AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jamie Hoch for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on June 1, 2004.

Title: Space and Movement: Dance, Art, and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams.

Abstract approved: __________________________

Tracy Daugherty

The Modern era, roughly the time between 1860-1930, brought about a significant restructuring of artistic mediums. From the canvas to the page, artists of the twentieth century turned towards collaboration as a means by which they could reconfigure their works. Painters, writers, and dancers, borrowed aesthetic techniques from one another and transferred them into their own mediums. One of these borrowed techniques was the use of space. Space as a theoretical principle is the device from which we can observe the connections between the literary, visual, and dance mediums which were emerging at the turn of the twentieth century. These connections, centered on a similar theoretical principle, show the significance of these collaborations to the formation of modern art.

Current studies of these associations have been centered primarily on writers and painters—particularly the poetry of William Carlos Williams and twentieth century visual art. This critique extends those readings of Williams’ poetry to include the
influence of dance on his work as well. By critiquing a literary work through dance and dance theory, this study demonstrates on the one hand the importance of dance in the twentieth century, and on the other, that dance theory is a viable source from which the field can more aptly engage in the scholarly inquiries of other academic fields.

A study of Williams and dance not only reveals the interconnectedness between literature and dance, but it also serves as an example of dance criticism which moves beyond the sociological questions of dance. It is an inquiry into the philosophical and kinesiological aspects of dance which shows that while the art form is inherently connected to the sociological critiques of race, gender, and class, dance is also based in theory as well. To observe dance in these terms creates a more distinct parallel between dance and other academic discourses. This study demonstrates a way in which dance criticism can expand and establish a lasting position as a viable academic discipline.
Space and Movement:  
Dance, Art, and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams

by

Jamie Hoch

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of  
Master of Arts

Presented June 1, 2004

Commencement June 2005
Master of Arts thesis of Jamie Hoch presented on June 1, 2004.

APPROVED:

Redacted for Privacy
Major Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy
Chair of the Department of English

Redacted for Privacy
Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Redacted for Privacy

Jamie Hoch, Author
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Tracy Daugherty, the major professor for this thesis, for his time and support of this work. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee - Dr. Jon Lewis, Dr. Kerry Ahearn, and Dr. Jonathon King - who also gave their support to this project. And a special acknowledgment to my grandmother, Dr. Mildred Miya, for her continual guidance and support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One: Introduction:</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dance and the Artistic Collaboration of the 20th Century</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: A Means of Parallelism:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectivism and the Aesthetic Binaries of Space</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: From the Constructs of Dance: The Essence of Space and Movement in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Conclusion:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Theory to Influence: Dance and Dance Criticism</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Length, Depth, Breadth</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Levels of space</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The cube</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jean Metzinger “Tea Time” 1911</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Charles Demuth “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold” 1929</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. William Carlos Williams “The Great Figure” 1921</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The modern era, as Vargish and Mook suggest, is a time driven by "a culture made up of specialized but comparable phenomena at the forefront of intellectual change -- a culture acutely aware of its own innovation" (2). This observation is borne out in certain collaborations between modern art disciplines. Peter Halter says, "The formation of Modernist literature took place in a cultural climate characterized by an unprecedented collaboration between painters, sculptors, writers, musicians, and critics on both sides of the Atlantic" (1). Like other scholars such as Henry Sayre and Peter Schmidt, he argues that literature and the other arts of the twentieth century share a profound relationship. However, beyond the interaction of painting, literature, and music, within the same time period, there were significant correlations between these mediums and modern dance. During the modern period there was, as Amy Koritz notes, "an active engagement between literature and dance." She argues that the principles defined by such literary figures as Wilde, Yeats, and Eliot "shaped the evaluation of performed art" during that time (4). However, beyond literature's influence on the "evaluation of performed art," dance also shared specific theoretical ideas with the other arts, most notably the theory of space. The use of space became a means by which artists could conceptualize the environment which surrounded them.
The existence of dance both as a form of communication and of aesthetic value has always depended upon the recordings provided by the writers and historians of the time. Early accounts of dance can be found in the pictograms of past civilizations. Egyptian hieroglyphs visually depicted motion in sequence just as ancient Greek dramatic texts did with their chorus, thereby assuring historical survival of dance through visual symbols and text. It seems that from the beginning, dance, literature, and visual art have shared a common thread. It is not surprising, then, that dance and literature would again coalesce to describe and define the creative upheavals of the early twentieth century.

Dance in its most rudimentary forms is rooted in ballet, the form of dance which emerged in the French court of Henry III in the latter part of the sixteenth century. A century after the premier of the very first ballet, the *Ballet Comique de la Reine* in 1581, dance became viewed as a serious art form complete with a codified technique. In 1661 under the reign of Louis XIV, the ballet master Beauchamps developed the fundamental technique of ballet (Kraus et al 74). It is Beauchamps' codification of body alignment and foot placement that remains a basis for ballet, as well as modern dance of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Written in shorthand, Beauchamps' analysis of the body and movement defines the beginnings of dance as a serious art form.

Although ballet was celebrated for roughly four centuries, by the nineteenth century it began to fall from public favor. Its reluctance to deviate from the classical tradition and its inability to change in structure and content made it appear outdated.
For the audience, dance became “increasingly stodgy and stereotyped.” According to Kraus, ballet as late as 1890 continued to follow the same format that had been in effect for the previous three decades. Pantomimic sign language, which often was incomprehensible to the dancers, as well as the audience, was still used. Costumes, music, and décor were all composed in a perfunctory way that contributed to the sterility of the performance and had little vitality or originality. (91)

The archaic nature of dance during this time was clearly unable to keep pace in a world teeming with ideas of innovation and progress. As such, dance seemed to be discredited as a discipline and moved from the center of high society and the courts of Louis XVI, to the fringes of art in the modern era. Dance struggled to maintain its position as a serious art form until it was revived by the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes.

In 1909 Diaghilev assembled the leading dancers from Russia’s Imperial Ballet and brought them to Paris to perform (Kraus et al 143). With him he brought the renowned choreographer Michel Fokine and dancer Vaslav Nijinsky. With their radical reforms of ballet, these men would redefine the art form. The key innovations of ballet were due in large part to Fokine’s new principles of ballet. Although not replacing Beauchamps’ fundamental placements of the body, Fokine would transform the ballet from the fragmented and seemingly unconnected choreographies of the past to a more cohesive narrative structure. Fokine’s five principles of choreography and ballet were published in a letter to *The London Times* in 1914. Fokine said,

1. It is necessary to create for each new dance new forms of movement, suitable to the subject matter, period, or country of the ballet, and appropriate to the music, rather than to use ready-made movements straight from the classic tradition.
2. The dramatic action of the ballet should be continuously developed . . . , rather than using sections of pantomime to relate the story . . . [this] had no dramatic or narrative significance.

3. The traditional gesture-language . . . should be abandoned; instead, in its place, the entire body of the dancer should be used to communicate ideas and feelings.

4. Similarly, the entire group of dancers should be used to develop the theme . . . rather than having the corps de ballet provide decorative interludes that had no significance.

5. Ballet should reflect an active and equal cooperation of all the arts involved in it; music, scenery, dancing, costuming are all crucial to a unified creative effort. Specifically, music should no longer be a series of separate and unrelated numbers but should be a unified composition dramatically integrated with the plot.

(qtd. in Kraus et al 142-143)

Fokine's ideas identified the problematic nature of dance as a genre. Its discontinuity and unpopularity among audiences created an atmosphere ripe for reaction among dancers of the time.

Isadora Duncan, often regarded as the mother of American modern dance, reacted against every aspect of ballet in favor of individual expression. In her writings she proclaims, "... it is amorously that I dance; to poems, to music, but now I would like to no longer dance to anything but the rhythm of my soul" (qtd. in Brown 10).

Duncan was not interested in the technical principles derived from the classic tradition nor the new ideas set forth by Fokine. Instead, she felt that the essence of dance was internalized within the self. The future of dance was not found in the compositions of narrative ballet, but in the individual and self expression.

Duncan was known throughout the world as a dancer who "enjoyed taunting audiences with her freer, uninhibited movement, scanty costumes, and blatant
sexuality” (Mester 12). Her earthbound movements, bare feet and awkward body alignment was set against the jetes (leaps) and linear movements of the Ballets Russes. These separate modes of thought bring into view distinct arguments over dance as a sexualized or conformed art.

The pairing of the Ballets Russes and Duncan in this work is not with the purpose of discussing the sexual nature of dance in history. Instead, on the one hand, it is to reveal the two philosophies that emerged in dance at the turn of the century, and on the other, to demonstrate the various ways dance emerged as a modern art form. The Ballets Russes’s contribution to the modernization of ballet reveals that unlike other forms such as poetry, ballet, in order to become modern, had to move towards totality instead of fragmentation. The rise of dance is unique among the arts where, in the same era, Cubists were breaking up forms through multiperspective, and poets like Eliot and Williams were dismantling poetry in favor of fragments. In a reaction against traditional norms, dancers had to recreate their art in opposition to tradition in order to redefine themselves as distinctly modern.

Unlike the reforms of ballet, however, which indicate a diversion from the other arts, modern dance signaled a parallel between them. Just as painters and poets defied the formalities and the techniques of their discipline, Isadora Duncan reacted against the traditional techniques of ballet. In this sense, the modernization of dance is distinctly analogous to the other arts.

The similarities and disparities between dance, literature, and the visual arts, indicate that creative restructuring was occurring simultaneously at the turn of the twentieth century. The artistic upheavals occurring across the genres interested the
individual artist as he or she produced their work. Artists from all disciplines were intrigued by one another. Dialogue between the arts emerged as artists captured the essence of other forms through their medium. The infusion between the arts and the work each field produced is uncovered through an examination of the work of Cubists, Precisionists, William Carlos Williams, and dancers Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman, and Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes.

