READING "MARIANG SINDERELA": TOWARDS A FEMINIST DISCOURSE OF DANCE*

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Introduction

It was Christy Adair's book, *Women and Dance,* that first introduced me to the relationship between feminism and dance. For a then college freshman earnestly trying to reconcile her budding feminist consciousness with her passion for ballet, unearthing Adair's text was a glorious discovery that led me toward a critical study of the arts and a basic understanding of feminist theories.

But my consequent involvement in a university student paper (that had delusions of being "radical and activist"), and, later, with a left-wing feminist group, soon prevented me from attending dance classes which I grew to cynically pass off — in characteristic grim-and-determined activist conviction — as an elitist endeavor. Writing for the university paper (which often meant submitting articles to macho editors) suddenly became a major priority, and dancing has sadly eclipsed in the background.

This detachment from dancing had its relevance, however, for it created a distance that allowed me to be critical of the workings of the very institutions (i.e., the ballet school and the dance company) that trained me to acquire the skill

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and taste for what many deemed to be "high-class art". My long respite from ballet dancing also paved the way for me to study and trace the roots of ballet, the cultures and ideologies of the societies that produced and developed the dance form. Reading, writing, and researching about women, dance, and the arts in general became a preoccupation that enlightened as well as demystified erstwhile unquestioned notions about "beauty", art", "the artistic", "the great dancer", among others.

Writing this thesis, undoubtedly, is a personal and political statement about knowledges and experiences accrued by an Art Studies major whose background in dance is rigidly classical ballet, and whose involvement in university activist groups made her politically conscious of legitimized institutional practices and the ideologies that are perpetuated therein. This thesis is the result of a personal long standing observation of the parallel marginalization of women in society, and of dance in art studies, and of critique of the homogenizing ideologies that result in the hierarchization of art and the suppression of certain groups in our society. Other than serving as a chronicle of my growth as a self-avowed feminist, this is also a political project exposing canon-constructions that have "othered" women and dance from "Great Art". Women, after all, are not considered natural creators of art in a patriarchal art world, as is presupposed by the oft-used term "woman artist"; men in the arts, on the other hand, are always readily conferred the title "*the* artist".

But this is not to insist that women, too, must be part of the Canon. For the Western-imposed Art Canon is itself problematical with its unquestioned privileging of the white, heterosexual, middle-class, Christian male.

In the same vein, the marginalization of dance, as we read —or do not read —in Western Art History, is very much in

question. If we trace the genealogy of what we call today "Art", we would go back to the seven liberal arts of the Middle Ages which were renamed into *beaux arts* ("fine arts") by Frenchman Abbe Charles Batteaux in 1747. Of these seven, oratory and poetry were re-grouped to form the *beaux arts* list, leaving only architecture, painting, and sculpture as the privileged triumvirate exclusively canonized as "Art" (Burgin 1986:143-144), as is still preached today in Art academies — the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts being one of the country's oldest bastions of such tenet.

Dance has thus been excluded in the Western canon of Great Art, and presently, in cultural studies. Dance has often been safely contained within the esoteric and the highbrow, while dance history is usually reduced to biographical sketches of so-called great dancers (Nationalist Artist for Literature Nick Joaquin's recently published book, *La Orosa,* on the life of National Artist in Dance, Leonor Orosa Goquingco, is one such example), if not in expensive coffee table books, and journal reviews (locally, the domain of Basillo "Steve" Villaruz, Edna Vida, *et al.*) which are mainly atheoretical, descriptive, and emotive. Meanwhile, European sociology of art (which is influential to Philippine academic thinking and theorizing), based on a neo-Marxist framework, has continued to privilege literature and the visual arts over the performing arts" (Wolff in Adair 1992:xi).

Pertinent to an understanding of the state of dance in the country is our nation's long experience of colonization by the West, which has significantly influenced how we view the body—the medium of dance. Western dualisms (i.e., mind/body, culture/nature, reason/passion, masculine/feminine) and the conservative tenets of the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, have placed restrictions on the body that prevented Filipinos from exploring the subversive possibilities of their

bodies, and hence, of their own dances. This notion of the privileging of the *One* over the *Other,* (which feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz calls the "bifurcation of being") is particularly important in tracing the roots of imperialist, masculinist, and capitalist hierarchies that perpetuate and reinforce the multiple oppression of women, who are construed to be the inferior half of the said patricentric binary logic.

The conspicuous void of dance studies in critical theory and cultural studies is an anomalous symptom of the art world's neglect to see the progressive potential of the moving/dancing body, especially "at a time when the focus of analysis of ideology, representation, and social relations is *the body*. . . . The body now has to be seen as central to the operations of power and knowledge, across the realms of medicine, mental illness, correctional practices and institutions, and sexuality" (Wolff 1992: xi). Viewed in this perspective, a reading of how women represent female bodies in their modern dance becomes a feminist project that attempts to recuperate the active role of women as creators in the dance world, in particular, and in society, in general, and no longer the idealized muse of the male creator, or the passive object of the male gaze. My perspective in reading/writing shall attempt to discard the trap of biological essentialism that differentiates the "truly male" from the "truly female", or "Great Art" from "women's art", categories that tend to romanticize and valorize "femaleness", "maleness", "the artistic", and any such perceived essences.

