To the American dancer I say 'Know your country'. When its vitality, its freshness, its exuberance of youth and vigour, its contrasts of plenitude and barrenness are made manifest in movement on the stage, we begin to see the American dance.

When we speak of this country, we speak of a vast concept whose infinite facets cannot all be seen. But in spite of this immensity let us find fundamentals of which we are all a part. Let us consider for a moment the striking difference in the Continent's and our own reaction to an important factor in modern times - the machine. Talk to the Continental, talk to the American of the machines' part in the tempo of modern life. The reactions are unmistakably characteristic.

To the European the machine is still a matter of wonder and excessive sentimentality. Some sort of machine dance is a staple of every European dance repertory. But to the American sentimentality for the machine is alien. The machine is a natural phenomenon of life.

An American dance is not a series of steps. It is infinitely more. The characteristic time beat, a different speed, an accent, sharp, clear, staccato.

(Armitage 1966: 105)

This is Martha Graham writing in 1936. Her assertions of the American-ness of American modern dance came in a decade when she was making a series of dances on American themes - some represented pioneering white Americans while others were inspired by the example of American Indian religious rituals. Graham, like many modern American artists of her period, was isolationist in her attitudes towards her art, paralleling the isolationist foreign policy which the United States pursued throughout the 1920s and 1930s. For her as for Doris Humphrey and Charles Weidman an assertion of the validity of modern American experience as a subject for choreography was a necessary counter to the superficially oriental, tribal, folk and other borrowed dance styles that typified the productions of Ted Shawn and Ruth St Denis. Furthermore, as I pointed out in the last chapter, by the early to mid-1930s claims about the American-ness of American modern dance were also, for Graham and her contemporaries, a rejection of the idea then current that their modern dance styles were merely derivative of the then more developed and more mature work of visiting German artists like Wigman and Krenzberg.

As a European I find Graham's broad generalisations about 'Continental' grating. They are certainly chauvinistic, somewhat arrogant and ill informed. Where did Graham get the idea that machine dances were 'a staple of every European dance repertory'? How could anyone think that European intellectuals like Siegfried Kracauer could look upon the machine as a matter of wonder and excessive sentimentality? At the time, Graham had never been to Europe (except for a brief tour with Denishawn, performing in England in 1922). Nor did she want to go to Europe. In 1935 she wrote:

'It has been the common practice [for Americans] to seek instruction in lands alien to us, feterered as we are to things European. What does this mean? It means to me losing all that we should hold most dear in the development of American dance.'

(Armitage and Stewart 1970: 54)

In March 1932 she had been awarded a Guggenheim fellowship which offered her the opportunity to travel to Europe and study with Mary Wigman, but, she later wrote: 'I said no. I didn't want to go to Europe without something American so I chose Mexico as a compromise. Some people still think that I studied with Wigman' (Graham 1991: 143).

All of Graham's comments tell us little of interest about European dance and a lot about Graham's idea of America. When she says 'let us find fundamentals with which we are all a part' Graham is expressing the classic, liberal American, assimilationist position. Having appealed to these American fundamentals, it is telling that she uses a supposed difference between European and American sensibilities to consolidate what we Americans' all have in common, and that she should choose modernity as the site of that supposed difference. This indicates that she thought about her modern dance in nationalist terms which are romantic and essentialist, and that she considered the ways in which modern life was being changed by modernisation and mechanisation were significant subjects for dance. Clearly Graham is discussing here the same types of issues which in previous chapters I have identified in European work. Ideologies of nationalism and internationalism affected dance in the United States just as they affected dance in Europe; and just as in Europe, American dance and critical discourses about dance were areas in which the experiences of modernity were articulated and contested. This is not to deny that the United States was, by the 1930s, much
further advanced in the process of modernisation than any European country; or that the choreographic work of Graham and Humphrey was different from the work of Wigman or Kreutzberg. This chapter looks at the ways in which American modern dance was shaped by the 1930s mediated American experiences of modernity, and of what it meant to be an American in the 1930s. Graham, in the quotation with which this chapter began, spoke of the American dance as moving to a rhythm which she characterised as fast, sharply accented, clear and staccato. The implication is that the pace of American dance expressed the pace of life in the modern American city — a pace whose tempo was affected by the processes of modernisation and mechanisation. The dance pieces discussed in this chapter all drew on this experience, most celebrating the dream of a positive future which modernity seemed to offer. The analysis of these pieces that I make in this chapter proposes that these American choreographers found new ways of expressing the individual's experience of the dynamism and scale of modern society, and explored the modern ways in which individuals related to one another and to the larger group that represents society as a whole.

The idea which Graham so clearly articulates that American experience was newer, more vibrant and above all different from European experience needs to be placed in the context of debates in the United States during the 1930s about nationalism and internationalism and about the social role of the artist in modern society. If much of the American critical discussion about dance generated by left-wing writers was concerned with realism and social relevance, this was because the Communist Party had, at the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, officially chosen to favour socialist realism over modernist, formalist abstraction (and the European avant-garde) which the John Reed Club of New York accepted (see Harrison and Wood 1992: 401-4 and 409-12). Meanwhile little intellectual support for modernist abstraction was offered from those writers not on the left. Franko has rightly observed that what modern dancers needed but lacked in the mid-1930s was "a formalist witness to articulate its modernism in words" (Franko 1995: 39). Theoretical frameworks for conceptualising and interpreting formal aesthetic qualities were being developed during the 1920s and 1930s by German marxist intellectuals and philosophers. The ideas of theorists like Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch and Krakauer were not at that time widely known outside Germany nor acceptable to the Communist Party itself; some of this body of theory has already been used in early chapters of his book to interrogate the modernism of early European modern dance and ballet.

The same or similar concerns can be identified within the work of modern dance artists in the United States during the period, with significant differences. The European avant-garde saw in modernity a utopian ideal that would follow the collapse of capitalism, and this led to a fascination with America. For Americans, on the other hand, modernity was the area in which they were in advance of Europe. Understandably, therefore, they perceived it in isolationist, nationalist terms and saw it as the means to realising the American dream. While the European avant-garde were largely libertarian, the American left were mostly marxists and thus viewed Hollywood as an institution that was a threat to dance and theatre consequently held fairly conservative views about aesthetic modernism. American choreography, which took American modernity as its inspiration, therefore conformed to isolationist notions of national identity.

