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## The Chosen One's Death/Life Lunge

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**Abstract:** Over the past century, the Chosen One's death/life act, which invariably culminates the innumerable productions of *The Rite of Spring*, has raised much controversy, particularly when viewed through four women choreographers and their interpretation of the piece individually. Historically the majority of choreographers who have yielded to the attraction of the scenario and its powerful score have been male, such as Vaslav Nijinsky (1913), Maurice Béjart (1959), Angelin Preljocaj (1989). This situation, possibly due to the ongoing imbalance between the genders to choreographic opportunities, is exacerbated by the violent resonances of Stravinsky's score which, arguably, attracts a masculine rather than a feminine sensibility. Most of the male choreographers have positioned the scenario in terms of a thematic rebirth, replicating in various forms the shamanic Elder of the original production who selects the sacrificial young woman. But what happens if the dance-maker is a woman – does it offer a particular gendered reading? Why do young women seem destined to be sacrificed within this specific scenario since the first work performed by Ballets Russes? Cognizant of the power of the music and the aesthetic complexity of the work's birth, this paper addresses four female choreographers revisiting/reimagining the themes of rebirth and sacrifice from 1975 to 2002. Is the destiny of the young woman's death different in female choreographers' creative visions based on the exploration from the perspectives of identity, gender and self-awareness? In surveying the works of Pina Bausch (1975), Marie Chouinard (1993), Maryse Delente (1993) and Maggi Sietsma (2002), alternative means of expressing the contradictory feelings of the life-giver and the fluctuations of power and vulnerability conveyed in the sacrificial – or perhaps murderous – act may surface. Through such an examination, changing gender relations will become apparent, especially when placed in each work's historical and cultural context.

**Keywords:** female choreographers, dance, women's studies, social bodies

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## The Chosen One's Death/Life Lunge

Min Zhu

2013 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Le sacre de printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*), which was choreographed by Vaslav Nijinsky to the music of Igor Stravinsky with the scenario and design by Nicholas Roerich<sup>1</sup> for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, an out-of-season touring Russian company in 1913 promoting home-grown modernism to the celebrated and assumed European capital of avant-garde arts, Paris. *Sacre* focuses on the ritual sacrifice of a young woman to ancient Russian deities to ensure the fertility of the group in the impending spring. The first act of the original version had a symmetrical, binary cast: a group of youths and a group of maidens, the old witchlike woman, and the Shamanic Elder who lead the ritual of sacrifice. But in the second act, there was a sharp contrast formed between the mass and only one individual, the Chosen One. In that notorious first performance, the shock of human violence was compounded by the mighty dissonance of the score and the throbbing, twisted gyrations of the dancers, which caused an aesthetic furor in the audience. As writer and critic Jacques Rivière discussed in his essay, 'If one can, for once, stop confusing grace with symmetry and the arabesque, he will find it on every page of *Le sacre du printemps*' (1913, cited in Hodson, 1986–87:9). Like its celebrated predecessors, Stravinsky's *The Firebird* (1910) and *Petrouska* (1911), and Nijinsky's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1912) and *Jeux* (1913), *Sacre* demonstrated Diaghilev's vision to bring together artists who could promote the pre-revolutionary vision of Russian modern art, a blend of European audaciousness and pre-Christian, Slavic imagery.<sup>2</sup> *Sacre* is exemplary in this respect.

As a seminal work, *Le sacre de printemps* proves to be an anomaly of the canon because, after a mere nine performances, the work was abandoned and its choreography virtually lost. Curiously, this inauspicious beginning gave birth to a classic of dance legacy

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<sup>1</sup> An interview with Roerich in the St. Petersburg press and other documentation show that he had already written a scenario when Stravinsky approached him with the notion of a ballet about archaic Russia. Roerich's scenario was entitled 'The Great Sacrifice', and it survives as the second act of what we know as *Le sacre du printemps* (see Hodson, 1986–87).

