

Jews and Jewishness in the Dance World Arizona State University Oct 2018

**DANIEL NAGRIN: ON “THIS AND THAT,” TIKKUN OLAM,
AND CHOREOGRAPHY**

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In this paper, I examine American choreographer and dancer Daniel Nagrin’s choreographic methods as a study in Jewishness. I extend the notion that dancing Jewish not only resides explicitly through overtly Jewish themes, time and place, subject matter, and tropes (Jackson in Ingber 2011, and Rossen 2014), but also is posited subtly yet discreetly in the methods, content/function, and structures and devices used to create and perform concert dances. I ask, “In what ways do Daniel Nagrin’s dances tacitly affirm Jewishness through identity, agency, and questioning?”

My personal experience with Nagrin and admiration for his work is the inspiration and force behind this research. By tracing patterns (Adshead et al 1988, and Kane 2003), I assert that Nagrin’s choreographic methods embody characteristics of Jewishness that are implicit yet tangible. My analysis contributes new knowledge to the dialogue surrounding both Jewishness in American dance and American modern dance, therefore calling for a re-thinking of their defining criteria.

1. Jewish Identity

Daniel Nagrin’s (1917-2008) Jewishness shaped his identity, his worldview (Banes 1987, Graff 1997, Jackson 2000, Prickett 1994a&b), and his works. Nagrin was married

to and performed with modern dance pioneer Helen Tamiris. Both were native New Yorkers who lived and danced in the cultural hotbed of New York City during the 20th Century. They were secular Jews whose parents fled the pogroms in Russia (Nagrin 1988). Nagrin's background, time, and place shaped his desire to create dances that in turn reveal aspects of Jewish cultural identity and values. I ask, what is at the core of Jewish cultural identity? And in what ways are these made manifest in Nagrin's dances?

The New York Jewish identity embraced a Marxist ideology that can be traced to the status of Jewish workers in czarist Russia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their humanism was a dual reaction to impoverishment, oppression, pogroms, and mass unemployment that produced a need for altruism (Smithsonian 2004, Goldberg 1988, Jackson 2000). I assert it also extended from centuries-long histories of struggles, conflicts, and persecutions. In America, Jewish immigrants embraced the common bonds of community and non-religion and largely subscribed to collective Marxist ideals (Franko 1995, Jackson 2000, Perelman 2004). Overall they were intellectual, artistic, socially conscious, humanistic, and sensitive to the Jewish experience as evidenced in their art, ideology, and values (Copeland 2004, Greenberg 1955, Jackson 2000). In conversations with Nagrin and from examining his works and writings (Nagrin 1989, 2001, and LoC 2014), I know that he embraced secular existentialism, which is rooted in Marxism. Nagrin eschewed religion including Judaism, calling all of it a 'crutch for the weak.' In conversations with him, he stated he was agnostic. We students would hear him quote Karl Marx, "religion is the opiate of the masses."

However, I argue that he did embrace Jewishness as his cultural ethos. It has shaped and is embodied throughout his choreographic work (see Albright 1997, Foulkes 2002, Giersdorf 2013). Since his high school Depression days of the 1930s, Nagrin adopted skepticism since no one could be certain of anything as many ideologies were present (Nagrin 1997). By the late 1940s and 1950s, he embraced the Marxist existentialists, particularly Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Satre, who offered what he called a “lovely gift” of confusion (Nagrin 1997:xvi). As a result, Nagrin grounded his thinking in doubt and uncertainty which he said were “exciting” ways to live; and since he was “*sure of nothing*,” each “should be all the more ready to think, choose and reformulate for him.herself” (ibed).

Undoubtedly, his personal philosophy transferred to his professional work, evidenced by the ambiguous and thought-provoking natures of *Indeterminate Figure* (1957), *Path* (1965), *Peloponnesian War* (1968), *Poems Off the Wall* (1982), experiments with his performative improvisation company the Workgroup, and most specifically in *The Fall* (1977) which is based on Camus’ work. For Nagrin, dance was full of unknowns and mysteries that unveiled human character and increased sensitivity and awareness within the viewer. It caused one to think and ask self-reflexive questions to gain personal understanding, or “our own poem” (Nagrin 2001:15).

