

Violence Against Women As Spectacle

Kinesthetic empathy and catharsis in works by Pina Bausch and Twyla Tharp

Twyla Tharp and Pina Bausch were prominent figures in shaping modern dance in disparate ways. The bulk of Tharp's success was on the Broadway stage in the United States, and Bausch's on German and international concert stages in the expressionist *Tanztheater* style. Different as they may be, both choreographers have spanned many decades in modern dance history, both starting in the 1970's and continuing their success beyond the turn of the century. The late 1970's to early 1980's marked a time in both the United States and Germany when domestic violence was starting to gain recognition as a significant issue. It was during this time of political momentum that Tharp and Bausch created pieces that involve violence against women. Tharp's "That's Life" (contained within *Sinatra Suites*) and Bausch's *Cafe Muller* are notable works that succeeded well beyond their inception. Why would dances that showcase violence against women warrant such momentous success? What sort of perceptual experience might the audience undergo for this phenomenon to occur?

It is possible that witnessing simulated violence from a distance can lead to catharsis, which is a purging of suppressed emotions (Meinhold 174). When these intense emotions are triggered and then discharged, a more comfortable state may be reached (Meinhold 182). I speculate that these particular dances induce aroused emotional states by way of mirror neurons, which are activated when we watch movement. The release of mirror neurons causes us to unconsciously internally simulate movement, so in a way, we execute the movements that we see (Hagendoorn 92). Further, when we receive visual sensory stimuli, there is a delay before that information reaches the visual cortex. Because of this delay in visual processing we constantly make predictions of how movement will unfold when we watch dance. The element of surprise and excitement that comes with an unexpected lift or sudden movement is caused by the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter involved in reward-motivation. Dopamine is released when an unexpected reward, like a virtuosic stunt, is received. Hagendoorn's research on visual perception and

dance suggests that a sublime experience is “triggered by the failure of the brain to predict the unfolding of a movement sequence and maintained by its effort, through increased attention, to keep up with the movement” (Hagendoorn 100). This moment of disorientation causes an increase in attention and the release of dopamine, which leads to a feeling of awe. Therefore, it is possible that the violent content within “That’s Life” and *Café Muller* causes aroused states, initiated by mirror neurons and dopaminergic prediction errors involved in delayed visual processing, which lead to cathartic experiences and the sublime state of awe. I argue that Twyla Tharp uses virtuosity to facilitate this perceptual experience and glorify the violence, while Pina Bausch uses mimesis, as theorized by Susan Kozel, to push past the catharsis and awe and re-present the violence as destructive. The ways in which the dances are choreographed and presented yield drastically different messages and interpretations regarding the acceptability of the maltreatment of women. I will analyze each dance in terms of how the movement portrays domestic violence and how the elements of each dance might induce catharsis and awe through the work of mirror neurons and dopaminergic visual predication errors.

The evolution and reemergence of Tharp’s “That’s Life” is intriguing. A duet danced by Tharp and Mikhail Baryshnikov, it was first performed in 1976 in *Once More Frank*, devoid of allusions to unequal male-female power dynamics. Somewhere between its premier and its third appearance in 1983 in *Sinatra Suites*, it became a stunning virtuosic dance filled with male domination and aggressive manipulations of the woman that involved combatively pushing, throwing and yanking her around, and most disturbingly, kicking and dragging her on the ground. “That’s Life” has appeared in most of Tharp’s Frank Sinatra inspired shows, most recently in 2010 in *Come Fly Away*. With every reintroduction it becomes progressively more violent. According to Sarah Kaufman’s 2012 interview with Tharp in the Washington Post, “in *Come Fly Away*, the battle of wills is harsher, close to true physical battery.” Tharp labels “That’s Life” as an Apache style dance, a stage combat dance from early 20th century Paris that is meant to comically animate a violent interaction between a prostitute and her pimp (Conway 66).

