

space embodied english

In the beginning was the body

The focus of "Space Embodied: The Russian Art of Movement 1920–1930" is on the concept of experimental movement in the new, Soviet Russia of the 1920s and 1930s. At the intersection of the many different themes and arguments offered here is the human body – nude, vested, individual, collective, visible and transparent, but, above all, in movement.

Before enforced ideological removal, the body in movement inspired the creation of the so-called Choreological Laboratory, active in Moscow between 1923 and 1929, which not only hosted lively debates, seminars and performances, but also organized annual exhibitions entitled "The Art of Movement". The Laboratory was a section of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences founded by Vasilii Kandisky in 1921, a unique,

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interdisciplinary center studied movement in connection with the visual arts, theatre, music, philosophy, and other branches of learning. It did much to stimulate the development of the *danse plastique* or, as it is known more generally, Free Dance or the New Dance.

The Choreological Laboratory was indebted to three extraordinary individuals, i.e. the artist Oton Engel's (Moscow, 1880– after 1946) and the critics and art historians Aleksandr Larionov (Moscow, 1889–1954) and Aleksei Sidorov (Moscow, 1891–1978). Larionov was director, Sidorov was to all intents and purposes co-director, while Engel's, a superb draftsman, was charged with depicting the Laboratory's experiments in movement in close collaboration with photographers.

Larionov and Sidorov, refined connoisseurs, appreciated all the genres and techniques of

Het Nieuwe
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programme
Jaarthema's

file
Olympische spelen

project
Space Embodied.
The Russian Art of Movement

curator
Nicoletta Misler

research
Anastasia Lesnikova

art director
Johannes Schwartz

graphic and spatial design
Experimental Jetset

The Olympic Games of 2016 form the inspiration for a programme about the quantification and beautification of the body. In a spatial installation Space Embodied adds a historical perspective on the strive for a liberated body.

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graphic representation, whether manual or mechanical. They supported complementary approaches to the visualization of movement and movement notation, both symbolic representation and modern technology such as photography and cinematography. Recent years have witnessed the rediscovery of major archives containing many of those extraordinary vintage photographs, although most of the cinematographic experiments are still missing.

“Space Embodied: The Art of Movement and the Russian Avant-Garde” presents a broad array of these materials by leading photographers of the time – from pictorialist Nikolai Svishchov-Paola to sports photographer Andrei Teleshev. They were members of the prestigious Russian Photographic Society, founded before the Revolution, which worked closely with the Choreological Laboratory.

Some of the most audacious choreographers of the 1920s also collaborated with the Choreological Laboratory: among them were Inna Chernetskaia, Kas'ian Goleizovsky, Lev Lukin and Aleksandr Rumnev, whose creative achievements are now being restored to the history of contemporary dance in Russia. Others fell under the aegis of the Choreological Laboratory after the Moscow Department of Popular Education – for political reasons – closed down the studios of plastic dance in 1924 such as Nina Aleksandrova's school, the Association of Rhythmists and Liudmila Alekseeva's Studio of Harmonious Gymnastics.

At that point, the more transgressive experiments vanished from public view: the naked body, radical performances and ecstatic abandon characterizing the *danse plastique* now entered the purview of a restricted circle of specialists thanks to the annual exhibitions of the Choreological Laboratory between 1925–1928.

Later on many of the innovative choreographic ideas such as Aleksandrova's and Goleizovsky's rhythmic movements were applied to mass choreographies such as the Stalin gymnastic parades, as we can see in the audiovisual section. At the same time, during the new Soviet prudery of the early 1930s Goleizovsky, for example, adapted his “girly” scenographic inventions to the cinema, often anonymously, yet always successfully, as in

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Grigorii Aleksandrov's *Circus* (1936, Mosfilm). This movie contains spectacular variety sequences which Goleizovsky himself choreographed, even if his name did not appear among the credits.

Nicoletta Misler

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1: space

Space for the New Dance was dictated by movements of the body and perceptions of light, resounding with the music of nature and the cosmos. Reducing the stage to a minimum and undertaking performances in the open air became the goal for dancers and choreographers. It was exactly this kind of space, whether structured by Alexandra Exter, Kas'ian Goleizovsky or Lev Lukin, which linked acrobatics with ecstasy, physical education with emotion, outward expression with interior sentiment – and the symbolism of choreographic design with the perfection of physical movement and the nude body beautiful.

The main proponents of the New Dance in Russia were dancers and choreographers such as Isadora Duncan, Kas'ian Goleizovsky, Lev Lukin and Aleksandr Rumnev. But the New Dance also brought dancers and choreographers especially close to artists and musicians.

stage design

In the early 1920s the stage of the New Dance often displayed progressive ideas of avant-garde design, scenic resolutions often consisting of stairs, ladders and minimal, structural scaffolding serving a utilitarian purpose. The most significant example was Alexandra Exter's (unrealized) stage design for the *Ballet Satanique* which Goleizovsky choreographed for the *Drambalet* in 1922.

Goleizovsky also designed a skeletal construction for a ballet based on Prokofiev's *Sarcasms* in 1922, subsequently elaborating the conception – together with the artist Boris Erdman – in the sets for *Faun* (after Debussy's *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*).

The production at the Hermitage Theatre in Moscow on 16 August, 1922 contained a ladder leaning against the wall – a manifest symbol of the minimalist new stage. The stage design for *Faun* was a tense complex of beams and bars held together pell-mell by ropes and offering a precarious equilibrium – an 'impossible' set which takes the wooden structures of the Constructivists to extremes.

the new body (naked and clothed)

Among the most transgressive choreographers of the moment were Kas'ian Goleizovsky, Lev Lukin and Aleksandr Rumnev – and also Inna Chernetskaia representing the erotic highpoint of the *danse plastique*, a rich resource for artists, photographers

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and art historians who regarded this as a re-embodiment of the great Classical legacy.

Scenes of nudes, often couples adopting the most impossible acrobatic positions, had long been a favourite subject with pictorialist photographers, fascinated by the possibilities of modulating the graceful lines of the nude body against diaphanous and decorative backgrounds. There were many variations on the theme, whether in the closed studio with its rugs, drapes, tapestries and other tinsel ornaments or *en plein air* with barefoot young things in tunics sporting veils, posing next to Classical friezes or leaning against Neo-Classical sculptures of Imperial Russia. But this classicizing bric-à-brac also served to disguise a more latent purpose of these mises-en-scène, one of which was taboo – namely, eroticism.

In the meantime, artists and critics were advocating the need to bare the body so as to study both its physical and its psychological movements, demonstrating that the dialectic between the nude and the clothed body was much more complex than the traditional conflict between eroticism and puritanism.

