its contemporary Western spectators and amongst the staunchest supporters of the private ballet company run by the impresario Sergei Diaghilev (1872-1929). These feelings culminated in the reception and eventual oblivion of Nijinsky's

two novelties for 1913, *Jeux* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. I wish to stress that these responses were aesthetic and political as well as moral: *Faune* forced fans of the Ballets Russes to come to terms with their stereotypical notions about ‘naturally’ dancing atavistic Russians.

As Ramsay Burt (2004, 30) has noted, canonisation tends to reduce choreography to a formal and aesthetic abstraction expressing the identity of the author-figure. This displaces the very actual and material challenges that the works and their performers had to face, although these challenges are often a major factor in the process of canonisation. Rather than representing *Faune* as something drastically new, I argue that its use of an obvious convention – the familiar theatrical device of the tableau (stage picture or картина) repositioned, repeated and made strange – heightened the awareness of theatrical mimesis, of dance as something composed, which required that dance be discussed as composition rather than as simply expression of (the Russian) dancer’s self. In other words, the reduction of choreography to its author is a historically specific ‘modern’ mode of representing dance, only evident when ballet-masters become authors of the entire dance work. The German poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1968, 145) wrote in *Berliner Tageblatt* of how *Faune* brought about such an important shift in the understanding of danced composition:

Hier aber handelt es sich nicht mehr um den Tänzer, den Mimen, den Interpreten, sondern um den Urheber eines Ganzen, um eine Funktion dieses außerordentlichen Menschen, für die nur der Name fehlt: ein Etwas zwischen dem Regisseur, dem Darsteller und dem Erfinder, alle diese drei Funktionen in eins zusammenfassend: es handelt sich um Nijinsky als Autor des choreographischen Gedichtes, und vielleicht ist Nijinsky eher den *schweren* als den *leichten* Autoren zuzuzählen.

Previously, although the ballet master had been known to arrange the dances in a ballet, what this arrangement comprised of had rarely been analysed or even described at any length in the reviews of the Russian Ballet. In the following, I claim that in *Faune*, the absence of space on stage and the lack of virtuosic tricks by star dancers strengthened the presence of the choreographer, Nijinsky, who was credited with authorship as well as authority over his art form in a manner quite different from how previous spectacles by the Ballets Russes had been discussed in the Western press.ⁱⁱ In the French, English and German responses, this new author-figure of dance, the choreographer, was situated

in opposition to the previous authority, the dancer – even the particular dancer embodying the title character in the work, Nijinsky.

Below, my short overview of the famous scandal leads to a discussion of the notion of stage pictures and of *Faune* as a ‘tableau chorégraphique’. I argue that *Faune* broke the ‘rules’ of staged representation in ways reminiscent of contemporary art, and more specifically, of cubism, with which also the choreographer associated its aesthetic. This alignment with ‘foreign’ modernism made the work doubly alien for its French and English spectators and, in the tense nationalist atmosphere of pre-War Europe, evoked fears of cultural degeneration, particularly amongst the more conservative reporters whose support had been crucial to the initial success of the Ballets Russes in 1909-1911. In fear of losing his financiers, the Russian impresario of the company, Diaghilev, quickly distanced himself from the controversial creations of his soon-to-be-former lover and star, Nijinsky. The subsequent financial disputes between the two as well as Nijinsky’s development of a notation system to write down his choreography, further strengthened the authorist discourse.

Yet, perhaps the most important changes wrought by *Faune* were in the experiences its ‘modernism’ created for contemporary audiences and dancers as well as its new requirements for the dancers, whose understanding of the expressive potential of their bodies this work apparently sought to expand. This possibility for a new kind of danced expression, even when accused of forcing the dancing bodies into ‘unnatural’ forms that did not suit the flowing musical score, was what made the work modernist; the experience of formal difference was what made it memorable for both performers and spectators. Both of these qualities were necessary for the work to become canonised, re-performed and re-interpreted, and therefore relevant even today.ⁱⁱⁱ With *Faune*, we can see the emergence of a new author, and with this new author, a new way of constructing canons of dance that rely on precisely the abstract, formal criteria that Burt justly criticises.

The Unspeakable Vice of the Faun

On the evening of May 29th 1912, the fourth consecutive season of Russian ballet opened at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. The visit of Les Ballets Russes de Serge de Diaghileff began with a programme of four works: *L’Oiseau de Feu*, *Le Spectre de la*

Rose and *Thamar* had all been seen in the years before, but the second work of the evening was a novelty. *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* was the latest “creation”^{iv} of the company’s male star, Vaslav Nijinsky – and his choreographic début. All boded well for the novelty: the costumes and set were to be designed by Léon Bakst, responsible for many of the exotic spectacles in which Nijinsky had delighted his audiences; the music a well-known work by a contemporary composer, Claude Debussy, inspired by another great Frenchman, Stéphane Mallarmé. Mythical creatures frolicking in the afternoon light of Mediterranean sun, somewhere between fantasy and reality, seemed to promise the best the Russian Ballet could offer.^v The dancers of the first production were Nijinsky himself (as the Faun), Lydia Nelidova (as the Chief Nymph), and Mmes Klementovich, Maicherska, Kopetzinska, Tcherepanova, Baranovich and Bronislava Nijinska as the other six nymphs (Nijinsky’s notes reproduced in Guest & Jeschke 1991, 12).

The scandal that followed the première has since overshadowed all discussion, restagings and reconstructions of a work that lasted less than fifteen minutes. Based on the choreographic notation Nijinsky wrote during the First World War, it is possible to say that the curtain opened on a faun, lying on a rock, playing a flute and eating grapes. When seven Nymphs arrived to bathe, the faun was attracted to the tallest one. As she undressed, he descended from his knoll, skipping over a small brook before trying to capture her. The other nymphs intervened, helping her and scolding the faun. After a brief encounter alone with the principal nymph, she, too, departed and the faun picked up her discarded drapery. The other nymphs tried to retrieve it, but the faun scared them off. Alone again, he carried the cloth back to his rock. Lowering himself on it, his caresses climaxed. The curtain fell to what could best be described as a mixed response from the audience.^{vi}

Perhaps the most curious aspect of the scandal was that what exactly offended in the work went largely unsaid. On 30.5.1912, instead of a review, the major conservative boulevard paper, *Le Figaro*, published a front-page editorial diatribe by Gaston Calmette titled “Un Faux Pas”. Similarly, without actually describing what offended, *Le Gaulois* (30.5.1912) announced no review would be published on its pages until the end of the offensive work had been changed.^{vii} The impresarios of the Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev and Gabriel Astruc, rallied eminent French artists Odilon Redon (quoted in *Le Figaro* 31.5.1912) and Auguste Rodin (*Le Matin* 30.5.1912) to Nijinsky’s

defence, after which Calmette committed something of a faux pas himself by turning his attack on Rodin and the condition of native French art.^{viii} The attack on the famous sculptor, in turn, riveted the attention of major newspapers even across the ocean (e.g. *The New York Times* 2., 3. (twice), and 14.6.1912; *Boston Evening Transcript* 24.8.1912 and 4.4.1913), and gave cartoonists a field day with the incident (see image 1: *L'Excelsior* 6.6.1912 cartoon). Even in the French press, *Faune* was situated rather exceptionally: the controversy relocated the Ballets Russes into the front-page political editorials, indicating a shift in the significance of the company. Moreover, several papers (e.g. *Comœdia* 30.5. and 2.6.1912; *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* 9. and 10.6.1912; *Le Courrier Musical* 15.6.1912) published more than the customary single review of the work, and *Faune* evoked discussion even in papers such as *La Plume* that normally paid no heed to the Ballets Russes.

In France, *Faune* was primarily contested because the danced expression was seen as incongruent with the musical structure of Debussy's score and/or the poetics of Mallarmé. This was sometimes phrased in explicitly chauvinist terms:

[Les russes] sont de grands artistes. Ce sont aussi des gens courtois, touchés des sympathies françaises et désireux de le reconnaître: seulement, ils sont étrangers et ils ne savent pas très-bien... [--] J'admire trop Nijinsky pour me retenir d'observer qu'il n'a pas du tout compris le Faune tel que Mallarmé l'avait voulu: de toutes ses créations c'est la moins heureuse, et il est impossible qu'un danseur slave, même si intelligent, pénètre une œuvre de ce genre,

complained Camille Mauclair (in *Le Courrier Musical* 15.6.1912). Mauclair had written to the previous issue of the same journal (1.6.1912) of how the Ballets Russes had realised Mallarmé's dream of a symbolist total work of art. Modifying his opinion, Mauclair now claimed that as a Russian, Nijinsky was racially incapable of understanding the civilised French art of Debussy and Mallarmé, no matter how well Russian dancers could illustrate the latter's principles in their more exotic, melodramatic spectacles. For some who shared Mauclair's distaste for *Faune*, the defenders of the novelty were showing not simply a lack of aesthetic understanding but worse, degeneration: "Que le public qui l'applaudit ne soit pas plus sensible à un tel défaut, c'est un signe fâcheux qui s'ajoute à tous ceux que j'énumérais récemment, et par lesquels on voit se révéler la dégénérescence de l'esprit français [- et -] la décadence de notre goût." (*Le Temps* 11.6.1912.) As was to be expected, some of these alleged

degenerates took offence and complained how such nationalist rhetoric was untenable: no French artist had been able to illustrate Mallarmé's poem or Debussy's music, either (Henry Gauthier-Villars in *Comœdia Illustré* 15.6.1912). Besides, Debussy may have been a French citizen, but his music was strange to many ears and, as the major literary review *La Plume* (1.7.1912) scornfully noted, were it not for Nijinsky, the French would still consider Mozart more French than Debussy.

Meanwhile, as noted, across the Channel and the Atlantic the interest of the press focused on Rodin's involvement. The scandal was generally attributed to Nijinsky's provocative costume: a skin-coloured body-stocking with dark patches that were partly painted on the dancer's body and a strategically placed wreath of leaves that seems to have been designed to emphasise the faun's crotch. Bakst's design for this costume was reproduced as the cover of the season's programme, and no-one called for censorship of any of the numerous publicity photographs of the novelty that were produced as 'proof' of provocation for people who had not seen the performance.^{ix} Unlike Nijinsky's similar body-stocking in *Le Spectre de la Rose* (1911), this was "a costume that makes Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan appear to be dressed for winter when they are doing similar stunts," ("Blush on Face of Paris." NYPLDC Nijinsky Clippings, unattributed) as one contemporary paper phrased it. The imitation skin of the faun apparently seemed altogether too naked.^x

With a dance work based on a poem by a canonised author often accused of 'Parisianism', and to a music by a known 'sensualist' composer – recently divorced to the bargain – the Faun's crime should have been a mere misdemeanour. Even if the audience did greet the work with a "tumult of conflicting exclamation" (*The Bellman* 29.6.1912), this was not atypical of theatrical life in Paris.^{xi} Moreover, the morality or immorality of a performance also depended on the venue in which it was shown – as *Variety* (15.6.1912) indignantly noted in conjunction with the *Faune* scandal:

Under the guise of 'art,' Nijinsky portrayed a fauna [sic] with bestial reality, and his success was great. The same show given in a vaudeville theatre would be banned as immoral. The Chatelet [sic] audience, paying \$4 for a seat, would be shocked at anything half as realistic in a music hall. [- -] An act was given at the Etoile Palace some months ago which showed a fauna and nymph at play. The management, after the trial show, withdrew it as unsuitable. A fashionable audience enthusiastically accepted a similar show at the Chatelet.^{xii}

Like the discussion over Rodin's status, this points to how much the scandal had to do with notions of cultural ownership, of the right to define what was art. These notions tangled *Faune* into a complex political discourse having to do with questions of nation and race, progress and modernity that cannot be fully discussed in the space of this text.^{xiii} Rather, I want to draw attention to specific qualities of the dance work that were cited as alien, vanguard, or shocking and used to define *Faune* as both an innovative novelty and as no longer dancing.

