

Escaping, experiencing, and challenging modernity in modern dance culture:

How translating the American modern dance culture enabled Dutch dancers to reflect on the modernisation of the society 1910-1940



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Pauline Dirven

3908461

Research Master History

Supervisor: Willemijn Ruberg

Second reader: Rachel Gillet

Abstract:

This thesis examines the relation between modernity and the American amusement dances that became popular in the Netherlands in the early twentieth century— such as the Charleston, foxtrot, shimmy, and tango. This research illustrates that cultural critics, the government, professional dancers, and parents took up a critical attitude towards the perceived origins of these dances: the ‘impersonal American mass culture’ and the ‘instinctive sexuality’ of people descending from South-America and the black community in the United States. In contrast to the current literature, I argue that their critique was not a traditionalist rejection of the modernity that these dances were said to symbolise. Instead, by approaching this history with transcultural theory, I illustrate that these authority figures were engaged in translating these dances and the modern norms that they embodied, to make them ‘suitable’ for the European audience. In doing so, they contributed to the creation of and reflection on a modern self-image. In addition, by shifting the focus from persons and intuitions that wanted to regulate the modern dance culture, towards the experiences of the actual dancers, I show that many participants were attracted to the dances because of their associations with the Caucasian American, African-American and Latin other. I argue that these dancers experienced an embodiment of these others when they practiced the new dance culture, and that these imitations or experiences of transcultural others enabled them to experience, escape, create, reflect on, or challenge modernity.

Prologue:

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Introduction

‘Het zou een gemeenplaats zijn, nog eens te zeggen dat wij op het oogenblik leven in de periode van den dans! Maar de latere geschiedschrijver zal dan toch dezen tijd, de jaren na den grooten oorlog, zonder enigen twijfel aldus betitelen. Dansen is een stuk leven geworden voor driekwart van ’t menschedom in Oud-Europa – zoowel als in Amerika, - dansen is niet meer alléén kunst, maar de meest-verbrede ontspanning voor jong en oud!’

‘It would be commonplace to claim, once again, that we are living in the period of dance! Without a doubt, the future historian will entitle this time, the years after the war, as such. Dancing has become a part of the lives of three quarters of the people in Old-Europe – and in America – dancing is no longer only art, it is the most popular leisure activity for young and old!’ (my translation).

‘Dansen: de kunst, tevens de ontspanning van onzen tijd!’, *Het Leven* 21, no. 45 (1926) 1431.

The age of dancing?

Even though no historian until now has defined the Dutch interbellum as ‘the period of dance’, the statement made by the author of the journal *Het Leven* makes present-day historians think about the importance of dance during this time period. Indeed, as the passage quoted above suggests, dancing was a very popular leisure activity in the Netherlands during Roaring Twenties. It was so beloved that some journalists spoke of a Dutch ‘dance mania’ and that the government felt it had to regulate the practice.² The so-called modern amusement dances that had travelled to Europe from the United States and Latin-America were favourite. Amongst them the most fashionable dances were the shimmy, the Charleston, the tango, the black bottom, and the foxtrot. It is remarkable that these dances were so popular that contemporaries believed that they were characteristic for the time period. This raises the question what this form of mass culture meant for people in Dutch society. Was it more than a popular leisure activity? Did it symbolise a broader cultural development or mentality?

Various historians suggest that it did, in various western European societies. According to them, these amusement dances embodied modernity – a complex concept that is described below. They argue that the dances connoted elements of modern culture such as Americanisation, a freer and more active bodily culture, changing gender relations, mass culture, and commercialisation. Generally speaking, scholars claim that an analysis of these

¹ Cover image: image of the ‘danspaleis’ in Rotterdam. ‘One-step = two-step = tango!’, *Het Leven: Geïllustreerd* 9, no. unknown (1914) 137-143, 142.

² Marjet Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’: Katholieken en lichaamscultuur: dans en sport, 1910-1940”, *Jaarboek Katholiek Documentatie Centrum* (Nijmegen: Katholiek Documentatiecentrum, 1982) 100-130, 105.

modern dances can offer insight in the position of and views on modernity in a society.³

This perspective on modern amusement dances offers interesting possibilities to study modernity in the Dutch context. This is a fascinating research focus because the presence of and enthusiasm for modern culture in the Netherlands before the Second World War is a topic of scholarly debate. For a long time, the consensus was that before 1940 the Netherlands were a culturally isolated and backwards province of Europe.⁴ Historians based their image of the pre-war society on the idea of ‘the shock of 1940’. They argued that the defeat in May 1940 was not only due to military and political failure, but also to a cultural shortcoming. According to this theory the Dutch lagged behind the rest of Europe that was rapidly modernising. Today, various historians contest this view. For example, in *Moderniteit: Modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940* Madelon de Keizer et al. argue that the First World War, like elsewhere in Europe, was experienced as a crisis of modernity in the neutral Netherlands.⁵ Analysing the position of the Netherlands in a European context leads the contributors to this edited volume to the conclusion that even though the Netherlands did not actively participate in the Great War, this war did rapidly introduce the Dutch to new norms of modern life and influence the emergence of a new culture (mass culture).⁶ More recently, historian Jesper Verhoef has argued – in line with this perspective – that in the interbellum the emergence of the American medium, cinema, launched a public debate and reflection on the modernisation of Dutch society.⁷

In order to contribute to this debate and to research the presence of modern culture in the Netherlands further, a closer look into the experience of modern dance in the Netherlands can be fruitful. Indeed, it is peculiar that the edited volume of de Keizer, which addresses the presence of modern culture in the Netherlands, neglects to research one of the most popular and contested leisure activities of the time. According to historian John Griffiths modern dances culture forms a suitable case study to research modern cultures because ‘it represented

³ See for example: Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”, 100–130.; John Griffiths, ‘Popular culture and modernity: Dancing in New Zealand society 1920-1945’, *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 3 (2008) 611–632.; Rob van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of dancing: Foreign vs. folk dances and the politics of culture in the Netherlands, 1919-1955’, *Ethnologia Europaea* 38, no. 2 (2008) 45–65.; Klazien Brummel, *Holland danst: Danscultuur in de twintigste eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburgpers, 2004).; Robert Snape, ‘Continuity, change and performativity in leisure: English folk dance and modernity 1900–1939’, *Leisure Studies* 28, no. 3 (2009) 297–311.

⁴ Madelon de Keizer, ‘Inleiding’, in: Madelon de Keizer and Sophie Tates ed., *Moderniteit: modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940* (Zutphen, NIOD Walburg Pers, 2004) 9-44, 15.

⁵ Madelon de Keizer, ‘Inleiding’, 16.

⁶ Madelon de Keizer, ‘Summaries’, in: Madelon de Keizer and Sophie Tates ed., *Moderniteit: modernisme en massacultuur in Nederland 1914-1940*, (Zutphen, NIOD Walburg Pers, 2004) 376-385, 376.

⁷ Jesper Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering: Denkbeelden over Amerika en Nederlandse identiteit in het publieke debat over media, 1919-1989* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2017) 16.

the leisure time activity alongside cinema, between 1919 and 1939 and beyond, (...) was clearly an important means of meeting the opposite sex, and (...) was intrinsically bound up with the process of modernity as it appeared in the 1920s'.⁸ In addition, taking up this theme is important because it can deepen our understanding of the transnational position of the Netherlands, not only in comparison with other modernising European countries, but also with regard to modern American cultures. This is the case because this practice was associated with African-American subcultures, American mass-culture, and Latin America. Analysing public responses to the modern dance culture in the Netherlands, can illuminate how modernity and America were associated with each other. To be more precise, researching this case-study allows me to critically reflect the current consensus in the historiography that – to use the words of Verhoef – 'it is difficult or impossible to distinguish between the Americanisation and modernisation of society'.⁹ However, before this thesis considers such large and complex questions, I take a step back and explain how I understand and use the complex concept 'modernity'.

Debating Modernity

Modernity, a process of progress and rationalisation?

For several decades sociologists and historians debated, and are still debating, what modernity entails. There is no common denominator or definition that clearly describes what kind of developments qualify as modern ones, or even when 'the modern time period' was.¹⁰ Instead, amongst scholars, modernity is known as a complex and contested concept.

However, there is some consensus amongst historians about the kind of developments that are characterised as 'modern ones'. For example, most scholars will agree that the emergence of automobiles, the establishment of shopping malls, the popularity of cinemas and the usage of telephones are part of the modernisation process. As the above-mentioned examples illustrate, modernity is often associated with the emergence of 'industrialisation, technology, urbanisation and individualisation'.¹¹ An influential narrative on modernity associates these developments with the triumph of rationalism and freedom. It argues that 'the modern period' was centred around the Enlightenment, an eighteenth-century intellectual

⁸ Griffiths, 'Popular culture and modernity', 611.

⁹ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 15.

¹⁰ See for example: Simon Gunn, *History and cultural theory* (Harlow: Routledge, 2006) 109–120.

¹¹ Joris van Eijnatten, et. al., 'Shaping the discourse on modernity', *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 1, no. 1 (2013) 3-20, 5.

movement that carried promises of progress, emancipation, and truth with it.¹² According to this line of thought, modern society was defined by its ability to become ‘mechanised’, or ‘rationally comprehensible and empirically researchable’.¹³ According to philosopher Jürgen Habermas this meant that modern society was characterised by its transition from ‘a world view based on faith to one based on reason’.¹⁴

This teleological view on modernity as a route towards a free and rational society is contested by various sociologists and historians. They point out that modernity also had unsettling effects on society. For example, sociologist Max Weber argued that the promises of rationality were ‘corrupted by countervailing pressures’, which he called ‘the iron cage of rationality’.¹⁵ He explained that the new worldview did not fully result in freedom, but instead had ‘the disenchantment of the world’ – the loss of a unitary worldview and the emergence of a fragmented perspective – and the emergence of bureaucratisation as its outcome.¹⁶ Other scholars point to the destructive outcome of fascism and National Socialism and argue that eventually modernity did not lead to emancipation and rationality at all, but to catastrophe, disruption and shock instead.¹⁷

Embodied Modernity

Shifting the focus from the effects of modernity to the experience of the modern, some scholars have illustrated that not only the (perceived) effects of modernity varied, but that the experience of the modern was diverse as well.¹⁸ Taking up a feminist understanding of the notion ‘embodiment’ – that denotes the lived (bodily) experience of humans – scholars explain that ‘the modern experience’ does not exist, but that people from diverse backgrounds and with different bodies encounter modern developments in various ways.¹⁹ To be more

¹² Gunn, *History and cultural theory*, 110.

¹³ Van Eijnatten et. al, ‘Shaping the discourse on modernity’, 5.

¹⁴ Gunn, *History and cultural theory*, 111.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.; Van Eijnatten, et. al., ‘Shaping the discourse of modernity’, 9.

¹⁷ Van Eijnatten, et. al., ‘Shaping the discourse on modernity’, 11.

¹⁸ See for example: Marshall Berman, *All that is solid melts into air: The experience of modernity* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1988) 15.; Janet Wolff, ‘The invisible flâneuse: Women and the literature of modernity’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 2, no. 3 (1985) 37–46.; Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, eds., *The invisible flâneuse?: Gender, public space, and visual culture in nineteenth-century Paris* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

¹⁹ See for example: Kathleen Lennon, ‘Feminist perspectives on the body’, in: Edward N. Zalta ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Metaphysics Research Lab Stanford University 2014) <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/feminist-body/>.; Uppsala Universitet, ‘Body/Embodiment’, *GenNa: Center for Gender Research*, 2007, [http://www.genna.gender.uu.se/themes/bodyembodiment/\(28-04-2017\)](http://www.genna.gender.uu.se/themes/bodyembodiment/(28-04-2017)).; Kathleen Canning, ‘The body as method? Reflections on the place of the body in gender history’, *Gender & History* 3, no. 11 (1999) 499–513. Various scholars that use different kinds of embodiment theories follow this basic line of thought. See: Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile bodies: Toward a corporeal feminism* (Bloomington:

precise, scholars using the concept of embodiment in this sense, argue that ‘embodied practices are always contextual, inflected with class, ethnic, racial, gender and generational locations, with “place, time, physiology and culture”’.²⁰ In other words, the bodily experiences of different persons are dependent on the context in which they are given meaning. For example, while urbanisation of the late nineteenth century gave men the opportunity to stroll through the cities as anonymous observers, women could not freely go for a walk all by themselves, as unchaperoned women were often seen as prostitutes.²¹ Postcolonial scholars have made similar claims with regard to the embodied practices and experiences of black persons, both in the West and in the non-Western world.²² In order to obtain a more complete picture of the experience of the modern, these scholars argue that historians should research in what ways others, such as women, non-western persons and black people, experienced modernity differently from white European or American males. This study takes up this view and argues that in order to research modernity a plurality of experiences must be considered.

Modern social dances

To study the diverse Dutch experiences of modernity in the Netherlands, I analyse modern social dances that became popular in the Netherlands between 1910 and 1940. This case study allows me to illustrate a variety of views on the modernisation process, as the dances were a controversial topic during this period. Although they clearly provided many people with a new activity to experience leisure and pleasure, they also evoked concerns, anxieties and resistance. Various groups uttered criticism. Religious leaders denounced or even forbade

Indiana University Press, 1994).; Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, time and perversion: Essays on the politics of bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995).; Leslie A. Adelson, *Making bodies, making history: Feminism and German identity* (University of Nebraska Press, 1993). And also feminist theory inspired by phenomenology along the lines of: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: S.P.A.D.E.M., n.d.); Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*, trans. Dorian Cairns (Dordrecht, Londen, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1999).; Edmund Husserl, *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1970). Feminist phenomenology: Iris Marion Young, *Throwing like a girl and other essays in feminist philosophy and social theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).; Sara Ahmed, ‘A phenomenology of whiteness’, *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007) 149–68.; Silvia Stoller, ‘Phenomenology and the poststructural critique of experience’, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 17, no. 5 (2009) 707–37.

²⁰ Canning, ‘The body as method?’, 505.

²¹ Griselda Pollock, *Vision and difference: Femininity, feminism and histories of art* (London, New York: Routledge 1988) 97.

²² See for example: Frantz Fanon, *White skin, black masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (Londen: Pluto Press 1986).; Gurinder K. Bhabra, ‘Historical sociology, modernity, and postcolonial critique’, *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011) 653-662.; Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The muddle of modernity’, *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2011) 663- 675.

dancing, the government and municipalities wanted to restrict it, and dance teachers tried to regulate the practice. Various historians have researched these responses to the new dance culture. Their arguments are explored in more depth below. For now, it is sufficient to say, that they claim that this debate on dancing actually embodied a discussion on new social norms and modern values.

Traditionalists versus supporters of modernity

Many historians view the debate on modern amusement dances as a well-defined discussion between two opponents. They argue that the persons who practiced these social dances were pleasure-seekers who propagated modern developments – such as (‘free’) female sexuality, less constricted gender roles, American mass culture, and urbanisation – though their dances.²³ In contrast, the people who were critical of this new leisure activity are typified as conservative people who were afraid that the dances would cause ‘the erosion of what by the 1920s could be called the “traditional' society”’.²⁴ These opponents of the modern dances are often identified as Catholic leaders, the Protestant clergy and city councils.²⁵

Historians argue that these traditionalists sought to restrain the development of modern leisure activity, because they were anxious that it would cause moral degradation amongst the young.²⁶ In contrast to the nineteenth-century round- and court dances these new amusement dances were practiced by people from various classes, and required couples to hold each other closely.²⁷ In addition, these dances were part of a modern bodily culture that developed in the early twentieth century in which the body was viewed as an instrument, which could move and be shown more freely and easily.²⁸ Body and sports historian Marjet Derks explains that because of these associations the amusement dances evoked a lot of resistance in the Netherlands. Catholic leaders argued that the satisfaction of bodily desires (through dance) interfered with spiritual life, associated the intimacy of the dances and the visibility of the body with a free form of sexuality, and pointed out that this more democratic form of

²³ See for example: Griffiths, ‘Popular culture and modernity’, 626.; Theresa Jill Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body: social dancing in Britain, 1900-1914’, in: Alexandra Carter and Rachel Fensham ed., *Dancing naturally: Nature, neo-classicism and modernity in early twentieth-century dance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 58-72, 58.

²⁴ Griffiths, ‘Popular culture and modernity’, 611.; See also: Harm Kaal, ‘Verderfelijk vermaak: het film-, toneel- en dansbeleid van de burgermeesters van Amsterdam, Rotterdam en Den Haag tijdens de roaring twenties’, *Holland 37* (2005) 259-277, 260.

²⁵ Kaal, ‘Verderfelijk vermaak’, 626.

²⁶ Griffiths, ‘Popular culture and modernity’, 612.; Klazien Brummel, *Holland Danst: Danscultuur in de Twintigste Eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburgers, 2004) 20.

²⁷ Brummel, *Holland Danst*, 28–29.

²⁸ Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”, 102.

entertainment stimulated contact between persons from different religious or ideological backgrounds.²⁹

Other historians add to these explanations that the critics found these dances immoral, because of their perceived roots. First of all, critics rejected this form of entertainment because they regarded it as a form of anonymous American mass culture.³⁰ ‘Pessimistic intellectuals’ considered mass culture to be problematic, as they experienced it as ‘devoid of meaning’ and ‘disconnected from the imagined national community’.³¹ Secondly, opponents of the dances claimed these dances were immoral because they were said to originate from ‘negro cultures’. This caused the opponents to see these dances as symbols of ‘primitive instincts of human nature’ which should not be celebrated but repressed by civilisation.³²

In addition to researching the meanings traditionalists attached to the new amusement dances, various historians also take into account the power relations that were at work in the public debate on dance. These scholars consider how religious groups, the municipalities, and the government responded to this moral anxiety. They analysed their controlling, restricting, and regulating practices. Some historians analyse these regulatory practices by primarily focusing on specific treaties, bills and rules that were issued by opponents of the modern dances – such as the Church, the municipalities and the central government.³³

Other historians research the controlling powers of the opponents of modern dances on a more abstract level, and analyse implicit practices of in- and exclusion. They take up the idea of philosopher Michel Foucault, that power is not only a repressive, but also a productive phenomenon,³⁴ to illustrate that in attempts to reduce the popularity of the modern dances some traditionalist critics created an alternative form of dancing, folk dance.³⁵ According to these scholars, country dance was constructed in opposition and resistance to the modern dances. Folk dancing symbolised everything modern dances were not. It was associated with an imagined form of ‘Englishness’, for example, that needed to oppose the Americanism and African-American roots of the modern dances. Furthermore, it was believed to be based on a feeling of ‘community’ and not of ‘individualism’, to be a respectable form of bodily movement instead of ‘a sexualised activity’, and to refer to an ‘authenticity’ or traditionalism

²⁹ Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”, 103.

³⁰ Snape, ‘Continuity, change and performativity in leisure’, 308.; Van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of dancing’, 60.

³¹ Van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of Dancing’, 60.

³² Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body’, 68.

³³ See for example: Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”.; Kaal, ‘Verderfelijk Vermaak’.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

³⁵ See for example: Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”.; Snape, ‘Continuity, change and performativity in Leisure’.; van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of dancing’.

instead of to modernity.³⁶ In short, scholars following this perspective argue that through folk dancing as a form of anti-modernity, conservative critics were able to define and control the traditional norms along which dancing was acknowledged as an acceptable bodily activity.

Adapting utterances of modernity

Some historians have pointed out that the debate on the modern dances, was more complicated than the scholars following the ‘traditionalists versus modern dances binary’ argue. For example, anthropologist Rob van Ginkel argues that the seemingly anti-modern form of dancing (folk dancing) was also a part of modernity, as it was a means for contemporaries to cope with the modernisation process.³⁷

Most historians, however, emphasise another aspect of the debate to nuance the debate on dancing. They emphasise that there was a mediating party in this debate, the dance teachers.³⁸ In contrast to the folk dancers, these professionals did not want to create a form of dancing that defined itself against the modern dances. Instead these teachers valued certain elements of the new dances. However, they also listened to the objections against this modern form of entertainment and proposed to adapt it, in order to make it respectable by adding more traditional elements to it.³⁹ Following the Foucauldian perspective on power, scholars following this line of thought argue that in the process of standardising and ‘civilising’ the dances the teachers simultaneously repressed elements of the modern dance culture from the United States, and produced new modern and European subgenres.

According to cultural geographer Tim Cresswell the dance teachers developed more than just new dance genres. He follows body and dance theorist Susan Foster in the argument that bodily movement is both an expression of ‘already existing normative ideas’ and ‘a form of meaning-making’ that *produces* ‘cultural and social norms’.⁴⁰ He argues that through the mediation between modern dancers and traditionalists, dance teachers not only created new dance forms, but also constructed new social discourses. He claims that the consequence of this process was that the dancing body could both experience the pleasure of dancing and simultaneously embody ‘a complex process of exclusion and othering’.⁴¹ To be precise, he

³⁶ Snape, ‘Continuity, change and performativity in leisure’.

³⁷ Van Ginkel, ‘The Dangers of Dancing’, 60–61.

³⁸ See: Brummel, *Holland danst*; Tim Cresswell, “‘You cannot shake that shimie here’”: Producing mobility on the dance floor’, *Cultural Geographies* 13, no. 1 (2006) 55–77.; Lutgard Mutsaers, ‘Op de maat en in de pas: de populaire danscultuur in de stad Utrecht 1918-1940’, in: *Jaarboek oud-Utrecht* (2007) 115-170.

³⁹ Brummel, *Holland Danst*, 33-34.; Mutsaers, ‘Op de maat en in de pas’.

⁴⁰ Cresswell, “‘You Cannot Shake That Shimie Here’”, 58.; Susan Foster, ‘The ballerina’s phallic pointe’, in: Susan Foster ed., *Corporealities: Dancing knowledge, culture and power* (Londen: Routledge, 1996) 1–24.

⁴¹ Cresswell, “‘You Cannot Shake That Shimie Here’”, 55.

explains that in adapting the modern dances in such a way that they became ‘respectable’ the dance teachers sought to exclude the ‘degenerate’, ‘primitive’, ‘barbaric’, and ‘eccentric’ aspects— meaning the ‘American’ and ‘African-American’ elements – of the dances.⁴² In other words, while producing new subgenres of the modern dances, the dance teachers also participated in the construction of cultural and racial discourses on the Caucasian-, African-American others.

Focusing on the mediating role of dance teachers, is an interesting approach to the history of modern dance culture in Europe. It illustrates that it is too simplistic to argue that the debate on dancing was shaped along the lines of a binary opposition between traditionalists and dancers/-supporters of American modernity. However, this argumentation is also limited. First of all, because it implicitly equals American culture to modernity, and English or European culture – before the encounter with culture from the United-States – to traditionalism. While it is true that contemporaries often associated American culture with modernity – as for example Verhoef argues for the Dutch context⁴³ – this equation is too simplistic, as European countries were involved in modernisation processes as well.

Secondly, this perspective provides an incomplete view on the history of modern amusement dances, because it limits the focus to the groups of persons who wanted to control, change and regulate the ‘modern’ dances, and neglects the experiences of the people who enjoyed them. First of all, this is a problem of representation, as only one side of the story is addressed. Secondly, this perspective neglects to include the agency of individuals. Even though the perspective on dance teachers shows that institutional bodies did not simply reinforced but also reflected on, and created cultural and social norms, it does not account for the opportunities individuals had to negotiate controlling discourses that were imposed on them.

Thirdly, the focus on dance teachers as a mediating party is limited because it implies that initially – before the dance teachers intentionally mediated – people belonged to either a ‘traditionalist European group’ that rejected utterances of modernity, or a group of ‘advocates of modernity’ that took up American dances in an unaltered form. This is a problematic perspective first of all, because it implies both that Europe and America are respectively fixed traditional or modern societies. And – more importantly – because it suggests that the dances remained unchanged when they travelled from America to Europe until dance teachers started to adapt them explicitly.

⁴² Cresswell, “‘You Cannot Shake That Shimmie Here’”, 71-72.

⁴³ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 15.

Despite the presence of these shortcomings, the focus on mediating dance teachers offers new insights for dance historians. While remaining cautious of the above-mentioned problems, this thesis does take up the important starting point that traditionalist and modern norms interacted with each other to create a European subgenre of the modern dance culture. In addition, this research refers to this perspective, because it illustrates that when foreign countries imported the American dances, local dancers – such as the dance teachers – adapted them to fit the norms of the society in which they were taken up. Lastly, this thesis values Cresswell's argument that through the modern dances persons could both express existing social discourses and create new cultural norms.

Theoretical framework: Cultural mobility & embodiment theory

Definitions

In order to get a more nuanced view and to go beyond the problems addressed above, I first of all propose to use mobility theory, *histoire croisée* and transnational thought in my research to the exchange of modern dances between the United States and Europe. The central claim of these theories is that when a cultural product travels, this product itself is in motion, meaning not only that a product is moving because it is relocated, but that the form, contents and/or meaning of the product are transformed or 'translated'.⁴⁴ According to these theories this process occurs whenever a product, subject or practice travels, not just when an agent – i.e. the dance teacher – consciously decides to intervene, as Cresswell proclaims. Indeed, as persons encounter the object, persons or practice that have travelled into their culture they will (un)consciously 'translate' it, as they already give it meaning through their own discourses, in their own culture, and with the background knowledge they have gathered.

Historians Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann explain that in order to understand the travelling process the historian must look at the 'point of intersection where events may occur that are capable of affecting to various degrees the elements present'.⁴⁵ In the words of Werner and Zimmermann, the core idea of this concept is that scholars researching exchange and relations between two places should inquire how an object or subject 'intercrosses' and what the effects of this intersecting process are. This focus enables the researcher to take historicity and constructivism into account, because Werner and Zimmermann claim that 'the entities, persons, practices, or objects that are intertwined with, or

⁴⁴ Greenblatt et. al., *Cultural mobility*, 89 – 90.

⁴⁵ Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond comparison: Histoire croisée and the challenge of reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006) 30–50, 37.

affected by, the crossing process, do not necessarily remain intact and identical in form'.⁴⁶ This means that both the 'locations' involved in the process of exchange – in this case Europe and the United States – and the product or practice that travels between these two places – in this case modern dances – are transformed through this process of 'intercrossing'. Applying this theory to the history of modern dances will illustrate that it is not defensible to claim that there existed 'a modern America' and a 'traditional Europe' as both entities were not fixed and statically defined, but were constantly changing through processes of exchange.

However, applying this theory does not solve all shortcomings pointed out above. As historian Hermione Giffard argues, most theories of transnationalism fail to take into account the agency of the actors in the translation process.⁴⁷ This makes it difficult to include the different experiences and roles of people involved in the debate on dance. To be precise, applying transcultural theory does not necessarily enable me to include the neglected perspective of the actual dancers, or to illustrate that individuals could reflect on or challenge the social norms that were imposed on them by institutions. However, this thesis argues that this is not an inherent problem of the theory, but a shortcoming of the ways in which this theory is applied.

To overcome this problem, I propose to approach the history of modern dance culture not only through the lens of mobility theory, but also with feminist embodiment theory. I understand this latter theory as a critical use of philosophical theories on the body – amongst the most important one's phenomenology – by feminist and postcolonial scholars. The starting point of phenomenology, as employed by philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is that 'our corporality is always the perspective from which we are involved in the world'.⁴⁸ This means that every relation a subject has with the *Lebenswelt*, 'the world in which we are always already living and which furnishes the ground for all cognitive performance and all scientific determination', is mediated by our bodily-being-in-the-world.⁴⁹ Because Merleau-Ponty sees a person and the world as interconnected with each other, he comes to the conclusion that subjectivity is not, as modern Cartesian thought states, located in the mind or consciousness,

⁴⁶ Werner and Zimmermann, 'Beyond comparison', 38.

⁴⁷ Giffard, 'Transculturalism and translation: New approaches to cultural contact zones'. *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 4, no. 1 (2016) 29-41, 37.

⁴⁸ Antoon Braeckman, Bart Raymaekers, and Gerd van Riel, *Wijsbegeerte* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Lannoo Campus, 2013) 190. My translation, original: 'onze lichamelijkheid altijd het perspectief is waaruit wij op de wereld betrokken zijn'.