As far as the New Dance is concerned, 1922 was a special year with, for example, Yurii Ars's *Evenings of the Denuded Body*, Lukin's *Evenings of the Liberated Body* and Goleizovsky's presentation of *Faun* with Boris Erdman's sparse mini-skirts and fringed *caches-sexes*. Lukin even organized a concert of eccentric dances with dancers, rouged and bare-breasted, which, inevitably, brought forth strong and predictable reactions such as "Eroticism or Pornography?", "Stop Pornography!", etc.

Rumnev recalled working with Lukin: "People danced nude, they danced barefoot and in underwear brocaded with abstract patterns and with brocaded hair looking like skullcaps, confirming that the nude body was the best costume for dance" (*A. Rumnev: "Vospominaniia. Minuvshchee prokhorodit predno mnoi"*). Quoted in *E. Surits and T. Kasatkina, eds.: Aisedora. Gastrol'i v Rossii, M: Artist. Rezhisser. Teatr, 1992, p. 364*).

biographies

inna chernetskaia

Inna Samoilovna Chernetskaia (1894–1963) was a

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dancer and choreographer born to Jewish parents. She studied the natural sciences at the University of Berlin, while attending the studio of Elizabeth Duncan. In Munich she also studied under Rudolf von Laban and then rhythmic gymnastics under Emile Jaques-Dalcroze. Returning to Moscow in 1915, she opened her own Studio of Synthetic Dance, choreographing performances to the music of Frédéric Chopin and Serge Rachmaninoff as well as compositions based on fusions of dance, pantomime and drama such as *Danse macabre* (Camille Saint-Saëns). In the Studio she tried to bring together Classical and free dance while still taking account of dramatic expressivity and acrobatics so as to create what she called “synthetic” dance. Perhaps, with her Bohemian lifestyle, the “demonic” Chernetskaia (as Rachmaninoff called her) was the plastic dancer most suited to the Dionysian representation of the dance with its “liberation” of the body from clothes and bourgeois conventions. In 1924 her studio was affiliated with the Choreological Laboratory.

On 17 December 1923, dancer and choreographer Inna Chernetskaia, presented the ballet *Pan* at the Bolshoi Theatre, but the next summer reinterpreted it in a very radical manner – with a group of semi-nude dancers, ecstatic, wild and Dionysian, in a real sylvan ambience. This series of photographs is an example of how choreographers and dancers explored the new space of the natural environment. Like other dancers and choreographers of the New Dance, Chernetskaia was inspired by the idea that music, dance and the body belong to nature and can find a new form in the open air.

isadora duncan

Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) performed in Moscow and St. Petersburg on multiple occasions. Claiming to recreate the Greek dances represented in sculptures and vases (hence the term “plastic dance”), Duncan had broken the strict rules of the Classical ballet opening the way to Free Dance. Performing barefoot in Greek tunics and peplos, she also promoted the integration of the visual arts, dance and music. In releasing the female body, Duncan both liberated the feet of the ballerina from the constrictions of the ballet shoe (her young students were called “barefooters”) and threw away the corset. Her dancing marked the true beginning of the revolution in contemporary dance and had an enormous influence on Russian dancers. Duncan opened her own official school in

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Moscow in October, 1921 (active until 1929). Duncan liked to have herself photographed surrounded by her baby ballerinas. She seemed to find an inner, primitive expressivity in the infantile spontaneity of these little girls in their tunics who, ironically, would soon be christened in Russia *dunkaniaty* (duncanettes).

The ethereal icon of Duncan as nymph pervaded most representations during her first sojourns in Russia. She was often depicted in a luminous and “anti-terrestrial” manner, as if, on the empty stage, she was hovering in light. Artists emphasized the natural softness of her gestures, the grace of her arms and hands twisting at the wrist as well as the absence not only of the scenic box, but also of the earthly plane.

aleksandr rumnev

Aleksandr Rumnev (1899–1965) was an experimental dancer, actor, choreographer and mime and one of the primary innovators in early Soviet ballet. After taking lessons in rhythmic and Classical dance and pantomime, in 1919 he enrolled in Liudmila Alekseeva’s school before joining Aleksandr Tairov’s Chamber Theatre. There he started to develop his own visual and choreographic dance language based on a combination of rhythmical movement, plastic expression and pantomime. In 1920–22 he served as protagonist in Lev Lukin’s *Evenings of the Liberated Body*, before organizing his own *Evenings of the New Dance* (together with Vera Drutskaia and her husband Boris Erdman (who designed the costumes). After his long awaited meeting in 1921, Rumnev became a friend of Duncan even if he was never a keen follower of her system.

In 1934, because of the anti-homosexual campaign, he was forced to leave Moscow and work in regional theatres, and in July, 1938, he was even accused of espionage and imprisoned for a year in Kuibyshev. In 1940 he moved back to Moscow to teach stage movement at Mosfilm. Rumnev argued that plastic movement is the art which develops intuition within us, an apprehension of beauty and an intellectual capacity.

Especially appropriate to the icon of Rumnev and his physical presence is Lev Lukin’s statement that the “bearer of movement on stage (the dancer) dances only himself, which means that what he experiences is what Narcissus also experiences as he looks at

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his reflection...[here] the expressivity of the dancer reaches ecstasy, the result of the intensity of the very form of dance.” (*L. Lukin: “O tantse” in Teatral’noe obozrenie, Moscow, 1922, No. 4, p. 4*).

lev lukin

Lev Ivanovich Lukin (1892–1961) was a dancer and choreographer. Through music (he took piano lessons with Mikhail Gnesin and at the Moscow Conservatoire) he came to dance, initially with Antonina Shalomytova, and in 1920 organized the Moscow Free Ballet which performed radical dance programmes to the music of Sergei Prokofiev and Aleksandr Skriabin.

In his choreographies Lukin elaborated new forms of plastic dance, trying to liberate the human body from the Classical ballet while still recognizing the value of this tradition in the training of the new dancer, especially of the new body. For this reason Lukin, with his audacious performances and productions, was often accused of pornography, even if his ultimate goal was to attain a plastic synthesis founded on, and guided by, music. Aleksander Rumnev, Vera Drutskaia, and Zinaida Tarkhovskaia were among his favourite dancers.

In the spring of 1926 the Moscow Free Ballet went on tour through Russia, disbanding on its return to Moscow, while Lukin stayed behind to work in Baku. Returning to Moscow in 1936, he directed the Duncan Studio, but was briefly arrested in 1939 in Frunze after which he retired in Moscow, where he died in obscurity.

