GETTING TO THE CORE OF X:

An Analysis of the Choreographic Methods of Daniel Nagrin

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ABSTRACT

GETTING TO THE CORE OF X: An Analysis of the Choreographic Methods of Daniel Nagrin investigates his choreographic and performance styles over five decades, from the early 1940s to the mid 1980s, through the close examination of his dances. This thesis is the first scholarly analysis of Nagrin’s choreographic methods and reveals that there is a second, marginalised strand of modernism prevalent within American modern dance through his privileging of content over form.

Part I situates Nagrin in his historical and contextual time in American culture from his high school days in the 1930s to the present, drawing upon the problematic notion of influence and upon theories of style and of aesthetic context. Nagrin’s works can be divided into four distinct, chronological and thematic periods from which to trace his choreographic methods of getting to the core of X, an idea which he appropriated from the acting techniques of Russian theatre director Constantin Stanislavski. Part 2 further contextualizes his work in order to conduct a stylistic analysis of four case studies, one from each period. The adapted analytical model, constructed from the writings of Janet Adshead et al., Angela Kane, and June Layson, facilitates this exploration into Nagrin’s non-formalist works.

This thesis investigates Nagrin’s stylistic characteristics and developments within his methods, in which he worked contrary to the current modern dance mainstream and worked fluidly across the borders of both modernism and postmodernism. His choreography involves searching the depths of the core of X -- Nagrin’s who or what – in order to find motivation and movement rather than manipulating formal elements. As a consequence of this approach, this thesis argues that he should be positioned as a dance finder rather than as a dance maker.
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INTRODUCTION

The imperative of this thesis is to examine closely the choreographic methods through the works of Daniel Nagrin, often regarded as a minor pioneer of American modern dance. He describes his method below:

At the heart of Stanislavski’s teachings and Tamiris’s [sic] development of them lies a creative act which amazingly enough tends to be ignored most of the time by much of the dance profession. It asks the imagination, the heart and the mind of the dancer to build the entire performance around a specific set of images which are linked as if they were a model sentence having a subject, a predicate and an object with subordinate clauses. The entire process can actually be encapsulated in one sentence: Who (or what) is doing what to whom (or what) and where, in what context and under what difficulties and why?

Nagrin, 1997:33-34

Whilst a Master’s of Fine Arts choreography and performance student for three years at Arizona State University during the mid 1980s, Nagrin constantly referred to the above process as “getting to the core of X.” This concept of X as the core from which dances are created motivated the entirety of Nagrin’s works, and is thus central to this thesis. I was first introduced to his approach through improvisation, and then through his non-formalist method of choreography (I also took jazz dance and modern dance technique courses from him). As a result and although trained in several different styles of choreography, it remains my preferred way of working and teaching. I named this process the Nagrin Method, as it enables me to produce works that are considered real, immediate, and speak directly to the heart of viewers, engaging and motivating them in subtle, yet powerful, ways.

My personal experience with Nagrin and admiration for his work is the inspiration and force behind this research. Nagrin, a native of New York City, performed and choreographed for over five decades, from the late 1930s to the late 1980s. These years and place are significant not only in American dance history but also in the societal changes that occurred within the larger cultural frameworks of modernism and postmodernism (Banes, 1987 and 1994; and Schlundt, 1997). He worked within and overlapped various genres
throughout his career, fusing acting techniques with modern dance, jazz
dance, Broadway, film, and improvisation (see Appendix A.1). Nagrin’s
crossing these genres had a significant impact upon shaping his
choreographic and performance styles.

A generative approach, one that allows the material to lead (Horton
Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999), guided this study and stylistic analysis. The
underlying, implicit hypothesis is that Nagrin’s method of choreography has
been marginalized and is worthy of analysis, illumination, and application.
The plausibility of the Nagrin Method is questioned, as well as how his work
can be useful and applicable to current choreographic study and praxis. This
research applies to the study of dance history, appreciation, choreography,
dance analysis, aesthetics, and performance theory. It is my view that there is
a need for a methodological analysis of his choreographic system. It involves
a six-step, self-reflective questioning process introduced in Chapter 1,
explained further throughout Chapter 2, and analysed and interrogated
throughout Part 2 to arrive at a specific image and specific actions, or his core
of X. The concept of X and how to find it is intriguing to me and merits
investigation. Nagrin’s search for this core, motivated by his commitment to
the human condition, underpinned his entire choreographic process. My
focus, particularly, probes the notion of finding X through Nagrin’s thematic
tools of content to reveal the depths of characters or specific images, their
doing/actions, structural juxtapositions, aural and visual contexts, and
cultural, historical, and sometimes political positionings. Scholar Christena
Schlundt (1997) corroborates the need for this sort of analysis as this has
never been undertaken, which opens the possibility of another valid way of
creating dances and justifies this research. Nagrin developed a unique
method of choreography at a time when most others followed formalistic rules,
including the rule of no rules at all. Therefore, his work is not well known and
is worth analysing and opening for debate.

Previous scholarship on Nagrin is quite scant. The only scholarly book
is Schlundt’s (1997) chronology of his works, which includes Robyn Bissell’s
documentation of Nagrin’s European tour in 1967. The best sources to date
on Nagrin’s methods are three of his own four books. These focus on acting
techniques for dancers, improvisation, and choreographic application. John
Gruen, Don McDonagh, and Susan Leigh Foster wrote sections or chapters within books on Nagrin. There is a limited number of Nagrin’s book reviews by McDonagh, Joellen Meglin, and Susanna Sloat. McDonagh, Nagrin himself, and Selma Jeanne Cohen, Bill Evans, Deborah Jowitt, and Marcia B. Siegel authored a few articles. Interviews and choreographic notes that aided this research are by Gruen, Barbara Newman, Cynthia Rosas-Thema, and Siegel. Numerous concert critiques and reviews from various sources covering Nagrin’s performance career were used. Also important to the research and integral to the analysis are the number of videotapes, DVDs, and photographs of Nagrin and his dances; and personal communication with him and two dancers who perform restagings of his works, Bill Evans and Shane O’Hara. A gap exists in the scholarship of Nagrin’s choreographic contribution that has not been probed or analyzed other than by Nagrin himself, placing objectivity suspect. It remains a mystery as to why no major study or analysis of his choreographic works has been undertaken previously.

The thesis is structured with the mindfulness of illuminating the core of X within Nagrin’s choreographies in order to analyse his choreographic methods. This thesis is divided into two parts. The data treated are historical, biographical, and aesthetic in nature which situate Nagrin in his time. A new history approach provides a contextual framework upon which Nagrin’s life and methods can be expounded in Part 1. The dance analysis methodology in Part 2 elucidates the choreographic and performative styles that distinguished him within his historical and cultural contexts.

Part I, Daniel Nagrin: The Man, situates Nagrin in his historical and contextual time and includes three chapters. Paradoxically, this research positions Nagrin as my core of X, which is analogous to the first question of his six-step method: “who” or “what” are you (Nagrin, 2001:42). Chapter 1, entitled Finding the X, is an exploration of research methodologies to find those suited to this research. It also includes a review of the literature on Nagrin. The historical methodology lays the foundation for this research and relies upon the complementary qualitative postmodern approaches of Linda Hutcheon and Keith Jenkins, since the artist’s relationship to his time and past context must be considered. The strength of this new history approach is that it views the writing of history, as Jenkins defines it, as a construct with multiple
approaches and maintains a flexible, discursive position. A weakness of this approach is that it problematises the plausibility of actually knowing the past due to the view of the historian/researcher.

It is argued that Nagrin’s biographical core of X, which is his Russian-Jewish background and living in New York City at a particular time in history, underpins his philosophical and artistic cores. Chapter 2, Getting to the Core, covers Nagrin’s biography, philosophy, and choreographic method and draws upon the problematic notion of influence that arguably affected his life and work. The question of to what extent specific influences affected Nagrin’s professional choices of theme, structure, and treatment of subject matter is analysed. The probable influence of three people is probed, which may contribute to his personal core. These are turn-of-the-century Russian theatre director Constantin Stanislavski, American modern dance pioneer and later wife Helen Tamiris, and Open Theatre director and co-founder Joseph Chaikin. In addition, two institutional influences in New York, The Neighborhood Playhouse and the 92nd Street Y, may have contributed further to Nagrin’s styles. These two groups present the possibility for influence on his life and work and are explored, compared, contrasted, analyzed, and synthesized with his choreographic method of getting to the core of X. Nagrin’s (1994:38) core of X is a notion appropriated from the acting techniques of Stanislavski and the “creative movement” methods of Helen Tamiris. Nagrin’s method contains several aspects worth probing further in Part 2, such as improvisation, metaphor, expression, and alienation that often were his choice of treatments, and sometimes structuring devices, to achieve the X. The interdisciplinary nature of Nagrin’s method with theatre, particularly those methods from Stanislavski, Tamiris, and Chaikin, is considered within its historical, political, and cultural contexts. Central to Nagrin’s method is the elevation of content through finding a specific image, the X, and then discovering its inherent action. His work of reaching into the inner depths permits the action to be found from the intrinsic motivation rather than using emotion to create movement (Franko, 1995). Nagrin (2001:1-2) insists that this “allows for the physical dynamic and skill to serve the expression of the dancer’s inner life.” This thesis investigates how his search for the core of X resulted in his choices that determined his choreographic and
performative styles. His six-step method is illuminated and examined through the stylistic analysis of his works in Part 2. The treatment of the historical data is through primary source documents and the comparison and contrast, analysis and synthesis of these with the writings of others. Nagrin’s works arguably can be divided into four distinct, chronological and thematic periods from which to trace his choreographic methods.

Chapter 3, A Man in His Time, focuses further on the historical contextualization, including Jewishness and marginalization by critics and writers. Nagrin’s association with Tamiris and the extent of her possible influence on him and his works is probed to a deeper degree. The larger ethos of cultural movements is explored. Arriving at a working definition of cultural modernism rather than dance modernism for the thesis is preferred due to the continual discourse surrounding this issue initiated by the Banes/Manning debate (Banes, 1994 and in Docherty, 1999; and Manning, 1988). Theories of style and aesthetic context serve as a starting point for this investigation into Nagrin’s styles and genres.

This thesis calls for the adaptation of a methodology suitable for the analysis of non-formalist dance works. My adapted model combines post-structural dance analysis approaches due to Nagrin’s non-featuring of performative characteristics (such as his lack of treating space and spatial relationships as primary or directly intentional) in lieu of privileging choreographic components through content. The dance analysis approach is a three-fold amalgamation appropriated from the post-structuralist framework pioneered by Janet Adshead, Valerie Briginshaw, Pauline Hodgens, and Michael Huxley (1988); and the dance analysis praxis of Angela Kane (2003) and June Layson (1987). The strength of an analytical approach is that the structure and temporal nature of a dance emerges and allows room for evaluation and interpretation. A weakness is that it may give the reader the impression that this is the only way to evaluate choreography, but it is actually one among many. Another concern is the plausibility of testing Nagrin’s choreographic methodology against any structural approach that is contrary to his content-oriented method of creating or finding, rather than making, dances. The adapted analytical model facilitated this exploration into Nagrin’s
non-formalist works by privileging what he privileged; that is, content or the core of X.

Part 2, Daniel Nagrin: The Work and Method, further contextualizes his work in order to conduct a stylistic analysis of four case studies. Ironically, my research and analysis once again parallels steps two, four, five, and six of Nagrin’s method (see Appendix C.1): what is the action, where and when did it happen (context), and what is the reason or motivation, and why (Nagrin, 2001). The analysis of four of his concert works from four distinct periods illuminates the extent that his choreographic development and methodology progressed over four thematic and chronological periods. Each case study explores an in-depth stylistic analysis of the whole of Nagrin’s works, similar to the approaches used by Angela Kane (2000) and Rachel Richardson (1994). A chapter is devoted to each dialogic and thematic period, entitled Dance Portraits, The 1960s, The Workgroup, and Post-Workgroup.

The Dance Portraits, Chapter 4, features Nagrin’s virtuosic solos centred on dramatic character portraits relevant to popular culture. Many of these works used jazz music and jazz dance. His social agency themes, seen through the characters and their actions concerning aspects of the human condition, reveal the core of X. Nagrin’s method of privileging content opens for debate the possibility of a strand of modernism that is marginalised in American modern dance.

The 1960s reveals a sharp departure from his character portraits and solo works with the formation of two companies at the beginning and ending of this decade. Chapter 5 discusses Nagrin’s new style of getting to the core of X which features minimal performative aspects, non-virtuosic and pedestrian movement and stillness, and theories of expression (Franko, 1995). It shows similarities to Brecht’s alienation techniques, opens the possibility of working within a performance art context, and focuses upon thematic diversity and social consciousness.

Nagrin’s Workgroup, Chapter 6, involves an investigation into his new aesthetic of interactive improvisations with a group, adapted from working with Chaikin’s Open Theatre. The core of X now includes a focus on his ‘other.’ Further work with metaphors, theories of expression, his concept of the heart-mind, and the de-centring of the performance space are treated.
Chapter 7, Post-Workgroup, treats his works to the end of his choreographic and performance career. This category includes revivals and new works, and themes of personal memoir and social agency. His performance art solos rely upon the heavy use of multimedia technology and talking dance, contain sardonic humour, and promote audience reflection. His X shifts once again to include himself and the audience.

This analysis reveals the patterns and consistent threads in Nagrin’s methodology as well as his shifting core of X. His implicit positioning into a specific aesthetic cultural movement is problematised and attempted. His actual method of choreography is probed, and its significance and usefulness to today is considered. Further questions include why it might be valuable to learn about another method of choreography as opposed to the widely-used formalist principles set forth by Louis Horst, Doris Humphrey, Rudolph von Laban, and Merce Cunningham. The extent that his method compares to that of the Big Four (that is, Martha Graham, Hanya Holm, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman, alphabetically) and others, such as the Judson dancers, and how this contributes to his distinctive style are probed. Lastly, the future value or relevance to the study of Nagrin’s choreographic method and positioning as a dance finder, rather than a dance maker, is argued.

My research into Daniel Nagrin’s choreographic method of getting to the core of X is neither exhaustive nor intentionally biographical. What is important to me, as a dancer, choreographer, researcher, and a colleague of Nagrin’s, is to select and construct a plausible way out of many to examine closely his methods and context from which his choreographic and performance styles emerge. At the same time, resonating Hutcheon’s (1988) and Jenkins’ (1991) post-structural views, it is my voice and experiences with Nagrin and his work that speak, shape, and filter through this thesis. My approach corroborates Lynn Matluck Brooks’ realization that she has a duty as a scholar, dancer, and choreographer “to bring to life the visions, the work, and the struggles of these, my ancestors in the field” (Matluck Brooks, 2002:45). She acknowledges her role and sees people as people, not as symbols, catching
the scent of human flesh that Marc Bloch wrote about . . . I attempted, as Gadamer suggests, to place myself in the direction of the text of the subject, so that I could serve as a transmitter of its voice into the present.

Matluck Brooks, 2002:48

She urges dance historians to continue the focus on the history “of dance, of dancers, and of dance makers” (Matluck Brooks, 2002:51). It is in this spirit of tribute that this research ensued, with conclusions neither fixed nor finite. Nagrin’s stylistic characteristics, developments, fluxes, and consistencies within his methods are investigated in this thesis through examining patterns in his core of X.
PART 1

DANIEL NAGRIN: THE MAN
CHAPTER 1: FINDING THE X

INTRODUCTION

In this section, I pursued my X, or finding the methodological theories and models suited to both the research and analysis of 20th Century American modern dancer Daniel Nagrin’s choreographic methods. A new history methodology was selected, which is one approach out of many and not the only way to investigate, but is what I believed to be the paramount approach for the specific biographical and contextual source materials for this research. The new history approaches of Linda Hutcheon (1988 and 1989) and Keith Jenkins (1991, 1995, and 2001) provided an historical and contextual frame to situate Nagrin’s thematic core of X within each dance. Additional historical approaches of others were examined. The amalgamated dance analysis was based upon the post-structural model pioneered by Janet Adshead, Valerie Briginshaw, Pauline Hodgens, and Michael Huxley (1988) and the writings of Angela Kane (2003) and June Layson (1987). Although not exhaustive, these approaches were useful in providing a rationale for the contextual and analytical frames, getting to Nagrin’s core of X, and justifying the plausibility for investigating his choreographic theories. These methodologies are appropriate to the research, since this study is underpinned by “aesthetic, historical, and cultural points of view” (Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999:17); and since Nagrin’s life and work spanned 20th Century’s modernism and postmodernism.

1.1. NEW HISTORY APPROACH

A new history approach best suits the research to examine Nagrin’s choreographic process, revealed in the X. New history breaks from the modernist, positivist, structural approach to the past. It questions what constitutes history; changes the manner in which the past is written, read, and interpreted; and holds suspect objectivity, facts, and evidence (Jenkins, 2001). Reality is a construct based upon social and cultural experiences, and
the actual past cannot be accessed or retrieved.¹ The final form emerges from the process engaged by the historian who reconstructs or “dialogues with” the past from his/her present perspective (Adshead-Lansdale, 1997; Berg in Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999; Hutcheon, 1988:20; and Jenkins, 1991), which is the process encountered by this researcher. History is theoretical, “all theories are positioned” (Jenkins, 1991:70), and varieties of interpretations and perspectives inherent within contextualisation rendered this a useful way to study Nagrin’s works and his X within their times from my viewpoint and personal experience with him and his methods. Empirical methods were not useful to this research as these tend to give one view and are both inclusive and exclusive (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1999 and Hutcheon, 1988). A flexible, “‘shifting historical continuum’” was needed in order to move between perspectives, including my own, from the application of critical methods (Cave quoted in Adshead-Lansdale, 1997:77). This proved to be a more useful approach as it allowed for the probing of several questions regarding who, what aesthetics characteristics, and to what extent living and dancing in New York during the 20th Century affected/influenced Nagrin’s method of getting to the core of X.

As Nagrin’s last work was produced in 1987, constructing my analysis of his past works was the result of the double process of “understanding what the evidence really says, and understanding how it fits together” (Elton, 2002:10 and Ostrowski, 1988). The historian, time, and cultural content cannot be independent of each other (Adshead, 1988; Appleby Hunt and Jacob, 1994; Hutcheon, 1988); nor can these ever be free of internal and intrinsic biases and distortions (Jenkins, 1991 and Ostrowski, 1988). Therefore, a “positive reflexive scepticism” (Jenkins, 1991:57), or critical distance through reflexivity, was necessary to uphold knowledge and to control my personal biases that affected objectivity (Matluck Brooks, 2002). This was difficult at times due to my association with Nagrin and practical experience with his methods, but proved useful in this research.

Linda Hutcheon defines historical method as the “process of critically examining and analysing records and survivals of the past,” and historiography as the “imaginative reconstruction of the above process” (Hutcheon, 1988:92). Therefore, several new history theories were examined
for suitability to this research. As an aspect of postmodernism, new history presents a “presence of the past” which affirms the existence of the past, while at the same time questions how we can know the past other than through its texts (1988:20). Postmodernism contextualises or situates and disturbs readers or audience by forcing self-reflexivity through the examination of one’s values and beliefs, which is somewhat akin to what Nagrin attempted to do in his works. Hutcheon argues for a shift from literary theory to cultural practice and theory with a “focus on differences” (1988:41). These were useful to dance sources since there are multiple notions of texts within a dance (Desmond, 1997), and dance is a part of cultural production (Desmond, 1997 and Koritz, 1995). It also was useful in situating Nagrin in his contextual time and probing differences and similarities in his works with his contemporaries to elucidate his choreographic and performance styles. The original author (or choreographer), the act of reading (the performer), and the role of the receiver (the audience) are important equally in the meaning-making process. Intertextuality challenges the author-text relationship with a reader-text one, or the choreographer’s relationship to both performer and audience, which is similar to the way Nagrin worked and to the way this researcher ‘read’ his dances. Therefore, no work can be considered original as it relies contextually upon the inter-weaving of past discourses, lived experience, and the discourse of the body in its time to give meaning and significance. Hutcheon’s (1988) theories embrace the works of several postmodernists such as architect Charles Jencks (1992) and cultural theorist Edward Said (1979). Her work provided a useful way to view Nagrin’s works from modern, postmodern, and cultural perspectives.

Hutcheon developed two theories of postmodernism, one as a “radical rhetoric of rupture” from modernism and the other as an extension and intensification of certain modernist characteristics (Hutcheon, 1988:50). This researcher used the latter theory as Nagrin’s various modes of getting to the core of X bridged the two eras chronologically and ideologically. Hutcheon’s poetics approach problematises and causes one to question rather than embrace a fixed definition, as problems may not have a solution or a definitive answer. This idea was contained within some of my analytical conclusions and was evident in Nagrin’s approach to his work. Hutcheon concludes that
theory needs to be developed from practice just as history cannot be separated from society (1989). Her approach was applied directly to this research and analysis of Nagrin’s praxis-based choreographic method to find the core or focus, to illuminate his philosophy and device of causing audiences to reflect, and to situate his works contextually within his time.

Keith Jenkins (1991) distinguishes between ‘past’, which has occurred and is brought back by historians; and ‘history’ which is learned, informed, and constructed. He argues that one recount of the past/history is not adequate to have the whole view; and certain groups, such as women and minorities, have been “hidden from history” or omitted (Jenkins, 1991:6-7). Thus, there is one past, but many readings of it, which was useful in this research as many viewpoints on Nagrin’s works were obtained, including my own; various theoretical lenses were employed to “read” his works; and Nagrin (2001) himself wants his works to be viewed fluidly. Jenkins, in harmony with Michel Foucault’s view (Munslow, 1997), asserts that the epistemological nature of history is fragile, demonstrating that past events cannot ever be totally recovered or known, and the past is not an account but rather events, situations, et cetera. Therefore, history is a constructed discourse with many modes of inquiry; it is “shifting [and] problematic” with a multiplicity of types of histories; and all historical knowledge is “tentative” as it may be impossible to say what really happened in the past (Jenkins, 1991:26). These were useful in constructing a Nagrin text through the writings, critiques, and photographs of several persons as well as my own viewings of his videotaped dances and personal experience with his methods. Jenkins questions objectivity, raises the issue of bias as ubiquitous, and discusses primary and secondary sources. The question of “who is it [written] for?” is more important than “cause and effect, similarity and difference, and continuity and change” (Jenkins, 1991:28). He concludes that bias is everywhere and permeates all of historiography, rendering it problematic (1991). Jenkins’ conclusions were a useful, underpinning guide for this analysis and for testing reliability and validity of sources and documents.

postmodern historical methods of beyond the text as “fatally flawed,” favouring archival research, primary sources, and the “canon of evidence” methodology (Jenkins, 2001:158-9). Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob (1984) use some of postmodern’s methodologies while still embracing former empirical ones, arguing for a blend of the two for integrity (Jenkins, 2001). Michel Foucault’s effective history differs from traditional history as it centres on events in terms of the most unique characteristics (Jenkins, 1991 and 2001; and Munslow, 1997). Although another plausible way of examining Nagrin’s works, this was not used. Foucault’s method has no constants, disrupts continuity, contains multiple voices, uproots traditional foundations, and presents a series of “histories of the present” that emphasize content and context within methodologically reflexive studies (Jenkins, 1991). Writing history from a self-reflexive view places the historian in the moment (Kellner in Jenkins, 2001). This perspective, combined with scepticism and detailed historical analysis, is crucial to realizing or constructing the past (Jenkins, 1991). Both Jenkins (1991) and Roland Barthes (in Jenkins, 2001) state that the past can be represented in many historical accounts that deconstruct various interpretations and contain irony, an ideal way to practice historiography. Jean-François Lyotard speaks of the need to legitimate knowledge through discourse and discussion (1984 and in Jenkins, 2001). An attempt was made to construct an account of Nagrin’s works of that time through my self-reflexive viewpoint, to position his works appropriately which arguably contain irony, and to open his works for debate.

Theories of several other scholars were examined that suited this research. Janet Adshead-Lansdale states the common-sense view of dance taken from positivistic “congealed residues” constrained its growth as an academic discipline (Adshead-Lansdale, 1997:63). The temporal yet “vibrant ephemerality” of dance is a strength that must be reflected in dance scholarship since it “is the subject matter of dance research” (1997:71). Echoing Foucault and Jenkins, she reasserts the pluralistic development of knowledge, argues for a fluid rather than fixed position, and concludes that there cannot be one dance scholarship but many approaches.

June Layson asserts Foucault’s argument that traditional history gives causal explanations while the new highlights dislocations, interruptions, and
ambiguities (Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1999). Her historical approach is based in recreating the past through description, synthesizing, making inferences, interpreting through contextualisation, and offering judgments and evaluations which produce a text that is "essentially ‘open’ and amenable to reinterpretation” (Layson in Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, 1999:4), a method fluidly followed by this researcher.

Lynn Matluck Brooks argues for a reconsideration of some of the current trends in dance research such as imposing research theories and methods onto historical material before sustainable facts are discovered. Matluck Brooks problematises the omission of information from the past such as nationality, chronology, genres, works, and great men of the past (Matluck Brooks, 2001:5), which directly applies to Nagrin’s life and works. The doing of history involves many approaches. Writing histories of artists, their works, and performances that centre on the person is the “best chance to reveal those themes in the present” (2002:38), which was the approach taken. She confirms the importance of Gadamer’s dialogue between text and researcher, as both voices need to be heard with clarity. Voices speak from “place and time” to reveal meanings, worldview, concerns, and connections to other texts, people, events, and occurrences, resulting in a “mediation” with the past and an “event of transmission” between researcher and text (2002:41). The goals and function of traditional historiography, which differ from deconstruction, are finding the evidence, evaluating its authenticity, forming connections, and creating an orderly, clear, and direct narrative (2002:39). These guidelines were useful in the contextualisation, analysis, and interpretation of Nagrin’s works.

Donald Ostrowski, like Hutcheon (1988), recognises a gap between theory and practice and claims that all historical theories come from a past-oriented position based in non-experiential sources to reveal what really happened in the past. This is problematic since historical sources can be unreliable and distorted, and extant sources are overlooked, which is similar to Jenkins’ (1991) view. Ostrowski (1988:24) proposes a “source-based, source-oriented view” of history in order to elucidate further evidence that may or may not tell more of what happened in the past and is not unlike authorial authority (Foster, 1995). This fit well with my account based upon personal
experience with Nagrin and his choreographic methods. Ostrowski distinguishes between evidence and traces, source testimony for factual events of the past, and “truth” which involves why the event happened. He argues that the ‘why,’ which is the experiences of the past, has been omitted along with the need to investigate human actions (1988:24). These were useful in understanding Nagrin’s selection of materials, examining his works, and probing his marginalisation from current practices of dance history. The possibility exists for differing “worlds of ideas in conflict” (1988:26), resulting in deceptive “tale tell[ing]” by historians. Ostrowski asserts that discoveries of previously unknown sources do not necessarily confirm current hypotheses due to faulty testimony, rendering historians “victims of distortion” (1988:38). He holds suspect any claim

> about the historical past . . . [as] contradictions between [the sources] raise suspicions that they are chock full of prevarications and errors of memory or expression.

Ostrowski, 1988:39

Ostrowski suggests a methodology that uses extant sources as a possible means to test evidences/testimonies, verify arguments and hypotheses, and develop source models to “perceive the historical past with our senses” (1988:40), or experiential or lived knowledge. The act of historiography as a process through the lens of my lived experience was attempted throughout this thesis. This approach actively engaged the practice of history and historical scholarship through research, writing, and the combined “critical link” of interpretation (Berg in Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999:226). My dance historiography recreated the past through written word and embodiment practices, or “bodily writing,” through my personal experiences with Nagrin and his work to “construct corporeal meaning” (Foster, 1995:3). Description, connecting narrative, and interpreting the past by means of reflexive analytical techniques was relied upon to find my account of Nagrin’s core of X.
1.2. DANCE ANALYSIS AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Nagrin uses analysis in several different ways. His six questions to aid choreographers to get to the core of X, explicated later in this chapter and in Appendix C.1, arguably is through analysis of the character and actions. When viewing and analysing dance, he considers the overall impression, impact, and meaning that is elicited. However, when choreographing, he states that analysis can be a “threat to the creative process . . . if it goes on too long” (Nagrin, 2001:41). Although several choreographic texts by others exist, Nagrin considers the focus

of their analysis and exposition [to be] structural, examining the trinity of Space, Time and Dynamics. Viewing the added factors of music, costume, lighting and content through the prism of these three elements supports a formal approach to choreography.

Nagrin, 2001:1

Also from my experience with him, Nagrin shuns formal dance analysis. Therefore, several models including description, interpretation, and evaluation were examined to find a model that suited this research. Analysis differs from criticism, which educates the lay person, as it is for “furthering knowledge . . . and increasing the depth of response” (Adshead, 1988:11). Dance analysis involves the relationship of elements between modes of description and objective and subjective values in order to interpret, evaluate, and discern meaning. It provides the structural framework for imagination and creativity by a detailed examination of its parts with a variety of ways in which to read the work (Adshead, 1988). What is on the surface or description, as well as how it is read or interpreted, needs to be treated. Francis Sparshott (1970:315) relates the factors of “felt quality” within each work develop the analytical criteria to expound and appreciate, such as the artwork’s description, reflection, and historical and contextual functions in validating human life and society. Internal considerations are the artist’s conception of the real world, the mental images of the artist, the choreographer’s theme and subject, emotion/experience and the effect on form and function, and the
dancer’s performance. These ideas are present in Marcia B. Siegel’s approach in which “simply describing dance” is inadequate since subjective and practical aspects need to be combined with sensual and expressive qualities (cited in Theodores, 1996:55). Sally Banes echoes this idea that analysis goes beyond description, writing that “content has triumphed over form” since the 1980s (Banes, 1994:21). These approaches were suitable for the whole of Nagrin’s dances since he lived in a particular time and place, which corresponds to my attempt to locate and situate his X.

Rudolph von Laban’s method and theories, particularly the development and application to dance, were examined briefly through various sources (such as Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop, 1990; Hutchinson Guest, 1977; Laban, 1966 and 1971; Maletic, 1987; Ness, 1987; Preston-Dunlop, 1998; and Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002). Although trained in Labanotation, this researcher’s decision not to use Laban-based theories for analysis included individual preference for and the desire to obtain proficiency in another model, suspicion that Laban’s form-based systems were not adequately suited to Nagrin’s non-formalist works, and respect for Nagrin’s preferences as he eschewed Laban’s method for analysing his works (Nagrin, 2004b). Although challenged as Euro-centric (Siegel in Gere, 1995), Laban’s systems are useful in the analysis of form, formal elements, spatial orientation, movement shape, body use, transitions, and an inner analysis based on heartbeat and breath rhythms (Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop, 1990; Hutchinson Guest, 1977; Laban, 1950/1971, and 1966; Maletic, 1987; and Preston-Dunlop, 1998). However, most of these “schemes and structures” were not of primary importance to Nagrin in creating his dances but used “only for the times when we slam into obstacles” (Nagrin, 2001:32). Therefore, the underpinnings of content would not be treated plausibly in the Laban system. Laban’s approach was based in some Delsarte theories, both using compositional form and rhythmic-spatial shapes of movement to communicate content and emotions happening on the inside (Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop, 1990; Laban, 1950/71; and Maletic, 1987). Nagrin, Tamiris, and Stanislavski did not embrace Delsarte’s ideas (Stanislavski, 1924/48 and Nagrin, 2001), examined further in the next chapter. The difference, which this researcher learned from Nagrin, was that he and Stanislavski focused on
the inner image to create movement or acting which resulted in emotions as well as shape and form. In contrast, Delsarte used detailed body mappings to emit “precise meanings for each possible position” in which the audience had to be informed previously (Nagrin, 1994:99).

Several scholars examined by this researcher applied and suggested music theory to dance analysis. Stephanie Jordan (2000), Linda Nutter (2000), Sophia Preston (1995), Rachel Richardson (1994), Marian Smith (1994), and to a lesser extent Angela Kane (2000 and 2003) have all examined the dance relationship to its musical counterpart regarding specific dance works of various choreographers. Employing the model of musicologists such as Charles Rosen (1971) and others, dance was analysed using the same elements such as duration, pitch, tempo, phrasing, patterning, and devices such as counterpoint and canons to elucidate meaning. This approach was not applicable to analyse how Nagrin derived his X as he rarely worked directly with or derived inspiration from the music, musical score, or sound.

This researcher also examined several post-structural approaches. Pauline Hodgens (in Adshead et al, 1988) defines the interpretative aspect of analysis as the process which reveals or makes sense of the specific object, activity, expression, or form of behaviour with the possibility of multiple results. She positions these into two categories: “concepts through which interpretations are made” or the background, context, genre, style, and subject matter; and “concepts relating to the interpretation of a specific dance” or character role, qualities, and meanings/significances (1988:60). She looks at dance characters, their location in time, and what they were doing to identify patterns of sameness as well as contrasting elements, then uses a contextual socio-political frame to deal with human oppression that was useful and applied to Nagrin’s works. She states that the structure of a dance carries and reveals the form, which contains significance and meaning; and multiple, plausible interpretations are valid (1988).

Susan Leigh Foster’s approach to dance analysis involves a post-structural frame or “blueprint” (Foster, 1986:59) of five components for choreographic meaning. It includes frame, defined as context determined by advertisements, location, setting, ticket price, programme notes, set design,
and the dancer’s gaze. Modes of representation are resemblance, imitation, replication, and reflection. Style involves movement quality, use of body parts, and the dancer’s orientation in the performance space. Vocabulary is the movement lexicon, and syntax determines why one movement follows another, resulting from mimesis or repetition, pathos or selection, and parataxis or sequencing. Analysis then proceeds from this established framework, just as Hayden White’s (1987; and in Munslow, 1997:12) literary tropisms or “figurative devices” (that is, metaphor, irony, metonymy, and synecdoche) and Michel Foucault’s (Munslow, 1997:126) deconstructive “epistemes” or historical ages (that is, Renaissance, Classical, Modern, and Postmodern) are used as analytical frames. Whilst the application of Foster’s approach to Nagrin’s works is merited and plausible, my adaptation from the models below was employed in this thesis since it is the reason that doctoral study under Janet Lansdale (previously Adshead) was pursued.

Janet Adshead’s (1988) model creates what she terms a text through the structural, conceptual, and theoretical aspects of a dance. She cites four parts which provide a tool for analysis: “describing the components” comparable to Preston-Dunlop’s “strands” or the “irreducible separate essentials” and their interrelatedness (Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg, 2002:39); and “discerning form, interpretation, and evaluating the dance” (Adshead, 1988:1). Dance analysis provides the structural framework for imagination and creativity by a detailed examination of the parts for evaluation and interpretation. Interpretation involves an examination of the dance elements that Hodgens mentioned above, all of which produce meaning and were useful directly to Nagrin’s works. Context or the development through history and the relational situating within a given society is important in understanding dance, which comes in many forms including performing, composing choreography, and writing about it (1988). Understanding can have a plurality of interpretations within the framework of the subject matter. Since the form and/or subject matter of a dance may be non-linear or abstract, Adshead argues that one must first create a text to see the form. This produces a linear development to determine what is attributed to the choreography or performance and to notate a value-free description as a language or means. This researcher developed a text through constructing
outlines for each of the case studies (see Appendix D). Choreographers may cite their intentions but are not in a position to state, in an unbiased manner, whether they have achieved this. Patterns then emerge for analysis (Adshead, 1988), and this approach suited Nagrin’s work.

Two other approaches to dance analysis, similar to Adshead’s, were examined by this researcher. June Layson (1987) suggests commencing analysis by identifying structural components and their relationships, then tracing the links and networks to reveal units and sections. An analytical framework is articulated through the overall complexities, climaxes, and predominances. Angela Kane (2003) divides a choreographer’s works into major categories, selects a representative prototype from each which was similar to Richardson’s (1994) approach, and then analyses contrasting elements of theme, structure, dynamics, and movement choices. These aspects in the approaches of Layson and Kane were amalgamated with Adshead’s to create a model using case studies applicable to this research and are treated further in Chapter 3.

Cultural theorist Jane Desmond (1997) argues that culture, including dance, is a construct that is shaped, defined, and identified reciprocally in its own time and place. This notion was used to situate Nagrin historically, socially, politically, and artistically in his own time and place. Cultural enactment is an embodied social practice, or marker, rendering the body as a text. However, in Western philosophy, bodily discourse has been omitted in scholarship in lieu of the mind. She argues for a rigorous analysis of movement to illuminate social identities codified in performance styles, such as organising patterns and processes of not just cognitive perception but of “emotional and kinaesthetic knowledge” to reveal a society’s traditions, history, and context of styles (Desmond, 1997:270). Several scholars support Desmond’s view, such as Susan Leigh Foster’s (2002a) situating bodily consciousness in the aesthetic and cultural moment, Julia Foulkes’ (2002) and Susan Manning’s (2004a) construction of the American modern dancing body, and the culturally engendered bodies of Amy Koritz (1995). Thus, contextuality cannot be separated from a post-structuralist study in the arts. This also was useful in understanding the inception of modern dance in America, the treatment of critics’ constructs of what constituted modern dance
and what they deemed worthy to review, and Nagrin’s Jewish-American body. Koritz blends a literary study to dance analysis with a resultant complex relationship to the context of engendered cultural production through a performative symbolist aesthetic. She draws from several literary artists to apply the role of dance practices on the enactment of culture and the gendered perception of dance in its specific time. This latter approach was not useful directly to Nagrin’s research, but proved helpful theoretically in defining modernism’s characteristics and Nagrin’s positioning within it.

Dance analysis involves a descriptive phenomenology and interpretation or hermeneutics of the dance work. These two philosophical aspects were treated briefly as they peripherally pertain to but affect the analysis of Nagrin’s works to get to the core of his X. Phenomenology entails describing the event, occurrence, or phenomenon; and this experience produces knowledge from introspection (Reid, 1969 and Peacock, 1986). From my experience with Nagrin, this is a reflexive idea that he hoped viewers would achieve through his works. Post-phenomenological theory added the questioning of whether or not what is seen is determined by what is known (McFee, 1992 and Theodores, 1996). This was useful in the case-study analysis of Nagrin’s four works due to his commitment to challenge the viewer, and particularly since this method of enquiry was prevalent within Nagrin’s time. Phenomenology is not concerned with re-making experience but with the experience as it is lived (Sheets-Johnstone, 1984), which directly applied to the analysis of Nagrin’s works. Creating, performing, and viewing dance is both lived experience and descriptive analysis (1984). It must be experienced in order to begin to understand and interpret the layers of felt meaning within it (Fraleigh, 1987 and Sheets-Johnstone, 1984). The lived body views the body as “meaningful and purposeful and is existentialistic and optimistic” as dance is an embodied, aesthetic form of expression (Fraleigh, 1987:4). This was an appropriate and useful way to view Nagrin’s works but is in direct contrast to empiricism, which promotes dualism. According to western philosopher René Descartes, dualism maintains the classic Dionysian/Apollonian, body/soul separation that views the body as negative, mechanistic, and inferior whilst privileging the superiority of the soul or mind. In contrast, Maurice Merleau-Ponty privileges body over mind as embodied
consciousness “emanates from the standpoint of experience” (Macann, 1993:180). Brenda Farnell’s (1994) New Realist Approach challenges both notions and calls for a balance between them. She asserts her view is wholistic, involving both cognitive processes and embodiment. These ideas are found in Siegel’s post-phenomenological approach (Theodores, 1996) that combines descriptive aspects of “what and how” with expressive and sensual qualities (Lavender, 1996:29). In post-phenomenological hermeneutics, meaning emerges and is constructed from the process of interpretation through interchanges between text, traditions, and cultural context. The very essence of the subject is valued within its various settings (Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999). Some aspects of these, such as Fraleigh’s approach, were useful in two ways: Nagrin used lived experience and felt knowledge particularly within his alienation devices; and this analysis is corroborated by my lived experiences with Nagrin, his works, and his methods.

1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

My search for the core of X included the corpus of primary and secondary source materials on Daniel Nagrin that were found in various archives, identified and examined in this section. The archives provided the foundational materials in which to begin the evaluation and analysis of Nagrin’s concert works by constructing a framework for the critical scrutiny of his methodology. All sources were examined for reliability, validity, and usefulness in providing insights into Nagrin’s life and works. Discerning patterns, making comparisons, and articulating differences within his work and among others in his time was possible through critical discourse based upon these source materials, leading to informed conclusions about Nagrin’s choreographic and performative styles.

Several articles and manuscripts were examined, and mostly published articles on Nagrin or comments on his performances and/or choreographic processes were found. Other records in this category were some of Nagrin’s authored articles for various dance publications on various subjects. Health and video articles authored by Nagrin (1960, 1982, 1988b, 1988c, 1999) were eliminated as these were not pertinent directly to his choreographic methods.
or biographical context. Articles on choreography, the choreographic process, and comments from other choreographers proved valid and were used in the research. Nagrin's own article, “In Quest of a Dance” for Dance Magazine, September 1951, revealed his choreographic process and inspiration for Strange Hero (1948) and Dance in the Sun (1951). Marcia B. Siegel’s (1969) article on Nagrin’s “War” diary in Dance Perspectives revealed his notes on his choreographic methods of finding movement for Peloponnesian War (1968). All of these were useful analytically, stylistically, and contextually.

Comments from dancers, choreographers, and others proved valuable. Bill Evans, performer, choreographer, and Professor Emeritus of dance at the University of New Mexico, discusses his recollections and influences of Nagrin (2002), which initially appears biased but are validated by other writings on Nagrin’s works throughout the decades. These comments illuminate the effects of Nagrin’s choreographic process and perception of his works. An article in the London publication, Dance Scope, by composer Stanley Walden (1967-68) gives insights into what he called collaboration with Nagrin. Although a valid source, this article was not useful as Nagrin’s choreographic approach was not discussed.

Other articles on Nagrin’s background and professional work, accomplishments, awards, and achievements were useful for historical, biographical, and contextual purposes. A few articles give general historical and empirical information but were of little use as these did not contain information about his stylistic choices. These were Anatole Chujoy’s (1958) comments on Nagrin’s concert and master classes at the University of Wisconsin, and William J. Martin’s (1960) article on Nagrin’s performance and master classes at Culver Military Academy in Indiana. Anonymous entries such as Dance Magazine’s pictorial “Christmas Carousel” (1971) of dance artists and companies including the Boston Ballet, Daniel Nagrin, and James Cunningham also were of little use as there were no photographs of Nagrin, but what was mentioned only was that he did perform.

The seven-volume International Encyclopaedia of Dance edited by Selma Jeanne Cohen lists a short but concise entry of Nagrin by Schlundt (1998a) and another on Tamiris (1998b). Terse, factual information on their lives and works proved to be important for support and consistency of
scholarly and critical materials. Articles from critics were used to validate research findings. Although Siegel’s “Dance Before Bennington” in Dance Research Journal (1987) contains no information on Nagrin, it was a valuable contextual source of American modern dance history from the late 1920s. She provides pertinent information on Tamiris and illuminates Tamiris’ influence on the career and life of Nagrin. Critic Deborah Jowitt’s (1974) article on the emergent 20th Century male modern dance roles discuss the concept of masculinity in dance. She uses Nagrin as the standard of comparison to other male choreographers, which was useful in situating Nagrin within the social, cultural, and artistic milieu of dance of that time.

Useful books or sections of books on Nagrin were from, alphabetically, Susan Leigh Foster (2002b), John Gruen (1988), Don McDonagh (1976), Christena Schlundt (1997), Helen Tamiris (1928/1989), and Nagrin (1988a, 1994, 1997, and 2001) himself. Each of the sources provides a different theoretical means of treating the data, illuminating different aspects, and obtaining a multiplicity of voices. The strengths and weaknesses of the writers are illuminated, and these collectively provide a more complete but not comprehensive picture of Nagrin. In particular, Schlundt, Foster, and Gruen uncover cultural influences affecting the formulation of Nagrin’s choreographic methods, which corroborate the writings of Tamiris and Nagrin. Schlundt is an historical chronicler; Foster utilises a descriptively historical and post-structural semiotics base; Gruen takes a biographical approach; McDonagh provides both chronicled facts and descriptive first-hand accounts; and the accounts by Tamiris and Nagrin are autobiographical or “auto-ethnographic” (Meglin, 1999:106).

Foster’s section on Nagrin’s Workgroup in Dances that Describe Themselves (2002b) begins by giving a brief description of the background, justification, and theoretical underpinnings for the creation of the improvisational Workgroup and provides a valuable insight into Nagrin’s choreographic method at this time. She probes Nagrin’s philosophical influences, some methodological exercises, and his performer/audience connection, corroborating his writings on theatrical devices and philosophy. Although the extent of metaphor and heart/mind are not probed, this was useful in Chapter 6.
Gruen’s book is based on interviews and observations of dancers and their works. He pens Nagrin as “the great loner of American dance” (1988:96) and as one of the leading solo artists in the United States. He gives a biographical recapitulation of Nagrin’s career from the 1960s with the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company to his current status as professor emeritus at Arizona State University. Gruen also discusses Nagrin’s philosophical methods and influences, particularly those of Helen Tamiris and Constantin Stanislavski’s method of acting. His insights were useful biographically, historically, and contextually, and directly applied to the research.

McDonagh’s brief first-hand description of some of Nagrin’s works chronicle highlights from his career in a chapter in The Complete Guide to Modern Dance (1976). Although he confuses dates and therefore is not reliable in this respect, his information was useful historically and for comparative validation.

Schlundt’s Daniel Nagrin: A Chronicle of His Professional Career (1997) is the most useful book on his life and work. Although she uses both primary and secondary source materials, her selection of performance reviews is problematic and is not without suspicion of bias. With a few exceptions of erroneous dates and misspelled names in the index, the chronology is reliable and useful contextually and philosophically since my aim was not to create a biography or choreochronicle of Nagrin. She divides the book into two parts, the first dealing with Nagrin’s life through dance until he left the concert stage in 1982. The second part is devoted to documentation and chronological listings that illuminate such points as his continuous college residencies from 1957 to 1982, therefore justifying Schlundt’s assertion that he is important in American dance history. Schlundt scatters biographical information throughout, discusses Nagrin’s influences, chronicles his performances and choreographies, illuminates tensions and conflicts, and elucidates theoretically his doing-acting approach to choreography. Nagrin provided her with personal handwritten descriptive notes on several works that revealed and aided in an understanding of his philosophy, choreographic methods, and processes.

A few publications on Tamiris were useful historically, contextually, philosophically, and comparatively. The first was “Tamiris in Her Own Voice:
draft of an autobiography” which is transcribed, edited, and annotated by Nagrin in *Studies in Dance History* (1928/1989). It is an incomplete text of an original draft that Nagrin thought Tamiris wrote in 1928 just before her European tour. Both Tamiris and Nagrin reworked it in 1950 from her handwritten updated manuscript of 1939. This 1939 version is housed in the NYPL archives and is closed until after his death. A primary source document, even though edited by Nagrin and therefore suspect for bias, “Tamiris in Her Own Voice” contains reliable and useful information to arguably trace her impact and influence philosophically, politically, and methodologically upon Nagrin’s career. An important, useful section for contextual influence was Tamiris’ “Manifest” (Tamiris, 1928/89) (see Appendix B.1), printed in her second solo concert programme of 29 January 1928. Schlundt wrote an empirically based chronicle of Tamiris in 1972 entitled *Tamiris: A Chronicle of Her Dance Career 1927 – 1955*. Although a secondary source document with reliability suspect, it provided the needed background understanding on the life of Tamiris; the political, cultural, and dance milieu of the times; her influence on Nagrin; and gave contextual insights. Schlundt traces Tamiris’ socio-political connections with the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Dance Theatre, her Broadway successes during the 1940s and 50s, and her affiliation with the Group Theatre. Due to their personal and professional relationship, any reliable information on Tamiris was useful for researching Nagrin, his work and method, and for synthesizing the extent of the notion of influence.

Nagrin wrote four books: *How to Dance Forever, Surviving Against the Odds* (1988a); *Dance and the Specific Image, Improvisation* (1994); *The Six Questions, Acting Technique for Dance Performance* (1997); and *Choreography and the Specific Image, Nineteen Essays and a Workbook* (2001). Except for the first which focuses on the health and longevity aspects of a dancer’s career interspersed with some biographical and chronological information, the remainder proved to be valuable sources of insights into Nagrin’s methods, which is the focus of this research. Nagrin’s books reveal useful insights into his core of X: background, thought processes, and work, including working with professional partner and wife Helen Tamiris. His book on improvisation discusses his new way of working with his company, The
Workgroup, based on ideas gleaned from Open Theatre director Joseph Chaikin. This was a very useful resource in Chapter 6, as well as my recollections from his improvisation classes. These elucidate the formulation, growth, and development of his philosophies and choreographic methods, which are open to critical scrutiny. In his last two books for actors and choreographers, Nagrin outlines his six-step choreographic method, the method in which I have been trained (see Appendix C.1 for more detail):

1. Who or what? (the subject)
2. Is doing what? (the verb; action analysis of spine, beats, subtext)
3. To whom or to what? (the object)
4. Where and when? (the context)
5. To what end? (the reason for the action)
6. What is the obstacle? (justifies theatrical viability)

(Nagrin, 1997:34 and 2001:30)

Therefore, these last three books were referenced considerably, particularly in gaining insights into, tracing consistent patterns in, and interrogating his choreographic method of getting to the core of X.

Book reviews, which are considered secondary source material but which may contain informed commentary, did not prove as useful. The book review of Schlundt’s *Daniel Nagrin: A Chronicle* by Barbara Palfry (1999), editorial associate for *Dance Chronicle* and *Ballet Review*, appeared in *Dance Research Journal* (1999). Palfry highly favours this author which raises the question of bias. Perhaps the only value of this review lies in the statement that Schlundt “sets out to rectify the omission” (1999:100) that Nagrin is an under-recognized American modern dancer.

Susanna Sloat’s book review of Nagrin’s *Dance and the Specific Image: Improvisation* in the periodical *Attitude* 11:1, Spring (1995) affirms Nagrin’s and Tamiris’ places in dance history and confirms from her perspective the influences on Nagrin. However, Sloat (1995:57) makes a few statements that arguably are open to debate, such as Nagrin and Tamiris were “part of the older movement in modern dance against which the Judson avant-garde” explicitly was rebelling. Another debatable statement is that Nagrin first “began using improvisation in 1969" as a way of exploring
movement. This was the only usefulness of this article as no analytical evaluation was offered.

Two book reviews for *The Six Questions: Acting Techniques for Dance Performance* (1997) were found. McDonagh’s (1997) appears in *Dance Magazine* and gives a quick biography commemorating Nagrin’s 80th birthday and a very brief review of *The Six Questions*. The book review was not useful, but the highlights of Nagrin’s biography were useful comparatively. Joellen A. Meglin (1999) speaks of this text in *Dance Research Journal* as a dance historian and composition teacher, calling this a “theoretical and practical manual from the horse’s mouth” (1999:104). She justifies Nagrin’s credibility for writing this book by stating his background and adding contextualised information on the era. Meglin confirms the influences, comments extensively on his theories and methodologies, illuminates strengths, similarities and differences with other choreographers, recognises his weak points, and applies his work in her current choreography classes. She summarizes briefly Nagrin’s career with an analytical view and debatably positions Nagrin as a high modernist. Meglin’s comments were a reliable and valid source; useful historically, philosophically, theoretically, and methodologically; and address one of this researcher’s concluding arguments situating Nagrin as modern or postmodern.

Peer-reviewed conference papers, proceedings, and articles were considered valid and reliable sources. These are not without bias that is inherent in all source materials (Jenkins, 1991), but rather used as a counter-reading of different kinds of resources that are needed and negotiated by this researcher. Robyn Bissell’s (1992) paper on *Daniel Nagrin’s Path Abroad 1967* on Nagrin’s European tour has validity in this research process for its historical and chronological content. Bissell uses both primary sources such as original concert programmes and concert reviews for the bases of her research. Her findings constitute a chapter in Schlundt’s (1997) chronicle of Nagrin’s career.

The Tamiris Conference organised by Nagrin at Arizona State University in April 1986 focused on Tamiris’ choreographic methods. Norma Adler’s (1986-87) “Reports: Tamiris Conference” reveals that Adler, a professor at New York University at the time of its publication, neither
attended the conference nor stated how she obtained her information. Therefore, the reliability and validity of her article is questionable. However, the information on Tamiris’ principles of choreography, which differ significantly from her contemporaries, was useful contextually and comparatively to Nagrin’s choreographic methods.

Nagrin’s (1989) Society of Dance History Scholars’ paper, “Helen Tamiris and the Dance Historians,” states his marital bias and his fear that Tamiris will disappear from dance history altogether. Nagrin discusses her marginalisation, controversies, and inconsistencies with the writing of Tamiris’ past, gives specific examples, and states how he conducted and validated his findings which are important for reliability and credibility. Nagrin comments on Tamiris’ background and principles, listing the main points of her manifesto (see Appendix B.1) without reservation. With factual evidence and the writings of others, he considers her a pioneer of modern dance and chronicles her “innovations and firsts” (1989:41). This source was useful historically and contextually in analysing her influence and their subsequent marginalisations.

A concert reviews category was created after assessing the amount of critical reviews of Nagrin’s choreographic works and performances. It includes his early days at Unity House, Broadway shows, solo dance portraits and full-evening concerts, experimental works with the improvisational Workgroup, and concert reviews of others such as Shane O’Hara to whom Nagrin gives permission to perform his works. The research concentrates on reviews of his concert works such as his dance portraits, various concerts, and the Workgroup. Some of the reviewers, alphabetically, are Clive Barnes, Suzanne Carbonneau, Selma Jeanne Cohen, Jennifer Dunning, Isabel Ferguson, Anne Hutchinson Guest, Fernau Hall, Doris Hering, Louis Horst, Deborah Jowitt, Anna Kisselgoff, Phyllis Manchester, Marcia Marks, John Martin, Don McDonagh, Jean Nuchtern, Linda Small, Gus Solomons, Walter Terry, Anne Tobias, Tobi Tobias, and David Vaughan. Every concert critique was useful and considered. In order to assess reliability, the hagiographical nature of critical writing, their aesthetic genre preferences, and Jenkins’ (1991) ‘for whom did they write’ dictum was examined and contrasted with the ballet and early modern reviewers such as Louis Horst and John Martin. For example, two separate reviews of the same
concert given by Nagrin in October 1957, one by Hering for Dance Magazine and the other by Horst for Dance Observer, illustrate this point. These two reviewers had vastly diverse reviews of the same concert, raising questions of bias and reliability, which is explored further in Chapter 4. Concert reviews of Nagrin’s work span the 1940s to the 1990s with others performing his works. All of these were useful. It is noted that the initial search for Nagrin’s concert reviews show none in Village Voice or by Deborah Jowitt, Jill Johnson, Arlene Croce, or Marcia B. Siegel, even though these critics reviewed dance concerts during Nagrin’s performance career. However, Jowitt and Siegel did write articles on Nagrin. This absence was investigated in Chapter 3 and the thesis Conclusions, particularly in regard to Nagrin’s positioning as modern or postmodern and his marginalisation.

The original concert programmes at the New York Public Library (NYPL) were valuable as primary source documents verifying concerts, dates, places, works, dancers, theatre venues, musicians, crew, et cetera. The repeated pattern was noted of Nagrin entitling his solo dances “Dance Portraits” based on various characters. It was evident that Nagrin’s concert background was extensive and spanned five decades. The National Resource Centre for Dance at the University of Surrey holds an original programme of Nagrin’s LAMDA Theatre solo concert performance in London on 6-7 May 1967 from his European tour. This was used to ascertain what works were performed in particular concerts and to obtain other information listed in the programmes.

Film, videotapes, and DVDs of Nagrin’s actual concert footage and studio performances are included in this category, as well as my interviews with other dancers such as Bill Evans who performed Nagrin’s works. It also includes discussions in which Nagrin was one of the dance panellists; Tamiris’ choreography with Nagrin as performer; and other dance companies performing his works such as the Limón Dance Company. The Tangent videotape consists of a moderated panel of dancers/choreographers discussing their careers, produced sometime during the 1970s. Nagrin speaks very little during this panel, and the information is redundant and of little use.

The *Jazz and Me Video with a Lecture by Daniel Nagrin* (1991) was taped during his summer workshop at Stanford University’s Dance Division. Five dances are shown, including the case study *Strange Hero* narrated by Martha Myers at a studio in Boston, MA, in 1962. Nagrin speaks of his background, and then answers specific questions. Both of these sections were very useful, and his lecture reveals historical and biographical information and comments undisclosed elsewhere. An American Dance Legacy Institute documentary videotape (2003) by Arizona State University’s Institute of the Arts entitled *Daniel Nagrin: The Great Loner of American Dance* was obtained and proved useful, although brief, for biographical information (Britton, 2002). Of particular importance were the concert videotapes and DVDs obtained from Nagrin by this researcher. These were important for observing the dances in order to understand and analyse his choreographic methods, trace patterns, and bring clarity to his concert reviews. These contributed to the style and genre evaluations, and justified my division of his career into four thematic categories.
The archival photographs at the NYPL are by photographers Marcus Blechman, Peter Basch, Paul Dennis, Walter E. Owen, and several for which no credit is given. Some photographs include Tamiris and their workshops and performances together, and others simply of Nagrin in concert. Also in this category are photographs discovered elsewhere in various books, periodicals, and from Nagrin’s website. Some of these photographs, particularly of the Workgroup, were useful in the analysis.

