

## 'You cannot shake that shimie here': producing mobility on the dance floor

Cresswell, Tim

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

[www.peerproject.eu](http://www.peerproject.eu)

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Cresswell, T. (2006). 'You cannot shake that shimie here': producing mobility on the dance floor. *Cultural Geographies*, 13(1), 55-77. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474006eu350oa>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter dem "PEER Licence Agreement zur Verfügung" gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zum PEER-Projekt finden Sie hier: <http://www.peerproject.eu> Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under the "PEER Licence Agreement". For more information regarding the PEER-project see: <http://www.peerproject.eu> This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

# ‘You cannot shake that shimie here’: producing mobility on the dance floor

Tim Cresswell

Institute of Geography and Earth Sciences, University of Wales,  
Aberystwyth

---

This paper examines the regulation of ballroom dancing in England in the first four decades of the 20th century. It demonstrates how various forms of dance considered to be ‘American’, particularly the ‘shimmy’, were labelled as degenerate and threatening, and how the newly formed Imperial Society for Teachers of Dancing and the dance master and band leader Victor Silvester sought to produce a thoroughly regulated and encoded ‘English’ style of ballroom dancing. The paper charts the various strategies of representation and standardization that were used to enact this regulation of corporeal mobility. Theoretically the paper argues for an interpretive approach to bodily movement that considers bodily movement in the context of wider contexts of cultural geographies of mobility. In so doing it contributes to a growing body of work on the politics of mobility in the modern West and, particularly, the cultural politics of dance.

## Introduction

In the late afternoon of Wednesday 12 May 1920 at the Grafton Galleries in London, 200 dance teachers from around Britain met to discuss the condition of dance – particularly ballroom dance – in London and the provinces. The meeting had been called by the editor of the *Dancing Times*, Philip Richardson, who, in his *History of ballroom dancing*, recalled: ‘It seemed highly desirable to me, as editor of *The Dancing Times*, that something should be done to call a halt to freakish dancing before it became something worse . . .’<sup>1</sup> In the decades before and after this meeting ballroom dancing became enmeshed in beliefs about appropriate and inappropriate mobility. In particular the development of ballroom dancing was founded on its own constitutive outside – the dance of African and Latin American cultures. In this paper I trace the process by which ballroom dancing in Britain and the Commonwealth was produced in relation to the dance of clubs in Britain and the Americas. The ideal dancing body that emerges at the end of the process is surely one that experiences pleasure but nonetheless, embodies a complex process of exclusion and othering. It is an account of the production of *correct* movement.

The focus of this paper, then, is the production of bodily mobility in ballroom dancing in the United Kingdom in the early decades of the 20th century. This is for two principal reasons. First, it aims to delineate the representational process involved in the production of 'correct movement' and second, it seeks to show how understandings of movement in dance had specific normative geographies – particular sets of associations between ways of moving and real and imagined spaces and places. In pursuing these aims the paper demonstrates the value of thinking of mobilities as produced within social, cultural and, most importantly, geographical contexts. In so doing, the paper contributes to a growing body of research on mobility as a politically fractured and contested resource at scales from the body to the globe.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, the paper is situated within a tradition of dance scholarship that seeks to understand movements as politically and aesthetically enlivened by considering their attachments to both productive and repressive forms of power.

The paper is structured as follows. First I consider the principal areas of interest that have inspired and informed this paper: the production of mobilities and certain strands of dance scholarship. This section will provide the theoretical context for the empirical material that follows in the second section, which examines the development and codification of ballroom dance in the second and third decades of the 20th century by the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing in England and by Victor Silvester in particular. This section will consider both the kinds of movement that were seen as superfluous, unnecessary and morally questionable as and those kinds that were considered 'correct' and 'proper'. It traces 'degenerate' movements such as the 'shimmy' from the Americas to London and looks at the institutional and representational responses to them. I conclude by summarizing the main points of the paper and considering what lessons it might have for geographies of bodily movement more generally.

## **The production of mobilities and geographies of dance**

The purpose of this section is to consider both the wide context of the production of mobilities in general and the more specific context of the production of mobilities in dance in particular. Mobility has recently become a central object of enquiry in the social sciences as sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers and geographers (among others) have sought to question understandings of the world that have prioritized place, boundaries, rootedness, territories and landscapes.<sup>3</sup> Occasionally this celebration of the mobile has itself been critiqued for dumping one essentialized geographical category (place) in favour of another (mobility) without regard either for the continuing importance of place or for the differentiated nature of mobility.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the production of mobilities within specific social, cultural and geographical contexts allows for a more nuanced understanding of mobility as a contested concept and practice rather than as a metaphor for new ways of thinking and being. Mobility is thus seen in relation to both forms of relative immobility (perhaps obduracy is a better term) and other connected but different forms of mobility. Thus the mobility of miners

going to work during the British miners' strike of 1984–85 is contrasted with the immobility of the flying pickets prevented from travelling into the county,<sup>5</sup> and the newly freed-up mobility of European citizens is contrasted with the altogether different experiences of refugees, asylum seekers and illegal migrants attempting to enter Europe.<sup>6</sup> As well as drawing attention to mobility as a necessarily relational concept, a focus on the production of mobilities focuses attention on the ways in which mobility is produced and the contexts within which diverse forms of mobility come to be.

Dance, like mobility in general, has been and continues to be an object of struggle in modernity and postmodernity. Attempts have been made to channel threatening mobilities into acceptable conduits. The history of tango, for instance, is one in which tango appears in Britain as a threat to 'polite' society and has to be revised in order to be acceptable.<sup>7</sup> Similar stories can be told about dances ranging from the waltz to swing in Nazi Germany.<sup>8</sup> As we shall see, the graceful steps of ballroom dance are no exception. Recent developments in dance scholarship have seen an increasingly productive engagement with other moves in cultural studies.<sup>9</sup> If scholars elsewhere (the argument goes) have developed sophisticated ways of reading texts both written and visual, why not do the same for bodily movement? Jane Desmond has argued for a formalist reading of dance movement:

While most scholars have spent years developing analytic skills for reading and understanding verbal forms of communication, rarely have we worked equally hard to develop an ability to analyze visual, rhythmic, or gestural forms. As cultural critics, we must become movement literate.<sup>10</sup>

Desmond is keen to see bodily movement taken seriously as a primary social text, as it is through bodily movement (she argues) that we enact our place in society. She reveals how a number of dancing bodies enact particular gendered, ethnic and class positions in society. For instance, the history of the tango is one that 'traces the development of movement styles from the dockside neighborhoods of Buenos Aires to the salons of Paris before returning, newly "respectable" from across the Atlantic to the drawing rooms of the upper-class portions of the Argentine population'.<sup>11</sup> Such migrations and appropriations reveal a great deal about the social construction of race, gender and class. In the tango, and in other dance forms, movements that originate in working-class and subordinate populations and places become 'polished' as they make their way upward through a social and spatial hierarchy. An important part of this 'civilizing' process is the abolition or toning down of overtly sexual components. Another example given by Desmond is the appropriation of hip-hop music and dance by white suburbanites in the United States.

A band such as Public Enemy, Desmond suggests, developed a particular kind of movement involving 'sharp pelvis thrusts' in association with stepping and hopping movements which accompany a percussive beat. In addition, both men and women would perform pelvic grinds with bent knees and spread legs. In these movements there are, in Desmond's analysis, striking similarities with West African dance, where 'pelvic articulation features prominently along with polyrhythmic relationships between stepping patterns in the feet and concurrent arm gestures'.<sup>12</sup> When hip-hop became 'whitened' by groups such as New Kids on the Block, the movement was toned

down and desexualized. While many of the stepping patterns remained, the pelvic thrusting and rotating was attenuated. In Desmond's view the transformation of these movements marked a change from 'black' music and dance to a more general 'youth culture'.