The elongated lines of Rumnev’s body, emphasized by the stretched muscles of his angular poses, became a favourite subject for choreographer Lukin, pictorialist photographer Nikolai Svishchov-Paola and artist Grigorii Zimin: “It is the will to movement intrinsic to the body which the art of choreography reveals. Music and the force of life resound within the inert gravity of the body, affirming its essential principle in forms of rhythmized movement”. (*K [not identified]: Skriabin v tantse Lukina, Moscow: Steklografiia pri Institute vostokovedeniia, 1922, p. II*)

Duncan’s fundamental behest to the Russian avant-garde was the actual disappearance of the stage as with Lukin’s Sappho. “Essentially, this is not dance. Darkness. A group forms in the darkness. Light – the group emerges. Dark again – a new construction”.

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(*Iving (V. Ivanov): «Balet Lukina. Raskaiavshiiis greshnik» in Teatr i muzyka, Moscow, 1923, 30, pp. 996–97*)

Lev Lukin adapted his *Sappho* ballet to a design containing an oval platform with steep, almost pyramidal, inclined walkways, which constituted the only scenic accessories. The result was very similar to Goleizovsky’s simple stage.

vera drutskaia

Dancer Vera Drutskaia (Moscow, 1898–1946), wife of the artist Boris Erdman, collaborated with Goleizovsky, Lukin and other modern choreographers who appreciated her flexibility of interpretation. In 1922 Lukin created the acrobatic number called Variété for her, while the following year Goleizovsky, impressed by the elasticity of her back, invited her to interpret his Spanish dances to the music of Isaac Albéniz and Enrique Granados. In 1924 she danced at the “evening of bourgeois dances” in Yakov Protazanov’s film *Aelita*.

kas’ian goleisovsky

Kas’ian Goleisovsky (1892–1970). Choreographer, dancer, artist. Distinguished for his radical experiments with the body, in his choreographies he demonstrated that ecstatic abandon did not necessarily mean rejection of technique or absence of professionalism. In fact, during the 1900s he initiated his career as student of Classical dance, taking courses under Michel Fokine, while also (1907) taking lessons with Isadora Duncan.

In 1909 he joined the Maryinsky Theatre and then the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow (until 1918) where, until 1925, he directed his own group primarily under the name of The Chamber Ballet. Goleizovsky was an extremely rigorous teacher, demanding the discipline from his students and performers. For his company he composed several one-act ballets such as *Salomé* (after Richard Strauss) and *Faun* (after Claude Debussy’s *L’Après-midi d’un faune*). In 1925 he created choreographies for Sergei Vasilenko’s *Joseph the Beautiful* and after the disbandment of his Chamber Ballet, collaborated with the Bolshoi, worked for the Moscow and Leningrad music-halls (1928–29) and also, in the 1930s, created important choreographies for the cinema.

Goleizovsky was capable of transforming two or more dancers into a single, homogenous unit and

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a well-defined contour of movement: "Goleizovsky constructs movement out of circles and spirals.... Goleizovsky is dynamic while his dance flows in ceaseless movement. The poses are 'unstable', taking us to a further development of the gesture [...]." (N. L'vov: "Goleizovsky i Lukin. V poriadke diskussii" in *Ermitazh, Moscow, 1922, No. 11, p. 6.*)

The oblique stage in the ballet *Joseph the Beautiful* which Goleizovsky produced in Moscow in 1925 and again in the Odessa Theatre of Opera and Ballet the following year – with its pieces of equipment and athletes doing work-outs resembling a gym – marked a turning point in the development of stage design for the *danse plastique*.

Goleizovsky's favourite dancer was Vasilii Efimov with whom he presented a series of orgiastic dances, contained within an elegant *passéisme* of Art Nouveau. His long and well-developed legs enabled him to make extraordinary leaps, while his acute sensibility and feral energy brought him close to the famous dancer Vaslav Nijinsky with whom he is often compared.

In some of his paintings and drawings Goleizovsky's highlighted the expressive sublimation of erotic embraces in the well-constructed bodies of his young dancers. For Goleizovsky dance was almost always the mimesis of a coupling or, conversely, coupling was always a kind of dance, a natural dance as with animals and insects – in particular, that of bees or butterflies – which he reduced to a formal configuration above and beyond the body itself.

circus

In the 1920s dancers and choreographers were drawn especially close to the circus, because for them it offered a creative space less subordinate to ideological pressure and incursion. As a result, they included acrobatics, contortionism, gym equipment and simple props into their numbers, relying heavily on joke, improvisation and repartee. The sanded arena of the circus – a space for dance experimentation – might have looked empty, but it was so only in appearance: as with the New Dance stage in general, one moment the circus arena was filled with the instruments and gadgets catering to the various movements of the performers and the next emptied of these same mobile structures. Moreover, both the circus and the dance studio demanded rigorous training.

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Many members of the Choreological Laboratory, including Kas'ian Goleizovsky and Lev Lukin, worked for the circus and the dramatic theatre. Popular clown Vitalii Lazarenko (1890-1939) collaborated with the latter who, in turn, took acrobatic lessons from him. Especially interested in circus were the followers of so-called *ektsentrika* or Eccentrism, a term linked closely with the circus. Choreographer Nikolai Foregger, for example, declared that it was essential to borrow from the circus so as to perform the acrobatics of his mechanical dances at Mastfor and to justify his visual paraphernalia imitating the movements of transmission belts, buckets and wheels.

Contortionism is a specific training of the body closely associated with the circus and its contiguity with the New Dance might explain why the "natural" body was rejected in favour of distortion and contortion. Such postures appeared in various photographs made for the Choreological Laboratory turning into a kind of "voyeuristic" experimentation.

Since 1919 the artist Boris Erdman had been working for the circus, designing special costumes to take account of the bizarre movements of clowns. Historian Aleksei Sidorov observed: "Boris Erdman came to dance via the [state] circus... The costumes which he drew for Vitalii Lazarenko do merit attention [because], in their play of acute angles, asymmetries and contrasts, they expose the problems of internal characterization" – to which Boris Erdman responded: "The artist's main task is not to blind the public with novelty of colour, but, in studying movement, to express this movement as vividly as possible".

Futurist poet Vadim Shersenevich asserted: "I shall never forget how Lazarenko circled about Boris Erdman who was doing sketches for his new costume and how Lazarenko began to think up tricks using that costume as his starting-point". (V. Shershenevich: «*Neobkhodimo vmeshatel'stvo*» in *Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1922, No. 22, p. 15.*)

"In the movements of physical training correlation with the spatial elements merits a special place inasmuch as it grants preference to movements which follow trajectories so as create an impression of beauty. A further example of the aspiration to organize space artistically is to be found in tri-partite, free, pyramidal movements which organize space into

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pyramidal forms» (A. Larionov: «*Khudozhestvennoe dvizhenie. Teoriia i praktika fizkul'tury*» in A. Larionov et al.: *Teoriia i praktika fizkul'tury. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov i statei po voprosam fizicheskoi kul'tury*, Moscow: VMSFK, 1925, p. 80).

