

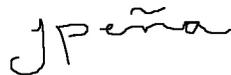
# **Performing the Multiple:**

## **Dancing a differently configured subjectivity**

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The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.



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## Abstract

The symbol of the multiple has been utilized in art throughout time. Displaying two or more bodies operating as a single entity, the multiple produces a number of effects in both visual form and content manifested. While this is commonly seen as displaying virtues of strength, perseverance and discipline, it is also questioned in its reduction of the individuals involved. “Performing the Multiple” explores the symbol across culture to examine both the popularity and the criticism of the form. I propose that Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage provides groundwork for the inherent meaning of the symbol. Starting with early modernist renditions of the multiple in Siegfried Kracauer’s *Mass Ornament*, I trace the form to contemporary dance. I then broaden my gaze to a range of practices including sculpture, photography, video, performance art, and pop media. I explore the ontology of three subjectivities prevalent in the performance of the multiple: the dancer, the female and the queer. My ultimate aim is to illuminate the symbol of the multiple and argue that in its current manifestations the multiple is a powerful site for re-imagining subjectivity. I propose that the multiple mediates the way subjectivities are embodied and has been repurposed over the years to produce a utopian subjectivity for female and queer identity.

In my own video and performance work, I explore methods of creating the visually pleasing form of the homogenous multiple, while maintaining difference. I am careful to recognize the individual subjectivities of the dancers while attempting to create a single, cohesive unit. I use the multiple with visual interest, but mainly because of the relationships it establishes between bodies. As a woman, a queer, and a dancer, the symbol of the multiple resonates with my identity, and is a useful tool to create works that are hypnotic visually and psychologically.

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## Introduction: The Symbol of the Multiple

The symbol of the multiple has been utilized across disciplines in fine art and performing arts. Through time, images of multiple bodies operating as a single subject continue to appear, captivating viewers with both the hypnotic form and accessible content. In ballet, a corps de ballet surrounds the soloists; in precision dance, a homogenous group of women move in perfect unison; in pop music videos and commercials, celebrities perform alongside multiple versions of themselves; and in literature, a subject is plagued by their doppelganger. Across these disciplines, multiple bodies represent a single unified and cohesive subject. This thesis will use the term “multiple” to apply to the plethora of instances in which two or more bodies appear together as a single unit—ranging from the twin and the doppelganger, to the homogenous corps and single entities that are comprised of many bodies. In its various appearances, the multiple has been constituted through different methods. In film and photography, bodies are multiplied through technological layering. In dance and performance art, precision movement by a homogenous corps creates a single entity. In literature, a subject is fictionally divided into different characters. In each of its manifestations, the multiple is a symbol producing a broad range of effects in both form and content.

In modern art, the individual identity of the creator is deemed most significant. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, dance companies transitioned from being named in reference to their location and style to carrying the name of a solitary choreographer. This transferred the focal point of the work from the group of performers to the individual creator. The individual is today privileged over the group, which complicates the symbol of the multiple in performance. Prior to the transition into modernity, performances displaying political values and messages were known to sacrifice the individuality of their performers. This was seen as a virtuous display of solidarity, unity, discipline, and strength. We currently see merit in visions of the celebrity multiplied in pop music videos and advertisements because it merely multiplies the already powerful individual. But when actual individuals comprise a group of multiples in the case of performance such as the corps de ballet, precision dance, or performance art, the loss of individual identity for the sake of the group is questioned. In contemporary dance, for an individual to be invisible within a performance and fade into a homogenous group is seen as a weakness of the performer and that the creator is exuding a politically complicated control and aesthetic. How do we view these bodies performing together as one? How has our understanding of them changed over time? What can the symbol of the multiple reveal about culture's relationship to the individual versus the group? How does the performance of the multiple change the subjectivities of the individuals involved?

In "Performing the Multiple: Dancing a Differently Configured Subjectivity," I will explore the symbol of the multiple across culture to examine both the popularity and the criticism of the form. In its incarnation across time and contexts, three identities are prevalent in my theorization of the body performing the multiple: the female, the queer, and

the dancer. I explore the ontology of female identity, queer identity and dance to find their connection to the multiple, and the reason for their predominance in the field.

I look first to find the origin of the symbol of the multiplied self. I propose that we can find the groundwork in psychoanalytic thought. Starting with the writing of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, I contextualize the meaning of the multiple as a cultural symbol within psychoanalysis and social thought. I allow Lacan to set the stage for the twentieth century multiple through his visual scene of the mirror stage. In seeing a mirror image that a child both is and is not, subjectivity is constituted. A subject is formed through multiplying, through Lacan's primordial split. I propose that this foundational multiplication of subjectivity makes the multiple a familiar and accessible symbol in arts and culture.

The symbol of the multiple has been popular across artistic mediums and periods. Starting with early modernist renditions of the performance of the multiple, I will trace the form up until the contemporary moment in performance. In some contexts, the multiple is capable of communicating strength and virtuosity, where in others it is written off as a superficial and highly designed emblem. Working through the popularization of precision dance troupes and the insertion of the corps into classical ballet, both in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I explore the development of what is today known as modern dance.

I find it important to include a range of work as case studies in the appearance of the multiple through time. Rather than continue to focus on the multiple within the field of dance, I turn to contemporary fine art and popular culture as other venues in which the form is employed. I direct my focus to other mediums such as sculpture, photography, video art, pop music videos and commercials, seeing what is retained in the content with the multiple, what such works have in common and what the symbol is capable of revealing about the

individual. After identifying the complications of the symbol, I am curious in which circumstances the multiple is most accepted and seen as the least problematic. Through mediums such as sculpture and video, the multiple can appear without the social-political relationships that complicate its manifestations in live performance. Without sacrificing the individual identities of bodies involved, I explore how our relationship to the symbol of the multiple is transformed. Although I could continue to push through the multiple in modern dance into its contemporary moment in dance performance and performance art, I want to broaden my gaze to see what is essential and unchanging about the symbol. Doing so ensures that the multiple is not specific to dance and inherent in the form. Instead, the multiple shows itself to be a broad-ranging emblem with both formal and conceptual relevance across mediums.

My ultimate aim in “Performing the Multiple” is to illuminate the symbol of the multiple—which is often seen as outdated, old-fashioned, and even offensive—and argue that in its current manifestations the multiple is a powerful site for re-imagining subjectivity. I intend to re-examine the role of the multiple in 20<sup>th</sup> century dance and queer visual culture to articulate its persistence and continued relevance today. I propose that the performance of the multiple mediates the way subjectivities are embodied and produced. The subjectivity created with the multiple is a site to re-imagine community and identity. The multiple has been repurposed over the years to create a utopian subjectivity for female and queer identity.

I come to these questions about the multiple first through my practice. Creating videos and performances, the multiple is a form that I have always employed: first as an unconscious aesthetic choice, and now as a critical investigation. When it came to my attention that people saw homogenous bodies moving in unison as a risky and problematic

endeavor, it was clear that my curiosity in the form that was evidenced in my work needed to become simultaneously theory-driven research. This thesis then follows the same trajectory as my own practice-as-research has taken.

I begin the thesis with subject-centered psychoanalysis, asking why I am drawn to the multiple. After my choice of the aesthetic was questioned, Lacan helped me see this as something I had *in common* with people rather than it being something that cast me apart. Psychoanalysis provides me with answers to the questions I have about the symbol that have become questions about myself. Turning away from specifically art-related theory to Lacan, I focus on the content and the meaning of the multiple beyond the work it creates.

In the second and third chapters, I navigate the same trajectory I took in my practice. I turn first to my personal narrative as a dancer, attempting to understand how different moments in my training could have led to my interest in the multiple. Beginning with precision chorus dancing and the corps de ballet, moving through modern dance into the multiple in contemporary art, I trace my own trajectory with the form in historical and theoretical terms. Employing different forms of dance in my practice, I am reconciling and attempting to “solve” the multiple. I push myself through different mediums attempting to find a location for my work in which I do not feel like a fascist dictator. Seeing how the multiple has been employed through time and in which ways it has been received gives me insight into the broader context of my work.

My research and writing inspires and has given me permission to create performance using the multiple in new ways. Employing the multiple in my work, the practice then talks-back to the research as I gather information about my experience, my performers’ experiences, and the reaction of the audience. The questions that have arisen in my processes

have led me to attempt to answer them in the research. Ultimately this thesis is a personal excavation of my interest in and my use of the multiple. It is performed simultaneously to and in conversation with my practice.

## I.

### Embodying the Mirror Image: Jacques Lacan and the Performance of the Multiple

An infant looks in the mirror and sees an image of a small body looking back at it. This other body appears to be whole and in control of its limbs while the child looking at it teeters. This is an image of a body that the child hopes to become, but isn't yet—a body that is unified and masterful. The child in the mirror is not connected to their mother, but is a solitary entity. When the child realizes they are indeed linked to this image of a child alone, they also realize that they are not, contrary to prior belief, connected to their mother. They are one single body lacking not only the motor control that the mirror image holds, but also lacking the most important thing to them, the part of them that fulfilled their desires. This is their first moment of self-recognition—a complex stage of gaining a coherent identity and self-reliance while losing the understood connection and control with the mother and the surroundings (Lacan 1977, 2).

In 1931, French psychoanalyst Henri Wallon developed what he called the “mirror test.” Placing a child between the ages of six and eighteen months in front of a mirror, Wallon identified a clear demonstration of the transition for the child that began with a

specular view of their mirror image. The specular transforms to the imaginary, and then from the imaginary to the symbolic (Roudinesco 2003, 29). This distinguishes a child from a chimpanzee, the closest relative of human, undergoing the same process at the same age. The chimpanzee engages with their mirror reflection, realizes it is merely illusory, and loses interest. The child, on the other hand, gains interest as they realize it is their own reflection.

In 1936, Jacques Lacan began a lecture on a similar idea that seemed to be the next step from Wallon's mirror test at the Fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress in Marienbad. Lacan never completed this initial presentation on the "mirror stage," as he ran out of time, nor was this first paper ever published (Roudinesco 2003, 25). In his use of these ideas and the language of the child's first recognition of itself in the mirror, Lacan has been criticized for never crediting Wallon. In the *Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, published in 2003, Elisabeth Roudinesco claims, "Lacan always tried to obliterate Wallon's name so as to present himself as the inventor of the expression" (Roudinesco 2003, 27). Lacan did, however, very clearly give reference to the work of James Mark Baldwin (Lacan 1977, 1). An American philosopher and psychologist, Baldwin wrote the paper "Imitation: A Chapter in the Natural History of Consciousness" in 1894, exploring the physical act of imitation and its tie to consciousness and mental development (Baldwin 1894).

Although these references to the mirror stage prior to Lacan's work could be seen as diminishing Lacan's own contributions, I believe that the continued exploration and research of this idea reveals the significance of this stage. While Wallon's term referred merely to a test, Lacan's mirror stage described a fundamental moment in the structure of the creation of subjectivity for an infant, which would continue to ground the permanent structure of an individual's subjectivity.

Lacan's use of the word "stage" was deliberate, combining the Kleinian term *position* and Freudian term *phase* (Roudinesco 2003, 29). This stage that Lacan identified is still acknowledged today as the fundamental moment in which a child becomes aware of itself. In the simultaneous recognition of itself while seeing what it is *not*, Lacan identifies the "primordial splitting" of the subject (Mitchell 1982, 5). Subjectivity is acquired as the child is doubled as both itself and its lost object. Working on it for years, Lacan articulated this function in 1949 with the publication of his paper, "The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience" (Lacan 1977).

### **Formation of "I"**

Lacan explained the mirror stage in his most popular book, *Ecrits*, describing the necessary steps a child would traverse to transition from thinking they were part of their mother's body to an awareness of their own body in relation to the world, and a relationship to that body (Lacan 1977, 1-7):

- 1) In seeing their image reflected back to them, this is the first moment a child recognizes the distinction between itself and its mother. Bearing witness to its own body moving without the body of the mother, the infant begins to establish its identity as an individual separate from the mother. Their image is constituted through the absence of their mother.
- 2) Lacking their mother also means lacking the means to gratify their own needs. In this step of the mirror stage, a child recognizes its lack. They are missing something; they are dependent on someone whom they are not.

- 3) Attempting to fill this lack, a child looks to the mirror. The child's dependency on the mother transforms to self-reliance on its mirror image. The mirror image replaces the mother in need and in desire.
- 4) In witnessing a lack, a child sees that something is missing. This brings the child into the symbolic order to replace the lost object through language.
- 5) In their specular observation of themselves in the mirror, they see a whole and unified subject, which they are not. As they teeter, they see in the mirror a body that is unified and masterful. The mirror conceals or freezes the infant's lack of motor skills.
- 6) Displaying a mis-representation of the child, the mirror further shows the child what they lack. But this fiction provides them with a promise and anticipation for the future. What they see in the mirror is not in fact their own image, but an image that provides the ground for their *ego ideal* that they hope to become. "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation" (Lacan 1977, 4). The image in the mirror is the model of the ego formation.
- 7) Seeing the ego ideal in the mirror, the ego is split between self and other. This relationship to the mirror image is alienating in its ability to line up with the self entirely and completely. A subject's reaction to its image is ambivalent. This ambivalence leads to a divided relationship to a subject's notion of self. "The image both is *and* is not an image of itself" (Grosz 1990, 40, emphasis in original). The ego is oriented around two "poles" of identification with the mirror image—one being joyful and affirmative in its experience of self-recognition,

unity, and pleasure, while the other is paranoid, jealous and frustrated in the split and misrecognition.

- 8) The mirror stage marks the emergence of a child's first psycho-sexual drives. Desire is turned from the mother onto the self.
- 9) Seeing themselves in the mirror alongside other people and/or objects, a child begins to develop spatial understanding. It bears witness to its own body in relation to its surroundings—attaining a sensory understanding of the self in relation to objects in terms of size, shape, distance, and position. Until then, the child's body and its surroundings were lumped together without distinction.
- 10) With this sensory understanding comes an awareness that the world is separate and is not their own. This diminishes the idea they had of themselves, heightening their lack and insufficiency.
- 11) In this separation between themselves and the world is an awareness of inside vs. outside, self vs. world/other, subject vs. object, etc.

Titling his paper “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,” we see Lacan trace this stage as a process that begins with no differentiation for the infant between their self and their surroundings, particularly their mother. The infant sees what it lacks, develops the ego-ideal, and finally the formation of the function of “I” (Lacan 1977, 2).

The mirror image is the model and the basis for future identification. In her writing about the mirror stage in the book *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, British scholar Jacqueline Rose brings attention to the imaginary fantasy aspect of a child's relationship with the mirror.

“Lacan’s account of subjectivity was always developed with reference to the idea of a fiction” (Rose 2005, 53). She traces this fiction through the elements of the mirror stage. The fictional aspect of the mirror stage is created through the freezing of the mirror image that conceals their instability. The mirror reveals the child’s lack by displaying a cohesive identity that they are not. But this image is purely an illusory fantasy. It is this fantasy that provides for the child their account of subjectivity. Therefore, their subjectivity is based in fiction. “The very image which places the child divides its identity into two” (Rose 2005, 53). This mirror image cultivates subjectivity, but the smoothness and totality of the mirror image is actually just a myth.

The mirror stage develops a fictional coherent identity. In this initial moment of the recognition of self-identity, the child is aware of two bodies. Thus, to be one body requires the presence of two bodies: the actual body and the image in the mirror. The self’s understanding of itself relies on its multiplication. The mirror image is a fantasy dividing the self into two. This moment of self-recognition is in fact a mis-recognition, as the image is smooth and total and conceals the subject’s real lack of motor skills.

In her book “Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction,” Australian theorist Elizabeth Grosz summarized that the mirror stage constitutes self-identity based not on one body, but on two. “From this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being” (Grosz 1990, 35). In this way, the split will persevere in subjectivity. Moving through life with this split, “the subject can only operate within language by constantly repeating that moment of fundamental and irreducible division. The subject is therefore constituted in language as this division or splitting” (Rose 2005, 54). This division and the lost object bring the child into language. In their desire for the lost object of their mother, they seek language to represent

what is not there. In the mirror stage, a child acquires both language and subjectivity. A self becomes itself by being two, and will continue to relive this moment of doubling throughout life to affirm their identity.

The primordial split at the heart of the formation of subjectivity creates an ambivalence towards itself. Ambivalence to the multiples of the self—these multiples both are and are not replicas, as the mirror image is and is not an image of itself. “It is the dual, ambivalent relation to its own image that is central to Lacan’s account of subjectivity” (Grosz 1990, 39). For subjectivity to be formed in this moment of ambivalence, the “I” created is constantly shifting. The “I” is a shifter—it will never be a stable subject, but will only ever be fixed in the moment and the circumstance at which it is named (Rose 1982, 31). “I” has a different meaning in each utterance.

### **The Mirror Throughout Life**

As Lacan continued to re-work his mirror stage and articulate its nuances more clearly, he distinguished that its implications carried through into the life of adults, “The mirror stage is far from a mere phenomenon which occurs in the development of the child. It illustrates the conflictual nature of the dual relationship” (Lacan S4, 17). What is established with the mirror is not only your relationship to yourself, but your relationship to others. The relationship between a self and itself has been a prevalent symbol of drama in fiction. Splitting a subject in two, a main character encounters their doppelganger, creating a complicated experience and propelling the story.