<sup>2</sup> For more discussion of using primitive Slavic models and pagan culture in Russia as a path to build Russian modern art (see Hodson, 1986–87).

that has crossed boundaries ever since. Every persuasion of choreographer and reconstructionist has succumbed to the attraction of this work. According to the research study, ‘Stravinsky, The Global Dancer: A Chronology of Choreography to the Music of Igor Stravinsky’, conducted by University of Roehampton, London, there were a total of 204 *Rites of Spring* choreographed from 1913 to 2008 (the number of reconstructions continues to climb after 2008). Feminist scholar Peggy Phelan’s celebrated observation, ‘[p]erformance’s only life is in the present,’ led to her conclusion that ‘[p]erformance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations’ (1993:146). Strategies to withstand the denouement of ephemerality reverberate through the multitude of re-versioning and re-visiting of *Sacre*. What is it about this ‘classic’ that is so compelling for dance-makers? And what is it that is particular for female dance-makers? Is it a desire to re-make the idea, score or even scandal of the original work present again which has created the rich legacy of *The Rite of Spring*?

The pivot of the *Sacre* is a fertility rite, which culminates in the condemnation of the Chosen Maiden to death for the well-being of the community, ostensibly demon-strable of a patriarchal perspective. Dance historian Sally Banes’ ruminations point, however, to possible variations in the inevitability of the gender of the Chosen One.

Rite is an imagined ritual, there was no documented practice of human sacrifice among the ancient Slavs.... The idea of the human sacrifice may have been based on an Aztec ceremony. But if so, why was the young man of Aztec custom transformed into a young woman?

(Banes, 1998:104)

That noted, in the final analysis, procreation is regarded as women’s innate biological and social destiny; consequently, her role in the act of giving birth – and by extension, societal and seasonal renewal – is sanctified and praised, tending to obscure any associated suffering. However, this gendered marking does not sit well with the equality sought by the feminist movement. As Banes further observed:

Opposing the tide of feminist demands was the idea of women as nature itself and the image of woman as naturally fecund, connected to cyclical change in nature, and for this reason located outside of time, transhistorically associated

with primeval origins. Thus, even within modern “civilization” one could locate the primitive in woman. Considering the popularity of this view ... [a] woman whose spiritual role in life is to re-fertilize the earth ... is not surprising.  
(Banes, 1998:104–105)

At the original performance, people paid attention to the scandal and aesthetic outrage surrounding *Sacre*'s unfamiliar presentation, leaving the psychology of the Chosen One's sacrifice virtually unremarked. According to the critic Rivière:

At no time during the dance does the Chosen Maiden show the personal terror that ought to fill her soul. She carries out a rite; she is absorbed by a social function, and without any sign of comprehension or of interpretation, she moves as dictated by the desires and impulses of a being vaster than herself, a monster filled with ignorance and appetites, with cruelty and darkness.  
(1913, cited in Banes, 1998:105)

Those uncivilized deities and the Russians who may have appeared to honour them with violent sound and aberrant movement were insupportable in refined circles of European culture. As Hodson indicated:

The use of primitivist models was a critique of contemporary culture for progressive artists prior to World War I ... Picasso and others stimulated the Russians to mine the rich ore of their mythological past ... partly because of late industrialization and partly because of the protracted struggle between adopted European traditions and indigenous customs since the time of Peter the Great.  
(Hodson, 1986–87:7)

Framed aesthetically, *Sacre*'s reception illuminated the collision of past and future, which Diaghilev, if not from the personal artistic investments of Nijinsky, Roerich, and Stravinsky, arguably engineered. In dance scholar Shelley Berg's terms, the primitivism of *l'âme slav* (Slavic soul), when combined with the confrontational forcefulness of Russian modernity conceived by Diaghilev, turned out to be too radical for the conservatives in the Parisian audience. A series of ritual tasks carried out by members of the tribe on the Chosen Maiden (as barbaric as it may have initially been viewed) were an unfortunate cause of the dissonance and ugliness with which some members of the audience felt they had been assaulted. However, as the legacy of this daunting work unfolds, the figure of the Chosen One emerges as a multilayered symbol of the very difficult idea of sacrifice.

