Nijinsky's Choreographic Method: Visual Sources from Roerich for *Le Sacre du printemps*

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Nicholas Roerich, the scenarist and designer of *Le Sacre du printemps* for the original production, by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, in 1913, built the ballet around the sacrifice of a young maiden. As the climax to a series of ritual tasks by members of an archaic tribe, the Chosen Maiden dances herself to death to assure the return of Spring. In the logic of the rite her sacrifice is seen as a marriage with Yarilo, the sun deity of pre-Christian Slavic mythology. The composer of the ballet, Igor Stravinsky, claimed from the outset that he had conceived the idea for *Sacre* as he was finishing *Firebird* in 1910. But an interview with Roerich in the St. Petersburg press and other documentation show that he had already written a scenario when Stravinsky approached him with the notion of a ballet about archaic Russia. Roerich's scenario was entitled "The Great Sacrifice," and it survives as the second act of what we know as *Le Sacre du printemps*. Contrasted with the somber tasks and grave tone of the second act are the vigorous games and ceremonies which Roerich and Stravinsky together planned for the first act. Stravinsky marked the score for Act I "Day" and Act II "Night," a polarity that is carried out in all aspects of the music, décor and choreography.

Much of what Roerich contributed to the collaboration on *Sacre* was based on his extensive archaeological background. The purpose of this article is to indicate some of the sources he shared with Nijinsky which helped to shape the strangely introverted movements of the dance. The use of primitivist models was a critical element of the choreography and decor. The wooden idols are the most probable source of Nijinsky's postures and gestures. Indirectly, Leonide Massine says as much in writing about his version of the ballet, the so-called "second *Sacre*," which Diaghilev commissioned in 1920, seven years after Ni-jinsky's departure from the company. Massine defended his own use of parallel instead of inverted foot positions by pointing out that the ancient carved figures did not really have turned in feet. His point was well taken, which only serves to underscore Nijinsky's originality in pushing the postures, and the gestures as well, beyond the limits of his visual sources. That Nijinsky communicated to the dancers in *Sacre* the concentrated focus of the carved figures is evident in one critic's comment on the maidens and youths in the first act:

> Their eyes have the fixity of those of wooden fetishes; their cheeks are painted red like their dresses; they hover awkwardly, heavily, with movements which still belong to animalism . . .

In Roerich's *Idols of Ancient Russia* (Illustration 1), parts of the carved figures are accentuated with red paint, a detail which may have motivated the stylized make-up for the dancers in *Sacre*. The sage, later in the first act, appears with his face painted like an idol too, but with long black lines, probably to denote his extreme age. A photograph of a typical Slavic idol (Illustration 2) reveals striking similarities to the original *Sacre* movements, as preserved, for example, in a backstage photo of the young men (Illustration 3). The single most important factor in Nijinsky's choreography, as his assistant for *Sacre*, Marie Rambert, emphasized to me in an interview, is the basic posture of the dance and the creative limitations it imposes on all aspects of movement. In Roerich's introduction to her choreographic notes on a piano score of *Sacre* — what Robert Craft has called Rambert's "promptbook score" — she specifies Nijinsky's fundamental principle, simple movement from a restricted base:

As reconstructor of the choreography for this ballet, I asked myself, what could these "archaeological documents" have been? The only "primitive Slavic paintings" were those on the walls of caves. Roerich could not have collected them, of course, but he could have shown Nijinsky photographs. When Nijinsky set the solo for the Chosen Maiden on his sister, Bronislava, he asked her to visualize certain Roerich paintings and told her that "the beauty of the tinted stones and the wall paintings of the cave dwellers have inspired Roerich's own art." In her memoirs Nijinska recalls the discussions between Roerich and Nijinsky, which her brother reported to her at length. Among the canvases he asked her to visualize was *The Idols of Ancient Russia*. In this and other works of the period, Roerich featured the brightly painted, carved wooden idols that were characteristic of pre-Christian Slavic settlements. Quite possibly, as the Roerich scholar Kenneth Archer suggested to me, the "archaeological documents" referred to by Prunières were Roerich's own paintings on such subjects, although earlier he could have shown Nijinsky small idols in his collection.

