

any native dancer

any native dancer,  
street man,  
may be challenged,  
questioned,  
taken a back  
by the assertive presence of others,  
ready and willing  
to take their own  
aggressive turn  
at toe and foot  
and heel scuffling  
in the dust of dance;  
and he may wonder  
if there is  
all that much difference  
all that much to hope for  
in some new land,  
some eden, some utopia,  
where equipoise can be trusted,  
or even in some old one  
where codification  
the entrenching rigidity  
of the ballet company  
freezes a native dancer  
in his own lamentable prison-image  
leaving him wide open

any native dancer (2)

to challenge/assault.

Perhaps it is in this land,  
ours for the moment  
in lieu of others,  
that we should learn to dance anew  
no longer trusting  
the doctrines of the academy  
but enlarging the circle  
and admitting to our shared mortality

what can ever be hoped for  
in those dreams of other countries  
when there is the denial here  
of this dream?

Perhaps in that other country  
of myth and swan lake  
all of the ballerinas  
are truly lovely  
and we are only quarrelling  
with the muscle-bound beauties  
on the home frontier.

But any place in the sun  
is chance-ridden  
as untrustworthy



any native dancer (3)

as footlights  
which may ebb, flicker, vanish,  
as dangerous as the proscenium arch  
which may no longer serve  
as happy and necessary barrier  
between the private dream  
of one lonely native dancer  
and collective public aspiration  
denied far too long

With its plush red velvet  
the old opera house  
can become as intolerable,  
as untenable,  
as irrelevant  
as a country square dance,  
as much a prison for conformity,  
as much an echo  
to a mythic past,  
and all the circling, rounding  
excluding  
which celebrates and elevates  
an utterly false privilege

how limited, ultimately,  
is the sociology of any dancer  
which only describes  
and remains,

any native dancer (4)

up to a point,  
self-congratulatory:  
rewarding, praising and reassuring  
one native dancer  
for his tribal loyalty  
in dancing only  
for some of his fellow natives?

How do we get to the natives  
who are beyond the immediate magic circle  
of the native dancer?  
and how does he escape  
from the encompassing circle of image/of ego?

Will it occur,  
this liberation,  
when the chandelier  
of the old opera house  
comes toppling down,  
appropriated by diggers,  
sharp in their contempt  
for property, possessions,  
when the extravagant decor  
is assaulted and raped  
by inhabitants of cold-water flats,  
an expensive mirror shattered  
and the elite elegance  
of the ballet

any native dancer (5)

limps to a halt?

Perhaps at such a time,  
even other tests are being made:  
of muscle, stance,  
tendon,  
tension,  
the multiple meanings of articulation  
spokesmanship  
elevation into shared humanity  
and side-taking  
in a time of riot, destruction  
and rebirth...

any sensate walking dancing man

any sensate walking dancing man  
circling in his own rounds  
involuntary and unchosen  
in which he becomes  
a spokesman for containment  
the propriety of a beginning,  
a middle, an end,  
the necessity for boundaries and limits  
and a little accidental exclusion,  
invites the corrolary antagonist,  
sometimes simply another street man,  
walker, dancer,  
excluded,  
verbal,  
ethnic,  
aware,  
suspicious of older schemes of order  
all too often a masking of privilege  
believing in dialogue, debate,  
turn taking,  
the healing attributes  
of challenge dancing;  
and any sensate walking dancing man  
may learn,  
sadly, wisely, competitively,  
if not by inevitable degrees,

any sensate walking dancing man (2)

that any dancer  
in the articulation of muscle  
can speak out,  
or be spoken out against,  
sometimes even  
in self-betraying moment,  
in ache, in straining tendon,  
one body, one vessel,  
self-effacing, self-denying;  
in that inadvertent forced dialogue  
which becomes his  
where there is the discovery  
that his own chance writing  
and dancing and acceptance of history  
on the grand scale  
can tangle  
squarely and immutably  
with his own history,  
his chosen "gnavish" role  
of native dancer,  
with his own illusions,  
his own circling movement.

Those old exercises,  
the old lessons,  
the postures of the past,  
so painfully learned, practised,  
so briefly reassuring,

any sensate walking dancing man (3)

once accepted, crystalized,  
may prove to be  
a rude route  
to self-betrayal,  
the betrayal and denial  
of other native dancers.