### **Many perspectives from women choreographers**

In surveying the works of choreographers Pina Bausch, Maryse Delente, Marie Chouinard and Maggi Sietsma, alternative means of expressing the contradictory feelings of the life-giver, exploring profound meaning of the ritual, and revealing the distinct longing for survival emerge. Moreover, changing gender relations become apparent, especially when placed in each work's historical and cultural context. For example, Bausch's *Sacre* (1975), created during the height of feminist activity in the 1970s, exerted a consciousness of women's rights through a degree of agency given to the women to nominate who might be the Chosen One. Their hesitancy to commit themselves to self-sacrifice or shy away from the actuality of death showed the working of this agency within the fateful limit that one of the group must die.

Dance has been suggested as a potent medium by which humans make and convey meaning (Desmond, 1997; Thomas, 2003). When meaning involves puzzling and terrifying aspects of life, whether plant, animal or human, overlain by the purported sophistication of civilization, the mix can provoke a profound explosion of ideas which pierce a hidden nerve deep in our psyches, simultaneously coveting flesh, the abyss of death, and the ruthless will of creation. For these women choreographers, rebirth and survival are not as beautiful or celebratory as poems to spring might propose but, instead, childbirth is thwart with harshness and pain. Their works reveal not so much the cruelty inherent in evolutionary thought but the glimpses of personal scars and/or provocations to traditional perception of seasonal renewal. Spring is quintessentially a marker of resurrection, an occasion for celebration, joy and the flourishing of beauty, but spring forces its entry into the world through a terrible adversity. Birth incurs inordinate sacrifice, played out in various ways in diverse cultures by examples such as a woman in childbirth to Jesus' crucifixion. Male members of the original Ballets Russes' collaboration may not have considered the complex ramifications that the work's theme could provoke, although it is well-documented that they 'were intrigued with the culture of pre-Christian Russia' (Hodson, 1986–87:9). Their objective lay in distinguishing Slavophile modernism from the ground-breaking propulsion of the European avant-garde that tended to reject origins (or barbarism) as unseemly for

their advanced practices (Hodson, 1986–87; Garafola, 1992; Morris, 2006). For its creators, *Sacre* was none other than a difficult and inflammatory artistic event. The four female choreographers analysed in this article engage in questioning the origins and implications of the character of the Chosen One, and commit themselves to present a non-patriarchal embodiment of gender and body.

### **Bausch<sup>3</sup> and the dilemma of choice**

Pina Bausch, near the beginning of her extraordinary career, examined the libretto of *Sacre* to find resonances with her life and imaginative ideas. ‘The starting point is the music. There are so many feelings in it; it changes constantly. There is also much fear in it. I thought, how would it be to dance knowing you have to die? How would you feel, how would I feel?’ (Bausch cited in Tashiro, 1999) True to her developing practice, the final questions indicate the wellspring of Bausch’s evocation and, indeed, interrogation of the theme: the harrowing process of choosing or designating the one to die. Very few commentators argue about this point; where they vary lies in the ramifications of the embodied process. Dance historian Susan Manning claimed, ‘The social ritual that frames the woman as victim became shockingly clear. Bausch made gender an issue in *Sacre*, and after her staging any choreographer who presented female self-sacrifice as a given risked the charge of old-fashionedness’ (1991:146).

A more ambiguous reading is given in Joanna Morris’ dissertation study, where she recognizes the bloodied symbolic scar of the red dress which features as a striking design element against the flesh tones of the costumes and the staining earth of peat. ‘Essentially, the red slip represents death; each woman, by picking it up, assesses her own strength to bear the responsibility of becoming the Chosen One’ (Morris, 2006:9). At the other end of the interpretative continuum lies dance journalist Nadine Meisner’s observation: ‘And when a woman is chosen [Aurelie Dupont] by the male leader, the music briefly unleashes the colossal power of its drums, like the cracking of the Russian ice in spring. It signals the

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<sup>3</sup> *Das Frühlingsopfer*, choreographer: Pina Bausch, premiere on 3 December 1975, performed by Tanztheater Wuppertal at Opernhaus, Wuppertal, West Germany. <http://www.pina-bausch.de/en/pieces/fruehlingsopfer.php>

release of pent-up sexual longing, the men and women flying like shards into each other's arms' (cited in Tashiro, 1999). That allusion to the cracking ice of spring's return and to 'men and women flying like shards' strikes the incomprehension which seems to inhabit Bausch's questioning and her responses: life as much as death dwells in the complex social and biological territories of procreation from which neither gender is exempt.