In his book *Thou Shalt Innovate*, Avi Jorisch (2018) discusses how Israel’s prophetic tradition over thousands of years produced an innovative culture from which the entire world benefits. On his list of 50 top Israeli innovations are Moshe Feldenkrais’ Awareness through Movement and Noa Eshkol and Abraham Wachman’s Language of

Dance movement notation system (Jorisch 2018:185). To the Jew, one is mandated to make the world a better place:

In Jewish tradition, the prophet Isaiah 42:6 commanded them to be a 'light unto the nations.' Its symbol is Israel's national emblem, the menorah or seven-branched lampstand. It also means taking responsibility for repairing the world, or engaging in *tikkun olam*.

(Jorisch 2018:6-7)

Tikkun olam is at the "heart and soul" of the Jew, the core of Jewish identity. It produces a culture of people who seek higher meaning through the defining purpose of "repairing the world" through the *chutzpah* of persistence, determination, talent, and intellect (Jorisch 2018:7). *Tikkun Olam* is the "secret sauce" that is embedded into the DNA of the Jewish people and is part of their cultural "osmosis" (Jorisch 2018:XVII).

The innovative success behind *tikkun olam* comes from several factors. One of these factors is to nurture a culture that encourages one another to "challenge authority, ask the next question, and defy the obvious" (Jorisch 2018:4). Another factor is to "elevate the mundane" as seen in everyday rituals, blessings, and activities which then "transforms it into something holy" (Jorisch 2018:6). I will show how these factors are characteristics of Jewishness that are threaded throughout Nagrin's works.

2. The Nagrin Method

Nagrin's greatest gift to make the world a better place, his *tikkun olam*, is his innovative, six-step choreographic process based in asking the next question. I affectionately have dubbed it The Nagrin Method. It relies upon internal questioning

and debate, what Nagrin often referred to as “this and that.” (The way I make sense of this as a *goy* is to compare it to how Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof* made decisions by questioning and debating with himself.) Drawing from the six-question acting model of Moscow Art Theatre director Constantine Stanislavski (1924 & 1936), Nagrin, with encouragement from Tamiris, schematically adapted it into his own way of working:

1. *Who or what?* (the subject)
 2. *Is doing what?* (the verb)
 3. *To whom or what?* (the object)
 4. *Where and when?* (the context)
 5. *To what end?* (the reason for the action)
 6. *The obstacle?* ([tension that] justifies theatrical viability)
- (Nagrin 1997:34)

Specific image. The identity for each of Nagrin’s Dance Portraits was found through searching for the specific image, his ‘X.’ It is found in the content of a specific character doing a specific action for a specific purpose (Nagrin 1994, 1997, 2001). In an informal telephone interview with Nagrin (2004), he defined it as a “doing approach through movement/dance based in acting techniques” that can only come from an internal place by analyzing a character’s actions. The X *does* something (Roses-Thema 2003). From the choreography and improvisation classes I have taken from him, Nagrin consistently stressed the specific image and specific doing, the “who are you?” and “what are you doing?”

Metaphors. Nagrin’s specific characters are revealed through movement metaphors. Drawing from literary theory, metaphors translate actions into abstracted or distorted communicable ideas. Nagrin defined it as one thing “as if it were another” (Nagrin 2001:76, Sparshott 1970:263). He gleaned from the ideas of Stanislavski,

Tamaris, and Open Theatre's Joseph Chaikin (1991) who all used metaphors. According to Nagrin, metaphors are so common that they are in every thought, movement, and action (Nagrin 1994). His use of metaphors gave new insight by comparing and illuminating the person or object while simultaneously creating another context (Nagrin 1994 and 2001).