Foremostly, this thesis is based on the premise that the body, which is the medium of dance, is a social construct and is therefore a bearer of ideology; hence dance movements are not natural nor neutral. Encoded therein are the political exigencies of material determinations in society. Gender stereotypes, for example, are always inscribed in dance move-

ments for the danseur and danseuse in the classical ballet tradition; even the seemingly instinctive movements of a-go-go dancers in Cubao's dingy clubhouses are unconsciously informed by the sexual politics of gender power relations between the female prostitute and her male client.

This thesis's focus is on dance as performed in theatre, or dance that has been institutionalized by the art world. This preference will necessitate the laying bare of the workings of the institutional dance world, usually a carrier of dominant conservative ideologies (i.e., patriarchy), as it interpellates choreographers and dancers to assume their particular subject positions. This thesis, nevertheless, shall grapple with the tension between the collusions and resistances within the dominant patriarchal idiom as seen in the text under study: "Mariang Sinderela," a modern dance/ballet choreography by two young female students of the Diploma for Creative and Performing Musical Arts of the UP College of Music. There will be an attempt to recover and re-read the utterances, disjunctions, and silences in the said text, and a problematization of how the female body was represented therein.

The thesis' focus on modern dance is due to the fact that this dance genre was developed mainly by women in Europe and America in the 20th century as a revolutionary resistance to the rigid restrictions and elitist ideals of European classical ballet. It is important to note that modern dance owes its tradition to the revolutionary mothers of 20th century Europe and America, from Angela Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham to Merce Cunningham and black woman Pearl Primus, among others, who refused to wear the corset, the toe shoes, and the tutu of ballet — all symbols of feminine fragility which the male-controlled aristocracy of 16th and 17th century Italy and France used in the course of developing the highly stylized classical ballet. Locally, modern dance was like-

wise introduced, developed, and practiced by women as Alice Reyes, Myra Beltran, Hazel Sabas, and Agnes Locsin, to name a few.

And so it is not incidental that the focus of this thesis is a modern dance by female choreographers. The category "female" is not seen here as an essential female but as a subject position laden with overdetermined relations of power.

Finally, the writer would like to expound on how the power of the dancing body has been coopted by conservative institutional dance practices (particularly by the academic community of the State University), and how this power may be re-appropriated to become a potential site for a feminist politics involved in the project of resistance toward a more liberative and liberating society.

Thus, this feminist discourse on "Mariang Sinderela."

Women and Dance in Society

Dance is the sole art where the whole human body communicates by moving through patterns of time, sound, and space.

But it is precisely this centrality given to the body that dance has been a marginal art. Western dualisms have viewed the body as inferior to mind and soul which explains the present-day idea of "mind over matter," or the religious platitude expressed thus: "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Feminist theologian Felicity Edwards would trace the evolution of the dualist thought, saying that the pre-classical and ancient Hebrew society viewed the human person holistically, and only later, "as Orphic influence impinged on classical thought, [that] the human person came to be viewed dualistically as made up not so much of complementary, but rather of mutually opposed elements: body and mind (or

body and spirit, or body and soul)" (Edwards 1995: 180). She further explains the serious implications of this bifurcation of being in relation to gender/sexual politics:

> . . . when the body/mind dualism became assimilated to the already existing female/male dualism of the classical world, the repercussions for women were disastrous and far-reaching. Women came to be identified with matter, the body and sensuality, while the association of the male was the spirit, mind and purity . . . . Christian missionaries spread it to the colonies of the Western empires and it is still part of our world-view today, charged as it is with harmful attitudes that accompany the perceptions of superiority and inferiority (*Ibid.*).

This Western phallogocentric reason would bring us to a host of other mutually exclusive polarities engendered by the basic mind/body opposition—reason/passion, dark/light, sense/sensibility, culture/nature, One/Other, masculine/ feminine, and even the orientalist West/East dichotomy (as Edward Said would theorize). Man was thus aligned with the first superior side, and woman with the other, negative opposition. This logic has been in keeping with imperialist and patriarchal dreams of naturalizing the civilizing mission of the white, Christian, heterosexual male to explore and subjugate his *others.*

Such conquest-driven thinking is particularly apparent in the dances developed in most of Western cultures. Ballet, for one—which had its heyday in French, Italian, and English courts from the 16th–17th centuries, and later in 19th and 29th century Tsarist Russia — was appropriated by the European aristocracy from the dances of the peasant and working classes of Europe to form a codified and highly stylized dance spectacle where the female dancers were idealized as sylphs and virginal muses (Adair 1992: 118).

Ballet technique, whose five basic positions of the feet are attributed to French nobleman and choreographer, Pierre

Beauchamp, requires the perfect line of the dancer's physique (Funk and Wagnalls 1993: 221). This stress given on verticality and symmetry was influenced by the classical Greco-Roman idealization of the human body as is physically evident in ballet's repertoire of anti-gravitational steps of elevation and flight — for example, the grand jete and multiple leaps of the male virtuoso, and the ballerina's reserved, mincing bourees and beats while in her restricting pointe shoes. These movements that repudiate gravity refer to the anti-body philosophy that seeks to discipline the flesh towards the achievement of an ethereal, immortal, celestial ideal.