What is interesting and significant about the essay 'The mass ornament' (discussed in Chapters 4 and 5) is not just the fact that Krakauer was prepared to look seriously at mass culture, but also that he was interested in locating the formal qualities that characterised the dancing and movement of mass ornament performances in relation to social changes brought about as a consequence of industrial modernisation. Despite his pessimism, Krakauer was initially just about able to see the modernist abstraction of chorus line dancing as a utopian ideal suggestive of a better future that the process of rationalisation might be able to bring about. However, as we have seen, by the time he wrote 'Girls and crisis' in 1931 Krakauer had come to believe that the mass ornament no longer offered a credible ideal but was a delusion and a distraction. Krakauer's pessimism was not unique within Germany or indeed Europe as a whole at that time but it was largely alien to Americans. Dance artists like Graham and Humphrey, together with some who wrote about their work, subscribed to a positive view of the potential of American industrial knowledge and experience to create the conditions that would fulfil the American dream. What is generally argued is that American modernist works like Balanchine's Serenade (1934) and Humphrey's Nyne Dance (1935) present an ideal because they achieve some timeless aesthetic goal. In this chapter I propose that some of the more celebratory American works of the mid-1930s present, in formal terms, levels of order and energy that could be seen as ideal and utopian precisely because these levels were the opposite of current conditions; in other words what real life lacked and thus needed, these works exemplified in abundance. Whereas an orthodox modernist view would evaluate the timeless truths of great masterpieces — asserting that a thing of beauty is a joy for ever — I want to insist that cultural productions like ballets and dance pieces are historically specific. This means therefore that, although the utopian ideals exemplified in these works are necessarily apart from present reality, the parameters governing what might or might not have an effect upon these works were ideologically determined and socially and historically specific. One should therefore be alert to the possibility of contradictions, absences and exclusions within the sorts of ideals they suggest.

This chapter therefore proceeds as follows. As modernity and mechanisation were significant issues around which the American-ness of American modern dance differed from similar developments in Europe, I look at the ways in which modernity as a theme was dealt with in American modern
dance. This leads on to a more detailed discussion of the relationship between modernity and utopian ideals in Balanchine's Serenade, Humphrey's New Dance and the dream ballet choreographed and performed by Katherine Dunham with her dance company in the 1943 film Stormy Weather.

Choreography and modern American life

What is at issue in the various accounts of dance modernism that were expounded in the United States during the 1930s was not whether modernist dance bore any relation to contemporary life, but rather the relationship between dance and life ought to be. For John Martin, subject matter on its own was no guarantee of modernity. 'In the early days of the modern dance', he wrote in 1936, there was a veritable deluge of machinery dances supposedly created in the belief that they should be more modern than machinery and no way easier, therefore, to the field of modern dance' (1968: 72). It is not the subject, Martin asserts, that makes a piece modern, but its content: 'A dance entitled "Opus 24" with no more program than its title would indicate might contain more deeply grounded social significance and vastly more immediacy, provided it were born of that inner illumination by which alone the artist conceives' (ibid.). Martin further explains this artist-centred view of modernity by referring to Isadora Duncan. Duncan, he says, 'was driven as a leaf is driven before the wind' faced by her responsiveness to the unformulated will of her epoch to do what the time required' (ibid.: 83). Martin seems to have thought that in the 1920s 'what the time required' was abstract dance which, following Mary Wigman, he called the 'absolute' dance: 'dance alone, an autonomous art exemplifying fully the ideals of modernism in its attainment of abstraction and in its utilisation of the resources of its materials efficiently and with authority' (Martin 1965b: 235). Graham herself seems to have thought in similar terms:

One has to become what one is. Since the dance form is governed by social conditions, so the American rhythm is sharp and angular, stripped of unessentials. It is something related only to itself, not laid on, but as a piece with that spirit which was willing to face a pioneer country.

(Armitage 1966: 101)

Clearly both Martin and Graham articulated their understanding of modernist abstraction in similar terms and both saw it as a direct response to American experiences of modernity. Both also saw American modern dance in terms of positive affirmation. While dance for Graham expressed the pioneering American spirit, Martin proposed in 1939 that the American dancer does not merely accept life but undertakes to shape it to his [sic] own ends. He is not content with experiencing and revealing states of being, but insists on being in states of action' (Martin 1965b: 238). Graham's Celebration (1934) is not only a clear example of a dance piece that exemplifies this positive affirmation, but also a piece whose critical reception indicates the range of political stances held by critics at the time.

What immediately strikes the viewer of Celebration is its dynamism and energy. It starts with twelve dancers (originally all women) in a close formation jumping together into the air, seemingly propelled by the 4/4 march tempo of Trumpet Tune in Louis Horst's music. As they bounce on the beat, they start to stretch up their arms, making striking images - sometimes symmetrical, sometimes not - that change with each jump. After this first section the music changes to a more winsome melody played on the oboe to which the dancers, breaking out of the solidly massed group to spread across the stage, stretch out their arms and turn their torsos so that their arms sweep around them through space. Then the trumpet tune returns with its trumpets (and in the 1996 version I saw big balletic lifts which surely couldn't have been part of the original dance). The piece returns once more to the oboe melody and ends as it began with the trumpets and a reprise of the opening jumps.

Marie Marchowsky, who was one of the dancers with whom Graham originally made the piece, told Alice Helpern that Graham used images of upward thrusting skyscrapers and percussive rhythms of the modern city. Helpern suggests that 'the pulsating power of Celebration echoed the thrusting energy of America, a strong industrial nation' (Helperin 1991: 13). America in the early 1930s was of course recovering from the effects of the Wall Street Crash and there was widespread unemployment and economic hardship. President F. D. Roosevelt was voted in in 1932 on the strength of his vision of economic regeneration and with it a new deal for 'the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid'. It is inconceivable that Celebration could have celebrated the reality of life on the streets of depressed American cities; what it expressed was the hope that the American dream must be vital if it could produce such modern marvels.

John Martin in 1936 saw Celebration as one of the pieces in which Graham moved on from her Indian ritual phase (with pieces like Primitivo Mysteries and Primitivo Canticle) towards 'the equally exultant rituals which underlie contemporary life' (1968: 199). Transitions, Celebration and Course were all in his opinion touched with a 'strong social awareness' (ibid.). Celebration, he wrote, is 'filled with vitality and the consciousness of victory. It is, from a compositional standpoint, one of the fullest and most finished of all [Graham's] group dances' (ibid.: 200). Paul Love, reviewing the premiere in the Dance Observer praised its opposition of fast and slow sections 'of vigorous excitement and almost ritualistic gravity' which 'is brilliantly worked out and brings immediate response from the audience' (1934: 17). Love complains however that sometimes there is too much going on on stage for the viewer to take in the whole, leaving, he says, 'my remembrance of the
form shot through with occasional small holes' (ibid.). But how like the pace and scale of metropolitan experience not to be able to take in everything in one glance. Edna Ocko made an – at the time – uncharacteristically positive judgement of *Celebration* in the December 1934 issue of *New Theatre*. The piece, she suggested, might have been called *Demonstration* because it evoked images of May Day parades and union organising. Another left-wing critic, Paul Douglas, took a sterner view. Graham, he thought, would be remembered as 'the greatest dance exponent of the last stages of capitalism struggling in its final agonies to salvage something out of its chaotic and decaying torment' (Douglas 1995: 140–1). This in his view caused her to be unable to apply herself successfully to 'vital subject matter' (ibid.). Yet clearly Douglas too was impressed by *Celebration*: having written Graham off, however, he seems to have had to make a special case for it:

There is discernible in Graham’s recent group dances, however, a noticeable change. In *Celebration*, for instance, a greater use of space and more elevation is attained than ever before. This, I believe, indicates the influence of some of her students, who from an ideological viewpoint are more advanced than Graham herself. The change is encouraging. The group has superb technical ability. But it will be wasted unless they continue to depart even more radically from the fundamental features of Graham’s dance forms.