Chapter Two, "A Means of Parallelism: Perspectivism and the Aesthetic Binaries of Space," traces the idea of space from Leibniz to Einstein and parallels these notions with the theories of space forged by modern dance choreographers Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman. The combination of these spatial philosophies, in conjunction with the idea of perspective that was identified by the Cubists will lead to a definition of space as positive and negative binaries. Using the concept of these binaries, Chapter Three, "From the Constructs of Dance: The Essence of Space and Movement in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams," is an analysis of the writer’s poetry in terms of space as an aesthetic component, and considers the influences of dance and the visual arts in his work.

A critique of modern art, which includes dance, is an important aspect of the modern period and should be more vigorously pursued by scholars for its artistic as well as its historical and cultural value. Although dance has been implemented into the university system since the mid-twentieth century, it remains largely outside the interest of academia in terms of theory and criticism. The field’s marginality is due, in part, to the dance community itself. Its unwillingness to write about dance in theoretical terms
has hindered its own admission into academic circles. In the preface to *What is Dance?* Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen explain:

> The impulse to theorize about dance continues to meet with considerable resistance, not only from dancers and choreographers, but also from many dance critics and historians who tend to dismiss theory as either an irrelevance or an impertinence. According to this view, dance writing should be primarily descriptive; and writers who stray from the immediate, palpable surface of the dance commit an act of sacrilege against the art itself. . . . In their view, one of the functions of dance is to keep us firmly rooted on earth, to prevent us from floating away into the heady atmosphere of ‘pure’ thought. (viii)

To excuse the importance of theory as an act against the art form is not only misguided in judgment, but is also a significant reason for the field’s inability to be taken seriously by other scholars. The dance community cannot entertain the idea of inclusion in academia on the basis of descriptive writings and reviews of dance performances. While a description of a performance provides, in some cases, a clear account of movement phrases and costuming, it fails to recognize and comprehend the complexities inherent in the art form. Therefore, critics in the field need to broaden the scope of dance scholarship in order to create an academic interest in it.

The difficulties within the field itself, however, are not the only problems facing dance scholarship. Some of the complications confronting dance arise externally. As noted by Ann Daly, one of the major problems outside the field is that there is a lack of publishing venues available for those who wish to publish serious analytical works on dance. In her work *Critical Gestures: Writings on Dance and Culture*, she comments on the usefulness of the current publication outlets. She says that dance journals are “devoting much more space to promotional features than reviews” (xxii). In fact most of the magazines and journals like *Dance Magazine* devote the majority of
pages to discussing the biographies of current and past choreographers. The remaining sections are used as either an opportunity to promote and advertise private and public dance schools, or as "health watch" sections which devote space to the correct eating habits for dancers. These outlets clearly do not promote the field as a serious academic endeavor.

The other setback is that in higher education there are minimal opportunities to train as a scholar of dance. This problem has persisted since dance emerged onto the academic scene. Even though Maude May Babcock pioneered a dance program at the University of Utah as early as 1892, dance has been primarily associated with Physical Education departments. As such, departments have been slow to materialize in the larger university system. It was not until the 1940s that there was an interest in creating formal dance programs in higher education. The slow integration of dance programs into the university has hindered its scholarly advancement to the point that even the work of dance scholars today falls short in its attempt to become fully integrated into academia. In speaking of current scholarship, Daly goes so far as to say that "Dance is a discipline that still hasn't made contact with major twentieth-century thought such as semiotics and deconstruction. . . . Dance is a discipline that has been so busy trying to recapture its past that it often overlooks the challenges of the present" (xxii).

The delayed acceptance of dance programs in universities, as well as the field's disinterest in theoretical studies, has marginalized it from other academic departments, as well as from other art forms. However, over the past three decades, dance has made significant strides towards scholarly inclusion. Today, according to Kraus, Hilsendager and Dixon, there are ideally five major areas of dance criticism: anthropological,
psychological, sociological, philosophical, and kinesiological. Of these five areas, it seems that only sociological criticism, which under literary theory is new historicism, has found any substantial notice outside of the field. Even though Daly in her essay, "The Interested Act of Dance Criticism," cites ethnographic and feminist criticism as major components to dance analysis, she does not consider the psychological, philosophical, or kinesiological perspectives of the art. Her deletion of these three criticisms indicates the shift and concentration of the field to areas of cultural studies.

According to Ellen Goellner and Jacqueline Murphy, it was not until the advent of cultural theory that dance began to develop an analytical edge. The ideas fostered by cultural critics in the mid-twentieth century, then, provided an initial framework from which dance could more aptly engage in scholarly inquiries of gender and race (1-2). However, today, the integration of dance scholarship with cultural studies has left other important elements of dance, such as the philosophical and kinesiological aspects, largely unexplored. This may be explained by the field's rush to find acceptance in another area of study. A comparison between the findings of Copeland and Cohen and Goellner and Murphy reveals that dance came into academia over the course of roughly a decade. In 1983 Copeland and Cohen stated that "... dance critics and historians ... dismiss[ed] theory as ... an irrelevance" (Preface viii), and by 1994 Goellner and Murphy were celebrating dance in cultural studies. Since 1994, it seems, dance has merged with cultural studies on the basis of its significance to history and culture.

Although commendable, the inclusion of dance in cultural studies has limited the field to focus on a few concentrated areas of analyses. The danger inherent in this move is that dance will come to be viewed as an art solely of cultural significance and
not one of artistic or theoretical value. This is not to suggest that dance’s inclusion in cultural studies is not important. Dance, like all other art forms, does reveal the tensions of history and culture; however, it achieves that end through aesthetic and theoretical means. The choreographer, just like the painter or poet, utilizes philosophy and ideas to create the art that has so captured recent critics’ attention. It is then equally important to understand the theoretical perspectives that drive an artist towards his representation of his environment (i.e., culture). In order to better understand the importance of art, one must analyze the process and theories behind the creation. This becomes just as instructive as critiquing the final product for its cultural and historical significance. The idea of critiquing the process and source of art has been acknowledged and analyzed in both literary and visual art criticism. However, dance critics have minimized subjects such as aesthetics, philosophy, and craft because an aesthetic view in the past has been a “descriptive” representation of the performance having little to no academic substance. Critics shy from philosophy and craft perhaps because they are content with the current trend in dance theory or they feel these are somewhat uninteresting inquiries for their potential academic readership.

The criticism of philosophy and kinesiology should be reevaluated as a means by which dancers and choreographers can be recognized as equal to the painter and author. There needs to be at least an acknowledgment of dance in terms of the philosophical, where dance is infused with different theoretical principles. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the kinesiological, which emphasizes dance in terms of “the physical performance . . . as an aspect of human movement subject to basic scientific laws” (Kraus et al 370). Both these aspects reveal the complexities inherent in
the art. The uniqueness of dance, in terms of kinesiology, offers a method by which the discipline can expand its scope of scholarly inquiry. Moreover, a perusal of dance on these terms more effectively parallels the academic modes of other disciplines, particularly literature. Even though the current trend in literary criticism seems to be toward new historicism, as well as gender and cultural theories, literary scholars possess the skill to evaluate literary works in terms of formalism, philosophical theory, aestheticism, as well as historical/cultural merit. If dance and dance criticism is to be considered an equal counterpart to the established fields of academic scholarship, critics of dance need to include philosophical and kinesiological analyses so that they can more aptly and easily engage in questions of formalism, aestheticism, and philosophical theory. An expansion in this manner will allow dance to sustain a viable place in academia, even after the current trends of theory subside and new criticisms emerge. Dance critics should note that criticism dies out after time as scholars find new ways to evaluate and discuss art. If dance continues to be noted as a discipline which engages only the cultural and historical consciousness of the moment, then, dance will find itself in the same place it started: marginalized.
Chapter 2
A Means of Parallelism:
Perspectivism and The Aesthetic Binaries of Space

The scientific and mathematical theories that emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a significant impact on the ways modern artists conceived of space. From the work of scientists like Einstein and his seventeenth century predecessor Leibniz, to the mathematicians of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the theory of space transcended its scientific boundaries and emerged as an aesthetic principle in the modern arts. In the seventeenth century Leibniz proposed that there was an inextricable relationship between a body or object and space. Two centuries later, this notion reemerged in the work of Einstein and his Theory of Relativity. Einstein’s view of the relativity of space and time, in addition to the work of Leibniz, was instrumental to the conception of space in art. Modern artists adapted these theories and used them as a means by which they could represent their environment through their medium.

Space as it emerged in the arts, particularly in dance, echoed the observations made by Leibniz. Emerging in striking opposition to the idea of “absolute” space, which Newton forged in the same century, Leibniz, according to Lefebvre, believed that space is endowed both with a perfectly abstract quality which leads mathematical thought to treat it as primordial (and hence readily to invest it with transcendence), and with a concrete character (in that it is in space that bodies exist, that they manifest their material existence). [He concluded that] . . . there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space. . . . Each living body is space and has its space. . . . The living body, creates or
produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies. (170)

Space, as the entity which manifests the body's existence, reveals an idea that developed in modern dance and in the work of Rudolf von Laban.

During his lifetime, the German choreographer and dancer Rudolf von Laban developed a sophisticated system for documenting and analyzing the movement of the body in space. Laban began composing his treatise on *Choreutics* in 1939, the same year that he was banned from Germany and his work was declared "against the state" ("About" 4). In that same year, he moved to England. Almost thirty years later, in 1966, his work, annotated and edited by his associate Lisa Ullmann, was published in Great Britain. In 1974 Ullmann published the book in America under the title *The Language of Movement: A Guidebook to Choreutics*.

Derived from the Greek term *xoreuw*, to dance, and *sophia*, wisdom, come the three aspects of movement: *choreography*, *choreology*, and *choreutics* (Ullmann viii). Laban was interested in the *choreology*, "a kind of grammar and syntax of the language of movement, dealing with the outer form of movement but also with its mental and emotional content" (Ullmann viii). In his chapter the *Principles of Orientation in Space*, Laban states, "Man's movement arises from an inner volition which results in a transference of the body or one of its limbs from one spatial position to another" (10). For Laban, the "inner volition" or the "mental and emotional content" is a catalyst for movement. Moreover, it is the process by which the
"language of movement" is augmented. Simply, the decisions forged by the mind and by emotion govern the movement of the body.