Indeed, in previous research, *Faune* has been altogether too often read as the first manifestation of Diaghilev's aggressive modernist strategy of 'épater la bourgeoisie', with Nijinsky relegated to the role of a marionette dancing at the impresario's fingertips. This not only ignores Nijinsky's repeated complaints about having been misunderstood by his public,^{xiv} but the fact that other Russians did not understand the outrage *Faune* caused. For the Russian dance critics, the Faun's auto-eroticism was far less abnormal than the decadent reversal of gender-roles in ballets like *Schéhérazade* (1910) that the same audience had cheered during the previous Saisons Russes. Nikolai Minsky wrote in *Utro Rossii*:

Образъ, несомнѣнно, смѣлый, можетъ быть, отвѣчающіи понятію о древнемъ фавнѣ, но столь же, несомнѣнно, порнографическій, созданный исключительно сладострастнымъ воображеніемъ, въ сравненіи съ наивнымъ, правдивымъ образомъ Нижинскаго, въ котормъ узнають себя 99 изъ ста юношей.^{xv}

In the Western reviews of the Ballets Russes, it would have been unthinkable to claim that ninety nine percent of all men were familiar with a 'perverse' practice like masturbation, if only because in contemporary aesthetic discourse, admitting to sexual thoughts in the presence of an artwork amounted to being a 'philistine',^{xvi} that is, it disqualified one as an authority on art. In late-nineteenth-century medical discourse, male autoeroticism had become a sign of degeneration and sexual inversion (i.e. homosexuality),^{xvii} and cultural critics like Max Nordau (1993) had stamped interest in such 'vices' a sign of more general social degeneration, typical of dangerous modernity. This link between non-normative sexual acts and modernity effectively made representations of such practices a sign of aesthetic modernism.

In Russia, government officials and revolutionaries alike had actively opposed the spreading of this discourse to Russia. Sexuality – the idea that one’s identity could be defined through sexual preferences – was associated with other Western notions like liberalism, constitutional democracy, or women’s rights, and as such, as a danger to Russia’s ‘soul’ (душа). Partly because of the dominance of the Orthodox Church, although sexual acts were a source for cultural anxieties in early twentieth-century Russia, they were still fundamentally private sins.

Particularly after the relaxation of censorship in the wake of the 1905 Revolution, Russian artists adopted non-normative sexual arrangements and depiction of sexual acts as one sign of their modernist aesthetic and political liberalism.^{xviii} With their decadent subjects and provocative costuming, the Orientalist choreographic works of the early Ballets Russes seasons can be seen as partaking in this same movement. However, for most Russian dance critics, this willing indulgence in morally dubious behaviour was problematic, because it meant the Ballets Russes exported a ‘wrong’ idea of Russia and of Imperial ballet (see my discussion in a previous issue of this journal).

In this manner, Nijinsky’s representation of a sexual act was sheltered behind the bastions of artistic tradition, particularly because *Faune* drew from the mythology of Ancient Greece, valued as the cradle of European civilisation and of art – despite the potentially ‘perverse’ connection to the “unspeakable vice of the Greeks”,^{xix} homosexuality. However, unlike the self-love of Narcissus (in *Narcisse*, 1911), where the youth falling in love with his own image had raised some eyebrows,^{xx} the faun still lusted after the opposite sex, albeit indirectly and in a fetishistic manner. As a device, the translocation of the male hero’s sexual desire for the female heroine into a scarf (“écharpe”, a word used of the Nymph’s clothing in the French reviews) was also familiar from Romantic ballets with which Nijinsky would have been familiar, and which he may – or may not – have emulated.^{xxi}

At least in the notation of *Faune*, Nijinsky’s composition carefully emphasised the bestiality of the faun from movements such as pawing the ground [61] to when the faun ‘smelled’ the nymph’s dress in [103] (Nijinsky’s wording, according to Guest & Jeschke 1991, 46; notably, in contemporary theories of sensation, smell was a lower, ‘animal’ sense than vision or hearing). According to the laws of mimesis, any representation of the sexual desire of an inhuman creature could therefore be explained as indicative of the character’s bestiality, not that of the dancer/actor. However, even if

this had been comprehensible for contemporary audiences unaccustomed to this style of representation, how much of the Russians' dance had been read as mimesis of otherness (rather than simply otherness) in this sense is a different matter. Western audiences had a tendency to represent the Russians as particularly capable of tapping into their own primitive, animal-like instincts, which enabled them to express their emotions in a corporeal art like dancing. The Russians were admirable because they had retained something that was lost to the West, an atavistic vitality, a connection with nature and with senses and emotions that civilisation and rationality destroyed.^{xxii} With *Faune*, this connection between dancing and the primordial, corporeal affects of the non-civilised Others could justify the Russian dancer's portrayal of animal lust on stage: "Type of what is animal in man, epitome of all his unsophisticated lusts and appetites, here [in *Faune*] is surely an ideal theme for the dancer's art," thought A.E. Johnson (1913, 182), who detested what Nijinsky made of this theme.

Somewhat overshadowed by the scandal in 1912, the formal aspects and movement qualities of *Faune* attracted more attention in conjunction with Nijinsky's 1913 choreographies, seen as confirming his new dance aesthetic. That this produced a change in how the reviews discussed dance as the art of the choreographer requires a short detour to the status of this particular author – Nijinsky.

The Dancing Genius

By 1912, Vaslav Nijinsky had become an international celebrity. The roles he danced in the spectacles of the Ballets Russes had garbed his public figure in the veils of oriental splendour and fashionable, decadent luxury. His stardom was quite unprecedented: theatrical dancing had never lacked stars, but these had been women. Moreover, in living memory, no other man had attracted quite this kind of attention: many contemporary reports emphasised Nijinsky's appeal to female spectators, and women reporters wrote quite openly of Nijinsky as the reason they would go to the Ballet:

Ah, Monsieur Diaghilew, great was the wisdom of the gods in your endowment!
It brought rich gifts to our times. Could you, I wonder, tell me my fancy of them all? No. It is not the new coherence of stage decoration, resulting from disinterested ambition; nor the *ballet féerie* dreamed of but never realized by

Mallarmé; nor the better acquaintance with your own great race, its power, its art; nor the marvellous exponents thereof, Bakst, Golovine, Soumoff, Stravinsky, Fokine; nor the lovely Palowa [sic], nor the exotic Rubinstein, nor the delicate Karsavina; nor even you yourself, Monsieur Diaghilew, with your grand efforts in art for art's sake. It is Waslaw Nijinsky. (Elizabeth Dryden in *The Trend*, NYPLDC Nijinsky Clippings, s.a.)

Dryden followed this with a breathless adulation of Nijinsky's dancing and, quite specifically, of his body that ran for several paragraphs at the very end of her article. At a time when male authorities still insisted women would prioritise the social standing of a partner rather than their physical or emotional characteristics (e.g. Freud 1997, esp. 92-95, 100, 109; also Battersby 1994, 119) this detailed attention on the male dancer's body was quite remarkable and reminiscent of how early male film stars would be discussed after the First World War.

Importantly, Nijinsky's fans were gendered female both to reinforce the heteronormativity of spectatorship and to strip these women of authority to define art. This was a particularly true in France, where, as Lenard R. Berlanstein (2001) has attested, 'theatre women', including ballet dancers, were constructed as objects of the male spectator's sexual fantasy, and where decent women would not publicly discuss theatrical performance.^{xxiii} Just as a painted nude would be pornographic only to the philistine who knew nothing of real art, the dancing man could only evoke aesthetic appreciation in the true connoisseur. The main function of women's desire in the reviews was to illustrate the affective, excitable reaction caused by the male star that could not otherwise enter the 'objective' review. Male authors went out of their way to attest how their admiration of the semi-naked male body displayed on stage was the cool, objective appreciation of a connoisseur. André Suarès declared:

Aucune femme n'approche de Nijinski.

Nijinski a toute l'intelligence de son instinct. [- -] il a de grâce dans la force [- -] Sa beauté est pure de toute séduction sexuelle. Je parle pour moi, qui suis homme. [- -] Dans la plus belle femme, on ne peut pourtant pas oublier la femme. Et plus on est sensible au charme féminin, plus le désir s'intrigue à l'admiration. Avec Nijinski, l'admiration est sans mélange. [- -] Peu de

sentiments nous porteraient plus haut dans la découverte de la perfection morale.^{xxiv}

Nijinsky's maleness thus lifted his body onstage above the base instincts that tarnished the gaze when one looked at the dancing woman. Suares's rhetoric elevates Nijinsky into an asexual and transcendental ideal that safeguards dance as an art form from accusations of indecency or immorality: Nijinsky's art is art because even his instincts are intellectualised, his mind controls the matter of his body. Thanks to this intellectualisation, his body can be forgotten in a way that the female dancer's body can never be, and the (male) critic can gaze at the male dancer at will without being suspected of sexual perversion.

Suares's text points to how the label 'genius' had been first attached to Nijinsky as a dancer, and that it was used to sublimate the material, corporeal aspects of theatrical dancing. The rhetoric of dancing genius emphasised the superhuman feats of the genius by downplaying Nijinsky's virtuosity, pushed the physical labour of dance out of sight by stressing the affective and intellectual aspects of the dancer's work and the connoisseurship required to recognise these in the physical manifestation of his art (and the gender is no coincidence).^{xxv} Particularly after his dismissal from the Imperial Theatres in 1911, Nijinsky was represented as a prodigy whose genius would have appeared regardless of the academic Russian training system, even against it.^{xxvi} It could be said that the Western European connoisseur could thus share the halo of the genius, whose political fate as a revolutionary exile ultimately represented the triumph of Western democracy over Russian autocracy.^{xxvii}

Nijinsky's reputation as a genius of his art form predisposed critics to treat *Faune* as his creation, particularly when the actual performance looked so different from all other works in the Ballets Russes repertory that some explanation for the difference seemed necessary. The absence of precisely the qualities for which Nijinsky was renowned as a dancer apparently obliged some critics to note that despite *Faune*, Nijinsky was dancing with quite his usual skill in other ballets of the season (e.g. Calmette in *Le Figaro* 31.5.1912; Linor in *Comœdia* 17.5.1913 writing of *Jeux*). Others conceptually separated the dancer's creation from the work of the new author(ity), the choreographer:

Nijinsky was rather a disturbing element. He is too great an artist to go as wrong as he was meant to go, and the gestures of his faun were too natural and eloquent

in their restraint for the scheme of the piece, though, indeed, he realised far more than the others the dainty spirit of Debussy. (*Pall Mall Gazette* 18.2.1913.)