Arguably, Bausch's sensitivity is haunted by her generational relationship with World War II and the Holocaust. Dance scholar Janice Ross, in a 1999 Stanford pre-lecture, suggested that 'Bausch's choreography seems so paradigmatically post World War II German. Like the performance form of *Butoh*, which arose in post war Japan, Bausch's *Tanztheatre* is rawly expressionistic, posing open questions and offering few easy answers about culpability, moral responsibility and humanity's dark side'. Eva Van Schaik, likewise, compares Bausch's work with that of the Japanese underground form of *butoh* as both belonging to the expressive vocabulary of a post-war generation:

Both cultures' dance belongs to the domain of doom, destruction, deformation, defeatism, disbelief, and even denial, as a result of a general notion of individual impotence and the disability to deploy and develop one's own faculties and potential during one's life.

(1990/2013:52)

Born in the ruins of this catastrophic moment in German history, Bausch, I speculate, was susceptible to experiencing something of the oppressive guilt that permeated the people's psyche as descendants of murderers or, worse, as helpless onlookers of atrocious acts of war, because, as Eva Van Schaik acknowledges, 'Nobody can turn away from the realization that the shocking destruction put upon mankind is enacted by none other than mankind itself' (1990/2013:52). Additionally, dance critic Horst Koegler intimated that Bausch's early expressions seemed to have 'something to do with muted despair and mourning for a beautiful world in which man was inevitably going to seed' (1991, cited in Climenhaga 1997:290). Indications therefore suggest that renewal might have been craved, not simply in the material reconstruction of communities but in hidden recesses of consciousness, as the young girl approached adulthood, speculatively raising questions about why the terrors of survival had seemingly erased all trace of self-sacrifice in the

parental generations. As such, it is not difficult to imagine Bausch asking: how would it be to dance knowing you have to die?

Irony pervades the tortuous repetition of the flailing and violent elbow-to-stomach action which the women enact at points throughout the work and which culminates in a pulsating image of the group against the individual of the closing sequence, so poignantly portrayed in Wim Wenders' film *Pina* (2011). For the Chosen One, the action writes exhaustion to its logical conclusion, while for the women as a group, saved in one sense from a death sentence, the movement shudders with the agonising guilt of survival and the ignominy of their worthlessness to bear the price of renewal. Male intervention fades in this crucial moment, though their shadowy presence suggests uneasy impotence. Whether intended or not, Bausch's *Sacre* (1975) suggested that the laws of nature prevail in spite of our civilized intentions to have it otherwise. Lingering too might be shame in the failure of moral strength when faced with the self-interest of survival.

### **Chouinard<sup>4</sup> and wilderness**

Québécoise Marie Chouinard takes renewal as her motif, exemplified by the seasonal fracture of winter's hold on life as its point of being. Gender becomes inclusive rather than confrontational because she dwells within microscopic as well as animalistic energies in an aim to convey the troubling sacred value attributed to spring. Like Bausch, Chouinard's instincts inhabit the Stravinsky score but she has another agenda; not a choice of what should die to enable procreation, but what prevails in nature as difficult, yet, astounding demonstrations of the violent cross-gendered energies with which species procreate. Such a view introduces awe in the death and regeneration in which survival actually occurs. The human in Chouinard bears less weight than the intriguing emanations of foliage or insect-life pushing, almost at a cellular level, through pain to intoxication. Not that she obviates the human dimension: her dancers are very human, but there is a sense that sacrifice is embedded in the wilderness as a disturbing yet normal process.

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<sup>4</sup> *Le sacre de printemps*, choreographer: Marie Chouinard, premiere on 18 June 1993, performed by Compagnie Marie Chouinard at Centre National des Arts, Ottawa, Canada.