⁴⁹ Stoller, 'Phenomenology and the poststructural critique of experience', 175.; Stoller cites Edmund Husserl, *Experience and judgment: Investigations in a genealogy of logic*, ed., Ludwig Landgrebe, trans. James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). Braeckman, Raymaekers, and van Riel, *Wijsbegeerte*, 190.

but in the body.⁵⁰

Reflecting on this argument, scholars of gender and ethnicity, such as Sara Ahmed and Iris Marion Young, point out that not all bodily subjects can experience or ‘be in the world’ in the same manner, as some are more privileged than others.⁵¹ They call to scholarly attention, that the notion of embodiment should be complicated, by suggesting that is not only about the bodily experience of the world, but about the ways in which social and cultural norms on bodies impact how diverse subjects can be in the world. As literary critic N. Katherine Hayles argues, ‘during any given period, experiences of embodiment are in continual interaction with constructions of the body’.⁵² Young further explains this problem by illustrating that discourses and power-structures restrict the ways in which female bodies are in the world. According to her, women situated in contemporary advanced industrial, urban, and commercial society, who conduct bodily movements with particular aims, fail to make full use of their ‘body’s spatial and lateral potentialities’.⁵³ She claims that the feminine body is limited, because in patriarchal society women ‘must live a contradiction: as human she is a free subject who participates in transcendence, but her situation as a woman denies her that subjectivity and transcendence’, as she is objectified.⁵⁴ According to her this tension restricts female bodily conduct, movement and the general experience of ‘being in space’. She concludes that ‘there is a world for a subject just insofar as the body has capacities by which it can approach, grasp, and appropriate its surroundings in the direction of its intentions’.⁵⁵

Following these lines of thought, this thesis uses feminist embodiment theory as a concept that enables scholars to understand how social and cultural norms impact the ways in which bodily subjects can ‘be’, move, or act in the world. Because of the limitations in the source material – which are explained below – the focus of this thesis will be more on this aspect of embodiment theory than on the actual individual bodily experiences of the world. Applying this understanding of embodiment to the history of social dance, enables me to overcome the shortcomings in the current historiography. First of all, it allows me to go beyond the generalisation of persons embodying modernity and to include the neglected perspectives of the actual dancers. As the feminist critique on the notion of ‘being in the

⁵⁰ Young, *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, 35.

⁵¹ Ahmed, ‘A Phenomenology of Whiteness’, *Feminist Theory*, 152.

⁵² Unpublished paper cited in: Canning, ‘The body as method?’, 505.; N. Katherine Hayles, ‘The Materiality of Informatics’ (Stanford University Humanities Center, 1992) 9. See also: Grosz, *Space, time and perversion*, 35-36.

⁵³ Young, *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, 30 and 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 32 and 38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

world' illustrates, feminist embodiment theory does not have one generalised experience as its starting point. Instead, scholars using embodiment theory emphasise that the experiences of individuals are influenced by meanings attached to the body.

Secondly, embodiment theory – understood in the line of thought of philosopher Elizabeth Grosz – can enable me to go beyond another problem in the current literature: the perceived passivity of individuals. Grosz points out that even though bodies are inscribed with knowledge, meanings, and power, they do also act and react.⁵⁶ She argues that 'the activity of desiring, inscribing bodies that, though marked by law, make their own inscriptions on the bodies of others, themselves, and the law in turn, must be counterposed against the passivity of the inscribed body'.⁵⁷ In other words, in her embodiment theory individuals are not merely viewed as anonymous and agency-less 'individual bodies (...) *reflective* of a social order, but are also [seen as] *active agents in the making* of that order'.⁵⁸ Indeed, embodiment theories try to include the idea that bodies can resist or reflect on the incorporation of material practices.⁵⁹ Applied to the history of the cultural exchange of the modern dance culture, this theory can illustrate that subjects were actively involved in the process of reflecting on, resisting, or *translating* the cultural norms that accompanied the modern dances.

Applying the theories to dance history

A few historians have already approached the history of social dance with transcultural theory or embodiment theory. For example, media scholar Barbara O'Connor employs the concept embodiment to analyse how dancers embodied and expressed sexual discourses in Ireland from 1920 to 1960.⁶⁰ She claims that both the negative and the positive discourse on the association between dance and sexuality – respectively a traditional discourse that stated that dance would lead to sinful sexual practices and a modern one that imagined the dance floor as a place of romance – were primary inscribed onto female bodies.⁶¹ According to her, women experienced dancing in a different way than men did, because 'the role of young women' was particularly emphasised in reference to sexual matters. They needed to consider how their bodily actions interacted with existing discourses on female sexuality, and what kind of discourses they wanted to inhabit. O'Connor explains that dancing women had 'the desire to

⁵⁶ Grosz, *Volatile bodies*, xi.

⁵⁷ Grosz, *Space, time and perversion*, 36.

⁵⁸ Barbara O'Connor, 'Ruin and romance: Heterosexual discourses on Irish popular dance 1920-1960', *Irish Journal of Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2003) 50-67, 51.

⁵⁹ Canning, 'The body as method?', 502.

⁶⁰ O'Connor, 'Ruin and romance', 50.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

display the body in a sexually appealing way and yet [were careful] not [to] be seen as sexually available – as a slag or a slut’.⁶² Cleary, the gendered discourse on sin and sexuality of this time period restricted women’s abilities to use their bodies. O’Connor concludes that the dance floor was an ambiguous space for women where different discourses on sexuality operated in tension with each other. Through this finding she illustrates that the ‘modern and Utopian discourse [of romance] operated alongside, and sometimes in tension with, the [more traditional] economic imperative of finding a suitable marriage [partner]’.⁶³

The embodiment theory, as used by O’Connor, illustrates that, at least with regard to sexuality, amusement dancers were not simply practicing a form of (American) modernity – as many of the above mentioned scholars have argued – but negotiated and moved between modern and traditional discourses that were inscribed on their bodies. This approach seems very suitable to further explore the connections between other aspects of modernity and ‘modern amusement dance’, such as race, ethnicity and class. However, O’Connor’s approach also must be adapted somewhat. Her theory suggests that traditional and modern discourses co-existed in the dance hall⁶⁴ and that dancers could choose which ones they wanted to inhabit. This perspective is somewhat problematic, because it derives from the initial assumption that there existed a well-defined traditionalist-modernity (or conservative Irish-progressive American) binary. O’Connor cannot account for the processes of ‘translation’, change and adaptation of the dances and the norms that were associated with it, that occurred when they travelled from the United States to Ireland.

In order to overcome this shortcoming and to enable myself to combine transcultural thought and embodiment theory, I turn my focus towards dance scholar Danielle Robison. Implicitly she combines the insights from mobility theory on the workings of translation processes, with the focus on individual experience as it is propagated in embodiment theories. Robison does so in order to study the popularity of ragtime dancing amongst European immigrants in America. Taking up the notion of translation, she finds that during the early twentieth century modern dances developed that contained both aspects of African-American dance traditions and European social dance practices. However, according to her such a unification of European and African-American dance traditions did not function as a means

⁶² O’Connor, ‘Ruin and romance’, 55.

O’Connor, ‘Ruin and romance’, 64.

⁶⁴ In this thesis, I will use the English word ‘dance hall’ instead of the Dutch term ‘dancing’ to refer to places where people went dancing at night. I use the translation, to avoid confusion when using the English conjugation of dance, dancing.

for social integration, but was experienced as a means for self-liberation.⁶⁵ She explains that that just like the ‘one-drop-rule’ proclaimed that a person of mixed race was black, so too were dances with traces of ‘black culture’ considered as African-American. She continues to argue that because of this racial association ragtime dancing functioned as ‘participatory minstrelsy that allowed dancers to embody markers of “blackness”’.⁶⁶ She claims that by embodying the African-American other the European immigrants felt that they could be playful, sexual and engage in self-parody.⁶⁷ In other words, the perceived ‘blackness’ of the modern dances functioned as a masquerade that allowed the white dancers to (temporary) experience a different ‘being in the world’; they could transgress the limitations of their own bodies by imitating the other. Somewhat challenging O’Connor’s claim that individual bodies were limited in action on the dance floor because of the discourses that were inscribed on them, Robinson argues that individual bodies experienced a degree of freedom to act in ways that were unaccepted or frowned upon under normal circumstances, because they felt that they enacted the other.

In this thesis I take up O’Connor’s and Robinson’s application of embodiment theory to the history of modern dance culture and apply it to the Dutch context to analyse how cultural discourses impacted the ways in which (gendered) bodily subjects could move and behave themselves in the dance hall. In addition, I take up Robinson’s theory on how the transcultural exchanges of dance traditions could lead to masquerading practices to research the dancer’s possibilities to resist and challenge these social restrictions on their bodies.

Operationalisation

Questions

In this thesis, I will take a new approach to the presence of modern American dances in the Netherlands. I will combine transnational and embodiment theory to account for the cultural exchange between the United States and the Netherlands, while simultaneously addressing the role and experience of subjects caught up in the travelling process. By analysing this process of transcultural exchange, I aim at gaining a better understanding of how this ‘modern’ dance culture related to the modernisation of Dutch society. I will study the ways in which modern amusement dances were experienced, to understand how traditional and modern discourses

⁶⁵ Danielle Robinson, ‘Performing American: Ragtime dancing as participatory minstrelsy’, *Dance Chronicle* 32 (2009) 89-126, 116.

⁶⁶ Robinson, ‘Performing American’, 89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

intersected in the Netherlands. To be more precise, this thesis asks whether it is too simplistic to argue that the persons who enjoyed the new social dances that travelled from America to Europe during the first half of the twentieth century embodied modernity, while the various European groups that criticised this practice enacted traditional values. Taking up the findings of O'Connor and the theory of Robinson, I consider whether the amusement dances were not only a way to practice (American) modernity, but could also function as a means to reflect on modern- and traditional norms that circulated in Dutch society. To take a stance in this debate on modernity and amusement dances, this thesis aims at answering the main question: 'to what extent were the translations of the modern social dances experienced as a means to embody, escape, negotiate, and/or translate modernity in the Netherlands 1910-1940?'

To answer this question, the first chapter considers how the dance culture was taken up in Dutch society. Here I research how the modern social dances were translated in the Netherlands. I analyse the translation process of the modern dances, to create a perspective on this leisure activity that is not based on a presumed well-defined binary between traditionalism (European values) and modernity (American culture). Instead this view enables me to analyse to what extent the Dutch executions of the dances could both include expressions of traditionalism and modernity. To do so, I will analyse how various persons engaged in the debate on dancing – such as dance teachers, amateur dancers, and the government – appropriated the practice. What kind of changes were made? And what kinds of meanings were attached to this leisure activity? In doing so, I will not ascribe the translation process to abstract forces. As is mentioned above, most travelling theories neglect to take into account the agency of the actors in the translation process.⁶⁸ I try to overcome this problem by redefining transcultural translations as transformations of cultural practices that come into being through the active involvement of subjects that possess agency. In chapter 1, I will identify these various subjects that took up or were assigned a role in the translation process, and refer to them as 'agents of translation'.

Secondly, in chapter 2 I research why the dances were translated. I do so by focusing on the perceived origins of the dances. Here, I take up Robinson's findings and raise the question whether the participants in the Dutch dancing debate believed and/or feared that the public experienced an embodiment of the other through modern dances? In answering this question, I take into account that in the Dutch context this experience of the Other could differ from the American experience Robinson refers to. Therefore, I consider in this chapter

⁶⁸ Giffard, 'Transculturalism and translation', 37.

whether Dutch dancers did not only associate the dances with the black racial other Robinson describes, but also experienced an embodiment of different others, such as the Caucasian Northern-American and the Latin other. I ask, whether authority figures – such as the government, dance teachers, and cultural critics – transformed the dances because they feared that people experienced an embodiment of the modern American other through these dances?

Lastly, chapter 3 considers in depth how the associations of the dances with transcultural others, related to modernity. In this chapter I take up Robinson's argument that, because dancers experienced an embodiment of the other, the dances functioned as a means for self-liberation. I ask how Dutch dancers experienced this self-liberating element of the dances. Did dancing simply function as a means for temporary escapism from the modernising society? Or did contemporaries use the dances as a 'masquerade' to enable themselves to negotiate, reflect and resist the cultural and social discourses of traditionalism and modernity that were inscribed on their bodies? Could they use these dances to create a self or identity that moved beyond or challenged the dominant discourses and (gender) norms that were inscribed on their bodies?

Method & Sources

To answer these questions, I will analyse how the modern dances were translated or appropriated by various groups in Dutch society. I will research the perspectives of the social dancers, the dance teachers, critical journalists, and the government. To analyse the various perspectives, I use a variety of sources.

First of all, in order to analyse the perspective of the Dutch government I consult the minutes, letters, and research report on *het dansvraagstuk* (the issue of dancing) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, dating from 1929-1931. These reports reveal information about the meaning the central government attached to the dances. Did the state view the dances as a means to embody modernity? And if so, how did it define modernity? Furthermore, the documents provide insight into aspects of dancing that the government found problematic and the solutions that it found suitable. How did the government propose to translate these dances?

Secondly, to establish the position of the dance critics and journalists in the Netherlands I research books and newspaper articles in which they proclaimed their position towards the modern dances. To be precise, I select 10 books, and 23 newspaper/magazine articles that utter critical views on the new dancing culture. I try not to limit my choice to texts by authors writing in the same traditions, and include books produced by writers from a

variety of backgrounds. I select books written by social-democrats, art-critics, artistic-editors, men, women, a Catholic priest, an active member of the protestant anti-position movement (*Middernachtzending*), and an outspoken evangelist. In addition to analysing these books, I also reflect on various newspaper articles, as they were more likely to be read by a larger audience. I detect these articles on modern dance culture by conducting keyword searches in *Delpher*. To prevent myself from limiting my analysis to the options of one specific ideological group, or pillar (*zuil*) in Dutch society, I include articles that are published in various newspapers. I select articles published in regional, national, religious, and liberal newspapers. Furthermore, I add to this list articles published in women's magazines, *Margriet* and *Libelle*, and in the notable public magazine *Het Leven*, which was – amongst other things – known for its articles on the roaring twenties.

I analyse these texts to understand the position of persons taking up a critical stance towards the modern dance culture. I ask: did they also consider specific elements of the dances to be especially problematic, or did they find the whole practice of dancing precarious and why? Were they afraid that through these dances persons could challenge values that were essential to them? And if so, from what kind of background did they utter their objections? Did these opponents of the modern dances mainly identify as Christians, or were there others who put forward these views? Did this leisure activity symbolise modernity for these groups? And if so, in what sense? And lastly, how did they position themselves in the debate: as traditionalists or as persons that preferred different expressions of modernity?

Thirdly, to understand the position of professional dancers I will analyse dance manuals, articles of the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Dansleeraren* (Dutch Society for Dance Teachers), and journals written by and for dancers: *De Kunst* and *De Dans*. I consider what kind of changes they propagated. Did they focus on the movements, the music, and/or the space in which people practiced this leisure activity? How did they propose to translate this American practice? And why did they make alterations? I will take into account the motives of the professionals in order to develop a critical view on their standpoints. While they might have agreed with some of the criticisms on dancing, it is also true that by arguing that people needed to learn how to dance appropriately the dance teachers created an economic market for themselves. In addition, I will take into account that what they propagated in their manuals were of course ideal images, that would not necessarily reflect the ways in which the dances were practiced.

Indeed, these regulations reveal much more about the dancing practices of the persons that were practicing the dances as a form of leisure activity. This becomes apparent when

employing the strategy often used by gender and postcolonial scholars: ‘reading against the grain’, that is not reading the text through the lens of the author, but trying to establish what he/she has left unsaid.⁶⁹ In this case, I will interpret statements about how people should dance as a sign that people were dancing in a different manner than the authorities wanted. Comments about how people should not behave, can inform me about the ways they were behaving in practice.

This is an important method to find out how the social dancers behaved, as it is very difficult to find texts in which these persons reflected on their practices. The dancers did not actively advocate their opinion in the debate in such an active way as the above-mentioned groups did.⁷⁰ Especially because the practice was somewhat frowned upon, most dancers did not openly proclaim their love for the dances. However, glances into their (bodily) experience can be found in ego-documents, and novels.

Ego-documents are especially suitable sources to retrieve information about ‘the ways in which key historical events and developments are subjectively experienced’.⁷¹ However, it would be naïve to use these sources to retrieve the neutral and ‘authentic experience’ of the writer. That is the case because every person is shaped by the cultural discourses of the time-period and represents him/herself according to the social conventions of the time, the purposes of writing, and the intended audience of the endproduct.⁷² In order to understand the writer’s experience, I will not look for a disconnected autonomous individual. Instead I will analyse how people ‘shaped their identity in relation to changing networks of interpersonal relations, with the “self” at the intersection of different sets of roles and expectations, while a monitoring “inner eye” records experiences, expectations and norms in the literary vehicles and conventions available and acceptable at any given time’.⁷³ Accepting the notion that individuals are imbedded in discourses could run the danger of denying the possibility of human agency. To prevent this I will use the personal narratives to analyse ‘how people worked their way through dimensions of norms and relationships’ as I already suggested above.⁷⁴ In order to do so, I will pay careful attention to ‘recurring words (...), central

⁶⁹ This strategy is said to be introduced by Walter Benjamin: Walter Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, trans. Dennis Redmond (Frankfurt, Main: online publication, 1974) <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html> (26-06-2017).

⁷⁰ Derks, “Harten Warm, Hoofden Koel”, 111.

⁷¹ Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, ‘In relation: The “social self” and ego-documents’, *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010) 263–272, 263.

⁷² Fulbrook and Rublack, ‘In relation’, 267.; Rudolf Dekker, *Egdocuments and history: Autobiographical writing in its social context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2002) 17.

⁷³ Fulbrook and Rublack, ‘In relation’, 268.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 271.

metaphors, emotional resonances, contradictions or inconsistencies in style, revisions and absences in the story', and the use of punctuation marks and underlining.⁷⁵

Unfortunately, there are not many ego-documents kept in which the experience of dancing is addressed. To my knowledge no historian has yet consulted ego-documents of anonymous dancers to gain insight in the history of modern dances in the Netherlands. Luckily, I have encountered the diaries of two persons in the *Nederlands Dagboek Archief* (Dutch diary archive): a young woman writing in the 1920s and a teenage boy writing in the late 1910s, who did reflect on their experiences on the dance floor. Unfortunately, this creates a representational problem. What can the stories of only two persons tell us about the experiences of dancers? Indeed, whose experiences are being told in these diaries? The ones of children whose parents made enough money to send them to dance classes, to take them to balls, and to let them go out on a frequent basis? These are experiences that are determined by class, and the stories of the less well-off remain untold.

Dismissing these sources on the grounds of the lack of representability is undesirable, as they can still offer vital new insights in the history of dance: they give us a glimpse in the experiences of the dancers. In order to be able to make more general claims about the findings in these sources, I will compare them to the ways in which the experience of dancing is described in novels. The fictional character of novels does not interfere with this goal. This characteristic would only prohibit me if I were to use them to learn about details of facts of a person's everyday life. Indeed, as historians Pieter Stokvis and Marita Mathijsen claim, novels are suitable sources to study the mentalities of a time period. That is the case, because – as the writer is limited by his own experience of the world and the mental grasp of his reader – these sources contain images of the reality and reflections on them.⁷⁶ However the usage of these sources does bring along the problem that a description of one writer is not necessarily representative for a general social mentality or problem. In order to enable myself to make more general statements based on novels, I compare books written by different authors from various backgrounds and perspectives,⁷⁷ take into account the intentions of the author, compare the findings with the information from other sources,⁷⁸ and study the public

⁷⁵ Fulbrook and Rublack, 'In relation', 272.

⁷⁶ Pieter Stokvis and Marita Mathijsen, 'Literatuur en maatschappij: Het beeld van de burgerlijke levensstijl in Nederlandse romans 1840-1910.', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, no. 18 (1994) 145-170, 149.

⁷⁷ Ineke den Hollander, 'Van boudoir naar studeerkamer: Gender en interieurs in negentiende eeuwse Nederlandse romans', Marjan Groot, e.a. ed., *Vrouwen in de vormgeving in Nederland 1880-1940* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011) 75-94.

⁷⁸ Stokvis and Mathijsen, 'Literatuur en maatschappij'.

responses to the books.⁷⁹

To be concrete, I select 12 novels in which the act of dancing or going out to the dance hall is an important theme. I singled out these books, by searching for newspaper reviews on novels that address the modern dances, and conducting an online key-word search in the book collection of *Delpher*. Because the dancing debate was strongly embedded in discourses on gender and sexuality, I try to avoid creating a gendered bias list. Half of the novels I select were written by a female author and the other half by a male writer. In addition, I aim at creating a list that covers the researched period. However, I am unable to find relevant books published in the 1910s, as the modern dance culture seemed to only have become a popular theme in literature after the practice became more popular and well-known in Dutch society. Therefore, the books I have selected were published between 1920 and 1938: six of these books were published in the 1920s and the other six in the 1930s.

⁷⁹ Karen Peters, 'Een schandelijk boek: Klaasje Zevenster en opvattingen over prostitutie in de negentiende eeuw', in: M. de Baar et. al. ed., *In de ban van het verhaal: Elfde jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1990), 27–54.

Chapter 1: Importing foreign dances:

How the modern dance culture was taken up in the Netherlands

During the 1910s, and more frequently during the Great War, modern social dances started to travel the Atlantic. They came to the Netherlands from the United States, though it was likely that they took a detour through Great Britain. In current literature, this development is often described through the lens of controlling practices. This view enables scholars to claim that the foreign dance practices were rejected, or strictly regulated by authority figures who wanted to protect traditional values in the light of the modernity that the dances embodied.⁸⁰

Applying a transcultural perspective to this history, however, sheds new light on this history. It illustrates that the exchange of dances was a process in which the dances were ‘translated’: their form, and meaning were transformed as different cultures exchanged them. In practice, this meant that various Dutch persons encountering the new form of leisure culture interpreted it through their own discourses, executed them in their own (sub)culture, and with their own background knowledge. This perspective allows me to endorse the claim of historian Rob Kroes that America did not just impose its culture on the rest of the world, but that it ‘washe[d] across the globe (...) mostly in disentangled bits and pieces, for others to recognize, pick up, and rearrange into a setting expressive of their own individual identities’.⁸¹

Though it is impossible to make an absolute distinction between the conscious and unconscious translation processes, altering and detangling the dances could happen in a more or less explicit way. Sometimes the appropriation was less outspoken. For example, persons took up the dances and carried them out with the knowledge they had of European folk and court dances, in the settings in which they were used to dance or spend their leisure time – for example the salon or in a restaurant – or attached meaning to them because they had specific images of the United States and African-Americans in mind. In addition, there were groups in society that explicitly argued that the dances needed to be adjusted to be suitable for the European, or more specifically, Dutch audiences. In the words of an author of *Het Leven* it was necessary that the dances were consciously ‘made European’.⁸²

⁸⁰ Griffiths, ‘Popular culture and modernity’, 611.; Kaal, ‘Verderfelijk vermaak’, 260. Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”.

⁸¹ Rob Kroes, ‘American empire and cultural imperialism: A view from the receiving end’, in: Thomas Bender ed., *Rethinking American history in a global age* (Berkeley: University of California press, 2002) 295–313, 302.

⁸² ‘One-step = two-step = tango!’, *Het Leven*, 139.

In this chapter I will consider these translation processes to gain an understanding of how dancers were expected to engage in this foreign dance culture in the Dutch context. I analyse the complex adaptations to this dance culture, to research how various groups involved in the dancing debate argued that this new and modern leisure culture could be integrated in 'the Dutch culture'. To analyse this, I will first research what kind of persons were actively involved in the process of translating the modern dances. I argue that primarily parents, the government, dance teachers, and individual dancers were adapting the modern dance culture. In addition, I pose the question: how did these subjects want to transform the foreign dance culture? I illustrate that most of these persons involved in the translation process tried to adapt the behaviour of the dancers and the environment in which people danced. Secondly, I shift my focus to the ways in which professional dancers transformed the dancing culture. I argue that these dance teachers were not only involved in adapting the space of and behaviour in the dance hall, but that they were also actively involved in transforming the actual dance steps: in changing the bodily movements performed on the dance floor.

Agents of translation: *Transforming the interior of, and behaviour in the dance hall*

For various Dutch dancers, the main reason to actively translate the modern dances was that they were the topic of a fierce moral debate. The dances were frowned upon by some journalists, who expressed their doubts. Christians, from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, published books, and articles to argue their objections. And at the end of the 1920s the government debated and investigated 'the question of dancing'. However, many of these persons did not reject the whole dance culture. They found themselves in a middle position arguing that the dances could be acceptable in Dutch society as long as some elements of the dances were changed. They addressed the question whether it was possible to ensure that the 'necessary alterations' were taken in consideration on the dance floor. In practice, this meant that they adapted the behaviour of the dancers, the space in which people danced – for example a high-class restaurant – and the relations between the sexes. Often the commonly held opinion on this matter was that the 'decency' in the dance hall could and should be maintained by ensuring that the atmosphere in which people danced was 'pure'.

As becomes apparent from my wording, the translations made in the dancing culture were put into practice by active subjects. At first sight, transcultural theory does not offer an excellent starting point to conceptualise their involvement in translations. As is explained in the introduction, Hermione Giffard has pointed out that mobility theory often neglects to pay

attention to the agency of the actors involved in the translation process. I try to overcome the shortcoming of transcultural theory by rejecting the view that translations are abstract processes, and redefining them as transformations of cultural practices that come into being through the active involvement of subjects that possess agency. To clearly conceptualise this new understanding of transcultural transformations, I introduce a new concept to refer to the subjects actively involved in it: ‘agents of translation’.

In this section, I argue that there were four ‘agents of translation’ who adapted the modern dances: the actual dancers, parents, professional dancers, and the government. I make a distinction between the first group and the latter three. The latter primarily prescribed how the dances should be executed, what their ideal translation was, while the former translated the dances in practice. In other words, the latter groups were more involved in an explicit and written debate on cultural exchange, while the actual dancers more implicitly took part in this discussion: they did or did not perform the ideals that the other agents of translation dictated.

Personality and self-control

During the 1910s, when the new dances first became popular in the Netherlands, many journalists argued that it was in the hands of dancers to guarantee the civility on the dance floor. As historians Remieg Aerts and Henk te Velde explain, the bourgeois ideal of self-control ensured that the responsibility of ‘decency’ was in the hands of the individual.⁸³ In order to counter the idea that the dances were ‘inherently’ vulgar, journalists proclaimed that the intentions and the personality of the dancers determined the performance.⁸⁴ In a published letter a concerned reader, who introduces herself as a vicar’s daughter and a vicar’s wife, argues that ‘the problem is the mind of the dancers, not the character of the dances’.⁸⁵ She continues to argue that she ‘assumes that, after some practice, she would be able to dance a step in a modest, civilised and even gracious manner, if she still had the flexible figure and the fast feet of her ‘eighteen-year-old self’.⁸⁶ The notion during these years was that if honourable persons danced the dances, the performance would inevitably be decent.

During the 1920s however, the responsibility for the ‘decency’ of the dances was no

⁸³ For more information about the bourgeois ideal of self-control see: Remieg Aerts and Henk te Velde, ‘Inleiding’, in: Remieg Aerts and Henk te Velde ed., *De Stijl van de burger. Over Nederlandse burgerlijke cultuur vanaf de middeleeuwen* (Kampen: Kok Agora 1998) 17.

⁸⁴ See for example: ‘Ingezonden stukken’, *De Tijd: Godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 11-06-1917.;

‘Tijdschriften’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 05-02-1917.; ‘One-step = two-step = tango!’, *Het Leven*, 138.

⁸⁵ ‘Tijdschriften’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Original: ‘de fout meer zat in ’t gemoed van de dansers, dan in de dansen’.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*. Original: ‘Ik neem aan een step na eenige studie, ingetogen, beschaafd zelfs gracieuus te dansen als ik nog mijn lenige figuur en vlugge voeten had van mijn achttiende jaar.’

longer primarily bestowed upon the individual. As is illustrated below, this task became entrusted to external figures who needed to adapt the dance culture. Even though the ideal of ‘self-control’ and the idea that a person with an honourable personality would act (read dance) in a ‘civilised’ way were still circulating, the public debate prominently included the view that the dances needed to be translated and the dancers educated.