Was it Tharp's intention to stage an authentic representation of an early 20th century Parisian dance of violence? This seems unlikely, given the greater context of *Sinatra Suites*. The piece begins at an elegant party. While Tharp engages with another man, and Baryshnikov with another woman, they lock eyes across the room, walk toward each other and leave the party together. Sinatra's "Strangers in the Night" accompanies the first duet, which is a dance of encounter and introduction. A tender and vulnerable duet sweetly danced to "I'm Gonna Love You All The Way" follows, with a pre-intercourse air evident by their gentle caressing gestures, the obvious song title, and Twyla's disrobing of Baryshnikov's black tuxedo jacket at the end of the dance. Tharp, with desire in her eyes, stands proudly in her black heels, draped in a low cut ankle length evening gown, her cleavage kissed by the diamond like jewels on her neckline. She tosses the jacket to the ground, and Baryshnikov, in a classic tuxedo, notices the subdued lust in her eyes, then puts a giant piece of gum in his mouth that he obnoxiously chews as he walks away from her. He stands with his back to her, looking disinterested. We have finally landed in "That's Life."

It is important to note the power of stripping this dance of its virtuosity by stating the facts of the movement. Part of my description of the movement is inference, but the bulk of it is simply converting the movement into unbiased language. This method of description will illuminate the pure violence contained within "That's Life" and break down its effect on the audience. Tharp stands behind Baryshnikov, focused intently on him, as if waiting for him to make a move. He nonchalantly struts away and she, with disappointment in her face, chases after him and grabs his arm to get his attention. Baryshnikov responds by yanking her arm, spinning her around and throwing her around his leg. This marks the introduction of the consistent dynamic where Tharp makes a move toward intimacy, and Baryshnikov diminishes and puts her in her place by aggressively manipulating and rejecting her. He stands behind her, gazing at the audience completely unperturbed, as she stands in front of him looking helpless. When he grabs her shoulders and abruptly twists her around to face him, he makes it clear to both Tharp and the audience that he is the one in control. They make eye contact for a second before he pushes her to the ground, their one-handed grasp

allowing her to rebound off the floor. As she grabs his hands he agitatedly pushes her away, sending her into a reverse *sauté arabesque*. In an attempt to assert herself, Tharp runs back into his arms. He briskly tips her backwards, her fear apparent by the way she reaches her hand out to break her fall. After a turning double attitude lift, he quickly turns her several times, the last turn ending curtly with their hands wrapped around her neck. Thirty seconds into the piece it is probable that the audience has already experienced an elevated state of arousal. The sudden moves and manipulations that Baryshnikov and Tharp execute have the potential to cause the audience to make movement prediction errors, which would lead to a release of dopamine and infuse the body with reward-like feelings.

The next moment is critical: Baryshnikov pushes Tharp far toward stage right, as if pushing her out the door, in a series of lifts where one foot is dragging on the floor. Her arms are defensive yet clumsy, and indicate her weakness and protest. He tosses her into an *arabesque en fondue*, her arms and head reaching for the exit, but he pulls her back into the scene, making clear for the first time that his intent is not to get rid of her, but to control her. Her movements and energy after this moment are more combative: her stance wide and firm, her eye contact intense, as an animal watching her predator like a hawk. He pursues her without hesitation, matching and surpassing her offensive air. In a passive state, with her body collapsed and focus down, she lazily executes a *grand ronde de jambe* to *à la seconde*. As Baryshnikov stands behind her, her shoulders fall into his hands as he steps over her and drags her across the floor face down in between his legs with her feet skimming the floor. He picks her up and pushes her down into the splits, and repeats. During these repetitions we hear Sinatra sing, “some people get their kicks stomping on a dream,” indicating Baryshnikov’s joy and satisfaction with exercising dominance over his partner, damaging her sense of power and confidence.

In watching Tharp alone, the mirror neurons of the audience members may simulate highly contrasting movements that could activate a plethora of emotions, causing them to kinesthetically empathize with Tharp’s violent experience. Alternatively or simultaneously, the audience may simulate Baryshnikov’s

aggression and experience a cathartic discharge of anger through the work of mirror neurons. It is my speculation that Tharp intentionally used virtuosity as a tool to override this potential for discomfort and aggression. The New York Times called “That’s Life” a “show stopper” in 1984. What gives it this “show stopper” quality is the display of strength, balance, flexibility and sudden yet seamless transitions. These virtuosic qualities soften the potentially agonizing effect that the presence of violence can induce. The end result is a feeling of awe, rather than a feeling of discomfort, anger or empathy.