In his theory of choreology, Laban defined the correlation between space and movement. "Space is a hidden feature of movement and movement is a visible aspect of space" (4). Movement cannot be conceptualized without the backdrop of space, nor can space be defined without movement. The term movement, the way it is used by Laban, is incorporated into the idea that the world, even when it appears to be in stillness, is actually in movement. He says, "We are perhaps still too accustomed to understanding objects as separate entities, standing in stabilised [sic] poses side by side in an empty space. Externally, it may appear so, but in reality continuous exchange and movement are taking place. . . . matter itself is a compound of vibrations" (4). Space, then, is not empty, but an entity of "vibrations" and "simultaneous movements" which makes movement visible (3-4).

Even though Laban identifies the connection between movement/space instead of body/space, his idea that there is an interdependency between space and movement reaffirms Leibniz's theory that "the living body creates or produces its own space" (Lefebvre 170). For Laban, a "living body" would constitute a "moving" body because, for him, matter is constantly in a state of movement and flux.

Beyond the relationship between space and movement, Laban further reasons that space is both general and personal. He refers to personal space as the body's "kinesphere." The kinesphere is "the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot, which . . . [is] call[ed] the 'stance' [or
Moreover, the basic elements of space are also three dimensional, consisting of length (height: up or down), breadth (the two directions: right or left), and depth (the two directions: forward and backward). When visualized, the combination of these three elements form the cube (Laban 11). Space is also divided into levels: "on the floor, . . . mid-height of the body, and . . . the height of the hands when raised above the head" (Laban 12).

Figure 1
Length, depth, breadth

Figure 2
Levels of space

Figure 3
The cube

Figures altered from Fig. 1.
The "three-dimensional cross." (Laban 13)
Laban's theory of space and movement materializes not only in his work, but in the work of his protégé Mary Wigman. A dancer and poet, Wigman studied Laban Notation, referred to above as choreutics, and used her interest in movement and poetry to express Laban's notion of space. In her poem "Space," Wigman considers the relationship between the movement of the dancer and space. She writes:

In the middle of space she is standing,
Upright,
Eyes closed,
Feeling the weight of the air which covers her.
The arm lifts itself carefully,
Groping,
Disturbs the unseen body of space.
She leans forward, feet following,
And direction is born.
Space tries to hold her,
And drags her back from the newly-found way.
Again up and down,
Forward and backward,
She combats with space for space,

The great, unseen, transparent space
Spreads without form,
Flowing.
A movement of the arm
Changes and forms it.

(Scheyer i)

Similar to Leibniz's observations of the interplay between body and air, and echoing Laban's idea of simultaneous movement in space, Wigman portrays the forces between the movement of the body in space. In her poem, the body is in "combat" with space, as though this action of combating is defining the movement and the motion is defining
the space. The space also becomes flexible as it "drags [the dancer] back from the newly- found way." Leibniz’s "laws of discrimination and space" have in this poem governed "the living body and the deployment of its energies" (Lefebvre 170).

Space also changes as the dancer’s kinesthetic field alters: she "disturbs the unseen body of space. / She leans forward, feet following, / And direction is born." By leaning forward, the dancer is utilizing depth, as defined by Laban. The forward movement, then, initiates the "direction" as the body moves from one "place" to another. This change of direction is immediately countered as space tries to "drag her back" into place. This opposition, then, between the body moving and the space attempting to deny that change of direction makes the dancer’s body move "up and down / forward and backward," and thus moving the body through the height and breadth of space. This exchange and tension between the body and space becomes, then, not only the embodiment of Wigman’s own thought that space "is an important silent partner of . . . dance" (Scheyer 16), but it also is a representation of the ways in which theories of dance can be incorporated into a literary genre.

While Leibniz’s and Laban’s notions of space reveal a means by which to establish a connection between art and science, it is important to note that creativity is also an intrinsic part of the scientific process. Although space as theorized by Leibniz is comparable to the Special Theory of Relativity, Einstein’s methodology reveals that, in the modern era, science and art were also closely related in terms of the use of creativity, particularly that of the imagination. The conception of Einstein’s theory, then, becomes interesting to observe not only in terms of science, but also from a creative standpoint as well. Einstein states, "When I examine myself and my methods
of thought I come to the conclusion that the gift of fantasy has meant more to me than my talent for absorbing positive knowledge” (qtd. in Gardner 105). Interestingly, it is to fantasy and the imagination that Einstein attributes his thinking, and not to the traditional view that scientific methodology consists only from the basis of confirmed solutions. In his analysis of Einstein’s work, Howard Gardner further suggests that “Space and time — no more absolute — have become forms of intuition that cannot be divorced from perspective or consciousness, any more than can the colors of the world or the length of a shadow” (114). Einstein’s methodology reveals the idea of space as emerging from creative, not definable constructs. His method not only dismantles Newton’s notion of absolutes in the modern era, but it also reconfigures traditional scientific practices used by both Newton and Leibniz.

Derived from the imagination, then, Einstein’s by-now established premise that space bends and is relative to time defines a temporal shift in the perception of time and space that was essential to the development of modern thinking. It is from this atmosphere that theories of space, such as the one defined by Laban, emerge. These theories, defined by science and dance, when considered together, offer a perception that space can be defined in the form of binaries — positive and negative. In his book The Culture of Time and Space, Stephen Kern defines these binaries: “‘Positive negative space’ implies that the background itself is a positive element, of equal importance with all others . . . . it implies that what was formally regarded as negative now has a positive function” (153). For the artist, then, Space can be understood as a relative entity composed of positive and negative aspects that change with perspective. Negative and positive space are binaries in which the negative affirms the positive. The
canvas, in painting, and the white page in poetry serve as negative space while the artistic medium such as paint or print constitutes positive space. Also, a body or object in space serves as positive, while the space encompassing the object or body is negative, an idea that was grounded in Leibniz's ideas of abstract and concrete space and reiterated in Wigman's suggestion that "A movement of the arm / Changes the form of [space]" ("Space"). Time, as relative, is a quantifiable interval defined by speed and rhythm. Rhythm, in a regular or irregular state, has inherent pauses that represent negative space. Moreover, space as a positive and negative entity changes with perspective. The binaries of space are, in part, relative to time and exist in conjunction with bodies and objects which change with perspective and thus define space as positive or negative.

The relationship between perspective and space can be traced through the history of perspectivism in the visual arts. Prior to the modern period, perspective was identified by painters as a technique by which "the whole picture or design is calculated to be valid for one station or observation point only" (Giedion 31). This singular view, as noted by Giedion, was not only a result of a new understanding of space, but it also allowed space to be "translated into artistic terms" (31). Since the Renaissance, space has been integrated into visual art through perspective. This correlation between the two -- space and perspective -- has remained the same in so far as one is related to the other. However, in the modern period the relationship changes with the advent of Cubist theory.

The Cubist era in the visual arts began in the mid-nineteenth century with the work of the Post-Impressionist painter Cezanne and continued into the turn of the
twentieth century in the art of, among others, Picasso and Braque. Originating from "Matisse's word 'Cube' ... [and] used for the first time in an article on the 1909 Solon des Independants ..." (Chipp 250), Cubism, has come to be defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Art as,

a radical departure from the idea of art as the imitation of nature that had dominated European painting and sculpture since the Renaissance ... [It] abandoned traditional notions of perspective, foreshortening, and modeling, and aimed to represent solidity and volume in a two-dimensional plane without converting the two-dimensional canvas into a three-dimensional picture-space. (129)

Presenting a representation of "solidity and volume in a two-dimensional plane" on a two-dimensional surface, Cubists portrayed different characteristics of the object simultaneously, thereby theoretically defining a "conceptual realism rather than an optical and Impressionistic realism" (Oxford 129). Picasso says, "the secret of my deformations ... is that there is an interaction, an intereffect between the lines in a painting; one line attracts the other and at the point of maximum attraction the lines curve in towards the attracting point and form is altered" (qtd. in Ashton 24).

In the modern period, Cubist painters used ideas of space and perspective derived from mathematical theories to achieve "an intereffect between the lines in painting" and accomplish "deformation" in visual art. This alteration in form, as it materialized in the work of Cubist painters, allowed them to "dismantle the uniform perspectival space that had governed painting since the Renaissance and reconstructed objects as seen from several perspectives" (Kern 132). The catalyst which allowed Cubist painters to move away from the traditional concepts of space and perspective can be found in the transformations of geometry and linear mathematic thought that
were pervasive at the turn of the twentieth century. Similar to the ways in which dance echoes the principles of Leibniz and Einstein, Cubism also contains the essence of the mathematical principles, particularly those which emerge in defiance of Euclid’s system of geometry.

Geometry, the field of mathematics which studies space in terms of points, lines, and planes on a given surface, was, prior to the nineteenth century, defined by Euclidean geometry. In his fifth postulate Euclid stated that “through a point in a plane it is possible to draw only one straight line parallel to a given straight line in the same plane” (Kern 132), and, thus, the lines will continue into infinity and never converge. However, working from a context which measured space on flat surfaces, Euclid’s idea fell under scrutiny as nineteenth century mathematicians began to recapitulate the representations of space and define it in terms of the “curvature of spherical space” (Antliff and Leighten 63).

This shift from Euclid’s view of space to a view that space is flexible was prompted by the work of Georg Fredrich Riemann. His theory that space was “the study of an infinite number of dimensions, subject to myriad types of curvature” (Antliff and Leighten 73), sparked an idea that would become the basis for non-Euclidean geometry. Spatial curvature, according to non-Euclidean mathematics scholars, “was not constant and objects could change their shape and properties as their position in space changed” (73). This idea of “malleable” forms, as Antliff and Leighten suggest, would be a key influence upon the ways the Cubist painters used space and perspective.
Perhaps the most influential mathematical ideas came from Henri Poincare's study of non-Euclidean geometry. In his work Poincare argued that "our models of space are obtained through the fusion of visual, tactile, and 'motor spaces' . . . ." Moreover, "our industrial experience of space is nothing more than a projection of our responses to bodily stimuli" (Antliff and Leighten 73). Poincare's theory of space as related to "bodily stimuli" seems to echo Laban's theory of the nature and relationship between the body and space. The idea that space is constructed by bodily responses and stimuli is particularly evident as one reconsiders Wigman's dancer in her poem "Space." Her depiction of a dancer "that disturbs the unseen body in space" and "The great, unseen, transparent space / Spreads without form / . . . A movement of the arm / Changes and forms it," echoes Poincare's idea that space is formed by bodily stimulus. Wigman's poem, as it did in relation to Laban's ideas, serves as an agent which transforms mathematical/scientific principles into art.