A close colleague of Lacan’s predecessor Sigmund Freud was Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank. In his book *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* of 1914, Rank traversed the

doppelganger in literature (Rank 1971). “Doubling” has always been a popular theme in literature, with the doppelganger as a secondary character revealing the struggles of the main character. Rank’s description of the double could be correlated with what was later to become Lacan’s symbolic. “This use of the double-theme derived not so much from the authors’ conscious fondness for describing preternatural situations, or separate parts of their personalities, as from their unconscious impulse to lend imagery to a universal problem—that of the relation of the self to the self” (Rank 1971, xiv). Although these stories and Rank’s text are limited to portrayals of a one-to-one relationship, deemed “double,” I equate his use of the term “double” with the term “multiple.” We have seen that Lacan’s divided self is ambivalent and shifting. The two bodies of the double are not each solitary entities, but instead together represent a combined single identity like that of the multiple. Referencing moments that may ordinarily be seen in psychoanalysis as doubling, “Performing the Multiple” is an experiment in thought in which the double is one manifestation of the multiple. In the literature that Rank discusses, characters encounter and form complicated relationships with other characters in their exact image, ranging from hate and violence to love and admiration. Rank identifies the theme of the double as underlying the basic human relationship to oneself, which is always complex. All future relationships developed through life adhere to the relationship set up of the self to its mirror image. In literature and artwork using the theme of the multiple, we see the complexity of a subject’s relationship to itself embodied.

To make sense of the mirror stage in terms of the biological conditions and the social conditions, Lacan brings in the zoological example of insects mimicking their environment. He references French social theorist Roger Caillois’s theory of *legendary psychaesthesia* that

animals alter their physical appearance in accordance with their environment (Lacan 1977, 3). Discussing Caillois's work in his paper "Mimicry and Legendary Psychesthesia," and its connection to the mirror stage, Elizabeth Grosz posits, "Mimicry, even within animals, threatens to assimilate the individual into its environment at the cost of any 'identity'. We have here the effect of a 'depersonalization by assimilation into space'" (Grosz 1990, 33). A child's relation to their image in the mirror is one of an awareness of what they are not yet that they hope to become. In these moments, it is common for the child to attempt to mimic its own mirror image.

Scientific studies show that this act of mimicking or mirroring, whether in the mirror or with another person, fires neurons in the brain named *mirror neurons*. The mirror neurons produce a brain signal that in turn generates empathy. In the act of mirroring, we take on another's posture and expression. Embodying the other person's physical expressions produce similar emotional expressions in the imitators. Thus, mirror neurons are the neural basis for empathy (Gallese 2001, 46).

Mirroring and mirror neurons are also said to help people learn new skills. Learning this way, one's physical technique when later executing the skill will always be in reference to the original body from which the imitation came (Gallese 2001, 36). Similar to this, "the mirror stage initiates the child into the two-person structure of imaginary identification, orienting it forever towards identification with and dependence on (human) images and representations for its own forms or outline" (Grosz 1990, 48). For everyone, it is through this image of self-as-other in the mirror that one grasps and forms his or her identity. Children set up a relationship with their mirror image based on an awareness of their own insufficiency, anticipation of what one can become, and mimicry of their mirror image.

## **The Mirror Today**

Still today, philosophy and critical theory persist in making reference to Lacan's mirror stage. It continues to be thought of as contemporary due to the widespread use of it across disciplines, the multiple ways to engage with it, and that although it refers to a phase an infant goes through, the subjectivity formed at that time continues to be a complex point of struggle and interest throughout life.

Crucial for this project is the multiple that the mirror stage visually establishes for the individual psyche. This mirror stage is characterized by a split and a divide in the ego which occurs in the formation of an individual's identity. The resulting subjectivity is constituted through partitioning and dividing. "It becomes... both a subject and an object" (Grosz 1990, 38). This dual existence of both seeing and being seen multiplies the perspectives of an individual. To be a coherent individual, an individual views and acts from multiple perspectives. A single subjectivity is comprised of multiple subjectivities.

With an unconscious awareness of our own bodies as multiple, to view other bodies acting as one appears familiar. The multiple or repetition of a singular body is a common symbol used throughout different art forms and popular media. I propose that the symbol of the multiple across the arts is the embodiment of the primordial split in subjectivity that Lacan speaks about, and that the popularity of it stems from its relation to a shared moment we each have in the creation of our individual identity. Making visible the imagined multiple selves creates pleasure not just for the maker and the performer through the process, but also for the viewer through an empathetic understanding of its symbolic nature. Lacan's mirror stage is fundamental and applies to people across varying cultures. In this same way, the multiple is a symbol that is universally accessible.

Arts of varying disciplines have portrayed the symbol of the multiple in different formats. Photography and video in both pop media and in fine art have utilized the form of the multiple increasingly as technology has progressed. Performances of all kinds—theater, dance, and performance art—have displayed groups of individuals moving in unison as one entity through time. Dance performance has a unique relationship to the multiple. I posit that the prevalence of the multiple in dance harkens back not only to the infant’s mirror stage, but specifically to the foundational training for the dancer of class in ballet technique and the continued formation of a dancer’s identity through the tool of the mirror.

Although created with diverse aesthetics and forms, there are similarities that persist in the appearance of the multiple. A striking similarity in much of the work across these disciplines is that the body of the multiple has most often been the female body, or a male performing female posturing. Also noticeable is that artists who identify as queer have produced a fair amount of contemporary uses of the performance of the multiple. I posit that the multiple female and queer bodies are not inadvertent, but have everything to do with the formation of female and queer identity. I will look to dance training, feminist theory and to queer identity to see what these have in common, what they can reveal about one another, and how they foster the popularity of the symbol of the multiple.

### **The Mirror in Dance**

Although reliance on the mirror image is necessary for everyone to acquire subjectivity and foster the growth of identity, for nobody is it more vital than for the dancer. From a young age, a dancer is taught in front of a mirror. Most dancers begin their training through studying ballet technique. These classes are structured for the young dancer to focus

precisely on the mirror reflections of themselves, their peers, and their teacher. They watch their teacher immediately from two sides: standing behind them, the students see the back of their body in the classroom simultaneous to watching the reflection of the front of their body in the mirror. The process of learning is to watch their teacher's movements from these two sides, and then through examining their own body in the mirror, attempting to match it. This process for a dancer in a mirror expands Lacan's mirror stage, multiplying the bodies to which a subject relates. Where for the infant, their body is doubled in the mirror, for the young dancer their body is multiplied. How well a dancer trains is in direct correlation to how well a dancer interacts with their mirror image. Although "Performing the Multiple" addresses the multiple in dance utilizing a range of styles including ballet, precision, modern, and contemporary dance, dance training begins with ballet class for virtually all dancers. Like Lacan's proposition that the subjectivity created in the mirror stage is carried through life, I propose that the subjectivity a dancer creates in ballet class is fundamental and activated regardless of style pursued in the future. In his essay "'Mirror Mirror on the wall...': Narcissism as a Danger for the Art of Dance," in *Ballet International*, Richard Merz explains, "A mirror actually constitutes a virtually ideal aid: the practicing dancers see the objective results of their exertions directly, with their own eyes" (Merz 1991, 13). Dance is based on a dancer mimicking first their teacher, and later their choreographer. Where Caillois had seen mimicry as "threaten(ing) to assimilate the individual," in dance mimicry *aims* to assimilate (Grosz 1990, 33). The act of mimicry in dance training is done not just by the present bodies of teacher/choreographer and dancer, but also in the repetition of these bodies in the mirror.

As Lacan has shown, the mirror image *never* lines up perfectly and instead creates a fictional identity based on this split or division (Rose 2005, 53). Also important in looking to mirrors in dance training is the fact that mirror images are reversed, and anything beyond the physical is not captured. “There is no such thing as objective self-observation in a mirror” (Merz 1991, 13). Therefore, in the mirror, a dancer doesn’t see their own body—they see the body of an Other, whom they must develop a working relationship with.

The working relationship between a dancer and their mirror image is not one unlike the relationship developed in Lacan’s mirror stage. It is most importantly based on witnessing lack, with a dancer asking: how does my perceived motor coordination match-up with the motor coordination I see in the mirror? How well am I synchronized with the bodies around me and around my mirror image? To train in the mirror is “to attempt to do something which is basically impossible, i.e. to simultaneously be the person in action and the spectator” (Merz 1991, 13). Dance training then is based on a split of the dancer into two roles. Even in performing a solo, a dancer is never alone, but is dancing with their imaginary double established through the mirror. Merz proposes that, “The art of dance tends toward narcissistic self-contemplation” due to its imbued emphasis on the mirror image of the self (Merz 1991, 16).

I propose that this narcissistic self-contemplation splits the dancer’s consciousness beyond the two poles of dancing and watching and into several more bodies of awareness:

- 1) The consciousness of the dancing body. To dance requires presence and awareness, not just to remember the movements, but to work with your body and the space around it.

- 2) The spectator gazing at their own body to correct it—similar to a step in Lacan’s mirror stage, a subject sees its reflection in the mirror and feels a disconnect, sees things that don’t line up with their imagination of how they look. But this process, as opposed to that of the infant, is based on reciprocity. It is a conversation between the real body and the reflected body: (I.E., does it help if I do this? Absolutely not, it looked better before.)
- 3) An imaginary image of the ideal body dancing. In ballet, there *is* an image of perfection. We may have never seen it, but we can imagine it. The technical aims are a fixed structure. The image in the mirror is no longer the ego ideal of the infant; the image we can imagine of the perfect ballet body performing the moves alongside us is the ego ideal.
- 4) An awareness of the bodies dancing alongside their own—in class, dancers must perform the same movements together. Looking into the mirror, then, they are not just met with the reflection of one body doing what they are doing, but many. Not only does the dancer develop that relationship with themselves in the mirror, but with the other bodies surrounding their own reflection. (I.E. What is the difference? If there is a difference, something is wrong—how do I change that? We should all be perfect and together. That body needs to move *this* way.) There is a sense of control over the bodies around the subject’s body, as they are all appearing similarly in the mirror.

This relationship that a dancer is trained to develop with the mirror establishes dependency—to look into the mirror confirms their awareness of their dancing body.

Without their reflection, are they dancing? This also develops a habitual gaze, which is hard

to re-train, “That not-so-rare, slightly lost look directed into space from dancers on the stage is perhaps somehow searching for its own mirror image, which is no longer there” (Merz 1991, 14). In their gaze outwards to the audience, although they may see rows of seats, they are also imagining their own image reflected in front of them.

Dancing alone after training in a mirror for years, one is never dancing alone, but alongside their mirror image, the invisible image of perfection, and the other bodies that it does or does not match. One dancing body is in fact always multiple bodies. The ontology of dance is grounded in the multiple, and the multiple is fundamental in the formation of a dancer’s identity. Thus, it is natural for dance performance to frequently use the symbol of the multiple both formally based on dance training and also conceptually based on the formation of identity for a dancer.

### **Lacan’s Unfixed Subjectivity: The Queer Mirror**

In her writing on the mirror stage in the book *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, Elizabeth Grosz calls the recognition of the self in the mirror a “perspective of exteriority” on the self (Grosz 1990, 38). In this relation, the self is cast as an outsider to the smooth fictional image in the mirror. This position of outside or exterior identity corresponds to the placement of queer or female identity within psychoanalysis. The female body is the embodiment of lack. Lacan’s castration complex casts the identity of women as those without (Grosz 1990, 39). Constituted as lack, the female body searches for how to make up for this lack. The common performance of multiples of female bodies is the embodiment of this recognition of lack. The performances add on multiples indefinitely asymptotically, as it will never make up for what is missing. We are what we lack.

Due to the definition of women as *not* men, based purely on being the negative of the man and not having what he has, feminist scholars have worked hard to negotiate their relationship to psychoanalysis. In her seminal book *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* on the work of Sigmund Freud from 1974, Juliet Mitchell posited, “[a] rejection of psychoanalysis and of Freud’s works is fatal for feminism. However it may have been used, psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society, but an analysis *of* one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women, we cannot afford to neglect it” (Mitchell 1974, xiii). In 1982, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose co-edited *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*. In their introductions Mitchell and Rose ground the complicated relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism. “The history of psychoanalysis can in many ways be seen entirely in terms of its engagement with this question of feminine sexuality” (Rose 1982, 28). Rose goes on to explain the fictional aspects of sex and sexuality according to Lacan, proposing his argument that “psychoanalysis should not try to produce ‘male’ and ‘female’ as complementary entities, sure of each other and of their own identity, but should expose the fantasy on which this notion rests (Rose 1982, 33). This unstable, unfixed notion of identity would today be equated with *queer* identity. The term “queer” was originally defined as something strange and unusual. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, this was turned directly to sexuality and referred to gender deviance particularly amongst effeminate gay men. The activist group Queer Nation reclaimed the word with their name in 1990. An offspring of the AIDS activist group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, known as ACT-UP, Queer Nation formed in New York to discuss AIDS advocacy and homophobia, and helped cultivate activism in the gay and lesbian community (Brontsema 2004: 4). Committed to fighting “queerbashing,” the group repurposed the

derogatory term *queer* to open up the restrictive and exclusionary terms *gay* and *lesbian*. The word *queer* created a community of inclusion across genders and sexualities. Queer is known today to both construct and dismantle the idea of a cohesive identity.

In his essay “Lacan and queer theory,” Tim Dean claims that although Lacan died before queer theory came into existence, Lacan would have been actively engaged with this contemporary discourse. According to Dean, “Lacan makes psychoanalysis look rather queer” (Dean 2003, 238). Many scholars trace the origins of queer theory to Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (Dean 2003, 238). Foucault was adamantly critical of psychoanalysis in the text with regards to its heteronormativity. Although he was clear in standing against it, Foucault never articulated specifically which school of psychoanalysis his work was against. Founded on the heteronormativity that Foucault spoke against, Lacan’s vision of sexuality was unstable and open. Dean proposes that Lacan’s notion of unfixed sexuality lines up with Foucault’s critique of heteronormativity (Dean 2003, 243). The lack of clear lines with regards to biology, desire, and sexuality makes the idea of lucid and fixed sexual identity impossible and “in the realm of fantasy” (Rose 1982, 35). Juliet Mitchell corresponds the relationship of psychoanalysis with sexuality as its relationship with subjectivity,

the analysand’s unconscious reveals a fragmented subject of shifting and uncertain sexual identity. To be human is to be subjected to a law which de-centres and divides: sexuality is created in a division, the subject is split; but an ideological world conceals this from the conscious subject who is supposed to feel whole and certain of a sexual identity (Mitchell 1982, 26).

Like subjectivity, sexuality is generated through a split. This unstable “I”, the shifter, will possess a sexuality that is also a shifting, open identity.

This sexual identity, the erotic, is constituted in the mirror stage as the autoerotic. Turning desire from the lost object of their mother onto the mirror image of themselves, the

child first experiences the psycho-sexual drive. Later in life, to turn desire onto the mirror image constitutes “narcissism” for Sigmund Freud. Freud’s essay “On Narcissism” described narcissism as a developmental stage occurring in the transition from auto-eroticism to object-love. This, like homosexuality, was classified as a perversion (Freud 1989).

In her writing about lesbian desire, Simone de Beauvoir freely uses the word “narcissist.” Beauvoir equates the homo-erotic with the auto-erotic in writing about lesbian identity in her book *The Second Sex*. “It is only when her fingers caress a woman’s body whose fingers in turn caress her body that *the miracle of the mirror* takes place” (Beauvoir 2009, 429, emphasis added). Accidentally or not, in her use of the term “mirror,” Beauvoir brings in Lacan’s mirror stage. With the mirror stage comes a child’s first account of psycho-sexual drives in which their desire is turned from their mother onto their own image in the mirror.

In her naming of lesbian desire as “the miracle of the mirror,” de Beauvoir gives language to the outdated notion that homosexual desire is desire for the self. This equation turns the self-as-other that we see in the mirror to an actual other-as-self in the flesh. Rather than be able to see the difference between two women, she reduces it to being an absolutely equal, mirror experience. “Each is both subject and object...; this duality is complicity” (Beauvoir 2009, 429).

Beauvoir sees the lesbian relationship as founded on too much similarity to create anything other than narcissism. “True reciprocity, Beauvoir implies, presupposes difference: too much similarity reduces sexual interaction to a narcissistic mirroring of the other: it is not a coincidence that she speaks of the ‘miracle of the mirror’ (SS436) precisely in the context of lesbian sexuality” (Moi 2008, 222). Arguing for difference, Beauvoir does not believe this

could be achieved between two women. Lacan's unfixed and open image of sexuality, however, leaves room to imagine difference and reciprocity between two people of the same sex.

### **Anti-Psychiatry**

Similar to his unfixed notion of sexuality, Lacan's notion of subjectivity was equally, if not more so, fluid. "The matter and manner of all Lacan's work challenges this notion of the human subject: there is none such" (Mitchell 1982, 4). Lacan's refrain from a concrete and fixed human subjectivity conflicted with popular humanistic thought. Humanism put forward the notion that humans are and should be in control of their thoughts and actions (Mitchell 1982, 4).

Similar to humanist thought, the method of psychiatry believes that there is a healthy and unified subject. Through its origin in hospitals, psychiatry is known as a treatment, and aims at healing the patient to lead them back to a unified self. The pursuit of psychiatry is in opposition to Lacan's notion of the subject. "Lacan's human subject is not a 'divided self' that in a different society could be made whole, but a self which is only actually and necessarily created within a split" (Mitchell 1982, 5). Thus, Lacan was not interested in healing or in making whole a subject. In fact, Lacan's divided self necessitates elements of madness, which is exactly what psychiatrists are attempting to cure (Turtle 2001, 511).