A miscellaneous category includes various items. A few copies of advertisements in Dance Observer magazines in 1963 cover a variety of topics, but these were of little use. Website pages viewed included Nagrin’s, Arizona State University’s Institute for Studies in the Arts Special Collections, the University of California-Riverside’s special collections, the LAMDA Drama School, and various scholars and authors. Several museums were visited which provided information and contextual understanding aesthetically, culturally, and historically. Further aesthetic understanding of modernism and postmodernism was gleaned from the Tate Britain, The National Gallery of Art in London, and the Art Institute in Chicago. A Polynesian war club in Chicago’s anthropological Field Museum illuminated Nagrin’s use of cultural essences within With My Eye and With My Hand (1957). The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, provided pre-WW II cultural background information on Eastern European Judaism and illuminated Russian-Jewish thought in the early to mid 20th Century. All this information proved useful for historical purposes.

1.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to find a research frame, or my X, in which to examine the choreographic methods of Daniel Nagrin; and in particular, to trace patterns in his core of X. Post-structural historical and contextual methodologies and aspects of dance analysis were selected as appropriate for this research topic. The complementary new history methods of Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Keith Jenkins (1991 and 2001) were chosen to guide the research, since Nagrin’s core of X needs to be contextualised historically and artistically. The dance analysis approach featuring four
specific case studies was based on my amalgamation of selected aspects of the Adshead (1988), Kane (2003), and Layson (1987) models. An extensive literature review conducted on two continents identified sources available, which was organized into specific categories. Each category item was reviewed for reliability and validity of sources and source materials, and their potential usefulness to the research was articulated.

The underlying hypothesis is to reveal Nagrin's method of getting to the core of X and to argue that it is useful, has been marginalized, and is worthy of analysis, illumination, and application. It is my assumption that Nagrin's choreographic methods remained intact throughout his career but at the same time reflected changes and growth in his works. Although there is sufficient biographical, concert, and descriptive literature on Nagrin, there exists no formal analysis of his choreographic methods or concert works. The most significant literature comes from Nagrin himself in the books he has written.

Since a new history approach involves the shifting discourse of multiple voices, including my own, to construct events and situations of the past (Jenkins, 1991), questions emerged to find the core of X within Nagrin and his choreographic methods. Applying Hutcheon's (1988) contextual cultural history position from the present perspective, the extent to which Nagrin's values and existentialist beliefs regarding his Eastern European Jewish heritage and influences on his work are examined in Part 1. The context of living and dancing in New York City from the 1930s to the 1980s is probed. An attempt is made to situate Nagrin's works within the above social and institutional hegemonies and to reveal the extent of such in his work. How Nagrin's styles compare and contrast to other concurrent choreographers, and whether other choreographers and artists affected his work are examined. His marginalisation from modern dance history is addressed as well as the hagiographical nature or approach of critical writing. In Part 2, a dance analysis approach is taken to reveal his methods of choreography and how he reached the core of X. Four case studies representative of the defined four unique periods are used. Nagrin's progression from the 1940s to the 1980s is traced and analysed for patterns and consistent threads to produce his own distinctive choreographic and performance styles.
Negotiating Nagrin’s situating into a larger cultural movement is tenuous, since a definite categorical label may not be plausible.

The ethical issue of bias needs to be addressed as my own experience with Nagrin and his works and method is voiced throughout this thesis. My intent is not to make this a personal account but rather to strengthen the arguments. Since bias is ubiquitous, Jenkins’ (1991) urge for critical distance was attempted by this researcher to ensure objectivity and validity. Therefore, the rigorous use of specific methodological, historical, and analytical tools suited to the materials was employed throughout this thesis.

ENDNOTES

1 This correlates with post-positivism, an umbrella term describing a variety of approaches responding to the limitations of Auguste Comte’s positivism of laws/truths. His theory, based on direct observation of empirical phenomena and ascertained facts, attempts to prove or disprove an hypothesis (Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999; & Jenkins, 1991).

2 Warren Lamb and Marion North further develop the dynamosphere by adding the personality assessment and action profiling such as the “attitudes (effort/mental)” of weight, space, time, and flow. Varying in quality and intensity, 72 of them were codified by Laban (Maletic, 1987:97 & 99), categorizing these into the eight basic motions or actions of punch, slash, dab, flick, press, wring, glide, float (Laban, 1950).

3 Nagrin served on this panel along with Anna Sokolow, Charles Weidman, Stuart Hodes, and Valerie Bettis. Jeff Duncan, Director of the Dance Theatre Workshop, moderated.
CHAPTER 2: GETTING TO THE CORE

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is not to present an in-depth biography of Nagrin but to get to his personal and situational cores through the examination of the literature. New history’s contextual approaches are used to probe the personal, historical, and cultural relationships between Nagrin and his time, place, and possible influences (Hutcheon, 1988). This method leads to a deeper synchronic understanding of the development of his choreographic method and styles. As Keith Jenkins (1991) indicates, events in time and similarities and differences in the literature can be illuminated. It also permits a “dialogue with the past” (Hutcheon, 1988:20) to occur for my analytical re-construction of the times in which Nagrin lived and worked.

2.1. PERSONAL CONTEXTS

A survey and evaluation of the biographical literature reveals several different types of sources. Three interviews with Nagrin, two in 1975, were found. Barbara Newman (1975) conducts the first for the oral history dance collection at the New York Public Library; and the other by John Gruen (1975) for Dance Magazine, later published as a chapter in his book, People Who Dance: 22 dancers tell their own stories (1988). A later interview by Cynthia Roses-Thema (2003) focuses on only one of Nagrin’s reviews and a book on acting techniques, and her ethnographic premise of his work is questioned in Chapter 6. Nagrin’s 1990 videotaped lecture at Stanford University (Nagrin, 1991) and Christena Schlundt’s (1997) chronicle of Nagrin’s career contain much of the biographical information found in Gruen’s interview. In contrast, Newman treats Nagrin’s choreographic processes, what motivated him, and his underpinning philosophy. All of the above were scrutinised against Nagrin’s own autobiographical ruminations interspersed throughout his books (particularly 1988a), the Stanford (1991) and Arizona State University (2003) documentary videotapes, and my experience. All of these are useful for
comparative consistency and further illumination of ideas and content emergent in Nagrin’s works.

Schlundt (1997) treats Nagrin’s career in the following categories referenced by her chapter titles: Beginnings 1935-1939; Early Performances, 1940-1944; Musical Theatre, 1940-1956; Dance Portraits, 1948-1965; The Peloponnesian War, 1965-1969; and Touring and Teaching, 1954-1982. Nagrin, in How To Dance Forever (1988a), divides his career into distinct chronological time periods which, in Appendix A.1, which I have charted and entitled “Dates.” His explanations are paraphrased and re-categorised into what I term “Genres/Styles” (Nagrin, 1988a:357-58) as I combined some of his dates to elucidate the content. To clarify Nagrin’s fluid genres and styles over the decades, I divided his career into “Categories” for continued investigation in order to illuminate the relevant research potential. These resultant categories are: The Early Years, Broadway, Dance Portraits, The Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company, Solo Concerts, The Workgroup, On the Road Again, and Professorship and Beyond. This delineation illuminates Nagrin’s genre differences and lays a foundation for his potential stylistic underpinnings. Using a new history approach, each is treated below to get to Nagrin’s personal and situational cores by constructing a framework of his past events (Jenkins, 1991) for further analysis. As a student, Nagrin would mention his background at times, and these recollections corroborate much of the research findings.

The Early Years. Schlundt (1997) and Gruen (1988) fragmentally construct Nagrin’s New York Eastern European Jewish heritage, rich in ethnic songs and customs. Both Nagrin and Tamiris are first generation Americans of Russian/Jewish immigrants (Nagrin, 1991). Nagrin, born 22 May 1917 in New York City and an only child (Schlundt, 1997), was shy and withdrawn into his adolescent years since his family frequently moved around Brooklyn for economic reasons (Nagrin, 2001). Since the rough neighbourhoods were not conducive to playing outside and making new friends, Nagrin remained indoors, using the excuse of needing long hours for homework. I recall Nagrin saying that he released his adolescent energy by turning on the radio during study breaks to “intoxicating” Armenian rhythms, and then “exploded . . . to the music” (Nagrin, 1988a:356). At a high school party prior to graduation, he
witnessed a female student in a familiar pose that he had improvised many times during his study breaks. Upon inquiry, he learned this was a Graham hinge (1988a).

Nagrin enrolled at City College in 1935 for a degree in psychiatry (Gruen, 1988; Nagrin, 1991; and Schlundt, 1997). He took his first dance class there in the spring of 1936 with former Martha Graham dancer Ray Moses and was “fascinated” by Graham’s technique. In May, he viewed a week of dance concerts by the National Dance Congress at the 92nd Street YMHA (Young Men’s Hebrew Association) and was “shaken” by dancer Harry Losee, whose stillness was broken by violent rib cage contractions. This unexpected movement proved to Nagrin (1994 and 2001) that a soloist could create a complex world on stage, and that made sense to him. While writing a dance review for a sociology class in 1937, Nagrin realised he did not want to write about dance, but do it. Informing his parents resulted in an all-night argument, culminating with his father’s reluctant approval and financial support for one year (1988a).

In the next several years, Nagrin absorbed himself with professional training in New York. He studied music with a Dalcroze teacher and ballet with Mme Anderson-Ivantzova, Nenette Charisse, and Edward Caton (Nagrin, 1988a and Schlundt, 1997). He took acting classes with The Group Theatre teachers Sanford Meisner, Stella Adler, and Miriam Goldina (Nagrin, 1997). He received a one-year scholarship to study with Graham (Nagrin, 1997), where he learned how to work as a soloist and whose technique was “‘brilliant, beautiful, close to my bones’” (Schlundt, 1997:8). His first professional performance was with Anna Sokolow’s company in 1940 (Nagrin, 1997) while attending City College. Sokolow’s Russian Socialist philosophy of using art to illuminate and challenge society arguably influenced Nagrin throughout his professional career. Schlundt referred to this impact as “consciousness of societal change [that] became embedded in Nagrin’s aesthetic” (1997:8). Nagrin often spoke of this as concern for the human condition. I refer to it as his social agency message through dance since his works deal with people, their responses to current social aspects or crises at the time, and the message delivered which often was intended for audience reflection. As his choreography student, Nagrin would encourage us that our
dances, through finding the core of X, contain a message or something intriguing sans solution with which the audience could connect and reflect upon. This reflective, connective content is something that could be pondered long after the performance ended; as Nagrin would tell us, “give them something to take home to think about.” This is known as alienation. As a result, he hoped that they would never be the same again due to deeper understanding, personal action, and/or a decision. Thus, through dance, he reached the mind/intellect via the door to the heart/emotions. Nagrin’s social agency, alienation, and his heart/mind approach are probed further throughout the thesis, as these are at the core of his X.

Upon graduating in 1940 from City College with a Bachelor of Science and Master’s of Science in Health Education, Nagrin immediately auditioned for Esther Junger at Unity House, the vacation resort of the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union in the Pennsylvania Poconos (Nagrin, 1988a and Schlundt, 1997). By default, he was hired and met fellow dancer Sue Remos who introduced him to “classic” (or what he means as “‘authentic’ historical dance forms”) jazz dance and music at Harlem’s Savoy Ballroom (Nagrin, 1994:143) at the peak of the Harlem Renaissance (Jonas, 1992). There, he learned the popular dances of the period: Lindy Hop (later called jitterbug and swing), Charleston, blues, Latino, and cakewalk. Nagrin incorporated these into his jazz dance course that I took from him four decades later. For him, the social dance floor was:

the birthplace of much of what we dancers do. On it, we can encounter some parts of what we really are, unexpected truths, joy and a profound reservoir of what makes dance.
Nagrin, 1994:10

As a result, Nagrin developed a passion for classic jazz music and dance and used these to explore characters in the creation of his trademark Dance Portraits (McDonagh, 1997). From viewing the videotapes, his full-evening solo concert, Jazz Changes (1975), used all jazz music and dances and is discussed in Part 2. By the time I studied jazz from Nagrin, he referred to this classic style as “vernacular jazz,” vehemently distinguishing it from the style found in much of Broadway of his time and in music videos of then 1980s.
For instance, he would never permit us to perform a high kick that exposed the crotch to the audience as it was “vulgar” and lacked “taste.” He also was repulsed by the typical Broadway use of jazz with its pelvic thrusts (called bump and grind) movements, later writing that it is a “violent, bruising, and naïve metaphor for the act of sex” (Nagrin, 1994:144). He credits Jack Cole with this world-renown “show jazz” style associated with “show business” that transforms women into “whores,” has simplistic, unsyncopated rhythms with a “continuous hammering of eight to the bar” with the sole purpose of “delivering sex like a battering ram” (1994:144). In contrast, Nagrin “delights” in the “intricacies of rhythm, humor, show-off, sheer joy in living – and yes, with a sexy innuendo” that is inherent in classical jazz (1994:144). Although I knew and performed most of these dances before taking his jazz class, what differed was that Nagrin demanded from us a complex physical interplay with the music’s syncopation that was both heard with and felt in and through the body. This was challenging and frustrating as I recall the difficulty with the bodily rhythms in dancing one of the jitterbug steps with the music exactly the way he determined it to be heard and done. The analysis in Chapter 4 further interrogates his jazz dance style of interplay with the music in some of his Dance Portraits.

Nagrin worked again at Unity House the following summer of 1941, this time under choreographer and later-to-be wife Helen Tamiris “for whom jazz was in the very bones of how she defined America” (Nagrin, 1994:143). But, working for Tamiris was confusing. I was thrilled to get the job and yet I harbored hostility, [even] though I’d been moved earlier by seeing her in concert several times . . . We were monogamists in those days and my loyalty was for the teaching and technique in which I was initially grounded – those of Martha Graham.

Nagrin, 2001:10

His hostility dissipated as Tamiris encouraged his strength and power as a dancer in spite of his technical inexperience. They connected very quickly due to their mutual Stanislavski-based training, and she helped him fuse acting techniques with dance (Nagrin, 1994, 1997, and 2001), which are treated in-depth later in this chapter. From Tamiris, Nagrin learned to work
from improvisation and impulse rather than technique. She used movement metaphors instead of words, and as he both performed and created his dances she would often pose the Stanislavski-like question, “Who are you and what do you want?” (Gruen, 1975 and Nagrin, 1988a:100-101). Nagrin worked with Tamiris for twenty-three years.

Using Hutcheon’s (1988) and Adshead’s (1988) contextualisation of an artist’s relationship to his time and past, the experiences of Nagrin’s early years and the influences of his dance and acting teachers and colleagues arguably were seminal in framing his dance career. Tamiris’ and Stanislavski’s methods were examined to trace the possibility of the extent of their influences upon Nagrin, and their backgrounds provide interesting insights into how and why these could shape Nagrin’s philosophical and methodological choreographic positions. Nagrin (2001) admits that although he was changed and educated initially by Graham, Tamiris ultimately had the greatest influence upon him. Through Tamiris’ careful artisanship, he developed, tested, and “honed” his choreographic methods of getting to the core of X “through the sieve of her brilliance and brutality” (Gruen, 1988; Nagrin, 2001:10; and Schlundt, 1997). Nagrin’s choreographic methods and philosophy, as well as how these were created and developed, need to be illuminated, analysed, and contextualised against the hotbed of New York’s social realism and existentialist modern dance environments of the 1930s and 1940s.

Broadway. Nagrin’s Broadway career began in 1940 with ‘Tis of Thee and ended by choice with Plain and Fancy in 1956 (Schlundt, 1997:16). In 1942, Nagrin was drafted into the United States’ Army Air Force due to the unrelenting remarks of a dance critic that he was not fighting in the war (McDonagh, 1997 and Schlundt, 1997), but within a few months received a medical discharge due to severe myopia. Upon returning, he worked again with Tamiris who was now on Broadway, successfully blending high art with popular culture. On Broadway, Tamiris’ choreographic method was to be immersed thoroughly in the style, content, and context of the material and “evolve movement to heighten [the plays] were they need heightening” (Schlundt, 1997:17). Nagrin (2001:12) states that she worked quickly and absorbed the “style and rhythm of whatever songs or production numbers
came her way.” She believed that the dances should not interfere with the action nor take over from the plot, but that the dance and show were a whole (Schlundt, 1997). Schlundt (1997:19) comments that Walter Terry, dance critic for the New York Herald Tribune, noticed that Tamiris did not “sandwich” her dances into musicals but that they were seamless. The “Wild Horse” dance from Annie Get Your Gun is a good example of how this worked: it was woven into the plot rather than being a separate dance; and it highlighted the star, Ethel Merman. Nagrin (2001:3) says Tamiris “never lost her integrity choreographing in that arena” and constantly maintained her “good taste.” She “never tried to thrust her own agenda into a script,” and “everything she did became the style of the particular show of the moment” (2001:12 & 13). The question arises as to whether Tamiris’ seamlessness between the dance and the story and the blending or fusion with popular culture influenced Nagrin and created a foundation for his future methods.

Tamiris and Nagrin were married 6 September 1946 (Schlundt, 1997:20). They continued to work on Broadway together throughout the next decade and a half, she as choreographer and he as leading dancer and her assistant to shows such as “Stovepipe Hat, Marianne, Up in Central Park, Show Boat, Annie Get Your Gun, Inside U.S.A., By the Beautiful Sea, Touch and Go, and Plain and Fancy” (Nagrin, 2001:10 & 13). Louis Horst of Dance Observer and New York Times critic John Martin highly acclaimed their work on Broadway, and Martin further commented that Nagrin treated the movement material with the same honesty and creativity as on the concert stage (Schlundt, 1997). Schlundt (1997:26) writes that Nagrin’s Broadway dances were “researched, accurate, and true.” I recall Nagrin saying that after performing his “Wild Horse” dance from touring Annie Get Your Gun in the upper Midwest, he was met backstage by a young Native American woman demanding he tell her who from her tribe taught him that dance. Nagrin danced in two Hollywood films including His Majesty O’Keefe (1954), danced on television, and choreographed the off-Broadway play Volpone which was reviewed as “brilliantly fresh” due to using different movement approaches that provided continuity and flow (Todd, 1957:27).

However, performing on Broadway was a mixed experience. Nagrin and Tamiris left due to the “frustration” and pressure from producers, agents,
and stars to please the public and make everything “socko . . . a blast” (Nagrin, 2001:3). He recalls Broadway’s non-reality approach of “coming off stage with my lip stuck to my upper gum from smiling non-stop for seven minutes,” but states his worst memory was the “exquisite” dancers that were cut from shows because their performances were not a “blast” (2001:13). By the time of Plain and Fancy in 1956, both he and Tamiris “had their fill” of the entertaining Broadway business, and pursued concert work instead,

the mysteries and delights of the world as I experienced them, probe them and find a shape for them as my gift to whoever [sic] chose to see my work. Nothing here [in this book] will be a guide to “knocking them dead,” only to finding movement and dances that are important to you.

Nagrin, 2001:3

Dance Portraits. Overlapping his Broadway experience, Nagrin began to choreograph a few concert solos in the 1940s based upon specific character studies, which he called Dance Portraits. Whilst assigned to entertain the troops on base in Biloxi, MS, during his brief stint with the military, Nagrin choreographed his first two solos (Schlundt, 1997). He continued to create and perform solo portraits of specific characters for the next two decades.

After attending a solo tap concert by Paul Draper in the mid-1950s, Draper encouraged Nagrin (2001) to perform full-evening solo concerts with a pianist and gave Nagrin the format he used. Draper’s concerts began with a few dances, then the pianist played alone, and he concluded with another dance before the intermission. He repeated this format in the second half to create a full-evening concert. Encouraged by this, Nagrin hired pianist Sylvia Marshall and began a solid professional relationship with her that lasted for several years. His first full-evening concert, featuring his Dance Portrait solos, was at Wheaton College near Boston in 1957 at the age of forty (Gruen, 1975 and 1988; and Schlundt, 1997). The following year, he produced only solo concerts, embarked on a series of concerts and professional workshops, and began touring his Dance Portraits. Gruen (1988:97) called Nagrin one of America’s leading solo artists, receiving “critical accolades and standing ovations.” Nagrin toured alone for both
functional and financial reasons. He served as his own lighting designer, set
designer, and sound technician; used no stage or business managers; and
often gave master classes and workshops whilst on tour (Gruen, 1975 and
Nagrin, 1988a).

The Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company. The Tamiris-Nagrin Dance
Company was formed and co-directed by Tamiris and Nagrin from 1960-63,
but received mixed or negative reviews. Both Schlundt (1997) and Gruen
(1988) agree that the company encountered severe financial set backs for a
number of reasons. Although the company existed for three to four years, it
was not a good experience for Nagrin as he did not like choreographing for
other people or others choreographing for him (Gruen, 1988). Maintaining a
company was financially problematic. In January 1964, the Ford Foundation
announced a $7 million grant to dance companies, but it was given only to
classical ballet companies such George Balanchine’s New York City Ballet.
Schlundt (1997) arguably asserts that no money went to a modern dancer,
choreographer, or company. Nagrin professionally and maritally separated
from Tamiris to concentrate once again on solo dances. Here the literature
shows discrepancies. Schlundt states they separated in 1964 whilst all the
others, including Nagrin (1988a and 2001), state the professional separation
occurred in 1963. It is unclear if Schlundt designated the distinction as a
personal separation versus professional as they ceased living together in
1964. Tamiris and Nagrin never divorced (Gruen, 1975 and 1988). In 1966,
Tamiris very privately passed away (Schlundt, 1972) from cancer (Evans,
2003).

The 1960s. With their professional and personal partnerships
dissolved, Nagrin toured solo from 1964-1970. He choreographed several
new works and took his Spring ’65 concert on tour, which solidified his
commitment to solo work. He married dancer Lee Nagrin, which from my
recollections ended in a bitter divorce during the mid 1980s while I was a
graduate student of Nagrin’s. By April 1967, he had performed in over eighty
cities in the United States. Nagrin commenced a successful European tour in
spring 1967, sponsored by the US Department of State (Bissell, 1992).
London critic Fernau Hall (1967) credits the growth of American modern
dance in Europe during the 1960s to Nagrin as well as the company tours of Americans Martha Graham, Paul Taylor, Merce Cunningham, and Alvin Ailey.

Upon returning to the United States, Nagrin developed and toured his first full-evening solo dance work in 1968, *The Peloponnesian War*. In 1971, the Daniel Nagrin Theatre, Film and Dance Foundation formed as he continued experimentation with videography in his works (Schlundt, 1997). He wrote several articles on videotaping techniques for dance and later included a video section in his first book.

**The Workgroup.** The Workgroup was Nagrin’s experimental dance company influenced by the pure improvisation of Joseph Chaikin. Very little written literature exists on this period in Nagrin’s work, with the majority found in Nagrin’s own writings. The exceptions are a few critiques and Susan Leigh Foster’s (2002b) chapter that features this improvisational experiment. Nagrin (1994) writes that approximately twenty dancers responded to Nagrin’s initial invitation of Saturday, 13 December 1969 to join him in experiencing improvisation. The Workgroup's first performative public showing was 25-26 August 1971 in his studio at 550 Broadway with favourable reviews.

The second Workgroup formed in 1972-73, and the final Workgroup in 1973-74. Nagrin preferred improvisation and challenged his company to follow through on given tasks (Gruen, 1975). His book entitled *Dance and the Specific Image: Improvisation* (1994) reflected these experiences. Although he received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to tour the Workgroup, the financial strain of supporting a company was felt by fall of 1972 (Nagrin, 1989 and 1994). Hence, the Workgroup performed its final event at State University College at Plattsburgh, NY, on 2 December 1974. Upon reflection, Nagrin said that he had

> created the Workgroup to pursue a way and an ideal of performance consciousness and not with the idea of becoming the director of a dance company.

Nagrin, 1994:124

**Post-Workgroup.** Nagrin began touring a “retrospective of his best solo works” (Schlundt, 1997:75), but this time added the experience and insights of his improvisational work in classes and concerts (Nagrin, 1989 and 1994). He
offered lecture/demonstrations, films and videotapes, collaborative
programmes with a composer, and a technically-based jazz class that even
those who “low browed” jazz noticed (Schlundt, 1997:76). He performed,
gave master classes and workshops at colleges and universities across the
country and the Pacific islands, taught movement for actors, chaired the
dance committee that created a BFA in dance at the City College of New
York, and conducted dozens of residences throughout the United States
(Gruen, 1988).

Professorship and Beyond. Nagrin received a full-time professorship in
1982 at Arizona State University, retiring as professor emeritus in the early
1990s. Schlundt emphasizes Nagrin’s teaching in colleges and universities in
the United States and asserts that he “is important in dance history because
he permeated for some thirty years this country’s educational system”
(1997:59). Nagrin began to write a series of experientially-based dance
books in the late 1980s. In 1994, the National Initiative to Preserve American
Dance gave $100,000 to Arizona State University to document and archive
Nagrin’s lifelong work (ASU, 2002a; Nagrin, 2003a; and Schlundt, 1997:78).
Although 90 years old at the time of this writing, he continues to travel, teach
workshops, lecture, set choreography, and write.

2.2. PERSONAL INFLUENCES

Continuing Hutcheon’s (1988) and Adshead’s (1988) notion of
contextualisation surrounding the relationship between the times and culture,
it is plausible that Nagrin was inspired and influenced professionally by three
main people. June Layson’s (1987:112) definition, that “influence is located in
the people” who encounter the artist during the formative periods of his/her
career, is useful in this section. Nagrin’s first encounter was with Constantin
Stanislavski’s ideas by three acting teachers from the Group Theatre: Miriam
Goldina, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner. The second major influence was
that of his professional partner and wife, the modern dance pioneer Helen
Tamiris. The third was the Open Theatre techniques of Joseph Chaikin. It is
argued that these individuals and their artistic processes contributed to
Nagrin’s worldview and aided in the development of his system of
choreography, the Nagrin Method. Each is treated below to illuminate the extent of the philosophical, methodological, and creative underpinnings that inspired and influenced Nagrin. However, the notion of influence itself is problematic and contentious in new history (Jenkins, 1991), as the establishing of influence or to ever really know what influenced someone is treated as an assumption which has to be validated. As indicated in Chapter 1, what can be done is to observe events with their patterns of similarities and differences across time (1991). This is the approach taken in this research.

2.2.1. Constantin Stanislavski

The extent to which we can know the influence of Russian acting director Constantin Stanislavski’s work on Nagrin’s life and choreographic process; and how far Nagrin influenced not only American theatre but also modern dance are questions pursued in this section. Stanislavskian traces in modern dance and the Russian-Jewish background of many American modern dance artists have been researched and examined to various degrees by several scholars. Stanislavski’s mutual association with and reciprocal admiration for Isadora Duncan and her work is documented (Duncan, 1968; Layson, 1987; Plumlee, 1989; and Stanislavski, 1924/48). Secondly, this connection is evidenced through the work and process of the Nahum brothers and Benjamin Zemach (Jackson, 2000). Thirdly, it is seen through the work of the Group Theatre in the 1930s in New York City through Nagrin’s teachers Adler and Meisner and later the Living Theatre (Kissel, 2000; Moore, 1984; and Nagrin, 1997); and fourth, through Tamiris’ relationship with the Group Theatre, teaching movement to the actors and choreographing dances for some of their productions (Martin, 1936/68). Lastly, Stanislavski’s influence reached Nagrin once again via his association with Joseph Chaikin’s Open Theatre. Personally, I do not recall Nagrin mentioning Stanislavski’s name or that his work emanates from him. This connection synthesized when I worked in a theatre programme in which acting students were being trained in the Stanislavski method. When Nagrin later published his books, this connection was stated.

Constantin Stanislavski\(^2\) (1863–1938) was director of the Conservatory of the Opera Studio of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. He was an actor and
co-founder with Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko of The Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) during the last part of the 19th Century until his death. Posthumously renamed the Stanislavski Theatre, MAT’s focus was on popular culture and symbolism (Clurman cited in Marshall, 1977; and Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 1936/68). It also included an occult-based social realism that Stanislavski (1924/48 and 1961a) termed psychological naturalism. Stanislavski’s method, or “system” as he preferred to call it (1924:522), is not only a style but “a logical approach to the training of actors” (Lewis cited in Stanislavski, 1961b:vii). It is one means to an end, not the end; and Nagrin (2001) upheld this same view regarding his own choreographic methods, which is an idea contained within new history’s multiple, flexible approaches (Jenkins, 1991).

It is argued throughout this thesis that Nagrin’s works also are characterised by popular culture, symbolism as metaphor, and a type of social realism which I term social agency that centres on the human condition. The latter involves an inner acting technique of building “the life of the human spirit” (Stanislavski, 1961a:25). The focus is not on dramatic form but on truthful acting of the character and his actions (Moore, 1984; Stanislavski, 1961b; and Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, 1975). This concept contains the notion of form following content, or content-then-form, pursued further in Chapter 4. Nagrin’s approach differs from most choreographers because it is based in content, often of the human condition. Gruen (1988) states these works convey social, political, and psychological attitudes. Nagrin achieves this by finding a specific internal motivation or intention through a clear, specific image and action of X. His content approach to creating is conceptual and philosophical rather than technical and form-based.

Stanislavski’s (1936/59 and 1961a) use of symbolism is metaphorical which eliminates artificial actions and feelings, such as the clichés of literal and mechanical gestures and overacting. This idea appealed to both Chaikin (1977) and Nagrin (1994 and 2001), which I can attest to from personal experience. Stanislavski, in his autobiography My Life in Art (1924/1948), indicates that arbitrary poses without spiritual connection to an inner truth are not believable. To achieve this inner life, Stanislavski, Tamiris, Chaikin, and Nagrin (2001) all worked through clichés via metaphors to open new
possibilities to get to the core of X. I recall a choreography assignment in which Nagrin had us take a literal gesture, abstract and explore its use metaphorically to determine what/who is behind the action, then construct a dance based upon the core of this character. In contrast, many actors and dancers at the turn of the century were trained by mastering François Delsarte’s (1811-1871) manual of gestural motions and attitudes that attributed known codified meaning into every little movement. For instance, an arm in eleven different angles had a different, specific meaning attached to each, and it was important that the audience knew and read it exactly (Nagrin, 1997:27-28). Tamiris called this literalness as working “‘too close to the bone’” (cited in Nagrin, 2001:82). In a telephone conversation with Nagrin (2004f), he further explained this as the selection of an image that is “too close to the real thing rather than finding an imaginative and provocative metaphor.” Nagrin’s use of metaphors are probed further in Part 2.

Stanislavski categorises his elements into several divisions of action to develop his characters. Those elements that play a central role in Nagrin’s development of his choreographic methods are treated briefly below. These are physical actions, imagination and the subconscious threshold, units and objectives, truth, emotion memory, communion, and inner motive, through line of action, and super objective (Litvinoff, 1972; Moore, 1984; Plumlee, 1989; and Stanislavski, 1936/59, 1961a, and 1961b).

To achieve a physical action, Stanislavski (1961b) asked ‘what would the character do’ in certain situations. Nagrin did the same in my classes to aid us in getting to the core of X. Every on-stage action must have a specific purpose, as “‘thoughts are embodied in acts’” (Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, 1975:4). From my experience, Nagrin also embodied action rather than emotion, as every movement was directly integral to the character or action, the core of X. Stanislavski (1936/59, 1961a and 1961b) searched for a means that would consciously stir an actor’s emotions and analysed each role. As a result, he developed a series or system of physical exercises, largely based in structured improvisations, to find internal expression. Embracing the then-contemporary scientific research of two Russian neurophysiologists, Ivan Pavlov and I. M. Sechenov, Stanislavski believed the physical body transmitted inner experiences (Plumlee, 1989). However,
Stanislavski’s scientific underpinnings are challenged by theatre scholar Andrew White (in Enders, 2006), as Stanislavski’s improvisations contained occult spiritism via emotions and physical actions that were developed from yogic exercises. An example of a physical action is below:

Instead of forcing an emotion before going on stage, the actor fulfils a simple, concrete, purposeful physical action which stirs the psychological side of the psychophysical art, thus achieving psycho-physical involvement.

Moore, 1984:19

Applying this principle, Nagrin would take on a physical action backstage or in the wings, such as fussing with his trench coat before performing *Man of Action* (1951) (Nagrin, 1997) to produce an embodied, truthful physical action of the character. In my work under Nagrin, he never focused on the emotion to find movement as Martha Graham did, but rather on the action or the doing to explore the depth of character, the X (Nagrin, 2001). For Nagrin, action and feeling are the same. Stanislavski (1936/59, 1961a and 1961b) suggested that when the logic of thoughts is searched and achieved through actions, emotions will follow. Nagrin’s teacher Stella Adler taught that everything an actor does is based on actions, and character develops “from the things he does” (Adler cited in Kissel, 2000:103). Therefore, it is vital that the actor understands the actions. Feeling and emotion come from doing, acting is doing, and therefore feeling and acting “are the same thing” (2000:44). She advised her students to spend lots of time studying actions, to make them believable and specific, and emphasized the need to follow-through or complete them (2000). Finding the core of a specific image through doing is a primary feature in the works of Tamiris and Nagrin (Nagrin, 1989 and 2001), probed further in Chapter 5.

Imagination is the inspirational key to stimulating the *if* which involves an activity (Stanislavski, 1924/48, 1936/59 and 1961a). The “magic *if*” or ‘what would I do if I were X?’ brings the actor into the character through “the realm of imagination” (Stanislavski, 1936:43). The *if* does not use fear or force, nor does it manipulate the actor to do anything, but produces the quality of a clear and honest inner activity by an inner stimulus based in one’s own
life experiences (Stanislavski, 1924/48, 1936/59 and 1961a). As discussed earlier, Broadway did not require this of Nagrin. These given circumstances, which Stanislavski (1961a) termed scenic truth, are dictated by the script, stage, time, place, life, and circumstances to define a character (Moore, 1984 and Stanislavski, 1961b) and are a contextual notion also found in new history (Hutcheon, 1988 and Jenkins, 1991). Adler places a character appropriately within his/her time and includes everything the actor says, does, and wears (Kissel, 2000). Stanislavski's contextualisation draws upon his own focused inner life of the mind, will, and feelings to evoke his imagination or play which is revealed through the characters (Moore, 1984 and Stanislavski, 1961b). To clarify the character’s focus through the magic if, he developed six steps: who you are, where you came from, why, what you want, where you are going, and what you will do when you get there (Stanislavski, 1936/59). Nagrin's (1997:34 and 2001:30) six steps (see Appendix C.1), mentioned earlier of who or what, is doing what, to whom or what, where and when, to what end, and what is the obstacle, also contextualises the character. From my experience with Nagrin, the core of X is reached through this six-step, complex method. The summation results in an image that is centred deeply in the heart and mind of X, which is probed further in Chapter 6. Stanislavski's “Always know who you are” (Moore, 1984:28) translates into Nagrin’s ‘who are you,’ heard repeatedly from the years this researcher was under Nagrin’s tutelage, in order “to get to the core of X” (Nagrin, 1997:92). As a young actor, Stanislavski discovered improvisation by working alone to develop his character roles through imagination which brought about an internal change that affected the mood of the scene (Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961b). Tamiris also worked this way when Nagrin began working with her in 1941 (Nagrin, 1989 and 2001).\footnote{Nagrin’s (1994 and 1997) improvisation is based upon observation, imitation, and imagination to construct a specific image. Passionate performance involves imagination and inspiration, which is innate, through the subconscious threshold since acting, in general, does not work as it is not real (Stanislavski, 1936/59, 1961a and 1961b). Nagrin (1997:56) calls faking on stage a “crime” and advises instead to find inspiration through a specific metaphorical action.} Nagrin’s (1994 and 1997) improvisation is based upon observation, imitation, and imagination to construct a specific image. Passionate performance involves imagination and inspiration, which is innate, through the subconscious threshold since acting, in general, does not work as it is not real (Stanislavski, 1936/59, 1961a and 1961b). Nagrin (1997:56) calls faking on stage a “crime” and advises instead to find inspiration through a specific metaphorical action.
Dividing the script into smaller parts or bits is to allow the given circumstances to provide the meat of the script from which the objective operates. Each is assigned an appropriate name to draw out and “crystallize the essence of a unit, discovering its fundamental objective” which often contains contradictions (Stanislavski, 1936:115). Nagrin (1997) refers to these bits as units or beats. The objective is not a noun, but a verb carrying action, and bodily actions need to stem from sincerity. Stanislavski (1936/59) defined three types of objectives: external or physical, inner or psychological, and rudimentary psychological type. Objectives are contextually personal to the character by giving an inner life to the role; are real, live, and human; and are truthful and believable. These attract and move the actor, are clear and specific to the role without vagueness, have value and content, are not superficial, and actively push the role forward so that it does not stagnate (Stanislavski, 1961a and 1961b). Nagrin uses objectives as his last three steps of his method, and this analysed in Part 2 as the structuring device of fragmentation.

Two kinds of truth are actual and scenic. In life, truth can be defined as what really exists; on stage, it is a product of the imagination. Truthfully probing the inner life of a character creates a belief in that reality. “This process is what we call justification of a part . . . Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues” (Stanislavski, 1936:122). Nagrin (1997) addresses this through the question, to what extent? An element of falseness resides in the sense of truth. On stage, everything is invented and reality is constructed, and an actor who thinks he is a character is emotionally unstable (Stanislavski, 1936). Nagrin applies this to a dancer as well, stating that the performance act is a paradoxical tension since “to perform is to pretend to be what you are not” (Nagrin, 1997:56; and 2001). Scenic truth is making the audience believe what is seen on stage, but there are varieties of truth. The performer is to look for the unexpected and the true during each performance (Moore, 1984). From personal experience, Nagrin said that actual performing occurs when the unexpected is encountered. Truthfulness and believability come from feeling, experience, and believing in one’s own internal actions and emotions within the context surrounding the character. Stanislavski’s method of
approaching emotions is to avoid falseness and everything that is against nature, logic, and common sense (Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961a).

The term “emotion memory” is an area that even today has caused a split in the interpretation of Stanislavski’s teachings, and thus in the literature, discussed further at the end of this section on major influences. Emotion memory can transform the actor’s real life experiences into the role of the character’s real life, and Stanislavski considered it the most important requirement for an actor’s work and the only source for emotions on stage (Moore, 1984). It was important to find the real every time without relying on a past performance, and to find natural emotions at every moment (Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961a). Adler (Kissel, 2000) took this realism/reality a bit further by placing it within its social context since acting (as well as dance and all art) cannot be separated from the world in which we live. Combined with the inner rhythm of the script, emotion memory stirs the actor’s emotions as it is not enough to rely on physical actions (Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, 1975). An actor needs to observe, conjecture, experience, and analyse the cause and conditions in order to interpret life through a role, and emotions inherent within the character help him to do this successfully (Kissel, 2000; and Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961a). Nagrin uses this same technique in order to find or develop his characters (Nagrin 1997, 2001, and 2004f).

On-stage relationships or communion/unity first begin with the self, then others, and then objects that are unreal or imagined. The self is dual, consisting of both mind and body, which Nagrin (1994 and 1997) differentiates as the “heart/mind”; and self communication needs to be on both of these planes, or on metaphysical and physical levels. It is likely that Stanislavski appropriated this from Russian playwright Anton Chekhov’s works, produced heavily by MAT, which featured unity and communion (Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 1936/68 and Stanislavski, 1924/48). In communication with others and/or an object, the goal is to reach the living spirit by communicating either directly or indirectly and is always mutual (Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961b). The actor must communicate his actions to those on stage and believe in the relationship so that reality on stage is achieved by establishing a sincere attitude (Moore, 1984; and Stanislavski and Rumyantsev, 1975). This is similar to Nagrin’s work with the Workgroup in which the emphasis on
the ‘other’ and the non-verbal exchange of communication between performers became a primary focus, covered in Chapter 6. Thus, Chekhov’s influence of awareness of the ‘other’ upon both Stanislavski and Nagrin is apparent.

According to Stanislavski (1936/59 and 1961b), the three most important features in the creative process to bring life to a performance are: inner motive, the through line of action, and the super-objective. Feeling is the most important inner motive instrument, involving imagination and attention followed by the mind or intellect. Sense of truth and belief in the truth are next (1936/59). The continuity of a role is the unbroken line or through line of action. This can have some necessary interruptions, but must remain coherent throughout the play. It flows from the past to the present and into the future, gives a logical order and perspective to an actor’s performance, and should form a solid line (Moore, 1984; and Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961b). A through line of action must be present to help create the super-objective, which is the innermost core of the role, the “inner essence” or spirit that contains the meaning and inner sense (Stanislavski, 1961b:78). This super-objective is contained within Nagrin’s core of X. To achieve this, Stanislavski incorporated both the term and techniques from yogic meditation and other occult practices that were popular at the turn of the century (White in Enders, 2006). Stanislavski believed every play needed to have a main idea, goal, or super-objective that is inherent. This is the larger purpose or theme of the entire event, as everything within a play such as minor objectives, thoughts, feelings, or actions should point to it (Stanislavski, 1936/59 and 1961b). The actors need to be energized by it and find their own interpretations. Nagrin followed suit with his belief that dancers must find their specific image interpretations if the choreographer does not reveal it. For instance, Nagrin writes about giving Karen Miyake a specific image of thanking José Limón whilst performing Chaconne (1997:38-39); Suzanne Farrell’s Meditation performance in which Balanchine instructed her to “just hold on to the air” (cited in Nagrin, 1997:34-35); and my performance in which I used the specific image of a sundial (Nagrin, 2001:79-80). Stanislavski’s super-objective contains the pulse of the character that includes Nagrin’s “spine” of action (1997:39).
The above are the major tenets of Stanislavski’s system, and the adaptation and influence on the work of Nagrin is further analysed in Part 2. Stanislavski’s socially conscious, occult/spiritual-based, inner-acting work appears to have appealed to actors and dancers of Eastern European Jewish heritage. Although not of this heritage, Duncan and Stanislavski mutually influenced each other regarding emotion and expression and inner truthfulness (Layson, 1987 and Stanislavski, 1924/48). How Tamiris first encountered Stanislavski’s work is uncertain (Nagrin, 1989 and 2001), but Tamiris studied at the Duncan school briefly in the 1920s (Tamiris, 1928/89). Nahum Zemach founded Habima, a Jewish theatre company in Moscow, and was drawn to Stanislavski’s symbolic characterisation, stage sets, and costumes – or the essence of Jewishness rather than a type of theatre that emphasised the details of Jewish life. Yevgeniy Vakhtangov, “Stanislavski’s top pupil” and one of Stanislavski’s best directors (Moore, 1984:9) that Nagrin’s (1988a) acting teacher, Miriam Goldina, studied under, worked with Habima on the staging of The Dybbuk in 1922. This was choreographed by Benjamin Zemach whom John Martin (1939) credits as choreographing the first Jewish ballet in history. After immigrating to America, Benjamin was instrumental in bringing Jewish dance and Zionist ideals (that is, the settling of a homeland in Palestine) to the YMHA in New York (Jackson, 2000) where both Tamiris and Nagrin performed. Most of the Stanislavski-based Group Theatre members of the 1930s were Jewish (Nagrin, 2004f) who saw the theatre as their religious obligation to the economic depression as they concentrated on themes of social value of the average person rather than on royal or military heroes. Nagrin began his acting studies in the 1930s with several Group Theatre teachers. One of these was Stella Adler, former wife of Harold Clurman who founded the Group Theatre and student of Stanislavski in Paris. She made the socialist statement that “the theatre was a vehicle for discovering and disseminating the truth. . . [and] is about ideas” (Kissel, 2000:262). Prickett (in Garafola, 1994a) pointed out that the Group Theatre was left-wing, but its influence on both Nagrin and Tamiris was evident in their works. Decades later, The Living Theatre and eventually the Open Theatre grew out of the concepts articulated by the Group Theatre, and Nagrin worked with the latter under director Joseph Chaikin.
2.2.2. Helen Tamiris

Modern dance pioneer Helen Tamiris is remembered in performance as “bold and liberated . . . [with] gusto and zest” (Bird and Greenberg, 1997:167-168); a “breathtaking panther” (McDonagh, 1970:37); “fluid grace [and] . . . special distinction” (Nagrin, 1988a:267); a “true popular artist” who added “glamour and vitality” (Siegel 1987a:6 & 94); and a “glorious” dancer who could really move, causing excitement (Schlundt, 1972:28).

Taking the name of an Amazonian Persian Queen who was known for her beauty and bravery by carrying the pickled head of a slain king into battle, Tamiris called her own work “Living Art” since it was meaningful only when viewed (Tamiris, 1928/89:3). Her annotated autobiography (1928/89) recounts her childhood upbringing in New York City, the commencement of her professional career in dance as a ballet dancer at the Metropolitan Opera, and seeing some of the great dancers perform such as Anna Pavlova and Isadora Duncan. Tamiris toured America, Europe, and South America before giving her first solo concert on 9 October 1927 at the Little Theatre in New York City. Tamiris’ philosophy of dance was developed early and is apparent from her Manifest (Appendix B.1), printed in her second solo concert programme of 29 January 1928. Nagrin (1989) states this probably was written in reaction to the current dance scene.

Tamiris’ (1928/89) quest to create American dances to American music using American themes, such as her Negro spirituals, jazz, and sports, was a strong influence on Nagrin’s (2001) work. He recalls “she always probed and searched for new forms to express her central concern for human dignity” (Nagrin, 1988a:267). In contrast to Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Hanya Holm, she explored non-formalist methods throughout her career, such as blurring the boundaries between high art and the vernacular by using Negro themes and working on Broadway. She also incorporated Marxist ideologies evident in the Moscow Art Theatre such as privileging the human condition, seen in her 1935 work on Spain’s civil war. Many of her contemporaries, with the exception of a few such as Agnes De Mille in the 1940s, would not incorporate the vernacular as popular. Several writers and scholars said this translated as ‘not artistic’ at the time (Evans, 2002; Siegel, 1987a; Lloyd, 1949; and Nagrin, 1994). Walter Terry, dance critic for the New
York Herald Tribune during Tamiris’ time, appreciated her seamless placement of dances into Broadway musicals. She won Dance Magazine’s first award in May 1937 for outstanding group choreography (Schlundt, 1972).

Tamiris did not impose her own movement style onto dancers but saw them as individuals, respecting the dance bodies she was working with to create movement out of them improvisationally (Nagrin, 2004f). She believed the body knew how to move and offered neither theories nor technique, just an existential approach through improvisation. The torso was the centre of movement, basic and universal rhythms were used, and the body was allowed to move in whatever way was natural (Schlundt, 1972 and Siegel, 1985). Therefore, her dancers had no recognisable Tamiris style (Nagrin, 2001 and Schlundt, 1972). Nagrin (2001) took some technique classes from Tamiris but insists he never received any formal instruction from her on choreographic design or structure, either on Broadway or in his solo concert works. However, he did observe a few of her choreography classes and asked for feedback during his choreographic processes. Nagrin is concerned that

[modern dance] history has sort of slipped by Helen, but she was one of the founders. She was self-defeating in terms of history and schools, because what she was doing was working from the moment. Each class was different. There was no schema, only that you were constantly thrown into yourself.

Nagrin cited in Dunning, 1982

Thus, to ensure her place in dance history, and from personal recollections of helping with this, Nagrin organised the Tamiris Conference at Arizona State University in 1986. He brought together some of the Tamiris-Nagrin company dancers in an attempt to reconstruct and publish (see Nagrin, 1989 and 2001) some of her theories in teaching technique and choreography. Tamiris differed in her choreographic method from the other founders of modern dance. The underpinnings of her choreographic method are to explore “who you were, where you were, what you were doing, and how you were doing it” (Adler, 1986-87:75 and Nagrin, 2001). Her dances, like Nagrin’s, moved from action to action, stillness had vitality, improvisation was used to find movement, and finding the contradiction in movement was necessary. She brought Lee Strasberg into some of her earlier choreography classes “to
teach her dancers” Stanislavski’s methods (Nagrin, 2001:11). Thus, the similarities to both Stanislavski’s and Nagrin’s works are apparent. For example, Phoebe Neville recalls a tea ceremony exercise using the literal action of serving and/or receiving tea, sans props, to develop an accurate embodied memory through the senses in order to allow the movement to go through the physical body and into the other person, and vice versa. This arguably is similar to Stanislavski’s emotion memory, what Tamiris called “sense memory” (Nagrin, 2001:16), as it allowed the dancer to take the physical action and the emotion behind it to develop movement metaphors through the imagination. She also handled literal gestures by transferring movement to another part of the body through her dictum, “don’t illustrate,” and going inside the body with the action (Nagrin, 1989, 2001:18, and 2004f). The specific image was central to her later work and brought out a personal movement vocabulary; even very abstract dance had to be very clear in its depth.¹⁰ Nagrin (2001:17) says Tamiris was “merciless” on this point, and he borrowed his emotion memory work from both her and Stanislavski.

Nagrin (2001) gleaned the basics of choreography from the many years of working with Tamiris, and says he and Tamiris both influenced one another in ways that he cannot define precisely. In turn, since he worked out movement in his body, he, therefore, cannot articulate where her teaching stops and his begins (Nagrin, 1989 and 2001). However, Nagrin identifies a specific turning point in his career at Unity House (Gruen, 1988 and Newman, 1975) during the summer of 1942 when he was choreographing Rhumba Bum (1943). Tamiris took an interest and offered some advice, such as understanding to whom the dance was addressed. Although he had an acting background, Nagrin did not apply those skills to dance but focused on the technical aspects of movement instead. Her recommendation was to begin from an acting premise when dancing to omit the majority of technical problems. Tamiris taught him that his acting craft and skill should be an integral part of his dance work; no separation was necessary, since he was a “human being doing something”; and dancers dance it instead of talking it (Gruen, 1988; Nagrin, 2001:10; and Schlundt, 1997). Thus, Nagrin’s concept of the entire person doing whilst dancing became a driving force and major influence in his work and teaching (Nagrin, 2001; Palfry, 1999; and Schlundt,
1997). She continued to work this way with him, asking questions, talking about the Stanislavskian method of acting, and paralleling it to dance; and he liked her Stanislavskian approach (Nagrin, 2001). He never focused on design or form but followed the necessity of the action and assumed the work would have design, or form follows function (2001). Instead of doing attractive movement, he began to work with inner conviction and content rather than form, movement metaphors, and combined virtuosity (Gruen, 1988). Schlundt (1997:60) confirms that this is grounded in Stanislavski’s teachings to “find truth not in trying to look like something or someone but in doing—acting’” (Schlundt, 1997:60). In a telephone dialogue, Nagrin (2004f) says his method differs in that he works more consistently from a specific image or act. The gangster in Strange Hero is one example of an image as the core of X. Nagrin thinks many dancers unfortunately ignore this Stanislavskian concept (Nagrin, 1997 and Schlundt, 1997). Critic John Martin greatly admired Nagrin’s work in this vein and was Nagrin’s “constant supporter” (Schlundt, 1997:60). Paradoxically, Horst and Martin arguably engendered Tamiris’ work along these same lines, considering it inferior (Schlundt, 1972 and 1997).

The “need to discover the inner life that fired” movements is the most profound insight that Tamiris gave Nagrin (2001:11). When this “conceptual door” was opened, he found a technical and choreographic freedom that exceeded his training. Tamiris used space as though it were limitless and her entire body in strong movements with flowing rhythms. Her works were constantly progressive, realistic and quotidian, and devoid of abstraction and subjectivism with a focus on speaking to the masses regarding social concerns and issues of the oppressed (Schlundt, 1972). Thus, she was more modern than any in that essence of modernity: responsiveness to the unformulated will of an epoch, a drive to do what a time required . . . movement as the substance of the art of dance.

Schlundt, 1972:34 & 7

Tamiris worked with jazz music and dance and on Broadway, because this was the dance of America and her understanding of what she should be doing (Nagrin, 2001). Her social realism was similar to Sokolow’s and
Wigman’s in which the purpose of dance, particularly after WW I, was the enmeshment of man with political and economic issues and social revolution (Sorell, 1966). Nagrin (2004f) says Tamiris frightened people with her social, political, and artistic views which distanced and alienated them. As a result, she was not invited to Bennington and was dismissed by the American Dance Festival until Nagrin was invited to teach and perform in the late 1950s. Bill Evans (2003) recalls her as a narcissistic but beautiful woman, and Merce Cunningham remembers her as “fierce” (cited in Harris, 1996:276).

2.2.3. Joseph Chaikin

A third major influence on Nagrin derives from his work with Joseph Chaikin and his actors at the Open Theatre. Nagrin discovered a fascinating connection internally while working with others and the ability to exchange this inter-connectedness. He developed an awareness of “the other person” rather than focusing on oneself which was the typical way of working with dance, improvisation, and theatre in general (Nagrin, 1994:13 and 2004f). This would develop into becoming his ‘other.’ Nagrin incorporated these concepts into his improvisational company, the Workgroup (discussed in Chapter 6), and his subsequent teaching.

Chaikin was born in 1935 to Russian-Jewish parents, was raised in Des Moines, Iowa and attended Drake University, then moved to New York and joined the Living Theatre. He founded the experimental Open Theatre in the early 1960s with the initial premise of abandoning speech, and like Stanislavski, developed a series of improvisational exercises based in movement and sound to achieve this goal (Chaikin, 1977). Nagrin began to adopt and create his own improvisations for the Workgroup based on what he encountered with the Open Theatre (Nagrin, 1994).

It is important to understand that Brecht’s epic theatre with its premise that people can change is a potential influence on Chaikin’s work (Chaikin, 1977). Nagrin also embraced this, which is a Marxist idea (Laing, 1978) further articulated throughout Part 2, since performing with Anna Sokolow during the late 1930s (Schlundt, 1997) as mentioned earlier. Both Nagrin and Sokolow believed that art could illuminate and challenge the disposable, inappropriate, and inept within a society. Brecht’s theories were similar:
confront rather than please the audience, to illuminate the cruelties and contradictions of man as a social rather than psychological creature, and to dispel the illusion of spontaneity by using a deliberate, conscious effect (Chaikin, 1977). Brecht involved the audience as a partner through irony, parody, humour, understatement, and allegory to “disturb our smugness and bend our fixed logic” (Chaikin, 1977:39 and Greenberg, 1961) to show we live by the choices we either make or accept. He was known for his performance style of the A effect, or alienation (Verfremdung) of the audience which was to “shock us into awareness” and detachment (Sorell, 1966:247). This theory contrasts with arousing pity (Mitter, 1992), and therefore appealed to Tamiris and Nagrin (Dunning, 1982 and Nagrin, 2001). As Nagrin’s student, we were not permitted to create works that aroused self-pity in the audience. Tamiris said that audiences do not tolerate it (Nagrin, 2001); and since self-pity is a response that cannot be changed, the performer is to alienate the audience instead (Chaikin, 1977). As a result, alienation is effective as it causes audiences to feel, think, and reflect upon what was experienced in the theatre and apply it to their own lives (Nagrin, 1997). Chaikin’s intention was to create theatre events from juxtaposed images, or collage and montage, similar to that of Brecht’s epic theatre. Nagrin employed these same fragmented images into his works as early as the 1940s, but they particularly are evident in his works from 1968 onward such as Peloponnesian War (1968), the Workgroup, and Poems Off the Wall (1981); hence, alienation is probed further in those chapters.

Chaikin was influenced by and exposed to Stanislavski’s method-acting approach, which he viewed as a

road map guiding the actor to spontaneous expression of character through tasks which he sets up for himself in the form of internal actions.

Chaikin, 1977:36

Acting teachers in New York taught their own versions of Stanislavski’s method (Kissel, 2000 and Silverberg, 1994). As mentioned earlier, a dichotomy continues to exist in the teaching of Stanislavski’s emotion memory
between teachers Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler/Sanford Meisner, all initially from the Group Theatre. Strasberg emphasised re-creating the emotional experience through a psychological approach using personal experiences to arouse emotion similar to those in the script. Emotion memory caused one to relive past emotions and feelings centred on an action or event that produces involuntary and unforced actions on stage, termed affective memory by the French psychologist Ribot (Moore, 1984). In other words, the actor needs to step out of character and into himself, delve into the memory of his personal background to obtain the emotion, retain the emotion whilst leaving himself behind, and then step back into character. All of this needs to occur immediately onstage during each performance in the role with the focus on feelings or emotions. However, Stanislavski (1936/59 and 1961a, and Stanislavski and Rumyantsev 1975) and those that studied from him such as Adler (Kissel, 2000) disagree. A stage emotion is different from an emotion in life as the cause is different; one is re-created, the other is constructed for the first time. Adler and Meisner taught that truth in the role was derived from an imaginative life within the text itself, and that relying solely on personal experience to evoke emotions would produce distortion. They felt that the character itself provides a richness of depth that needs to be explored by the actor prior to the rehearsal process. This thorough examination of the character, or getting to the core, reveals and generates all the emotions needed and could be called upon immediately within the performance. The focus is on the portrayal or doing of the character. Meisner advocated a concentrated compassion on the character’s time and context elicited through the actor’s personal life experiences as he performs the role. Adler advocated going outward into the audience through the character, as acting was based in actions that elicited emotions in both the actor and the audience. With both, the emphasis is on doing rather than feeling (Kissel, 2000). For this reason, Adler (Kissel, 2000) went to Paris to study under Stanislavski to rectify the confusion surrounding his teaching of emotional memory. Nagrin studied acting with Adler and Meisner (Nagrin, 1997), and both he and Chaikin were influenced by these teachings and incorporated them into their ways of working. The question arises as to whether this provided a foundation for both Nagrin’s getting to the core of X method of choreography.
as early as the 1940s, and his non-use of emotion, or expression (Franko, 1995), to find movement. Nagrin writes:

One never asks for an emotion or a mood. That is the direct highway to banality. One always asks for an action on the assumption that the specific “who” doing a specific action in a specific context will arrive at a truthful emotion or mood.