How imperiled, how threatened,  
how lost, how mislead  
is the native dancer  
who looks  
to the Bolshoi for approval?  
applause? acclaim?  
love?



for the narcissist

for the narcissist

there are many tribal mirrors:

bar-room

graduate seminar

symposium on the dance

shopping center,

all glaring, distorting,

mirror-illusion-complacency-inviting

and even grass-root applause

and praise

for a native dancer

may sometimes confuse,

fix and arrest

an image,

prove treacherous

and leave him

without root or sustenance

for growth,

as much, in the long run,

as the socially approved race

where there are goals and prizes and awards

and opportunity for a little manipulation

and chicanery

of and with

the image of a native dancer

for the narcissist (2)

what native dancer,  
what narcissist,  
has ever been changed  
altered  
illuminated  
or even been seriously dislocated  
either by the image in the mirror  
the local press  
or by the wound and womb  
which he mirror-seeks?

In any new land, wherever,  
or in any old one,  
corrupt, corroded, corrosive,  
a native dancer,  
street man,  
may find  
that it is no longer  
possible  
to bypass  
the over-denied  
the over-avoided  
anarchistic dreams and ego-aspirations  
of others

form and structure, often,  
have a way of existing  
only to be challenged and altered.

for the narcissist (3)

on the Coney Island express  
or the Brighton local  
there are many riders  
and a native dancer  
may find there  
less the image of himself,  
however rationalized sociologically,  
than the necessary image of others,  
requiring and insisting upon recognition,  
demanding form  
statement  
structure  
with which to move  
into the motion of native dance

Considering the precarious line,  
sometimes little more  
than a cracked and less than trustworthy mirror,  
between subject and object,  
how many share  
the responsibility  
in the inevitable  
tarnishing,  
challenging,  
corrupting  
of the image  
of any one native dancer?

through the dance of history

through the dance of history  
the history of dance  
boys and others  
impatient with passive assigned roles  
have thrown rocks and stones  
smashing mirror, window, glass,  
establishments' image of self:  
sometimes for fun,  
self-expression,  
for self-effacement on Sunday afternoons,  
for rediscovery, assertion,  
and, sometimes,  
during any long hot summer  
out of a turbulent frustration  
and sensing of betrayal.

Sad is the native dancer,  
torn between direct engagement  
and suspecting that the action  
may well be elsewhere,  
that it is the others  
who are riding the train of history  
himself, trembling, wanting to cast the first stone,  
fearful of being and becoming its target,  
left behind at some forgotten whistle-stop.

through the dance of history (2)

splintered, fragmented,  
divided, corrupted,  
made dizzy by the circling limits of dance,  
the outer limits of any circle,  
history as we have thought it was  
or should be for us,  
we can all ache to throw a stone,  
break a window,  
shatter a pane of glass,  
challenge and destroy  
rituals of the past:  
including a native dancer's image  
and know,  
in the simultaneous trembling  
the fear as willed and vulnerable target  
that any native dancer can know

Perhaps  
for all of the perils  
of dancing through and on and around broken glass,  
there can be a hope,  
the clearing of a way,  
a brutal short-cut,  
a new vision,  
a fresh assault  
on the old tribal lies  
in the over-due interruption  
of codified dance,

through the dance of history (3)

the fractured, splintered, demolished  
challenging of tradition...

There are occasions and circumstances  
when a native dancer  
needs a little restructuring  
of image and himself  
if both are to belong to his fellow natives.

Only the wise choreographer  
of the dance of history  
turns to Sicily and Mexico  
(poverty can trigger  
either crime or revolution)  
incorporates the social reality  
and knows the meaning and movement and motion  
and direction of the new ballet.

Other criminals sustain poverty.

And one wonders  
why the alternate choreographic reading  
wasn't made earlier.

Reality was there, all along.  
Native ritual can be revitalized  
by a little astute reading  
in its sources.

through the dance of history (4)

The evaluation,  
the alternate version,  
the variant synthesis,  
could have been made,  
acted upon,  
and danced out,  
before the decadent house of cards  
comes toppling down  
on the troubled ambivalences  
spinning around  
within the person of a native dancer.

spinning dust under his feet

spinning dust under his feet,  
sharing in the weaving and fabricating  
of the inevitable proletarian myth,  
addicted to the permanency of laurels,  
how reflective is any native dancer,  
how trustworthy the mirror image,  
of his own true and wholefolk idiom?

how trapped,

constricted,

encircled

within his dust

his turf

his terrain

his own whirling circle?

a walking circling man of the street

may jeopardize his role

by acquiescing to limitation,

bowing to tradition and the past,

playing hell with the larger production

by wondering,

if he does or dare to,

just why the dust

underfoot, set swirling, spinning,

ambling into electric (and electrifying) motion,

differs from dust anywhere,

elsewhere,

in and out of danced time



spinning dust under his feet (2)

all locomotion is political:

locomotion remains locomotion

on the picket line of protest

or around it,

circling, ambling,

in still another

wary form of protest,

the protest of denial of issue

belonger,

insider,

street man,

native dancer,

the man who saw the circle enlarge,

with round dance

becoming carol,

may find

in the circular motion/movement

the rounding and enlarging of self,

himself becoming

hero, spokesman,

villain, priest,

tragically flawed,

critic,

target and object of criticism,

envious of the boy with a stone for throwing...