In the aftermath of World War II, the distance between the methods of psychiatry and psychoanalysis grew to public pronouncement in France. At that time, psychiatry was well supported by the government within its place in hospitals and schools. Psychoanalysis, however, sat on the margins of culture, not yet entirely accepted, and appealing mostly to the

artistic community (Turkle 2001, 509 quoting Lacan 1966, 176). During the hardship of the war and the years after, mental patients residing in asylums lived under inhumane conditions, with thousands of them starving to death (Turkle 2001, 509). A group of reformers established themselves with a mission to humanize the conditions for the patients through various means. This was a radical political movement that included people approaching the issue from interests in politics, psychoanalysis, humanism, and community organizing. Psychoanalysis found its way into the movement by being on the outside of the governmental institution of the hospitals itself, and having similar social objectives to the political protestors.

From its birth, psychoanalysis was political, believing in action against social repression. Starting with Freud and continuing with Lacan, psychoanalysis was formed “as a radical doctrine with an implicit critique of social repression” (Turkle 2001, 508). Psychiatry was founded on the idea of normal, and of repressing madness, whereas psychoanalysis was built against these structures. Psychoanalysis was cast as the “stigmatized outsider” in the organizational terrain of the hospitals and schools in which it had no place (Turkle 2001, 509). Placed on the periphery, psychoanalysis was met by leftist political organizers. These two communities were brought together with similar ideals in the interests of anti-psychiatry. Although psychoanalysis had since its inception carried implicit critiques, this was a moment in which those critiques were made explicit.

### **The Structure of Desire**

We have seen through Lacan’s mirror stage that subjectivity is constituted through the doubling process in psychoanalysis (Lacan 1977, 3). Individual identity is based not on one

body, but on the reflection of that body—the multiple. This symbol of the multiple in the mirror is understood largely through Lacan’s mirror stage and corresponding ideas within psychoanalysis and science. But we can also understand the symbol of the multiple as a broader cultural issue whereby questions of psychoanalysis, social standing and subjectivity all come together. In the performance of the multiple, the structure of the performance corresponds to Lacan’s structure of desire.

For Lacan, desire is metonymic and can never be defined, pinpointed, or held. Desire is only for something that will never be attained. It is “caught in the rails of metonymy, eternally extending toward the desire for something else” (Lacan 1977: 518). This creates an asymptotic structure, with the desired object continuing to be out of grasp. We see this structure physically articulated in the symbol of the multiple. In performances of the corps de ballet, precision dance, and performance art such as that of Vanessa Beecroft, bodies could continue to be added, but it will never be enough. There could always be more. The multiple embodies Lacan’s asymptotic structure of desire with its endless replication of bodies. There is no end that will ever be reached. Although these structures and relationships are internal, viewing the symbol of the multiple in performance with a single body interacting with its multiples brings an empathic understanding of the complex terrain. “By partitioning, dividing, representing, inscribing the body in culturally determinant ways, it is constituted as a social, symbolic and regulatable body” (Grosz 1990, 38). The performance of the multiple inscribes not only a personal dilemma and dimension, but also a human one. It embodies a quest for fulfillment—an awareness of what one strives for and what one lacks. The multiple makes visible Lacan’s asymptotic desire. In the circumstances of the performance of the multiple, ranging from precision chorus dancing, to Vanessa

Beecroft's performances, to the music videos of pop stars, no matter how many multiples there are, there could be more. We desire more. There can never be enough of that single body. Watching these performances thus keeps our desire activated—since we can always imagine more bodies, we have pleasure in the impossibility of fulfillment.

### **Embodying the Primordial Split in Art**

Subjectivity is constituted through the primordial split. In Lacan's fundamental mirror stage, a subject becomes itself through seeing its reflection as a separate entity. This initial moment of the split is relived continuously through life to affirm one's individual identity. There is pleasure in the revision. In a range of arts including literature, television, and performance, the split subject is present in the work, embodied in the symbol of the multiple. Work displaying the multiple has been popular due to both the visual scene it creates and the reference it gives to the split. There is empathetic pleasure in seeing this symbol of the multiple embodied, and pleasure in its creation. The symbol makes visible what a subject had been coping with as imaginary.

The subjectivities who reckon with the symbol of the multiple most frequently are women, queers, and dancers. Female artists and artists who identify as queer seek the use of the symbol of the multiple to glimpse a solid reflection of their own identities. From their position of exteriority of identity in life, women and queers look to multiplied images of themselves with the desire for the smooth fiction of identity that the multiple provides.

Popular across the arts, the symbol of the multiple or repetition of a single body has been particularly present in dance. The split that occurs in the mirror for an infant is expanded for the dancer, who sees their body moving in unison alongside other dancers. For

a dancer, to perform as a multiple in a homogenous group is pleurably familiar in its reference to training with a mirror from childhood. Choosing to perform as a multiple, or creating work that uses the structural symbol of the multiple is reliving the childhood fantasy for the dancer that was constituted in the mirror. I propose that the persistence of reliving the moment of the primordial split in the mirror stage in dance training has made this symbol present as both form and content. Populist precision dance troupes across the world were a common form of this symbol, with their focus of performances being on the repetition of homogenous bodies. I posit that these performances are popular because they make visible a moment in the formation of subjectivity that confuses self and other and establishes a primordial splitting of the ego.

Looking at the performance of the multiple specifically in the field of dance, in the next section, I will focus on dance ranging from precision dance troupes, to the corps de ballet, to modern dance. I will do so through the eyes of social theory, rather than through psychoanalysis. In subject-centered psychoanalysis, the multiple reveals an individual's unconscious, but through culture-centered social theory, the multiple is capable of revealing a culture's unconscious.

## II.

### Modernity in Dance: Siegfried Kracauer's *Mass Ornament* from 1890 to Today

In 1927, Siegfried Kracauer proposed that it is through superficial expressions that the unconscious characteristics of a cultural moment are revealed. A German intellectual, Kracauer explained his theory in both philosophical and sociological terms, positing that an epoch's own conscious beliefs about itself do not offer insight into its entire formation. Instead, looking at "surface-level" emblems of entertainment, "unheeded impulses" of an era are made visible (Kracauer 1995, 75).

Kracauer applied his theory to the Tiller Girls, whom he identified as a popular superficial emblem. The Tiller Girls were a precision dancing group created by John Tiller in Manchester, England. Kracauer, however, identified the Tiller Girls as "products of American distraction factories" (Kracauer 1995, 75). Regardless of whether Kracauer knew he had the wrong information about the origins of the Tiller Girls, in his attribution of them with factories in America, his intention was to correlate them with a Capitalist ethos and a focus on production and machinery.

The Tiller Girls were among the first of many precision dance troupes. Their large-scale performances involved a group of homogenous women in identical costumes dancing in perfect precision. They moved through intricate geometric patterns, with the focus of the performances on the abstract forms they created rather than on the individual women doing so. Kracauer did not limit his scope to precision dancing, but left it ambiguous, including rhythmic gymnastics and other sporting events. Watching the performances would be an even larger mass of spectators, arranged in finely organized stadium seating. Both the masses of performers and masses of spectators were abstracted to become ornaments equally instrumental in the creation of the spectacle. This performance of precision dancers mirrored by precisely organized viewers created what Kracauer titled, “The Mass Ornament.”

My interest in “Modernity in Dance” is to bring discussion to the mass ornament within contemporary culture, particularly within contemporary modern dance. I will investigate the structure of the mass ornament, how it has changed from its inception in 1927 to today, what it reveals about the cultures it has been displayed within, and how it has influenced contemporary performance. Although the structure of the symbol of multiples within the mass ornament seems outdated, and embodies a moment of modernity as Kracauer suggests, I propose that the structure had a life prior to the Tiller Girls, and still has a place within contemporary culture. I agree with Kracauer when he says, “No matter how low one gauges the value of the mass ornament, its degree of reality is still higher than that of artistic productions which cultivate outdated noble sentiments in obsolete forms—even if it means nothing more than that” (Kracauer 1995, 79).

Approaching these questions from an interest in preserving or cultivating the value of the mass ornament, this chapter hopes to address: how does the mass ornament continue to

exist today, and with what political implications? How is it understood in democratic America? Why did Kracauer impulsively correlate them with America? How did the mass ornament exist prior to the Tiller Girls? What does the mass ornament reveal about the cultural moment we are in right now? How does the mass ornament correspond with contemporary performance? Why do female bodies embody most of the performances of the mass ornament?

### **The Tiller Girls**

The history of the mass ornament begins with John Tiller, a British man who successfully ran a cotton trade factory in Manchester, England until 1890. He was a man from humble beginnings, raised by a young single mother working as a seamstress in Blackburn. Tiller married Mary Carr in 1873, when they were both nineteen, with whom he had seven children. His uncle, John George, took him in to his life in Manchester, lavishing the results of his successful cotton business on Tiller, and helping him navigate his way into the industry himself (Vernon 1988, 10).

Always interested in music, Tiller began taking small jobs in local theaters in the 1880s, first as the stage manager of the *Minnehaha Minstrels*, and later as the director of the local Comedy Theatre. It was at this time that Tiller began teaching dance to children at the cotton factory and in his home. Although Tiller's background did not include any formal dance training, he taught the girls simple moves and focused on their execution in perfect precision as a group. These first troupes performed in local church pageants throughout Lancashire. Tiller travelled with his troupes to perform and recruit new students while maintaining his work at the factory and caring for his seven children (Vernon 1988, 12).

With rising popularity, Tiller was invited to present a quartet of his students at the Prince of Wales Theatre in Liverpool in 1890. Of all his pupils, Tiller was very exact with his cast, choosing four 10-year old girls of the same shape, equal height, and similar looks. Although this was not very difficult among the white inner-city children of Lancashire, the effect was highly visible. Thus began the aesthetic of homogeneity of the Tiller Girls (Vernon 1988, 12). Tiller was sure of an encore in Liverpool and built an additional dance for the children, after which they received a standing ovation each night. The show continued for three months, affirming Tiller's decision to leave the cotton industry.

The girls on tour with Tiller lived a highly managed existence, attending school for the three hours required by law, chaperoned by matrons, and performing two shows a day. Far away from their home of Manchester, the girls' position was coveted, bringing home more money than most of their working-class families (Vernon 1988, 17). The success of the show resulted in a year of touring and many other bookings. It was necessary that supplementary troupes were formed in the same likeness. In addition to the school he formally established in Manchester, Tiller opened another school in London that would house a hundred dancers from around the country. This created multiple groups of Tiller Girls for distribution.

Tiller's wife Mary passed away in 1905. Within 2 years, Tiller remarried Jennie Walker, who became a vital component of the Tiller business. Jennie Tiller helped establish the international ties that the Tiller Girls were quickly cultivating, opening an additional school in New York City around 1916 (Vernon 1988, 29). By his death in 1925, John Tiller had become an international household name, changing working-class girls' families and revolutionizing popular dance.



The Tiller Girls, 1897



The Tiller Girls, 1980

### **The Mass Ornament**

In 1927, two years after John Tiller's death, Siegfried Kracauer wrote the now famous essay "The Mass Ornament." By this time the Tiller Girls were known worldwide, with multiple troupes touring and headlining many newsreels. They were a popular form of entertainment to no contention.

Displaying masses of women moving with exact precision in ornate patterns, Kracauer claimed that the individuality of the women disappears, and they are rendered abstract. This abstraction was the aesthetic Kracauer corresponded with modernism and referred to factories filled with machinery, devoid of meaning and geared solely towards efficient production (Kracauer 1995, 78). Kracauer's critique of the mass ornament is a critique of modernity. He is skeptical of the effects of modernity, through abstraction and rationalism on the subjectivity of the individual. Capitalist production has no meaning other than itself and creates nothing but more capitalist production. For Kracauer the mass ornament, like capitalist production, is "an end in itself" (Kracauer 1995, 78). Kracauer was pessimistic about this modern and capitalist process of abstraction, proposing that it leads to ambivalence and to rationality, away from reality, and that "man is left behind" (Kracauer

1995, 82). Despite the meaninglessness, however, “the *aesthetic* pleasure gained from ornamental mass movements is *legitimate*” (Kracauer 1995, 79, emphasis in original).

With “thousands” of homogenous girls moving in exact unison, their individuality is subsumed.<sup>1</sup> The girls are bound together as a group, and the individuals exist only in relation to the group. This can be seen as either a communal celebration of collective identity and social harmony, or it can be seen as embodying militarist and hierarchical orders of mechanical nature. Kracauer correlates the Girls’ perfection of precision with the logic of mass production, thereby writing the women as the objects of production (Kracauer 1995, 78). Despite their feminine attire and ideal aesthetic, the focus on kicks and lines renders them abstract, and in turn, sexless. They were known for their legs, which Kracauer suggests were not seen as an erotic part of each girl, but instead as “an abstract designation of their bodies” (Kracauer 1995, 84). Kracauer correlated the legs of the Tiller Girls with the hands of the workers in the factories. The hands in the factories are a symbol of efficient production. Similarly, the Tiller Girls’ legs were symbolic designations.

Kracauer corresponds the structure of the mass ornament, with its viewing masses organized above the performing mass, with the Taylor system. Fredrick Winslow Taylor developed an acute system known as “scientific management” right at this time, in the 1880s and 90s. Taylor studied the manufacturing industry, designing methods of working to increase productivity and efficiency (Taylor 2006). Kracauer saw the abstraction of the mass ornament, with its focus on lines and forms as Taylorist. In this way, the subjective experience of the Girls disappears, as attention is merely on space and on time.

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<sup>1</sup> Kracauer refers to the performances as of thousands of women however the largest group of Tiller Girls I found was 32 women.

## **After the Mass Ornament**

This mass ornament as Kracauer defined it in 1927 has been performed worldwide. Declining in prevalence since the 1960's, the mass ornament is still in existence today, though not as prominently. From the commencement of the Tiller Girls in 1890 to the unending adoration of the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes of New York today, the mass ornament has persevered as a homogenous set of women moving in unison in front of tiers upon tiers of pleased onlookers. Meanwhile major political reformations have taken place, including the rise and fall of Fascism, National Socialism, and the global spread of Capitalism.

Written in 1927, Kracauer's perspective from Germany was in relation to an undermining of the Enlightenment, the speculation of the approaching demise of capitalism, the height of the Weimar economic boom, and the impending occupation of the National Socialists in Germany. From this shaky political ground, Kracauer posits, "the structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation" (Kracauer 1995, 78).

Kracauer's essay, "The Mass Ornament," approaches the dance performance of the Tiller Girls through philosophical and sociological methods, rather than through interest in dance or the rise of body culture at the time, both of which Kracauer knew little about. In 1998, British dance scholar Ramsay Burt takes this up in his book *Alien Bodies: Representations of Modernity, 'Race' and Nation in Early Modern Dance*. Proposing that the mass ornament contained something useful for dance studies, Burt's "intention... is to bring dancing bodies back into the discussion" (Burt 1998, 87). In his chapter "The Chorus Line and the Efficiency Engineers," Burt brings the dancing bodies back through a thorough examination of the text and the context of Weimar Germany in which it was written. Burt

also creates ties from the mass ornament to the American choreographer Busby Berkeley, in an effort to form a dance-specific context for the Tiller Girls (Burt 1998, 89).

In bringing the body back into the discussion, Burt includes an exploration of subjectivity and embodiment. With many bodies moving in unison, subjectivity is reduced, and identity recedes into shapes and lines. Each dancing body is void of individuality for the sake of the group. Subjectivity is given up for the identity of the self as a mechanistic part of a larger whole. The individual does not exist. Burt proposes that Kracauer's training as an architect provides a context for his attention to the space of the mass ornament, and the shapes that are created (Burt 1998, 94). The space of the mass ornament created a social space of estrangement.

After his discussion of the mass ornament, Burt admits his contention with the landscape Kracauer has set forth. Being wrong about the Tiller Girls country of origin also meant for him being wrong about the implications of the political system and the economic system. Burt also finds contention with Kracauer's placing together of the precision line dancing with rhythmic gymnastics. Burt points out that in his writing, Kracauer assigned gymnastic movements an "organic connection with nature" (Burt 1998, 91). As this is opposite from the abstract dehumanized mass ornament, Burt suggests that in placing rhythmic gymnastics alongside the Tiller Girls, Kracauer was referring to newsreel films, rather than to the live events (Burt 1998, 91).

Burt finds that despite the factual falsities, however, the mass ornament offers significant theoretical insights. Kracauer had proposed that, "the structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation" (Burt 1998, 78). Burt takes this one step further saying, "the performance of mass ornamental movement material mediated

the way subjectivities were embodied and produced in that particular historical, social and psychological context” (Burt 1998, 99). The mass ornament was a clear example of the performance of the multiple in dance. I would like to take Burt’s proposition one step further. In a broader context outside of Kracauer’s writing, I propose that the performance of the multiple mediates the way subjectivities are embodied and produced through time and in various contexts.

### **Standardized Products—the New Women**

The four girls Tiller selected to perform in Liverpool in 1890 were presented as “*The Four Sunbeams*.” Tiller’s many troupes had different names, including the “*Tiller Quartette*,” the “*Tiller Tropes*,” the “*Sunshine Girls*,” the “*Lollipops*,” and the “*Tiller Combination of Eight Ladies*.” Tiller’s use of the word ‘ladies’ was a deliberate description and went beyond this troupe’s title into his vernacular. He wanted the dancers to exude class and maturity, and felt that identifying them as ‘ladies’ helped do so and distinguished them from the ‘bad girl’ reputation of showgirls (Vernon 1988, 23). By the turn of the century, the newspapers adopted the term ‘Tiller’s Girls’ to apply to all the troupes (Vernon 1988, 23). Receiving a larger blanket term was a compliment that their work deserved a separate overall identity.