Dance has thus been alienated from the working classes, while its status as art declined due to the Christian church fathers' restriction of the body. The spiritual shackle on the body was further confounded by the economic prerequisites brought about by the advent of the Industrial Revolution. This made sure that the use of the body was harnessed for economic production, for the body/mind split was very much in accord with the values of the then emerging capitalist society which main ethic was "the selling of one's body to another for the purpose of making profit (surplus value)" (Goodman in Hanna 1988: 124). This is particularly true in ballet history when the term "ballet girl" accrued, up to the mid-20th century, a degoratory connotation of being a prostitute of a wealthy male audience (*Ibid.*). Logically, the existing economic, social, and religious hegemonies of Western society supported the patriarchal dualist reason which is responsible for the resulting nearly parallel marginal status of women and dance in society.

In contrast to the aforementioned repulsive attitudes toward the body, women, and dance are the earthbound dance practices of African and Asian societies, where dance is an intricate part of the indigenes' daily life. Dance for them is a

communal and ritualistic activity that marks the passage of significant life-occurrences — as birth, courtship, marriage, battle, death — in their respective communities:

> The social values that. . . indigenous and traditional dances convey are. . . markedly different from those of the Western world. While in the latter context, dances function mainly to create an artistic form of erotic play, or to suggest transcendental concepts of ethereality and spiritual flight from the world as physical and hence gross, here the indigenous Asian dances are imbued with a social and ceremonial character because of their ritualistic origins. The dancer continues the tradition of the *babaylan* or priestess, intermediary between man and the spirits of nature (Guillermo 1988: 114).

The perceived matriarchy of pre-colonial Philippines is not yet an established fact in the academe, but there is at least a basic notion that women were regarded highly during those days. But with the onset of Western imperialist imposition, cultural aggression invaded the "primitive" lands which weakened most of the rites and values endemic in indigenous cultures. The Philippines in particular, which has endured "300 years of convent and 50 years of Hollywood," is presently predominantly Christian as it was heir to a Spanish colonial tradition that had indoctrinated, through the Judeo-Christian-influenced Roman Catholic Church, so many misogynist myths about the body, especially the female body. We see this manifested, for example, when ballet first made its way in the country via our American colonizers, when moral guardians from convent schools imposed a ballet ban to prohibit students from taking ballet classes, deeming the dance "immoral" (Alejandro 1978: 57).

Problematizing this centuries-old anti-body, anti-feminine world-view has become a crucial point in the deconstruction, demystification, and demythification of the naturalized, universalized Law of the Father. Subverting the

body/mind phallocentric binary logic has become the project of many feminists who have chosen to valorize and no longer feel victimized by their connection with their bodies, but to celebrate their sensuality towards the achievement of what French feminists call *jouissance,* "the orgasmic overflowing of female pleasure" (Eagleton 1986: 205). We see this concretized through the modern dance movement spearheaded by women in the 1920s in defiance of balletic norms. Thus they see the female body positively as voiced by Helene Cixous' imperative that woman must write her body to articulate her erstwhile repressed desires amid a male-centered libidinal economy. In an ecstatic tone, she writes to women in her most influential essay, *The Laugh of the Medusa,* "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (Cixous in Eagleton: 227). For the feminists following this bold assertion (among them Linda Singer, Gayatri Spivak, and Luce Irigaray), writing the body becomes a woman's personal and political statement of re-articulating her erstwhile silenced voice. "Because of female desire," As Mary Eagleton says, "what women want, is so repressed or so misrepresented in a phallocentric society, its expression becomes a key location for deconstructing that control"(Eagleton 1986: 205).

In this light the dancing body may be similarly viewed as an act of writing the body, because writing, when translated to dancing, is a physical, more concrete manifestation of woman actively inscribing her desires through her body which masculine culture has "othered" from her. The dancing body, in this sense, is an alternative articulation to the dominant patriarchal idiom of sexual representation wherein man is the norm. Using the French feminists' discourse, it can be asserted that dancing for women is an act of maternal utterance rebelling against the patriarchal linguistic order that defines woman as lack or absence. Women dancing their bodies is women

asserting themselves, their desires no less, re-appropriating their power otherwise withheld by a macho sexual economy. Dancing is writing in the flesh, and woman dancing is woman reclaiming her body from the clutches of the patriarchal representation of the female body.

Hence, reading women's representations of the female body and decoding the movements therein become a key act to an understanding of how women have challenged, and sometimes collude with partiarchy in their dance projects.