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2: body

The human body in movement was at the center of the researches of the so-called Choreological Laboratory. During the 1920s – a decade so crucial to the evolution of Soviet culture – the goal of the Laboratory was how and by what means the body could be visualized in movement and represented in dance, gymnastics, on the factory floor and in everyday life. In the early 1920s, at least, the body as the epitome of sensuality can be regarded as a model for all research into the New Dance at that time – and not necessarily the female body, but also the abstract elegance of Rumnev's male body with the provocative lightness of its homosexual beauty.

Photography became the privileged medium for representing the body in movement inasmuch as it could be adapted readily to diverse conditions, whether in the studio or outdoors. In 1922 Sidorov had written: "In painting we have the eye, in music – the ear, in architecture – the sense of space, in dance – the body....It is incumbent upon us to understand the material of the body – within the embryo of pure dance....as the basic content of all art. Because any reexamination [of art], albeit of the role of costume and nudity in the art of the dance, must be rooted therein." (A. Sidorov: «*Ocherednye zadachi iskusstva tantsa*» in *Teatr i studiiia, M, 1922, No. 1-2, p. 16*).

The first impulse to liberate the entire body from the tutu and the institutional baggage of the Classical ballet and also from the hindrance of its ballet movements was provided by Duncan – implicit in the logo of her Moscow school – "A Free Spirit Can Dwell Only in a Free Body". In other words, not only vestiments, but also the interior emotions were to be released, a behest which her disciples heeded with particular dedication.

followers of duncan, biographies

liudmila alekseeva

Liudmila Alekseeva (1890–1964) was a dancer, pedagogue and outstanding figure in the Art of movement. Following in the footsteps of Isadora Duncan, the "Studio of Harmonious Gymnastics" directed by Ljudmila Alekseeva was one of the most important Russian schools of the *danse plastique*, not least, because it was oriented primarily towards the harmonious development of the feminine body.

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After travelling in Europe between 1911 and 1913 Alekseeva joined the Central Studio of Proletcult, producing inter alia a *Marseillaise* of which Lenin himself was an immediate enthusiast. Renamed Art of Movement in 1924, the Studio was amalgamated with the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences where Alekseeva focused on the principle of natural movement, maintaining that time dedicated to gymnastics must be one of active artistic perception and that any woman can obtain esthetic gratification while ameliorating her body. Basic to Alekseeva's system was the alternation of muscular tension and rest which, according to her theory, formed a soft and undulatory composition of movement

"Alekseeva is working to formulate a new way of life. She is interested in life rather than the theatre, in the human being rather than art. She develops and liberates the human body...so as to allow as many people as possible to exercise control over themselves, who can move and, in life, stand on their own two feet. (V. Mass: "*Khoreostudii i shkoly. Masterskaia L. Alekseevoi*" in *Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1923, No. 43, p. 7*).

The iconic image of Liudmila Alekseeva's system derives from her celebrated ballet *Dying Birds* (after the music of Frédéric Chopin's *Revolutionary Etude* [Opus 10, No. 12]), with its poses of a young girl, her arm raised, bent to frame the head bowed slightly backwards. Reproduced numerous times, the configuration underlines one of the fundamentals of Alekseeva's "harmonious gymnastics" – the fluency of the movements of the body, especially head and neck.

geptakhor

The dance group Geptakhor (Heptachor; from the Greek "the seven arts") was active in St. Petersburg-Leningrad during 1913–35. Founded by dancer Stefanida Rudneva (1890–1989) and artist and dancer Natal'ia Enman (1889–1961), Geptakhor was the most active "Duncanist" group in St. Petersburg before switching to a more experimental kind of dance. Between 1924 and 1927 and in collaboration with the artists Boris and Mariia Ender, followers of Mikhail Matiushin's "organic school", Geptakhor conducted researches in three directions: perception of space, perception of colour and perception of nature. Boris Ender, for example, made the Geptakhorians move so as to develop new spatial perceptions such as moving blindfolded in an open space.

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Mariia Ender, sister of Boris, who worked in the Colour Laboratory in close collaboration with Matiushin, also conducted scientific experiments on color perception together with Enman – for example, on how, with one eye closed, the viewer perceived "changes in the colour spot and colour background over time". The relevant tables which she compiled were very close to the those which Enman also used during group sessions.

Furthermore, employing coloured "grills" as a departure-point, Enman and the students who participated in these courses freed not only the body, but also the artistic imagination.

the choreological laboratory

The body in movement inspired the creation of the Choreological Laboratory (1923–1929), an interdisciplinary think-tank involving practising artists, art historians, architects, musicians and even scientists. The Laboratory was a section of the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences founded by Vasilii Kandinsky in 1921, a unique, interdisciplinary center that studied movement in connection with the visual arts, theatre, music, philosophy, and other branches of learning. It did much to stimulate the development of Free Dance.

The Choreological Laboratory conducted pioneering research into what was called "The Art of Movement", an art form which could synthesize the musical, spatial and visual arts through the medium of the human body.

The Laboratory investigated how movement could be transcribed in its numerous kinetic extensions – gesture, mime, dance, gymnastics, emotional expression as well as Classical movement notations. These researches were developed both on theoretical and practical bases with the help of the schools and studios of *danse plastique*.

The Choreological Laboratory was indebted to three extraordinary individuals, i.e. the artist Oton Engel's (Moscow, 1880–after 1946) and the critics and art historians Aleksandr Larionov (Moscow, 1889–1954) and Aleksei Sidorov (Moscow, 1891–1978). Larionov was director, Sidorov was to all intents and purposes co-director, while Engel's, a superb draftsman (and a primary contributor to our exhibition), was charged with depicting the Laboratory's experiments in movement in close collaboration with photographers. The Choreological

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Laboratory was dismantled along with the Academy of Artistic Sciences in 1929.

oton engel's

Oton (Otton) Engel's (Moscow, 1880–after 1946) was an artist, bibliophile and passionate collector of books, Engel's was one of the most active members of the Choreological Laboratory, attending virtually all its staff meetings. He collaborated closely with the Studios of Vera Maia and Valeriia Tsvetaeva, depicting – together with them and professional photographers – specific movement poses (both *danse plastique* and Classical ballet) and superscribing the exact hour of execution on his drawings. He assembled albums, now dispersed, containing numerous photographs taken of these dancers and choreographers. In 1930 he was arrested and imprisoned and the date and circumstances of his death are still open to question.

aleksandr larionov

Aleksandr Larionov (Moscow, 1889–1954) It was a deep passion for rhythmic and eurythmic which brought Larionov to the New Dance. Like many intellectuals of his time and place, Larionov favoured a multidisciplinary approach to his topics of study, moving from philosophy and mathematics to cinema and even aerial photography. He attended the Archaeological Institute, Moscow, took part in ethnographical expeditions and in 1920–25 was professor of alphabetic characters at the Higher State Artistic and Technical Studios (VKhUTEMAS) which in turn reinforced his interest in movement notations.