(ibid.: 141)

The dynamic energy of *Celebration* – its speed, accent and characteristic time beat – was therefore acknowledged as a response to modernity at a significant moment in the establishment of the New Deal. This energy was, however, interpreted in different ways from different political positions. If its characteristically American energy seems to have been appreciated by both Ocko and Martin from differing political stances, Mark Roth has argued that the Warner Brothers musicals which Busby Berkeley made in 1932 and 1933 used modernist imagery in ways that were more explicitly supportive of Roosevelt’s New Deal. The final number from *Gold Diggers of 1933* ‘Remember My Forgotten Man’ echoes Roosevelt’s words directly. Roth suggests that in 42nd Street and *Footlight Parade* the strong director who forces his cast to work hard and succeed embodies the spirit of the New Deal (1981: 47–8). Berkeley’s extraordinary, mass ornamental production numbers represent the fruits of this successful labour. As Roth (1981) and Hoberman (1993) both suggest, in the context of the New Deal these mass ornaments signify putting America back to work. Berkeley’s choreography offered precisely the hope that Kracauer had dismissed as illusory in his 1931 article ‘Girls and crisis’ (see Chapter 4). The mechanical efficiency and clarity of the geometric patterns in these numbers celebrate the power of modern industrial production just as Graham’s *Celebration* celebrated the modern metropolis.

While Graham’s *Celebration* and Berkeley’s film numbers used the dynamic energy of dance to present a utopian image of modernity, Jane Dudley’s *Time is Money*, which she made in 1934, attempts to show what it was like to be one of Roosevelt’s forgotten men at the bottom of the economic pyramid, and while Graham may not have known about Taylorism, this piece indicates that it was a topic of discussion for Dudley and other dancers on the left in New York. Dudley was a member of the New Dance Group who used to perform at union meetings and the group developed a close relationship with the Needlework and Allied Trades Federation (Prickett 1990: 52). In *Time is Money*, which Dudley recently reconstructed for performances in London and New York, she used a poem of the same name by Sol Funaroff which includes the lines:

Time is money and the tailor’s shears
become the whirring cutters’ gears of efficiency engineers.

(quoted Prickett 1989: 53)

A left-wing poem about tailors would have been apposite for a dance performed for members of the needlework union. The term ‘efficiency engineers’ was used at the time to refer to specialists in the type of industrial restructuring that Taylor had pioneered, and this is perhaps behind Funaroff’s reference to tailors. At this point in *Time is Money* the dancers’ movements mimic those of a machine turning mechanically at right angles between two operations.

These three examples all come from the early 1930s. *Time is Money* was reviewed in the December 1934 *Dance Observer* by Henry Gillond on a page facing a review by Ralph Taylor of *Celebration*. All three pieces were produced for different contexts and each articulated different ideological positions. From a political point of view, Berkeley’s choreography is the most conservative in that it lacked any kind of critical edge, while Dudley’s piece is the most radical of the three. Like Kracauer’s essay, *Time is Money* suggests that it is the individual’s body that most clearly reveals the negative, dehumanising effects of contemporary industrial reforms aimed at greater efficiency; and Dudley’s piece also evokes the extent to which the individual yearns to be able to free her own body from such dehumanisation. Mark Franko has shown that what those on the left in New York admired in Graham’s choreography was the way it showed how dance could present images of the individual’s desire for freedom and of a possible utopia. What these three pieces have in common is the embodiment in movement of the lived experience of metropolitan modernity.
Choreographing the new communities of consumption

The relationship between modern dance and the pace of modern, mechanised life, which these three pieces exemplify in different ways, is only part of the experience of modernity. Taylorism and Fordism were strategies for changing industrial work practices in the interests of greater production. Increasing factory production requires ever bigger and more standardised and homogenised markets. If for most of the twentieth century the United States was the leading industrial nation, this was not only because of its industrial efficiency but more importantly because of the ways in which American society was changed by the dynamics of consumption. As Victoria de Grazia points out, the key issue in understanding the social experience of modernity is:

how conceptions of market, merchandising techniques, and advertising design of American provenance forced the development of new patterns of consumer culture and thus came to define what it meant to be modern. . . . Increasingly, the contractual relations of market shaped notions of community, pressures for entitlement, and the modalities of political consensus. This change was accompanied by the construction of new social subjects such as consumers.

(de Grazia 1989: 223)

One difference between European and American modern dance of the 1930s is the extent to which American dance explores the embodiment of these new subjectivities and considers how they combined together into new conceptions of community in ways which were not yet significantly present in Europe. De Grazia calls these 'communities of consumption'. The new dynamic principle of consumption depended upon and effected a levelling of social hierarchies and regional differences in the interests of a greater and more homogenous pool of consumers each buying the same product and responding to the same merchandising techniques. Theoretically this suggests a society of equals. So when Doris Humphrey wrote of her enthusiasm for some discoveries about movement, which had to do with the experience of young people of the twentieth century living in the United States (see p. 130 above), that experience was from the point of view of the new subject positions and within new forms of collectivity brought about by the needs of modern industry.

Two of the key themes which underlie some of the most interesting modern dance created in the United States during the period covered in this book is the relationship between subjectivities and collectivity as expressed in the dynamics of the group and the relationship between the individual and the group. From Graham and Humphrey's writings and statements it is evident that each in different ways was concerned with the group as a theme in their choreography: this manifested itself in the precarious balance between the need for social conformity and the freedom to explore individual aspirations. Jawitz (1988), Graff (1994) and others have discussed the differences between Humphrey and Graham's approach to the group. In pieces like Heretics and Primitive Mysteria, it is argued, Graham casts herself as the individual who is separated from or at odds with the group; Humphrey's works like Papuaeania and New Dance, however, show a group of individuals who each have their own solos but come out of and return to the larger group which ultimately seems to represent something more important than anything that individuals can achieve on their own. Since I have already devoted some space in this chapter to discussing Graham's work and ideas and shall be looking at her Primitive Mysteria in the next chapter, I shall not discuss her work further here. Instead I shall look at the ways in which group choreography in the work of George Balanchine, Katherine Dunham and Doris Humphrey expresses American hopes and fears about the new subject positions and new forms of collectivity that were being brought about by the needs of modern industry. I am therefore looking at Balanchine's innovative and unusual use of the interplay between soloists and corps de ballet in Serenade (1934), which was made soon after her arrival in the United States and which, I shall argue, is informed by her perception of the difference between European and American society; Humphrey's concern with modern social ethics and the group which informed her pieces New Dance (1935) and With My Red Fists (1936); and the dream ballet from the motion picture musical Stormy Weather (Twentieth Century Fox 1943) choreographed by Katherine Dunham, which is clearly situated in a modern, urban environment and informed by African American experience of modernity.