Mark Franko has similarly argued that the experience of dance is only legible when it is acknowledged that experience is never pure and 'visceral', but mediated through a net of social relations. Indeed, he suggests that dance is only given life through its place in social relations. Franko focuses on the mediation of dance through the audience:

To perceive things or events as abstract or 'immediate' is to accept their inevitability, to be seduced by the vivid presence of their now. Thus is their 'immediacy' constituted, but so also their abstraction because they remain disconnected from interpretation: unmediated or im-mediate. The immediacy or facticity of appearances paradoxically dehumanizes our relation to them.<sup>13</sup>

To Franko, mediation enlivens rather than nullifies the experience of dance. Far from being immediate and unmediated, dance is refracted through the lenses of society and power. Although dance can be read as a form of unalienated labour inseparable from the dancing body, it is, in Franko's terms, 'contaminated by imagined exchange value'. Dance is a form of movement, process and relation, and such forms 'do not lend themselves to fixity, abstraction or objectivity'.<sup>14</sup> The dance historian Norman Bryson also sees dance as a bodily expression of wider social flows. He charts the transformation from premodern to modern forms of dance movement through the idea of abstraction and mechanization. He argues that modern dance in Paris, for example, has to be understood as but one example of a complex interplay of spectacle, spectatorship and sexuality that 'figured forth, in intense and specialised form, the essential social relation of observer and observed'.<sup>15</sup> But to comprehend thoroughly this transformation between emergent and residual senses of movement, he argues, we need to see a form of movement such as dance as symptomatic of wider changes in the sense of movement. The rise of abstraction and mechanization in a dance such as the can-can, for instance, must be seen alongside changes in the work place such as Taylorism, the arrival of mass production and new forms of mechanical transport. To understand the can-can, then, Bryson argues that we must 'refer to other domains of movement than dance, to other social regions where motion is analysed and represented and to larger social processes that turn on the redesigning and stylization of action and gesture'.<sup>16</sup> This history of socially structured movement points towards the political and theoretical necessity of seeing mobility as operating within fields of power and meaning and, crucially, larger contexts of changing senses of movement.<sup>17</sup> While it is clear that bodily movement is a form of meaning-making that is crucial to the production of cultural and social norms, it is also clear that bodies express already existing normative ideals. Take this description of ballet from Susan Foster:

And these two bodies, because of their distinctly gendered behavior, dance out a specific kind of relationship between masculine and feminine. They do more than create an alert, assertive, solicitous

manliness and gracious, agile, vibrant womanliness. Their repeated rushes of desire – the horizontal attraction of bodies, the vertical fusion of bodies – do more than create unified sculptural wholes that emblemize the perfect union of male and female roles. *He* and *she* do not participate equally in their choreographic coming together. *She* and *he* do not carry equal valence. *She* is persistently put forward, the object of his adoration. *She* never reaches out and grabs him but is only ever impelled towards him, arms streaming behind in order to signal her possession by a greater force.<sup>18</sup>

It is evident that bodily movement, in some instances at least, is implicated in the reproduction of meaning and power.

These approaches to dance suggest that bodily movement exists in the context of social and cultural worlds in which various forms of power are at play. As dance scholar Helen Thomas has suggested, dance needs to be treated as a form of cultural knowledge, and as such is ‘an appropriate area of socio-cultural inquiry. However, the concern is not simply to read the dance codes, but also to understand the context in order to be able to ask *how* does the movement mean?’<sup>19</sup> Indeed, much work in the anthropology of dance has sought to look at the ways in which context makes bodily movement meaningful in dance – how, in other words, the social and cultural context of dance provides the conditions under which bodily movement can be creative.<sup>20</sup> In contrast, work on bodily movement that has arisen in Geography recently has turned attention away from these contexts in order to explore the world of affect that exists in an ambivalent relation of the representational. I have chosen in this paper to explore bodily mobility within an interpretive framework, rather than seeing body movements as somehow either below or entirely separate from other forms of expression such as text and image.<sup>21</sup> In this sense this paper stands in sympathetic contrast to recent developments in Geography concerned with non-representational theory or ‘the ways in which the world is emergent from a range of spatial processes whose power is not dependent upon their crossing a threshold of contemplative cognition’.<sup>22</sup> One of the aims of this paper is to insist on the continuing importance of seeing bodily mobility within larger social, cultural and geographical worlds that continue to ascribe meaning to mobility and to prescribe practice in particular ways. I will return to this theme at the end of the paper.

In the remainder of this paper I examine some key moments in the history of ballroom dancing. This particular story reflects a general desire to see mobilities as produced in relation to other mobilities within particular contexts of meaning-making that enable and constrain the practice of mobility. In addition it forms part of a wider examination of the geographical coding of movement types as correct and appropriate on the one hand and dangerous and threatening on the other.

## **The production of mobilities in ballroom dance**

### ***Degenerate dancing***

The social and cultural context of ballroom dance in the 1920s needs to be understood in the wider context of dance and music at the time. This was a time in which the role of

professional dance instructor was becoming more popular. A plethora of schools and institutions had formed to take advantage of the annual dance crazes that swept over Britain, normally from the United States. Dancing had never been more popular. Many of the popular dances were quite intricate, and thus the role of the teacher became more prominent. Dance instructors sought to capitalize on the immense popularity of dancing and at the same time make dance 'respectable'.<sup>23</sup> It was in this context that the gathering at the Grafton Galleries in 1920 occurred.

In fact the idea for the meeting was not Richardson's but that of the American dancer Monsieur Maurice,<sup>24</sup> who had written to the *Dancing Times* earlier in the year:

Dear Mr. Richardson

Since being in London I have been wondering whether it would not be possible for me to carry out some arrangements of the same sort as I carried out in New York.

I was very anxious in some way to standardise ballroom dancing, so that the same standard should prevail in all good class dancing places and ballrooms. In order to do this I got together the other leading dancing teachers of New York, and we held a conference, and came to mutual agreement how the foxtrot, two-step, waltz and tango should be danced correctly, so as to avoid the ungraceful and undignified forms of dancing, which were gradually creeping into both public and private dances.

Would it be possible to arrange to do something of the sort here?

Maurice goes on to describe his horror at the 'strange dippings and twirlings and eccentricities' that he sees as prevalent on the transatlantic dance floors, and declares the necessity of getting together in an attempt to stamp these movements out. 'Could you, as Editor of *The Dancing Times*, arrange for a conference to be held amongst the first-class dancing teachers of London, so that we could talk this matter over and mutually help each other?'<sup>25</sup> At the foot of the letter Richardson suggests that this might be a good idea and asks for people to write in, declaring an interest. He soon had enough replies to call the meeting at the Grafton Galleries.

Richardson chaired the meeting. He began with a stirring speech about the increasingly irregular nature of social dancing in the British Isles. He warned of increasing liberalism on the dance floor:

Just as in the big world there had been a struggle against despotic autocracy so in the dancing world had there been a revolt against the autocracy of the Victorian dancing master and the formal dances of the last generation. Unfortunately just as in the big world the struggle for liberty had on occasions gone to extremes and in places developed into bolshevism, so in the ballroom there had been a tendency towards an artistic bolshevism.<sup>26</sup>

The floor was then given to Monsieur Maurice. He railed against the current state of dance, blaming it on the influence of jazz music and the dubious new dance steps that had found their way into 'decent places'. He pointed out that such music and such dance originated in the clubs of African-Americans and therefore had a necessarily prurient significance. Jazz music, he said, was only played in third- or fourth-rate places, and its lack of melody and rhythm was responsible for much bad dancing. Monsieur Maurice and his dancing partner, Miss Leonora Hughes, then proceeded to demonstrate good steps and, to the delight of the *Morning Post* and the *Daily Mail*, whose reporters were on hand, bad ones (see Figure 1).