The transformation of mathematical ideas into artistic work, however, is perhaps most apparent in the Cubist theories of space and multiperspective. In their work, Antliff and Leighten cite Jean Metzinger's painting Le Gauter (tea-time) as an example of the ways in which multiperspective is achieved in painting (Fig. 4).

Figure 4
Jean Metzinger "Tea Time" 1911
Metzinger’s model sits at the table frozen in the moment between drawing tea from the cup to the spoon and sipping it. This pose, however, seemingly finds movement through the use of multiperspective. A particular example of the changing perspective and movement is found in the angular juxtapositions of the lines in the work.

An examination of the woman’s facial features, as well as the representation of the tea cup, demonstrates the perspectival changes in the painting. The face, turned slightly to the left, is complicated by the nature of the subject’s gaze. The right eye gazes off to the left and in the same direction as the face, whereas the left eye is transfixed in a forward stare. The left eye, then, sits in perspectival juxtaposition to the other facial features, and is not in profile with the rest of the face. The saucer and the cup also complicate perspective in the painting. The vertical center of the objects are split by a singular line. The left side, from the observer’s standpoint, is shown in a frontal view, whereas the right side of the object is portrayed from a heightened view. It is as though the painter moved to a position somewhat above the object.

The movement of the painter around his subject has created the appearance of multiple perspective. The physical movement of the painter is defined as “motor space.” Antliff and Leighten note that through the use of “motor space,” perspective was achieved, and that through multiple views, “painting could evoke a complex series of mental associations between past and present muscular, tactile or olfactory sensations…” (79). The association between perspective and “muscular, tactile or olfactory sensations” are, as noted by the critics, the results of Poincare’s influence on Cubism.
Artists, as seen through the examples of dance and visual art, are acutely aware of the space that encompasses them, and they differentiate or conceptualize that environment by acknowledging space as fluctuating and associated with the body and objects. It is, as I have suggested, space as a binary of positive and negative aspects that change with perspective. The ideologies of space, as defined by Einstein and Leibniz and the theories of the perspective forged by Cubists, represent the unifying elements between the various art forms. Moreover, through an understanding of the ways space is used in art and dance, one can move effectively towards an analysis of space as it is used in poetry, particularly by William Carlos Williams.

Williams was interested in other art forms and the use of space as an aesthetic component of creative art. In his book, The Embodiment of Knowledge, he critiques "The Logic of Modern Letters, Primary." In this brief essay on language, he states,

Language is made up of words and their configurations, (the clause, the sentence, the poetic line -- as well as the subtler style); to these might be added the spaces between words (for measurement's sake) were these not properly to be considered themselves words -- of a sort. (141)

Williams alludes to the definition of space as binaries, positive and negative. In his work the binaries exist in "the spaces between words" where the printed letters form the positive space and the whiteness of the page the negative space. As the poet notes, these "spaces between words . . . [are] considered themselves words . . ." (141).

It is through this lens of space, with an emphasis on the relationship between the words to the whiteness of the page that I will discuss the poetry of William Carlos Williams. However, because he was so influenced by the other art forms, particularly visual art
and dance, this study will also note key ideas and works of poetry that directly relate to
the modern dancers Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham, and the dancers and
choreography of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. In that same sense, the critique will
explore representations of space and show particular correlations between Williams’
work and the Precisionist painters. An analysis of Williams’ poetry in terms of space
and the other arts, then, reveals the subtle and yet important mergers between the art
forms of the modern era.
Chapter 3

From the Constructs of Dance:
The Essence of Space and Movement in the Poetry of William Carlos Williams

Literary scholarship based on Williams' interest in the visual arts has surfaced in the works of Henry Sayre and Bram Dijkstra. To Sayre, "Williams [and Pound have] been mistakenly canonized as . . . father figure[s] for an entire generation of poets who value speech over writing, performance over text, parole over ecriture" (3). Sayre argues against this traditional view and states that Williams' "last poems, the ones in which his new measure is finally achieved, are meant to be read, with the eye, on the page" (4). Sayre argues that from "the painters with whom he associated throughout his life, Williams learned one lesson especially: the advent of pattern or design in a work of art is a function of the imagination, and the justification for the artistic imagination is, in fact, its ability to order or compose the world" (4). In order to defend his thesis, Sayre defines the poet's "visual text." The "visual text" is found within the space of poetry. Sayre states,

The "space" of Williams’s poetry is both subjective and objective, but it is not a space created by synthesis of the two. It is a space defined . . . by the poem’s visual dimension, a dimension which embodies for Williams the artistically creating subject’s imposition of formal design upon the world. . . . It is a space which not only represents the aesthetic relation between the artist and his world, but also embodies the relation between the artist and his audience . . . . It is to this new poetic space, in which the demands of the aural and the visual unendingly compete, that I refer when I speak of the ‘visual text.’ (6)

Though Sayre’s critique of Williams’ poetry analyzes space in terms of the “visual dimension” of the poem, and space as it “represents the aesthetic relation
between the artist and his world,” the definition of space offered in this study differs from Sayre’s as to its origins. The previous chapter traced theories of space from the scientific world and demonstrated the parallel between these notions and Laban’s *Choreutics*. Space has been defined as binaries, positive and negative. Extrapolating from this definition, we can analyze Williams’ poetry from its “visual dimension.” In this context, we can establish Williams’ association with the visual arts and offer a critique of a literary genre through the lens of dance theory.

Our main focus, then, is Williams’ interest in the other art forms and the use of space as an aesthetic component in creative art. The poet’s interest in “the space between words” as an important aspect to the overall expression of the poem reveals his use of positive and negative space on the page. Laban’s notion of dance that “Space is a hidden feature of movement and movement is a visible aspect of space” (4) can be transposed onto literary art. Like Laban, Williams used space between his words as “a hidden feature” of his form, and acknowledged that poetry, as a visual medium, cannot be conceptualized without the backdrop of space, nor can space be defined without the words on the page. It is from Laban’s notion that Williams’ work can be analyzed as a visual form of art.

Certain modern dancers also had a particular influence on Williams’ work. These influences emerge throughout his writings either in terms of subject matter, such as his poems “The Dance” and “Danse Russe,” or in terms of dedications such as “War, The Destroyer,” a dedication to Martha Graham. These poems not only reveal Williams’ awareness of the dancers of his time, but also establish another lens from which to view his art. It is through these works that the scope of Williams’ association
with other arts can be broadened, and that dance, in particular, can be viewed as influential to other artists of the time.

Williams' interest in other art forms, particularly the visual arts, stems from his association with Ezra Pound and the Imagists. Working from T.E. Hulme's notions of the image, Pound asserted that an "image . . . presented 'an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' -- with the intellectual component borne by visual images, the emotional by auditory" (Harmon and Holman 264). Amy Lowell solidified Pound's idea of the relationship between the image and poetry in *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry.* In her work she defines the major objectives of Imagism. Harmon and Holman summarize these aspects in the following:

(1) to use language of common speech but to employ always the exact word -- not the nearly exact; (2) to avoid the cliché; (3) to create new rhythms as the expressions of a new mood; (4) to allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject; (5) to present an image (that is, to be concrete, firm, definite in their pictures -- harsh in outline); (6) to strive always for concentration, which, they [the Imagist poets] were convinced, was the very essence of poetry; (7) to suggest rather than to offer complete statements. (264)

Although Pound dismissed Lowell's extensions of Imagism as "Amygisms" -- in part because of the discontent shared between Pound and Lowell -- her ideas were key to Williams' own philosophy of art and poetry.

Even though Williams ultimately moved away from Imagism, the influence of both Pound and Lowell gave him access to the thinking of visual artists of his time and also, from a literary viewpoint, showed him how to move beyond the conventional form of poetry. One of the key premises of Imagism comes from the visual arts. "The 'direct treatment of the 'Thing,' whether subjective or objective'" (qtd. in Dijkstra 24),
is an idea instigated by the Post-Impressionist painter Cezanne, and borrowed by Pound in his Imagist Manifesto. This idea would become a fundamental aspect of Williams’ work, as well as “nearly all painters that came after [Cezanne]” (Dijkstra 24).

The Imagist’s attention to “common speech” was also a catalyst for Williams. The poet was, prior to his experiences with the Imagists, writing in the conventional form used by the Romantics. It was only after, or perhaps through, his experience with Pound and Lowell that his focus shifted from the poetic language of the Romantics to the type of speech he would define as the American idiom.

Williams altered Lowell’s idea of the “exact word” to that of finding an exact language which could effectively avoid the “cliché” of traditional literary verse, and which would “create new rhythms” capable of expressing the “new mood” of twentieth century thought. He found this in the American idiom. In an interview with Stanley Koehler in 1962, he discusses the importance of American speech and notes its difference from the European vernacular. He states that the American idiom is “not the speech of English country people, which would have something artificial about it; not that, but language modified by our environment, the American environment” (Interviews 59).

The idea that European vernacular is artificial not only indicates his regard for American speech, but also presents a critique on the language that has been at the core of literary art from Shakespeare to the Romantics. The artificiality of English is, for Williams, perhaps connected to the idea of the cliché. As English poets allude to the works and phrases of their predecessors, the repetition of those lines lose their prominence and become cliché. To avoid this, then, Williams offers a shift towards
speech that is fresh, not encumbered by any prescriptive history, able to more effectively relate the “new rhythms” and express the “new mood” of the time.

