**Ausdruckstanz, flourished 1910-1950 in German-speaking Europe**

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## Summary

The term *Ausdruckstanz* became common usage after the Second World War to designate a widespread dance practice in the early and middle decades of the twentieth century that flourished in German-speaking Europe. Ausdruckstanz emerged from the life reform movement of the early twentieth century that promoted diverse practices of physical culture as a way of contesting the industrialization and urbanization of modern life. Emile Jaques-Dalcroze’s expansion of eurhythmics at Hellerau in the few years immediately preceding the First World War, and Rudolf Laban’s and Mary Wigman’s explorations of movement on Monte Veritaduring the years of the war, anticipated the dramatic growth of Ausdruckstanz in the 1920s and early 1930s. Students flocked to the many studios that offered amateur courses in *Tanz-Gymnastik* (‘dance gymnastics’) alongside professional training and certification. The most talented graduates then embarked on their own careers as educators and choreographers of solo, group, and mass dance. Leading dancers crisscrossed Central Europe on tour, and some ventured as far as the Americas and East Asia. The rise of National Socialism after 1933 decisively impacted Ausdruckstanz: while many dancers remained in Germany and Austria and collaborated with the National Socialists, others went into exile due to their leftist political commitments and/or their Jewish heritage. In the Americas, in Australasia, and in Palestine, émigrés, working together with other dancers, developed and disseminated Ausdruckstanz, integrating its practices and principles with a range of other dance forms, including ballet and modern dance.

## Exposition

During the 1910s and 1920s many terms were used to describe the movement we now call Ausdruckstanz—Freier Tanz (free dance), der neue Tanz (new dance), der modern Tanz (modern dance), Tanzkunst (dance art), der neue künsterlische Tanz (the new artistic dance), and Tanztheater (‘dance theatre’) (see Franco 2007 and Manning [2ed.] 2006, xxii). Under the National Socialists, Deutscher Tanz (German dance) became the dominant term to describe the practice, which became part of the state-dictated curriculum along with ballet and folk dance (Manning 203). Although the term Ausdruckstanz appeared on occasion during the 1920s and 1930s, it was not until the years after the Second World War that the term took on its present definition to refer to the broad sweep of interwar developments.

Ausdruckstanz has been translated as ‘expressionist dance,’ and the movement in the early 1920s did bear a family resemblance to Expressionismin theatre, film, and visual art, especially in its use of distorted gesture to suggest the fragmentation of human subjectivity and the disjointedness of modern life. But by the late 1920s Ausdruckstanz had shifted in accord with the aesthetics of New Objectivity *(Neue* *Sachlichkeit*), a movement in visual art and design that rejected the distortions of Expressionism in favor of rationality and the geometric clarity of the human figure and built environment. In terms of Ausdruckstanz, the spirit of New Objectivity meant a heightened appreciation for balletic training and theatrical legibility.

Ausdruckstanz is most accurately translated as ‘dance of expression.’ Expression (Ausdruck) was a ubiquitous term in aesthetics of the time. As Mary Wigman wrote in her 1925 primer on composition, ‘expression [Ausdruck] is the breakthrough of subconscious, spiritual processes into conscious, corporeal realization’ (Wigman 87; this translation by Manning differs from that of Sorell 1975, 87). Two years later Kurt Jooss, a student of Rudolf Laban, described his vision as ‘a creative compromise between free personal expression [Ausdruck] and formal compliance with objective, intellectual laws’ (qtd. in Markard 17). From one perspective, Wigman’s view more closely accords with expressionist aesthetics, while Jooss’s more closely accords with the New Objectivity. And yet, both concurred that expression alone did not constitute art; only when expression (Ausdruck) took shape as time, space, and energy—as form—did dance become an art. Advocates also believed the converse: form alone, without expression, did not constitute art.

Integrally related to Ausdruckstanz were Tanz-Gymnastik (dance-gymnastics) and mass dance. In one sense, Tanz-Gymnastik provided the foundational training for mass dance and Ausdruckstanz, introducing students to the principles and practice of tension-relaxation, swings, oppositional and successive movement, improvisation based on temporal, spatial, and dynamic qualities. Distilling a signature movement language, practitioners aspired to the artistry of Ausdruckstanz; fostering a sense of community or collectivity, practitioners aimed for the achievement of mass dance. Yet the distinctions between Tanz-Gymnastik, mass dance, and Ausdruckstanz were not rigid, at least during the 1910s and 1920s.

After working together on Monte Verita, Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman became professional rivals during the interwar period, and their followers tended to emphasize their differences: Wigman was known for her own solo choreography, Laban for his mass dance; Wigman was known for emphasizing creative inspiration, Laban for his systematic movement analysis. Yet, in actuality, Laban, Wigman, and their many colleagues—Jooss, Gret Palucca*,* Yvonne Georgi*,* Harald Kreutzberg, DoreHoyer—worked along a continuum between solo and group dance, between inspiration and analysis, between expression and form. Indeed, the dynamic tension between these endpoints gave Ausdruckstanz its vibrancy during the 1910s and 1920s.