**Steps the Teachers wish to abolish.**

*Daily Mail Photograph*

FIGURE 1 'Steps the Teachers wish to abolish': image from the *Daily Mail*, reproduced in *The Dancing Times* (June 1920).



Following this exhibition the dancing partners left to perform at the Piccadilly Hotel, and a number of eminent dancers and teachers of dance joined in a heated discussion in which Edward Scott, a well-known writer on dance, appealed for the suppression of ragtime.<sup>27</sup> Eventually Scott moved the first resolution:

That the teachers present agree to do their very best to stamp out freak steps particularly dips and steps in which the feet are raised high off the ground and also side steps and pauses which impeded the progress of those who may be following.<sup>28</sup>

The resolution was carried unanimously. The second resolution formed a committee to decide what the recognized steps of each dance shall be who were to report back on 10 October. At that meeting the committee (headed by Richardson) presented the fruits of their labour. The approved dances were as follows:

One-Step	<i>Pas marché</i> <i>Chassé</i>
Foxtrot	Foxtrot Walk (one step to two beats) <i>Chassé</i> Three-step
Tango	<i>Paseo</i> <i>Marche Argentina</i> <i>Corte</i> <i>Carré</i> <i>Huit</i>

Many movements met with the disapproval of the various bodies that sought to regulate ballroom dancing. The very first resolution had called for the abolition of 'freak steps' such as dips and pauses. One that proved particularly upsetting was the 'shimmy', which had found its way into up-tempo versions of the foxtrot. A shimmy is a small sideways movement accompanied by vigorous shaking of the hips and shoulders. One writer in the *Dancing Times* reports how Parisians believed it was connected to the word 'chemise' but the explanation, he writes, 'will not bear repeating in the chaste columns of the *Dancing Times*.'<sup>29</sup> In fact the origins of the shimmy in the United States can be traced to the performer Gilda Gray, who would move her shoulders when she sang, to reveal small glimpses of the chemise she wore as part of her outfit. According to one account, around 1918 a person asked her what she called her dance, to which she replied, 'I'm shaking my chemise, that's what I am "doing".'<sup>30</sup> Indeed, by 1918 singers such as Mae West were singing songs with 'shimmy' in the title such as 'Everybody shimmies now' and the dance was part of popular stage performances such as the Ziegfeld Follies. By 1919 the capacity of the shimmy to outrage was acknowledged in the song 'You cannot shake that shimmie here'. Given how long it takes popular dance forms to reach commercial spaces, it is likely that people were dancing the shimmy long before 1918. Indeed, the word 'shimmy' turns up in a 1908 song, 'The bullfrog hop'. As is often the case with forms of music and dance that are hybrid, a search for origins reveals many contradictory claims depending on where the observer thinks one dance ends and the other begins. One suggestion is that the shimmy is derived from a Nigerian

dance called the Shika brought to the United States by slaves. Another claims it comes from Haiti. What is apparently universally believed is that the dance originates in African-America culture. Whatever its origins, by the middle of the 20th century the word 'shimmy' had migrated out of dance vocabulary to denote all kinds of unwanted and potentially dangerous movements – particularly the abnormal wobbling of automobile wheels at high speed. Indeed, one dictionary definition of the verb 'shimmy' states that it means 'to vibrate or wobble abnormally'.<sup>31</sup> So a form of bodily movement emerging from the hybrid culture of African-American dance came to be used as a general term for 'abnormal' movement.

Richardson recalls the effect the shimmy, and the accompanying jazz music, had on dance in the early 1920s:

The presence of the shimmy, the quickening of the tempo and hectic jazz music all combined to place the smooth foxtrot, which had been slowly developing, in grave peril. There was much freak dancing to be seen and freak variations, such as the tickle-toe, were tried.<sup>32</sup>

A June 1921 editorial in the *Dancing Times* reports on the decision of the 8 May meeting of the dancers to outlaw the shimmy:

The genuine 'Shimmy,' with its shaking limbs and shoulders, is horrible, and offends, and should not be permitted, but if the dancer likes to do a certain foot variation of the foxtrot which has come to be known as the 'shimmy' let him do it. It is useless the teachers saying they won't have it; if the public want it they will help themselves. The teachers would be doing far more useful service if they would put their heads together and evolve some very harmless variation and suggest that it should take that form.<sup>33</sup>

Another report on the shimmy in Paris made a similar comment:

M. Achard, manager of the Colisée Club . . . thinks its history is, and will be, exactly that of the tango. Sprung from low haunts, it has become a rage, and will gradually lose its eccentricities . . . until in the very near future dancers who stick to the shimmy in its original form will be regarded with curiosity and disdain. He thinks that in its perfected form it will prove to be quite a good dance.<sup>34</sup>

Note how this description of the shimmy combines a logic of exclusion and inclusion. These moves were not simply banned but incorporated and smoothed out. The shimmy was not the only kind of movement that was treated in this way. The Charleston is another example of a dance that outraged the British dance fraternity before Silvester and his colleagues enacted their process of 'refinement'.

The disadvantage of the Charleston from our point of view was the nuisance value of its vigorous kicking action – people were continually getting their legs bruised and thousands of women's stockings were laddered. So in the Imperial Society we produced a simpler and more graceful version known as the flat Charleston which soon replaced the original . . .<sup>35</sup>

This incorporation process needed an institution to enact it. Richardson was well aware that some of the dances that appeared on the official list of acceptable dance forms had previously been deemed 'degenerate'. The tango is the classic example of the supposed

'refinement' of a dance form from the Americas via Paris. This is how Richardson records the tango craze of 1910–14:

Like many other dances of to-day it was brought about by the slave trade and the consequent introduction of negro folk rhythms into Latin America, particularly into Cuba. Here as Mr. Cyril Rice wrote in 1931: 'The barbaric and novel rhythms of the plantations combined with the musical tradition of the Creoles to evolve the Cuban styles of which the habanera, taking its name from the city of Havana, is the most conspicuous example.'<sup>36</sup>

These 'negro folk rhythms' made their way from Havana to Buenos Aires, where they entered all manner of disreputable places:

Here in the drinking shops and bordellos of La Boca and ill famed Barrio de las Ranas seamen and gauchos from the 'camp' competed for the favours of half-Indian habituées . . . . Becoming acquainted with the harbanera rhythm in the Port, as they called the capital city, they immediately adopted it and from it created their insidious tango.<sup>37</sup>

Tango, in Richardson's account, was a dance that emerged in marginal space – liminal zones of licence where the normal rules of acceptable conduct no longer hold sway.<sup>38</sup> These spaces of liminality, from the perspective of an English dance instructor, ranged from the whole of the Western hemisphere to Latin America, thence to the particular ports and bordelloes of Havana and Buenos Aires. Even in Argentine, Richardson tells us, tango was frowned upon. It took a transatlantic voyage to Paris for it to be 'shorn of all its objectionable features'<sup>39</sup> before returning to the acceptable ballrooms of Buenos Aires. It appeared in a report in the *Dancing Times* in 1911, and by 1912 it was featured in the musical *Sunshine girl* in London's West End.<sup>40</sup> Even at that stage the pages of the London press were full of outrage about the tango's sexual suggestiveness. It is all the remarkable, therefore, that it should feature on a very short list of acceptable dances drawn up following the meeting of 1920.