Balanchine's Serenade and Humphrey's New Dance were choreographed within a year of one another. There are similarities between the modernist structure of the way each piece presents the group but there are also large differences both in movement style and in the way each represents gender. Dunham's dream ballet in Stormy Weather can also be seen as a modernist work; the technical basis of its movement material exemplifies much of the discipline found in Serenade but is at the same time informed by ideologies of individual freedom that bring it closer to Humphrey's work. I shall therefore contrast and compare Serenade (focusing on the opening 'Sonatina' section) and New Dance and then use the conclusions drawn from this discussion as a basis for looking at Stormy Weather.

The idea of finding points of comparison between George Balanchine and Doris Humphrey might seem slightly bizarre. On the face of it each belonged to entirely different constituencies within the dance world. Balanchine, born in Tsarist Russia, gave new life to the traditional vocabulary of classical ballet but was also attracted to jazz dance and, at the time of his arrival in the United States, was keen to work with African American dancers. In New York during the 1930s, as well as making ballets and
producing choreography for opera productions, Balanchine also choreographed successfully for musicals and revues. Although Humphrey also choreographed for operas and had worked shown on Broadway, she felt deeply uneasy about these activities, and she decisively rejected ‘European’ ballet in order to develop new ways of moving through which to express the experience, as she put it, of young people of the twentieth century living in the United States. While Balanchine felt secure enough about his status as a ballet choreographer to start a school in New York which would train dancers, the best of whom would then be used to create and perform his American ballets. Serenade was made with dancers from the first intake at this school who attended an evening class Balanchine offered in stage technique. Instead of teaching them an existing piece of repertory, as was usual in such classes, Balanchine decided to make something new for them. He presumably wanted to make his students into useful dancers as quickly as possible. The most effective way of letting them know how the steps they were learning in class could be used on stage would be with a piece that was within their technical range; but the young dancers would undoubtedly have responded more favourably if the ballet also related to their experience, and a European ballet might not do this so well. If one considers the first section — the Sonatina — the appropriateness of the format Balanchine devised in Serenade becomes evident. In the original version the leading role in the ballet was shared among various dancers who each emerged from the corps de ballet to dance a solo and are then absorbed back into it. From the point of view of the original evening class, this meant a number of students got to dance solo material without the parts being too overwhelming or beyond their capabilities. Similarly, as is often observed, a significant amount of the movement material in Serenade consists of exercises lifted with little alteration from the ballet class. And if Balanchine did not therefore have the possibility of dazzling his audience with displays of technical virtuosity (the piece must have aimed at introducing audiences as well as dancers to modern ballet), he made up for this through the extraordinary way in which dancers group and regroup in series of fascinating spatial transformations.

A certain mythology has developed about the circumstances of the ballet’s composition. On the night of the first class, Balanchine tells us, seventeen women enrolled for the class but no men (1968: 365). So Balanchine created the ‘necktie’ formation with which the ballet opens.

| F | F |
| F | F | F |
| F | F | F | F |
| F | F | F |

Figure 6 Balanchine’s ‘necktie’ formation
Balanchine implies that seventeen is an awkward number to work with and that he would never have come up with this configuration had it not been for these fortuitous circumstances. This may be true but, as Roberta Hellman and Marvin Hoshino (1995) have pointed out, if one were going to create a ballet with solo material shared by various members of a corps de ballet, seventeen is actually a very useful number to work with: when a soloist comes out from the mass, she leaves behind sixteen dancers, and sixteen can be divided into a useful variety of different sub-groups as Balanchine shows throughout Serenade. The dancers are of course not all on stage throughout the piece and Balanchine says he worked through the music (Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings in C) choreographing with however many dancers were present that evening. As men started to attend the evening class, they too were given roles. Other incidents were incorporated.

At one moment when Balanchine told the women to rush off the stage, one of them slipped to the floor and started to cry. I told the pianist to keep on playing and kept this bit in the dance’ (1968: 364). One dancer, arriving late at a class when the others were already working, calmly picked her way across the floor through the dancers to take her place. This moment too is preserved in the choreography. As a result of Balanchine allowing himself to respond to these fortuitous accidents, Serenade has a very free structure — it has even been likened to a Joycean stream of consciousness. Another factor that adds to this looseness is the fact that Balanchine chose to reverse the order of the last two movements of the music so that what Tchaikovsky intended to be the climactic musical ending is followed by the mysterious ‘dark angel’ section. And it is out of this loose framework that there emerge, often quite unexpectedly, the piece’s dazzling, ever shifting spatial and rhythmic patterns. Francis Russell, who has staged Balanchine’s ballets with a number of companies, says that Serenade is one of the most difficult for her because everybody’s part is slightly different ‘and the patterns — It’s like sand’ (Dunleavy et al. 1983: 87).

Marcia Siegel has commented that, as a result of incorporating accidental events and giving the piece a very free form, Serenade turned out to be an odd-looking ballet. In the way soloists merge in and out of the group Siegel sees ‘an assertion about the theoretical equality of all dancers, about the right each of them has to belong — to fit in and to stand out’ (1979: 72). She goes on to suggest that:

Balanchine could almost be declaring his own independence from the undemocratic ranking systems of the old Russian companies, where this one is the Ballerina, another is the Cavalier, and others are the corps or the second lead, and they never do anything more or less than their assignments.

Declaring this independence from the old world ballet companies could also be read as claiming allegiance with the new world, with a state that was founded upon ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. The levelling of the distinction between soloists and corps in Serenade can be read in relation to the comparative lack of social hierarchy in the United States compared with most European countries at that time. Serenade’s free form can thus be seen in relation to American modernity, to the homogenisation and levelling of social and regional distinctiveness in order to produce large new communities of consumption within which to market ever increasing quantities of standardised, mass produced consumer goods. Consider the very beginning of the ballet: the dancers start in the ‘necktie’ formation and each raises a hand as if to shade her eyes from the light. If one dancer performs this gesture on its own it seems to signify some sort of emotional or dramatic context; it is the sort of movement a principal might make in a narrative ballet. Marcia Siegel has commented that:

There is something strained about this tableau — the pose is too angular and eccentric to match the formal way the women are distributed, and yet the way they all do it alike denies any realistic or dramatic ideas we may have about it.

(1bid.: 73)

Siegel also points out that towards the end of the ‘Sonatina’ section all the dancers execute pasé turns in unison, and such showy steps are usually only used for solo by ballerinas. Whereas Krauzer saw in the Thiller Girls’ work force that has been standardised and turned into deindividuated robots, Serenade might be said to exemplify the point of view of the new communities of consumption in which delicate sensibilities are not the privilege and prerogative of an hereditary elite but everyone (who can afford it) has access to the same experiences.