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Illustration 1. Painting by Nicholas Roerich, Idols of Ancient Russia. (Variants of this work are dated from 1901-1910.) Nijinsky asked his sister, Bronislava, to visualize this and other Roerich paintings as they set the solo of the Chosen Maiden, which established the vocabulary of Sacre.

Illustration 2. Slavic wooden idol. Note the horse talisman located between the level of the arms and legs, thus seeming to hang from a belt at the waist, as in some of the Roerich costumes for Sacre.

Nijinsky's choreographic method began with a definitive posture whose design he extended to gesture and then to the shapes made by groups as well as the ground patterns they described in the stage space. Working from the individual to the crowd is a characteristic of modern choreography which probably derives from the artist creating in solitude for his or her own body. It is not an opera-house method of devising material for soloists or corps de ballet, and implied in the method of spinning movement out of oneself is the notion of discovery — finding a new idiom for each dance rather than rearranging academic steps. No doubt Nijinsky adapted this method from what he knew of Isadora Duncan's ways of working, and certainly he tried out the method in embryo when he created *Faune* on his sister in the front room of their apartment in St. Petersburg. Nijinsky's method is sculptural, and quite possibly it was further developed by his experience of being sculpted by Auguste Rodin, in the aftermath of *Faune*. In any case, Nijinsky worked with the body in *Sacre* as a kind of block, as Jacques Rivière explained in his seminal essay several months after the première. The body, he says, "moves only as a whole, it forms a totality and its manner of speaking is to leap suddenly with arms and legs outspread, or to move to the side with knees bent and the head on the shoulder." Rivière's description clarifies both the wooden feeling and the fetish-like focus of the dancers, which Nijinsky seems to have developed from the idols:

Rather than glide over things in his flight the dancer comes down on them with the full weight of his body, he accounts for every one with his heavy and complete attack. He jumps with both feet onto every idea that he comes upon which he wishes to express; with a quick leap he turns to it, covers it, and stays for an instant to copy it. He forgets everything else to make himself one with it for a moment . . .

In the sculptural form of the idols Nijinsky found, I think, a visual model for the more ephemeral qualities of ritual dance, which Roerich surely discussed with him as well. Self-abnegation, absorption in a ritual responsibility — these qualities of archaic religion are fossilized in objects like masks and idols, which, for the generation after Gauguin, exemplified what was missing from modern life.

Toward the end of Rivière's essay he gives a sort of stylistic checklist for *Sacre*, declaring that it adds up to a radical redefinition of grace:

If one can, for once, stop confusing grace with symmetry and the arabesque, he will find it on every page of *Le Sacre du printemps*, in the sight of profiles of faces posed upon full-front shoulders, in the elbows glued to the body, in the horizontal forearms, the rigid and open hands, in the trembling which descends like a wave from the head of the dancers to their feet, in the obscure, sparse, and preoccupied march of the adolescents in the second act.

It is useful to read Rivière's check-list while looking at the photographs of the Slavic idol and the *Sacre* dancers. The right angles of the carved figures on the idol create much the same effect Nijinsky achieved with his profile postures. For instance, note the second man from the left in the backstage photo, for the profile of a face "posed upon full-front shoulders." All the men, except the one on the far right, have their elbows close to the ribs if not "glued to the body," a distinct characteristic of the carved figures on the idol. This closure of the elbows breaks a cardinal rule of classicism, the framing of the torso or head with open arms. Even when a *Sacre* dancer maintains the three-quarter view preferred in ballet — like the man on the far left — closure of the elbows obstructs the line of the torso, reinforcing the block-like impression of the body, as does the bundling of the costumes. What Rivière calls "the horizontal forearms" are not demonstrated in the photo, but the reader can follow the line of movement and see how "glued elbows" require that some movements would be made from that joint instead of from the shoulder, causing the forearms to jut out from the waist in a stunted port de bras. If one looks again at the idol and studies the gesture of the top figures, it would seem to lead into any of those for the *Sacre* men, even the dancer on the far right. From the position of one hand angled up and one hand down — "elbows glued" — slide the "rigid and open hands" to the waist, and that is the *Sacre* gesture, moving from the shoulder with elbows now released. Yet none of the closure is lost, because of how the hands are held flat and how they adhere to the body rather than float in space.