At the centre of debates about dance and its alleged degeneration was the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD). There was no single body that represented dancing teachers in Britain by the 1920s, but the ISTD was certainly the largest and most influential. Much of its efforts were directed at social dancing and ballet. The ISTD was the result of a previous meeting of 200 dance teachers in the summer of 1904 at the Medici Rooms of the Hotel Cecil in Covent Garden. At that time anyone could teach dance, and there were no recognized qualifications for teachers. Dancing was a key ingredient of the social lives of fashionable society, and the teachers that met at the Medici Rooms were keen to keep their dances out of the hands and feet of people who were not of the 'right background'. At this meeting it was agreed that teachers of dance needed an organization to protect their interests and regulate teaching standards. As a result the ISTD was founded on 25 July 1904 with R.M. Crompton, a ballroom teacher from Soho, elected as president. The stated purpose of the new body was the creation of a uniform method of teaching and the encouragement of the higher education of the teacher.

The pages of the *Dance Journal*, the Imperial Society's in-house newsletter, were soon full of invectives against what was called the degeneracy of dancing:

Bad habits are our dearest foes, and the three-score years and ten, allotted to us for discipline and growth, seem all too short a period in which to do our warfare; so the enemies are visited on the children, the battle is continued, and often many lifetimes of years are required to annihilate these stubborn adversaries. But as the generation is greater than the individual, so its bad habits are greater than the bad habits of the individual, and require a proportionally longer period to eradicate.<sup>41</sup>

The purpose of the ISTD, then, was to eradicate these bad habits and produce standardized and graceful steps for the nation to share. But the bad habits continued to pop up everywhere. Dance appeared, to guardians of correct movement like Butterfield, to be degenerating.

Dancing now has degenerated into a mere pastime, it is no longer an Art, and in many cases into a vulgar romp . . . . That every canon has been violated is due in a great measure to the methods by which untrained instructors have pandered to the slovenly and rough habits of those who, not having taken the trouble to learn dancing properly, introduce movements and mannerisms to disguise their own inefficiency and ignorance.<sup>42</sup>

Between 1908 and the meeting of 1920 many articles and letters followed up on Butterfield's outrage. Many of them were more explicit about the connections between the dance steps and their perceived lowly origins:

In the last few years some little has been done to restore to the art of dancing its pristine nobleness. Setting aside the inexplicable vogue, now happily past, of the niggers' cake-walk, we observe that the Boston is increasingly popular in drawing rooms.<sup>43</sup>

Freak dances and freak steps, as they were called, were invariably connected to the United States and, more specifically to African-American culture. But it was not only uptight British dance instructors who made these connections. The *Dance Journal* was only too happy to report the views of Miss Margaret Chute, an American woman who joined the chorus of denunciation against the freak dances. Chute had linked dance to the evils of Post-impressionism in art, decadent literature, 'svelte ladies with terracotta hips' and 'other evidence of brain kinks'.

Ever since the American Boston and Two-step came to England, writes Miss Chute, we have been gradually edging nearer and nearer to freak dances . . . . At the moment the only dances that really count are the monstrous caricatures, the ungainly, unpleasant inventions best characterized as Freak Dances . . .

Anything more ungraceful, awkward, even indecent, than the contortions of most modern dancers is inconceivable. The exquisite grace has gone; the long, liling swing in the valse is dead. We get, instead, the abominable hops, jumps, springs, and rushes of scores of freak dances and dancers.<sup>44</sup>

This was the background to the meeting of dance teachers in 1920 – more than a decade of concerns about degenerate, decadent and freakish dancing that was threatening to undo the carefully structured grace of the 'right kind of people'. In 1924 a specific branch of the Imperial Society was formed devoted to ballroom dancing.

## ***The Imperial Society, Victor Silvester and the codification of ballroom dancing***

The origins of the ballroom branch owe everything to Philip Richardson. Following the 1920 meeting, he was approached by ballroom teachers to decide how to judge increasingly popular dance competitions and what should be allowed. Richardson was worried that a profusion of dance societies would militate against uniformity, so he asked the ISTD to form a ballroom branch. In a 1921 editorial in the *Dancing Times*, Richardson was already suggesting the increased need for standardization of dance movements:

My suggestion that the Imperial Society should tackle the very big subject of remodelling the ballroom technique and phraseology has been adopted, and the Council of the Society are now hard at work on a task that is proving bigger than was at first thought.<sup>45</sup>

The future president of the Imperial Society, Victor Silvester, called the advent of the ballroom branch in 1924 'an event which has had as great an influence on ballroom dancing as did the founding of the Académie Royale by Louis XIV of France on the ballet'.<sup>46</sup> Silvester himself was one of the founding members of the ballroom branch of the ISTD, and was its president between 1945 and 1958.

It did not take long for the ballroom branch to set about its business. Within a year it had set out a syllabus for ballroom dancing that included knowledge of music, carriage of the body and four dance forms that were all inscribed in the *Dance Journal*. The ISTD certified teachers to teach these dances, and they were soon being demonstrated across England and Wales. In his autobiography Silvester recalled the situation he faced in 1924 when the branch was set up. It was, in his mind, chaotic:

For instance, there were men who held a girl by her finger-tips with the other hand very low on her waist line. There were others who placed one hand between the girl's shoulder-blades and stretched her arm to its full length. Some men would embrace a girl in a bear-like hug so that she could barely breathe, much less dance. Then there were others who held their partners too far away from them.<sup>47</sup>

To confront this chaos Silvester and his colleagues worked tirelessly to develop their holy grail of standardization.

We spent hours discussing basic principles – the correct hold and such finer points as body sway, contrary body movement and footwork – all of which we put down on paper.

We decided the most suitable figures for the different rhythms, and we laid down what was good and bad form.

Then, to ensure that our code of ballroom procedure and behaviour became widely known, we incorporated it in a syllabus for a teachers' examination which prospective members of the branch had to pass before they could be admitted.<sup>48</sup>

To Silvester the codification of ballroom dancing was a ten-year project, and indeed it took a little more than that to produce the definitive charts and terminology that would set what was to be called the 'English' style in stone. In 1936 he published an

alphabetical list of definitions of technical terms used in ballroom dancing. In the same year the *Dance Journal* featured handy pull-out charts, developed by Silvester, for all the approved dances (see Figure 2).

But Silvester's talents were not limited to dance instruction, and his ambitions went well beyond the confines of the Imperial Society. He was also a musician, and had become increasingly annoyed by the music of dance bands in London and beyond. While Silvester and his colleagues had been busy codifying dance, band leaders had continued to experiment musically, especially with jazz. As early as 1920, not long after the fateful meeting at Grafton Galleries, a writer to the *Dancing Times* made a plea for a standardized tempo in dance music:

Dear Sir,

In connection with the movement for uniformity in dance work, may I plead for a standardisation of tempo for all dance measures. At present, one set of people will dance the foxtrots and one-steps quickly, another will make them moderate time, and from a playing point of view, you never feel quite safe unless you know your people well.

We all know the rhythm, spirit, and tempo of, say, a minuet. It has one and only tempo. Surely all other dance movements should have their one original dancing time and speed. – I am, dear Sir, yours faithfully.<sup>49</sup>

This plea did not fall on deaf ears. The Imperial Society soon busied itself with the issue of tempo in dance numbers. On 14 July 1929 another conference of teachers was held in the Queen's Hotel in Leicester Square. There it was agreed that the standardization of dances needed to make them as simple as possible, and that part of that simplification process was the designation of suitable speeds for each dance. Silvester, as a leading figure of the ballroom branch, was right at the centre of the process described by Philip Richardson:

After full experiments had been made, the most suitable speeds at which these dances should be played were agreed upon, and it was hoped that all bands will help to make the way of the dancer easier by adhering to these speeds.<sup>50</sup>

It was decided, following the necessary experiments that the standard tempos should be as follows:

Quickstep . . . . .	54–56 bars per minute
Valse	36–38
Foxtrot	38–42
Tango	30–32
Yale Blues	30–34

The Imperial Society was apparently unsuccessful in policing these new tempos, as six years later Silvester wrote an opinion piece on just this issue in the *Dance Journal*. Here he argued that broadcasting in particular had ruined the production of dance music.

