

**STEAL, DU
PLICATE,
UNMASK,
STRETCH,
CONNECT,
INTOXICATE A
DANCE-IMAGE
FROM HEXENTANZ
(WITCH DANCE) BY
MARY WIGMAN (FILM,
1930) TO ÉCRAN
SOMNAMBULE BY
LATIFA LAÂBISSI
(2012)**

Isabelle LAUNAY

in Noémie Solomon (ed.), *Danse : An Anthology*, Les Presses du Réel / New York series, 2014, p. 209-222. Translated from « Voler, doubler, démasquer, distendre, relier, intoxiquer une image-danse. De *Hexentanz* de Mary Wigman (film, 1930) à *Ecran somnambule* de Latifa Laâbissi (2012) », in Anne Benichou (dir.), *Re-créer/Scripter, Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon, Presses du Réel, 2015, p. 333-350.

**STEAL, DUPLICATE,
UNMASK, STRETCH,
CONNECT,
INTOXICATE A
DANCE-IMAGE :**

Isabelle LAUNAY

**FROM HEXENTANZ (WITCH
DANCE) BY MARY WIGMAN
(FILM, 1930) TO
ÉCRAN SOMNAMBULE BY
LATIFA LAÂBISSI (2012)**

in Noémie Solomon (ed.), *Danse : An Anthology*, Les Presses du Réel / New York series, 2014, p. 209-222. Translated from « Voler, doubler, démasquer, distendre, relier, intoxiquer une image-danse. De *Hexentanz* de Mary Wigman (film, 1930) à *Ecran somnambule* de Latifa Laâbissi (2012) », in Anne Benichou (dir.), *Re-créer/Scripter, Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon, Presses du Réel, 2015, p. 333-350.

The development of a dance work sometimes takes mischievous turns. Under the influence of what we shall call here, for lack of a better alternative, the historical gestural subconscious, going back to an earlier piece may take a detour via a different work. And, when this occurs, which forms of oblivion, untimely migrations, unexpected moments, deformed masks, and unsuspected overdetermination can a dance from the past be reactivated in accordance with? There are indeed some re-creations of dance pieces that reveal completely unexpected aesthetic potentials and political impacts, while illuminating a part of unknown history.¹ The revival of Mary Wigman's *Hexentanz* by Latifa Laâbissi in *Écran somnambule* is one of these. What is it that she documents as much as she produces in aesthetic terms? What kind of history, at once discontinuous and transnational, recomposing the geographic regions and chronologies stated by histo-

¹ On this perspective, see André Lepecki, "The Body as Archive: Will to Re-enact and the Afterlives of Dances," *Dance Research Journal* 42:2 (Winter 2010) and Mark Franko, "Reproduction, reconstruction et par-delà," *Degrés, Le texte spectaculaire* 63 (Fall 1990). For a broader examination of dance practices and history, see Ramsay Burt, "Memory, Repetition and Critical Intervention, the Politics of Historical Reference in Recent European Dance Performance," *Performance Research* 8:2 (2001); Marina Nordera and Susanne Franco, *Ricordanze, Memoria in movimento e coreografie della storia* (Turin: UTET, 2010); and Isabelle Launay and Sylviane Pagès, *Mémoires et histoire en danse* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

riography, does she invite us to tell? And at what price? More precisely, what modalities does this French artist of Moroccan origin—a dancer and choreographer who trained at the Cunningham studio, a performer for numerous French artists (Jean-Claude Gallotta, Georges Appaix, and Loïc Touzé, among others), and *a priori* miles from the aesthetic and political issues that concerned Mary Wigman at the end of the 1920s in Germany—see in the few minutes of this film? The film is as much of an aesthetic shock as a resource, since it possesses critical potential for the production of a reproduction that is polysemic, fascinating and hypnotic, sardonic and monstrous, an obsessive fear, and illustrative of the contemporary unease of the minority.