When the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater restaged this dance in 2013, it was described in the program as “a fast a furious one-upmanship.” Clearly, this is not a “one-upping” situation. Baryshnikov is driving the violence, and Tharp responds either with passivity or desperation. Dance magazine claimed that Tharp’s female choreography is empowering for women because they have to take risks to execute the movement, which portrays equality in her choreography for couples (Rogoff 574). Challenging this argument, Rogoff states, “this review may reflect the amount of attention Tharp has lavished on the women’s steps, but watching Plantadit (who played Tharp’s Role in *Come Fly Away* in 2010) tossed about in “That’s Life,” seeing all of these fine dancers diminished to tired sexual types, I wonder where the equality truly lay” (Ragoff 574). This notion is most evident toward the end of the dance where there is a shift in partnering.

Baryshnikov becomes more overtly manipulative of Tharp’s body and she responds with increasing passivity. For example, he grabs her shoulders and shakes her aggressively, and her head just dangles. While holding her wrists and pinching her shoulders back, he shakes her. This movement looks painful, like her arms may pop out of socket. She falls to the ground and he spins her around in a classic ballroom move, only she stays on the ground, lifeless, for a moment. She flips onto her back, and in a struggle, grabs around his lower legs and hugs her shins toward her face folding in half, making her butt the focal point of the movement. He grabs underneath her arms and lifts her butt close to his face and puts her back down. This is not a graceful transition. It is a moment where we forget that she is a dancer. There is no display of virtuosity, presentation of long limbs or athleticism. She is just a woman, unable to move, because a man has

rein over her. He eventually pulls her arms as he travels backward to unravel her to a standing position, grabbing her by the wrists with her shoulders pinched behind her back. Her passivity is clear in how released her head and upper body are as he jerks her around. Baryshnikov's aggression toward Tharp has the potential to evoke a cathartic experience for viewers. Even though Baryshnikov's face looks indifferent, his movements indicate anger and aggression. As viewers execute his actions internally by way of mirror neurons, suppressed anger may percolate and send the mind into a moment of catharsis where viewers can extinguish the anger through continued simulation of Baryshnikov's bodily expressions.

Eventually Tharp stands with her back to the audience, and Baryshnikov, facing the audience in complete nonchalance, grabs her arm and shakes her, caresses her shoulder blade with his other hand, then shakes her again. In a final rejection of Tharp, both parties storm away from each other. As he puts on his jacket, she pauses, then runs and throws herself in his arms, only to be tossed to the ground, dragged, and kicked. The virtuosity and athleticism involved in this moment could potentially override an aggressive catharsis and replace it with a feeling of awe, as the unexpected and breathtaking lift occurs and the dopamine is released. Baryshnikov forcefully pulls her up by her arm, inch by inch. Tharp is completely passive until the final yank to verticality startles her to face him, their faces inches apart. He stares at Tharp as he intimidatingly leans into her. His message is clear: he is in charge, and she better not challenge him.

Domestic violence became a serious public concern in the late 70's. According to the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the term "battered woman" entered public consciousness in 1977. That same year, in *Washington State vs. Wanrow*, the Supreme Court recognized Yvonne Wanrow's right to self-defense against her husband in consideration of how the domestic violence she endured adversely affected her mental state and perceptions. In 1978 the US Commission on Civil Rights held a Consultation on Battered Women where activists clarified and defined the needs of battered women and their children, which led to the formation of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (Wilson 345). President Carter established the Office of Domestic Violence in 1978, which was dismantled with the election of

Ronald Reagan. With a conservative government in power, progress for anti-domestic violence advocates slowed down in the 1980's.