In 1921 Larionov published his first essay on the *danse plastique* in the journal *Zhizn' iskusstva*. In the 1920s while at the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences he studied the interrelationships of movement, space, sound and colour, delivering lectures on the subject and serving as director of the Choreological Laboratory (in concert with Aleksei Sidorov). Subsequently, he focused on the elements of sports and gymnastics in movement, served as secretary of the Section for Popular Dances at the Higher Council for Physical Education and helped organize the 1928 Spartakiada.

aleksei alekseevich sidorov

Aleksei Alekseevich Sidorov (Moscow, 1891–1978) was art and dance historian, connoisseur of the graphic arts, and collector. After graduating from high-school in 1909, Sidorov joined the Little Circle

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for the Study of Symbolism where he met Aleksandr Larionov. Enrolled in the Department of Architecture and Art History at Moscow University in 1913, he also spent time in Munich where he met Vasilii Kandinsky, contributed to the lively discussions inspired by Kandinsky's *Klänge* and cultivated a strong interest in the new Expressionist dance. In 1915 Sidorov wrote a long essay on this which, in 1923, he further developed into the first Russian monographic publication on the New Dance.

Back in Moscow in 1914 Sidorov taught art history of Moscow University, worked at the Alexander III Museum of Fine Arts and took lessons in rhythmic gymnastics offered by Proletcult. In 1921, together with Kandinsky, he helped establish the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences, becoming its secretary for academic affairs and three years later, together with Aleksandr Larionov, co-directed (albeit not officially) the Choreological Laboratory there.

the four “art of movement” exhibitions

The Choreological Laboratory presented its research findings at four “Art of Movement” exhibitions held in Moscow between 1925 and 1928. One of the most stimulating elements of the exhibitions was the visual confrontation between results attained from different media and methods of transcription and applied to the same object. For example, the drawings of poses of dance movements often paralleled or even “duplicated” photographs of the same poses.

the first “art of movement” exhibition moscow, 1925

The first “Art of Movement” exhibition, intimate and experimental, catered only to specialists. Its goal was to represent the “problem of how to convey the movement of the human body” and “define the meaning of the art photograph as well as the registration of movement in general and of dance in particular” (“*Otchet o deiatel'nosti Russkogo Fotograficheskogo obshchestva s 1/X/1924 po 1/7/1925 [Pravleniiu GAKhN]*” [25 July, 1925], I. 188).

Engel's was the most important contributor, his drawings demonstrating not only a profound sensibility, precision and graphic succinctness, but also an intense sensual energy dynamizing the lines of his graphic interpretations of the model, variegated and articulated, whether static or in movement.

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the second “art of movement” exhibition moscow, 1926

Among the contributors to the second “Art of Movement” exhibition were the Russian Photographic Society, the Central Institute of Labour and Nina Aleksandrova’s Association of Rhythmists. The journal *News of Physical Culture of the Higher Council for Physical Education* was also represented with sport subjects caught by the camera, including football, tennis, swimming, running and fencing. Photographers took pride of place, although sculpture and the graphic arts did constitute a small, but significant, section.

the third art of movement exhibition moscow, 1927

The third Art of Movement exhibition presented the systematization of numerous types of movement: from artistic movement (including gymnastics) to sports and labour. The Cabinet of the Eastern Theatre presented a number of reconstructions of Ancient Egyptian dances which Sidorov photographed in the Egyptian Halls of the Museum of Fine Arts. Animal movements were also included.

the fourth art of movement exhibition moscow, 1928

Following the First International Dance Festival hosted in Magdeburg in 1927, the fourth Art of Movement exhibition focused on the new European (mostly German and Austrian) tendencies in dance. Ukrainian artist Georg Kirsta, a resident of Vienna, served as host curator. With its splendid dance photographs submitted by the most famous Austrian photographers of the time the exhibition attracted over 800 visitors, while a special section paid homage to the school of Isadora Duncan, deceased in a tragic accident the year before.

dance and movement notation

From its early phase of 1924–25, the Choreological Laboratory oriented its researches towards the elaboration of a precise system of movement notation, each exhibition boasting a section dedicated to this. At the four Art of Movement exhibitions, movement notations by Aleksandr Larionov, Nikolai Mal’tsev, Aleksandr Sidorov and others occupied a central position.

The Journal of Photographic Work at the Choreological Laboratory, in which Larionov and Sidorov

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systematized their experiments with photography, provides precise indications as to how the latter had been divided into specific rubrics such as “Movements of the Hands”, “Movements of the Legs”, “Unified Movements of Arms and Legs”. For example, during academic year 1925–26 the issue of gait constituted a special field of study, the Journal referring to experiments in “Diverse Typologies of Gait”, “Episodic Snapshots of Gait with Footwear”, “Gait in Stockings”, etc.

A fundamental field of research at the Choreological Laboratory during academic year 1924–25 was the “framing” of a movement or the recording of that single moment of artistic movement which subsumes all the others, which can be conceived within a simple geometric frame. This device, which, undoubtedly, is important for any kind of performative art, has been manifested and elaborated via the materials of three “frames” – the circle, the triangle and the rhombus.

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3: movement

Inevitably, the fact that the body, nude or otherwise, was at the centre of the Choreological Laboratory programme did create problems. In 1922, when Aleksandr Sidorov was asked how he could reconcile his academic activities with the “frivolous” study of dance, he replied that his aim was precisely to live the most radical manifestations of dance, its essential nature and artistic expression *par excellence* inasmuch as the material of dance was the “human being, ones own body.... the art of the body, the art of the body in movement.” Consequently, for all the hype about sophisticated mechanical instruments for recording movement (from the camera to the cyclograph), the principal object of experimentation remained the body – the body which Sidorov regarded as the “static beginning of the dance,” declaring that he supported nudity on stage.

These two approaches – the subjective body as the expression of emotion (and hence of eroticism and sexuality) and the objective body as a fundamental, organic instrument and the expression of health and hygiene (as, for example, in gymnastics and collective work-outs) – had now become the two alternating poles between which the Art of Movement was born. But the free, if not, anarchical, experiments which had been emerging from the private dance studios outside of state control could not fail to alarm the Soviet authorities.