In the context of France, the expressionist dance that arrived from Germany (*Audruckstanz*) experienced a crisis or rupture in the transmission of its experience.² Whereas before the war it had been received partly with interest and partly repugnance, during the post-war period, set against the landscape dominated by the neo-classicism of Serge Lifar, it was rejected outright since it had come from France's old enemy Germany. This repression repeated what had taken place in Germany when the heritage of Weimar was rejected from the intellectual and artistic scene for having been involved in the excesses of the National Socialists. Then, during the 1970s and '80s, it suffered a second rejection due to the appeal of young artists in the American choreographic scene, in particular that of Merce Cunningham and Alwin Nikolais—and then again in the '90s, under postmodern dance's influence on the new generation. It was only in the wake of the increasing success of Pina Bausch, from the early '80s on, that choreographic art from Germany began to receive recognition, and even then more in its relation to the work of Kurt Jooss, which differs from expressionist dance in many respects. In spite of the sustained efforts and recognition of a few artists influenced by this current, expressionist dance in France was unable to find neither performers nor a large public.³

Thus, for expressionist dance to achieve a new vitality, three conditions were required: first, that the oblivion it had fallen into could be considered a virtue, with confidence placed in the power [*puissance*] of art's memory traces; second, that stealing ideas or even an entire work from an author could be interpreted as necessary for the other and trust placed in the reasons underlying such an act; and third, for copying to be appreciated as a form of artistic work and creative transfer, even in the art of elaborating toxic figures. We'll come back to that. Like various twentieth-century choreographic works, the *Witch Dance* can be appreciated through the cinema medium. In using films as reference, dancers immediately transform the history of cinema into a depository of dance archives, movement scores, and a vast repository of attitudes and behaviors. The history of dance is thus partly mixed up with that of the cinema to which it is linked, and in so doing transforms cinema into a technique of the body. From this standpoint, in the choreographic field it is possible to develop Walter Benjamin's notion that modernity requires a new kind of relation to the past, and that the tradition of continual experience should be replaced by the appropriation of a citation that has already occurred.⁴ This lineage-free citation is paradoxical: it is as much a place where memory is exercised (there is indeed a sort of return) as it is a place of an impossible transmission (since it is no longer linked to the continuity of a body-to-body experience): in other terms, it is made *in spite of everything*.

² On this, see Susanne Franco, "Ausdruckstanz: traditions, translations, transmissions," in *Discourses, Keywords in Dance Research*, eds. Susanne Franco and Marina Nordera (London: Routledge, 2007); Isabelle Launay, "Poétiques de l'extase, mémoire et oubli en danse dans l'Allemagne des années 20," in *Destruction, Création, Rythme, l'expressionnisme, une esthétique du conflit*, ed. Georges Bloess (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009).

³ Françoise and Dominique Dupuy were influenced by Hans Weidt, and Jacqueline Robinson and Karin Waehner by Wigman in particular.

⁴ See Hannah Arendt, *Vies politiques* [Walter Benjamin] (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

Possessing one's dance

First, let us recall a few elements. *The Witch Dance* was created in 1926 (following a first version in 1914), and it was the fourth solo in a cycle of eight titled *Visions* created between 1925 and 1928. An extract from the dance was filmed four years after its creation, in 1930, as part of a promotional film called *Mary Wigman tanzt*. The career of Mary Wigman, who was then aged 44, was then, from various points of view, on the rise: as an artist, her first group pieces in Germany were well received, and her status as a soloist was boosted internationally by her tours in the United States; as a teacher, her school in Dresden had several hundred professional and amateur students, employed new teachers (notably Hanya Holm), and other schools would soon open; in the political field, she was made head of the association *The Dance Community* in 1928 and she made clear the divergence between her association and the one run by Rudolf Laban.⁵ In this context, the *Witch Dance* can be considered a manifesto for expressionist dance: an artistic, pedagogical, political, and feminist manifesto.⁶