Apparently, it never occurred to this critic to ask why Nijinsky the choreographer would have invented a work that went against the nature of Nijinsky the dancer? Louis Laloy (in *La Grande revue* 25.6.1912) made a similar distinction between the two Nijinskys when he claimed that the choreographer did not really understand the music but that of the dancers only Nijinsky managed to illustrate it. Such discrepancies illustrate how the stylised form of the dance functioned to emphasise the nature of choreography as design, as something composed for specific effect.

Fortunately for Nijinsky, judging a work the product of genius did not necessitate liking it: like many of his French colleagues (e.g. Pierre Lalo in *Le Temps* 11.6.1912), A.E. Johnson (1913, 186) both attacked Nijinsky's new aesthetic and judged it a significant departure:

The whole thing is brilliantly clever, a *tour de force* on the part of Nijinsky, and considered as such one has nothing for it but praise. But as an attempt to vivify plastic art it fails, for it deliberately adopts conventions and restrictions which are proper to the latter, but were never intended to govern the moving human form. [- -] one regrets all the more the unnecessary restrictions with which Nijinsky has hampered himself, when reflecting what his genius as a dancer, given proper scope, might make of such a *rôle*. If he would but play one of Pan's goat-footed progeny legitimately 'in the round,' one might anticipate a creation to supplement, and rank alongside, his wonderful harlequin in 'Le Carnaval.'

Faune failed because the choreographer had forced himself as a dancer to behave against his nature and against the laws of danced expression. His disobedience contested contemporary ideas about cultural ownership, about the status of the Western critic (the legitimising authority in Johnson's text) as a connoisseur of the Russian Other (who unnecessarily "hampered himself" with conventions).

By contrast, Russian reviews of Nijinsky's new aesthetic tended to cite such reactions as proof of the existing Russian prejudice that Western critics had never understood ballet as an art form. For example, the future Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky (in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 15.6./28.6.1912), claimed that *Faune* was so sublime and artistic that the Western hostility proved the incompetence of the fans of

the Ballets Russes. Notably, like Minsky (whose text was reproduced e.g. in *Rampa i zhizn* 27.5.1912), Lunacharsky also found that the stylisation of *Faune* resonated with the work of new Russian theatre directors.

Stage Pictures 1: The Fourth Wall

In the 1912 reviews of *Faune*, much was made of its quality as a two-dimensional or ‘bas-relief’ stage picture. Ever since, this two-dimensionality has been seen as the most visible breach of ballet aesthetic in *Faune*, and researchers have pondered on how Nijinsky (or whoever they attribute with the work) came up with the idea.^{xxviii} In principle, there was nothing new in the idea of having dancers represent reality in two dimensions: tableaux vivants were popular entertainment both in professional variety theatres and in the amateur theatricals of the upper classes, and these sometimes aimed for apparently ‘two-dimensional’ effect. In the Ballets Russes repertory, a section in *Pavillon d'Armide* called *Les Gobelins animé* showed dancers representing a tapestry come to life, and *Cléopâtre* (1909), composed in the ‘Egyptian’ style, had, according to Nijinska (1992, 276) “very few dancing *pas*” because it was almost entirely a ‘bas-relief’ ballet (cf. Fokine 1961, 127).

There was one difference between *Armide* and *Cléopâtre* in comparison with *Faune*, however. In the earlier works, the dancers had always ‘come to life’ – moved out of the bas-relief in ways that emphasised the three-dimensionality of their bodies and of the stage. In *Faune*, they remained ‘two-dimensional’ throughout: even reversing the direction of movement was done rapidly, on the spot, to keep the dancers in profile (Guest & Jeschke 1991, esp. 51). Some of Nijinsky's contemporaries thought this indicated the choreographer’s failure to join his two-dimensional sources from Ancient Greece into a flowing, three-dimensional stage picture.^{xxix} As implausible as this argument seems, it does point to how three-dimensionality was considered essential to life-like representation in dance and any dance that failed to become lifelike in this manner was interpreted as incomplete or as a ‘failed’ rendering of a two-dimensional model.

Yet, the elimination of space from the stage did not have to derive from imitation of Greek vases, of paintings, or of tableaux vivants, for it was a logical extension of a dancer’s experimentation with the space in which he found himself. Precisely because

space was (and is) taken for granted as a defining principle of dance, only its limitation, not its expansion, reveals the importance of spatiality for ontological definitions of 'dancing'. As Joan Acocella (1987, 52) notes: "What was natural, and therefore harder to see, in the round becomes, when forced into flatness, both readable and miraculous." In other words, the limitation of space brought to the fore other conventions of the art form similarly taken for granted, from the *épaulement* turn of the body, which adds volume to a dancer's positions on-stage, to the representational conventions of proscenium stage space. (*Op.cit.* 52, also 70n9.)

Taking this further, Acocella points out that Nijinsky did not have to make movement in two dimensions, and the fact that he did so implies he had a specific interest in eliminating space from (the) dance. She thinks Nijinsky did this because he was interested in the heightened sense of middle and sides produced in foreshortened space (*op.cit.* 65). I would suggest a more radical interpretation: Nijinsky was actually returning to what was meant by 'stage picture' in order to destabilise how audiences experienced dance and how dancers danced it. That is, Nijinsky was doing what modernists in other arts had been doing for some time: questioning the givens of the medium. Explaining how he did this requires the introduction of two terms: 'the tableau' and 'the fourth wall'.

To begin with the latter, 'fourth wall' was a recent innovation in naturalist theatre, credited to André Antoine (1858-1943) and the Théâtre Libre (est. 1887). In practice, it meant that actors behaved as if the stage were a room with the fourth wall transparent – for example, turn their backs to the audience if the situation so warranted. In an ideal case, the actors would act as if the audience did not exist: the spectator is conceived as a voyeur prying into the secret life on stage. In Russia, the Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavsky (pseudonym of Konstantin Alekseyev) and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko was famous for such illusory realism, and this kind of acting was also one of the renovations introduced in the 'new ballet' of Aleksandr Gorsky from circa 1900 onwards (Krasovskaia 1971, i: 46-50, 107-151). However, the point for this naturalist reform was not as much verisimilitude (or the creation of a 'more real' mimesis) as it was to enable the actors' immersion in their roles. This immersion in the other reality on stage would in turn increase the affective immediacy of the acting for both actors and audiences, crucial in illustrating the characters of subtle, 'modern' pieces by

playwrights such as Chekhov and Ibsen (Brewster & Jacobs 1997, esp. 4-13, 37, 48-74, 85-96, 140-141).

In its quest for psychological depth and (political) meaning, naturalist theatre utilised the fourth wall convention to make performances more intimate and to concentrate attention on the inner realities of the characters. What the ballet reformers took from all this was not any kind of profound reorganisation of the performative qualities of ballet: in the 'new ballet' of Gorsky and his followers, dance was still very much performed to the audience, the most important actions onstage taking place in plain view, preferably downstage centre and near the footlights. The 'new ballet' also avoided flammable political subtexts common to contemporary realist drama, even modern life as a theme. What it retained was narrative intensity, which meant focusing on the 'realism' of the dancers' acting. In ballet, narratives were told through mime (Smith 2000, esp. 33-38), so in the 'new ballet' mimed signs replaced the lines of the actors. This meant that the 'new ballet' emphasised expressive gestures and mimicry to the extent of being accused of degrading the technical demands of ballet dancing (Volinsky and Kudrin quoted in Sokolov-Kaminsky 1992, 57).

Unlike his predecessors, Nijinsky seems to have understood that the premises of dance as an art form are never 'realistic' in the sense of realist drama because the dancers dance, and human beings do not normally communicate solely by bodily movement. No matter how pedestrian in style, dancing can be recognised (and labelled) as dancing when it corresponds with a set of cultural references, conventions that we associate with a dance, a performance, and/or a space as somehow different from quotidian experience (think of the experiments of the Judson group in the 1960s). Conversely, what is legitimate for something to be dance is limited to the horizon of expectations in a given culture at a given time. In his context, Nijinsky seems to have realised that since replacing spoken lines with mimicry was always a convention, it was quite possible to stylise these gestures to a degree where the significance of each gesture became specific to the reality of only one work. Once again, he would not have pulled this out from the thin air.

In contrast to the 'realism' of the 'new ballet', still obviously performed to the audience, the choreography of *Faune* erected the fourth wall to strengthen the artificiality of the performance. As in naturalist theatre, the dancers now failed to acknowledge the presence of the spectators – they appeared “seemingly oblivious of any suggestions of

a watching audience” (Beaumont 1951, 53), in a world of their own that the audience could only witness and either reject or accept on its own, highly stylised terms. But it is also possible to say that by turning away from the spectators, the dancers refused to acknowledge the importance of the audience to the spectacle. Confronted with a work that did not meet their horizon of expectations for ‘dance’, many of these self-appointed experts turned to attack in defence of what they saw as their right to define the limits of the art form.

Paradoxically, dancing in ‘bas-relief’ was only possible if the dancers remained constantly aware of the audience. Claudia Jeschke (1990, 117) has discussed how the narrow stage space changed not simply what the audience saw but how the dancers experienced their dancing. The dancers now had to orient themselves both towards the front of where they were heading (the stage wings) and to what was the front for the spectators (their silhouette). Particularly in a work that utilised qualities of movement not associated with the existing ‘Egyptian’ or ‘bas-relief’ character dance styles, the necessary attention would also have heightened the awareness the dancers had of being in space.

Moreover, the same was true of the choreographer’s position: just as the basic idea of two-dimensionality required that the spectators shared a particular, still point of view, Nijinsky's reversal of perspective in his notation system implies a concern with how the work would look like from outside the stage. In practise, this illusion was not quite sustainable for members of the audience sitting to the far sides of the three-dimensional theatre auditorium (Lunacharsky in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 15.6./28.6.1912). In a manner of speaking, *Faune* attested how theatrical attention assumed the spectator would sit still and observe in silence from a particular point of view (Crary 2001, 41-43). One indication of this interest lies in the stage drawings included in Nijinsky’s notation of *Faune*.

In his notation, the choreographer placed the reader of stage drawing into the role of the audience (we tend to identify with that which is closest to us), with downstage quite literally down in the illustrations. As a consequence of this change, the direction of every action on stage also had to be reconfigured in the notation.^{xxx} Although this change had little actual effect on how the work was perceived in performance, it once again heightened Nijinsky’s role as a choreographic author – we must remember Nijinsky had plans to publish the notation system, which he considered his “real life-

work” (Nijinsky in *Musical America* 15.4.1916), a contribution more important than either his dancing career or his choreographic compositions. This resonates strongly with the authorist statements of some modernist theatre directors, such as Edward Gordon Craig (1977, esp. 37-57). However, despite the choreographer’s authorist attitude, in *Faune* he had to collaborate with dancers whose responses to the new aesthetic were mixed.