Slavic idols were typically carved at right angles on the four sides of a wooden column. The same figures were often repeated on each side, so that an identical image was projected to the four directions, a result perhaps of the placement of idols at crossroads. Nijinsky may have been struck by this visual repetition as an analogue to the obsessively repeated rhythms of Stravinsky's score, a legacy of Russian folk music and shamanistic rites. The titles for the various scenes of *Sacre*, such as the fifth scene of Act I, "The Procession of the Sage," or the third scene of Act II, "Evocation of the Ancestors," call attention to the importance of ritual structure to the original ballet. Roerich was clearly the collaborator who imparted this knowledge to the others. When I interviewed the artist's son, Svetoslav Roerich, he recalled his father's interest in the vitality of old Slavic customs in Russia even in this century. One occurrence near the arts colony at Talashkino, where Roerich worked on his *Sacre* sketches, particularly fascinated him, as his son remembered:

Princess Tenisheva built a big idol at the crossroads in Talashkino, where several roads met — a big idol, carved in wood. Really it was to show the direction towards the estate. So it was standing there, a very big figure carved and painted. What is interesting is that the local villagers would bring offerings to it. You could find eggs with figures on them. They would bring towels and hang them on the projections of the wood. So that idol had become part and parcel of the life of the people.

The destruction of a wooden idol provides the climax to the Bolshoi Ballet's version of *Le Sacre du printemps*, choreographed by Natalia Kasatkina and Vladimir Vasiliev in 1965 (Illustration 4). This action, which demonstrates the death of the old gods, reversed the meaning of the original ballet. When *Sacre* was first created, all the collaborators were intrigued with the culture of pre-Christian Russia. Roerich returned to this theme for paintings throughout his life, and Stravinsky, though his interest lasted a shorter period, made extensive formal use of traditional material. The Slavic scholar Simon Karlinsky has written about the pagan survivals in Stravinsky's music:

From *Petrushka* to *The Soldier's Tale*, Stravinsky seems determined to compile a sort of register of archaic Russian ceremonies and entertainments. *The Rite of Spring* (Vesna svyashchennaya, 1913) which followed *Petrushka*, fits quite naturally into this register, having as its theme an enactment of a pre-Christian *rusalka* or a *Yarila* ceremony.

Karlinsky noted, as few writers on *Sacre* have done, that there is no clear precedent in Slavic mythology for the sacrifice of the maiden. In Karlinsky's discussion about the authenticity of the rite, he suggests the sacrifice may derive from Mexican mythology.
Illustration 3. The gestures of the figures on the wooden idols are strikingly similar to those Nijinsky gave to the young men, as indicated in this backstage photo from the 1913 Sacre. Credit: Photo Gerschel, Paris.

Illustration 4. Destruction of the old gods: Photograph of the final scene from the Bolshoi Ballet production of Le Sacre du printemps (1965).

The final sacrifice of a chosen virgin, it is true, is an invention that has no historical Slavic antecedents. It seems to be Aztec and not anything connected with native Russian religion or folklore.21

Even though some historians recognized a synthesis of ritual tradition in Sacre, few specify the possible origins of the sacrificial ceremony, an exception being Cyril Beaumont. He discussed the end of Le Sacre in his early book on Nijinsky:

Just as the Aztecs sacrificed the handsomest young man among them in honour of the god, Tezcatllepoca [sic], so one spring evening, after initial ceremonies, we see the fairest maiden of the tribe forced to dance until she dies from exhaustion. . . .22

Roerich wrote an essay on the Stone Age, which does not relate directly to Sacre, but in it he associates the rites of Slavic and Scandinavian tribes with those of Mexico.23 So he may have found a precedent for the dance of the Chosen Maiden in each of these traditions, but he left no documentation of it. Given Roerich’s commitment to archaeological authenticity and the encouragement he gave both Stravinsky and Nijinsky to use their Slavic heritage, it is curious that he rewrote mythology for the climax of Sacre. I wonder if the decision enabled him to resolve the desire to use an archaic subject with what he considered an appropriate way to end a ballet.