With regard to others performing her works, Wigman adopted a radical position: she refused to teach her solos to other dancers or to form a repertoire of works that could be re-created. Instead, she encouraged conditions that would allow anyone to develop their own dances, leading to the founding of the school of expressionist dance. In fact, as far as I am aware, none of Wigman's solos were ever danced by someone other than herself during her lifetime. Moreover, distrustful of methods of transcription, she did not think that her dances could be subjected to the analytical work of notation that could be reinterpreted by another dancer, so it seems that no scores of any of Wigman's solos were created during her lifetime. This attitude was underlain by two ideas: on one hand, Wigman made sure that she would not have to grieve for her past dances, "I would never have wanted to dance the dances of my youth [...] their place has been taken by different and more important things in the different seasons of my life."⁷ On the other hand, and more importantly, she had developed a conception of dance—especially in relation to the *Witch Dance*—characterized by possession. Danced works were for her as much a question of being possessed by an inner impulse, conveyed by visions, as it was to possess and master the impact of that impulse. For Wigman, ecstasy was the keystone of her work, and this defined her not as a "professional dancer" but as a "dancing being" who experiences the moment "when awareness of things ceases."⁸ For Wigman, who described herself as a "fanatic of the present, in love with the instant,"⁹ the creative moment exists within a sort of eclipse of perceptive consciousness, allowing her to be "a thousand times exalted by dying and being reborn to life."¹⁰ It is not insignificant that Wigman would often prefer to use the term dancer in her writings to that of performer or interpreter. In this state of ecstasy, a dance is not interpreted, nor is it organized on the level of a choreographic score: it is lived and experienced. The work thus finds itself

⁵ For an analysis of this context, see Laure Guilbert, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich* (Paris: Complexe, 2000).

⁶ For greater detail, see Isabelle Launay, "Portrait de danseuse en sorcière," *Théâtre Public* 154-55 (2000): <http://www.danse.univ-paris8.fr/>; and Mary Anne Santos Newhall, *Mary Wigman* (London: Routledge, 2009), 106-11.

⁷ Mary Wigman, *Die Sprache des Tanzes* (Munich: Ernst Battenberg Verlag, 1963); *Le Langage de la danse*, trans. Jacqueline Robinson (Paris: Chiron, 1986), 20.

⁸ Mary Wigman, Conference in Zurich, 1949, in *The Mary Wigman Book: Her Writings*, ed. and trans. Walter Sorrell (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 166.

⁹ Wigman, *Le Langage de la danse*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

suspended between choreographic/legislative power and performative/executive power. It becomes a *Tanz-drama*, a danced drama, the drama of a work tested by the powers of a corporeality that consumes it as it consumes itself. This “absolute dance” is organized by means of an ecstatic form of conduct in a dialectics between Wigman the choreographer and Wigman the dancer.¹¹

It is understood that whereas “the work will disappear at a rate dependent on its excellence and the quality of its performance,”¹² it only has meaning through its promises of unconscious recollection, faculties opposed by the memory-screen that prevents the working of the imagination. This ideology of possession organized the ecstasy of this dancer, who constantly felt threatened each time she went into a trance by the loss of her self-control, though she nevertheless always came out victorious: “As soon as the curtain rose [again], it was necessary, and I wanted it so, to be present and acknowledge the audience. Once again I had succeeded!”¹³ The rapture of her self-sacrifice, and the kinesthetic and existential vertigo she experienced were thus salvaged through the blessing of the applause showered upon Wigman as she stood on the stage in all her power. No one could recreate this incommunicable interior need, doomed to disappear. Wigman never gave an encore of her dances. Her expressionist dance was based on the possibilities offered by a unique and unforgettable event, each of which inscribed the name of the artist, who was inseparable from her work, into dance history while her dances were destined to disappear. Mary Wigman’s creation was thus founded on a necessary amnesia and a prohibition placed on the circulation of her works. The possessed creator was the possessor of her creation. All that remains of the *Witch Dance* is a film lasting 100 seconds,¹⁴ a few notes and photographs of Wigman, articles in the press, and, above all, the retrospective account of her creative process and its visionary foundation that was published much later, in 1963, in *Le Langage de la danse*.

