**Bunster, Patricio (b. 19 October, 1924, Santiago, Chile; d. 24 September, 2006, Santiago, Chile)**

**Summary**

Patricio Bunster’s career was emblematic of a Latin-American engagement with European modernism and unique in its exchange with German modern dance (*Ausdruckstanz*). Trained in Chile by immigrant German members of Kurt Jooss’s company, Bunster merged a local vocabulary with globalized movements—such as modern dance vocabulary derived from *Ausdruckstanz* and ballet—with the goal of restructuring existing nationally defined movement. This merger was utopian in its rethinking of national culture towards a global artistic expression. Such a utopian understanding of the capacity of movement as a global unifier and transformer recalled early modern dance's vision for a changed world through corporeal awareness and choreographed emancipation. Influenced by Laban as well as Jooss and Leeder, Bunster observed and deployed movement found in manual labour, leisure, daily rituals, nature, and the structure of architecture. In Bunster's opinion, all of these sources carried traces of future choreographies that could express a new transnational, (Latin) American, and utopian society. Different utopian models, such as the radical rethinking of political structures through a breakdown of the barrier between art and life or the embracing of technology in relation to design for the bettering of society were at the core of modernist conviction that the world needed to be fundamentally changed.

For Bunster, any utopia was decisively political and he always emphasized the political function of dance. With the Ballet Nacional Chileno and later the dance company Espiral, he brought dance to remote rural provinces of Chile, constantly providing access to dance for diverse audiences through pre- and post-performance discussions and consequently expanding dance into all strata of society.

**Early Life and Training**

While finishing his degree in architecture at the University of Chile in the late 1930s, Bunster saw Kurt Jooss’ company perform during its Latin American tour. Inspired, Bunster began dance training with Ernst Uthoff, Lola Botka, and Rudolf Pescht, all former members of Jooss’ company who were offered work in Chile after they were stranded there during the Second World War in 1941. Bunster danced in Uthoff’s productions for the dance ensemble and in the National Ballet Company in modern versions of *Coppelia* and *Don Juan*. Jooss was invited by Uthoff to teach and choreograph in Santiago from 1947 to 1949 and Bunster danced major roles in Jooss’ most important works: *Der Grüne Tisch* (*The Green Table*), *Großstadt* (*Big City*), *Pavane* (*Pavane on the Death of an Infanta*), *Ball in Alt-Wien* (*Ball in Old Vienna*), and *Jugend* (*Youth*), the latter specifically created for the ensemble.

**Major Contributions to the Field and to Modernism**

After Jooss returned to Essen in 1949, he asked Bunster to join the Jooss Company in West Germany in 1951. Although the company unexpectedly disbanded while on tour in England in 1953, Bunster stayed in the UK to study with Leeder, thus deepening his understanding of Jooss and Leeder’s movement system and Laban’s theories. Bunster returned to Chile in 1954 and eventually asked Leeder to develop a new curriculum for the dance department of the university emphasizing further the Jooss-Leeder System and extending the impact of Ausdruckstanz in Chile. At that point, the department served not only as a conservatory for dancers, but also as an interdisciplinary institute for research and for the education of choreographers and dance teachers. The institute’s research was based on Jooss and Leeder’s system of investigating human movement determined less by a single dance style and more by an inquiry into the most appropriate vocabulary for a specific choreography. Those formalist analyses were truly modernist in their emphasis of technique and abstraction, yet they utilized vocabulary towards symbolic representations.

In his own choreographies, Bunster often emphasized Chilean or Latin American culture in both the themes of the dances and the used vocabulary. For instance, his 1959 choreography *Calaucán* (*Rebellious Bud*) reflected this search for a Latin American identity by embracing a pan-American leitmotif and abstracted Latin American folk vocabulary. Based on Neruda's Canto general, it depicted the fight of the indigenous people against the Spanish conquistadores using imagery and movement from Aztec, Mayan, and Inca cultures. The abstraction of pre-Columbian movement stood not only in line with a familiar Western modernist appropriation of the primitive but also localized the choreography inside a unique Latin American modernism. Bunster continued his search for a Latin American—and specifically Chilean—cultural expression through dance in all his subsequent works. In *Catrala desciende* (*The Descent of Catrala*) from 1969, Bunster abstracted a Chilean legend into a highly symbolic and visually arresting dance of one woman with three men—a priest, a slave, and a nobleman—to reflect on sources of cruelty in all classes and in the oligarchy in past and contemporary Chile. The piece exclusively employed abstract female vocals composed by Luciano Berio that together with the surprisingly modern movement vocabulary lent the piece a contemporary feel.