Naming the troupes of women ‘Tiller’s Girls,’ the newspapers were in fact describing what they were seeing. Though the girls ranged in age from about 16 to 26, codifying them as “girls” cast them as disciplined youth with no agency. It also cast the one man in charge of them, John Tiller, as the father of the girls, and the owner of the girls, rather than provide

them with an abstract name that put the dancers ahead of the maker (for instance—the later ‘Rockettes’). Tiller did not contend this title and description.

In the 1890s John Tiller displayed the ease with which multiple troupes of chorus girls could be produced. Along with his multiplication of the Tiller Girls came numerous troupes of different names from different places that were nearly identical to the original. André Levinson, a Russian dance critic living in Paris, agreed with Kracauer in the performed reduction of these women to products. He felt that the vast number of girls performing in this way created an archetypal and stereotypical woman. The alternative troupes multiplied their status as product exponentially. “The personality of the classic ‘girl’ has been effaced, and a wholesale type, a stereotyped model has been multiplied to order. They are standardized products and they have no names but their trade names” (Levinson 1991, 90). This ease of reproduction referred back to Kracauer’s correlation of the Tiller Girls with distraction factories.

In her book on the artwork of Hannah Hoch, Maud Lavin referred to the Mass Ornament in relationship to some of Hoch’s imagery and her context as a German artist working in the Weimar period. Lavin pointed out the role of the woman in the mass ornament, “viewing women as mass ornament is congruent with identifying women as commodities” (Lavin 1993, 86). The mass ornament is always a group of women moving in unison. Why is the mass ornament female-specific? Through the disciplined training of performing in the mass ornament, the body does not just become controlled, but docile. The docile body is more useful in production than a machine, as it is flexible and obedient. “The mass ornament should therefore be seen as one of a number of patriarchal practices through which women voluntarily impose on themselves regimes of discipline. Through the resulting

docility, they therefore conform to patriarchal norms of femininity” (Burt 1998, 117). This patriarchal norm of femininity, however, was viewed as powerful. The mass ornament was an empowering new model for women to admire and aim towards.

The Tiller Girls were flaunted in the press to represent the “New Woman” (Gordon 2005, 165). In her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* from 1993, feminist philosopher Susan Bordo explains that in the nineteenth-century it was typical for women to be diagnosed with agoraphobia, the fear of being trapped within a wide-open space or a within a crowd (Burt 1998, 95). The mass ornament displayed the new twentieth-century woman: happy, healthy, and social. To see the women succeeding meant for viewers that they were succeeding as a society. The ‘new woman’ was the embodiment of their perception of a new culture.

All women could aspire to this image of the ‘new woman.’ It was not something impossibly out of reach—the girls were not beautiful, instead, they were pretty. The women were neither modest nor shameful, morbid nor passionate; they were emblems that any women could achieve (Levinson 1991, 93). This was pleasurable to watch because it showed something not too far away; something accessible.

The “disciplined and determined army” of the mass ornament represents a culture—displaying its physical and emotional values in the performance and creating an invisible political relationship between performer, maker, and audience (Levinson 1991, 89).

Although feminine, the Tiller Girls are abstract designators. Kracauer rendered them “sexless” with their focus on the lines and the masses. The sexuality of their bodies in bathing suits performing kicks was a mere designator—for a fertile, successful culture. In corresponding them with the Taylor system, with its focus on efficiency and productivity, we

look at the Girls as efficient and productive machines. Their legs, however sexy, displayed the fertility of their society. A fertile society is a successful society.

### **The Military Aesthetic**

Among the brand names Levinson mentioned of the identical troupes of precision dancers around the world was the German Hiller Girls. As they toured different countries, the performance of the Tiller Girls moved through different political understandings. The girls gained their success during the very chaotic political time of 1890-1940, a time when entertainment held political value. In Germany, the Tiller Girls were highly praised by Adolf Hitler. In her essay “Fascism and the Female Form” in the book *Sexuality & German Fascism*, Terri Gordon explored Hitler’s reaction to the Tiller Girls. He found them to be a “spectacular” display of Aryan beauty (Gordon 2004, 165). In 1928, German opera singer Rolf Hiller created the Hiller Girls as the German equivalent to the Tiller Girls. The Hiller Girls were instantly the model of success, embodying the “notions of order, discipline, and control” that were strived for in Nazi Germany (Gordon 2004, 173).



The Hiller Girls, 1939

At this height of Fascism, entertainment was an ideal vehicle for propaganda. The Hiller Girls were capable of making military behavior accessible and desirable. Their unison movement pointed to a collective ethos of discipline and control, while their homogenous aesthetic repeated the Fascist value of an Aryan nation. The Hiller Girls became an important faction of the Nazi military. In many of their performances, the Girls would be dressed in military uniform and fully armed, performing dance numbers incorporating the choreography of weapons and banners. Equating the dancing troupes with the military, Terri Gordon quotes Karsten Witte when she said that the Hiller Girls were “turning troupes into troops” (Gordon 173). Troupes and troops appeared similarly, moving with the utmost order and control to the directions of their hierarchical invisible leader. The invisibility of the leader renders him God-like, as he fabricates images of perfection and utopia with seamlessly moving identical replicas. The correlation of revue choreography with military training brought the question of politics visibly to the stage.

The title coined by Kracauer, the mass ornament, is similar to a highly political performance in practice today: the Mass Games. In Pyongyang, North Korea, the Mass Games is the largest continuing display of the mass ornament. Started in 1946, the festival is comprised of over 100,000 people participating in gymnastics, the display of pictures through the flipping of colored cards, and music. The North Korean Economy Watch refers to the Mass Games as a synchronized socialist-realist spectacular (North Korean Economy Watch 2010). The Mass Games tells the story of North Korea, honoring the leaders of the country, and its history. The 2004 documentary “A State of Mind,” follows two girls as they train for and are selected to perform in the Mass Games. The girls are so thankful of their opportunity to perform for their leader, saying that they hope to “give happiness to the dear general” Kim

Jong Il (A State of Mind 2004). The narrator of the film explains that there is no room for sentiment in the girls' performance. The target audience of the Mass Games is internal to North Korea, as they pay homage to their leader, and show him strength, loyalty, unity and devotion.



The Mass Games, 2007



The Mass Games, 2010

Kracauer, however, finds that the mass ornament is inherently different from military choreography. He points out that there is no meaning to the ornament other than itself. Although the performance can point to formations and meaning outside itself, the mass ornament itself is a vacuum. “The parade march arose out of patriotic feelings and in turn aroused them in soldiers and subjects. The star formations, however, have no meaning beyond themselves” (Kracauer 1995, 77). In their abstract formations, Kracauer proposes that the Tiller Girls are devoid of meaning and can only be understood “rationally.” He understands their lines and shapes to correspond with geometry and physics, and do not move beyond these forms. “They are pure symbol, the living image of our life, which substitutes for the glamour of the mind and the quest of the sublime the worship of biological forces and mechanical forces” (Levinson 1991, 94). Removing meaning from the performance, the focus of the multiple girls is on their formation.

## The Mass Ornament Prior to the Tiller Girls

With the continuing Mass Games of North Korea, and the Radio City Hall Rockettes in New York, we see that the mass ornament is still a celebrated form of performance today. The Tiller Girls were the first precision dancing group to gain notoriety. Their usage of unison and homogeneity, however, was not original. I am curious whether prior usage of unison and homogeneity constituted what can now be viewed as a form of the mass ornament, and how the tension between the individual and the group has existed through dance history.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, the French *ballet d'action* replaced the Italian *grand ballet* in prominence. The formerly popular *grand ballet* was a spectacle focusing on ornate geometrical designs with the king at the center. By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the lavish formula was being criticized, “the *grand ballet* completely lacked ‘individual expressivity.’ The individual dancer remained nothing but a tiny wheel in a gigantic machinery that aimed at praising the king” (Weickmann 2007, 55). With the replacement of this aesthetic, we see that even centuries ago there was discomfort in viewing performers whose aims were to be part of a formal structure rather than express their individual human emotion. Backed by French writers, the hopes in *ballet d'action* were to create venues for ballet that would include form, function and content harmoniously. “Instead of presenting mere virtuosity and conceptual emptiness, dance was supposed to translate human emotions and affects” (Weickmann 2007, 55). The tension Kracauer expressed in 1927 was not a new tension.

The structure of ballet continued to transform over time. Through ballet’s history, it was common and minimal to have a chorus of women surrounding the primary soloists. This is known as the *corps de ballet*. A group of twenty to thirty rigorously trained women dance

in unison, with their movement built to support and highlight the work of the soloists through the lines of their bodies. In order to do so, their appearance must not take on the appearance of individuals and interrupt the soloists. Therefore it was, and still is, common for the corps to be comprised of a fairly homogenous group. Dancing as swans, birds, or townspeople, the corps varies in roles but never in bodies.

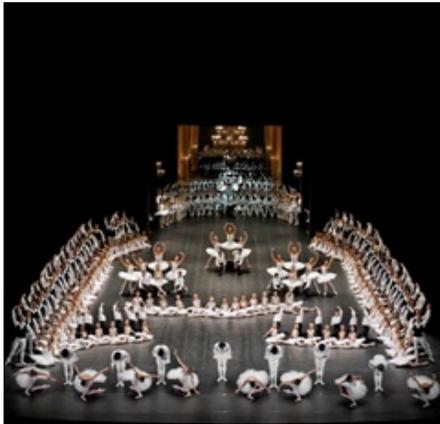
Although the ballet frequently had dancers that would be thought of today as the corps, it was French choreographer Marius Petipa who turned them into a significant and essential feature of the work. Several decades prior to the inception of the Tiller Girls, in 1847, Petipa pioneered an active use of the corps in his major works, revolutionizing the corps de ballet (Manko 2012). Where the corps had previously been mere background, Petipa brought more significance to their bodies, adding in long diagonal dimensions to cover the entire proscenium stage. His scene “The Kingdom of the Shades” from the ballet *La Bayadere* of 1877 is one of the most celebrated scenes of corps de ballet unison. Over nine and a half minutes, 32 women dressed in white tutus and white body makeup descend a zig-zagging ramp while performing arabesque penchés. “By the time the last woman has appeared, there’s no more question about the individuality of any one; all we’re longing to see is how they’re going to work together” (Siegel 1980: 411). The scene flawlessly articulated ballet’s ideals of precision. So much so that dance critic Clive Barnes is famous for writing in reference to this scene, “If you don’t enjoy *La Bayadere*, you really don’t enjoy ballet” (Ballet Contexts 2013). While Petipa was bringing more value to the role of the corps de ballet, he was also transforming their structure to correspond with what Kracauer named the “logic of mass production” (Burt 1998, 75). The countless women in Petipa’s corps de ballet creating articulate spatial patterns rendered the dance abstract. The analogous timing

of these two moments in dance history—the development of the corps de ballet in 1847 and the formation of the Tiller Girls in 1890 could not be accidental, but instead, confirm Kracauer’s idea that “the structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation” (Burt 1998, 78). Similar to the Tiller Girls, the corps must forego their individual identities, rendering themselves to be modern, abstract ornaments.

The prevalence of these two forms of female multiples in dance—the corps de ballet and the precision troupe—both formed and cultivated primarily by male choreographers call into question the gender distinction in dance. In her short essay “Unlimited Partnership: Dance and Feminist Analysis,” dance theorist Ann Daly finds that dance and feminism need to have a conversation, “As a traditionally female populated (but not necessarily female-dominated) field that perpetuates some of our culture’s most potent symbols of femininity, western theatrical dance provides feminist analysis with its potentially richest material” (Daly 1991, 2). In these two forms of dance we see popular forms of female representation that are passed down.

Daly finds that bringing Laura Mulvey into dance performance invokes discussion on the “entire *process* of representation” (Daly 1991, 2). In her renowned essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” British film theorist Laura Mulvey looks to the classic cinema of Hitchcock and Sternberg to distinguish the roles men and women embody on screen. Men are classically set up towards the front of our screen, and we see *through* them. Along with the male stars of the movie, viewers assume a scopophilic stance gazing at the women on display in front of them. The women are objects who do not deliver any action to the story but are placed as the “bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (Mulvey 1975). While men are in action whether on-screen or off, women are “simultaneously looked at and

displayed” but do not carry the film forward (Mulvey 1975). Transferring the structure of Mulvey’s “male gaze” onto the structure of dance performance, the performers, on display for the spectators, are in the passive, feminine role. The viewers are then in the powerful male position, consuming and possessing the performers (Daly 1991, 2).



*La Danse*, The Paris Opera Ballet, 2009



*Swan Lake*, The Paris Opera Ballet, 2007

On stage, a corps surrounds the soloists, on whom you are intended to focus. The performance of the corps de ballet visibly demonstrates an inherent social political structure in the relationship that is set up between the group and the individuals, the group and the audience, and the invisible relationship of the group to the maker. The movement and position of the corps de ballet places them clearly in a tertiary role to the soloists. The dancers follow the action, but are never the cause of any action. As a group, they create the background to the important characters. We see the corps operating as the laymen of the performance; as the characters we can relate to as outside viewers. Although the creator of the work is not physically present, we see the relationship of maker to performer replicated in the visible relationship of the soloist to the corps. We can imagine the relationship between creator and performer with the corps de ballet, as we see representations of such relationships onstage.

Classical ballet dancers with bodies trained since youth, the corps de ballet is always comprised of female dancers. Although the form is extremely exclusive in the requirements on the bodies, and to be accepted into the corps is a great honor for only a select few, to be part of the corps does not mean you will ever proceed in the hierarchy of the ballet company to receive solo roles. In Jérôme Bel's *Veronique Doisneau* of 2005, the retiring Paris Opera Ballet dancer Doisneau reflects on her role in the corps de ballet of Swan Lake. "We become a human décor to highlight the stars... and for us it is the most horrible thing we do" (Bel 2009).

This uneven hierarchical plane that we see between the corps de ballet amongst the soloists is leveled in the performances of the mass ornament. With precision dancing troupes, bodies are arranged in specific physical order to equalize the group. Using height and shape as organizational factors, all performers are seen as equals by the spectators. There is no differentiation between them: they are the same; they are one. This leaves a gap in what we are watching. The invisible creator becomes a character that is felt but not seen. The lack of hierarchical levels performed with the mass ornament creates a larger hierarchical gap in the relationship between the performers and the creator, between the Girls and John Tiller.

### **The Role of the Spectator**

While watching, viewers instinctively set up a relationship of two, of one to the other. Thus, when two bodies are visible onstage, we can empathetically relate to one and imagine our relationship to the other as the one displayed. But in an instance with only one body performing, we are in fact the other possible subject being called into question. With the

corps de ballet performing amongst the soloists, we imagine that we are the corps in relationship to the soloists, whereas viewing the Tiller Girls, we as viewers are placed in a subject position. The Girls are looking out at us as if we are part of their performance, as if we are in relationship to them.

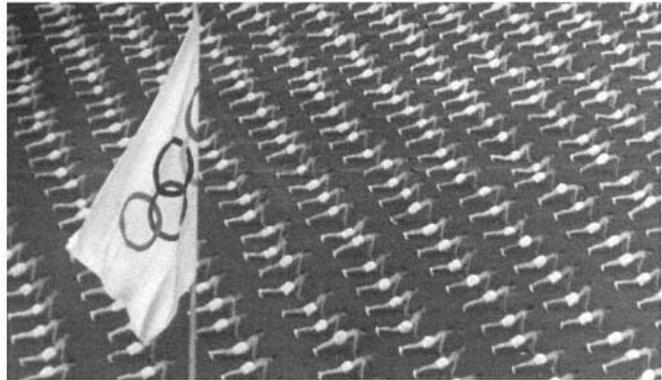
In “The Mass Ornament,” Kracauer proposes that the audience is an equal member of the mass ornament in its replication of the mass geometric display. What is the role of the spectator in the mass ornament? Ramsay Burt looks beyond the Tiller Girls to other examples of the mass ornament, or the multiple in dance, to see what information they can offer. In “Totalitarianism and the Mass Ornament,” Burt focuses on a minute and a half scene from the second of Leni Riefenstahl’s two *Olympia* films, *Fest der Schonheit* (*Festival of Beauty*) from the restaging of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games. Burt suggests that, “it is the fact that Kracauer’s critique of Weimar body culture was written before the rise of Hitler that makes it a useful reference point for evaluating Nazi uses of body culture” (Burt 1998, 100).

The scene opens with a close-up on a woman swinging, and opens onto a group of several girls moving in unison. One of the women, immediately our focal point in the group, is smiling. As the film proceeds, it continues to open back and out until thousands of women are revealed, all moving in unison. The movement is serene, with lots of swinging back and forth and up and down. Even though only one woman has been revealed to be smiling, we imagine them all to be. Starting with such intimate proximity to the first dancer, the spectator feels immediately as they are one of the participants. “The film invites the spectator to make a connection between her or his own subjective experiences of embodiment and those of this young woman” (Burt 1998, 103). The pleasure written on the

woman's face, coupled with our understanding of the movement through kinesthetic empathy makes the viewer "at least approve of this group if not actually want to join in and become part of it" (Burt 1998, 103). This was complicated by the context within which Riefenstahl created *Olympia*. The film, although in documentary style, was propaganda for the Nazi party. In finding the film seductive, we fear that we are being seduced by the German National Socialists.



*Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1938



*Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl, 1938

As the film recedes further and further back, the women transform from individuals into lines in a mass, and then mere points in space. It is in these long shots that Burt identifies the women being turned into the mass ornament. The scale and the anonymity identify it as the mass ornament, and thus correlate it with modernity. "It is only a capitalist and rationalized industrial society that requires and therefore produces standardized, docile and disciplined bodies of the sort shown in this film extract" (Burt 1998, 104). Burt points out that the initial viewpoint of the natural quality of movement switching to the mechanical viewpoint of the bodies as lines is a reflection of the contradictions of modernity and how the individual relates to the mass.

Burt finds *Olympia* useful in its relationship to the mass ornament. With his attention to the abstraction of lines and forms, Kracauer sees the mass ornament as modernist. Looking at *Olympia* through my proposition that the performance of the multiple mediates the way subjectivities are embodied and produced, we do not see individual subjectivity produced. Instead, we see thousands of disciplined bodies under a single command. Riefenstahl's use of the organic and natural alongside the modern and abstract embodies national pride, displaying their image of a healthy, happy and productive community.

In her essay "Fascinating Fascism," from 1974, Susan Sontag confronts Riefenstahl's identity and our relationship to her work. Published in the book *Under the Sign of Saturn* in 1980, Sontag demystifies Riefenstahl's status as a close friend of Hitler, who commissioned many of her films. Sontag goes line by line through the introduction to the book of photographs, *The Last of Nuba*, correcting all the lies that are given in Riefenstahl's biographical history which construe her as an innocent martyr in Nazi Germany. Turning to *Olympia* and Riefenstahl's other popular documentary, *Triumph of the Will*, Sontag postulates that the films very clearly define a fascist aesthetic. She describe this as films which

flow from (and justify) a reoccupation with situations of control, submissive behaviour, extravagant effort, and the endurance of pain; they endorse two seemingly opposite states, egomania and servitude. The relations of domination and enslavement take the form of a characteristic pageantry: the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force (Sontag 1980, 91).

In *Olympia*, we see the equation of the multiple as directly embodying a fascist aesthetic. However strong the women appear, they are actually performing their submission to a single leader, and the pleasure on their faces is an honest pleasure in serving him.

An element of Leni Riefenstahl's film *Olympia* that differs from typical displays of the mass ornament is the role of the viewer. Given our proximity and the movement of the camera, the viewer is given the illusion that they have more control. This viewpoint places the viewer in position alongside the dancers, and with the performance of calm elation by the lead dancer in *Olympia*, the viewer desires to be one of them, to join in the mass ornament.

The film *Olympia* corresponds the viewer with the dancers through the initial proximity. This relationship does not translate to the stage performances of the Tiller Girls and other performances of the mass ornament. In the mass ornament the audience is equally as controlled as those performing. Kracauer is clear that the viewers constitute the mass ornament equally with the performers (Kracauer 1995, 77-78). Seated in a geometric pattern above the spectacle, one would not exist without the other. Maud Lavin points out that the tiers of rows of spectators above the performers gave the spectators "a position of control, above the dancers....". She proposes that "this projection has the added attraction of maintaining a position of control, or to use Kracauer's crude reflection theory, it promotes an identification with factory owners, not workers" (Lavin 1993, 86). In Laura Mulvey's location of the male gaze, the audience is put in the position of the maker, of John Tiller. Thus, the politics of the creation of the work are placed on the viewers, who develop the same relationship to the dancers as John Tiller's relationship to them. This includes attention to details and desire for perfection.

### **The American Mass Ornament**

Although the Tiller Girls were frequently associated with America, the value systems in the two cultures of the United Kingdom and America were distinct. After seeing the Tiller

girls in the Ziegfeld Follies of 1922, American businessman Russell Markert pronounced "If I ever got a chance to get a group of American girls who would be taller and have longer legs and could do really complicated tap routines and eye-high kicks, they'd knock your socks off!" (Wikipedia 2013). Markert asserted his American value system on the Tiller Girls, proposing that the American version of them would be better because they would be taller, stronger, and faster, the three values of efficient capitalist production.

Meanwhile, when asked about the comparison between the British dancers and the American dancers, John Tiller said, "There are no girls on earth that have the beauty of face of the American girl, nor the peculiar charm of your lasses. But I doubt if American girls have the perseverance required to compete with Tiller Girls in dance and drilling. Of course America produces wonderful dancers, great soloists as the term goes" (Vernon 1988, 94). Tiller proposed that America created great soloist dancers rather than creating precision chorus dancers. Pitting America against England in its national pride, Tiller proposed that America was lacking in discipline. While America cultivated the free individual, England created the disciplined agile body.

A political ideology that has also persevered throughout these years is Nationalism. On one hand, I posit that the mass ornament could be seen as a modern display of Nationalism. It is not so much that the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation, but that the performance of the mass ornament reveals a culture's values, image of itself, and image of how it is seen (or would like to be seen) from the outside. The ease with which the Tiller Girls were exported across the world, however, points to the mass ornament embodying a Transnationalist ideology, rather than a Nationalist one. The language of the performance of the Tiller Girls spoke to a broad range of cultures

and communities. The performance of the unification of these women in precision dancing, although inclusively performed by the groups, was quickly translated across cultures, holding a range of identities. Markert did eventually do just what he was proposing in Americanizing the Tiller Girls when he created the Missouri Rockets in 1925, which became the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes in 1932.

If the mass ornament reveals the aestheticization of politics, what politics are revealed in the mass ornament of today in the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes? The Rockettes do not appear to be abstract as the Tiller Girls were in Kracauer's eyes. In their performance, the audience enjoys not just the present moment of their performance, but their own participation in the history of the form. Watching the Rockettes, the audience feels that they are watching the history of New York come to life. Although we must remember that Kracauer maintains that the mass ornament's pleasure is legitimate, it is not only the performance that the audience enjoys, but their participation in the mass ornament by virtue of their presence. In this way, the contemporary mass ornament of the Rockettes *is* in fact abstract. The girls are not individuals, and they are no longer the lines of the Taylorist system, but they are a symbolic representation of history. We celebrate them because we are celebrating history, New York's history of commerce, and our place in it.

In Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, Germany viewed the girls with the utmost pride, as the women of the country displayed the power and the glory of the National Socialist movement. The girls performed healthy, happy and unified bodies. North Korea's Mass Games is an embodied history of the country's vision of its success. Watching these performances affirms the culture, and allows viewers to reap the joys of their success as a country.

The mass ornament envisions a culture's utopia, both in its form and its process of creation. The process of the mass ornament focuses on a hierarchical relationship of the mass to the leader. The mass will move their healthy and strong bodies, affirming and demonstrating the culture from which they come. They are thereby embodying the success of their culture. In the process and the performance they adhere to the utmost allegiance to their leader through discipline and order. They surrender their subjectivity into the objectivity of collectivism. The mass ornament has existed through a range of political systems, including Socialism, Communism, Democracy, and Nationalism. But above all, the mass ornament points to Transnationalism.

The Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, although embodying the Transnationalist movements of the mass ornament, are the epitome of American pride. They are a picture of the past, as well as progression to the future. In 1985, lawyer Gregory J. Peterson wrote "The Rockettes: Out of Step With the Times?" The article draws attention to the group's use of homogeneity from a legal standpoint. Since then, the Rockettes have worked to include the idea of a range of races. In their current acceptance of races and ethnicities other than Caucasian, they believe themselves to be demonstrating America's diversity and freedom.



The Rockettes, 2011



The Rockettes, 2010

Although the Rockettes became superficially diversified in ethnicity after 1987, the bodies and the gender presentation of the women remain uniform. The superficial inclusion

heightens the exclusion, turning the values from race onto strength and beauty. The widening of the aesthetic sphere of the Rockettes indicates America's widening of its ground. Including these other ethnicities means *owning* these other ethnicities, embodying America's belief that it is comprised of a vast diversity. Their training of the dancers also remains exactly the same, creating a precise sequence. Regardless of race, they were all *created* by America, and in performing with the Rockettes, America puts on their stamp of ownership. The girls symbolize the community, and the performance gives the spectators the viewpoint of a creator in the situation. The viewer feels successful. The viewer feels connected with the hundreds of other middle-class viewers scattered around them.

### **The Formation of Modern Dance**

The Rockettes are still going strong today as a New York entertainment group, though they continue to be looked down upon from the other dance communities. The two reasons they are looked down upon are exactly the two qualities that define them: unison and homogeneity. In Germany at the time of their creation in the 1930's, Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman were working to create dance formed in opposition to the form of the mass ornament. Laban openly asserted his identification with Hitler, but despite his alliance with the national socialist movement, Laban's movement training was based on ideas of openness and freedom. The movement that Laban and Wigman were creating was originally deemed '*Ausdruckstanz*' meaning free or expressive dance (Lavin 1993, 93). This new way of dancing emphasized the individual. Their value on freedom and the individual and their rejection of unison and homogeneity drew clear lines between precision dancing and modern dance.

Laban and Wigman's *ausdruckstanz* was created in opposition to the mass ornament. This form of dance was later identified 'modern dance.' Modern dance, then, is bound to the mass ornament, and defines itself against it. The Tiller Girls displayed a "choreography of control" while modern dance was "perceived as liberatory" (Lavin 1993, 93). The mass ornament as Kracauer defined it reflected the fragmentation and repetition of modernity. Modern dance was in fact anti-modernity, seeking individual and free structures.

Laban continued in his research of the individual versus the collective in dance. Around 1920, he introduced his concept of the movement choir (Toepfer 1997, 300). His movement choirs produced 'mass movement,' in which dancers would maintain group unity and identity while performing their own individual movements. Working against precision movement while upholding a fascist aesthetic was complicated. Laban's mass movement focused on the content of the movement itself, rather than on the formal structure and quality.

The relationship of the individual to the group continued to transform within modern dance. Privileging the individual's identity over the identity of the group, we see casts of bodies, techniques and personalities with a broad range performing together. Still today, the individual is highlighted in contemporary dance. To see a homogenous group performing in unison is unsettling.

I propose that however unsettling it would be to see this outmoded form of the multiple within contemporary dance today, it still has a place and should be respected, both formally and in terms of the content which it holds. We see through Kracauer's writing that it appears to indicate a very specific period of culture. The multiple of homogenous bodies, however, eludes being bound to a specific era and is in fact still contemporary and relevant, proving useful as a form across the arts, and over time.

When Laban and Wigman were working to craft modern dance in the 20's and 30's, they did so in opposition to these multiples (Lavin 1993, 93). They found objection with the usage of homogenous bodies reducing the individuality of the dancers. From this onset, modern dance has held fast to representing *difference* rather than the sameness that they saw the multiples embody. When in fact, multiples can reveal difference through another pathway. Viewing a group of "individuals" looking and moving differently, it is natural for the eyes to create ties between the bodies, points of sameness and correlation. This is opposite to seeing a homogenous group moving in unison where the viewer tends to spend time differentiating the performers, pulling them apart and realizing qualities that make them who they are; make them individuals.

Although the form of the multiple may appear to sacrifice the individuality of the performers involved, it in fact highlights the terms of being an individual with its layers and complications. The multiple in dance is still relevant and always will be, just as the mirror stage although occurring in infancy continues to be relived through adulthood. The multiple is a symbol that not only has legitimate visual pleasure, but also holds implicit meaning as we have seen through recognizing it as embodying the moment of gaining subjectivity in the mirror stage. Despite that this symbol is rarely seen in contemporary dance, it has continued to be utilized across disciplines in contemporary fine art.

### III.

#### Queering the Multiple

The symbol of the multiple has taken many forms through its appearance in varying disciplines. Given its visually pleasing structure and its empathically understood content, it continues to be transformed today. In “Queering the Multiple,” I broaden my gaze on the multiple to include a contemporary range of practices including sculpture, photography, video, performance art, and pop media. Despite these different mediums, three subjectivities continue to repeat in the performance of the multiple: the dancer, the female and the queer. The multiple re-constructs these subjectivities and offers alternative configurations of the body.

Starting with the performance art of Vanessa Beecroft, I look to the ontology of the multiple female versus the solitary male. This ontology is turned upside down by the choreographer Matthew Bourne, who “queers” the ballet *Swan Lake* casting men as the corps de ballet rather than women. Re-envisioning a queer utopia, artists Anthony Goicolea and Wynne Greenwood create alternate realities using themselves multiplied. Replication and disfiguration are explored by artists Charles Ray and the Chapman Brothers. Finally, I look

to contemporary pop music videos and advertisements such as Madonna, Beyonce, or America's Next Top Model.

Through these disciplines in which the multiple is embodied in a plethora of ways, we see alternate subjectivities rendered. Although some would say that individual identities are erased in the performance of the multiple, I propose that these artists create utopian realities in which individual subjectivities thrive.

### **The Multiple in Performance Art**

The precision and uniformity of the group of girls in the Rockettes, and previously the Tiller Girls, is of primary importance to the performance. Although skilled dancers, the focus of the work is on the mesmerizing spatial configurations, reducing their bodies to formal elements of lines and color. This form of precision dancing sacrifices the individual identities of the women for the formal design and coherence of the group.

Since 1993, Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft has cast her performances in a similar way. Creating sorts of installation pieces using performers as her objects, Beecroft installs groups of homogenous women in galleries and museums. The cast varies in size from 2 to over 20, with each performer placed in near stillness for approximately 3 hours. The performers stand and look out towards the viewers, shifting slightly as needed. Beecroft instructs them not make any connections with each other or with the audience, and to maintain their position within the group. Similar to the homogenous precision dancing troupes, Beecroft's performances erase the women's identity as individuals in exchange for identity as part of a coherent and unified group. Casting women that resemble one another, "there aren't any individuals on this horizon" (Avgikos 1999, 106).



Vanessa Beecroft, VB45, 2001



Vanessa Beecroft, VB50, 2002

In her 68 or so performances, Beecroft has dressed her performers using a range of stereotypical female archetypes including the prostitute, the schoolgirl, and the model. In each of these works, the *girls* (as Beecroft calls them) are clad in uniforms that often include partial nudity. “Fashion is used by Beecroft not to individuate but to homogenize, and even nudity is exploited not as an expression of sexuality but rather as a way of reducing the models to an appearance of sameness” (Seward 1999, 100). Even when naked, the similarity of the bodies of the women brings them together, rather than separates them.

Regardless of the number of bodies in each performance, it always seems that there could be many more. Like Lacan’s asymptotic desire in which the desired object is always out of reach, Beecroft’s performances could always have more bodies; we can imagine the bodies continuing infinitely. “Beecroft’s girls, whether ordered up in modest numbers or in throngs of twenty or more, suggest a potentially endless supply of nubile bodies available for immediate mobilization” (Avgikos 1999, 106). Similar to Maud Lavin’s assertion that women in the mass ornament were viewed as commodities, the capability of seemingly endless multiplication of Beecroft’s performers correlates the women with factory machinery (Lavin 1993, 86).

Beecroft chooses women not for their capacity to be striking, incredible, or desirable, but on their capacity to be women to whom a broad audience can aspire. These women are all classically attractive. “As it turns out, the body we aspire to is a body that’s not only standardized, but reproducible and, indeed, mass-producible. It’s a body that echoes the aesthetics of mass culture in that it’s generic and assembly-line perfect. When deployed about art, these girls have the potential to speak about the way we are objectified, colonized, and commodified by technology” (Avgikos 1999, 106). The sheer number of girls and the similarities between them is overwhelming and powerful, turning the viewer’s attention away from them as individuals and onto their lines and shapes, erasing the viewer’s desire for them.

The products of Beecroft’s work are photographs documenting the performances. While being present for the live performance feels much more like the core of the work, the popularity of the photographs implies the interest in reliving the audience position of her work, continuing to gaze at the women, but perhaps more comfortably since the gaze is not returned in the photographs. Without the performance, however, Beecroft’s photographs would not be interesting, as there is nothing to remember; no role that the viewer imagines that they have within the artwork.

The durational performances are structures that exist only to create experiences to be documented. The audience in Beecroft’s performances is essential to the creation of the photographs. Similar to the mass ornament, the viewers are equally as instrumental to the work as the performers. “Whether we are aroused, offended, indifferent, amused, analytical, or otherwise engaged as viewers, we’re on display as much as, if not more than, the girls” (Avgikos 1999, 107-8). In the performances, the gaze of the women is directly forward,

towards the audience. While viewers move around the girls, the sense of who is in control is ambiguous. The performers are simultaneously active in their gaze and passive in their allowance to be looked at. In this relationship of viewers to the women, Laura Mulvey's female gaze is subverted, as the viewer doesn't have complete authority over their gaze with the girls gazing back (Mulvey 1975). Beecroft's performances both reinforce and destabilize Mulvey's theories of the distribution of power and agency in the gaze.

### **The Multiple as a Feminine Symbol**

The specific use of women in her performances is fundamental to Beecroft's work. This is comparable to the endlessly replicated international precision dance troupes that were also women to no variation. The number of Tiller Girls through the nearly 120 years of their existence was monstrous yet never included a male body. Even in their contemporary air of diversity, the Rockettes have never included a male dancer, or any alternate views of female sexuality. Kracauer never distinguished the superficial emblem of the mass ornament as a specifically female organism displaying female sexuality. In fact, he viewed their bodies as "sexless" (Kracauer 1995, 76). The homogenous repetition of female bodies reduces the subjectivity of these individual women to be objects for multiplication and distribution. Regardless of their abstraction, with the examples through time of the performance of multiple women, we must take the form of the multiple as a female form.