Nagrin also used tasks as metaphors for deeper meaning. In *Ruminations* (1976), he depicted his mother washing dishes (Nuchtern 1976) and then he built a bench. He questioned and challenged the viewer on whether the action of building a bench is literal or metaphorical:

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

Within the work, he commented that perhaps his intention in building a bench was not just for the sake of doing it. Instead, the specific task was a personal tribute to his father who was a skilled woodworking artisan (Nagrin 1997).

Gestures. Searching for and developing movement metaphors sprang from ordinary gestures that were central and essential, as these were the windows into the core of X (Nagrin 1994:11).¹ Literal and exaggerated gestural movement metaphors, or Sparshott's (1970) simulacra, create each character's personality (Carbonneau 1995, Kisselgoff 1994, Manchester 1957, McDonagh 1976, Schlundt 1997). Nagrin exaggerated ordinary gestures into dual-coded, deeper metaphorical meaning, which is part of *tikkun olam's* ethos. Dancer Shane O'Hara (2005) commented that Nagrin's work "always was about gesture and metaphor" to reflect an internal, humanistic movement that goes beyond "simple realism" which is "pure Daniel." Indeed, a holy act!

However, critics did not always agree. Anna Kisselgoff (1982) saw Nagrin's abstracted gestures as highly dramatic, "predicated on fierceness and originality." In contrast, critic Doris Hering (1951) saw them only as superficial pantomime. John Gruen (1975) defended them as aesthetic social gestures that contained meaning, an idea extended from cultural theory (Desmond 1997). Nagrin explained:

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

Nagrin's method of "clarifying" the literal into a metaphorical "springboard" demonstrates how to "bend it, stretch it, squeeze it" by using improvisation. Literal gestures "cancel the role of the audience" by removing mystery, inhibiting imagination, and destroying creative impulses (Nagrin 1994:96).

Abstracted gestural metaphors are prevalent in several of his dances. *Strange Hero's* (1948) heightened pedestrian antics of smoking, running, chasing, and shooting were metaphors to poke fun at America's morbid fascination and cult hero worship of gangsters. *Man of Action's* (1948) stressed-out busy businessman looks frantically at his wristwatch, sits anxiously in a meeting, and runs to hail a taxi. His wide, second-position lunges both literally and metaphorically attest to being pulled in two directions before finally collapsing backward. Gestural metaphors reveal not only the identity of X through actions, but also the relationship between his characters, whether real or imagined. For example in *Jacaranda* (1979), the daily act of pulling on clothing was

interpreted as a final layer of protective skin for the emotionally distant, “defensive, cocky” lover (Nuchtern 1979, Robertson 1979:112).

The simple, non-codified, mundane movement in *Getting Well* (1978) was not just a metaphor, but also was his actual convalescence from knee surgery. It “orchestrated an ode to the joy of locomotion” (Robertson 1979:110). Sally 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 or content occurred in performing the task itself and nothing more. Therefore, Nagrin challenged and differed from his contemporaries because he used task as metaphor rather than as ‘art for art’s sake.’

3. Agency and The Human Condition

Nagrin’s methods and works harmonized well with both Judaism’s *tikkun olam* and the early 20th Century aesthetic ethos that an artistic ideal was the solution. The prevailing Nietzschean, Kantian-based philosophy privileged “Dionysian Being” over “Apollonian Thinking”² so that experience and expression were viewed as important critiques of reason and scientific objectivity (see Habermas 1999). Art now could have an ameliorative function, capable of causing reflection on one’s own experiences and ideals for the purpose of improving society, maintaining order, and producing solidarity (Sparshott 1970). Leo Tolstoy’s Russian Socialist Realism regarded art as a useful unifying function through communicating feelings. This “progressive ideology of tolerance and egalitarianism” appealed to the New York independent Jewish choreographers (Jackson 2000:9, Perelman 2004, Prickett in Garafola 1994a). Francis Sparshott (1970:295) asserted that in a society that values the human condition, as did

these Jewish immigrants and their children including Nagrin, the greatest value will be placed on artistic works that embody the deepest feelings and ideas “about the world in which he lives.” For the Jewish artist in New York City at this time, three potent ethos synthesized *tikkun olam*, Russian Socialist Realism, and an American identity through modern dance. The resultant unifying message was that one could transcend circumstances to make positive, powerful statements for oneself and the community/world. Nagrin’s work is the embodiment of these three intersections.