Nagrin, 1994:38

I argue that Nagrin was influenced by Chaikin’s approach of relating to given situations, observing, and requiring a fresh start for each role in every play. The performer begins with nonverbal questions about experiences that are later transformed into character. One must be in touch with his/her own astonishment in order to create imaginatively. Chaikin’s steps in this process are: from where is the impulse of a character derived, who/what is the character, what is the context of the character, and what is the goal. No absolute principles are upheld in order to remain open and flexible (Chaikin, 1977:16). Working out clichés through improvisation enables one to go beyond. These ideas are contained within Nagrin’s six questions (Appendix C.1). Chaikin’s (1977) balancing act of control and abandonment, innocence and intelligence, produces a physical and mental tension/conflict that Nagrin (1997) terms the obstacle, or his sixth step. To accomplish this, Chaikin used improvisational jamming borrowed from jazz music and emblems to complete actions, the latter which I assert are Nagrin’s metaphors. These are probed further in relationship to Nagrin’s Workgroup use in Chapter 6. As an actor, Nagrin found all his images and metaphors within the script after studying the character; as a choreographer, this process remained intact (Nagrin, 1997) as he relied heavily upon the use of metaphors in his dances. From my experience with him, metaphors are central to his choreographic method. However, he is aware that many American dancers do not use metaphors but rather the notion of movement for the sake of movement and the shapes it creates. Nagrin’s (2001:80) comment from viewing my Sundial work mentioned earlier is that a “characteristic of metaphors” is the ambivalence between what is felt and experienced and the inability to articulate it clearly.
2.3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Nagrin’s life spans a remarkable time and place in the history of dance in America – New York City during the developing years of the various styles of American modern dance, jazz music, and improvisation. His professional career equally reflects several dance genres and styles of these periods: early modern dance, jazz dance, Broadway, Hollywood, and modern dance concert work; the era of the 1960s with its dance minimalism and abstract expressionism; group experimentation with improvisation; and further works based in reflection and multimedia. Four major thematic periods emerge from this reconstruction and are identified as the framework (Jenkins, 1991) for research and analysis of Nagrin’s choreographic methods. These are streamlined into four thematic, chronological periods to provide a focus for analysis: Dance Portraits from the 1940s through the 1950s; The 1960s, including the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company and his own solo works; The Workgroup influenced by Chaikin’s improvisations with the Open Theatre; and Post-Workgroup.

This research into the problematic notion of influence on Nagrin and his works is neither exhaustive nor exclusive. Rather, it provides a sufficient framework in which to articulate his work and examine the historical context in relationship to his art. The three most profound influences on his methods of finding the core of X are the acting techniques of Stanislavski, the appropriation of these to dance by his wife and partner Tamiris, and the improvisational experiments of Chaikin. The extent and in what ways these are applied to Nagrin’s actual choreographies is analysed in Part 2.

Each period will be examined contextually and aesthetically to allow stylistic distinctions within Nagrin’s works to emerge. The defining characteristics that make his dances unique will be identified, and patterns and contrasts in the development of his choreographic styles and methods of getting to the core of X will be articulated. Justifications for his shift from specific portraits to minimalistic, improvisational, and more abstract works will be illuminated through the contextual and stylistic analyses. The stylistic underpinnings of the various movements within the arts, such as modernism, social realism, abstract expressionism, and postmodernism, need to be
examined in relation to Nagrin’s works and methods. These are considered next in order to provide a more concise framework for the study and contextual understanding of Nagrin’s styles and choreographic methods.

ENDNOTES

1 Schlundt confuses the dates in her “Preface” page ix, in which she said Nagrin and Tamiris were married in 1942; and that Tamiris died in 1963 rather than in 1966, which is stated later in her text.

2 Stanislavski’s given name is Alexeyev, but he used his stage name instead in order to not bring shame to his father’s wealthy Moscow merchant business (Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, 1936/68 and Stanislavski, 1961a).

3 ‘Occult’ in this chapter refers to Eastern, non-Western ideals and is the opposite of ‘occidental’ or Western (Said, 1979).

4 Nagrin quotes the line from the musical Madam Sherry, which is associated with Ted Shawn: “Every little movement has a meaning all its own, Every thought and feeling by some posture may be shown” (Nagrin, 1994:99). Nagrin said Shawn was influenced by the theories of Delsarte who influenced Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan. They introduced the concept that all dance should express something; and even though the dramatic, emotional, narrative, and kinetic or symbolic values can vary, every movement had to have meaning. Even Graham embraced it. In a personal conversation with Graham in her Fifth Avenue studio, she told Nagrin how the body was divided into three parts: physical (i.e., the legs), emotional (the torso), and mental (the head), and so on until every part of the body was divided. Nagrin called this “Pure Delsarte” (1994:99), which was a flawed system as it led to naïve and simplistic storytelling, shallow choreography, and clichés. However, it produced some interesting dances by “reflecting deeply felt emotions and complex thoughts” (Nagrin, 1994:100 and 1997:28).

5 Laban arguably is credited as the first choreographer to use improvisation before World War 1 (Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop, 1990), but it is unclear exactly from what time period he began to work this way as Isadora Duncan used it (Layson, 1987). Tamiris (1928/1989) began working with improvisation in the late 1920s.

6 It is rather humorous how Nagrin derives calling this the “beats” and explains (1997) that it stems from the mispronunciation of the word ‘bits’ by the Russian actors and actresses who brought this method from their homeland to New York City.

7 Stanislavski and Duncan did not work directly with emotion, but emotion was a by product as a result of exploring and analysing the depths of a role (Layson, 1987; Nagrin, 1994; and Stanislavski, 1924/48, 1961a and 1961b). It flowed from an unconscious, “natural” place; and since Stanislavski’s method acting was “a scientific technique for developing access to the private in public,” it was considered natural not artificial, thus asserting that Duncan was not expressive (Franko, 1995:6).

8 Nagrin (2004f) confides in a telephone conversation that he never heard Tamiris mention her work as “Living Art,” so perhaps this is an earlier designation.

9 Adler, from New York University, does not say whether she attended this Tamiris conference in her review in Dance Research Journal. The invited participants from the former Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company were Marion Scott, Phoebe Neville, Elina Mooney, Cliff Keuter, and Elizabeth Keen (Adler, 1986-87:75).

10 This methodological development came late in Tamiris’ career and is probably due to the influence of Nagrin, as he states that twenty years earlier, this is one of the aspects which differentiates their work.
CHAPTER 3: A MAN IN HIS TIME

INTRODUCTION

It is argued that Daniel Nagrin is a man in his time, just as his choreographic method of getting to the core of X is situated in its time. Therefore, this chapter attempts to situate Nagrin by examining the relationships between his works and times (Jenkins, 1991 and 2001; Layson, 1987; and Hutcheon, 1988). The three-fold aims of this chapter are, firstly, to examine the historical, institutional, and contextual influences on Nagrin’s work as opposed to the personal influences covered in Chapter 2. Secondly, an attempt is made to question, understand, and define the placement of Nagrin’s concert works through the examination of cultural movements. Thirdly, an analytical framework to probe his choreographic and performative styles is articulated. This provides a more extended rationale for my division into four thematic and chronological periods of Dance Portraits, The 1960s, The Workgroup, and Post-Workgroup. It is argued that each period demonstrates distinct phases in Nagrin’s evolving choreographic processes and methods of getting to the core of X and thus justifies my divisions based upon stylistic differentiation and treatment.

3.1. HISTORICAL AND AESTHETIC CONTEXTUALIZATIONS

The purpose of this section is to present historical and aesthetic understandings of the times in which Nagrin lived and to examine the relationships between these times and his art. The institutional influences on his life and work, particularly surrounding Jewishness, are examined, and his marginalization is problematised. New history’s (Hutcheon, 1988 and Jenkins, 1991) contextualisation is “the primary method of historical understanding and practice” emergent through a strategy of relationships and themes (Berkhofer in Jenkins, 2001:141). By situating the event in the context of the times in order to deduce or synthesize contextual facts, a “diversity” or multiplicity is achieved (2001:143). Contextualization explains events that occur through
interaction, which reveals a fluid epistemological pattern as to why these occurred through the “functional interrelationships existing among the agents and agencies occupying the field at a given time” (White, 1973:18). Several dance and aesthetic scholars also agree, adding that contextualisation plays a role in shaping embodied style and genre (Adshead, 1988; Desmond, 1997; Foster, 2002a; Foulkes, 2002; Kane, 1988; Layson, 1987; Martin, 1939/75; Moore, 1999; Reid, 1969; Sparshott, 1970; and Theodores, 1996). Using a contextual methodology, artists such as Nagrin can be studied within the interrelationships surrounding the historical and cultural moments in which they live. Layson’s (1987:112) definition of context as “a general or prevailing cultural ethos” that emerges through the “social or artistic nature” of Nagrin’s works and time is useful.

By the 1920s, the foundational influences of Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis provided a very strong “cultural ethos” among many dancers. Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Weidman danced with St. Denis’ company, Denishawn, in Los Angeles prior to relocating to New York. Two institutions in Manhattan proved seminal in constructing an American modern dance historical context and, in particular, shaping a Jewish worldview through dance which arguably affected Nagrin and his work. The first was the Neighborhood Playhouse in lower Manhattan, and the second was the 92nd Street Young Men’s Hebrew Association, or YMHA. Three people were examined in the preceding chapter whose influences arguably emerge in Nagrin’s artistic work: Constantin Stanislavski, Helen Tamiris, and Joseph Chaikin. A contextual re-envisioning is needed of what Eastern European Jewishness meant at this time, and living in New York during the birthing of American modern dance are of pertinent value in addressing Nagrin’s subsequent marginalisation.

3.1.1. Jewishness

The concept of a Jewish influence, some of which is based in revolutionary ideology, in the creation and shaping of modern dance in America has been researched recently (Foulkes, 2002; Franko, 1995 and 2002; Garafola, 1994; Graff in Garafola, 1994; Harris, 1996; Jackson, 2000; and Prickett in Garafola, 1994a and b), thus validating and illuminating this
issue. Several key individuals of the American modern dance movement in
the 1920s and 1930s were Jewish, such as Helen Tamiris, Irene Lewisohn,
Esther Junger, Benjamin Zemach, as well as Anna Sokolow and Sophie
Maslow who were beginning to debut their works. However, it is argued that
all were not necessarily socialist revolutionaries. According to scholar Naomi
Jackson (2000:15), these dancers, like Nagrin, were children of Eastern
European Jewish “working-class” immigrants. Some of these dancers or their
parents fled the pogroms, some were not religious practitioners, and some
were active in the Socialist party in the United States. The New York brand of
Jewishness embraced a Marxist ideology traced to the status of Jewish
workers in Czarist Russia during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their
humanism was a dual reaction to impoverishment, oppression, pogroms, and
mass unemployment that produced a need for altruism (Smithsonian, 2004;
Goldberg, 1988; and Jackson, 2000), which I assert is based in centuries-long
histories of struggle, conflict, and persecution of the Jewish people. In
America, they were joined by the common bonds of community, socialism,
non-religion, and a Protestant working class social structure which was a
particularly important theme during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It was
in this context that many of these Russian Jewish immigrants embraced the
arts, modernism, and dance (Copeland, 2004; Greenberg, 1955; and
Jackson, 2000). Isadora Duncan (1968) wrote that the ideal domain is
communism, which appealed to a collective social conscious, with a vision of
a more educated, just, and better world created through a mass dance
movement. As New York rapidly became the centralising city for artists
(Goldberg, 1988 and Martin, 1968), and ultimately the Western city for artists
after WW II (Greenberg, 1961), New York Jews shared mutually transcendent
characteristics. Overall, they were intellectual, artistic, socially conscious, and
humanistic; sensitive to the Jewish experience as evidenced in their art,
ideology, and values; and largely embraced collective Marxist ideals (Franko,
1995; Jackson, 2000; and Perelman, 2004).

The underpinning aesthetic ethos that fuelled the merging of a Jewish
identity and desire for assimilation was the shaping of a new American culture
through art. The 19th Century notion of Hegel’s view of history as progress
was replaced by the Nietzschean concept based in Kantian sublime that an
aesthetic, artistic ideal was the solution. It privileges the Dionysian Being over Thinking, and experience and expression are as important as the critiques of reason and scientific objectivity (Habermas in Docherty, 1999). As scholar Francis Sparshott (1970) indicates, art now had an ameliorated function, capable of causing reflection upon one’s own experiences and ideals to convey both the mood and structure of experience or emotion for the purpose of improving society and maintaining order and solidarity. This fit well with the Marxism of Leon Tolstoy who thought art useful as a unifying function through the communication of feelings. Since an artist’s worldview, which can include atheism, religion, or secular philosophies, comprises “his deepest feelings about the world in which he lives,” these feelings are expected to appear and even “dominate” in his works (Sparshott, 1970:295). For the most part, Eastern European Jewish immigrants and dancers in New York embraced the ideals of both Nietzsche and Marx. Sparshott (1970) asserts that in a society that values the human condition, as did these Jewish immigrants and Nagrin, the greatest value will be placed on artistic works that embody those feelings and ideas. Thus, morality and society can be intertwined, and art can contribute by endorsing, supporting, or opposing them. This idea is useful in Part 2 to further investigate Nagrin’s use of dance as social agency.

The first institution to have a major influence on American dance and community at this time, which subsequently affected Nagrin, was the Neighborhood Playhouse on Grand Street from 1915 to the late 1920s. It developed from the Henry Street Settlement, a social service agency to the immigrant communities. These settlement houses were common, as America’s unrestricted immigration policies until 1924 attracted thousands of impoverished, disillusioned Europeans. The Nietzschean-inspired German Jewish sisters, Alice and Irene Lewisohn, desired to improve the quality of life of immigrant children through the arts (Harris, 1996 and Jackson, 2000). Although a former pupil of Genevieve Stebbins who was considered a “disciple of Delsarte,” Irene taught the dance classes from a creative and expression base similar to Duncan’s, rather than from a representational Delsarte base.2 She felt it was important to stir an intellectual and emotional response in performance, and both Tamiris and Sokolow studied under her (Martin, 1936/68 and Nagrin, 1994). Thus, two trends later formed in reaction
to Delsarte’s theories. One was the pure, movement-for-movement’s sake that discarded any deeper attempt at meaning; the other was the Stanislavski-induced theory

*to do – not to appear;* not to indicate an emotion [*expressive, my brackets*] but to find the emotion through action [*expression, ibid*]. It was Tamiris who applied this to dance both as a method of choreography and of performance.

Nagrin, 1994:100

In 1928 at the Neighborhood Playhouse, Louis Horst taught dance composition (Siegel in Adshead, 1986) and Martha Graham taught modern dance during the 1920s where the young Jewish dance students developed a passion for revolution. Graham inspired them to “‘get to the core of everything’” and to “‘express what was inside’” (cited in Jackson, 2000:175). During an informal telephone interview with Nagrin (2004b) by this researcher, he recalled that this became a key underlying principle to his finding the core of X after working with Graham. Because of their status and historical background of persecution, these Jewish dancers related their central issues of social egalitarianism to modern dance. It is argued that their voicing of concerns for the marginalised resulted in an American identity that contrasted with the formalist modern dance ideology of what in America is commonly referred to as the Big Four – Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, Charles Weidman, and Hanya Holm (Jackson, 2000). Tamiris (1928/89) thought these four did not intend to establish something American which is debatable, but rather to create a form and expression that would have integrity and be a creative force. The critic John Martin (1939/68) saw the possibility of a new dance form emerging out of the commotion and encouraged these promising dance artists of the 1920s, including Graham and Humphrey, to acquire “substance and character,” or form, so that this new dance would be unified to produce a national form of expression (Siegel, 1987a). At this time, Sanford Meisner, with whom Nagrin studied acting as discussed in the previous chapter, taught at the Neighborhood Playhouse (Silverberg, 1994).

The second major institutional influence on the Jewish shaping of an American identity through modern dance is the 92nd Street YMHA, founded in 1874 by German Jews to promote harmony and good fellowship among
young Jewish men. During the 1930s and 40s, the Jews who frequented the Y were affluent, middle-class German and Eastern Europeans who lived in the Jewish neighbourhoods that sprang up during the 1920s in Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. The children and grandchildren of these immigrants had a strong desire to assimilate into American life whilst linked to their Jewishness. They could achieve this by participating in general or nonparochial American activities and contemporary culture provided by the Y. This philosophical blending was rooted in long-standing humanistic views and moral tenets of the Jewish faith such as rational belief, tolerance, and human perfectibility, canonized during the period of Jewish Enlightenment. This Enlightenment, called Haskalah or “reason” of the 18th Century, began to rechannel intellectual and creative energies “from religion to contemporary arts and ideas” for the humanistic purpose of improving and enriching the lives of citizens (Franko, 1995 and Jackson, 2000:6). Since the Y was a major centre of dance classes and performances in New York from the mid 1930s – 1950s, it is argued that the Jewish influence is prevalent in the formation of a strand of modern dance identity in America, thus challenging and problematising the current praxis of modern dance history.

The Y supported both high and low cultures and minority artists by fostering progressive policies and choreographic ideas that helped lay the groundwork for the 1960s new dance experimentations (Jackson, 2000). Due to its multicultural mission, it encouraged other dance genres by fusing ethnic forms with American forms such as modern, jazz, ballet, and tap which I assert are ethnic as well. Tamiris taught at the Y during this time, and Nagrin’s first performances as a solo concert artist were presented here. The Y presented the lesser-known dance artists as well as celebrities, thus covering a broad spectrum of dance genres and styles. This presentation of diversity artists, genres, and themes challenges some of the mythology-based dances of the Big Four. It reflects the humanist tradition in Jewish thought and ethics that strives to create a framework for equity and for individual and social betterment rather than a “space of separation, nihilism, skepticism, or lack of meaning” (Jackson, 2000:211).

However, the foregrounding of diversity can be problematic (Acocella, Jowitt, and Siegel in Gere, 1995; Crowther, 2003; and Manning in Lepecki,
Modern dance’s message implies that a person can transcend circumstances to make positive powerful statements for oneself and the community/world. This “progressive ideology of tolerance and egalitarianism” along with the 1930s Communist slogan of “culture is a weapon” appealed to the independent Jewish choreographers (Jackson, 2000:9; Perelman, 2004; and Prickett in Garafola, 1994a), whilst contrary to the formalism of Martin, Horst and the Big Four. It is argued they saw the potential for racism and ethnocentrism in the bodies of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant choreographers (Foulkes, 2002) such as Graham and Humphrey and in the writings of white, male critics such as Horst and Martin who promoted their works. Some of the aims of this new revolutionary dance were to erase differences between the classes and in the arts, privilege the popular, and produce an egalitarian society. Several scholars (Foulkes, 2002; Franko, 1995; Graff in Garafola, 1994; Harris, 1996; Jackson, 2000; Melosh in Garafola, 1994; and Prickett in Garafola, 1994a & b) challenge modern dance history based in Martin’s critiques. Therefore, the hagiographical nature of critical writing during this time needs to be examined further.

3.1.2. Marginalisation

It is argued the research reveals that writers and critics have marginalised Nagrin for four plausible reasons. This is linked, in part, to his personal and professional association with Tamiris. Particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, she was dismissed and omitted by the major dance critics and writers (Nagrin, 1989) such as Louis Horst, John Martin, and Edwin Denby.

The first reason for marginalisation is due to Tamiris’ controversial social action, which Nagrin also values, which is associated with Russian Jewishness and amelioration as indicated in the above section. Tamiris is linked inadvertently with the revolutionary dance movement since she addressed the plight of the underprivileged as acknowledged by historians Susan Manning (2004a), Stacey Prickett (in Garafola, 1994), and Christena Schlundt (1972). Mark Franko (1995:27) argues that the revolutionary dance was both leftist and featured socially relevant issues rooted in an intellectual socialist production in an Anglo-American tradition of radicalism, but I contend that these roots are in Russian social realism instead. Revolutionary critics
such as Edna Ocko, former dancer and the daughter of Russian-Jewish immigrants whose father was a passionate socialist (Prickett in Garafola, 1994b), criticised Tamiris because she would not use movement as propaganda as did the revolutionary dancers in the United States and arguably Laban and Wigman in Nazi Germany. However, Ocko did praise Tamiris’ recital in January 1935 at the Civic Repertoire Theatre since over half her works dealt with social issues, thus labelling these as revolutionary dance (Prickett in Garafola, 1994b). To complicate this problematic, erroneous revolutionary dance linkage, then-critic Paul Douglas proclaimed Tamiris the heir to Isadora Duncan’s pro-communist revolutionary dance aesthetics. Like Duncan, Tamiris refused to adopt capitalist-based bourgeois dance forms in lieu of the working proletariat (Franko, 2002); and she avoided the subjectivity of emotion for expression, probed in Chapter 5, which further contributed to her marginalisation (Franko, 1995:x). Douglas published an article in *New Theatre* entitled “Modern Dance Forms” in November 1935 in which the ideological limitations of Graham’s dance is discussed, urging his viewers to look to Tamiris instead for the fusion of form and content which will make the modern dance a real weapon for the emancipation of culture . . . . Her arrival into the modern dance has been the result of many years of intellectual development and a constant evolution into new forms based upon concepts which were always growing in relation to a greater understanding and intimacy with her objective world. In struggling with these forces she clarified her own position and needs . . . She understands fully that the form of a composition is always determined by the subject matter. And that fundamental truism is the guide to the future of the modern dance.

Douglas cited in Franko, 1995:141

Tamiris’ social consciousness during the 1930s led her to develop the Arts Project for the Federal Theatre of the Works Progress Administration, the American Dance Association, and the Dance Repertory Theatre (Tamiris, 1928/89) in an attempt to organize modern dancers into a collective voice. She donated much of her time and energy (Banes, 1994; Nagrin, 1989; and Schlundt, 1972), but these attempts proved unsuccessful by 1940. The Federal Dance and Theatre Projects were dismantled in 1939 by the Dies
Committee, a forerunner of the House Un-American Activities Committee of the 1950s, due to allegations of Communist sympathies (Manning in Lepecki, 2004b). By this time, some considered her red, and Manning (2004a) indicates she was on the government’s Red Listing of dancers during the 1930s. However, I argue that neither Tamiris nor Nagrin would have been invited to dance for President Roosevelt’s 1944 wartime re-election campaign (Nagrin, 1989) if suspected of communist sympathies.

Whilst scholars today support the efforts of the Jewish marginalised choreographers, they differ in some ways that further complicates the marginalisation issue. Sally Banes (1994:203) dichotomises the modern dancers of this time into two groups, the noble “progressive liberals” such as Graham and Humphrey and the derogatory label of “radical,” “leftist” revolutionaries such as Sokolow and Maslow. Franko (1995:28), speaking from a progressivist viewpoint, states that revolutionary dance was not as much a form of social protest but a discourse of desire for the radical viewpoint of bringing social action into existence, calling it “rehearsing revolution.” Ellen Graff (in Garafola, 1994:11), Prickett (in Garafola, 1994a) and Schlundt (1997) agree that Tamiris was not leftist as her ideal for a dance aesthetic based in form is similar to those of Graham and Humphrey and actually “collides” (Prickett in Garafola, 1994a:16) with socialism; however, it does displace modernist formalism (Franko, 1995). Jackson’s (2000) omission of Tamiris and Nagrin in her examination of the leftist elements in modern dance implicitly corroborates this. It is argued that Tamiris’ red label was erroneous and results from two main aspects that occurred in the mid and late 1930s Depression, a period of economic, political, and social unrest. First, her efforts in organising the afore-mentioned dance organisations were too close a link to the socialist practice of forming large groups as a collective voice. Secondly, the Communist party supported some of the other dance organisations at this time; therefore, both she and the organisations she founded were perceived as inclusive rather than exempt. In addition, Tamiris’ theatrical embracement during the 1930s of proletariat art featuring Negro experiences and Spain’s civil war are identified as “revolutionary political beliefs” (Bird and Greenberg, 1997:42) stemming from social concerns. It is plausible that this linkage is made because Sokolow, considered an overt
rebels (Banes, 1994 and Harris, 1996), also created a work in 1937, *Slaughter of the Innocents*, based on Spain's civil war (Garafola, 1994 and Warren, 1991). However, it is interesting that Graham remains immune to this label since her dance contribution to a Spanish Civil War benefit programme at this time was seen by some (Graff in Garafola, 1994) as for her own political gain rather than social concern (Siegel, 1987b). Humphrey is excluded altogether from the revolutionary label as her *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías* (1946) based on Lorca’s fallen bullfighter (Siegel, 1987b) occurred a decade later (Banes, 1994). Critics such as Martin, Horst, and Henry Gilfond, whose wife Edythe was Graham’s costume designer (Prickett in Garafola, 1994b), eschewed the leftist revolutionaries. Therefore, the erroneous red labelling due to social action stigmatised both her and thus Nagrin by association, contributing to their marginalisations at that time and in the present construction of dance history.

A second marginalisation factor is that Nagrin and Tamiris did not use Horst’s choreographic principles. This is important as critics constructed a view of modern dance (Kane, 2002) based in formalism. Horst founded *Dance Observer* to promote and establish American modern dance as an art form according to his perspective. He commenced publication during the 1930s “as a mouthpiece for the modern-dance movement just beginning” and became “the arbiter of the art in the 1950s” (Schlundt, 1997:34). It is argued that Horst was inclusivist as well as exclusivist in his selection of dances and dance concerts that he reviewed. Author of the well known and then widely used choreographic primer in the United States, *Pre-Classic Dance Forms* (1940), he helped shape American modern dance of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s through both his writings and his dance composition classes which appropriated musical structures to choreographic theory. He favoured the works and ideals of Graham, Humphrey, and Weidman who mirrored his formalist, traditionalist principles (Kane, 2002); and the works of Wigman and Holm who used Laban’s form and dynamics. Tamiris and Nagrin appropriated acting theories to dance instead. According to Tamiris (1928/1989), Horst had no regard for her views or her refusal to embrace structured formalism. By her second concert in January 1928, she sensed his feelings toward her had changed in this regard and therefore no longer discussed dance theory.
with him. One fundamental difference between them was that she believed dance would have meaning and survive if movement were captured truthfully rather than making primary a formalist framework (Nagrin, 1989 and Tamiris, 1928/89).

John Martin privileged the structural theories based in form taught by Horst. As the dance critic for the *New York Times* since 1927, Martin not only “shaped dancers’ careers as well as the public’s perception of dance” (Jackson, 2000:57), it is argued that he and Horst actually constructed historical, formalist modern dance in America in two respects: politically through their journalistic visibility and power, and secondly through their positioning as formalist critics. Through Martin’s sought-after advice, he is responsible for recommending the Big Four dancers to initiate and establish both the dance programmes at the YMHA and at the Bennington summer dance workshops. Lasting for nine summers from 1934–1942, Bennington brought together students and teachers to promote and highlight the new dance genre of the Big Four (Siegel, 1987a). The Bennington workshops eventually inspired the formation of American college and university dance programmes that today overwhelmingly are based theoretically in the formalist writings of Horst and works of Humphrey, Cunningham, and to a lesser extent Laban. Martin’s choice to select only certain choreographers shaped the dominant influences in formalist modern dance and American dance history, and he positioned these historically at the exclusion of non-formalist choreographers such as Tamiris and Nagrin.

By the mid-1930s, Tamiris fit neither ideologically with the Big Four nor with the politically radical revolutionaries, and thus was omitted by both camps. Horst complained that she could not choreograph (Prickett in Garafola, 1994b; and Siegel, 1979), but his account is suspect since he felt he and choreographers who used his formalist music-based theory were the only ones who could choreograph appropriately. For example, since Graham and Humphrey used Horst’s formula, he and Martin hailed them as compositional geniuses (Siegel, 1985). But upon reviewing the literature, this researcher discovered that Martin also omitted Tamiris from his books during this decade (Martin, 1936 and 1939; and Nagrin, 1989). Even Denby (1949/68) excluded Tamiris and Nagrin from his concert viewings and writings during the 1940s.
Denby’s exclusion is significant because he was a supporter of Graham’s modern works, ballet, Agnes de Mille’s and Jerome Robbins’ Broadway musicals, and some popular culture dance (Denby, 1949/68 and Jowitt, 2004). Equally significant is that Marcia B. Siegel, Arlene Croce, Deborah Jowitt, and Nancy Goldner (Theodores, 1996) esteem Denby as the consummate dance critic, which leads into the next reason.

A third reason for marginalisation is Tamiris’ and Nagrin’s theatrical embracement of popular culture, Broadway, and American Negro experiences including jazz music and dance. Since they embraced socially relevant, non-formalist “proletariat art,” it was seen as conflicting with the “bourgeois” art of the Big Four (Franko, 1995:27). The relationship between, and the socializing impact of, bourgeois art and popular culture, ironically also known by the Yiddish name kitsch (Greenberg, 1961), needs to be understood during this time that upheld and articulated the dichotomy between high and low, capitalist and workers’ art. Clement Greenberg (1961:15) saw kitsch as a product of the industrial revolution’s urbanized masses of Western Europe’s and America’s capitalist economies and the rise of universal literacy that brought about a demand for a less elite, “plastic” culture or “synthetic art.” Marginalisation is problematised further by the lack of a recognizable dance technique (Franko, 1995) such as Graham’s, Humphrey’s, or even de Mille’s, as critics deemed Tamiris’ works mediocre and amateur. In contrast, the ballet-trained Jerome Robbins, also the only son of Russian-Jewish immigrants (Jowitt, 2004), historically is treated favourably as a Broadway choreographer since his first musical, Fancy Free, in 1944 (Jowitt, 2004). Marcia Siegel asserts that Tamiris “paid a price” for her dual career on the concert stage and Broadway as a “victim of subtle snobbery and clannishness among the ‘in’ modern dancers . . . [who] thought her vulgar” (Siegel, 1985:42).

Most dance critics did not treat jazz with seriousness and respect (Roses-Thema, 2003). Tamiris was passionate about an American dance form based in American themes such as jazz, Negro spirituals, and sports (Nagrin, 1989 and Tamiris, 1928/89) which the ethnocentric and possibly xenophobic Horst could not embrace. Thus, it is surprising that Horst lauded Nagrin’s works due to Nagrin’s affiliation with Tamiris. Tamiris’ and Nagrin’s
penchant for popular culture and Negro-based music were not being explored by most of their formalist contemporaries, possibly due to the dichotomy and conflict between high and low, bourgeois and proletariat, and Negro and white art at that time. Martin regarded the Big Four as the elite dance artists and ignored the socialist roots of nation, class, race, and gender in American modern dance that led to the marginalisation of independent and minority choreographers and of those who dealt with popular art themes.

A double standard existed among critics, since ethnic/racial dimensions presented in the modern dances of the Four were acknowledged. At the same time, critics demeaned, marginalised, and dismissed ethnic dance artists from Jewish, African-American, and Hispanic/Latino backgrounds as less pure or important than the white, formalist American modern dancers. Thus, the marginalisations of Nagrin and Tamiris are plausible and complex due to their treatment of minority and popular cultural themes, jazz, and work on Broadway. By the late 1940s, second and third generation modern dance artists were marginalized as the American Dance Festival and Juilliard focused on Graham and José Limón.

Fourth, Nagrin’s privileging of content rather than form contributes to his marginalisation by critics who were mostly formalist. Franko (1995:27) asserts that the most “hotly contended issues” at this time were the politically intertwining, complex notions of “form versus content and heritage versus innovation.” The decade of the 1950s commenced with Senator Joseph McCarthy’s campaign to purge America of artists and intellectuals with Communist ideals; it closed with the cold-war threat and fear of nuclear annihilation. Political dissent was suppressed (Manning in Lepecki, 2004b), and modern dance was “laundered . . . of its redder tints” (Banes, 1994:204). As a result, socially-oriented, content-based works, an aspect of Marxism (Laing, 1978) favoured by the leftist revolutionaries, were not privileged. Before, during, and immediately after WW II, artists, critics, dealers, and collectors fled Europe for New York which universalised the content of art (Goldberg, 1988; Greenberg, 1961; Hodson in Adshead, 1986; and Martin, 1936/68). These Bohemians were identified as the avant-garde who narrowed their art to the absolutist, modernist expression, “art for art’s sake” (Greenberg, 1961:5). Content was dissolved into form, exemplified in works in
which the body was the medium and content of its expression. Subject matter turned away from the common experience to the personal, found inspiration in the medium, and departed from the angular lines of Cubism. Abstract expressionism, also known as action painting and abstract impressionism, became a form of American-style painting. These artists searched for qualities found in paintings of the past such as expressionism in German, Russian, and Jewish art rather than breaking with it (Greenberg, 1961:210).

Another possibility is that Tamiris and Nagrin worked within a different strand of modernism. The choreographic methods of James Waring, Merce Cunningham, and George Balanchine during the 1950s reflected the nation’s cultural trend toward abstract and plotless expression, which has had a lasting impact on American dance. Waring eliminated the narrative and dramatic structure, blended both music and dance styles which Nagrin did with jazz since the early 1940s, and used intuition to choreograph. Waring employed parody and collage and organised concerts by his students, some of whom were Lucinda Childs, David Gordon, Deborah Hay, Yvonne Rainer, and Valda Setterfield. Although Waring was not officially part of the Judson group of the 1960s, he worked and performed with them and was linked socially to a group of poets connected with the Living Theatre (Banes, 1987 and 1993). Cunningham’s approach is influenced by colleague John Cage’s involvement in Zen Buddhism, which features minimalism, unclutteredness, indeterminancy, and chance selection. He validates the use of any movement, procedure, space, subject, and body part as content in composing dances. Dance is inherently about the human body and its movements; expression in movement is inseparable from the body and is located in one’s personal way of moving, as “movement already is intrinsically significant, ‘in its bones’” (Banes, 1987:6). Although Tamiris stated this almost thirty years earlier in her Manifest of 1928 (Appendix B.1), Cunningham is credited with it. Extending the ideas of whiteness mentioned earlier from the writings of Susan Leigh Foster (2002a) and Julia Foulkes (2002), the probable reason is that Cunningham represents the white Anglo-Saxon protestant, and he is male. He also is privileged to dance in a Big Four company (Graham’s) rather than coming from a marginalised heritage and working with popular cultural themes.
and music. Meanwhile, arguably contributing to his marginalisation, Nagrin continued to dance and choreograph on Broadway, receiving prestigious awards for his performing (concert programme #20), and embarked on his first full-evening concerts featuring African-American popular jazz music and social dance.

Critics Doris Hering of Dance Magazine and Jill Johnston of Dance Observer and later The Village Voice privileged the new dance of the 1950s Dance Associates and the Judson Church group of the 1960s. They broke away from formalist dance critics after Horst’s death in 1962 and Martin’s retirement in 1964 (Jackson, 2000 and Kane, 2000). It is suggested that these new dance critics also are just as inclusivist and exclusivist as Horst and Martin who distanced themselves from choreographers who operated outside their periphery, preference, and ideals of what constituted modern dance or new dance, particularly in their privileging of form over content. For example, Deborah Jowitt calls Johnston an “engagingly partisan commentator” (in Banes, 2003:113), perhaps due to Johnston’s lesbian relationship with Judson member Lucinda Childs during the 1960s (Manning, 2004a). Thus, using Jenkins’ (1991) notion of the ubiquitous nature of bias, questions of objectivity surround Johnston’s reviews, critical strategies used, and choice of genre preference just as Horst’s personal partnership with Graham makes suspect his privileging and promotion of her work. Johnston identifies two concurrent, divergent threads of modern dance in the late 1950s that continued into the 1960s: continuation of the pioneer’s “materials and ideas,” and the “rebels” who were no longer satisfied with these forms (Johnston, 1955:101). She speaks negatively of metaphorical dance but privileges the new or analytical modern dance (Banes, 1987; Johnston, 1955, 1957a and 1957b; and Nagrin, 1994). Other critics, such as Emory Lewis (1959), notices that American modern dance was experiencing a shift during the late 1950s. Scholar Angela Kane (2000) argues that this not only signals a change in writing dance criticism, but also the eschewing of the critical, formalist model set by Horst and others.

By the 1960s, poetry, music, theatre, and dance emphasised performance, immediacy, concrete experience, and the other including popular culture and Broadway musicals (Banes, 1993 and Theodores, 1996).
The economy was expanding, and the new Kennedy administration stressed youth, art, and culture. In Greenwich Village, beatnik culture had catalyzed a renaissance of the ‘bohemia’ that had long been the reputation of the neighborhood. The area was an intensive center of theatrical, literary, and artistic activities, and ideas spread freely and flowed from one art form to another.

Banes, 1987:xv and xvi

Banes states that the dance artists of the early 1960s “protested against the genre’s bombastic social messages” of the previous decades (1994:204). Thus, the newly formed Judson Dance Theatre was an “assault” on academic ballet and modern dance (Banes, 1994:211 and in Adshead, 1986a:93). It celebrated the modernity of youth, searched for the new, had an intelligent, analytic approach to the process of dance making – any movement, any body, any method. In his composition classes for this group, Robert Dunn wanted to find another pedagogical method for choreography since he found Horst’s and Humphrey’s teaching too rigid. Dunn worked with time, literary ideas, chance, giving up clichés, repetition, stillness, arbitrary choice instead of chance, and radical juxtaposition through collage that, according to Banes, (1986a:96) replaced chance. Movement was stripped down or reduced to minimalism, and the handling of objects and tasks was used to distance movement from personal expression and style. Rainer’s spontaneous determination fused chance with improvisation. The Judson group explored various performing spaces other than the proscenium stage as well as several methods and devices for choreographic process (Banes in Adshead, 1986a). Dance was fused with art and sculpture (in, on, around), improvisation, talking while dancing, indeterminacy, rules, limits, collaboration, written scores, quoting other artworks, games, pop music and social dancing, satire, automatism, responding to physical space, analytic dances, mixed media, and traditional methods of composition (Banes, 1993).

The Judson group changed the shape of dance history. These artists questioned dance aesthetics in their compositions and weekly discourses, rejected all codified dance, questioned the traditional dance concert format, explored the nature of dance performance, and discovered a cooperative, democratic method for producing dance concerts. This young artists’
downtown movement contrasted with the “uptown juried concerts” and became the centre of experimentation (Banes, 1987:92 and 1993). Their works solidified the choreographic and performance styles for the next decades.

Many of the characteristics of the Judson group are prevalent in Nagrin’s works of this time, but Nagrin worked with neither them nor Dunn, which may contribute to his marginalization. It is noted that several critics reviewed Nagrin’s concert works less frequently during the 1960s, which seems to suggest four things. First, the large number of new dance concerts of the 1960s may have created a shortage of critics (Theodores, 1996). Secondly, major dance publications were not satisfied with the quality of critiques as attested to by the brief tenures of some reviewers with these publishers; or third, a combination of both. Fourth, it appears that non-Judson artists were marginalised and not reviewed, evidenced in the paucity of reviews for Nagrin’s Workgroup. Critics from Dance Magazine, Dance News, and Ballet News covered some of Nagrin’s performances. However, it is interesting that The New York Times did not send a critic to review his works. Arlene Croce of Ballet Review, which covered many dance genres, never reviewed Nagrin’s performances; neither did Village Voice’s Jill Johnston. Diana Theodores (1996) refers to the “golden age” of dance from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s in New York City. It demanded a number of individuals to critique dance due to the large number of concerts; therefore, it is possible that critics were not always available for the Workgroup’s showings, or that critics and editors deemed it not worth reviewing. The younger, new dance groups and choreographers who experimented in other styles of improvisation, such as Meredith Monk, The Grand Union, and Steve Paxton’s contact improvisation, received much more critical and historical attention. Critic Arlene Croce recognized that even Graham was being ignored at this time and featured an issue on her (Theodores, 1996). Another marginalisation possibility worth deeper scrutiny: Nagrin privileged functional, action-based content rather than the manipulation of form. Nagrin states this is why his work “attracted only a limited segment of the New York dance audience and . . . critics” (Nagrin, 1994:80). He theorized that most critics and audiences were used to being shown something rather than recognizing the
involvement of doing, which is examined in Chapter 6; this elucidates an important strategy for the criteria of viewing, critiquing, and writing of dance. It also is probable that dance writers and critics did not have the strategies at this time to treat content within dance modernism. The epistemological critical theories and strategies of how we view dance performance that affects dance criticism and writing, such as Siegel’s (1977:55 and in Gere, 1995) concern for what dancers are “actually doing,” need to be improved and developed.

Nagrin’s marginalisation illuminates several key factors. Critic Suzanne Carbonneau (1995) suggests, “Nagrin’s constant experimentation has worked most against [his] recognition.” This has merit along with Schlundt’s assessment of his work primarily as a soloist rather than with a company, his association with Tamiris, his Broadway work and musical theatre, and lack of an underpinning technique or “process” (Schlundt, 1997:60). It was argued that Nagrin’s marginalisation is the result of four dominant factors. The first is his association with the controversial Tamiris and her social action; secondly, his use of Stanislavski’s theatre techniques rather than Horst’s choreographic principles. Thirdly, his Broadway career, use of jazz music and dance, and popular cultural themes were seen as problematic. Fourth, some critics rejected his privileging of content over form, which renders him within another strand of modernism that differs from formalist critics and choreographers. These key factors distinguish Nagrin and are analysed further in relationship to his works throughout Part 2.

3.2. CULTURAL MOVEMENTS

Re-constructing Jewishness, New York City’s modern dance scene, and Nagrin’s marginalisation contribute to a framework using Jenkin’s (1991 and 2001) and Layson’s (1987) contextual approaches to examine Nagrin’s works within the cultural milieu of the times. Several aesthetic philosophies or cultural movements affect Nagrin’s choreographic and performance styles as well as choice of dance genres that he worked within, such as modern, jazz, and improvisation. A cultural movement is based upon artistic and intellectual activities and one’s response to them (Sparshott, 1970). Relevant sources from 20th Century writings on art and aesthetics ranging from arts
philosophers (such as Docherty, Eco, Greenberg, Habermas, Hutcheon, Jencks, Langer, Lyotard, McFee, Reid, Rosen, Sparshott, Stern, and Wollheim) to dance critics (Macaulay, Martin) and dance scholars (Banes, Briginshaw, Franko, Manning, and Morris) were selected for examination. These are evaluated in this section for strengths and weaknesses and are useful to an understanding of ideas current in Nagrin’s choreographic time. Ideas within the various movements of classicism, romanticism, modernism, and postmodernism are discussed, but not exhaustively, in relation to Nagrin and his works. Those ideas that may be contained in Nagrin’s works are charted (Appendix A.2) and treated in the following section. Combined with historical context, a cultural movement context provides a framework, potential relationship, and categorisation for positioning and understanding Nagrin’s choreographic and performance styles.

John Martin’s (1939/75) writings on genre, place, and style in dance are helpful particularly in situating and relating Nagrin’s works since both men co-existed in the same historical moment and were involved in dance, albeit in different capacities. Martin associates classicism with ancient Greece and Rome or working from another surviving period, aristocratic rather than from popular culture, order and beauty, set rules of form, standard or specified technique, codified vocabulary, and a balanced, symmetrical design. The approach is not exploratory or adventurous but orderly, mental and reflective, and takes delight in things made and created (Martin, 1939/75). Alastair Macaulay distinguishes between the classical period with set dates and classicism which defines non-literal concepts, expressiveness of pure dance, order and beauty, and a keen sense of style (Macaulay in Adshead, 1986) that diachronically transcends time periods and cultures. He further delineates classicism as two-fold: based in the Homeric principle that something divine is embedded in humans’ lives and behaviours, such as the gods’ activities; and in the Genesis principle that God created man in His own image. For example, Macaulay cites the use of the element of repose in dance as a classicist trait as opposed to what he considers the more Dionysian look of African dance (Macaulay in Gere, 1995). This distinction relates to and can be applied to the other ‘isms’ as well. Although some of these characteristics are present in modernism and modern dance, clearly Nagrin and his works do
not fit classical ideals. Form, beauty, aristocratic works, set technique or vocabulary, rules, symmetry, and the making of dances are not of interest to Nagrin. Instead, he privileges popular culture, experimentation, metaphors, and finding dances through the specific image of a character, the X.

Romanticism is concerned with realism but also with fantasy, emotion and feeling, the picturesque, content and substance rather than form (Martin, 1939/75 and Scully in Langer, 1958). Romanticism ignores time, place, and action; is democratic instead of aristocratic bordering on anarchism; spontaneous and demands the participation of its audience; and delights in things discovered rather than made. Since a “germ” of romanticism is evident in modernism (Rosen, 1971:57), particularly in its approach to form and content, some of these ideas are found in Nagrin’s works. The romantic’s approach is from nature and subjective experience, not by rule but revelation and discovery, sensitivity, and emotional adventure (Martin, 1939/75). June Layson (1987) clarifies it as an emphasis on personal expression, beauty and nature, a disregard for tradition, a revolutionary position against classical ballet, feeling, content, and free expression. These theories are useful as some of these key ideas are evident in Nagrin’s works, particularly democratic or popular themes, realism, discovery/finding over making, and content over form; but not in finding movement through emotion. Form is the visible shape, structure, and embodiment of content as “something new” (Reid, 1969:81). It is “the shape of content” (Shahn, 1966:60) and is “inseparable” as it cannot exist without content (Reid, 1969:27; Shahn, 1966:53; and Stern in Langer, 1958). Formalism can exist in both but can be distinguished intellectually and analytically (Reid, 1969). Pattern is not necessarily the same as artistic form but can be a part of it, revealing the “inner life” of the work (Stern in Langer, 1958:75). Discerning key features of content, form, and pattern in Nagrin’s works aids in articulating his styles.

Modernism includes a mid 19th Century Kantian Enlightenment concept of l’art pour l’art or art for art’s sake that involves method or process and is object- and form-based (Cheney, 1946). However, Sheldon Cheney (1946) further defines it as abstraction in two strands, both l’art pout l’art and feeling/content, corroborated later by Louis Arnaud Reid (1969). Cheney includes personal identification, intensity of expression, and things revealed...
rather than imitated. Martin (1939/75) characterises it by the privileging of functional form, individuality, neurosis, decadence, angular lines, cacophony, intellectualism, primitivism, and the industrial age and technology, which eliminates art as representationalism (objects) in lieu of abstraction or essential qualities (or concepts) and subjective experiences. Abstraction is stripped of decoration, a sort of distortion but not mutilation, based in reality, and features materials (1939/75). Divergent art movements within modernism emerge and are useful in the analysis of Nagrin’s works. Both Martin (1939/75) and Sparshott (1970) validate modernism’s merit by process or the act rather than by product, artefact, or object. In contrast is Reid’s (1969:17) view of art as the making, contemplation, and enjoyment of artefacts or objects “with attention to its form or selected aspects of form.” Cheney’s (1946) dual strands include both. Even though Martin’s and Sparshott’s views are oppositional to Reid’s and outdated by contemporary standards, they are relevant historically to the understanding of the larger cultural movements and situating Nagrin within his time. Thus, the treatment of art as process and the two strands within modernism of form and content/essence are part of the qualities that are characteristic of a certain movement and are useful.

John Martin (1939:126) states that modernism “makes tangible the new directions of its time” and is “impossible to tie down.” Cheney (1946:69) reiterates this with “art inevitably changes, grows, expands into new forms; and tradition marks the main path of progress.” Martin viewed modernism as sometimes classical, sometimes romantic, and unpopular in its day. Graham, Humphrey, Weidman, Horst, and Wigman approached form through a developed dance technique and treatment of subject matter, space, abstraction/distortion, austere costumes, gravity, and angular and percussive rhythms and lines to reflect a progressive industrial society. The ideas of both Cheney (that is, art as content and essence, process, abstraction, expression, revealed, changing, taking on new forms) and Martin (abstraction and distortion, based in reality, process, minimalist, experiences, romantic, and unpopular) coincide with Nagrin’s philosophy and works. Mark Franko, reflecting on this period from his viewpoint within the postmodern era, explains that the term modernism covers a “complex of aesthetic procedures currently under intense critical scrutiny,” articulating that “all modern dance is
not modernist” (Franko, 1995:145). This is evident in the works of modern choreographers that some scholars consider classicist such as Graham (Macaulay in Adshead, 1986) and Cunningham (Copeland, 2004), even though their works are conceptually different. Franko (1995) further states that the most significant characteristic of the absolute modernist narrative is its development of expression through the presence of the moving body as the sole intent (Denby, 1949/68). It is not expressive in the sense of the Romantic emphasis on subjective emoting to find movement. Franko (1995) distinguishes between expression and expressive, discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to Nagrin’s works. An equally important relationship to Nagrin’s works is Banes’ (1987) analysis of the changes, splits, and variations from dance d’école (academic ballet) in the 20th century.

Scholars cannot agree on the first usage of the term postmodernism, used interchangeably at times with post-structuralism (Sarap, 1989), which in itself reflects its ambiguous and complex nature. Thomas Docherty (1999) credits the label to historian Arnold Toynbee in 1939; and Ihab Hassan (in Docherty, 1999:147) to Federico de Onís of Spain in 1934, but comments that it has “no clear definition” or “birth date.” Valerie Briginshaw (1991) dates the earliest use of the term to the 1950s, and architect Charles Jencks (1992) traces its use in 1870, but neither indicate by whom. Jean-François Lyotard (1979/84) calls it a condition, Umberto Eco (in Docherty, 1999) an attitude, and Jencks (1992) a movement.

Several ideas surround postmodernism’s characteristics. Jencks (1992) positions it as a world-view arising from feminism that is pluralistic and multicultural rather than one universal truth, interdisciplinary and intertextual, non-elitist by challenging hierarchy and authority, and features popular culture. Lyotard situates it within ultra avant-gardism, Nietzsche’s nihilism, and Kant’s sublime (Lyotard, 1979/84 and in Docherty, 1999c). Hassan (in Docherty, 1999:154) states it is immanence or in the moment, indeterminancy with ambiguity and discontinuity, and a “playful . . . discourse of ironies and fragments.” Linda Hutcheon calls it contradictory, politically based, “resolutely historical” and contextual (1988:4). Keith Jenkins (2001) states it has no absolutes; includes Barthes’ death of the author and all centres; contains Derrida’s deconstruction, relativism, and nothing outside of the text or object;
and is sceptical with doubt and uncertainty. It is non-Marxist, democratic, post-industrial, and technological with consumerism, particularly in America (Bell in Jencks, 1992). It contains pastiche, reflexivity, simulacrum (Sarap, 1989); is anti-form, features content, and questions (Munslow, 1997). In dance, Briginshaw (1991) sees it in experimentation, blurred boundaries, satire, audience involvement, media usage, hybridisation and fusion.

Modern/postmodern boundaries are neither fixed nor clear, which further problematises postmodernism’s definition. Gay Morris (1996) argues that postmodernism’s shifting ground contrasts with modern’s fixed boundaries and pure form. Jencks (1992) considers it double-coded and a hybridisation from modernism. Eco views postmodernism as a “metahistorical category that cuts across periods of cultural history” (cited in Jencks, 1992:10). Both Hassan (in Docherty, 1999) and Hutcheon (1988) assert that its historical placement is unstable and is not the antithesis of modernism but has permeable and fluid boundaries, working critically from within both. A writer can write as a modernist and a postmodernist at the same time because the period is perceived as both continuity and discontinuity, proving that opposites can co-exist. Jencks’ and Hutcheon’s views offer the best explanation or description used in this thesis, and are useful in analysing these ideas further within Nagrin’s genres and styles.

In dance, the defining line between modern and postmodern is a flexible one and is more ambiguous than in the other arts, problematising the rigid categorising of 20th century American dance artists into modern and postmodern dichotomies. Hutcheon’s notion that postmodern characteristics are constructed in various ways by various people, rendering all as “finally fictions” (1989:11), is appropriate for dance. Due to the continued discourse surrounding the Banes/Manning debate (Banes, 1987 and Manning, 1988) over the rigid definition of dance modernism and postmodernism (also, see Banes in Adshead 1986a and 1986b, in Briginshaw 1991, 1993, 1994, and in Docherty 1999; Daly, 1992; Fleming in Gere, 1995; Franco, 1995; Kane, 2000; Murdock, 2000; Nagrin, 1994; and Banes, Copeland, Driver, Foster, Halprin, Hay, Novack, and Siegel in Daly 1992), the formalist definition of modernism is used throughout this thesis rather than dance modernism. Banes (1987) initially defines postmodern dance as beginning with the Judson
group, but later changes this position to be high abstract expressionism or high modernism (1994 and in Docherty, 1999). Meglin (1999) refers to the 1960s as high modernist. Manning (1988) argues postmodern dance began around 1979/80. Whilst Manning’s (1988) definition of postmodern dance is preferred, Banes’ later re-positioning of her definition also is useful in this thesis for two reasons. Banes not only re-thinks some of her earlier defining characteristics which supports its dualistic nature, but she is arguably the most prolific scholar on the Judson Church group and subsequent attributes of American postmodern dance. Therefore, both Manning’s and the later characteristics articulated by Banes (1994 and in Docherty, 1999) offer a useful framework on which to attempt to examine the relationships between Nagrin’s works with dance modernism, high modernism, and postmodernism since his career happened within these movements. Using this framework, emergent patterns in his works, albeit non-conclusively, that plausibly contain ideas within 20th Century dance were charted into the rubric in Appendix A.2. This is used in the analysis in Part 2, which may be able to reflect cultural positionings of Nagrin’s works during each period.

Dance postmodernism does not always follow the other arts as elements of it are found within modernism, such as the medium’s materials, abstraction, formalist exploration, reflexivity, and essentialism. Dance’s identification with postmodernism is partially an institutional one contingent upon venues, producers, and self-presentation (Banes in Briginshaw, 1991); postmodern dancers are both bearers of the modern tradition and critics of it; and historical modern dance was not modernist as were the other arts (Franko in Desmond, 1997). As a result, the positioning of dance as well as Nagrin into an aesthetic movement is equally problematic. Even the modernist Martin (1939/75) acknowledges the confusion in relationship to modernism in dance, whilst Banes (1987) states that modern dance history is cyclical as the new modern dance tolerates invention and change and breaks with tradition. Jackson (2000) suggests there is a greater connection than realised in the relationship between modern and postmodern dance rather than the radical divide as multiculturalism and ethnic diversity challenge the male white American history, a concept illuminated further by Foulkes (2002) and Manning (2004a). Briginshaw (1991) suggests there may be many different
strands of both modernism and postmodernism, and Geoff Seale (in Briginshaw, 1991:44) writes that “classical and modern styles co-exist alongside the products of postmodernism.” Thus, what is clear is that a definition of American postmodern dance is murky.

This thesis implicitly problematises the categorical definitions of modern and postmodern dance, evident in the tendency to generalise all or most of Nagrin’s concert oeuvres as modern dance portraits by such writers and historians as Selma Jeanne Cohen (1998), Don McDonagh (1976), Christena Schlundt (1997) and Marcia B. Siegel (1985) is challenged. Anna Kisselgoff (1994), Barbara Palfry (1999), and Schlundt (1997) place Nagrin as a modern dancer. These labels and viewpoints are controversial and inconsistent. Joellen Meglin (1999:104-106) asserts that he is not postmodern due to his continued use of metaphors, but is nonetheless a “divergent voice” throughout it. She positions him on the fluid cusp of modernism/pre-postmodernism by labelling him a “high modern” and a “precursor to the popular in postmodernism” (1999:104). Critics Suzanne Carbonneau (1995) and Kisselgoff (1994) see Nagrin’s works as experimental. Susan Leigh Foster (2002b), Deborah Jowitt (1974), and Gus Solomons (1998) label his works from the 1960s onward as postmodern. Others, such as critic John Martin (Schlundt, 1997) and dancer Bill Evans (2002), praise Nagrin for successfully crossing the boundaries between high art and the vernacular, a postmodern concept (Hutcheon, 1989). It is dubious whether Doris Hering (1951, 1957a, and 1957b) would consider him an artist at all, but rather an entertainer which Nagrin (1991) flatly eschews. It is interesting that Nagrin refuses labelling or pigeonholing into one specific style (Gruen, 1988 and Nagrin, 1997). Nagrin (1988a) considers himself a minor artist. In contrast, Carbonneau (1995) refers to him as a major dance artist.

Nagrin refuses to comment on his positioning or discuss his dance contributions (Gruen, 1988 and Nagrin, 1997), work, and past, dismissing these as “self-righteous narration” (Newman, 1975). He adds that background information, while having everything to do with a person’s convictions and beliefs as an artist, is unimportant, irrelevant, and misused. However, Nagrin’s view is challenged both in Part 2 of this thesis and earlier in this chapter, which is consistent with current research trends regarding contextuality’s
cultural validity and influence. Nagrin insists the importance is within the artwork itself and whether or not he can inspire others to dance rather than what is the context or how his works were created. He states he has no desire to be great, but simply wants to do his work in a highly rigorous manner (Nagrin, 1991). When questioned recently about his historical placement as modern or postmodern, he laughed and responded:

The whole schtick flowing out of Merce simply puts the focus on the medium. This all starts with Flaubert who said he would love to write about nothing.

Nagrin cited in Roses-Thema, 2003:117

Nagrin asserts that Gustav Flaubert’s modernist l’art pour l’art manifesto is identical to what the 1960s choreographers, including Cunningham, were saying, although the latter’s positioning is challenged by Roger Copeland (2004) as situating between modernism and postmodernism. This further problematises the Judson and other choreographers of that time as postmoderns and continues to blur the divide between the defining characteristics of modernism and postmodernism in dance, rendering it as fluid, flexible, and ambivalent.

Nagrin further comments that the Judson group danced about things, not about the depths of the human experience. Nagrin does not consider them humanist (an Enlightenment concept) as they elevated things over people (Dunning, 1982 and Roses-Thema, 2003). He criticizes their ignoring socio-political and cultural ethos of the time in their works such as the Vietnam conflict and upheavals in America. This supports the view that formalist, modernist dance is not concerned with social agency (Copeland, 1990 and Franko in Desmond, 1997), which differs from modern art (Cheney, 1946). However, some Judson dancers did make dance statements about the war in Vietnam by the late 1960s and early 1970s (Banes, 1987), documented by concert reviews. Both physical and emotional risk is important in dance, which in Nagrin’s opinion is one of the founding contributions of modern dance, as both tragedy and comedy are defined and shaped through conflict. Thus, Nagrin (2001) debatably asserts that of primary importance is the specific character doing specific actions -- his core of X -- rather than style, genre, or
dramatic, formal, abstract movements. This is consistent with my experiences with him.