Death of a young woman, or apotheosis of her spirit, is, after all, the crux of Romantic ballet. In a sense Alexandre Benois made the same decision in Petrushka, combining a folk subject with the pathos of loss, the death of the most vulnerable character. I also wonder, though, whether Roerich perceived the impending destruction of war, like Vassily Kandinsky and other artists rethinking cultural values through primitivist models.24 Sacrifice of the young is still the image that shrouds the generation of 1914, and it was the subject Nijinsky chose to dance in the solo that concluded his career in 1919.25 Roerich made sacrifice the climax of all the ritual actions in Sacre, and it was this emphasis which, in retrospect, gave contemporary relevance to the archaic rite. Jean Cocteau, among others, later regarded this ballet as a prediction of what was to him and his peers, “the Great War.”26

In the Stone Age essay Roerich affirmed his faith in the aesthetic development of primitive man:

The caves in the South indicate beyond any doubt the true sense of art in ancient man; they bear traces of the first mineral paints and sometimes have complex designs on their ceilings. Such dwellings are sure to have been lighted with suspending lamps, especially as the discovered objects of that period reach the qualities of jewelry: finest needles, bridles for deer, ornaments made of pierced sea-shells and of the teeth of animals.27

Such objects were Roerich’s models for the accessories to the costumes for Sacre: great loop earrings for the women, ornamented headbands and belts, some with a charm attached — a horse, which is associated with divination ceremonies of the early Slavs — and for the men, belts with decorated weapons.28 “There is something refined about their ornamentation,” Roerich continued, “which reminds you of India and Japan,” and as he narrated what was known of a festival for “the victory of the Spring Sun,” it is possible to imagine his conversation with Nijinsky:

Quick, alert dancing is going on, to the piping of wood-and-horn pipes. Many of the various garments amid the crowd are trimmed with furs and with touches of colored needle-work. . . . The younger generation forming rings for dancing and singing wears amber ornaments, embroidery, stone beads and the talisman teeth.29

Roerich concluded that “the day will come yet when we shall learn much about the Stone Age . . . and learn a lot from it too,” adding “only the Indian and the Shaman wisdom has kept some reminiscences of it,” a statement that articulated the thought of many artists in his generation.

Nijinsky’s choreographic method started with the design of posture and gesture on the individual dancer. In Sacre he seems to have had a direct visual model in the wooden idols that were of particular interest to Roerich. Other visual sources came through Roerich as well, probably influencing the shapes of groups and ground patterns. Nijinsky and his sister, Nijinska, evolved a method of choreography that freed the body of classical restrictions but channeled its energy through equally rigorous disciplines of design, such as the inverted postures of Le Sacre du printemps and the parallel movement en pointe in Nijinska’s Les Noces. Their choreography unified posture and gesture for separate dancers with the organization of ensembles and their configurations on the stage. For both of the Nijinskys there seems to have been an attempt also to coordinate the design of the movement with forms in the décor. In Sacre the figures are huddled together in clumps on the ground, repeating in successive planes the rounded hills of Roerich’s drop — with a group in red repeating the shape and color of the sacred stone, a large reddish rock painted at the center of the drop.30 Likewise, the pristine postures and gestures and group formations of Les Noces were related to the décor; the piling up of dancers in double lines and pyramids is comparable to the multiple levels and real volume in the Constructivist-inspired set designed by the artist Natalia Goncharova.31 Nijinska regarded Les Noces, choreographed for Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes in 1923, as her companion piece of Russian ceremony to Nijinsky’s Sacre.32

That Nijinsky took Roerich’s plans for costuming into consideration in his choreography is clear from Stravinsky correspondence during the early rehearsal period. On December 14, 1912, the composer wrote from Clarens, in Switzerland, to Roerich in St. Petersburg:

I have just returned from Berlin and received your costume designs for our “Spring.” I am pleased they were sent to me first so that I could see them — they are a real miracle, and I only hope the realization of them will be good! — but I regret the delay before Nijinsky receives them, which is the reason that my telegram said, “Send to Nijinsky.” I am forwarding them to him today.33