Performance requires a certain level of objectification of the performer, and according to Mulvey, "the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (Mulvey 1975). If we read the mass ornament as a feminine symbol of the multiple, the equivalent symbol for

the masculine would be the solitary male body. The male figure, escaping objectification, is alone both in the creation of performance, and the performance itself.

In *Exhausting Dance*, dance scholar Andre Lepecki seeks to understand the usage of the performance of the solitary male body in vacant space through dance's history. Lepecki posits that it is through choreography's ontology that male subjectivity takes the shape of the solitary male body. "Choreography's ontological, social, and historical effects haunt (and are haunted by) solipsistic masculinity" (Lepecki 2006, 19). Lepecki looks to Bruce Nauman's late 1960's collection of choreographic experiments on video, such as *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square, Dance or Exercise on the Perimeter of a Square*, and *Revolving Upside Down*, Juan Dominiquez's *AGSAMA* of 2003, and to Xavier Le Roy's *Self Unfinished* of 1999. In each of these works, the artist, a man, is seen moving or dancing alone in a vacuous studio. "Haunting the temporally circulatory site of dance, defying logics of causation and representation, there moves a particular subjectivity, ontohistorically foundational to Western choreography: the solitary male dancer" (Lepecki 2006, 19). Lepecki traces the phenomena of the solitary male body to *Orchesographie*, Thoinot Arbeau's famous dance manual of 1589. In *Orchesographie*, Capriol, a lawyer, seeks the guidance of Arbeau, a Jesuit priest and dance master, to teach him how to dance. Capriol urges Arbeau to notate his teachings in writing, telling him "your method of writing is such that a pupil, by following your theory and precepts, *even in your absence*, could teach himself in the *seclusion of his own chamber*" (Arbeau 1966: 14, quoted in Lepecki 2006, 26-27, emphasis added by Lepecki). *Orchesographie* proposes that it is this solitary practice whilst envisioning the missing teacher's presence that creates dance. Choreography appears

as a solipsistic technology. Tracing the ontology of choreography, Lepecki finds the root of masculine solipsism ultimately within the field of desire.

To understand the origin of the symbol of female multiples, we must look beyond dance and, like Lepecki, into the field of desire. But in this instance, specifically *feminine* desire and the “multiplicity of female desire” as proposed by Luce Irigaray (Irigaray 1985, 30). In 1994, Belgian philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray drew a clear distinction between male and female desire, explaining, “women almost always privilege the relationship between subjects, the relationship with the other gender, the relationship between two” (Irigaray 2001, 17). She goes on to clarify the difference, “instead of the feminine universe’s relationship between two, man prefers a relationship between the one and the many” (Irigaray 2001, 17). In the instances Lepecki points out, we see the male body as a solitary body in relationship to mass viewership, and in the formation of the Tiller Girls and the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, we see again the solitary male this time in relation to the many female bodies the male was directing. Regardless of the very different formats, in both instances, we see man’s preferred relationship of one to many.

Prior to this writing from 1977, Irigaray traces this distinction between female and male desire back as far as the biological anatomy of the female. She identifies the female sex as the “sex which is not one,” but multiple (Irigaray 1985, 23). As opposed to male biology, which is “the *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ,” the female body “is already two,” “for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact” (Irigaray 1985, 24-26). This biology, for Irigaray, is fundamental to the structure of feminine desire. She does not stop at seeing feminine sexuality as double due to two lips, but says “Her sexuality, always at least double, goes even further: it is *plural*” (Irigaray 1985, 28, emphasis in

original). Female subjectivity therefore is multiple. “*She is neither one nor two*. Rigorously speaking, she cannot be identified either as one person, or as two” (Irigaray 1985, 26, emphasis in original). When we see displays of the performance of multiple homogenous women, this does not surprise us, but in fact makes sense. Tracing back to biology, male subjectivity is solitary, female subjectivity is multiple. In the cases of the corps de ballet, precision dancing, and Beecroft’s girls, we are comfortable with groups of women performing as one. A group of men performing the multiple, however, would feel unfamiliar.

### **Multiplying Men**

Beecroft took this challenge in her performance VB39. At the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego in 1999, Beecroft shifted the gaze of the audience on to male bodies. Challenging the representation of the ontology of the solitary male versus the multiple female, Beecroft cast 16 men from the Navy SEALs, the highest rank in the military. Standing at perfect attention in uniform, Beecroft displaced the viewer’s relationship to the men, as these men in power became objects to look at. Once again, Beecroft disrupts Mulvey’s proposition of the male gaze of male spectatorship and female objectification. The Navy SEALs perform simultaneously a male power of military attention and control, and a passive female role of object to be looked at.



Vanessa Beecroft, VB39, 1999



Vanessa Beecroft, VB39, 1999

Compared to Beecroft's other performances, it has been common for writing to focus on VB39. Although it could be that Beecroft made a very distinct and surprising decision to use men, and men of authority for this performance, it is also probable that to speak of clothed men is a much simpler task than to interrogate the performance of groups of nearly nude women. If we were to watch VB39 out of the context of Beecroft's earlier and later work, it would appear as a celebration of military control. Reducing the men to formal visual objects that were not individuals but served only to further the group identity, the work correlates to Riefenstahl's work at the Olympics. Art historian Norman Bryson posits, "When the military meets the aesthetic, one possible outcome is fascist" (Bryson 1999, 79). This fascist aesthetic is stylized and almost celebrated in the work as viewers stand in awe of the focus and disciplined energy of the physically fit men.

But watching it within the context of Beecroft's larger body of work, we look to the men assuming we will look at them the same way we looked at the scores of women. We are put at ease with their clothing, however, and are put at ease imagining that their attention is not on us, but above us, on the government. As viewers, we do not feel that their statuesque attention is geared towards us, but towards a larger and more powerful order. In this way, the men are leveled; not any higher or lower than the viewers. These are *men*, where in

Beecroft's other work, we see *girls*. The women are only standing there for *us*, the viewers, while the men are standing there for something else that we are not responsible for. VB39 has a reduced sense of accountability for the viewers.

In the case of the women, we participate in the looking-at and are confronted with our own relationship to the girls, be it desire, sympathy, or envy, ultimately projecting a vulnerability onto the women that is in fact our own vulnerability at watching. Whereas with VB39, we are not implicated in the same way, in fact, we are outsiders looking in on a world we are not part of.

With VB39, Beecroft's single performance using men as opposed to women, the men perform a disciplined masculinity. In so doing, she equates the obedient females standing at attention in her other work to the clothed military men—both in control, and completely disciplined. Each of these groups is embodying their everyday performance as men and women—the women exuding to-be-looked-at-ness, and the men ready to follow orders. In VB39, Beecroft's men assumed a female position of homogenous objectification void of individual identity.

### **Queering Dance**

Similar to most of Beecroft's performances and the performance of precision dance troupes, the corps de ballet in classical ballets is comprised of a homogenous group of women. In 1996, British choreographer Matthew Bourne disrupted that formula by replacing the female corps of *Swan Lake* with a corps made entirely of male dancers. *Swan Lake* is a 130-year-old classic Russian ballet telling the story of a love drama of a Prince searching for the woman he will marry. Bourne maintained the premise and Tchaikovsky's score, but cast

all the swans, ordinarily the women of the corps de ballet, as men. The ballet follows a traditional classical ballet construction, with a large corps portraying swans interested in the main character. Bourne's corps de ballet was bare-chested men wearing fur pants made of thick white hair that billowed around their legs. Watching men perform the tertiary role of the corps de ballet, surrounding other male soloists, disjoints the viewer's expectations.

In "The Queering of *Swan Lake*: A New Male Gaze for the Performance of Sexual Desire," dance scholar Kent G. Drummond proposes that with the work's instability of gender and sexual desire, Bourne's *Swan Lake* is in fact a queer re-visioning, rather than a gay re-visioning, and that Bourne "queered" *Swan Lake* (Drummond 2003, 235). Drummond correlates our assumed role of the viewers with Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, explaining that the traditional structure of male spectatorship of female objectification has been displaced to become male spectatorship of male objectification (Drummond 2003, 238).



*Swan Lake*, Matthew Bourne, 1996



*Swan Lake*, Matthew Bourne, 1996

Drummond's assertion that Bourne queered *Swan Lake* calls to question the ontology of queer identity. If we look to queer as a verb rather than as an adjective, to *queer* something would be to shift the perspective and thus the meaning. Alongside today's colloquial understanding of the word, to *queer* can be an act that alters boundaries and definitions, often specifically regarding issues of sex and gender, but an action that could have broad horizons. To *queer* the corps de ballet means creating new contexts for the

performance and with different bodies. In his recent book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz defines queer as a utopian ideality. He proposes that queer is a mode of thinking which points outside the present, to the future, to utopia (Muñoz 2009, 1). Defining queerness as community, Muñoz is standing against the current antirelational approaches to queer identity, saying that it “replaced the romance of community with the romance of singularity” (Muñoz 2009, 10). In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz aims to situate queerness in a field of hope encompassing both antirelational and relational thinking—with both community and singularity. Bourne’s *Swan Lake* visibly accomplishes this in bringing the romance back to community. His corps of costumed men dancing together embodies fantasy across the board—for the dancers, the viewers, and himself as the creator. Bourne’s assertion that men can assume these traditionally female roles points to a utopian future that is not here yet. *Swan Lake* articulates a queer desire and hope, though not necessarily one that is completely accomplished.

In his early work, Bourne used a gay sensibility in a tongue-in-cheek way, allowing a broad audience to laugh *with* him, rather than *at* him. In *Spitfire* of 1988, Bourne directly quoted strategies of the choreography used by Balanchine in *Serenade* and Perrot in *Pas De Quatre*, replaced the women with men, and scantily clad the men in white men’s underwear. He transformed the poses used by Balanchine and Perrot to resemble poses used in advertisements for men’s underwear.

Bourne’s *Swan Lake* re-envisioned a historical ballet through the gaze of gay male culture. His corps of male swans operates on several levels of desire—to multiply the desire of the viewer, given multiple men to gaze at; and the desire of the male dancers, presumably gay male dancers who get to perform a typically feminine role of the multiple. With *Swan*

*Lake*, Bourne brought the classical form into a new populist context. This recuperation of the form of the corps de ballet results in a camp aesthetic. Bourne's popularizing of both classical ballet and queer identity, although providing access to a large audience, also reduces its genuine significance in both dance and cultural history. I imagine that Bourne's desire to create a venue in which men who grew up in the same classical ballet training as women, confronted with their multiple bodies in the mirror just as the women were, could finally take part in a performance from which they were left out, was a sincere desire. Re-envisioning the corps de ballet with male bodies could be an earnest, critical, and scholarly act. Bourne's use of humor and his tongue-in-cheek performance of femininity, however, reduces the aim.

In Andrew Ross' influential essay of 1989, "Uses of Camp," Ross defines camp as created "when the products... of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste" (Ross 1989, 139 quoted in Meyer 1994, 11). The fall of the classical corps de ballet from contemporary pop culture allowed it to be recuperated and redefined by the gay community through camp reinterpretation. The gay community has reclaimed this form of the mass ornament, of homogenous women dancing in unison, through camp sensibilities. In *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, edited by Moe Meyer, Meyer starts off by asserting, "Camp is both political and critical" (Meyer 1994, 1). Meyer casts camp performance as an important assertion of queer identity,

In the sense that queer identity is performative, it is by the deployment of specific signifying codes that social visibility is produced. Because the function of Camp, as I will argue, is the production of queer social visibility, then the relationship between Camp and queer identity can be posited. Thus I define Camp as the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility (Meyer 1994, 4).

Bourne's use of camp reveals the possibility of recuperating common and accepted forms of the past, making light of qualities within them we never questioned, and re-visioning them in a contemporary way. This exposes the viewers' assumptions to themselves and shows alternatives in an accessible form of entertainment. But Bourne's *Swan Lake* does not meet up with the "political and critical" definition of camp proposed by Meyer.

In 1964, Susan Sontag defined camp as almost the opposite, as "disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical" (Sontag 2000, 290). In her essay, "Notes on 'camp,'" Sontag works through a sensibility that she admits she is both drawn to and offended by (Sontag 2000, 288). Meyer's definition of camp may be a contemporary one, but Bourne's work much more properly aligns with Sontag's. While Clement Greenberg degraded the form of kitsch art in 1939 to the 'synthetic pleasures' of popular culture, it has since been used throughout postmodern artwork in an attempt to bring art history and pop aesthetics together (Greenberg 39). Classifying *Swan Lake* as either camp or kitsch may completely depend on the viewer. "Many examples of Camp are things which, from a 'serious' point of view, are either bad or kitsch" (Sontag 2000, 291). Writer Phil Cohen recently suggested the term "high camp" for Bourne's work. "Kitsch has also been appropriated by a gay aesthetic and worked up into an idiom of high camp, as in Matthew Bourne's all-male version of *Swan Lake*. In its postmodern version, then, kitsch has become cool and chic, providing a gloss on its own sources in popular culture" (Cohen 2012). By glossing *Swan Lake* over through an accessible pop culture aesthetic, Bourne is able to bring queer desire into the mainstream.

## Self-Multiplication

While in live performance it is impossible to divide the self to perform simultaneously, digital technology has made the layering of a single body easy and popular. Rather than many different yet homogenous bodies colliding together for a single vision of the body, contemporary uses of the multiple do the opposite and stretch one body into many versions of the same body. In Jean Baudrillard's essay "Clone Story" in his collection *Simulacra & Simulation*, he contends that the fantasy of the multiple is something with which we reckon throughout life. "Everyone can dream, and must have dreamed his whole life, of a perfect duplication or multiplication of his being" (Baudrillard 1994, 95). This desire to see yourself take another shape outside yourself harkens back to the simultaneous recognition and mis-recognition of the mirror stage. Throughout life, the relationship a child establishes with their mirror image continues to resonate. Artists using film and photography can recreate this moment of recognition/misrecognition by documenting themselves multiplied.

Photographer Anthony Goicolea does this successfully in both its formal quality and the content of the groundwork of subjectivity. A Cuban-American residing in New York, Goicolea became famous for his series of photographs 1999-2002 that appear to document life at a boy's school. The characters all appear on the brink of puberty—*boys* photographed in compromising and often sexual relationships with each other. I say *boy* in Goicolea's work with reference to John Tiller and Vanessa Beecroft's use of the term *girl*. The photographer, however, portrays all the characters himself, as an adult with agency and control over them.

In casting his replicas as children, Goicolea is portraying a childhood moment of discovering sexuality. These multiples appear to be looking at each other with desire and with physical attempts to mimic each other. We see a range of expression on the boys through his photographs. The varying gaze between the boys recalls the two “poles” of identification with the mirror image in Lacan’s mirror stage—one of joyful affirmation and the other of paranoid frustration. Goicolea’s multiples very visibly embody moments of Lacan’s mirror stage, developing subjectivity and sexuality through the first psycho-sexual drives, founded on autoeroticism. Goicolea’s photographs bring up questions of our own desire as viewers. What is it that makes these photographs so popular? At first glance they are child pornography. As viewers, we must wrestle with looking at and placing value in them. What exactly is pleasurable in them? Is it the overall composition of the photographs, what they are depicting, the process we imagine they are made through, or our placement as viewers?



*Premature*, Anthony Goicolea, 1999



*Poolpushers*, Anthony Goicolea, 2001

The portrayal of these figures as young adolescents reduces the correlation that could be assumed between autoeroticism and homoeroticism. If these were adults in the same positions, what is shown as innocence would appear as deviance. As viewers, we trust that these private school kids are just cut off from the real world of heterosexual desire, and are

forced to develop their sexuality amongst each other. Thus, the photographs appear to document not homoerotic desire, but someone merely at a stage of the foundation of desire, and understanding one's body in relation to surrounding bodies.

Goicolea's scenes portray characters on the brink of figuring out how to relate to each other. This ambivalence between the multiples is exactly what gives the photographs power and to which we relate. "The imaginary power and wealth of the double—the one in which the strangeness and at the same time the intimacy of the subject to itself are played out—rests on its immateriality, on the fact that it is and remains a phantasm" (Baudrillard 1994, 95). This immateriality and phantasmic quality arises because we both believe and disbelieve the images. The ambivalence of belief/disbelief of the multiple activates the viewer and is captivating.

With Goicolea using his own image multiple times, the effect is uncanny; it is both familiar and foreign (Freud 2003, 135). All of Goicolea's bodies appear together, creating the need for several viewings of the photo to ultimately identify the bodies as multiples. Freud cites the motif of the double as leading to his concept of the uncanny (Freud 2003, 142).

The concept of the double need not disappear along with this primitive narcissism: it may acquire a new content from later stages in the evolution of the ego. By slow degrees a special authority takes shape within the ego; this authority, which is able to confront the rest of the ego, performs the function of self-observation and self-criticism, exercises a kind of psychical censorship, and so becomes what we know as the 'conscience' (Freud 2003, 142).

Freud takes us through a process of the double that resembles the process of viewing Goicolea's photographs. Our initial impression is that we are witnessing a simple narcissistic moment of a subject caught up with his own image. However, as we realize these are in fact

images of adults, the work takes on new content. We see figures at odds with each other in self-observation. Finally, we glimpse the final plane of the work that is yet another level of self-observation and self-criticism: that of Goicolea as the performer, photographer and editor. Goicolea's work almost knowingly traverses the process of the uncanny double that Freud has articulated.