3.3. NAGRIN’S STYLES AND GENRES

Using Layson’s (1987) idea of context emerging through artistic nature, an exposition of stylistic underpinnings to re-construct an understanding of Nagrin’s works and times for further analysis is merited. Thematic, structural, and treatment variations throughout Nagrin’s career prompted my grouping of his works into four distinct periods, each treated separately in this section. These groupings give a synchronic view that elucidates prevalent aesthetic ideas and their relationships (Jenkins, 2001). This is useful in understanding the flux, growth, and fusion within Nagrin’s genres and styles and his artistic choices of theme, structure, treatment, and performative elements.

Just as a new cultural movement tends to be shaped by changes in style from one period to another (Cheney, 1946 and Martin, 1939/75), one element of a new style can gradually transform all other elements into an integrated whole (Rosen, 1971:57). Artistic concepts emerge through such elements as unity, beauty, genre, and style; and various types of style are cultural movements, styles within that movement, the artist’s, and the performer’s (McFee, 1992). The first two types were treated in the previous section, and the last two are treated here. In relation to dance, genre is defined as the overarching knowledge, technique, or belief that collectively is distinct to a group of dances (Adshead, 1988), such as the genre of ballet or Nagrin’s genres of modern, jazz, and improvisation. Each of these dance genres is subdivided by the individuality of style that contains both choreographic and performative styles (1988), such as Balanchine’s and Tudor’s styles within the genre of ballet or Graham’s and Cunningham’s styles within the genre of modern dance. Genre is rather explicit as mentioned in the categories of dance, but style can be more subtle (Meyer in Lang, 1979). Style is how or in what way something is said (McFee, 1992), and content is the meaning or what a work of art says (Sirridge and Armelagos, 1977).

An attempt to define style is made by various scholars. For Sparshott, style is the essence plus tensions between representation and truth, with
representation not the actual reality but a distortion of the truth or a referent of the real thing -- the artist’s “method of interpreting reality” (Sparshott, 1970:379). This reality is maintained throughout the work, “like wearing a garment that looks as if it might have been made for you even if it wasn’t” (Croce, 1977:9). Style is shaped intentionally through personal vision, authorship, and “a system of creating, modifying, selecting, arranging, and interpreting forms” that are subject to selection and exclusion by the artist (Sparshott, 1970:98), or artist’s “choice” (Meyer in Lang, 1979:3). It is based upon a set of rules or formulae, including the rule of no rules at all (Sparshott, 1970), but can deviate from fixed rules (Milosz, 2004:7) and change constantly. It includes patterning (Meyer in Lang, 1979:3); form within content, internal order and expressiveness, spatial orientation, relationships between other works of art (Kubler in Lang, 1979); the artist’s or group’s signature, and complex characteristics (Sirridge and Armelagos, 1977).

Martin’s writings on style initially published in 1939 are useful here, although somewhat historically dated, since they reflect the dominant aesthetic philosophy of the time that Nagrin began to dance and choreograph. These provide an understanding of his inherited influences. Martin is undoubtedly one of the most important critics of the modern dance movement at the time, along with Edna Ocko and Louis Horst (Graff in Garafolo, 1994; Franko, 1995; Jackson, 2000; and Prickett in Garafolo, 1994). Martin (1939) believed that art was a product of a specific group, constructed by people within a given society shaped by the underlying factors of time, place, race, religion, culture, economics, politics, geography, and social customs. Whilst the impulses for creating are deemed universal by Martin and most of these scholars, the forms are localised and are projected into the work along with the artist’s image. Stylistic influences from the past may enrich an artist’s current style whilst maintaining his own approach in his time, and it is within this range that a “practical consideration of style must function” (Martin, 1939:104). Since personal style and vision create a unique identity, Martin concludes that modern dance is built upon it and is meaningless without it (1939). How Nagrin’s personal vision affected his choreographic and performance styles is open for examination. As indicated, Nagrin favours not defining one’s style as he thinks freedom and creativity are thwarted and the
artist becomes a “prison of which you are the architect,” which eliminates the need to experiment (Gruen, 1988; and Nagrin, 1988a:197 and 1997).

The above signature features or characteristics are fluid and can be seen both in and out of an artist’s style (Wollheim in Lang, 1979). These are useful in the analysis by identifying and tracing patterns in X to determine how Nagrin shaped his choreographic and performance styles. Choreographic style is evident in the choice of treating subject matter and by tracing thematic and structuring patterns within the works, beginning with description, then understanding and interpretation (Adshead, 1988; Reid in Langer, 1958; Sanders, 2004; and Wollheim in Lang, 1979). Aural and visual choices determine performative style. Dance technique, defined as both “a method of training the body to achieve specific movement tasks” and a “systematic approach” to moving or the medium (Siegel, 1977:107), reveals idiosyncratic styles (McFee, 1992) seen throughout each of Nagrin’s four periods.

Three analytical models provide the framework to commence a stylistic analysis of Nagrin’s thematic periods. Janet Adshead’s (1988) model places the work within its respective dance genre and then proceeds with subject matter, qualities, and the artistic statement or meaning but not necessarily following this sequence. Angela Kane (2003) traces the complex patterns of theme, structure, and dynamic contrasts in the works of Paul Taylor to illuminate his distinctive stylistic changes. She selects five representative dance prototypes, similar to the way Rachel Richardson (1994) in her music and history analysis divides Antony Tudor’s works into four case study periods and styles. Kane identifies key characteristics of each, such as treatment of subject matter, movement preferences, choice and treatment of music, and use of certain costume and set designers. Performance style emerges with various dance company members dancing specific roles. June Layson’s (1987) stylistic analysis of Isadora Duncan’s works involves probing structural components of form through the identification and choice of consistent movement selections and their body action and dynamics, spatial relationships, use of time within dance phrases, and visual and aural contexts. She also examines the treatment of subject matter in how the source material is utilised and “packaged” into identifiable labels as representational, narrative, literal, abstract, lyrical, impressionistic, pure movement, et cetera.
Both Kane and Layson acknowledge the importance of a choreographer’s choice on style in the selection of these elements. Choreographic style is determined by the overall look of the dance’s structure, theme, and treatment; and performance style is the expressive communicative corporeal function of the individual performers combined with selection of music, costumes, and visual contexts (Layson, 1987).

The Adshead, Kane, and Layson sources are useful in creating an adapted model that features five components and a case study for the analysis of Nagrin’s choreographic and performance styles. Based on my experiences with him and his methods, an adapted model is required to probe his works more comprehensively since his work is non-formalist. A major focus of the three sources that is problematic in this analysis is the manipulation of elements and their relationships to one another, as Nagrin’s search for the core of X does not derive from or centre around these formalist characteristics. Other aspects prominent in the three sources such as treatment of space and other performative characteristics are neither featured nor remarked in Nagrin’s works. Furthermore, Nagrin’s choreographing and performing solo in most of his works blurs and overlaps with these two styles, particularly his corporeal function of movement preferences and his treatment of subject matter. Therefore, the analytical components appropriated from the Adshead, Kane, and Layson models to illuminate Nagrin’s core of X are: dominant theme, which includes locating the X; choreographic structure; and treatment of subject matter to determine choreographic style. Tracing Nagrin’s choices in the aural and visual contexts reveals his performance style through illuminating the dance elements. These are not presented necessarily in this order in each of the chapters, as Adshead (1988) suggests. Rather, each chapter’s structure begins with the most dominant characteristic first. The exception is the case study sections, which, for consistency, follow the same structure throughout each chapter; that is, thematically locating the image and the X, formal elements, structural devices, and treatment of the material.
3.4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

An investigation into the historical background that situates Nagrin in his time reveals three main threads: Jewishness, marginalisation, and the larger aesthetic context. The contextualisation re-envisioned the Eastern European Jewish ideological influence on American society and art during the first half of the 20th Century. In particular, its impact on modern dance in New York City bears direct relationship to Nagrin's life and art through the primary institutional influence of the YMHA and secondary influence of people connected with The Neighborhood Playhouse. The aesthetic context positions Nagrin and his works concurrently with other artists and reveals plausible reasons for his marginalisation. The marginalisation of Nagrin's work and method is re-visited and argued due to his association with Tamiris who also was kept on the periphery, privileging of social consciousness, and non-use of Horst's formalist principles. Nagrin's use of popular culture and jazz, Broadway career, privileging of content that suggests a different strand of modernism, and the bias of formalist dance critics and writers all contribute to his marginalisation. The extent to which his historical context and key marginal factors also affect and influence his resultant styles and genres needs further examination.

The placement of Nagrin's concert works is framed through the study of aesthetic philosophies and cultural context, and corresponding stylistic underpinnings were examined and charted (Appendix A.2). Various sources from 20th Century writings on art and aesthetics were evaluated for strengths, weaknesses, potential usefulness, and application to the research in order to provide a contextual framework to understand the zeitgeist in which Nagrin lived and worked. A study of Nagrin's entire works is undertaken in Part 2, and each of the four periods is articulated separately for stylistic content, comparison and contrasts, and continuity and change to elucidate distinctive patterns. These are traced through the various eyes of Nagrin and others through written texts, videographic and photographic cameras, my personal recollections from his tutelage, and recent communication with him. Nagrin's choreographic methodology of getting to the core of X is analysed through his choreographic and performance styles and case studies from each of the four
thematic periods, located at the end of each chapter before the summary. Albeit new to dance at the time, it is strange that Nagrin’s methods remain on the periphery today and have not been analysed prior to this thesis.

ENDNOTES

1 Lyotard further expounded on this and traced the sublime, which means surprise and admiration in French, to Kantian aesthetics. The Sublime is something that cannot be shown or presented, but is an emotion to be experienced, a concern for sensations (Lyotard in Docherty, 1999c). Beauty derives from the feelings of pleasure, appeals to the universal, and involves judgment in presenting or ‘taste’ (Lyotard, 1984).

2 Harris (1996) is the only scholar found to date who states Irene Lewisohn taught Delsarte’s theories but fails to reference how she arrived at this as well as several other conclusions. Whilst working in the Pennsylvanian Poconos in 1941, Nagrin showed Tamiris drawings of human silhouettes corresponding to the specific Delsarte positions with their assigned meaning which expressed different emotions. She “hooted the theory down” as “Delsarte nonsense” since it was in direct contradiction to the Stanislavski approach using the internal life” (Nagrin, 1989:16). Years later when writing one of his books, Nagrin validated his suspicion that Lewisohn did not teach Delsarte by phoning Anna Sokolow who, along with Tamiris, was a former student of Lewisohn’s at The Neighborhood Playhouse. She “flatly denied” that any theory or principles of Delsarte were taught in the classes (Nagrin, 1989:17).

3 Denby was “silent” on other 1940s modern choreographers such as his young friend, Paul Taylor (Kane, 2006).

4 The term ‘Negro’ is used here as that was the culturally accepted term for African Americans and their art at that time. Brenda Dixon Gottschild’s (in Gere, 1995) ‘Africanist’ label applies to the appropriations by various African cultural groups fused with Euro-American culture, not to the displaced peoples themselves living in America. From my experience of living through these times in America, the term ‘Negro’ changed to ‘black’ during the 1960s’ civil rights struggles, to ‘Afro-American’ in the 1980s, then to ‘African-American’ in the early 1990s. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to maintain consistency with the historical and cultural relevancy of the terms when speaking from the viewpoint within the period; when speaking from a viewpoint outside the period, I use today’s accepted term, ‘African-American.’

5 According to Madan Sarap (1989), post-structuralism, as a set of critical theories, breaks from a structured, formalised linguistics approach. It has no real theoretical viewpoint or fixed meaning. Postmodernism is a reaction against the Enlightenment and describes a new type of society since WW II, which also refers to post-structuralism in the arts. Hegel’s view of history as progress is rejected, nihilism prevails, universal philosophy is held suspect, conformity is viewed critically, and the subjective and belief in the eternal are questioned.
PART 2

DANIEL NAGRIN: THE WORK AND METHOD
CHAPTER 4: DANCE PORTRAITS

INTRODUCTION

The entitling of Nagrin’s early works as a Dance Portraits thematic cluster is derived from his original concert programmes. It is argued that the core of X in these works is seen primarily through dances of the human condition via the development of specific characters in action. Both John Martin (1939/1975) and Christena Schlundt (1997) compare these theatrical portraits to theatrical drama, which is not surprising as Nagrin appropriated his choreographic model from acting techniques. These solos reflect heavily Nagrin’s adaptation of the Stanislavski-Tamiris influences mentioned in Chapter 2 of getting to the core of X.

Nagrin is situated within this time from repeated viewings of his concert works and a case-study analysis of Strange Hero (1948), which is included at the end of the chapter before the summary. An attempt is made to analyse the Nagrin Method by tracing patterns in how he arrived at the core of X, to situate his aesthetic context during the period, and to justify his thematic categorisation. The sources probed for Nagrin’s Dance Portrait period include his videotapes and books, photographs, original concert programmes, and professional critiques and reviews. Don McDonagh’s (1976) writings are used as well as personal handwritten descriptive notes given to Schlundt by Nagrin (1997).

4.1. PORTRAITS AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

It is argued that Nagrin’s defining hallmarks to reveal the core of X during this period are through the dominant themes of dramatic portraiture and aspects of the human condition and behaviour. Considered a “great dancing personality” of the 1950s (Siegel, 1977:237), Nagrin shaped and translated specific characterisations prevalent and believable in American society at that time into Dance Portraits. From viewing the videotapes and various writings, the crux of Nagrin’s solos, or his X, are personalities defined
through specific actions. Spanning the 1940s and 1950s, this period covers Nagrin’s first attempts at choreography. The Dance Portraits commence in 1942 (Schlundt, 1997) with Private Johnny Jukebox, although McDonagh (1976) delineates the beginning as 1948 with Spanish Dance and Strange Hero. It might be argued that Nagrin’s Portrait period ends in 1959 with Theatre for Fools, formerly entitled An Entertainment (Nagrin, 2005a). This thematic array of dramatic, action-oriented male characters includes the club-dancing, cola-drinking soldier in Private Johnny Jukebox (1942), created whilst entertaining U.S. troops during World War II. Landscape with Three Figures, 1859 (1943) focuses on the historical figure, John Brown (Concert Programme #6), whose 1859 raid on the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry (in what was the state of Virginia at that time) catapulted America into civil war (Harper’s Ferry, 2002). An exuberant autumn walk in Dance in the Sun (1951), the good-looking, cigarette-smoking gangster on the run in Strange Hero (1948), the “average joe” (Pastore, 1975:74) busy businessman in Man of Action (1948), and the narcissistic fool in Indeterminate Figure (1957) are other examples. The “primitive” (Manchester, 1959d:9 and McDonagh, 1997), tribal ritual of the islander in With My Eye and With My Hand (1958); the study of adolescence (Manchester, 1959d:9) in For a Young Person (1958); and the solo character studies of Three Happy Men (1958) on “The Peasant (medieval) . . . The Tradesman (Reformation) . . . and The Nobleman (baroque)” (Horst, 1958:57) substantiate my argument that Nagrin developed a broad range of social portraits. These solo, “focused movement statements of individual people . . . became his legacy” (Schlundt, 1997:27) in contrast to the group characters of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and José Limón.

It is argued that Nagrin’s dances flowed from his existentialist philosophy. Nagrin is concerned with the present moment, and his idiosyncratic characters are constructed from his worldview. Themes are created from his lived experiences and observations from everyday life, or his “immediacy of ‘felt’ life, the ‘now’ carried over into movement and then expressed through movement” (Schlundt, 1997:15). He exposes popular culture’s morbid fascination with aberrant hero worship in Strange Hero, fears of nuclear annihilation in Indeterminate Figure, and the futileness of a stressful lifestyle in Man of Action. Unlike Graham and Limón who created
dances around a character, usually mythological or biblical personages of the past, Nagrin for the most part developed and situated characters from his observations of and interaction with people in the immediacy of his time and in the world around him. For instance, Nagrin states how he arrived at his idea for *Man of Action*:

> Tamiris and I lived in Croton-on-Hudson from 1948 to 1950, which meant that we spent a lot of time in Grand Central [subway station], going and coming. One day we were on that elevated section on the west side of the station looking down at a late afternoon crowd criss-crossing the enormous space. My eye was caught by a man moving faster than anyone there. Suddenly he changed direction, without losing a beat and then just as abruptly he changed back to his original direction, but before long he was headed in an entirely new direction. I laughed and knew that he had given me a new dance.

Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:212

These dance portraits are socially oriented as he feels everyone has a social comment to make (Nagrin, 2001). Shane O’Hara, a graduate school colleague who performs several of Nagrin’s works and will assume the role of Artistic Director of The Nagrin Foundation after Nagrin’s death, states, “like all of his solos, they are about the human condition and that still resonates today” (O’Hara, 2005). Schlundt (1997:70) explains that Nagrin “dealt with the plight of people in this world,” and his focus was “always human beings and their relationships with their environment.” From my work under Nagrin’s tutelage, this is his *raison d’être*.  

The extent to which Nagrin’s social consciousness emerges through the social actions of characters reflecting the human condition, or what I term Nagrin’s social agency, is probed. Nagrin “explores, values, and makes accessible what it means to be human” (Evans, 2002:58) by provoking “audiences to share and ponder” in these “equally biting and gentle” portraits (Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a:531). He reflects current social concerns through men in conflict by an “honest, no-nonsense approach” (McDonagh, 1997:78). Rather than dance someone else’s choreography as on Broadway, Nagrin simply wants “to be an artist who demanded straight out that people...
look at their lives and think about their values” (Schlundt, 1997:62). He accomplished this by confronting viewers with dramatic, conflicted characters to acknowledge personal biases and to reflect upon relevant social issues (Evans, 2002). These ideas are based in the new history and phenomenological approaches discussed in Chapter 1 (Hutcheon, 1988; Jenkins, 1991; and Horton-Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999). New history includes a multiplicity of voices reflected through Nagrin’s use of multicultural social portraits and uses reflexivity to place the reader/viewer in the moment, and the phenomenological experience causes introspection. In a time of white cultural hegemony, Nagrin’s Dance Portraits confront racism by privileging Latino heritage in *Spanish Dance*, the Negro-inspired dances and music in *Jazz Three Ways* (1957), and Southeast Asia island culture in *With My Eye and With My Hand*.

At this time, many African-American (as well as Latino) dance artists were gaining recognition as performers and choreographers on the concert stage rather than as vaudeville entertainers. These included Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Geoffrey Holder, Alvin Ailey, Arthur Mitchell, Donald MacKayle, and later, Gus Solomons. However, Susan Manning (in Lepecki, 2004b) argues that critics such as John Martin and Walter Terry only accepted black concert dance at this time when staged on the Euro-American white body, such as Tamiris’ embodiment of Negro themes. Manning (2004a:10) terms this “metaphorical minstrelsy,” further discussed in the next chapter. Nagrin’s non-xenophobic use of multicultural characters mentioned above is both “convincing” (McDonagh, 1970:79) and egalitarian, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or social class. Inspiration came from his culturally diverse reality, New York City and America in general, that thematically shaped and directed his characters, or X, within this cluster of dances. Some of these are described below. The culture influenced him on thematic choices as seen earlier, and he arguably influenced the culture (Desmond, 1997; Foster, 2002b; Foulkes, 2002; Koritz, 1995; and Manning, 2004a) by encouraging reflexivity and breaking stereotypical racial and gender assessments. This contrasts with the “aesthetic modernist narratives” that omit politics, mass culture, and sexual difference even though modern dance paradoxically incorporates largely women (Franko, 1995:ix). Nagrin
transcends these barriers as both his dances and dancing body defy labels and are neither black nor white nor Jewish as in Jazz Three Ways, but rather a cultural fusion called American. His works in performance repertoires today are genre and gender diverse. They are performed by the Kansas City Ballet (Evans, 2002), modern dancer Shane O'Hara (2005 and A. Tobias, 1994), modern and tap dancer Bill Evans (2003); and by men as well as women, such as Anne Sahl in Dance in the Sun (Schlundt, 1997:77) and former Limón dancer Roxanne d'Orléans Juste in Spanish Dance (Small, 1978:47).

Some examples of Nagrin's social agency themes emergent through X follow. Man of Action demonstrates an urban executive’s stresses, strains, hurriedness, and frustrations of life (Horst, 1957a; McDonagh, 1997; and Schlundt, 1997). A programme note indicates:

The Urban Man, in order to survive, must solve the problem of being in two or more places at the same time.
Nagrin, 1985 and Concert Programme #32

Indeterminate Figure spoke to America’s concurrent fears of nuclear holocaust during post-WW II Cold War politics of the late 1950s. A repertory staple, this nihilistic work begins with Nagrin (1967) peering into an imaginary mirror, “a comment on his own generation’s oscillation between illusion and reality” (Bernstein, 1959:94). Louis Horst concurred that this “transcendent” work was a “bitter social comment” condemning the present generation through a self-centred man who “concerns himself with his trifling vanities until a fatal bomb drops . . . a timely work” (Horst, 1957a:103).

John Cage believed that an artist’s personality was the basis for his/her style (Macaulay in Adshead, 1986). However, Nagrin used the personalities of his artistic creations as his X to define his thematic performance and choreographic styles into an identifiable cluster called Dance Portraits. The recurring, distinctive themes of X through solo portraits of specific characters and their relevant, transcendent social agency messages emerge.
Another prominent feature in finding the core of X is Nagrin’s choreographic approach during this period that contributes to a choreographic style of privileging subject matter as the content, rather than form. This subsequently positioned him at a distance from concurrent trends and methods as introduced in Chapter 3. Nagrin’s works can be categorised further into the modernist constructs of collage and montage using essence and a quasi cause-and-effect narrative choreographic structure, both explained below, to reach his core of X. From personal experience with Nagrin’s works and methods, his inherent movement responses from the character’s motivations are discovered and found, not made, through analysing each character and focusing on content rather than working from emotion or form. “I try not to make up movement. I try to find it. I find it out of what happens” (Nagrin, 2001:35), which justifies the action. Martin referred to this intrinsic motivation based in internal content to define character as “motor characterisation” (in Schlundt, 1997:30). Nagrin calls it the heart/mind which is treated further, along with expression, within the next two chapters. As discussed in Chapter 3, aesthetics philosophers Sheldon Cheney (1946) and Louis Arnaud Reid (1969:80) state that art consists of two strands, “the discovery and construction of form,” which is both finding and making. Thus, it is argued that Nagrin is a dancefinder, not a dancemaker, since he created his dances through discovery rather than constructing them by manipulating form. His method is in direct contrast to the form-based works of his contemporaries. Rather than allowing content surrounding the core of X to shape the dance as Nagrin did, the formalist choreographers Graham and Humphrey manipulated external elements of space, floor pattern, body shape, texture, rhythm, and dynamics to convey an inner idea or quality. These women were tutored and influenced by Horst and were promoted by Martin. Concurrently in Europe, but affecting American choreographers later, was the structural, form-based work of Rudolf von Laban (Laban, 1950/1971). His work came to America via Hanya Holm who was the student of his pupil, the German dance expressionist Mary Wigman (Fuller Snyder and MacDonald, 1991).
Nagrin’s use of essence as a structuring device to shape the core of X slightly predates the 1950s dance expressionists. Nagrin arguably uses essence the way Louis Arnaud Reid (1969) later defined it; that is, as abstracted representations made specific through metaphor that contain what Nagrin considers to be the essence or “vital feeling” (Stern in Langer, 1958:78) of and ideas about the character. In this regard, it is possible to view Nagrin’s essence as the feeling projected through abstracted, inherent movement metaphor phrases based in an inner psychological character analysis (Schlundt, 1997) rather than simply literal movement. These metaphoric phrases are juxtaposed to create a whole image. The result is a series or montage of collaged metaphors from which the existing external structure of form then emerges and functions as a contextually relevant window to peer into the essence of his characters. Originally developed as a reaction to analytic cubism and an alternative to perspective, collage is deemed the “single most revolutionary formal innovation in artistic representation to occur in the [20th] Century” (Banes, 1994; and Ulmer in Foster, 1990:84). Nagrin believes emotion and form (such as the manipulation of steps, floor pattern, and space to create structure) are not primary to reach his core of X but happen and follow because of the focus on content. At this time, essence is viewed as the artist’s adaptation, resulting in variations of style within the culture (Martin, 1939). From viewing the videotape, When the Fire Dances between the Two Poles (Fuller Snyder and MacDonald, 1991), it appears that Wigman also employed essences to convey ideas and feeling through a specific image. Essences evident in her works are Pastoral’s summer beach enjoyment, Seraphic Song’s angels and lightness, the inclement weather of Storm Song, and Dance of Summer’s love song for that season. Where she and Nagrin differ is that she placed importance on the emotions conveyed by the gestural motions of the hands.

Examples of how Nagrin uses emergent feeling to shape movement and character are Strange Hero, Spanish Dance, and Dance in the Sun, all discussed further either in this section or the case study. Some writers see Nagrin’s inner, subjective essences in several of his works during this period. Spanish Dance contains no actual Flamenco steps (Nagrin, 1997 and 2001; and Schlundt, 1997), but rather is an impressionistic pursuit of essences
reflected in external techniques, shape, feeling or “eloquence of mood and motion” (Horst, 1957b:153), and a clear “rapport between movement and idea” (Stodelle, 1960:25). This elevation of subject matter-as-content shapes the dance and correlates to the late modernist notion that content is the form (Reid, 1969; Shahn, 1966; and Stern in Langer, 1958), discussed in the previous chapter. Nagrin writes:

There is not a single authentic Spanish-Flamenco step. I was too awed and in love with that style to dare any kind of imitation of the real thing. I aimed for the feel of it, for what I sensed was the inner action of the man I imagined, for how he needed to be seen, for what he thought he was and for how he wanted to be judged. Of all the dances I ever choreographed or ever performed, it is the dance I loved doing the most and where I felt I belonged.

Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:29

*Spanish Dance* is in the Limón company repertoire. Kisselgoff (1994) states that Nagrin needed “only a few strokes to paint these animated Cubist portraits, to get at the essence of his subject’s inner reality.” Tobi Tobias (1994) praises it for its choreographic artisanship, genre fusion, and beauty.

The essence-based structure of *Dance in the Sun* is impressionistic and thus considered “content less” by Williams (1958:251). It relies entirely on the projected image of sheer delight in “revelling in the warm spaciousness of nature and the body’s place in that scheme” (Terry cited in Schlundt, 1997:33). Nagrin (1997:201) recalls it as an impressionistic walk down a country lane on a “breath-taking autumn day,” reservedly explaining his motivation and structure in one of his books. A non-linear narrative structure inspired the movement, which Nagrin calls “beat analysis” (1997:200) of outer and inner actions. A section of the text is below:

Lyric arms flowing in successions starting from torso.
A *mess of reaching, receiving and needing to touch the immensity of what I am looking at.*
Right leg raises slowly; glide run to downstage right; long, slow relevé; jumps in place; run backward to upstage right; sissonnes into beat run in two circles.
Each single thing I see adds to a tide of energy and power that fills my body until I am pouring it out, trying to fly up out of my skin, and I pound the ground in futility at my limitations . . . Into the waltz and the big leaps; relevé and jumps in place. I believe I have succeeded and I am flying, floating and hovering.

Nagrin, 1997:201-202

Nagrin’s analysis, as well as my experiences with his works and methods, illuminates an impressionistic structure through a mostly arbitrary juxtapositioning of ideas/feelings/text to find movement rather than making and manipulating steps to create feeling or mood. Nagrin concedes that the main idea was with him a long time: “There are moments when the sight of a sun-blue sky makes one want to jump out of his skin” (Nagrin, 1951:23). “Exuberant” (Levitan, 1973:86) and “a joy to behold” (Williams, 1958:251), it exhibits a “fine spatial sweep of movement” (Horst, 1958:55).

Critics saw other examples of Nagrin’s essence (idea and feeling) as choreographic structure. A programme note for Man Dancing (1954) indicates it was an “‘essence of folk dance: sentiment, skill, joy and display’” (Horst, 1958 and Schlundt, 1997:34). Jazz Three Ways displays three variations of jazz music and dance styles at the end of the swing era. With My Eye and With My Hand was moulded from movements based on experiences during Nagrin’s time in the Fiji Islands whilst choreographing for the Burt Lancaster film, His Majesty O’Keefe. Nagrin dedicates the dance to every person who experiences the ambiguity of the unknown and finally crosses into the darkness, either perishing or adding a bit more light and a bit more space for himself and others.

Nagrin, 1985 and Concert Programmes #11 & 16

Dance Observer (Horst cited in Schlundt, 1997) and Dance News (Manchester, 1959d) both declared this as one of Nagrin’s best new works. From viewing the videotape (Nagrin, 1985), Nagrin uses primordial, abstracted gestural survival symbols that could be seen as the drawing of a bow for hunting, squatting, and eating with hand and fingers, washing the arms and face, and using full space and energy with virtuosic fighting.
movements. He "creates an image which is almost a declaration of faith" (Manchester, 1959d:9). The structure is a non-linear but seamless narrative of juxtaposed strands. He built a scene of pulsing fear overcome by courage and resolved in quiet conviction . . . [and went] beyond the realm of a mere compilation of folk material. It was a moving work.

Cohen, 1960:26

A second choreographic structure category is the quasi cause-and-effect composition evident in some dances. However, it privileges a non-linear positioning of arbitrary movement phrases typically with the exception of the last phrase. This final phrase is the result of the action; or in other words, the actions of the characters produce the effect. For instance, Man of Action’s frantic life-style causes his collapse from stress, and Indeterminate Figure’s self-absorption results in his atomic demise. Joellen Meglin calls Nagrin’s choreographic approach “structuralist” and his “specific description technique . . . strong stuff” because he uses metaphors and brings intuition into action through movement (Meglin, 1999:106-107). Her positioning is arguable since his creative process is complex, and it implies that the entirety of Nagrin’s dances contain a solely cause-and-effect or narrative structure. He seeks the “finely detailed and layered construction of character, circumstances, conflict, and human complexity . . . the master of idiosyncrasy” (1999:105).

Nagrin (2001) believes that any image, as long as it is concretely specific and not conceptual, is suitable content material for dance. Therefore, his X is achieved through the content of a specific character doing a specific action for a specific purpose (Meglin, 1999; Nagrin, 1994 and 1997; Schlundt, 1997; Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a; and Tamiris, 1989). It is important to emphasize that Nagrin asserts that a certain character, his X, does something (Roses-Thema, 2003). Schlundt (1997:2) and Meglin (1999:105) refer to Nagrin’s methodological approach as “doing-acting.” In an informal telephone interview with Nagrin (2004b), he sums it as a “doing approach through movement/dance based in acting techniques.” This differs from pantomime and gesturing to an in-depth character analysis appropriated from acting theory. What is stressed is the content of a specific character’s function of
doing a specific action through dance, not acting. From the choreography and improvisation classes taken from Nagrin, what he stressed consistently was the specific image, the “who are you,” above anything else or any other element. He then asked “what are you [that is, X] doing” to find the actions that emanate from the core of X.

Throughout his career, Nagrin rarely worked from or with the manipulation of formal elements such as floor pattern, steps, and space, but used them only when thwarted choreographically (Nagrin, 2001). His existentialism shapes his structure, asserting the fundamental question is “not how you create a dance, but why . . . technique flows from philosophy. Content determines form” (Nagrin, 1951:24). The last two statements seem plausible, just as Cunningham’s dance-for-dance’s-sake flows from his Buddhist beliefs of chance (Copeland, 2004) and Sokolow’s Soviet social realist philosophy permeates her dances (Warren, 1991). Nagrin’s privileging of content/function over form is a maverick thought in dance at that time possibly gleaned from Stanislavski via Tamiris who urged him to apply his acting characterization techniques to choreography (Nagrin, 1997; Schlundt, 1997; and Vaughan cited in Rosas-Thema, 2003). This is the defining principle that shapes and distinguishes Nagrin’s choreographic method and style during this period, which he defines as personal authority (Nagrin, 1997), and underpins the work of his entire life. To search for the intrinsic function or content, not study the external forms or develop movement from an emotion or for art’s sake, is key. This process is the antithesis of emoting, but not in the romantic sense; and unlike Graham, he rarely based his work in emotional content, or in expressive (Franko, 1995) emoting to find movement. Nagrin’s development of action through the specific image and essence in which the character motivates the action and situates it in its contextual time (Nagrin, 1994 and 1997) is explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Another way of stating this, to borrow from the modernist architect Louis Sullivan (Cheney, 1946), is form (particularly the choreographic shape or structure) follows function (internal content, motivation, intention). In general, form and content cannot be separated completely and the distinction between these can be unclear as discussed in Chapter 3 (Shahn, 1966 and Sparshott, 1970). Form arguably refers to the structured “processes of
producing works of art” or the object itself and contrasts with subject matter, content, or meaning (Sparshott, 1970:350). Meaning is defined as “that which stimulates, by stirring recollection, sympathy, moral sentiment, etc,” including the observer’s feelings ranging from popular art to religious art; and may be a further “stimulus to action through arousing feeling” (Cheney, 1946:352). This stimulus to arouse feeling and actions, used heavily by the revolutionary dancers in the previous chapter, is a Marxist thought (1946) and is an idea Nagrin uses to shape his dances rather than manipulating formal elements to create the structure. Nagrin (2001) believes form emerges through finding dances. One way to view this is that content contains pattern (which can also be a characteristic of structure, however) and feeling (Cheney, 1946; Rosen, 1971; Shahn, 1966; and Sparshott, 1970). Nagrin’s approach arguably involves more than revealing character through playing with the musical rhythms and structural design to evoke character as Schlundt (1997) suggests. Evans (2002) and Schlundt (1997) concur that the Dance Portraits involves the complex manipulation of music, space, and memories to create the form, but they omit the important recognition of function. Structural elements are important as these provide the framework to shape a dance, but the heart is in the post-structural notion of content (Hutcheon, 1988; and Jenkins, 1991 and 2001). Content provides meaningful reflection and can apply to abstract (a misleading word since it may not completely be devoid of meaning, intention, or imagery, however) or plotless, movement-for-movement’s sake dances, such as Cunningham’s and Balanchine’s in which the movement is the content (Macaulay in Adshead, 1986).

Several critics recognised Nagrin’s emphasis on content over form as his core of X. His London performance of Indeterminate Figure lacked attention to form (Guest, 1967), and notions of ambiguity and abstraction were evident in O’Hara’s restaged performance (Carbonneau, 1995). The importance of content in For a Young Person (1958) was recognized as opposed to structural elements or technical proficiency (Cohen, 1960). Doris Hering did not always agree that Nagrin’s “content motivated form” (1958:82) as in Man of Action. Hering called Three Happy Men a “movement shell without a consistent foundation of character” and failed to find any evidence of the “relationship between form and content” (Hering, 1958:82-83). Manchester
concurred (1958). On his first full solo concert, Hering completely dismissed the content-driven intent of many of his dances:

Mr. Nagrin’s creative growth has not fully kept pace with his expressive growth. In fact, his new solos seemed a cut below some of the older ones. The problem was the eternal one of the relationship between form and content.

Hering, 1958:83

The contentious relationship-at-a-distance between Nagrin and Hering is illuminated both by Schlundt (1997) and noted from this researcher’s experiences with Nagrin. Upon examination of the literature (Hering, 1951, 1954a, 1954b, 1957a, 1957b, 1958, and 1959), it centres on the struggle between form and content; her preference for choreographers Cunningham and Sybil Shearer, rivaling them against Humphrey, Limón, and Tamiris (Manning, 2004a); and his Broadway background, a notion derived possibly from his jazz treatment and popular cultural themes. These aspects all contribute to his marginalisation, discussed in Chapter 3. Decades later, Nagrin’s emotionally painful recollections of her critiques were witnessed whilst a graduate student at Arizona State University; however, he never mentioned her by name. Hering was the “principal dance critic [and circulation director] of Dance Magazine” during most of this time, later becoming editor (Kane, 2002:64; Schlundt, 1997; and Theodores, 1996).

In contrast, Horst (1957a, 1957b, 1958, and 1959) and another editor, P. W. Manchester (1953, 1957, 1958, and 1959a,b,c,d) of Dance News (Theodores, 1996), remained steadfast in recognising the merit of Nagrin’s works. Hering just as passionately and vehemently remained Nagrin’s (1991) nemesis whilst privileging the works of the downtown Dance Associates during the 1950s and experimental dance minimalists of the 1960s. The penchant for form is evident in the critiques of Hering, whereas Horst is amenable to content.

Nagrin does not fit with modern dance’s aesthetic guidelines of elevating the empirical, external structures of form later standardised by Graham, Holm, Horst, Humphrey, or Laban. Instead, he places primary importance on the human condition (Nagrin in Dunning, 1982; O’Hara, 2005;
and Schlundt, 1997) through the privileging of content/function at the core of X. Nagrin (2001) refers to this as the specific image that can only come from an internal place through an in-depth analysis of character function. Reid (in Langer, 1958) argues that the culture in this era of art for art’s sake viewed content as having no aesthetic importance. Decades later, Anna Kisselgoff (1994) recognizes the educational value in examining the choreographic content of his works as a model for young choreographers trained only in dance making through the manipulation of form.

4.3. RHYTHMIC, VIRTUOSIC SOLOS WITH ABSTRACTED GESTURES

During the Dance Portrait period, Nagrin made distinct choices in his treatment of subject matter to get to the core of X that overlap with some performative aspects, since he is both choreographer and dancer. Consistent throughout are his rhythmic, virtuosic solos and use of abstracted gestures. These solos of rhythmic, athletic dexterity became a trademark of his performance style, which he began to tour from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Two exceptions to his solos are the group work An Entertainment, later called Theatre for Fools (1959); and A Dancer Prepares (1958), initially a solo, but then developed for a group using local dancers from his concert tours (Nagrin, 2005a). Neither of these two group works focuses on specific characters, nor deals with social agency, nor employs overt Africanist movement and rhythm concepts. Nagrin appropriated Africanisms into his Dance Portraits, such as featuring jazz music and dance; polycentrism and polyrhythms whereby different body parts do different movements and rhythms simultaneously; emphasis on the ‘cool’ or “dwo” (Jonas, 1992), seen in the cigarette-smoking gangster in Strange Hero (1948) and the narcissistic fop in Indeterminate Figure (1957); and improvisation (Dixon Gottschild in Gere, 1995; and Welsh Asante in Dils and Albright, 2001). Everything Nagrin produces through movement is implicit in and a result of the character’s personality found through improvisational exploration to get to the core of X. The evolution of his performance style during the Dance Portraits is both individualistic and versatile, gleaned from Tamiris who taught him to find “virtuosic moves through inner actions, even when [his] technique was still quite raw” (Nagrin,
In addition to his highly rhythmic virtuosity, his idiosyncratic movement vocabulary is economically terse, largely non-codified, and often contains exaggerated gestures and metaphors mixed with satire and humour. His “sharply etched” characterizations contain no ambiguous details, and he “discovered a medium” conducive to his style of moving (Cohen, 1959:29). Nagrin (1997) responded out of an internal impulse for what he called honesty and clarity in movement rather than consciously wanting to fit with a current trend. Thus, his performance style helped create a new aesthetic through the fused genres of modern and jazz dance.

Critics Bernstein (1959), Cohen (1959), Hering (1961), Horst (1957a and 1958), Lewis (1958), Manchester (1958 and 1959a), Stodelle (1961), Terry (1958), and Williams (1958) all attest to Nagrin’s strong and controlled technique, rhythmic virtuosity, and effortless performance skills in getting to the core of his characters. He won the coveted Donaldson award in 1954-55 as Broadway’s best male dancer (Concert Programme #20; Gruen, 1975; and Horst, 1958), attributing his success to dancing slightly ahead of the beat, even though others were more technically proficient (Nagrin, 1988a and 1991). Solomons (1998:69) calls Nagrin “one of modern dance’s feistiest individuals,” and Evans (2005b) says he is “very comfortable in his own masculinity.” His powerful performing helped abolish the public stereotype that “real men’ don’t dance” (Solomons, 1998:69), a notion grounded by Jowitt (1974) and Manning (1988) that modern dance liberates men as well as women.

Nagrin’s first New York concerts as a soloist, held at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA, were well received. In October 1957, he shared the bill with two other virtuosic men, Geoffrey Holder and Company and William Hug Dance Company (Concert Programme #31 and Manchester, 1957). The standing-room-only crowd included the leading dance critics of the time: Hering, Horst, Manchester, Martin, and Terry. The audience-pleasing programme included Strange Hero, Spanish Dance, and Indeterminate Figure, reviewed as “excellent . . . a terrific wallop . . . strong work” (Horst, 1957b:153). Hering (1957b:86) saw Nagrin “reaching for a new economy of movement, new clarity in rhythmic emphasis” that was “exhilarating to watch.” Nagrin’s first all-solo “Dance Portraits” concert (Concert Programme #32) on 2 March 1958
was a “great success” as he commanded a “very powerful communicative presence” on stage (Horst, 1958:55). Hering complimented him on his organic treatment of subject matter and the performative aspects of dynamics and gestural use of space, but disparaged his Broadway background:

> It is inspiring to see a dancer grow from a bundle of eye-catching tricks into an expressive human being. Over the years, despite detours on Broadway, Daniel Nagrin has valiantly done so . . . His sweeping energy has been harnessed into dance gesture of boldness and he has achieved the dignity-in-stillness so alien to young dancers.

Hering, 1958:82

Martin called him “‘one of the most serious and gifted artists in the modern dance field’” (cited in Schlundt, 1997:36), also stated by Manchester who described this premier solo concert as “exciting” (1958:10). Terry praised it, saying Nagrin held the audience’s attention throughout the entire solo performance through his treatment of dynamics, full action, energetic curiosity, and humour.

> [Nagrin] delights us with virile and vivid solo offerings . . . every passage of every dance was quite of top calibre, the total effect was exhilarating, engrossing and . . . thoroughly entertaining . . . [Nagrin’s] intense personality [was present throughout] . . . he obviously believes passionately in the rhythms and purposes of each of his dances . . . a toughness of body and spirit as well as of theme . . . [a] brilliant celebration in dance terms . . . one of the most exciting events in years.

Terry, 1958:5

Nagrin’s performances were “always a pleasure,” and it was rare that any dancer could sustain a two-hour concert of his/her own works (Williams, 1958:267). Emory Lewis (1958) made some revealing observations. Although drama was undergoing a renaissance off-Broadway, modern dance was “seriously ill” and stagnant, echoed at the same time by Jill Johnston (1957a) and referred to as “social malaise” by Meglin (1999:105). Lewis felt modern dancers, most obviously referring to Graham, were introverted, esoteric, based in Freudian concepts and mythology, ignored by the audience as they performed for themselves, but was propitious about Nagrin:
There are a few hopeful signs. Number-one hopeful sign is a young [Nagrin was 41!] dancer, Daniel Nagrin . . . I nominate Mr. N as the dancer of the year . . . He is not afraid to make large social statements in his dance works – clear and bold. He is articulate off and onstage, rather rare in the modern dance field . . . Modern dance may yet regain its excitement and health.

Lewis, 1958-70, microfilm reel

Nagrin’s virtuosity included a movement vocabulary to get to the core of X that demanded expression in “broad, vigorous” movement from a “palette [which] is rich indeed. And it seems to be acquiring added richness” (Cohen, 1960:26). Nagrin had a precise “command of an enormous range of movement . . . never slur[ing] anything” (Manchester, 1958:10), was an “accomplished” dancer “with a prodigious technique” (Lewis, 1958), “a superb technician” (Terry, 1958:5), and the “undisputed master of the modern technique” (Williams, 1958:267). Critics hailed Nagrin, like Paul Taylor (Kane, 2000), as a highly trained dancer but without a formal, codified technique (Horst, 1957b and 1958; and McDonagh, 1976). This physical, non-codified virtuosity emerges in repeated viewings of his works on the videotapes, along with gestural abstractions of the subject matter. These viewings show non-codified and virtuosic movements in With My Eye and With My Hand using the same forward high kicks, then flexing the knee to bring the leg into the body. Peculiar, quirky movements are repeated throughout and consist of cocking the head ear-to-shoulder, then right to left; a series of shoulder, arm, and hand movements or gestures; and jumps into various spaces with quirky leg movements to define place. The non-specific aerial acrobatics include high jumps into rolls on the floor and leaps that use full body turns in the air, similar to a tour jeté but with a raw, primitive quality. The “frantically scrambling” (Pastore, 1975:74) Man of Action contains large, daring leaps outrageously high with one leg extended and the other folding under and kicking out, similar to a grand pas de chat but without the finesse. Various non-specific jumps, spins, and turns are employed in Jazz Three Ways.

Shane O’Hara (2005) comments that Nagrin’s style of exaggerating gestures into metaphors to reflect an internal, humanistic movement extends beyond “simple realism” and is “pure Daniel.” Examples of metaphors taken from literal and exaggerated pedestrian actions and gestures are seen in the
case study and in *Man of Action*’s stressed-out businessman running down steps to the subway, frantically looking at his wristwatch, sitting at a meeting, running and hailing a taxi, and literally being pulled in two directions. The latter is indicated by wide second position lunges with frenzied changes of focus and snapping of the head from side to side until he collapses by falling backward. As indicated above, gestures in *With My Eye and With My Hand* are clear but mildly abstracted.

It is evident from these examples that literal and exaggerated gestural movement metaphors, or Sparshott’s (1970) simulacra, to create each character’s personality are developed through non-codified, rhythmic virtuosity (Carbonneau, 1995; Kisselgoff, 1994; Manchester, 1958; McDonagh, 1976; and Schlundt, 1997). “His work always was about gesture and metaphor, very much a product of dance/theatre today” (O’Hara, 2005). Hering saw these gestures as superficial pantomime, calling it his “richest creative vein” (1951:9), and therefore certainly not abstract. Nagrin believes his “pantomime” is an aesthetic social gesture (Gruen, 1975), an idea relating to Desmond’s (1997) cultural theory, that contains meaning (Schlundt, 1997). Hering reviewed his Twelfth American Dance Festival performance of *Theatre for Fools* as

> not really a dance. It was a pantomime bordering on dance . . . Twas not life. Twas only the game-of-life. This kind of theme, age-old . . . requires more philosophical insight than Mr. Nagrin has achieved at this stage.
> 
> Hering, 1959:34

In contrast, this same performance reviewed at two different times by Horst was “witty” (Horst, 1959:2) and possessed a “spontaneous quality” (1961a:7) through improvisation.

If it can be assumed that Hering’s notions of pantomimic gesture stem from aesthetics philosopher Susanne Langer (in Copland and Cohen, 1983:28-47) who addressed this issue at that time, then it is plausible that Hering’s notions are underpinned by Delsarte’s gestural theory that divides the body into head, torso, and limbs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Delsarte’s work was disdained by Nagrin and Tamiris (Nagrin, 1994 and 1997), which is
consistent with my personal accounts of Nagrin pointing out the absurdities of such a theory, but debatably was used to some extent by Laban and Graham (Hodgson and Preston-Dunlop, 1990; Maletic, 1987; and Nagrin, 1997). However, Nagrin (2004i) clarifies that in his experience with her, Graham never worked this way even though she verbally articulated Delsarte’s theory.

Hering blamed Nagrin’s Broadway career and jazz for his use of pantomimic gesturing (Hering, 1951 and 1959) and therefore consistently viewed his work as non-artistic, constantly reminding her reader/audience of this in almost every review (Hering 1951, 1954b, 1957b, 1958, 1961). Nagrin attributed this reaction to her non-acceptance of his use of jazz (Schlundt, 1997 and Nagrin, 1991), which is accurate partially as his uses of jazz dance and music consistently are disparaged in her critiques. The non-use of popular art as concert work, the hierarchal categorisation of cultural production, and the emphasis of form over content/function are structuralist, modernist constructs (Hutcheon, 1988; Jenkins, 1991 and 2001; Murdock, 2000; and Postlewait and McConachie, 1989). These fit Hering’s view that distinguishes between high and popular art. As a result of being “dismissed as Broadway slick,” Nagrin “did not create another new dance for five years” due to her devastating critique on his creativity (Nagrin, 1991 and 2001:166). At the same time, critics’ partisan treatment and favourable perception of ballet-turned-Broadway choreographer Jerome Robbins contrasts with their rejection of Nagrin (Jowitt, 2004).

The actual label “Broadway slick” is not used by Hering in writing, but presumed to be gleaned from bits of critiques referencing Nagrin’s Broadway background in which he “sometimes resorts to slickness” (Hering, 1957b:85). Although Hering praised his sincerity, warmth, “robust uncomplicated zest” and distinctive “feeling for characterization” in her first critique of his work, she felt the Broadway years had

taken their toll, [as] there is a tendency to gloss over moments of choreographic aridity by injecting facile device, instead of digging deeply into himself to find solutions.

Hering, 1951:9
In contrast, Nagrin and Tamiris are praised by others for their rare but successful ability to fuse, or “blur the distinction between,” art and entertainment (Evans, 2002:57). Although Hering called his dance portrait performances “joy-in-dancing” and charming, she referred to the choreography as “more suited to the popular theatre than to the concert stage” (Hering, 1954b:44), indicating her segregation of the two. Other critics such as Cohen, Martin, and Terry saw him as an artist with something unique and original to say. Later viewed as formalist writers/critics, Martin (1957) of the New York Times and Terry (1958) of the New York Herald Tribune, the “most influential newspapers in the country” (Schlundt, 1997:32), expressed divergent views to most of Hering’s critiques of Nagrin’s works. They saw Nagrin’s work as more than mere pantomime, recognised its foundation on the movement analysis of character, and insisted Nagrin’s work was artistic. Martin and Terry concurred it was a “long time since someone so original had surfaced,” and Martin was Nagrin’s constant “supporter” (1997:32 and 60).

Humour (Guest, 1967; Horst, 1959 and 1961b; Manchester, 1958; and Terry, 1958) and satire (Horst, 1957 and 1958; McDonagh, 1976; Schlundt, 1997; and Stodelle, 1961) are two recurring categories critics and writers use to describe several of the dance portraits. The question of how these are evident in this cluster of Nagrin’s works was posed via email to Nagrin and two dancers-cum-university professors who perform his works, the certified Laban Movement Analyst Bill Evans (2003) and Shane O’Hara. It is interesting that all three spoke on the issue of humour, but largely ignored the question of satire.

I never thought of Jazz Three Ways as being particularly humorous or satirical . . . the real interest for me lies in the manipulation of time, weight, space and flow. The dances are very much kinesthetic embodiments of three styles of jazz music . . . some of it is fun, but I wouldn’t say it is funny.

Evans, 2005a

Evans later explains that upon re-viewing one of his performance videotapes of Nagrin’s works, he previously did not notice the audience laughter throughout. He struggled with this different movement style and was intently
focused on the inner monologue/dialogue that Daniel had given me, and on becoming one with the music . . . the laughter was of surprise (at unexpected dynamic/spatial changes) and of delight. I see now why people enjoyed those dances so much. They are incredibly detailed and full of surprises.

Evans, 2005b

O’Hara, who performs several of Nagrin’s choreographic works and is considered a “stunning and efficacious messenger” (Michelotti, 1996:31) of Nagrin’s “wonderfully made” choreography (A. Tobias, 1994), states that the humour comes from the power of abstraction, rhythm, timing,

preciseness and clarity of the performer’s inner life . . . [without it] the piece becomes two-dimensional and superficial. A pleasant reflection of dance history with no substance for today’s society . . . In order to be funny, you have to be real.

O’Hara, 2005

O’Hara finds it difficult to identify Nagrin’s solos as serious or humorous, as this duality “of showing the pathos of a feeling or emotion” in both elements interestingly “entwine” his work into a “wonderful flow of images and intent” (O’Hara, 2005). Nagrin states that during the Dance Portraits,

I never plotted or designed a move or phrase with the intent of getting a laugh . . . getting a laugh is a very satisfying feeling, but treacherous, because the next time you might try to make it funny and that is death.

Nagrin, 2005a

Nagrin admits the satirical nature of the title Strange Hero was “to poke fun at” America’s post-war fascination with the gangster, a hero of violence that had “long disgusted me” (Nagrin, 1951:23). Using Kane’s (2003) model of humour analysis focusing on juxtapositions, themes, and movements, what actually qualifies his works as satirically “excellent” (Horst, 1957a:103) and “superb” (Stodelle cited in Schlundt, 1997:37), or humorous with a frantic “Jerry Lewis style” (Pastore, 1975:76)? From repeated viewings of his videotapes, emails, and some of the critical reviews, a few possibilities emerge. The first is a weaving of complex thematic layers through the
juxtapositioning of abstracted, contradictory movements and/or phrases. These are not humorous or satirical themselves, but the juxtaposition is. For instance, the satirical irony in *Indeterminate Figure* is seen in the positioning of a narcissistic man intent on looking at himself in the mirror against a sound score of nuclear annihilation. Other examples are in *Man of Action* in which the hurried executive actually gets nowhere; and the carefree, seemingly immortal gangster in *Strange Hero* is killed. Secondly, Nagrin uses themes that sometimes denote humour as/or satire, but choreographically and performatively are approached clearly and seriously regarding the detailed inner life of the character. This is seen in the jitterbugging army private in wartime and the gangster as hero. Lastly, playing with the rhythm itself is “fun” to perform, as Evans (2005a) and O’Hara (2005) state, and fun to watch.

### 4.4. MINIMALISM AND FUSION

During the Dance Portrait period, Nagrin frequently used a formalist approach to probe his X by obtaining inspiration from recorded music and commissioned musicians. Some of these performative characteristics overlap with choreographic characteristics as Nagrin was both choreographer and dancer of his works. In over half of his dances of this period, predominantly jazz-embodied Africanist rhythmic concepts emerge in both the movement and the music, as embodied later in the mid 1950s by rock-and-roll icon Elvis Presley. Nagrin uses sophisticated jazz polyrhythms and compositional structures of layering rhythms. Nagrin’s choice of jazz music composed by current Negro musicians such as Jimmy Yancy, Nat “King” Cole, Thelonius Monk (all in *Jazz Three Ways*), and Count Basie (for *Man of Action*) (Nagrin, 1985 and 2005a) is intentional and aides in shaping his style. During this period, Nagrin also was active in musical theatre, and the connection of jazz dance’s impact on concert dance forms is recognised and articulated:

I think the unpretentiousness of musical comedy music and its simpler, more natural rhythms have evoked art dancing that looks more familiar. Show dancing, of course, came largely from jazz and tap, which are more closely rooted in ordinary [American, my brackets] modern life anyway . . . We can see
these sources fusing into stage types . . . in the frenetic, man-on-the-street solos of Daniel Nagrin, a modern dancer with extensive show experience.

Siegel, 1985:312

However, Nagrin and Tamiris both eschewed the use of dance as showy entertainment, indicated in Chapter 2; even as a Broadway choreographer, Tamiris “never lost her integrity” (Nagrin, 1997:3). Instead of making dances to “knock them dead” as discussed in Chapter 2, he preferred to find movement and dances that were important to him (1997:3).

The performative aspects of high rhythmic activity characterize Nagrin’s jazz context during this period (Hering, 1957b; Horst, 1957b and 1958; Manchester, 1958; Schlundt, 1997; and Terry, 1958). In pre-civil rights America at the time, Nagrin acknowledges the “black influence” in his works as where his “river comes from” (Nagrin, 1991). The early 1940 jitterbugging “duets” in *Private Johnny Jukebox* and *Rhumba Bum* (1943) use popular culture’s Harlem swing rhythms of jazz music and dance. For others, it was *Strange Hero* or *Man of Action* that initially identify him with the contemporary jazz style (Stodelle, 1961 and Williams, 1958), questionably regarded as non-concert material. *Jazz Three Ways* (1957 and 1967) displays variations of jazz music and dance forms presented as concert dance. McDonagh (1997) comments that Nagrin used “outside” music, indicating his disdain of jazz as concert material which perhaps explains the mixed reviews for this dance (Schlundt, 1997). Horst’s ethnocentricity emerges by acknowledging that Nagrin’s choice of music was not his preference as it was too close to “natural” jazz and, therefore, “not up to the high level of Mr. Nagrin’s earlier solos” (Horst, 1958:57).

A complex relationship is formed through the combination of jazz music layered with movement. Nagrin states he “had to know everything musically because I thought I wasn’t musical,” as he uses the music as a “dialectic” or the “way I would dance with another person” (Roses-Thema, 2003:116). He constantly plays with, against, and around the beat contrapuntally so that a “fierce constant interaction” is maintained (2003:116). He claims he never resorted to “mickey-mouse” movement, or movement that “follows every dynamic, rhythmic and melodic shape of the music” as did many stage and
film choreographers such as Fred Astaire (Nagrin, 1997:108-109). His "uncanny sense of timing" (Manchester, 1958:10) and rhythm that is pushed to a precision of a warrior, is also a major tool of his solo work... half of my rehearsal time for "Indeterminate Figure" is spent just getting back the syncopation and subtle timing changes that connect and disconnect with the score.

O’Hara, 2005

Schlundt (1997:28) calls this a “relationship” between the rhythms of sound and movement in both the music and the dance rather than co-existing in the same time and space. This further reveals the character, as Nagrin’s kinetic playfulness and musical interaction result in a dominant distinguishing characteristic of his Dance Portrait’s style, using the relationship between music and movement to accomplish and define the character’s function. Jazz music’s impressionistic form and mood prompt the theme and develop the character, evidenced in the recorded music for Private Johnny Jukebox, Strange Hero, Man of Action, and Jazz Three Ways.

