**Hoyer, Dore (1911-1967)**

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**Summary**

Dore Hoyer was perhaps the most innovative figure in German modern dance in the years between 1935 and 1965. This was a period in which political and historical circumstances in Germany severely marginalized the powerful and turbulent dance culture of the Weimar Republic and compelled modern dancers to work within a highly fragmented artistic environment in isolation from each other. Although Hoyer constantly sought opportunities to develop ensemble dance pieces, her artistic significance rests on her work as a solo dancer. She embodied the extraordinary capacity of an isolated soloist and modern dancer to transform oppressive constraints on dance and on bodily expressivity into intensely emotional, existential, and political experiences. Because of her, it is possible to see that the astonishingly imaginative Weimar dance culture did not come to an end with the advent of the Nazi regime in 1933, nor did the movement remain stagnant within a discouraging artistic atmosphere. Partly for this reason, later German dancers, including Susanne Linke and Arila Siegert, have recreated her solos as integral works in the contemporary dance repertoire.

File: ehre.jpg

Figure 1Hoyer in ‘Vanity’ (Ehre/Eitelkeit) from Affectos Humanos, photographer: Siegfried Enkelmann, German Dance Archive, Cologne

Source: h*ttp://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/hoyer/hoyer5.htm*

**Training and Early Career**

Hoyer was born into difficult circumstances. Her father worked in the building construction business, but as a result of misguided investments, he lost the masonry company that he inherited. Hoyer did not grow up in a milieu that strongly appreciated artistic aspirations. Physical education classes in the public school awakened her interest in bodily movement, and her father supported her desire to become a gymnastics instructor. In 1927 a scholarship enabled her to attend a school in Dresden established by Ilse Homilius, a graduate of the Dalcroze school in Laxenburg, Austria. In 1930, Hoyer entered the school founded in Dresden by Gret Palucca, a graduate of Mary Wigman’s school in the same city, and in 1931, upon completing her exams, she accepted appointment as a solo dancer in the ballet company for the municipal theatre in Plauen im Vogtland. This was the first of many short-term contracts with German state theatre companies that Hoyer accepted throughout her career, although she rarely managed to realize her artistic ambitions within the municipal theatre system.

In 1933, Hoyer performed her first solo dance concerts in Dresden. The same year, she began collaborating with a young musician, Peter Cieslak (1915-1935). Hoyer fell passionately in love with Cieslak, but two years later in 1935 he committed suicide. His death affected Hoyer deeply, and the tragic affair perhaps informed her desire to link modern dance aesthetics to profoundly and even violently emotional communication.

**Later Career**

From the early 1930s until the end of her life, Hoyer kept a detailed journal of her life and dances. She was cautious about commenting on the political conditions of the Third Reich (1933-1945), but at other times she seemed sympathetic to socialist and even communist perspectives. Hoyer believed that the institutional obsession with cultivating ballet during the Third Reich, the occupational governments (1945-1949), and the early years of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic resulted from politicized bureaucracies that crippled the development of modern dance. Even though she regularly received short-term appointments as a solo dancer or director within state ballet companies, resistance within the ballet culture to her choreographic ambitions prevented her from realizing her ideas for large-scale expressionist dance works.

Hoyer was a prolific creator of solo dances. Between 1933 and 1967, she produced new dances almost every year, but she lacked sufficient resources to present the dances as quickly as she constructed them. Consequently, her concert programs lacked space to retain some of her older dances. Health problems, especially a chronic knee injury, further limited her opportunities to perform. However, her *Bolero* (1938), set to Ravel’s music, was quite popular and appeared on numerous of her concert programs until the early 1960s.

In 1935, Hoyer collaborated with Mary Wigman in Dresden on the latter’s dance cycle *Tanzgesänge* (*Hymnic Dances*) and Wigman periodically assisted Hoyer with opportunities in the years to come, including dancing the central role of the sacrifical victim in Wigman’s 1957 choreography for *Le sacre du printemps* *(The Rite of Spring)*. In 1936, Hoyer began her collaboration with pianist and percussionist Dimitri Wiatowitsch, who composed music for many of her dances as well as provided accompaniment. The collaboration lasted until her death.

At the end of the Second World War, Hoyer planned to pursue her career in Dresden, but she soon came into conflict with the communist cultural authorities who, after the presentation of her group piece *Tänze für Käthe Kollwitz* (*Dances for Käthe Kollwitz*, 1946), regarded her expressionist dance aesthetic as inimical to the aims of socialist realism. She migrated to Berlin in 1948. The following year, she received an appointment as ballet director for the Hamburg State Opera. While the Hamburg appointment provided access to a larger audience than was previously available to her and demonstrated her success in choreographing conventional opera ballets, she faced insurmountable resistance to her application of modern dance aesthetics within the ballet corps. Finding the resources to produce solo dance concerts proved almost as challenging. Critics and audiences responded enthusiastically to her solo concerts, but audiences remained small, and it was impossible for her to mount tours within Germany or even to construct a concert program that had more than a couple of performances. In postwar Germany solo dancing did not have the support that it had during the Weimar years.