In his current work, Goicolea has turned his focus to photographing families in their home neighborhood of Chelsea, New York. Despite this new focus, his work continues to engage with questions of the individual within the group. He writes that he "is interested in how people shed their sense of individuality to become part of a larger homogenized group, or conversely, how they rebel against the larger whole and assert their individuality" (Goicolea 2008). In these earlier photographs, we see boys ascertaining how they can relate to each other and given the form of the replicas of the same body, to themselves. Goicolea continues to explore questions of the individual within the group in different contexts.

Goicolea's photographs constitute a collective queer utopia like what Muñoz pointed to in *Cruising Utopia*. Muñoz proposes that queerness needs to move back towards community and the idea of a distant, future utopia. To provide shape to this new queer modality, Muñoz points to Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of "being singular plural." In his book *Being Singular Plural*, from 2000, Nancy posits that Being only exists as a being-with; that "'with' is at the heart of Being" (Nancy 2000, 30). In other words, he proposes that existence is only ever co-existence, that there is no existence without other existences. In this way, one only exists because there are others. In Goicolea's photographs, he creates a world in which he exists because his multiples bring him into Being. It is this plurality of self, his multiples, which constitute his existence. Nancy contends that the word "singular" is in fact already

plural, given the Latin roots of the word. “It designates the ‘one’ as belonging to ‘one by one’” (Nancy 2000, 32). To be a singular self, one must exist alongside other selves. One only exists as one of many. “The singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many and *because*, in general, a singularity is indissociable from a plurality” (Nancy 2000, 32).

Nancy’s proposition that being is singularly plural or plurally singular lends an optimistic viewpoint to the symbol of the multiple. Rather than imagine that when a group performs as one they are sacrificing their subjectivity, we can imagine that in fact the multiple does the opposite: it brings the bodies into Being through their being-with. The multiple can thus constitute subjectivity, rather than disfigure it.

Anthony Goicolea portrays this state of being as being-with in his photographs. The equation of queer identity with the utopic embodied fantasy of being singular plural makes this form of the queer multiple a common occurrence in contemporary video and photography produced by queer artists. “There exists something (“me”) *and* another thing (this other “me” that represents the possible) to which I relate myself in order for me to ask myself if there exists something of the sort that I think of as possible” (Nancy 2000, 29, emphasis in original). In relating to other versions of the self, artists bring the fantasy possibility into existence.

Similar to Goicolea’s early images of the boys at boarding school, also multiplying her image to embody notions of self-observation and queer identity is Wynne Greenwood. Greenwood, a queer-identified video and performance artist, performs live as a singer and is backed up by two of her multiples on video in her band Tracy + the Plastics. From 1999-2006, Greenwood performed live as Tracy, and projected on the screen behind her would be

Nikki on the keyboard and Cola on the drums. All three members were played by Greenwood (Greenwood 2001).



*Tracy + the Plastics*, Wynne Greenwood, 2004

*Tracy + the Plastics*, Wynne Greenwood, 2004

In *Tracy + the Plastics*, we see the artist multiplied several times collaborating to create and perform music together. Tracy, Nikki, and Cola, although frequently struggling with each other and bickering, perform a very trusted community. In her performances, Greenwood is creating another reality in which she can interact with herself in another dimension. “There's a history, a reality created by the interaction between the self and the image of the self” (Greenwood 2001). This collective reality, however manufactured, brings Greenwood into Being, into subjectivity. In her repetition of bodies, Greenwood presents a tight community. These three women create a unified entity performing in solidarity.

Greenwood places both the solidarity and fragmentation of self-multiplication in the context of the marginalization of queer identity. She mentions that the reflection created in a relationship one edits together with multiple selves is empowering.

When an individual in a marginalized group talks to a recorded image of themselves it empowers the individual to open the door to the understanding and celebration that she/he/it can be deliberate. It is an interaction with a fragmented self. By fragmented, I mean a cohesive identity that's constructed from different, often conflicting, parts of society, culture, and life that we relate to because popular culture has no whole identity to offer its audience other than one that resembles the ruling class. We can come out. And then

come out again. We can rearrange our world how we want it (Greenwood 2001).

For Greenwood, to create a cohesive identity means constructing it as a conglomeration from fragments parts of her identity. To engage in this act of fragmenting and reconfiguring one's identity is seen as empowering to her. As a queer, talking to oneself, interacting "with a fragmented self," gives an individual a sense of understanding and of being seen that might not have otherwise existed. The subject that Greenwood creates is an image like what Muñoz called for: a utopian embodiment of collectivity (Muñoz 2009).

Queer identity is by definition unfixed, or unhinged. With a political resisting of fixed identities, queering the multiple in performance allows a visible negotiation between multiple selves or states. The performance of the queer multiple in the work of Goicolea and Greenwood display the artists reckoning with the idea of a coherent self in regard to sexuality, friendship, and work. The relationships formed between these multiples range from siblings, to lovers, to friends. The doppelganger in video and photography has been prevalent in the work of queer artists today. It fabricates a community where there is only one.

### **Political Communication Using the Multiple**

In an interview with Venus Magazine, Greenwood says that she believes in "queer art as political forum" (Greenwood 2013). In her work, the multiple is a political tool through which to communicate. The multiple in Greenwood's performance carried with it specific meaning and politics, "as with every media technology, to some degree the medium is the message" (Kim 2011). In the fall of 2011 during the events of Occupy Wall Street in New

York, protestors designed a way to perform with the same kind of unified solidarity that Wynne Greenwood's multiples portray. Microphones and speakers were banned from the outdoor area of the protests. As a way to disseminate information through the space, the "human microphone" was developed. This begins with someone shouting "Mic check?" as a question to the surrounding group. "Mic check!" is yelled back in unison by the people within earshot. This second "Mic check!" is heard by a third tier of protestors, and responded to with the same affirmation "Mic check!" This continues to be disseminated however many times necessary for everyone to repeat back, and thus to hear and to acknowledge. The human microphone creates a unified and stable entity through chanting together. "The human mic is also, of course, an egalitarian instrument, and it exudes solidarity over ego" (Kim 2011).



*Human Microphone, Occupy Wall Street, 2011*

This unified front of the human microphone was celebrated both by participants engaged in it as well as by onlookers and those who watched videos of the protests that quickly went viral. Like the mass ornament, both the participation in and the viewing of the human microphone is pleasurable. "The overall effect can be hypnotic, comic or exhilarating—often all at once" (Kim 2011). A group of people acting together in unison appears strong and empowering. This is especially true in the case of the human microphone, in which different bodies are capable of finding points of entry.

If the unison in the performance of the mass ornament is patriarchal, oppressive, and exclusionary, the next movement of a culture would be to recuperate the form, to queer it. Similar to Matthew Bourne queering *Swan Lake* to include his own aesthetic and identity-based value system, the Occupy Wall Street protestors recuperated and queered the form of the performance of the multiple to include bodies of difference to become a useful political tool.

However, as with other manifestations of the performance of the multiple, there has been criticism about the use of the human microphone. It was proposed that the principle of the human microphone is not in the best interests of free speech, and that it is a fascist structure. Similar to the mass ornament, rather than celebrate the individual, the human microphone embodies a group ethics. “There’s something inherently pluralistic about the human mic” (Kim 2011). The masses operating in unison for one unified common cause is not altogether different from Riefenstahl’s *Olympia*. For the structure of the human microphone to be equated with political ideals it was actively against would have confused many of those involved. But Susan Sontag contends that, “fascist art... is hardly confined to works labeled as fascist or produced under fascist governments” (Sontag 1980, 8). She goes on to say, “In dealing with propagandistic art on the left or on the right, a double standard prevails” (Sontag 1980, 9). Sontag explains how uncomfortable it is for people to admit enjoying Riefenstahl’s films, as they now know the political motivations for the work. Instead, they point to the aesthetic merit, supposing that to be in line with the style doesn’t necessitate being in line with the meaning. In the same way, participants and onlookers could celebrate the human microphone—focusing on the idyllic solidarity and forgetting about the fascist structure it carries.

## **Sculptural Renditions of the Multiple**

The performance of the multiple is capable of succeeding as a symbol both in terms of content, with the politics of queer identity and the politics of Occupy Wall Street, and successful in terms of form, in the case of the corps de ballet and the Tiller Girls. The complications of the mass ornament as Kracauer described it were in the way it rendered the women abstract through its focus on the form. Where the performance of a homogenous corps reduces the individuals to lines and shapes, the technological multiplication in the work of Goicolea and Greenwood takes a step to rectify that. The mass ornament dehumanized its performers, but the multiple in video and photography uber-humanizes them. They are no longer flat images on a screen, but activated and complicated subjects. I will look now to see what happens to the form when the performance of the multiples does not include humans as the performing subjects, in the case of sculpture.

Similar to Goicolea's early photographs with their focus on the fantasy of multiple selves in erotic relationship with each other, in 1992, American sculptor Charles Ray cast 8 naked fiberglass models of himself in orgiastic relationship with one another in his work *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley*. The artist, like Goicolea, makes visible the confusion between autoeroticism and homoeroticism. Ray, however, has created this from a very different context. Goicolea, although an adult, was portraying boys, creating an image not of sexuality but of self-discovery, of collective self-development. Ray, on the other hand, uses an accurate presentation of himself at the time of creation. Although still capable of working with ideas of subjectivity and how one relates to others and themselves, *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley* crosses a line into perversion.

Narcissism is classified as a perversion in Freud's "On Narcissism" from 1914. When a child goes through stages of narcissism it is seen as stages of growth and development, but when narcissism is embodied in adults, it becomes a perversion. As we saw earlier in the work of Goicolea, the motif of the double can cross through primitive narcissism to create new meanings (Freud 2003, 142).



*Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley, Charles Ray, 1992*

One principal difference between the work of the two artists is that Goicolea identifies himself as a queer man, whereas Ray is heterosexual. Ray's "normal" sexuality proposes a different reading than if he was, as his models are, identified as queer. His portrayal of a queer sex scene is one grounded in narcissism, the men intertwined with their multiples. The symbol of desire in this instance operates differently. Where in Goicolea's work desire is founded on sex and sexuality, in Ray's work desire points to the artist's psychological relationship to himself.

This narcissism of the work might refer to the artist himself, and the narcissism inherent in the act of being an artist. Alternately, it could portray Simone de Beauvoir's "miracle of the mirror" of gay sex from the view of a straight man. Ray's sculpture makes visible the correlation of homoeroticism with autoeroticism and speaks to an old

misunderstanding between gay identity and narcissism. In *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley*, Ray is portraying gay sex as founded entirely on narcissism. As Freud explains,

We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts or homosexuals, that in their later choice of live-objects they have taken as a model not their mother but their own selves. They are plainly seeking themselves as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object-choice which must be termed 'narcissistic' (Freud 1998, 8).

In homophobic situations, gay sex has been perceived as “sex with yourself,” linking it to narcissistic behavior. Ray’s identity as a heterosexual artist abstracts that idea in *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley*. If he was queer-identified we may see it as a fantasy or an eschewed version of reality, but his identity as a straight man either brings question to his identity, or takes the sex out of the picture to bring the attention back to the formal qualities of the work. Although the title *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley* lets the work be read in a very clearly orgasmic way, Ray himself contends that the work is purely formalist and is aiming to achieve unity within a composition through repetition of form and shape. The fiberglass men for him are shapes and lines and their sexual relationships towards one another are actually just geometric spatial patterns. These men are multiples of the artist himself and are denied identity. Ray has been known to obfuscate discussions of his work, rarely being forthcoming about meaning and intentions. Whether Ray was avoiding discussion of the homoeroticism and the narcissism of the work, or being honest about his formal intentions, that both of these options are entirely possible is compelling, and point to the power of the symbol of the multiple.

Taking both a formal reading of the work’s lines and shapes and also a Freudian psychoanalytic reading seems appropriate for Ray’s work. In 1993, a year after first

exhibiting *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley*, the artist created *Family Romance*. Cast from the same fiberglass, *Family Romance* depicts the ultimate nuclear family: a husband, a wife, a son, and a daughter. Although of varying ages, Ray cast them to be of equal heights, and anatomically complete.



*Family Romance*, Charles Ray, 1993

Although Ray again claims a formal interest in repetition and lines, he verifies the uncomfortable sexual tones of the work with the title *Family Romance*. The title is a Freudian phrase that refers to stages for a child of dissociating themselves from the authority of their parents. In these moments, children doubt their biological relation to their mother and father. Prior to this desire for individuality within the family unit, a child is overcome with desire to be like the parent, to match them in size (Freud 2003).

If both of these works, *Oh! Charley, Charley, Charley*, and *Family Romance*, are indeed formal exercises of shapes and lines, we are reminded of Kracauer's take on the mass ornament, and his reduction of the women's bodies to be abstract designators (Kracauer 1995, 84). Ray's life-like sculptures point towards the tension between the abstract body versus the real body that we have seen through the history of ballet and precision dance. The fact that these works are not real people, but instead fiberglass sculptures, creates less

tension, but keeps the viewer on the edge of discomfort. The seeming realness of the bodies in Ray's sculptures teeter the work between fantasy and reality.

Diving in the opposite direction, completely away from reality, is the work of Jake and Dinos Chapman. Known as the Chapman Brothers, these British artists create fantasy worlds that are grotesque and horrific, composing a plethora of "other" bodies with displaced body parts. Driving the work are the same childhood fantasies we have seen in the work of Ray and Goicolea—regarding size and shape in Ray's *Family Romance*, and regarding repetition in Goicolea's photographs. The Chapman brothers, however, push past fantasy and into the realm of nightmare.



*Zygotic acceleration, Biogenetic de-sublimated libidinal*, Chapman Brothers 1995      *Tragic Anatomies*, Chapman Brothers 1996

The bodies in the work of the Chapman brothers are fractured, fragmented, and conglomerated. Their work may be identified as Surrealist, given the fantastical appearance. In an interview outside the Chapman Brothers' "One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved XIV" show at White Cube gallery in London in 2008, Will Self discussed surrealism with Jake Chapman. Chapman explains, "Well, I dislike Surrealism—I think it's a form of psychiatric policing; they promote the idea that the unconscious is a friend to us; it's not—it's an animal" (Self 2008). Jake Chapman's belief that the unconscious is an animalistic other recalls Lacan's vision of the unfixed self, one that is divided and contains elements of

madness. “Zygotic acceleration, Biogenetic de-sublimated libidinal” and “Tragic Anatomies” from 1995 and 1996 make visible Lacan’s description of the subject, and the primordial split.

Sculptural renditions of the multiple remove our concern for the dehumanization of the individuals involved. Taking bodies into the realm of imagination allows viewers to focus on the forms created. Siegfried Kracauer first addressed this issue of dehumanizing bodies in the performance of the multiple in his text “The Mass Ornament” in 1927. In the performance of the Tiller Girls, the focus on shapes and patterns rendered the performers abstract. Contemporary artist Louis-Philippe Demers took the Tiller Girls as inspiration to create his own sculptural performance. His “Tiller Girls” of 2009 included a dozen robots re-performing chorus line movement. “What used to be made by flesh, now made by steel and electronics” (Demers 2010, 0:26-0:30). A Canadian artist living in Singapore, Demers worked with engineers in artificial intelligence to create these small autonomous figures. Configured with individual batteries and Bluetooth, each robot was linked to a computer that would control their movements. The variety of their possible movements was quite limited, but Demers contends that with their timing and patterning they are still capable of producing a range of emotional content (Demers 2010, 1:15-1:22). Demers’ interest in the material of the Tiller Girls relates back to their placement in dance’s history. The Tiller Girls represent some kind of a paradox for performance. “The Tiller Girls were not called upon to perform because they have any kind of interpretive skills. Actually, they’re not interested in these qualities, they’re interested in the machinery aspect of the dancers” (Demers 2010, 3:40-4:30). Demers was curious about how viewers expected perfection because the figures he created were machines. In fact the machines were flawed, which he proposed gave the

robots humanity. The performance then further reduces distance between human and machine, aiming to give agency and emotion to robots.



*The Tiller Girls*, Louis-Philippe Demers, 2009



*The Tiller Girls*, Louis-Philippe Demers, 2009

### **Bringing the Multiple Back to Pop Media**

The recentness of Demers' return to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Tiller Girls reveals that the group and Kracauer's Mass Ornament present issues we are still grappling with today. In 2009, the same year Demers' "Tiller Girls" was produced, American artist Natalie Bookchin revisited Kracauer in her video, "The Mass Ornament." The work samples YouTube videos of people dancing alone and edits them side-by-side to create a synchronous chorus.

Bringing it back to Kracauer's assertion that "the structure of the mass ornament reflects that of the entire contemporary situation," Bookchin contends that the structure of YouTube videos, like the mass ornament, reflect today's situation (Kracauer 1995, 78). In the very disparate videos included, Bookchin finds and highlights the commonalities—placing everyone doing the same movement together, from fixing the hair, to hitch-kicks, to looking in the mirror. Although these videos represent individuals on their own choosing how they are seen, she shows us that in fact, people want to be seen very similarly. She compares the

structure of the original mass ornament with the one she contends is contemporary today, “Just as rows of spectators in the 1920s and 1930s sat in movie theaters and stadiums watching rows of bodies moving in formation, with YouTube videos, single viewers sit alone in front of computer screens watching individual dancers voluntarily moving in formation, alone in their rooms” (Kane 2009). Bookchin brings the mass ornament back to the contemporary moment and asks how it exists today. It is fitting that she returns to the mass ornament through the pop modality of YouTube, as the original mass ornament was considered a pop performance. Over the years, the multiple continues to be present in popular culture. This has been particularly true as technology has progressed and the multiple can be fabricated without a live group of homogenous bodies.