Nagrin commissioned several composers resulting in a complex, cohesive relationship between movement and music. Nagrin (2005a) clarifies that he did not collaborate, which denotes “equality of decision making,” since he made all the musical choices and decisions. He first commissioned Genevieve Pitot in 1943 for Landscape with Three Figures, 1859 and again for Spanish Dance. Other musicians Nagrin commissioned during this period were Freda Miller for The Ballad of John Henry (1950); Ralph Gilbert for Dance in the Sun; Robert Starer for Indeterminate Figure; Stanley Walden in For a Young Person; Trude Rittman in Three Happy Men; and Herbert Harris and Michael Colgrass in With My Eye and With My Hand (Nagrin, 1985 and 2005a). Nagrin recounts the creative process with the latter as follows:

The original score was worked out with Herbert Harris for one drum over a period of at least one month. We then agreed that it could use another percussionist and Michael Colgrass was brought into the sound studio on the very day set for the recording. They knew each others [sic] work and worked well together.

Nagrin, 2005a
Dance in the Sun is Nagrin's first concert experiment with multimedia use. From viewing the videotape, images of dancing in the outdoors, sun, nature, and waterfront are projected intermittently with jump cuts to his real time dancing on the studio theatre stage. This multimedia attempt is concurrent with filmmaker Birgit Cullberg's innovative experiments with dance and film.

Franko (1995:ix) states that the subject matter of aesthetic modernism is a continual reduction of elements to essential qualities. Nagrin's performative choices of set design, costumes, props, and spatial treatment during the Dance Portrait period are integral, as every element contributes fundamentally to the dance. Keeping these to a minimum with essentials only, the visual context supports the theme and/or statement of the dance and is similar to Cunningham's and Graham's minimalist approaches. As a solution to frequent touring, Nagrin sought to economise on all aspects of production, eventually eliminating the use of a pianist for recorded accompaniment (Schlundt, 1997), using little or no sets and both real and imagined props minimally.

Whilst on tour, the reduced set design typically is only a simple table to one side of the stage for the pragmatic function of containing only a self-manned tape recorder and a glass of water. Frequently, no set is used for Spanish Dance, Man of Action, With My Eye and With My Hand, and Jazz Three Ways. Strange Hero is the exception as the videotaped (Nagrin, 1985) version includes a few common, every-day stage props placed mainly upstage, such as a fire hydrant, alley stairs, large billboard, and various street signs denoting the back entrance of a theatre. These realistic, prosaic sets directly contrast with some of Graham's concurrent abstracted sculptural sets by Isamu Noguchi. Another visual or performative element that Nagrin would develop further in the 1960s and 1970s is the Brechtian concept of exposing the behind-the-scenes conventions as Cunningham later does in Walkaround Time (1968) (Copeland, 2004). Nagrin began to experiment with this in Dance in the Sun in which both he and the pianist walked onto the stage and began preparations for the dance in full view of the audience. Another example is A Dancer Prepares, a pre-performance group warm-up as part of the performance. This challenges the typical proscenium dancer-spectator
formal distancing by allowing them to enter the work through active mental engagement rather than passive viewing. Nagrin employed this device almost a decade before the Judson group and continued to break the barriers between audience and performer throughout his career.

From viewing the videotapes (1985 and 1991) and various photographs (Blechman, 1948a, 1948b, 1957a and 1958c; and Ikegami, 1948), it appears that costumes are extremely functional, unembellished and ordinary, and specifically relevant to the character and theme. This is evident in the black tank top, white trousers, and technique slippers in *Spanish Dance*; the businessman’s trench coat, brimmed hat, trousers, and dress shoes in *Man of Action*; the pyjamas and technique slippers for *Indeterminate Figure*; the simple but functional top, pants, and jazz shoes, all in black, for *Jazz Three Ways*; the cape in *Three Happy Men*; and the trunks, armband, and skullcap in *With My Eye and With My Hand*. Nagrin never dances in bare feet, even in the modern technique class I took from him, but dons either jazz shoes or technique slippers.

Props are minimal as well and, at times, possibly can be considered an aspect of costuming, such as the lit cigarette in *Strange Hero*. In some of the dances, props are “seen” through a powerful, realistic imagery created by gestures and movement such as the handgun in *Strange Hero* and the bow in *With My Eye and With My Hand*. Another imaginary prop is the indigenous club, commonly used by south Pacific peoples (The Field Museum, 2006), in *With My Eye and With My Hand*. In *Man of Action*, an invisible briefcase and wristwatch, desk and chair, and subway stairs could be “seen” through the movement imagery. *Indeterminate Figure* uses an imaginary mirror and bathroom sink.

Nagrin’s performative use of space is evident in both his works and some concert reviews. It typically is not of primary concern, but evident through the character’s actions, broad range of movements, and specific gestures or focus that add to the depth of X. Nagrin’s use of lines in space is evident by form-trained Labanotator Guest’s (1967:517) commenting on the “long line in spatial design” of *Indeterminate Figure*. From viewing the videos (Nagrin, 1985 and 1991), it is evident that a sharp, direct use of focus also creates a broad spatial awareness in several of his works. The outdoors is
revealed in both *Dance in the Sun* and *With My Eye and With My Hand* through the imaginary vastness and beauty in the former and the sights and sounds in the latter. The frantic changing of focus and frenetic awareness creates spatial tension in *Man of Action* and *Indeterminate Figure*.

4.5. CASE STUDY: **STRANGE HERO** (1948/1962)

It is my analysis that Nagrin’s choreographic character study and commitment to social consciousness emerge through the core of X. Originally entitled *Strange American Hero* but shortened as Nagrin says he “‘adjusted’” to the McCarthy era (quoted in Schlundt, 1997:211), Nagrin’s performance of *Strange Hero* is a thematic portrait of an immediate aspect of the human condition that Nagrin chose to feature. This absurd, cult-status, ironic gangster/hero was portrayed widely in American popular culture of the 1940s:

> Our novels, films and stories have made this hero all too familiar. It is only strange that he is a hero.
> 
> Concert Programme #6

First performed in a hotel ballroom in the spring of 1948, Nagrin’s Hollywood icon was “one of the few convincing portraits that we have on the dance stage” (McDonagh, 1976:229). It is currently in the repertoire of various soloists and companies mentioned earlier. A “masterpiece” that passionately “pulls and tugs at one’s emotions” (Horst, 1957b:85 and 1958:55), it is considered Nagrin’s best and most famous work by both McDonagh (1997) and Williams (1958). Hailed as an “undoubted triumph with his compelling study of viciousness” (Manchester, 1953:7), it is only three minutes and ten seconds in length.

Nagrin confronts the action or problem (Nagrin, 1997) through developing a clearly defined specific image and specific actions as his X. O’Hara (2005) confides that in rehearsal, Nagrin once even described the *Strange Hero* character as a “cartoon, a caricature of a lost hero.” This dramatic, complex “invisible duet” (Evans, 2002:58) with enemy gang members on the back streets or alleys of an inner city centres on and layers
stereotypical, hyped mob actions that help define the character thematically. From my repeated viewings of the videotape, these actions are smoking, strutting, deceiving, chasing, hiding, and killing.

The viewings of Strange Hero (Nagrin, 2004g) reveal a complex dance that relies on the relationships between several components to define the X, most of which are supportive rather than primary. Spatial tension is created through the simple but strong opening movement pattern of strutting on the downstage diagonal, which Nagrin (2001) comments is a metaphor for entering a dangerous place; and by the frantic focus changes. An underpinning angst and fear resonant in the agitated jazz piano music is noted: “The insistent rhythm of the score supports the mounting tension of a doom-happy character” (Concert Programmes #6, 30, and 31). As a recurring thematic relationship throughout the dance, it produces a conflicting texture of anxiety and ease. Further thematic relationships are evident in the minimal but distinct set; and the detailed costume of a heavily shoulder-padded pinstriped suit, initially designed by Karinska who designed costumes for Tamiris and Balanchine’s New York City Ballet (Croce, 1977).2 This opening cluster of complex components and their inter-relatedness immediately frames the contextual period of the impressionistic narrative and the dualistic personality of the attractive hero/terrifying gangster.

Nagrin’s formalist approach to choreographing Strange Hero began when working alone in an empty storeroom studio above a grocery store in Croton-on-Hudson. Nagrin kinetically explored the recorded “progressive jazz” music of Stan Kenton who “wanted to move jazz into the concert halls by way of exploring new harmonies, uneven tempos, uneven measures.” (Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:211).3 The strong, ominous rhythm of the song Monotony changed his initial intent and shaped his choreographic process, developed accidentally since he planned to choreograph a Blues dance. Since Nagrin (1997:211) was still “convinced” that he was not musical, he probed the rhythm by using his feet “as if they were fingers picking out the notes.” He began walking carefully on the beat and noted that the opening bars of the theme were a bit behind the downbeat; suddenly, an “irreverent feeling emerged . . . Humphrey Bogart and his tribe [of] tough guys” (Nagrin, 1951:23). Strange Hero fuses popular culture’s jazz dance,
considered lowbrow at that time, with the high art modern concert dance elements. This is the work's historical relevance.

When performing the piece, every second has a precise inner life that moves it forward, one thing leading to the next, as in life itself. This is why the solo works even today, the pathos of it (backed by the intense inner commitment by the performer) takes it beyond the dated music, costume, and concept.

O'Hara, 2005

The skilful use of jazz rhythms as a tool to explore the X is recognized and described as a “jazz-inflected criminal” with “caffeinated responsiveness” (Carbonneau, 1995). Even though music and plot contribute to form, Nagrin’s emphasis is on process and content, not appearance or steps. Commenting on his arbitrary, yet structured, choreographic process of getting to the core of X, Nagrin writes that creating a dance is similar to entering a “trackless jungle” as rules, principles, and theories can be a hindrance (Nagrin, 1951:23). This indicates Nagrin’s non-use of manipulating form as a primary choreographic structuring device. In Strange Hero, content or function is privileged over structural elements in the creation of a dance whilst recognizing the integral, connected relationship between content and form. From the structural outline (Appendix D.1) created for this analysis, Strange Hero elucidates a dominant cause-and-effect, non-linear narrative that also is based in essences and effects. These choreographic phrases are juxtaposed to create the specific image of popular culture’s gangster-cum-hero. The repetition of various patterns of engaging gang enemies in the course of daily life, then killing them, is consistent throughout except for the last phrase when he is killed. Nagrin explains how content, or essence based in ideas and feelings, structures this dance:

Constructing this dance was a cinch. I had the music. The nearest movie house was my source material. The simple, monotonous plot shaped the form of the dance: enter the tough guy armed to the teeth, cigarette drooping from arrogant lower lip. He calmly greets his enemies, smashes one, struts a bit, then the chase, the killing and being killed and killing and being killed and so on, ad nauseum.

Nagrin, 1951:23
Nagrin’s six-question thematic obstacle (see Appendix C.1) is demonstrated in this cause-and-effect layering of duality or contradiction, which shapes the phrases and further defines the X. McDonagh (1976) articulates this notion through his detailed description and interpretation; and O’Hara, who performs some of Nagrin’s works, sums it as "in order to go left, . . . you have to go right" (O’Hara, 2005). For example, the first dualistic or binary (in this sense, opposite movement themes rather than rhythmic structures) theme is the impressionistic calm produced by an attractive man smoking whose menacing gangster personality abruptly emerges through aggressive punching. Yet, Nagrin contrastingly layers these with a charming, glamorized impression of a handsomely dressed, “Humphrey Bogart”-looking street thug (Hering, 1958:82; Jowitt, 1974 and 1976:206; Nagrin, 1951:23; and Schlundt, 1997:114 and in Cohen [ed], 1998a:530). Thus, the conflicted gangster context is juxtaposed against a relational opposite: the “tough” character is also “tender” (Horst, 1957b:85). This binary structure is repeated thematically, and its relationship between these two components creates a continual tension throughout the dance. Another example of Nagrin’s use of a binary structure is Man of Action’s strong, direct focus in one direction and hurried, busy feet and body movement going in another.

Nagrin’s treatment of subject matter in Strange Hero includes a rhythmic, virtuosic solo that relies upon the heavy use of literal and exaggerated gestural movements developed from the core of X. For example, smoking and pulling out an imaginary handgun are abstracted into metaphors of a gangster’s personality and actions. Contrasting with the use of these gestural and stylized walking movements are virtuosic, non-codified, daring leaps including jumps in the air with legs folded under from a crouched position during the chase/hide scene. Africanist movement themes (Acocella in Gere, 1995; Dixon Gottschild in Gere, 1995; Manning, 2004a; and Welsh Asante in Dils and Albright, 2001) are seen in his fluid spine and pelvic freedom. Prosaic movement is demonstrated in the off-centred lunges and balances; various non-labeled fast spins and turns; and hinges and "incredibly fluid" backward falls (Kisselgoff, 1994) all give kinetic thrill and excitement. The Hero literally kicks, then punches prone bodies in a straddled, low-level modified split. He steps over bodies to stand in the oft-repeated exaggerated
right lunge position, smoking calmly. No graceful, ballet-like movement or specific technique is used in this work, which further supports the masculine-but-ethnocentric character of the gangster.

4.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Demonstrating Nagrin’s first attempts to get to the core of X, the Dance Portraits thematic category is named by Nagrin’s own titling of these dances. These are created around a cluster of solos during the contextual period from the early 1940s to the late 1950s post-war era. Except for two group works, they are largely dramatic character portraits through an action-oriented, psychological, observational analysis of character based in relevant social issues or themes with conflicting results. These portraits are based in his X or specific characters, and his core is found from the doing of specific tasks or functions, such as the soldier in *Private Johnny Jukebox* who likes to drink coke and boogie, the mobster in *Strange Hero* who kills and then is killed, and the businessman in *Man of Action* who collapses from stress. Using the adapted analytical models of Adshead, Kane, and Layson, Nagrin’s choreographic method was contextualized and probed through several examples, culminating in a representative case study of *Strange Hero* with characteristics charted in Appendix A.2.

Nagrin further develops his core of X by using content through essence and a specific image doing. Patterns of choreographic structure and treatment of subject matter emerge in these dramatic works. The use of collage and montage to position abstract, juxtaposed fragmented phrases create a whole, but in a non-linear narrative form. The use of movement is found and discovered through improvisation instead of made by manipulating form, thus privileging internal content over external structural form and creating his signature, six-step compositional structure of getting to the core of X. Essences and cause-and-effect are used to develop his content-based subject matter that is abstracted further into movement metaphors through impressionistic, abstracted gestural motifs. Although he relied on improvisation to find movement in rehearsal, he rarely used it in performance as generally the dances were set (Nagrin, 1994). His works engage humour,
satire, and irony; and his treatment of subject matter is through non-codified movement, virtuosic solos, prosaic and pedestrian movements, and an economic and terse vocabulary. These elements are egalitarian in nature, transcend time, and fuse modern and jazz dances. Contributing to his play with the jazz rhythms and musical structures is the strong performative skills of using highly virtuosic movement-oriented phrases to the point of defying the limits and restraints of the human body.

Nagrin’s performance style is defined by his decisive choices to work as a solo artist and to fuse popular mediums with Africanist elements. His dancing body is a progressive fusion of what it means to be American at that time. Also defining his performance style is his use of minimal and reduced stage and set designs, costumes, and props that are integral to the character; Brechtian influence of baring stage conventions; and experimenting with challenging the performer-audience relationship as a mutual performative act. Using Hutcheon’s (1989) notion that theory needs to be developed from practice, Nagrin’s privileging of content and other factors are a strand of modernism that merits a re-visiting of historical strategies for dance.

ENDNOTES

1 McDonagh lists the date of this work as 1959 (1976:230), but original concert programmes, concert reviews, and an article by Nagrin on the choreographic process date it as 1951.

2 McDonagh gives credit erroneously for the costume design in Strange Hero to Daniel Nagrin. The designer is verified by videotape credits in 1962 for WGBH Boston, several original concert programmes from the NYPL Daniel Nagrin Collection, and through an article in which Nagrin discusses the designer’s effective work but did not mention her name. It is based on Karinska’s original costume design for Tamiris’ gangster work, Waterfront Serenade, and is described as a “tight-fitting wool jersey jacket with outrageous shoulder pads” (Nagrin in Schlundt, 1997:29).

3 Schlundt (1997) confuses the date of the first performance with the year that it was choreographed, saying it was first performed “sometime in spring 1948” (p. 31) but that Nagrin began work on this in the “summer of 1948” (p. 211), whilst her index lists the premier in 1949 (p. 84).
CHAPTER 5: THE 1960s

INTRODUCTION

Nagrin’s core of X during the 1960s shifted from dancing character portraits to experimenting with current trends, arguably demonstrating his greatest growth in the briefest amount of time. His 1960s work can be seen to show three distinct phases of development. The first was with the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company, working with a group. The second was his return to both creating and reviving solo concert works. The third was the addition of group improvisational explorations resulting in the formation of his improvisational dance company, The Workgroup. Since all of Nagrin’s new solos are contained in his Spring ’65 (1965) concert and his first full-evening work entitled Peloponnesian War (1968), the focus of this chapter is the new works within the second development. Nagrin’s choreographic styles and methods of getting to the core of X during this time are illuminated and analysed, and I argue for a clustering of these unrelated works into the interpretive categorisation which I term The 1960s.

The rationale for using the second development as a new Nagrin period is that stylistic changes which determine Nagrin’s X are unique during this time. Chronologically, the 1960s commenced with Nagrin’s departure from creating solo portraits to forming the Tamiris-Nagrin Dance Company. Not only was it viewed as belonging to Tamiris, but also Nagrin’s role was seen as that of capable performer and co-director rather than choreographer (Hering, 1961 and Horst, 1961a). Nagrin did attempt some small group concert choreography in the late 1950s and early 1960s, such as A Dancer Prepares (1958), An Entertainment (1959), and The Man Who Did Not Care (1963), all featuring a soloist against a backdrop of other dancers. These were not seen as outstanding works choreographically based on viewing a videotape (Nagrin, 1967) and various reviews (Lewis, 1958; Hering, 1961; Horst, 1961a; Manchester, 1963; Marks, 1963; and Maskey, 1964). Recognising his strengths and admitting he was not fond of choreographing for a group, Nagrin welcomed the return to solo works after their company
The formation of the Workgroup at the end of this decade is identified and reasoned as the start of another interpretive Nagrin period that is treated as the next chapter. The 1960s Nagrin period consists of his solo works inserted between the two sole occasions that he worked with dance companies.

During this decade, Nagrin departed from his purely dance portrait style by experimenting with several other structures, devices, and treatments to get to his core of X.¹ He assimilated “some of the new trends into his own style” (Jowitt cited in Schlundt, 1997:76), representing a marked shift in his work. To justify further my formation and categorisation of this choreographic period, the case-study Path (1965) from Spring ‘65 is analysed at the end of this chapter. A structural outline (Appendix D.2) was developed from repeated viewings of the DVD (Nagrin, 2004d). The analytical writings of Sally Banes (in Adshead 1986a, 1987, 1993, in Docherty 1999, and 2003) provide the primary theoretical framework for this chapter, along with additional writings from several other scholars.

Contextualising (Adshead, 1986 and Hutcheon, 1988) Nagrin and his works within this period and culture, the 1960s was a tumultuous decade in America. Many upheavals and meta-revolutions occurred politically, socially, philosophically, and aesthetically which questioned all establishment norms. Pragmatism and the modern-Enlightenment manifesto that positioned man as possessing all the answers were destroyed after the first atomic bomb dropped in 1945 (Appleby et al, 1994). The American mindset of the 1950s was dominated by McCarthy’s fear of communism, the launching of Russia’s Sputnik that placed the first man in space, and threat of nuclear holocaust (Kane, 2000 and Manning, 1988). During the 1960s, various life-style experimentations shook and challenged the traditional foundations of American culture such as protests, unrest, the Kennedy New Era liberal social policies (Banes, 2003), assassinations, and the divisive Vietnam conflict.² Since the contextual relationship between art and the cultural times is complex and possibly reflective (Adshead, 1988), it is plausible to assume that dance was experiencing a shift as well. Modern dance experienced its own cultural revolution through the application of such devices as audience engagement, defamiliarization, the celebration of the everyday that blurred art
and life, and non-Western influences on the staging of dances (Banes, 2003 and in Docherty, 1999) which created new venues.

Even though Nagrin continued to perform some Dance Portraits (Programme #16), these new works exhibited a growth and progression from

the literal miming of *Hero* and *Man of Action* (1948) [sic] to the abstract minimalism of *Path* (1965), influenced by the experiments of the avant-garde Judson Church group.

Solomons, 1998:6

It is debatable that the Judson Church group influenced Nagrin directly, as personal information from him as a graduate student indicated otherwise. Nagrin worked with neither the Judson group nor Robert Dunn, teacher of composition classes during the 1950s and early 1960s attended by those later known as the Judson group. However, it is reasonable to assume that Nagrin possessed “a continual awareness of the contemporary world” (Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a:530-31) and changing times that were reflected throughout his works. How Nagrin remained a “‘pacesetter’” (Jowitt cited in Schlundt, 1997:76) rather than maintaining a set style, and how his core of X is determined and shifts, are analysed further.

5.1. MINIMAL MOVEMENT, EXPRESSION, AND ALIENATION

Reflecting the dubious, conflicting times as indicated above by Banes (2003), Nagrin’s treatment of subject matter was both consistent with and different from his Dance Portrait period. He continued to perform solos, work with abstracted metaphors found through improvisation based in the specific internal reality of X, and at times retained his physical, kinetic dancing style. However, from the analysis of source materials, it is argued that various stylistic changes in treatment of subject matter contribute to his shifting core of X. These involved many firsts for Nagrin and are hallmarks of this period. The stylistic changes are the use of minimal movement, treatment of expression, and experimenting with a performance art genre. The latter includes alienation, with the possibility of similarities to Brecht’s theatre during the 1960s. It also involves Nagrin’s development of a distinctive relationship
between performer and spectator that demanded subtle, covert audience participation.

Banes (2003) argues that art in the 1960s was minimalistic. Several critics such as Carbonneau (1995), Guest (1967), Jackson (1965), Michelotti (1996), Solomons (1998), and Vaughan (1975) commented on the minimalist characteristics within Nagrin’s works of this time. These are marked by stripped-down, pedestrian movements and are seen in his experiments for the first time with performance art works such as *Peloponnesian War* and minimal, task-like works such as *Path*. The extent to which this minimalistic movement vocabulary is consistent with or differed from the 1960s dancers is examined. With minor exceptions, his movement contrasts with the physically virtuosic feats of his Dance Portraits. Since Nagrin’s first two questions of his six-step method are ‘who are you’ and ‘what are you doing,’ how movements are treated further reveals his shifting, developing core of X.

Although Nagrin’s *Spring ’65* was his first solo concert since 1959, critics attended other dance events instead (Schlundt, 1997). In contrast, his 1967 London tour was extremely successful (Guest, 1967 and Hall, 1967). From viewing the concert videotape and DVD (Nagrin, 1985 and 2004d), *Spring ’65* consists of several new works and some revivals. Several of these dances and the spaces between them contain elements that further define the character of X. For example, movement minimalism emerges through a seamless flow of various commonplace actions and functions both between and within the dances. Stanislavski (1936:33) said all of the actions that “happen on stage must be for a purpose,” as no action or movement from the performer is unintentional. Taking this into Nagrin’s works with the assumption that he is working from Stanislavski’s ideas, his core of X, therefore, is revealed in the intention of doing through stillness, gestures, pedestrian and task-like movements. Character-defining actions are evident in natural walking, operating the tape recorder, lighting a cigarette, drinking water, sitting down, changing and tying shoes, and wiping his face with a towel. In viewing *Why Not* (1965), these movements are playing what appears to be an American street game called craps; Nagrin’s X throws imaginary dice by thrusting the arm outward and ecstatically snapping the fingers, hand slapping the rhythm, and foot stamping. *In the Dusk* (1965) contains statuesque poses
and various uncoded arm movements sans torso. Between *National Dance* (1965) and *Not Me, But Him* (1965), Nagrin performs some non-codified hand and arm gestures that flowed into the next dance. In the latter, some reviewers considered his movements to be effortless (Jackson, 1965 and Marks, 1965) and exciting, holding an audience’s attention (Guest, 1967). From the videotape, Nagrin begins with a pose, his back to the audience with right finger pointed in the air. According to written accounts, *Nineteen Upbeats* (1965) used “common movement” (Osolin cited in Schlundt, 1997:44) and gestures such as everyday grooming (Guest, 1967); however, the specific actions are unknown since various correspondences with Nagrin (2005b) proved unfruitful. This is not surprising from my experience with him at Arizona State regarding intention and reception, discussed throughout this section. In *Peloponnesian War*, he changes clothes several times to reveal different characters, takes a bath, performs another morning routine of waking and dressing, sleeps, smokes, and arm-wrestles with a disembodied hand (Fortney, 1968 and Schlundt, 1997). Nagrin’s random, pedestrian walks can be seen as similar to those of Yvonne Rainer, Lucinda Childs, and Kenneth King during this time.

London critic Fernau Hall (1967) comments that Nagrin possesses his own style, technique, and approach with incredible stamina in performance. Years later, Don McDonagh (1976) writes of Nagrin’s perpetual uncoded virtuosity. From viewing the videotape of *Spring ’65*, these interjections of physical virtuosity and stamina appear, which contrast with minimalism, and further define both the X and his style. For example, the cartwheels and a double *tour en l’air* in *A Gratitude* (1965) contrast with tender and slow movements to define an exuberant character. *Why Not* employs a fast, uncoded spin. The first section of *National Dance* later included in *Peloponnesian War* uses steps from Eastern European traditional dances. These consist of a fast grapevine, then Ukrainian men’s *bleking* hops\(^4\) that end in a small *plié* on one leg with the other out to the side and heel touching the floor, and finishing with large jumps from a deep *grand plié* similar to Russian men’s folk dances. Nagrin’s parody of a jazzy Broadway style with frenzied spins, kicks, leaps, and a wide, plastic smile are seen in *Not Me, But
Him and National Dance II from Peloponnesian War. In contrast are the slow, smooth qualities of In the Dusk’s aerial jumps and leaps.

Nagrin’s continual display of the ordinary through popular culture during the 1960s blurs the boundaries between real life and art. This is similar to Stanislavski’s (1924:49) focus, particularly in directing Chekhov’s plays in which the common and ordinary in the world around him were used. Using new history’s contextualisation (Hutcheon, 1988 and Jenkins, 1991) to situate Nagrin contemporaneously, the vernacular and pop art were emphasized by many 1960s artists who would “fling anything which is ‘read’ in front of us and call it ‘art’” (Reid, 1969:125). Examples are Andy Warhol’s Brillo pad box and his multiple neon portraits of Hollywood icon Marilyn Monroe (Banes, 2003). In general, art at this time could be anything that was displayed through the

use of ordinary gestures, actions, rhythms, and . . . household objects [incorporated] into their paintings and performances . . . blurring the boundaries between art and everyday life, [an] arrant celebration of the banal . . . a shocking . . . fascination with the mundane.

Banes, 2003:3

Nagrin’s dual-coded treatment of subject matter is distinguished by fusing literal gestures and quotidian movements with/as abstracted metaphors, or what he terms as a “poetic use of specific images” (Nagrin, 1997:xvi). From my experience with Nagrin and his work, he always used metaphors to probe further into the core of X. This idea is contained in Stanislavski’s (1924:49) use of “symbolism,” or using one thing to represent another. To both Stanislavski and Nagrin (2001), metaphors can be multiple and are based upon individual experience, as Adshead (1988) also argues. Nagrin’s metaphors during the 1960s are analysed throughout this section, but Path’s are included in the case-study. Chapters 6 and 7 critically probe Nagrin’s movement metaphors further, which arguably carry embedded cultural meaning relevant to the times. Nagrin’s continued use of metaphor during the 1960s contrasts with those who were using pure movement, or what Banes calls analytical dance (1987 and in Docherty, 1999), such as the Judson group and Merce Cunningham. Rainer’s Trio A explored and
suppressed dance movement possibilities (Burt in Lepecki, 2004) as Nagrin did, but not through metaphor (Carroll in Fancher and Myers, 1981). Nagrin (2001) believes that the intention or function of art is to evoke a stirring mystery rather than communicate something concrete, thereby engaging both performer and audience into the process of meaning making. Like Stanislavski, Nagrin achieves this through the fluid nature of metaphor’s reception and interpretation through personal experience:

> Personally, I believe in doing my work and not interfering with the work of the audience. It is their task, or joy, to enter into what they see, experience and if possible, to draw a relation to their own lives . . . If there is a love of dance, the means to perceive it in its many forms will be found without it being spelled out by the choreographer.

Nagrin, 2001:68

He does not like to divulge his intentions or the underlying meanings of his works so that viewers derive their own interpretations by trusting their own reactions. Nagrin remained passionate about this during the time I studied under him.

It is argued that Nagrin further reveals his X through bodily expression, since it is both a choreographic and performative element in determining style (Layson, 1987 and Martin, 1939/75). Stanislavski (1936:43) taught that all on-stage “action must have an inner justification” rather than develop from contrived emotions that produce “false acting.” He achieved this through inner psychological work to evoke inspiration, then the outer work through embodiment, or the “I am” (1961a:27). In all his concert works, Nagrin never resorted to dancing an emotion in a literal sense; but expression (Franko, 1995) is inherent in a strong image of either who or what he was through the function or action, or his X. Scholars define the complexity of expression, which is a disputed concept, as the pressing outward of water from a sponge, but yet the same water is contained within the sponge (Best, 1974 and Reid, 1969). Mark Franko (1995:ix) states that expression (Ausdruck) is the inner pressed out through force, the “outwarding of inwardness” stimulated by the experience of emotion. He extends this to dance and distinguishes between “expressive” that is outward and contains subjectivism or emotion; and
“expression,” which is inward, privileges the moving body’s presence rather than pursuing an emotion, a key characteristic of modernism (1995:6). Expressiveness in dance is not the emotional expression of choreographers, dancers, or spectators but of certain characteristics emergent in the bodily movement that is three-fold: stimulus, feeling impact, and expression (1995:x). For example, a work does not symbolize sadness but is, in itself, sad (McFee, 1992). This notion is similar to Isadora Duncan’s use (Layson, 1987), and what Graham did in Frontier (Franko, 1995). The looking outward transformed her, and the audience saw and believed what she saw (Nagrin, 2001). The movement itself possesses emotive qualities within Nagrin’s (2001) dances to define the core of X. For instance, Nagrin’s X embodies happiness in A Gratitude and Eastern European essences in National Dances. Nagrin worked through the action rather than emotion to create movement. He writes:

the action produces the emotion. Stanislavski says, never work for or from the emotion; only work from the specific action and the emotion will follow . . . . Where I work from, indeterminacy and uncertainty prevail and answers are few.

Nagrin, 2001:103

It is clear from the above quote that Nagrin works from expression rather than working from an emotion, which is consistent with my experience with him, and embraces Stanislavski’s (1924/48, 1936/59, and 1961b) concept of expression through embodied action to find the core of X. This idea contrasts with abstract expressionist painters’ uses of the moving body in which emotion is separated from content and intent (Franko, 1995 and Copeland, 2004). Nagrin’s expression includes the notion of content/function; that is, ideas, feelings, images, or experiences achieved through a specific image. Since these feelings cannot exist without content, a “something,” such as the specific image of a personal, felt experience (Reid, 1969:46) is needed, which is Stanislavski’s (1924) focus. This is evident in Edgar Allan Poe’s and T.S. Eliot’s works which denied expression that “involves emotion” (Reid, 1969:77). Nagrin’s content through embodied expression is seen in the angry movement sarcasm in Peloponnesian War that projects his adversity for the
Vietnam conflict; and *Path*, analysed at the end of this chapter. Nagrin’s allowing the body to speak through movement and content contrasts with the “classical expression theory” (Sirridge and Armelagos, 1977:15) that projects an emotion by the dancer (Martin, 1939/75). For example, emotion is evident in one of two phases of Martha Graham’s dances, distinguished as materialist and dramaturgical rather than the previously attributed Americana/Mythology category (Franko, 1995).

Nagrin’s notion of audience with regard to the spectator/performer relationship is fluid by using them as a force in his works, which differs from his Broadway experience (Nagrin, 1994) and affects his core of X. In *Peloponnesian War*, Nagrin ruptured conventional, formalist boundaries between spectator and performer by allowing the sound tape to run for several minutes whilst the audience waited in the dark for the performance to begin. Then, dressed as an audience member, he began to mimic their actions from his seat on the stage as they rose for the national anthem (Schlundt, 1997 and Siegel, 1969), thus becoming an audience member himself. After a performance in Guam, a spectator told Nagrin that he resented the performer/audience role reversal by implicitly making the audience the spectacle. Nagrin said this man captured the core of the performance. Nagrin challenged the automatic willingness of the audience to act without thinking, which elicited contradictory and angry responses from them (Schlundt, 1997). Markedly, this “manner of working the audience” (Nagrin, 1997:83) differs from many companies of this time that conventionally performed for the audience, and then spectators responded by applauding and laughing. One exception is the Judson group’s treatment of audience as performers/participants and their questioning of hierarchies between choreographer, performer, and audience (Banes, 2003). Another exception is Meredith Monk’s use of spectators to move sets on stage in *Portable (1966)* (Jowitt in Banes, 2003). For Nagrin (1997), the actions of performing and viewing a dance event are a mutual, creative effort by artist and audience. This concept, introduced to him by actor Jack Berry during the summer of 1940 whilst at Unity House, made a life-long impact upon Nagrin. Berry was a student of leading actor Benno Schneider of Moscow Art Theatre’s Habimah Theatre, discussed in Chapter 2. He taught Nagrin to reach the audience
“through the other actor” (Nagrin, 1997:44) by pulling the audience into his own kinesphere (Evans, 2002). Thus, the audience became a force, even a character, within the context of X as the action occurred both on-stage and within the audience. Nagrin writes:

There are times when the audience is the other actor, or just one more factor at the heart of what is going on in the theatre. Thus, Brecht did not leave Stanislavski behind, he just dragged him off the stage into the house with the audience. Nagrin, 1997:82

This relationship between performer and audience (Hanna, 1983), intention and reception (Hodgens in Adshead, 1988), is an aspect in Nagrin’s development of X seen primarily through the treatment of alienation. American artists of the 1960s were aware of the work of mid-20th century German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956). His “epic theatre” of alienation or verfremdung, sometimes referred to as the “A-effect” (Mitter, 1992:44) or the “V-effect” (Chaikin, 1991:38), is rooted in Victor Shklovsky’s Russian Formalist concept of defamiliarization (ostranenie), or “‘making things strange’” (cited in Banes, 2003:4). The aim of verfremdung is to alienate, dislocate, or interrupt strategically the habitual frames of reference or convention through a critical opposite, making strange and peculiar the startling obvious, the ordinary, and the familiar (Mitter, 1992). Alienation counteracts an illusion in the audience by using constructed objects or elements of reality to discover situations rather than reproducing the real (Ulmer in Foster, 1990:94) and through the theatrical experience itself (Chaikin, 1991:34). Brecht used it in various ways to keep his audiences actively interested . . . [such as] entertainment, allegories, songs, impersonation, humor, clever, always-visible theatrical invention, and a unique kind of secrecy as a constant current during the whole event. Chaikin, 1991:35-36

It can also be achieved through iconic gestures, baring or showing the process, improvisation, disappearances of high art through privileging the everyday or popular, and jamming (Banes, 2003).
Defamiliarization was used by the Judson group and Monk, who literally walked off the stage into the audience and invited them to gaze with her at a bare performance space in *Needlebrain Lloyd* (1966) and answered a real telephone call in the site-specific work, *Vessel* (1971) (Jowitt in Banes, 2003). Some aspects of Nagrin’s works during the 1960s contain similar ideas. For instance, Nagrin defamiliarized the performance space by challenging the limitations of the proscenium stage and blurring the boundaries between performer and spectator in several works. He non-verbally encouraged viewers to participate in the process of psychological and physical investigations with him through imitating the familiar energy, configurations, actions, and responses of the audience mentioned above in *Peloponnesian War*. Another example from viewing the videotape of *Spring ’65* is Nagrin’s informal chats with the audience during and in between the dances whilst doing collectively familiar activities such as changing clothes and shoes and sipping from a water glass. He draws the audience into the performance through these common actions, thereby creating a familiarity or relationship between them and the X. He defamiliarizes these through their quotidian contexts and then displaces/dislocates them within a performance context. His nonchalant, chatty performance style seen frequently during this period later becomes a Post-Workgroup trademark, treated in Chapter 7.

Alienation can be seen as a structuring device (Ulmer in Foster, 1990). Brecht’s strategic interruption contrasts with Stanislavski’s (1936:221) causality, or naturalness in the through line of action discussed in Chapter 2, since it reveals forces that drive it (Mitter, 1992:56). *Peloponnesian War* is arguably the most overt example of Nagrin’s use of strategic interruption during the 1960s period to aid in developing the core of X. Some of the strategic interruption devices employed are “continuous blackouts and bumpups -- to make darkness and fear palpable,” suspending a chicken about to have its head cut off, using a live snake, firing a rifle point-blank at the audience, and throwing things at them (Schlundt, 1997 and Siegel, 1969:23). This work contains “irony” (Loney, 1970:68) and “uncertainty” (Schlundt, 1997:50), and these constructed objects of reality create a “distrust [of] appearance” (Nagrin, 1997:45) due to their disruptiveness. Schlundt (1997) states that Nagrin’s intent was to make the audience remember the conveyed
images, sensations, and meaning through embodiment or felt knowledge rather than cognition. I argue, however, that his intent also can be to alienate by rendering peculiar the familiar through the structuring device of strategic interruption, with the intent as examined below.

Nagrin also uses strategic interruption as treatment of subject matter to challenge first, then draw the audience into the action by deliberately causing them to acknowledge their feelings and make connections to their “hopes, fears and prejudices” (Nagrin, 1997:82). In one regard, he both faced and challenged the audience by never letting them forget that he was a man who was performing for them (Schlundt, 1997). On the other hand, he took ideas and situations that directly involved them, even threatened them, and threw them back in their faces (Nagrin, 1997) via the devices mentioned in the previous paragraph. Initially, the spectator identifies with the performer, which opens the potential of seeing oneself within “the world of the work” (Elliott in Vesey, 1973:90) by interrupting with familiar tasks or objects that are distorted. Alienation works from inside and outside of spectators’ worlds that causes them to question and reflect (Mitter, 1992:56). Nagrin uses alienation to allow spectators to see themselves in his works, which is what choreographers Bill T. Jones and Pina Bausch did in the 1980s (Goldberg, 1988 and Nagrin, 1997). Nagrin employed this again, but with different treatments, in *Poems Off the Wall (1981)* which is analysed in Chapter 7.

Nagrin’s treatment of audience alienation, which he called “Brechtian Consciousness,” also is in opposition to the “Stanislavski Involvement” of arousing empathy in the audience since it renders them a victim of the experience by being mastered by the action on stage (Nagrin, 1997:81). Brecht rejected theatre that permitted the audience to experience compassion and tears during a performance, but who afterward could return to self-centred indifference. Through the process of getting to the core of X, Nagrin used alienation to produce an “enquiring, cynical spectator” (Nagrin, 1997:82). Nagrin (1997), as in Brecht’s epic theatre, wanted to make the spectator assume a reflexive, questioning attitude toward events through dissociation, but without pity. “If a dance makes you think, you are already interpreting” (Nagrin, 1991), which renders the possibility for multiple and idiosyncratic interpretations in his works (Loney, 1970 and Schlundt, 1997). Using
alienation to challenge the viewer reflexively in his/her own idiosyncratic time, place, and personal experiences results in two outcomes that debatably are problematic to determine. The first is the plausibility of alienation to change man’s fate as Brecht stated (Bently [trans.], 1949 in Nagrin, 1997; Chaikin, 1991:35; and Mitter, 1992); and the second is whether it actually “intervenes and changes reality” (Ulmer in Foster, 1990:94). These notions, coupled with developing the X from a fluid alienated audience interaction, also have a direct relationship to Nagrin’s continual social agency themes, treated next.

5.2. THEMATIC DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

A significant cluster of dances emerges in the analysis that covers a range of diverse themes at this time, compared to Nagrin’s X as seen in the Dance Portraits. Ironically, his thematic experimentations parallel the complex anomalous times of the 1960s and include autobiographical works, portraits, revivals, task-like dances, films, and social and political commentaries. These are seen in dances such as the autobiographical and Eastern European essence-based A Gratitude and the querying Why Not; the portrait-like unrequited love of In the Dusk; and the revived Spanish Dance (1948) and Indeterminate Figure (1957). Other works include ritualistic tasks seen in Path, Nineteen Upbeats, and Peloponnesian War; experimenting with film in Path and An Evening with Dance and Cinema (1968); social and racial politics in Not Me, But Him; and the multifaceted social/political commentary, Peloponnesian War. With the exception of the revivals, it could be said that all these dances include new thematic characteristics, even though the first three dances continued some of the “semi-dramatic” (Hall, 1967:7) progressions from his Dance Portraits period. This thematically diverse section focuses on the repeated themes of task-like dance and social consciousness that Nagrin arguably uses to frame his core of X.

Historians herald the development of task-oriented dances by the Judson group, but they omit Nagrin’s contributions. Ordinary movements and tasks qualify as dance (Banes, 1993 and 2003) but differ from abstract, pure dance by “operating upon an object” (Franko in Desmond, 1997:298). For Jews, kashruth laws regulate some of their day-to-day, ordinary practices that
overwhelmingly weave everyday tasks with ritual (Banes, 2003), particularly with regard to the Sabbath. It seems plausible, then, that a natural outcome of Nagrin’s Jewishness would incorporate these commonplace, daily tasks into his professional work. However, it is argued that Nagrin uses task as a theme rather than as treatment of subject matter as did the Judsons since it is doing-centred instead of object-centred, which reveals his core of X. Therefore, his use was task-like. Similarly, the actions of Nagrin’s dance portrait characters reveal their cores. Examples of task-like themes in Nagrin’s works are the construction worker carrying a beam in *Path*, analysed at the end of this chapter; the character’s morning routine in *Nineteen Upbeats*; and certain sections of *Peloponnesian War*.

Jane Desmond (1997:49) argues that movement can be seen as a social and cultural text. It is argued that Nagrin further expands his social consciousness seen through the core of X during this time by framing his existential philosophy and Russian Jewish heritage, although problematic as an influence. He achieved this by situating these themes contextually within American “values and history” (Hutcheon, 1989:12) through equality, amelioration, and awareness. His human condition focus, presumably gleaned from Tamiris, reflects the immediacy of social, political, and psychological attitudes since “any aesthetic gesture is also a social or political gesture” (in Gruen, 1988:103), thus blending these issues in his works. Scholar Mark Franko (1995) asserts that dances of social action, which are rooted in the 1930s revolutionary political dance, give attention to the development of black dance and men in dance. This idea is seen in Nagrin’s privileging of Africanist elements and themes. Susan Manning (2004a:4) illuminates the fusion of Afrocentric and Eurocentic influences into American theatre dance of the 20th Century, further problematising choreographers such as Tamiris who used Negro themes, elements, and socio-political issues in their works.

Multiple aspects of social consciousness are seen from viewing the videotape (Nagrin, 1985). Issues of projected racism are evident through the wearing of a black-faced mask in *Not Me, But Him*. The mask symbolises a different identity, transforming Nagrin either into a “vaudeville-like character” (Jackson, 1965:13) or completely possessing the dancer as in Noh theatre.
(Hall, 1967). On tour, an unnamed Southern reviewer from Baton Rouge saw this as a protest dance, thus corroborating Foster’s (2002b:74) statement that during this decade, Nagrin “advocates the broadest possible definition of choreography, so broad as to include political demonstrations.” Nagrin was penned as

a secret commentator putting his message across behind the backs of those who think protest must have words, printed, spoken or sung.

cited in Schlundt 1997:43

Choreographed against the contextual 1960s backdrop of an African-American man struggling in a racially driven society (McDonagh, 1997), Nagrin was not afraid to perform this in the historically oppressive South. He boldly engages with controversial political issues to arrive at his X at a time when America’s cities literally were ablaze in racial rioting. Nagrin’s “metaphorical minstrelsy,” Manning’s (2004a:10) arguably pejorative term for white performers portraying blacks mentioned in the previous chapter, was a daring act of displacement during America’s explosive civil rights era. Based on my experience, Nagrin always valued and was passionate about equality and fair treatment for all, corroborated by Schlundt (1997). Ironically, though, his daily interactions were underpinned with passion and conviction that were, at times, contentious but open to a reasonable consensus.

Desmond’s (1997) notion of dance as a social and cultural text blends with Foster’s (2002b) political statement in Nagrin’s *Peloponnesian War*, a metaphorical commentary that “parallels the Vietnam War with the disastrous conflict between Athens and Sparta” (McDonagh, 1997:79). Using alienation, discussed in the previous section, the social agency action involved getting the viewer to distance him.herself for a moment so that the conscious could take over and “‘make a human being out of him’” (Myrdal cited in Schlundt, 1997:47). It was a “portrait of us in America” (Siegel, 1969:23), as Nagrin

held up the mirror of his art to his society again, with brutal and shocking images reflecting a brutal and shocking time.

Schlundt, 1997:45
Nagrin’s anti-war performance is considered a “satire of war and the human condition” (Siegel, 1969:18), “a raw, vital, and confrontive attack” (Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a:531). Even though Nagrin believed he was the only choreographer reflecting this aspect of American consciousness (Roses-Thema, 2003), Richard Bull concurrently was performing his satire War Games: Strategies, Tactics, Diversions, and Delights (1968) (Anderson, 1968:26). Some of the post-Judson performers dealt with this issue by the early 1970s (Banes, 2003). Nagrin’s choreographic notes reveal his social agency by affirming a relationship between art’s value to society via confrontation with life’s issues (Siegel, 1969), an idea contained in Russian social realism at the turn of the century (Laing, 1978 and Sparshott, 1970). Nagrin stated the purpose of this work was not attention to form, which was popular among choreographers at the time, but on the social value of giving a damn about other people . . . Ideology doesn’t mean a thing [to some artists who are] in the process of distancing [themselves] from caring and responsibility.

cited in Dunning, 1982

In contrast to the “escapism of formalism,” the “grittier, messier realities of the social and political arena” (Copeland, 1990:6) were preferred by Nagrin, which somewhat recalls the 1930s American political dance as “impure” modernism (Franko, 2002 and in Desmond, 1997:298). In contrast, most other dance artists of the mid-1960s embraced formalism, such as the Judson Dance Theater, Anna Halprin (Banes, 2003), Martha Graham, and Merce Cunningham (Macaulay in Adshead, 1986). At this unsettling, explosive time in America, they were not dealing with current racism or political unrest in their works. Thus, Nagrin’s social agency message expanded to include current political themes into his core of X, challenging the vitality and importance of modern dance in America (Foster, 2002b).

5.3. CONTENT, REPETITION, AND MONTAGE

The core of X is elucidated further through Nagrin’s choreographic structure. How far his choreographic methods underwent a revolutionary
process during the 1960s is analysed. Nagrin’s choreographic structure is based in a rigorous methodology, as is Cunningham’s (Copeland, 2004), of getting to the core of X. Nagrin continued to use many of the techniques of modernism (rather than modern dance) to structure his works, such as elevation of content over form, repetition, and fragmented phrases. The latter is through the use of collage and montage, introduced to the Judson group by Robert Dunn in the early 1960s (Banes, 1987 and Manning, 1988). The Judson group also explored traditional methods of composition for choreographic process (Banes in Adshead, 1986a). Sally Banes (1993) further articulates that the Judson aesthetic was intentionally undefined and unrestricted, and choreographic styles and methods such as improvisation, spontaneous determination, chance, choreographic choice, collage, and collaboration are metaphors for freedom. All of these shape choreographic style (Adshead, 1988).

A major shift occurred in Nagrin’s choreographic approach during this period by injecting the techniques of Bertolt Brecht’s epic theatre (Mitter, 1992 and Nagrin, 1997), discussed earlier. According to Banes (2003), alienation in general was achieved through various choreographic structuring devices such as repetition, juxtapositioning, fragmentation, and montage as seen in Spring ’65, Peloponnesian War, and as discussed further. Nagrin experimented choreographically in a variety of ways with all of these during this decade to reveal deeper his core of X. These, along with content, are his dominant choreographic structure that this analysis focuses upon.

As in his Dance Portraits, Nagrin constantly incorporated content by observing people, then taking these observations into his solos through improvisation and metaphors to find the X (Nagrin, 2001). Often, similar to other artists, the content of Nagrin’s choreography deals with moments in life when the individual has to cope with something or demonstrate personal responsibility (Burnham, 1971; Gruen, 1975; and Nagrin, 2001). Critics saw Nagrin’s Spring ’65 as continuing to elevate content over form, which further defines the X. Tamiris’ influence in the “inner dynamic intensity” was primary rather than steps or positions, as “design in space seems never to be used for its own sake . . . there is no pure dance” (Guest, 1967:517). Not Me, But Him was without “apparent form, only characterization” (Guest, 1967:517), aided
by a mask. Nagrin’s notion of content can be compared to Turner prize-winning postmodern British artist Anish Kapoor. From viewing (Tate Britain, 2003) Kapoor’s four-piece sculpture satirically entitled *Three* (1982), the Artist’s Statement on the wall above this work states that his aim is not to create sculpture about form, since form does not interest him. He prefers to make sculpture about belief, passion, experience, and things that are outside material concerns. These notions are contained in Nagrin’s works.

Nagrin (1997) admits even the most abstract of dance can contain a specific but quips that he never does abstract movement for the sake of movement, or *l’art pour l’art*. In contrast at this time is the content of pure dance dances by Merce Cunningham and Yvonne Rainer, which were neither representational nor expressive (Copeland, 2004; and Franko in Desmond, 1997); nor based in events or emotions, feeling, or fiction (Banes, 2003). Rainer was opposed to such qualities as ideas, relations, feelings, and emotions, a “reductionist” position (Carroll in Fancher and Myers, 1981:96). These latter qualities are exactly what Nagrin was using choreographically whilst working from content and minimal movement rather than pure dance. Nagrin stripped down both movement and intention, similar to the analytic reductionism of the Judson group, but unlike most choreographers of this time approached it through content, not form. An example is *Path*, discussed at the end of this chapter. Ironically, Rainer became uninterested in pure dance by 1974 due to its lack of content. She abandoned dance for avant-garde film work based in an inward, social/political consciousness (Franko in Desmond, 1997) which embraced both meaning and non-expressive emotion. Whilst Nagrin (2001) articulates that abstract movement has intention, his shift was to reduce intention exemplified by pared-down, bare-essential movement that contains content and meaning through metaphor to reach his core of X.

Roger Copeland (1990) refers to the use of repetition as the formalist and minimalist link to the 1960s and 70s. Nagrin uses repetition in a variety of ways as a structuring device to get to the core of X as viewed in the videotape (Nagrin, 1985). Unlike Rainer who used repetition to purify or objectify movement by draining it of any other content other than the movement itself, Nagrin’s approach was akin to later choreographers Pina Bausch and Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker (Goldberg, 1988). Their uses of repetition are to
intensify content and meaning (Burt in Lepecki, 2004) through post-structural “anti-formalist aesthetics” instead of movement for movement’s sake (Copeland, 1990:5-6). In National Dance from Peloponnesian War, a dynamic, high-energy phrase with an extended high kick is repeated throughout the dance as well as intentional heavy breathing in timed intervals which help define the ethnic character. Finger snapping is repeated in Why Not as are certain poses in Not Me, But Him. The use of repetition as content in Path is analysed at the end of this chapter.

Montage, fragmentation, and juxtaposition continued to be evident in the manner in which Nagrin chose to choreograph during the 1960s. Collage and montage were developed by modernist painters Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso (Burt in Lepecki, 2004; and Ulmer in Foster, 1990). Banes (2003) defines movement images as fragments or collages; joined side-by-side to create meaning is juxtaposition; and once the “mosaic” has been juxtaposed by “accruing meaning” (p. 117), it is termed a montage. Copeland (2004) credits Cunningham as the first choreographer to use montaged movement phrases thereby influencing the Judson group, others, and later used heavily by Stephen Petronio. However, as seen in the previous chapter, Nagrin used collage and montage throughout his Dance Portraits as early as 1943 with Private Johnny Jukebox. It is likely that Nagrin borrowed fragmentation from Stanislavski’s (1936:110) teachings on “units and objectives,” in which a script is divided into several small sections for intuitive “analysis through feeling” (1961b:8) and adaptation into acting. Nagrin’s six-step method allows for the similar breaking down of a dance into smaller ‘beats’ or ‘bits’ from which to begin the creative search for movement (see Appendix C.1., step 2). These small ‘bits’ or phrases of movement fragments are combined in various ways to form the whole dance, which is how Nagrin taught to construct dances in my choreography classes.

Fragmentation is used to structure several of Nagrin’s works during the 1960s, such as sections in Nineteen Upbeats that are linked by quotidian movements (Guest, 1967). The concert structure for both Spring ’65 and Peloponnesian War consists of several independent, anomalous dance collages which could be seen as arbitrarily juxtaposed fragments to create a montaged whole. Peloponnesian War’s programme, entitled “A
Dance/Theatre Collage” (Fortney, 1969), is a non-linear rationale of dance and theatre collages that form a “nonsequential, fragmented, patchwork of events” (Schlundt, 1997:47). Nagrin’s fragmentation is similar to some of Cunningham’s works (Copeland, 2004) in which unrelated movement phrases are juxtaposed. In Spring ’65, the individual dances were called “studio studies” (Marks, 1965: 67). Linked by the informal, casual conversations of Nagrin with his audience, these were used as icebreakers. The structure is exposed through the seamless manner in which he connected the dances, as demonstrated in the review below:

[Nagrin] was on friendly terms by intermission time. It was obvious that he had statements to make and that dancing was his natural form of expression. The audience found out later he was dancing.

Marks, 1965: 67-68

Nagrin also used fragmentation as one method of discovering movement from a variety of ideas through kinetic improvisation (Gruen, 1975 and Siegel, 1969). For example, Nagrin’s method of finding movement for Peloponnesian War and later Poems Off the Wall began by actually pinning fragmented ideas onto his studio bulletin board (Nagrin, 2004i). Next, “blind fumbling improvisation [followed] but sooner or later the action is defined, usually quite precisely,” continuing to develop each fragmented section until a pattern emerged (Siegel, 1969:23). This approach to structure through improvisation is similar to the physical action, “planned and unplanned” compositions of abstract expressionist painters (Burnham, 1971:107 and Copeland, 2004).

5.4. MINIMALISM AND AURAL EXPERIMENTATIONS

From viewing the videotape, DVD, and various writings, Nagrin’s core of X is shaped minimally but functionally by the use of visual elements during the 1960s period. Props are used only when integral to the character (the X) or action, such as the simple black-faced mask in Not Me, But Him and the beam in Path. A bench, dance shoes, water glass, towel, and even a
functioning tape recorder are used in *Spring '65*. The props in *Peloponnesian War* include a gun, decapitated chicken, live snake, dismembered arm, and arguably costumes as props through repeated on-stage costume changes (Schlundt, 1997 and Siegel, 1969).

Nagrin’s minimal-but-functional costumes of ordinary, everyday clothes reflect the core of X and mirror the Judson aesthetic. A simple white T-shirt, light-coloured pants, and ballet slippers are worn in all the dances in the *Spring '65* concert. He dons a belt in the first Eastern European *National Dance* sections of *Peloponnesian War*, but not for the second. Nagrin usually works in ballet slippers or jazz shoes, but never in bare feet, speculatively due to his degrees in health sciences, his mother’s obsession with cleanliness (Nagrin, 1988a), and my personal observations of his insistence during classes to keep hands and feet clean. *Peloponnesian War* involves several costumes such as a business suit, toga, white turtleneck and pants with a belt, and a cloth wrapped around his pelvic area. From viewing various writings and photographs (Schlundt, 1997; Siegel, 1969; and Stein, 1968 and in Loney, 1970), these different costumes are changed as the performance progresses.

Various visual possibilities were explored during the 1960s as Nagrin once again incorporated film. He experimented with viewing films from different angles as an integral part of his *An Evening with Dance and Cinema* in 1968, but with unsuccessful reviews (Fortney, 1968 and McDonagh, 1968). The films shown were Humphrey’s *Air on the G String*, Don Redlich’s *Reacher*, Nagrin’s *Path* preceded by his live performance, and other filmed works from choreographers Anna Sokolow, Valerie Bettis, Talley Beatty, and Hilary Harris (Fortney, 1968). From viewing *A Gratitude*, it was filmed in silhouette, which gives a stunning visual effect to the stirring movement and evocative Armenian music.

During the 1960s, Nagrin’s treatment of aural elements shifts by using commissioned and pre-recorded music, narrated text, ambient sounds, silence, and his live voice whilst performing. Just as the relationship of dance to music was questioned and explored by choreographers of the 1960s (Banes, 1993), many of Nagrin’s works demonstrate a marked change from his constant interplay with the music as in his Dance Portraits to achieve his
X. Why Not and Nineteen Upbeats were performed in silence (Nagrin, 2005a), the first of his works to do so. Wigman also challenged convention by creating dances without accompaniment, but her intent specifically was to reject the primacy of music with its domination of formalism and emotionalism (Martin, 1939:234 and in Van Camp, 1982:115).

