

Susana Zimmermann

Dore Hoyer

A Body Labyrinth in Space

INTRODUCTION

Dore Hoyer was an exceptional artist, who was born in Germany in 1911, and who committed suicide in 1967. A dancer and choreographer, pupil of Mary Wigman and Grete Palucca, she created all her performances integrally: choreography, costumes, music and theme. Everything came from her essential concept.

She was especially well-known as a soloist, though she created some choral works. The contents of her performances were articulated from her deep intense humanity - never banal - which didn't leave anything important out. The structure in her choreographies was essential, as she created it from original movements, not copied from others, but linked to the principal theme and in connection to the piece she was building up. She was a master in making variations around an original idea, developing it from the simplest to the most complex aspects.

She made several trips to South America with her recitals, and in 1960 she was hired for a year by the Teatro Argentino of La Plata in the province of Buenos Aires to run courses and to create performances.

HISTORY

From nine to sixteen years old, my own life was essentially dedicated to dancing. They were years of growing up, development, making discoveries, the enchantment of the arts and of living all the emotions through dance. In happiness and pain, dance was my way of expressing and experiencing.

One day, my classical dance teacher suggested I take part in an artistic tour of Italy, with some other dancers. My odyssey started then. It was a path of anguish and light, as my family didn't allow me to do the trip, and forbade all contact with the world of dance. I started reading and devouring books about dance, and I discovered *My Life* by Isadora Duncan, which became my consolation and my bible. I dreamt and hoped that some day, a magic wand would help me to return to dance. I discovered fantastic

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books and the history of dance. Little by little, I opened myself to the aesthetics and to the philosophical understanding of dance and art, and I ended up choosing to study philosophy.

But one day, I saw for the first time contemporary dance, performed by a German dancer who had come to my country, and it was very moving for me to discover in real live presence all the theory I had read and dreamed about: a woman who transformed herself as a metamorphosis, who moved giving out the pure essence of different situations and states of being, who moved all the emotional fibres of the audience. She possessed an absolutely personal and fascinating technique, which didn't correspond to any classical or modern canon, and a capacity for synthesis that provoked feelings and expressed metaphysical contents through her dance.

This unique dancer and creator was Dore Hoyer, who became later my teacher waking me up violently from my "Sleeping Beauty" dream. She enthused dance, creation, hope in me; she opened a new door or connected me to that open door in me, the door that had always been open and had been shut down and locked later.

I was already reincorporated to contemporary dance, preparing, as a dancer, a performance to be represented outdoors, in the parks of the Palermo neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. While rehearsing for a photographer, Dore Hoyer, who had recently arrived in Argentina with her interpreter, appeared mysteriously and came to watch our group of young dancers. We couldn't believe this miracle, we stopped the rehearsal and started talking to her. That is how we found out that she was about to begin a course in La Plata and we were invited to participate. This was the beginning of my journey in the German Expressionist School, which continued in Germany with the

masters Kurt Joos, Mary Wigman and Dore Hoyer. It was thanks to the impact that the impressive figure of Dore Hoyer had on me, and surely on my whole generation, that I began my dance studies again.

In 1960, we also had the chance of seeing the National Ballet of Chile and after them Kurt Joos' company that was presenting its whole repertoire and especially *The Green Table*, that received the 1927 United Nations Award. This choreography had a profound political, historical, cultural and social content, but this movement was dispersed during the Second World War and disseminated in other countries and continents, as the great masters had to flee or leave to find work elsewhere. So when in 1961 and 1962, I went to Germany with a scholarship, I found there what was left of the Expressionism that had started with such strength, but had faded during the war. It had faded precisely because it had to do not only with dance, but with the body, with theatre, with a total human being; in a visceral way it referred to a theatre and dance committed to its time. In those years, the movement was slowly regenerating; I studied improvisation, which I had already been introduced to by Dore Hoyer, with Kurt Joos, and Mary Wigman.

It is important to remember some of Dore Hoyer's performances that I had the privilege of seeing: *In Memory of García Lorca*, *Ecstatic Andante*, *Children of the Earth* (with music by Bela Bartok), *Bolero* (by Ravel), *Human Affections*, *Biblical Women*. I carry her image inside me, wearing her skirt and bolero jacket going from pink to red in *degradé*. The whole choreography design in space of the *Bolero* was built over variations around a circle and spirals. For twenty-five minutes, Dore Hoyer didn't leave this enclosed space, while her body made all the possible variations on a theme, which start from a thumb to finally involve



Terra di Tango, choreographed by Susana Zimmermann. Photo: archive

her whole controlled body.