Telling the Plot

As noted above, the choreography of *Faune* had a narrative but this was not the grand melodrama of a typical ‘new ballet’ work like *Daphnis et Chloë* (1912), Fokine’s work set in Ancient Greece, whose première followed that of *Faune*. *Daphnis et Chloë* told the love-story of the title characters, their tragic separation through the hero’s deceitful rival, the threats to their love and lives, the hero’s defeat of his rival, and the joyful reunion of the lovers, with groups of shepherds, bacchantes and pirates dancing in between. By contrast, as Jeschke (1990, 106) observes: “Nijinsky’s little scenario is more suggestive of a playful, Attic romp than a major drama seething with sexual conflict.” In his stage instructions for *Jeux*, (Debussy & Nijinsky 1913), Nijinsky described the movements of the characters in quite quotidian terms: walk, run, jump, bow, turn, stop. In interviews, he went as far as denying *Faune* had a plot, and he also professed he had no use for “the accepted stage ‘language of gesture’” (*The Times* 25.2.1914 paraphrasing Nijinsky), meaning precisely the kind of ‘realistic’ acting the dancers with whom he worked had just trained themselves to execute.

Some of the dancers did not take this well: they referred to Nijinsky’s demands as ‘unnatural’, ‘constraining’ and making them feel like they were made of wood or stone, materials to be moulded by a sculptor.^{xxxix} Marie Rambert, who joined the company to teach the dancers the eurhythmics of Dalcroze so that the dancers could come to terms with the complex rhythms of the modernist scores Nijinsky used, reminisced:

Once when a new girl had to learn Nijinsky’s sister’s part in which the Nymph suddenly sees the Faune, turns away and walks off – he said to her: ‘Why do you look so frightened?’ She said she thought she was meant to be. Thereupon, quite in a rage, he said that the movement he gave her was all that was required of her, he was not interested in her personal feelings. (Rambert 1983, 62.)

This lack of precisely the kind of expressions of emotion emphasised by the other ‘new ballet’ choreographers limited the interpretative power of the dancers to an unprecedented degree. True to his authorist views, Nijinsky abolished conventional ballet steps and mimicry, forcing the dancers to follow his instructions to the letter so as to not to ruin his elaborate design, on which he had worked since late in 1910 when Diaghilev acquired the composer’s permission to use the music (NYPLDC Astruc Papers). For the first time, even the tiniest details onstage became of importance. In an interview to *The Pall Mall Gazette* (15.2.1913), Nijinsky noted:

The treatment of ballets of the purely imaginative type is of great importance from the point of view of the producer. One false accent, and the whole decorative value of the production is destroyed. In the case of ‘L’Après-midi d’un Faune,’ this is particularly important, and mathematic precision must mark every minute action.

Yet, although Nijinsky did not want the dancers changing anything in his beloved vision, he did use mime to emphasise important points in the ballet: for example, the satisfaction of the Faun after he has disturbed the Nymphs is underlined when he throws back his head and “laughs like an animal” ([90], [91]; Guest & Jeschke 1991, 44, 68, 181). We can see this moment in one of de Meyer's photographs of the ballet that appeared as the cover of *The Sketch* (26.2.1913), although it was not included in de Meyer's book of photographs on the ballet.^{xxxii}

This manner of underlining important moments later helped to distort the perception of reconstructors and researchers. In contemporary dance texts, facial mimicry was often represented as essential to ‘expressivity’, the quality that separated true art from vaudeville entertainment (e.g. Caffin & Caffin 1912, esp. 206-207), so the few gestures that could be considered mime became emphasised in the press and in the photographs of the ballet, which centred on moments of high intensity – the parts that stood out through the use of such gestures. Later, this lent support to the exaggerated turnout of the torso, muscular tension, and steps made heel first apparent in the memory-based reconstructions. But the poignancy of the mimed moments was emphasised as early as in 1916, when the Ballets Russes mounted *Faune* for the American tour. Nijinsky, seeing this first memory-based version of his composition effectively forced the

company to withdraw it from the repertory (e.g. *The New York Times* 8.4.1916; cf. *The New York Herald* 8.4.1916; cf. *Musical America* 29.4.1916).

Moreover, the gestures of the dancers were aimed to emphasise the emotional state of the character rather than to further a narrative: when the Faun became excited, his thumbs went up and his head tilted down, attentively; after he startled the 'joyful' nymph, she kept looking back at him as she ran away, her arms raised above her head, fingers spread wide in a gesture both defensive and surprised (Guest & Jeschke 1991, 21-22, 27, 40-41, 46, also 62-63 images).

The simple storyline thus found its parallel in the small gestures – the bend of a finger, the angle of the head – and in the relationship between the characters in what seemed to be something simultaneously timeless and quotidian. Although it can be asked how much of these small gestures was visible for all members of the audience in a vast theatre like the Châtelet, “le Gulliver de nos scènes parisiennes” (*Le Figaro* 20.5.1909), Nijinsky had thought them out very carefully.^{xxxiii} According to his score, the events are framed as something mundane that will repeat itself like a routine: in [5], [7], [15] and [20] the faun turns several times to listen or look in the direction from which the Nymphs will soon emerge, expecting their arrival (half-way into [21]). The Nymphs are not frightened at seeing the faun, because they also seem to know he might be on his favourite rock. They do not seem to mind him much even when he descends to the same plane ([44]) and startles one of them ([48]), and as the faun disrupts their actions, they scold him for it ([82]-[84]). The faun is thoroughly satisfied with his mischief ([90]-[91]) but in the end, again turns in the direction of the departed nymphs, either remembering their existence or expecting their return ([94], [102]) (Guest & Jeschke 1991, 21, 33-46; Gerhard 2000, 32.) The circularity in the music and in the danced composition further emphasise this sense of return – that when the work ended, it could begin anew.

Although the familiarity of the fauns and nymphs in classical mythology has been used to explain the behaviour of the characters of *Faune*, in view of Nijinsky never having studied the classics, it is far more likely that he was reflecting upon recent trends in Russian arts, where ‘timeless’ classical models were once again in fashion.^{xxxiv} Although there is nothing to prove that Nijinsky himself was familiar with Acmeism, a literary movement that sought for clarity and simplicity through the use of everyday language in depiction of realistic events, for his contemporaries, his choreographic

work functioned like the work of these poets in an art form where heady spectacles and tragic love-stories had always dominated the repertory. *Apollon*, the journal most closely associated with the Acmeist poets Akhmatova, Gumiliev and Mandelstam, had very favourable things to say of Nijinsky's work; and the critic and poet Nikolai Minsky, a member of this loose group, called both Acmeism and Nijinsky's choreography 'neo-realism'.^{xxxv} Indeed, it is crucial to note that in Russia, most modernists thought their work a new kind of realism, in part to associate what they were doing with the political ideas and aesthetic status of the 'Golden Age' of Russian arts in the 1860s and 1870s – the work of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, the kuchkist composers and peredvizhniki painters. Yet, by 1912, the Russian avant-garde had moved towards stylisation, abstraction and discussion over the essential qualities of a medium in ways that drastically differed from how 'realism' as a stylistic label is usually understood. Already in 1902, Valeri Briusov had criticised "The Unnecessary Truth" of the Moscow Arts Theatre (*Mir iskusstva* 3-4/1902) and Aleksandr Benois the failures of the 'realist' new ballet (*Mir iskusstva* 2-3/1902). *Mir iskusstva* was edited by Sergei Diaghilev, who gave a complete set to his lover (Nijinska 1992, esp. 258; Rambert 1983, 72 on Nijinsky discussing *Mir iskusstva* articles with her).

For Russian dance critics, also the debt of *Faune* to contemporary Russian experimental theatre seemed obvious: in his review of *Faune* (in *Utro Rossii* 24.5./6.6.1912), Minsky suggested that Nijinsky might have known of Vsevolod Meyerhold's experiments with the bas-relief form, and Anatoly Lunacharsky (in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 15.6./28.6.1912) also made the connection between Nijinsky's style and Meyerhold's stylisation.^{xxxvi} Although Nijinsky never professed his knowledge of Meyerhold's experiments (nor vice versa), the two men had collaborated with many of the same people, and in 1910, they even performed together in Fokine's *Carnaval* (Nijinska 1992, 260-261, 286-289; Braun 1995, esp. 65n*). During the Maryinsky season, Nijinsky would also have had ample time: Russian critics complained Nijinsky danced but rarely (e.g. *Rech* 25.1./7.2.1911), and after his dismissal, Nijinsky went as far as calling his position a "sinecure" (*Comœdia* interview of 25.4.1911).

But although Nijinsky may have adopted the use of stylised gesture and lack of facial mime from Meyerhold, this director was merely one of many that were utilising such conventions in Russian theatre. Many of the members of the *Mir iskusstva* group had worked in the theatres of Fyodor Komissarzhevsky, Nikolai Evreinov, and Aleksandr

Tairov, and even Stanislavsky flirted with stylised ‘symbolist’ theatre between 1905-1910.^{xxxvii} Nijinsky’s contemporaries (Thomas H. Uzzell in *Harper’s Weekly* 27.11.1915) also likened his work to the new stagecraft of Chekhov and Andreyev, again indicating the work captured the spirit of the age far more than that of a specific contemporary or a particular artistic precedent. Notably, these comparisons were not made to contemporary dancers like Duncan.

Stage Pictures 2: The Tableau

The most striking claim made in conjunction with Nijinsky's first choreography was that it was not dancing at all: “The miracle of the thing lies with Nijinsky – the fabulous Nijinsky, the peerless dancer, who as the faun does no dancing.” (*The Daily Mail* 18.2.1913; see also Diaghilev in *Current Opinion* December 1916.) The same spectators who complained of nothing happening in *Faune* had not protested against the circularity of *Thamar*, the scanty plot of *Les Sylphides* or *Les Danses Polovtsiennes*, or the simplicity of *Le Spectre de la Rose*. Moreover, this claim also surfaced with both *Jeux* and *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 1913, so the lack of ‘life’ in the two-dimensional reality onstage was not the only reason for it.

Francis de Miomandre (1913, 6) suggested the fault lay in the excessive choreographic stillness on stage: “as if unsatisfied with all the rôles of movement, I see him change and resolve the drama of *L’Après-Midi d’un Faune*’ into hieratic poses, into a succession of states of immobility.” This stillness made *Faune* essentially something other than dancing:

Quant à la chorégraphie même, elle implique en soi une contradiction: prétendant à renouveler la danse, elle en est la négation; car elle prohibe ce qui en fait l’essence, la grâce des gestes, l’harmonie des attitudes. Elle ne répudie pas moins l’expression qui est à l’origine même de la danse, et se cantonne le plus souvent dans de rudimentaires manifestations rythmiques,^{xxxviii}

claimed Maurice Touchard. His definition suggests that the definition of ‘dance’ was tied to aesthetic qualities like grace and harmony, rather than formal aspects of danced movement.

In his notation, Nijinsky wrote dance as a series of poses, almost as if ‘dance’ comprised of a series of flawless attitudes of the body that became movement.^{xxxix} Although this

is typical of dance notation systems, including the Stepanov system upon which Nijinsky based his own,^{xl} it is too often forgotten that it is also the principle underlying classical ballet, where all movement is founded upon the five still positions. A dance that would, at times, stop for a moment to present the audience with dancers in poses had, as a device, been known since the early court ballets, where these still figures were also discussed as the dance (Franko 2001, 191-201; Turocy 2001, 202). Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs (1997, esp. 8-13, 29, 35-38) have shown how, at the turn of the twentieth century, theatrical scenes were structured through tableaux – a word that means, quite literally, ‘paintings’. These short freezings of the performers of a particular scene on stage created a pictorial effect that focused the attention of the audience on moments of importance in the plot, such as the entrance or/exit of a major character, or they prolonged moments of dramatic intensity, usually culminating narrative scenes. Stillness was such an obvious heightening device that even early silent films narrated through such tableaux.