Parenting

Even though the current literature does not reflect on this practice, it seems that already since the late 1910s the public opinion voiced the idea that parents, and specifically mothers, needed to take their task seriously to protect their children from the dangers in the dance hall. In 1917, a student of the student organization *Vereeniging Saint Thomas van Aquino* emphasised the importance of the opinion of the mother in the debate on modern dances. He criticised the fact that the morality of the dances was often judged ‘by someone who sits in his office, located several kilometres away, and from there reviews our affairs and judges our dance based on two words (two-step and one-step) on our programme’.⁸⁷ In contrast to these ‘moralists’ the student argued that the decency of dances should be reflected upon by mothers. He stated that he asked the opinion of concerned mothers who attended the dance of his student organisation, and that all of whom replied that they did not see any harm in it. The student valued the opinions of these mothers who had ‘a certain amount of life experience’, and who were present at the party, over the opinions of people who criticised the dances from a distance.⁸⁸

The opinion of mothers was valued by many more people mingling in the debate on dancing. Often journalists referred to the role of the mother, or both parents regarding this ‘issue’. According to some, their task was quite simple; they needed to be strict and forbid their children from attending dancings or other places where the (modern) dances were performed. Jan van Munster, an active member of the *Middernachtzending* Organization who ‘fought against’ prostitution and ‘other immoralities’ in the Netherlands, argued that parents needed to be firm. He admitted, ‘it seems so harsh to deny adult children the pleasure of a party, or to forbid a visit to an inn where people gather to dance’.⁸⁹ He explains that the new view on parenting is that children should not be raised too strictly to prevent them from

⁸⁷ ‘Ingezonden Stukken’, *De Tijd*. Original: ‘op eenige kilometers afstand op zijn kamer zit en vandaar uit onze aangelegenheden bekijkt en ons bal beoordeelt naar twee worden (two-step en one-step) van een programma’.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

⁸⁹ Jan N. Munster, *Iets over dansen* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1921). (No pagenummers present). Original: ‘’t Lijkt zoo hard de volwassen kinderen ’t genot van zoo’n feestje te onthouden, of ’t bezoek van de herberg, waarin gedanst wordt, te verbieden’.

becoming dissolute. And that parents must allow their offspring some fun, to show that they understand them. However, according to Munster, this parenting style led to horrific situations in which sons and daughters lost their virtue on the dance floor. According to him parents need to step up and strictly forbid children from visiting dances.⁹⁰

Not everyone agreed that the task of the parents was to deny their children access to dance parties. Others argued that if parents raised their children ‘right’ they would not be harmed by external influences.⁹¹ This view is clearly expressed in a governmental report written by a commission that needed to assert the severity of the ‘dancing problem’: ‘*Rapport der Regeerings-Commissie Inzake het Dansvraagstuk*’. According to this governmental report on ‘the question of dance’, the character of mothers determined the moral level of the children. According to the commission ‘when women run wild, their offspring demoralises as well’.⁹² It followed that the dancing problem would be limited if mothers took their roles seriously. To execute their task properly the commission thought it important for mothers to teach their daughters about love. They argued

if our mothers are ready to teach their daughters that they should never give themselves to a man who is not willing to give his whole personality for her, and that every woman, who settles for less, becomes the victim of the man and will be left ravaged, it will not be possible for men to parasitise on women’s lives (...).⁹³

According to the commission the dangers on the dance floor could be limited if mothers taught their daughters about relations between men and women. In other words, according to the commission mothers needed to enable girls to behave correctly on the dance floor by making them knowledgeable about men and relationships.

The view that mothers needed to protect their daughters on the dance floor and in relations with men, was not only an ideal that journalists and a governmental commission put forward. Many sources indicate that in practice mothers took their task as ‘agents of translation’ quite seriously. Various novels mention mothers reflecting on the practice of their daughters to go dancing, deciding whether their daughters can attend a dance, chaperoning

⁹⁰ Munster, *Iets over dansen*.

⁹¹ ‘Tijdschriften’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

⁹² Hendrik de Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk* (Den Haag: Algemeene Landsdrukkerij, 1931) 14.

⁹³ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 15. Original: ‘Als onze moeders zoover zijn, dat zij aan hun dochters kunnen leeren zich nooit aan een man te geven, die niet bereid is zijn heele persoon en zijn heele persoonlijkheid voor haar in te zetten, en dat elke vrouw, die met minder genoegen neemt, slachtoffer wordt van den man en als geschondene achterblijft, dan zal het voor mannen verder niet mogelijk zijn op vrouwenlevens te parasiteren’.

their children at balls, and instructing their girls on whom to dance with.⁹⁴ In addition, in her diary an adolescent girl living in the mid-1920s also mentions the interferences of her mother in her dance practices. She points out that her mother once did not allow her to go dancing. More importantly, she reflects on an intense argument at home where the mother tells her off for ‘not being able to think of anything else than going out dancing (...)’.⁹⁵ The adolescent girl admits that her mother set her straight, and decides not to go dancing the next evening as she had planned.⁹⁶

Clearly, mothers exerted, both in theory and in practice, a big influence on the behaviour of their daughters. By instructing them, they impacted the practices and behaviour of their children on the dance floor.⁹⁷ In other words, mothers acted as ‘agents of translation’ by prescribing their children the dominant gender norms that would determine how they could use their bodies in the dance hall.

Professional dancer: supervisors and teachers

A third agent of translation who was said to ward off indecency in the dance hall, was the professional dancer. His or her first task was to oversee the dance party and consider whether people were performing the dances ‘correctly’.⁹⁸ While it is obvious that dance fanatics could enjoy or even prefer a dance without supervision,⁹⁹ appointing a professional who controlled the dancing was not a regulation that evoked a lot of complaint or frustration among the dancers.¹⁰⁰ In fact, according to the professional dancer Willy Yardaz, the presence of a qualified dance teacher in the dance hall ‘who would ensure that (...) those who cannot dance or provoke, are not allowed to enter the dance floor (...) would increase the amount of visitors’.¹⁰¹ While the idea that people preferred to attend supervised dances is most probably

⁹⁴ See for example: Kees van Bruggen, *De verlaten man* (Bussum: C.A.J. van Dishoeck, 1928).; Arthur van Schendel, *De wereld een dansfeest*. (Amsterdam: J.M. Meulenhoff, 1938).; F.H. Burnett, *De groote lord*, (Leiden: A.w. Sijthoff’s Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1922).; Irène Nemirowsky, *Het bal*, trans. J.W.F. Werumeus Buning (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Gulden Sterk, 1934).

⁹⁵ Nederlands dagboek archief [NDA], 472.2.8, diary 1927-1936. Original: ‘ik doe werkelijk niets anders, ik denk nergens aan dan (...) dansen’.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ By stating that their instructions impacted the behaviour of their children, I do not wish to imply that their parenting techniques would always have the desired effect. Indeed, they could have the opposite effect as their offspring rebelled against their wishes. However, the possible decision of their children to do the exact opposite as what their mothers told them to do, would also be a result of a mother’s interference.

⁹⁸ J.B.M. Koenders, ‘De nieuwste dans’, *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant*, 18-09-1925.; De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 19.; W. J. A. J. Duynstee C.S.S.R., *De leer der kuisheid* (Roermond: J. J. Romen & zonen Uitgevers, 1927).

⁹⁹ Jo van Ammers- Küller, *Mijn Amerikaanse reis* (Den Haag: H.P. Leopold’s Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1926) 148-149.

¹⁰⁰ In most sources, the presence of a supervisor is just casually mentioned. See for example: NDA, 472:66, inv. no. 2, diary 1912.

¹⁰¹ Willy Yardaz, ‘De danssport: beschouwingen over den dans in het algemeen, methodiek en theorie der

an overstatement the writer made because of his own background as a dancing professional, it is likely that the presence of a supervisor indeed attracted a larger audience. The reason for this was, that persons who controlled or guided the prospective dancers – parents and members of Christian organisations – could be reassured of the decency of a dance by the presence of a professional.¹⁰² In addition, Yardaz' idea that dancers enjoyed having a professional present at a dance is not just a coloured view on reality. The professionals present at a dance sometimes oversaw informal competitions and rewarded the couple that danced most beautifully or 'the fairest lady' with an award. Even though this practice was obviously a playful way to control the dancers, i.e. to encourage them to conform themselves to the norms and regulations that the supervisor promoted, it was very much enjoyed by most dancers who felt honoured or acknowledged by the attention.¹⁰³

The role of the dance professional was not limited to that of a controlling dance supervisor. His or her second, and most important task was carried out in the dance school. The dance teacher needed to make the dances suitable for 'the European' or 'Dutch culture' and teach their students how to perform them in a 'decent' way. Plenty of professionals were eager to take up this task. In the next section, I describe the concrete changes they made to the dances. Here I first explain how dance teachers took up their role and how they were perceived by advocates of 'the decent performances of the dances'.

Many professional dancers saw a commercial opportunity in the popularity of the new dances and the public cry for the need to perform the foreign steps in a 'civilised' way. Dance teachers advertised with the promise that only they knew how to properly execute the dances.¹⁰⁴ They even established a society of dance teachers '*Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Dansleeraren*' to ensure the position of professionals. In addition, dance enthusiasts published a journal *De Dans* (The Dance) in which many articles were dedicated to explanations of how to dance correctly and to the statement that it was important that these modern dances became standardised by professionals.¹⁰⁵

Even though it is true that the dance teachers served a very profitable niche during the period in which dancing became one of the most popular leisure activities, it is unlikely that they only acted out of profit motives. A first and obvious reason is that most professionals

danssport', *de Kunst* 18, no. 937 (1926) 177 – 179, 178.

¹⁰² Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*, 102.; 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

¹⁰³ NDA, 472.2.8, diary 1925-1926.; Menno ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest...* (Rotterdam, Nijgh & Ditmar 1933) 107-108.

¹⁰⁴ Mutsaers, 'Op de maat en in de pas', 130.

¹⁰⁵ *De dans: geïllustreerd maandblad gewijd aan de veredeling der danskunst* (1923-1924).

truly had a passion or love for the act of dancing. In the first editorial of *De Dans* the editor in chief shares his regrets on the status of dance:

It may be argued, that for the dance as an artistic expression, after the Great War a period of misunderstanding set in; misunderstanding which is fatal for the dance itself and more importantly degrading for all of whom love the dance because of the dance!¹⁰⁶

Many of the teachers took up the role as mediator or translator of the dances because they wanted to redeem the degraded status of their precious profession and show others its beauty and pleasure. To make the dances suitable for a large audience however, they understood that they needed to mediate between people who were excited about the new dances from the United States and persons who questioned the morality of these American and ‘black dances’. In other words, for the professionals to have an impact on the view and execution of dance they needed to serve the market. As Paul Raymond, president of ‘the Union’,¹⁰⁷ explains:

Our influence on the public (...) can be real, if we consider her taste and preferences. We cannot learn her dances which she does not fancy. Our role must be restricted to suggesting, advising the public, and keeping it from eccentricities in which she could indulge herself.¹⁰⁸

The dance teachers were quite successful in their attempts to influence dancing practices. Many people were convinced that only a professional could teach a person to dance properly and gracefully.¹⁰⁹ For example, in a fictional story in *Margriet* a person observes a friend, Dick, who tried to teach himself the latest dance, and remarks:

Expert, personal guidance is necessary to learn such an elegant art as dance (...)
And I was sorry to notice, that Dick did not form an exception to the rule. (...)

¹⁰⁶ ‘Noot van de Uitgever’, *De dans: geïllustreerd maandblad gewijd aan de veredeling der danskunst* 1, no. 1 (1923) 1. Original: ‘Het mag gezegd, dat voor den dans als uiting van kunstzin, na den grooten oorlog een periode van miskenning is ingetreden; miskenning, welke noodlottig is voor den dans zèlf en bovendien vernederend voor allen, die den dans beminnen om den dans!’

¹⁰⁷ Text does not make explicit of which specific Union he is present, only that it is a Union for dancing professionals.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Nieuws uit het buitenland, *De dans* 2, no. 2. (1923) 24. Original: ‘Onze invloed op het publiek (...) kan daadwerkelijk zijn, onder voorwaarde, dat wij rekening houden met zijn smaak en zijn voorkeur. We kunnen ’t dus geen dansen doen leeren, welke niet in zijn smaak zouden vallen. Onze rol moet zich beperken tot raden, raadgeven aan het publiek en ’t bewaren voor excentriciteiten, waarvan ’t zich zou kunne overgeven’.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Hoe men wel en hoe men niet moet dansen’, *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 11 December 1926.

Dick could not have made more of a spectacle out of himself, if he would have appeared on the dance floor in his nightgown.¹¹⁰

Apart from adjusting dancing lessons to the public's taste to exert influence on the practice of dancing and undo it of its degrading status, the professionals had another task, a pedagogical one. This task was both acknowledged by the teachers and their clientele. According to the regulations of the *Nederlandsche Vereeniging van Dansleeraren* 'the dance teacher must be a pedagogue. He will continuously be conscious of his influence on the moral and cultural development and the character building of the youth that is entrusted to him'.¹¹¹ Not only did the teachers impose the role of educator on themselves, others – i.e. the government, journalists and parents – also held them responsible for teaching children moral lessons and explain them how to relate to members of the opposite sex.¹¹² Like the mothers, and to some extent the government as is illustrated below, the dance teachers were actively involved in the process of translating the behaviour on and around the dance floor.

Government: regulating the environment

The government did not interfere with the practice of dancing when its popularity peaked. The regulation of dancing was left to the municipalities. In 1929 members of Parliament discussed the matter. Their opinions were divided on the question of state interference. Some members of parliament wanted to forbid the whole practice of dancing, others preferred a governmental regulation of the practice, a different group argued that the practice should be supervised by the family and, if necessary, the municipality, and the last group argued it would be counterproductive to interfere as it would lead to the establishment of clandestine dance halls.¹¹³

In the parliamentary meeting of 22 November 1929 Miss Meijer pleaded for governmental regulations. She stated that 'behind the dancing lurks a severe danger for the

¹¹⁰ 'De Blue Swing Stomp', *Margriet* 1, no. 4 (1938) 4. Original: 'Deskundige, persoonlijke leiding is noodig voor het aanleeren van een zoo bevallige kunst als een dans, (...) En het speet mij heel erg, maar ik moest al heel spoedig opmerken, dat Dick geen uitzondering op den regel vormde. (...) Dick zou geen erger figuur hebben kunnen slaan, als hij in nachtgewaad op den dansvloer was verschenen.'

¹¹¹ Nationaal Archief [NA], Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur, inv. no. 2401, Aantekeningen bij regelingen betreffende het dansvraagstuk. Original: 'De dansleeraar zij pedagoog. Hij zal zich voortdurend bewust zijn van zijn invloed op de moreele en cultureele ontwikkeling en op de karaktervorming der aan hem toevertrouwde jeugd'.

¹¹² De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*; 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

¹¹³ NA, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur, inv. no. 2401, Aantekeningen bij regelingen betreffende het dansvraagstuk.

youth'.¹¹⁴ She explained, 'many youngsters who encounter the criminal court, are the victims of the public dancing'.¹¹⁵ She argued that the youth engaged in theft to pay for the expensive dance parties and the clothes that the dress-code required. However, more importantly, Miss Meijer identified the danger in the stimulus that dancing evoked and the social encounters in the dance hall. According to her, the government needed to intervene as both large and small cities encountered this problem and parents did not have enough authority to solve it.¹¹⁶ A couple of months after her plea the government decided to appoint a commission

which will be assigned the task to investigate whether there are social dangers connected to providing the opportunity to dance at locations that are accessible for the public, that are of such a serious nature that the Government must intervene, and, if so, must make propositions for this regulation.¹¹⁷

This investigation resulted in the *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*. The findings in this report led the parliament to adjust the *Drankwet* (drinking-law), in which dancing was regulated.

As is mentioned above, the governmental report stated that most of the problematic aspects of dancing could be solved if mothers and dance teachers took their responsibility to educate the youth in their behaviour on the dance floor. The commission emphasised that it was the task of the professionals to teach persons how to move correctly, and that it was a mother's duty to teach her children about relations with members of the opposite sex.¹¹⁸ The report adds to this that it is up to the municipality to concretely regulate issues concerning the music, dance competitions, the admission of performers and professional dancers, the consumptions, and the closing hours.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the commission called upon employers to make an effort to decrease the alienation from the workers. They believed that this could stop the disruption of the masses (that visited the dancing). 'A voluntary cooperation' in 'free relationships' between leaders and employees would help both parties to obtain 'a fulfilment

¹¹⁴ NA, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur, inv. no. 2401, Aantekeningen bij regelingen betreffende het dansvraagstuk.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Original: 'Vele jongelieden, die in aanraking komen met den strafrechter, blijken slachtoffers te zijn der openbare dansings'.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Original: 'aan welk zal zijn opgedragen te onderzoeken, of aan het bieden van gelegenheid tot dansen op voor het publiek toegankelijke plaatsen, maatschappelijke gevaren verbonden zijn van zoo ernstigen aard, dat daarin van Overheidswege behoort te worden voorzien, en bij bevestigende beantwoording voorstellen te doen nopens deze voorziening'.

¹¹⁸ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 14.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 39.

in life' that would prohibit many derailments from occurring, according to the report.¹²⁰

The commission did not only point to the responsibilities of others however. They also suggested that governmental regulations were necessary to improve the condition of dancing. First of all, even though the commission argued that it was the task of the dance teacher to discipline people's movements, they did argue that it might be necessary to make the presence of a professional mandatory.¹²¹ Furthermore, according to the report, the state should be primarily concerned with the circumstances in which people danced. They believed that by changing the environment, the degree to which a 'dangerous sexual stimulus' would occur during the practice of dancing would decrease.¹²²

The commission pointed out that the interior design of the dance halls should be regulated. They considered it necessary to 'adjust the size of the dance floor to the number of available seats in the venue and to determine the maximum number of couples that can be on the dance floor, of a specific size, at the same time.'¹²³ The report does not make explicit why this would be an improvement. Considering the criticism on the close distance between the bodies of the dancers and the bumping up to each other of different couples,¹²⁴ it is highly plausible that the commission believed that this rule would ensure that people were less stimulated by bodily contact and that the supervisor of the party could clearly watch every couple. The report adds to this that the dance floor must be demarcated to prohibit that the whole facility is used as a dance floor. This rule was most likely recommended to contain the dancers in a specific spot, which made it easier for a supervisor to exercise control in the dance hall. Furthermore, the commission proposed to get rid of all private boxes and partitions, to stop dimming the lights or changing the colour of the light, to place the bar strategically to prohibit people from quickly drinking their consumption when a new dance started, and to ensure the presence of proper ventilation.¹²⁵ By doing so the representatives believed that the environment of the dance hall would be less sexually stimulating and that young women were better able to judge the situation they were in.

Perceived through the lens of phenomenology, I would argue that this governmental body adapted the space in which the dancers gathered along the lines of their gender norms and dominant discourses on sexuality. By doing so they hoped that they would transform the

¹²⁰ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 13-14.

¹²¹ Ibid., 33.

¹²² Ibid., 31.

¹²³ Ibid., 31-32.

¹²⁴ Marlene G.H. Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 October 1933.; Yardaz, 'De danssport', 179.

¹²⁵ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 32.

bodily experience of the dance hall and make it less sexual. They wanted to establish this by changing the space's smell, light, and size, and adapting people's bodily state by inserting rules about the distance between the various bodies, and the availability of liquor and food.

In addition to the interior design, the commission also argued that the kind of people – or to be more precise the class – present in the dancing determined its morality. The report states that the more expensive dance halls were often 'contaminated by prostitutes', while in the dances that attract shop and office personal the atmosphere is made impure by 'men (...) who look for young girls to become victims of their urges'.¹²⁶ In general the commission argued that the dance halls, where youth of the same social standing meet each other, were less dangerous than those where members of different classes met each other. In practice, the latter referred to dance halls where the wealthier men and the young women of a modest background crossed paths.¹²⁷ According to the report, dance halls where classes mix were often locations in which less wealthy women were made into an 'object of exploitation' without realising this. These women, according to the commission, were vulnerable because their vision of a romantic future blurred their sense of reality.¹²⁸ The report argues that 'the only effective means, which can protect the youth from the impure environment, in which she finds herself too often in the public dancing, is a prohibition for underaged persons to enter the dance hall'.¹²⁹ The minimum age for entering a dance hall would become 18 years.

The view of the commission that the mixing of classes in the dancing was an undesirable development was also emphasised in other documents. In a few novels, the meeting of people from different social backgrounds or *zuilen* (pillars) was depicted as problematic or even fatal.¹³⁰ In various stories this led to pregnancies out of wedlock, or worse, death. However, these books do not entirely follow the line of thought of the commission. In this literature, not only the mixing of women from modest backgrounds with wealthy men is depicted as something undesirable. There is also an anxiety that wealthy adolescent girls would be approached by men from a lower or working class. For example, in the story of J.N. Munster such a mixing leads to a pregnancy out of wedlock, which could not

¹²⁶ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 33-34. Original: 'mannen (...) die het eropaan leggen de jonge meisjes ten offer te brengen aan hun driften'.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21. Original: 'de dansgelegenheid, waar jongelui van gelijke stand elkaar ontmoeten, minder gevaarlijk is dan die, waarin leden van verschillende stand, en dat wil dan in de praktijk zeggen: de beter gesitueerde man en het meisje van eenvoudige huize elkaar ontmoeten'.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 34. Original: 'Het eenige afdoende middel, dat de jeugd kan beschermen tegen het onzuivere milieu, waarin zij in de openbare danszaal maar al te vaak verkeert, is het verbod minderjarigen in dergelijke dansgelegenheid toe te laten'.

¹³⁰ See for example: Constant van Wessem, *Celly: Lessen in Charleston* (Amsterdam: N.v. Em. Querido's Uitgevers-maatschappij 1931).; Munster, *Iets over dansen*.

be made 'legitimate' due to the low social standing of the boy.¹³¹ While not everyone uttered this worst case scenario, various people showed concern about well-to-do women being bothered by lower-class men in the dance hall.¹³² According to Willy Yardaz it should be a social convention that women had the right to refuse a dance, and that they did not have to give an explanation to spare the men's feelings if he were a member of a lower class.¹³³ It is remarkable that Yardaz pleaded for a social rule that dismissed the mixing of class in the dance hall, when he is one of the few persons to advocate that one of the most important functions of the dancing was that it brought together the rich and poor as one democratic unity.¹³⁴ From these examples it becomes clear, that the government and dance critics were not only concerned with transforming the outlook of the space in which people danced, but also wanted to influence how subjects from different backgrounds interacted with each other.

Changing the dance steps and bodily movements: do's and don'ts

As is explained above, space, supervision, and knowledge of relations with the 'opposite sex' were important factors on which the 'decency' of a dance party depended. However, in the end, the most important aspect of a dance that determined its moral quality was the way in which people danced and how they displayed their bodies. In other words, the decency of the dances depended on the degree in which subjects internalised the norms inscribed on their bodies. The arrival of the new dance culture challenged people's understanding of their bodily existence, as the foreign dances were associated with new, contested bodily movements and behaviours that some dancers wanted to take up. In order to prevent these dancers from engaging in bodily expressions that moved beyond the boundaries of the dominate discourses on gender, sexuality and the body, dance teachers were assigned the responsibility to transform the dance steps and introduce 'decent' variations.

In this section I will research this side of the translation process. I ask: how did the professional dancers, as agents of translation, adapt the dances in such a way that they were considered 'respectable'? From what movements were dancers expected to restrain themselves? Which forms of dancing needed to be banished from the dance hall by a supervising professional? And, most importantly, why were certain motions rejected? To answer these questions, I will identify the most important do's and don'ts of the early twentieth century dance floor and various opinions about these criteria. In addition, I analyse

¹³¹ Munster, *Iets over dansen*.

¹³² Van Wessel, *Celly*, 106.; Yardaz, 'De danssport', *De Kunst*, 179.

¹³³ Yardaz, 'De danssport', *De Kunst*, 179.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

to what extent these rules reflected the public opinion on the modern dance culture. I consider whether critical journalists and the government agreed with the changes. And I analyse whether the adaptations were put into practice. Did the actual dancers experience a bodily restriction along the lines of the rules that the professional dancers initiated?

Do: hold your partner in a close embrace

This was such a basic rule and so essential for this type of dancing that it was almost unnecessary for dance manuals to point it out. The basic pose in which the dancers moved across the dance floor is depicted in image 1. The dancing couple needed to hold each other in close embrace: the woman would put her right hand in the man's left hand and her left hand on top of her partner's shoulder, while he would place his left hand at the centre of her back. Their feet needed to close in, precisely in front or next to each other, as is shown on image 2.¹³⁵ This position was characteristic for the modern dances as they were practised in early twentieth-century Europe. Even though the close embrace was already adopted for the waltz which entered the ballrooms during the nineteenth century, its prominent use in the modern dance hall was striking. As dance historian Theresa Jill Buckland explains, this manner of dancing differed tremendously from previous ways of dancing, i.e. round- and court dances in which couples often stood at a distance of each other and only sporadically held each other's hands.¹³⁶ In addition, this position also distanced itself from the kind of solo performances that revue artists from the United States staged, because it ensured that the dances were executed as couple's dances.

This transformation in dancing was not appreciated by everyone. The new position, in which the male and female bodies were in close distance to each other was a point of discussion. Some critics found the usage of this position too incompatible with Dutch norms. The most important reason to denounce this way of dancing, was the idea that such an intimate embrace with a person from the other sex would raise sexual feelings.¹³⁷ In the words of priest Willem Duynstee, the close contact between the bodies was problematic as 'every touch from a person of the opposite sex can have a somewhat stimulating effect'.¹³⁸ This often repeated argument was countered by dance fanatics who first of all pointed out that 'when in

¹³⁵ 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

¹³⁶ Buckland, 'From the artificial to the natural body', 60.

¹³⁷ See for example: Henri van Wemeskerken, *Het handschoentje: vroolijk spel van de zee, in drie bedrijven* (Amsterdam, L.J. van Veen 1931).; Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man.*; Chatherine, Booth-Clibborn, *Tooneel, bioscoop en dans* (Voorhoeve Den Haag, 1925).; Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*.

¹³⁸ Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*, 95. Original: 'dat iedere aanraking van een persoon van het ander geslacht eenigermate opwekkend kan werken'.



Image 1: a dancing couple holding each other in close embrace¹⁴⁰



Image 2: The feet of a dancing couple closing in¹³⁹

1812 the Waltz was first danced in the ballrooms, there erupted a moral outrage on the way in which couples embraced each other and the fact that they danced in this close distance of each other for a long time', while 'today it is considered as one of the most magnificent social dances'.¹⁴¹ This development was not only mentioned as proof of the waning indignation towards the modern dances, it was also put forward because dancers argued that in fact, the position used to waltz, was very similar to the basic position of the modern dances. This argument was questioned by Duynstee who argued that there was a vital difference: namely the closeness of the lower part of the body during performances of modern dances. According to him this was a serious problem, as it was even more stimulating than the touching of the upper body.¹⁴²

A second argument that dancers used to defend themselves, was the claim that only

¹³⁹ Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Original: 'Toen in 1812 de wals voor het eerst in Engeland in de balzaal gedanst werd, brak er een heftige storm van verontwaardiging los over de wijze, waarop paren elkaar omvat hielden en in deze nauwe omstrengeling gedurende geruimen tijd dansten' terwijl het 'heden ten dage als een der heerlijkste gezelschapsdansen wordt beschouwd'. A similar argument is also uttered in: 'Ingezonden Stukken', *De Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*.

¹⁴² Duynstee, *De leer der kuischheid*, 96.

(perverse) outsiders could look at the dances and see something immoral.¹⁴³ According to dance fanatics, to understand the dances people needed to have the bodily experience of dance. They argued that dancers did not *experience* the dances as something sexual. On the contrary, sexual instincts either disappeared because people were too focused on remembering the steps, and not stepping on each other's toes, or because they dissolved in an unconscious urge to create beauty.¹⁴⁴ Duynstee however, countered this argument in his book, with the statement that even though a person might be distracted by the environment and the practice of dancing, the suppressed sexual feelings will resurface when the dance is over.¹⁴⁵

Many moralists followed Duynstee in his critique of the intimacy of the modern dances. For most of these critics the primal concern was a person's, and especially a woman's, honour.¹⁴⁶ The modern dances were perceived as too intimate to be danced with someone else than 'one's own husband', and strict opponents of the new leisure activity argued that 'many girls must lose their virtue, before they are able to surrender themselves to the dances of this time'.¹⁴⁷ In accounts on the status of modern dances in America authors proclaimed that the act of dancing was not just disgraceful for women, but could lead women into a life of vice. Women were said to be deceived on the dance floor with the promise of marriage, and lured into a life as prostitutes or 'white slaves'.¹⁴⁸ According to a newspaper article 'out of 2500 deserted women [in an American city], three quarters have become fallen women through dancing', and that 'in a house of ill fame, 163 of the 200 prostitutes were ruined at the dancing school'.¹⁴⁹ Even though such extreme stories circulated in the Netherlands and presumably shaped the image of dancing in this context, I have not encountered messages stating (the anxiety) that such tragic events also occurred on Dutch soil. However, as is explained above, a moral panic did exist over the possibility that dances led to pregnancies outside of wedlock.