Described on the Compagnie Marie Chouinard's website as a 'powerful hymn to life,' this first group choreography (1993), created after some years of radical experimentation as a soloist, 'explores a New World and marks the entry of dance into modernity'. The allusion to the 'New World' signals the cultural catalyst that generates Chouinard's approach. Removed in time and spatial location from *Sacre*'s origins in the 'Old World' of Europe, this creator subscribed almost to a reversal of the motivation that drove the Diaghilev collaborators. Instead of reaching back to actual or imagined ancestors, the Canadians, who are descendants of European colonialism, express their modernity as newcomers in wild and intimidating landscapes, 'emptying the deep ecology' of an inconceivable geographical and cultural 'real,' with, in cultural theorist Jonathan Bordo's terms, the 'imaginary' of the European 'wilderness' (2000:246). Novelist Margaret Atwood's pursuit of the emotional negotiations by European settlers with the land, climate and the near erasure of the Indigenous inhabitants corresponds with Chouinard's exploration of 'deep ecology' in *The Rite of Spring*. The female narrator in Atwood's *Surfacing* (1972) grapples with her sense of identity within the wild-ness of the terrain by way of language: 'The forest leaps upward, enormous, the way it was before they cut it, columns of sunlight frozen; the boulders float, melt, everything is made of water, even the rocks. In one of the languages there are no nouns, only verbs held for a long moment' (212). Words wrestle, like Chouinard's dancers, with an environmental consciousness which projects a sense of the enormity of nature, the rights of the Indigenous inhabitants and the fragility of (trespassing) humans who are forced to tap into cosmic and spiritual levels of awareness to come to terms with the land's incomprehensible forces. From this point of departure, Chouinard's *Rite* excavates deeper into the idea of sacrifice, into its non-human origins. She claims it is '[o]nly 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' (Compagnie Marie Chouinard, 1993).

### **Maryse Delente and 'female-world'**

French choreographer Maryse Delente created a complete female world in *Le sacre du printemps* which, like the Chouinard version, premiered in 1993, in Lyons, France. There is

no intermediation of a shaman, but an action of self-sacrifice occurs. Likewise, there is no intervention on the part of men and, yet, a masculine oppression remains in the guise of an unmoving sedentary male figure in the shadowy background. The seemingly strong female figures execute movements that struggle against this shadowy gaze of patriarchal power. Whatever the dancers try to do to confront or deflect this omniscient male gaze ends up becoming a reinforcement of the patriarchal status quo, because ‘by definition, that which is communicated arises from within the fabric of culture, that is to say, within patriarchy’ (Daly, 1992:243). However, their ineffectual resistance is finally transformed in the extreme lunge of the Chosen One in the culmination of the work.

Delente’s work attempted to challenge the pervasive social model of women’s inferior status and to disrupt the framing patriarchal construction that holds such inequitable perceptions in place. Six high-backed wooden chairs are placed in a half-circle upstage, with a man (who later we find to be a mannequin) seated in the middle of them. An invisible, yet intense, power hangs over the whole stage, like a nightmare haunting the dancers, who sit on the chairs quivering uncontrollably. In this deliberate design of relations between a group of real women and a man/mannequin, the ‘man’ is not a single person but symbolises patriarchal construction. Even if the figure on the stage is just a model, its location centre-stage places the women in a marginal position, on the periphery of men. This image is in line with the French feminist Luce Irigaray’s point of view in that a woman ‘is or ceaselessly becomes the place of the other who cannot separate himself from it. Without her knowing or willing it, she is then threatening because of what she lacks: a “proper” place’ (1993: 10–11). The absence of women in male-dominated history ultimately sees her ‘relegated to the position of the object’ (Poovey, 1988:55).

Showing female vulnerability, however, is not Delente’s major purpose. The score’s change to strident percussion directs the dancers to engage in a series of elastic jumping, expressive of violent passion. The source of energy that triggers such intense and powerful movements comes from the depths of the dancers’ physicality and mentality as they strive to overcome any associations with feminine vulnerability and challenge the fixed opposition of femininity/masculinity. This choreographic approach is a direct response to feminist

statements which seek to contest the dominance of patriarchy and interrogate the logic of binary oppositions. In other words, in response to Delente's women, people should recognise that 'there is no necessary connection between anatomical sexuality and gender stereotypes or roles' (Poovey, 1988:59).