Through her friendship with the director of the Berlin State Opera ballet, Tatjana Gsovsky, Hoyer received in 1952 an invitation to perform solo dance concerts in Buenos Aires. There she encountered a comparatively large audience and rapturous acclaim. She made five subsequent tours of Latin America between 1953 and 1963, eventually presenting her solo work in Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. She even considered establishing a school and production company in Buenos Aires, but she abandoned the scheme once she realized that she could not rely on her Argentinian partners to fulfill promises and expectations. In 1966, the Goethe Institute sponsored a tour of solo dances in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Ceylon, and Iran, where, again, she attracted comparatively large audiences and enthusiastic responses.

In 1956, Hoyer worked with Harald Kreutzberg on the creation of an Elektra dance for the ancient theatre festival in Athens. The next year, Mary Wigman secured for her an invitation to attend the American Dance Festival in Connecticut, where she met leading figures of American modern dance and presented a concert of her solo dances. The ‘iron vitality’ of American modern dance impressed her, but she complained in her journal that the Americans seemed ‘obsessed with technique’ and ‘motoric’ movement, that they avoided ‘anything intimate and quiet,’ and that they excluded ‘inwardness’ and eroticism (Qtd. in H. Müller, et. al. (1992) *Dore Hoyer, Tänzerin*, Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 59). Nevertheless, she and Wigman jointly welcomed Martha Graham to Berlin in 1957, when Graham performed a solo of her own, *Judith*.

Despite her success in staging ballets for modern operas such as Honegger’s *Jeanne d’Arc au bucher* *(Joan of Arc at the Stake*, Ulm, 1952) and Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron* *(Moses and Aaron,* Berlin, 1959), Hoyer continued to despair over the lack of audiences and resources in Germany for her solo dance programs. As she experienced several health problems, she feared that she had become too old to perform the complex and physically demanding dances of her solo repertoire. She gave her last solo concert in Berlin on her fifty-sixth birthday and committed suicide a few weeks later.

**Contribution to the Field and to Modernism**

In her dance aesthetic, Hoyer remained devoted to the values and goals of the Weimar dance ethos of Ausdruckstanz. Although she absorbed some influences from her travels in Latin America and Asia, she found little inspiration in the dominant modern dance trends between the 1930s and the 1960s. She resolutely avoided dances that told stories, emphasized acrobatic virtuosity, overtly dramatized political or social themes, or amplified feminine voluptuousness. The structure and organization of her dances followed a highly abstract logic, yet at the same time presented concentrated and complex emotional content. Hoyer possessed a deep and unprecedented insight into relations between movement and emotional signification, and this insight allowed her to devise highly compressed and innovative narrative structures for her pieces.

Her journal, along with many photographs and a few films, document her dances. Although she devised various kinds of notation for her choreographic ideas, she constantly revised her pieces, and they evolved in ways that she did not explicitly acknowledge in the journal. She generally favored the music of living composers, but with Cieslak and Wiatowitsch she found her most appropriate accompaniment: percussive music built directly out of and around her movements. She consistently chose costumes that covered her entire body, including her arms, and she sometimes donned a tight cap that concealed her hair and magnified her skull. She liked swirling skirts and dresses that reached her ankles, but occasionally she danced in tights (*Dämon Maschine*, *Demon Machine,* 1954) or elegantly designed exotic costumes (*Potiphars Weib*, *Potiphar’s Wife,* 1942; *Tango Macabre*, 1954). Her costume choices, so abstractly laden with symbolic-allegorical colours and patterns, exuded a vaguely medieval-Gothic aura that amplified the modernity of the movement.

Hoyer tended to conceive of dances within the cycle format pioneered by Wigman: a suite or set of discrete dances governed by a common theme. Each dance within the set lasted between three and five minutes; each cycle could contain as few as two dances (*Zwei ernste Gesänge*, *Two Serious Songs,* 1933) or as many as seven (*Auf schwarzem Grund*, *On Black Ground,* 1956), although she did produce many solo pieces that did not fit into a cycle. The mood of her dances was consistently somber, dark, and intense, though not always tragic; she rarely introduced comic or cheerful elements, for the most part only in work inspired by her travels in Latin America and Asia; and she often moved with her eyes closed. She almost never used props and preferred an empty scenic environment in which movement unfolded within an undefined space lacking clear borders, as if she moved within a soft glow separating her from an engulfing darkness. Yet she was reluctant to build dances that took advantage of the entire space available to her, preferring instead to concentrate the action within a small section of the performance area. Perhaps the most famous example of this spatial concentration is her *Bolero*, nearly twenty minutes long, in which she remained throughout in the same space and achieved an incredible escalation of tension that culminated in convulsive ecstasy almost entirely through the movement of her torso, hands, arms, shoulders, neck, and head.