The dancers concerned were quite aware of this issue of virtue. A young woman wrote in her diary:

¹⁴³ Yardaz, 'De danssport', *De Kunst*, 177.

¹⁴⁴ C. P. van Rossem, *Surprises* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoffs Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1920).

¹⁴⁵ Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*, 98.

¹⁴⁶ Henri Borel, *Over de moderne dansen* (Den Haag: Het Geert-Groote-Genootschap, 1927).

¹⁴⁷ Booth-Clibborn, *Tooneel, bioscoop en dans*, 35-36. Original: 'zeer vele meisjes hun eerbaarheid moeten verliezen, eer zij zich kunnen overgeven aan dansen van dezen tijd'.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴⁹ 'Het dansgevaar', *De Sumatra Post*, 20 November 1922. Original: 'zijn van de 2500 verlaten vrouwen drie vierden tot hun val gebracht door den dans'. And 'In een huis van prostitutie zijn 163 van de 2000 op de dansschool ten val gebracht'.

Halfway through I moved my hand on his shoulder to grab him more tightly, which had the consequence that he also tightened his arm around my waist, while he pushed himself against me (...) The amorous glances he gave me, and the way he held my hand. At the end, he even laid his cheek against mine. I should be ashamed; an honourable girl!¹⁵⁰

However, from this account, and various fictional stories, it seems that these women were more concerned with the pleasure of dancing and ‘resting in the arms of a man’ than with their possibly tainted virtue.¹⁵¹ As the woman writing in her diary explained ‘she does not really care for that’.¹⁵² Indeed, she wondered why one should not be able to flirt as ‘it feels so good’.¹⁵³ As is explained in more detail in chapter 3, in practice it seemed that the dancers were less concerned with issues of sexual morality than the authority figures – parents, the government, dance teachers, journalists – who debated these issues. Men, who did not need to be as concerned that their enjoyment of bodily closeness would affect their honourability as women, even more explicitly expressed their amusement for this practice. For example, the narrator in the novel *Celly* described the bodily experiences of a young man on the dance floor by saying: ‘than he pulled her close to him, to feel her warm breasts, below which her heart was beating, against his own heart’.¹⁵⁴ Clearly, the dancers were not very likely to restrict their bodily expressions according to the norms of critical authority figures such as Duynstee. Instead, they discovered that engaging in these new bodily movements transgressed and gave them access to a new and pleasant bodily experience.

Don't: move your limbs, head, hips, or shoulders (excessively)

One of the most important conscious translations carried out to ‘make’ the modern dances ‘European’¹⁵⁵ was to see to it that people kept their heads, hips, and shoulders still, and did not excessively move their limbs or jump around.¹⁵⁶ In other words, people should not

¹⁵⁰ NDA, 472.2.8, diary 1925-1926. Original: ‘Halverwege verplaatste ik mijn hand op zijn schouder om hem wat beter vast te kunnen houden, wat ten gevolge had dat hij zijn arm om mijn middel ook wat steviger vastlegde, terwijl hij mij tegen zich aandrukte (...). De verliefde blikken en de manier waarop hij mijn hand vasthield. Tegen 't eind legde hij zowaar even zijn wang tegen de mijne. Eigenlijk moest ik er mij voor schamen; een eervol meisje!’.

¹⁵¹ Jeanne Reyneke van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen: Een studie van huwelijksleven* (1931); Nemirowsky, *Het Bal*.

¹⁵² NDA, 472.2.8, diary 1925-1926. Original: ‘Maar daar voel ik zoo weinig voor’.

¹⁵³ Ibid. Original: ‘'t Doet je zoo goed’.

¹⁵⁴ Van Wessem, *Celly*, 96. Original: ‘dan rakte hij haar vlak tegen zich aan, zoodat hij haar warme borsten, waaronder het hart luid sloeg, voelde tegen zijn eigen hart’.

¹⁵⁵ ‘One-Step = two-Step = tango!’, *Het Leven*, 139.

¹⁵⁶ Yardaz, ‘De danssport’, *De Kunst*, 179.

‘execrate’.¹⁵⁷ Many professionals and journalists kept pointing out that people who wanted to dance in a civilised way, should not move their bodies widely and freely.¹⁵⁸ The manner in which the people on image 3 and 4 moved was considered indecent. The fact however, that this rule was emphasised vary often, and that the magazine *Het Leven* often published pictures of people dancing in this way, suggests that a considerable number of people were attracted to this way of dancing. A teenage boy writing in his diary proclaims: ‘I fancied the “Washington Post”, a wild, and therefore amusing dance’.¹⁵⁹



Image 3: African-American dancers in New York dancing kicking with their legs and moving their torso¹⁶¹



Image 4: dancers moving their hips while the conga¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Ten Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest....*

¹⁵⁸ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 6.; Neeb, ‘Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?’, *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; Koenders, ‘De nieuwste dans’, *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant.*; ‘One-step = two-step = tango!’, *Het Leven.*; Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man.*

¹⁵⁹ NDA, 472:66, inv. no. 2, diary 1912. Original: ‘Zeer viel in mijn smaak de “Washington Post”, een wilde, dus leuke dans’. Emphasis added.

¹⁶⁰ Het geheugen van Nederland, ‘Dans. Een man en een vrouw dansen de conga. Zij is op hoge hakken en draagt een kort jurkje (1935)’, in: Fotocollectie Het Leven.

<http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/nl/geheugen/view/dans%20een%20man%20vrouw%20dansen%20conga%20zij%20is%20hoge%20hakken%20draagt%20kort%20jurkje%20zonder%20plaats?query=dans&facets%5BcollectionStringNL%5D%5B%5D=Fotocollectie+Het+Leven+%281906-1941%29&page=3&maxperpage=36&coll=ngvn&identifier=SFA03%3ASFA022827329> (21-04-2017).

¹⁶¹ Het geheugen van Nederland, ‘Dans. Dansers van de Lindy Hop, een Afro-Amerikaanse dans, gebaseerd op

Even though after the Great War, a new bodily culture developed in which people were eager to move their bodies more freely,¹⁶² this was not widely accepted yet. Various professionals and moralists tried to convince dancers that the dances were not executed properly if they ‘shuffle[d], shake[d], shudder[ed], turn[ed], (...) and squirm[ed]’ on the dance floor.¹⁶³ Moving one’s body ‘like a (wo)man possessed’¹⁶⁴ attracted too much attention to a person’s bodily existence. This was, first of all, considered as something ‘ridiculous’.¹⁶⁵ Many authors could not understand that people made such a strange spectacle out of themselves and argued that, according to contemporary customs, people needed to behave themselves seriously, even when they danced.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, in line with historian Jesper Verhoef, I argue that Dutch journalists saw this exaggerating behaviour as a characteristic of Americans, that was incompatible with the modesty of Dutch persons.¹⁶⁷

Secondly, attracting this much attention to one’s body was considered immoral.¹⁶⁸ According to journalist Henri Borel all this ‘perverse’ shaking and squirming would lead to ‘the forbidden deed’.¹⁶⁹ He was astonished that it seemed that dancing women did not understand how vulgar they were when they engaged in ‘hysterical shoulder shakes [and] (...) leg kicks’.¹⁷⁰ For him, and other moralists, women who displayed their bodies in this manner lost their dignity or virtuousness.¹⁷¹ The display of the shoulders and neck was clearly considered to be suggestive, not to mention the ‘provocative movements’ of the hips and pelvis. As is explained in the next chapter, these kinds of movements were associated with sexuality and immorality because they were said to originate from ‘sexual coloured cultures’, i.e. African-American and Latin culture. Clearly, these critical journalists regarded moving

jazzdans en charleston en ontstaan rond 1932 in New York (1937)’, in: Fotocollectie Het Leven. <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/nl/geheugen/view/dans%20dansers%20lindy%20hop%20afro%20amerikaanse%20dans%20gebaseerd%20jazzdans%20charleston%20ontstaan%20rond%20new%20york%20new%20york%20verenigde%20staten%20amerika?query=dans&facets%5BcollectionStringNL%5D%5B%5D=Fotocollectie+Het+Leven+%281906-941%29&page=2&maxperpage=36&coll=ngvn&identifier=SFA03%3ASFA022827336> (21-04-2017).

¹⁶² Derks, “‘Harten warm, hoofden koel’”, 102.

¹⁶³ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 4. Original: ‘heenschuifelen en knikken en bihbieren en draaien en quasi-elegant likkebaarden en knoeien en wringen’.

¹⁶⁴ Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 31. Original: ‘als een bezetene’.

¹⁶⁵ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 6.; O.D., ‘De dans-waanzin’, *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 18 September 1920.; ‘De heeschappij van Terpsichore’, *De Dans* 2, no. 2 (1923) 24.; ‘Amerika als danscentrum: Raadgevingen bij shimmy en foxtrot’, *De Telegraaf*, 30 June 1923.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Amerika als danscentrum’, *De Telegraaf*.

¹⁶⁷ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 41.

¹⁶⁸ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4. Original: ‘de verboden daad’.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 11. Original: ‘hysterische schouderchokken [and] (...) de beenschokken’.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 11.; Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 41.

wildly as a bodily expressing that was incompatible with gender and sexual norms in Dutch society.

Do: Let the man lead

The new dancing position required dancers to move across the dance floor together, as one united entity, instead of manoeuvring near each other as was customary in court dances. To do this, one person needed to guide the other through the dance hall. Professionals proclaimed that to execute the dances properly male dancers were advised to ‘be confident and lead’ while the ladies were instructed to ‘dedicate themselves [to the male partner] and let themselves be guided’.¹⁷² For this form of dance to be a success, dancers were advised to dance with people they knew or danced with often, in order for them to quickly understand each other’s intentions and movements.¹⁷³ This was of importance, as the modern dances allowed and even encouraged the dancers to use their fantasy and improvise. Unlike the ‘old-fashioned dances’ these dances could be performed in various ways, which required the dancers to see eye-to-eye.¹⁷⁴

The dancing professional Willy Yardaz argued that the necessity of the man to lead the woman was beautiful and educational. According to him modern dances were ‘one of the few sports in which the perfect natural relation between both sexes comes to its full advantage: the man as a leading, creating power’.¹⁷⁵ However, both dancers and sceptics of the modern dances did not agree with this view. They did not believe that women’s bodies should be restricted in this way. They regretted that ‘despite all emancipation and women’s independence, the modern dances require the man to take the lead and have absolute authority’.¹⁷⁶ While the opinions in practice were divided with regard to this rule, it becomes clear that there were critics of the modern dances who regretted the unmodern gender practice they required.

The government too uttered its critique on this unmodern practice. The governmental commission stated in its report, that this arrangement between the sexes on the dance floor was not just regrettable because it represented ‘old-fashioned’ gender relations, but also

¹⁷² ‘Hoe men wel en hoe men niet moet dansen’, *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*. Original: ‘Wees zelfbewust en geef leiding’. And ‘geef u geheel over en laat u leiden’.

¹⁷³ ‘Dansende Amerikanen’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; ‘Amerika als danscentrum’, *De Telegraaf*.

¹⁷⁴ Van Rossem, *Surprises*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ Yardaz, ‘De danssport’, *De Kunst*, 177. Original: ‘een der weinige sporten is, waarbij de volkomen natuurlijke verhouding der beide geslachten geheel tot zijn recht komt: de man als leidende, scheppende kracht’.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Amerika als danscentrum’, *De Telegraaf*. Original: ‘Alle emancipatie en vrouwenzelfstandigheid ten spijt, bij de moderne dansen is het altijd de man, die de leiding en het absoluut gezag heeft’.

because it made women vulnerable. The commission explained that women were superior to men on the dance floor, as women liked to express themselves through dance and had the bodily ability to mimic the rhythm of the music, whereas men did not care about the dance itself, but only danced ‘to dance with women’.¹⁷⁷ Because dancing usually was a female territory, women were said to be able to take the lead, control the situation, have a lot of confidence, and be themselves.¹⁷⁸ This allowed them to ward off ‘dirty’ womanizers. However, the commission feared that in practicing the modern dances the woman no longer had the upper-hand, as her position as the strongest party became relative by the necessity for the men to lead.¹⁷⁹

Clearly, the supposed ‘traditionalists’ – such as the government and dance critiques – did not always favour traditional values over modern norms. On the contrary, with regard to this example it seemed that the ‘modern’ dance culture propagated a celebration of ‘traditional gender norms’, while the supposed opponents of the dances advocated more emancipate values. It seems that the traditionalist-modernity binary that is often utilized in the current literature on dance history, is too simplistic to explain the dancing debate in the Netherlands.

In addition, it seems that in practice dancers did not uncritically embrace the norms that were reflected in the modern dances. Indeed, the new ‘unmodern’ custom to let the man lead, did not clip women’s wings as much as is suggested in the report. From the descriptions in novels it becomes apparent that the rule did primarily apply to the context of the dance hall. At home women often thought men how to dance before they went out. According to *De Dans* this was very customary as women had the advantage to learn the new dances sooner than the men, as men often guarded the boarders during the Great War.¹⁸⁰ When women taught men how to dance, they often took the lead at first.¹⁸¹ Moreover, when there were no men around to dance with, in the context of the home it seemed common practice for women to dance together and to take turns to lead.¹⁸² Clearly, the space in which women found themselves, determined their bodily restrictions and opportunities. While women did not contest the more ‘traditional’ gender discourse that the practice of letting the man lead in the dance hall, they could resist this norm by deciding to dance in another context.

¹⁷⁷ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 17.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁸⁰ ‘De heerschappij van Terpsichore’, *De Dans*, 24.

¹⁸¹ See for example: Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 26.; Wessems, *Celly*, 42-55.; Cissy van Marxveldt, *Joop en haar jongen* (Amersfoort: Valkhoff & co, 1925) 60-62.

¹⁸² Van Wessems, *Celly*, 52-54.; Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 27.

Conclusion

Applying transcultural theory to the history of modern dances in the Netherlands offers new insights. It makes apparent that the ‘traditionalists – advocates of modernity’ binary that is supported by the current literature is too simplistic. First of all, transcultural theory illustrates that through the process of cultural exchange the dances, the modernity they embodied, and the contexts through which they travelled were transformed. In other words, applying transcultural theory shows that it too simplistic to argue that the Dutch could either reject or embrace these dances in their ‘original form’.

Secondly, by nuancing transcultural theory and redefining the practice of translation as transformations of cultural practices that are realised by the active involvement of subjects, it becomes clear that many supposed ‘traditionalists’ acted as ‘agents of translation’. As mediators, these authority figures – the government, parents, professional dancers – prescribed how the modern dance culture should ideally be translated to be acceptable for the Dutch. They did not reject the modernity that the dances embodied, but critically reflected on it. In practice this meant, that these ‘agents of translation’ were actively involved in transforming the behaviour of the people attending dances, changing the interior of the dance halls, and reformulating how people could use their bodies in the dance hall.

Thirdly, it is interesting to note that the reserved attitudes of these ‘agents of translation’ towards these dances, did not always come forth out of a preference of ‘traditionalism’ over ‘modernity’. Indeed, various perceived ‘traditionalists’ – such as the government and dance critics – had an ambivalent attitude towards the practice that – despite of all emancipation – the man needed to lead the woman on the dance floor.

Lastly, looking at the practices of the actual (amateur) dancers it becomes clear that that were not executing the modern dances in their ‘original form’ or uncritically embraced the social norms that the dances embodied. As transcultural thought explains, this would be impossible: the regulations of the authority figures, the habitus of the dancers, and the cultural discourses that influenced the dancers all had an impact on the way in which the dancers would execute the dances. Even though the dancers did not always restrict their bodily expression along the rules that came forth out of dominate cultural discourses, the social norms did require them to adapt the dance culture. For example, as women were required to let themselves be guided by a man in the dance hall, some females danced in informal settings such as their own homes, to be able to lead or to dance with other women. Clearly, like all other ‘agents of translations’ the actual dancers transformed the modern dance culture,

however they were inclined to do so through practices instead of uttering explicit opinion in the public debate.

Chapter 2:

Experiencing the other through modern dances:

Debates on the racial and cultural origins of the new dance culture

As is explained above, the modern dances and the corresponding behaviour on and around the dance floor were consciously adapted to become 'suitable' for the Dutch public. The main goal of these changes was to strip the dances from markers that were said to connote too much 'foreignness', i.e. American, African-American, and Latin culture. However, not everyone agreed on the degree to which the dances needed to 'be made Dutch'. Most dancers enjoyed the fact that the dances were associated with cultures from abroad. Following Danielle Robinson's line of thought in her above-mentioned research into the experience of modern dances by European immigrants in the United States, it could be suggested that Dutch dancers took pleasure in the foreignness of the dances because they felt they embodied the black 'other' through them. In this chapter I will research to what extent dancers experienced, and critics feared such an embodiment. To do this, I will complicate Robinson's theory by suggesting that in the Dutch context multiple others were associated with the dance practices. In this chapter I identify who these others were and how they were seen by contemporaries. I argue that Dutch dancers were not only attracted to the associations with 'black culture', but could also be fascinated with the experience of the Caucasian North-American, Latin American, and British other.

Shaking and squirming on the dance floor: *Embodying the 'coloured other'?*

According to Robinson, during the early twentieth century European immigrants in the United States could embody markers of blackness through ragtime dancing. She argues that this was the case because the movements this kind of dancing required were considered 'black'. According to her, they were 'stereotypical renderings of African-Americans'.¹⁸³ The movements she refers to are dance steps, which 'involved the whole body, especially the buttocks and shoulders'.¹⁸⁴ To be more precise, the steps she referred to were the 'excessive' shaking and squirming of the body that Dutch dance teachers wanted their pupils to refrain from, as is described in the previous chapter.

Robinson acknowledges that the European immigrants did not take up an unchanged version of the dancing style of African-Americans. Instead she follows the line of thought of

¹⁸³ Robinson, 'Performing American', 113.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 113.

cultural mobility to show that these dances were translated; ‘the movements associated with ragtime dancing [...] integrated European American and African-American dance traditions’.¹⁸⁵ However, she believes that despite this cultural exchange and integration of traditions, ragtime dancing was considered to be entirely black. Just as the ‘one drop rule’ proclaimed that someone of mixed race was black, these dancers perceived a dance as black, when it included some aspects of African-American culture.¹⁸⁶ According to Robinson, the European immigrants strategically used this racial association. They emphasised the binary opposition between ‘black’ and ‘white’, to prioritise their own whiteness through these dances and obscure ‘other social differences such as [their] foreign birth’.¹⁸⁷ In doing so, they hoped to be less stigmatised as immigrants and more accepted as white members of American society. As Toni Morrison observes, ‘race, in fact, now functions as a metaphor (...) necessary to the construction of Americanness’ (...), ‘American means white’.¹⁸⁸

Applying these insights to dance in the Dutch context can illuminate perspectives on race, foreignness, and cultural exchange in the Netherlands. In this paragraph, I will try to answer the question whether the Dutch experienced an embodiment of markers of blackness through the dance steps that were considered African-American, as the European migrants did. To do this, I will analyse to what extent the shaking movements of the body, and especially the shoulders and hips were associated with African-American culture in the Netherlands as well. Furthermore, I will consider to what degree the ‘one drop rule’ was transferred onto dance practices in the Netherlands.

African-American movements

Just as amongst the European immigrants in the United States, the Dutch saw shaking, hip swinging, and shuddering movements as characteristics of ‘negro dances’.¹⁸⁹ Not only were these steps associated with African-American culture, they were also perceived as sexual and immoral. These were not two different associations with the movements, but instead two myths that intersected with each other. With this I mean, that this way of dancing was not

¹⁸⁵ Robinson, ‘Performing American’, 90.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 108.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the dark: Whiteness in the literary imagination* (Cambridge: Mass, 1992) 47. For more information about the complex association between Americanness and Whiteness see also: Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became white* (New York: Routledge 1995).; Ronald Takaki, *A different mirror: A history of multicultural America* (New York, Boston, Londen: Back Bay Books, 1993).

¹⁸⁹ Koenders, ‘De nieuwste dans’, *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant.*; Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 7.; ‘Wat zullen we dansen?’, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 05 December 1927.; Van Wesseem, *Celly*, 172-192.; ‘Kunst: “Black Follies”’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 28 February 1928.

simply seen as sexual or ‘black’, but that it signified sexuality *because* it connoted non-white and non-European races or ethnicities. Hyperactive sexuality and blackness were associated with each other because of the contemporary discourse on people with a coloured skin. Still in the early twentieth century, there existed a racial discourse in which black people were typified as uncivilised, barbaric, and primitive. White persons contrasted themselves to these ethnical others, by attributing themselves the opposite characteristics; civilised, refined, and advanced or modern.¹⁹⁰ This view on black persons was further developed and/or justified by scientific research that tried to explain the ‘primitivity’ of these people by comparing them to animals, or even actually classifying them closer to fauna than white people. Like wild beasts, these people were believed to act more from primal instincts than rationality. This ‘fact’ in combination with their bodily characteristics – for example big buttocks of women, and the presumed/feared large penises of men – was said to indicate that black persons had strong sexual instincts to which they reacted.¹⁹¹ Because of this perceived hyperactive sexuality, the dances that were believed to have their origins in ‘black cultures’ were considered as expressions of such erotic impulses. This view clearly resonates in the Dutch debate on modern dance. For example, describing dance steps that required shaking, squirming, or ‘wildly moving the limbs’, Borel argued that these movements had ‘their origins in negro tribes that excite themselves into erotic madness’.¹⁹² Other journalists described performances of these ‘negro dances’ as ‘a negro-dance-orgy’.¹⁹³

Various ‘dance specialists’ and journalists emphasised that these ‘primitive’ and ‘sexual movements’ were natural for black people.¹⁹⁴ *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* proclaimed: ‘because he is very sensitive to music, a negro cannot resist the natural dance- or rhythm-movements. It starts at their shoulders, runs down through their backs, and ends in their feet’.¹⁹⁵ According to various writers African-Americans had a natural love for dancing, as it made them very happy.¹⁹⁶ It is questionable whether these journalists believed this, as the

¹⁹⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘The spectacle of the ‘Other’’, in: Stuart Hall et. al. (ed.) *Representation* (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2013) 215-287, 219 and 225-227.

¹⁹¹ Hall, ‘The spectacle of the ‘Other’’, 232-234 and 245-255.

¹⁹² Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 8. Original: ‘waarvan de oorsprong bij zich tot erotischen waanzin opwindende barbaarsche negerstammen ligt’.

¹⁹³ ‘Kunst: “Black Follies”’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; L. M. G. Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken* (Amsterdam: Allert de Lange, 1927) 177.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.; ‘Het dansen van Negers’, *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, 21 December 1929.; ‘Van Wessem, Celly, 172-192.

¹⁹⁵ ‘Het dansen van negers’, *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*. Original: ‘Daar hij zeer gevoelig voor muziek is, kan een neger de natuurlijke dans- of liever rythme-bewegingen niet weerstaan. Het begint bij hun schouders, loopt langs hun rug naar beneden en eindigt in hun voeten’.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.; Van Wessem, *Celly*, 172-192.

argument was most probably uttered to justify the long hours and low payment of the professional dancers in the nightclubs. Not only were black people said to have a strong emotional or mental connection to this form of dancing, they were also believed to have the proper physique to execute them. According to an article in *Algemeen Handelsblad* the racial characteristics of African-Americans were inherently connected to these movements. It argued ‘a negro dance with various wonderful jumps fits the heavy, musical niggers. It belongs to a black skin, and a curly head, and singing teeth between sensual lips, and a dose of passion, which is foreign to us children from a different race’.¹⁹⁷ Clearly, the dancing debate inscribed social and cultural discourses on the bodies of African-Americans that restricted how they could use and move their bodies.

Both professional dancers and dance critics tried to discourage Dutch dancers from taking up these movements by arguing that the dances belonged to ‘the black race’ and that only African-Americans could rightfully perform such movements. They argued that African-Americans performed these dances with their ‘primal instincts’. They claimed that dancing was a way from them to express their inner being with complete devotion.¹⁹⁸ L. M. G. Arntzenius, a Dutch journalist of *De Telegraaf* visiting New York, describes how African-Americans danced the Charleston:

Here you can see the truth: now it is wild and dark, threatening with desire, then it is grotesque with laughing yells and funny jumps, then it is happy and full of devotion. Sometimes it is confronting and fear washes over you, after that it makes you laugh again in relief. Living, living.... You no longer have a moment of peace: the tension, the anxiety becomes unbearable. It rips you of your seat; you do not know whether you want to participate, or run away...¹⁹⁹

Arntzenius described how the African-Americans danced; with a great passion to express their ‘primal’ emotions. In line with other journalists his description of their passionate performance connoted a ‘wildness’; it almost seemed to him as if the dancers were

¹⁹⁷ ‘Het dansen van Negers’, *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*. Original: ‘een negerdans met allerlei wonderlijke sprongen past bij de zware, spierkrachtige niggers. Er hoort een zwarte huid bij en ene kroeskop en blinkende tanden tusschen zinnelijke lippen en een dosis passie, die ons kinderen van een ander ras vreemd is’.

¹⁹⁸ ‘De Dans: ’t rythme der beweging’, *Het Leven* 26, no. 14 (1931) 428.; ‘Over theater dans: ‘Het karakter van den dans geeft ook ras en natie te kennen’’, *Het Leven* 21, no. 15 (1926) 458.

¹⁹⁹ Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 177-178. Original: ‘Hier ziet ge waarheid: nu is het woest en donker dreigend van begeerte, dan is ’t grotesk met lachende uitroepen en jolige sprongen, dan weer gelukkig en vol overgave. Het komt soms op u af en slaat u met een golf van angst, daarna doet ’t u weer lachen in wijde opluchting. Leven, leven... Geen oogenblik van rust meer kent ge: de spanning, de beklemming wordt ondragelijk. Het trekt u van uw stoel; ge weet niet of ge mee wilt doen, dan wel wilt vluchten...’

possessed.²⁰⁰ Journalists argued that when black people dance, they were ‘honest’ or ‘naked’ in the metaphorical sense; their dance is not an act but a necessary and inevitable need to express themselves. As Arntzeniüs’s story clearly illustrates, most dance critics simultaneously admired and feared this ‘instinctive dancing’.

According to some supporters of the adapted version of the dances and the opponents of the modern dances, European dancers who tried to imitate black persons looked foolish.²⁰¹ They argued that Europeans would never be able to dance with the same primitive passion. In contrast to the African-Americans, who were believed to dance with the ‘unity of their being’, Europeans were said to have more ‘differentiated feelings’ which denied them the opportunity to lose themselves in, or express themselves through dance, in the same way as black persons could.²⁰² Dutch persons who tried to imitate the dancing of African-Americans with earnest were said to look foolish, stupid, tasteless, and hypocritical, as they transgressed the limitations of their presumed bodily abilities.²⁰³ They were typified as caricatures.²⁰⁴ This was not only the case because Europeans were said to be too civilised or refined to express primal instincts, but also because this dancing seemed strange out of context. As Arntzeniüs describes: ‘again I have a vision of a European restaurant of high quality, in which gentlemen in dress suits and ladies with bare arms are kicking around in a stupid and serious way’.²⁰⁵ Most critics were bothered by the habit amongst dancers to imitate these ‘primitive’ dances in clothes and spaces that were associated with elegance and class.

Professionals and critics tried to discourage the Dutch public further from ‘imitating’ these ‘wild’ movements, not only by arguing that they belonged to the ‘primitive cultures’ of black persons, but also by (re)locating them in Africa and associating them with beasts. They argued that these dances were ritual or religious tribe dances.²⁰⁶ A poet published in *Het Leven* stated:

²⁰⁰ See also: Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 11.

²⁰¹ ‘Kunst: “Black Follies”’, *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 7-8.

²⁰² ‘De Dans’, *Het Leven*, 428.

²⁰³ Arntzeniüs, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 178.; ‘Kunst: “Black Follies”’, *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 12.

²⁰⁴ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 12.

²⁰⁵ Arntzeniüs, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 178. Original: ‘Weer heb ik 't visioen van een aanzienlijk Europeesch restaurant, met meneeren in rok en dames met bloote armen, die dom en ernstig om zich heen staan te trappen’.

²⁰⁶ Madme. Tamar Karsavina, ‘De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!’, *Het Leven: Geïllustreerd* 21, no. 45 (1926) 1431.