New dance

Doris Humphrey once wrote in a letter: ‘I want to visualise with [the group] the visions and dreams that make up the entire impact and desire of my life. The group is my medium, just as marble is the sculptor’s medium’ (quoted in Jowitt 1988: 184). But she also wrote:

With one hand I try to encourage [the dancers] to be individuals — to move regardless of me or anyone else — and in rehearsals it is necessary to contradict all that and make them acutely aware of each other, so that they may move in a common rhythm.

(1bid.)
This is how she makes them move in *New Dance, Pasacaglia* and in parts of *With My Red Fire*. In these pieces Humphrey aimed to show that there is, in her words, a 'modern brotherhood of mankind'. Of the three works, she preferred *New Dance*, which showed 'the world as it could be and should be where each person has a clear and harmonious relationship to his fellow beings' (Cohen 1972: 238), and *Pasacaglia*, which showed 'that there is still happiness, a measure of harmony, to be found while working towards that goal', to *With My Red Fire* which, by comparison, she thought 'obvious and crude... but easy to understand - dramatic, with a plot and characters - much more what people have learned to expect from the dance' (Kriegsman 1981: 181). What in her view was wrong with modern dance was that 'anyone could tell you what was wrong but no one seemed to say what was right' (ibid.: 284).

In her draft for a lecture on *New Dance*, Humphrey states that 'comment on our times through group action has always been my sole aim' (Kriegsman 1981: 284) and continues:

> Even my earliest dances stressed the group and used the individual entirely in relationship to that group. This was really a difference between a democracy and an empire and obviously required a complete reorientation. New forms had to be discovered which could express concerted action and replace the solo system of the ballet.

(Gibd.)

*Serenade*, I have argued, also attempted to create forms that expressed the difference between a democracy and an empire. But whereas Balanchine modified and to a certain extent deconstructed the solo system, he did not reject the academic vocabulary of ballet itself in order to create those forms. While in both *Serenade* and *New Dance* individuals relate to a larger group from which they emerge to dance solo material and into which they then become reassembled, the two pieces differ radically in the technical basis of the movement vocabularies each employs. Balanchine was happy to initiate new dancers and audiences into the existing, canonical vocabulary of ballet movement. Humphrey felt that ballet movement itself could not be used to represent her experience and that of her fellow Americans. In order to express the specificity of her experience, Humphrey invents a new movement vocabulary for *New Dance* which gradually develops and establishes itself as the piece evolves.

*New Dance* lasts forty minutes and was the most ambitious piece Humphrey (or indeed any of the American modern dancers) had up until then attempted. John Martin reviewing it in the *New York Times* (11 August 1955) wrote:

Certainly a more authoritative piece of creation in the dance has not been seen for many a long day. It is especially significant in this time when it has become habitual to question the validity of 'absolute' dance that here is a work which has the same power to stir the emotions, to kindle aesthetic excitement, as is to be found in symphonic music.

(Kriegsman 1981: 130)

When Martin refers to a tendency to question the validity of 'absolute' dance, he is surely referring to the critical positions being developed by Edna Ocko and others on the left. A good example of this is Norma Roland's criticism of *New Dance* published in the left-wing magazine *New Theatre*. The work exists on the sheer excitement of its movement. We regret to see such tremendous possibilities used for form and technique alone - with little attempt made to integrate content and idea into the form' (ibid.). Roland is following the party line which seems to have been to dismiss formalism merely because it was not social realism. Although she recognises that the work is exciting, she seems to inhibit herself, and not allow herself to relax and enjoy the piece. (Or perhaps she cannot accept that the type of utopian meanings Humphrey intended the piece to signify could be produced by a bourgeois artist in a capitalist society.) Without a theoretical structure with which to interrogate *New Dance* in ideological terms, Roland cannot respond to the piece on the sort of level that Marcia Siegel later did when she wrote: 'When it's over I feel radiant, optimistic. *New Dance* confirms my falling hopes for action and change in the world. That is undoubtedly what Doris Humphrey intended it to do' (Siegel 1979: 89).

Siegel can see Humphrey's intentions categorically because we have two fascinating but very different drafts by Humphrey of a lecture or lectures on *New Dance* (Cohen 1972: 238–41; Kriegsman 1981: 284–5) from which I have already quoted. In these Humphrey explains that the piece starts with the two leaders (herself and Weidman) dancing a duet while the rest of the dancers are grouped on stage boxes piled at each side of the space. These are for the 'audience' of other dancers who the leaders gradually encourage to take to the floor and to dance with them. So after the opening solo the female leader brings the women onto the floor, then as the women watch from the sides, the male leader brings the men onto the floor. The female leader then initiates a procession that brings all the dancers together 'bringing the whole group into an integrated whole' (Cohen 1972: 240). Together they dance a celebration and what Humphrey calls a square dance. However, Humphreycarefully ensured that all through the development from the initial duet to this statement of group values, she kept back and only developed little by little the full resources of her movement and choreographic vocabularies. The duet material primarily used leg and foot movement and the men's and women's dances only used a limited range of
ways of crossing space. Therefore, when the group had been united in celebration, she still had something left to show. She explains:

Having unified the men’s group and the women’s group, one more section was necessary in order to express the individual in relation to the group. Too many people seem content to achieve a mass-movement and then stop. I wished to insist that there is an individual life within that group life.

(ibid.)

This she set out to exemplify in the last, best known part of New Dance, the ‘Variations and Conclusion’. Using the now familiar vocabulary of dynamic and exuberant movement — with its sweeping, off-centre turns that use the body’s momentum — and creating complex centrifugal series of floor patterns for the group, all the dancers take it in turns to perform some solo material before gradually taking their place on the cubes that have been moved from the wings to a stepped tower centre stage. It is this high energy finale that has left so many viewers with a feeling of radiance and optimism.

Humphrey states that New Dance shows a development from the ‘primitive’ to the civilised:

My main theme was to move from the simple to the complex, from an individual integration to a group integration, and therefore thought it best to confine myself to movement which was in a way primitive. The primitive urge for movement — in fact, all early dancing made use of steps and leg gestures but scarcely ever used the rest of the body with emphasis. Therefore until the group integration had been achieved, the feet and leg themes seemed more expressive.

(Gohen 1972: 239)

Marcia Siegel has suggested that in New Dance Humphrey searched out ways of reconciling ‘the conflicting demands of the familiarly focused proscenium stage and the inward-facing communality of folk dance’ (1993: 156). Although Humphrey called a section ‘square dance’, New Dance doesn’t look like a folk dance: it does however have a folk dance type of energy with, at times during the final variations, as Siegel observes, some members of the group beating time as if urging on the featured dancers. Here yet again in this book (although for the first time in an American context) is modernist dance drawing on imagery or expressive qualities from ‘primitive’ dance in order to express modernity, although in this instance Humphrey’s ‘primitive’ dance seems to be of European origin. Nevertheless, Humphrey clearly sees group integration as a move from the ‘pre-urban’ to a modernist utopia. If New Dance showed the world as it could be and should be, it avoided showing how it is, leaving that to the other two pieces in the New Dance.
Trilogy – Theatre Piece and With My Red Fires. Yet the implication is that within what was wrong with Humphrey's metropolitan, modernist world was a loss of something that could only be brought back through reference to 'primitive' and folk communities.