That powerful physicality seems to lead to collective violence that follows and this time is initiated amongst the women themselves. The circular dance of ancient ritual turns into a 'crazy girl game'; one woman is expelled from the rapidly spinning circle by the tremendous centrifugal force. She, it seems, is the Chosen One. In order to survive in a cruel world, the sacrifice of a few is taken as given, derivative from the cycle of death and rebirth inherent of human groups' reading of the phenomenon of *Spring*. Even in Delente's female world, a 'chosen' woman suffers group oppression in an act that implies women can be as cruel to each other as men can be to women. This replication of the system of patriarchal power has seemingly penetrated into every corner of life's actuality and cannot be destabilized through logical action. When women gain status (and strength indicated by their movement), they are still perceived in relation to men (or the dominating traits of masculinity). A woman's marginal place and identity is difficult to change, as is the ideational reliance on binary distinctions.

The Chosen One appears in the dance to eventually realize that the oppression she strikes against does not emanate from a single man (or what he may represent), but from the inherent system of power relations. In the culmination of this choreographic work, she fiercely strikes the male figure with her head and, then, determinedly penetrates into his body through his stomach. She literally dives into his centre. This act of self-sacrifice aims not only to gain rebirth, but acts as a manifesto to disrupt the seemingly powerful patriarchal structure. That radical movement of diving into his belly collapses the patriarchal figure and his dominating gaze, transforming the feminine 'other' from subordination into a state of equal coexistence. In other words, she acts as a new force that enters into the original construction and, through a swift imaginative move, severs initial positions and relationships.

Delente's version of *Le sacre du printemps* interrogates the oppositional logic that governs the male/female binary from a female perspective, reconsidering the female role

both physically and socially. According to Luce Irigaray, ‘Woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man, and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy’ (1993:10). In the image of ritual sacrifice, the maiden is not carried to the altar by the others, but she takes the initiative and sacrifices her life and the rebirth that may come by a self-chosen action which collapses the phallogentric domination of that ever-present male figure. He, and all he stands for, is shown to be an empty shell which she shatters as she sacrifices her life.

### **Maggi Sietsma<sup>5</sup> and contemporary tribalism**

Unlike most choreographies of *Rite of Spring*, the version by Australian choreographer Maggi Sietsma deals less with the striking Stravinsky score, than with an examination of the theme of ‘rituals’. She indicated in the program notes that ‘[she] revisited and explored the drive, innocence, passion and sophistication of both tribal and contemporary rituals’ (Expressions Dance Company, 2002). From her point of view, tribalism has not disappeared but still exists in the behaviours of distinct contemporary social groups and subcultures. The six dancers of Sietsma’s company, Expressions, create a fanciful world on a cave-like stage with their suggestive dancing and acting. The work’s structure is based on a series of selected verbs: waiting, watching, selecting, pursuing and catching, which are infused into the distinct spoken monologues performed by dancers. The interweaving of dance and voice within the solo and collective sections create innovative and visible dramatic tension in the work. The performance represents the sophistication of contemporary society and the intangible power of rituals affecting binary relations, such as the collective and the individual, the male and the female.

In this contemporary ‘tribe’, the naked warriors turn into stylish modern people involved in mystical ceremonies which become contemporary games of survival. The tribalism builds on the basic demands of humanity, like desire, fear, love and safety, rather

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<sup>5</sup> *Rite of Spring*, choreographer: Maggi Sietsma, premiere in 2002, performed by Expressions Dance Company, Brisbane, Australia.

than on any form of distinctive ethnic culture and identity. In a world of emotions, seduction not only occurs between female and male, but also surfaces in homosexual pairings. Women, in Sietsma's eyes, are more likely to have fantasies about love and to feel disappointed at an affair's culmination. The fierce opposition between the male and female demonstrated in other versions melts here into intra-sexual attractions.