Look at the bushman jumping	Ziet de boschjesman eens springen
With his fat bushman:	Met zijn vette boschjesman:
Don't they imitate, with their skips,	Bootsen zij niet bij hun hopsen
the monkeys, as we do?	Net als wij, de apen na?
Zulu-scoundrels, Kongo-negroes	Zoeloe-kaffers, Kongo-negers
All of them enjoy it a lot,	Allen zijn erop verzot,
Aren't our new dances	Zijn niet onze nieuwste dansen
A Hottentot-trot?	Soms een Hottentotten-trot?
Don't the fakirs dance	Dansen niet de taaie fākirs
On nails and glass?	In de spijkers en het glas?
Don't the head-hunters	Maken niet de koppensnellers
Gladly perform their fresh head-pas?	Graag hun versche koppen-pas?
Don't the cannibals dance	Dansen niet de menschen-eters
Accompanied by a concert of cries	Begeleid door gil-concert
Around a steaming pot	Rond de vorelenden ketel
Filled with missionary pies? ²⁰⁷	Vol met zendelingen-snert?

Publishing satirical poems like this one, and using words as ‘primitive’, ‘wild’, ‘jungle’, or ‘animalistic’ to refer to the ‘excessive movements’ that accompanied the modern dances, enabled critics to make a caricature of this way of dancing. By representing the movements as belonging to ‘barbaric’ cannibals cooking white Western missionaries, the opponents of this way of dancing othered the movements and inscribed them onto black bodies.

The opponents of the modern dances used this othering of ‘African-American movements and dance styles’ to discourage Dutch people from engaging with them at all. Some of the professional dancers echoed the idea that Europeans were not able to dance like black people. However, for them this was no reason to abstain from the modern dances all together. Instead, they interpreted it as a confirmation of their standpoint that the dances needed to be altered in order for them to become suitable for a Dutch audience, or most precisely for Dutch bodily subjects. They believed that changing these dances and mixing them with European dance traditions would make the most extreme markers of blackness and

²⁰⁷ J.H. Speenhoff, ‘Dansen’, *Het Leven: Geïllustreerd* 21, no. 15 (1926) 457.

immoral sexual associations fade. Amongst the Dutch dance teachers then, the modern dances were not considered to be completely black because they had their roots in African-American culture or contained aspects of it. In contrast to the European immigrants in the United States, these Dutch professionals did not apply the ‘one-drop-rule’ to dancing.

Despite all the efforts of professionals to convince dancers that they should not try to imitate African-American dance styles, it seems that there existed a notable group of persons in Dutch society who did not want to erase all the ‘markers of blackness’ in the dances. First of all, this becomes apparent from the large written record on the attempts of professionals and opponents of dancing to convince Dutch dancers that they should not take up these movements (any more). Moreover, some journalists explicitly expressed the belief that there existed an impulse amongst the Dutch to embody ‘the wild primal instincts of the uncivilised niggers’.²⁰⁸ While this latter finding refers to a concern that existed amongst sceptics of the modern dances, it seems that this anxiety was not unjustified. As I already illustrated in chapter 1, there were people who especially enjoyed themselves when dancing ‘wildly’.

The question why this need existed amongst Dutch dancer will be addressed in the next chapter. Here, I will limit myself to the question to what extent the experience of the dancers was limited to an embodiment of the African-American other, as the experience of the European immigrants seems to have been according to Robinson. I will argue that, because the ‘one-drop-rule’ was not applied to dance in the Netherlands, the experience of Dutch dancers was not limited to an embodiment of a singular other.

Latin movements

In the Netherlands, not all the wild movements in the modern dances could be attributed to black persons. As is scantily acknowledged in contemporary historical research into the popularity of modern dances, criticism was also uttered in regard to the Latin roots of the movements. During this period, it was well known that the tango and the rumba had different origins than the Charleston, black bottom, or shimmy. According to the professionals who defended the Latin dances on the European dance floor, the tango, and the rumba – as they were danced in the Netherlands – had only little in common with their Cuban, Brazilian or Argentina precursors. The original rumba was considered a ‘wild’ dance. Like the modern dances with ‘African-American roots’, this dance was characterised as unfit for ‘civilised

²⁰⁸ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 12. Original: ‘drang verklaard naar wilde oer-instincten van onbeschaafde niggers’. See also: J.W.F. Werumeus Buning, *Over danskunst* (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij Ontwikkeling, 1926) 14.

dancers' because it was 'animal-like, with a strong rhythm', which required the dancers to move their shoulders and hips.²⁰⁹ *Algemeen Handelsblad* emphasised the 'wild' character of the rumba, by reporting that the Cuban government forbade its citizens to dance the original rumba.²¹⁰

The tango, in its 'untranslated stage', was also marked as unsuited for 'civilised dancers', as the 'wild' movements were seen as vulgar and suggestive.²¹¹ However, in this case 'wild' did not only refer to the 'erotic image' of the dance. This dance form was also defined as such because it was said to have developed itself in 'pubs for thieves' where 'the weak, sensual, sliding music of this dance, influenced passionate feelings in such a manner, that the dancing often ran wild and resulted in a bloody fight, in which people and revolvers played a big part'.²¹²

Opponents of the modern dances did not frequently refer to this 'wild' and 'dangerous' character of the Latin dances. Dance fanatics mentioned the above mentioned 'prejudices' to counter them, by explaining that the European form of the tango did not include big or wild movements and would not raise heated feelings, but strangely, in practice there were few complaints against which the dance teachers needed to justify themselves. It appears to have been unnecessary for the dancers to take up such a defensive attitude. Why then would the dance fanatics bother to address the myths revolving around Latin dances? I argue that the professionals addressed these issues, not because they needed to explain their involvement with the dances, but as a commercial strategy. They referred to the associations of 'wildness' to make the new dances more attractive for dancers. They believed that such associations made the dances more exciting and gave them some edge. As is mentioned above, people enjoyed taking up these frowned-upon movements and transgressing the boundaries of bodily restrictions by embodying the other. The Latin dances were perfect for this, as they were characterised by their ambivalence: they were considered to be 'beautiful and charming' on the one hand, and 'repulsive' on the other hand.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Original: 'animale dans met een zeer sterk rythme'.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 10 December 1913.

²¹² 'One-Step = two-Step = tango!', *Het Leven*, 139. Original: 'misdadigerskroegen', en 'de weeke, zinnelijke, glijdende muziek van dezen dans, de verhitte moederen dermate in beweging bracht, dat de dans onttaardde in een bloedige vechtpartij, waarin mensen en revolvers een groote rol speelden'.

²¹³ 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

Embodying the American other

These modern dances were associated with more than sexual, primitive, or exotic coloured others. The fact that these dances were often described as American dances, points out that in general, they were associated with the United States and Americanism. Various historians have already emphasised this connection. They argue that, together with the African-American influence, this origin was one of the main problems uttered against the new dances. They explain that critics rejected this leisure activity because they regarded it as a form of anonymous American mass culture.²¹⁴ To be more precise, van Ginkel explains that ‘pessimistic intellectuals’ objected to the modern dances because they feared that the modernisation process, embodied in the modern dances, would establish an anonymous mass society in the Netherlands.²¹⁵ Opponents of the dances considered such a mass culture to be problematic, as they experienced it as ‘devoid of meaning’, ‘cultureless’ and ‘a boundless ‘general’ or ‘bogus civilization’, disconnected from the imagined national community’.²¹⁶ For them, it was inconceivable that mass culture could establish a real sense of community, as it was too general: it was not an expression of a specific *Gemeinschaft*, as folkdance for example was believed to be. According to Snape, at least in England, there was another, even more important reason for this negative attitude towards Americanisation. He points out that, contrary to what historians might suspect, the English opponents of Americanisation through jazz dance, were less concerned with the preservation of ‘a newly defined national heritage’ than with ‘the need to protect taste from becoming debased’ – for example by British women dressing themselves as American ‘flappers’.²¹⁷

Taking up this finding of Snape, I will argue in this paragraph, that also in the Netherlands Americanisation through modern dance was associated with more than only the occurrence of mass culture. I consider the findings of Verhoef, who has illustrated that in the Netherlands – at least with regard to another important American form of leisure culture, cinema – Americanism referred to various perceived aspects of the culture in the United States, such as commercialisation and sensationalism.²¹⁸ Without denying the importance of the association between dance and mass culture, I will explore the other ways in which

²¹⁴ Robert Snape, ‘Continuity, change and performativity in leisure: English folk dance and modernity 1900–1939’, *Leisure Studies* 28, no. 3 (2009) 297-311, 308; Rob van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of dancing: foreign vs. folk dances and the politics of culture in the Netherlands, 1919-1955’, *Ethnologia Europaea* 38, no. 2 (2008) 45-65, 60.

²¹⁵ Van Ginkel, ‘The dangers of dancing’, 50.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹⁷ Snape, ‘Continuity, Change and Performativity in Leisure’, 306.

²¹⁸ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 176.

opponents and advocates of jazz dance associated them with Americanism. In this analysis, I include the question to what extent Americanism was associated with modernity. As I explained in my introduction, historians have often portrayed the advocates of the American dances as proponents of modernity, while they have depicted the opponents of this foreign leisure activity as traditionalists. In this paragraph, I analyse this view by exploring the discourse on Americanism. Was Americanism equated to modernity, as for example Verhoef suggests? Did Dutch journalists and governmental inquirers consider Dutch society to be unmodern before it came into contact with the ‘New World’?

Furthermore, in order to connect the views on Americanism to the ideas on the African and South American roots of modern dance, I will analyse how the association between Americanism and the modern dances influenced the experience of embodying ‘the other’ through dance. Could the modern dances be viewed as simultaneously originating from an African, South, and Caucasian American culture?

Mass culture

As van Ginkel, and other historians have argued, the American dances were associated with mass culture. Especially pessimistic intellectuals and art critics, who were strong proponents of folk dance and a revival of ‘(rural) community life’, negatively identified the jazz dances as a part of ‘meaningless mass culture’. However, this view was not limited to fierce opponents of this new leisure activity. The government too, worried about the development of mass culture and especially the loss of social cohesion that came with it. As the report on the question of dance argued ‘one does not have to be a pessimist, to realise, that this forms a danger for Europe’.²¹⁹

In line with van Ginkel’s findings, it seems that most critics saw the modern dances as a symbol or the embodiment of the Americanisation of Dutch society. Writer and literary critic Menno ter Braak used the metaphor ‘dancing the Charleston’ to refer to the Americanisation process in the Netherlands, or as he called it ‘the poisoning by American superficiality’.²²⁰ For him, America was characterised by its ‘shallowness’, ‘haste’, ‘efficient mentality’, ‘will to conquer the world in a march pace’, and ‘corporate character’.²²¹ Indeed, for most other critics, Americanisation primarily referred to ‘the demise of the fabric of

²¹⁹ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 12. Original: ‘Men hoeft toch werkelijk geen pessimist te zijn, om te beseffen, dat hier voor Europa een gevaar schuilt’.

²²⁰ Menno ter Braak, *Afscheid van domineesland* (Brussel: A.A.M. Stols, 1931) 200.

²²¹ Ter Braak, *Afscheid van domineesland*, 200-202.

organic community ties' through 'social differentiation and specialisation'.²²² As the governmental report on 'the dancing issue' explains, American society was said to be characterised by superficial contacts between people. These came forth out of the differentiation, mechanisation, and specialisation of the labour process, and the perceived melting-pot culture; the ideal of 'e pluribus unum' which stated that the many diverse cultures that came together on American soil would create one American culture.²²³ The dance commission argued that in this country 'the organic ties' were dislocated, because individuals could not experience the whole labour process anymore as they were only responsible for one aspect of the production process. This limited connection to their labour would limit people's ability to develop their inner life and deep, meaningful relationships with others. Cultural critics argued that these characteristics of American society were expressed through modern dances and that the dancers taking them up would experience these negative markers of American culture.²²⁴ For example, social-democratic proponents of folk dancing Anne de Koe and Anna Sanson-Catz argued that dances like the Charleston symbolised 'the fast rhythm of the far going mechanisation of the working life and the hasty traffic flows of the metropole'.²²⁵ According to them the convulsive movements of the dances developed from people's fake, limited, and hopeless connection to life and society which stemmed from a condition in which people were only acknowledged for their role in the social labour process. They believed that just like labourers in society, dancers that took up these movements were only considered as instruments.²²⁶

However, not everyone agreed that the modern dances were only linked to the mechanisation of the labour process and the mass culture in a symbolic way. Groups that had a more positive attitude towards dancing, such as the government and the dance teachers, did not believe that dancers experienced the movements as the embodiment of the mechanisation and specialisation process, but as a way to cope with these developments.²²⁷ Most journalists argued that Americans danced to forget their corporate worries for some time.²²⁸ According to the governmental commission, Americans tried to create social cohesion amongst themselves

²²² Van Ginkel, 'The dangers of dancing', 49.

²²³ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 20.

²²⁴ See for example: Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche kunstindrukken*, 8.; 'Amerika als danscentrum', *De Telegraaf*; A. Sanson-Catz and A. de Koe ed., *Oude Nederlandse volksdansen* (Amsterdam: Stichting Jeugd, 1927).; Ter Braak, *Afscheid van domineesland*, 200-202.

²²⁵ Sanson-Catz and de Koe, *Oude Nederlandse volksdansen*, 5.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²²⁷ De Bie et. al, *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 10-12.; Werumeus Buning, *Over danskunst*, 14.

²²⁸ Van Ammers- Küller, *Mijn Amerikaansche reis*, 53.

to counter the development of alienation through the mechanisation process and the multi-cultural character of the society. They did so by searching for a connection in the ‘instinctive sphere’; by hoisting the flag, singing the national anthem, uttering cries and yells, making music, and of course dancing. In this line of thought, dancing was considered to function as a way to bring people closer together.

In the next chapter I will further explain in detail how dancers experienced this escapist aspect of the American dances. Here, it is more important to focus on the fact that the governmental report argued that it was problematic that European dancers embodied these American markers. Interestingly, the commission did not argue this because it feared that the Americanisation of the Netherlands would be accompanied by the ‘modernisation’, i.e. mechanisation and specialisation of the labour process. The commission pointed out that Europe had already entered this process in its own, milder form. Instead, the anxiety of the government was focused on the experience of instinctive emotions. The commission feared that Europe would become disordered and could even be torn apart by a civil war when the instinctive life of its people was triggered. It argued that such a horrible outcome was possible, because the people belonging to different nations did not feel connected to one European Unity, as the Americans did.²²⁹ The commission explained that in contrast to America, Europe did not have a flag to hoist ‘that can hypnotise the people’, a European anthem that ‘expresses our continental unity’, or yells and cries that are able to bind us ‘as naïve children’ by uttering a chauvinism of ‘Europe first’.²³⁰ Because of this the commission believed that the ‘instinctive emotions’ generated through dance, could not be guided towards a feeling of social cohesion, but would instead lead to the derailing of people.²³¹

The belief that only Americans could benefit from instinctive emotions was not only tied up with views on social relations, but also with the perspective on the cultural products from America. The government and various journalists joining in the dancing debate argued that the culture produced in America, of which the modern dances were the most important export product, should be classified as low culture in comparison with the ‘high art’ of Europe.²³² Like the people inhabiting the United States, American culture was seen as

²²⁹ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 10-12.; Werumeus Buning, *Over danskunst*, 10-13.

²³⁰ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 12. Original: ‘die hypnotiseeren kan’, ‘om uitdrukking te geven aan onze continentale eenheid’, ‘waarin een chauvinisme van “Europe first” ons als naïve kinderen kan binden’.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²³² See for example: *Ibid.*, 12-13.; Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche kunstindrukken*, 136.; Koenders, ‘De nieuwste dans’, *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant*.

superficial, instinctive, and ceremonial, instead of deep and reflective.²³³ According to the governmental commission this difference illustrated why too much affiliation with the instinctive modern dances formed a danger for Europeans; modernising Europe should not need to seek unity through superficial gatherings, but through deep contemplation and high art.²³⁴ However, even though the government argued that it was a negative development, it seems that many European dancers were enthusiastic about the instinctive dances from America. This becomes clear from statements such as L.M.G. Arntzenius's claim that he finds it remarkable, that while the Americans are buying and importing the high art of Europe, the Europeans are keen to welcome the American second-hand culture as it was expressed in dance.²³⁵

Emancipation and elegance

Through dancing people were also able to embody a second marker of Americanism: the free spirited and emancipatory attitude, and behaviour of women. On and around the dance floor, American women were said to engage more casually with men than women in the 'Old World' did.²³⁶ Europeans saw American females as easy-going, independent women, who were less prudish than the European ladies and were not afraid to look for 'beauty in healthy, toughing bodily reaction', i.e. dance.²³⁷ Through the modern dances these women were able to display such characteristics, and in and around the dance hall they could experience the markers of American femininity.

Describing her experiences in the United States, the Dutch writer Jo van Ammers-Küller argued that in the new time-period 'the flapper rules the World'. She explains that it seemed as if the whole world revolved around her [the flapper], this 'happy woman who has 'boyfriends', which whom she goes dancing and dining, swimming and driving, in an on-going search for 'fun' and 'good times''.²³⁸ These American ladies were characterised by their independence, their ability 'to take care of themselves'. According to Ammers-Küller, in practice this meant for example, that in contrast to the Dutch youth, these young women did

²³³ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 10-12.; Werumeus Buning, *Over danskunst*, 12.

²³⁴ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 11.

²³⁵ Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche kunstindrukken*, 136.

²³⁶ 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

²³⁷ Therese Hoven, *Meisjesleven: Een meisjes detective* (Gouda, G.B. van Goor zonen 1925) 20.; 'Dansen, dansen, zelfs in de sneeuw!', *Het Leven* 21, no. 45 (1926) 1431.; Van Ammers-Küller, *Mijn Amerikaansche reis*, 149-150.; 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

²³⁸ Van Ammers-Küller, *Mijn Amerikaansche reis*, 64. Original: 'voorlijke meisjes met hun "boyfriends", met wie ze gaan dansen en dineeren, zwemmen en autorijden, in een onafgebroken jacht naar "fun" en "good times"'.

not need any chaperones during dance parties.²³⁹ The writer argued that even when Dutch readers would frown upon such habits and point out that the relations between young men and women are not innocent enough to allow such liberties, she considered this attitude to have a positive consequence. She explains;

the safest person, is the one who learns how to take care of herself, these girls are not silly geese, who believe in sappy moonlight patter of love and loyalty as fools; 'flirt' is a sport in America that requires practice and skills.²⁴⁰

This writer argued that the free-spirited attitude of American women enabled them to look after themselves, by being knowledgeable about the intentions of men.

However, even this woman who saw the positive outcome of the emancipated behaviour of the Americans, admitted that the freedom of the 'flappers' could go too far for Dutch standards. In this latter opinion, other journalists supported her.²⁴¹ They either thought that the flapper's behaviour was too up-front – for example American girls did not shy away from asking a man to dance, instead of having to await an invitation²⁴² –, too free in their relations to men, or not classy. In Arthur van Schendel's novel *De wereld een dansfeest* the narrator remarks; 'she moved herself with [...] a dignity that formed a strange contrast to the new American dances [that she performed]'.²⁴³ From this remark it becomes clear that the writer depicted the American dances and the bodies that performed them as not classy or elegant.

While it was easily associated with female behaviour, many Dutch journalists saw Americans in general as less classy or elegant than Europeans. This association was created by the disapproved free relations between men and women, the idea that Americans created low culture, and in general the way in which they danced. Especially in the period in which Dutch journalists first started to encounter the modern way of dancing, they uttered their resentment towards the inelegant movements of the Americans. In *Algemeen Dagblad* a journalist wrote:

²³⁹ Van Ammers- Küller, *Mijn Amerikaansche reis*, 149.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 151. Original: 'Het veiligst is altijd wie op zich zelf leert passen, deze meisjes zijn stellig geen domme ganzen, die in verliefde praatjes in den maneschijn als in eeden van trouw gelooven; 'flirt' is in Amerika ook een sport en een oefening en 'skill' vereischt'.

²⁴¹ See for example: 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; Van Schendel, *De wereld een dansfeest*, 149-150.

²⁴² 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

²⁴³ Van Schendel, *De wereld een dansfeest*, 149-150. Original: 'Zij bewoog zich met [...], een waardigheid die vreemd afstak bij de nieuwe Amerikaansche dansen'.

I found the way in which the Americans molested the Waltz downright annoying and ridiculous. The whole three-four time is finished off with one slow step. The couples do not twirl, do not glide but walk in a very slow step next to or in front of each other.²⁴⁴

The new way of dancing irritated the author. For him, and various others, the fact that the dancers walked instead of glided indicated less gracefulness and a lack of taste amongst the Americans.

Foreignness precedes racial differentiation

As becomes clear from these findings, the American other that could be embodied through modern dance was characterised by a loss of a deep connection with other individuals, superficiality, creation of low ‘instinctive’ culture, free and independent behaviour of women, and lack of class. These markers of American identity differ to some extent from the associations with the coloured others. Indeed, it seems that while the Latin and African-American roots of the dances were said to be visible in specific bodily expressions, the Caucasian American was associated with specific behaviour in and around the dance hall. To what extent this difference was created by a racist assumption that coloured people would express their racial or ethnical markers through their bodies and emotions, while Caucasian would utter this through actions motivated less by instinct than intellect, is a question that future research should answer.

Here, it is important to point out that there was also some overlap in the othering images of the Caucasian and African-American other. Both others were said to have a freer and less prudish attitude towards inter-sexual relations. In addition, both the coloured and the Caucasian American other were attributed a culture of emotional expression that is more instinctive and primitive than the Dutch rational or deep reflective culture. Perceived through the lens of othering theory, it becomes clear that both the Caucasian and African-American other were attributed characteristics from which the Dutch wanted to distance themselves. Indeed, as is explained in further detail in the next chapter, to some extent the Dutch used these othering images to create a self-image: it helped them to establish what they were not. They argued that in contrast to these others they were virtuous, rational, created high culture, and capable of rational reflexion.

²⁴⁴ ‘Dansende Amerikanen’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Original: ‘Ik vond de manier, waarop de Amerikanen de wals mishandelden, gewoonweg ergelijk en belachelijk. De geheele maat van drie wordt met één langzamen pas afgewerkt. De paren draaien niet, glijden niet, maar loopen met een zeer langzamen pas naast of voor elkaar’.

Interestingly, it seems that – even though the Dutch differentiated between the African and Caucasian American – this self-image was created by attributing negative characteristics to both coloured and Caucasian people. Clearly, in the Dutch dancing debate the self-image that was created was not only based on skin-colour: after all, the white Americans were described as less civilized than the Europeans, but more civilized than the African-American and Latino. For now, the question remains what the implications these findings have on research on the history of ethnicity and race in the Netherlands. Does it counter the view that only after the Second World War the Dutch references to race were replaced with the concept of ‘ethnicity’ which refers to ‘the social system that gives meaning to ethnic differences between people – to differences based on origin, appearance, history, culture, language, and religion’?²⁴⁵ And in addition, does it contradict gender scholar Gloria Wekker’s claim that the concept ‘ethnicity’ is ‘used in such hardened ways that biology and culture have become interchangeable in the stability that it is ascribed to the cultures of others’ while ‘being white’ is ‘invisibilized and installed as the norm’?²⁴⁶ While further research is necessary to answer these questions, here the finding that participants in the Dutch dancing debate differentiated between white Europeans and white Americans, implies that it might be too simplistic to argue that ethnicity is only applied to other *non-white* subjects. Without denying Wekker’s claim that othering images take up racial stereotypes, or that the Dutch often deny their racism, this finding at least makes gender and ethnicity scholars reflect on the usage of binary oppositions. Indeed, it seems that in the pre-Second World War Netherlands, being white was not the norm, but being a white European was. Clearly, not only race but a hybrid form of race and culture influenced self and other images. Indeed, the bodies of the dancers were not only inscribed with racist discourses, but also with cultural norms associated with geographical contexts.

To explain the overlap in othering images of the African and Caucasian Americans, it is useful to differentiate between racial and cultural othering images. This illustrates that the governmental commission typified America as a melting-pot,²⁴⁷ a society in which various cultures interacted with each other to create a new American culture.²⁴⁸ Though Dutch journalists and the government did make clear that some aspects of the modern dances had their roots in African-American culture, simultaneously they emphasised that the integration of these Afro-American markers in the dance culture was something typically American. This

²⁴⁵ Gloria Wekker, *White innocence: Paradoxes of colonialism and race* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2016) 22.

²⁴⁶ Wekker, *White innocence*, 22-23.

²⁴⁷ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 10-11.

²⁴⁸ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 20.

view of America as a melting-pot impacted the degree in which Dutch participants in the dancing debate could identify the dances along the lines of race. Robinson's research points out that European dancers used ragtime dancing strategically by emphasising the binary opposition between black and white to eclipse their own foreignness. In the Netherlands however, the dances were not experienced as such. Here the dances were primarily seen as American. The foreignness of the dances preceded racial differentiation in this context. As is explained above, in the Netherlands most dancers believed that the negative racial associations could be erased by adapting the dance steps. As is illustrated in chapter 1, parents, the government, and professional dancers tried to translate them, for example, by discouraging dancers to execute movements that were associated with African-American sexuality. Furthermore, these groups also tried to adapt some Caucasian American characteristics. They tried to change contact between the sexes by making supervision at dances mandatory, for example.

However, even though it was believed that most racial aspects of the dances could be eclipsed, it seemed impossible to erase all their 'foreignness'. Indeed, the superficiality of the contact in the dance hall could not be 'removed', and the lyrics of the dance music were often in English. But more importantly, it was impossible because there were no specific movements that could be left out, which were typified as American. Indeed, while race was perceived as something that was expressed in bodily movements, emotions, and specific behaviour, the foreignness of the dances, or the Americanness, was not located in such specific (bodily) expressions and actions but in the general atmosphere, the 'je ne sais quoi' that accompanied the dance culture.

The British other, a role model

When Dutch dance teachers needed to alter the American dances to make them more respectable, they often looked to Great Britain for guidance. During this period, 'the English style was leading'.²⁴⁹ According to Marlene Neeb, journalist of *Algemeen Handelsblad*, the English 'have created a technique, that forms an example for almost the whole civilised world'.²⁵⁰ Great Britain was believed to be a place where dancing was an important and widespread leisure activity.²⁵¹ According to *Het Leven* 'England is the land, that seizes every

²⁴⁹ Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*. Original: 'Vooral de Engelsche stijl geldt als toonaangevend'.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. Original: 'men heeft daar een techniek opgebouwd, die vrijwel de geheele beschaafde wereld tot voorbeeld sterkt'.

²⁵¹ 'Nieuws uit het buitenland', *De Dans* 1 no. 1 (1923), 2.

opportunity to participate in dance'.²⁵² More than that England was considered to be an exemplary nation that was characterised by its civility and class. It was the land of lords, gentlemen and ladies, a place with which the Dutch dancers wanted to identify themselves. Because it was believed that the country had a high level of civilisation, it was deemed only logical to follow the lead of the English Association for Dance Teachers in their decisions to alter American dances. Translating the American dances in the Netherlands often meant adapting them to the English style.²⁵³ Furthermore, if proponents of the modern dances needed to prove the respectability of a new dance they often referred to the fact that the specific dance was also practiced in London.²⁵⁴

However, while most professional dancers agreed to use the English dance style as a standard, some opponents of the modern dance form had different associations with England. An outspoken opponent of dance, doctor Evert van Dieren, who typified the jazz dances as a 'contagious sickness of the soul' argued that by performing these dances people embodied Englishness. For him this meant that they

like the English, attached too much value to the formal, to pretence; they show this by paying too much attention to vanities, embodied by the hairdressers, the tailors, and the dance teachers; those of whom always present themselves with a shining lock, a perfect hair line, a carefully shaved visage, ironed trousers, matching socks, tie, and pocket square (if possible a different colour everyday), and above all are able to perform the newest, licentious English negro dances with a straight face, as if he is cherishing the purest thoughts.²⁵⁵

According to van Dieren it is odd that these persons are considered to be correct these days, that they are said to be able 'to move themselves as gentlemen'.²⁵⁶ Instead, he argues, these people are putting up a façade. According to him, it was impossible to be classy as long as

²⁵² 'De Dans: 't rythme der beweging', 426. Original: 'Engeland het land is, dat elke mogelijkheid, hoe dan ook, om aan den dans deel te nemen, aangrijpt'.

²⁵³ 'De heeschappij van Terpsichore', *De Dans* 1, no. 2 (1923) 24.; Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; Koenders, 'De nieuwste dans', *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant*.

²⁵⁴ 'De "Charleston", de veelbesprokene!', *Het Leven* 21, no. 15 (1926) 471.

