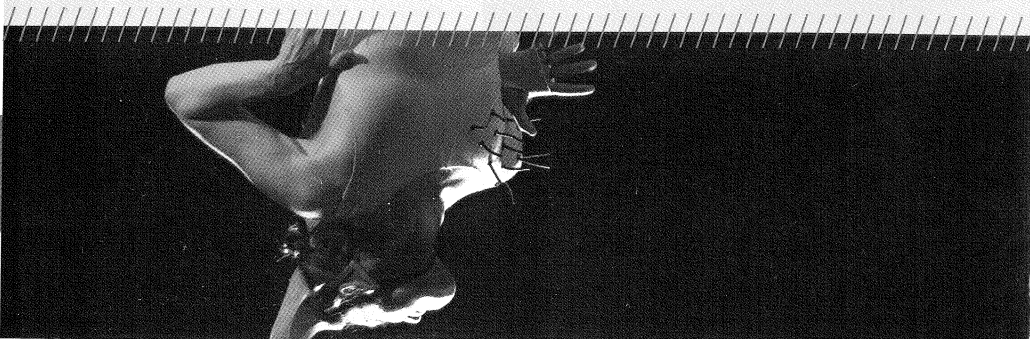


// TONY PERUCCI

ON COMPAGNIE MARIE CHOUNINARD



One of the most profound potentialities of art is its ability to be transgressive – to unsettle our expectations, to challenge our deeply-held beliefs, to bewilder our sensibilities, to undermine our sense of aesthetic competence, and to upset our understanding of what constitutes art – or even more disconcerting, our understanding of what constitutes the “real world.” It is this transgressive quality that, in heralding uncertainty and violating our sense of the taken-for-granted, art has the potential to not only remake us as individuals but also to refigure us as societies. The infamous riot that accompanied the 1913 premiere of *The Rite of Spring* embodies the ways that art can upset, unnerve, disorient and anger through its very form.

This dynamic of transgression exceeds the presence of identifiable message or ideology that might upset an audience. Writing about the dramatist Bertolt Brecht, the German theorist Walter Benjamin suggested that beyond the articulation of meaning, the engine that enabled Brecht’s theatre as a political force was its use of “interruption” as a means of making the audience feel astonishment towards the inequalities of capitalist society rather than empathy towards the characters of his plays. Transgressive art produces such ruptures as a relentless means of seeing and hearing the world anew by making the familiar seem strange.

Stravinsky produced such an interruption through the reorganizing of sound in time – through the continual making and remaking of dissonance (a sonic embodiment of rupture). In challenging the dominance of the pretty melody and the elegant chord progression, Stravinsky not only challenged the old guard, but also produced both a new kind of music as well as a new way of hearing it. *The Rite of Spring* exemplifies the ways in which the rupture of transgressive art does more than tear down conventions and expectations, it reorganizes them and refigures them into something new.

Marie Chouinard has long been known for the transgressive character of her work – from her early solo provocations to the highly-charged compositions choreographed for her company. While Chouinard’s work is often intended to “shock,” it is transgressive not simply for its erotics and overt engagement with sexuality. Rather, Chouinard’s work produces rupture through the enactment of what Allana Thain has called an intensification of movement. The production of intensities exceeds the limits of the bodies of the dancers – energizing the time and space not only inhabited by the dancers but that which surrounds them. The electrification of time and space through intensity always threatens to spill (sometimes quite literally) off the stage and into the audience. In her making of *The Rite of Spring*, Chouinard has stripped away the narrative to focus instead on the production of intensities: “There is no story... Only synchronicity. It is as if I were dealing with the very moment after the instant life first appeared. The performance is the unfolding of that moment. I have the feeling that before that moment there was an extraordinary burst of light, a flash of lightning.” Chouinard puts us in a very indelicate position – to live in the ruptural intensities of a constant becoming. It is a dangerous and unsettled place that Chouinard challenges us to be in. How will we respond. Will we riot?

Tony Perucci is an Assistant Professor of Performance Studies in the Department of Communication Studies at UNC-CH.

Since 2007, the company has occupied its own workspace, Espace Marie Chouinard, in Montreal. There, in 2009, after a twenty-year absence from the stage, Marie Chouinard returned with her solo morning glories :-). In 2008, *Chantier des extases*, a collection of her poetry, was published by les éditions du passage. The book was followed in 2010 by COMPAGNIE MARIE CHOUNINARD COMPANY, a superb volume illustrated with numerous color photos highlighting two rich decades of creation, culminating in the company’s most recent work, *THE GOLDEN MEAN (LIVE)*.

Always visually compelling, the work of Marie Chouinard reflects her deepest concerns as an artist: dance is to be approached as a sacred art and virtuosic performance; each new work must invent and explore a whole new universe. Her raw material is not only muscle, bone and flesh, but also the aura, instinct and throb of life in the human body, an inexhaustible intelligence.

In addition to choreography, Chouinard sometimes designs the scenography and lighting for her pieces and photographs them. Her multimedia and visual creations include *Cantique No. 3*, an interactive installation with Louis Dufort, and *icônes*, a video installation with Luc Courchesne, as well as the film *BODY_FEMIX / GOLDBERG_VARIATIONS*, based on the dance work of the same name.

Appointed Officer of the Order of Canada in 2007, Marie Chouinard has received numerous awards recognizing her contribution to the world of dance and the arts. In 2010, she received a Prix du Québec, the Prix Denise-Pelletier, the highest honor bestowed annually by the Government of Québec in recognition of a distinguished career in the arts and culture. The same year, the Compagnie was chosen for the Imperial Tobacco Foundation Arts Achievement Award, established to recognize “sustained artistic excellence and innovative achievements of a Canadian arts organization.” The choreographer was also appointed a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres from the French Ministry of Culture. Marie Chouinard’s name entered the *Petit Larousse illustré* in 2010 and appears in the 2011 edition of the *Dixel*.