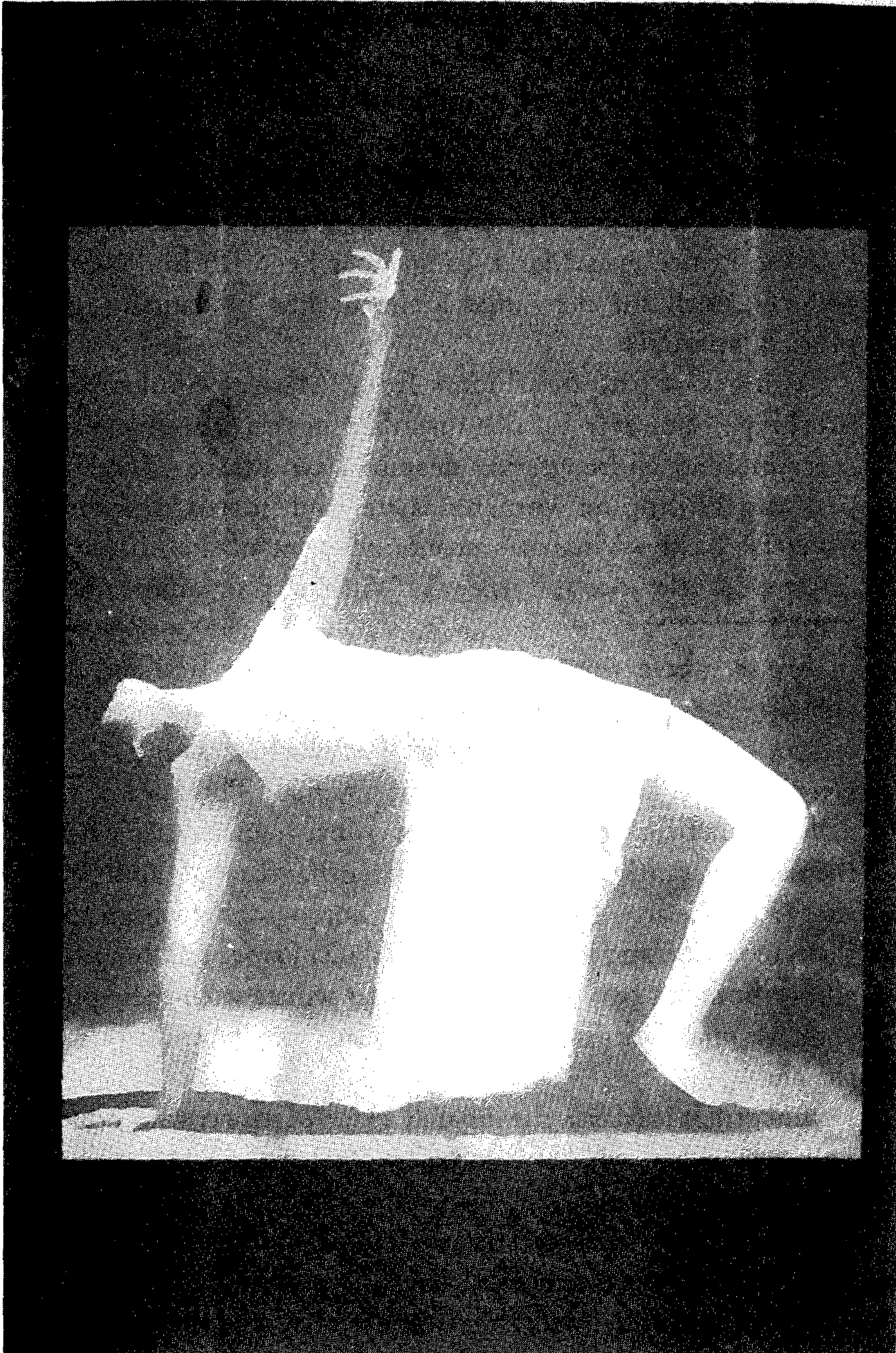
Reading "Mariang Sinderela"

What is at stake when a fairy tale classic is reconstructed into a choreographic project attempting to articulate the contemporary Overseas Contract Worker (OCW) issue as women's issue?

"Mariang Sinderela: Ang Bagong Bayani" — a modern ballet choreographed by UP students Joelle Jacinto and Angela Lawenko, premiered at the UP Theatre last August 3, 1996 would show in more ways than one that it is the dancing female body, the patriarchal construction of femininity therein, and the Pinay OCW that are primary subjects of contention in such a venture.

Jumping off from the Cinderella narrative, that popular story where so many girls' misogynist fantasies are built, "Mariang Sinderela," is about a naive, docile, pretty young Pinay named Maria who is left in the hands of an impoverished, scheming stepmother (Mrs. de las Alas) plus two equally wicked stepsisters (Sharon and Felipa) who maltreat her as she is made into the *katulong* (house helper) of the de las Alas shanty.

And so the story unfolds thus: Mrs. de las Alas sells her three daughters as "cultural dancers" to Japan through recruiter Mrs. Ye-yes, who with a male dance trainor privilege



Maria's graceful dancing over Sharon and Felipa's showy crassness. Maria is later rewarded with a pair of golden shoes which she brings delightedly to Japan. Soon we find the three young Pinays in a Yakuza-owned club; Mrs. Ye-yes turns out to be a pimp, and we see the two stepsisters outrightly seducing a Yakuza-cum-Prince Charming through their erotic dances. But the Prince eyes Maria, gang-rapes her with his Yakuza cohorts, until she dies amid a chorus line of dancing, exploited Japayukis.