Agency. But how does one actually do *Tikkun olam*? By doing good, helping others, and engaging in social activism (Jorisch 2018). Nagrin’s driving concern for the world around him can be defined as social activism or what anthropologists call agency. His “doing-acting” approach weaves character, intentions, and emotions into deliberate social action that assigns a specific kind of agency to any character (Meglin 1999:105, Schlundt 1997:2). Therefore, his dances are embodied expressions (Franko 1995) of contemporary social and political actions.

Anthropologist Jennifer Hornsby (2004:16 & 21) views human agency’s “realistic” bodily actions as *deliberate*, *willful*, and *intentional*. These actions are ethical choices and are treated as causal power, or agent-causation (1980 and 2004:19). Nagrin defined action as “the inner life that drives what we see on the stage . . . It refers to the *verb* that drives the dance and the dancer” (Nagrin 2001:44). Hornsby’s theories are very useful here to elucidate *tikkun olam*’s human agency in Nagrin’s works.

Through the deliberate actions of his characters, Nagrin “explores, values, and makes accessible what it means to be human” (Evans 2002:58) by provoking “audiences to share and ponder” (Schlundt 1998:531). His specific characters

embodied a critique of society that confirms Hornsby's concept of agent/causation: persons as agents who do something [action] that bring about "the things that they actually do [cause]" (Hornsby 2004:16). Nagrin wanted his audiences to "look at their lives and think about their values" (Schlundt 1997:62) through conflicted characters. His characters prompted viewers to acknowledge personal biases and to reflect on relevant, current social issues (Evans 2002). He articulated his agency 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

Some examples of agency in his works include a tribute to the hard labor of construction workers in *Path* (1965), challenging America's morbid fascination with the mob gangster in *Strange Hero* (1948), displaying fears of nuclear annihilation in *Indeterminate Figure* (1957), and confronting racism in *Not Me but Him* (1965). He protested the Vietnam conflict in *Peloponnesian War* (1968) and resisted institutional racism and sexism in *Poems Off the Wall* (1982). He focused on disturbing, dysfunctional relationships through *Jacaranda's* (1978) self-centered, cold-hearted man (Nuchtern 1979:38), *Ruminations'* (1976) pain of loneliness as he quoted Nietzsche, and *The Duet's* (1971) blatant domestic abuse. By bringing attention and immediacy to these issues, Nagrin's work blurred the boundaries between art and life, becoming "one step closer to real experience" (Kahn 1972:79). By exposing these messier aspects of life, Nagrin's *tikkun olam* compelled the viewer to grapple with and then repair and make the world a better place by looking at one's own life first.

Content and Marginalization. From his Dance Portraits to performative improvisation to performance art, Nagrin's commitment to human agency differed radically from most choreographers. However, it came with a price as it set him against the hegemonic modern dance canon. Nagrin's use of agency did not fit with modern dance's aesthetic guidelines set by Graham, Holm, Horst, Humphrey, Laban, the Judsons, and Merce Cunningham. These formalist, expressionist (Franko 1995) artists elevated empirical, external structures of classical form by manipulating space, floor pattern, body shape, texture, rhythm, and dynamics. Nagrin's works contrasted. Instead, he preferred working with the grittier, weightier, Dionysian aspects of contemporary life. Several people noted his Hellenistic penchant. Critic Louis Horst (1957:103) described some of his works as a "bitter social comment." John Gruen (1988) stated that his works conveyed social, political, and psychological attitudes. Scholar Christena Schlundt explained he "dealt with the plight of people in this world" and his focus was "always human beings and their relationships with their environment" (1997:70). Dancer Shane O'Hara (2005) said his works "still resonates today." Writer John Martin referred to his intrinsic motivational content as "motor characterization" (cited in Schlundt 1997:30). Nagrin (2001) simply called it "heart/mind."