²⁵⁵ E. van Dieren, *Besmettelijke zielsziekten* (Baarn: N.V. Hollandia-Drukkerij, 1931) 128. Original: 'ze hechten „quite-English" véél te veel aan het *vormelijke*, aan den *uiterlijken schijn*; ze toonen „zulks o.m. door overgrootte aandacht te schenken aan de nietigheden, die des kappers, des kleermakers, en des dansmeesters zijn; „wie altijd voor den dag komt met een glimmende kuif, een onberispelijke scheiding, een zorgvuldig uitgeschoren gelaat, een broek „in de plooi; sokken das en borstzakdoekje van één kleur (maar liefst „iedereen dag een *andere* kleur), en bovendien de nieuwste, *wulpsche* „Engelsche negerdansen weet uit te voeren met een uitgestreken gezicht als koesterde hij op dat oogenblik de reinste gedachten'.

²⁵⁶ Van Dieren, *Besmettelijke zielsziekten*, 128. Original: 'bewegen als een gentleman'

one was enjoying the ‘negro dances’, whether they were performed in an adapted form or not. Clearly his negative attitude towards modern dances made it impossible for him to appreciate their performance in any format.

For most people involved with the jazz dances however, the status of the dances improved because of its associations with Britain. The eagerness with which the Dutch dancers imported English dance styles and habits, illustrates that this social group was enthusiastically involved in a transnational culture. The fact that the professionals argued that the American markers of the dances needed to be softened somewhat, is therefore not necessarily proof of the fact that the Dutch wanted to ward off too many foreign influences as some historians have suggested. It might however suggest that the Netherlands were less keen on embodying un-European characteristics. This claim will be further explored in the next chapter. Whatever the reason was for the Dutch welcoming attitude towards embodying markers of ‘Englishness’, it illustrates that – in line with the findings of for example Madelon the Keizer²⁵⁷ – the Netherlands were not an isolated province with regard to culture. Indeed, the Dutch were eager to take part in a large transnational modern leisure culture.

Conclusion

Jazz dances were part of a large transnational culture. The new dance style travelled across different countries and continents before it arrived in the Netherlands. Because of this transnational character, the dances connoted various ethnical others in the Netherlands. The wild movements of the head, shoulders, buttocks, and hips were associated with African-Americans. Sceptics and professional dancers tried to erase these Afro-American characteristics from the dances, because they were afraid that European dancers would embody a primitive hyper-active sexuality through these movements. They believed that such racial aspects could be removed by altering the dances, often by changing them according to English standards. Interestingly it seems that the wildness of the modern dances was not only located in African-American culture, but was also said to have its roots in South-American dances. Strikingly, there seem to have been less problems with the erotic and dangerous wildness that the Latin dances connoted, as the ambiguous nature of these dances – they were both beautiful and repulsive – was often considered to be more fascinating than dangerous.

In contrast to Robinson’s findings in the case of European immigrants in the United States, it seems that the Dutch dancers did not apply the ‘one-drop-rule’ to dance. Here the

²⁵⁷ De Keizer and Tates, ed., *Moderniteit*.

opposite was true: dance teachers believed that they could erase unwanted ‘racial markers in the dances’. In the context of the Netherlands, the foreignness or Americanness of the dances preceded racial influences on the new dancing style. It is too simplistic to explain the othering practices in the dancing debate through the lens of the black-white binary. In the Netherlands, participants in the dancing debate differentiated between white Americans and white Europeans. Moreover, the debate illustrates that the othering images of the African- and Caucasian-American other overlapped to some extent. A plausible explanation for this is, that people involved in the debate on dancing saw the dances as originating, first and foremost, from the American melting-pot culture in which African, Latin and various European cultures had blended together.

Interestingly, because the Dutch participants of the dancing debate emphasised the foreignness or Americanism of the dances over the racial associations, they were unable to erase all the ties with the United States. While they believed that the racial markers – seen as located in specific bodily movements or behaviour – could be dismissed, they were unable to erase the whole cultural association between the dances and their American roots. For example, the government was concerned with the fact that Europeans took over the superficial, instinctive social interaction that characterised American society and could be embodied through dance. These kinds of shallow and inelegant social relations were said to be unsuitable for modernising Europe, where people of different nations needed to bond through deep and meaningful interaction. However, as most people realised that it was impossible to forbid persons from engaging in this immensely popular leisure activity, dance teachers suggested that the Dutch should follow the example of the British dancers. They believed that executing the dances in the English style, would allow the Dutch to participate in this activity in a more lady- or gentleman-like fashion.

In this chapter, it becomes clear that the ‘agents of translation’ that are mentioned in the previous chapter, were eager to transform the dancing culture, because they associated it with various others who were said to differ a lot from the Dutch dancers. The motivations for the transformations were clearly motivated by the cultural stereotypical images of African, Caucasian, and Latin Americans. Cultural discourses on the other stimulated and limited them in their translation processes. Interestingly, this other was not always identified as coloured, or even non-European, and could be attributed positive characteristics. The British other for example, was represented as a role-model, instead as something the Dutch did not want to be. In the next chapter, I analyse the complexity of the presence of these multiple and various othering images and its implications for our understanding of othering theory. In addition, I

explain how the dancer's embodiment of these different others influenced their understanding and experience of modernity.

Chapter 3:

Embodying the other to liberate, create and develop the modern self:

How the dancers used the associations with the other to reflect on, challenge, and create their modern self-images

The previous chapter has illustrated that the modern dances had a clear transcultural character, and that there was controversy about the degree in which people should engage with the markers of foreignness in the dances. The fact remained however, that the people involved with the dancers would always encounter some transcultural aspects, as it was impossible to totally erase them. Dancers would experience some sort of embodiment of the African-American, Latin, Caucasian American, or British other. Above I have established what this embodiment entailed; how the Dutch dancers saw these others. In this chapter I will go a step further and research how the dancers utilised these experiences of the other and how they related them to modernity

According to Robinson, the embodiment of the black other functioned as a means for self-liberation. She argues that this experience operated as a masquerade; by imitating an other, the dancers felt the freedom to be playful, sexual and engage in self-parody.²⁵⁸ In this chapter I will research to what extent the Dutch dancers experienced such a liberating feeling when they embodied the various others with whom they associated the modern dances. However, in doing so, I also aim at nuancing Robinson's theory. First, I consider the finding that the Dutch experienced embodiments of multiple others and analyse what kind of effect this had on the self-liberating function. Did the embodiment of the African-American enable Dutch people to experience a different kind of liberation than the European immigrants in America that Robinson describes? Secondly, I amplify Robinson's theory by posing the question; what does the concept self-liberation refer to? Was it simply a form of escapism from the modernising society? Or did the participation in the masquerade enable the dancers to transgress social norms; could they reflect, challenge, and even change traditional and modern cultural customs through the embodiment of the other?

In this chapter, I argue that self-liberation could refer to all of these different meanings, because dancing influenced 'the self' on three levels. First of all, it impacted the creation of a *(trans)cultural self-image*: the construction of a (modern) European identity.

²⁵⁸ Robinson, 'Performing American', 114.

Secondly, it influenced the liberation of the *gendered, and bodily self* in Dutch society. And thirdly, it functioned as a means to develop the *self* on a more individual level, on the level of a subject's personality.

Transcultural identity: the creation of a European self-image

On a meta-level, the transcultural dance practices functioned to establish a transnational identity. This was the case, because the professional dancers were actively involved in the process of adapting the dances in such a way that they were suitable for the Dutch dancers, and more general the European public. By determining what kind of behaviour was acceptable in the dance hall, the dance teachers defined important cultural and social characteristics or ideals of the practitioners. These mediators decided which markers of others were too incompatible with their own culture, and which features suited their own identity so well that they needed to be emphasised or implemented in the new leisure culture.

To understand such processes of constructing a (trans)national identity, various scholars have used the concept of 'othering', a concept most famously used by Edward Said in his research to Western images of the Orient and the Occident. Said's theory, inspired by the ideas of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, describes that the othering images of the Orient were produced in 'a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony'.²⁵⁹ According to Said the stereotypical image of the other that came into existence gained meaning in a binary opposition. This served the purpose of creating a sense of 'us' versus 'them'. In this binary opposition characteristics were assigned to the other that were seen as inferior, while the self, the Occident, was described with its superior counterparts.²⁶⁰ Thus by emphasising that the West was everything the East was not, the Occident created a superior self-identity.²⁶¹ While Said applies this theoretical concept of othering to the specific way in which the West referred to the Middle-East, an understanding of this conceptual framework is of importance when researching the creation of self and other images in general. It offers a theory that allows scholars to argue that people shape their identities by defining what they are not. For example, applied to the development of an understanding of the concept 'Europe', political scientist John McCormick argues that 'Europeans were for centuries understood less on their own terms than in relation to

²⁵⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, New York: Penguin, 2003) 5.

²⁶⁰ For example, if the Orient was said to be drenched in religion, the Occident was assigned secularity or when the Orient was seen as backward, the Occident could claim to be modern.

²⁶¹ Said, *Orientalism*, 332.

outsiders'.²⁶² In other words, he claims that Europeans identified themselves through the belief that they differed from others.

The concept of Europe however, proves to be too complicated to grasp solely through the concept of othering. According to contemporary historian Bo Stråth, Europeans do not simply experience Europe as belonging to their self-image. Instead Europeans can see Europe simultaneously as something to which they belong, and as something that belongs to others. He argues that 'Europe has been an element of both national self-understanding, the nation as a part of Europe, and of something different outside the nation'.²⁶³ According to him, the meaning of Europe is constructed 'in the intersection between self-images and images of the other'.²⁶⁴

Applying this perspective to the history of the concept Europe, Stråth limits himself to the period after the Second World War. His demarcation of time is in line with the claim of McCormick that Europe was divided until 1945, and that only after the Second World War there emerged a sense of a common European mission or purpose.²⁶⁵ Many historians studying European identity tend to follow this line of thought and limit their focus to the period after 1945. According to historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle this is a justified decision. He claims that 'there was no Europe' between 1914 and 1945, 'as a destructive combination of nationalism, imperialism, and fascism undermin[ed] the region materially and intellectually, [and] assur[ed] an almost continuous state of civil war'.²⁶⁶ However, not all historians agree with this. Antony Pagden for example, traces the history of the concept of Europe back to Antiquity and argues that a European identity had developed long before the Second World War. According to him the complex understanding of Europe as a space that belongs both to a self and other image has a long history, as Europe 'has for long possessed an identity as a cultural space where there have been and continue to be frequent political unions'.²⁶⁷

In this paragraph I involve myself in this debate on the concept of Europe, by analysing the practice of othering and translating in the transcultural dance culture. By doing

²⁶² John McCormick, *Europeanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

²⁶³ Bo Stråth, 'A European identity: To the historical limits of a concept', *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 4 (2002) 391.

²⁶⁴ Stråth, 'A European identity', 391.

²⁶⁵ McCormick, *Europeanism*, 18–19.

²⁶⁶ Translation by McCormick. *Ibid.*, 19. Cited from: Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *L'Idée d'Europe dans l'histoire* (Paris: Denoel, 1965) 261.

²⁶⁷ Anthony Pagden, 'Europe: Conceptualizing a continent', in: Anthony Pagden ed., *The idea of Europe: From antiquity to the European Union* (Cambridge, Washington: Cambridge University Press, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2002) 33-54, 54.

so, I try to determine how the Dutch shaped their national and European identity during the early twentieth century. Did the Dutch dancers already have a sense of a European identity before the Second World War? And if so, what did it look like? What was the position of the nation in this transnational culture? And how was the concept of Europe given shape? Did it indeed develop, because the dancers tried to define themselves against others? Or did the continuous cultural exchange with these others make the process more complicated?

A sense of being European pre-1945

Looking at the dancing debate of the early twentieth century, it is striking that the professional dancers who needed to adjust the foreign dances, were less concerned with making the dances suitable for ‘the Dutch’, than with adapting them to ‘European’ standards. The dance teachers were more inclined to talk about ‘European dance styles’, ‘European movements’, ‘European trends’, and a ‘European audience’, than about ‘Dutch’ dance styles, movements, or customs.²⁶⁸ For them ‘Europeanism’ – to use McCormick’s term –, and not a Dutch identity, formed the first parameter of respectability and civilisation. This finding, is striking as it both contrasts the abovementioned argument that before 1945 there did not exist a sense of Europe, and Verhoef’s finding, that in the public debate on cinema, journalist primarily contrasted the image of the American other, with a national self-image, and only occasionally would refer to the American-Europe binary.²⁶⁹ It seems characteristic for the dancing debate that Europe, and not the nation, most prominently functioned as a parameter for an identity that contrasted Americanism. As is illustrated in chapter two, in this line of thought, the Dutch governmental commission researching ‘the dancing problem’ even pointed out that Americanisation was a danger for *Europe*, not specifically for the Netherlands.

However, looking more closely at the argument of the commission it becomes clear that it had a complex attitude towards the concept of Europe. As is explained in the previous chapter, the commission argued that Europe could be negatively influenced by American mass culture, because it lacked a feeling of a European unity. Indeed, the commission explicitly pointed out that different nations formed Europe and that the continent was ‘very diverse’.²⁷⁰ The report emphasises that, in contrast to Americans, Europeans did not experience a sort of national belonging to the continent. However, that did not necessarily mean that a European

²⁶⁸ Neeb, ‘Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 178.; Koenders, ‘De nieuwste dans’, *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant*.; ‘De Dans: ’t rythme der beweging’, *Het Leven*, 427.; Wessens, *Celly*, 196-197.

²⁶⁹ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 60.

²⁷⁰ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 12.

identity or culture was absent. Indeed, in line with the dance teachers, the commission defined (West-)European characteristics. For the members of the commission the most important identifier was that Europeans developed themselves along the lines of deep contemplation. As was already suggested in chapter 2, this view resonated within other texts on modern dance. Various journalists repeated the idea that, in contrast to (African) Americans, Europeans were less focused on instinctive pleasures and more on rational reflection, intellect, high art, class, and elegance.²⁷¹ Looking at these findings, it becomes clear that the Dutch participators in the dancing debate considered Europe a fragmented space with shared ideals: they did not see Europe as one whole, as it was made up out of various nations, but they did point out that Europeans shared characteristics, such as intellectually, rationality, elegance, and a love off high art. In line with Pagden's findings, it seems that in the Netherlands Europe was perceived as a cultural space with some shared values and ideals that was made up out of different nations.

The Dutch were very selective in identifying which nations belonged to this space of Europe. In the dancing debate, the practitioners most often referred to Great Britain, France, Germany, and the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent to Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Spain. Clearly, the journalists reporting on the new dancing culture were referring to Western Europe when they discussed European dance styles and characteristics. In addition, the dance teachers argued that only a few of these countries were exemplary of the European identity. The Dutch dancers simultaneously saw these countries as part of one European self to which they all belonged, and as other than the Dutch – in the sense that they embodied European ideals that the Dutch had not yet fully mastered. As was described above, it appears that the Dutch primarily preferred to follow the example of the British. Great Britain had taken over the position of France in this regard. Before the modern dances had become popular in Europe, not London but Paris had set the tone in the spheres of art, leisure, and fashion trends.²⁷² However, during the early twentieth century the position of France as the cultural trendsetter of Europe began to wane. This did not mean that the Dutch stopped valuing Parisian developments overnight. During the 1920s journalists still reported on French dancing styles, dress codes, and practices connected to the new leisure culture.²⁷³ Another important reference

²⁷¹ 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; Arntzeniüs, *Amerikaansche kunstindrukken*, 136.; Koenders, 'De nieuwste dans', *Provinciale Geldersche en Nijmeegsche courant.*; Arntzeniüs, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 178.; 'Kunst: "Black Follies"', *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 12.

²⁷² Buckland, 'From the artificial to the natural body', 59.

²⁷³ *De dans: geïllustreerd maandblad gewijd aan de veredeling der danskunst* (1923-1924).; 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; 'Wat zullen we dansen?', *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad.*; *Libelle* 1, no. 1 (1934).

culture was Germany. Even though the Dutch primarily looked at their neighbouring country as a role model for gymnastics and art dances, journalists made a habit out of mentioning trends in Berlin or comparing Dutch dance halls with the ones in Germany.²⁷⁴ For the Dutch journalists engaging in the new dancing culture, these three Western-European countries were the most important role models.

Transcontinental influences

As becomes clear from chapter 2, the Dutch dancing debate focused on defining the other in dance practices. Especially the professional dancers – who had the responsibility to make the dances respectable for the Dutch public as educators of the youth – identified which aspects of the dances belonged to others and were too incompatible with the European, and to some extent, Dutch (bodily) self, to be left intact. They pointed to the perceived ‘wildness’, ‘sexuality’, and ‘primitiveness’ of the African-American other, as being incomparable with the highly level of civilisation, chastity, and rationality of the European. They argued that the ‘sensuality’, ‘passion’, and ‘dangerousness’ of the Latinos did not belong in the European bodies. And they contrasted the perceived American ‘absence of deep social cohesion’, ‘superficiality’, and ‘lack of class’, with the presupposed presence of social connection through deep contemplation, meaningful art, and elegance of the Europeans.

From these practices of othering it seems that in the dancing debate the European self-identity was constructed in relation to outsiders; the dance teachers defined what Europeanism entailed by pointing out the characteristics of the others that were incompatible with their self-image. However, I argue that this process of self-identification of Europe in the dancing debate was more complex. This is the case first, because, as is illustrated above, it was not always well defined which groups belonged to the insider and outsider group. The role model countries such as Great Britain and France could simultaneously be considered as belonging to the self and being other. Secondly, as various critics of the othering theory have pointed out, identification processes cannot solely be based on fixed images of the other, as these cannot account for historical developments in self and other images.²⁷⁵ In order to better understand how a European self-image was constructed in the dancing debate, I shift my focus from othering theories to transcultural thought and the theory of *histoire croisée*. These theories explain that the places through which a cultural product or practice travels, are always affected

²⁷⁴ ‘Dansende Amerikanen’, *Algemeen Handelsblad.*; ‘One-step = Two-step = Tango!’, *Het Leven.*; Neeb, ‘Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?’, *Algemeen Handelsblad.*

²⁷⁵ Michiel Leezenberg and Gerard de Vries, *Wetenschapsfilosofie voor geesteswetenschappen* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012) 290.

by the exchange. They point out that cultures that export and receive an entity, for example dances, are transformed as they participate in the translation process. Applying this perspective to the translation process of the dances, I argue that the European dancers did not only identify themselves ‘against’ the others, but also – to some extent – ‘in line with’ them.

During the early twentieth century, the European self-image was defined in its transcultural relations with the American others. While not everyone could agree that Americanisation was a fact²⁷⁶ – indeed many dance teachers believed they made the American practices and products European – most people active in the new leisure culture agreed that they needed to take notice of the latest developments in America to remain up-to-date.²⁷⁷ One of the new ideals amongst the dance fanatics was to be modern, and fashionable. To achieve this, a person needed to be aware of the latest dance-trends that travelled the Atlantic, in order not to fall behind.²⁷⁸ In 1938 a fictive character of a short story in the women’s magazine *Margriet* said to his friend, who had not heard of the latest dance trend, ‘man, you are hopelessly behind! (...) you are out of date, old-fashioned (...)’.²⁷⁹ The exchange of dance traditions created a new ideal and awareness amongst Europeans that, just like the dances, the society was changing at a fast pace. For many people, it became important to keep up with all the changes. By being aware of the latest American trends people could display that they were part of an international culture, that they were *modern* Europeans. In this sense, I find in line with Verhoef and Cresswell, that – at least to some extent – America was associated with modernity.

Not everyone was positive about this new self-image however. L.M.G. Arntzenius argued in 1927

While America is buying all the “high” art of Europe, and imports musicians, actors, painters, and sculptors in large numbers, en masse Europe is growing fond of the “low” American art. Europe cheerily welcomes the one-step, fox-trot, charleston, and receives the dancing-girls and the negroes with open arms. Europe becomes – it is characteristic of all take-overs – plus royaliste que le roi: what is second-hand in America, is bon ton in our old world.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 136.

²⁷⁷ Neeb, ‘Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?’. Original: ‘De danskunst is internationaal en (...) Terpsichore veranderlijk is als alle vrouwen’.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.; ‘De dans-waanzin’, *Limburgsch Dagblad*.; ‘Dansende Amerikanen’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; ‘De Blue Swing Stomp’, *Margriet*, 4.

²⁷⁹ ‘De Blue Swing Stomp’, *Margriet*, 4. Original: ‘Maar man, dan ben je hopeloos achter!’ (...) “Je bent uit den tijd, verouderd’.

²⁸⁰ Arntzenius, *Amerikaansche Kunstindrukken*, 136. Original: ‘Terwijl Amerika de „hooge” kunst van Europa opkoopt, en musici, acteurs, schilders en beeldhouwers bij het gros importeert, wordt Europa en masse

According to him the ideal of keeping up with American trends was strange, maybe even a sign of decay. In line with Verhoef, I find that various journalists shared his negative amazement over the fact that so many people tried to keep up with the modernising and Americanising society.²⁸¹ However, I argue that in this case most of these views came forth out of nostalgia and a sad realisation that they were too old to be fully up-to-date.²⁸² The new ideal produced a very clear generation gap that was painfully noticed by the older persons as soon as they tried to participate in the new dancing culture.²⁸³ Clearly then, the exchange of dance traditions inevitably functioned as a means for the Dutch to take part in an international and modern leisure culture.

Liberating the gendered, and bodily self: challenging cultural norms

The cultural exchange of the dances led, not only to a transformation of the European, but also to the adaption to the gendered, and bodily self-images of the Dutch dancers. As is explained in the introduction, using the embodiment theory of Elizabeth Grosz allows me to illustrate that bodily subjects had agency. They did not only reflect or perform the dominant social discourses that were inscribed on their bodies, they could also make their own inscriptions on their own bodies and the bodies of others. However, Grosz does not make explicit how subjects were able to go beyond these cultural inscriptions and how they could alter their gender performances. In order to understand this process of reflection on and altering of cultural discourses, I turn my focus to the theory of Robinson. Taking up her finding that dancers experienced self-liberation through the embodiment of the other, I argue that dancers were able to challenge and transgress the social and gender norms inscribed on their bodies by imitating the inscriptions they made on the bodies of others. To be precise, I argue that dancers transformed norms by embodying the various others they associated with the modern dances.

verzot op de Amerikaansche „lage" kunst. Europa haalt met luid gejuich den one-step, fox-trot, charleston binnen, het ontvangt de dancing-girls en de negers met open armen. Europa wordt — het is kenmerkend voor alle overname — plus royaliste que le roi: wat hier in Amerika als tweede-rangs beschouwd wordt, is in ons oude werelddeel bon ton'.

²⁸¹ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 61.

²⁸² Amerika als danscentrum', *De Telegraaf*; 'Dansende Amerikanen', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

²⁸³ Julia Frank, *De onschuldige* (Leiden: Leidsche Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1924) 86.

Gendered self-image

Dominant gender discourses

With the emergence of the modern and American leisure culture, gender relations were changing. Men and women could interact with each other in a freer, less formal way than before, and they were able to meet new persons in a public sphere.²⁸⁴ Indeed, as sociologist Cas Wouters points out, it had become hard to deny that the dance hall had become one of the most important sites to meet members of the opposite sex.²⁸⁵ It functioned as a place where the modern ideal of romance – which was disseminated in women’s magazines, romantic novels, Hollywood films²⁸⁶ – was profound.²⁸⁷ According to the Dutch governmental commission, the dance floor formed a perfect place for adolescents to practice with expressing their feelings and interacting with members of the opposite sex.²⁸⁸ The members of the commission believed that ‘a care-free interaction in a familiar and pure atmosphere’ would enable young people to make a good choice in marriage.²⁸⁹ According to the Dutch government, the new modern means for interaction between the sexes was justified by a more conventional goal; finding a marriage partner. In line with the findings of Irish gender scholar Barbara O’Connor it seems that a ‘modern and Utopian discourse [of romance] operated alongside, and sometimes in tension with, the [more traditional] (...) imperative of finding a suitable marriage [partner]’.²⁹⁰

The government however, was also aware of the problems that the new forms of interaction could cause. As is pointed out in chapter 1, the commission feared that the dance hall could be a dangerous place for women. According to the members of the commission, the reason for this was that men’s and women’s erotic lives, which they expressed through dancing, developed differently. They claimed that women’s sensual feelings were steady and focused ‘unconsciously [on] searching for a life partner’, while men’s erotic feelings were more unstable and could from time to time be experienced as ‘conscious sexual desires’.²⁹¹ Indeed, as is illustrated in chapter 1, the view that the uncontrollable sexual desires of men

²⁸⁴ Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body’.; See also: Marcel Ronner, ‘De club van negen uur: memoires van een groepje vroolijke jongens en meisjes’, *De Dans* 1, no 2 (1923).; Yardaz, ‘De danssport’, *De Kunst*, 177-179.

²⁸⁵ Cas Wouters, *Seks en de Seksen: een geschiedenis van moderne omgangsvormen* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 2005) 36.

²⁸⁶ O’Connor, ‘Ruin and romance’, 59.

²⁸⁷ See for example: a column in *De Dans*: Ronner, ‘De club van negen uur’, *De Dans* (1923-1924).; NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8 diaries 1925-26 and 1927-36.; Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen*.

²⁸⁸ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 16-17.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20. Original: ‘onbewust zoekt ze naar een levenspartner’, ‘bewuste sexueele begeerte’.

could endanger the females whose sense of reality was said to be blurred by a vision of a romantic future,²⁹² was shared by various journalists who participated in the dancing debate.²⁹³ Looking at this material, many historians have pointed out that the dancing debate of the early twentieth century primarily focused on the question of the morality of the dances.²⁹⁴ However, shifting the focus to the experiences of the men and women that are discussed in this debate offers different insights.

Challenging the image of the woman as searching for a life partner

Analysing the perspective of the actual dancers, illustrates that in practice neither the experiences of men nor of women followed the myths about male and female sensuality that were inscribed upon men's and women's bodies by the authority figures – the government, parents, and dance teachers. First of all, it seems that not every woman was eagerly searching for a husband. In fact, various novels that include chapters on the relations of men and women that go dancing together, indicate that adolescent females postponed marriage until they were older, were very selective with regard to potential partners, or were not interested in it at all. In Menno ter Braak's novel *Dr. Dumay verliest* (1933) one female character is depicted as enjoying the company of one man on the dance floor and in the movie theatre, without wanting to marry him. The narrator explains

When Lucas started talking about marriage, Karin always became nervous. (...) Dancing and going to the movies remained pleasant; but most of the fun was ruined by the prospect of Lucas' nagging afterwards. (...) If he brought up marriage there was no stopping him. Sometimes he whined on continuously for half an hour.²⁹⁵

In comparison to the beliefs uttered by the governmental commission, here the roles seemed to have been reversed. The man is the one who is eager to wed while the woman is not interested in finding a life partner in him. This latter experience resonated in other sources. In the novel *De verlaten man* (1928), a female character dancing with a man proclaims to him that it is 'a fact' that she will remain unmarried.²⁹⁶ She explains that she does not refuse to be

²⁹² De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 21.

²⁹³ Booth-Clibborn, *Tooneel, bioscoop en dans*, 44.; 'Het dansgevaar', *De Sumatra Post*.; Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen*.; Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 9.

²⁹⁴ O'Connor, 'Ruin and romance', 53.; Brummel, *Holland danst*, 24.; Van Ginkel, 'The dangers of dancing', 47.; Derks, "'Harten warm, hoofden koel'"; Kaal, 'Verderfelijk vermaak!'; Snape, 'Continuity, change and performativity in leisure'; Cresswell, "'You Cannot Shake That Shimmie Here'".

²⁹⁵ Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 87. Original: 'Als Lucas over trouwen begon, werd Karin altijd erg zenuwachtig. (...) Dansen en naar een film kijken bleef prettig; maar een groot deel van het plezier werd bedorven door het vooruitzicht op Lucas' aandringen na afloop. (...) Was hij eenmaal op het trouwen gekomen, dan was hij er niet meer van af te brengen. Soms zanikte hij een half uur achter elkaar'.