Vestiges of patriarchal ideas from "Mariang Sinderela's" prototype, however, remain inscribed in the dance's overall storyline and choreography despite attempts to address a pressing Philippine women's issue, and notwithstanding librettist Basilio Villaruz's pronouncement of his libretto's "attempt at relevance and renewal" (Villaruz, programme notes 1996).

We see, for example, as opening salvo of the first act, the stepsisters competing in a card fight that leads to a needless *sabunutan* (hair pulling) scene of the Bella Flores kind. (The stereotyped villainess in Philippine cinema.) This idea of female competition extends itself in subsequent scenes where the two constantly compete with each other for male approval, first from the attention of the male choreographer who trains them to dance, and later from the Yakuza Prince and his male allies whom the two would attempt to seduce with their provocative undulations in their respective dance renditions at the club.

But still it is Maria, the innately graceful dancer who stands no matter what, who is favored by their male dance trainor and by Mrs. Ye-yes.

Mrs. Ye-yes' character is particularly interesting for her dual role: first she is a modern-day fairy godmother who helps Maria escape her miserable domesticity, and then in the

second act, is transformed into a money-motivated *matrona* (matron) who pimps Maria to death in Japan. Or perhaps, we can read her as a crack in this whole patriarchal plot because she would deconsruct the mythical goody-two-shoes fairy godmother in the original Cinderella story. But on second thought, she fails considerably precisely because of her insistence on the clear-cut dichotomous representation of woman that she clearly embodies, and which we see separately typified in virginal Maria versus her whorish others.

Thus the spotlight would always focus on the subservient Maria, who stays in the background but eventually singled out as she performs solo dances that idealize her balletic, fragile, lithe form, so unlike the brusque, comic moves of her stepmother and sisters.

This stereotyped virgin-whore syndrome is stretched throughout this whole two-act choreography and is most evident in the second act where we find the spotlight on an immaculately-garbed Maria essaying her way in the club with mincing steps and soft swirls opposite an unlit space for her stepsisters' cocksure, suggestive stance. The rest of the Japayukis, on the other hand, wear a uniform red sexy suit while they constantly sculpt the shadowy air in scaled, regular moves of leg-kicks, turns, bows, hip-and-shoulder gyrations. In addition, the scene of Maria's rape would even pursue the myth that only virgins may be raped: as the phallic ties of the Yakuzas are flung around Maria's meek body, we see her fellow Japayukis slowly fading out of the stage, their hands crossed in helplessness as they are swallowed by the dark, as if to persist with the myth that it is only the untouched woman and never the wench who can be defiled.

It can at least be said that the creators behind "Mariang Sinderela" have consistency. Consistency, that is, in terms of putting to the fore the patriarchal dichotomous definition of woman as either virgin or vamp, saint or seductress, sylph or siren.

Further, no trace of sisterly solidarity may be gleaned in this wholly classical choreography which is so necessary in any portrayal of the OCW situation. The various Pinoy OCW formations in foreign countries, where female bonding thrives in a network of small groups, was totally elided in the whole performance's predilection to portray defiled and debased Japayukis, another patriarchal backlash that objectified women as always already victims. We see this in the aforementioned choreography of the Japayukis' dances, especially in the final scene when Maria's lifeless, wasted body is carried off in a funeral behind the nameless, faceless dancing bodies who never even became her sisters — wanton women all wearing the same red outfit, the same golden shoes, their regulated, rigid leg-kicks sinisterly evoking their unfeeling inhumanity despite their dark, deterritorialized plight.

The problem here, of course, is in configuring women into a homogenized helpless, hapless, forever forlorn disposition. "Mariang Sinderela", in this sense, has simply not secured a space for Japayuki's self-empowerment. As Patrick Flores puts it:

> But prostitutes... are not just prostitutes. They are also breadwinners who send children to school, feed families, take care of sick relations, strive to be women/wives/mothers, and sleep with the enemy — all at the same time. Now, how can you possibly stereotype this complex, highly mediated subjectivity?" (Flores 1993: 45).

It is important to note at this point that choreographers Lawenko and Jacinto used the modern ballet genre, more known as modern dance, which women of the 20th century developed in rebellion to the restricting conventions of the elitist, not to mention sexist, classical ballet, which was fathered by the male aristocracy of 15th–17th century Europe. Among the revolutionary mothers of the dance form as earlier mentioned were Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Ruth St.

Denis, Martha Graham, who all disregarded the restricting corset, bra and pointe shoes worn by the ethereal, eroticized, idealized female dancers of ballet. The repertoire of movements modern dance has accrued are mainly derived from the everyday, organic motions of life. For example, "Duncan based her vocabulary on the idea of the elemental human motion evident in such simple activities as walks, skips, runs, swaying waltzes, turns, and falls. . . (while Graham would) include the contraction and release, spiralling movement through the body" (Foster 1988: 90).