Since the tableau was a normative manner of structuring the narrative, Nijinsky knew perfectly well how to use them. Thus, in *Faune*, everything halts at [26], just before the Chief Nymph arrives on stage for the first time at [27]. Similarly, when the faun encounters the Chief Nymph alone and face-to-face at [55], absolute stillness of two bars follows, heightening the dramatic tension of this crucial moment and emphasising how both leading characters are faced with a choice that will determine their relationship and ensuing events.^{xli} This was all very well, but the dancers also stopped at ‘wrong’ moments and they kept repeating the short pauses: in the duet between the faun and the leading Nymph, full stops occur in Nijinsky’s score at [55]-[56], again at [58]-[59] and again at [63]-[64]. (Guest & Jeschke 1991, 40-41 also 111-115.) The tableaux no longer made sense, no longer resolved the intensity of the moment or focused attention to a specific instant.

Together with the stylised gestures, the ‘misplaced’ pauses explain something of why audiences had difficulties understanding the events on stage. As *Faune* did not come with a clearly narrated synopsis, this small detail necessitated a new kind of attention on what took place. As ‘L.H.’ wrote (in *Comœdia* 2.6.1912):

Nijinski, hiératique, affronte aux grâces tour à tour fuyantes et figées des Nymphes, l’animalité subtile de ses attitudes, on est surpris pas la soudaineté

des gestes, et par leur impeccable mathématique, que règle seule la chaîne des rythmes musicaux.

Le silence de la salle est profond et attentif. On sent que les esprits sont tendus vers la découverte ou l'attente d'une défaillance; ou bien vers la compréhension d'une beauté inconnue. Un dernier accord. Les flûtes expirent. Le rideau se clôt.

The notion that dance was something that required constant attention was, in 1912, more novel than it might sound for us today. The profound silence noted in this review was a sign of interest and a mark of respect from a disciplined audience who revered the artwork, attempting to discern in it the sublime mark of genius. As such, attention was important for the status of the art form – the connoisseur acted as the public peer review of appropriate behaviour in theatre, in the process delineating the high (art) from the low (entertainment).

This novel attention to dance as a composed art shows also in how critics described the work in unprecedented detail. Henri Bidou, the dramatic editor of *le Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* (10.6.1912), described these qualities in detail unprecedented in reviews of the Ballets Russes spectacles:

Ces nymphes marchent, s'arrêtent et demeurent immobiles. Comme les gestes, les actions sont nettes et nues. Le temps qui les sépare n'est pas occupé de transitions inutiles, et le passage de l'immobilité au mouvement est soudain. Soudain une troisième nymphe paraît, toujours en glissant de gauche à droite, comme dans les scènes d'ombres. Cette troisième figure a la tête et le corps de face, mais les jambes de profil; ces jambes sont pliées, les genoux à droite; le bras droit fait une ligne brisée au-dessus de la tête; et dansante, la nymphe rejoint en bondissant ses compagnes.

Bidou may have been responding to a negative review of the composition by Adolphe Jullien in the same journal (9.6.1912), but his review exemplifies how *Faune* encouraged a new style of writing about itself, rich in evocative description of the movement qualities of the work. Importantly, this change is equally apparent in negative reviews:

Mais pour un grand artiste, un parti pris, même absurde, est profitable en raison de la contrainte dont son invention est resserrée. De ces positions forcées son instinct a déduit des attitudes hardies et vraies, comme un poète habile trouve

dans la rime nécessaire le germe d'une pensée. On n'oublie pas ce corps tacheté par places en mémoire du primitif pelage, ces membres qui se plient dans la paresse d'une force inutile, cette convoitise élémentaire que détourne une timidité animale. Le seul défaut de ce poème plastique est d'avoir avec la musique un rapport si lointain, qu'à peine peut-on suivre l'un et l'autre à la fois. Quant aux jeunes femmes qui représentent les nymphes, leur effort est moins heureux: il importerait peu que la télégraphie de leurs bras demeurât inintelligible au spectateur, s'il n'était manifeste qu'elles n'y attachent elles-mêmes aucune signification, attentives seulement au signal convenu. D'ailleurs, le désir vain du Faune ne devait poursuivre que des chimères. (Laloy in *La Grande revue* 25.6.1912.)

Besides noting what was intelligible for the spectators, these descriptions are also noteworthy for the extent of emotional engagement shown in them by the members of the audience, encouraged by the generally slow pace of events on stage. *Faune* began with the leading character lying down, which was not a position from which great feats of physical prowess could be executed, and as if to emphasise this, the faun lay down or sat for about a half of the ballet's length.^{xlii} By contrast, Fokine had relied on the impression of speed, not on stillness; on jumps, not on gravity. Therefore, it is likely that at least in the first performances of the novelty the audience grew increasingly frustrated by the lack of action on-stage, which led to greater emphasis getting placed on the last action of the faun. This is attested by the affective release critics associated with the sole leap of the faun in [62]: "And during the whole ballet he made only one leap – only one! The effect of it was unforgettable." (Francis Toye in *The Bystander* 26.2.1913) "He leaps once. This one leap is a surprise and an illumination." (Capell in *The Daily Mail* 18.2.1913) Again, the stress placed on familiar, rapid movement (the leap) as something exceptional and positive would recur in the reviews of Nijinsky's 1913 choreographies.

Cubism

Together with the definition of *Faune* as a 'tableau chorégraphique' in the programme notes, the flatness of the stage space and the slow pace of the events evoked painting; whilst the aesthetic, variously described as "angular" (*The Athenaeum* 22.2.1913),

“hieratic” (*Comædia* 2.6.1912), or “contorted” (Samazeuilh in *Le Courrier Musical* 15.6.1912) associated this ‘painting’ specifically with what was called Post-Impressionist art. Retrospectively, it is impossible to ascertain whether there really were obvious affinities between contemporary painting and what was seen on stage or if the critics just saw the connection because they had been told to see it: as part of the advance publicity of the novelty, on 18th April 1912 the theatrical paper *Comædia* had headlined: “Nijinski va faire dans l’après-midi d’un Faune” des essais de chorégraphie cubiste”.

In 1912, Cubism was but one of several major trends in contemporary painting, and what made a work belong to this particular category was not entirely clear to most people (e.g. Apollinaire 2004, 52-59 included Marie Laurencin). Transplanting an aesthetic style from one medium to another further obscured the potential similarities or differences between the dancing and the styles of fine art lumped together as 'Post-Impressionism'. Although the label 'Cubism' ascribed certain meanings on to *Faune* and provoked critics to treat the work as Cubist, all of Nijinsky's choreographies were very consistently described as evoking (for better or worse) the same principles, similar structures, and matching feelings in the spectator as did contemporary painting – and these included accusations of lawlessness, foreignness, and degeneration.^{xliii}

Although in view of the lack of evidence it would be tenuous to claim Nijinsky was influenced by specific works by Cubists, Futurists, or others, it is equally improbable he would have tolerated the constant allusions to his style as Cubism had he utterly disliked this kind of art. In an interview published in *Peterburgskaya gazeta* 15./28.4.1912, Nijinsky explained that:

Мое произведение в сущности не балет. Это совершенно новая ритмическая музыкально-хореографическая композиция. Моя формула – строгая пластика, связанная с музыкою. Моя попытка заключается в желании отметить новый, любопытный этап в хореографии. Моя новая формула движения подчеркнет механизм жеста и линий. Я применил к хореографии теорию живописцев-кубистов.^{xliv}

The poor Russian balletomane reporting these views thought Nijinsky, the great classical dancer, could not have really thought through what it meant to do Cubism in ballet but had simply said what he had been told to say by his impresario. In reality, it

seems the impresario had his doubts, already in 1912, about the modernist aesthetic of *Faune* – by 4./17.6.1912, *Peterburgskii listok* reported Nijinsky and Diaghilev had fought over the work. These kinds of ‘insider information’ reports on the conflicts between the star and his impresario were to become increasingly frequent in 1913, culminating in Nijinsky’s dismissal (see e.g. *Peterburgskaia gazeta* cartoon of 3./16.9.1913; Stravinsky to Benois 20.9./3.10.1913 in Stravinsky 1997, ii:146-147).

Yet, to describe the similarities between *Faune* and Cubism as “le souci des dimensions, des plans successifs, de la vérité linéaire quasi-géométrique, qu’animeront, en la rehaussant, la couleur, les agréments et les émotions esthétiques” (*Comœdia* 18.4.1912) strikes remarkably close to the mark. What Cahusac (in *Le Figaro* 14.5.1913) reported Nijinsky as saying about how the choreographer manipulated the bodies of dancers as the Cubist painter the paint and canvas, also rings true. It seems the staged space of *Faune* did include significant similarities to the manner in which the Cubists constructed the picture space. The lack of a horizon in the backdrop, together with the lack of aerial aspirations in the choreography, created a sense of the events being decidedly grounded, spilling towards the spectator. The narrow space limited the movement into a linear grid, the flatness emphasised by the dancers’ posture that turned the upper body slightly towards the audience whilst retaining the face in profile.^{xlv} In order to increase the sense of flatness and solidity of the choreographic picture, surrounded by a separate frame inside the proscenium that limited the dimensions of the stage, Nijinsky stipulated the lighting to be such that no shadows would fall onto the backdrop (quoted in Guest & Jeschke 1991, 13). The lighting thus fused the object (dancer) with the background (décor) in a manner similar to the loss of volume in Cubist painting brought on by the distortions of light and perspective that made Cubism so difficult to grasp for pre-war audiences.^{xlvi}

Some problems emerged in actual production, however. Nijinsky was, first of all, not entirely happy with Bakst’s backdrop, claiming in his *Diary* that “Bakst failed to understand me.” (Nijinsky 1999, 203-204.) In his score, Nijinsky only indicated that the setting should be “a parched Greek summer landscape”, (quoted in Guest & Jeschke 1991, 13) without reference to a particular style or colour scale. Some contemporary reviews shared the choreographer’s discontent: Tugenkhold in *Apollon* 8/1910 had suggested that Bakst would have benefited as a colourist had he imitated Gauguin, but now, in *Apollon* 7/1912, he criticised the set for having too much detail, even if this was

“à la Gauguin”: “чисто графическія фигурь требовали такого же графическаго, нейтральнаго фона.” (i.e. “the pure graphic figures need something as graphic, a *neutral* background.”) Similarly, Anatoly Lunacharsky complained that a landscape was not at all what was needed:

У Нижинскаго же фономъ служилъ пейзажъ Бакста. Пейзажъ или даетъ иллюзію глубины, и тогда смѣшно видѣть канатное хожденіе фигуры, которымъ сценически, зрительно дано трехмѣрное пространство, или онъ не пейзажъ, а коверъ – и живописецъ, создавая его, самъ доженъ убивать перспективность.^{xlvii}

Whereas Cubist painting represented a super-real reality where all objects were depicted as if from all sides at once, in the three-dimensional art of dance, the flatness of the ‘stage picture’ similarly heightened awareness of art as fundamentally based on potentially changing conventions specific to the art form. In other words, in abandoning perspective or in superimposing moments in the picture space contemporary painters did not just distort objects – they revealed how realist modes of representation were all based on conventions not present in the art works of distant times or places. In a sense, the conventions of the old works became visible in the modernist works through their very absence.