The hybridity of talking whilst dancing is evident in many American works since the 1980s (Banes in Docherty, 1999 and Manning, 1988). However, talking appears in several of Nagrin’s works during the 1960s. From viewing the videotape of the Spring ’65 concert (Nagrin, 1985), A Gratitude is performed to traditional Armenian music. Nagrin speaks at the end of it and of Why Not, and narrates the title during the opening pose of Not Me, But Him. In the Dusk combines Charles Ives’ music (Nagrin, 2005a) and spoken word by Nagrin. During this period, Nagrin developed a performative style of casually conversing with his audience. In addition, he experimented with physically manipulating sound and silence by manually operating the tape recorder and making his own tape collages. Nagrin commissioned several musicians during this time, such as Cecil Taylor for Not Me, But Him and Archie Shepp and Eric Salzman for several sections of Peloponnesian War (Nagrin, 2005a). From viewing the videotape, Peloponnesian War layers live and recorded words, text, and talk with music and ambient sounds. Nagrin’s choices to use various music and ambient sound collages in this work included the live firing of a gun (Schlundt, 1997) and his loud belch at the end of Wordgame (Nagrin, 2005a).

5.5. CASE-STUDY: Path (1965)

After repeatedly viewing Path (Nagrin, 2004d), choreographed and performed by Nagrin, I divided it into the structural outline (Appendix D.2) of three sections for analysis, entitled The Commencement, The Path, and Finale. The Commencement is the brief fifteen-second opening in which the performer contemplatively stands upstage right. A large beam rests at his feet, which he then picks up. The second section, The Path, is the longest -- the task of carrying the beam whilst gradually progressing on the downstage left diagonal in a box-step pattern until the opposite corner is reached. Nagrin
also used a diagonal floor pattern as viewed in both *In the Dusk* and within repeated movement phrases in *National Dances*. *Path’s* twelve-count box-step phrase is repeated in eight steps: starting on the right foot, walking slowly forward for the first three counts, then crossing the left foot over the right on count four; a hold on count five; quick, fast steps sideways to the right on six-and-seven, with count seven *en relevé*; sustain count eight; stepping backward four times on counts and-nine-and-ten; a sustain on eleven; and then replacing the foot as in the beginning on count twelve. “After what seemed an eternity” (Schlundt, 1997:41), the brief twelve-second Finale section commences with a pause. Nagrin steps forward and bends down to place the beam on the stage floor. He gives it a push, slides it into the wings, and removes his gloves, thus ending the work.

Nagrin’s core of X derives from a specific image doing that is consistent with his method. Task emerges as the dominant theme, which is established immediately through the specific image of a construction worker, dressed in T-shirt, pants, and worker’s gloves, who performs his on-the-job duty of carrying a beam. The task is performed with a serious, determined, “hypnotic” (Fortney, 1968:26) focus with a specified purpose and intention. Nagrin’s featuring of just one movement and arguably one internal motivation of doing the task could be considered a tribute or salute to men who make their living through physical exertion, sweat, and peril, or the “act of working” (Schlundt, 1997:45). The complex relationship between the workman’s clothing, prop (the beam), box-step diagonal floor pattern, careful stepping, silence, and concentrated focus reinforces the image of the construction worker as the X. These complex components provide the imaginative framework that transports this viewer to the top of a construction site on a skyscraper or housing development. To Nagrin, the specific image is rarely seen or known by the audience, but believed to be sensed or felt by supplying the image out of their own lives and imaginations, a “mutual act of creation by artist and audience” (Nagrin, 1997:xiv).

Nagrin’s social consciousness emerges through traditional values embedded within American society. The well-known core of the American dream is the Protestant work ethic, a Judeo-Christian historical value taught in American grade schools.⁸ Its foundations are in the pronouncement by
Mayflower Puritan Miles Standish to wealthy Englishmen that they would not eat if they did not work. Specifically, the value of work is directly related to self-sufficiency and responsibility by not burdening society. In this regard, Nagrin addresses multi-faceted social agency functions through his X: the importance of work, although sometimes pedantic; the need for society to grow and establish through the hard work of dedicated individuals; that hard work is embedded in American culture; and that it is honourable. Nagrin paid homage to the average, hard-working, blue-collar American male. President Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address of social responsibility that shaped the decade of the 1960s is relevant, which I recall from my childhood: ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.’ A few years later, Nagrin reaffirms this statement through the task in *Path*.

Several elements contributed to the whole of X. Subtle variations of speed, tempo, and dynamics (Guest, 1967) emerge among the box-step phrases, but from the viewing, each phrase itself consistently does not flux in rhythm or accents. The order of the steps never changes, but the box floor pattern has a modified circular shape that some critics call “tediously circular” (Levitan, 1973:86) and “unvaried” (Carbonneau, 1995). Wigman, Holm, and Humphrey included this spatial formation in their works (Banes, 1994). Repeating and exhausting the task gives this structure a complex ritual-like quality, particularly since it is layered against the circular floor pattern. Circle dances have a primitive connection to ritual and are evident in the dance traditions (Banes, 1994 and Jonas, 1992) of various cultures. These range from the circular dances of the Yoruba in western Africa, the trance-invoking spins of the Turkish Sufis, the *kolos* of Croatian dances, the Morse dances of England, the *horas* of Israel, to the contra dances of the United States. A decade after *Path* was first performed, this ritualistic formation continued to be seen in some 1970s dances such as the “communal” circle dances of Deborah Hay, the cosmic planetary trajectory of Molissa Fenley, the “primal circular crawls” of Simone Forti, and the ecstatic spins of Meredith Monk, Kenneth King, and Laura Dean (Banes, 1994:261). Nagrin’s choreographic obstacle, or justification of theatrical viability, is achieved through maintaining tension via the consistency of the steady rhythmic dynamic. *Path* is performed in silence. Additional elements include the props of the beam and the
worker's gloves that can be seen as such. The visual setting is a proscenium stage; however, from viewing a videotape, photograph (Garner in Schlundt, 1997), and personal recollections of seeing this years ago, Nagrin (1967) also filmed it outdoors on a mountain top. Other visual elements noted are the non-use of special lighting effects.

A dramatic departure from Nagrin's previous choreographic styles is illuminated whilst maintaining the underpinnings of his choreographic method. The analysis and the structural outline (Appendix D.2) clearly posits three fragmented sections linked by a cause-and-effect linear structure. The structural form is shaped by the content, or the task itself; but unlike his Dance Portraits, it emerges through the key structuring device of repetition that further defines the X. *Path*'s content is seen through the repeated box-step phrase as both meaning and intention emerge through the act of working. This repetition-as-content emphasizes the task-oriented action of a worker and emerges clearly through the structure of a "single movement phrase" (Guest, 1967:517). The relationship between the specific moment and the linear development occurs during the accent, focus, reinforcement, and climax, which is the repetitious continuation of the dance to progress until the task is completed.

Alienation emerges as the repetition defamiliarizes this task and makes it strange by extracting it from reality (Banes, 2003), similar to what defines some of the avant-garde works, events, or performance art of the 1960s. Nagrin's use of alienation differs from the Judson group but is similar in context to those of Bausch and Rainer as he used repetition both as a structuring device and as treatment of subject matter to define further his core of X rather than to manipulate props for their own sake. For instance, Nagrin takes basic walking, layers it onto a box-step pattern, strips it of all conventions and embellishments, and thus illuminates not only familiarity of the bare movement task but also the intention through continuous repetition. In contrast, Nagrin's use of repetition as a device for content-within-structure, not as treatment, is a very different approach to get to the core of X than in his Dance Portraits. However, its content is not as distinct for some critics. Former Cunningham dancer David Vaughan, who continues to tour with the company in an administrative capacity, has this to say:⁹
Path is quite remarkable... using repetition: carrying a length of two-by-four in front of his chest, he walked forward a couple of paces, then out to the side, and back again almost to the starting point, in a gradual diagonal progression... I suppose it would be possible to search for some 'meaning' in this, but I found it fascinating enough just to watch the sometimes infinitesimal variations of the endlessly repeated phrase.

Vaughan, 1975:28

Nagrin also uses alienation as a treatment to invite the audience into his performative kinesphere through an active, metaphorical process of reflexivity (Evans, 2002). He uses defamiliarization to blur the boundaries between performer and audience by allowing them to unknowingly determine the duration of the incessant floor pattern during each performance. This is possible through the non-use of accompaniment that forces a focused intensity on certain visual aspects such as the slow progression of the movement, resulting in stretching and elongating the element of time. Nagrin did not limit this work to the restraints of metered or phrased musical accompaniment, nor did he restrict it to exact phrasing but let it progress as long as needed. However, the duration varied for each performance, with at least one performance continuing for as much as fifteen minutes. This caused audiences to become a force or character within the work that creates tension, as Nagrin would modify it to suit or annoy them based upon their patient or agitated responses.¹⁰

Nagrin’s minimal and pedestrian movement vocabulary is evident in the walking. Critics and writers describe Path as a “minimal” dance (Carbonneau, 1995 and Schlundt, 1997:43) of “stark, simple beauty” (Michelotti, 1996:33); “as emotionally involving as a crossword puzzle” (Jackson, 1965:13); and “stunning -- pure, bracing, astringent” (Carbonneau, 1995). Nagrin refers to this “tight-rope”-like (Fortney, 1968:26) solo as “obscure movement” (Nagrin, 2001:87). It was “fascinating... while the action so very gradually progressed across the stage” (Guest, 1967:517). However, Nagrin’s movement minimalism or non-use of his “full technical and choreographic potentialities” was deemed “unfortunate” (Jackson, 1965:13). For Nagrin, as well as the Judson group, virtuosity and formal technique were not important during the mid-1960s, which contributes to an overall unpolished, spontaneous, natural...
look (Banes, 1987 and 1993; and Manning, 1988). The gradual progression of the robotic movement does not demand a highly technical, virtuosic performance. The waltz-step box pattern is the only semblance of a dance-like form in the work. The reduced movement elements foreground the movement and its function to get to the core of X by presenting construction work in a dignified manner. Tensions embodied within the work emerge through the ease of a simplified movement task contrasted and coupled with the deeper intensity of the dangerous nature of the work.

Path can be viewed simply as an example of Nagrin’s use of expression through the body in which the movement emerges as the object. However, the emotion through the moving body also expresses the construction worker’s “integrity” (Schlundt, 1997:45) with its intense focus and need for accuracy, albeit sometimes monotonous labour. It can be seen as a metaphor, since Nagrin derived the character’s internal motivations and intentions to find his X through the movement itself. Critics saw the diligent pacing in Path as plausible metaphors for “boredom” (Vaughan, 1975:28) and as a “veritable eulogy to monotony” (Jackson, 1965:13). The possibility for spiritual, existential, and idiosyncratic value is present, as this tentative walk could be translated into one’s personal path or journey in life, challenging viewers to examine their lives as complacent or taking risks. Mundane, quotidian tasks will always be with us and can be seen as a metaphor; perhaps the core of who we are derives from searching for quality and inner purpose of life from doing tasks well with mindfulness and conscientiousness.

5.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It was argued that the contextual and stylistic analyses reveal a corpus of choreographic and performance characteristics during the 1960s that are borrowed or unique but integral in shaping Nagrin’s styles. This analysis justifies the grouping of his works into the 1960s interpretive categorisation which exhibits a marked departure from his Dance Portraits. This cluster of new works is as diverse as the contextually complex historical period in America, ranging chronologically from company works to solos to performance art. It is remarkable how closely Nagrin’s works mirror the socio-
political landscape, reverberating with change, experimentation, and adapting to the current aesthetic. Additionally, his voice is evident through continuing some methodological and stylistic threads, charted in Appendix A.2.

Nagrin’s treatment of subject matter maintains his use of abstracted metaphors, working solo, gestures, some virtuosity, and improvisation. He embraces minimal movement, expression through the moving body, and forms a relationship with his audience. Brecht’s alienation techniques develop a fluid core of X with the audience, and his continuation of this into the Workgroup is probed in the next chapter. Other consistent patterns that emerge are the lack of a formal, codified technique, experimenting with performance art rather than dance works, irony and satire, and ambiguous and multiple interpretations. Nagrin chose diverse themes that feature task-like work and social agency, but with immediacy. The emergent choreographic structure reveals the continued privileging of content, fragmented collages, and montage. His six-step method of getting to the core of X is clear. What differs is that Nagrin now uses radical juxtapositions and repetition as structure rather than treatment.

Visually, Nagrin’s approach is minimal and modernist. He confines space by repeating floor patterns, experiments with film and alternate venues, uses props only when integral to the work, and keeps stage conventions to a minimum. His use of various aural elements differ distinctly from his Dance Portrait period. The interplay with rhythmical structures challenges the relationship of dance to musical accompaniment. Commissioned and pre-recorded music are used, as are silence, sound, speech, and text. Time is stretched or elongated. His performance style is characterised by his treatment of conversing with his audience, changing everyday clothes-as-costumes, and challenging conventions that erode the barrier between performer and audience. Thus, the times changed, and Nagrin’s treatment changed with them, but deriving his core of X from a specific image doing remains intact, particularly as seen in the task-like movement of Path. His Workgroup period is treated next.
ENDNOTES

1 Throughout this thesis, choreographic method is defined as the procedure, systematic plan, or way; structure is how that plan is arranged; and device is something contrived to achieve a particular effect.

2 The USA’s involvement in Vietnam was never declared an act of war by Congress; therefore, technically, it is a conflict.

3 In this thesis, gesture is used in the Laban sense; that is, as a non-weight bearing movement such as of the hands or arms or of the leg, if not bearing weight (Kane, 2000). This is contrasted with pedestrian or walking movements and with task movement, defined by Webster’s Dictionary as work or duty in everyday life which involves an object.

4 Vocabulary gleaned from personal experiences with both performing and teaching cross-cultural dances.

5 Sally Banes (2003) categorises defamiliarization into four areas related to the Judson group. These are: making the familiar strange inside and outside the artwork, and making the strange familiar inside and outside the artwork.

6 Joseph Chaikin lists the intentions of Brecht, which he says “were different from those of other leading theaters of his time: (1) he wanted to attack the bourgeois audience, which others made an all-out effort to please; (2) his theme was the cruelties and contradictions of man as a social creature, while other theatres were concerned with psychological problems; and (3) Brecht wanted a deliberate, conscious effect, while other theaters were interested in illusion or spontaneity” (1991:35).

7 It is noted that overall, Don McDonagh is consistent with getting the content information correct, but confuses objective information such as dates and titles of Nagrin’s works, inverting this title to Not Him, But Me. These inaccuracies hold suspect the accuracy and reliability of McDonagh’s historical information and sources, therefore I have treated his writings with caution.

8 To clarify, in this thesis the term America, in general, refers to the United States of America and is never used to refer to either the North or South American continents. If used to designate continent(s), then the term United States can also refer to the United States of Mexico, not necessarily the United States of America, and must be clarified.

9 This is based on my professional associations with the Cunningham company and David Vaughan.

10 Nagrin (2001) and feedback from an anonymous audience member at the Society of Dance History Scholars Conference at Duke University (2004).
CHAPTER 6: THE WORKGROUP

INTRODUCTION

Nagrin’s Workgroup period commences at the bridge between two dissimilar decades. The “seeds were sown in 1969” with an “experimental start in 1970,” the first performance in 1971, various Workgroups formed, and then disbanded in 1974 (Nagrin, 1994:ix). During this period, the ideologically and politically controversial conflict between the United States and Vietnam ended, and then-President Nixon resigned due to scandal and threat of impeachment. Sally Banes singles out the years 1968 to 1973 as a “transitional period” in American culture as “new directions in political change suggest new models for dance” (Banes in Docherty, 1999:161). Nagrin (1994:ix) also recognised dance’s “flux” during this time and appropriated new models, what Schlundt (1997:70) calls an “interest that had been developing in response to extensive travels, myriad encounters, artistic pulses, and national politics.” Distinguished by performative improvisation and group work, the Workgroup focus was two-fold: exploring the possibilities of a unique “interactive improvisation,” and developing skills to take improvisation into performance (Nagrin, 1994:ix). These aspects and other stylistic characteristics are analysed through reviewing the literature and DVD viewings of the case study, *The Duet* from *The Edge is Also a Center* (1971/1973). These justify categorising The Workgroup as distinct from previous periods by demonstrating several key shifts in the core of X: structure, treatment of subject matter, theme, and space.

Combined with Nagrin’s (1994:x) continual penchant for the “freedom, invention and personal expressiveness” of the social dance scene, the foundations of the Workgroup were laid in 1969. Jacques Levy, co-director of Open Theatre with Joseph Chaikin, moved into Nagrin’s loft building in New York and invited him to give movement classes to the actors, which proved seminal by diverting the course of Nagrin’s career. Nagrin (1994:ix) was amazed with their experimentation and those of Julian Beck’s The Living Theatre, Jerzy Grotowski’s Polish Lab Theatre, Peter Schumann’s Bread and
Puppet Theater, and director Peter Brook’s work (Chaikin, 1991:x-xi), all of whom manipulated Stanislavski’s principles. Open Theatre featured “profoundly moving” ways through a focus on “pure improvisation” as both choreography and performance (Nagrin, 1994:ix) rather than using words. This “dramatic theatre” (Schlundt, 1997:71) was achieved through “physical engagement” (Foster, 2002b:74). Since the adaptation of Chaikin’s work is the foundation for the subsequent formation of Nagrin’s Workgroup and the impetus and driving force behind this period, Chaikin’s (1977 and 1991) writings are used as a framework for this chapter. Using new history’s contextualisation, Sally Banes’ (1994 and in Docherty, 1999) writings further situate Nagrin as she analyzes strategies, characteristics, and methods for the new dance of this time. The writings of two scholars who wrote briefly on Nagrin’s improvisational work, Christena Schlundt (1997) and Susan Leigh Foster (2002b), are also used. Emergent characteristics are treated through my adapted Adshead, Kane, and Layson analytical model.

Contextually, the Workgroup came shortly after Judson member Yvonne Rainer’s “spontaneous determination” blended chance methods with improvisation (cited in Banes, 1987:17). As indicated in the previous chapter, a multiplicity of methods were used by dancers at this time to create and explore new territory (1987), evident in concurrent improvisational works of Steve Paxton’s contact improvisation and Deborah Hay’s Circle Dance (Banes, 2003), both of which centred on the dancer’s physical sensation and awareness as did Nagrin’s. Dianne McIntyre’s 1972 company, Sounds in Motion, featured an “interplay between music and dance” fuelled by the Black Arts movement (Foster, 2002b:85). Anna Halprin’s experimental work on the west coast centred on human movement potential¹; and by 1969, Esquire magazine declared, questionably, the “collapse” of American avant-garde dance (Ross in Banes, 2003:24).

6.1. IMPROVISATION

Improvisation was not new to the 1960s nor to Nagrin’s work. In modern dance, it was used by Isadora Duncan (Van Camp, 1982), Mary Wigman (Fuller-Snyder and MacDonald, 1991), and Helen Tamiris when
Nagrin (2001) met and began working with her in 1941. Wigman’s approach is centred in Rudolph von Laban’s improvisational teachings that differ from Nagrin’s. Cursorily, Nagrin’s performative use of improvisation appears to overlap with Laban’s, who urged his students, including the Dalcroze-trained Wigman, to use improvisation intuitively to make dances. However, Laban states in his 1927 paper to the German Dance Congress that improvisation is an occurrence rather than art (Maletic, 1987), suggesting he used it in the studio but not in or as performance. Laban’s work in America was continued by Wigman’s student Hanya Holm, and subsequently Holm’s students Alwin Nikolais and Murray Louis. Nagrin’s use overlaps both choreographic structure and performance, which signals a marked change in his method of getting to the core of X. This fluid overlap is a distinguishing feature of The Workgroup period and presents the need for a unique analytical treatment combining these two styles as opposed to his other periods. As a result, stylistic characteristics in this section are analysed with improvisation as choreographic structure, then as performative treatment.

At this time, Nagrin (1994:13) debatably defines improvisation as “any structure whose shape was to be discovered, not shaped or directed,” within a framework of carefully constructed rules. He views it as “the gold mine, the library . . . the testing ground” as well as “the house of horrors” (Nagrin, 2001:55) and is the first step in constructing a dance since it aids exploration into the core of X. This is similar to Stanislavski’s (1961b:96) compositional method of finding a “physical expression for feeling, thoughts, actions, and images”; however, Stanislavski did not use it as a performative structuring device. Nagrin diverted from his former way of working with it as set choreography:

Improvisation has always been there from the very beginning, but never as a central focus. . . I would improvise until something ‘felt right’ and then try to remember and pin down what that was.

Nagrin, 1994:3

What caused him to re-think how and in what ways he worked with improvisation was the brief teaching contact with Open Theatre in 1969, which
opened my eyes to a breathtakingly different way of working in the theatre and in art. Improvisation was the source from which all else flowed.

Nagrin, 1994:ix

Nagrin then incorporated Chaikin’s improvisational approach into his own acting and dance skills during his residences and workshops at various colleges and universities throughout the country. The results were “so freeing, full of surprises and promise” (cited in Schlundt, 1997:72) that Nagrin formed the experimental Workgroup in New York City to further probe this new method of getting to the core of X.

Nagrin’s use of improvisation “as a source for material, concept and structure” (Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:72) is revealed in his studio experiments of Chaikin’s (1977) set patterns of movement and verbal improvisations adapted from Stanislavski’s familiar physical exercises, discussed in Chapter 2. These “made unexpected demands upon [Nagrin]” (1994:11). One particularly useful and influential structuring exercise appropriated is an exploratory, improvisational method of storytelling via words, sounds, movements, or silences called “jamming”:

The term comes from jazz, from the jam session. One actor comes in and moves in contemplation of a theme, traveling within the rhythms, going through and out of the phrasing, sometimes using just the gesture, sometimes reducing the whole thing to pure sound, all of it related to the emblem. Then another comes in and together they give way and open up on the theme. During the jamming, if the performers let it, the theme moves into associations, a combination of free and structured forms.

Chaikin, 1977:116

As this progresses, “meaning and intention” are then included (Chaikin, 1991:117). Nagrin’s application of “emblems” and “associations” are analysed in the treatment section on metaphors. Even though these jamming structures could possess the same anticipated body shapes or rhythmic patterning, the focus was on the improvised action at that moment, indicating immediacy and the privileging of content over form. One aim, similar to the Judson group (Jowitt in Banes, 2003 and Nagrin, 1994), is to work against the structured, formalized dances of Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, José Limón, and
Merce Cunningham who manipulated form and/or privileged the medium as content. In contrast, both Chaikin (1991) and Nagrin (1994) privilege the content of ideas, image, and action, which were not popular at this time. In jamming, improvisational movement phrases are juxtaposed and linked arbitrarily. Scholar Brenda Dixon Gottschild, a member of Chaikin’s Open Theatre (in Osumare and Lewis, 1991), identifies this radical juxtaposition as an Africanism appropriated into Western dances such as modern dance and jitterbug that omit transitions between movements, resulting in surprise and irony (in Gere, 1995). This is evident throughout the Workgroup, since the jamming structure “left the majority of the choreography up to individual dancers” (Foster, 2002b:74). It is interesting to note that a few years later, Steve Paxton also used a jamming structure in his contact improvisations (Banes, 2003).

To incorporate jamming, Nagrin (1994:15) began to apply, modify, and adapt some of Chaikin’s improvisational exercises into a systematic progression by creating “exercises, games, and structures” or “EGAS” as well as develop new ones. I recall several of these and continue to use many of them in my work. Since Nagrin (1994:72) uses the word ‘practice’ rather than ‘rehearsal,’ as he feels it is an “oxymoron” to rehearse what would not happen exactly in performance, this same terminology is retained throughout this chapter. Chaikin (1991:15-16) believed that the “historical and evolutionary” past is contained in the body; therefore, “all exercises must start from and return to the body in motion.” However, from reviewing the literature, Chaikin (1977 and 1991:135) does not document his exercises as Nagrin (1994) does, as he considers these “internal territory . . . untranslatable . . . can’t be explained,” although the structure is agreed-upon.

For Nagrin (1994:15), his EGAS evoked clarity of inner logic with the focus on what X was doing rather than searching for performance material. To begin this process, practices commenced with a warm-up EGAS such as Gifts where coupled dancers sense what the partner needs, then progressed to find a specific image in the focused Hub Meditation (see Appendix C.2). This is achieved first by each person entering the work space with a blank mind, beginning the focused meditation to find an image that “heats you up” (1994:xii), then waiting to be “inscribed by the unexpected – and accept the
premise that the ideal cannot be fully achieved” (1997:29). Afterward, each one is ready to relationally re-direct his focus to and engage with the other outside the body, a corporeal practice that embodies similar notions within the theory of performative contextualisation (Franko, 1995 and Thomas, 2003). Other EGAS permit a deeper freedom of the body within community such as Solo Singer, in which someone moves into the centre of the room and without a visual or audible cue, “lets loose a river of sounds [that] ride on his impulses of the moment” (1994:11). The others form a circle around him and begin to move in response to those sounds. The opposite is done with Solo Dancer, as group vocal sounds are created from the movement impulses of the soloist. From personal experience, Nagrin later adapted and developed the latter into Musicians and Dancer by adding physical sounds produced on, from, with, or by the body. The Chord also features layers of vocals. A circle is formed with arms linked over each other’s shoulders, and a series of vocal sounds ensues beginning with the breath rhythm of the group that “seemed to wrap around the first vocalization . . . slowly grow[ing] to a rich chord of gentle singing” that “floats” on each layer (1994:12). Medicine Ball is similar to playing group Frisbee, but it receives, reflects, and tosses “sound-motions” instead (1994:128). Foster (2002b:75) asserts that the purpose of these exercises “focused dancers on ‘the now’ so that they could move free from premeditated impulses”; however, from my experience, I argue it also is more than that. It opens pathways to probe limitlessly into the core of X, to discover and pull out material embodied in the specific image and action, and sometimes to provide a structural framework or parameters in which X operates. Nagrin’s kinetic and verbal improvisations in this respect differ from his contemporaries Meredith Monk and Kenneth King as their “aesthetic of chance” structured the sequence of actions through physical tasks “rather than any inner motivation for that action” (Foster, 2002b:79). Nagrin’s EGAS process is important in this thesis for two reasons: first, it is used as an exploratory tool to find and then reveal the core of X; and secondly, it provides a structured format that can be taken into performance.

Taking improvisation from studio into performance is problematic, or a “great leap” which necessitated the development of “performative skills” (Nagrin, 1994:78). Some of these skills were similar to those of jazz
musicians, such as developing trust among each participant, maintaining integrity to the work, and encouraging freedom and risk taking (1994). He juxtaposed several exercises, not with the typical movement phrase transitions, but through seamless shifts of focus by the same directive I heard in his classes, “Someone or something is doing something to or with someone or something” (1994:73). The Workgroup spent hours in the studio exploring various kinds of verbal and movement EGAS until a sequence, stillness, or position was formed, then repeated to develop performative structures “to guarantee a high level of performance” (Matheson in Cohen [ed], 1998:447). Therefore, the first work was not shown until 25-26 August 1971, twenty-one months after the group commenced (Nagrin, 1994:79). In “showings” (1994:80), Nagrin’s term that fit the current trend of calling performances by other names such as events and happenings, each EGAS was listed in the programmes and assigned sequential letters. After the warm-up and minutes before performing, Nagrin and the group selected and combined several of the EGAS into a performative structure, or “scored in sequence scenarios” (Foster, 2002b:76), then wrote these letters on “a giant sketchpad” propped on an easel to inform the audience (Nagrin, 1994:122). The criteria for selecting the EGAS varied; the total performance time had to fit into ninety minutes including intermission, and other choices were made based upon “space, the anticipated audience, our mood and what piece was in the best shape” (1994:123). The programmes also informed the audience that:

The plan of the Workgroup is no plan. It takes its shape from those dancers who participate in the exploration of the new challenges.

Nagrin, 1994: x

This statement indicates his own “contributions” as well as the “very specific intent” determined by the participants, emphasizing the unplanned structure as “conception and performance happened, occurred simultaneously” (Schlundt, 1997:71 & 74). Nagrin’s arbitrary performance structure is obvious, but is explained even further in another programme announcement below given to prepare and instruct spectators beforehand on how to view Workgroup showings. It encapsulates Nagrin’s improvisational approach from
the studio into performance and reveals the “shifting balance between the poles of improvisation and structure” (Nagrin, 1994:x):

starts from improvisation – moves toward structure
find the experience – looks back at the experience
returns to it transformed – thus shaping it to be seen and felt by others

if there are 10 parts to our dance works, 3 parts may be structure, 7 parts improvisation or 8 parts may be structure and 2 parts improvisation

the wish: to use our dance heritage, skills, vocabulary and every other motion, but not to be used by our dance heritage

choreography, i.e., “you do this and you do that,” is only one useful way among others

the Workgroup tries to find dances, not to make them
the self is revealed in the object, the other person

the center task/focus of the Workgroup from its preparation in the studio to the stage performance is the difficult one of knowing the other

Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:72 & 74

From the above statement, improvisation’s arbitrary nature shapes the structure, and it is evident that Nagrin problematises his Dance Portrait’s causality approach of “you do this and you do that” as one of multiple structuring devices. The last two paragraphs of the above quote, which centres on the concept of the ‘other,’ are examined in the section on theme. The Workgroup’s press material further explains this approach as Nagrin drew parallels “between what the group was trying to do with other human activities” such as

chess, football, and jazz, where anything can happen within a precise set of rules, lines and goals. Many hours of preparation, rehearsal, and discussion go into finding and shaping dances. One of the Workgroup’s most important rules is not to “write the script” of what will happen. The same dance in one performance can be grimly tragic and on another night lyrically joyous or even hilariously silly.

Nagrin cited in Schlundt, 1997:74
In performance, the EGAS were treated differently, sometimes set to time structures of jazz music such as a twelve-count blues or its thematic phrasing and repetition (Nagrin, 1994:15). The exercises *The Mind Wash, The Other* (an adaptation of *The Mirror*), *Hub Meditation*, and *Each Alone* were linked together with subtle changes to become the performative work *The Duet* (1971) (Nagrin, 1994:73-74), discussed further as the case-study and not to be confused with the complex EGAS entitled *Duet*. However, Nagrin does not state explicitly what these changes are that transported this from practice into performance, which is problematic. Foster (2002b:78) refers to the performance structures of *Hello Farewell Hello* (1974) and *The Edge is Also a Center* (1973) as “confrontational encounters” since dancers shared travelling patterns, confined space, and phrases. Further practice-into-performance development is probed in other sections of this chapter. Since it is problematic to discern the full nature and scope of the interactive relationship during performances by reference to one recorded performance, this researcher must rely upon personal experience in the studio under Nagrin’s tutelage. Working from an internal, interactive focus differed from creating improvisationally set phrases; the chance for failure was more likely as the locus of X could shift internally or externally, thereby rendering both performance and structure unpredictable and risky (Nagrin, 1994). In a private conversation with Chaikin, Nagrin agreed that performing improvisation is difficult, for

> If you do a bad performance of set material, you can reassure yourself that the next performance will be better – that you will be able to recapture your belief in yourself. With improvisation, there is nothing to repeat and do better. If you blow it – tough – there’s no going back.

Chaikin cited in Nagrin, 1994:163

Since Nagrin (1994:157) carefully phrased EGAS problems that ambiguously allowed for an “open-ended” multiplicity of directions, one rule applied when these were taken into performance. The ending of each improvisation was achieved when the dancers knew there was no further development and were certain the audience felt its impact. They were to “get
off the floor . . . possibly the only time we consciously allowed audience awareness to affect what we did," thus developing an “uncanny sensitivity” to finish together (1994:167). As a result, their performances continually were fresh and unexpected,

Finding the right balance between structure and improvisation is extremely delicate. The Workgroup has found it . . . never dissolving into chaos or waste . . . improvisation harbors a greater potential for intensity than completely structured performance. Unlike many improvisational groups which misuse audience time for a few rare moments of magic, these precocious dancers continuously create magic, supplying an endless barrage of genuine, spontaneous communication. Their respect for structure, coupled with dancing that is technically and artistically superb . . . a company we should watch for, attending their performances with open and eager minds, and sharing in their joy of discovery and creativity.

Kahn, 1972:79

It appears that Nagrin, as did the Judsons, shifted the paradigm as he wanted to find what was inherent, or at the core, rather than to be concerned with antiquated notions of Kantian classicism covered in Chapter 3. Nagrin (2001) opposes featuring sublime beauty and order, including logical sequences through manipulating elements to structure his performance works, in search for an innovative reality:

what is being projected here is indeed an aesthetic and an implied ethic . . . The search is for the revelation of what is, not with what is made. Beauty is identified with light, with vision, with insight, not with ordering.

Nagrin, 1994:20

From the above statement and analysis, Nagrin embraces a non-linear, arbitrary framework for both practice and performance that is revealed through insightful discovery. Thus, the core of X shifts once again, becoming fluid and arbitrary within its choreographic and performative improvisational structures.
6.2. NON-CODIFIED MOVEMENT, METAPHOR, AND HEART/MIND

Nagrin’s improvisational treatment is seen particularly through non-codified movement, metaphor, and heart/mind, which further clarify his core of X and distinguish the Workgroup period. A key characteristic is fusing non-codified movement improvisation, an Africanist appropriation (Dixon Gottschild in Gere, 1995; Jonas, 1992; and Welsh Asante in Dils and Albright, 2001), with Stanislavski-based theatre techniques and modern dance. This is similar to how Nagrin fused jazz dance and music, also Africanist, with modern dance during his Dance Portraits. According to cultural theorist Allegra Fuller Snyder, blending in general of various cultural elements produces

‘fusion’ and the creation of new genres . . . linkage of understandings that does not negate cultural values but rather evolves into a new aesthetic.

in Gere, 1995:90

Thus, Nagrin’s fusion creates a new aesthetic featuring solely improvised works as performance, which he calls “interactive improvisation” (Nagrin, 1994:ix). Other Africanisms seen in his works during this period are the use of verbal elements in The Edge is Also a Center; embracing conflict instead of resolution, which is Nagrin’s obstacle (see Appendix C.1); attention to the performer-audience relationship (Jonas, 1992) throughout Workgroup performances; and nonlinear or curvilinear patterns and shapes seen in the circular floor patterns and curved spines (Dixon Gottschild in Gere, 1995; and Welsh Asante in Dils and Albright, 2001).

Nagrin (1988a) was not satisfied with formalist modern dance training as he thought it lacked a deep inner motivation and expression. As in his early Dance Portraits, he wanted to infuse his new improvisation with the social excitement of “young people who are dancing on their Saturday nights” (Nagrin, 1994:ix). During Workgroup auditions, he noticed and selected those who improvised freely without resorting to clichés and theatricalities, had little performing experience, and lacked a highly codified technique (1997). He wanted performers who “could surprise themselves” (1994:68) by refraining
from “enacting the obvious or most spectacular responses to one another” (Foster, 2002b:78). The following is an excerpt from a statement for his first audition in December 1969 that spanned two weeks.

Dance now is in a beautiful state of flux and indeterminacy. Just as audiences are learning to expect anything as they enter today’s dance theatre, so the choreographers approach each new work with less predetermination and certainty than at other periods. Ironically, those least prepared for the new directions and demands are often the skilled dancers who have been trained in the romantic tradition . . .

The Workgroup is open to choreographers, intermediate and advanced dancers. Also, musicians, composers, film-makers, playwrights are invited to participate.

Nagrin, 1994: ix-x

The term Workgroup is used for the first time. Foster (2002b:73) labels the above as his “manifesto” because it demonstrates his recognition of and adherence to postmodern’s ambiguity; however, although this elucidates his Workgroup approach, Foster’s ascription is challenged in the next chapter.

Nagrin believed his role in practices was not to over-direct or manipulate, but to “open up areas of imagination, and not subjects of imagination” (Nagrin, 1994:157). For Nagrin, practice sessions clarified motives and intentions rather than seeking signature movements and setting choreography, which also is my experience with him, and sought what he deems as organic, ingenuous movement both physically and rhythmically. His EGAS “de-program highly trained dancers from moving in stereotypical ways by expanding direct responses to situations” (Foster, 2002b:76), thus discovering alternative ways of moving (Nagrin, 1994). This deviates from other choreographers who place their movement styles on other bodies resulting in various modes of resemblance or abstraction. Tamiris assigned choreographic problems to dancers to find their own movements through improvising. She worked with movement from the other; that is, after giving a technical sequence, she would finish with “continue,” indicating to use the last movement to begin the improvisational explorations (Nagrin, 1994). During this period, Nagrin interspersed her improvisational approach into his technique classes (1994).
While teaching an improvisation workshop at the University of Texas-Austin in the fall of 1969, Nagrin wrote a non-traditional credo (Appendix B.3) to frame his new way of working with uncodified movement. It includes no concern with the audience, and no beauty, skill, inventiveness, or success; but the point “was to concentrate on the specific object (task) at hand” (Nagrin, 1994:17). In his writings and from personal experience, no mirrors are allowed in his studio since it “sucks every dancer into banality, prettiness, audience seduction and playing it safe” (Nagrin, 1994:162). Neither are cameras, videotaping, or guests permitted, as he is concerned with developing confidence in the movement material.

Due to the idiosyncratic nature of performative improvisation, signature movements are elusive in the Workgroup. Dancers “initiated new moves and responded to those of others,” thus inspiring “wildly innovative styles and idiosyncratic invention” (Foster, 2002b:74). Nagrin’s improvisation was a “vehicle for forging a more genuine connection between the expressive subject and movement that revealed that subject’s motivations” (Foster, 2002b:73). From viewing The Edge is Also a Center, it appears that the improvisers are not tempted to rely on movement conventions resulting from years of formalised training. Because Nagrin chose dancers whose technical-skill levels are not highly developed, the range of movement overall is limited and sometimes pedestrian, also seen in Steps in which the commonplace actions of climbing stairs and walking are used. However, Nagrin did use some “traditional dance movement and vocabulary” (Matheson in Cohen [ed], 1998:447). He (1994) claims the Workgroup was dancing which distinguishes it from the non-dance works of many of the post-Judsons at the time. The Workgroup rarely uses facial expressions, and Foster (2002b) notes that the full range of emotions are embodied through actions.

Nagrin continued using abstracted metaphors into the Workgroup period. From my experience with him, searching for and developing movement metaphors are essential, as these are the window through which are seen glimpses into the core of X. He states repeatedly that “anything” could be danced (Nagrin, 1994:42), and “whatever we had to say was channelled into dance and danced metaphors” (1994:108), and explains:
Every action, in or out of art, can be seen as a metaphor for something else. Metaphors are what we do for a living . . . When the metaphor is a specific image the work has life. And when the literal is flipped, our imagination is fired up . . . In choreography, a flip can go into another century, to a different part of the body, to an animal, the list is endless.

Nagrin, 1994:98 and 2001:89

Metaphors are common in every thought and action; and X is not metaphor, but rather is found through it. During the Workgroup’s daily improvisational practice sessions, Nagrin (2001) learned to crystallize the action of the specific image into dance metaphors. Finding the specific image is key, or the starting point from which metaphors are found and then abstracted. Nagrin’s definition of “abstract” and “obscure,” which appears he uses interchangeably, is a metaphor denoting a sign, statement, view of life, conviction, or philosophy (Nagrin, 1994:98). He (1994:96) understands that some, such as Balanchine, Cunningham, and critic Jill Johnston who “pronounced it dead,” define the abstract as obscure or plotless movement in space and time that is void of further content, but yet still contains the content of bodies, shapes, rhythms, steps, sound, or lights (Preston-Dunlop, 1998). However, Nagrin (2001) consistently challenges this notion through specific movement metaphors.

Adapting poetic metaphors into movement is not new to Nagrin, but its positioning within his new aesthetic is. Metaphor is based in literary theory of this time with the prime purpose of non-literal understanding that speaks of “one thing as another” (Sparshott, 1970:263). Nagrin uses metaphor to extend its meaning, which gives a fresh insight by drawing comparisons to another, or an attitude, and illuminates the object whilst simultaneously creating another context (Nagrin, 1994 and 2001). He defines metaphor as

\[\text{a transferring from one word the sense of another . . . a figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another, different thing by being spoken of as if it were that other.}\]

Nagrin, 2001:76

It is Nagrin’s conscious choice to present dance as “just one of the ten thousand ways of seeing and experiencing” out of multiple possibilities
Nagrin (1994:97) and is a distinguishing underpinning feature of his entire method. What differs during the Workgroup is that he now believes the movement becomes personal and individual for each member of the group. During this time, Nagrin formalizes his adaptation of Stanislavski’s approach of becoming the other person:

The act of becoming X is realised by one part of the body at a time doing what it is that X does. You do not imitate X. You do not try to look like X. You only do what X does with one part of the body at a time.

Nagrin, 1994:90

This idea of the physical embodiment of X produces what Stanislavski terms the real or truth as opposed to imitating, falseness, or representation; therefore, the X also has both a physical and metaphysical sense. Tamiris (Nagrin, 1994 and 2001) used a similar approach with working with various body parts to get to the core of X. Chaikin (1977:113) refers to this as an “emblem,” mentioned in Chapter 2, that “contains a core dramatic element” within a story; it is usually a “point of conflict that could generate multiple resonances” (Foster, 2002b:75). I assert that Chaikin’s emblems are Nagrin’s metaphors. For Chaikin (1977:116), “jamming is the study of an emblem . . . [and] becomes a kind of contemplation of that emblem.” The emblem can be a word, gesture, sound. It is not a symbol representing an action, but is parts of the whole action:

The crown is emblematic of the king. The bars are emblematic of the prison. If an emblematic part of an action is played out, with the actor living in the action, there is a resonance beyond what there would be if the entire action were played out.

Chaikin, 1991:113

Nagrin developed his emblem work from jamming with a dynamic focus to the core idea, “potentially referencing a physical, psychological or social situation,” which “offered both the flexibility and the limited focus that would enable dancers to explore its meanings” (Foster, 2002b:75). How he accomplishes this is evident in his writings of and my experience with his
various physical exercises. He developed two EGAS, *Circles* and *Hot to Cold to Hot*, to lead each body part at a time until the entire “body is engaged’ (Nagrin, 1994:36-37). He would probe the core of X further by challenging us to learn all you can about the X, the someone or something known only to you. Look at X from all sides, from close up and far away. Can you smell X? The more specifics you learn about X, the richer and more personal will be the movement that emerges from this work.

Nagrin, 1994:36

Since the use of the body and its parts are “metaphors for the whole world,” a greater metaphorical motility is permitted into a “freer and more expressive mode of moving” by fusing X into the armoured or frozen area by “thinking, feeling, sensing the fluidity of the free part” (Nagrin, 1994:37, and 38-39). He is quick to add that these are not exercises in isolations, but rather a specific search based in action for the “specific someone or something” through each part of the body (1994:37). He created *Ambient Sound* in which the dancer became the audible sound (1994). It is this metaphorical embracing of action that Nagrin found “liberating . . . [as] every artist in our time is faced with the choice of formalistic art or metaphoric art” (1994:100).

Nagrin employs various metaphorical treatments. For instance, the seemingly literal or task-like treatment of the repetitive ascending of stairs in *Steps* “evoked tension, suspension,” and is seen as “weary resignation, plodding indifference, energetic eagerness and hysterical fear (or anger?)” (Levitan, 1973:86). Levitan states that this pedestrian movement serves as a source from which to go beyond through the development of structured metaphors.

Nagrin’s previous work with metaphors translated movement into abstracted or distorted communicable ideas without resorting to literalness, a method antithetical to Delsarte’s theory explained in Chapter 2. His method of “clarifying” the literal into a metaphorical “springboard” demonstrates how to “bend it, stretch it, squeeze it” by using improvisation (1994:96). Nagrin disdains non-metaphorical literal gestures as they “cancel the role of the audience” by removing mystery, inhibiting imagination, and destroying creative impulses (Nagrin, 1994:96). The metaphorical emblem of an action
is the junction of the actor's performance with the spectator's imaginary completion "from the part of it which is being performed" (Chaikin, 1991:113).

There is the situation being played out on the stage (the play), and there is the situation of actually being in the theater – the relationship between the actors and the audience. It is this living situation that is unique to the theatre.

Chaikin, 1991:1

Mindful of audience involvement by establishing a connection with them, he engages them through the active mental process by using alienation's personal reflection discussed in Chapter 5 through metaphor's idiosyncratic ambiguity (2001). This contrasts with the physical participation of Trisha Brown and Monk (Banes, 2003). He believes this frees spectators' imaginations and senses to attach their own personal meanings to the actions they observed, hoping a non-visible discovery of embodied sensations occurs (Foster, 2002b; and Nagrin, 1994 and 2001). He refuses to discuss the work and its meanings in order not to "intrude upon the insights and the imagination of any audience" (Nagrin, 2001:67), since it is "the private creation and seed of the dancer" (1997:57). Instead, he encourages trusting one's own reactions. Jowitt wrote of her experience with this idiosyncratic embodiment in Village Voice:

I felt a kind of excitement that I don't often feel at dance anymore. Why? Because the dancers are so open, take such risks with their bodies and their feelings, your body feels their tensions and the relaxation of those tensions. The danger is shared, and it is both real and not real. The Workgroup avoids phoniness and emoting to a surprising degree.

Jowitt cited in Schlundt, 1997:74

Nagrin comments that the spectator response to his approach is mesmerizing and intensely mental. Through the use of metaphors, he "learned that if there is an active, honest, inner life, an audience will go with the performer" (Nagrin, 1994:78).

Equally unique during this period is Nagrin's metaphorical treatment of the subject matter through the privileging of the heart/mind, or internal rhythm
or pulse. Nagrin’s heart/mind taps intellectual and emotionally embodied knowledge through layering inner rhythmic exercises. Nagrin asserts that everything is shaped by this rhythm; it is central to the creative act which is the “pulse of the irrational center”; and is the core or “truth of what is being danced” (Nagrin, 1994:7).

Getting to it is one of the central problems of being an artist or, for that matter, of being human. It was the question that haunted Stanislavski and spurred the development of his seminal technique of performing . . . we humans operate with two distinct areas of awareness: one, the intellectual, the cerebral, the mind; and the other, the irrational, the heart, the dream world, the unconscious or the subconscious as identified by Sigmund Freud. I fantasize an ideal way of being: that these two realisms (sic) coexist merely separated by a beaded curtain through which one can pass at will and with ease and, while in one maintain a glimpse of the other. ‘Heart/mind’ is the word I like to use.

Nagrin, 1994:71

Chaikin (1991:109-110) also thought of the body as interacting relationally on both what is deemed the outer or worldly social self and the inner, ‘true’ self or the soul. Thus for both Nagrin and Chaikin, imagination and reality are embraced equally and inform each other, which is an idea later contained in Brenda Farnell’s (1994) mind/body theory. Echoing the mind/body debates discussed in Chapter 1, Cartesian dualism separates the body from the mind and privileged all things intellectual. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s privileges the reverse or body over mind. Even though Nagrin (1994) states his group explored the inner depths of the soul, different approaches were developed by others. Laban (see Chapter 1) is deemed the “minister of the inner and outer” (Lewitan cited in Maletic, 1987:29) through his theories of the inner attitude, and Graham used Freudian psychology to probe the depths of her characters. In contrast, Stanislavski, Tamiris, Chaikin, and subsequently Nagrin focused solely on internal motivations of X to produce and shape concepts of action to convey meaning, and they are unique in that approach. One of Tamiris’ exercises he continues to use is Stillness with the unsophisticated command to find movement from the moment’s impulse (1994). Chaikin (1991:8 & 60) also worked from an impulse or stimulus,
defined as a “thought, “inspiration, or idea,” which is the inner part chosen and shaped by the actor where the energy either “comes from or is moving toward.” It is

a kind of inner rhythm going on all the time in any single person. If you would let the body go with the rhythm, you would discover that there is a pattern and a dynamic and an intensity that would change as experience changed during the day, a quality which, if you knew somebody else well, you could say is the theme of that person’s rhythm. This is the rhythm in a room and it affects the room and it charges the room and it charges the people . . . There is a kind of clash of certain rhythms, and sometimes rhythms and inner dynamics get together and sometimes they counterpoint.

Chaikin, 1991:59-60

Nagrin also asserts that each character has its own inner rhythm which is related to the musical and choreographic rhythms, but yet distinct. Finding it by becoming X and its metaphoric identity is pivotal; and although he believes all work leads to this, the process is determined individually (Nagrin, 1997). Thus, the Workgroup searched for and found physically and psychologically motivated movement (Duncan, 1976 and Foster, 2002b).

To find the inner pulse, Nagrin’s *Hub Meditation* (Appendix C.2) locates the specific image, and the *Inner Rhythm* EGAS identifies the inner pulse or rhythm by letting it happen rather than forcing it before embodying it physically by taking it into movement (Nagrin, 1994 and 2005). From my experience, we sometimes would begin by first lying down with eyes closed, tapping into the heart rhythm then the breath rhythm as these are felt easily. When the inner pulse is located, which is not always easy to do and requires an intense focus, we arose and took this into movement. Chaikin (1991:131) worked with inner “breathing rhythms” to locate deeper material. Nagrin’s EGAS such as *True Repetition* find the internal rhythm through the senses and the breath within one’s own literal space. He then exhibited this through movement that was integral to X and developed spatial and durational patterns characterised by X, which have the potential for multiple responses. Building upon this exercise, *Each Alone* found the internal rhythm and image inherent in X, one body part at a time, which controlled sequence and duration. *Duet* took this X
into social contact by developing movement first through observation of, then engagement with, another. Responses were ambiguous and idiosyncratic; as a result, actual coded movement, gestures, and shape were not featured since the qualities of the heart/mind of X were privileged. This was not unlike some of Halprin’s concurrent human movement potential experimentations, minus her concern with the formal elements of architectural shapes in space (Ross in Banes, 2003).

Nagrin’s *Spinning* EGAS occurs in place as long as possible before changing directions and coming to stillness to find the internal rhythm, eliminated distractions (1994), and was similar in appearance to the spins of Wigman (Fuller-Snyder and MacDonald, 1991) and ecstatic Sufi trance dances. He realises that our own rhythm is one of the “critical elements that define our individuality” that “stirs up deep elements that cannot easily be reached by reason or analysis” (Nagrin, 1994:6-7 and 2001). An explicit example of how Nagrin uses internal rhythm, or the heart/mind, is demonstrated in his written account of initially improvising the *Duet* EGAS with Fitzgerald during a studio practice session. He experienced something that “shook” him. The clear direction took an unexpected path, producing a profound change in character for the first time. From then on, the *Duet* EGAS became the Workgroup’s “cornerstone” and was the “most fertile, challenging and exciting structure of all” (1994:78). It eventually developed into a performance piece of a larger group work, which is analysed in the case study. Therefore, the X shifts again and is underpinned by an internal rhythm that is capable of leading and producing the specific image.

6.3. GROUP WORK AND NAGRIN’S ‘OTHER’

Nagrin’s commitment to and development of the Workgroup’s social agency message is underpinned by his awareness, that “what is happening in the world around me moves me more deeply than my personal condition” (Nagrin, 1994:103). Nagrin’s “world” emerges in the Workgroup’s shift of X from the internal focusing on a specific character’s image to the ‘other.’ Two dominant themes characteristic of this period emerge in the analysis:
Nagrin’s departure from solo work to forming and working with a group; and his existential redirection of focus onto the ‘other.’ He defines the ‘other’ as both an obvious and an elusive something . . . it could be said that the chief thirst of our work was to become fully alive to the mysterious “other,” the one with whom we were working.

Nagrin, 1994:xi

Just as Chaikin (1991:ix), when he “encountered the plays and theories of Brecht, began to learn dynamically to locate character within the social context,” Nagrin’s empathetic commitment to social agency or the human condition is based on “the engagement and search of human beings for one another” (cited in Schlundt, 1997:72). From reviewing Nagrin’s (1994) writings and the DVD (2004e) of Workgroup improvisations, the thematically difficult and sometimes sensitive social issues tackled are noted. Examples are the injustice of hierarchy and power in The Spine of Style (1973); living with disabilities in Ham and Clove [sic] (1973) based on Samuel Beckett’s Endgame; and the “dark, troubled places” encountered with loss of freedom and racism in Prison (1972) (Nagrin, 1994:102). By bringing attention and immediacy to these issues, his work blurs the boundaries between art and life and is “one step closer to real experience” (Kahn, 1972:79). Theoretically, this is similar to the way Monk attempted to dissolve art/life boundaries through “‘improvisatory dance/theatre’” at this time (Rockwell cited in Van Camp, 1982:84 and Banes, 2003). Monk’s style of dance/theatre combined singing, musical compositions, theatrical fables, and sparse movement elements (Jowitt in Banes, 2003) that differed from Nagrin’s interactive improvisation dramas.

Chaikin (1991:11) writes it was a mistake for an actor to study the script and develop his character without the presence and interaction of the group, as “the study of character is the study of ‘I’ in relation to forces that join us.” Likewise, Nagrin positioned the Workgroup to explore the interpersonal relationship “between colleagues rather than between teacher and pupils” (Schlundt, 1997:71). It is not surprising, then, that Nagrin’s credo that “the essence of the experience cannot come from any individual; it must come from those around him” (Nagrin, 1994:33) is an idea contained within Marxist
“collective individualism” (Zollar cited in Banes, 1994) or Soviet socialist realism covered in Chapter 2. This, along with Nagrin’s underpinning Russian Jewishness, is a continuous thread woven into his social agency messages that contradicts the individualism of the dance formalists (Franko, 2002) and embraces reflection and popular culture (Laing, 1978). During the Workgroup period, Nagrin develops this into a post-Marxist, post-egalitarian (Hutcheon, 1988 and Sarup, 1989), or what Laing (1978:129) terms a post-“American Realist” approach in which Nagrin had the final voice as director (Nagrin, 1994). This is evident in the following philosophy statement included in the Workgroup’s programmes, which shaped the group work:

The results are the product of the creative energies of all. For us, in improvisation, the director usually plays the major role in setting the structures and problems of each piece. The dancers have the creative responsibility of working out the problem. Why do we divide the responsibilities? Since each of us has only a partial vision, in order to make a bit of sense out of a common experience, we have to see/hear everyone . . .

If one is to do more than simply recognize the existence/ache of alienation, then the improvisation with its strongest focus on the other is one of the ways to develop the capacity to learn/guess a little about each other. If we look at/probe/dance off each other, you who look at us sensing each other may learn as we may learn. If this task is deeply futile, it is a mystery before which it is worth risking failure – again and again.

Nagrin, 1994:x

This statement also illuminates one of the social agency functions of the Workgroup; that is, understanding the ‘other.’ Nagrin arguably transports this awareness of the human condition to another level to include the political demonstrations of that time, as did Chaikin (1991:52). Demonstrations were occurring in America’s “streets and campuses across the country” which, to Nagrin (1994:x), took on “theatrical and choreographic forms that challenge the very vitality and relevance that has defined American modern dance.” Foster (2002b:74) states that Nagrin “advocates the broadest possible definition of choreography” and compares his “revolutionary urgency” to the 1930s modern dancers.
Since his high school days in the Depression years of the 1930s, Nagrin embraced scepticism. He believed no one could be certain of anything as many ideologies were present (Nagrin, 1997). By the late 1940s and 1950s, the Marxist existentialists, particularly Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre (Laing, 1978), offered what he called a “lovely gift” of confusion (Nagrin, 1997:xvi). Nagrin grounded his thinking in doubt and uncertainty which were “exciting” ways to live, and listening to differing voices was important since everyone was “floundering.” Since he was “sure of nothing,” each “should be all the more ready to think, choose and reformulate for him.herself” (1997:xvi). Undoubtedly, his personal philosophy and concern for the human condition transferred to and shaped his professional work through the Workgroup’s ambiguous and thought-provoking experiments.

The 1960s had a democratising effect on both the Judson group (Jowitt in Banes, 2003) and arguably Nagrin’s work, which was evident in the manner in which he engaged the Workgroup. During this time, he felt that “much of dance moved away from a focus on humans toward a preoccupation with the materials of the art itself (Nagrin, 1994:103). Nagrin noted that the Open Theatre actors “sent their antennas out to each other” instead of “centering in themselves” (cited in Schlundt, 1997:71). Therefore, an important progression for him was the realisation that group work is founded on interconnectedness, interchange, and an intense focus on “what the other person was doing” (Nagrin, 1994:13). This differs from Cynthia Rosas-Thema’s (2003) ethnographic application to his work. Rather, it is similar in ideology to Halprin’s “interpersonal explorations” (Ross in Banes, 2003:35) which feature another person, but not necessarily the outsider or stranger perceived in ethnography. Nagrin realized the ‘other’ existed and recognized that attention must be “given for these voices” (Chambers in Jenkins, 2001:78), or a post-egalitarian process of heightened kinetic awareness. He believed if the

hunt for the reality of the ‘other’ is pursued with the greatest rigor possible, with a minimal focus upon self, one gains an unexpected gift, a deep insight into our own mysterious selves [which is] the very spine of Workgroup.

Nagrin, 1994: xii and 128

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Thus, not only does one begin to understand the ‘other,’ but the Workgroup aided the viewer in alienation’s process of reflection, which was probed in the Heart/Mind section. For Nagrin, dance is full of unknowns and mysteries which unveil human character and increase sensitivity and awareness within the viewer, causing one to think and ask self-reflexive questions to gain personal understanding, or “our own poem” (Nagrin, 2001:15). For Chaikin (1991:60), ensemble work included two principles: Brecht’s arousal of “empathy” rather than competing with another actor; and “rhythm, with dynamics, with a kind of sensitivity which could be self-expressed.”

Nagrin’s social agency theme of a de-centred and re-centred centre, or X, appears paradoxical superficially. It is somewhat similar to Roland Barthes’ post-structuralist “death of the author” de-centred, reader-focused text (Barthes in Jenkins, 2001; and Foucault in Jenkins, 2001). It is possible to maintain from the analysis of Nagrin’s writings, the very few performance reviews, and personal experience with his improvisational work that he achieved this by re-positioning or re-centring the centre or X onto other co-participants which then is read or viewed. Whereas Barthes’ is a three-part approach, the author, the text, and the reader, Nagrin’s approach involves four: performer, improvisational text, viewer, plus co-performer(s) as the other. The self, or centre, is re-discovered ironically through a loss of self by re-directing it to the unknown qualities of the other, whether object, person, or task at hand, whilst maintaining the purposeful observations and improvisations of a specific image, the X (Nagrin, 1994). Nagrin believes this re-directed focus through the distinct use of improvisation based in partner observation is foundational to interpersonal commitment or relationship. This process demands attention and receptivity on all levels, and his EGAS are designed to “increase awareness of one another” during practices (Nagrin, 1994:15) in which the group began to first clear, then probe into the ‘other’ within the self. As stated, the Hub Meditation (Appendix C.2) is central to this process and involves a deep, inner focus to search for the X. Exercises such as Chaikin’s The Mirror develop partner awareness by doing the mirror image of the other and, with no visual initiation, leader and follower merge via inner impulses (Nagrin, 1994). From personal experience, Nagrin appropriated this exercise without change. Once again, the X is now the ‘other.’
Nagrin’s re-centred social agency is evident in some of the performances developed from other-focused EGAS. “The group dances together, the members are always sensing one another, and they respect individual space, approaching [each other] cautiously” (Kahn, 1972:79). Although in performance the same EGAS were used, what was new every time was the “disciplined allegiance” (Foster, 2002b:78) of the improvisational interaction in the moment through finding and maintaining the X. In the ‘Wind II’ group EGAS later performed as a section of Sea Anemone (1973), reading the other’s body and physically absorbing the space, time, and movement from moment to moment was emphasised. This produced a level of sensed or felt awareness (Horton Fraleigh and Hanstein, 1999) and a response from which each dancer worked (Nagrin, 1994:93). Based upon the description in Nagrin’s writings and from the photograph of Recognition Ritual (1973) (Moore in Nagrin, 1994b), it appears that, at times, these works intersected with Paxton’s contact improvisation particularly when the dancers lifted one another over their heads. Thus, the Workgroup’s level of consciousness was raised and the core of X re-located through this dynamic.

6.4. MINIMALISM AND NON-CONVENTIONS

Nagrin’s performative style during the Workgroup is shaped by his visual and aural choices that further define the core of X. The greatest change that occurred in the visual context during this period is Nagrin’s treatment of space. This is seen in two ways: positive or between performers, which is probed in the case study; and negative or outside the performer’s kinesphere through rendering the proscenium ineffective and experimenting with environmental works. During the 1960s and 1970s, choreographers Merce Cunningham, the Judson group, Meredith Monk, and Twyla Tharp rejected the traditional proscenium, comparable to the spatial treatment of sculptors David Smith and Carl André. When on tour with the Workgroup, a statement issued by the board of Nagrin’s Foundation stated they typically preferred the open, circular seating spaces of “gymnasiums, ballrooms and lounges” that enabled the audience to sit all around the performance area, on three sides, or on opposite sides as in “bleacher
seating” (cited in Schlundt, 1997:75). Schlundt (1997:30) calls it changing “the concert stage to fit him” through emphasizing the “flexibility of the group” (1997:74). A stage convention of French King Louis XIV (Jonas, 1992), Nagrin (1994) considers the proscenium a metaphor for showing as performers and choreographers are tempted to shape their performances based upon the angle from which it is seen.

When the Workgroup first encountered performing on a proscenium stage, our resolution was to ignore the spatial imperative of ‘front’ – where the audience was. We successfully concentrated on each other and the task at hand.

Nagrin, 1994:179

Dismantling the conventional spatial configuration of the proscenium stage into a round staging caused a change in the spectator/performer relationship. This de-centering of the performance space, made common by the Judson Church group and others (Banes, 2003) into a theatre in-the-round, engaged the audience by inviting them into the action mentally and emotionally. What was important to Nagrin (1994:80) is that action and activity were seen rather than passively viewing a performance, or privileging “doing” rather than “showing,” which challenges viewers’ conditioned responses. As seen in the previous chapter, the notion of engaging the audience through familiarity and displacement are ideas contained within Brecht’s alienation techniques. By blurring the separation between art and life, spectators’ choices of what, when, and where to view were forcibly determined (Jowitt in Banes, 2003). For example, From Now (1972) opened many of the Workgroup performances by establishing the dancers’ foci within the confines of the performance area to dance for rather than to the audience (Nagrin, 1994). The performance of Steps (1973) involved transporting the audience to the warehouse staircase area, similar to the concurrent site-specific performances in parks for Monk and on the sides of buildings for Brown.

Two other visual context changes occurred in the use of costuming and lighting. Costuming continued to consist of the participants’ best dance clothes or simple, everyday clothing such as sweat pants and T-shirts (Nagrin,
1994), similar to the Judson group. What differs is the use of nudity, a radical inception for him, which occurs in the last section of *Steps*. Overall, visual components are minimalistic and non-specific, and neither a set nor special lighting effects are used. The Workgroup did not use intense lighting from side trees during performances. Even though these aid in defining the body, Nagrin (1994) thought it eliminated the dancer’s personal expression and individuality and therefore was modified. Keeping both costuming and lighting to a minimum forces the eye to be fixed upon the movement tasks of X and continued Brecht’s alienation notion of baring stage conventions.

With minor exceptions during the Workgroup period, actual movement does not relate necessarily in time to aural elements due to the spontaneous nature of improvisation. An example is the impressionistic street sounds in *From Now* as the taped collage was difficult to distinguish from the actual traffic noises. Nagrin is fairly silent on this performative relationship during this time, but did comment on its use in the studio during various EGAS. Initially, he put together a 30-minute tape of “high ecstatic energy” consisting of African drumming, “smokey jazz,” and Stravinski’s *Sacred du Printemps* to “lubricate imaginations and bodies”; however, he realized that “in most cases, the best scores were those that had a long sustained line that did not change frequently” (Nagrin, 1994:36). Improvisation also may not restrict itself to either metered or unmetered time; however, the actual time can be measured and set to accompaniment of equal duration, as did Cunningham and Cage and this researcher’s experience with former Cunningham dancer Mel Wong and his musical collaborator, Rob Kaplan. From my experience, the music used in the studio was to find and develop the core of X and not intended to be taken into performance. This is a marked change from Nagrin’s Dance Portraits, where the jazz music influenced or determined choice of movement performed. Thus, the X is shaped and shifted further through the visual and aural contexts.

6.5. CASE-STUDY: *THE DUET (1971/73)*

The case-study, *The Duet*, from the larger group work entitled *The Edge is Also a Center* justifies my Workgroup categorization as the core of X
changes from previous periods. The DVD (Nagrin, 2004e) performance used in the analysis is seven minutes and forty-seven seconds in length. Performed by Ara Fitzgerald and Lee Connor in 1973, the open-ended work was created initially in a 1971 jamming practice between Nagrin and Fitzgerald through the EGAS, *Each Alone*:

Someone is favored in almost every way: looks, health, wealth, position – the works. You are that person or someone dealing with that person . . . How many times are two people united in a power struggle, each determined to dominate, or each longing to find someone to lean upon?

Nagrin, 1994:76

It was developed further into *The Duet*. Whilst working out this improvisation, Nagrin found his X as responding to the favoured person. Although he never knew Fitzgerald’s core of X during both the studio exercise and several performances, he imaged her character as a very wealthy woman. He reveals his X as a poor, “physically powerful” man with a “violent temper” who manipulatively desires the love of this “rich bitch,” resorting to dominance and physical abuse (Nagrin, 1994:76-77). By the summer of 1973, it was included as part of a larger, complex EGAS called *Compass* that performatively became *The Edge is Also a Center*.³

Five people are sent into the space to form a circle, with one person in the center, to be called “the center figure” (CF). Roles of father, mother, friend and lover are assigned to each of those on the rim of the circle. All are standing apart from each other, as the CF contemplates each of them in turn. When ready, the CF addresses them individually with one sentence or question and finally confronts him.herself . . . whatever the CF comes up with . . .

Each person, including the CF, takes the sentence given as the guide for a Hub Meditation, to visualize the person they are to become and to learn the task that will be the metaphor for that person’s relation to the CF and the others . . . This is the Each Alone part of The Duet . . . transforming her.his body by doing part by part the core action of that person. When the CF finishes his.her Each Alone, he.she surveys the circle and on impulse proceeds to engage with any one of the others.

Nagrin, 1994:121-122
From viewing the DVD, the circled group of personally influential people consists of five women and four men. The action commences immediately which frames the relational context of each participant to the CF, danced by Lee Connor, in the centre. Connor addresses each “archetypal figure” with a short “descriptive question” (Foster, 2002b:78). For example, The Duet section begins with the question to Fitzgerald, “Lover, why am I afraid when I embrace you, you will disappear?” Then to himself, “I can taste truths, but they are not yet mine.” Their duet ensues, then ends with her question, “Why do you always have to outdo me, even in love?” She now finds herself at the centre, surrounded by her own personally influential figures, and the circle continues.

Nagrin (1994:74) says that the performance structure or “big bones” of The Duet is easily recognized from the EGAS. Therefore, repeated viewings resulted in my division into a descriptive structural outline (Appendix D.3) of eight sections for analysis: Meeting, Kiss, Struggle, Sexual Intimacy, Competition, Hug, Abuse, and Stare. It reveals Nagrin’s play between choreographic structure and improvisation, as the line of action elucidates non-linear montaged frames of collaged movement fragments juxtaposed arbitrarily and sometimes radically. Movement sections are not repeated except for those that define each character. The couple’s various ritual acts, noted in the interpretive titles, are not sequential chronologically and have the potential to occur in any pattern except for the last collage, the Stare. However, the narrative quasi cause-and-effect structure within each of the collages, or Nagrin’s “you do this and you do that,” is apparent through questions that are “tacitly informed by the classic trajectories of narrative logic and resolution” (Foster, 2002b:78). The action then progresses through a series of independent jammings seamlessly woven together from one section into the next by complex dynamic changes within the movement. It is obvious that The Duet, as a collage, is positioned both linearly and arbitrarily within the montage of a larger group work.

The X is seen thematically through a de-centred focus on the ‘other’ rather than self through group work and duets as opposed to Nagrin’s typical solo style. Since all actions derive from the core of X, it is apparent that the characters of Connor and Fitzgerald are lovers. This is supported through the
visual complexity of their light-coloured leotards and tights that give the impression of nudity, and the Brechtian baring of conventions by not using typical stage lighting which enhances the intimacy. *The Duet* includes non-codified movement exemplified in the “lack of a highly trained, codified technique” (Kahn, 1972:79) within the genres of modern dance and interactive improvisation. These are seen in the unspecified jumps, kicks, walks, rolls, partner flips, sitting and lying on the ground, backbends, and deep forward contractions of the lovers. In addition to the improvisational jamming, other Africanisms (Dixon Gottschild in Gere, 1995; Jonas, 1992; and Welsh Asante in Dils and Albright, 2001) are the conflict between the lovers, attention to the performer-audience relationship via the arena spacing, and nonlinear or curvilinear patterns and shapes seen in the circular floor patterns and curved spines. Distorted and elongated limbs of the lovers either reach, twist, flip, or pour over one body into the other as they each absorb the other via space, time, movement, and a heightened intuitiveness. “Their dancing revealed a sincere mutual admiration, affection and deep understanding of one another that went beyond the stage” (Kahn, 1972:79). These movements convey meaning and expression, and give character identity but without the technical exhilaration of pushing the physical limits that are a trademark of Nagrin’s earlier Dance Portraits. Some literal gestures are featured, such as the wave-like, quivering movement of the hands and the kick in the face, but corporeal rather than facial expression dominates through use of abstracted and exaggerated movement metaphors seen through actions. Treatment of space involves various interchanges of high, middle, and low levels throughout with minimal spatial extension and intense proximity of the bodies. Spatial direction is unremarked, as the only “space problem that preoccupied us was the space between us and the ‘other’” (Nagrin, 1994:xi). The complex relationship between their movement action motifs and the non-proscenium space appears to be performed without a demonstrative playing to the audience.

The addition of electronic music during *The Duet* portion of *The Edge is Also a Center* set this section apart rhythmically. Each component is its own entity, determined by choice of when and where to position it with/against movement to occur simultaneously in the same space and time, similar to the procedures of Cage and Cunningham. Nagrin layers music, sound, spoken
word, and/or silence with the improvisations, sometimes arbitrarily; in other instances, the accompaniment seems to either mirror or support the movement, accenting and emphasizing its arrhythmic timing. The dancers’ voices are integral to the work as opposed to recorded accompaniment and shape each core of X. Through repeated viewings, it is apparent that each character creates his or her unique identity through these verbal sentences by developing idiosyncratic movement phrases, some of which are repeated at various intervals. For instance, the internal, inaudible aural elements of inner rhythms and pulses propel the specific image and motivate the lovers’ actions.

A complexity between the aural elements, the movement, and the performative relationships to each other within the musical moment in time exists. The various forms of accompaniment, including the effective use of silence, contribute to the emotions of tenderness, love, passion, anxiety, frustration, anger, rage, and confusion. An example is the embracing seen as tender hugs in the Kiss section that becomes a more frantic, suffocating struggle through repeated melodic rhythm and dynamic movement qualities in the next. Likewise, the intimate gazing into one another’s eyes at the end of the Hug section becomes the beginning of the physical abuse in the next. The stillness and intensity of the action and the cessation of sound seamlessly link both sections. Onomatopoeic harp music during the intimate sections repeatedly mirrors Fitzgerald’s wave-like, quivering movements of the hands, plausibly symbolising inner tension and fear through the ironic appearance of calm through mutual tenderness and affection. Chime-like electronic music interspersed throughout either accentuates or reflects the movement and produces an over-all meditative, dream-like quality. In contrast, the most profound simple relationship in time between movement and aural context occurs before, during, and directly after the Abuse, which is only fifteen seconds in length. Immediately prior, the piano’s heavier quality of an increased tempo and heightened expressionist tonality emits a sense of unsettling urgency that adds to the couples’ inter-relational tension. This contrasts with the abrupt use of silence during the abuse. It continues into the Stare section as the embattled lovers stand apart from each other, the lack of motion and sound emphasizing their stillness, confusion, and harsh realisation of the domestic violence that has just occurred. Fitzgerald’s slow, backward
steps increase the spatial and relational distance between herself and Connor, which can be seen as a metaphor for disassociation/alienation and a need for safety.

Equally disturbing is the relationship between this moment and the linear development in time in which the abused woman returns to her abuser rather than fleeing. The balance/struggle of Nagrin’s attention to the social context is evident in the EGAS and by the lovers’ speech and embodiment, juxtaposed radically against humanity’s deepest and darkest emotions: love, the need for intimacy, fear of abandonment, control, then the violence of domestic abuse. The latter precursed American public acknowledgement by approximately twenty years. It is my assumption that domestic abuse is universal and transcends time, culture, and status with relevance to audiences in the here and now, blurring art/life boundaries. The viewer reflexively can identify with some of the strong emotions seen through the movement.

6.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A contextual and stylistic analysis of Nagrin’s Workgroup highlighting key features from the DVD of The Duet from The Edge is Also a Center was undertaken to justify this distinctive categorization which I have termed, The Workgroup. The analysis revealed his characteristics charted in Appendix A.2, particularly the degree of experimentation with this new style and method called interactive improvisation, coupled with his willingness to explore new ideas and methods (Nagrin, 1994 and Schlundt, 1997). Nagrin’s cross-cultural fusion of American modern dance, Russian theatre methods, and Africanist characteristics resulted in this new interdisciplinary aesthetic within the genre of improvisation.

A direct result of working with Chaikin was the use of structured improvisation based in kinetic and verbal exercises rather than set choreography, which led to the development of EGAS. An ambiguous, open-ended choreographic structure used in jazz jamming produced multiple responses in which both improvisation and structure were used. A non-Kantian, paradigmatic shift from order to insight occurred. A quasi cause-and-
effect structure continued, along with collage and montage with some radical juxtapositions. Nagrin continued to privilege content over form and finding rather than making and continued to use his six-step method of getting to the core of X.

Nagrin’s treatment of subject matter was seen through non-codified improvisations which exhibit a limited, non-virtuosic range of movement that is gestural, pedestrian, commonplace, task-like, and repetitive at times. His treatment of abstracted metaphors through emblems combining his heart/mind approach to get to the core of X were sometimes impressionistic, dramatic, and narrative; psychodramatic rather than expressive; based in inner motivations rather than attitudes; and marked by the non-use of mirrors in practice. Brechtian alienation techniques continued, along with audience participation through reflexivity and felt awareness. Finding the pulse and inner rhythm, or the heart/mind, were central and continued to be the key to his specific image, or X.

The two main dominant themes illuminated were group works and a de-centred focus on Nagrin’s ‘other’ based in partner observation, which engaged the performer outside the body and shifted the X from self. The continuation and further development of three former aspects emerged: his existentialist beliefs embracing doubt and uncertainty translated to ambiguity in his work; the immediacy of Nagrin’s social agency which blurred the boundaries between art and life/reality; and his post-democratic, post-Marxist, and post-egalitarian working style termed post-American realism (Laing, 1978), through which he created dances by performative improvisation’s empowerment of each dancer as a co- or multi-creator in the moment, or death of the author.

A final re-centering occurred with Nagrin’s reconfiguration of space into a democratized, egalitarian performance venue by eliminating the proscenium in order to have movement seen, not shown. His experimentation with other alternate venues such as lofts and environmental sites brought the audience into the action and enabled them to see movement from a variety of angles, once again blurring the boundaries between art and life. Costuming and lighting remained minimal and functional, including his first use of no costumes or nudity. The treatment of aural elements revealed both a pattern
of a non-formalist relationship to movement, with minor exceptions, and the accompaniment of inaudible rhythms of breath and pulse. The addition of unmetered music, various street sounds, dancers’ verbal speech, and silence were used. Finally, a complex layering of movement-visual-aural relationships was employed. All these characteristics contributed to a re-definition of X.

ENDNOTES

1 It is interesting to note that Halprin is also the daughter of Russian-Jewish immigrants (Ross in Banes, 2003), as were both Nagrin and Tamiris, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.


3 A discrepancy is noted: on the DVD, it is entitled The Edge is Also a Circle; in the DVD credits and in his book (1994), it is listed as The Edge is Also a Center.

4 From the DVD, the performers for The Edge is Also a Center are listed as: Lee Connor, Ara Fitzgerald, Steven Karlen, Peter Lawrence, Alain Lerazer, Lorin MacDougal, Anet Ris, MaryAnn Smith, Lois Welk. Many of them are not listed by Nagrin (1994 – see endnote #2) as among any of the Workgroups. Thus, a discrepancy in the literature is noted.

5 Paul Taylor concurrently choreographed a work on domestic abuse, Big Bertha (1970) (Kane, 2000).
CHAPTER 7: POST-WORKGROUP

INTRODUCTION.

The Post-Workgroup period began in the spring of 1974 when Nagrin accepted an invitation from Swarthmore College to perform different concerts on two consecutive nights. The Workgroup performed the first night, and on the following he performed a retrospective of his earlier solo works which shook me, for I suddenly felt as if I had come home . . . from that time on, the company became secondary in my mind . . . It had been a good time, a productive time, and it was over. Nagrin, 1994:124

Nagrin then returned to touring solos, both his retrospectives (Nagrin, 1994; and Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a) as well as new works. The Post-Workgroup period commences with Untitled in 1974 and closes in 1987 with his final composition, the film The Art and Memory of Bohuslav Vasulka (Nagrin, 1985 and 2005a). A structural outline (Appendix D.4) was developed and used in the case study analysis of Poems Off the Wall (1981), included at the end of this chapter. For brevity, the last two works hereafter are referred to as Bohuslav Vasulka and Poems, respectively. These written texts were created from viewing DVDs (Appendix E) specifically made for this researcher by Nagrin (2004c).

Nagrin’s re-shifting arguably produces another stylistic change that situates his X within an overall interpretive performance art context. This includes theatricality via talking dances and multimedia; technical and still dances, metaphor, and sardonic humour; content and radical juxtaposition; and autobiography and reflexivity. Therefore, performance art is the primary theoretical model for this chapter and best suits Nagrin’s new style of working. Its complex characteristics are constructed from the later writings of Sally Banes (particularly 1994 and in Docherty, 1999), RoseLee Goldberg (1988), and Susan Manning (1988). These justify my labelling and categorising this cluster of characteristics into another Nagrin period as Post-Workgroup.
7.1. PERFORMANCE ART SOLOS, METAPHOR, & SARDONIC HUMOUR

During the Post-Workgroup period, it is my interpretation that Nagrin worked both consciously and unconsciously within the definition of performance art during the Post-Workgroup period. Arts curator RoseLee Goldberg (1988:153) defines performance art, also known as cerebral and conceptual art since it translates “concepts into live works,” as implying

the experience of time, space and material rather than their representation in the form of objects, and the body became the most direct medium of expression. Performance was therefore an ideal means to materialize art concepts . . . ideas on space could be interpreted in actual space . . . [or on] the painted canvas; time could be suggested in the duration of a performance or with the aid of video monitors and video feedback . . . the viewer could, by association gain insight into the particular experience that the performer demonstrated.

Goldberg, 1988:153

Thus, performance art “covered a wide range of materials, sensitivities and intentions, which crossed all disciplinary boundaries” (Goldberg, 1988:154). Banes further states that dance in the 1980s broke from and built upon 1960s dance, paralleled other arts and culture, and contained two major thrusts. The first was the merging of high art and popular culture including vernacular and quotidian dance, mass media, and the overt non-use of formalist elements. Secondly, the question of content and meaning was “reopened” which re-visits the elements of virtuosity, narrative, theatricality, expression, and autobiography and reflection (Banes in Docherty, 1999:164). In addition, expressive metaphors were employed (Manning, 1988) and remained “detached from personal expression” (Banes, 1994:307).

How far Nagrin operates within the above definitions of performance art at this time through treatment of subject matter is probed through tracing patterns in X. Specific examples are illuminated from reviewing the videotape (Nagrin, 1985) and written literature. He crosses boundaries by using and layering movement, poses, music, sound, talking, theatricality, and multimedia in most of these solos to create complex theatrical works. Movement and non-movement are treated in this section; aural and visual elements are
treated in the next, seen through the privileging of media and ideas, and existential talking. Questioning on culturally relevant works based in collective and personal, or in Nagrin’s case, autobiographical experiences to invoke audience reflexivity and a multiplicity of interpretations are treated in the social agency section. These examples, and in particular the case-study Poems, demonstrate that Nagrin’s works fit the above definitions of performance art as well as cross interdisciplinary borders with other theatrical, musical, and visual arts.

The extent to which Nagrin maintains a distinct voice during this time within Banes’ definition regarding techniques and processes through virtuosity and quotidian movements is analysed. Contextually, Trisha Brown, Meredith Monk, Lucinda Childs and others continued their movement experimentations begun in the 1960s such as exploring any movement, any body, any method and using objects; and using reductive and abstract elements such as minimal movement (Banes in Docherty, 1999; and 2003). Nagrin already had begun to explore these same and other ideas in the 1960s and continued them into the 1970s. His treatment of movement throughout his entire career is neither formalist nor analytical, which also correlates with Banes’ definition. Nagrin’s approach differs particularly in his treatment of virtuosity and skill with minimal and commonplace movement, but internal actions continue to be determined by whom or what is the core of X. However, rather than interweaving virtuosity with pedestrian, minimal, and non-codified movement which was popular at this time (Banes, 1987 and 1994; and Manning, 1988), Nagrin juxtaposes them, sometimes rather abruptly, thus emphasising the disjunction. This complex, separate-but-relational use of virtuosity with minimal movement emerges in several works. For instance, the non-codified spins and knee work in Ruminations (1976) and the “great gusto and skill” of his high kicks that “cut” into movement (Rosen, 1977:11) are contrasted against the actual quotidian building and auctioning of a bench. Jazz Changes (1975) with its “technically difficult steps” (Newton, 1984:15), high-energy vernacular jazz, ballroom dancing, and idiosyncratic movement is declared the most enjoyable solo concert I’ve seen in a long time . . . pure jazz.
dance, the isolating movements of his fingers, razor-sharp thrusts of his legs, arms slicing the air and sudden tumbles displayed Nagrin’s sinewy strength at its ablest . . . quick-pivot-and-fall followed by a s-l-o-w recovery . . . swinging kicks and feinting movements . . . Nagrin contrasted small movements, such as his feet stepping over each other in a horizontal path, with space-eating wide slides into splits.

Pastore, 1975:74-75

Nagrin’s continued penchant for virtuosity is evident in the “remarkably defiant knee work” (Small, 1978:48) performed by Marcus Schulkind in Time Writes Notes on Us (1978); the “utmost care, skill, and intensity” (Robertson, 1979:110) of the leg kicks and extensions in Jacaranda (1979); and the technically virtuosic Silence is Golden (1978) (Schlundt, 1997).

In contrast, Nagrin’s non-virtuosic approach is seen through stripped down, minimal, non-codified, commonplace movements in the revived Path (1965). These characteristics evident in the improvisational Untitled (1974) consist mainly of movement and stillness through a series of “listening or reflective poses, standing, sitting, kneeling, or recumbent” with a “slow walk around the room” (Vaughan, 1975:26), or a sort of conceptual “living sculpture” (Goldberg, 1988:167). It emits an “elusive” (Small, 1977:96), “Japanese mood” (Rosen, 1979:12), somewhat similar to the quietly posed stillness of concurrent New York based, Japanese-born Butoh/modern dancers Eiko and Koma (Eiko and Koma, 2004; and Goldberg, 1988). Sections of Fragments (1978) contains “energy frustrated and constricted . . . an empty kind of frenzy” (Merry, 1979:115) with its complex juxtaposition against the upbeat accompaniment. Changes (1976) contains little “dance” (Small, 1976:87 and Vaughan, 1975), pedestrian walks, and simple falls also seen later in Bohuslav Vasulka. At that time, “deconstructed” or minimal and commonplace movement was incorporated into works of Europeans Pina Bausch (Goldberg, 1988 and Manning, 1988) and Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker (Burt in Lepecki, 2004:41). Nagrin uses circular, non-virtuosic paces, pedestrian walks and hops, as well as diagonal reaches with the arms in Ruminations. His non-codified movements in Jacaranda include rolls beneath “blue satin sheets” (Nuchtern, 1979:38), and
all his moves, whether jabs or curves, seem corked up . . . there
are no follow-through resolutions . . . pacing, darting, circling . . .
Nagrin flops himself face down, spread-eagled in a cater-
cornered X across the bed . . . he starts to roll up the sheet . . .
letting the sheet fall through his hands, moving haltingly, almost
with a limp.

Robertson, 1979:110

Nagrin’s further idiosyncratic approach to movement is seen in his
continued combining of abstracted metaphorical and literal gestures to
produce meaning to reveal the actions of the core of X, which relate to the
defining performance art characteristics of both Banes and Manning. These
are demonstrated sometimes through what appears to be “pantomimic skills”
(Duncan, 1976:13), but dancer Shane O’Hara comments that Nagrin’s work
always was about gesture and metaphor, very much a
product of dance/theatre today . . . the way he has changed
the gesture to reflect a humanistic movement, taking it
beyond simple realism. It is not mime in its style of
presentation. It is pure Daniel in the sense of being
metaphors of what is going on inside the performer.

O’Hara, 2005

Kisselgoff (1982) summarizes Nagrin’s overall movement style as based in
gesture that is “amplified into abstraction,” highly dramatic, and “predicated on
fierceness and originality.” Nagrin’s gestures through the isolation of body
parts are seen in Untitled, Fragments, Ruminations, Getting Well (1978), and
Poems. Several critics (Duncan, 1976; Nuchtern, 1976; Rosen, 1979; Small,
1978; and Vaughan, 1975) comment upon these as well, undoubtedly
reflecting Tamiris’ influence of transferring gestural movement. 2 Getting Well
is reviewed as an “intricate,” mesmerizing, “brilliant ‘shadow-play’ of animated
fingers” (Manor, 1978:3 and Merry, 1979).

During this time, Banes (in Adshead, 1986b:110) states that expression
through the moving body returned, quoting what Noël Carroll calls “‘the return
of the repressed.’” This is seen further in gestural metaphors such as the
abstract quivering and gesturing of the hands and fidgeting of the body whilst
walking in Ruminations. Reviewed as ambiguous and abstract (Carbonneau,
1995), the “tight walk and quirky arm movement” are seen as metaphors for
“inner repression and fear” (Small, 1977:96). Nagrin depicts his mother washing dishes (Nuchtern, 1976), and questions and challenges the viewer on his literal action of building a bench:

> can you be sure that the carpenter driving in the nail is simply driving in that nail or is it a metaphor for something entirely different?

Nagrin, 1997:56

A dual-coded nature is apparent in Nagrin’s works through his use of tasks as metaphors for meaning, also seen in Chapter 5. For instance, Nagrin (1997) comments that perhaps his intention in building a bench is not for the sake of performing a task but a personal tribute to his father who was a skilled woodworking artisan. In contrast, Banes (in Docherty, 1999) argues that the analytic task dancers of the 1960s and 1970s primarily did not use metaphor as meaning as their meaning occurs in performing the task itself and nothing more. Nagrin’s meaning of task differs from the task works of this time due to his use of metaphor. Several critics (Jowitt cited in Anderson, 1987; Manor, 1978; Merry, 1979; Schlundt, 1997; and Small, 1978) consider the simple, non-codified, “most mundane of movement” in Getting Well a metaphor for his actual convalescence that “orchestrated an ode to the joy of locomotion” (Robertson, 1979:110).

At first, he can only move his upper body and there is a violent trembling in his head. He wiggles his fingers. The healthy leg gives an involuntary shudder, then the knee bends. As time goes on, he can move more and more, eventually swinging his legs off the table, hopping, rolling around with the stool, limping, walking, juggling.

Small, 1978:48

Throughout his career, Nagrin uses metaphors to reveal the relationship between his characters, whether seen or imagined as in Jacaranda, in which the pulling on of clothing is seen as a final layer of protective skin as the character is emotionally distant from his lover (Nuchtern, 1979). “Defensive, cocky body attitudes” (Robertson, 1979:112) are transformed by donning
urban cowboy clothes. Another metaphor is seen in the circular pattern of walking around the bed, then moving across the top of the bed doing extensions in second position. They look like a physical litany, as if the extensions were symbolic of him blessing and cursing her memory.

Nuchtern, 1979:38

A distinguishing characteristic of dance in the 1980s is irony and play (Banes in Adshead, 1986a and in Docherty, 1999; Goldberg, 1988; Manning, 1988; and Morris, 1996). These also are seen in several of Nagrin’s Post-Workgroup works that are described as humorous (Merry, 1979; Nagrin, 1982 and 2005a; Newton, 1984; and Small, 1976), ironically satirical (Nuchtern, 1979; Small, 1976; and Stevens, 1984), and witty (Michelotti, 1996; Nagrin, 1982; and Nuchtern, 1976). In contrast to the humorous trend in some performance art works of this time (Goldberg, 1988), Nagrin reveals that only one moment had this intent. This is the “belch and blackout at the end” of *Wordgame* from *Peloponnesian War (1968)* that continued to be performed at this time (Nagrin, 2005a). When audiences laughed during other dances, he thought, “Oh! They think that’s funny!” (2005a). What caused this cluster of works to be reviewed as sardonically humorous, and to what extent sardonic humour is evident within the works is analysed.

Webster’s dictionary (1991) defines sardonic humour as sceptically humorous or derisively mocking. From repeated viewings of the DVDs and videotapes, laughs from the audiences are heard. Using the humour analysis model in Chapter 4 adapted from Angela Kane (2003), a few possibilities emerge. The first is the juxtapositioning of complex thematic layers of abstracted movements and/or narrative phrases with opposites. Although these are not humorous or satirical themselves, the juxtaposition or context is, and the audience responds with laughter. This is seen throughout *Entertainment* with Nagrin’s repeated backward falls during his serious diatribe on the aesthetic value of art and artists. *Jazz Changes* reveals the notion of a proper woman who, dependent upon her male partner to ballroom dance, is liberated by the breakaway solos of the Charleston shown light-heartedly by wildly ecstatic movements. Irony among human relationships is
seen in *The Fall’s* (1977) romantic pleasure and pain, *Jacaranda*$’s “paradoxically” dysfunctional love/hate dependency (Nuchtern, 1979:38). Satire is evident through various social, political, and moral themes in *Bohuslav Vasulka* via multimedia images of nuclear destruction contrasted with Nagrin-as-actor laughing in the foreground.

Secondly, Nagrin uses themes that sometimes denoted humour or satire resulting in audience laughter. However, choreographically and performatively, these are approached clearly and seriously from the inner life of the character (O’Hara, 2005). The audience laughs when both hands dance simultaneously in *The Hand Dance* from *Getting Well*. In *Ruminations*, Nagrin’s witty diatribe reveals that he would not ask Tamiris for help with his first solo even though he was working for her since “she was not Martha Graham” (Nuchtern, 1976:33). Lastly, playing with the rhythm itself is fun to perform (Evans, 2005a and O’Hara, 2005) and to watch, as in the “fun and interesting” *Getting Well* (Merry, 1979:115) and the revived “lighthearted, fun piece” *Bounce Boy* (1957) (Newton, 1984:15).

7.2. MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND TALKING DANCES

The highly complex cluster of visual and aural performative elements dominates during the Post-Workgroup period, but contributes economically through a concise relationship informed by the core of X. How far Nagrin’s multimedia and talking dances shape his performative style is analysed.

During the 1970s and 1980s, performance art’s multimedia, working with several types of artists, and theatricality dominated (Banes, 1994; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988). Trisha Brown’s “multimedia spectacle” *Glacial Decoy* (1979) involved “magnificent décor, slide projection, and costumes” by visual artist Robert Rauschenberg; and Lucinda Childs layered sets, film, lighting design, and music to create her “moods and atmosphere” (Banes, 1994:254). From the viewings, Nagrin relies heavily upon sophisticated multimedia in two new works to elucidate the X through performance art as defined by Banes, Goldberg, and Manning. These are the case-study *Poems*; and *Bohuslav Vasulka*, designed specifically for the camera, in which Nagrin experimented with 3-D imagery of floating words
bouncing on and off the screen, interacting with both the videographed images and various sounds. These two works can be seen as interactive, sensational, and theatrically complex; and it is apparent that he co-laboured with other artists. To a lesser extent, he uses a background videotape of his dances in *Dance as Art, Dance as Entertainment* (1982), hereafter referred to as *Entertainment*. Concurrent interactive multimedia works are Brown’s *Son Gone Fishin’* (1981) that “featured moving drops in watery colors” against music, and David Gordon’s juxtaposed visual art and videography *TV Reel* (1982) (Banes, 1994:254). Nagrin published a few visual technology writings during this period, ranging from a chapter in one of his books (Nagrin, 1988a) to articles in magazines (1988b) and professional journals (1988c).

Theatricality is evident in *The Hand Dance* (1978) from *Getting Well*, set against a black drop. The only movement is the *Mummschanz*-like conversation between Nagrin’s two hands. From my experience in viewing various performances of this Swiss mime company, the human body is costumed in various shapes and used as puppets. Nagrin’s “theatrical background” (Nuchtern, 1976:33) emerges in the “solo dance epic” *Ruminations* that includes the building of a bench, taking bids, and the immediacy of selling it to audience members during the intervals, “donating” the monies to charities of their choices (Duncan, 1976:13). In *The Fall, Jacaranda, Entertainment, Poems, and Bohuslav Vasulka*, Nagrin is both dancer and actor.

During the 1970s, another “performance strategy” was the “presence of the artist in public as interlocutor” (Goldberg, 1988:153). Choreographers Wendy Perron, Pooh Kaye, and Jim Self used narratives throughout their dances, and Brown narrated the process of making *Accumulation* whilst dancing it. By the 1980s, this “trend toward the narrative” was seen in such works as Ralph Lemon’s *Folktales* (1985) and Arnie Zane’s *Peter and the Wolf* (1985) (Banes, 1994:280). Extending this aspect of performance art into Nagrin’s Post-Workgroup, the analysis reveals two groupings: a copious use of talking and narrating, which dominate; and the arbitrary, non-formalist use of music, various sounds, and silence. Both categories are probed further.

Nagrin’s talking in his dances and concerts is both live and taped, and it occurs either during or in between the dances in a number of ways. This is
apparent in every work from this period with two exceptions. The Hand Dance contains a section in which his lips are moving but no sound is produced (Small, 1978), and Silence is Golden uses no accompaniment (Schlundt, 1997). Poems is the outstanding example from this period, analysed in the case study. From viewing the videotape (Nagrin, 1985), brief chats are inserted in between his dances in Fragments and Ruminations (Pastore, 1975 and Small, 1976). A narrated history of vernacular jazz is injected throughout his concert, Jazz Changes. Entertainment begins with his narration during the blackout. In The Fall, he casually talks to the audience about his “charm” and success with women. Changes contains a “running commentary . . . with engaging informality” (Vaughan, 1975:26). Jacaranda contains both a taped text to Sam Shepard’s script (Robertson, 1979:110). A more complex, sophisticated integration or “tricky mix” of speech with movement is seen in it (Robertson, 1979:47) and in Poems.

Music, sounds, and silence are prevalent in other works by Nagrin. His jazz revivals retain their jazz music, and likewise Twyla Tharp began to explore popular music and dance in the 1970s (Banes, 1994). Classical piano music, silence, and Nagrin’s verbal comment, “Intermission,” are heard in Someone from Ruminations. Recorded Medieval and Renaissance flute music, silence, and string instruments are heard in The Hand Dance. In Entertainment, he persists with talking whilst falling backward, and the sound of his body repeatedly hitting the floor continues to resonate after the final blackout. Bohuslav Vasulka has several dissonant sound effects, including an atomic explosion.

Nagrin’s complex relationship between lighting and space contributes to an overall minimal and unobtrusive quality that typifies dances of this period (Banes, 1994:307), yet sophisticatedly is integral compared to his previous periods. In Changes, he begins and ends his soliloquy during blackouts. The pool of light in Fragments spatially “confines” the movement (Merry, 1979:113). Effective lighting in The Hand Dance produces the spatial black box theatre effect. Jacaranda’s dim, dark lighting emits a “cave”-like quality (Nuchtern, 1979:38). Space is restricted by his lying supine and seated on a stool in Getting Well (Nagrin, 1985).
From reviewing the videotape and literature, Nagrin’s choice to use minimal-to-no set designs and props is a visual element threaded throughout his works of this time. No sets are used in Jazz Changes, Changes, and Ruminations. The Hand Dance contains only a “white hospital cart” and “rolling stool” (Manor, 1978:3; Merry, 1979; Rosen, 1979; and Small, 1978:48). A bench is used both in The Fall and in Ruminations, the former to sit on and the latter, mentioned earlier, built with hammer and nails during the interval. Jacaranda’s set by Sally Ann Parsons has a large “king-size bed,” chair, and “fashionable dresses on hangers” (Nuchtern, 1979:38). Both Untitled (Small, 1977) and Entertainment use no sets but only a chair and stool, respectively.

Costumes remain simple and some can be considered as props, such as holding a hat in The Fall. Everyday clothing is used, such as a suit in The Fall and an overcoat, chapeau, and glasses in Bohuslav Vasulka. The Judson group (Banes, 2003) also relied upon the use of everyday clothing. Once again, costumes are economical and functionally specific to each work. For example, the large, white overstuffed jacket that covers only the torso in Entertainment is needed for his repeated series of backward falls. Ruminations’ white blouse, vest, pants, and jazz shoes reflect his Russian-Jewish background. Paradoxically, Jacaranda contains both his most elaborate and minimal uses of costuming at this time. When not clad in “bikini underwear” (Nuchtern, 1979:38), Parsons costumes him in a white shirt and socks, jeans, cowboy boots and hat, and jacket (Robertson, 1979).

7.3. CONTENT, FRAGMENTATION, AND RADICAL JUXTAPOSITION

Nagrin’s core of X is reinforced at this time through the dominant choreographic structures of content, fragmentation with radical juxtaposition, and repetition. To what extent Nagrin uses these structures and how these differ from or compare to others is probed. To commence his post-Workgroup style of choreographing, Nagrin found it necessary to establish what he terms “ground rules” (Nagrin, 1994:125) to shape his approach during this period. I have re-labelled this as his Manifesto (Appendix B.4), thus challenging Susan Foster’s postmodern manifesto (2002b) ascription to Nagrin’s non-traditional
credo (Appendix B.3) mentioned in Chapter 6. Briefly, both his credo and ground rules contain his performance philosophy, but his ground rules are more akin textually in both content and form to the manifests of Helen Tamiris and Yvonne Rainer (Appendices B.1 and B.2, respectively). Nagrin also wrote what he calls a “litany” (Appendix B.5) which he said helped him to remain focused, to motivate him, and to serve as a choreographic guideline during this period (Nagrin, 1997:88). Both his manifesto and litany substantiate his continuous methodological practices of getting to the core of X, of injecting immediacy, and of privileging content rather than form. He accomplishes this with a specific character image doing, regardless of what others are doing. In addition, these two writings reveal that he appropriates various choreographic methods, focuses on humanity or his ‘other,’ and allows for multiple interpretations and ambiguity. Thus, Nagrin’s statements reflect his continuation of some choreographic methods from previous years, but the distinctive difference is his use of radical juxtapositions.

“The defining hallmarks of the 1980s are the question of content and meaning,” particularly emergent through historical meaning and talking dances that are used as both structural method and meaning (Banes in Adshead, 1986b:108-109). Even though some of his works at this time, such as portions of Ruminations, Poems, and Bohuslav Vasulka, have the appearance of conceptual art, his content-based structure emerges within this notion. It is seen through historical meaning such as Jazz Changes, which traces the history of “pre-jazz and early jazz” with the cakewalk, Charleston, Lindy hop, and blues (Goldberg, 1988; Pastore, 1975:74; Small, 1976; and Vaughan, 1975). Similarly, postmodern choreographer Stephanie Skura performed a history of modern dance in Survey of Styles (1985) a decade later (Goldberg, 1988). Nagrin’s also is seen in two ways through talking dances. First, his narration defines the character, action, and sometimes thought processes and philosophies in Entertainment, Jazz Changes, Ruminations, The Fall, Jacaranda, and Poems; and secondly, through kinetic movement and/or visual imagery relationally inherent in the X in Jazz Changes, Ruminations, The Hand Dance, Jacaranda, Poems, Entertainment, and Bohuslav Vasulka. In addition, both of these are used to link fragments, discussed further below. Throughout his career, Nagrin’s works are always
about “weighty matters” (Carbonneau, 1995 and Nuchtern, 1976:32) which provide the genesis for movement. This contrasts with the content of conceptual material found in pure dance (Copeland, 2004; Goldberg, 1988; and Banes, 2003) and distinguishes him from many performance artists of this time. Therefore, in this respect, Goldberg’s (1988) definition of performance art as solely conceptual is challenged as Nagrin’s performance art features a different type of content. Nagrin remains consistent with his six-step choreographic model (Appendix C.1) to get to the core of X with its specific image and action, object, objective, context, and conflict. His thematic use of content through a specific image is seen in a variety of ways, which is treated in-depth in the next section.

Nagrin’s dominant structuring device during this period is a fragmented (Kisselgoff, 1994) montage with radical juxtapositions. In general during this period, artists and dancers privilege fragmentation rather than linear narratives (Banes in Adshead, 1986a, 1987, 1994, in Docherty 1999, and 2003; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988). At this time, America’s fascination with multiple forms of mass media and popular culture, particularly entertainment and music, contribute to a “new political expression in dance” (Banes in Adshead, 1986b:114). As a result, radical juxtaposition is now the key choreographic structure for postmodern dance (1986b and 1994), just as collage was the “revolutionary innovation” for modernism (Ulmer in Foster, 1990:84). However, in opposition to many of his contemporaries such as Merce Cunningham who use unrelated juxtaposed fragments (Copeland, 2004), Nagrin’s reliance upon simultaneous components “sparks” (Nagrin, 2004c) one another and “propels” the action forward to reveal contradictions (O’Hara, 2005). He does this at times by repeating various elements to connect fragmented sections, shaping his works not only by the complexity of components occurring within but also between the segments. At this time, Nagrin’s fragments do not feature a semi-cause-and-effect structure but are, at times, seemingly unrelated narrative fragments radically juxtaposed to create an arbitrary, montaged whole.

Some fine, fascinating dance is being made by choreographers who, rather than taking on a single problem, tackle a jumble of
issues and elements and somehow make them fall together . . .
[in this manner,] Nagrin’s prepared . . . for the great mess.
Small, 1981:89

The exception is Jacaranda’s “stream-of-consciousness monologue” between himself (live) and his thoughts (recorded) (Robertson, 1979:110).

Since fragmentation and radical juxtaposition aid in alienation (Banes, 2003; Goldberg, 1988; and Mitter, 1992), it is not surprising, then, that Nagrin experiments with them in his works of this time. For instance, Fragments, as the title implies, is described as an arbitrary series of dances (Merry, 1979) which have no linear connection except that these are revivals of his past works. Ruminations is a montage of non-linear fragments and choreographic revivals with no particular coherent thread except for his “unified . . . charisma” (Duncan, 1976:13). Some of these unrelated, oddly juxtaposed sections are entitled Jazz Go, Flamenco Go, For Mamash, For Papash, Someone, Gettysburg March, Weary Blues, Wild Man Blues, Choreography, For Helen, Layers (Nagrin, 2005a) and Dance Designed for Partial Viewing (Duncan, 1976). Nagrin’s juxtapositions are sometimes abrupt, disruptive, startling, and seemingly unrelated, but yet are interconnected which differ from his formalist contemporaries. For example, he uses talking to connect the fragmented sections in the Ruminations and Changes concerts (Duncan, 1976 and Small, 1976). Jazz Changes consists of disjunctive revivals of former modern works with several vernacular jazz dances abruptly linked verbally by “short observations on their social significance” (Pastore, 1975:74). The Fall pieces together nostalgic recollections through brusque, startling commentaries. Fragmented, startling, non-linear multimedia film projections in Bohuslav Vasulka are layered simultaneously with talking-acting. Nagrin’s effect of fragmentation is an interconnected montage from radically juxtaposing phrases of unrelated works that is underpinned by the X.

7.4. DANCE MEMOIRS AND SOCIAL AGENCY

During the Post-Workgroup period, Nagrin’s core of X takes a unique turn. For the first time, it is about himself, which contextually relates to the
concurrent “me generation” focus within the United States. Two dominant themes emerge repeatedly in his works: dance memoirs, including choreographic revivals, autobiography, and the personal made public; and social agency, including personal philosophy and human relations. From viewing Nagrin’s works (Nagrin, 1985 and 2004c) and from various writings, every work of his during this time thematically falls into these two relationally complex categories. How far Nagrin’s core of X translates Goldberg’s (1988:153) “concepts” and viewer’s “association” and “experience,” quoted at the beginning of this chapter, through memoirs and social agency is probed.

During the 1980s, thematic hallmarks in dance and performance art turned to repertoire, a revival of autobiography, and the public display of the personal (Banes in Adshead, 1986b; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988). Nagrin’s memoirs through choreographic revivals and montaged concerts are referred to as “dance memoirs” (Duncan, 1976:13), “retrospectives” (Schlundt in Cohen [ed], 1998a:530; and Vaughan, 1975:26), and a “resumé” of his previous dances (Pastore, 1975:74). From viewing the videotape, these revivals are seen in his return to performing some of his Dance Portraits and works from the 1960s. With a few exceptions, such as some works in Spring ’65, Nagrin never resorts to performing previous dances until this period. His Jazz Changes concert contains his former dances such as Strange Hero (1948), Man of Action (1948), Not Me But Him (1965), and Jazz Three Ways (1957/1966) (Nuchtern, 1976 and Pastore, 1975). Ruminations contains some of Nagrin’s earlier dances such as his re-staged Johnny Dance (1943) and National Dances I and II (1968) (Nagrin, 2005a), revealing his growth since the Dance Portraits (Duncan, 1976). The Fall, Silence is Golden, Fragments, and sections of Entertainment also use some of his past choreographies such as Strange Hero (Duncan, 1976; Nagrin, 2005a; and Pastore, 1975). The “particularly fine” (Merry, 1979:115) Word Game is revived from Peloponnesian War (Schlundt, 1997).

A second memoir sub-category emerges in Nagrin’s autobiographical content, blurring the boundaries between art and life. Autobiographical works by concurrent performance artists such as Laurie Anderson’s For Instants in 1976 incorporates everything up to the moment of performance, including the process of creating (Goldberg, 1988). This also is evident in Nagrin’s
Ruminations and Poems. Julia Heyward’s Shake! Daddy! Shake! (Goldberg, 1988) and Twyla Tharp’s Scrapbook trace fragments from their childhood upbringings. Nagrin’s autobiographical material appears through the movement and costuming of the ethnic character in Ruminations, in which glimpses his life and upbringing are given. Called a “compendium” (Duncan, 1976:13) or “solo diary” (Nuchtern, 1976:33) of his personal memories (Schlundt, 1997:77), it consists of his life with Tamiris, recollections of his mother, a possible homage to his father, and an arguably semi-autobiographical section entitled Someone (Nagrin, 1985, 1997, and 2005a). Not only did the audience discover Nagrin through this “meaty history of a man,” but also he “discovered himself” (Nuchtern, 1976:33).

The third memoir strand is the private made public that is seen in Nagrin’s works. Since the 1980s, several American choreographers continue to weave personal and communal aspects into their dances ranging from losing a partner to AIDS to tracing Southern U.S. and African heritages. These include Bill T. Jones, Ronald K. Brown (2005; and Wawrejko, 2005), Ralph Lemon (2005 and Reardon, 2004), Reggie Wilson (2004 and 2005), and Jowale Willa Jo Zollar (Kisselgoff, 2004; and Martin in Lepecki, 2004). Nagrin’s Entertainment can be considered a public display of the personal since it depicts an “artist’s daily ritual” (Nagrin, 1982:7). Changes is a “presentation of personality [rather] than dance” (Small, 1976:86). The Hand Dance is his literal recuperation from knee surgery (Concert Programme #36; Manor, 1978; Robertson, 1979; Rosen, 1979; and Small, 1978). A decade earlier, Rainer performs a thematically similar solo, Convalescent Dance (1967), while recuperating from her “serious operation” (Burt in Lepecki, 2004:43). The lines between life and art are blurred through revived repertoire, autobiography, and the public display of the personal with no secrets, the “inside” becoming the “outside” with all exposed (Greenberg, 1961:137). Thus, through performing memoirs, Nagrin’s subject and content of X for the first time is now himself.

Nagrin’s second dominant theme of social agency includes the ideas of personal philosophy and human relations. In general at this time, “mood, emotion, and situation returned,” seen in Nagrin’s personal philosophy of existentialism; and his human relations through “characters” rather than pure
dance dances are revived (Banes in Adshead, 1986b:110). Nagrin’s concern for the human condition spans his entire choreographic life (O’Hara, 2005 and Schlundt, 1997). One example of his continued commitment to social agency is his 1982 seminar participation on “Social Issues and the Arts” at Jane Addams’ Hull House in Chicago (Dunning, 1982). From my experience, this is a 100-year-old organization that at the time was dedicated to social justice and welfare of immigrants and underprivileged individuals. It is today a living museum under the auspices of the University of Illinois-Chicago campus, conducting tours and sponsoring lectures. Nagrin chooses to continue to frame his works from his philosophical worldview and centres his X in human interaction. What his social agency looks like at this time is best summed as:

It makes no sense to make dances unless you bring news. You bring something that a community needs, something from you: a vision, an insight, a question from where you are and what churns you up.

Nagrin, 2001:21

To what extent Nagrin’s existential philosophy and personal vision are contained within his works, and how he used his social agency messages as stirring “news” needed by audiences during this period, are probed.

Goldberg (1988:152) marks the decade of the 1970s, which she states actually commences in 1968, with a general social “mood” of “irritation and anger” against social and political establishments. Thus, artists attempted to redefine the institution of art, questioned its meaning and function, and “express[ed] these new directions in lengthy texts” (Goldberg, 1988:152). These are seen in Nagrin’s The Fall, Jacaranda, Entertainment, Poems, and Bohuslav Vasulka, which foreground his philosophical homilies and ideas. The American Realism strand of Soviet Marxism, discussed in Chapter 5, peaked during the 1960s and 70s. It appeals to general rather than elitist audiences through the use of popular culture, gives attention to the underprivileged and underrepresented, and is anti-formalist and anti-classicist (Franko, 1995 and 2002; and Jackson, 2000). It embraces existentialist philosophy and Brechtianism (Laing, 1978) through the distancing of alienation and reflexiveness (Banes in Docherty, 1999). This strand emerges
in *Changes* with his philosophical statement, “art is a weapon in a class struggle” (Nagrin, 1985), mirroring the American Socialist workers' 1930s slogan of “culture is a weapon” (Franko, 2002; Jackson, 2000:9; Perelman, 2004; and Prickett in Garafola, 1994a). Nagrin’s social agency dominates the entirety of his professional works of getting to the core of X and now extends to include these aspects through direct audience relationship. Since this overlaps with a heightened treatment of alienation, it is analysed here as opposed to the treatment of subject matter section. As seen in Chapter 6 in particular, Nagrin’s existential philosophy manifests through alienation, also called detachment, elevated through his work with Joseph Chaikin:

The V-effect [*verfremdung*] is a means of presenting events so that the audience can have an unsentimental view of them. It is anything but indifference . . . [Brecht focuses] a searchlight on the social roles we play. He wanted to show that we live either by values which we choose deliberately or, as most often by those at hand which we simply accept. His themes are of man involved with society; man suffering from a choice he may not himself have made . . . The first requisite for an actor approaching Brecht is to accept Brecht’s assumption that what takes place in the world is taking place within himself, and that the actor is connected to whatever takes place in the world . . . Brecht’s works are intended to be a call to action – action as a form of choice, choice based on what I see.

Chaikin, 1991:38-40

Throughout his career, Nagrin uses the distancing of alienation as a challenge to his audience in a variety of ways. However, in the analysis from viewing his works, alienation takes the form of two repeated patterns. The first is confrontation through the immediacy of culturally relevant situations and ideas with which audiences are involved or familiar (Goldberg, 1988; Nagrin, 1997; and Schlundt, 1997); and secondly, through questioning and reflection. Both patterns are characteristic of performance art (Banes, 1994 and Goldberg, 1988). Whether Nagrin works intentionally or unintentionally within a performance art genre nonetheless proves to be a useful way to first engage, or draw, his audience into the action to physically feel and identify with it. Just as Chaikin’s (1991:37) “audience is the actor’s partner” through “tacit understanding,” Nagrin continues to engage his audience initially
through lived experience juxtaposed with kinetically felt knowledge (Fraleigh, 1987; Schlundt, 1997; and Theodores, 1996), ideas contained within Banes’ mood, emotion, and situation. However, Nagrin now extends or reduces alienation to include personally identifying with X within the work, similar to that of other performance artists (Goldberg, 1988). Nagrin (1982:7) evokes this through what he calls a “visceral response,” achieved in a variety of ways from viewing his works. He then alienates the audience by bringing the performance into the here and now through using confrontational subject matter. Bausch also uses this same association device of “visceral dance” in her Brechtian dramatic theatre (Goldberg, 1988:205). In Entertainment, his character constantly receives unseen blows during a philosophical commentary on the pleasure and pain of being an artist, thus problematising this vocation. After a soliloquy on an unpleasant, sad relationship in The Fall, Nagrin abruptly looks into his audiences and asks whether they have had a similar experience. In Getting Well, the audience is engaged with reliving his convalescence “in total empathy” (Rosen, 1979:12). Jacaranda’s moral theme of “loss” (Robertson, 1979:47) due to a self-centred, “destructive” (Nuchtern, 1979:38) relationship invites personal reflection. In the Dance Designed for Partial Viewing section of Ruminations, Nagrin directly engages audiences by having them “open and close [their] eyes in various rhythms” to problematise perception and reflect upon the creative process (Duncan, 1976:13). In general, Ruminations explores the different ways in which a performer can relate to an audience. One moment Nagrin is chatting to us directly; the next moment he has drawn us into his . . . dramatic role. During intermissions he even makes us disappear while he builds a simple wooden bench . . . he made us confront ourselves by having us decide the fate of his wooden bench. 

Duncan, 1976:13

Thus, this idea of Goldberg’s (1988:153) experiencing, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, by the spectator to “gain insight” via association through the performer’s experience is important to both Chaikin and Nagrin. Chaikin (1991:37) contrasts Stanislavski’s character-in-the-moment concentration on other actors with Brecht’s “analytical” concern that “lets the
audience in” by sharing a “response to the character’s predicament” based on the logic of the playwright’s intention. I recall from my choreographic work under Nagrin that he instructed us to use our work to touch the viewer in reflective ways so that they could see a part of themselves within each work.

Secondly, alienation emerges through Nagrin posing questions to the audience that encourage reflection and a wide variety of interpretations, which also fits Goldberg’s (1988:153) performance art context of viewer’s “insight” and “experience.” Artists such as Brown, Monk, and Childs encourage the performer-audience relationship through devices or direct participation that blur the boundaries between them and life itself (Goldberg, 1988 and Manning, 1988). From viewing Nagrin’s works, this is based reflectively in Nagrin’s personal experiences, which corresponds to Francis Sparshott’s (1970) notion of art as a reflective activity of one’s own experiences and ideals. Much of Nagrin’s social ethos emerges through existential, reflective statements and asking questions of himself and the audience (Evans, 2002 and Schlundt, 1997). For instance in Entertainment, the seated Nagrin discusses the functions of the art of dance, contrasting it with dance entertainment that to him is fun and physical with “sweet answers, [but] it doesn’t answer ‘Who I am’ or ‘What is my place in the world’” (Nagrin, 1985). He then parallels art to scientific research, which fits the performance art trend that questioned, “where did scientific or philosophical enquiry end and art begin, or what distinguished the fine line between art and life?” (Goldberg, 1988:152-3). Further queries are on the ambiguity of constantly being both in and of the world, and his duplicitous “nihilism” that the “sensory world” would provide opportunities to live “humanely in the future of undisclosed certainty” (Nagrin, 1982:7).

The complicated web of human interactions and relationships, not merely with but through others, emerges through Nagrin’s characters as his core of X. This is underpinned further by his affinity toward social agency recognised by some dance historians, critics, and peers (Evans, 2002; McDonagh, 1976; O’Hara, 2005; and Schlundt, 1997). Most of his characters throughout his career have a disturbing social quality as seen in the content of Strange Hero’s gangster, Indeterminate Figure’s narcissistic man, and the self-absorbed “lover” in Jacaranda that focuses attention to the here and now.
Contextually, this period occurs after a major social and cultural shift of 1960s America in which issues of racism, feminism, male domination, and social injustices are wrestled with and questioned ideologically (Banes in Docherty, 1999). Thus, 1980s modern dance features multicultural artists and themes that produce a pluralistic, democratic view of American culture (Banes in Adshead, 1986a and in Docherty, 1999; Goldberg, 1988; Jackson, 2000; Manning, 1988; and Morris, 1996). It is argued that Nagrin deals with issues of cultural plurality, which is an example of both social consciousness and performance art (Goldberg, 1988), through race, politics, abuse of power, and colonialism. For example, *Ruminations* contains the African-American influenced *Jazz Go*, Hispanic *Flamenco Go*, and sections on his Eastern European Jewishness (Nagrin, 2005a). As a result of the fascination with popular culture and “anti-elitist” political expression, several African-American choreographers and dancers emerge (Banes in Adshead, 1986b:114; and Manning, 2004a). At this time, other performance artists such as Blondell Cummings address social themes of feminism and black culture, and Jones and Zane deal with homophobia and racism (Goldberg, 1988). However, the big modern dance companies such as those of Graham, Cunningham, and Taylor, for the most part, do not.

Nagrin further presents and problematises relationships through confrontation and questioning via thematic collages on gender issues, loneliness, and morality. Gender issues in *Jazz Changes* demonstrate how the Charleston liberates and empowers women with its ecstatic freedom via non-contact with a male partner (Jonas, 1992; Fuller Snyder in Gere, 1995; and Malnig in Dils and Albright, 2001). A scene from *The Fall* directly deals with male/female relationships from a man’s perspective, verbally recounting his experiences with women. *Jacaranda* portrays a disturbing love relationship through a self-centred, cold-hearted man (Nuchtern, 1979:38). Other relational issues occur, such as *Ruminations*’ pain of loneliness as he quotes Nietzsche. Nagrin integrates these into a dialogue on the “emotions and frustrations of working alone in the studio” (Michelotti, 1996:33). A transcendent collective morality message emerges in both *Word Game*, based upon playing with words to manipulate others (Schlundt, 1997 and Stevens, 1984), and *Bohuslav Vasulka*. The latter contains historical filmed
footage of war and bombing ironically and radically juxtaposed against peaceful scenes of the Grand Canyon. A taped narrative accompanies it from a Hindu sacred text by Robert Oppenheimer, creator of the atomic bomb that destroyed thousands of lives, who now questions his own role in society.

These examples of social agency seen through alienation and human relationships corroborate the notion that a collective and reflexive awareness produces shared meanings between performer and audience (Banes in Docherty, 1999; Burt in Lepecki, 2004; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988). Therefore, his X not only includes himself, but through social agency, it also shifts to include the reflexive viewer.

7.5. CASE-STUDY: **POEMS OFF THE WALL (1981)**

Poems Off the Wall is a highly complex solo work and the only one of Nagrin’s choreographies, other than *Peloponnesian War*, that he calls “performance art” (Nagrin, 1997:82). As seen in his written description shown by the rear-view projection, he also refers to this as “dance theatre” (2004c). I divided these collaged multimedia images juxtaposed with the constantly moving performer and sound and/or silence into a structural outline (Appendix D.4) of nine interpretive sections as opposed to Nagrin’s (2003e) six. These are: Introduction; I Can’t Quit. I Got a Grant; NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] Grant Application; I Can’t Read the Newspapers, They’re Too Disturbing; Ah China!; Blacks and Jews; Ah Women!; Lennon!!; and Conclusion. Many of Goldberg’s complex, definitive performance art elements, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, are seen in this work that justifies this final shift in Nagrin’s core of X. What distinguishes *Poems* as performance art and how far this categorisation is sustained are probed.

*Poems* involves many types of artists and is contingent relationally upon the choice of layering interrelated components of movement, visual imagery, and aural elements. Since one component does not dominate consistently, each cannot be divorced from one another during the stages of the analysis. All components create a relationally cohesive, complex whole and at times an internal tension that contribute to his core of X. *Poems* can be seen as performance art, since it combines movement and words with
strong visual “projections, dances, and poems written and spoken” (Schlundt, 1997:78) by Nagrin as solo performer. The “crazy quilt bulletin board” (Small, 1981:89) of various images, photos, advertisements, and documents is projected throughout the 45-minute work. Nagrin states it is

perhaps the most complex work I have done other than The Peloponnesian War [sic] . . . Three rear projecting slide machines operated by a computerized program filled a massive screen. The dance, the slides, the words and the music all leaned on each other. Not one could make sense or stand without the others.

Nagrin, 2003b

Nagrin’s uses of multimedia, theatricality, metaphorical content, meaning, narrative, and collective history are apparent from viewing the DVDs. These are juxtaposed and layered against the additional auditory elements of talking, music, sound, and silence. This is similar in treatment to works of concurrent performance artists Meredith Monk, Kenneth King (Jowitt in Banes, 2003), and Blondell Cummings who use “rich, multilayered metaphors . . . [of] gesture, movement, music, the spoken word, light,” silence, pre-recorded texts, and video (Banes, 1994:255). Nagrin talks to his audience, confronts them, and asks open-ended, ambiguous questions to invoke/invite personal reflection and multiple interpretations, thus translating Goldberg’s (1988:153) “concepts into live works” through performance art. He juxtaposes rear-view projections against the movement and talking. Nagrin is dancer, performer, poet, actor, and interlocutor, thus justifying this work as performance art with blurred lines between dance genres and styles.

Nagrin’s contrasting movement vocabulary is revealed through fusing modern dance with jazz technique, pedestrian walks, and tai chi-like white crane stance popularized in the concurrent movie, Karate Kid. Virtuosity is seen in the non-codified leaps, jumps, spins, floor work, repeated foetal position phrase with falls, and primal chimpanzee-like jumps onto the hands in low level. Critic Anna Kisselgoff (1982) calls both the choreography and performance “intense, powerful and rather angry.” Nagrin’s idiosyncratic vocabulary is demonstrated in commonplace movements such as walking, shaking, abruptly dropping to the floor, marking steps instead of dancing, and
frantic, non-codified movement that mirrors the accompaniment. Nagrin’s use of improvisation is similar to the performative techniques of abstract expressionists (Burnham, 1971 and Copeland, 2004), live art (Goldberg, 1988), Steve Paxton (Banes, 2003), and his own Workgroup. Abstract and literal gestures include fingers combing through his hair, rubbing the back of his neck, and miming the playing of a clarinet. Just as “the body became the most direct medium of expression” for performing artists (Goldberg, 1988:153), expression is seen through Nagrin’s moving and talking body. At this time, “scores, verbal commentary, and ordinary movement and postures also contributed to the search for movement detached from personal expression” (Banes, 1994:307). It is possible that the shouting in some of the sections can be interpreted as expressive; however as seen through these analyses of his entire career, it is unlikely since Nagrin never resorts to the use of expressive emoting as defined by Franko (1995) but rather embodies expression by searching for the core of X.

Some complex movement metaphors are contained in the juxtaposition of subject matter against a high-tech visual background. This produces a “sensory overload” that “nullifies” collective and individual consciouses that can be seen as a metaphor for living in a fast-paced, technological society (Small, 1981:90). Nagrin’s verbal talking in the Introduction section is interrupted by the taped voice of a woman, which can be seen as an alter ego or the subconscious since she questions what and why, thus competing with his enjoyment of movement and focused concentration. Nagrin’s exploration of improvisation to create the choreography whilst performing and talking is juxtaposed against the rear-view projections of his written NEA grant. Nagrin takes a written page of the grant for this work and projects it onto the screen behind him. Tension is created through the complex modalities of listening, watching movement, and reading text. In the China section, the complex components of movement, sound, props, and visuals elicit an historical impression of its people and culture, such as inwardly focused meditation-like movement, flute music, cherry tree prop, and projected drawing of Chinese people. The interpretive abstract movement of cradling a baby possibly alludes to China’s current one-child policy. However, it is noted that no critics commented on these images. In contrast to the entire work is the strikingly
simple structure of the last section in which Nagrin shouts and walks. The extensive projected visuals by Pablo Orrego that are complexly integrated into some of the clusters of movement and aural elements are omitted noticeably.

During the 1980s, an “antiillusionist approach” of minimalism regarding stage conventions, which “demands close viewing” of movement (Banes, 1994:307), is seen in Poems through lighting, set designs and props, costuming, and space. Specific pools of light are featured throughout various sections, such as a dim centre-stage spotlight, dancing in and out of the light pools and ahead of the spots, a focused spotlight, and lights fully up. Fade ups and blackouts are used both during and in between several sections with blackouts at the beginning, end, and interspersed between projected images. Complex relationships are evident in some parts, such as the dim stage and Nagrin’s non-specific movement which draws attention to the screen projections. No set designs are used, except that the visual multimedia projections could be considered as such. The only prop is an abstracted, sparse tree-shaped wire stands against a bared sidewall during the China section. Costuming is limited to technique slippers and plain, light-coloured T-shirt and pants designed by Sally Ann Parsons. Most of the spatial elements such as movement patterns and directions are fore-grounded, consistent with Nagrin’s non-formalist and antiillusionist philosophy. Throughout this work, Nagrin uses all levels as well as the entire performance space of his studio theatre. The open studio setting with projected screen images contributes to the overall shape of a performance art work as opposed to the formality of a proscenium theatre. Once again, Nagrin privileges the Brechtian concept of exposed walls, no side wings, and no proscenium (Mitter, 1992).

There is a heavy reliance on aural elements, ranging from taped spoken word to live dialogue/narration by the performer to music, various sounds, and silence. The music and sound scores are by Pulitzer prize-winning saxophonist Ornette Coleman, who invented the “free jazz” style (Italie, 2007); jazz musician Conlon Nancarrow; and Daniel Nagrin spelled backward, “Leinad Nirgan.” Voices are Sue Nadel and Nagrin; and various music collages are “re-constructed” by Nagrin “outside of the composer’s intentions” (Nagrin, 2003e and 2005a). The simultaneous occurrences of these are interspersed throughout the work, “before, during and after some of
the dances” (2003b). In the Introduction section, Nagrin converses live with the taped voice of a woman. This turns into a playful electronic distortion, high-pitched and child-like, reminiscent of an animated Disney cartoon, followed by a deep, slow, masculine voice. In the next section, the complex juxtaposition of a taped, inaudible noise of reading the grant is played intermittently whilst the performer verbalizes self-talk and nonsense words such as “be-badda-badda” (2004c) which creates an annoying tension. Other narrative scenes are his “schmuck” (2004c) dialogue on love and leaving; the discourse on China; several sections in which Nagrin narrates throughout on a variety of topics; and his laughing and shouting “Lennon!” in his final pose in the penultimate section. Nagrin’s use of music is scant but diverse, ranging from his live singing and humming to Chinese flute music to sexy jazz trumpet, saxophone, double bass and snare drum to fast, dissonant jazz piano music. Various sounds are heard such as birds and a subway train. Silence opens several sections, some of which are very prolonged.

Nagrin uses content to structure Poems. This is seen through narration, kinetic movement, visual imagery, and social commentaries. From viewing the DVDs, the intent or content and relational structure between components underpins this work, seen on his projected NEA application:

I plan to examine the flux between dance and movement and the word, each to be used as a spark capable of igniting the other, not as translation but as forward motion and as revelatory of contradiction and surreal reference.

Nagrin, 2004c

The structure of a complex, fragmented montage with radical juxtapositions is evident through the placement of unrelated movement phrases, sound, music, and words “thematically tied to clippings and . . . slides” (Kisselgoff, 1982) into a complete performance work in which he consistently “disrupts our thoughts” (Small, 1981:90). The idea, the choreographic structure, and hence the title comes from the fragmented manner in which he worked during the process of Peloponnesian War, with all the “material coming from [his] bulletin board” (Nagrin, 2003b). “Hot” ideas were pinned onto the bulletin board on the right wall and “cool” ideas on the
left. Linking them together arbitrarily, the visual collage supports each section (Nagrin, 2004i). The interpretive section titles alone reveal their radical placements. These “dissociated” (Kisselgoff, 1982), unrelated strands of juxtaposed fragments shape the whole work by their disjunctive complex relationships of confronting and challenging, except for the social commentary theme that seemingly could be juxtaposed in any manner.

Nagrin’s repetition of movement, poses, theme, lighting, images, and speech in Poems before, during, or after one section into the next, “inserted into the interstices of seemingly unrelated phrases” (Kisselgoff, 1982), provides a linear development or link that unifies the fragments within the whole work. At the same time, it heightens their disruptiveness. This repetition maintains the relationship between the disjointed sections and provides a somewhat seamless thread throughout, even though other disruptive components such as sudden black outs, awkward fade ups, and abrupt sound endings occur. The beginning section closes with a taped female voice interrupting the dancer’s movement that also provides the transition into the next section. In contrast, talk is used as a type of serial repetition to link fragments, similar to the structuring device used in the works of 1980s’ anti-formalist choreographers Bausch, de Keersmaeker (Burt in Lepecki, 2004; Copeland, 1990; and Manning, 1988), and Jane Comfort (Goldberg, 1988:204). For example, the minimalism achieved through overused, repetitive phrases (Copeland, 1990) such as “I can’t read the newspapers, they’re too distressing” unify and link the fragments within that section. The most remarked relations at a point in time occur with the verbally repeated pattern of “et cetera, et cetera.” Spoken at the end of several sections, it creates a cohesive effect throughout the entire work. The repetition of certain projected visual images such as a black woman and a black pot contribute to another unifying thread of social agency, analyzed next.

From the analysis, the two dominant themes of autobiographical memoirs and social agency emerge once again through Goldberg’s (1988:153) performance art as “concepts into live works.” Poems is considered an “examination of personal and social concerns” (Kisselgoff, 1982) and a socio-cultural “paradox” (Small, 1981:90). Nagrin relies upon ideas of personal and collective cultural memory and lived experience to
produce this work, which are the defining characteristics of Poems. Autobiography is present with Nagrin himself as the core of X. This is seen in his writing and receiving a grant [date of receipt unknown] for this work, sections on the “liberal Jew in America” (Nagrin, 2004c), the possibility of his partiality to Marxism with tributes to John Lennon and China, and by him performing his own ideas and concepts.

Nagrin’s personal ideology of Russian/Jewish/Marxism emerges as social agency in portions of Poems. The audience is confronted and challenged with current social issues and progressive ideas on discrimination based upon gender, racial, political, class, and religious preferences along with famine, fascism, and war. Nagrin “expertly” exposes these “demons from society” in order to “disarm” them (Small, 1981:90). Sexism, exploitation and discrimination of women, the white male American hegemonic idea of the perfect image of beauty seen as “men’s thoughts about women” (Small, 1981:90) are raised. Nagrin accomplishes this by projecting photographic images of two non-Western dressed dark-skinned women, a dark-haired white female’s crotch and thighs, a navel, the brassiered torsos of two underwear models, and a female figure skater.

Whereas Nagrin uses props as choreographic devices to achieve a distanced alienation in Path and Peloponnesian War, his development of this device in Poems is through confrontational talking, questioning, and projecting multimedia images to invoke reflexivity. This not only signals a similarity to some performance artists since the late 1960s (Goldberg, 1988), but Nagrin now exhibits a reductive form of alienation through Goldberg’s idea of the spectator’s association within the work through the experiences of the performer. The function is to mirror the audience by presenting controversial, contemporary social issues, thus challenging the audience to reflect on their thinking and attitudes in order to confront their biases and prejudices (Nagrin, 1997; and Schlundt, 1997). Nagrin’s “invisible duets” (Evans, 2002:58) now extend to engage Chaikin’s (1991) idea of the audience directly as his partner, even though Poems is a solo. Therefore, Nagrin’s audience becomes the X through alienation. It is accomplished through the complex relationship of the audio and visual elements as well as a direct visual focus and verbal dialogue with the audience by inundating them with various, and sometimes shocking,
multimedia images, movement, and speech. This Brechtian device of unnerving spectators is common among performing artists of the 1980s (Goldberg, 1988). Slides of an armed, black military man viewing prisoners in the yard are juxtaposed with a close-up showing several black men, stripped to the waist, tied to a huge post or tree with a pile of corpses in the background. Nagrin then asks socially relevant questions to invite audience reflection such as “is this a poem or a polemic,” why does he have “all these black people on my wall,” and whether or not they have a message for him and subsequently us. In another section, he asks, “What is he doing? Is he a woman?” Looking straight at an audience, he then parodies a neurotic, fearful public through another discourse/polemic regarding the 1960s political assassinations of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King and of singer John Lennon in 1980 through various quirky, repeated movement phrases. He poses his final question before an abrupt blackout, “what will you do?” Throughout this work, Nagrin’s attention to cultural plurality, immediacy, and the performance-audience relationship blurs the boundary between art and life.

Humour is evidenced through audience laughs heard on the videotape as Nagrin mocks viewers by calling them “angels and saints.” This is juxtaposed against nervous, quirky pedestrian walking that in itself is humorous. Satire and humour are seen through quoting J. P. Morgan, “If you want answers, you cannot afford to look at dance,” juxtaposed against photographs of a beautiful, dignified African-American actress identified by Small (1981) as Cicely Tyson. Nagrin abruptly declares, “this dance is not going to be about that” (Small, 1981:90).

Further issues of race and politics, including abuse of power and colonialism, appear and appeal to the collective conscious of audiences. These are treated through projected images of and verbally confronting the struggles of black men and women, slavery, the Ku Klux Klan, and Bolivian military atrocities. Connected through various verbal narratives, Nagrin confronts “the relations between blacks, Jews . . . and the violence of contemporary life” (Small, 1981:90). In this regard, Nagrin’s treatment is similar to the concurrent work of Bill T. Jones and Arnie Zane (Banes, 1994 and Goldberg, 1988). Other racial images include ideas of colonial power via
a chained black slave with his white master resting in a hammock, newspaper clippings of war and famine in Africa, and a high school classroom in an obviously disadvantaged country. African-American critic Linda Small (1981) admits initially to taking offence since the racist remarks and images shook and unnerved her, but then realises that perhaps that is the intent. The socio-political treatment of Marxism in the China section seem to suggest a romanticised, idealised notion that racism and discrimination would vanish in a socialist society. Lastly, a variety of politically complex and controversial images are projected, such as a photograph of black entertainer Paul Robeson. Nagrin talks to Robeson’s projected image about Robeson’s appearance before McCarthy’s anti-Communist House Committee and singing for the Spanish civil war fascists in the 1930s.

It is interesting that Nagrin uses historical occurrences from the past 20-30 years, such as Robeson and President Kennedy, to make relevant, immediate connections to the present. In general, Nagrin’s social agency messages are presented through confrontation, empathy, humour, and reflexivity as evidenced in the following review:

Poems reduces reality to black and white, male and female, serenity and violence, love and hate, and so forth; and then, in a revealing way, overlaps these polar opposites or flips from one to the other, blotting out the distinctions.

Small, 1981:89

7.6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Performance art solos, virtuosity and quotidian movement, metaphors, and sardonic humour characterized Nagrin’s dominant choices of treatment of subject matter. From viewing Nagrin’s videotape (1985), DVDs (2004c), telephone conversations (2004i), correspondences (2005a and b), as well as various reviews, every work during the Post-Workgroup period corresponds with Banes’, Goldberg’s, and Manning’s definitions of performance art. Nagrin’s movement featured continual use of abstracted and literal gestures, expression through the moving body, virtuosity and skill through technically
difficult steps, and quotidian, non-codified, and idiosyncratic movements.

Nagrin’s experimentation with crossing interdisciplinary borders into theatricality, thus fusing styles and genres during this period, marked two emergent dominant characteristics in his performance style. These were achieved by a complex integration of multimedia technology and talking dances, which are dominant characteristics and present in almost every work of this period. His use of music, various sounds, and silence remained non-formalist. Costuming, props, and sets remained economical and functional. Two minor changes from his previous periods occurred with his use of lighting and space. Space was restricted intentionally in some of the works, and specific lighting was more extensive but remained minimal and functional.

The analysis revealed that Nagrin’s dominant choreographic structures were a continuation of his non-formalist methods of privileging content and meaning as history and talking, collage and montage, and repetition. His Manifesto and litany revealed his continuation of his six-step specific image and getting to the core of X, but now included a focus on his ‘other.’ Improvisation and fragmentation through juxtaposition also continued, but with radical disruption and seemingly unrelated, arbitrary plotless narratives that were largely non-linear but intra-relationally connected through the X. Not only did this depart from his semi-cause-and-effect structure of the Dance Portraits, but also his messages appeared nihilistic due to ambiguous, indirect answers. He used repetition through movement, poses, series of dances, and speech to unify his fragmented, montaged works. Thus, Nagrin maintained his reliance on structural components whilst adding radical juxtapositions.

Every work and concert during this period centred on the two dominant themes of memoirs and social agency. These included the trend of reviving former works, using autobiography, and making public the private, all which marked a shift in his X. These aspects, plus the use of popular culture elements, contributed to the blurring of art and life. His pluralistic, socially relevant messages were often politically charged and his existential philosophy and concern for humanity were reflected in and through the web of human relationships. Experimenting with a reflexive audience connection through alienation was achieved in a variety of ways, mainly through the immediacy of asking confrontational and challenging questions that produced
multiple answers layered onto his existing choreographic and performance styles. As a result, Nagrin’s core of X made its final shift during the Post-Workgroup to centre on the ‘me,’ concurrent with the ‘me generation’ in America at that time; that is, on Nagrin himself through autobiographical content, and on the viewer through alienation and reflexivity.

ENDNOTES

1 From my personal experiences with Nagrin, he refers often to his works as ‘vernacular.’ However, Webster (1991) defines ‘vernacular’ as communication relating to a group of people and ‘quotidian’ to actions found in everyday life.

2 To recall from Chapter 2, Tamiris handled literal gestures by transferring movement to another part of the body. Another way was to go inside the body with the action instead of bringing it out to the surface with transference; that is, the inner body reacts to the sensation of the action, then allows an outward manifestation. Character roles could shift as long as the action was the same which allowed for a variety of metaphors guided by imagination and personal taste (Adler, 1987-87 and Nagrin, 2001).

3 In the United States, special shoes that are supple with a hard sole and heel specifically are worn for the technical demands of jazz dance.
CONCLUSIONS

My research examines Daniel Nagrin’s choreographic methods of getting to the core of X. In Chapter 1, the methodology for this thesis is based upon the hypothesis that it is possible to discern an artist’s methods from probing stylistic characteristics. At the same time, the notion of influence on styles is problematised (Chapter 2) by analysing stylistic choices of the choreographer and by taking account of the micro historical context in which he lived and worked. In addition, the Introduction takes into consideration my role as researcher and former student of Nagrin. This analysis provides a frame to trace stylistic patterns of continuity and change to discern the workings of Nagrin’s choreographic methods.

This research addresses these issues through an analysis of key features within the actual dances themselves, probing their stylistic characteristics and examining how Nagrin uses his methods. The thesis is divided into two parts. The three chapters in Part I, Daniel Nagrin: The Man, provide the contextual understandings needed to begin the analysis of his dances. In Part 2, Daniel Nagrin: The Work and Method, I categorise his entire works into four chronological, thematic periods with a chapter devoted to each. Using representative case studies, stylistic characteristics which I argue reveal his methods are drawn from Strange Hero (1948/62) from the Dance Portraits, Chapter 4; Path (1965) from The 1960s, Chapter 5; The Duet from The Edge is Also a Center (1971/73) from the Workgroup, Chapter 6; and Poems Off the Wall (1981) from the Post-Workgroup period, Chapter 7.

In Chapter 2, the underpinnings of Nagrin’s six-step choreographic method of getting to the core of X, which I label the Nagrin Method, are investigated. It is framed by an amalgamated dance analysis model in Part 2 appropriated from Janet Adshead (1988), Angela Kane (2003), and June Layson (1987). This adapted model permits an analysis that elucidates Nagrin’s prominent featuring of choreographic elements, the key of which is privileging content rather than featuring space and manipulating form. This allows his non-formalist works and each period to be viewed within contextual aesthetic ideas and relationships that contribute to an understanding of his
stylistic fluxes and growth. My adapted model features the four categories of dominant themes, choreographic structures, treatment of subject matter, and visual and aural contexts with their complex relationships, but not necessarily in that order.

Two contextual factors that prove to be major underpinning influences (Chapters 2 and 3) are threaded throughout the analysis in Part 2. These are the fact that he lived and danced in New York City from the 1930s to the 1980s; and his embrace of the social and institutional hegemonies of Marxist socialism through his Russian-Jewish cultural heritage transported by persecuted, diasporic Jews around the turn of the century. Both factors in Nagrin’s own history that contribute to his existentialist worldview are visible in his dances through idiosyncratic stylistic choices, particularly in his themes and adapting Stanislavski’s method. Further evidence is his implicit Jewish/Marxist/socialist-permeated altruism of challenging and engaging his audience. In a broader sense, the Russian Jewish influences of others also contribute to an American dance identity that challenges and problematises the current praxis of modern dance history and criticism.

These above factors not only distinguish Nagrin but also contribute to his marginalisation, an issue raised in Chapter 3. The relationship between his marginalisation from dance history, the hagiographical nature of critical writing, and his non-conformity with dance modernism as defined by formalist critics and historians in the first half of the 20th Century is examined. As shown through the historical and contextual analyses in Chapters 3 and 4, ‘making’ dances is a formalist term that excludes the content-based approach of ‘finding’ the X exemplified in Nagrin’s works. Although discovering and finding through focused content and meaning was employed by modernist artists outside the field of American dance, form-privileging modern dancers and historians of this period, who in essence were not modernist (Franko, 1995), constructed a skewed, exclusivist notion that modern dance only was based in classicism or abstraction through the making of dances by manipulating form. Their political influence and power negated a valid strand of dance modernism used particularly by Tamiris and Nagrin. This renders the notion and term, ‘making’ dances, as ethnocentric and exclusivist, whereas the concept of ‘creating’ dance is universal and encompasses both
making and finding. This ethnocentric notion of privileging form within modern dance escalated during and shortly after the Marxist-purging McCarthy era of the 1950s, contributing further to the marginalisation of choreographers such as Tamiris and Nagrin. In addition, non-Judson artists such as Nagrin were not favoured by critics and publishers and were marginalised. Further probing is merited to present a more complete understanding of the bias and preferences of mid-20th Century dance writers and critics.

It is clear that Nagrin’s identity emerges within the ideological context of cultural New York Jewishness, an identity that is visible throughout his works, shaping his choreographic method, treatment, and X. This is illuminated by Nagrin’s commitment to people through his existentialist worldview or concern for and about the human condition, which I term his social agency. His privileging of content and meaning as a choreographic method rather than l’art pour l’art is framed by the Russian Socialist Realism strand of art characteristic of Eastern European Jews of the early 20th Century. Embedded within is the Kantian notion of art as an ameliorated function that emerges in Nagrin’s humanistic featuring of content through metaphors from a specific image by getting to the core of X. Nagrin’s concern for humanity, from which he never deviates, is embedded in and underpins his entire oeuvre from his Dance Portraits to the Post-Workgroup periods. Likewise, his Russian/Jewish humanitarian ideals emerge in an interdisciplinary and intercultural nature through constant experimentation with and fusion of new ideas, genres, and styles. His Russian/Jewish/Marxism emerges in his appropriation and accommodation of American social realism into his works, which are at the core of X. This ideology peaked socially during the 1960s and 70s (Chapters 5 and 7), when Nagrin featured the culturally relevant issues of gender, loneliness, morality, cultural plurality, politics, power, and colonialism. This is seen in the ability of X to shift with the times, both aesthetically and socio-culturally, by responding to racial issues in Not Me, But Him (Chapter 5) and in Poems (Chapter 7), and using ‘Negro’ music and dance throughout several of the Dance Portraits (Chapter 4). His focus on his ‘other’ through the Workgroup’s interactive improvisation (Chapter 6) and his use of popular cultural themes and materials throughout his life are other examples. The flow from concert works to performance art
works, and incorporating personal and historical autobiographies, further attests to his experimental nature whilst foregrounding humanity. His social agency messages fit into the larger socio-cultural, shifting landscape of a pluralistic, multicultural, diverse post-modern America which informs his X.

From the analysis in Part 2, Nagrin’s dances developed during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s are markedly different from his dance portrait style of the 1940s and 1950s. Each of the periods uniquely shows a shift, changing qualities, and degree of maturation emergent through choreographic and performative characteristics, justifying my periodic divisions by stylistic differentiations. These stylistic changes, as theorized by Adshead (1988), Jenkins (1991), and several others, result from Nagrin’s adaptation to the social, political, and cultural zeitgeist. At the same time, these reflect his historical and ethnic roots as well as influences from people. Beginning with his Dance Portraits (Chapter 4) and continuing throughout his career, Nagrin distinguished himself through certain elements. His most prominent trademark is working with content and expression in a non-formalist manner, resulting in the development of his six-step choreographic method of getting to the core of X through a specific image doing; that is, creating a character or image through specific, inherent actions and motivations that reveal the X through the asking of six questions (Appendix C.1).

Nagrin’s use of content serves as a thematic frame for finding the core of X through the human spirit via movement metaphors developed mainly from improvisational findings. His featuring of content renders the Dance Portraits as non-expressive portrayals and impressionistic essences of the world around him, that of mid-20th Century America. His X emerges through culturally relevant personalities whose actions define the character. His specific image doing to search for the core of X shifts during the remaining periods, but consistently is underpinned by a social agency message. His privileging of content permits his 1960s dances to be viewed as task-like, rather than movement for movement’s sake, and experimental; and the Workgroup’s improvisational content shifts from solo to group work. Awareness of the ‘other’ via Joseph Chaikin’s work (Chapter 6) fosters another shift of X, extending outward to involve the other person, including an awareness of different voices within society. During the Post-Workgroup, his
thematic X shifts again to include memoirs and autobiography as the content, both personal and collective within society; thus, the X shifts to become both himself and the spectator. Nagrin’s social agency, based upon relationships between people or things, can be extended into his treatment of alienation, as seen during the Post-Workgroup period. This challenges viewers through identity and kinetic embodiment to think and reflect, resulting in questioning, ambiguity, multiple answers, and positive change. Thus, the audience cannot be passive, but is engaged actively and covertly. With the exception of the Workgroup, his predominant style of working as a soloist is inconsequential to his social agency messages as these solos can be restaged for groups.

Nagrin’s choreographic structure of fragmentation, montage and collage is consistent throughout his career. He relies upon a formalist, semi-cause and effect structure for his Portraits. Throughout the Post-Workgroup and in some works of the 1960s, radical juxtaposition is seen and repetition appears as a structuring device to intensify meaning. A distinguishing element that emerges is his treatment of content as choreographic structure throughout his entire career, particularly in Chapter 6. This is achieved through improvisation, used typically as treatment of subject matter, but goes beyond to shape and construct the work in the moment of performance, which is problematic for analysis. Thus, Nagrin shifts the paradigm and creates a new aesthetic through his interactive improvisation techniques.

Nagrin’s consistent treatment of movement is revealed through the use of abstracted metaphors, inflected with sardonic humour. In Chapter 5, his works are viewed in light of current theories of expression (Franko, 1995) and are similar in this regard to the works of Martha Graham and Antony Tudor (Richardson, 1994). In the 1960s and Post-Workgroup, his work develops into incorporating Brecht’s alienation techniques, largely due to his experimenting with performance art. In the Workgroup (Chapter 6) and Post-Workgroup (Chapter 7), Nagrin refers to his treatment of expression, metaphor, and heart-mind from which the core of X is grounded in motivations. This concept, along with alienation, reveals social agency threads woven within his treatment of subject matter resulting from his cultural Jewishness. Throughout the whole of his works, the X is seen through virtuosic or minimal movement that often fuses the genres of modern, jazz, improvisation, and
performance art. Thus, his dances are a cultural embodiment of his Jewishness within 20th Century America.

With the exception of talking dances in Spring ’65 and Poems and his integral use of videography in Poems and Bohuslav Vasulka, performative aspects are not dominant elements in Nagrin’s works but support the core of X. Thus, these works represent a shift in his performative style. Although he experiments with film at times, his aural and visual characteristics remain functional, minimalistic, and economic by choice. From the 1960s onward, Nagrin provides spectators with different modes of seeing through alternative venues such as mountaintops (filmed for Path) and unconventional performance spaces as in the Workgroup’s de-centred theatre in-the-round and stairwells (Steps). Talking and interacting with his audiences whilst ‘dancing’ (Chapters 5 and 7) both erodes and challenges the performer-audience barrier/relationship.

As introduced in Chapter 3 and seen throughout Part 2, Nagrin’s aesthetic positioning within modernism, abstract expressionism/high modernism, and postmodernism is problematised. Initially, I thought he was postmodern after personally working under his tutelage for three years in the mid 1980s. Several characteristics of finding the X throughout Nagrin’s four periods overlap modernism and postmodernism (Banes, 1994 and 2003; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988), such as his continual use of modernist expression in the moving body (Franko, 1995) which Manning (1988) also states returned in the 1980s postmodern dances. During the Dance Portraits period, his choreographic and performance styles predominantly are modernist, but certain elements crossed the borders of modernism and postmodernism quite fluidly. This is seen particularly within his use of content/function, metaphor, everyday clothing, and popular culture including jazz music and dance. Nagrin’s new works during the 1960s period align with aspects of modernism via social agency and collage and montage, abstract expressionism or high modernism such as minimalism and alienation’s challenging the audience, and postmodernism through radical juxtaposition, technology, and performance art. During the Workgroup, Nagrin departs from a former modernist way of working by performing improvisation, a de-focused centre on the ‘other’ with its multiplicity of voices, and continuing non-codified
and pedestrian movement. The choreographic pattern that emerges throughout the Post-Workgroup analysis is the use of these modernist themes and structures with postmodern methods but without “radical rupture,” reflecting Linda Hutcheon’s (1988:50 and 1989) notion of permeable boundaries between the two. This constant state of flux, in which Nagrin negotiates the gap between modernism and postmodernism evidenced in his choreographic and performance styles, renders Nagrin’s concrete placement problematic. It reflects the unstable, shifting boundaries between these two cultural movements within his works, illuminating his romantic as opposed to classicist roots. Thus, Nagrin’s works, particularly after the Dance Portraits, parallels the fluidity and murkiness between what is considered modern and postmodern thinking (Banes, 1994 and in Docherty, 1999; Goldberg, 1988; and Manning, 1988) and continues to problematise the term ‘modern dance.’

My research fills a gap in the study of not only Nagrin’s works but also American dance history, as there exists no formal analysis of his choreographic methods or concert works. In addition, this study reveals an under-rated aspect of modernism within dance that features a specific image or X doing, subsequently exposing the fluid links between modernism and postmodernism to a greater extent than previously considered. Until recently, modern dance historians and critics did not recognize two strands of modernism in relation to dance (Chapter 4), even though these strands are evident and accepted in other art forms. Sheldon Cheney’s (1946) and Louis Arnaud Reid’s (1969) notions of two concurrent but different strands, form-based Classicism and found-based Romanticism which define and operate within modernism simultaneously, are suitable in examining Nagrin’s works. Nagrin’s insistence that his dance movement is found, not made, is a modernist construct that affects his themes, choreographic structures, treatments, and thus is defined by X. Much of 20th-Century America is rooted in the notion of making; that is, mass production, the plastic, ready-mades, post-structuralism’s constructivism, and the making of popular art such as music and videos. However, Nagrin worked in a different strand of modernism than most of his dance contemporaries. Siegel’s (1985) statement of Tamiris also applies to Nagrin: he, too, paid a high price for his non-formalism.
As this thesis is based on an analysis of the whole of Nagrin’s choreographies divided into four chronological periods to trace patterns in his core of X, an approach that treats each stylistic characteristic as a separate thematic cluster may provide further insights into his methods and works. This may expose more clearly his positioning with working inside and outside the fluid boundaries defined as modernism and postmodernism and could open further the similarities and differences between these aesthetic categorisations and other artists that led to Nagrin’s marginalisation. Gender issues surrounding the male dancing body and probing deeper into the American political underpinnings of dance and modernism are additional approaches to conduct further research. The extent to which Nagrin’s choreographic method influences American and perhaps global dance performance and choreography, how far his method currently is used and by whom, and the extent it crosses into interdisciplinary genres are other dimensions to be investigated. Such research may contribute to the relevance of Nagrin’s methods as providing new and different schemes for the future of choreography. It may aid in clarifying components within American modern and postmodern dance and in developing strategies for viewing non-formalist dances.

To conclude, Nagrin’s cultural Jewish history, evidenced in his social agency, cannot be divorced from his works and is rooted deeply in his core of X. His dances exude insight, compassion, and a brutal reality that bring an understanding of differences to the hearts and minds of viewers. His works represent different voices within a post-modern, multicultural society, rendering his choreographic methods useful today. Although recognition and acknowledgment of Nagrin’s choreographic methods by dance historians and educators is protracted, the Nagrin Method remains as this researcher’s preferred approach to creating dances. Nagrin’s works are a study in 20th Century America – identity, reflection, change, multiple voices, race and gender struggles, multicultural, diverse – with the hope or goal of eliminating barriers by understanding the other. His works present a portrait of the past, and the immediacy of his specific image method of getting to the core of X to reveal what it means to be human points toward a direction for the future.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A:

CHARTS
## A.1. CHRONOLOGICAL CHART OF NAGRIN’S CAREER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>GENRES/STYLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Early Years</td>
<td>1936-40</td>
<td>Health education major at City College of New York. Begins dance study, mostly Graham technique, included a one-year scholarship with Martha Graham and one season in Anna Sokolow’s company. Studied acting under Miriam Goldina who studied with Vakhtangov, Stanislavski’s disciple at the Moscow Art Theatre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1940-43</td>
<td>Dancing and acting in summer theatres; Sue Remos was his partner and mentor for jazz dance; two Broadway revues; one nightclub appearance in the Rainbow Room in Radio City; joined Helen Tamiris’ company as her partner; began study of ballet with Mme. Anderson-Ivantzova, Nenette Charisse, and Edward Caton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance Portraits</td>
<td>1944-56</td>
<td>Overlaps with his Broadway experience. Choreographed and performed solo concert works called Dance Portraits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1956-60</td>
<td>Solo concerts in New York and on tour with extensive teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo Concerts</td>
<td>1964-70</td>
<td>Solo concerts in New York and on tour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Workgroup</td>
<td>1969-74</td>
<td>Began work on performing improvisation, which developed into directing and touring the Workgroup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Road Again</td>
<td>1974-</td>
<td>Solo concerts in New York and on tour with extensive teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professorship and Beyond</td>
<td>1982-</td>
<td>Professor of Dance, professor emeritus, Arizona State University; guest workshops; setting re-stagings on others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A.2. STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS RELATING TO NAGRIN’S CHRONOLOGICAL PERIODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAGRIN PERIOD</th>
<th>STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Dance Portraits | **Theme:** Specific characters with specific actions and specific purposes or dramatic dance portraits, social agency via the human condition.  
**Choreographic Structure:** Six-step Stanislavski model, collage and montage, juxtaposed fragments, non-linear narratives, improvisation to find movement, privilege internal content, get to the core of X, essences, and cause-and-effect.  
**Treatment:** Abstracted movement metaphors, impressionistic gestures, use of humour, satire, and irony; non-improvised performances; non-codified movement, prosaic and pedestrian movements, virtuosic solos, egalitarian, economic vocabulary, transceded time. Fused modern and jazz dance.  
**Visual and Aural Contexts:** Fusion of popular culture themes with Africanist jazz rhythms and dance, strong performance skills; minimal-but-functional costumes, sets, lighting, and integral props; Brechtian stage conventions, and challenging performer-audience relationship.  
**Cultural Movement:** Modernist. |
| The 1960s | **Theme:** Anomalous themes, task-like dances, and social agency with immediacy.  
**Choreographic Structure:** Privileged content, fragmented collages, montage, six-step method, get to the core of X; and radical juxtaposition, repetition.  
**Treatment:** Solos, abstracted metaphors, gestures, some virtuosity, and improvisation. Minimal movement, expression, Brecht’s alienation, phenomenological audience relationships; lack of formal codified technique, experimentation, irony and satire, multiple interpretations. Modern dance and performance art.  
**Visual and Aural Contexts:** Minimal-but-functionally integral sets, costumes, lighting, and props; confined space and repeated floor patterns; Brechtian stage conventions, use of alternate venues, experimentation with film and aural elements; challenged relationship of dance to accompaniment, interplay with rhythmical structures, stretched time; non-formalist use of silence, sound, and speech; and eroded performer-audience barrier.  
**Cultural Movement:** Modernist/Postmodernist. |
| **The Workgroup** | **Theme:** Group works, de-centred 'other'; existential social agency with immediacy, Post-Marxist.  
**Choreographic Structure:** Interactive improvisation, EGAS, ambiguous open structure, jazz jamming, multiple responses, shift from order to insight, quasi cause-and-effect, collage and montage, some radical juxtapositions, privileged inner content, get to the core of X, finding, and experimentation.  
**Treatment:** Stripped-down non-codified movement, limited range of movement, gestural, pedestrian, prosaic, task-like, repetitive; abstracted metaphors, heart/mind, impressionistic, irony, psychodramatic, narrative; content, pulse, and inner rhythm; inner motivations and alienation, audience reflexivity, multiple interpretations, art/life boundary blurred. Modern dance fused with interactive improvisation.  
**Visual and Aural Contexts:** Unconventional spatial treatments included no proscenium or performance-in-the-round, seen not shown, alternate venues that challenged the performer-audience relationship, and Brechtian stage conventions. Minimal and unconventional functional costumes, nudity, and lighting. Non-formalist relationship of movement to accompaniment; unconventional rhythms; and unmetered music, prosaic sounds, speech, and silence. Complex layering of movement-visual-aural relationships.  
**Cultural Movement:** Modernist/Postmodernist. |
| **Post-Workgroup** | **Theme:** Dance memoirs, revivals, and personal and historical autobiography. Existential social agency via human relationships with immediacy.  
**Choreographic Structure:** Continuation of non-formalist privileging of content and meaning, collage and montage, repetition, six-step method, specific image and core of X, focus on the 'other.' Improvisation, fragmentation, radical juxtaposition, arbitrary plotless narratives, non-linear but intra-related. Nihilistic, ambiguous.  
**Treatment:** Solos, metaphors, sardonic humour, abstracted and literal gestures, virtuosity and skill, minimal and prosaic movements, non-codified and idiosyncratic movements. Experimentation, alienation and audience reflection, ambiguity, questioning, and multiple answers. Performance art and modern dance.  
**Visual and Aural Contexts:** Multimedia technology, talking dances, interdisciplinary theatricality. Minimal-but-functional sets, costumes, props, and lighting although more extensive at times; Brechtian stage conventions, some restricted use of space. Challenged performer-audience relationship; various sounds, non-formalist use of music, talking, and silence; complex layering of movement-visual-aural relationships.  
**Cultural Movement:** Modernist/Postmodernist. |
APPENDIX B:

MANIFESTOS, ET CETERA
The stylistic formats and titles, except where in quotations, are as they occurred in the original texts.

B.1. TAMIRIS’ MANIFEST

Art is international, but the artist is a product of nationality and his principal duty to himself is to express the spirit of his race.

A new civilisation always creates new forms of art.

We must not forget the age we live in.

There are no general rules. Each work of art creates its own code.

The aim of the dance is not to narrate (anecdotes, stories, fables, legends, etc.), by means of mimic tricks and other established choreographic forms. Dancing is simply movement with a personal concept of rhythm.

Costumes and music are complements of the dance. A dancer’s creation should stand the test in the nude and the experience of motion without music.

Sincerity is based on simplicity. A sincere approach to art is always done through simple forms.

Authenticity tries to convince with the exact reproduction of details: costumes, postures, regional music and photographic make-up. A dancer must create his own reality, independent of the reality we live in. Reality has no interest for what it actually is but for what the artist sees in it.

Toe dancing . . . Why not dance on the palms of the hands?

To give primary importance to facial expression is just as bad as to give primary importance to the feet. Both are elements of the ensemble, spokes of the same wheel – neither is the centre.

It is false to create atmosphere or mood with exact reproduction of costumes belonging to a period or contemporary with a character. It makes one think of children who, to appear as men, paste moustaches on their faces.

The word, pattern has become a standard term for choreography, decorative poses and external attitudes. Pattern is really what style is in any other art: an individual form of expression.

The dance of today is plagued with exotic gestures, mannerisms and ideas borrowed from literature, philosophy, sculpture and painting. Will people never rebel against artificialities, pseudo-romanticism and affected sophistication? The dance of today must have a dynamic tempo and be valid, precise, spontaneous, free, normal, natural and human.

Tamiris, 1928/89:51

B.2. YVONNE RAINER’S MANIFESTO

NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.

Rainer, 1965:175
B.3. NAGRIN’S NON-TRADITIONAL CREDO

It didn’t matter what you looked like.
You were not to be concerned with your success with the audience.
You were not to try to be interesting, creative, inventive or original.
You were not to try to show either your personal beauty or your personal skill.
To sum it up, you failed if you tried to be successful.
Success was not the object.
The task was the object. The point of all the work and all the exercises was to concentrate on the specific object (task) at hand.
Nagrin, 1994:17

B.4. NAGRIN’S “MANIFESTO” (i.e., Ground Rules)

no working to the mirror
no working to look good
no working to be beautiful
no working to be interesting
no working to be creative
no comparing self to others
but rather:
working to lose the self
working to find the other person
to just do
Nagrin, 1994:125

B.5. NAGRIN’S LITANY

A Way

One way of many ways:
To find the self,
lose the self,
find the object.
Not a table, this table.
Not a minute, this minute.
Not a person, this person.
Words mark the place only,
eyes speak dark light,
words conceal, bodies reveal.
Walk into eyes, look inside bodies,
very difficult,
often painful,
even dangerous,
But at least wet with life.
Nagrin, 1997:88
APPENDIX C:

METHODS and EXAMPLES
C. 1. THE SIX QUESTIONS

Nagrin wrote two books on his choreographic methods that are based in defining conceptually the specific image rather than working with structural design elements and principles. Ironically, he felt that how he personally created some of his works would not be of help to others (Newman, 1975). He clearly articulated his method through the asking of six questions (Nagrin, 2001:42 and 1997:34), listed below, which aids the choreographer in “getting to the core of X” (Nagrin, 1997:92-3). This researcher has personal experience with this method as a graduate student in his choreography and improvisation classes at Arizona State University, August 1983 – May 1986.

1. “Who? Or What?” This is the key question to this entire process and is based on what someone or something is doing. Movement flows when a specific identity is found and bears the specific imprint of that vision, “no matter how dramatic or how abstract” (Nagrin, 2001:43). The specific image involves context of the internal life of the identity.

2. “Is doing what?” The second step after defining the specific image is filling a motion, or ‘doing something,’ with an action from within. There are thousands of possible actions to be selected, and Nagrin defines ‘action’ as

   the inner life that drives what we see on the stage . . . ‘action’ becomes central. It refers to the verb that drives the dance and the dancer.

   Nagrin, 2001:44

The process of action analysis is clarified if three aspects are applied: the spine, the beats, and the subtext:

--the spine is the specific action that fills the entire dance. “This is the overarching intent that defines the major thrust of a dance and each of the characters” (Nagrin, 2001:47).

--the beats, bits, or units are the smaller sections which the dance is broken into, the inner and outer changes demand responses in order to make the performance alive. “These are the changes that occur on
the way to realizing the spine . . . [in which the] source of the movement impulse can change" (Nagrin, 2001:48).

--the subtext is the underlying conflict within the main theme. “What is on the surface differs from what is hidden from sight or even the conscious awareness of the character” (Nagrin, 2001:48).

When repeating a performance of a role, if the performer finds it cold and empty, the ‘spine and the action’ will help to find the passion and conviction once more. Nagrin says these are the hidden forces that Stanislavski called ‘the subconscious’ (Nagrin, 1997).

3. “To Whom or To What?” This is the object, and without one, the specific dissolves into generalities. An object gives a focus, and even formal and abstract works have an object (Nagrin, 2001).

4. “Where and When?” Nagrin aptly clarified this as:

The awareness of context enriches a performance. The time and the place of any event or of any dance movement are factors which must affect and color what is done, but only if the reality of the time and place live vividly in the mind of the dancer.

Nagrin, 1997:45

5. “To What End?” This is the goal or objective and is related to the spine of the dance within the context of the action which initiates and propels the movement. Nagrin advises to “reach beyond the moment” instead of focusing only on virtuosity and technique so that one becomes what they are not and arrives where they are not (Nagrin, 1997:46).

6. “The Obstacle?” The obstacle, or conflict, encompasses two kinds of action that unifies the dance: the external action between forces and the internal action within (Nagrin, 1997). Conflict reveals the character of each dance role (Nagrin, 2001) and tends to occur during the unplanned moments (Nagrin, 1997). The obstacle needs to be discovered, not invented. Every action contains a reason why not to do it. Nagrin insists all dances need to contain a ‘this’ and a ‘that’ and are boring without conflict (Nagrin, 2001).
C. 2. THE HUB MEDITATION

During The Workgroup years, Nagrin developed this improvisational exercise as a tool to tap into the ‘core of X,’ which is the starting point to apply his Six Questions.

Close your eyes and clean your head out with your breath. In a little while I will say, ‘Someone or something is doing something.’ It will be a simple verb, such as ‘Someone or something is rising and falling.’ From here on, let your mind roam and search for everything in your experience of rising and falling. Rising and falling in nature, in history, in films, TV, the people you know, your own life; a piece of bleached driftwood in the surf, a child on a pogo stick, a red autumn leaf in a cold wind . . . . The list can and should feel endless. Each of these will be for a moment in the center of your mind, at the very hub of your consciousness.

After a while, you may discover that regardless of what you come up with, the hub of your mind is occupied with one thing, even though you continue to raise up new images . . .

Note that in this example, everything was specific. Don’t reach for anything as general and grandiose as the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Avoid unspecific feelings like going from gaiety to sadness to gaiety. These will land you neck-deep in stereotypes and stencils, to steal a word from Stanislavski.

When you know that the hub of your mind is occupied by one image regardless of whatever other images come up, accept that and move in to get a close look at what is there. Then open your eyes. You will have just done a Hub Meditation.

Nagrin, 1997:162-63
APPENDIX D:
STRUCTURAL OUTLINES FOR ANALYSIS
from four case studies

[MY SECTIONING AND SUB-TITLES]
### D.1. STRANGE HERO (1948/1962)

Choreography and Performance: Daniel Nagrin, 1948  
Music: Stan Kenton and Pete Rugolo  
Costume: based on a Karinska design  
Pianist: Sylvia Marshall  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Sections Given Interpretive Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td><strong>Enter the Gangster:</strong> Strutting and smoking cigarette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td><strong>Intrusion, Betrayal, and Fight:</strong> Hears sound, pulls out gun, offers foe cigarette in friendship, then betrays him, punches and knocks out, gloats and struts off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td><strong>Attacked:</strong> Startled by another foe, adrenaline jump, ducks, hides, peeks, sees no enemy in sight, then confidently walks away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td><strong>The Chase and Catch:</strong> Sees enemies coming, is chased, hides against brick wall, takes a break to smoke, is found, begs for mercy, hands up in surrender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td><strong>The Escape and Climax:</strong> walks with hands high, rolls to escape, pulls out imaginary gun, shoots twice, encircles two dead victims, kicks and punches them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td><strong>The Denouement and Death:</strong> Pauses to smoke, is surprised, is shot, then shot again, falls down, gets back up, falls backward, Italian-like obscene arm gesture, is shot again, reels and spins and falls backward again, gets up, reels and spins and falls backward again, then lights fade to blackout.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D.2. **PATH (1965)**

Choreography and performance: Daniel Nagrin  
Performed in silence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Sections Given Interpretive Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Start</td>
<td>End</td>
<td><strong>The Commencement:</strong> Standing by large beam at feet; looks at it and ponders; then picks it up with gloved hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>The <strong>Path:</strong> Proceeds to step forward in a graduated box-step walking pattern, from upstage right to a downstage left diagonal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td><strong>Finale:</strong> Finishes down stage left, pauses in parallel, steps forward to place beam on floor in wings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>7.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
D.3. THE DUET
from The Edge is Also a Center (1971/1973)

Conceived and Directed by: Daniel Nagrin, 1971 & 1973
Costume: each dancer provides simple light-coloured leotard and tights
Sound Score: Kirk Nurock, composer/pianist, with William Shimmel on electronics; silence; spoken voice by performers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Sections Given Interpretive Titles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>Meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Touching and embracing. Connor (C) breaks from the trio, with finger waves slowly walks toward Fitzgerald (F), passes Mother repeating her phrase. F is doing her own repetitious phrase of grabbing into the air in front of her and the follow through. As he approaches her, they lock hands and melt to the floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>Kiss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bodies tightly embracing, both crouch to floor low level, embrace, ‘kissing’ action of repeated face-to-face brushing. Standing, begin weight sharing and lifts. Embrace each other standing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>Struggle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Music takes on a more frantic tone. Lovers break away suddenly. Re-embracing, moving away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>Sexual Intimacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>She teasingly plays with his hair; ‘finger waves,’ embracing into low level, F lying prone with legs apart, C over her with rhythmic action. Her hands are shaking/trembling to harp music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>Competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Music changes to a strong, definite compulsively repetitive beat rather than the tender harp music. Control and dominance movements, grabbing, interlocking arms, releasing, lifting and pouring over each other, pulling away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>Hug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality change in a tender moment involving hugs in middle and low levels. Tentative moving into partner, looking away, embracing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.43</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>Abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Abruptly, C kicks her in the face, F submissively falls into his open arms and chest, allowing him to embrace her as his right hand vibrates back and forth before he tosses her forward. No music, adds to the tension between them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.06</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>Stare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Standing apart, they eye each other, motionless. F slowly continues to back up, putting more and more distance between. Performed in silence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choreography, Text, and Performed by: Daniel Nagrin
Visuals: Pablo Orrego
Costume: Sally Ann Parsons
Music and Sound Score: Ornette Coleman, Conlon Nancarrow, Daniel Nagrin
Voices: Sue Nadel, Daniel Nagrin
Video Camera: Johaness Holub
Technical Consultant: Gary Harris

Two DVDs: #1 – The Dancer.  #2 – The Slides:

Three rear projecting slide machines operated by a computerized program filled a massive screen. The dance, the slides, the words and the music all leaned on each other. Not one could make sense or stand without the others. To view Poems Off the Wall, it is necessary to have two VCRs and two monitors, one on top of the other. The two videotapes are cued up to play in a [sic] synchronicity, one is focused on the dancer, the other on the slides.

Nagrin website, 2004b

Time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Sections Given Interpretive Titles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Most titles taken from Nagrin’s website, 2004c. Movement, et cetera, too extensive to include in this outline.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>1:02</td>
<td></td>
<td>Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1:03</td>
<td>2:30</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2:31</td>
<td>4:16</td>
<td>I CAN’T QUIT. I GOT A GRANT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4:19</td>
<td>8:08</td>
<td>NEA GRANT APPLICATION.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8:09</td>
<td>12:06</td>
<td>I CAN’T READ THE NEWSPAPERS, THEY’RE TOO DISTURBING (sound tape says “distressing”), repeated continuously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12:07</td>
<td>21:44</td>
<td>AH CHINA!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21:44</td>
<td>28:10</td>
<td>BLACKS AND JEWS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>28:10</td>
<td>39:02</td>
<td>AH WOMEN!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>39:02</td>
<td>44:39</td>
<td>LENNON!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>44:40</td>
<td>46:48</td>
<td>CONCLUSION.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Website searches of both the New York Public Library’s CATNYP (NYPL on-line catalogue) and the Library of Congress (LC) catalogue were conducted prior to the on-site visits. NYPL houses the largest collection of primary source documents on Nagrin, and the LC provided a listing for and contains the complete printed materials on Nagrin. Due to the proximity of the researcher at the time and their completeness of Nagrin materials, most of the data collection was accessed and accomplished at the LC. The majority of the Nagrin materials were found at these two archives, with a minimal amount held at the National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD) at the University of Surrey in the UK and from Nagrin himself. Other archives contacted were the George Washington University Library’s Works Progress Administration archives; University of California-Riverside Daniel Nagrin Collection of Professor Emeritus Christena Schlundt; The National Archives in Washington, DC, which also was visited; and the Arizona State University’s Institute for Studies in the Arts.

In general, these bibliographical entries are alphabetical by author, title of work, source, date, and page, if applicable. An exception is the section, Concert Programmes and Playbills, included at the end. It is assigned numeric references due to lack of authorship and is listed alphabetically by programme title. All but one of the Programmes and Playbills were viewed in the New York Public Library: Daniel Nagrin Collection archives, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Jerome Robbins dance research division.
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