Certainly, by the mid-1920s what the official agenda now required was physical education and the mass parade, not the *danse plastique*.

On 26 August, 1924 the Moscow Soviet issued a decree demanding the closure of all dance schools, studios, classes and similar groups, a decree which functioned as a chronological and ideological watershed between the “warm” body of the plastic dance and the “cold” body of physical culture.

ballroom and popular dance

At the beginning of NEP (Lenin’s New Economic Policy allowing for a partial return to private enterprise) the heavy Muscovite body had given way to the inexorable movement of the big city – to urban rhythms, the dance craze and the cinema: «The world, as it were, has grown tired of sitting around. Our era is one of movement. In the turbulent tempo of urban life and machine culture with every kind of spiritual

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displacement and social revolution, mankind senses an unswerving urge to dance, to engage in sports, to go to the cinema... Essentially, the dance is nothing but the artistic organization of physical education” (A. Sidorov: «*Novyi tanets*” in *Krasnaia niva*, Moscow, 1923, No. 52, pp. 19–20).

All ballroom dances from the tango to the cake-walk, the *dance de l’apache*, the shimmy and the Charleston captivated the new bourgeoisie and became equally popular after the Revolution. The more talented followers of the *danse plastique* were swift to interpret them. For example, in one of Nikolai Foregger’s drawings of 1921 we see Aleksandr Rumnev dancing a cake-walk.

In general, just as the avant-garde had reevaluated “inferior” forms of art, so the New Dance turned to minor genres of dance, suggesting that performers provide fresh and original interpretations. Reviewing the variety theatre and music-hall, one critic spoke of this “microscopic” trend which “in contrast to great art which sometimes blinds you or sometimes bores you, microscopic art... exerts a special charm. The imposing weight of monumentality yields to the brilliance of the kaleidoscope. [*A microscopic art*] is always ephemeral like an inner dream” (A. Abramov: “*O mikroskopicheskom*” in *Ermitazh*, Moscow, 1922, No. 9, pp. 11–12). If, in 1924, the Choreological Laboratory had offered a warm welcome to the *danse plastique* then threatened with ostracism, just a few months later it found itself at loggerheads with the new campaign against bourgeois dances such as the tango and the fox-trot.

What kind of role the ballroom and popular dance was to play in the life of the Soviet proletariat was at the centre of a vigorous debate which even included the methods of teaching gymnastics in school. To this end, a special Commission on folk dancing (*pliaska*) at the Higher Council for Physical Education was even established.

tango and fox-trot

The Higher Council for Physical Education issued specific directives in 1925, emphasizing that the fox-trot and tango, in particular, were dances «absolutely unacceptable in workers’ clubs», because they manifested a pronounced sexual character “with a clearly expressed and dominant eroticism of movement.” Dances like the tango, therefore, were “inadmissible at public gatherings, clubs, parties,

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theatres of a lighter genre and dance classes” (*«Vremennoe polozenie o pliaskakh i tantsakh v klubakh i obshchestvennykh sobraniakh. Utverzhdeno Plenumom NTK VSFK»* [18 July, 1925]. Typescript in OR-GTsTMB: f. 517, ed. khr. 134 (folder No. 7), l. 31).

From the official viewpoint, all ballroom dances were deemed to be a degenerate expression of “Americanism” – the puritanical reaction of the Soviet regime against the extraordinary success and popularity which these bourgeois manifestations of dance enjoyed among the proletariat. Accusations of pornography were directed not only at the tango and fox-trot, but also at all ballroom dances. Still, in the summers of the 1940s, in spite of stern reprimands, people were still dancing the fox-trot in the Gorky Park of Culture and Leisure.

Indeed, from 1913 onwards Russia had witnessed a real explosion of “tangomania”, so much so that when a certain demure citizen asked the Moscow Archbishop to prohibit this “so-called dance”, this foreign import called tango, the churchman took up the challenge, riling furiously against this evil of Sodom and Gomorrha, but to no avail.

character dancing

In 1927 the Soviet Union’s tactical policy on the nationalities offered an appropriate political context for the re-evaluation of “Soviet” character dances, one coinciding with an intense campaign of ethnographical researches into the nationality question. This allowed for the promotion of all manner of character dances, from Jewish to Spanish dances, popular with the Soviet public, which could now be included in the repertoire of the new choreographers. It was thanks to this apparent tolerance of the minorities, including the populations of Jewish “nationality”, that, in 1929, dancer Vera Shabshai was allowed to produce Jewish dances to the music of Jewish composers such as Yurii Engel’, Mikhail Gnesin and Aleksandr Krein and to reconstruct antique Palestinian dances.

It was designer Petr Galadzhev who expressed and articulated the varied diapason of Lukin’s *Jewish dances*. Through an emphatic and symbolic use of colour, Galadzhev’s costumes conveyed the “luxury and voluptuousness” typical of Lukin’s ecstatic dances. Moreover, Galadzhev harmonized the movements of the body with the forms of the costume.

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spanish dances

In popularity, so called Spanish dances vied with the tango and the fox-trot. As one of their most celebrated interpreters emphasized: “Of all character dances, the Spanish ones are the most interesting. Music is the *conditio sine qua non* of character dancing...which must ever pass through the prism of contemporary life, yet still leave behind the trace and character of its country of origin» (*M. Dyskovsky: «O kharakternom tantse» in Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1923, No. 42, p. 9*).

Goleizovsky, who visited Valencia in his youth, made Spanish dances the centrepiece of his repertoire, arguing – and demonstrating – that their substance «lay not in the country called Spain or in its folklore or subject-matter, but exclusively in the precise, distinct and mastered rhythm, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the simplicity and clarity of the emotional language» (*Li [Aleksandr Cherepnin]: “Gliadia, kak tantsuiut” in Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1924, No. 89, p. 10*).

costume

In 1925–26 the Choreological Laboratory directed particular attention to the issue of costume for the stage and how costume could influence pose and posture or, conversely, could be transformed by the conditions dictated by the dance. Indeed, the visual documentation of the many different performances and experiments describes a wide variety of styles and inventions which the same artists might have used to create moving costumes, while observing a systematic and programmatic minimum of materials.

“First and foremost, it should be said that the costume for the dance is certainly not the same as the one for the stage. Concealing the working mechanism of the body is incorrect... It’s not our fault if the public perceives the denuded body as raw, formless material in need of elaboration ... A performer has the right to total nudity only when every part of the body is alive and when even the tiniest muscle participates in the dance. At this point the issue of costume passes to the issue of corporeal, scenic makeup” (*A. Sidorov: “Boris Erdman, khudozhnik kostiuma” in Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1923, No. 43, p. 4*).