Many years later, taking part in a congress about the Bible and Dance, in Jerusalem, in Israel, I got to know and saw the performances of groups from Yemen. They also created their dances from the variations of the thumbs. I was reminded of Dore Hoyer and of how she was interested in seeing tribal dances, especially from Oriental, Mediterranean, Greek and Spanish origin. Perhaps these were a key to her inspiration. I also remember how she handled the different planes of the movement and of her body, using costumes in yellow, black and red. In Berlin, Germany, in 1962, I saw the opening of *Human Affections*, a performance about vanity, hate, anguish, desire and love, in an intense synthesis of shapes, colours, movements and spaces.

HER CLASSES AND WORKS

In 1960, Dore Hoyer's classes in the Argentine Theatre of La Plata in the province of Buenos Aires were divided so we did Dance Technique twice a week and Improvisation once a week. She was the first teacher to help me reach an opening of the body and voice through improvisation, asked us to exclaim or sing while we moved sitting

on the floor. The basic key for interpretation in Dance-Theatre started in this way even reaching a hypnotic state of trance. Some of our other teachers visited us during her classes; they rejected in particular the improvisations - even if they acknowledged the technique - because they considered them to be an excessive discharge of energy and feelings. This resulted in conflicts for some.

The Technique classes were a surprise every day, two classes were never the same, at times they were excessively pedagogical, other times anti-pedagogical, but always transcendent and poignant. Depending on her affective state, as she was a very strongly emotional person, sometimes she was infinitely and incommensurably soft. She was an extremist, even when she corrected us she could adore us, or get very angry, always intense, uncompromising and brilliant.

When she taught us movements they were always original, new, and her way of connecting them was a true unique lacing, a registered trademark of choreographic composition.

I remember an exercise that uses the arms that I always teach in my classes: it combines circles in different senses with movements of wrists, forearms, arms, separately, or combining two elements in a symmetrical or asymmetric way, adding and merging torso and hip movements, drawing circles on the floor with the feet, varying the combinations in progressive form, elaborating a real "labyrinth". Another work was on the vertigo of turns: making turns from the centre outwards, with an emotional ingredient that makes other people suffer while running in a circle, or the opposite making concentric turns, towards the centre, suffering or punishing oneself. I remember obstinate movements, and using the tremolo a lot, a tremolo that could start as smoothly as the heartbeat of a bird, and transform in

crescendo to reach a violent, fast paroxysm. Another crescendo was from walking to running, to flying, to get to a jump. Dore Hoyer didn't jump a lot, she seemed to be the opposite of her great master Grete Palucca, who was a technical prodigy in her jumps; for Dore it was more coming off the ground with meaning.

All this German Expressionist dance movement that had dispersed and had its originators persecuted during the Second World War, had its *revanche* in the 1970s when for the first time Pina Bausch's company performed in Nancy's Festival showing the direct derivation of Dance Theatre from the German Expressionist dance of the 1930s, freeing it all over the world from a codified art form bound to conservative powers; for this reason, in the 20th century, dance doesn't try to acquire a fixed language, reproducing sequences, but rather it supposes a return to the original sources of movement.

Both Laban and Wigman associated her with a strong avantgarde current: Expressionism. Dore Hoyer feeds off this source to renew and search for her own language. An essential characteristic of this movement is not to copy what others do, but to create from within. This is what Dore Hoyer transmitted to us, we who had the privilege of being chosen as her students in Argentina, connecting us to the magic and ritual of dance.

Remembering this extraordinary

artist and great master, makes me connect with my deepest and most intense creative force. It is important that new generations get to know the pillars of an authentic art.

Translated from Spanish by Mercedes Arbizu
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SUSANA ZIMMERMANN (Argentina) is a choreographer, dance teacher and manager of different ballet companies. As a classical and contemporary dancer, Susana studied with Kurt Joos, Mary Wigman and Dore Hoyer in Germany, and with Maurice Bejart in Belgium. She directs the Dance Laboratory of the Istituto di Tella, the Ballet de Hoy and the Chamber Ballet of Argentina. From 1976 she also works in Italy as choreographer and teacher, and belongs to the Jury of the International Contest of Choreographers of Nyon (Switzerland). Recently Susana has celebrated her 40th anniversary of work as a dancer in Buenos Aires and 30th anniversary in Italy.