

Schwan Alexander

Choreoethics in Early Modernist Dance

standard lecture

The American choreographer Ted Shawn (1891 – 1972), who studied Methodist theology before becoming a dancer and choreographer, conceptualized modernist dance with strong theological implications. In his early choreographic work, he made proliferate use of liturgical gestures, which, strangely enough, still resonated with his Methodist background. Typical aspects of Methodist ethics such as sanctification, self-enhancement, and social-political commitment, but also the impossible assumption of an alleged universality, can clearly be seen in Shawn's idealization of the dancing human body. With a particular focus on Ted Shawn and his appropriation of François Delsarte's system of codifying gestures, the paper will investigate the ethical dimension of liturgical gestures in early modern dance. How did they relate individuality and community, prescription and expression, overpowering and self-assertion? And finally, to which political dimension did these gestures appertain in terms of responsibility, power, and guilt?

Bio:

Alexander Schwan is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the Institute of Theatre Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Prior to his current position, he was trained in theatre directing and studied Protestant theology, Jewish studies and philosophy in Heidelberg, Jerusalem, and Berlin. His dissertation entitled *Correlations between Dancing and Writing in the Work of Trisha Brown, Jan Fabre, and William Forsythe* was awarded the 2016 Tiburtius Award. In his current book project, Alexander researches theological implications in the works of modernist choreographers such as Ruth St. Denis, Mary Wigman, and Martha Graham. In the fall term 2017, Alexander will be a Visiting Scholar at Harvard University.