This appeal in the context of literary criticism alone is important to an understanding of Williams’ work, as well as to an understanding of the modern era. However, it is also important in placing Williams in an interdisciplinary context. Williams’ interest parallels an idea which was emerging at the same moment in American modern dance. Like Williams, Isadora Duncan, the founder of “American” dance was also striving to break from tradition and establish a native cultural form. For centuries, dance had been defined by the techniques developed by the sixteenth century French ballet master Beauchamps. His codification of body alignment and foot placement serve as the central core for ballet even today. Duncan, however, discarded these ideas and proposed a new type of dance that would have inherent in it the essence of the American culture. She, like Williams, felt that tradition had created an art inundated by clichés. The technique of ballet was like the poet’s use of the English vernacular — stodgy and constrained by its own sense of history and tradition. Like the numerous poets who use Shakespeare’s lines to allude to their own time, choreographers, too, were using Beauchamps’ technique to repeat the art of the past. Duncan believed that the only way to rejuvenate the art was to digress from it completely, and create a new form that expressed an American sensibility.

Like Williams, Duncan found inspiration through the voices of other artists. Her celebration of America came from the writings of Walt Whitman. In her book My Life, Duncan goes so far as to position herself as a next generation Whitmanian, and writes, “The supreme poet of our country is Walt Whitman. I am indeed the spiritual daughter
of Walt Whitman. For the children of America I will create a new dance that will express America. I bring the theatre the vital soul that it lacks, the soul of the dancer” (31). She assumed this responsibility to bring America its own form of art, and imagined the country, in a sense, dancing to the songs evoked by Whitman.

However, despite the fact that both Williams and Duncan pursued their art through an American vein, ironically both had to look towards Europe to find the basis from which they could affirm their ideologies. Although Duncan longed to dance the American dance, her audience discredited her. It was not until she received praise in Paris that she became popular in America.

Williams was also keenly aware that the epicenter for the avant-garde was initially in Europe. And it was to Europe, particularly the French painters, that Williams looked as models for American art. In *The Embodiment of Knowledge*, he acknowledges a debt to the French painters. In his section titled “French Painting,” he states, “all painting is representation and cannot be anything else. . . . It is to represent nature. The problem being: what shall we represent and how? . . . The writer is to describe, to represent just as the painter must do — but what? and how?” (22). His answer to this question is in part that writers must follow the French painter’s example of “following a local tradition.” He writes, “The virtue of Paris is not that it is a world capital of art. Facile nonsense. It is that Paris is a French city, dominated by French ideas -- attracting the good to that, to that positive. None more local than the French: it’s vigor. It is the local that is the focus of the work -- everywhere available” (23-24). For Williams, it was essential that an artist use the local as subject matter. The poet’s regard for the locality of the subject also echoes his idea of common language in
poetry. He believes, then, that both the language and the subject matter must stem from a local environment — the American environment.

In contrast to his scolding of England as “artificial,” Williams seems somewhat indebted to France. He writes, “French painting from this viewpoint . . . can be highly instructive to the writer — as it has been to me — ” (22). And on the influence of French artists on American painters he argues that “Someone by the name of Stearns has kicked against the pricks of French painting, saying that it has seduced American painters as it has, save for a few. All right. If the rest are not witty enough to circumvent, even use, that influence — to hell with them ” (24). Unlike Sterns, Williams does not see the French influence as the seduction of American painters. Instead, he sees the French solely as models by which Americans can learn to use their own environment as the subject of their work. In his concluding remarks, he discusses the mode of interpretation for an American painter. He asks,

Well, what does one see? to paint? Why the tree, of course, is the facile answer. Not at all. The tree as a tree does not exist literally, figuratively or any way you please — for the appraising eye of the artist — or any man — the tree does not exist. What does exist, and in heightened intensity for the artist is the impression created by the shape and color of an object before him in his sensual being — this whole body (not his eyes) his body, his mind, his memory, his place: himself — that is what he sees — And in America — escape it he cannot — it is an American tree.

Render that in pigment and he asserts his own existence . . . he becomes prophet and seer in so far as he is wholly worthy to be so.

That is the significance, the penetration, the wit and power of a picture. (24- 25)

According to Williams, the artist has an intimate relationship with his subject. He has a “heightened intensity” which allows him to depict the object subjectively, creating his “impression” of the world around him. Through his heightened sense, he is
able to not only reveal his own interpretation of his environment, but he is also capable of ascertaining his own existence in relation to the object, as well as in the larger environment. It is this intimacy between artist and subject that Williams believed was missing from American art. In his essay "The American Background," he claims, "The thing that Americans never seem to see is that French painting, as an example of what is meant, is related to its own definite tradition, in its own environment and general history.... And that American painting, to be of value, must have comparable relationships in its own tradition, thus only to attain classic proportions" (Selected Essays 157). It is interesting that in "The American Background" Williams repeats, almost verbatim, his sentiments towards the French painters which he espoused in The Embodiment of Knowledge. However, there is a sense of judgment in "The American Background" that is absent in Embodiment. In his essay he states "American painting, to be of value" should find inspiration in its own environment, whereas in Embodiment he merely suggests that American painters cannot escape their surroundings and, thus, should represent the subject from their own subjective point of view. The subtle diction difference — from a suggestive statement to a claim of value — suggests that, for Williams, it is not merely that artists need to represent, to rephrase his analogy in Embodiment, "an American tree" because it is American and can only be American. By incorporating the American scene into art and by acknowledging the artist's existence in relation to this environment, American art can find a legitimate place in the modern era. Williams was not the only artist who hoped to validate American art. The Precisionist painters who shared Williams' position defined an art movement that rose succinctly with the advent of industry and the modern American city.
As the physical constructs of the landscape shifted more drastically from a rural to an urbanized setting, and social space became more condensed, the construction of the city began to re-characterize the ways the artist conceptualized his environment in terms of space. Perhaps one of the first groups to acknowledge this shift was the architects who were responsible for building the structures that would become the key subjects for American painters and writers. It seems that, for the modern architect, the city not only brought about a sense of condensed social space, but also a sense of restriction. This constraint is noted by the Dutch architect Hendrick Berlage:

"Architecture must recognize its true purpose as an 'art of space.' The primary subjects of architecture are not so much walls and ceilings as the spatial enclosures created by them" (qtd. in Kern 156-157). American architect Frank Lloyd Wright shared this sentiment: "Space [is] the basic element of architectural design" (qtd. in Kern 157).

According to Kern it was this attention to spatial enclosures and open spaces that prompted the idea of space which is positive and negative. He explains,

Around the turn of the century, architects began to modify the way they conceived of space in relation to their constructions. Whereas formerly they tended to think of space as a negative element between the positive elements of floors, ceilings, and walls, in this period they began to consider space itself as a positive element, and they began to think in terms of composing with "space" rather than with differently shaped "rooms." (155)

Kern reasserts the attention to space, particularly as positive and negative, as an aesthetic component of art. From architecture to dance, and painting to poetry, space is an agent by which the artist creates a sense of meaning between himself and his environment. And it is this attention to the artist and the environment which Williams
and the Precisionists hoped to achieve through their urban subjects, created by the modern architect.

From the perspective of the Precisionists, the rise of the American city not only created a sense of space, it also redefined the constructs of American culture. As industrial progress enticed the population to move into cities, it flourished and a new popular culture arose. The cities became venues for the cinema, the new medium of the time. These media, in conjunction with architectural works, created an aspect of the environment that was particularly interesting to the artists of the time. Painters, particularly the Precisionists, were acutely aware of the phenomenon and sought to incorporate a sense of the new modern American into their work. In his chapter, "The Artist Looks at the Machine," Miles Orvell states, "'Precisionists'—began to create a visual and literary culture that responded to the extraordinary transformations of American society under the impact of the machine" (3). Using the subject of the machine in the urban environment, and depicting that subject through distinctly clear and defined lines, these painters formed, as Williams hoped American artists would, a representation of modern America.

Their technique which is almost photographic in nature is the most compelling aspect of their representations because it reveals a sense of the relationship between the artist and the immediate environment. Moreover, it is, according to The Oxford Dictionary of Art, a technique derived from the French Cubist forms.

Urban and especially industrial subjects were depicted with a very smooth, and precise technique, creating clear, sharply defined, sometimes quasi-Cubist forms. The terms 'Cubist-Realists', 'Immaculates', and 'Sterilists' are also
applied to Precisionist painters. . . . In Precisionist painting the light is often brilliantly clear, and frequently forms are chosen from their geometric interest. (399)

The Precisionist's attention to geometry is key to the manner in which they related to Cubist ideas. As noted in the previous chapter, perspectivism in Cubism derives from Riemann's mathematical equations in non-Euclidean geometry. Riemann's ideas continued in Poincare's work, which then were transferred into Cubism and seen explicitly in Jean Metzinger's painting "Le Gauter."

The connection, then, drawn between the Precisionists and Cubism constitutes the elements that shaped Williams' own technique for representing visual art in poetry. His close friendships with foremost Precisionist painters, Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler, as well as his association with all of the artists of the Walter Arensberg group, which included Isadora Duncan, provided the vehicle by which his art could incorporate other art forms, and even fuse with them. In his work William Carlos Williams and the Painters, 1909-1923, William Marling elaborates on Williams' close, influential friends. "As his critics and confidants [Williams] preferred friends such as Pound, his brother Ed, and Charles Demuth — people he had known for a long time. Much of what he saw, read and did, he pursued on the strength of their recommendations" (5). Through his close friends, Williams was introduced to the Arenbersgs who, at that time, held weekly parties for the most "ambitious painters and poets" of the time (Marling 6). Poets and painters were not the only artists present at these parties, however. As Patrick Stewart's work on the Arensberg circle reveals, Isadora Duncan was also a frequent visitor to the studio between 1914 and 1918. She,
along with French painter, Marcel Duchamp, Precisionist painters Charles Demuth and Charles Sheeler, as well as poets Alfred Kreymborg, Williams, and Mina Loy constitutes a partial list of artists at the apartment during these years. (Marling 6). In his autobiography, Williams recalls particular moments at the Arensberg’s apartment. "There were parties, mostly of painters, at Arensberg’s studio . . . . You always saw Marcel Duchamp there. His painting on glass, half finished, stood . . . along with one of Cezanne’s . . . [and] the work of Gleizes and several others. It disturbed and fascinated me. I confess I was slow to come up with any answers” (136). These parties were, for Williams, a way to understand the concepts behind the painter’s forms. He adds, “After all, most of us were beginners in matters of art, no matter how we might try to conceal the fact; bunglers, surely, unable to compete in knowledge with the sophisticates of Montmartre” (137). Williams’ acknowledgment of the sophistication of French painting reveals a sense America’s disposition toward the modern period. For the poet, the American position in the modern art world became apparent at the Armory Show in 1913.