Oton Engel’s drawing of a standing, nude figure together with the dynamic forcelines of its potential rotation might be perceived as an extreme, if virtual, vestment of the dance. Antipodal are four costume designs for an *Oriental Dance* which Nina Sibiriakova-

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Goleizovskaia made for her husband's Intimate Theatre in 1916. They depict a woman dancing in a chador, or, rather, a chador dancing.

Boris Erdman designed very simple costumes for Goleizovsky, often in black and white only, whether for the Romantic works of Chopin and Debussy or for the lyrical distillation of Prokofiev's *Visions Fugitives* of 1922. Daniil Demutsky, a refined and sensitive photographer, made the embraces which Goleizovsky represented in his own renderings deliberately fuzzy and out of focus.

The photographs of the almost nude Aleksandr Rumnev indicate that Erdman's geometric and highly stylized glad rags still played an important role in defining the lines of the body in movement: "The costumes which Erdman invented for Lukin's productions are both minimal and acute ...and might be the ideal costume solution for nude dancing on stage". (A. Sidorov: *Sovremenniy tanets, Moscow Pervina, p. 55*).

Anatolii Petritsky's geometric and dynamic stylizations for Goleizovsky's dances are clearly expressed in his costume for Goleizovsky's *Studies in Pure Dance* in 1923 at the Moscow Chamber Ballet. The peculiar costume consisted of a veil in the shape of a simple triangle covering his boxer shorts, an article of clothing ever more common, yet ever more chaste, in the Soviet Union of the late 1920s – a true sign of the puritanical transformation of plastic dance. Similar to this are Anatolii Petritsky's four costumes for the *Eccentrodances* which Goleizovsky staged at the Crooked Jimmy Cabaret in Moscow in 1923 – diagonal cut-outs on severe geometric planes of red and black.

nikolai forreger

Nikolai Forreger (Greifenturn, Nikolai Mikhailovich). (Moscow, 1892–Kuibyshev, 1939) was an artist, actor and director. From 1919 onwards Forreger cultivated a particular interest in the circus. In 1919–20 he taught at the First Working Theater of Proletcult with Sergei Eisenstein, Mikhail Chekhov, Aleksandr Tairov et al. From 1920 to 1924 Forreger directed his own private studio called Mastfor (Foregger's workshop) in Moscow where he organized Constructivist and Eccentrist spectacles and acrobatic dances, including *Good Treatment of Horses* and *Dances of the Machines* (1923) close to, and influenced by, Vsevolod Meierkhol'd.

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Using stylization of movement, elements of the grotesque and circus tricks, Mastfor aspired to create machine dances. It also made recourse to the devices of cinematographic montage, sound and light and the rhythms of the fox-trot, the Charleston, the two-step and jazz. In attempting to construct a "synthetic" performer, Mastfor elaborated its own system of training called *tafiztrenazh* [dance and physical training]. In accordance with this method, every interpreter was to exert total control over the body and to move with heightened agility and optimal, virtually Tayloristic, tempi. In 1924 as a result of studio fire, the Mastfor was disbanded. Nonetheless, Foregger produced a number of ballets, including *Constructive Gopak*, working predominantly in Leningrad in 1924–26.

electric, eccentric

The concept of "eccentric" subsumed every kind of expressive form of movement deriving from the variety theatre, ballroom dancing, character dance, pantomime and the circus. The term also came to stand for jazz, the maquillage of the dancer's body and unconventional costumes as well as the irrational, alogical or "mechanical" (sometimes called "electric") aspects of the theatrical spectacle, which the champions of the avant-garde manipulated creatively, each in his own individual way. The repertoires of many choreographers, from Kas'ian Goleizovsky and Lev Lukin to Vera Maiia and Aleksandr Rumnev, usually contained an "eccentric" section, even if the experiments were not necessarily oriented towards the methods or goals of the avant-garde. The first champion of Eccentrism was Nikolai Foregger, an inventor of genius who, while never practising any form of physical exercise, opened the way to many new trends in the performing arts.

As one critic commented, "Foregger has moved from the body to the machine... Following on from the mechanical potentials latent in the human body and taking the movements of the machine as his model, Foregger has constructed a [new] type of dance... Stroll, Dance No. 6 and Pastorale are three new dances which for the first time merit the denotation of mechanical and eccentric. What is amazing is how the mechanism of the body is used in the most unexpected movements» (Frank [Vladimir Liutse-Fedorov]: "Mekhanicheskie tantsy. Mastfor" in *Zrelishcha, Moscow, 1923, No. 26, p. 17*).

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jump!

The idea of the jump being the initial movement in any dance had been an element intrinsic to the evolution of the Choreological Laboratory. In his 1926 book *Point and Line to Surface*, Vasilii Kandinsky had even resorted to one of Gret Palucca's most exuberant jumps in order to reveal the significance of the "point" in art as in dance.

The body freed of the terrestrial pull, liberated in space and at the apex of its dynamic tension, was an ideal subject for both graphic and photographic representation. Engraver and draughtsman Oton Engel's even challenged the photographer's technical skill by trying to catch that lightning moment which represents the most expressive instant of any movement. Photographer Andrei Teleshev "responded" to Engel's by recording analogous sequences.

taylorism

Aleksei Gastev (1882–1939), poet, theorist, Taylorist and trade-unionist, eagerly supported by Lenin, founded the Central Institute of Labour in 1921 in Moscow in an attempt to create a Socialist Taylorism in the new Russia. The Institute played a major role in the second "Art of Movement" exhibition, especially since Aleksei Sidorov was fascinated by the artistic potentials of chronophotography, while his immediate colleague, the "engineer" Aleksandr Larionov, was much taken by its technology. The Central Institute of Labour materials here consisted of graphs, chronophotographs and photographic cyclograms of different labour movements such as cutting with a chisel, working with a saw and a hammer, a blacksmith striking and forging a piece of iron and digging with a shovel – each of which had been transcribed to show the correct trajectory of this or that movement as well as the posture of the subject.

It was Il'ia Shlepianov, Vsevolod Meierkhol'd's disciple, who best visualized Gastev's texts in propaganda, exhorting all concerned to utilize their time armed with a metronome. To Gastev the *trenirovka* or *trenazh* of the Soviet worker was an essential element which was to permeate his every gesture and every action, bearing in mind gymnastic and acrobatic agility in general, which was to be developed from early childhood on so as to respond immediately to the right reflexes – just like the "bunny rabbits of our clown Durov" (*A. Gastev: Kak nado rabotat', Moscow: 1-oe izdatel'stvo, 1924, p. 52*).