The relationship between urban and 'pre-urban', between city and folk or peasant communities was a subject to which the sociologist and anthropologist Robert Redfield, at the University of Chicago, devoted himself during the 1920s and 1930s. Returning from Katherine Dunham, Redfield's students, but his ideas were useful for contextualising Humphrey's ideas on modernity and morality which underpin the New Dance Trilogy. Humphrey, like Dunham, was born in Chicago, and urbanism was a central concern of the so-called Chicago School of sociology during the 1920s and 1930s. From his field research in Mexican town and village communities, Redfield proposed a dialectical process through which local, 'pre-urban' communities would have to disintegrate when peasant communities in touch with urban civilisation. Thus he observed that one band or tribe 'regard their own way of life as better than other people' (1968: 61). As people developed civilised values, Redfield proposed, there arose new, more inclusive moral orders. It is surely the process of developing this new, more inclusive moral order that Humphrey wanted to demonstrate in New Dance. Humphrey's other great but puzzling work of the mid-1940s, With My Red Fires, can be looked at from the point of view of morality and community. I call it puzzling because people who have written about the trilogy have often found it difficult to explain how what appears to be a love story fits into Humphrey's grand overall scheme. Also Humphrey herself, although so clear at describing the reasons why she had devised certain formal qualities and devices in her choreography, was surprisingly opaque in explaining what With My Red Fires is about. This may account for the mixed critical response the piece initially received. Its title, which comes from Jerusalem II – one of the most prophetic book's long prophetic books – O'Keeffe saw this possessive love as a product of custom, class, and society (women as charnels) and proposed that socialists should strive, therefore, not to give in to it. Carpenter's notion of non-possessive love is surely consonant with Redfield's notion of new, more inclusive moral orders. With My Red Fires, by contrasting the possessive, destructive love of the mother with the romantic love of her daughter for the Young Man, is surely exploring the romantic problems that Carpenter discussed but looking at them from the point of view of feminine experience.

Finally the couple are left alone on stage, despised and rejected, and they end together in a noble, symmetrical pose that suggests that it is their love that is to be respected while the Matriarch's jealousy and the community's intolerance are at fault.

I have written elsewhere about With My Red Fires (Burr 1995b). What I want to discuss in the present context is the way it is informed by the same ideas about morality that I have identified in New Dance. While the title With My Red Fires, together with quotations in the programme, came from Blake, apparently Humphrey only came across these lines after finishing the piece. Paul Love, writing in 1937, said that initial inspiration came from reading Edward Carpenter's book Love Comes of Age. Edward Carpenter (1844–1928) was an Englishman who was prominent in the late nineteenth-century socialist revival. He was homosexual and an eloquent advocate of the liberation of homosexual love. It is curious that Humphrey should at this time have been reading his writings. But the ideas on sexuality would have appeared rather dated in the light of psychoanalytic theory (which many artists including Graham and Wigman were interested in), although his views on the ethics of sexual politics were subsequently rediscovered in the 1970s by the women's and gay liberation movements. In the 1890s and early 1900s Carpenter knew many early feminists involved in the Independent Labour Party and ardently supported feminist aspirations. Love Comes of Age: a Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes was published in 1896. In it, as Sheila Rowbotham has observed, Carpenter does not deny the complexity of sexual desire but tries 'to probe the irrational and come to terms with deep sexual passion' (Rowbotham and Weeks 1977: 109). Writing about jealousy, Carpenter identifies a nice distinction between love as an 'initial preoccupation with a lover's uniqueness' (ibid.) and the jealous, possessive feeling that (generally male) lovers sometimes have that comes from a feeling of owning their beloved and having proprietary rights over them. O'Keeffe saw this possessive love as a product of custom, class, and society (women as charnels) and proposed that socialists should strive, therefore, not to give in to it. Carpenter's notion of non-possessive love is surely consonant with Redfield's notion of new, more inclusive moral orders. With My Red Fires, by contrasting the possessive, destructive love of the mother with the romantic love of her daughter for the Young Man, is surely exploring the romantic problems that Carpenter discussed but looking at them from the point of view of feminine experience.

Two moments in With My Red Fires recall choreographic images in New Dance. In an unforgettable sequence, the Matriarch whips herself into a frenzy in order to infect the group with a fanatical hatred of the lovers, compelling them to find them and treat them inhumanely. She makes the group rotate slowly like spokes of a mechanical wheel with herself at the centre, every now and then stopping them dead in a frozen, silent tableau. The choreographic image of a rotating, spiked wheel is very similar to that
people are running, shouting, they're on the morbid scent, they gleam with vuriduous hate. She's run off with a nobody! Which way? To the town, to the inn? No, here by the wall. Tear them apart, the dirty things. What shall we do, old one, marry them with a gun and a giggle or run them out?

(quoted in Kriegsmann 1981: 140)

Marcia Siegel (1993) has pointed out the similarity on the level of theme between With My Red Firs and Charles Weidman's Lysistrata, also choreographed in 1926. In terms of Redfield's ethnographic view of morality, Humphrey shows a community in transition, which, through contact with modernity, has lost its balanced 'primitive' or folk morality and now expresses its fears through hatred and intolerance. They have yet to develop the new, more inclusive moral order that I have argued New Dance exemplifies.

The other moment that recalls New Dance comes at the end. The Young Man and the Young Woman, alone on stage, circle round one another holding hands as they mount stairs to stop centrally upstage. They stand opposite one another in profile, one straight leg planted forward, the other behind (like Greek athletes or the heroes in David's painting Oath of the Horatii). Their upper backs arch and their heads fall back to gaze upwards as they stretch out their arms to rest their hands on each other's shoulders. Each is making equal claims on the other and expecting equal respect. The symmetry of this striking tableau is unashamedly pure and clear, and recalls an identical pose in the opening duet of New Dance. The inference is that love (come of age, and with equality between the sexes) is the starting point that can transform the negative energy with which the Matriarch wreaks havoc on the community to fanatical hatred, into the ideology exemplified in the 'Variations and Conclusion' of New Dance. What is clear from this discussion of the two pieces is the extent to which the ideal presented in New Dance is a transformation of what is shown to be morally and ethically wrong and at fault in With My Red Firs.