As noted by the American Federation of Arts, the exhibition was held on February 17th, 1913, at "the armory of the New York National Guard . . . officially called the International Exhibition of Modern Art, it feature[d] Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, Neo-Impressionist, Fauve, Symbolist, German Expressionist, and Cubist works and provide[d] the American public with the first real opportunity to view avant-garde European art " (“Debating” 1). Williams attended this exhibition and in his autobiography writes,
There was at that time a great surge of interest in the arts generally before the First World War. New York was seething with it. Painting took the lead. It came to a head for us in the famous “Armory Show” of 1913. I went to it and gaped along Duchamp’s sculpture . . . A magnificent cast-iron urinal, glistening of its white enamel . . . The silly committee threw out the urinal, asses that they were. The “Nude Descending a Staircase” is too hackneyed for me to remember anything clearly about it. But I do remember how I laughed out loud when I first saw it, happily, with relief. (134)

The laughter expressed by Williams after he saw Duchamp’s work is the culmination of an event that, as Williams recalls, “. . . shocked New Yorkers into a realization, a visualization, that their world had been asleep while the art world had undergone a revolution” (qtd. in Dijkstra 9). Although he found the Armory Show, and particularly Duchamp’s work, irresistibly humorous, he noted the serious implications of it all. He writes:

There was a break somewhere, we were streaming through, each thinking his own thoughts, driving his own designs toward his self’s objectives. Whether the Armory Show in painting did it or whether that also was no more than a facet — the poetic line, the way the image was to lie on the page was our immediate concern. For myself all that implied, in the materials, respecting the place I knew best, was finding a local assertion — to my everlasting relief. I had never in my life before felt that way. I was tremendously stirred. (138)

He was stirred by the group’s break from traditional forms, as at first exemplified through the progressive works of Duchamp, and second as each artist in the Arensberg group moved towards their individual pursuits. Whether simply a “facet” or not, the Armory Show was a catalyst for his own work which he found could be in “the place [he] knew best,” in “a local assertion."

His close relationship with Demuth provides a direct example of the crossing of genre lines between painting and poetry. In 1921 Williams published his poem “The
Great Figure.” This piece, Williams writes, was inspired by a visit to Marsden Hartley’s studio.

Once on a hot July day . . . I dropped in as I sometimes did at Marsden’s studio on Fifteenth Street for a talk. . . . As I approached his number I heard a great clatter of bells and the roar of a fire engine passing the end of the street down Ninth Avenue. I turned just in time to see a golden figure 5 on a red background flash by. The impression was so sudden and forceful that I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote a short poem about it.

(Autobiography 172)

This poem became “The Great Figure” which, seven years after its publication, would be reconfigured into a painting by Demuth (Fig. 5) (Aiken 178).

Among the rain and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red firetruck moving
tense unheeded
to gong clangs siren howls
and wheels rumbling through the dark city.

Figure 5 Charles Demuth “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold” 1929

In his article, “‘I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold’: Charles Demuth’s Emblematic Portrait of William Carlos Williams,” Edward Aiken provides an excellent reading of the poem and the painting. According to Aiken, this painting is one of a collection of “Poster portraits” that Demuth painted for artists and writers. These portraits are
symbolic in that they use "words and images of objects to evoke the identity of the
subjects." And through the juxtaposition between words and images with an emphasis
on "design, color, line . . . the portrait complex . . . must be read and interpreted to
identify the subject correctly and to discern the nature of those personality traits that
the artist has chosen to emphasize" (178). The traditional use of physiognomy has no
dominant role in Demuth's portraiture. The painting, through the use of images and
language, attempts, on the one hand, to visually represent aspects of Williams' own
work and on the other, to describe the friendship between the two artists.

A joint reading of Williams’ poem and Demuth’s reconstruction reveals similar
stylistic distinctions. As critics have pointed out, the primary correlation between these
pieces is the way that each artist creates a sense of movement in his piece. For Williams
it is found in line seven, "moving" and for Demuth in the three "5's." Aiken notes, "At
the center of Williams's . . . composition is the word 'moving,' and the force of this
word has been expressed dramatically by Demuth through the four telescoped '5's'
pulsating in and out of the painting's space" (179). And Sayre similarly argues that
"the figure 5 . . . organizes the chaotic world around itself" (64). The repetitions of
the figure "5" are the focus of the poem and, through their gradual expansion on the
page, gain visual intensification and project a sense of movement. Moreover, their
placement on the canvas mimics the visual structure of Williams’ poem. As Sayre
notes, the middle lines "moving" and "tension," "move us in short, tension-ridden, one
word lines through the center [of the poem]" (65). However, these short single word
lines also create a sense of focus and intensification. These one word lines cause the
positive space of the poem to contract, thus creating a sense of movement. This
narrowing of the positive space of the poem, as seen in lines seven and eight, not only creates a sense of movement and tension as the central component of the poem, but also focus. It is interesting, too, that Williams’ poem consists of thirteen lines, which gains symmetry only by hinging on the seventh line. The seventh line is the center and becomes the poem’s vanishing point and the core by which all other images radiate.

This notion of contraction is also seen in Demuth’s representation. Through the repetition of the figure “5” from the direct center of the canvas to the periphery, Demuth captures movement in the painting. The smallest “5,” the object located at the most condensed center of the painting, becomes like line seven in the poem, the point by which movement initiates and radiates from the center outward.

Movement is also captured in each of these works through the use of color. Like the Italian Futurists, who followed the notion that through the juxtaposition and intensity of color, movement materializes on the canvas, Williams and Demuth also used color and line to reveal motion. In his Futurist Manifesto, F.T. Marinetti “proclaim[ed] the glory and beauty of modern dynamism, youth, speed . . . [and] energy,” and championed the use of the modern city and machines as subjects. (Gowing 856). As Aiken indicates, both artists were familiar with these ideas. “In 1917 Demuth began to use . . . various formal devices associated with Futurism . . . . [And] with the writing of ‘Vortex’ . . . Williams had begun without recognizing it, to incorporate basic concepts of Futurism into his developing poetics” (180-181).

The Futurist notions of the dynamism of modernity and the essence of its speed and energy are found in the movement of the poem, but are also captured through the vibrancy of the Williams’ colors. The intense pallet of this piece, the gold “5”
superimposed “on the red firetruck” are the colors and images that directly precede line seven. These images not only allow the poem to move from the larger vague image of rain and lights to more distinct images, but they also create a sense of intensity as the firetruck moves towards the subject, “unheed[ingly]” “through the dark city.” The larger images of “the dark city” and “the rain” constitute the frame of the poem which encompasses the energy of the “unheeded” movement of the firetruck.

Following the same principles of speed as created through the use of a singular point on the canvas, the lines of Demuth’s painting give the illusion of speed as they move from the corners of the canvas to the center and converge behind the small “5.” Moreover, through a mixture of light and dark tones, the background of the painting captures Williams’ impression of the lights “through the dark city.” However, the tonal colorations of the “5’s,” like their repetition, also become key to the movement of the piece. However, unlike the effect of the “5’s” moving forward, as indicated by their replication, the differences in the gold color seem to reverse the movement. The smallest “5” is the brightest gold on the canvas, and as the figures enlarge, their color becomes more dull. This coloration indicates a reversal in the way that one perceives objects coming closer to the observer. It is as if the lights on the firetruck are not becoming more intense as the image gets closer. Instead, the highest intensity of the light appears at the furthest point from the observer. Perhaps it is for this reason that Aiken argues that “the four telescoped ‘5’s’ pulsate in and out of the painting’s space” (179).

While the connection between these works reveals the artist’s similar beliefs in art, it also indicates the close relationship that they shared. As Aiken notes, “When
Demuth began his portrait of Williams, he had known his subject for almost a quarter of a century” (179). Their friendship was important to Williams. In his autobiography, he writes, “I have had several but not many intimate friendships with men during my life. . . . There have been Ezra Pound, Charles Demuth, Bob McAlmon and a few others. You could count them surely on the fingers of one hand” (55). Williams frequently speaks of Demuth and calls him Charley to which Demuth responds by calling Williams, Bill. These informal names are present in Demuth’s painting. In the upper right hand corner, there is a fragment of the name “Bill” and in the background, slightly below the large “5” is “Carlos.” These references not only reveal the common and informal aspect of their friendship, but they also indicate, through language, the presence of the poet. Although Williams’ name appears incomplete on the upper margin, and in the background of the painting, Demuth recognizes the existence of the poet through the language on the canvas. In the bottom right hand corner, Demuth also signs “C.D.” Interestingly, the artist is acknowledged through letters, figures, and not the language of a partial or full name. The other significant word is “Art Co.” located in the white background on the right margin. According to Aiken, “Art Co.” had “at one time . . . converged upon Stieglitz’s gallery at 291 5th Avenue” (182). The inclusion of this reference in conjunction with the allusions to Demuth not only strengthens the essence of Williams’ association with other predominant artists of the time, but also further reveals the directness by which artists influenced his work.

Generally, Williams scholarship has been primarily focused upon his relationships with painters and discussed from the biographical standpoint of his own paintings and interest in the visual arts. However, the concept of movement, as seen in
"The Great Figure" was of particular interest to him. He was interested in ideas of multiperspective and speed in art, and it is no surprise that he would find the concept of dance, which is defined in terms of space, movement, and rhythm, of interest in terms of his own medium. In her critique of Williams and dance, Terri Mester writes, "[Williams] had been enthralled in his student days by Isadora Duncan's dancing and was to enjoy a longtime, mutually productive relationship with Martha Graham" (123). His relationship with these women prompted his belief that dance and poetry were mediums defined by form and motion. According to Mester, this comparison provides an "additional implication besides the ethical and epistemological" subjects often associated with the poet's work. However, like Sayre, she acknowledges space as a prime subject in his work. Unlike Sayre, who proposes that space is "defined . . . by the poem's visual dimension" (6), Mester claims that space is related to the body. She argues "just as dance creates a space of interacting forces emanating from the dancer's bodies, the poem for Williams consists of distinct but interrelated words or particles which interact with each other on a blank page like objects in an electromagnetic field" (124). Her suggestion that space consists of "interacting forces" reveals the tension between the positive forces of the body and negative space. Mester's parallel of dance, in terms of space, to "the interrelated words . . . which interact with each other on a blank page" appears in Williams' poem "Overture to A Dance of Locomotives."