1st time. Steal-duplicate-unmask: Phasmes (2001)

In this context, Laâbissi’s “capture” of the *Witch Dance* is first and foremost a critical act, an act of disobedience. When she appropriated this dance, which had become almost untouchable, she did not ask permission to do so from the Mary Wigman Society or work with the support of the former pupils legitimately able to offer it. Instead, she taught herself the dance alone. *Phasmes* (2001) consists of three solos in which Latifa Laâbissi copied the work of Mary Wigman, Valeska Gert, and Dore Hoyer as seen in three successive films. For *Witch Dance*, the bare stage was set out to suggest the humble nature of research. The poor quality and discontinuous images of the *Witch Dance*, of which the last few seconds are an addition in close-up, are presented to the public just as they are. Nothing stresses the character of aura conferred on the old black-and-white films by our fascination with what is remote from us. The films are presented using the most domestic of formats, either a VHS or DVD played on a television screen before the audience. There

¹¹On Wigman’s creative process, see Isabelle Launay, *A la recherche d’une danse moderne, Rudolf Laban et Mary Wigman* (Paris: Chiron, 1996), 211-23. <http://www.danse.univ-paris8.fr>

¹² Wigman, *Le Langage de la danse*, 20.

¹³ Wigman, *Le Langage de la danse*, 41.

¹⁴ Unnamed producer, music by H. Hasting and W. Goetze.

is no mention in the program of the provenance of these copies, which have most likely been pirated from sources of varying legality that circulate among a network of art lovers and artists, who use all means and materials available to produce their work, as the occasion offers.

The films are not simply played once but repeated several times. Thus the source material has a sort of rehearsal value, like a study tool for the dancer who imitates what the bodies are doing in the picture. In art, and particularly in dance, artists tend to copy others in order to avoid the risk of imitating themselves—assuming that it is more dangerous to copy oneself than others. It all resides in the way a gesture is recreated in the new environment. Laåbissi's attitude is neither one of a melancholia caused by the demise of a moment of unforgettable dance that needs to be resuscitated, nor of a fanatical desire to attain an ideal. The production does not, therefore, turn the dance into a farewell, or a tribute, or, even less, a choreographic tomb. Instead, it develops a dialogue and an encounter between the images and their duplication.

Facing the public from the center and back of the stage, in the vast space of a studio lit up like the space of the audience, Laåbissi (or Annabelle Pulcini) is seated like Wigman's witch, wearing a warm-up suit, her face bare and her hair tied behind her head. She performs Wigman's dance three times in a row accompanied live by a percussionist playing the score transcribed for drums.¹⁵ The audience watches the rehearsal of a dancer who repeatedly runs through the movements: she is brightly lit, unlike the dark restricted space that Wigman occupied, as though stripped of the spatial envelope that both threatened and protected her. The dancer-duplicator presents variously productive constructions of new relationships with time and space. Wigman's contradictory dialogue with space is here transferred into a direct dialogue with the sound space. The solo is transformed into a duet. The performance of the percussionist on the stage (who is invisible in the film) harmonizes with that of the dancer. They are aware of each other's performance in order to ensure that the beats and their resonance, of which the choreography is composed, are in perfect unison. Here the synchronization of the pair's percussive movements, with which the breathing of each is coordinated, attains visibility. Whereas in the film the poor synchronization of the sound track with her movements gives Wigman the appearance of a witch-conductor, who solicits, controls, and dismisses the sound world she conjures up, Laåbissi's version presents a game of reciprocal control between the percussive beats of the musician and the movements of the dancer. Lastly, when the television screen is turned toward us after the looped projection, the audience is invited to study the disparity, with astonishment, between the two performances, one in images and the other live. In using the film as a ready-made, and in simulating Wigman's dance, Laåbissi is emptying out the images of their original content. She also exploits the intrinsically subversive aspect of the act of imitation: an imitator exposes what we all believe is inimitable and unique about us, and leaves us unmasked, challenging our narcissistic inclination to consider ourselves exceptional, and making public the manner in which we act (the way we look, touch, communicate, stand, sit, etc.). The mere fact of the imitation frees the audience's captured attention and the mesmerizing Medusa influence produced by a film that has become a totem of the history of modern dance. This deconstruction through imitation consequently defuses Wigman's Medusa trap and, in doing so, repeats, in its own way, the aesthetic and political debate that pitted the cabaret artist Valeska Gert against Mary Wigman. The