Until a few years ago a dance-band was a band to dance to, and the music played was always rendered at the correct *tempo* for dancing purposes. But to-day this is not the case. Unfortunately for the many dancing

Further copies of these novel, informative and concise dance charts, printed on stout paper, can be obtained from the Secretary, I.S.T.D. Please state whether Quickstep, Tango, Slow Foxtrot, or Waltz is desired.

Price 6d. per chart post free.

# DANCE CHARTS

COPYRIGHTED BY

**Victor Silvester**

S. = A slow sl. (1/2 beat).  
 Q. = A quick step (1/4 beat).  
 R.F. = Right foot.  
 L.F. = Left foot.  
 R. = Right. P.P. = Promenade position.  
 L. = Left. L.O.D. = Line of Dance.  
 C.B.M.P. = Contrary body movement.  
 C.B.M.P. = Contrary body movement position.

Supplement to the Dance Journal, June, 1936.

## TANGO

NAME OF FIGURE.	NO. OF STEPS.	NO. OF BEATS.	SLOWS AND QUICKS.	CONTRARY BODY MOVEMENT OR C.B.M.P.	BODY SWAYS.	RISE AND FALL.	AMOUNT OF TURN.	ALIGNMENT (GENTLEMAN--LADY CONTRA).	REMARKS.
WALK	1	1	S.	C.B.M.P. on L.F. forward and R.F. backward.	Nil.	Nil.	—	Begin facing diag. to centre.	The Walk should be curved inwards slightly.
PROGRESSIVE SIDE STEP.	3	1	Q.Q.S.	1.3.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil or a slight turn to L.	Begin and finish facing approx. diag. to centre.	2nd step to side but slightly back. Lady opposite.
BASIC REVERSE TURN	6	2	Q.Q.S.Q.Q.S.	1.4.	Nil.	Nil.	1/4 of a turn to L. on 1.2.3. No turn or a 1/4 turn to L. on 4.5.6.	Begin facing diag. to centre. Take 4th step back into L.O.D. Finish with back to L.O.D. or facing wall.	The figure is not used in full—only in parts.
OPEN REVERSE TURN	6	2	Q.Q.S.Q.Q.S.	1.4. (If partner is outside on 3 and 6, then on 1.3.4.6.)	Nil.	Nil.	Approx. 1/2 of a turn to L.	Begin facing diag. to centre. Take 4th step back into L.O.D. Finish facing diag. to wall.	Alternative ending—4.5.6. of Basic Reverse Turn.
PROGRESSIVE SIDE STEP REVERSE TURN	11	4	Q.Q.S.S.Q.Q.S.S.Q.Q.S.	1.3.8.9.11.	Nil.	Nil.	1/4 of a turn to L. on 1.2.3. No turn on 4.5.6.7. 1/4 of a turn to L. on 8.9.10.11.	Begin facing diag. to centre. Take 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th steps back into L.O.D. Finish facing diag. to wall or facing L.O.D.	Alternative ending after the Rock—4.5.6. of Basic Reverse Turn.
NATURAL TURN	6	2	S.Q.Q.S.Q.Q.	Man on 2. Lady 2 and 5.	Nil.	Nil.	If finished with a Promenade, 1 full turn to R. If finished with Back Corté approx. 1/4 turns to R.	Begin facing wall. 4th step back to L.O.D. Finish facing wall for Promenade. Finish back into L.O.D. for Back Corté.	On 5.6. man should twist on ball of R.F. and heel of L.F.
CLOSED PROMENADE	4	1 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.	2.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.	Face wall (approx.) throughout.	1 and 2 should be the longest steps, 3—short to side and slightly in advance. Lady opposite.
OPEN PROMENADE (Old version)	4	1 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.	2.	Nil.	Nil.	Approx. 1/4 of a turn to L. on 3.	Begin facing (approx.) to wall. Finish facing diagonally to wall.	1 and 2 should be the longest steps.
OPEN PROMENADE (Finishing outside).	4	1 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.	2.4.	Nil.	Nil.	Man—nil. Lady—approx. 1/4 turn to L. on 2.	Face wall (approx.) throughout.	1, 2 and 4 should be the longest steps. 3 short.
BACK CORTÉ	4	1 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.	2.	Nil.	Nil.	1/4 or a 1/2 turn to L. on 2.	Begin back into L.O.D. Finish with back diag. to centre or facing wall.	1 and 2 should be the longest steps. 3—short to side and slightly in advance. Lady opposite.
ROCK L.R.L.	3	1	Q.Q.S.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.	Taken back into L.O.D.	—
ROCK R.L.R.	3	1	Q.Q.S.	Retained throughout on 1.2.3.	Nil.	Nil.	Nil.	Taken back into L.O.D.	—
ROCK TURN	7	2 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.Q.Q.S.	1.5. (very slight on 1.)	Nil.	Nil.	1/4 turn to R. on 1.2.3.4. 1/4 of a turn to L. on 5.6.7.	Begin facing diag. to wall. Take 5th step back diag. to centre. Finish facing wall.	—
NATURAL PROMENADE TURN	4	1 1/2	S.Q.Q.S.	2.4.	Nil.	Nil.	Best used on corners. 1/4 of a turn to R.	Begin facing (approx.) to wall. Finish facing (approx.) to next wall.	—

FIGURE 2 Dance chart for the tango developed by Victor Silvester and published in the *Dance Journal* (1936).

enthusiasts . . . there are a greater number of listeners who prefer to enjoy their dance music while reclining in an armchair, rather than exert themselves and enjoy the greater benefits, both physical and mental, which can be derived from actually dancing to rhythmical music.<sup>51</sup>

Because of the preponderance of these armchair listeners, Silvester argued, band leaders took too many liberties with standard dance forms like the foxtrot and played them at 'every conceivable speed', making them difficult to dance to. Silvester had already worked out the solution to this problem – he set out to record his own records for dancing in a format he labelled 'strict-tempo'. He had been having trouble with record company directors who complained that records made for dance were invariably the worst sellers because they were simply uninteresting to listen to: 'In other words,' Silvester wrote, 'a non-crooning number with good melodious syncopation throughout, had a small sale compared with one in which some female wailed: "Yo-doe-de-o-doe, I've lost my beau"!' <sup>52</sup>

Fortunately for Silvester the anonymous company director was wrong, and Silvester with his dance band went on to make many strict-tempo records from 1935 onwards. To date more than 75 million have been sold. Beginning in April 1937 Silvester and Orchestra featured in more than 6,500 broadcasts for BBC Radio including 130 during the war. Later, the Victor Silvester Television Dancing Club ran for 17 years. His success was central to the success of the Imperial Society which, as a result of the standardization and codification of dance, managed to spread the so-called English, or Imperial, style throughout the world.