But this is not in any way to privilege the choreographic techniques of the wholly middle class, Euro-American foremothers of modern dance. Mention of Graham and Duncan's style is only to contextualize the tradition from which Lawenko and Jacinto fashioned their dance recital. And it is also to back up this writer's point that it is rather disorienting, because contradicting, to watch a dance as this that calls itself modern, and addressing a contemporary local women's issue at that, while remaining caught in the antiquated idiom of aristocratic spectacles that date as far back as Rennaissance Italy and Henry II's courts in France, the classical ballet idiom so alienating to modern-day, everyday Filipino viewers. It does not help, too, that they use Serge Prokofiev's classical score in rendering the dance. *"Kailangan si Prokofiev's talaga kasi yun yung binigay ni Steve (Basilio). Sana hindi pero anong magagawa namin?"* (It has to be Prokofiev because that is the one assigned to us by Steve (Basilio). It ought not to be, but what can we do?) Lawenko says of their constrained position as graduating students trying to pass the standards of their professor/librettist with this dance recital.

This work thus suffers from a double-bind: Other than the misogynist ideas coming from an incompetent deconstruction

of Cinderella, the all-too-classical choreography plus the romantic musical score reinforce the male-defined construction of femininity in the classical ballet tradition. Hence, we find unnecessarily inserted in the dance a balletic convention that is the *pas de deux,* or partnering, usually depicted as an idealization and romanticization of male-female, heterosexual love. The *pas de deux* is rendered by Maria and the Prince, where he is supposed to be leading/coercing her to his cubicle in an effort to win her. But rather than turning into a violent, angry scene where Maria should be resisting an obvious act of sexual harassment, we see a romantic flirtation between a meek maiden and her manly knight. We may see Maria's head turning away to elude the Prince's kiss, or smoothly stepping away from his embrace, but all her small resistances are depicted in a feminized, pleasant way only to heighten the romantic image of the active-male-and-passive-female tryst. It is a scene where ultimately an at-first-defiant-woman softens and concedes to her passivity in the muscled arms of her virile lover — very like the stuff Harlequin Romances are made of.

But the point is not only that the *pas de deux* reinforces a compulsary heterosexuality, it also fetishizes the female as erotic object of the male gaze as best described in this passage:

> The ballerina rises from the man's waist, from his crotch, above his shoulder, across his legs. He carries her erect, though her arms may soften the line, her legs remain stiff. An initial lift into one position is followed by him carrying her in another. Lifted he swoops and plunges with her, before bringing her down to earth so that the narrative can continue. He handles her as he would his own penis. Fondly he holds the phallus in his arms, longingly he looks into his princess' eyes, ecstatically he lifts her, his hands around her long, stiff tube of a body. Easily he holds and moves with her. Flying she is his own (English in Adair 1992: 78).

Another problematic portrayal is found in the scene of the fairies. We don't know why there are fairies in the first place, but each is supposed to represent the four seasons of Japan, and give Maria a gift — a corset, a gown, a headress, a fan — all symbols of femininity. Mrs. Ye-yes is suddenly dressed in tutu and turns out to be a fairy herself, convinces Maria to go to Japan and finally gives her a pair of golden shoes. The fairies teach her the trade of being feminine, how to flirt, to please and look good and Maria is a willing learner. Of course, being fairies that they are, they are portrayed as idealized entities on pointe shoes and dainty tutus.

To say that the use of tutus and pointe shoes in a modern dance is inappropriate is an understatement. These are the very ones that modern dancers would foremostly forego, because they are restricting when dancing. The toe/pointe shoes (used by the fairies) in particular is a pair of hardened, oppressive footwear — often in satin pink with a long, silky shoe lace and are the cause of ballerina's bleeding toes — that may be likened to women' s high-heeled shoes (used by Maria and the Japayukis) in that they both cause the fetishization of the female, feminine form, especially the ". . . female foot and leg [which] are turned into ornamental objects and the impractical shoe, which offers little protection against dust, rain, and snow, induces helplessness and dependence. . . ." Further, both the pointe shoes and heeled shoes prompt an "extra wiggle in the hips, exaggerating a slight natural tendency, is seen as sexually flirtatious while the smaller steps and tentative, insecure tread suggest daintiness, modesty, and refinement. Finally, the overall hobbling effect with its sadomasochistic tinge is suggestive of the restraining leg irons and ankle chains endured by captive animals, prisoners, and slaves who were festooned with decorative symbols of their bondage" (Browning in Bartky 1990: 130).

Opening Some Cracks

Using the *pointes,* however, as Judith Lynn Hanna would propose, may be seen positively in that it was developed by one of the first female innovators and choreographers of ballet has become Marie Taglioni, in the 1830s. Toe dancing since then was a sole female reserve where the ballerina can exert her balletic prowess:

> While the tight-fitting toe-shoe, hardened by sturdy fabric and glue, restricts natural movement and perpetuates the ethos of female frailty and dependence upon male authority. . . it also permits the dancer a range of movements, positions, and height impossible for other footwear. In a sense, the toe shoe raised women above the herd and out of the house (Hanna 1988:125).