¹⁵ The musician is Henri Bertrand Lesguiller, also known as "Cookie."

following is the critique and caricature that Gert made of Wigman, mocking the serious side of expressionist dance in general and targeting the *Witch Dance* in particular: "Suddenly we were confronted by visions that could have come straight from the imagination of a devotee of chapbooks. [Wigman] slithered on the floor disguised as a chimneysweep, to the sound of the rolling of pea-filled drums, using movements like devils from the service stairs that in any variety show would be considered a mediocre performance."¹⁶ Skilful in her use of criticism in her own choreographic work, Gert wanted to deflate both the tone and the scenario of the tragi-pathetic appeal of an "interior need" aimed at organic growth, i.e. the growth of the motif as a principle of composition.

Given that *Phasmes* certainly no longer suggests the self-portrait and manifesto of a modern dancer as a witch at grips with the context and issues of the 1920s, why did Latifa Laâbissi feel the need to return to this instance of the German expressionist avantgarde? On one hand, she had a wish to experience these dances that had not been included in her training, being in many respects the opposite of the aesthetic, technical, pedagogical, and political choices of American abstraction. She also wished to have the experience of teaching herself, as if it were necessary in order to leave behind the imitative process inherent in any dance course, to throw herself into an even more demanding replication, which examines and makes a display of even the act of looking. On the other hand, she had the desire to allow herself to do it without having obtained permission. As a result, the project was met with resistance: how could she claim that she was interpreting *Hexentanz* by Mary Wigman? Wasn't this setting up a deceptive act? The dancer showed the tactics of the poor, who, lacking a part of their history, are led to revisit it using the means at hand. Furthermore, although she never referred to them, in France, Latifa Laâbissi's Moroccan origins gave her copy an important cultural slant. Wasn't this Arab dancer-witch imitating a German dancer who made a political compromise with the cultural policy of the Third Reich,¹⁷ as recent work by historians in France has demonstrated? Upon closer examination, it seems *Phasme* permeated with a degree of political irony, attacking from behind both the unquestioned and unconditional approval given to the expressionist avantgarde ("Who does she think she is?") and the politically correct rejection of expressionist dances of the 1920s and '30s by offended leftists ("How on earth is it possible to dance Wigman's dances today?").

2nd time. Stretch-connect: Écran somnambule (2009, first and second version) in Rebutoh

In April 2009, Latifa Laâbissi invited by Boris Charmatz to take part in the opening event *Étrangler le temps* for the new Dancing Museum in Rennes. Along with the dancer Dominique Brun, she performed a second, experimental version of her copy of the *Witch Dance* under the title *Écran somnambule*¹⁸. In this version, she gave a slower but exact performance of Wigman's film score. However it was with a presentation she gave, which lasted 32 minutes (that is to say, sixteen times slower than the film), several months later, as part of the *Rebutoh* event at the Dancing Museum, that the dance achieved an unexpected historical perspective by condensing and reversing the direction of expressionist dance's migration in France by

¹⁶ Valeska Gert, *Der Querschnitt*, May 1926, trans. Gabler, in Claudia Gabler, *Mouvement et montage de gestes dans les danses de Gert*, DEA dissertation under the direction of Isabelle Launay, Département Danse, Paris 8, 2000.

¹⁷ See Laure Guilbert, *Danser avec le IIIe Reich*.