If modernism is defined as the questioning of what is the given in the medium (i.e. asking what are the things essential for painting to be painting or dance to be dance, and whether these are essential (i.e. ontological) qualities or aesthetic preferences), we can explain the similarities between what was happening in Nijinsky's works and the works by contemporary artists with which they were constantly compared – for better or worse (e.g. Octave Mauss in *L'Art Moderne* 1.6.1913 quoted in Bullard 1971, ii:72-76; cf. Vuillermoz in *S.I.M. Revue musicale* June 1913). Simultaneously, however, the essence of modernism becomes not a presence but an absence: modernism is defined as that which it is not. This is echoed in the explicit denial of history in favour of the contemporary in the modernist aesthetic – a denial in which Nijinsky, too, engaged (quoted e.g. in *Le Figaro* 14.5.1913; and by Blanche in *La Revue de Paris* 1.12.1913). All of Nijinsky's works were set in periods with styles considered ‘eternal’ or particularly important for the development of modernist forms: archaic antiquity

(*Faune*), the future (*Jeux*), the primitive (*Le Sacre du Printemps*) and the medieval (*Till Eulenspiegel*, 1916).

Thus, the mythical setting of *Faune* did more than ensure that the new work was not too incongruous with the rest of the repertory, and that its innovative character could be comprehended through the familiar subject-matter. As myth, *Faune* acquired a kind of ahistoricity, its characters functioning as eternal symbols without a past, beyond the constraints of time and place that a mere narrative of Antiquity could have imposed on the work, in the manner of Fokine's *Daphnis et Chloë* (see e.g. Brussel in *Le Figaro* 10.6.1912; Gauthier-Villars in *Comœdia illustré* 15.6.1912). Besides stylisation and lack of narrative, the circularity of the events depicted strengthened this sense of ahistoricity: in the beginning and again in the end, the faun lay on his rock, alone on stage (Guest & Jeschke 1991, 33-34, 46, 58 plate 1 cf. 70 plates 41-42). This reflected the Debussy score, which starts with the solo flute that the faun was seen playing in the beginning of the ballet, and ends with a variation of the same theme. Notably, the last action of the faun took place to a diminuendo of the score, which further stressed the lack of melodrama in the work. This 'endless' structure created a sense of an extended present in the piece that several critics saw as making the work intensely contemporary and modern (e.g. *The World: A Journal for Men and Women* 1.7.1913; *Musical America* 18.11.1916; also Whitworth 1913, 66-67).

The treatment of the subject-matter and the lack of a melodramatic narrative made *Faune* thematically similar to the way many contemporary painters chose their subjects and even their materials from everyday life. Like much of Post-Impressionist art, this new dancing looked deceptively simple: whereas it is unlikely anyone in the audience had aspired to become another Nijinsky during *Le Spectre de la Rose*, his movements in *Faune* looked like something that anyone could do (an argument still heard in vulgar denunciations of contemporary art). By narrowing the distance between the Russian dancer and the spectator in this way, *Faune* pointed to how in contemporary aesthetics, the qualities required of staged movement differed from quotidian movement – the qualities of angularity, jerkiness and unnatural contortions often found in Nijinsky's choreography were also cited as qualities of modern movement outside of the stage:

the modern world has lost the old graceful motions natural to man in a less artificial state. The characteristic of natural movement is undulation. Waters, winds, trees, all living forms, obey a sovereign law of rhythm. Nature moves in

curves and graduations rather than by leaps and bounds. [- -] The dependence upon easy means of locomotion, the resort to labour-saving appliances, the endless dull circulation through the rigid streets, the long periods of inaction interrupted by sudden spells of haste, have quenched the old buoyant and even rhythms. Human motion nowadays tends to be not flowing but angular, jerky, abrupt, disjointed, full of gestures not flowing imperceptibly one into another, but broken off midway. (Flicht 1912, 103-104.)

For J.E. Crawford Flicht, the ‘true’ and ‘natural’ body had been lost. In direct contrast to modernist appraisal of the present, all contemporary life was ugly and bad; it could only be remedied by recourse to the transcendental (although for all but the very few, such glimpses of eternal truth were forever forbidden). Today’s body was burdened by modernity, from which it could be released by a new body culture, exemplified by free-form dance that evoked the eternal values of beauty and flow. The new body would not work in a factory but dance on an Arcadian field. Salvation lay in a return to ‘natural’ models, found either in ancient Greece or in barbarians/primitives whose art lay outside of history and artistic canons (Rhodes 1994, 7-22; Foster 1995). In both instances, dancing was quite simply expressive of the ‘natural’ body of the dancer, freed from the constraints of urban modernity and of academic conventions. This was not an art that looked forward but yearned for a return to the past, “a time when action was probably most pure, removed equally far from the rudeness of the savage and the inexpressiveness of the modern.” (Flicht 1912, 105.) For Flicht, as for others writing in a similar vein, dance was eternal and true and important precisely because it was not of the present. Not surprisingly, Flicht also protested against art addressing contemporary issues: “All dull things are trivial. Art which has only the interest of contemporary problems is ephemeral, for when the problem is solved, the interest vanishes.” (*Op.cit.* 23.)

By contrast, most people who defended Nijinsky’s choreographic style favoured the realist principles of art as needing to be relevant to contemporary life (see e.g. ‘One of the Public’ in a letter to *The Times* 1.8.1913). Geoffrey Whitworth (1913, 28-29) reproached those who thought that dancing:

is of the essence of freedom [- and that to -] restrain is to sterilise and to reduce the living body of man to nothing better than a mechanism of spring and steel.

[- -] As a matter of fact, a feeling for outline like Nijinsky's allows a far wider range of effect than that possible to a looser method; implies, too, the possession of a far surer and subtler intellectual faculty.

Although this kind of intellectualisation of the art of the genius is such a common trope it is somewhat suspect, this quote indicates how Nijinsky's interest in stylisation of movement (especially quotidian movement) sprang from a totally different body of work than Duncan's 'natural' gesture or Fokine's 'realism', both of which relied on a rhetoric of the 'free' and 'natural' body. Indeed, it took Jacques Rivière a year to come to terms with the idea that the movement of the dancer was a conventionalised composition rather than expression of liberty (*La Nouvelle Revue Française* July 1912 cf. August and November 1913).

The extent to which Nijinsky's approach differed from how his contemporaries conceived theatrical dancing to be is perhaps best indicated by the controversy around how his danced compositions related to the 'difficult' musical scores of Debussy, Stravinsky and Richard Strauss. According to Louis Schneider (in *Comœdia* 30.5.1912), the exact relationship between the music and the choreography was one reason why *Faune* was no longer dance to dance aficionados:

[I]l a attaché un geste à chaque syllabe de l'orchestre de M. Debussy. Les 'balletomanes' vous diront que ce n'est pas de la danse; les personnages, en effet, ne se livrent pas à des gestes arrondis, à des poses plastiques, à ces incertitudes délicieuses qui font le mérite des mouvements du ballet convenu.

This points to how Nijinsky's manner of designing dance required an understanding of music as more than a tune with a 'danceable' beat, as for example Lydia Sokolova (1998, 146) claims dancers thought of music at the time. Although the system of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze may nowadays be seen as a major influence on Nijinsky's choreographic style, Dalcroze seems to have been incapable of thinking movement in counterpoint to music, and he considered *Faune* a mismatch of music and movement (letter to Stravinsky 7.1.1913 in Stravinsky 1984, 77-79; see also McGinness 1996, esp. 49-50). As Hofmannsthal (1968, 146) noted, the relationship of dancing and music was far more complex in *Faune* than in works like *Carnaval* where dancers seemingly improvised to the music. Although it is unlikely that the choreographic notation score of *Faune* was what was executed on stage in 1912,^{xlviii} it is intriguing that Nijinsky

sometimes wrote a dancer ‘slipping’ from the musical beat, adding to the temperament of the character: in [39-43] the fourth nymph – the smallest and youngest of the group – wanders off and forgets what she is supposed to be doing, then hurries to catch up with her companions (Guest & Jeschke 1991, 37-38). In this moment, the music becomes an ideal that the reality does not quite fulfil.

Sokolova (1998, 146) attested that *Faune* was indeed difficult to learn, “But once you mastered it, and you could hear yourself, or feel yourself dancing in sound, it was the most delightful thing to dance in that you could possibly imagine.” With *Le Sacre du Printemps*, Nijinsky’s choreography apparently revealed the possibilities of this kind of composition, and his treatment of musical rhythms in particular found favour with such Russian critics as the former Director of the Imperial Theatres, Prince Volkonsky (Volkonsky 1914, esp. 42-51). This is important, since one of the principle objections against *Faune* had been that its stylisation was too specific to this one work and could not, like ‘new ballet’ more generally, become the foundation of a new art (e.g. Tugenkhold in *Apollon* 7/1912). For various historical reasons, Tugenkhold ended up being correct: Nijinsky’s aesthetic never formed a new style of dancing, perhaps because it was too difficult to be practical. Years later, both musicians and dancers complained of how Nijinsky had unduly complicated their work with his demands (e.g. Cocteau 1918, 65-66; Ansermet quoted in Haskell 1955, 269; Stravinsky 1975, 40-41, 47-49).

Some Conclusions

Faune contested the expectations of its audiences in several, historically specific ways. At a time when cubism was but one controversial style in contemporary art, what it might mean in dance and how this dance could then be discussed was still undetermined and in flux. For many commentators on both sides of the footlights, the work was quite simply strange. Members of the audience and of the company both had to come to terms with a new kind of signification: in *Faune*, the meaning of the action was no longer either in a plot or in harmonious, graceful beauty but in the complex set of allusions built in the specific, conventionalised gestures of the ballet, emphasised in the bas-relief design and displaced moments of stillness.

With this self-proclaimed modernism, trench-lines familiar from contemporary discussion on avant-garde painting emerge in the context of dance. The explicitly racist arguments about the Russians' dancing as evidence of degeneration and dangerous foreign influences on one hand; and on the other, the rhetoric about daring innovation of the artist facing a group of conservative philistines sheltering behind their notions of taste to hide their incomprehension. For the former group, many of the virtues of the Russian Ballet became vices in the hands of the star dancer, but few of them were yet willing to denounce Nijinsky's authority in his art form. This generation of critics remembered all too well the condemnation of impressionist painting or of Wagner's music (see e.g. 'L.H.' in *Comœdia* 2.6.1912 comparing the reception of *Faune* to that of Hugo's *Hernani*, Wagner's *Lohengrin*, and Ibsen's plays). Simultaneously, the latter group could hardly be accused of vanguard innovation in either their rhetoric or their aesthetic preferences – *Faune* was defended by people with solid artistic reputations (like Rodin and Redon), not by the still emerging authorities defending Cubism or other radical styles of contemporary art.