The original 1913 performance of *Sacre* emerged through vague composition and choreography and, yet, the creation actually followed clear symmetrical structures with a first and second act, female and male groups, and the shaman and the witch. Nijinsky's choreography embodied the power of the masses and images of different groups, rather than aiming to give any representation of individuality. As the contemporaneous critic Rivière wrote: 'We find ourselves in the presence of man's movements at a time when he did not yet exist as an individual. Living beings still cling to each other; they exist in groups.... Their faces are devoid of any individuality' (1913, cited in Banes 1998:105). In contrast, Sietsma designs a distinctive identity for each dancer with unique dance sequences and costumes. Each solo is associated with specific personality states that are then interwoven into group dances to form a relatively loose contemporary tribe. At times that tribe becomes lost in collective confusion and, at other times, evolves into an internal game of chase wherein the relationship between dancers is detached and yet intimate.

Compared to the original, mystical ritual, sacrificial acts are not very explicit in this choreography and the theme of rebirth is muted or implicit. The extreme repressive tension between the community and the Chosen One transforms into collective anxiety, expectation and release. The main female dancer might be perceived as the Chosen One, if spectators insist on correspondences, but she is more directly a contemporary woman, dancing individualistically in this illusionary tribe. When people surround her in a tense metaphoric circle, she strives to find an exit to escape the menacing environment. The action confronts the group, but also seems to evoke her internal struggles in an imaginary world. Finally, she realizes that she has no choice and, with everyone watching and waiting, she walks to the slope and lies down, where she suddenly stretches out her hand to hold something. As if hypnotized by the touch, she reclines again, placing her head into a mystical hole. After a

moment, she sits up wearing a bridal veil and holding a bunch of lilies, her eyes gazing into the distance where a future of hope seems to abide.

In this contemporary ritual, which is obviously less brutal and dark than most other versions of *The Rite of Spring*, the quest for survival continues, not for an ancient community but for this contemporary woman. The Chosen One is not a symbol of sacrifice, rather, in this performance she is a person with her own emotions and expectations. Sietsma pays attention to the contemporary conditions of individual lives, not just on the part of a female, but for everyone, even though the female plays an important role in the structure of this work. Sietsma borrows the concept of tribalism to demonstrate the complexity and sophistication of contemporary society, where 'contemporary and primitive, at times [are shown to be] markedly different and at other times show great similarities' (Expressions Dance Company, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

What ties Bausch, Chouinard, Delente, and Sietsma together, in spite of their individual positioning as choreographers from distinct cultures, is an appreciation of the complexities of birth, which is always a re-birth, as both an idea and actuality. Side by side they represent the contradictions that emerge in any equation of culture and nurture and, more significantly, their unique works show how the embodied nature of dance can convey the many ideas entangled in sacrifice and how women choreographers probably have the capacity to encompass difference and contradiction. Renewal for Bausch metaphorically implies a reconstruction of the spirit and consciousness through deep moral self-reflection, while Delente creates a radical subversion of patriarchy as a means of rebuilding female status in history. For these choreographers, the Chosen One is a multi-layered symbol, endowed with social, political and religious functions. On the other hand, no matter whether conceived in the proto-human ecology of Chouinard's work or in Sietsma's contemporary tribalism that follows social living principles, survival is an eternal concern with ritual as a pivotal medium for its realisation. As may be expected, female choreographers are more susceptible to the vulnerable images of women in *Rites* and are committed to sever any

stabilized gender impressions that may be projected by society. Moreover, their distinctive representations of *Rites* make possible further explorations of the historical origins and cultural meanings of sacrifice and rebirth for other generations of dance-makers.

The disturbing energy in the spasms of a burgeoning spring is exactly what drives the chosen female choreographers' visions of *Rites*, and intimates that human strivings for survival, however dangerous and fraught with inequities, follow a desire which is inextricably tied to the physical, psychological and social forces of life and death or, more pointedly, of death and life. The imperative to survive drives all the hundreds of versions of *Le sacre de printemps* since its momentous debut 100 years ago, but that legacy would not be so rich and nuanced if Bausch and Chouinard, Delente and Sietsma had not imbued the terrible and haunting idea of sacrifice with the particularized compassion and intelligence of the selected women choreographers.

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