¹⁸ See "Le corps de Wigman est un médium, entretien avec Dominique Brun," *Repères, Cahier de danse* 30 (November 2012).

making a detour to Japan and revisiting butoh. Although these two versions are still not fully perfected, particularly with regard to the difficult timing and the type of face make-up (entirely in white) and costume (dark green crushed velvet), what does this echo of *Hexentanz* reveal? In other words, isn't this witch concealing another? The stretching of time, the pleats and folds of the skin of a body huddled up on the floor, the whitened face, the fragility of the movements, the work on the metamorphosis of an enigmatic figure: are they all not suggestive of a work close to butoh, which was discovered in France in 1978? Butoh was itself strongly influenced by expressionist dance from the 1920s. Doesn't *Écran somnambule* bring back unexpected memories of a series of witches conjured up by butoh practitioners Carlotta Ikeda and Yoko Ashikawa in particular? Who's films Latifa Laâbissi has also seen? In fact, in *Hitogata (Human Shape, 1976)* Tatsumi Hijikata, entirely supported by Yoko Ashikawa's grotesque metamorphoses, reproduced several motifs identical to those in Wigman's dance in a similarly explosive dynamic. Were they blurred citations or a subconscious, though mostly overdetermined, recollection? Latifa Laâbissi's "rebutoh" astonishingly condenses, against the grain, the aesthetic migration of expressionist dance from Germany to Japan from the 1920s on, where it was metabolized during the 1960s and 70s by butoh, and then returned to France during the '80s, where today it is once again present. It is as though expressionist dance, with the aesthetic of conflict by which it is characterized, needed to pass through its simulation and then its Japanese fantasies in order to discover a new place of expression in the 2010s.¹⁹ This summary of a history of dance migration is a deterritorialization that reveals the extent to which dance is able to assimilate ideological, cultural, and identity issues.

3rd time. Intoxicate the copy: Écran somnambule (2012)

Freed from this butoh-related context, *Écran somnambule* undergoes a final development phase in order for its duplication to become a separate piece in itself. Each element of the film is at once integrated and altered, in short, metabolized. The choreography, music, costume, mask, and lighting have all been recreated. The music was initially recorded so that it could be remixed by Olivier Renouf. The tempo was not slowed down but stretched, dilated, thus allowing it to maintain its pitch, its relation with the sound environment, and enabling the dance to preserve its relation with the suddenness of the movements that strike the floor. The music is like a long muted chord given new life by cymbal strikes. Thus resonance and continual vibration—both sonic and gestural—are the themes of this version, or, more precisely, the resonance of the resonances of *Hexentanz*. This seated dance loosens the cinematic suspense of Wigman's dance, copied in its every gesture and intensifying the tension. The movement follows a permanent continuum broken by the stresses necessary for the "original" impacts that Latifa Laâbissi wanted to preserve with their full force. The effect is all the more surprising as the abrupt and rapid ruptures have their origin in a much lower physical tonicity, such as a spider slowly weaving its web that suddenly throws out a net over invisible prey. The surprise jolts the audience out of the hypnotic state into which it has been induced. By distending time and deploying vibration, Latifa Laâbissi both rarifies and intensifies the contrasts.

¹⁹ See Sylviane Pagès, "Résurgence, transfert et voyages d'un geste expressionniste: une historiographie discontinue et transnationale. Le Buto entre le Japon, la France et l'Allemagne," in *Mémoires et histoire en danse*, 373-84.

Additionally, the dilation of time allows us to view the dance quite differently: our attention, which was caught in the internal tensions and concentric dynamic of Mary Wigman, can here wander from one part of the dancer's body to another and observe the subtlety of the micro-tension of the forearms, the hands, the relationship between the hands and face, the toes and ankles. In this extreme slowness, and having been liberated from Wigman's choreographic net, the dance follows the kinesthetic events that organize the perception of the dancer and take on the semblance of an instantaneous composition. The relation to the choreographic order is thus undermined by the constant metamorphosis of perception. On the other hand, our gaze can also follow the curves in space, the lines slowly etched, and the diagonals that emerge and then fade away at the same slow rate. As in the film, the light is focused on the figure, thereby making the surrounding space disappear, strengthening the dramatic power, and holding the audience's attention captive despite the extreme slowness. It simply offers variations in intensity every fifteen minutes, a simple dramaturgical device that refocuses our attention. The sculptural and plastic dimensions of the figure are formed before our eyes rather than forcefully planted right in front of us. By shifting the simultaneously fascinating and repugnant frontal view of the figure, what is exposed is a play of twisting, the independence and dissociation of her movements. We are able to see into the recesses and reliefs of the sculpture, to slide our gaze over the surfaces, to imagine the hidden faces of the limbs, to appreciate the transformation of a shape, and to fix on one bodily zone and then abandon it for another. We also have the time to associate images, to lose ourselves in an imaginative excess that was previously concentrated into just a few seconds. Whereas the attention of the audience was immediately captured by the shocks and pauses of Wigman's witch, here it is tested by a figure that is both asthenic and powerful, and that displays all its plasticity.