The great emotional power of her dances derived from an abstract, almost mathematical calculation of tensions between movements of different parts of the body. She concentrated manifold complex movements within a highly compressed time and space to reveal a body struggling to resolve a violent conflict within itself or struggling against the amorphous, oppressive constraints of a space lacking definition or identity. For Hoyer, movement does not describe or represent an emotion, as occurs within a storytelling format; rather, movement is the product of emotion. An emotion is what stirs and then drives the body, but it always arises within and through a body that is fundamentally uncertain of how to deal with a constraint upon it. Her approach to choreography may seem mechanical in her journal notes about her pieces, but she understood that she could reveal emotion only by abstracting it from whatever narrative context (story) motivated it, for in her mind emotion created the context rather than the other way around. Thus, the narrative organization of her dances largely entailed a complex set of contrapuntal variations of bodily movements in tension with each other. The left hand moves away or down or up from the right; the right arm moves away while the left hand moves in, even as the fingers of the left hand move away; the torso twists away from the left arm yet the left leg, jutting forward, refuses to follow either the torso or the left arm; meanwhile, the head gazes upward, trying to lead the body in still another direction. Emotion, however, is not simply the position of various body parts in relation to each other; it is the dynamic relation between successive sets of conflicting positions of body parts. It is also the rhythm of the position shifts and the muscularity of the movement—undulant as opposed to angular, sweeping as opposed to cramped, and so forth. Hoyer saw emotion as a shifting, volatile, geometric or topographic mapping of conflicted body points, transforming the body into a complex network of points capable of extraordinary variations that linked all emotions to each other in relation to the constraints imposed by any space outside the body.

Even in her portraits of women from the Bible, history, and literature, including *Ophelia*, (1941); *Jeanne d’Arc* (1941); *Potiphars Weib (Potiphar’s Wife,* 1942); *Ruth* (1947); *Judith* (1952); and *Maria Magdalene* (1952), Hoyer did not perform the stories associated with these characters, but distilled the characters through an emotion that uniquely possessed them. Most of her dances, however, carried more abstract titles, with perhaps her most famous cycle, *Affectos Humanos* (*Human Emotions*, 1962), explicitly naming, in medieval-allegorical fashion, the emotions generating each of the dances in the cycle (Sloth, Lust, Hate, Fear, Love). Although her dances occasionally used pantomimic movements or movements that blurred the distinction between pantomime and abstract movement tropes, Hoyer’s choreography dramatized the struggle of an emotion to free the body from mechanistic pressures controlling and stabilizing it. This way of thinking about dance narrative, as a sequence of thematic variations on the conflict between the body and the deathly space it inhabited, advanced the Ausdruckstanz approach to movement beyond where it was during the Weimar Republic.

File: angst.jpg

Figure 2Hoyer in ‘Fear’ (Angst) from Affectos Humanos, photographer: Siegfried Enkelmann, German Dance Archive, Cologne

Source: *http://www.sk-kultur.de/tanz/hoyer/hoyer2.htm*

In her group pieces, Hoyer sought to show how an emotion gripped a community of bodies. This ambition entailed showing how the same emotion not only created conflicting positions within individual bodies but also differentiated them from each other, so that an emotion was not a major source of communal unity. Her approach generated very complex group movements that often led to difficulties with ballet companies accustomed to thinking of communal identity in relation to synchronized unity of movement, which requires less time to rehearse. Perhaps her most ambitious group work was *La Idea* (*The Idea*, 1961), done in Buenos Aires and inspired by the 1920 expressionist woodcut graphic novel by Frans Masereel. In this piece consisting of five scenes and an epilogue, a naked woman (‘The Idea,’ the creation of a man) provokes different, disturbed responses from crowds that encounter her at a government conference, on a city street, in a prison, in a slum, and at her self-immolation. In this piece, the female body as a vision of redemption becomes the dominant source of emotion and movement within society, but ‘The Idea’ is never a source of unity within society—for she ultimately belongs to Death (Müller, et al 187-91).

**Legacy**

It was only after her death that leaders of the emergent Tanztheater movement in West Germany, notably Susanne Linke and Gerhard Bohner, recognized the significance of Hoyer’s contribution and sought creative ways to revive her works. In East Germany, too, choreographers such as Arila Siegert restaged her works. After the reunification of Germany in 1989, a number of other dancers have also engaged Hoyer’s dances, most especially *Affectos Humanos*, which survives on film and which Hoyer’s close associate Waltrud Luley taught to a number of dancers. In fact, Martin Nachbar’s lecture-demonstration *Urheben Aufheben*, exploring how he could and could not approximate the expressionist qualities of *Affectos Humanos*, became a model for other contemporary choreographers exploring the history of German modern dance.

**Major Works (excluding opera choreography)**

*Afrikanisches Kriegerlied* *(Song of the African Warrior)* (1933)

*Allegro ritmico* (1933)

*Ballade* (1933)

*Drei Gesichte* *(Three Faces)* (cycle) (1933)

*Gotisches Lied* *(Gothic Song)* (1933)

*Stiller Tanz* *(Silent Dance)* (1933)

*Tanz in schwarz* *(Dance in Black)* (1933)

*Tanz in weiss* *(Dance in White)* (1933)

*Vierteilige Studie* *(Four Part Study)* (cycle) (1933)

*Zwei ernste Gesänge (Two Serious Songs)* (cycle) (1933)

*Barlumi* (cycle) (1934)

*Drei stille Tänze (Three Silent Dances)* (cycle)(1934)

*Masken* *(Masks)* (cycle) (1934)

*Fünf namenlose* *Tänze (Five Nameless Dances)* (cycle) (1935)

*Zweite stille Suite* *(Second Silent Suite)* (cycle (1935)

*Schrei* *(Cry)* (1936)

*Enge der Grossstadt* *(Corner of the Big City)* (cycle (1938)

*Bolero* (1938)

*Tänze der Verlorenheit (Dances of Loss)* (cycle) (1938)

*Weite des Landes* *(The Width of the Land)* (cycle) 1938)

*Ophelia* (1941)

*Jeanne d’Arc* (1941)

*Potiphars Weib* *(Potiphar’s Wife)* (1942)

*Amazone* *(Amazons)* (1944)

*Der Geliebten* *(The Beloved)* (cycle) (1944)

*Vibrato* (1944)

*Tänze für Käthe Kollwitz (Dances for Käthe Kollwitz)* (group dance cycle) (1946)

*Gesichte* *(Faces)* (cycle) (1947)

*Mütter (Mothers)* (cycle) (1947)

*Schiessbude* *(Shooting Gallery)* (group dance cycle) (1947)

*Antigone* (1948)

*Der grosse Gesang* (*The Great Song)* (cycle) (1948)

*Gesichte unserer Zeit* *(Faces of Our Time)* (cycle) (1948)

*Der Fremde* *(The Stranger)* (group dance cycle) (1950)

*Aus der Mottenkiste* *(From the Mothballs)* (cycle) (1951)

*Drei* *Tänze mit Schlagzeug (Three Dances with Percussion)* (cycle) (1951)

*Suite in Hell* (cycle) (1951)

*Sonate* *für zwei Klaviere und Schlagzeug (Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion)* (cycle) (1951)

*Judith* (1952)

*Maria Magdalene* (1952)

*Mit Trommel und Gong* *(With Drum and Gong)* (cycle) (1952/1956)

S*üdliche Impressionen*  *(Southern Impressions)* (cycle) (1953)

S*üdmerikanische Reise (South American Journey)* (cycle) (1954)

*Zwischen Gestern und Morgen* *(Between Yesterday and Tomorrow)* (cycle) (1955)

*Auf schwarzem Grund* *(On Black Ground)* (cycle) (1956)

*Zu Ehren einer Dichterin* *(In Honor of a Poetess)* (cycle) (1956)

*Kinder ihrer Erde* *(Children of the Earth)* (cycle) (1957)

*Mosaico* *(Mosaic)* (cycle) (1958)

*La Idea* *(The Idea)* (group dance cycle) (1961)

*Cadena de Fugas* *(The Leaking Chain)* (group dance cycle) (1961)

*Affectos Humanos* *(Human Emotions)* (cycle) (1962)

*Ostinato* (1962, revised and separated from *Auf schwarzem Grund*)

*Notturno* *(Nocturne)* (1965)

*Grossstadt* *(Big City)* (cycle) (1966)

*Asien-Suite* *(Asian Suite)* (cycle) (1967)

**Archival Sources**

Documentation on Hoyer is deposited in a numerous archives as well as in private collections but primarily in the Tanzarchiv in Cologne, Germany, the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, the Theater Museum of the University of Cologne, and the Performing Arts Collection of the New York Public Library.

**Further Reading**

(Bell-Kanner)

(Hardt)

(Muller)

(Peter)

(Schuldt-Hiddemann)

(Werner)

(Zimmermann)

(Linke)

(Wiley)