The scandal affected the reputation of both the star and the company during the 1912 season, and it also had a definite impact on the reception of Nijinsky's 1913 works, *Jeux* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. It also filled the coffers: Diaghilev had taken a large bank loan to guarantee the success of his lover's choreographic début (Garafola 1992, 187-188), and the scandal meant sold-out performances. To milk it for all that it was worth, *Faune* was given extra performances at the expense of another novelty, *Daphnis et Chloë* to the specially commissioned music by Maurice Ravel (Fokine 1961, 201-215 claimed Diaghilev deliberately plotted to ruin *Daphnis* to favour Nijinsky's *Faune*; NYPLDC Astruc papers). This angered the ballet-master responsible for the choreography, Mikhail Fokine, who promptly left the company. In 1914, after Diaghilev had dismissed Nijinsky and dropped all of his choreographies from the repertory, Fokine's return was not a success and Diaghilev was increasingly accused of cowardice (e.g. Rivière in *La Nouvelle revue française* July 1914; Inkster in *The New Statesman* 4.7.1914; *The English Review* July 1914). Obligated to hire his former lover for the 1916 tour of the United States, Diaghilev's professional image received another blow when Americans took to Nijinsky and his latest novelty, *Till Eulenspiegel*. After yet another parting of the ways, the impresario seems to have made a conscious decision not to promote Nijinsky's choreographic work, even to label it aesthetically unviable.

It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that *Faune* has been attributed to Diaghilev's search for shocking novelty.

To contest the frequently-used aphorism, the separation of the dancer from the dance is crucial to the shift of dance authorship to the choreographer. Individual expression had been the key constituent of genius since Romanticism – the genius, in effect, existed in the sincere and original expression of the artist, because the genius transmitted the message of transcendental truth by means intelligible enough to his audience. The dance could not become the expression of the genius of the composer of the dance until the dance was both the primary focus of the spectacle and something conceived of as independent of the expression of the individual dancer. As in classical music, the finished composition thus reflected the genius no matter who performed it, although the message of the genius could be obscured by bad execution. Perhaps more so than through its formal differences, *Faune* was a significant work because it emphasised the choreographer as the absent author of dance. Precisely because critics had to come to terms with the new 'angular' aesthetic, with new kinds of relations between the musical score and the bodies of the dancers performing on stage, or with the absences of plot and virtuosity, the rhetoric used for dance took a decidedly formal turn. In comparison to how little Western reviews have left us of the choreographic designs of the works in which Nijinsky had become famous as a dancer, *Faune* was described in great detail, analysed in different frameworks, and represented in contexts previously marginalised in the reception of the Ballets Russes. Yet, its significance was finally only realised in conjunction with subsequent works by this new author and those who followed – canons, after all, are always constructed retrospectively.

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- ⁱ See e.g. Kirstein 1971, 199; similarly, Garafola 1992, 62; Hanna 1988, 184-185; Acocella 1987, 66-70.
- ⁱⁱ See e.g. *S.I.M. Revue musicale* June 1912 on *Faune* as led by Nijinsky's ideas vs. *Daphnis et Chloë* as a collaboration; similarly, Miomandre 1913, 7.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Besides numerous references in dance works such as Marie Chouinard's *La Faune* (1987), or Douglas Wright's *Faun Variations* (1987), *Faune* has acquired a place in popular culture. Celebrities from Rudolph Valentino (Trimborn 2000, 18-20) to Freddie Mercury (in the Queen video *I Want to Break Free* of 1984, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hMrY8jysdg> esp. c. 2:07-3:07) and Evgeni Plushenko (in his 2003-2004 free skating programme, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zeons6QmeHM> esp. 2:10-2:18) have played at being Nijinsky's faun.
- ^{iv} Dancers were generally spoken of as the "creators" of particular parts, to the extent of being credited for composing what we would understand as formal, choreographic qualities of these parts. See e.g. Nijinsky spoken of as "le rénovateur de l'art chorégraphique russe" in *Comœdia* 7.6.1911; similarly, *The Daily Mail* 23.6.1911. This is apparently why Mauclair, quoted below, spoke of *Faune* as only one of Nijinsky's many creations.
- ^v See e.g. *Comœdia illustré* 15.5.1912 and 1.6.1912 on *Faune*.
- ^{vi} Nijinsky's scenario, reproduced in Guest & Jeschke 1991, 14, differs from this one in emphasis.
- ^{vii} *Le Gaulois* did produce a review 4.6.1912, claiming the ending had been sufficiently changed. Also e.g. *La Liberté* 2.6.1912 agreed with Calmette.
- ^{viii} Hôtel Biron, where Rodin's studio was located, had been a Catholic school for girls until 1905. Calmette accused Rodin for living there at the taxpayers' expense despite being the richest of French sculptors, which caused an uproar in Rodin's favour that eventually led to conversion of the Hôtel Biron into the Musée Rodin in 1919. See *Le Figaro* 31.5. and 2.6.1912. According to *Current Literature* August 1912, *Gil Blas* in particular campaigned for Rodin; also *The New York Times* 3.6. and 9.6.1912; Newton 1989, 102-103.
- ^{ix} *The Bystander* 26.2.1913 noted that baron de Meyer's photographs of *Faune* were exhibited in the passage around the stalls.
- ^x The cover of *The Sketch* 26.6.1912 headlined: "Bakst's design for the costume (sic) worn by Nijinsky as the Faun in 'L'Après-midi d'un Faune.'" The '(sic)' implies this was not a costume. See also *Rampa i zhizn* 3./16.6.1912 caricature of Nijinsky; and *Pittsburgh Gazette* 5.6.1912 "Wicked Paris Shocked At Last" in NYPLDC Nijinsky Clippings.
- ^{xi} Theatrical scandals were actually quite commonplace in Paris: e.g. the review of *Faune* and Regnault's *Salomé* in *La Nouvelle revue française* July 1912 was titled "Deux récentes scandales". Also Blanche in *Revue de Paris* 1.12.1913.
- ^{xii} See also Benois (on Nijinsky's costume in *Giselle*) quoted in Wiley 1979/1980, 177. It is also noteworthy that the Châtelet had been a variety theatre prior to the extensive repairs Diaghilev conducted for his first ballet season in 1909. *Rampa i akter* 17./30.5.1909; Haskell 1955, 208. In December 1916, *The Theatre* parodied the immorality of *Faune* in a cartoon where a variety artist gets booted out of a Broadway show after giving it as an "artistic" encore. Again, the construction of the Ballets Russes as a 'high' art in contrast to the 'low' entertainment of variety theatres deserves more attention.
- ^{xiii} My discussion on cultural ownership has been particularly informed by Lawrence Levine 1988 and Pierre Bourdieu 1995.
- ^{xiv} Although authors' statements are always suspect, Nijinsky was very consistent in his protests that "M. Calmette a vu de la pornographie là où jamais, – jamais, je vous le jure, – je n'ai eu la moindre intention équivoque, la moindre pensée tendancieuse." Interview in *L'Intransigeant* 13.6.1912. Similarly, *Je Sais Tout* November 1912; *Pall Mall Gazette* 15.2.1913; Nijinsky 1999, 203-204.
- ^{xv} "No doubt the image is daring, perhaps answering [our] understanding of the fauns of Antiquity, but no doubt it is pornographic only to the lustful imagination, in contrast to Nijinsky's naive, honest depiction of something that 99 out of a hundred young men have got themselves acquainted with." Minsky in *Utro Rossii* 24.5./6.6.1912.
- ^{xvi} 'Philistine' was specifically Matthew Arnold's term for people who did not understand art. It was used to connote people who did not understand art or hindered true genius by promoting mediocre artists.
- ^{xvii} Foucault 1990, 104, 153; Rosario 1995.
- ^{xviii} As Goering 2003, 35-46 notes, in Russia, 'degeneration' was linked more with moral and social rather than biological decline, and as such, held particular significance in the discourse on the future path of Russia. In the last decades of the tsarist era, sexual acts and relationships were not, as in the West, about heredity and health (of the individual or the class) but about the individual's character and morals, and therefore discussed in terms of religious sin or moral character, especially when the transgression involved abuse of superior class position. Unlike in a discourse of 'sexuality', in Russia, a homosexual encounter in a bath-house was reproachful on the same terms as abuse of superior class position or sex

between spouses during Lent, even if of these, only *muzhelostvenno* (usually interpreted as ‘anal intercourse between men’) was also illegal. *Muzhelostvenno* was notoriously difficult to prove when medical evidence was not considered admissible in court. Engelstein 1992; Healey 2001; Sharp 1993; Neuberger 1998, esp. [43].

^{xix} The expression is from E.M. Forster’s *Maurice*, written in 1913 and circulated amongst the Bloomsbury group, although published only posthumously. See e.g. Ledger & Luckhurst 2000, 313-314n3. Greek and Roman props and garb were used in some of the first self-representations of homosexuals, such as the photographs of Wilhelm von Gloeden, or the homosexual rights publication *Der Eigene* (established 1896). Dyer 1993, 26-29. One of the signs of ‘inversion’ was masturbation.

^{xx} *The New York Sun* 23.4.1916 made the connection of *Narcisse* with self-love clear by citing Reginald Bunthorne from the Gilbert and Sullivan hit *Patience or Bunthorne’s Bride* (1881). In its entirety, the passage from *Patience* goes: “And everyone will say, / As you walk your flowery way, / “If he’s content with a vegetable love which would certainly not suit *me*, / Why, what a most particularly pure young man this pure young man must be!” Gilbert 1994, 165.

^{xxi} I am grateful to Debra Sowell for pointing my attention to the scarf dance trope in e.g. *La Sylphide* in her presentation and our conversations at the SDHS conference 2008. Regardless of authorial intention, French audiences seem to have read the nymph’s abandoned dress in this tradition. Guest & Jeschke 1991, 180-181 have changed Nijinsky’s wording from ‘dress’ to ‘veil’. Lists of ballets in which Nijinsky performed (including leading roles he took) whilst at the Imperial Theatres are available in the *Ezhegodniki Imperatorskikh Teatrov*, 1907-1911. These include *Esmeralda*. However, I am wary at creating any lines of influence between particular nineteenth-century ballets and Nijinsky’s works, because in the past, Nijinsky fans have read such tenacious suggestions as solid facts.

^{xxii} As Said 1995, 1-42, 58-67, 96-104 has shown, Orientalism is a process of pointing to the Other’s Otherness as a justification for political domination and cultural appropriation. It functions much like the us/them dichotomies of primitivism and nationalism (where the self cannot exist without the Other that determines what it is not). In an Europe preparing for a major imperialist war, these notions quickly became blurred as nation became race (i.e. something biological) and culture an indication of the destiny of this nation/race. On civilisation as somehow inimical to nature, see e.g. Rosario 1995; Rhodes 1994, esp.13-38; Beddow 1989, 99-105. On Russians represented as primitives, savages, barbarians, and Orientals see e.g. Daugny in *La Nouvelle revue* 15.9.1911; *The Illustrated London News* 25.5.1912; Flitch 1912, 130; and finally, Nordau 1993, 145-147 on Tolstoy. Also e.g. Williams 1999, *passim*, esp. 25-43, 253 on the repercussions of this association of Russia with the Orient.