Both Serenade and Humphrey's New Dance Trilogy present danced representations of ideals that are responses to the disruption and disorientation brought about by the formation of what de Grazia calls new communities of consumption. Balanchine's Serenade attempted to rework the aesthetic ideals of classical ballet in ways appropriate to American experience, while New Dance presented ideals that were rooted in similar social experience and in the intellectual climate of its time and place. The ideals which these pieces present had a particular resonance in their time because each grew out of a response to needs that were real. But, as Richard Dyer has pointed out, the exemplification of such timely ideals also amounts to a definition and delimitation of what constitutes the legitimate needs of people in society (1981: 184). Dyer identifies a problem in the ways in which a process of definition and delimitation of certain kinds of needs and inequities can exclude and delegitimize other needs and inequities, often in relation to class, patriarchal, sexual and racial struggles. The ideal which Balanchine presents in Serenade is obtained through a fetishised display of women dancing on pointe. Balanchine may initially have had only seventeen women and no male dancers when he started to make Serenade but that undoubtedly suited his aesthetic: he famously defined ballet as woman, thus reinforcing limiting stereotypes of femininity (see Daly 1987). The ideal that Humphrey evokes in New Dance reacts against the sorts of normative gender roles presented in Serenade. While male and female roles in New Dance are different from one another, it conveys a greater sense of equality between the sexes than Serenade, and both male and female dancers assume universal significance rather than being limited to meanings that are gender specific. Nevertheless, this is circumscribed by Humphrey's adherence to a positivist view of human development as the assimilation of 'primitiveness'. The underlying assumption within her argument about 'the primitive urge for movement' (Cohen 1972: 238) is that superior modern civilisation has the right to appropriate this 'primitive urge' for its own ends without considering the consequences of this appropriation for those deemed to be not yet wholly part of civilisation.

What is excluded from the universalising ideals of both New Dance and Serenade are the particularities of African American experience. If Balanchine's Serenade and Humphrey's New Dance explore the embodiment of new subjectivities and new conceptions of community brought about by the needs of modern industry, then Katherine Dunham explores African American experiences of these in her dream ballet in Stormy Weather. This film was made in 1943, eight years later than Serenade and New Dance and after the United States had entered the war against Germany and Japan. It is one of a small handful of big budget films which the Hollywood studios made at that time with all black casts. It constituted part of Hollywood's contribution to the war effort, given that many African Americans were joining the armed forces and being killed for their country and for ideals of freedom and democracy which they did not yet fully enjoy themselves. The dream ballet nevertheless has much in common with Serenade and New Dance in the optimism of the utopian ideal it presents.
Stormy weather

Katherine Dunham's dream baller is shown as part of a night club performance at the end of Stormy Weather. Lena Horne11 sings the title song, while behind her on stage is a window through which can be seen the city street. As she reaches the musical 'break' in the song the camera goes through the window to enter a city street. Sheltering from a thundery shower of rain under the bridge of an elevated urban railway gather a number of African Americans who are in fact Katherine Dunham and members of her dance company. All the men are dressed in slightly exaggerated versions of zoot suits made from material with a distinctive, asymmetrical, chequered pattern. There is a similarly exaggerated quality about the way everyone is moving, that suggests the way 'real' people might hurry under cover in the rain. Movements are larger than life - almost operatically so - and imperceptibly become synchronised with the beat of the music. The spectator is being subtly prepared for the dancing to come. Under the bridge, always at the centre of the frame, is Dunham herself with two big tropical flowers in her hair and a satin dress with fur trim which contrasts with the plainer dresses of the other women. One man looks at her in what could be a request to dance or a sexual advance, but he is claimed by his female partner who shoos him respectfully away; another touches her on the shoulder but she rejects him with a slight shake of the head. Everyone under the bridge except Dunham has begun to slowly dance in heteroerotic couples but their energy level is low; they look tired and more than one couple prop one another up with their shoulders while their torsos and pelvises jut away from one another like exhausted competitors in a dance marathon. This present 'reality', that frames the dream of ideality which follows it, is a city that is cold, wet and full of exaggeratedly extrovert but tired characters.

A thunder clap causes Dunham to look reproachfully up at the cloudy sky, and these clouds turn into the stage smoke which along with gauze curtains and a wind machine are the sine qua non of filmed dream ballets. Like peeling skins off an onion, the camera, having gone from the night club set into a street set, now goes through the clouds into a gloriously exotic dream set. Dunham enters this new stage alone down a ramp performing a series of slow, high leg extensions. At the bottom she is joined by a group of male dancers while the other women in the company follow behind her. In comparison with the flashy but heavy street clothes of the previous scene, the women dancers now have bare legs, tight fitting tops with a gauzy, trailing skirt. Both male and female costumes are trimmed with patterned material that recalls the checks of the street clothes. But whereas the city was cold and inhospitable, the dream is clearly warm, and on many levels presents an excess of what was marked as lacking in the city. The shuffling, tired and awkward couple dancing is replaced by faster, more energetic and more unified movement. Gone also is the awkwardness of the men's earlier requests to dance with Dunham. If she was in control earlier by saying no, she is in control now as she unhesitatingly chooses to dance for a moment with one then another and another man, briefly leaning back to stretch over and rest her weight against their bowed backs.

Central to the utopian scene that the dream ballet evokes is the style of the movement itself. This combines ballet vocabulary with movement of African origin that Dunham had studied during her anthropological field trips in the Caribbean. The ballet style is established first, disciplined but also powerful and exciting; the male dancers all together spring into the air and spin round, the women sail forwards with a beautiful balletic port de bras. Towards the end of the 'break' a new, more syncopated rhythm comes into the music and the dance material becomes more polycentric and polyrhythmically - qualities Gotschild (1996) identifies as particularly Africanist. Isolated ripples of stomach and lower back pick up a cross rhythm in the music, which is then emphasised with characteristic flexion at the tips of the shoulders. Looking back from the 1990s, dance historians recognise and act as a key document in the development of the Dunham technique, but seeing it in these terms can obscure what it meant at the time.

Dunham herself remembers an unidentified Chicago critic complaining about her use of ballet vocabulary.12 It is important to recognise both on a practical and an ideological level the significance of Dunham's use of the ballet tradition. From the early 1930s Dunham had trained in ballet with Mark Torfybill and Ludmilla Speranzeva: at the time there was no significant modern dance teacher in Chicago. When in 1937 she returned to Chicago from her field work in the Caribbean, she put on a concert with Ludmilla Speranzeva of what she then called The Negro Ballet. As far as the older established black middle class in Chicago were concerned,13 this was the right name to call the company, but from a white point of view it was not; they became the Katherine Dunham Dance Company instead. John Martin, reviewing a company performance in 1940, complained about their use of ballet:

The group as a whole is handsome and competent, though there is among certain of the male dancers, including Talley Beatty, a distressing tendency to introduce the technique of the academic ballet. What is there in the human mind that is so eager to reduce the rare and genuine to the standard and foreign?