in this drama of locomotion danced

in this drama of locomotion danced

there is

either in the beginning

or at some point

the discovery

of more roles

than were allocated,

parcelled out,

or bargained for

in the original

choreography of privilege

for some,

swan lake is always frozen,

inaccessible,

less than relevant

sometimes

in the intense training,

by degrees,

with the ritualized illusory moving ahead,

the locomotion of dream and drama,

there has been only accommodation,

adjustment,

homage and deference to the past,

with progressive and meaningful motion

more encompassing, imprisoning

in this drama of locomotion danced (2)

sharper at circumventing and limiting and denying  
than liberative or freeing

Not all of us have been  
to the same school  
we may not have been admitted  
or may have lacked tuition  
and may not have learned  
the same ground rules:  
our experiences  
with parallel bars  
may have varied enormously.  
We may not have belonged  
or danced  
or played the folk-dance-game  
traditionally (and appropriately)  
with one eye out  
for the inevitable  
umpire of dance

Always, in this drama of locomotion danced,  
there are other dancers,  
collision prone,  
of necessity assertive,  
the inadvertent, unchosen companions,  
fellow-travellers on the Coney Island line,  
members, equally, of the larger tribe,  
delimited by another "ethnic" stance,

in this drama of locomotion danced (3)

but just a little out of step  
as defined by the dancing academy

there are dancers  
who move  
like ambulatory psychopaths  
and the movement  
like any motion  
becomes key and clue enough:  
lumbering denial  
in the guise of a Russian bear,  
the dancer who refuses  
to animal-identify himself;  
another  
over-embracing  
the happy velvet gazelle role  
selected so long ago  
in the progressive school  
where choices were numerous and wide-open  
and it was only society  
which was  
less permissive  
less tolerant  
in the continuing acceptance  
of the danced-out life role  
of the velvet gazelle;  
another stumbling toward ego  
by a very private route:

in this drama of locomotion danced (4)

creating a new animal  
for self-identification  
may be uniquely helpful  
in this instance,  
while still another  
whirls like a top,  
the toy soldier  
whose mechanism has come unsprung  
and some fall down,  
as anachronistic  
as dancers of older native marathons,  
cheered on by a sadistic audience  
until they are exhausted,  
spent, torn:  
knowing nothing  
of the religious ecstasy  
of a dancing hassidic rabbi

a little gnavish, perhaps

a little gnavish, perhaps,  
that first movement into dance,  
and perversely so,  
if the choice was his,  
but then he could  
have been apprenticed  
at a tender, vulnerable  
and less than knowing age  
by parents  
themselves gnavish  
footlight loving  
willing to let a son  
chance and know  
the precariousness of applause;  
and there could easily have been  
long unquestioning years  
with motion  
in and out of time  
and no undue concern  
about the curriculum  
which shapes and molds  
a native dancer's image,  
making him harbinger,  
vessel-container of motif,  
inadvertent symbol, statement,  
weather-vane spinning and whirling

a little gnavish, perhaps (2)

as the wind blows  
helter-skelter  
among the uncertain  
folk-mores,  
as available for tilting at  
as any windmill...

however contained, groomed,  
assured,  
what native dancer  
hasn't known  
a little tribal conflict,  
that occasional moment of angst  
with image,  
with elders, with peers,  
the dissident audience;  
and begun to wonder  
about the boundaries  
and tributaries  
of ritualized dance,  
the fixing of motion,  
the place where definition  
began, ended,  
started or stopped  
  
as we mechanically  
move into motion,

a little gnavish, perhaps (3)

after hearing two bars of music,  
why must it always be  
the Missouri waltz  
which does the trick?

or can the music  
occasionally come  
from a happy raid  
on the storehouse  
or heritage  
of another tribe?

any native dancer  
weary of red wing  
or black hawk  
may wonder  
just when  
he pledged allegiance  
and what the commitment  
was to:

a boundary strip,  
a territorial flag,  
a place of entry,  
some succinct line of demarcation  
what port, what call

how valid or tenuous  
are the passports of dance



a little gnavish, perhaps (4)

and where are the sustaining frontiers  
of dignity  
which can keep  
an adventuresome native dancer  
alive, vital, free?

must there always be terminal points,  
boundaries beyond recall, return?

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