As in any other texts, there are always disjunctures to defend. We find, for one, in Maria's life at least a rare moment of connection with her own beloved mother in the scene where she stubbornly insists to her sisters to give her back her late mother's portrait which they wickedly toy with and eventually tear. Maria takes it and pieces the torn part back together, embraces it, then twirls around while upholding the picture before her longing eyes. Here we see an act of dignifying one's mother, such that we see Maria's virtuous, virginal character as a positive signifier of a daughter honoring a sacred female bonding with a maternal figure. Luce Irigaray explains best this other way of construing virginity:

> Purity. . . does not [necessarily] signify defensiveness or prudish virginity, as some of our profane contemporaries might take it to mean, nor does it seek allegiance to patriarchal culture and its definition of virginity as an exchange value among men; it signifies the woman's fidelity to her identity and female genealogy. Respect for these female filiations and qualities attests to the sacred character of the home (Irigaray 1993: 8–19).

All in all, the whole idea of reversing Cinderella's happily-ever-after ending in "Mariang Sinderela" may be seen as an effort at breaking the fantasies and myths constructed during our overdetermined childhood. But then a simplistic inversion of the equation — by turning the prince into a villain, the fairy godmother into a wicked pimp, and finally making Mariang Sinderela die sadly-ever-after — would only reproduce the same oppressive condition, the same binary logic that debilitated women in the first place. It is sad that at the end of Maria's day, there is hardly a trace of transformation to be seized, not even for the sisters she left in the trade.

Power Relations

Portraying the Filipina Japayuki as a ballerina is indeed an act fraught with conflicting overdeterminations, as we saw in the foregoing analysis of "Mariang Sinderela". Despite the efforts of the likes of Lisa Macuja to bring ballet to the barrios, the system of valuation of what is a "great dance" or not, what is "cultured" or not, goes unquestioned in such practices which our so-called premiere cultural institutions as the Cultural Center of the Philippines and its resident ballet company Ballet Philippines would messianically call *their* "outreach program." But then, Flores asks:

> Can we really hope that the poor people of a squatter colony will learn to appreciate the aesthetics of ballet after watching a *prima ballerina* dance sacrificingly on the basketball court? And what if indeed they manage to "like" ballet, can they afford to subsidize—not only under the auspices of economic but also of cultural capital/competence/power—this newly acquired taste for something supposedly superior to *Tinikling* and disco dancing? (Flores 1998:10).

As mentioned earlier, the choreographers' strict adherence to the classical ballet tradition restricted them from ar-

ticulating effectively the social exigencies of the OCW issues.

A great factor that influenced them in this project is of course their training in the college wherein their curriculum (said to have been drafted by Basilio himself) is based on a strong grounding in ballet. To paraphrase Lawenko, *bobo ka pa rin as a dancer kung di ka marunong mag-ballet* (you are wanting as a dancer, if you don't know ballet).

Such value judgements and privileging of the balletic style is obviously shaped by the aforementioned training they mostly got from Professor Basilio Steve Villaruz, who was also their librettist for this recital.

Lawenko relates the process of their collaborative work: That they consented to Basilio's suggestion to make a libretto about the OCW, thinking that it would be easier for them to choreograph a ready-made work written by their trusted dance mentor. The use of Prokofiev, as mentioned earlier, was also an imperative from Basilio.

Though Jacinto and Lawenko had certain liberties in interpreting the libretto as choreographers, they admit to have been constrained by the given format and had regrets in the course of the recital. Add to this the fact that it is not a common practice in their college for a professor to impose a libretto, much less a musical score, to his graduating students. Senior dance major Joanna Enerio's dance recital last year ("Impulses and Inclination"), for example, was a project she collaborated with fellow student Cindy Espinas, while last February's recital by Cecile Manlapao and Liza Fernandez *("Babae at Babae Pa")*, was also an independent product of this recitalist-students.

Thus Jacinto would spill her gripes over the recital. She admits, for instance, her disappointment over the change of the supposedly male dance instructor into a homosexual. "I

purposefully wanted him to be a man because I don't like to stereotype homosexuals in theatre and it would be hypocritical of me to say that the piece is feminist while ridiculing another gender. The result was out of my hands—Basilio approached my dancer before the show and commanded him to be gay without informing me. . .," she says.

Lawenko, on the other hand, adds about the imperatives of their project: "What happened was he was our professor and we could not do anything about it." After all this was our final exam.

But Villaruz is himself equally disappointed with how his students treated his libretto, saying that they were "still caught in the desire to make it pretty and beautiful when my concept was to show the problems of the Japayuki and the parody."

This notion of power relations in a student-professor relationship consequently brings us to the hierarchies produced and perpetuated in the academe, particularly in a state university as ours that reproduces Western canonical constructs in its whole system of teaching.