Although the poem has been noted by Aiken as "Williams's vaguely Futurist poem" (181), it provides a more explicit example of the way the poet incorporated nuances of dance into poetry.
A leaning pyramid of sunlight, narrowing
out at a high window, moves by the clock:
disaccordant hands straining out from
the center: inevitable postures infinitely

Repeated —
Two — twofour— twoeight!

(Collected Poems I, 146)

In this partial stanza, Williams evokes the image of a clock with its "hands straining out from/ the center" in "inevitable postures" repeating a cadence of time. Although the clock is mechanically reporting time, there is a particular parallel between the object and the human body. The poem is in part about the relationship between "Men with picked voices [who] chant the names/of cities in a huge gallery" and the machine of time. There is a distinct relationship between men and machine: aspects of the body merge with the mechanical object. The image of "hands straining out from / a center" describes, on the one hand, the fundamental construction of the clock, but on the other, with the word "postures," it also alludes to the body.

The punctuation, the colon, which separates the images of the "hands straining out from / a center" and "inevitable postures" also reveals their interconnectness. The poet's grammatical choice, in part, justifies Mester's reading because the colon binds the images together on the page, and connects the images in their significance. Not only does the colon reveal Mester's critique, it also allows both the men and the clock to be seen as instruments that maintain time. The way the mechanical object repeats time is also interesting to note. It is not reporting singular seconds, but moments of "two — twofour— twoeight!" This rhythm repeats a traditional rhythm count in dance. Music that is written in 4/4 time is often doubled in choreography. The dance then becomes
movement sequences based on two measures of music or eight beats. Williams’
indication that the clock keeps time in increments of two which concludes in eight,
draws an interesting parallel to the rhythmic construction of dance. Williams continues
this time-structure and repeats it in the second to the last stanza. “In time: twofour! / In time: twoeight!” He, then, concludes in the final line, “The dance is sure.”

This line, “the dance is sure,” reappears in “The Dance,” a poem written more than forty years after “Overture.” This poem is particularly interesting because it describes images suggestive of Isadora Duncan’s movement. Although “The Dance” was written nearly three decades after Duncan’s death, the stanzas of the poem seem to resonate the essence of her ideologies of dance. It is clear, from Mester’s study, that Williams was intrigued by Duncan. She was, as Marling notes, a frequent visitor to Arensberg’s apartment. And as Mester claims, Williams saw her perform in New York in 1908. In a letter to his brother he wrote that her performance “caused his hair to ‘stand on end’... he continued, ‘she is an American, one of our own people, Bo, and I tell you I felt doubly strengthened in my desire and my determination to accomplish my part in our wonderful picture” (qtd. in Mester 126). Williams’ admiration for Duncan is alluded to in “The Dance.”

Like many of his poems, the dance is a metaphor for the movement of the natural world. In this poem, the snowflakes “spin upon the long axis/...most intimately/ two and two to make a dance” (Collected Poems II 407). Similar to the relationship between the men in “Overture” and the clock, the dance in this poem emerges simultaneously as a dance between “yourself and the other,” a partner of both
a lover and nature. The poem’s overall attention to dance and nature draws an interesting parallel to Duncan’s ideas of dance.

The great and only principle on which I feel myself justified in leaning, is a constant, absolute, and universal unity which runs through all the manifestations of Nature. . . . [Duncan says] every moment that can be danced in the forest without being in harmony with the swaying branches . . . Every movement is false, in that it is out of tune in the midst of Nature’s harmonious lines. (qtd. in Brown 9-10)

This inherent relationship between dance and nature reverberates in Williams’ representation of “The Dance.” The image of the dance in the forest materializes in the final stanzas of the poem.

in the woods of your own nature whatever twig interposes, and bare twigs have an actuality of their own

this flurry of the storm that holds us, plays with us and discards us

Duncan’s notion that true movement is performed in harmony with nature is reiterated in Williams’ description of the power of the natural world. Both artists comment on the power inherent in nature. For Duncan, nature is the only principle upon which to lean and to learn from, as one must learn to move with the “harmonious lines” of nature. It is the same for Williams as well. The image of the woods, which has “an actuality of their own” defines the course of the movement as it “hold us, / play with us and discard us.”
Beyond the general notions of dance and nature in the poem, the diction in a few key lines also reveals an association with Duncan. Prior to this final scene, the interplay between the metaphor of dance as nature transforms in the poem, the diction becomes more descriptive and clear with aspects of Duncan’s choreography. Stanzas six and seven allude to Duncan’s movement.

```
gayer, more carefree
spinning face to face but always down
with each other secure
only in each other’s arms

But only the dance is sure!
make it your own
Who can tell
what is to come of it?
```

(Collected Poems II, 408).

The initial line in stanza seven, “gayer, more carefree” specifically echoes Duncan’s movement quality. Her dance, uninhibited by the formal structure of ballet, was regarded by Duncan as spontaneous movement sparked by the soul. Her movement had a sense of being “carefree” as it was uninhibited and seemingly improvised, based on her reactions to the world around her. Although this singular line seems to qualify Duncan’s movement, stanza eight provides the most interesting lens by which to view Duncan and Williams’ connection. The poet begins the stanza with a reiteration of “... only the dance is sure!” In this instance, unlike “Overture,” the dance, as noted by the punctuation, has become a celebration, a celebration of art that can be made one’s own. This idea to “make it your own” reflects Pound’s notion to “make it new,” and is the basis behind both artists’ works. Duncan hoped to create a
new American dance, and Williams, through his poetry, sought to compose poetry that reflected modern America.

Williams’ regard for Duncan, while only implied through interpretive readings of his poems, is most evident in a sonnet he wrote in a letter to his brother Ed in August 1908. Contained within the same letter in which he wrote that Duncan’s performance in New York “caused his hair to ‘stand on end’” (qtd. in Mester 126), he further expresses that the performance was “‘the most chaste, most perfect, most absolutely inspiring exhibition’ he had seen” (qtd. in Mariani 67). And, according to Paul Mariani’s extensive biography of the poet, “when [Williams] returned to his hospital quarters at Child’s, he wrote an Italian sonnet . . .” to Duncan.

Isadora Duncan when I saw
You dance, the interrupting years fell back,
It seemed, with far intenser leave than lack
Of your deft step hath e’er conferred. No flaw
However slight lay ‘tween me and the raw,
Heatthristy Scythians craving wrack,
Lilthe Bacchanals, or flushed, in roseate track,
Athenian girls completing vict’ry’s law.
I breathed their olden virgin purity,
Their guileless clean abandon, in your fling
Those truth’s refound which heavenly instinct’s bliss
Bare innocence withal, but most to me

I saw, dear country-maid, how soon shall spring
From this our native land great lovliness.

(qtd. in Mariani 67-68)

The formal Keatsian style of this sonnet reveals the form of much of Williams’ work prior to his association with Pound and the Imagists. It mimics the style of the Romantic’s formal diction and conforms to the structure of an Italian sonnet, an octave and a sestet, perfectly. The poem details Williams’ reaction to Duncan’s choreography.
"No flaw! However slight lay 'tween me and the raw" art of dance. He describes "the Athenian girls" dancing at the Bacchanalia with "guileless clean abandon." The girls' movement, innocent and with "virgin purity" dance like the dancers in "The Dance," "gayer, more carefree / spinning" with "clean abandon, in [their] fling." These dancers are, as Williams foresees, the future of American art. "Soon shall spring / From this our native land [the] great lovliness" which he sees in the form of dance.

The style in which Williams wrote his sonnet to Duncan was abandoned as he matured as a poet. However, it is interesting to parallel the sonnet with his later poem "War, The Destroyer!" written in 1942. This poem, a dedication to another modern dancer, Martha Graham, was published in the March 1942 issue of Harper's Bazaar. Flanked by Earl Mohn's "Around the Fish," James Higgin's "The Village," and Kenneth Patchen's short poem "The Crowded Net," Williams' poem is shown on the left margin of the page.

WAR,
THE DESTROYER!
(For Martha Graham)

What is war,
the destroyer
but an appurtenance
to the dance?
The deadly serious
who would have us suppress

all exuberance
because of it
are mad. When terror blooms —
leap and twist
whirl and prance --
that's the show

of this the circumstance.
We cannot change it
not by writing, music

neither prayer.
Then fasten it
on the dress, in the hair
to incite and impel.
And if dance be
the answer, dance!

body and mind --
substance, balance, elegance!
with that, blood red
displayed flagrantly
in its place
beside the face.

WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS
(49)

In the sonnet to Duncan, Williams celebrates dance as containing the "great lovliness" of the future of art, and in "War" the poet's enthusiasm for dance is raised above the other disciplines. He describes the dance in the fourth stanza, "Leap and twist / whirl / and prance -- / That's the show." "Of this circumstance" where war is the destroyer that "suppress[es] / all exuberance" neither "writing, music / [nor] prayer" can change it. For Williams, neither art nor faith can alter war. "Then fasten it on the dress, in the hair" of a dancer, "And if dance be / the answer, dance!" Williams momentarily elevates dance as the art form that can "incite and impel" and release the exuberance which has "in this circumstance" been suppressed by war. In the end,
however, the “body and mind — / substance, balance, elegance!” is overcome by the "blood" of war that has been "displayed flagrantly . . . / beside the face." The poem ultimately finds that the destruction of war, which cannot be altered by art, is the destroyer of beauty, as the image of a dancer, the symbol of the body and mind in all its elegance, becomes offensive in the blood of war.