Stravinsky also told Roerich that “Nijinsky started his staging of the ‘Spring’ only yesterday,” which would have been December 13, and probably means the first rehearsal with dancers, other than his sister for her solo as the Chosen Maiden.34 Diaghilev telegraphed Stravinsky on December 18, advising that neither had arrived, nor rehearsals started.35 The rehearsal on the 13th was only, it would seem, for acquainting small groups of the cast with the music, rather than for setting movement. The timing of the communiqués is of interest because Serge Grigoriev, the company regisseur, wrote also on the 18th, reporting that “Nijinsky has not started the rehearsals of our new ballet; he is waiting for the drawings of the costumes.”36 Presumably, the drawings were those Stravinsky just sent, which, as an earlier letter from Roerich indicated, were in two books, accompanied by twenty-four finished costumes.37 It may be that Nijinsky simply wanted to have a visual sense of the whole production before embarking on the ensemble dances. Or, he may have been concerned about the bulk of the garments, as it would affect the movement. But he may have wanted to construct the Sacre group work and ground patterns in a way directly connected to the costumes.

The two books of designs that Roerich mentioned are not known to survive, although separate drawings may be among those in collections in the Soviet Union, United States, and Western Europe.38
Most of the seventy-nine costumes he created have been preserved, and the large group of them housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, are in good condition, so that I was able to study them first-hand. Because of Roerich’s lifelong interest in iconography and systems of ritual signs, I attempted to analyze the costume motifs for their mythological references. In the course of this analysis, I began to notice correspondences with the choreography. It stood to reason that Roerich might use motifs associated with Yarilo, the solar deity who was the subject of the rite. One male costume, which had a label for the dancer Alexander Gavrilov, was notable for the emblems that ran up from the border at the hem; the emblems look like ladders surmounted by wheels, and they may represent the wooden wheels that were threaded with dry twigs, placed atop ladders or poles, and set afire to celebrate the return of the sun. A photograph of the costumes, from the sale of the collection at Sotheby’s, features this garment with the firewheels. The colors Roerich used supported the interpretation of these emblems as firewheels for Yarilo — the ladder and wheel were orange, and the spaces between the spokes on the wheels were dark aqua, as though the sky were showing through them. On the sleeve of the same costume was a figure stencilled in orange and dark aqua with magenta added. It occurred to me that it might be a totem of Yarilo, such as are shown on the wooden idols of the early Slavs. At the same time, reminded me of Bronislava Nijinska’s description of the dance of the Chosen Maiden, which she wrote in a letter to the Soviet ballet historian Vera Krassovskaya. Detailing a section toward the end of the solo, Nijinska suggested that “the movements give the image of a prehistoric bird whose wings try to raise the body, which is clumsy and not yet ready to fly.” When I met Svetoslav Roerich, I showed him my study sketch for the costume (Illustration 5), and I asked him what he thought it signified. “A bird, he said without hesitation, and I queried whether or not it might be a totem of some deity, but he repeated, “An ancient bird.” The leaps of the young men who wear the firewheel costumes adumbrate those of the Chosen Maiden in her awkward effort to join Yarilo in the sky.

Beyond the symbolic references of the costume motifs, I hoped, if possible, to decode dance movements from them. On the firewheel costumes the border print included circles with a darkened circle in the center, and outside the circumference of the circles were the curves of broken or incomplete circles. According to my cross-referencing of sources for the reconstruction, a ground pattern very like this concentric circle motif appears in the second act of Le Sacre; once the Chosen Maiden has been selected by a trick of fate and surrounded by the other young women, the elders begin to close in around them (Illustration 6). A number of ground patterns familiar from my research were identifiable, perhaps by coincidence, on the costumes. It may well be impossible to prove any relationship between the dancers’ garments and the dance design, but such continuity exists in ritual traditions from various cultures.