²⁹⁶ Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 29.

wed to 'provoke' or 'make a statement', but that this is simply the way it is. She seems to consider this as a modern decision, or at least as an act that fits the time in which she lives, as she refers to her 'old' mother as 'up-to-date' for not insisting that she would engage herself.²⁹⁷ According to this woman, the view that all women wanted to get married was no longer accurate. This view is shared by an eighteen-year-old woman reflecting on marriage in her diary in 1925 after she comes home from a night on the dance floor. She explains that she used to believe it would be ideal to wed young, but now 'how older I get, the more I feel I am too young for marriage'.²⁹⁸ She explains that she 'does enjoy flirting and going a little bit too far, but not that far'.²⁹⁹

The last remark of this young woman points to a second indicator that the young people did not experience the interactions in the dance hall along the strict gender discourses that the government and journalists (re)produced. Indeed, in practice they seemed to challenge them by going beyond the presumed bodily restrictions. In general, many women were keen to visit the dance hall, not to find a marriage partner but to have fun, dance for the sake of dancing, and most importantly: to flirt.³⁰⁰ While many journalists proclaimed that American women were famous for engaging in 'the art of flirtation', by the 1920s Dutch women took up this American form of interaction between the sexes in the dance halls. For many women in the Netherlands, flirting seemed to have become one of the most interesting aspects of going out at night.³⁰¹ The young woman writing in her diary, who is cited above, judged the success of a night on the basis of the flirtations she had had and the amount of attention had received from men.³⁰² When reflecting on nights she spent on the dance floor she wrote down statements such as 'I took turns flirting with everyone!'.³⁰³ She explained into detail how she liked to turn the heads of the men in her company, and what kind of 'strategies' she used to make them jealous. For example, she argues:

From the beginning the tall one was floating around me. It was funny really. He joined us later, and danced with me non-stop. Until, at some moment, I had three dances with someone else and flirted [with the other man]. After that, he did not

²⁹⁷ Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 29.

²⁹⁸ NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diary 1925-26.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diaries 1925-26 and 1927-36.; Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen.*; Van Wessems, *Celly*, 77-78.; Van Wemeskerken, *Het handschoentje*, 36.; Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 66.

³⁰¹ NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diaries 1925-26 and 1927-36.; Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen.*

³⁰² NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diaries 1925-26 and 1927-36.

³⁰³ NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diary 1927-36.

dance with me for half an hour, and of course I pretended he did not exist. But after a while he showed up again and he reclaimed me.³⁰⁴

This young woman enjoyed herself by practicing her ‘flirtation strategies’ to get admirers on the dance floor. In novels, the same image appeared: female characters were often depicted as enjoying the ‘art of flirting’. The characters would sigh that they enjoyed being in a man’s arms, proclaim that they used their eye-lashes to turn a man’s head, or be thrilled to receive hand kisses.³⁰⁵

It seemed that from the 1920s onwards, many Dutch women were keen to embrace their sensuality through inhabiting a space that was associated with the flirtatious behaviour of the independent American woman. In contrast, to what the authority figures argued, women’s bodily experiences were not restricted by their ‘natural passivity’ or search for a live partner. On the contrary, in the dance hall they often used their bodies to go beyond this dominant norm and flirt: they would hold a man tight when they dance, enjoy the close embrace, dress themselves up in order to attract male gazes, and give their dance partner flirtatious glances.³⁰⁶

Men’s experiences of the changing gender relations

A third experience that illustrates that the Dutch youngsters did not internalise the strict gender discourses that authority figures referred to, is that of the men spending their leisure time in the dance hall. As is illustrated above, in various texts these men were depicted as dangerous womanizers driven by their uncontrollable sexual impulses. They were said to control the situation in the dance hall as they were to ask women to dance and to lead. Indeed, it seemed that many men enjoyed interactions with women on the dancefloor and that they enjoyed holding their dance partners close to their bodies.³⁰⁷ As the narrator of *Dr. Dumay* proclaims about a dancing man: ‘George felt more powerful, invincible, with the woman in his arms’.³⁰⁸

However, it seems that in practice men did not only experience a superior sexual position as womanisers. In contrast, it seems that many men simultaneously could experience

³⁰⁴ NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diary 1925-26. Original: ‘Van het begin af aan heeft de lange om mij gedraaid. ’t Was heus en wel grappig. Hij kwam wat later en danste eerste bijna onophoudelijk met me. Tot ik op een gegeven ogenblik met een ander drie dansen had en flirtte. Hij heeft toen zeker in geen +- een half uur met me gedanst en ik deed natuurlijk of hij niet bestond. Maar toen kwam hij weer op dagen en legde beslag op me’.

³⁰⁵ NDA, 472.2.8, diary 1925-1926.; Jeanne Reyneke van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen.*; Nemirowsky, *Het Bal*, 30.; Burnett, *De groote lord*, 333.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Van Wessem, *Celly*, 96.; Van Wemeskerken, *Het handschoentje*, 40.; Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 66.

³⁰⁸ Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 66. Original: ‘voelde George zich machtiger, onoverwinnelijker, met de vrouw in zijn armen’.

insecurity on the dance floor. For example, the superior feeling of George – the character in *Dr. Dumay* – is soon replaced by torment and insecurity when his dance partner responds to his flirtatious questions that he must stop talking.³⁰⁹ In addition, it seems that various men even had difficulty taking up their leading role. A young man writing in his diary about a dance he attended complained ‘a disaster was that so many girls were already taken when I asked them [to dance]’.³¹⁰ He considered having the responsibility to approach women and ask them to dance as stressful, instead of powerful. The professional dancer Willy Yardaz seemed to have been aware of this difficulty and tried to make it easier for men to approach women. In the set of ‘regulations for the dance hall’ that he published in *De Kunst* in 1926, he incorporated the rule that while ‘women have the right to refuse a dance’ they ‘need to take into account the feelings of the gentlemen’.³¹¹ This meant that she could not refuse an offer and accept another one after that, she needed to explain that she had already promised the dance to someone else, or had to give another good reason for rejecting the man.

Men were not only insecure about their position in these more traditional gender roles. They were also worried about the new playful interactions women seemed to enjoy.³¹² Some of them were frustrated or even insulted that women were interacting with different men to have fun, and were not actively searching for a meaningful relationship. A fictive character in van Wessems’ novel *Celly* (1931) asked his dance partner ‘do we men have any other value to you women than just the use of our legs and feet?’.³¹³ Various men seemed to have struggled to figure out how they needed to act around these modern, active, and confident women. A figure in Jeanne Reyneke van Stuwes’ *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen* (1931) described his attitude towards these changing gender roles when he attends a dance hall:

The modern brute females, [are those] who think that they can please a man by approaching him unannounced as if they were a male acquaintance, who boldly search for cigarettes (or a jeopardising correspondence) on his desk, who drink cocktails, and smoke, and curse, and with all this, have casted aside all female

³⁰⁹ Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 66.

³¹⁰ NDA, inv. no. 472:66.1, diary 1911-1912. Original: ‘Een ramp was dat zooveel meisjes al bezet waren toen ik ze kwam vragen’. See also NDA, inv. no. 472:66.1, diary 1913-1914.

³¹¹ Yardaz, ‘De danssport’, *De Kunst*, 179. Original: ‘Vrouwen hebben het recht om een dans te weigeren. Wel moeten ze dan rekening houden met de gevoelens van de heer’.

³¹² See for example: Van Wessems, *Celly*, 77.; Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 66.; Van Stuwes, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen*.

³¹³ Van Wessems, *Celly*, 77. Original: ‘tellen wij mannen overigens nog wel met iets anders mee bij jullie vrouwen dan met onze beenen en voeten?’

dignity and female charm, (while they have not won over the male charm, - indeed, men have charm as well!).³¹⁴

According to him these modern women were characterised by ‘deceit and viciousness and egoism and unscrupulousness’, they were ‘roughly desiring’ women who could cast aside a man if they wanted to.³¹⁵ He explains that some men with corrupted taste found this new attitude attractive, but that he preferred ‘sincere’ and ‘gentle’ women.³¹⁶ Clearly, this character did not enjoy the liberated behaviour of the modern woman and felt the need to defend the idea that the man should be the one who was charming and in control in interactions with the opposite sex.

Some men however, went a step further than uttering their offence in a sarcastic or sulking way. In several novels, there are passages of men losing their temper and insulting women who made clear that they were only interested in ‘having a good time’ and go dancing and did not want to commit themselves to the man in question. Men could become jealous and would call women names.³¹⁷ Out of frustration and incomprehension for the new attitude women displayed towards men, they called them ‘vane’, ‘insolent’, ‘dirty’, ‘slut’, ‘whore’, or ‘bitch’.³¹⁸ George in *Dr. Dumay verliest* expressed his disbelief in the new behaviour of women by repeating the dominant gender discourse through the statement ‘all normal women want to get married. And if they do not get married they become hysterical’.³¹⁹ Clearly, the female display of sensuality, freedom, and agency was not appreciated or understood by all. This behaviour was difficult to place, as it deviated from the heterosexual marital norm that was strongly emphasised throughout the nineteenth century, as Michel Foucault has illustrated.³²⁰ To wrap their heads around it, or to ward off this behaviour, men used swear words to place these women at the margins of the society. Understood through the lens of anthropologist Mary Douglas’s work, by calling them dirty, this behaviour was characterised

³¹⁴ Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen*, 112-113. Original: ‘de moderne brute vrouwspersonen, die denken een man te kunnen bekoren, door onaangekondigd bij hem te komen oploopen, als waren zij een heerenkennis, die brutaal op zijn schrijftafel naar sigaretten zoeken, (of naar een compromitteerende briefwisseling!) die cocktails drinken en rooken en vloeken, en alle vrouwelijke waardigheid en daarmee alle vrouwelijke charme overboord hebben gegooid, (terwijl zij de mannelijke charme, - ja, zeker, mannen hebben óók charme! - daarmee niet hebben gewonnen!’.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 113. Original: ‘Veinzerij en valsheid en egoïsme en onscrupuleusheid... en grijpen en drijven en hard begeeren en harder weg-smijten, van den kant der vrouw’.

³¹⁶ Van Stuwe, *De roman der getrouwde vrouwen*, 113.

³¹⁷ See for example: Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 88-94.; Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 92.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 146. Original: ‘alle normale vrouwen willen trouwen. En als ze niet trouwen, worden ze hysterisch!’.

³²⁰ Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality: The will to knowledge v. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998) 45.

as being ‘out of place’.³²¹ Indeed, they compared them to prostitutes to classify their behaviour as something that went beyond the boundaries of what they saw as acceptable or honourable gender behaviour.

Interestingly, the descriptions of the experiences of men and women in the dance hall illustrate that, in contrast to what the dominant gender discourse proclaimed, often men seemed to be looking for life partners on the dance floor, while women were more interested in casual flirtations. When men noticed that women were not seriously committed to relationships with them, men could become frustrated, insecure, and even aggressive, because they did not understand this shift in gender behaviour.

Challenging the image of women as defenceless

The presence of these negative responses to the sensual behaviour amongst women raises the question whether the authorities were right to point out that women were vulnerable in the dance hall and that men could form a danger for them. Did not Duynstee have a point, when he asked his readers, what is a woman to do if she finds herself on the dance floor with a man ‘who is going too far, who wants to do her wrong? Quit immediately? What kind of girl dares to do that?’.³²² Indeed, as the examples above illustrate, women could be hurt by these frustrated men. They were insulted, humiliated, and perhaps assaulted in some cases. However, that is not to say that they were defenceless. Most women understood that there were men on the dance floor who wanted to take advantage of them. And it seems that in practice, like the emancipated American women who were praised for their ability to take care of themselves, most Dutch females did dare to do defend themselves. In novels, there are various examples of women telling men to take their distance or even resorting to a physical defence when they encountered unwanted behaviour around the dance hall.³²³ As a character in *Celly* reflecting on her practice to go out dancing and interact with various men, argues ‘us girls are no longer wimps. We live freely and happily, but this means that we have to know how to handle an uppercut or hook’.³²⁴ While it is not very probable that all women were able to resort to boxing techniques when they were confronted with unwanted advances, this statement does illustrate the new understanding amongst women that they needed to learn

³²¹ See Mary Douglas, *Purity and danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 36.

³²² Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*, 97. Original: ‘eigenlijk te ver gaat, verkeerd wil, wat dan?’ Onmiddellijk ophouden? Welk meisje durft dat?’.

³²³ Van Wemeskerken, *Het handschoentje*, 36.; Van Wesseem, *Celly*, 42.; Burnett, *De groote lord*, 336-338.

³²⁴ Van Wesseem, *Celly*, 42. Original: ‘Wij meisjes zijn geen doetjes meer. We leven vrij en blij, maar dan moeten wij ook zelf met een uppercut en een hook weten om te gaan’.

how to keep themselves safe when embracing a new form of interaction with the opposite sex.

Another way in which women could ‘defend’ themselves against men who did not understand their free-spirited behaviour, was to use the normative gendered ideas to their own advantage. Taking up the theory of Michel de Certeau, I would argue that women, as the less powerful subjects in the dominant gender discourses, engaged in tactics; they ‘turn[ed] (...) forces alien to them [to their own ends]’.³²⁵ To be precise they used the dominant and powerful gender discourses to their own advantage. For example, in *Dr. Dumay verliest* a female character goes out dancing a couple of times with a man with whom she has a good time, but to whom she does not want to get married. Seemingly hopelessly she tries to think of a way to explain to him that she simply does not want to marry him. She argues that he could never understand it, as he is too convinced of the dominant gender discourse which proclaims that ‘all women want to get married’. When he asked whether there is another guy in the picture she sees an opportunity. She answers conformingly while in fact it is not the case. She sighs by the thought that for him, her answer confirmed his stereotypical perspectives on women, marriage, and hysteria. However, by doing so she is happy that he can finally accept her rejection of his proposal.³²⁶

Bodily self-image

The emergence of the American amusement dances did not only challenge the gender discourses that circulated in Dutch society, they also functioned as a means to reflect on and contribute to the creation of a new bodily culture that was prevalent in the Netherlands. Dancing of course was a very bodily activity that required the dancers to consciously consider the ways in which they used their bodies.

Indeed, an important part of the dancing debate focused on the question to what extent people should use their bodies. This discussion first of all revolved around the more specific question to what degree the Dutch should imitate the wild bodily movements that were associated with the African-American other. As is explained in chapter 2, the government and the dance teachers wanted the Dutch dancers to refrain from embodying these wild movements that emphasised their bodies. It proved to be rather difficult however to convince people that these dance styles were not suitable for them. Many dancers did not want to erase all the ‘markers of blackness’ in the dances and especially enjoyed themselves when dancing

³²⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) xx.

³²⁶ Ter Braak, *Dr. Dumay verliest*, 145-149.

‘wildly’.³²⁷ They felt attracted by the corporality and emotionality of the black other. According to various participants in the dancing debate, the reason for this was that the modernisation of society did not enable people to interact with their own bodies in a positive way.³²⁸ The Dutch were said to live in a modernising society in which the machine and the intellect had become of a greater importance than the body and the deep emotions of life.³²⁹ According to writer and artistic editor of the *Telegraaf* Werumeus Buning, people felt attracted to the cultural products and practices of people that lived in a more natural state than they did, because their modernised intellectual lives had created a huge craving for a renewed contact with their bodies and emotions.³³⁰ According to him engaging in these wild dance styles formed a way for the Dutch to ‘express their need for a shortcoming feeling of life and body in an exaggerated and undisciplined wild way’.³³¹ In the words of Buckland ‘the desire to move naturally, following instinct rather than dictated pattern and defying the boundaries of social corporeality, frequently resonated with the wider contestation of political, cultural and social authority that characterized so much of the twentieth century’.³³²

It seems that in the debate on the body and dance, racist and stereotypical images of African-Americans were so profound that many professionals and journalists took up a negative view towards the tendency of people to embrace a bodily experience through dance. However, that did not mean that they neglected the bodily aspect of dancing in general. Instead, they shifted the focus from the wild dance styles of the African-American to associations with the body that were more compatible with a Dutch self-image. For example, professionals emphasised this aspect of dancing by pointing out to people that they should pay attention to their posture. They argued that dancers needed to know which positions and movements could lead to injuries. In this line of thought, *De Dans* explained that it was vital that dancers did not just dance on their toes, as ‘the bodily abnormalities that can be caused, especially amongst young persons, are very serious and cause deformed feet, which lead to severe pain’.³³³ According to the magazine such injuries were sustained when people danced

³²⁷ Borel, *Over de moderne dansen*, 12. Original: ‘drang verklaard naar wilde oer-instincten van onbeschaafde nikkers’. See also: J.W.F. Werumeus Buning, *Over danskunst* (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij „Ontwikkeling”, 1926) 14.

³²⁸ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 9.; Buning, *Over danskunst*, 12-14.; Karsavina, ‘De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!’, *Het Leven*, 1437.

³²⁹ Peter Wagner, *Modernity: Understanding the present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012) 17-18.

³³⁰ Buning, *Over danskunst*, 12-14.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 14. Original: ‘overdreven en verwilderd, zijn behoefte aan tekort gedaan levensgevoel en lichaamsgevoel gaat uit’.

³³² Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body’, 70.

³³³ ‘De heerschappij van Terpsichore’ 2, no. 3 *De Dans* (1923) 43. Original: ‘De lichamelijke afwijkingen die daardoor, voornamelijk bij jonge mensen, kunnen ontstaan, zijn van zeer ernstigen aard en veroorzaken niet

without professional guidance. Dancing correctly, however, was said to have the opposite effect. Moving around on the dance floor was seen as a good exercise to keep the body fit and healthy.³³⁴ A fictional novel character asked her new co-worker: ‘Dear, you look so pale, don’t you play any sports, don’t you dance? Where in the world are you from?’³³⁵ Furthermore, dancing was considered an excellent way to learn how to control your bodily movements and how to move (gracefully).³³⁶

The focus that the dance teachers laid on the body, clearly differed from the one of the dancers who enjoyed giving attention to their bodies by embodying the black other. The professionals did not refer to an experience of the body that came forth out of wild movements, but instead to an awareness of the corpus that was more compatible with European norms. For them the body was considered as a site that could be controlled and trained to move elegantly. In both cases however, there is a tendency amongst the dancing community to take up a new perspective on the body, in which the experienced corpus became of a greater importance.³³⁷ As a fictional character in *De verlaten man* claims ‘one of the victories of our new time (...) is the adoration of the body. (...) Dancing (...) is the singing of the body, feet, torso, and shoulders...’³³⁸ Dancing became a way for people to involve themselves with the health of their bodies and be considerate about its functions.³³⁹ In other words, dancing formed a way for people to contribute to, and participate in, a new body culture that – according to sports historian Marjet Derks – since the Great War propagated more active bodily movement, considered the corpus as something fragile, and allowed the body to be displayed more freely and easily.³⁴⁰

In line with Verhoef, I argue that through the emergence of American cultural products, such as film and dance, a new bodily culture could develop in the Netherlands.³⁴¹ According to Buckland, in practice this meant that people rejected the stiff upper-bodies, constricted by corsets, and the turned out feet of the old court-dances, in favour of dances that

zelden vervormde voeten, zoodat hevige pijnen niet kunnen uitblijven’.

³³⁴ ‘De heerschappij van Terpsichore’, *De Dans*, 43.; Karsavina, ‘De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!’, *Het Leven*, 1437.

³³⁵ Van Wesseem, *Celly*, 32-33. Original: ‘Kind, wat zie je toch bleek, doe je niet aan sport, dans je niet? Waar ter wereld kom je dan vandaan?’.

³³⁶ ‘Tijdschriften’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; Karsavina, ‘De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!’, *Het Leven*, 1436.

³³⁷ Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body’.; Derks, ‘"Harten Warm, Hoofden Koel"’, 102.

³³⁸ Van Bruggen, *De verlaten man*, 28. Original: ‘Een der winsten van den nieuwen tijd (...) is de vereering van het lichaam. (...) Dansen (...) is zingen van het lichaam, de voeten, den romp, de schouders...’.

³³⁹ Charlotte Macdonald, ‘Body and self: Learning to be modern in 1920s–1930s Britain’, *Women's History Review* 22, no. 2 (2013) 267-279, 270.

³⁴⁰ Derks, ‘"Harten Warm, Hoofden Koel"’, 102.

³⁴¹ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 38.

allowed them to loosely move their upper-bodies, wear comfortable clothing, and move their limbs more freely. She explains that this illustrates that with the growing popularity of the modern dances reflected a new bodily culture, which was characterised by its shift from the ‘artificial’ and restrained body that was preferred in the bourgeoisie culture of the nineteenth century, towards the natural body.³⁴²

Developing a personal self

Dancing did not only influence European and social norms, it was also a leisure activity that was enjoyed by various persons. Of course, changing gender norms and bodily culture influenced how individuals experienced dancing. However, for most people challenging social norms and self-images would not be the primary reason to go out at night. In this paragraph, I research what personal motivations were to go dancing. In other words, I analyse how the dances functioned on the individual level.

Having fun and escaping reality

Obviously, one of the most important motivations for people to go dancing was to have fun. Challenging the dominant idea amongst the dance critics that all people went out dancing for immoral reasons, jurist and priest M.J.A.J. Duynstee admitted that in general, dancing was ‘not a dead of lusts of the flesh, but of happiness’.³⁴³ As an author in *Het Leven* claimed dancing was ‘the most wide-spread recreation for young and old’.³⁴⁴ Looking at the diaries of young adults and novels in which experiences of youngsters are described, it seems that indeed persons went out to have a good time.³⁴⁵ Interestingly, for the young woman writing in her diary, cited above, ‘challenging’ or provoking gender norms and enjoying herself went hand in hand. She, and most probably many other women, flirted and took up an active attitude in the dance hall because they found it enjoyable. Others, such as the teenage boy keeping a diary, explained that they liked to go out at night to spend time with their friends. And lastly, some people argued to enjoy dancing for bodily sensation of dancing. A novel character expressed the following thought: ‘the impact of the stirring music, the fast changes of the movements, the fluttering of the thin wraps, that floated around her like nymphs, all of

³⁴² Buckland, ‘From the artificial to the natural body’, 66.

³⁴³ Duynstee, *De leer der kuisheid*, 94. Original: ‘geen „daad van vleeschelijke begeerlijkheid, maar van blijdschap’.

³⁴⁴ ‘Dansen: de kunst, tevens de ontspanning van onzen tijd!’, *Het Leven* 21, no. 45 (1926) 1431. Original: ‘de meest-verbrede ontspanning voor jong en oud!’.

³⁴⁵ NDA, inv. no. 472:66.1, diary 1911-1912.; NDA, inv. no. 472.2.8, diaries 1925-26 and 1927-36.; Burnett, *De groote lord*, 329 and 331.

that filled her with a heavenly youthful joyfulness which made her wrists beat faster'.³⁴⁶

Some critics and the governmental commission questioned the experiences of these people.³⁴⁷ They argued that dancing only created a façade of happiness. According to the dancing commission, at least during the 1930s 'for most dancers the pleasure, that they search for, remains absent', while 'an inner emptiness and boredom determine the mood'.³⁴⁸ The commission explained that during and after the Great War, people went out to dance because their social security eroded. They were said to go out, because they wanted to 'forget, stop thinking, and seize the day'.³⁴⁹ The commission explains that they could easily do so by using the dance and music of the African-Americans, that could 'generate a kind of trance, in which it is easy to live for anyone for whom an awareness of their lives is a burden'.³⁵⁰ They explained that it is logical that the African-Americans, who 'could be under a lot of pressure' developed cultural expressions that enabled them to forget about life for a while. The members of the commission argued it is striking that the African-Americans 'with their heightened light-heartedness must contribute to a general popular culture, to keep up the spirits of a white population, who excluded them in the past'.³⁵¹

Various dancers acknowledged that indeed dancing was a form of escapism for them. In *Celly* a female character reflects on the practice of dancing. She utters 'darn, that makes you feel better, otherwise you would die at the office'.³⁵² Dancing for many people formed a way to escape from the Great War, the modernising society with its new labour forms, and at the end of the 1930s the threat of the Second World War.³⁵³ However, for the dancers the fact that they looked for an escape of reality through dance did not mean that the joy they experienced on the dance floor was unreal. In fact, Tamar Karsavina argued that 'rhythmical

³⁴⁶ Burnett, *De groote lord*, 329. Original: 'De invloed van de meesleepende muziek, de snelle afwisseling der dansfiguren, het wapperen van dunne draperieën, die als slanke zustersnimmfen om haar heen zweefden, dat alles deed haar polsen van een heerlijke jonge vreugde sneller kloppen'.

³⁴⁷ ³⁴⁷ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 9, 12, and 24.; P.G. Wodehouse, 'De man met twee linkervoeten', *De Libelle* 1, no. 1 (1934) 8-9.

³⁴⁸ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 9. Original: 'voor de meeste dansers het genot, dat ze zoeken, absent blijft en dat innerlijke leegheid, landerigheid en verveling de stemming bepalen'.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 8. Original: 'vergeet, denk niet, pluk de dag'.

³⁵⁰ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 12. Original: 'de roes te verwekken, waarin het gemakkelijk leven wordt voor wie een dieper levensbesef uit een oogpunt van levenstechniek te last is'.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 12. Original: 'met hun opgeschroefde zorgeloosheid bijdragen moeten leveren voor de algemeene volkscultuur, om nu bij de blanke beschaving, voor wie ze vroeger niet meetelden, "de moed er in" te houden.'

³⁵² Van Wessem, *Celly*, 34. Original: 'Verdikkie, dat doet een mensch goed, anders ga je maar dood op die kantoren'.

³⁵³ Ibid., 34, 60 and 96.; 'Toch avondkleedij...', *Margriet: weekblad voor vrouwen en meisjes* 1, no. 24 (1939).; 'Sweet Seventeen Gaat uit!', *Margriet: weekblad voor vrouwen en meisjes* 2, no. 34 (1939).; Yardaz, 'De danssport', *De Kunst*, 177.; Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1436.

movements, especially the kind accompanied by music, results in joy, it makes a person forget their troubles, it makes life happier'.³⁵⁴ For most dancers, escapism and experiencing sincere joy went hand in hand.

Expressing and developing your personality

A second individual motivation for people to dance was to develop their selves or let their children explore their personalities. Various professionals and parents argued that dancing formed an important aspect of child rearing.³⁵⁵ According to the Dutch organisation of dance teachers (*de Nederlandsche bond van dansleeraren*) dance was 'an import facet of the education of the youth in its most important and critical stages of her life: puberty and the transition from puberty to adulthood'.³⁵⁶ Through dancing young people learned how to move and train their minds 'in harmony with their bodies'.³⁵⁷ According to journalist C.P. van Rossem, doing so taught persons how to present their selves, gave them confidence, and diminished the 'risk' for shyness later in life.³⁵⁸ In addition, he argued that dancing also taught youngsters how to convert their phantasies or creative ideas into actions, and to make decisions.³⁵⁹ In general, he and others argued that dancing helped people to develop and create their personalities.³⁶⁰ According to Tamar Karsavina this was of great importance at the time. She explains that during 'the modern time period' it is of essential importance for 'a man or woman who wants to accomplish something to have a personality (...), to have character and superiority'.³⁶¹ She believed that 'in this time it seems that this is the highest ambition of modern civilisation: creating and developing the human personality!'.³⁶²

According to her, having a personality meant, 'being slightly different from the

³⁵⁴ Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1436. Original 'Rythmische beweging, vooral door muziek begeleid, leidt tot vreugde, tot een verzetten van moeilijkheden, maakt het leven gelukkiger'.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.; 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; Van Rossem, *Surprises*, 32.; NA, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur, inv. no. 2401, Aantekeningen bij regelingen betreffende het dansvraagstuk.

³⁵⁶ NA, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Afdeling Binnenlands Bestuur, inv. no. 2401, Aantekeningen bij regelingen betreffende het dansvraagstuk. Original: 'een belangrijk stuk opvoeding, dat aan de jeugd wordt geschonken in het belangrijkste en kritiekste stadia van haar leven: de puberteit en de overgang van puberteit tot volwassen-zijn'.

³⁵⁷ Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1436-1437.; 'Tijdschriften', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.

³⁵⁸ Van Rossem, *Surprises*, 32.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 32.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 32.; Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1436-1437.

³⁶¹ Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1437. Original: 'de man of de vrouw die iets bereiken willen, persoonlijkheid hebben, (...) dat ze karkater hebben en overwicht'.