(Martin 1978: 64)

The key words here are standard and foreign. Martin thinks that African American dancers possess innate abilities which are inimical to 'standard' dance techniques like ballet. Dunham, however, eloquently made the case against essentialism in a 1938 interview. While recognising that a sensibility
for dance and rhythm may be a sociologically conditioned aspect of peoples of African descent, Dunham nevertheless argued that African American dancers still need professional training:

We are sociologically conditioned by our constant contact with [African musical rhythms]. In the West Indies, women dance to the drums almost until the hour the child is born — and they nurse it, still dancing. But that doesn’t mean there is no technique. There is. And it is every bit as essential that we train as rigorously as any other group, even in presenting ordinary folk material.

(Orme 1978: 60)

Later in the same interview, Dunham says she aims:

To establish a well-trained ballet group. To develop a technique that will be as important to the white man as to the Negro. To attain a status in the dance world that will give the Negro dance-student the courage really to study, and a reason to do so. And to take our dance out of the burlesque to make it a more dignified art. We lack a tradition in the dance as we present it now, and the young Negro has no aesthetic creative background.

(ibid.: 61–2, emphasis in the original)

From a practical point of view it made sense to use the ballet tradition, which Dunham knew well, as a basis for developing this new technique and this new aesthetic. Marcia Siegel notes that Humphrey sought to reconcile ‘the conflicting demands of the frontally focused proscenium stage and the inward-facing communality of folk dance’ (Siegel 1993: 156). The same is true of Dunham. Folk or ‘primitive’ dance won’t work if put on a modern theatre stage in an unmodified state. Ballet, with its tradition of turning folk dance into character dance, offered Dunham a useful means for theatrically representing the dances she had observed in the Caribbean.

Martin objected to her company’s use of ballet because he said it was foreign. Admittedly Martin at the time was no balleromaniac. But underlying his idea of the ‘foreign-ness’ of ballet is a notion that African Americans should keep to their indigenous, ‘natural’ dance and musical traditions. From the point of view of white hegemony, the exoticism of African or Caribbean dance and music is acceptable because it reinforces the separation between black and white. Dunham however suggests that her technique could be as important ‘to the white man as to the Negro’. But this, and the idea of black ballet dancers, suggest a commonality between black and white that evidently disturbed Martin as much as it had disturbed Levinson and Haskell (see Chapter 3). Dunham, however, didn’t want to represent the sort of ‘rare’, ‘genuine’, ‘primitive’ spectacle Martin clearly wanted to see.

AMERICAN MODERNS

What she shows in Stormy Weather are disciplined, modern, African American dancers. 14

In her autobiography, A Touch of Innocence, Dunham recalls in the third person a time when she was very young and made a daily journey home in the elevated train from the centre of Chicago to her Aunt’s flat in the South Side:

At the bottom of the stairs [linking station and sidewalk] there was a whole new world. The train rumbled away overhead to lose itself in the far South Side, and the impact of Negro sounds and smells hit the child with such force that she nearly melted with fear, clinging close to her Aunt Lulu and drawing as far away as she could from the dark streets and sullen laughter and bold flaunting, the dust and litter on the pavement, the weariness and sickness.

(Dunham 1994a: 41–2)

Written in the late 1950s, this is very similar to the setting that Dunham chose for the rainy opening of the Stormy Weather ballet. Elsewhere in A Touch of Innocence she writes about the flashy African American city dwellers of Chouteau Street, East St Louis:

Chouteau Street’s own kind, who had made good and who showed it in a way Chouteau Street understood, with a lot of gold teeth and hair made slick with straightening combs and pulling iron and gleaming with Madame Walker’s pomade; and with diamond stickpins and pointed yellow shoes with mirrors in the toes and broad-striped suits and shirts .

(ibid.: 178)

Here she reveals an ethnographic understanding of detail that is not dissimilar to that developed by sociologists of the Chicago School with whom Dunham studied for her undergraduate degree. Dunham’s appreciation of the over-exaggerated, extraverted mentality of the city dweller recalls George Simmel’s notion of the brasseur, neuroticistic city dweller discussed in Chapter 2; Robert Park, one of the founders of the Chicago School, had studied with Simmel. 15 In showing the characteristically loud-dressing inhabitants of modern Chicago in the street scene of the Stormy Weather ballet, Dunham drew on what she had learned at the University of Chicago.

While her academic training may have taught her how to distance herself, observe and judge, Dunham used ethnography to make sense of her own position as a modern African American woman. She sought to clarify what she had in common with other African Americans. Dunham wrote of the night when as an adolescent she first saw Chouteau Street as the beginning of a possession by the blues, a total immersion in the baptismal font of race (ibid.: 179). The blues turned people ‘way, way inwards, deep into something people are
supposed to know about and don't look at, or knew a long time ago and lost touch with. Single road to freedom' (ibid.). The song 'Stormy Weather' may not actually be a blues number but the dream ballet shows a process of going inwards and getting back in touch with something of Africa that Dunham and her fellow African Americans as a diasporic people knew and kept alive.

**Conclusion**

It is clear that *Stormy Weather* is situated in a modern urban environment. Like Balanchine's *Serenade* and Humphrey's *New Dance*, it is informed by American experiences of the new subjectivities and new conceptions of community brought about by the needs of modern industry — with the important proviso that Dunham's *Stormy Weather* baller was only filmed eight years later. Nevertheless Dunham's role in *Stormy Weather* is similar to that played by Humphrey and Weidman in *New Dance*, in that all three were leaders. It is they who in each piece direct the community towards a utopian ideal of harmonious and celebratory dancing. And, as I have shown, the ideals in all three pieces directly or indirectly addressed needs experienced in everyday metropolitan life.

Balanchine, in order to create an ideal movement style in *Serenade* and other ballets, appropriated some characteristic movements from the vernacular African American dance and music tradition (see Banes 1993; Gotschuld 1996; Hill 1996), in order to give the academic ballet vocabulary an 'American' style. Humphrey, for her part, based the development of *New Dance* on a progression from 'primitive' to civilized: from what she considered to be the limited bodily movements inherent in the 'primitive urge for movement' to the engagement of a larger degree of bodily involvement in dancing. This for her represented the summit of contemporary potential while retaining the high energy level and sense of community found in a barn dance. The ideal modern society, in Humphrey's view, is one that assimilates 'primitive' communality just as the ideal movement vocabulary for Balanchine is one that assimilates what Gottschuld calls an Africanist aesthetic. Dunham, however, recognised that African American needs could neither be satisfied through assimilation nor through an isolationist return to a mythically utopian 'Africa'. What *Stormy Weather* presents is an ideal vision of modern African Americans who have both the strength and discipline implicit in ballet and a pride that comes from the rediscovery and maintenance of links with deeply hidden African roots.

Dunham's view of what is wrong with city life is closest to that of European choreographers like Jooss and Börlin, just as her understanding of urbanism is not dissimilar to that of Simmel, Kraus and Benjamin. Doris Humphrey complained that too many modern dances represented something wrong with modern life but no one seemed to say what was right.
ALIEN BODIES

Representations of modernity, ‘race’ and nation in early modern dance

Ramsay Burt

London and New York
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