That Roerich and Nijinsky may have planned specific correspondences in the choreography and costume motifs is consistent with the manner in which they worked together. Nijinsky does not seem to have put any of the ensembles together until mid-to-late January 1913, by which time he had received Roerich’s drawings and costumes. Many of the ground patterns in the original Sacre have antecedents in the ritual dance of shamanistic tradition — circles, concentric circles, squares, and the circle-in-the-square. Surely Roerich passed on to Nijinsky the importance of such patterns in the archaic rites of the Slavs. As designer, he would have already incorporated them as motifs on the costumes, which Nijinsky insisted on seeing before his preparation of the ensemble movement. So it is reasonable to suppose that the ground patterns of the ballet have this derivation from Roerich and ritual tradition.

On January 27, Nijinsky wired Gabriel Astruc, director of the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, for the dimensions of the stage, which means that he was working on the relationships of the groups, their proximity, the time it would take for one group to pass another and other ensemble questions. Two days earlier, Nijinsky wrote to Stravinsky from Leipzig, where the company was still touring before the London season. The letter is such a comprehensive report on rehearsals and the choreographer’s reflections on Le Sacre that it makes all the more enticing the fact that similar correspondence with Roerich did exist, although its whereabouts are now unknown. Nijinsky also wrote regularly to his mother in Petersburg during his travels with the Ballets Russes, and those letters, too, would have disclosed much about his creative process, but they were lost in World War II. What Nijinsky expressed to Stravinsky on January 25, 1913, summarized this process.

Dear Igor, I have been able to make five rehearsals since our departure from Vienna. This is not very many, of course, considering how much remains to be done, but with the burden of work that we have, and with these tiring moves from town to town, where we stay only two or three days, it was not possible to do more. I squeezed as much out of these rehearsals as I could, and if I am able to continue this way, I will possibly have enough time for everything — without damaging my health and at the same time dancing well at the performances. We have composed almost everything through the games and dances in the ring, and the game of abduction.

Nijinsky may mean that in less than three weeks he completed the first two scenes of Act I, Augurs of Spring (which climaxes in the game with the twigs) and the continuation in Dance of the Maidens (which includes chain movement that become circles, or rings) plus Ritual Abduction — seven minutes of the thirty-five minute ballet. This rate of productivity is high by any company standards, if Nijinsky’s performances as a principal are borne in mind. But on the other hand, he may mean that he has finished the first four scenes of Act I, Augurs of Spring/Dance of the Maidens; Ritual Abduction; Spring Rounds (possibly the “dances in the ring”); and the Games of the Rival Tribes, which would mean a third of the whole work. According to Nijinska, her brother went over every accent with every dancer, and he “would not proceed in his composition until he obtained the exact execution,” which “created the impression that Nijinsky himself was proceeding at a slow pace” in his choreography. The Leipzig letter helps establish the fact that, given the complexities of Sacre and the touring schedule, Nijinsky was proceeding apace. Part of the purpose of the letter may have been to demonstrate as much to Stravinsky, who had already promulgated the idea Nijinsky was a slow worker. That idea, together with Stravinsky’s verdict that Nijinsky was unmusical, went a long way to discredit his dance in the years before the composer retracted his interim views and declared that the original choreography was the best of any for Sacre. The letter continued with Nijinsky full of hope and excitement over his creation:

I am very pleased with the way everything has turned out. If the work continues like this, Igor, the result will be something great. I know what Le Sacre du printemps will be when everything is as we both want it: new, and, for an ordinary viewer, a jolting impression and emotional experience. For some it will open new horizons flooded with different rays of sun. People will see new and different colors and different lines. All different, new and beautiful. I go to Dresden today, where it will be impossible to rehearse since we are only there for one day. From Dresden we go to London. A bow to your wife. I kiss your hand. Vaslav.

When the Ballets Russes arrived in London at the end of January, 1913, Stravinsky joined them for Sacre rehearsals. Nijinsky confided to his sister his frustration over what he considered time lost in rehearsals with the composer’s “lectures” concerning “the begin-
Illustration 5. Costume by Nicholas Roerich for Young Man in Sacre. Reconstruction drawing and costume study by Millicent Hodson, Act I, Scene 4, Games of the Rival Tribes, a sudden leap with arms and legs outspread, based on observations in Jacques Rivière's essay on Sacre, 1913.