Silvester's strict-tempo music stood in stark contrast to jazz music. Just as the ISTD ballroom dancing code had emerged in opposition to African-American dance, so strict tempo was opposed to jazz. Jazz and ragtime had appeared for years in the pages of the dance journals as a wildly chaotic and primitive form of music associated, like the shimmy and cakewalk, with lowly places in the ghettos of New York City and elsewhere. It was Monsieur Maurice who had reminded the collected dance teachers at the Grafton Galleries in 1920 that jazz music was confined to 'third- or fourth-rate places'. Another well-known dancer of the time, Mrs Vernon Castle, was quoted by Richardson as writing in 1918:

It is difficult to define jazz. The nigger bands at home jazz a tune: that is to say they slur the notes, they syncopate, and each instrument puts in a number of fancy bits of its own. In the States we dance to jazz music, but there are no fixed steps for it. We get our new dances from the Barbary Coast. They reach New York in a very primitive condition and have to be toned down before they can be used in the ballroom.<sup>53</sup>

Jazz was described in an American ballroom magazine as 'strict rhythm without melody. The jazz bands take popular tunes and rag them to death to make jazz. Beats are added as often as the delicacy of the player's ear will permit. There are many half notes or less, and many long-drawn wavering notes. It is an attempt to reproduce the marvellous syncopation of the African jungle.'<sup>54</sup> The efforts of Silvester and others to produce a toned-down form of jazz with a strict rhythm did not stand in isolation. Instead they can be seen as part of a wider context in which forms of popular culture, and particularly music, were seen as 'American' and in need of toning down. Imported jazz music had



been the principal ingredient of so-called 'rhythm clubs' that had sprung up around Britain. The music was referred to as 'hot' jazz, and the audience was predominantly male, middle class, suburban and young. The vast majority of people, particularly those who might be described as working-class, favoured British commercial music, which toned down jazz music in much the same way as American forms of dance had been transformed by the Imperial Society. As Jack Hylton wrote in 1929 about American 'hot' music:

It has not appealed to the public. Before it can be played here it much be modified, given the British touch, which Americans and other foreigners never understand. Symphonic syncopation, which I feel proud to have developed in this country, is pre-eminently British. In the dance-hall or on the gramophone record alike, it makes a subtle appeal to our British temperament.<sup>55</sup>

The British style of dance music was marked by less spontaneity and more formal orchestration. This music was gentler and cooler and, it might be added, whiter.

The relationship between the Imperial Society and so-called degenerate dancing was not straightforward. A cursory reading of the dance journals of the time might suggest a simple disgust at freak steps originating in the lowly dance halls of African-Americans. But as is often the case, disgust was tinged with desire. Dances such as the waltz, foxtrot and tango – the first dances to be deemed acceptable by the Society – had all, at one time or another, been deemed dangerous and unacceptable. Now the Boston, the cakewalk, the turkey trot, the jitterbug, the shimmy and others were all going through a similar process.

The Imperial Society and Victor Silvester enacted, over several decades, the codification of social dancing in Britain and beyond. The development of correct steps, the abolition of unnecessary ones, the production of accepted terminology and handy dance charts were all part of this process. So were the production of syllabi for teachers and the awarding of bronze, silver and gold awards to students. Finally, the policing of tempo and production of strict-tempo music by Silvester capped the process that began in the Grafton Galleries in 1920. And all this regulation occurred throughout the United Kingdom, and later the Commonwealth, at a local level, in dance schools that were opened up in cities throughout the nation where dance instructors who had passed examinations set by the Imperial Society would operate. Needless to say this process was not all-encompassing. As James Nott has noted,

Among those who did not learn, there was resentment at the new-found seriousness of some dancers and some dance halls. As a result it became possible to distinguish between two quite separate and opposed groups of dancers, as the *Oxford Magazine* noted in 1929: 'Ballroom dancing appeals to thousands upon thousands . . . its followers form two great camps, those who learn to dance, and that quite appreciable number who dance without learning.'<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, Nott argues, the attention to detail brought about by the Imperial Society deterred many thousands from entering the 'right kind of places' where ballroom dance took place. They were made to feel awkward and embarrassed by their lack of technical expertise. The Mecca organization, which ran a circuit of dance halls across the United Kingdom, had no lofty ambitions to civilize dancers but simply wanted to

make money from the popularity of dance. Partly in response to the efforts of the Imperial Society and others, they introduced easy group dances such as the Lambeth Walk and the Palais Glide in the 1930s in order to allow people to overcome any hesitation they might feel about joining in.

## **Discussion**

The aims of this paper have been to show how forms of ‘correct’ and ‘appropriate’ movement are produced in relation to ‘inappropriate’ forms of movement through a complicated representational process and, second, to reveal the normative geographies that are at play in this process. My aim in examining these practices is to provide an empirically rich account of the production of bodily mobilities and thus to add to a long and recently invigorated tradition of conceptualizing bodily mobility in human geography.<sup>57</sup> This snapshot of the history of abstraction through representation charts the tension between the threat of actual lived and embodied motion – always potentially excessive and threatening – and the rationalized and abstracted mobility of dance instructors and choreographers who have attempted, through representation and practice, to make mobility functional, ordered and, in the end, knowable.

In this account of the codification and regulation of ballroom dancing, so-called ‘correct’ forms of ballroom dance were produced through two principal forms of representation – one that sought to locate ‘freak’ or ‘degenerate’ movements in particular moral geographies and another that sought to produce new movements through such things as dance charts and strict tempo. First, degenerate dance steps such as the shimmy were firmly located in ‘other’ places. Several geographies of mobility are entangled in the account of the codification of ballroom dancing given here. Most obviously there is the corporeal mobilities of the dancers themselves. In addition, however, there is the mobility of mobilities – the way, in other words, that these corporeal mobilities resulted from the movement of dance forms across the Atlantic in the first half of the 20th century. The kinds of move being made on ballroom dance floors in London and across Britain around 1920 were, in part, the result of dance forms being learned elsewhere which had migrated to the United Kingdom. These places included Africa, Latin American, the United States, the American South and New York at one level and so-called ‘third- or fourth-rate places’ such as jazz clubs at another. Particular kinds of movement and rhythm – the microgeography of bodily mobility – were thus coded as being from elsewhere and not British. There was a very definite sense that forms of movement revealed national belonging. Consider the following account that appeared in 1920.

In my books I have described or alluded to the tango as an *alien* dance, because, in its original form, the movements are wholly at variance with British tradition. The action of the limbs and movements employed in waltzing are, on the contrary, essentially British. If you would test this, watch closely any good Highland dancer – native, I mean – in the Sword Dance. You will note that between the points and hilts of the

crossed weapons he executes what is practically a *waltz turn*. And this has been done for two or three thousand years – at least, so long as the Highlander has carried a sword.<sup>58</sup>

Of course it wasn't simply places that located particular forms of movement in a moral lexicon. The vast majority of the descriptions were also racialized in a way that went hand in hand with the moral economy of place. Dances such as the shimmy, but also the cakewalk, the turkey trot, the bunny hug and endless other dance forms were seen as essentially black forms of dance that were variously described as 'simple', 'primitive', 'barbaric', 'eccentric' and 'hectic' among other descriptors.

The solution to these 'freak steps' proposed and enacted by the ISTD was to produce their own coded set of appropriate movements that were seen as universal in their applicability. There is certainly an air of high modernity about the rigorous codification of dance in charts, in strict tempo calculations and in the definition of what is acceptable. This is only amplified by the terms used to describe English, or Imperial, ballroom dancing at its finest. These include 'graceful', 'dignified', 'uniform' and 'lilting'. The accent of uniformity and universality indicate the truly imperial ambitions of Silvester and his colleagues. It was the variability of dance forms that they really could not put up with. Within both the reactions to 'degenerate dancing' and the codification of 'correct' movements there is clearly an aesthetics of mobility at work. While offensive movements are described as exaggerated, out of time, too fast or too physical (lifting off the ground, for instance), the movements proposed by the ISTD were rhythmically regular, constrained, smooth and predictable. Again, these denotations more or less mapped onto spaces such as the Americas on the one hand and Britain on the other. The name 'Imperial Society' was to be taken at face value. The ambition of the Imperial Society was to standardize ballroom dancing internationally by exporting a style known as the 'English Style' and later the 'Imperial Style'. As Richardson notes with pride, the English style, thanks mainly to the efforts of Silvester, spread quickly to places such as Denmark and Germany. English dancers, including Silvester, won international competitions thanks, in part, to the establishment of a set of universal rules known as 'English'. Just as the corporeal mobilities of dance moved across the Atlantic to Britain so Britain, in turn, exported new forms of codified mobility to the rest of the world.