Ausdruckstanz preceded and paralleled the related movement of modern dance in the United States. In fact, it could be argued that tours of the United States by Kreutzberg and Georgi from 1929 to 1931 and by Wigman from 1930 to 1933 pushed their American counterparts to develop a distinctly national genre from what had been a mostly shared practice during the 1920s (Manning 2006, 257-65). While an improvisational approach remained central to Ausdruckstanz, American practitioners of modern dance favoured the development of codified movement vocabularies (Manning 2007, 46-60). Hanya Holm, a leading member of Mary Wigman’s company, opened a studio in New York in 1931, and although she modified Wigman’s approach, she retained improvisation as an important component of her pedagogy and passed it on to her many students, including Alwin Nikolais.

During the same decade that American modern dance came into its own—the 1930s—Ausdruckstanz entered a period of decline in Germany. After the National Socialists came to power in 1933, they adopted Tanz-Gymnastik as part of women’s compulsory physical education, adapted mass dance as the basis for fascist spectacle, and standardized Ausdruckstanz as part of the required curriculum for stage dancers. These changes separated physical culture from artistic expression and in so doing undermined the vibrancy of the form. Historians have pondered why so many more practitioners of Ausdruckstanz remained in Germany than went into exile and have questioned whether true belief in National Socialism—or opportunism—motivated the decisions of Wigman, Laban, Palucca, Georgi, and Kreutzberg (see Müller and P. Stöckemann 1993, L. Guilbert 2000, L. Karina and M. Kant 2004, and S. Manning 2006 and 2017).

After the collapse of the Nazi state, the separation of physical culture from theatrical dance was complete. In fact, the legacy of Ausdruckstanz divides between these two arenas. On the one hand, the principles and practices of Tanz-Gymnastik and Ausdruckstanz contributed to the fields of dance therapy and somatics in the postwar years. For example, Irmgard Bartenieff studied with Laban in the mid-1920s and pursued her career as a dancer in Germany before emigrating to New York City in the late 1930s and then turning her attention to therapy and later somatics. Trudi Schoop, a Swiss dancer who performed in the comic style of a Valeska Gert or Lotte Goslar, emigrated to Los Angeles after the Second World War and also became a pioneer in dance therapy. Fe Reichelt, a student of Wigman in the postwar years, has become a leading dance therapist in Germany.

On the other hand, the dancers who remained in Germany continued their careers after the Second World War, joined by Kurt Jooss, who returned from exile and resumed his leadership of the dance department at the Folkwang School. Yet whereas Ausdruckstanz had been the dominant form of theatrical dance in the years between the wars, in the Cold War years ballet became the predominant form, influenced by Anglo-American models in West Germany and by Soviet models in East Germany. In both Germanys, young dancers rebelled against imported models of ballet in the 1970s and 1980s and innovated new forms they called Tanztheater—a term that Jooss had first used in 1928.

Whereas German commentators see the Tanztheater of Pina Bausch, Susanne Linke, Arila Siegert, among others, as the central legacy of Ausdruckstanz, a global perspective reveals a broader influence. Dancers who went into exile shaped dance cultures around the world: Kurt Jooss and his associates Sigurd Leeder and Ernst Uthoff affected dance in Great Britain and in Chile; Gertrud Kraus played a seminal role establishing modern dance in Palestine and Israel; Renate Schottelius in Argentina; Gertrud Bodenwieser in Australasia; and Ruth Abramovitsch Sorel in Canada. Not only did dancers in exile influence global dance, so too did dancers who travelled from their country of origin to study in Germany and then brought home what they had learned: in this way, Birgit Åkesson and Birgit Cullberg brought the influences of Ausdruckstanz to Sweden, Jacqueline Robinson to France, Aurelio Milloss to Italy, and Chinita Ullmann to Brazil, while Eguchi Takaya and Miya Misako did the same for Japan (the first comprehensive attempt to trace the global circulation of Ausdruckstanz and related practices is found in Ross and Lindgren 2015; the country entries in Cohen 1998) chronicle dance modernism nation by nation). In the United States it is impossible to separate the influences of American dancers who travelled to Germany from German dancers who emigrated for economic, political, or religious reasons: among the many notable artists and educators were Trude Kaschmann, Erika Thimey, Louise Kloepper, Anneliese Mertz, Pola Nirenska, Margaret Dietz, Isa Partsch-Bergsohn, Til Thiele, and Helmut Gottschild. In all these diverse national contexts, Ausdrucktanz was modified by contact with other dance forms, creating a variegated thread within the larger tapestry of dance modernism.

**Further Reading**

(Cohen)

(Elswit)

(Franco)

(Guilbert)

(Howe)

(Karina)

(Kolb)

(Launay)

(Manning)

(Manning, Modern Dance in the Third Reich, Redux)

(Manning, Ausdruckstanz across the Atlantic)

(Markard)

(Muller)

(Oberzaucher-Schuller)

(Partsch-Bergsohn)

(Randall)

(Sorell)

(Toepfer)

(Wigman)

(Bergsohn)

(Decoufle)

(Wangenheim)

(Weisenburger)

(Ross)