ning theory of music." He also spoke at that point how he was inspired by the liberatory movement and how he was greatly encouraged in his creative work by Roerich, which again suggests communication about the relation of dance to design in Le Sacré during the actual period of its construction. Anatole Bourman, Marie Rambert, and other Ballets Russes dancers have described how the tensions mounted during the rehearsal period for Sacré, but Nijinska, with her unique perspective on Nijinsky, best explained the causes and effects for her brother. Much of the problem she attributed to his perennial isolation from the rest of the dancers, due to his relationship with Diaghilev. When he most needed the company's solidarity, there was no bond to strengthen and intensify, and instead the alienation between choreographer and cast grew ever greater. Although Roerich had been connected with the Ballets Russes off and on since its first season, he did not have the familiarity with the company that, for example, Bakst had. When Roerich came to Monte Carlo for the Sacré rehearsals, according to Nijinska, he focused his attention on the choreographer:

Only Roerich supported Vaslav. He often came to the rehearsals and encouraged Vaslav, who would listen attentively. The only time Vaslav appeared relaxed during rehearsals was when he was with Roerich.

At the end of the London rehearsals or beginning of those in Monte Carlo, Nijinsky was working on the final scenes of Act I, the Games of the Rival Tribes and Procession of the Sage/Dance of the Earth, about which Roerich wrote to Diaghilev: "The wisest ancient is brought from the village to imprint his sacred kiss on the new-flowering earth. During his rite the crowd is seized with a mystic terror, and this our excellent Nijinsky has styled for us admirably well." During the early spring rehearsal period, Roerich came to Monte Carlo, where the company resided from mid-March, staying on through their April season there, until they left in early May for Paris. Still at this stage in the construction of the dance, conversations continued between the scenarist-designer and choreographer. Nijinska recalled:

Vaslav often told me how much he liked to listen to Roerich talking about his studies of the origin of man, describing the pagan rites and the prehistory of the tribes "that roamed the land we now call Russia."

The collaboration with Nicholas Roerich thus seems to have been a constructive experience for Nijinsky. Not only were the wooden idols a potential source of posture and gesture but also the motifs on the costumes—all with the mythological references embodied in them—created options for the shape of the whole dance on the stage. Although Nijinsky began working toward his choreographic method with Faune, it crystallized in Sacré. In ritual tradition a votive design is thought to contain the energy of whatever it signifies. A circle, like the sun, is potent in and of itself because of its correspondence to that source of energy. So the continuity of design from a shaman's rattle to the steps of his dance is a form of incremental repetition which multiplies the impact of the rite. Some magical systemizing of this sort pervades Nijinsky's movement for Sacré. What remains to be explored choreographically is whether this system, or method, of extending the design of movement for a single dancer to the configurations of a full cast requires a ritual subject. Neither Nijinsky nor Nijinska exhausted the creative possibilities of this method.

NOTES


3. This article develops material from my doctoral thesis, Nijinsky's New Dance: Rediscovery of Ritual Design in "Le Sacre du printemps" (University of California, Berkeley, 1985). The thesis is not published but parts were adapted for two articles in Dance Research, the journal of the Society for Dance Research, London, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Autumn, 1985) and Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring, 1986). I would like to acknowledge the help and interest of my thesis chairman, Prof. Bertrand August, Comparative Literature, and committee member, Prof. Robert Hughes, Slavic Studies.


5. "Conclusion," Revue Musicale, XI (December, 1930), p. 103. Unless indicated otherwise, translations in this article are by the author.


12. "Introduction to Typescrint of Notes for Le Sacre du printemps, Piano Score for Four Hands" (Introduction, 1967; Notes, 1913). I would like to acknowledge Jane Pritchard, archivist of the Ballet Rambert, who made this material available to me.


15. Jacques Rivière, "Le Sacre du printemps," La Nouvelle Revue Française, Vol. VII (November 1, 1913), p. 723. The translation of this passage is from the doctoral thesis of Truman C. Bullard, The First Performance of Igor Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps" (University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music, June 6, 1971). In addition to his written text, which is Volume I, Bullard included a collection of contemporary reviews, which is comprehensive if not complete, his translation of them comprises Volume II and the reviews in the original French constitute Volume III. His translation is direct, often literal, and I have found it useful for searching out choreographic clues. Another translation which reads well but is less helpful for dance data is the selection of excerpts by Miriam Lassman, included as an appendix in Lincoln Kirstein, Nijinsky Dancing (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975). The Rivière quote given here is from Bullard, Vol. II, p. 296.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., p. 300.