While this paper has considered the representation and encoding of dance in the early 20th century, it is not my argument that such strategies were entirely successful nor that the outcomes were entirely negative. As recent accounts of non-representational theory have pointed out, there is a whole world beyond the kind of account I have produced – a world of affect where representations and practices are both mobilized in order to produce a world where power may not be able to intrude – as McCormack has put it, a world of the '*processually enactive*', where the 'styles and modes of performative moving and relating' are more important than 'sets of codified rules'.<sup>59</sup> Although 'codified rules' are important to McCormack, they are not as important as the styles and modes of moving themselves. This notion lies at the heart of contemporary geographical discussion of non-representational theory

and the idea of practice. Indeed, a good deal of current thinking about practice in geography and beyond has been set up in contrast to theories of representation.<sup>60</sup> Thrift, in particular, argues for an account of social life in which a multitude of everyday actions, including bodily movement, dance and play, exist outside of, and independent from, our representations of them. 'Movement is not thought about movement, and bodily space is not space thought of or represented.'<sup>61</sup> Mobility (at least in dance), to Thrift, is a way of inhabiting space and time that is not secondary to consciousness but primary. 'My body', he asserts, 'has its world, or understands its world, without having to make use of my "symbolic" or "objectifying function"'.<sup>62</sup>

This line of thinking has clearly opened up important new avenues for human geography. This could be made even more productive, I argue, by thinking of it in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, ideas about representation. Non-representational theory, as Richard Smith has argued, is not *anti*-representational theory.<sup>63</sup> It is the interface between the representational and the non-representational that concerns me here – the representational strategies that seek to colonise the world beyond cognition that Thrift, McCormack and others discuss. How, in other words, representation is used to hijack the process of *becoming*.

When bodily mobility is thought of in terms of both representation and the non-representational it is no longer possible to maintain the distinction between discursive and practical consciousness that has fettered social theory for decades.<sup>64</sup> This dualism is derived from the basic Cartesian dualism of mind and body. The championing of practical consciousness does little to overcome this way of thinking, but rather reproduces it by inverting the age-old hierarchy of mind (representation, consciousness, culture) over body (the non-representational, practice, nature). By attempting to turn upside down the hierarchical logic that has marginalized embodied knowledge, the body has frequently become a signifier of the preconceptual. The centrality of the sensuous body to the post-phenomenological has inadvertently retained the Cartesian/Platonic legacy. To talk of a realm of action, such as dance, as purely 'non-representational' runs the risk of solidifying the distinction between representation and practice that befuddles approaches to human movement.<sup>65</sup>

The claim I make here is that human mobility is simultaneously representational and practical – representation as practice and practice as representation. Angela Martin has made this point more generally in her consideration of identity and Irishness: 'bodies are simultaneously material and metaphorical, therefore all practice is representational.'<sup>66</sup> Human bodily mobility is a set of culturally and socially laden actions that exist within contextual systems of meaning and power. The movement of human bodies, whether self-propelled or transported, is never separate from consciousness and representation. As Mauss has observed, human body movements are always subject to the human psychosocial realms of meaning production.<sup>67</sup> This is as true of dance as it is of language. It is the process and mechanisms that link practice to representation that I have delineated in relation to the dance hall.

Reading the pages of the dance journals from the 1920s two things are quite clear. First, regardless of the attempts of the ISTD and Silvester, many people continued to dance outrageously in the clubs of London and the provinces, much to the disgust of the dance teachers. By the 1930s the simpler dances of the Mecca dance halls were all the rage. Second, even those who were trained in appropriate ways of moving experienced a significant and abiding sense of pleasure in the process of learning to dance. To disregard this sense of pleasure would be foolhardy. But this pleasure too was surely not simply a pleasure derived from a world beyond power but pleasure that was, in part, a result of the representational strategies at work in the Imperial Society. Power is not simply about control and regulation through denial, but about the production of pleasure itself. As Bourdieu, among others, was eager to show, it is exactly the process of the internalization of the social in the body that produces the strongest adherence to established norms. This adherence is at its most successful when it is experienced as pleasure.<sup>68</sup> This has not been a beguilingly simple story of representation as denial and repression, on the one hand, and bodily movement as pure play on the other. The story that arose from the endeavours of the Imperial Society, I suggest, shows both how representational strategies produce often pleasurable bodily mobility and how bodily movements are part of the play of representational power. For this reason, I believe that it is important to perceive the kinds of representational worlds that have been constructed around and through dance, and to provide an account of some of the normative geographies that provided a basis for such worlds.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Rhys Jones, Theresa Buckland and the anonymous referees for their comments on this paper. The paper has also benefited from a discussion at a seminar at the Centre for Mobilities Research at Lancaster. The research for this grant was funded by an ESRC fellowship (R000271264).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> P.J.S. Richardson, *The history of English ballroom dancing 1910–1945* (London, Herbert Jenkins, n.d.), p. 41. I am indebted to the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing for the use of their archives. The following account is based on their archival material.
- <sup>2</sup> See e.g. S. Ahmed, M. Sheller, A.-M. Fortier and C. Castaneda, eds, *Uprootings, regroupings: questions of home and migration* (Oxford, Berg, 2003); T. Cresswell, 'The production of mobilities', *New formations* 43 (2001), pp. 3–25; C. Kaplan, *Questions of travel: postmodern discourses of displacement* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1996); V. Kaufmann, *Rethinking mobility: contemporary sociology* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2002).
- <sup>3</sup> See e.g. J. Clifford, *Routes: travel and translation in the later twentieth century* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997); G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Nomadology: the war machine* (New York, Semiotext(e), 1986); L. Malkki, 'National geographic: the rooting of

- peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees', *Cultural anthropology* 7 (1992), pp. 24–44; J. Urry, *Sociology beyond societies: mobilities for the twenty-first century* (London, Routledge, 2000).
- <sup>4</sup> See e.g. I. Ang, 'On not speaking Chinese: postmodern ethnicity and the politics of diaspora', *New formations* 24 (1994), pp. 1–18; T. Cresswell, 'Imagining the nomad: mobility and the postmodern primitive', in G. Benko and U. Strohmayr, eds, *Space and social theory* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1997), pp. 360–82; Cresswell, 'The production of mobilities'; C. Kaplan, 'Transporting the subject: technologies of mobility and location in an era of globalization', *PMLA* (Jan 2002), pp. 32–42; G. Pratt, 'Geographies of identity and difference: marking boundaries', in D. Massey, J. Allen and P. Sarre, eds, *Human geography today* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999), pp. 151–68.
- <sup>5</sup> N. Blomley, *Law, space and the geographies of power* (New York, Guilford Press, 1994).
- <sup>6</sup> G. Verstraete, 'Technological frontiers and the politics of mobility in the European union', *New formations* 43 (2001), pp. 26–43.
- <sup>7</sup> See M. Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion* (Boulder, CO, Westview Press, 1995).
- <sup>8</sup> For an account of swing dance in Nazi Germany see B.D. Palmer, *Cultures of darkness: night travels in the histories of transgression* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 2000).
- <sup>9</sup> J. Desmond, *Meaning in motion: new cultural studies of dance* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1997); G. Morris, ed., *Moving words: re-writing dance* (London, Routledge, 1996); C. Picart, 'Dancing through different worlds: an autoethnography of the interactive body and virtual emotion in ballroom dance', *Qualitative inquiry* 8 (2002), pp. 348–61.
- <sup>10</sup> J. Desmond, 'Embodying difference: issues in dance and cultural studies', *Cultural critique* (winter 1993–94), pp. 33–63.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion*.
- <sup>12</sup> Desmond, 'Embodying difference'.
- <sup>13</sup> M. Franko, 'Five theses on laughter after all', in G. Morris, ed., *Moving words: re-writing dance* (London, Routledge, 1996), pp. 43–62.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> N. Bryson, 'Cultural studies and dance history', in J. Desmond, ed., *Meaning in motion: new cultural studies of dance* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 55–80.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Cresswell, 'The production of mobilities'; Kaufmann, *Re-thinking mobility*; Urry, *Sociology beyond societies*.
- <sup>18</sup> S. Foster, 'The ballerina's phallic pointe', in S. Foster, ed., *Corporealities: dancing knowledge, culture and power* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1–24.
- <sup>19</sup> H. Thomas, *Dance, modernity, and culture: explorations in the sociology of dance* (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 170.
- <sup>20</sup> For examples see J. Kaeli'inohomoku, 'Cultural change: functional and dysfunctional expressions of dance, a form of affective culture', in J. Blacking and J. Kaeli'inohomoku, eds, *The performing arts* (The Hague, Mouton, 1979), pp. 47–64; A. Kaeppler, 'American approaches to the study of dance', *Yearbook of traditional music* 23 (1991), pp. 11–21; S. Reed, 'The politics and poetics of dance', *Annual review of anthropology* 27 (1998), pp. 503–32; D. Sklar, 'On dance ethnography', *Dance research journal* 23 (1991), pp. 6–10; P. Spencer, *Society and the dance: the social anthropology of process and performance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- <sup>21</sup> In Geography this is connected to the observations made in C. Nash, 'Performativity in practice: some recent work in cultural geography', *Progress in human geography* 24 (2000),

- pp. 653–64; G. Revill, 'Performing French folk music: dance, authenticity and nonrepresentational theory', *Cultural geographies* **11** (2004), pp. 199–209. For work on these themes elsewhere see Desmond, 'Embodying difference'; Franko, 'Five theses on laughter after all'; Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion*.
- <sup>22</sup> D.P. McCormack, 'The event of geographical ethics in spaces of affect', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **28** (2003), pp. 488–507. For accounts of non-representational theory see J.D. Dewsbury, 'Performativity and the event: enacting a philosophy of difference', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **18** (2000), pp. 473–96; N. Thrift, 'The still point: resistance, expressiveness embodiment and dance', in S. Pile and M. Keith, eds, *Geographies of resistance* (London, Routledge, 1997), pp. 124–51; N. Thrift, 'Summoning life', in P. Cloke, P. Crang and M. Goodwin, eds, *Envisioning human geographies* (London, Arnold, 2004), pp. 81–103.
- <sup>23</sup> See J.J. Nott, *Music for the people: popular music and dance in interwar Britain* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).
- <sup>24</sup> Monsieur Maurice (pseudonym), along with his normal dancing partner, Florence Walden, was one of the most influential exhibition dancers of the time.
- <sup>25</sup> P. Richardson, 'Can we get together and raise the standard of ballroom dancing? A suggestion from Maurice.' *Dancing Times* (Apr. 1920), pp. 526, 528.
- <sup>26</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, p. 42.
- <sup>27</sup> Edward Scott was a writer on dance and an influential figure in social dancing. See T. Buckland, 'Edward Scott: the last of the English dancing masters', *Dance research* **21** (2003), pp. 3–35.
- <sup>28</sup> 'Our conference of ballroom teachers', *Dancing Times* **177** (June 1920), p. 44.
- <sup>29</sup> 'Paris notes: The "shimmy" once more', *Dancing Times* **125** (1921).
- <sup>30</sup> See <http://www.streetswing.com/histmain/z3shimy.htm> (accessed 26 Mar. 2004)
- <sup>31</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th edn. (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- <sup>32</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, p. 39.
- <sup>33</sup> 'The sitter out', *Dancing Times* (June 1921), p. 703.
- <sup>34</sup> 'Paris notes'.
- <sup>35</sup> V. Silvester, *Dancing is my life: an autobiography* (London, Heinemann, 1958), p. 89.
- <sup>36</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, pp. 22–23.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- <sup>38</sup> See R. Shields, *Places on the margin: alternative geographies of modernity* (London, Routledge Chapman Hall, 1991); V.W. Turner, *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1977).
- <sup>39</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, p. 23.
- <sup>40</sup> For a wonderful account of the travels of tango see Savigliano, *Tango and the political economy of passion*.
- <sup>41</sup> C. D'Albert, 'The evils of imitative teaching', *Dance Journal* **1** (1907), pp. 2–3.
- <sup>42</sup> G. Butterfield, 'The degeneracy of dancing', *Dance Journal* (1908), pp. 2–3.
- <sup>43</sup> 'Is dancing degenerating?', *Dance Journal* (1908), pp. 8–9.
- <sup>44</sup> 'Decadent dances: an American woman's denunciation of the new "freak" dances', *Dance Journal* (1911), pp. 15.
- <sup>45</sup> 'The sitter out', pp. 704–05.
- <sup>46</sup> V. Silvester, *Modern ballroom dancing: history and practice* (London, Barrie & Jenkins, 1974), p. 40.
- <sup>47</sup> Silvester, *Dancing is my life*, p. 85.

- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Some expressions of opinion about the conference', *Dancing Times* (June 1920), p. 709.
- <sup>50</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, p. 78.
- <sup>51</sup> V. Silvester, 'What is your opinion?', *Dance Journal* (1935), pp. 105–6.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Richardson, *History of English ballroom dancing*, pp. 37–38.
- <sup>54</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 38.
- <sup>55</sup> Jack Hylton, quoted in Nott, *Music for the people*, p. 201.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- <sup>57</sup> T. Cresswell, 'Embodiment, power and the politics of mobility: the case of female tramps and hobos', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **24** (1999), pp. 175–92; Dewsbury, 'Performativity and the event'; L. McDowell, 'Bodywork: heterosexual gender performances in city workplaces', in D. Bell and G. Valentine, eds, *Mapping desire: geographies of sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 75–95; D. Seamon, *A geography of the lifeworld: movement, rest, and encounter* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979); Thrift, 'The still point'.
- <sup>58</sup> E. Scott, 'A few suggestions', *Dancing Times* **121** (Oct. 1920), p. 17.
- <sup>59</sup> McCormack, 'The event of geographical ethics in spaces of affect'.
- <sup>60</sup> Dewsbury, 'Performativity and the event: enacting a philosophy of difference'; M. Rose, 'The seductions of resistance: power, politics, and a performative style of systems', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **20** (2002), pp. 383–400; T.R. Schatzki, K. Knorr-Cetina and E. v. Savigny, *The practice turn in contemporary theory* (London, Routledge, 2001); Thrift, 'The still point'.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> R. Smith, 'Baudrillard's nonrepresentational theory: burn the signs and journey without maps', *Environment and planning D: society and space* **21** (2003), pp. 67–84.
- <sup>64</sup> A. Giddens, *The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984).
- <sup>65</sup> A. Martin, 'The practice of identity and an Irish sense of place', *Gender, place and culture* **4** (1997), pp. 89–114; Nash, 'Performativity in practice'.
- <sup>66</sup> Martin, 'The practice of identity and an Irish sense of place'.
- <sup>67</sup> M. Mauss, *Sociology and psychology: essays* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).
- <sup>68</sup> See P. Bourdieu, *The logic of practice* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1990).