Together with the communist folk singer Victor Jara, Bunster also created mass dance and theatre spectacles in the national stadium in Santiago leading up to Salvador Allende's election in 1970 and during the three years of his presidency. Following the Pinochet coup in 1973, Bunster had to immigrate to East Germany, where he eventually taught at the Palucca School and successfully choreographed several works. By 1985 when Bunster was finally allowed to return to Chile, he had trained a new generation of dancers and choreographers in East Germany and reintroduced them to a lost part of the *Ausdruckstanz* tradition. His pupils became influential dancers, pedagogues, and choreographers in East Germany and, after 1990, in the united Germany, such as Susanna Borchers and Stephan Thoss. Upon his return to Chile in 1985, Bunster continued his work with *Ausdruckstanz* vocabulary at the dance center Espiral, which he cofounded with Joan Jara at the Universidad Academia de Humanismo Cristiano until he died in 2006.

**List of works**

*Bastián y Bastiana* (1956)

*Elegia* (1957)

*Calaucán* (1959)

*Surazo* (1963)

*UKA-ARA* (*Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1963)

*Capicúa 7/4* (1964)

*El Visitante* (1964)

*Las Tres Caras dela Luna* (1965)

*Amatorias* (1966)

*Agresión* (1966)

*La Silla Vacia* (1967)

*Catrala Desciende* (1969)

*Canciones de la Guerra Patria* (with Victor Jara, 1972)

*Congress of the Chilean Communist Youth Organization* (with Victor Jara, 1973)

*Chile saluda Pablo Neruda* (with Victor Jara, 1973)

*Los Siete Estados* (1973, but never premiered)

*Trotz alledem – Venceremos* (*A pesar de Todo*, 1975)

*Capicúa 7/4* (new version, 1976)

*Leuchten wird mein Schatten* (1979)

*Tui sum* (1980)

*Meister Antonio und seine Schüler* (1981)

*Gruß an Amadeus* (1982)

*… den wir haben nur ein Leben* (*Porque tenemos solo mia vida*, 1984)

*Aurora* (1987)

*Vindicación de la Primavera* (*Le Sacre du Printemps*, new version, 1987)

*Caras más Caras* (1988)

*Pobladora* (1987)

*Dos Aminos* (1987)

*Poema 15* (1987)

*El Diario de la Tia Solferina* (1988)

*Basta* (1988)

*Tocallas* (1989)

*Los Palomos* (1990)

*La Araucana* (1992)

*El Mundo es un Pañuelo* (with Jorge Guerra, 1992)

*Pequeña cantata de los poetas chilenos* (no year)

*Cuartel Terranova* (no year)

*Ventoleras* (2005)

*Danzando con Victor* (2005)

**References and Further Reading**

Borchers, Susanne. (1994) ‘In Bewegung denken: Zur Arbeit mit Patricio Bunster.’ *Tanzforschung* 5: 133-36. (Borchers provides an account of her work with Bunster during his exile in East Germany and their development of a modern teaching exercise.)

Giersdorf, Jens Richard. (2013) *The Body of the People: East German Dance since 1945*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press. (In the last chapter of the book, Giersdorf explores the complex intersection of Bunster’s immigration with the diaspora of German modern dance before and after the Second World War as sites for visionary utopian imaginations and regional and global critiques.)

Kant, Marion. (1998) ‘Dance in Exile: The Latin American Connection’ in *Performance Research* 3, no. 1: 32-42. (Kant examines how migration of artists between Europe and Latin- America shaped modern dance.)

Kühl, E. (1990) *Patricio Bunster: Wege—Begegnungen*. Berlin: Akademie der Künste, Sektion Darstellende Kunst. (Kühl provides the first comprehensive account of Bunster’s career until 1990, with a strong focus on his time in East Germany.)

Winkler, E. (1994) ‘Ausdruckstanz in der DDR’, in *Tanzforschung* 5: 53-58. (Winkler situates Bunster’s work in relationship to the repression of German modern dance in East Germany.)

**Moving Image Material:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQAUaz39lwA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSNNjstuy7s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YV4LAqqIY5k>

**Paratextual Material:**

Fig. # 1

Caption Patricio Bunster rehearsing ‘Trotz Alledem-Venceremos” with students of the Palucca School, Dresden, 1975

Credit Language Photo: Erich Höhne, Dresden, Tanzarchiv Leipzig e.V.

Modifications and Restrictions none

Preferred Orientation normal

Submission Format tif

File Name (if you are submitting the illustration digitally) tal\_010.tif

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Fig. # 2

Caption ‘Trotz Alledem-Venceremos” Choreography: Patricio Bunster, Palucca School Dresden, 1975

Credit Language Photo: Erich Höhne, Dresden, Palucca Hochschule für Tanz Dresden

Modifications and Restrictions none

Preferred Orientation normal

Submission Format jpg

File Name (if you are submitting the illustration digitally) A1975\_Bunster\_Venceremos\_1200dpi.jpg

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Fig. # 3

Caption Patricio Bunster teaching male students at the Palucca School Dresden, 1982

Credit Language Photo: Erich Höhne, Deutsche Fotothek

Modifications and Restrictions none

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Fig. # 4

Caption Patricio Bunster in conversation with Gret Palucca at the Palucca School Dresden, 1982

Credit Language Photo: Erich Höhne, Deutsche Fotothek

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