18. Information on Yarilo cults and northern Slavic rites I have gathered from such sources as the following: E. Louis Backman, Religious Dances in the Christian Church and in Popular Medicine (London: Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1952), a general book which deals with pagan antecedents; James Billington, The Icon and the Axe (New York and London: Vintage, 1966); R.W. Ralston, Rus-

19. Interview with Svetsoslav Roerich (Bangalore, India, September 14, 1983).


21. Ibid.


23. Nicholas Roerich, "The Stone Age," Adamant (Paris: Franco-Russe, 1923, in French; New York: CorunaMundi, 1924, in English, a translation which seems to have been by Roerich himself), pp. 125-139.

24. For discussion of the issue of rethinking cultural values, see Gray, especially pp. 110-130, and Compton, pp. 18-19, 26-31, and 92-95.


27. Roerich, pp. 131-132.


30. This design for Act I is reproduced in "Nicholas Roerich and his Theatrical Designs: A Research Survey" by Kenneth Archer in this issue, p. 4. During the week of the Sacre premiere, the artist Valentine Gross made many sketches of the ballet, including five pastels which demonstrate the relationship of the choreographic groups and their costumes to the shapes and decorated weapons can be seen in a photo of Sacre costumes published in Alexander Shouvaloff and Victor Borovsky, Stravinsky on Stage (London: Stainer and Bell, 1982), p. 69.


34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 93.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., p. 90.

38. These collections include the Bakhrushin Theatre Museum in Moscow, the Stravinsky-Diahiilev Foundation in New York, the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra in Paris and the Theatre Museum, currently housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

39. See note 18.


42. Interview with Svetsoslav Roerich.

43. Contemporary research needs to be done on the relationship between ritual dance pattern and talismanic designs on musical instruments and votive objects. What is available to read is either out-of-date or restricted to a single discipline, such as musicology or mythology. Probably the best results could be attained by combining methods of dance anthropology with those from the history of design. The necessity of combining methods no doubt results from the integration of ritual dance in social, cultural and metaphysical systems which draw upon consistent visual symbolism. A number of available texts touch on this subject. Among those I found most useful are: Jane Belo, Trance in Bali (New York, Columbia University, 1960); Franziska Boas, The Function of Dance in Human Society (1944; reprinted in New York: Dance Horizons, 1972); Erika Bourguignon, "Trance Dance," Dance Perspectives, 35 (Autumn, 1968); Maya Deren, Divine Horsemen (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1953); Joan Halifax, Shamanic Voices (New York: Dutton, 1979; London: Penguin, 1980); John T. Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones, editors, Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1976); Laszlo Lgegeza, Tao Magic: The Secret Language of Diagrams and Calligraphy (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975).


45. The correspondence between Roerich and Nijinsky I learned about from Sina Fosdick, who was then director of the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York. She quoted an article by Roerich in which he reflected on the life of an emigre and the dispersion of treasured possessions. In the article he asked, "And where are the letters from Nijinsky now?" Mrs. Fosdick, a Russian emigre herself, was then in her nineties, having worked in New York since her arrival in the early 1920s, shortly after which she met Roerich and began a lifelong association with him and his cultural projects. In our discussion she could not remember the name, date, or title of the article, or whether it had been published, but she could visualize the typed page, which was in Russian. Interview with Sina Fosdick (New York, October 15, 1982).

46. Conversations with Irina Nijinska. Bronislava Nijinska told her daughter of a wicker sewing basket in which she had kept Vaslav's letters to their mother; it was left for safekeeping with a Moscow friend when Nijinska left the Soviet Union in 1921, and contact with the friend ceased during the war.

47. Stravinsky and Craft, p. 94.


49. Stravinsky and Craft, pp. 92-94. This view is clear from the letters during the early rehearsal period, December 1912, through January 1913.


51. Stravinsky and Craft.

52. Nijinska, p. 458.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.


56. Ibid.