Dance as/in Art

As previously chronicled, Western art history has excluded dance from the arts, when in 19th century, it was effaced from the seven *beaux arts* (fine arts) together with music, such that architecture, sculpture, and painting came to be the priveleged canonized "Art" that is still taught in our universities today. Oratory and poetry almost suffered the same fate though they were at least re-grouped into another canonical discipline known as *belles lettres.*

To take the University of the Philippines as a microcosm of this centuries-old hierarchy in the Art Canon, we have the College of Arts and Letters as venue for the belles lettres discipline, the College of Architecture for architecture, and

the College of Fine Arts for painting and sculpture. The study of dance, on the other hand, is dispersed and reduced to course offerings/electives in different colleges, among them the College of Arts and Letters (particularly the Department of Art Studies), the College of Human Kinetics, and the College of Music. And though the latter offers a four-year course in dance, its status as a diploma course — the Diploma in Creative and Performing Musical Arts — is apparently construed of lower stature compared to a bachelor of arts degree. Finally, we know by the title of this diploma course, and by the name of the college that offers it, that music is at least of more respectable status than dance.

Here do we see concretely the repercussions of the Western phallogocentric binarized thought, carried on to our culture mainly through the influence of our Church fathers' Judeo-Christian tradition that effectively appropriated the mutual exclusivity of the One and the Other. The far-reaching effect of this is seen in the academe's low regard for the "physical" disciplines (i.e., dance, physical education' as opposed to a priveleging of the more "intellectual" ones.

And so it is not surprising to see the dance majors' decrepit studio beside a well-furnished Center for Women's Studies Center, nor is it unexpected to hear from Jacinto that "UP is the worst place to cultivate dance as art. The UP Theatre heads just wanted to make some money; the UP Diliman Committee on Arts and Culture agree to give us money but it's so hard to get it from them."

Dance in cultures

But this is not to insist that a monolithic establishment called College of Dance must be part of the present academic system, for that would only generate the same canonical hierarchies and power relations that this paper is out to critique.

To go back to this student's main analysis of "Mariang Sinderela", there are patriarchal feminine constructions persistently inscribed in the female body, especially in ballet, such that there seems to be a conspicuous inadequacy of using the balletic idiom to address a supposed feminist issue, such as seen in the text understudy. These observations would eventually extend itself to the workings of the institutions that produced this dance, from the students' dance training and valuation of the "beautiful" dance, to the power relations between student and professor, up to the homogenized, binarized, hierarchized system of thinking that the university's academic system would subscribe to.

The marginal position of dance in art studies needs to be addressed, and the dance we mean here is not just the canonical theatrical ballet but also disco dancing, social dancing, the pop youth dances of the United-Motion-Dancers (a popular youth dance group) kind, dances of the indigenous, and the various cultural formations, attitudes, and valuations found therein. Dance whether as leisure, social activity, way of life, theatrical performance, or a minimum P. E. requirement in one's academic curriculum, need to be read and taken seriously. Every dance has a tradition to be articulated, a set of practices that must be evaluated, studied, and if need be, practiced.

There is no one dance because there is no one body. And if there is any insistence on a particular representation of the body, it "may be undermined through a defiant affirmation of a multiplicity, a field of differences, of other kinds of bodies and subjectivities" (Grosz 1994:19). The project of choreographers — especially those working in institutions/ dance companies — as such is not to impose one idealized view of the body (such as the likes of George Balanchine would to his anorexic ballerinas), but to provide a holistic dance training that does not rigidly impose notions of "the great

dance", "the beautiful dancer/body", and to respect the dancers' opinions and right to learn a broad tradition of dances as possible that is not limited to the bare work of the dance studio.

Dancers in turn are enjoined to read and study critically the dances they are taught, and to see their body not as an instrument to wield and discipline but a *lived, thinking* body that actively articulates a language of its own.

There should not, in the first place, be a rigid hierarchized distinction of choreographer-dancer-viewer, because all are creators of meanings in the production and reception of dance, as Susan Leigh Foster would propose about the interactive, communal practice of dance-making. Thus we read her unconventional outlook on dance, dancing and the body, which is clearly reminiscent of the French feminists' articulation of writing the body:

> When the body is allowed to develop a polyvalent significance, dance likewise becomes a practice or activity rather than a contained object. Its dancing-ness comes to the foreground so that dance proliferates from a single phenomenon into countless different forms for making meaning. *The body, no longer the stylus, the parchment, or the trace, becomes the process itself of signing, created mutually by all those—choreographer, dancers, and viewers—engaged in the dance. In this world of writing dancing,* (italics mine) the body of this text could, as if in counterpoint with the writing body, leap-off the two-dimensional page: it could turn, lunge, twist, kick, suspend. . . and with a final gesture—was it 'Going my way?' or 'Thumbs up'?—vanish (Foster 1986:227).

Further, Foster's allusion to "writing dancing" refers to the prospects for a dance criticism that would enjoin the viewers to write about dance and thus be actively engaged in dance production. Her suggestions as such would debunk the myth of authorial genius, or in this case the idea of the choreogra-

pher as the lone creator of dance. The dancers and the viewers are themselves creating meanings as much as the choreographers do; dancers are no longer docile bodies merely interpreting the choreographer's idea, while viewers are no longer a captive audience or passive percepients of a dance spectacle that is totally detached from their lives, but are part of a communal creation of dance in society.

Every dancing is a writing, as much as every writing is a dancing. There is no one choreographer, no one dancer, no one viewer. All of us are enjoined to create, critique, and construct dances, and therein actualize the subversive possibilities of moving and dancing bodies in society.

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