Aesthetics philosophers Sheldon Cheney (1946) and Louis Arnaud Reid (1969:80) stated that art consists of two strands, "the discovery and construction of form," or finding and making, respectively. Accordingly, Nagrin is a 'dancefinder,' not a 'dancemaker,' since he created his dances through the act of discovering motivations and actions rather than by manipulating form. Nagrin's nonformalist, nonexpressionist method was not popular at the time, and his maverick approach was in direct contrast to

the form-based works of his contemporaries. His treatment of privileging content is *the* defining characteristic that distinguishes The Nagrin Method and shapes his style throughout his entire life. Therefore, Nagrin's *tikkun olam* positions him within a separate strand of modernism as he dared to challenge and defy the methods developed by the authorities of dance formalism. These differences are important when considering Nagrin's place in the history of American modern dance since these highly visible formalists constructed its prevailing view based in making dances (Jackson 2000, Kane 2002).

4. Structures and Devices: Alienation and Improvisation

I examine Nagrin's use of choreographic structures and devices, in particular alienation and improvisation, through the lens of Jewishness. Alienation and improvisation in and of itself are not peculiar Jewish traits, but I argue that the way Nagrin used them are examples of Jewishness through *tikkun olam's* mandate to challenge authority, ask the next question, and defy the obvious (Jorisch 2018).

Alienation. In general at this time, American audiences were familiar with German playwright Bertolt Brecht's (1898-1956) "epic theatre" of alienation (Chaikin 1991:38). Its aim is to alienate, dislocate, or interrupt strategically the habitual frames of reference or convention through a critical opposite, thereby making strange and peculiar the startling obvious, the ordinary, and the familiar (Mitter 1992). Also called detachment, it presents events with an unsentimental view yet calls the audience to action, even if it is merely to choose between two things (Chaikin 1991). It can be

achieved through iconic gestures, improvisation, and privileging the everyday (Banes 2003).

Jorisch (2018:6) states that perhaps the center of all *tikkun olam* teachings is to elevate and transform the mundane, including rituals, blessing, and everyday things, “into something holy.” Used in this way, alienation becomes an agentic device. For instance in *Spring '65*, Nagrin chats informally with the audience during and in between his dances while doing collectively familiar activities such as changing clothes and shoes and sipping a glass of water. He thus draws the audience into the performance through a familiarity of the everyday actions, then but defamiliarizes them from their quotidian contexts by displacing or dislocating them within a performance framework.

Nagrin presented, problematized, and challenged relationships and hegemonic ideals through alienation’s questioning and reflection to produce an “enquiring, cynical spectator” (Evans 2002, Nagrin 1997:82, and Schlundt 1997). As in Brecht’s epic theatre, he wanted to make the spectator assume a reflexive, questioning attitude toward events through dissociation, but without pity. For instance after a soliloquy about an unpleasant, sad relationship in *The Fall* (1977), Nagrin abruptly looked into his audiences and asked whether they have had a similar experience. In *Getting Well*, the audience relived his injury and convalescence “in total empathy” (Rosen 1979:12). *Jacaranda*’s moral theme of “loss” (Robertson 1979:47) invited personal reflection.

Nagrin’s defamiliarization can be seen as a structuring device by interrupting or blurring the boundaries between performer and spectator. *Peloponnesian War* is one of the best examples of Nagrin’s use of strategic interruption. Strategic interruption compels the audience to react or respond by personally identifying with X. He allowed

the sound tape to run for several minutes while the audience waited in the dark for the performance to begin. When the light arose, he was dressed as one of them -- an audience member. Then he mimicked their actions from his seat on stage as they stood for the national anthem (Schlundt 1997, Siegel 1969). 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). He also used "visceral responses" (Goldberg 1988:205) such as "continuous blackouts and bump ups -- to make darkness and fear palpable," suspended a chicken about to have its head cut off, used a live snake, fired a rifle point-blank at the audience, and threw things at them (Schlundt 1997, Siegel 1969:23). With the exception of the Judson group, Meredith Monk, and Pina Bausch, this "manner of working the audience" (Goldberg 1988, Nagrin 1997:83) differed from many companies of the time.