Appropriating the queer aesthetic of the multiple, Charles Ray portrayed himself, a straight man, in a sexual relationship with his many other selves. Similarly, it has been popular for heterosexual pop stars to multiply themselves and portray themselves as heterosexual couples in advertisements or music videos. This is visible in singer Ciara’s music video “Like a Boy” from 2007. In this video, Ciara plays herself singing about issues between herself and her boyfriend. Mourning for a better boyfriend, Ciara proposes that if they “switched up the roles,” they would learn how to be better to each other. Ciara embodies that ultimate relationship between partners by playing her feminine self and her masculine counterpart (Ciara 2007). This perfect pairing is founded on mutual understanding ostensibly within herself. While singing about being a boy, Ciara simultaneously affirms her heterosexual identity while making it ambiguous.



*Like a Boy, Ciara, 2007*

What makes these pop references to a queer aesthetic acceptable in mainstream media is that we really wholeheartedly believe in their heterosexuality. If we weren't sure, their portrayal of queer identity would frighten us and make us unsettled. But with our trust in their normative sexuality, we see it as portraying the search for one's "other half," a beautiful symbol of true love and self-acceptance. Meanwhile, such mainstream pop artists normalize queer aesthetics. Artists such as Ciara perform a reverse of the queer camp process of taking something from the past and re-envisioning it in a new context. Instead they take an aesthetic that is on the edge and bring it to the center.

But the symbol of the multiple is certainly not new to the pop music video world, and has been used in as broad of a range as it has been presented in performance. Before technological advances allowed editors to multiply the same body, artists turned to the homogenous unison movement used in precision dance troupes. The British singer/songwriter Robert Palmer was famous for creating the "Palmer Girls," in the likeness of the John Tiller's "Tiller Girls." The video for his song "Addicted to Love" introduced the girls in 1986 (Palmer 1986). Shot by photographer Terence Donovan, the video featured Palmer singing alongside a faux back-up band of models. These five women each appeared to play an instrument, while swaying back and forth to the music. The girls were nearly

identical, each wearing matching black dresses and high heels, with their dark hair pulled back into a slick ponytail, red lipstick, and dark eye makeup. The girls quickly became iconic, as Palmer released three other videos in the same likeness, “I Didn’t Mean to Turn You On,” “Simply Irresistible,” and “Change His Ways.” Where in precision dancing such as the Tiller Girls, the single male creator was invisible in the performances; Palmer’s placement was the primary position in the videos, at the center, surrounded by the women. Watching the videos through the lens of Laura Mulvey, the viewer relates to Palmer, and places themselves into his subject position (Mulvey 1975). Although this video, as opposed to Ciara’s video, did not portray an explicitly queer aesthetic, it has been co-opted by queer artists. As video technology progressed, it became achievable to multiply a single body. In 2004, Brooklyn-based artist Andrea Merckx re-performed each of the roles in Palmer’s video (Merckx 2004). Performing the highly-feminine roles of the band, and singing as the male lead, Merckx re-envisioned a video that would otherwise be seen as displaying very clear gender roles. Her convincing performances in each of the roles destabilize their solid grounding.



*Addicted to Love*, Robert Palmer, 1986



*Addicted to Love*, Andrea Merckx, 2004

## **Multiples as Heroes**

The performance of the multiple in music videos has assumed a diverse range of forms as technology has progressed. As self-multiplication has become easy and accessible, the relationship of the self to the self that Otto Rank proposed was popular in literature in the form of the doppelganger became possible to embody on video (Rank 1971). In her video “Die Another Day,” Madonna performs a struggle between two versions of herself (Madonna 2002). Composed to be the theme of the James Bond movie of the same name in 2002, the video is filled with references to previous Bond films. Madonna appears to be escaping captivity throughout the video, interspersed with scenes of two characters in a fencing match, dressed in coordinating costumes, one in black and one in white. After one of the initial scenes of the fencing match, the video cuts to Madonna saying towards the camera, “Sigmund Freud analyze this,” and cuts back to the two fencers removing their masks, each revealing themselves to be Madonna (Madonna 2002, 1:00-1:08). These two characters continue to fight, with the one dressed in white eventually killing the one dressed in black, and the solitary Madonna escaping incarceration. Although one of Madonna’s multiples was indeed killed, we see heroism in her other two multiples.



*Die Another Day*, Madonna, 2002

Berlin-based artist and writer Hito Steyerl addresses early manifestations of technological multiplication in her essay, “A Thing Like You and Me,” written for a

catalogue for her solo exhibition at the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Norway, and subsequently published on e-flux.com. Steyerl looks at the symbol of the hero to see how it has changed, proposing that it has transformed away from being a subject into a pixelated object without a subject. She speaks about the supremacy of the image over the actual physicality of a person, proposing that what we desire now is the image and not the human: our new “hero” is a pixelated and reproducible JPEG file (Steyerl 2010). She locates herself in the year 1977, looking to lyrics from songs by the punk band The Stranglers, and the musician David Bowie. In that year, The Stranglers released the song “No More Heroes,” and David Bowie released “Heroes.” While The Stranglers pronounced, “Whatever happened to the heroes? No more heroes any more,” David Bowie appears to make a contradicting statement that “We can be heroes.” In fact Bowie’s image proposes a changing definition of the hero, away from a super-human and into a super-image. In the music video for “Heroes,” multiple angles of David Bowie singing are seen blending into one another. It is a simple video that looks low-fi today, but at the time that it was released, to see different sides of Bowie simultaneously each singing together was a striking image. Steyerl summarizes that “Not only has Bowie’s hero been cloned, he has above all become an image that can be reproduced, multiplied, and copied, a riff that travels effortlessly through commercials for almost anything, a fetish that packages Bowie’s glamorous and unfazed postgender look as product” (Steyerl 2010). With his multiples singing about being a hero, Bowie flattens himself, makes himself an object without a subject. It is not Bowie himself that is being cast as a hero, but his image. “This hero’s immortality no longer originates in the strength to survive all possible ordeals, but from its ability to be Xeroxed, recycled, and reincarnated” (Steyerl 2010). Rather than aim to better ourselves as social humans, a

prominent desire today is to become an accessible image. The contemporary image of the hero is in fact an image, an image that can be multiplied and reproduced.



*Heroes, David Bowie, 1977*

Possibly the most frequently reproduced celebrity today is the pop star Beyonce. Becoming famous through her performance in the group “Destiny’s Child” in the 1990’s, Beyonce has established herself as a solo artist since her first solo album in 2003. Frequently dancing alongside a chorus of back-up dancers, Beyonce appears as a collective, despite being solo. In her performance at the 2011 Billboard music awards, Beyonce’s chorus is in fact video projections of many of her multiples. In her song “Run the World,” Beyonce repeatedly asks, “Who run the world?” with the answer an exclamatory, “Girls!” The song is viewed superficially as an empowering song based on this Girl Power! attitude of the lyrics. She goes on to encourage, “Men have been given the chance to rule the world, but ladies, our revolution has begun. Let’s build a nation. Women everywhere: run the world!” (Beyonce 2011, 0:23-0:36). In her call to power, a group of Beyonce’s multiples are projected behind her marching in leotards with a salute.



*Run the World, Beyonce, 2011*



*Run the World, Beyonce, 2011*

These girls appear again later, and eventually in the performance become a chorus of live back-up dancers ending in the salute. In this nod to fascistic military, Beyonce is the leader. Our new hero, as Steyerl has suggested, is this infinitely malleable and reproducible body (Steyerl 2010). We are just as impressed by the precision and the discipline of Beyonce's multiples as we are with her singing ability. If an artist outside the mainstream did this same performance, we would be put off by the references to her as a military leader. But we celebrate Beyonce's multiples because we celebrate her as an individual. We desire to be or to be led by highly dispersed JPEG images.

In her use of military posturing, Beyonce is proposing that if we all follow her, we can "run the world." Returning to Susan Sontag's "Fascinating Fascism," we start to understand why we are still entranced by military posturing today.

National Socialism—more broadly—fascism—also stands for an ideal or rather ideals that are persistent today under the other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community.... Riefenstahl's films are still effective because, among other reasons, their longings are still felt, because their content is a romantic ideal to which many continue to be attached and which is expressed in such diverse modes of cultural dissidence and propaganda for new forms of community.... The exaltation of community does not preclude the search for absolute leadership; on the contrary, it may inevitably lead to it (Sontag 1980, 10).

This contemporary search for a leader has turned up Beyonce, and people from many contexts and backgrounds believe in her.

The reproducible celebrity creates a new form of religious or political fervor. As Steyerl suggested, we desire to be pixilated JPEGs (Steyerl 2010). Nowhere is that more clear than in the introduction for the television show “America’s Next Top Model” from seasons 14, 15, and 16. Hosted by international supermodel Tyra Banks, this reality competition show is aimed at finding the next high-fashion model from castings across the country. Many of the women entering the competition have no background in modeling at the start of the show, and through the show learn the skills necessary in the industry. Essentially, the show aims at crafting models. The introduction to the episodes from seasons 14, 15, and 16 start with Tyra multiplied infinitely through mirrors and video editing, striking different poses alongside her chorus of multiples. The clip cuts to give each of the contestants short segments of themselves multiplied in a similar way exponentially. Their multiplied images show them to be reproducible objects ready for distribution. The show creates products out of the contestants, and this is their first display as desirable objects.



*America's Next Top Model Cycle 14 Intro, 2010*



*America's Next Top Model Cycle 15 Intro, 2010*

The multiple in pop culture embodies a capitalist ethos where the aim is to create products that are infinitely reproducible. In these examples, the person multiplied is already

being multiplied exponentially in their profession as a pop celebrity. Multiplication of celebrities in a single image frame is an accurate representation of their experience as a celebrity, with their image being shown everywhere repeatedly. A celebrity no longer has agency over their image; they are no longer their identity, but their image. The displays of their multiple selves exude agency whether or not it is actually there.

### **Multiples Multiply Pleasure**

As we have seen, multiples of the individual have been widely used in music videos. This aesthetic has been utilized through time in pop media including print and commercial advertising. A widespread image of this in both form and in language can be found in the 1985 commercial for Double Mint gum (Double Mint Gum 1985). Opening with two twin women walking together, “a double pleasure is waiting for you.” Cutting to two twin men seeing the women, “A double great feeling making you realize double is the one for you.” In proposing that “*double* is the *one*,” they indicate that these multiples only constitute one entity, like Lacan’s split subject. To be two people having a great experience rather than just one would merely multiply the pleasure. Double mint gum promises to “double your pleasure and double your fun.” Surrendering to an overtly capitalist agenda, more = better. More men, women, and gum, leads to more fun. This is one of the first instances in which the language and the content of the ad were communicated in the form.



*Double Mint gum, 1985*



*Double Mint gum, 1985*

As technology has progressed, it has been easier to create images of “double pleasure” without real-life twins. Using mirrors and editing techniques, to create multiples of the same celebrity also multiplies the pleasure and in turn, the quality of the product advertised.

Regardless of not being real multiples, the more girls technologically reproduced, the better. Technological reproduction ties the body to the factory. In *The Mass Ornament*, Kracauer corresponded the legs of the Tiller Girls with the hands of factory workers (Kracauer 1995, 84). Similarly, being reproducible indicates that the body is a contemporary machine, and reduces the individual to the mechanical. If one can be multiplied, one is a product ready for consumption. The individuals multiplied in pop videos and advertisements are primarily women. These women are presented to be modern, precision-crafted objects ready for dissemination.

### Conclusion: The Multiple as a Utopian Queer Futurity

In “Performing the Multiple,” we have seen just a small portion of the many performances displaying the symbol of the multiple. This is a symbol that has been popular throughout time, although questioned often. Used in different disciplines with varying structures, the multiple is known first and foremost for superficially carrying a visually hypnotic and arresting form. But the work never stops there. Whether intentionally or not, the symbol of the multiple holds meaning.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the multiple was used in precision dance troupes and as propaganda for political use. In these contexts, the multiple displayed strength, discipline, and solidarity. Given its political structure and implications, however, it also embodied obedience, domination and sacrifice. It is with this history that the multiple carries not only popularity but also questioning. Susan Sontag discusses the double standard of the fascistic aesthetic of the multiple, saying that

Somewhere, of course, everyone knows that more than beauty is at stake in art like Riefenstahl’s. And so people hedge their bets—admiring this kind of art, for its undoubted beauty, and patronizing it, for its sanctimonious promotion of the beautiful. Backing up the solemn choosy formalist appreciations lies a larger reserve of appreciation, the sensibility of camp, which is unfettered by the scruples of high seriousness (Sontag 1980, 97).

This is the complicated reaction that the multiple produces in its viewers: admiring yet patronizing.

Sometimes seen as outdated and offensive, I argue that in its current manifestations, the multiple is a powerful site for re-imagining subjectivity. I propose that the performance of the multiple mediates the way subjectivities are formed and embodied, and has been repurposed over the years to produce a utopian subjectivity for female and queer identity. Almost always cast as women, the multiple is accused of reducing the subjectivity of the individuals involved. Queer artists have also used this symbol in their work frequently in recent years, portraying themselves in different relationships with their multiples. Although the presence of women and queers could, like the fascist aesthetic, point to submission on the part of these subjectivities, I argue that in fact the multiple constructs a utopian subjectivity in which the individuals are plurally singular.

In chapter 1, “Embodying the Mirror Image: Jacques Lacan and the Performance of the Multiple,” the multiple emerges as a universal cultural symbol. As individuals gain subjectivity in infancy through glimpsing their multiple in the mirror, to view the symbol of the multiple in various forms of art is familiar. Referencing this formative moment affirms a subject’s individuality. Viewing our multiple in the mirror is the moment in which we become more concretely a single subject. Although reliving this moment is perhaps self-empowering for all, it is particularly striking for the queer subject. A queer subject is by definition unfixed. To bear witness to multiple facets of one’s queer identity, operating both collectively and individually in the symbol of the multiple, feels like the first moment of actual self-visualization. The subjectivity a queer person acquires in the performance of the multiple matches up more clearly to their own identity.

Analyzing the performance of the multiple through time in chapter 2, “Modernity in Dance: Siegfried Kracauer’s *Mass Ornament* from 1890 to Today,” we have seen that the symbol has held strong despite contention. Reducing the individuals involved to parts of a machine, our concern for sustaining difference and self-reliance has made the form seem outdated. We question the political aesthetic the multiple reveals, and what it may mean about us as viewers if we enjoy the performance. We are both drawn to the symbol and repulsed by it because the aesthetic of the multiple is an ideal one—it admits a belief in beauty, a particular kind of beauty, and it admits to its belief in the collective.

Democratically, we are unsure about the collective. But if we can see the form only for what it is, it is in fact a utopian form. Leaving aside personal reactions to ethnicity or body type, the multiple simply performs a hope: a hope for beauty, collectivity, and unity.

In the contemporary moment, artists in different disciplines have found ways to create work using the multiple that eclipse the social dilemmas the performances in the past produced. In chapter 3, “Queering the Multiple,” we see the multiple take shape in photographs, sculptures, performances, and videos. To re-direct the dilemma of the sacrificing of the individual, artists in these disciplines created worlds in which a single body was multiplied, or the body was not of a living person. In doing so, artists have created alternate realities.

In fact this hope for an ideal and another form of reality defines queer identity. José Muñoz describes queerness as an ideality. This ideality is a mode of desiring for a state beyond our present world. “The queer aesthetic... frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” (Muñoz 2009, 1). It is in the performance of the multiple that we envision the utopian queer futurity come to life. In the worlds we have seen

artists create through disciplines and through the years with the multiple, we see utopian collectives. “Concrete utopias can also be daydream like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even a solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many” (Muñoz 2009, 3). When a queer artist creates this work with their own body multiplied, they are doing so not just for themselves but for their community, or the dreamed-of community. They are embodying a vision of a utopian queer subjectivity.

The multiple has persevered over time as a visually enchanting form granting access to the masses. Although always pointing towards a utopian vision of the future, it has in the recent decades been re-imagined as displaying a specifically queer version of utopian subjectivity. Queerness is a future ideal, and the multiple gives shape and reality to that utopian vision.

If I were to write the next chapter of this thesis, it would return again, as I have in my practice, to dance. I see the multiple as a symbol for which the medium of dance prevails as the most effective in employing. Although I did find a great home for the multiple in my video work, I believe that it is in live dance performance that the tension and impact of the multiple comes to fruition. I was glad to have found a solution to the political discomfort of the multiple by multiplying myself of video, but I am currently enjoying the challenge of using the form with my dancers and attempting to have the symbol be not so directly visible. Aside from the unambiguous use of homogeneity or unison, I am asking what other ways I can utilize the symbol. I search for ways to make the multiple invisible or psychological.

Performing this research alongside my practice energized my work and forced me to consider it more critically. It was interesting to get into rehearsal, see a run of my work, and be able to pick apart the many references that live inside it, regardless of the fact that it was

not made intentionally with those things on my mind. My process was truly dialectical as I learned different things from my research and my practice that then were in conversation with each other. It was exciting to place my work in such a broad context. I am happy to be able to reference a long history that is in conversation with what I am doing in my work. This is why I would be interested in furthering my study of dance to include contemporary choreographers and the ways in which the multiple is still enacted.

The multiple is a powerful symbol that I have given language and history to here, but that I address every day in my rehearsals with the dancers I work with. It feels like a riddle that I will never completely solve, but instead continue to peel through the layers of in both practice and research.

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