Moreover, the carapace-like costume devised by stage designer Nadia Lauro, made to imitate snakeskin, intensifies the protective aspect of Wigman's shimmering dress. And while it has those same sparkling qualities (another essential notion of Wigman's aesthetic link to vibration), it reinforces them through an effect characteristic of a creature as it molts, slowly separating itself from a first body (Wigman's as much as that of an animal). Lastly, Nadia Lauro decided to not recreate Wigman's mask but produce Latifa Laâbissi's by following the Wigman process, namely taking a cast from the dancer's face. However, whereas the Wigman mask emphasized the fiendish traits of the dancer in the same way as Noh masks, leaving no doubt that she is in fact wearing a mask, the mask worn by Latifa Laâbissi is almost imperceptible and helps to smooth over her features. As a counterpoint to the animal nature of the costume, the face with closed eyes seems inert, creating another source of tension in the contrast between a dead face and a living body. Whereas Wigman's creature was compact, caught in a crossplay of contradictory yet also harmonized tensions, Laâbissi's is instead marked by the heterogeneity of its flesh and tonicity of the different parts of its body.

In both cases, the figure created is one of "otherness": other than Reason, other than the discursive knowledge of the Enlightenment; knowledges that are literate, rich, masculine, white. But the dark, asthenic, and powerful figure with the reptile skin is endowed with a forceful sense of enigma originating in other sources. It is no longer a question of dominating the audience's attention by imposing the authority to communicate of a complex figure. This *Écran somnambule* has more to do with the hypnotic register, all the more so because it rests on the art of the exact copy: the art of copying exactly and the art of creating

“toxic figures”²⁰—with a double meaning and on several levels. Cinema and dance infect one another here with their respective strengths: this figure is effectively “intoxicated” with cinematic images, copied pretty much exactly, but it also inoculates them with a counter-virus because, conflicting with certain aesthetic and political aspects of Wigman’s piece. Furthermore, in freeing Wigman from her portrait as Medusa and deconstructing it, its effects are subverted. Far from being hypnotized, our gaze wanders, rambles and dozes, opening onto the potential of the anarchic scenes of our fears and waking dreams.

Isabelle LAUNAY

MUSIDANSE (E.A. 1572)

*Équipe « Danse, geste et corporéité »
Université Paris 8 Saint-Denis*



To quote from this article : Isabelle Launay, "Steal, duplicate, unmask, stretch, connect, intoxicate a dance-image. From *Hexentanz (Witch Dance)* by Mary Wigman (film, 1930) to *Écran somnambule* by Latifa Laâbissi (2012) ", in Noémie Solomon (ed.), *Danse : An Anthology*, Les Presses du Réel / New York series, 2014, p. 209-222, reprinted in 2019. Translated from « Voler, doubler, démasquer, distendre, relier, intoxiquer une image-danse. De *Hexentanz* de Mary Wigman (film, 1930) à *Ecran somnambule* de Latifa Laâbissi (2012) », in Anne Benichou (dir.), *Recréer/Scripter, Mémoires et transmissions des œuvres performatives et chorégraphiques contemporaines*, Dijon, Presses du Réel, 2015, p. 333-350.

Taken from a digital version published on the website Paris 8 Danse in 2019 : www.danse.univ-paris8.fr

²⁰ This is the title of a research session organized by Laâbissi in 2013-2014 at the Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers.