

CND CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON NYOTA INYOKA

Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar, Amanda Piña, Sandra Chatterjee, Nicole Haitzinger & Franz Anton Cramer

Aide à la recherche et au patrimoine
en danse 2020 – synthèse fév. 2022

AIDE À LA RECHERCHE ET AU PATRIMOINE EN DANSE 2020

RÉSUMÉ DU PROJET

“Contemporary Reflections on Nyota Inyoka”, par Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar, Amanda Piña, Sandra Chatterjee, Nicole Haitzinger, Franz Anton Cramer

[recherche appliquée]

Nyota Inyoka (1896–1971) was a Parisian dancer and choreographer of mixed heritage who was active between the 1920s and 1970s. While there is evidence that she was popular in the 1920s and 1930s, during the craze for “exoticisms,” she is by now a forgotten figure in the canon of modern European dance history. The interdisciplinary research project Contemporary Reflections on Nyota Inyoka centered on an exchange about Nyota Inyoka’s work between two contemporary choreographers of color: Mexican-Chilean-Austrian choreographer Amanda Piña, based in Vienna, and German-Indian choreographer-scholar Dr. Sandra Chatterjee, based between Munich, Salzburg, and India. Both choreographers are engaged in critical processes concerned with post- and decolonial approaches. The exchange was based on an engagement with materials available at the Fonds Nyota Inyoka at Bibliotheque Nationale de France (COL 119), focusing mostly Inyoka’s notations, photos, sketches, and writings from contemporary ‘of-color’ perspectives in dialogue with the primarily theoretical and dance historical research project Border-Dancing Across Time: The (Forgotten) Parisian Choreographer Nyota Inyoka, her Œuvre, and Questions of Choreographing Créolité (Austrian Science Fund (FWF): P 31958-G). This project is conducted at the Department of Music and Dance Studies, University of Salzburg by Nicole Haitzinger, Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar, Sandra Chatterjee (participating in dual capacity: as a choreographer and dance scholar), Gerrit Berenike Heiter, and in collaboration with Franz Anton Cramer. In addition, Contemporary Reflections on Nyota Inyoka included interdisciplinary dialogues with experts from literature studies (Sneharika Roy), Indian dance practice (Malavika Klein), and two more dancers/choreographers of color based in Vienna: Linda Samaraweerová (of Sri Lankan / Czech background) and Lina Venegas (from Colombia).

Some parts of the project had to be realized online or in hybrid formats.

Nicole Haitzinger and Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar were able to interview Malavika Klein in person in her Parisian apartment. Malavika Klein is a former dancer of Nyota Inyoka’s company and therefore a

AIDE À LA RECHERCHE ET AU PATRIMOINE EN DANSE 2020

contemporary of Nyota Inyoka, who directly worked with her, but also an expert in the classical Indian dance form Bharatanatyam, who was influential for the development of the classical Indian dance scene in Paris. A transcript of the interview is part of the documentary resources produced in the project.

The dialogue with postcolonial literature scholar Sneharika Roy on Nyota Inyoka's poetic work was carried out via Zoom on 30 October 2020, during which, among other topics, Inyota's authorial position particularly in relation to her (poetic) writing activities were discussed.

In collaboration with Tanzquartier Wien (TQW) a very intense research phase took place in the TQW studios in Vienna in March 2021. Together with Linda Samaraweerová and Lina Venegas we dedicated the first three days to re-embodiments of Nyota Inyoka's dances Shiva (1926), Nagui (1932/33), and Prière aux Dieux Solaires (1921). We were also able to welcome dance historian and curator Eike Wittrock and discuss policies of archiving, imageries of so-called "oriental" and "Indian" dancers, as well as Inyoka's costumes. Selected video recordings of those reconstructions are part of the documentary resources produced within this project.

The public panel discussion Complex biographies and fluid history. Re-visions of cultural, political, and aesthetic modernism in dance, which concluded this research phase, investigated to what extent 'contemporary dance' can be situated within a matrix of (neo-)colonialist modernism even today, because dancers, movement and composition systems, and aesthetic principles deemed culturally or ethnically 'other' are still being excluded from the canon. Impulse presentations were given by Franz Anton Cramer, Sandra Chatterjee, Lina Venegas, and Eike Wittrock, followed by a discussion with Nicole Haitzinger, Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar, and Linda Samaraweerová – therefore also addressed the urgent need to decolonize historiographies and archives. A recording of this panel discussion is the third part of the resources produced within this project.

Another intensive exchange took place in Paris, where the team, together with "Border-Dancing" co-worker Gerrit Berenike Heiter spent the mornings in a dance studio (Centre de danse du Marais) to work and think on material we had found at the BnF Richelieu in the afternoons. An extensive walk led us to various venues where Nyota Inyoka had performed 100 years ago and that mostly still function as theatres: Salle Adyar, Palais de Chaillot, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Théâtre Marigny, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Les Folies

Bergère, musée Guimet and her private addresses.

In order to visualize the multiple voices of this collaborative project, we decided to divide the report into sections authored individually by the core collaborators of this CND research project: Franz Anton Cramer, Sandra Chatterjee, Nicole Haitzinger, Amanda Piña, and Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar with a supplement on the locations by Gerrit Berenike Heiter. Each section details the respective collaborator's approach, understandings, insights from the research process, and reflections.

Sandra Chatterjee

Collective re-embodiment and kinaesthetic connections

Working with Nyota Inyoka's notations has been a central approach for me since we (Nicole Haitzinger and myself) first came across her notations in 2016. This initially dialogic exploration of notation between myself, a dancer trained in Indian dance forms, and Nicole Haitzinger, a dance scholar and expert in European dance modernities, aimed at moving through notation as a research process rather than reconstruction. It was fruitfully expanded through CND's Aide à la recherche.

As a mixed-heritage dancer of color in Europe, often assigned, but also claiming the ascription 'Indian', I was excited from the beginning to have found a 'dance ancestor' in Nyota Inyoka – a mixed-heritage, of-color dance predecessor in Europe marked by, and engaging with 'Indianness'. Finally, a dance ancestor in Europe, who was charting her own path between European aesthetic norms and notions of 'Indianness' (and beyond) on her own terms. As a European dance ancestor, she was very different from the dance ancestors who were the now marginalized hereditary dancers in Indian temples and courts who have been the keepers of the roots of the classical Indian dance forms I am trained in – a direct physical lineage.¹ I don't think Inyoka had any Indian dance training. Instead, she activated Hindu, Buddhist, but also Cambodian and Ancient Egyptian iconographies and philosophies, among others, through her own movement language. It was, such is my impression after several phases of moving through notations over the past five years, kinesthetically heavily informed by the dances' circulation in her European surroundings. The (most likely) non-European half of her origins is unknown to us, her actual ancestors are unknown to

¹ Cp., among others, Soneji, Davesh. 2012. *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India*. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press.

us. Her authorial position is culturally ambiguous. What we have is her danced web of connections she creates, her visions, and traces of her embodiments, which we can pick up as kinesthetic connections² and bring them into the present.

During the time spent in the dance studio with colleagues who are dancers/choreographers of color in Europe, Amanda Piña as well as Lina Venegas and Linda Samaraweerová, new exchanges and insights were facilitated going far beyond the singular perspective of embodiment by way of my own body. This process, which intended to center on the embodied knowledge that each of us bring to the work with the notations, confirmed the centrality of this embodied knowledge for decoding the notations. Through the wide range of our movement experiences situated in specific cultural knowledge complex research questions, contents and choreographic associations came to the foreground.

The notations are often incomplete. They consist of 'static' drawings akin to complex stick figures. The movement connections between the figures are not apparent but sometimes commented upon with handwritten notes, which are in French and not always readable. Also, the figures are not always drawn in the order they should be danced. The work of embodiment here consists of 1) deciphering the positions drawn in the figures, particularly with attention to details such as exact foot or hand position, level, head facing, etc., and 2) putting the positions in motion and connecting them. In addition, especially for putting the positions in motion and thinking about movement quality and speed, the question of the intention of the movement, hence the content and feeling quickly became central points of exchange.

As a dancer it was rewarding to observe the many ways in which the same notation can be embodied: how does our different dance and movement knowledge decipher and move the same figure differently? Figures that looked iconographically Indian to me can look much less culturally specific in terms of Indianness in and through a dancer's body not trained in Indian dance – which most likely Inyoka herself was not. Each of our trainings is necessarily so ingrained that without the dialogue with multiple dancers with different trainings it was impossible for me to remember the figures and kinesthetic traces Inyoka left for us beyond the Indian dance training. Seeing and re-learning my colleagues' embodiments made this possible. For example, I realized new ways in which the sculptural base of classical Indian dance focusing on iconographic poses arrests my capacity to flow through the movements even as I undoubtedly recognize (sometimes –

² Srinivasan, Priya. 2007: "The Bodies beneath the Smoke, or, What's behind the Cigarette Poster: Unearthing Kinesthetic Connections in American Dance History." *Discourses in Dance*. 4:1, pp. 7-47.

compared to Indian dance notation – incomplete) ‘Indian’ postures: reflecting back on my training, I was taught to describe, revere, meditate on, tell stories about deities like Krishna and Lord Shiva, not embody their energies in immediate ways.

Beyond the Indian iconographies, in terms of movement quality as well as in terms of embodiment, the range and at the same time depth of the culturally grounded associations of Amanda Piña, Lina Venegas, and Linda Samaraweerová, confirms to me – in the sense of resonances and points of connection – the universality Inyoka aspires to in her work. In light of wrestling with the concept of universality from a postcolonial theoretical perspective, I had some difficulty embracing earlier. It seems that through the high level of abstraction and partial incompleteness of Inyoka’s notations (due to archival processes) and the resulting gaps in transmission and room for interpretation we could find common ground in associating with symbolisms of, for example, the snake, the sun, astronomy, and visions of the divine/ancestors from various cultural contexts ranging from South America via Egypt and Europe to South Asia. Inyoka’s aspiring to universality was in part affirmed as a unifying moment emerging from a kind of creolité-mixedness and helped us connect through and across cultural particularities and conditions of migration during the research process in the dance studio in unexpected ways.

Franz Anton Cramer

Archival embodiments: Reading sources, reconstituting practices

Nyota Inyoka’s archival holdings give ample insight into her professional development, but they seem to withhold important aspects of her personality as well as creative mechanisms leading to the specific body of work she has realized. An exception to this lacuna are the few notational scores that we have been able to identify within her holdings (and also in some published material). This notational material, alongside a few film snippets available, have been at the basis of the reconstitutive project carried out. They have also more neatly defined my own perspective of an archival researcher: For the available archival holdings have another feature that had so far puzzled me in the research process as they point towards a much larger field of activity than “only” stage work, informing Nyota Inyoka’s creative processes. Inyoka seems to have been involved all throughout her life, but to varying degrees and in differing materializations, with spiritual

as well as intellectual quests. Therefore one of the questions we are seeking answers to is how these non-choreographic processes relate to the form and nature of her artistic and stage work.

By assisting embodiment processes based on the formal script bequeathed by Nyota Inyoka and on complementary information from a contemporary, postcolonial, and also political/ activist perspective, it has become clear, so it seems, that Inyoka's artistic practice inscribed itself in larger structures of history-making, of generation of forms and manifestations of subjectivity. We do infer from the current state of research that it is not the originality or newness that was in the front of Nyota Inyoka's artistic endeavors, but an understanding of dance as medium and the actualization of non-subjective forces, energies, and impulses that she ascribed her choreographic work to. We can conceive both in her dance-related writings as in her non-choreographic projects a recurring stance of considering dance as an entity outside of herself, an entity imbued with cosmological and religious values, and that her dance was not so much a realization of her own subjectivity but a materialization of relation with non-human entities. One of the notational manuscripts we have been working with (unfortunately incomplete: it only shows the second page of a full script of two pages), is marked at the end: "FIN" and then in parentheses "(mais la danse ne finit pas)".

The notations work with phrasing and poses and presuppose, or tacitly include, transitions between one pose/form and the following. As some of these transitions seem impossible to execute or at least have various possible continuations, the graphic aspects seem somehow secondary to the lived experience of the dance-as-movement-towards. This lived experience, probably including the spiritual dimension, would be known only to Nyota Inyoka herself.

Over a period of circa forty years of creation, Inyoka's oeuvre, so we can claim, mostly is concerned with non-changing forms and subject matter. A certain thematic structure – adoration, worship, ritual, ceremony – involves all of the dances dedicated to divinities or moments of worship as well as the more narrative works from the 1930s (*Danse magique*, 1931) and especially the 1950s (*La Chrysalide*, 1952). They all "illustrate" a cosmological vision of dancing divinities or divinities at dance. It is this very continuity both in movement material, in subject matter, and in actual materialization (e.g. costumes, props, music) that reveals a practice based on embodiment and repetition rather than inventivity and originality. Inyoka's concern is not the new but the continuous, the continuation, the flux, the "totality". This is why, in the reconstitutive project, some of the non-notated phrases/passages in the dances at the basis of the notational material were able to be filled in a deductive way by drawing on other forms of knowledge,

themselves based on the embodiment and lived experience rather than proficient documentation, such as Indian dance (even though the Indianness of Inyoka's dances is a topic that remains to be discussed, see the contribution of Sandra Chatterjee). Or by the materiality of movement, we have called "ancestral", thereby taking up proposals by Amanda Piña (see the contribution of Amanda Piña).

Nicole Haitzinger

Profane Context, spiritual tone: Insights into (re-)enacting selected performances of the 1920s

The collective process of discussing and re-enacting Nyota Inyoka's oeuvre by means of pluridisciplinary and pluriversal research practices has been highly illuminating. The combination of re-enactment in the studio and collective archival research lead to unexpected insights not only with regard to Nyota Inyoka's oeuvre but also in terms of a deeper understanding of the multifaceted manifestations of so-called 'modern' dance. The re-enactment of three different performances from the 1920s (*Prière aux dieux solaires, Nagui, Vishnu*) revealed a specific concept of knowledge that can't be defined by a commitment to a 'western' or 'exotified' episteme. The most striking aspect for me was to find out about three very different and distinguishable movement concepts, corresponding with different regulations of energy and performative presences. Nyota Inyoka's artistic signature seems to be outstandingly flexible (in every sense of the term). Despite the rather profane frame of her productions (e.g. the settings, the music, the costumes), we could see and experience a particular 'spiritual' tone in her performances. Her artistic oeuvre is profoundly based on implicit knowledge, which is to say, more or less conscious, including practical wisdom, ancestral and spiritual aspects, and even aisthesis, meaning particular multisensory perception and shamanistic practices (in the sense of a constant shift of perspectives between the register of representation and the register of performative=divine presence).³ This phenomenon can be grasped in the moment of bodily re-enactment. It can't be constrained to a narrow epistemological definition because it is a particular kind of performative knowledge. It enacts a logic of its own that can only be deciphered by means of re-enactment. In our research constellation, we combined two approaches: (1) movement archeology and (2) performative re-

³ "Nyota Inyoka réussit à surprendre le secret de celui-ci pour transmettre aux mondes sa dynamique énergie. [...] Nyota et Shiva disparaissaient ensemble dans le mouvement." Roudanez, Loulou. 1947. *Nyota Inyoka. Des danseurs qui sortent du cadre*. Paris: Susse, p. 87.

appearance. Whereas the first is informed by philosophy (e.g. the Foucauldian archaeology of knowledge), the second refers to decolonial thought and more specifically to ancestral/spiritual knowledge transfers and performances that enact a logic of their own and that seem to emanate something. For Nyota Inyoka, dance was a form of knowledge that creates specific constellations of time-space-movement based on the fundamental idea of transforming physical bodies into spiritual bodies. The dancing body is more than a physical, self-referential or representative entity, it is a set of phenomena, which ‘appear’ and can be systematically recreated by means of technique.

Referring to this concept Amanda Piña proposed a ritual for hosting the re-appearance of Nyota Inyoka and her performances, starting from the idea that this kind of particular knowledge is not bound in time by the mortality of the knowledge producer Nyota Inyoka. Amanda Piña introduced the method of compossession – an alternative to that notion of the ‘western’ composition – conceived by herself. Compossession⁴ operates in decolonial terms beyond the notions of time, space, subject, object proposed by ‘the contemporary’ as a continuation of modernity/coloniality; it combines composition and possession, referring to forms of different knowledges beyond a ‘western’ conception, and integrates practices from Caribbean, creole and indigenous practices. In this research week, we worked together on the reappearance of the ‘darker’ side of modernity in a double sense: (1) an anatomy of the Parisian gaze and craze for the exotic in modernity and (2) a compossessed experience beyond the logics of representation.

Amanda Piña

Hosting the re-appearance of Nyota Inyoka. An anatomy of the white gaze

The following are observations on the artistic work of French choreographer Nyota Inyoka (1896–1971). They have been written with a direct involvement in processes of becoming her dancing body. They come from my experience as a dancer and choreographer of color.

By hosting the re-appearance of her dances in my body, by observation and research on Inyoka’s material and immaterial legacy, I have come to the conclusion that the concepts of “representation” and

⁴ Piña, Amanda. 2019: “Ideas for a practice of ‘Compossession’” in: Amanda Piña, Angela Vadori, Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar (eds.) *Endangered Human Movements* Vol. 3 – The School of the Jaguar. Wien: BMfB / nadaproductions, pp. 283-295.

“composition” fail to describe her practice. My argument is that it is not possible to understand creole, mestiza⁵ or chi'ixi⁶ forms of art within monolithic white, modern/colonial ontologies. To do so would only mean reproducing a persistent form of epistemic violence present in modernity/coloniality⁷, and European dance history. I will call this form of violence the ‘white gaze’ and will deepen on that in the following lines. My purpose is a decolonial practical inquiry, proposing the re-union of thinking, feeling, sensing, and acting in re-visiting Inyoka’s choreographic work.

Hundred years have passed since Nyota Inyoka became a figure in the European dance scene. The institutional framings for the modern arts at the time worked reproducing the othering schemes of coloniality. Depending on those framings one could either be an artist who exhibits or be the one exhibited at the ‘human zoos’ of the time. The works of artists (white and male) were being featured at the modern art exhibitions of the time while artists who were BIPOC, queer or female, “new” or second-generation Europeans – were featured at the international colonial exhibitions, where the term ‘exhibit’ gained other connotations in the colonial metropolises.

At the core of this divergence in framings, the operating colonial notions of race, gender and class, determined the working possibilities for women-artists of color available at the time. The discourses available through which women of color could express their approach to art were permeated by exoticism and existing within whiteness.

⁵ In her work from 1987 *Borderlands la Frontera, The new Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt lute books) chicano writer and poet Gloria Anzaldúa, proposes the figure of *mestiza*, a feminist queer alternative to the male *mestizo* identity. The *mestizo* is a subject fusion between indigenous and spanish heritage. Anzaldúa’s *The new Mestiza* is introduced as a multiversal identity made of that encounter but also existing at the border between worlds, in diaspora, writing and existing from the U.S. side of the border. As a chicano figure, which complexifies identity, Gloria Anzaldúa’s *new mestiza* reivindicates indigenous heritage from a diasporic perspective..

⁶ In her works, 2018 *Un Mundo Chi'ixi es posible: Ensayos desde un presente en crisis*. (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limon) and 2010 *Chi'ixinakax Utxiwa, Una reflexión sobre Prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*, (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limon) Bolivian Sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui proposes the Aymara term *Chi'ixi*, as a metaphor for a new understanding of Andean identities. *Ch'ixi* is a mottled grey colour formed from a multiplicity of dots or spots that are not necessarily contradictory colours;. The resulting grey colour is not produced through a fusion of both materials, but by their proximity within the dotted weaving pattern. It proposes an identity in which ontological divergence is not erased as in the concept of *mestizaje*.

⁷ Quijano, Anibal. 2000. “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina”. Lander, Edgardo (ed.) *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*. Buenos Aires: CLACSO. <http://bibliotecavirtual.clacso.org.ar/ar/libros/lander/quijano.rtf>.

An anatomy of the white gaze

How does the white gaze operate? Is it individual? Collective? Private? Public? Institutional? Curatorial? Is it present in this reading? In this text? In you and me? Does it exist per default? And if yes, in which way is it co-constitutive (and not-only)⁸ of the artistic works of BIPOC artists in the time between the wars in Europe and today?

A form of seeing which is not aware of its ontological constructions, a form of representation that turns invisible the representational activity of the one who represents. An oculo-centric image-based form of enacting the world. In his book *La Hybris del Punto Cero*, Castro-Gomez (2005) thinks of the ways of knowing modernity/coloniality as zero-point perspective, a zero point of enunciation, from which the representational activity of the one representing is rendered invisible. Decolonial scholar Rolando Vázquez in his book *Vistas of Modernity, decolonial aesthetics and the end of the contemporary*⁹ draws a relation between the Eiffel tower and modernity proposing the tower as an optical device that can perform the reduction of the world to an image.

In the same way, as the elevated viewpoint one gets from the top of the Eiffel tower, western perspective developed a universalizing form of seeing. It advanced an understanding of the subject qua spectator in a world of represented objects. The white gaze represents the world as an image, viewed from the zero point perspective of western thought (modernity/coloniality) invisible to itself and its local historical emergence. Through hierarchies built within categories such as truth (science) and superiority (race), whiteness is not understood as an ethnic category, while all others are. Whiteness becomes the norm, even when representing a minority.

The white gaze here would be proposed as an ideology of superiority but also as an idea of what it is to see. The ontological site of the spectator of representation, reducing other worlds of meaning to forms of cultural belief, and the practices of other bodies to images for consumption.

⁸ I borrowed the expression “not-only” from Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena, because I find it very helpful in grasping the complexity of what is beyond western ontologies and languages: De la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Being – Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University press.

⁹ Vázquez, Rolando. 2020. *Vistas of Modernity, decolonial Aesthetics and the end of the Contemporary*. Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund.

Hosting the re-appearance of ancestral forms of movement

Nyota Inyoka worked within European modern dance and with not-only western methods. Her live performances, in my point of view, hosted the reappearance of the movements of ancestral deities. This re-appearance implied a form of relation that went beyond dance making as the construction of a form, an object for the senses (western aesthetics), and beyond the modern notion of image as representation (white gaze).

Through hosting the re-appearance of her dances in my body I understood that a much more somatic approach is needed in order to allow those dances to take body, a practical approach, that relates less to composition than to Indian philosophies in practice.

Inyoka's solo dances can be understood as embodiments of content and form, energetic qualities, and states of the body of the deity which can be understood better through spiritual tantric traditions present in Hinduism and Buddhism. Tantras ("doctrine" or "framework" or "system")¹⁰ refer to numerous Scriptures pertaining to any esoteric tradition rooted in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy such as Vajrayana¹¹. In these tantric spiritual practices, embodiment is understood as the absorption of the deity's qualities, through identification and imitation, in a process that includes reproducing the particular postures of the deity, its facial expression and also visualizing one's fusion with its spirit as the nature of mind, a form of pre-existence divine, awareness or consciousness. This understanding of embodiment relates to the notion of Compossession¹² in the sense that exceeds western rational and scientific epistemic framings.

Compossession combines composition and possession, referring to different forms of knowing and knowledge, beyond a 'western' conception. . As an alternative to the notion of composition, compossession

¹⁰ <https://hareesh.org/blog/2015/6/10/definition-of-the-word-tantra> (last accessed: 28.11.2021)

¹¹ Vajrayāna (Sanskrit: "thunderbolt vehicle" or "diamond vehicle") along with Mantrayāna, Guhyamantrayāna, Tantrayāna, Tantric Buddhism and Esoteric Buddhism are names referring to Buddhist traditions associated with Tantra and "Secret Mantra", which developed in the medieval Indian subcontinent and spread to Tibet, East Asia, Mongolia and other Himalayan states. Vajrayāna practices are connected to specific lineages in Buddhism, through the teachings of lineage holders. Others might generally refer to texts as the Buddhist Tantras. It includes practices that make use of mantras, dharanis, mudras, mandalas and the visualization of deities and Buddhas. David Seyfort Rugg has suggested that Buddhist tantra employed various elements of a "pan-Indian religious substrate" which is not specifically Buddhist as Shaiva or Vaishnava. Shaivism ([/ˈʃaɪvɪzəm/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaivism); Sanskrit: शैवसम्प्रदायः, Śhaivasampradāyaḥ) is one of the major Hindu traditions that worship Shiva. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vajrayana>

¹² See Piña, 2019.

operates in decolonial terms beyond the notions of time, space, subject, object proposed by “the contemporary” as a continuation of modernity/coloniality.

In her persistent, life-long embodiments of Shiva, Nyota Inyoka composes her dances through a tantric-like practice. Was she acquainted with Tantric practices such as Vajrayana? Was she familiar with Alexandra David-Néel’s writings on her travels in Tibet, where Vajrayana practices had flourished and developed?

The form of knowing implicit dance and embodiment, based on imitation and not on distant observation, can be understood as a context in which to become what is being known through dancing. To become is a radically different practice than to make-believe or craft for others to see. To compose an image as an object of the senses is a different process than working on the senses through mimesis. The practice of becoming the deity can be described as a practice of trans-substantiation. By acquiring the qualities of the deity one becomes not only human and not only dancing for others (audience), existing beyond whiteness and its context of representation. The re-appearance of the deity has its own agency, its own tendencies, its own dances with their own duration. From a decolonial research perspective, Nyota Inyoka’s work (if she did it intentionally or not) can be understood as an actualization of tantric practices such as Vajrayana and Shaiva traditions. It could also be understood as a practice of radically exiting the racializing schemes of the white gaze from within by involving the wholeness of our body-mind in the process of becoming.

To host the re-appearance of ancestral forms of movement implies a passive rather than active role, one must invite (= call or invoke), host, and care for the guest (= ghost or specter, an archetype, a deity). Dance in this sense is better understood as a subject and not as an object. In this process of hosting, one’s intentionality must remain low for a certain experience, awareness, state of mind and body, to take possession of us. It is a practice of listening rather than talking. To allow that process is an art, the art of Compassion, in which allowing the re-appearance of ancestral forms of movement, means to become the writing (*graphos*), instead of being the one who writes. Hosting the re-appearance of the multiplicity of bodies implied in the figure of Shiva includes all the ones who have embodied Shiva before (*choros*), and here Iconography is understood as a residual process in which temporalities super impose each other and sediment at a certain moment in the frozen movement of a sculpture. A fossil of experience to be reactivated by dance. This collective process includes the dancing body in the now, embodying this

collectivity as ancestrality, activated by becoming the dance. Border-dancing in unison with ancestral entities, through the time of precedence¹³.

A double appearance

By means of compossession I invited Nyota Inyoka's Shiva to re-appear in my body. The compossessed experience is one in which dancing and experiencing the dance are equally important. While hosting the re-appearance of Shiva as danced by Nyota Inyoka I could feel the energy of the deity, and also the exotified context in which the choreographer created.

The exotic can be thought of from many different perspectives: as a problem in the eyes of the ones who see (white gaze), like the incapability of dealing with otherness which turns difference into a fetish for consumption. When the exotic is embodied purposely, as a realm of possibility beyond the norm, in Inyoka's case the western canon of dance and its implied coloniality¹⁴, it can be a possibility of embodying the "exo" (outside, somewhere else). Through shape-shifting, identity speculation, glamour, creativity, and dreaming, in this way, the exotic becomes also a fertile terrain for epistemic disobedience.

Nyota Inyoka's epistemic disobedience to the western forms of representation in the arts is rooted in the speculative perspective of diaspora and of creolité. Her choreographic approach produced other worlds of meaning and sensing, which had to fit into the frames of the modern/colonial theatre dispositive, and was consumed within modern/colonial notions of authorship, audienceship, frontality, central perspective, spectacle, show representation, and composition. Yet the principles of her work cannot be reduced to, nor only understood within modern/colonial European understandings, and this writing is an effort to make justice to her work beyond them.

¹³ As the title of this research, *Border-dancing across time*, implies, precedence can be understood as a practice of exiting the understanding of time as a line, so present in Modernity/ coloniality, which is to be found at the source of the notions of progress and development. Precedence is a time in which what is before is before us because it precedes us. See "precedence" in Vázquez, Rolando. 2017. *Precedence, Earth and the Anthropocene: Decolonizing design*. Design Philosophy Papers. 15:1, 77-91. DOI: 10.1080/14487136.2017.1303130

¹⁴ Nicole Haitzinger "The pose of the conquistador" in: Amanda Piña, Angela Vadori, Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar (Hg.), *Endangered Human Movements Vol. 3 – The School of the Jaguar* (Wien: BMfB / nadaproductions, 2019). (pp. 191-231)

Creole, mestiza, and chi'ixi, before the time in which those concept-practices could flourish, existing in that in-betweenness, Nyota Inyoka creates an alternative Indian and European modern dance, inhabiting this third place of "border-dancing". A place that is not accessible solely from being on one or other side of colonial difference, on the inside or on the outside of a territory or an epistemic or ontological context, but in both. Her practice embraces divergence as a creative force for the emergence of other worlds of sensing and meaning, for other presences to re-appear – in-between worlds.

Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar

India as a destination of myth and desire

Although we have been able to retrieve information on Nyota Inyoka being born in Paris, her mother being French, we cannot tell yet where her father was from. Her life-long quest for and construction of ethnic/cultural identity and heritage lead us to the hypothesis that she herself did not know this half of her ancestry. Our feeling (especially of Sandra Chatterjee as a mixed heritage dancer trained in various Indian practices), that Inyoka never actually had pursued training in Indian dance practices, could be affirmed in two very generous and insightful encounters with Christine Malavika Klein, a dancer in Inyoka's company in the years 1947-1949.

Malavika herself was born in 1936. Her father, Jean Klein, was a spiritual intellectual, writer and musician, and her mother "Taffy" Françoise Guillemot de Mercet, a painter, poet and musician. Being raised in such an artistic and spiritual environment, she came across Indian culture at a very early age. She and her sister (the actress Nita Klein) got in touch with the writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and Krishnamurti (a.o.). At the very young age of 12 years, when Malavika started to dance with Inyoka, she already had taken lessons in Bharatanatyam with Sonal Gupta, who was the wife of a UNESCO delegate in Paris. In 1950 she went to London to dance in Ram Gopal's company, before moving with her parents to Colombo (Sri Lanka) and then Bangalore (India) where she continued her studies in Bharatanatyam with Vina Visalkshi and Kanchipuram Ellappa Pillai. When she later returned to Paris, she became one of the prominent figures in the Parisian Indian dance scene, collaborating with / being teacher of Padma Subrahmanyam, Dominique Delorme, Kalpana, and Dalaya Singam (a.o.).

In our talks, Malavika confirmed what we had suspected: Nyota Inyoka did not have classical Indian dance training. It is also doubtful whether she had ever travelled to India. Her technical references were European and US-American classical and modern dance styles. Malavika mentioned that Inyoka knew the work and rank of Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis, and Anna Pavlova. She is sure that Inyoka had also known Indian contemporaries as Ram Gopal and Uday Shankar in person and was familiar with their work. Being aware of all those references, what impresses her until today was Inyoka's very idiosyncratic and powerful way of creation. Inyoka had the ability to make people dream about India, a place that most people at the end of the 1940s and beginning of 1950s had not seen, but only imagined through the writings of Rudyard Kipling and Alexandra David-Néel.

Inyoka's male dance partners of those years, Anand Koumar and Paritosh Sen, were both not trained dancers. But according to Klein they were able "to move very nice with Nyota",¹⁵ Sukhendu Dutt, on the other hand, whom Inyoka danced with as well, had a training in Ceylonese dances and a notion of Bharata Natyam. Klein emphasized that Inyoka was "able to bring people towards her" and inspire them with her charm and creative power.

In conclusion one can say that Inyoka was keen on keeping the myth around her persona not only in public, but also with her dancers. No one really knew about her family background, but everybody was fascinated by her and the desirable image that she was able to create referring to India and its culture.

Overall, within this project I had the possibility to approach Nyota Inyoka via various paths: through her personal archive and notations, in visiting the places where she had lived and performed, in finding traces that she had left in the Parisian dance scene through Malavika Klein and in seeing the universality of her approach re-appear in my own body and the bodies of my colleagues.

¹⁵ Christina Gillinger-Correa Vivar, Nicole Haitzinger. Qualitative interview with Malavika Klein on October 24, 2020. Paris.

Gerrit Berenike Heiter

Following the Traces of Nyota Inyoka's Performances in the Parisian Theater Topography

Part of the experience of the (artistic) research were several walks through Paris, following the traces of Nyota Inyoka's performances in the different Parisian theaters as well as visiting the areas where she lived at different moments in her life.

Unfortunately, several of the buildings, where she or her family lived do not exist anymore – having been replaced by new buildings. In her childhood, her mother lived in the streets behind the city hall, in the rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville and – symbolically interesting – in the building 15, rue Geoffroy l'Asnier, where today dance studios of Micadanses¹⁶ are located. As a young woman, she lived in an apartment at 13, rue Franklin in the prestigious 16th arrondissement. Later, in the 1930s she moved to a flat in an Art Deco building 2, place d'Auteuil in the same district, where she lived until her death in 1971. One of the first venues where Nyota Inyoka appeared in 1917 were the Folies Bergères in the 9th arrondissement.¹⁷ In the 1921/22 season, Inyoka performed a dance for the stage adaption of *L'Atlantide*, a popular novel by Pierre Benoit,¹⁸ at the Théâtre Marigny. At this early stage of her career she furthermore performed at the Théâtre de l'Oasis, which belonged to the couturier Paul Poiret,¹⁹ as well as the Théâtre de l'Œuvre,²⁰ directed by Aurélien Lugné-Poe.²¹

Among the numbers of several music-hall revues at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1925 were also dances of Nyota Inyoka. She returned there for a WWII charity gala (probably in 1944/45).

The Salle Adyar, today the Théâtre de la Tour Eiffel, was part of the building of the Theosophical Society in Paris, built between 1912 and 1915 by the architect Louis Lefranc. Inyoka created her solo dance Shiva there in 1926, with actor Samson Fainsilber reading an extract of Ananda Coomaraswamy's *The Dance of Shiva*. In 1957 she presented *Les Danses divines et rituelles* there with her dance company "Les Ballets Nyota Inyoka" and with actress Fanny Robiane reading several sacred texts.

¹⁶ ADDP (Mission capitale danses – Association pour le Développement de la Danse à Paris).

¹⁷ Cf. [Recueil factice de documents concernant les revues des Folies Bergère, 1917], ark:/12148/btv1b8594998v (last accessed 13.12.2021).

¹⁸ Pierre Benoit, *L'Atlantide*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1919.

¹⁹ This theatre had then the address: 26 avenue Victor-Emmanuel III, 75008, Paris. The actual address today is avenue Franklin D. Roosevelt. https://data.bnf.fr/15740524/theatre_de_l_oasis_paris/ (last accessed 13.12.2021).

²⁰ The Théâtre de l'Œuvre is located at 55, rue de Clichy, in the 9th arrondissement.

²¹ See for programmes and press articles the "Scrapbook" (1921-1924 by Nyota Inyoka), BnF, coll. 119, F° boîte 2.

AIDE À LA RECHERCHE ET AU PATRIMOINE EN DANSE 2020

She first gathered this group of female dancers on the occasion of the Exposition coloniale internationale in 1931 (i.e. at the Salle des Fêtes du Musée des Colonies)²² and presented a new programme with them in 1931/32 at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier.²³

In 1947 Nyota Inyoka danced at the Gala de la France d'Outre Mer, which was performed at the Palais de Chaillot.²⁴

A special location for Nyota Inyoka's artistic research was the musée Guimet, where she studied the different art works, consulted the library, and performed.²⁵

²² *Rapport Exposition coloniale*, BnF, GE-FF-15112 (1931) IV "Vie de l'Exposition".

²³ See programme in "Dossier d'artiste – Nyota Inyoka", BnF, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra.

²⁴ See newspaper article in *La Défense*, 05.04.1946.

²⁵ See newspaper article in *La Fronde*, n° 240, 07.04.1927.