The context from which Williams wrote “War” was a photograph of Graham taken by Barbara Morgan, Duncan’s photographer. The image, as Mariani explains, “symboliz[ed] the destructiveness of war” (457). It depicted Graham “dressed in a long black robe, in a gesture of stooped, rhythmic terror” as a bomb exploded over her head (Mariani 457). Of the photograph Morgan explains, “I shot with a strobe light at 1/10,000 second exposure for a spastic effect in a composition in which I slanted the shadow to dehumanize facial features and imply Death” (qtd. in Mariani 457). Williams, who met the two women at Charles Sheeler’s home in October of 1941, was struck by the work and agreed to write a poem based on the photograph. The project became a collaborative effort between these artists as they reacted against the onset of the Spanish Civil War (Mariani 457).

Although Williams was perhaps more familiar with the modern dancers because of his direct contact with them, he was nevertheless also influenced by modern ballet. Mester notes that while “Williams’s interest in dance ignited after watching Duncan perform in New York in 1908, . . . . his attendance at a performance of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes . . . in 1916 resulted in one of his most widely read poems [“Danse Russe”]” (126-127). “Danse Russe” did not receive the literary attention of poems like “The Red Wheelbarrow,” and thus does not constitute the merit of a
“widely read poem”; still, the critic notes significant moments between Williams and the disciplines of dance.

Mester claims the Russes’ performance of Vaslav Nijinsky’s *L’Apres midi d’un Faune* (*The Afternoon of a Faun*), inspired Williams to write “Danse Russe.” In an interview with John Gerber in 1950, Williams states that the poem “was the time of our first appreciation of the Russian Imperial School of Dancing when Nijinsky and Pavlova were here. That’s the reason, I suppose, that Danse Russe comes in. Anyhow, a dance” (*Interviews* 11).

**DANSE RUSSE**

If I when my wife is sleeping  
And the baby and Kathleen  
Are sleeping  
And the sun is a flame-white disc  
In silken mists  
Above shining trees, --  
If I in my north room  
Dance naked, grotesquely  
Before my mirror  
Waving my shirt round my head  
And singing softly to myself:  
“I am lonely, lonely.  
I was born to be lonely,  
I am best so!”

If I admire my arms, my face,  
My shoulders, flanks, buttocks  
Against the yellow drawn shades, —

Who shall say I am not  
The happy genius of my household?

(*Interviews* 11)

Mester, in her comparison between the performance and poem, states

“Nijinsky’s narcissistic, pagan faun... inspired the image of the poet as a
mythological satyr dancing ‘naked, grotesquely’ in front of his mirror . . .” (127). Mester’s evaluation of the narcissistic actions of Nijinsky’s faun and the speaker in the poem is accurate. Like the faun, who, through his movement, exudes a sense of sexual narcissism, the speaker in the poem admires his physical features as it silhouettes against the backdrop of the “yellow drawn shades.” However, it is not all together clear that the speaker in the poem is either mythological or a satyr, as Mester implies. The setting of the poem, which has been converted from Nijinsky’s Grecian scenery to a domestic one, does not reveal the essence of the mythic, nor is there any indication that the speaker is, in the sense of mythology, a satyr. The speaker does not portray goat-like qualities that would qualify him as being the mythic figure. He is instead caught in a dream as he ponders the idea of the dance. This is signaled in the poem through the use of “If.” He is then contemplating actions that have not yet been exercised, and thus remain internal in the mind. His wonderment leads him to consider himself a composer of movement, who is, like Nijinsky, creating forms in front of a mirror. The image of a dancer in front of a mirror is familiar to the general public. In his commentary on Nijinsky’s choreography of the Faun, Lynn Garafola reveals a similar scene between Nijinsky and his sister Nijinska. “In front of the pier glass in the Nijinsky family living room, where brother molded sister into the poses of Faun and Nymph, the ballet took shape” (52). These moments between brother and sister were not uncommon as Nijinsky often choreographed with his sister at their home. While the setting of the poem is most likely formed to create Williams’ “local” atmosphere, the image of the “genius” in the “household” is a noteworthy aspect of the poem, since it is doubtful that the poet knew of Nijinsky’s creative habits.
One of the key moments in the poem is the assertion of the isolation of the artist. The speaker asserts, “I am lonely, lonely/ I was born to be lonely, I am best so!” Mester suggests that this moment “celebrates the isolation . . . [that] an artist needs if he is to unify the demands of an inner, domestic world . . . with the outer world beyond ‘the yellow drawn shades.’ Enclosed within the intimacy of his womb-like, triangular space, the poet’s being expands outward” (128). In speaking of this poem in terms of the artist and seclusion, Williams states, “I think the artist, generally speaking, feels lonely . . . He is usually in rebellion against the world . . . I think that’s a rule. I have thought myself that that’s rather a snide thing to say — here I am living with my wife and . . . Child and saying [in the poem] ‘I’m lonely.’ It merely records a fact” (Interviews 12).

Mester’s argument, however, becomes problematic in her interpretation of “his womb-like, triangular space.” It is unclear how the poem suggests this type of space as it implies no distinction of physical or metaphysical space as triangular. It is curious that the critic would suggest this in a comparison between the two works. Nijinsky’s choreography is purposefully geometrical in design. As Garafola notes,

Nijinsky . . . reimagined the body as an interplay of Euclidean forms — triangles, arcs, and lines — that equally serve as the unifying design of his ensemble. These forms, now meshed, now layered, invoked the . . . geometrized landscape of a Cubist painting; they announced the modernity of Faune, while simultaneously compacting into a single gestalt an entire narrative sequence. (58)
Through his geometric style, Nijinsky not only reconfigured balletic forms from seamlessly fluid movement to linear and geometric, but, through his choreography, he also defined dance as distinctly parallel to the painters of the time.

Although Mester's claim allows for a digression into a description of Nijinsky's art, it is difficult to ascertain these choreographic images in Williams' poem. The key lines which suggest movement quality and allude to Nijinsky are the images of the speaker dancing "naked" and "grotesquely." The appearance of nakedness and grotesqueness are comparable to the dancer's costuming and the audience's reactions to his movement. In the Faun Nijinsky's costume is tight on the body and flesh-colored. From the perspective of the audience, the dancer appears naked. The attire in conjunction with the choreographic qualities — angular and yet sexualized — were perceived by audiences as grotesque. In a performance of his third ballet Le Sacre du Printemps (1913), the Parisian audience was appalled by what Garafola describes as the "final masturbatory gesture" (50) as the culmination of a piece based on primitive and sexualized movement. The reaction of the crowd was reported to all the major cultural sites. From London to New York, the newspapers wrote of the event. It is perhaps not a stretch to assume that Williams, who saw the Ballets Russes perform in New York three years after Sacre was completed, and who was a frequent visitor to France, was familiar with the critique of Nijinsky's choreography as grotesque.

Williams' interest in dance not only affects his work in terms of subject matter, but it also reveals the influence that dance had on other artists. Laban's theory of the body and movement in space creates a plausible construct from which to analyze the visual composition of Williams' poetry. Williams' work, though, is perhaps most
important because it provides a vehicle by which we can understand the nature of the artist, not only from the modernist’s view, but as a composer of aesthetic qualities and as an interpreter of the artistic milieu of the time. Through his work we gain a sense of the universality within the crafts of art, as innovations and traditions transgress genre lines to inform with new significance from one to another.
Chapter 4: Conclusion
From Theory to Influence: Dance and Dance Criticism

The emergence of the twentieth century brought with it substantial reformations among the arts. As advancements in science and mathematics altered the mental and physical constructs of reality, artists in all disciplines were forced to reevaluate the nature of their work. From Picasso’s Cubism to Laban’s Choruetics, art forms were being challenged and reconfigured. This shift away from traditional norms also marks the beginning of the disciplines directly influencing one another. Although the lines that separate the arts have never been distinct, the artists of the time who chose to move beyond their own medium blurred these lines even further as subjects were borrowed and accurately reshaped from one art form to another. The manner in which subjects were reconstructed from genre to genre is seen in the poetry of William Carlos Williams. Through his work that we can clearly see the direct connections among art, literature, and dance. Through his use of visual art and dance techniques, such as the concepts of space and movement, his work becomes a filter from which ideas from other art forms pass and traces of each remain. These traces, as they emerge through the pages of his work, create a window from which to observe the creative restructuring of art at the turn of the twentieth century.

For literary scholars, the criticism of Williams and the other art disciplines has been centered primarily on his associations with visual art. However, his relationships to dance also had a noteworthy effect on his work. The dancers, Duncan, Graham, and
the Ballets Russes, influenced his particular conception of movement and space. Even though Laban’s critiques of movement in space were unfamiliar to Williams, his dance theory is embedded in the poet’s work. Laban’s theoretical perspective provides a way to understand how Williams used the “space between words” and manipulated the space of the page to be an agent for movement in poetry. Laban’s theory, then, in conjunction with his relationships with the dancers marks a direct link between dance and literature. Moreover, through using Laban’s theory to critique Williams’ poetry, the similarities between the theoretical principles of space that governed both dance and painting become evident.

Beyond the scope of literary interest, a study of Williams and dance theory serves as an example of dance criticism which crosses the boundaries of sociological criticisms in the field. An inquiry into the philosophical and kinesiological aspects of dance not only demonstrates the usefulness of inquiry based in this type of study, but also complicates the art form. Kinesiology, too, is central to dance and offers a unique mode of criticism. To view dance in these terms creates a more distinct parallel between dance and the academic pursuits of other disciplines. In order to promote dance as a viable field of academic study, philosophical and kinesiological studies of the discipline should be reconsidered by dance critics. It is only through an expansion of the critical and theoretical fields of dance that the art can establish a lasting influence in academic discourses.
Works Cited


Aiken, Edward A. “‘I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold’: Charles Demuth’s Emblematic Portrait of William Carlos Williams.” Art Journal. (Fall 1987) 178-184.


Demuth, Charles. “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold.” Painting. 1928. 6 May 2004 <http://www.usc.edu/schools/annenberg/asc/projects/comm544/library/images/429.html>


<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/4aa/4aa34.htm>