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Similar to the movements studied at the Central Institute of Labour, Petr Galadzhhev's mannequin-like renderings of the movements of the actress Ol'ga Khokhlova, illustrated in the journal, *Ermitazh* (*Moscow, 1922, No. 10, pp. 10–11*) led to the development of an entire graphic "style" based on rhythmical and repetitive movements. In his journal *Organizatsiia truda* [Organization of labour] of 1924 Aleksei Gastev reproduced one of Jules Marey's most impressive photographic experiments – the chronophotograph of a man hammering or striking (*Marteau*). He then presented it at the second "Art of Movement" exhibition (No. 35) under the title *Blacksmith Striking along* with Sidorov's similar experiments under the rubric "Experiments in the Multiplication of Movement".

mass parades

In the 1930s of Joseph Stalin the new regime took advantage of professional choreographers and artists to organize the grandiose mass parades and demonstrations essential to the propaganda machine. The ability of the rhythmists and choreographers of plastic dance to arrange groups and move them in unison proved to be of vital importance, even if celebrities such as Kas'ian Goleizovsky were often forced to work anonymously. They reaped particular benefit from previous work in the variety theatre during the late 1920s, transferring their lessons to the choreography of the mass parade. This is apparent, for example, in Goleizovsky's application of his choreographic representation of a blooming flower to the mass parades which became especially popular in summer pioneer camps.

Similarly, the parades were often animated by sophisticated acrobatic figures and groups based on the kind of training intrinsic to Moscow's studios of plastic dance. For example, the human pyramid, an exercise which the studios had promoted in the late 1920s, became a recurrent topos in the mass sports meets, gymnastic displays and parades of High Stalinism.

space embodied index/colophon

index

(acronyms of the captions exhibition)

at

Andrei Teleshev repository. Collection of the Teleshev family, Moscow

gtg

Gosudarstvennaia Tret'iakovskaia galereia (State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow)

gtstmb

Gosudarstvennyi tsentral'nyi teatral'nyi muzei im. A.A. Bakhrushina (Bakhrushin State Central Theatre Museum, Moscow)

ich

Inna Chernetskaia repository. Collection of Galina and Maksim Fedorovsky, Berlin

kg

Kas'ian Goleizovsky repository. Collection of the Goleizovsky family, Moscow

migsp

Muzei istorii goroda Sankt-Peterburga (Museum of the history of the city of St. Petersburg)

oe

Otton Engel's repository, Moscow. Formerly in the collection of Irina Malakhova.

pkh

Collection of Pavel Khoroshilov, Moscow

rgali

Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow)

rnb

Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka (Russian National Library, St. Petersburg)

tsmk

Tsentral'nyi muzei kino (Central Museum of Cinema, Moscow)

tsgam

Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Moskv (Central State Archive of Moscow)

vts

Valeriia Tsvetaeva repository. Now in the collection of Evgenii Chernov, Moscow

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text

Nicoletta Misler

graphic design

Experimental Jetset

translation

Guus van Engelshoven

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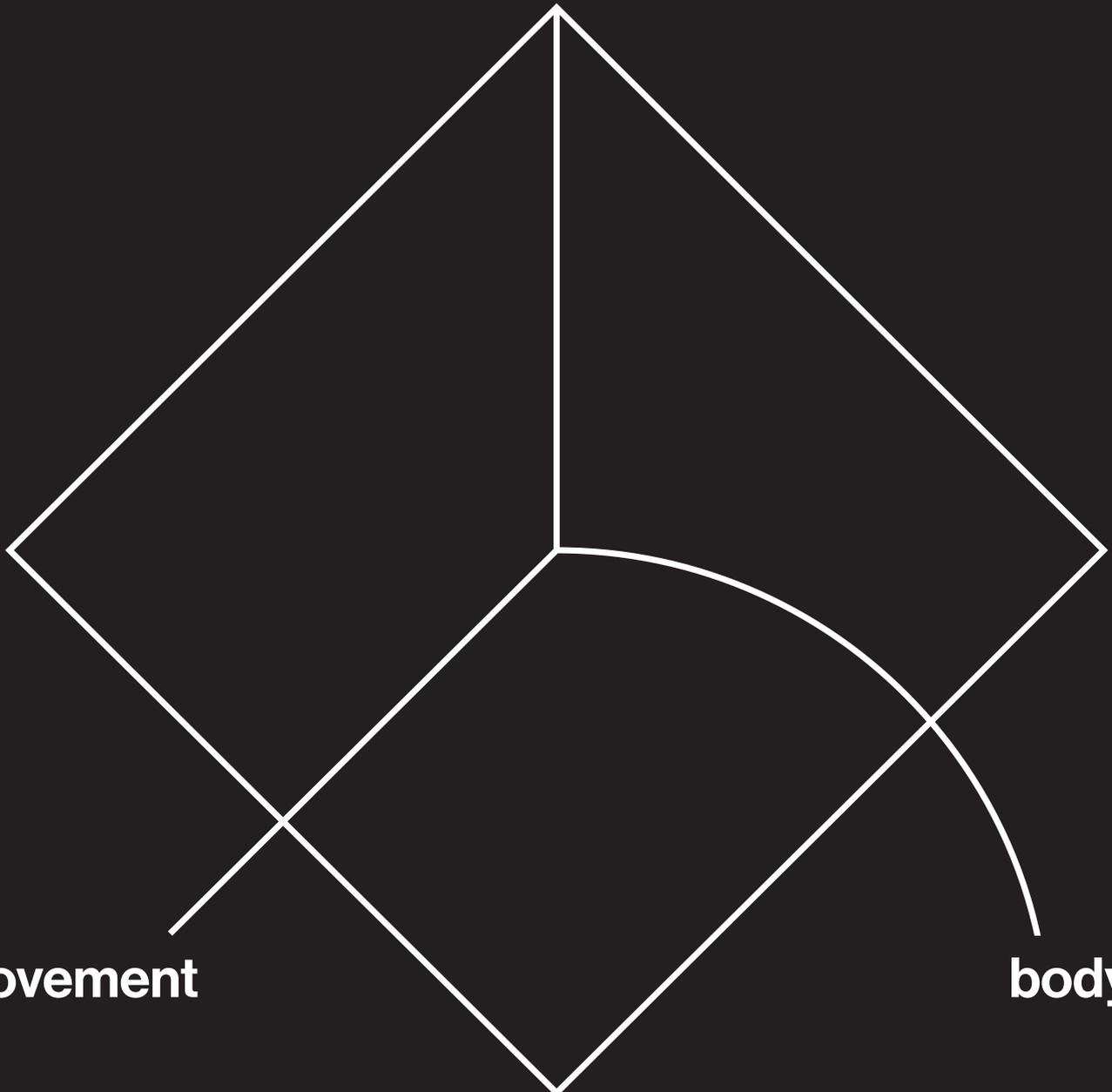
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