Improvisation. Nagrin's use of improvisation is another example of Jewishness due to his innovative approach. It is based upon observation, imitation, and imagination to construct a specific image. Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, and Helen Tamiris all used improvisation (Fuller-Snyder and MacDonald 1991, Nagrin 2001, Chujoy cited in Van Camp 1982). However, Nagrin's improvisation differed because he used it as a structuring device.

By the 1960s and 1970s, Nagrin created a new aesthetic called "interactive improvisation" which emphasized performative improvisation and formed his Workgroup (Nagrin 1994:ix, Schlundt 1997:70). His experimental aim was to give a distinctively

fresh quality of unexpectedness in performance as opposed to set choreography, permitting greater diversity within the movement (Nagrin 1994). An important progression was the realization that group work was founded on interconnectedness, interchange, and an intense focus on the other, or “*what the other person was doing*” (Nagrin 1994:13). Nagrin believed this re-directed process demanded attention and receptivity on all levels. He developed specific “exercises, games, and structures” or “EGAS” that were designed to increase awareness of one another during practices (Nagrin 1994:15).

Summary and Conclusion

I argued that Daniel Nagrin’s dances are studies in Jewishness as seen through Jorisch’s (2018:4, 6-7) lens of *tikkun olam* as historical and cultural values. It produces an innovative people mandated to repair and “make the world a better place” by seeking higher meaning and purpose, challenging and defying authority, asking questions, and transforming the mundane into something holy. By examining Nagrin’s methods, content and function, and structures and devices as examples of *tikkun olam*, dancing Jewish emerges clearly through Nagrin’s identity, agency, and questioning.

His innovative, six-step choreographic process that I have termed The Nagrin Method finds the specific image through specific action to define a specific purpose, what he called ‘this and that.’ He began by extending and exaggerating gestures into movement metaphors to arrive at deeper meaning, content, and function that centered on humanistic, relevant issues from the world around him. I draw upon Jennifer

Hornsby's (2004:23) theory of agent-causation with its "realistic account of human agency" to view his works as studies in agency, and aspect of *tikkun olam*.

Nagrin's innovative methods and works focus on the messier, complicated web of human interactions and relationships. The aim was to bring about both reflexivity and change, his version of repairing the world and making it a better place, through confrontation, questioning, and reflection. He used Alienation and Improvisation differently, often as structuring devices to dig deeper into the core of his character's X to make audiences think, ponder, reflect, and act.

Nagrin's Method provides an alternative lens through which we can analyze, read, and narrate the genre of American modern dance in new ways. He was a maverick and a man of conviction, not afraid to privilege content over form even though it placed him at odds with most other choreographers. His compelling social critiques not only distinguished him from them but also from formalist writers and critics, subsequently leading to his marginalization and elimination by positioning him within a different strand.

Nagrin's strand of modernism merits a re-visiting of historical strategies and modes of analyzing choreographic processes. It suggests the need for both a deeper examination of extant critical and historical writings and more thorough, critical analyses of concert works. Nagrin's confidence in his way of working led him unapologetically to challenge and defy hegemonic canons. His passion and innovation to create a new Method to focus on the human condition embodies the essence of *tikkun olam*. Daniel Nagrin's works are studies in Jewishness.

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Endnotes

¹ 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, Nagrin 2001).

² Apollonian vs Dionysian. John 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 defines classicism as 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 [particularly Apollo's]; 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). 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 privileged popular culture, experimentation, metaphors, and finding dances through the specific image of a character, the X. These are characteristics of Hellenism, which privileged the god Dionysius.