^{xxiii} See e.g. *Comœdia* 20.5.1909: “un *ah!* de stupeur éblouie s’échappa des poitrines de femmes”. The complexities involved in the gendering of the audience of the Russian Ballet by contemporary dance critics on one hand and in reminiscences on the other really merits an article of its own, particularly because of the cultural differences between Russia, France, England and the United States, prior to and after the First World War. As Henson 2007, 8 notes, this kind of gendering was typical of opera and ballet reviews in the nineteenth century; Berlanstein 2001, esp. 6-7 on French public discourse on theatre as a male domain.

^{xxiv} André Suarès in *La Nouvelle revue française* August 1912. Similarly, Louis Laloy in *La Grande revue* 10.6.1909; Henri Ghéon in *La Nouvelle revue française* August 1910 and August 1911.

^{xxv} See e.g. Whitworth 1913, esp. 25-26; also e.g. Oskar Kokoschka in a letter to Romola Nijinsky 30.11.1973 quoted in Nectoux 1990, 44 on touching Nijinsky; Lieven 1973, 353 relegates the physical exercise “In a corner in the shadows at the back of the stage”. On the explicit gendering of genius as male creation, see Battersby 1994.

^{xxvi} Stories of Nijinsky failing in his final examinations first appear as a part of the advance publicity given to the dancer in 1909: *Le Figaro* 15.5.1909 ridiculed the idea that in Russia, a failure in an exam on religious history actually mattered to the career of such a prodigy; also e.g. *Le Théâtre* 15.5.1911 gave the story as an example of Russian despotism, not – as later authorities have wished to see it – as proof that Nijinsky was slow-witted.

^{xxvii} E.g. *Comœdia* 14.2.1911; *Le Matin* 14.2.1911 drew this assumption from Nijinsky’s dismissal from the Imperial Theatres; Flitch 1912, 129-130, 154-155 on the Ballets Russes as “dangerous innovators whom the intransigent conservatives had expelled as hastily as if they had been political agitators”. On the tropes of the virtuoso, the genius and the connoisseur, see Bernstein 1998, 6, 10-15, 17; Schonberg 1988, 120-138; Lehmann & Ericsson 1998, esp. 70-72, 76-77.

^{xxviii} On two-dimensionality as a breach of ballet aesthetic, see Jeschke & Guest 1992, 88; Accocella 1987, esp. 52.

^{xxix} E.g. *Pall Mall Gazette* 18.2.1913; Johnson 1913, 186; Propert 1972, 77. However, Larionov’s famous story (see e.g. Kirstein 1971, 199; Buckle 1993, 185) of Nijinsky mixing up the galleries in the Louvre seems to have been born after the event as a justification for the basic posture: Nectoux 1990, 20-21

the falsity of this record; also Kirstein 1975, 125 on how Nijinsky was quite familiar with the Mariinsky 'Egyptian' style.

^{xxx} In the old Stepanov dance notation – like in theatrical scripts in general – all action was conceived from the perspective of the stage, the audience placed up in the stage drawings. See Guest & Jeschke 1991, 145-146, who, however, still draw their stage directions the old way; cf. Nijinsky reproduced in *op.cit.* 9-10, 15-16; cf. Gorsky 1978, esp. 19, 70.

^{xxx1} Years later, Ida Rubinstein told Nijinska that she had refused the role of the Chief Nymph because “there was not a single natural movement, not one single comfortable step on the stage. [- -] Nijinsky wanted the impossible. If I had submitted to his direction I would have dislocated every joint in my body”. Quoted in Nijinska 1992, 406fn*, see also 428. Sokolova 1960, 40-41 agrees.

^{xxx2} Baron de Meyer took a series of photographs of Nijinsky in *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*, most of which were published as a book in 1913. The images in this are reproduced in order in Jean Michel Nectoux (ed.): *Nijinsky. Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune*. Thames and Hudson, London 1990 (1989), 65-96.

^{xxx3} It seems that Nijinsky, too, noticed the incongruence between the intimate dance and the huge stage, for 27.1.1913 he wrote to Gabriel Astruc requesting the plans for the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Perhaps because he had performed on such different stages on tour, Nijinsky paid unprecedented attention to the dimensions of the stage in his notation for *Faune*: the set was to be 8 feet by 40 (2 by 11 metres), and he also identified the exact dimensions of the dirigible – the rock upon which the faun was to lie – because the faun had to step up and down in time to the music. Guest & Jeschke 1991, 15-16. NYPLDC Astruc Papers; also Nijinska 1992, 316 on the first rehearsals.

^{xxx4} After the upheavals of the 1905 Revolution, many Russian artists turned to neo-classicism. Bakst had been very interested in Archaic Greece (sixth century B.C.) ever since his visit to Knossos, and he had depicted the period in his paintings, e.g. *Terror Antiquus* (1908). Besides Yevreinov's Ancient Theatre, *Apollon* and Acmeism discussed below, even in kustar crafts neo-classical models began to dominate production from around 1910 onwards. Salmond 1996, 173-174; Segel 1993, 98-109; Pyman 1994, *passim*; Scholl 1994, 50-53, 75-76, 106-109; also Acocella 1984, 291-292n49; Jeschke 1990, 97.

^{xxx5} Minsky in *Utro Rossii* 24.5./6.6.1912; Scholl 1994, 106-112, esp. 106-109 on acmeism. Bartlett 1995, 71 on acmeists finding Wagner cumbersome; and Mandelstam quoted in Petrov 1992, 54: “the everyday is the death of plot”.

^{xxx6} Independently of these Russians, this claim has been taken up by Garafola 1992, 52-56, 74; cf. Hodson 1985, 110 reverses the direction of influence but provides no sources why she should. Meyerhold was in Paris in May 1913 for the opening of Ida Rubinstein's *La Pisanelle*, but there is no record of him ever seeing any of the Nijinsky ballets. Braun 1995, 126, also 172-177.

^{xxx7} Braun 1995, 35 quoting Meyerhold, for whom stylisation meant “to employ every possible means of expression in order to reveal the inner synthesis of that period or phenomenon”. In *Hedda Gabler* (1906), although the stage was foreshortened (to ten meters by four), the actors performed as if in three-dimensional space. In *Sister Beatrice* (1906), where stylised movement was present, the orchestra-pit was covered by a forestage on which most of the action took place, i.e. the stage was connected to the audience. *Op. cit.*, *passim*, esp. 52-60 on these productions. Also Segel 1993, 50-146; Slonim 1963, esp. 207-226; Golub 1999; Tjalsma 1976; Souritz 1999; and Garafola 1998, 9-11 on theatre directors' interest in plasticity and the links between dance and theatre in Russian cabarets.

^{xxx8} Maurice Touchard in *La Nouvelle revue* 1.7.1913. This is a review of both *Sacre* and *Jeux*. Also Blanche in *La Revue de Paris* 1.12.1913.

^{xxx9} Guest & Jeschke 1991, 147, 162-166, 175. Hodson 1990, 65, cf. 109n31 quotes Raymond Drey for *The New Weekly* 23.5.1914 speculating that were *Sacre* to be halted at any given moment, it would reveal the significance of each group to the general design.

^{x1} Gorsky 1978, 21: “strictly speaking, we do not notate the movements of the human body; we notate precisely only the poses, that is, the extreme points of each given movement.”

^{x2} Guest & Jeschke 1991, 35, 40; Brewster & Jacobs 1997, esp. 29-38; and Singer 2001, 41-42 on immobility as heightening device. Even Fokine 1961, 208-209 had to admit Nijinsky's use of stillness was very brave. This contradicts his claims *op.cit.* 206-209 that there was nothing innovative in *Faune*.

^{x3} I.e. the faun does move, but he does not really stand up on his hillock until [37]-[38]. In [42]-[43] he descends to the floor-level. In [100]-[101] he climbs back up and sinks slowly down in bar [102]. Guest & Jeschke 1991, 33-46. Also Weinstock 1982, 82 quoting Stravinsky on how an audience would get restless after about 40 seconds of nothing happening.

^{x4} In the City of the Revolution, avant-garde painting was perceived to be the domain of foreign nationals who came to Paris to revolt against conventions in their respectable art forms. By 1912, this was seen as a definite threat to French culture, and theories of degeneration, fears of military invasion and conservative aesthetics boiled down to a potent concoction used to attack modernism in all art forms. E.g. Touchard in *La Nouvelle revue* 1.7.1913; *The Daily Mail* 12.7.1913; *The Sketch* 26.6.1912, and

23.7.1913 used contemporary painting as a means to attack Nijinsky's choreographic work; cf. attacks on the Salon d'Automne of 1912 by Léon Werth in *La Grande revue* 25.10.1912; or "Il faut défendre l'Art français" in *Le Monde illustré* October 1912. The same argument made in music by Jean Celte in *La Nouvelle revue* 15.5.1912. Stansky 1997, esp. 214 quoting *The Times*, 220 quoting Ricketts, 232-236; Hynes 1969, 324-348.

^{xliv} "My work is not, in fact, ballet. It is really a new rhythmic musico-choreographic composition. My formula [consists of] a rigorous plastique tied to the music. My attempt includes a welcome to signify new, interesting stage in the development of choreography. My new formula of movement emphasises the mechanism of gesture and line. I apply to choreography the theory of Cubist painters". Nijinsky in *Peterburgskaya gazeta* 15./28.4.1912 quoted in Zilberstein & Samkov 1982, i:448. See also Whitworth 1913, 83; according to Berg 1988, 25, Eugène Belville in *Art et industrie* Septembre 1913 quoted Nijinsky saying: "Je ferai de l'art cubiste."

^{xliv} In the Nijinsky score, the movements seem not at all artificial in turnout or tension: it is quite natural for the body to turn when the arms are swung in opposite directions. Guest 2000, 80-82. As Sokolova 1998, 146; and Nijinska 1992, 316 stated, any tension in execution of the movements actually breaks the delicate line of movement.

^{xlvi} These were the dangers that e.g. Jacques Rivière saw in Cubism, because the attempt to show the object as it really was (from all sides) could lead to an impossibility to discern between the objects in the two-dimensional picture. See "Sur les tendances actuelles de la peinture" (1912) in Rivière 1999, 293-306.

^{xlvii} "Bakst's landscape functions as Nijinsky's background. Landscape either gives an illusion of depth, and then it is funny to see a string of figures passing through it, because theatrically, the spectator is distant from the three-dimensional space, or it [should be] not a landscape [at all] but a carpet – and the painter, in creating it, should have murdered perspective." Lunacharsky in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 15.6./28.6.1912. Similarly Propert 1972, 77: "If it was only doubtfully legitimate, there was a grave enchantment about it that disarmed criticism, and if the scenery had been schematized in like fashion we should have accepted without reserve the singular beauty of this surprising ballet".

^{xlviii} E.g. Jeschke 1990, 104 thinks the rhythmic structure of the notation is so complex that it seems likely Nijinsky must have elaborated it somewhat from the staged productions. Also e.g. Rambert 1974 on Nijinsky's demands for precision as extraordinary.