What message was Tharp sending by presenting a piece with unmistakable implications of intimate partner abuse during a time when the issue of domestic violence created political friction? *That's Life*. Incorporating a violent duet within a narrative that presents different phases of courtship implies that abusing the woman is a normal part of courtship. When analyzing the appeal of Tharp's *Work*, Dee Reynolds theorized that, "spectators without specialist knowledge can be attracted to dance in its more popular forms because it is presented in contexts which are more familiar to them," (Reynolds 20). In consideration of this theory, it is reasonable to infer that Tharp aimed to captivate her audience by presenting a narrative that they can relate to. She may believe that a man abusing his female lover is a normal relatable situation, and that the audience will be more enticed watching it with a familiar Frank Sinatra tune in the air. After "*That's Life*" ends, Tharp and Baryshnikov dance a delicate waltz to Sinatra's "*My Way*." The title itself, when taking the power dynamics of "*That's Life*" into account, implies that everything will be fine as long as the man gets his way, and disregards the woman's needs. Further, the fact that the movement qualities of this dance suggest deeper intimacy and grace after a violent incident normalizes the act of violence that was just committed and may even suggest that relationships are more satisfying if the man is able to control his lover.

Around the same time that the issue of domestic violence became a hot topic in the US, the issue of Gender equality was creating political friction in Germany. The German feminist movement was initiated in the 1960's by the student left, who created a culture of critical thinking influenced by the nations re-evaluation of Nazi history (Harrigan 42). It wasn't until the 1970's that the feminist movement began to involve activism from non-student women. 1977 marked a time of progress for women, with most of the energy channeled into the campaign of wages for housework. Feminists recognized the violence and coerciveness common in heterosexual relationships and worked to eliminate it (Altbach 457). Shifting public

consciousness led to a spike in the number of homes for battered women and the establishment of two rape crisis hotlines (Harrigan 44). According to Renny Harrigan, the “consciousness raising” group was crucial to the growth of feminism in Germany, however, within this notion of “consciousness raising” laid Germany’s inherently sexist culture. The word for female left consciousness raising was *selbstenerfahrung*, which means self-experience. Male consciousness raising was called *Aufklärung* which means enlightenment. These words illustrate the diminutive stereotype of women as more individualistic and experiential, and men as more serious, intellectual and political. It was within this political climate in 1978, that Pina Bausch premiered *Cafe Muller*.

Cafe Muller, from my analytical perspective, involves two categories of people: the “others” who are being oppressed and controlled, and the “authorities” who are oppressing and controlling the “others.” These two categories of people are differentiated by dress. The “other” man wears a yellow button-down shirt and brown pants and the “other” women wear ethereal, white night gowns. The male “authorities” wear black suits and the female “authority” a black pea coat. The jackets and pea coats allude to armor and protection, which the “others” lack. The permeability of the “others” indicated by their lack of armor, and the constant surveillance enacted upon them by the “authorities” creates a dynamic that aligns with Michel Foucault’s “Panopticon” theory. Throughout most of the piece, one category enters from stage right and the other from stage left. Therefore, I will refer to the door on stage right as “the door of the oppressed” and that on stage left as “the door of the oppressors.” When the “others” dance, they consistently travel from stage right to left, unless they snap, at which point they violently toss themselves back to stage right. I interpret this to indicate conflicting desires: one to succumb to the beliefs and norms that the “authorities” mandate, and the other to rebel.

I believe that *Cafe Muller* abstractly and non-linearly drives a narrative that displays an effort by German society to promulgate beliefs that diminish women and normalize abuse against them as a way to maintain social order. It is important to note that Bausch did not hold these beliefs herself. Rather, she set

up this framework to challenge them. The female “others” played by Pina Bausch and Malou Airaudu represent the tormented and exhausted souls of oppressed women. They dance with their eyes closed throughout the piece, indicating their inability to physically and metaphorically “see.” The male “other,” Dominique Mercy, is aware of how Airaudu, his lover, is deteriorating, but he is pushed and shoved by the cognitive dissonance of longing to restore her power while wanting to follow the rules of society that oppress her. The “authorities” strive to maintain control of the “others” through surveillance, direct violence and manipulated violence. Brutality and extreme control eventually lead to chaos and leave the authorities fearful of what they created. My description of *Café Muller* will support this theory on the narrative, infer the audiences potential experience based on the activities of mirror neurons and visual processing delays, and show how Bausch uses the presence of violence against women to challenge and question society’s acceptance of it.