³⁶² Ibid., 1437. Original: 'In dezen tijd schijnt wel dit de hoogste ambitie te zijn der moderne beschaving: het kweeken en ontwikkelen van de menschelijk persoonlijkheid!'.

masses'.³⁶³ It was argued people could display such an uniqueness through the modern dances because, contrary to the old-fashioned dances such as the Waltz, they could be danced in many variations.³⁶⁴ They appealed to a person's creativity and stimulated the dancer to express his or her own character through the movements. Interestingly, while the governmental commission and (social-democratic) critics argued that the modern dances were an utterance of a mass culture,³⁶⁵ various professionals argued that through the modern amusement dances people were enabled to express their individuality, their inner uniqueness that separated them from the masses.³⁶⁶

Comparing these findings with the above mentioned development that Dutch dancers started to engage in a new bodily culture that focused on the health, capability and visibility of the corpus, I argue that dancers felt that they could express and shape their selves through their bodies on the dance floor. I consider this development through the lens of phenomenology and argue, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, that during this period subjectivity was seen as something that did not (only) reside in the mind, but in the body. In line with Charlotte McDonald, I would argue that on the dance floor men and 'women were engaged in a deliberate and active display of themselves as people, modern in form and action'. I agree with her that 'a sense of self was created by such participation, from the embodied action and sense of active being by those performing'.³⁶⁷ To follow her line of thought, I argue that the above-mentioned tendency to see dancing as a means for developing a personality illustrates that a 'modern sense of the self' began to take shape. People no longer limited the self to something invisible belonging to the inner life, but began to understand the self as something that could be given shape and expressed through actions and performances.³⁶⁸

Conclusion

In the Netherlands, the amusement dances functioned as a means for self-liberation through the embodiment of multiple others. 'Self-liberation', in this context, referred to various processes of identification. At a transcultural level, this concerned the creation of a European

³⁶³ Karsavina, 'De dans kweekt persoonlijkheid!', *Het Leven*, 1437. Original: 'dat men juist 'n beetje anders is dan de gewone massa'.

³⁶⁴ Van Rossem, *Surprises*, 32.; 'One-step = two-step = tango!', *Het Leven*, 139.; Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; 'Moderne dansen', *Het Vaderland: Staat- en Letterkundig Nieuwsblad*, 10 October 1934.

³⁶⁵ De Bie et. al., *Rapport der regeerings-commissie inzake het dansvraagstuk*, 10-12.; Sanson-Catz and de Koe, *Oude Nederlandse volksdansen*, 5.

³⁶⁶ Van Rossem, *Surprises*, 32.; 'One-step = two-step = tango!', *Het Leven*, 139.; Neeb, 'Wat zullen wij dit seizoen dansen?', *Algemeen Handelsblad*.; 'Moderne dansen', *Het Vaderland: Staat- en Letterkundig Nieuwsblad*.

³⁶⁷ Macdonald, 'Body and self', 275.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 275.

self-image. Through a complex process of identification in contrast to and in line with the American other, a European self-image took shape in the dancing debate. In practice, this meant that the dancers contrasted the perceived European 'civilisation', 'chastity', and 'rationality' with the African-American and Latino 'sexuality', 'passion', and 'wildness'. And contrasted the American 'superficiality' and 'inelegance,' with the 'deep contemplation' and 'class' of the European. In addition to this process of othering however, the dancers also developed their self-image in line with their idea of American culture. For them, being a modern and young European meant, being up-to-date and up to speed in the American dancing culture. In this sense, modernity was related to America.

Being involved in a cultural exchange with an other also influenced the Dutch culture on a social level. The images of the (African) American others that were shaped in the dancing debate had an impact on the gender and bodily self-images of the dancers. Through an embodiment of the other, dancers were able to reflect on, and even challenge, cultural norms. By practicing new gender behaviour on the dance floor, men and women questioned the dominant gender discourse – uttered by the government, parents, and dance critics – in which women were portrayed as passive, fragile beings looking for a husband, and men were imagined to be sexual, active, and powerful. They engaged in bodily behaviour that they associated with others, in order to go beyond the norms that were inscribed on their bodies. The female dancers took up the kind of behaviour that was primarily associated with the Caucasian American woman, who was seen as sensual, emancipated, and up-front in her relations with men. The Dutch women eagerly took up the American practice of flirting, often uttered their reserves about marriage, and showed that they were able to take care of themselves in their freer relations with men. The men on the other hand, expressed their insecurities with regard to their required active position in the dance hall – they needed to ask women to dance, and lead –, and were frustrated or confused about their position in the light of the modern, active behaviour of women. A second cultural norm that was challenged by the embodiment of an other, was the idea that the Dutch needed to adhere to the ideal of rationality and intelligence. By embodying the perceived 'wild', 'bodily', and 'emotional' African-American and Latino other, the dancers expressed their need for a return to an appreciation of the body.

Lastly, on an individual level dancing could lead to a form of 'self-liberation'. It might be superfluous to point out that people danced to enjoy themselves. It is interesting however, to remark that dancers felt the need to have fun to escape from reality. Dancers wanted to go out at night, to forget about the modernising society, and the wars that made them insecure.

However, dancing did not only function as a means for escapism. It was also experienced as a method to get to know your self. As a new, bodily, understanding of the self developed itself, dancing became to be perceived as a means to shape and express an individual's personality.

Conclusion

Transcultural theory

Between the 1910 and 1940 the modern amusement dances were eagerly imported in the Netherlands. Participating in the new leisure culture that had travelled across the Atlantic, became one of the most popular forms of entertainment and relaxation.

Approaching this history through the lens of transcultural theory – instead of using theories of controlling and regulatory practices, as is common in the current literature – makes apparent that in the process of cultural exchange the dance culture was transformed. It illustrates that it is too simplistic to argue that in the dancing debate the dancers took up American modernity, while traditionalist authority figures rejected the utterances of modernity. Indeed, transcultural theory shows that the modern dances and the behaviour that accompanied a night in the dance hall did not arrive in the Netherlands fixed and unchanged. Instead the dance culture was translated: it was given new meanings by various groups in Dutch society, the execution of the dances was adapted, and the customs and etiquette that accompanied the practice of dancing were changed. In line with Hermoine Giffard, I argue that such translations should not be perceived as abstract processes and that the agency of the subjects involved in the transformation processes must be considered. In this research, I try to put Giffard's recent theoretical intervention in transcultural theory into practice, by introducing the concept *agents of translation*, persons actively involved in both consciously and unconsciously translating foreign cultural expressions.

Applied to the history of the cultural exchange of dance cultures, I find that there were at least four different agents of translation involved in the adaptation of the foreign dance culture. The individual dancers, parents, the government, and professional dancers all intervened when the dances arrived in the Netherlands. Looking at their practices, it becomes clear that these persons were not involved in the process of rejecting all associations with modernity and promoting traditional values. Instead they were all primarily involved in translating the dance culture in such a way that it became compatible with Dutch norms. They did so by adapting the environment in which people dance. To be precise, they intervened in the etiquettes, customs, interaction between the sexes, and space in which the dance culture was practiced. They did so for multiple reasons: their prime concerns were the demoralisation of the youth, sexual relations before marriage, interactions between members of different classes, and, most importantly, – as is explained below – the associations of the dances with cultural and racial others.

During the 1910s the general opinion was that the individual dancers had the responsibility to control their own behaviour on and around the dance floor. Individual persons were expected to be able to control themselves and to adapt the dances in such a way that they corresponded with ‘the Dutch norms’. However, during the 1920s this view changed and the responsibility for transforming the dancing culture shifted from the individual to authority figures, such as parents, the dance teacher, and the government. They were expected to prescribe how the Dutch dancers should take up the new dancing culture. Parents, and especially mothers, transformed the dancing culture by – successfully or not – prescribing their children etiquette and guiding their behaviour.³⁶⁹ The government, in contrast, was concerned with adapting the interior design of the dance hall to influence the bodily experiences of dancers and make them less sensual. They wanted to establish this by changing the space’s smell, light, and size, and adapting people’s bodily state by inserting rules about the distance between the various bodies, and the availability of liquor and food. Lastly, the professional dancers translated the dances in the most explicit way. They supervised dances and dance lessons to keep an eye on the interactions between the sexes. But most importantly, they had the task to adapt the steps and the bodily movements of the dances to make them ‘suitable for a civilized audience’. The most important rules that they came up with to realize this were: the dances needed to be executed by a couple that held each other in a close embrace, the dancers needed to restrain from wild and excessive movements – and instead move gracefully –, and lastly men needed to take the lead.

Shifting the perspective from control to the process of translation is useful, because it enables the historian to research both what kind of behaviour was not permitted, and what sort of practices were ideal. Amongst other things, this has allowed me to notice that between the 1910s and the 1920s there occurred a shift from the belief that dancers had the responsibility to translated the dance culture, towards the idea that professionals needed to transform the dances in order for them to become suitable for the audience. This is a striking finding that raises various questions for additional research. Why did this shift occur? Was it simply because the dances became more popular? Did the new movements that the dances required, cause too much confusion about the cultural norms on the ways in which people could and should use their bodies? In other words, did the authorities felt they needed to redefine the bodily norms for the audience, as the emergence of new and foreign corporeal movements

³⁶⁹ The influence of the mother’s interference with their children’s behaviour would affect the dancing culture, even if their offspring would not listen to them. The reason for this is, that if the children rebelled against their parent’s guidance, their behaviour was still driven by their parent’s advice.

challenged the discourses that the dancers had internalised before? Or was there a shift in mentalities towards ideals of discipline and control? And if so, what triggered this? Future research could ask whether it could be the case that the ideal of self-control of the nineteenth century bourgeoisie³⁷⁰ still had impact on the culture during the 1910s, but began to wane with the emergence of the Great War. In addition, it would be interesting to consider to what extent the democratisation of the dancing culture contributed to this shift: did the authorities believe that the emergence of the working classes on the dance floor required them to exercise external control and reaffirm bodily norms?

Embodying others

Transcultural theory clearly provides new insights in the history of the modern dances in the Netherlands. However, by only employing this theory one important aspect of this history remains under exposed: the perspectives of the people who were actually engaged in the new leisure culture. In literature on the dances historians often limit their view to the persons trying to regulate and control the new dances, while little attention is paid to the experiences of the persons executing them. This thesis shows that scholars can break this pattern, by combining transcultural thought with a focus on embodiment, a concept that refers to the cultural norms that determine how bodily subjects can act and move in the world. To be precise this research illustrates to what extent dance historians can achieve this goal by employing (a variation on) Danielle Robinson's theory on self-liberation through the embodiment of the other. Robinson theory states that European dancers in the United States experienced an embodiment of the black other when they engaged in transcultural exchange of dance traditions with the African-Americans. According to her, despite the fact that the Europeans were involved in translating the dance culture of the African-Americans, these immigrants experienced the dances as being entirely black. She argues that just like the 'one-drop-rule' proclaimed that a person of mixed race was black, so too were dances with traces of 'black culture' considered as African-American. She explains that the immigrants felt that they embodied this 'black other' through the dances and experienced this as a form of self-liberation, as they could be playful, sexual and engage in self-parody.

Applied to the context of dance in the Netherlands, this theory offers new insights in the dancing debate and the way in which criticisms uttered against dances were linked to general societal developments and changes in mentalities. This research illustrates that the

³⁷⁰ Aerts and te Velde, 'Inleiding', 17.

modern dances were perceived as related to four others. In addition to the findings in the current literature on the history of modern dance in the Netherlands, this thesis shows that the dances were not only associated with the African-American and Caucasian American other, but also with the Latin and British other.

The African-American origins were said to be visible in the dances, because the dance steps often required the dancers to make 'wild movements'. While various dances enjoyed this, various critics argued that this was very problematical. They pointed out that the modern dances had developed themselves in 'black cultures' and that they were expressions of the perceived 'primitivism', 'hyper-sexuality', and 'barbarism' of the black other. They argued that European dancers could and should never execute these dances that required 'wildly moving the limbs', swinging the hips, and shuddering the shoulders. According to them, in contrast to the African-American other whose character and physique was perceived as suited for these 'wild and sexual dances', the European was said to be too 'civilized', 'intellectual', and 'capable of experiencing differentiated emotions' to execute dances that required people to express 'primal' and 'instinctive' emotions.

However, not everybody agreed with the critics that this was a reason to banish the modern dances. According to the dancing professionals this problem could be solved by 'erasing' the 'markers of blackness' that were considered incompatible with European norms. Through this finding, this thesis illustrates that in the Netherlands the 'one-drop-rule' was not applied to dance, as it was in the United States. In the Dutch context both the presence of a different perspective on race and the fact that the dance teachers, as agents of translation, were consciously and actively involved in the process of adapting the dances, led to the belief that racial expressions could be removed.

Interestingly, while dancers believed that the race specific markers could be erased, they did not argue that the 'foreignness' of the dances could be forgotten. The dances would always be considered as 'American dances'. In the dancing debate in the Netherlands, foreignness preceded race. To what extent this development was part of a general mentality, is an interesting question for future research. As recent research suggests that while today North-Americans tend to speak about race, Europeans have referred to ethnicity since the Second World War,³⁷¹ it would be interesting to take up this finding and research whether a different mentality towards race already existed before the holocaust. Moreover, such research could focus on the question to what extent the transcultural existence of Western-Europe in

³⁷¹ Wekker, *White innocence*, 22.

opposition to the melting pot culture of the United States contributed to the development of these different perspectives on race.

The ‘Americanness’ of the dances was said to become visible in various aspects of the new dancing culture. In line with the current literature, this thesis illustrates that the primal association with the American other was ‘mass culture’. Both cultural critics, social-democrats, and the government pointed to the dangers of the emergence of mass culture in the Netherlands. They argued that mass culture was devoid of meaning, and would lead to the loss of organic and natural social bonds, through the specialisation and mechanisation of the labour process. The cultural critics and the social democrats believed that the foreign dances symbolised the negative side of the modernisation of the society: they required that people used their bodies as instruments, and moved themselves in the new fast pace of the metropole. The government and various dance teachers countered this view and argued that the dances were instead a means to escape from the effects of modernisation. They claimed that the dances functioned as a way for people to experience a superficial, and instinctive connection with each other, that could function as a replacement of the deep and organic social cohesion that they had lost in the mechanised and specialised society.

In addition to the association of the American other with mass culture, this thesis illustrates that the Americanism of the dances was also connected to the emancipated and free-spirited behaviour of women in and around the dance hall. The new dancing culture was related to a modern attitude of women, which was characterised by their aim to have a good time, to flirt, and their ability to take care of their selves. The Dutch journalists were ambivalent about the emancipated behaviour of American women. On the one hand, they admired that these women could take care of themselves, but on the other hand many argued that their free-spirited and sensual behaviour was too inelegant for European women to take up. In general, this view reflected the perspective of journalists that Americans had less class or grace than Europeans.

The third other, the Latino/Latina was also considered with ambivalence. This thesis shows that – while it is scantily acknowledged in the existing literature – the wild movements of the amusement dances were not only associated with the African-American other, but also with the Latin other. Dances such as the tango and the rumba were considered sensual, animal like, and dangerous. Interestingly, opponents of the modern dances did not identify these markers, but the professional dancers did. This thesis argues that most probably, the dance teachers referred to these seemingly negative associations as a commercial strategy, as many dancers enjoyed dancing wildly and were eager to embody this dangerous and sensual other.

The last figure that was referred to in the dancing debate, was the British other. Contrary to the three others referred to above, journalists and professional dancers considered the English other as a role model for the Dutch dancers. Britain was seen as an excellent example, because it was associated with a high level of civilisation and a gentlemen or lady-like elegance.

Liberating and creating the self

By employing and adapting Robinson's theory this thesis shows that the dancing debate of the early twentieth century reflects more than ideas and ideals about morality and the other. By shifting the focus from the objects to the modern dances to the experiences of the dancers and the ways in which the dances functioned for them, I illustrate that the dancing debate can also serve as a case-study to analyse how modern self-images were created. Robinson argued that through the embodiment of the other dancers could experience self-liberation. However, as she does not specify exactly what she means by this, one of the aims of this thesis is to analyse how the dances functioned as a means for self-liberation in the Netherlands. I conclude that the self was impacted by dance on three levels: it influenced the creation of a *(trans)cultural self-image*: the construction of a European identity, the liberation of the *gendered, and bodily self* in Dutch society, and the development an *individual's self* or personality.

By applying transcultural theory to sources that discuss Europeanism or a European identity, it becomes clear that othering theory – often used by historians to explain that Europe defined itself by defining what they were not: the (African) American and Latin others – is too limited to explain how a European self-image was created in the dancing debate. This was the case, first of all, because the concept of Europe was fragmented: the Dutch dancers saw some countries as more European than others. Especially Great Britain, Germany, and France were considered to be role models for the European-self-image. Secondly, othering theory seems too simplistic because while the dancing debate produced and repeated negative images of the other against which the European was contrasted, it simultaneously created space for a European identification along the lines of the other. Indeed, on the one hand, 'the European' was said to contradict the 'primitiveness', 'emotionality', and 'sexuality' of the African, Caucasian and Latin American other with his/her 'civilisation', 'rationality', and 'purity'. However, simultaneously dancers began to take up an American marker: the idea that to be modern and fashionable a European needed to 'keep up to date' with the latest trends in the American dance culture. Through the presence of the amusement dances the European

self-image was transformed: to the key-words ‘civilisation’, ‘elegance’ and ‘intellect’ young dancers added ‘modern’. For them being modern was not only about the mechanisation of the society and the specialisation of the labour process, it meant ‘being fashionable’, i.e. capable of keeping up with new (American) trends.

The dancing debate clearly reflected the complexity of the on-going creation of a European self-image. It illustrates that a European self was shaped by contrasting it with stereotypical images of the other, by defining which Europeans embodied the European characteristics the most, and by internalising some markers of the other. In addition, the debate points out that such a complex process of a European self-identification was prevalent before the Second World War. To be more precise, this finding contrasts the claim that a sense of Europe only developed after 1945, and confirms the claim of Madelon de Keizer that the Netherlands was not a culturally isolated province of Europe. It illustrates that in contrast, the Netherlands were part of a transcultural leisure practice and were actively involved in defining a Europeanism with which they could identify themselves.

At a second level, self-liberation through dance referred to the reflection and transformation of gender norms and body culture in Dutch society. Taking up the notion of embodiment as it is understood by Grosz, I argue that bodily subjects did not only reflect normative discourses but were also able to inscribe norms on their own bodies and the bodies of others. I add to her theory an explanation of how bodily subjects were able to challenge and create cultural discourses. I argue that, by embodying the perceived ‘modern behaviour’ of the Caucasian American women, Dutch females challenged the gender norms that were inscribed on their bodies by authority figures, such as the government, parents, and dance critics.

These latter groups acknowledge that the ways in which young men and women interacted with each other had changed with the emergence of the new dance culture, as they could go out in the public sphere and meet new people. However, they argued that while ‘the means’ had changed, the aim remained the same: men and women interacted with each other to find a marriage partner. In line with Barbara O’Connor’s claim, this finding seems to indicate that a modern form of interaction worked alongside a more traditional discourse. While the authorities justified the modern interplay between men and women by pointing to the desirable outcome, they also emphasised that these modern contacts could be dangerous. They argued that the reason for this was that men and women experienced eroticism in a different way. According to the dominant gender discourse women were unconsciously searching for a life partner on the dance floor, while men could be driven by sexual impulses and take advantage of these innocent, naïve, and defenceless women.

Interestingly, a different reality is illuminated when shifting the focus from the written debate on intersexual relations in the dance hall, towards the actual experiences and practices of men and women on the dance floor that are described in diaries and novels. It seems that the dancers did not restrict their bodily actions and movements along the lines of the dominant gender discourses. Instead, the actions of women challenged the dominant gender view. On and around the dance floor women embodied behaviour they associated with Caucasian American women: they used their bodies – glances, eyelashes, or their grip during a dance – to flirt, were questioning whether they wanted to get married (at an early age), and showed that they could (physically) take care of themselves when men assaulted them. Men in turn responded to this modern and emancipated behaviour of women. Some were complaining that women were becoming more active in interactions with men, that they were more upfront, and that they simply enjoyed flirting with different men without committing themselves to anyone. Other men got more frustrated with the new female attitude and insulted women by calling them names such as ‘whore’ and ‘dirty’. Understood through the lens of Mary Douglas’ work, I argue that these men associated these women with dirt and prostitution to indicate that they were ‘out of place’ in the society.³⁷² Interestingly, exploring the experiences of men in the dance hall it becomes clear that they did not follow the line of the dominant gender discourse either. Stories expressing males’ frustrations with the flirtatious women, illustrate that in contrast to what authority figures argued, men were often looking for a life partner on the dance floor. In addition, it becomes clear that while they were depicted as ‘being active’ and ‘in control’ in the dance hall, men were often insecure about having the responsibility to ask women to dance.

A second cultural norm that was challenged through the embodiment of the other in dance, was the idea that the Dutch should or could not engage in an expressive bodily culture as they needed to adhere to the European ideal of intellect, rationality, and self-control. In line with Verhoef, I find that the emergence of American leisure culture, such as dancing and cinema, stimulated the development of a new bodily culture. In addition, I conclude that through the embodiment of the African-American other, who was associated with ‘wildness’, ‘corporality’, ‘emotionality’, and ‘sexuality’, dancers expressed their participation in the creation of a new bodily culture in which the body could be more active, move more freely, be displayed more easily, and was considered to be natural, instead of artificial and in need of containment.

³⁷² Douglas, *Purity and danger*, 36.

The third level on which the embodiment of the other through dance impacted the self, was on the personal level. This was the case first of all, because through dancing people could experience an escape from the modernising society that was changing at a fast pace and in which people were subjected to the effects of the specialisation of labour forces. Secondly, dancing was considered to affect a person on an individual level because it could function as a means to express and shape people's personalities. With the emergence of the new bodily culture in which the display, activity, health, and movement of the body gained importance, ideas of the self also changed. Amongst dance teachers and parents, the notion developed that through bodily movement people could express their inner being. To use the words of Charlotte McDonald, I argue that – at least partly – through the popularity of the new dance culture 'a modern notion of the self developed'. In line with McDonald findings, I claim that also in the Netherlands there occurred a shift in the understanding of the self: it was no longer solely considered as something invisible belonging to the inner life, but became understood as something that could be shaped and displayed through bodily actions and performances. To what extent this modern notion of the self gained popularity outside of the dancing community in the Netherlands is unknown at this stage of my research. I propose that this is a question that future research must answer. I believe it would be interesting to analyse this by researching responses to art dancers that tried to disseminate this bodily self-understanding in their dance, and by comparing the experiences of the dancers with those of people involved in sport and health movements.

Looking at the meaning and functioning of self-liberation in dance in the Netherlands, it becomes clear that through the usage and embodiment of stereotypical images of various others dancers enabled themselves to reflect on, challenge, construct, and transform cultural norms and self-images that were inscribed on their bodies. In other words, they could liberate and (re)shape their selves/their identities, by inscribing simplified images on the bodies of African-, Caucasian-, and Latin-Americans. Writing the history of the functions of modern dances in the Netherlands, therefore leads to a one-sided story. While it illuminates identification process and points out in what ways seemingly powerless subjects could challenge and transform cultural norms, it leaves out the experiences of the persons who were said to create the dancing culture that enabled the Dutch to liberate their selves. In the words of Verhoef, this kind of research will only illuminate 'Dutch images of America [which did] not necessarily have a connection to the 'reality''.³⁷³

³⁷³ Verhoef, *Opzien tegen modernisering*, 9. Original: 'Nederlandse beelden over Amerika [die] niet noodzakelijkwijs verband met de 'realiteit' [hadden]'.

Indeed, focusing on the Dutch context, it is difficult to retrieve the experiences of the few African-American dancers that worked in Dutch dance halls. Very few of these dancers would have been in the position to keep a diary and write about their personal experiences. And even if they had left ego-documents, it is very unlikely that they would have survived, as this kind of material was, until recently, not stored in archives. In addition, unlike the experiences of the white dancers, it is almost impossible that retrieve their stories by analysing novels. During this time, authors did not often choose black dancers as characters whose thoughts are explicitly formulated, and if they did the racism of the author would often be too profound for it to be representative for the actual experiences of African-American performers.

However, even though it is unlikely that future research is able to retrieve the voice of this subaltern in the Dutch context, it is possible to write the story of the experiences of the other at the other side of the Atlantic. Shifting the focus to North- and South-America would enable the historian to paint a more complete picture of how the modern dances were experienced and how they functioned. By broadening the scope from the Dutch context to the American environment, a scholar will first of all, be enabled to illustrate how the dances were actually translated, instead of being limited to accounts of how the Dutch claimed they translated the dances. Future research can analyse whether the translations the agents of translation claimed to make were the most profound adaptations made. Did the authorities exaggerate some of the transformations or silence others? And if so, why? Was the ‘truth’ about the actual dancing habits of the African, Latin, or Caucasian Americans incompatible with their othering-images? A second advantage that the inclusion of the American context in research to modern dances has, will be that historians are able to reflect on the question how these others actually experienced these dances, instead of being limited to a reproduction of the stereotypical thoughts of Dutch contemporaries on the issue why these others danced.

Challenging, embodying, and escaping modernity through dance

This thesis illustrates that it is too simplistic to argue in line with the current literature, that the dancing debate was a well-defined discussion between opponents of dancing who could be categorized as traditionalists, and proponents of the new leisure culture who could be classified as advocates of modernity. Instead, this thesis argues that the dancing debate illustrates that Dutch dancers, dance critics, parents, dance teachers and the government could reflect on, escape from, experience, negotiate, define, challenge and/-or transform modernity. In other words, I argue that the new dancing culture functioned as a means to understand the

complex reality of a modernising society. Various findings support this new perspective.

First of all, as the application of transcultural thought to the history of modern dances shows, it is impossible to use such fixed categories as any cultural exchange led to the transformation of both the product of exchange – in this case modernity through modern dance – and the contexts through which the product travels – here the ‘traditional Dutch society’. Indeed, in practice many of the authority figures who expressed negative views on the dances were actively engaged in translating the dances in such a way that the new modern influences were considered compatible with the Dutch or European – and sometimes more traditional – norms. For example, the Dutch government accepted that the youth engaged in a modern way of interaction with the opposite sex on the dance floor, as long as the environment in which they danced was set up in such a way that the dance hall was a safe space in which they could search for a marriage partner. In addition, the government, dance teachers, and parents argued that they did not want young women to be as flirtatious, cheeky, and free-spirited as the modern American woman, but that they saw the advantage of teaching them about relations with men so that they could take care of themselves in the same manner as American women could. In short, these authority figures should not be typified as traditionalist who rejected modernity, but as ‘agents of translation’ who pointed out how certain ‘modern’ attitudes could be united with Dutch norms.

Secondly, the traditionalist-modernity binary is too simplistic because it supposes that Dutch society was traditional and only encountered modernity as an American phenomenon. This thesis illustrates that while various modern attitudes and developments were associated with the United States – such as the emancipated behaviour of women, the mechanisation of the society, and mass culture – Europe was believed to have already entered its own modernisation process. The Dutch governmental commission for the dance question and various social-democrats, argued that Europe started to modernise by the mechanising and specialisation of the labour process. In this context, the effects of this modernisation were noticeable as people experienced alienation from each other. According to the social democrats and various cultural critics, the dancers embodied and experienced these effects of modernisation when they took up the American dances that symbolised the fast pace of the metropole and the instrumental usage of labourer’s bodies. The governmental commission on the other hand, argued that the modern dances functioned as a means for American people to cope with the alienation that modernity caused. According to them, it was a superficial way to replace organic ties with a more instinctive feeling of social cohesion. The commission argued that such a shallow experience of belonging was not suitable for Europeans.

According to them, Europe needed to combat the alienation with deep contemplation and high art. According to the government, both European and American modernity were characterised by mechanisation and specialisation processes that led to a loss of social cohesion. However, while Americans tried to fix this problem of modernity by instating superficial practices that needed to stir up instinctive feelings of belonging, Europeans needed to solve this with more refined methods.

Thirdly, the most important intervention that this this thesis makes, is that it illustrates that it is too simplistic to suggest that the amusement dances were equated with modernity because they connoted American mass culture and female emancipation. Indeed, I argue that the associations with modernity and social dance were more complex. The dances were connected to multiple others, who – at first sight – did not seem to be associated with modernity. However, shifting the focus from the explicit debate on dancing in which authority figures reproduced dominant discourses, towards the actual experiences of dancers and the ways in which they challenged those discourses through (bodily) practices, illustrates that through the embodiment of these others Dutch dances engaged with modernisation practices. In other words, approaching the concept of modernity, not only as a social process of mechanisation, technology, specialisation, and urbanisation, but a something that is experienced by contemporaries, offers new insights. Through the embodiment of the African-American and Latin other the dancers did not only engage themselves with cultures that were perceived as ‘backwards’, ‘wild’, or ‘primitive’. Indeed, through the embodiment of the other the dancers were enabled to critically reflect on, challenge, transform, or escape modernisation practices. They could engage in perceived ‘modern’ behaviour that differed significantly from the dominant discourse on gender and the body, create a transcultural and European identity, contribute to the construction of a new modern understanding of the self, or escape the hectic and alienating labour that characterised modern life. Clearly, the history of modern amusement dances illustrates that already before the Second World War the Dutch were actively engaged in an exchange of modern cultural practices, and that through the process of translating the foreign dances Dutch dancers could embody, escape, negotiate, reflect on, and transform the complex concept of modernity.

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