Through double glass doors we see a revolving door in the distance. Black wooden tables and chairs cover the stage. In a slow, wobbly walk, Bausch enters with her eyes closed through “the door of the oppressed.” Her arms lead like she is sleep walking, and her palms face out to feel her surroundings. She softly lays her back against the wall in the upstage right corner. Bausch never veers far from this area of the stage, indicating imprisonment, or being stuck between two worlds. Ann Nugent acknowledged in her *Dance Now* journal article, “The Green Table and *Café Muller*” that there is a “ghostliness that makes her not quite of this world” (qtd. prelectur.stanford.edu). The ghostliness is further exemplified by the fact that she is not acknowledged by any of the characters throughout the piece, yet she seems particularly sensitive to the emotional states of the dancers onstage. In her *New York Times* review, Anna Kisselgoff describes this quality in Bausch’s character as “absorbing into her pores every single detail of the emotionally stunted behavior around her” (Kisselgoff 1). Bausch directs her body and energy toward the characters as they move about onstage, especially when the “others” dance their pain and remorse. It is possible that Bausch represents the ghosts of all women destroyed by oppressive norms, and is devastated to discover that things

have not changed. She is especially empathetic with the second sleepwalker, Malou Airaudó, and often echoes her movements in canon.

With eyes closed, arms outstretched and palms receptive, Airaudó slowly, calmly and cautiously enters through “the door of the oppressed.” As she makes her way across the stage she runs into tables and chairs, startled by each blockade. She stops in front of “the door of the oppressors” and softly lowers her head. She traces her torso with her hand, up and across her breasts as Henry Purcell’s heart wrenching opera piece “The Fairy Queen” begins to play. In a raw state, she caresses herself, tenderly and sensually, but her expression is one of pain. Is she trying to remember something? Maybe she is striving to get in touch with a part of herself that feels pleasure while being drowned in cultural norms that rob her of it. In a breath, her arms extend away from her sides and she gently catches her head in her hand. In a sudden shift, she bolts back toward “the door of the oppressed.” For the audience, mirror neurons may cause an internal simulation of the shaky steps of the female “others” who cannot see, which may lead them to feel on edge or insecure. Mirroring Airaudó’s sensual, tender and breathy movements while simulating her expression of pain may invoke empathy or disorientation with the simultaneous presence of, often contradictory, feelings. Her sudden slip toward the door could cause arousal and the release of dopamine via a visual prediction error.

As Airaudó swiftly makes her way stage right, Rolf Borzík, in his black suit, pushes the chairs and tables out of her path with urgency. He is completely present with her, witnessing her as she presses her elbows into the wall, tosses her chest forward, and slides to the floor. She swirls her torso around in undulating motions, her curved arms framing and carving the space, one hand tracing or pushing the other, her head riding the circles of the movement. He constantly pushes chairs out of the way as she wildly expels pain through her movements. I will refer to this act of witnessing, following and clearing tables and chairs out of the path of the “others” as “monitoring.” This action is only exercised by the “authorities” in response to the volatile emotional movement phrasing of the “others.” I choose the word “monitoring”

because it is an action of surveillance that indicates the presence of an unequal dynamic and a call to seize control when necessary.

Mercy stands facing Airaudo as she walks toward him, and Borzic carefully arranges the tables and chairs along her path. Perhaps Mercy is what she has been trying to remember. Perhaps he has been the source of her tenderness and pain. They slowly slide their arms into a full embrace, and a calm serenity briefly fills the air. The alpha “authority,” Jan Minarik, enters through “the door of the oppressors.” I call him the alpha because he is the only authority who physically manipulates the “others” while the rest simply “monitor” them. Arm by arm he disconnects their embrace, leaving their heads nuzzled in each other’s necks. He gently lifts Mercy’s head and places Airaudo’s lips on his. Both dancers allow the manipulations to happen, and seem devoid of life, and yet they are clearly alive because they are standing upright. This movement quality may allude to Martin Seligman’s theory of “learned helplessness,” manifested by oppressive cultural norms. Manarik wraps Airaudo’s arm around Mercy’s shoulders, then places her on the shelf he created with Mercy’s arms. She lays limp, outstretched and vulnerable as Mercy looks forward, emotionless, and removed. Surely the audience feels uneasy and slightly jarred by the way Minarik interrupts a calm embrace by manipulating their position. If the viewers mirror the passive movements of Mercy and Airaudo, perhaps they also feel the helplessness that comes with being manipulated.

Manarik walks away, content with the change he made. Gravity slowly pulls Airaudo out of Mercy’s arms and she crashes to the ground. The life in their faces returns, and in an urgent fashion, they slam back into their original embrace. Minarik, frustrated, returns to the couple and manipulates their embrace again. He does this nine times, each time he is more frustrated and manipulates them more forcefully with greater speed. The breath of all three dancers becomes more audible, and they slam back into the embrace with more speed and force every time. The embrace between the lovers signifies equality. They connect to each other’s bodies reciprocally, with equal amounts of energy and longing. By changing their orientation, Minarik condemns their equality and shifts them to a physical position where the woman lays in her man’s

arms passive and helpless, which aligns with the rules of society. By the tenth repetition, Mercy and Airaud thrash the movement with rapid speed without Minariks assistance. The throwing of limbs becomes aggressive, her breathing becomes vocal gasps of struggle, and her crash to the ground appears to occur because Mercy has thrown her. The delivery of these movements without Minarik's manipulation shows the power of cultural programming and that resisting it is a brutal struggle. After the seventieth embrace, they hold each other tight, breathing quickly and heavily.

Susan Kozel beautifully articulates Bausch's method of mimesis in her article, *The Story is Told as a History of the Body: Strategies of Mimesis in the Work of Irigaray and Bausch*. Kozel states, "There is always a moment of excess or a remainder in the mimetic process, something that makes the mimicry different from that which inspires it, and which transforms the associated social and aesthetic space" (Kozel 101). Bausch employed this mimetic repetition to exhaust the audience with violence. There is no room for movement predication errors because the violent act is repeated exactly the same way every time with a gradual increase in tempo, which means there would be no reward of dopamine. Mirror neurons, on the other hand, are hard at work in this scene internally simulating the same action repeatedly, facilitating an empathetic response to the intense struggle depicted by the dancers. Catharsis is also a possibility with an invocation of aggression or fear. However, Bausch moves the audience beyond the point of catharsis through mimesis, which transforms the audience's perception of the violent act. In Arlene Croce's review in *The New Yorker* she states, "Bursts of violence are followed by long stillnesses. Bits of business are systematically repeated, sometimes with increasing urgency but more often with no variation at all. At every repetition, less is revealed, and the action that looked gratuitous to begin with dissolves into meaningless frenzy" (qtd. prelectur.stanford.edu). I infer that Croce is referring to the brain's inability to continue to make meaning out of something that has been re-presented to the limit. So the audience goes beyond seeing the violence, beyond being intrigued by it, beyond being disturbed by it, beyond experiencing catharsis in response to it, to relinquishing it completely. Through mimesis, Bausch makes us tired of violence.

Toward the end of *Cafe Muller*, all six dancers are on the stage together and all “authorities” are “monitoring” the “others.” Mercy runs back and forth between both doors, torn about which world he wants to be a part of. Airaudo slowly creeps in from the upstage wing and Mercy calmly sits at the table and waits for her. He gently lifts her from behind, circles her around and places her down, sending both of their bodies into a lunge. She softly repeats her gestures from the beginning, this time with Mercy holding her. They take turns lifting and gesturing as Borzik monitors them. As they get closer to “the door of the oppressed,” the lift develops into a gentle press into the wall, which eventually escalates into the couple taking turns slamming each other into the wall. This is another mimetic repetition of a violent act, but it differs from the former one because the shift toward violence is more abrupt. The predictability of the movement set in place by repetition creates an opportunity for arousal in the viewers with the sudden shift from tenderness to brutality. In this scene there is a simultaneous opportunity for the release of dopamine and catharsis via internally simulated acts of aggression. I hypothesize that as the movements continue to repeat in this aggressive quality beyond the release of dopamine and beyond the initiation of catharsis, arousal diminishes, exhaustion ensues, and the mimetic transformation of the violent act occurs.

Given the length and profound content in *Café Muller*, a full description is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note the impact of the ending. Chaos ensues. The “others” and the “authorities” enter and exit through all of the doors. The boundaries between both groups blur. Merly Tankard, the female “authority” that enters and exits several times throughout the dance with a precarious skitter and a timid and anxious “searching” mannerism, removes her black pea coat (armor) and reveals a thin and satiny blue dress. She flirts with the world of the “others” as evidenced by her kissing encounters with Mercy and her solo that traveled toward the “door of the oppressed” earlier in the piece. Minarik shifted from an alpha presence to one of anxiousness and fear. It seems as though the “authorities” have realized the destructive consequences of their actions and have lost control and order, however the dance ends with all characters executing movements that do not differ from those in the beginning. Even though

there has been a change in awareness by the “authorities,” the systematized oppression has been so powerful and chronic that shifting behaviors in opposition to it feels impossible. Like machines, the characters continue to act in accordance with destructive societal norms. Tankard, however, is the exception. She acknowledges Bausch, who has otherwise been invisible, and places her pea coat and red wig on her. Bausch’s movements become heavier and clumsier, and Tankard exits the scene. When making the choice to free herself from the life of being an “authority,” she acknowledges the raw and vulnerable ghostly woman, destroyed by the oppressive norms that Tankard herself implemented, only to lay her burden of armor upon her.

“That’s Life” and *Cafe Muller* both had a powerful impact on their viewers by incorporating violence against women into their choreography, but their disparate choreographic devices yield staggeringly contradictory messages about the acceptability of violence against women. Twyla Tharp’s method simplifies and glorifies violence against women while Pina Bausch’s method illustrates its complexity and embodies its destruction. Jay Ragoff commented on this reductive nature: “*Come Fly Away*’s problem lies not in Tharp’s aim to please a Broadway audience, but in her underestimation of both the audiences’ taste and their ability to enjoy a range of dancing that would offer a more complex and mature account of the varieties of romantic feelings and expression” (Ragoff 574). Tharp presents a violent relationship as a courtship phase, where a man abuses a woman who responds to the oppression with passivity and desire. This dynamic never shifts. The dance becomes progressively more exciting with the increased display of virtuosity, but it never becomes more than a presentation of violence. If Tharp’s intention is simply to entertain audiences with the presentation of violence against women, it is logical to infer that she condones and celebrates it.

Nothing about *Café Muller* condones violence against women. Rather, Bausch calls the audiences views on it into question. She constructed a complicated world where female oppression is protocol, and exposed its shattering effects through the interplay of six characters. Marianne Goldberg commented on Bausch’s choreographic methods in her article *Artifice and Authenticity*: “To dissect solidified gender

meanings, Bausch employs various strategies: juxtapositions of simultaneous, incongruous activities, a defiance of the time and space conventions of realism, and narrative fragmentation that disrupts the contexts of human behavior” (Goldberg 1). It is through these methods and mimesis that Bausch exhausts, disorients and bothers her audience in a way that invokes distress regarding violence against women. Bausch’s intent is not to use domestic violence to entertain, but “to produce a ‘proper consciousness’ through emotive experience” (Broadhurst 27).

The impact of a dance is determined by the interplay between choreographic choices and audience psychology. Based on my analysis of “That’s Life,” I argue that Tharp’s work was successful because she invoked cathartic opportunities for her audience to release aggression via the work of mirror neurons, and soothed this reaction by capitalizing on the dopaminergic response to sudden and virtuosic movements, leading to a message of acceptability and normalization of violence against women. The process of investigating *Café Muller* leads me to believe that its success was derived from the provocation of profound transformational thoughts, manifested through the repetitive activation of mirror neurons via mimesis that moved the audience past catharsis and dopaminergic rewards to disorientation and rejection of violence against women. By making violence against women the centerpiece of a dance in the late 1970’s, these choreographers chose to charge up the audience by embedding a political hot topic in their works. The effects and meanings regarding the inclusion of this content were cultivated in the choreographic methods and executed by the perceptual mechanisms of the audience.

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