

Living Archive. Nyota Inyoka's Archive: Traces of the Ephemeral and Ancient Dances Reenactment

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Recibido: 1 de febrero de 2022 / Aceptado: 7 de abril de 2022

Abstract. The French National Library keeps since 1983 the personal archive of the dancer and choreographer Nyota Inyoka (Fonds Nyota Inyoka). This archive comprises twenty-eight boxes of documents, besides costumes belonging to the dancer, which are constitutive as material of enormous value for the necessary recovery of this figure that has fallen into oblivion in the history of dance. This article aims at providing a first approach to the Nyota Inyoka Archive by ramifying the study in two directions. On the one hand, it allows us to articulate some keys to her choreographic proposal and her theoretical conception of dance. On the other hand, it enables us to broaden the reflection towards the relationship between the archive and the dancing body. Nyota Inyoka's repertoire revolves around ancient cultures that refer mainly to traditions from ancient Egypt and South and Southeast Asia. Thus, the archive takes on an important presence linked to the discipline of dance in a double sense. Firstly, the ephemeral nature of this art favors the archive to become an essential element for dance research. Whilst if we take into consideration the choreographic process of the dancer based on visual sources from Egyptian and Asian art, her body is constituted as a living archive. In this sense, I will offer a reading of Nyota Inyoka's work as a kind of *avant la lettre* reenactment of ancient dances.

Keywords: Dance; Nyota Inyoka; body; archive; reenactment; visual arts; Asia; Ancient Egypt; antiquity.

[es] Archivo-viviente. El fondo Nyota Inyoka: huellas de lo efímero y *reenactment* de las danzas antiguas

Resumen. La Biblioteca Nacional de Francia conserva desde 1983 el archivo personal de la bailarina y coreógrafa Nyota Inyoka (Fonds Nyota Inyoka). Está compuesto por veintiocho cajas de documentos, además del vestuario perteneciente a la bailarina, que se constituyen como un material de enorme valor para la necesaria recuperación de esta figura que ha caído, sin embargo, en el olvido de la historia de la danza. Este artículo tiene como objetivo ofrecer una aproximación a los Fondos Nyota Inyoka abriendo el estudio en dos direcciones. Su análisis permite, por un lado, articular algunas claves de su propuesta coreográfica y de su concepción teórica de la danza, al tiempo que amplía la reflexión hacia la relación entre archivo y cuerpo danzante. El repertorio de Nyota Inyoka orbita en torno a culturas de la antigüedad no-europea que remiten, principalmente, a tradiciones de Egipto y del sur y sudeste de Asia. Así, el archivo cobra una presencia importante vinculado a la disciplina de la danza en un doble sentido. Por una parte, el carácter efímero de este arte favorece que el archivo se constituya como elemento esencial para la investigación sobre danza. Mientras que, si tomamos en consideración el proceso coreográfico de la bailarina a partir de fuentes visuales del arte egipcio y asiático, su cuerpo se constituye como archivo-vivo. En este sentido ofreceré una lectura de la obra de Nyota Inyoka como una suerte de *reenactment avant la lettre*.

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Palabras clave: Danza; Nyota Inyoka; body; archivo; *reenactment*; visual arts; Asia; Antiguo Egipto; antigüedad.

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Cómo citar: López Arnaiz, Irene. (2022). Living Archive. Nyota Inyoka's Archive: Traces of the Ephemeral and Ancient Dances Reenactment, en *Anales de Historia del Arte* n° 32 (2022), 327-350.

1. From the historiographic shadow to the light of the archive

1.1. Story, fiction, and document. Some findings about Nyota Inyoka

The Paris-based dancer and choreographer Nyota Inyoka (1896-1971) developed a prolific body of work that would cross spatial and temporal borders as a result of her recurring tours, the (trans)cultural imaginaries and references present in her repertoire, and her own condition as mestizo woman. She made her debut in 1917 in the *Revue Féerique (Magic Revue)* of the well-known Folies-Bergère Theater². She was announced as «the pearl of Asia», inserting herself as a racialized body in the gear of variety, exoticism, and vertiginous novelty that the cabaret and music hall circuit demanded³. Shortly after, she would conquer other scenic contexts that moved between concert halls, independent, private, or avant-garde theaters, entertainment halls, galas, the Salon d'Automne, and universal and colonial exhibitions. In addition, she gave several lectures and developed a fruitful exchange with writers, historians, philologists, thinkers, and high society people. The undeniable success achieved throughout a career that would last for more than four decades is evident not only in the amount and well-received shows offered in Europe and North America⁴ but also through the monographic book that Loulou Roudanez devoted to her⁵. Furthermore, Nyota Inyoka was awarded in 1949 with the Arts of the Theater Prize, recognized by the Society of Fine Arts⁶.

² Hand program: *Les Folies-Bergère [La Revue Féerique]* (n.d. [16 November, 1917]) (s.p.). In *Recueil factice de documents concernant les revues des Folies Bergère*, 1917, Bibliothèque nationale de France [BnF], Paris). All English translations from the original French documents are by the author. I would like to thank Almudena Rodríguez Guridi for her invaluable help with the English version of this text.

³ Décoret-Ahiha, A. (1998). *Les danses exotiques en France, 1900-1940* (Doctoral thesis). Université de Paris VIII, Paris, 249-341.

⁴ The Nyota Inyoka Archive of the BnF preserves more than forty hand programs and brochures of solo performances, with her company or in collective programming. In addition, there is a large volume of press documentation that records the reception of her shows. Besides, other archives mentioned later preserve, although to a lesser extent, documentation of this type referring to the dancer.

⁵ Roudanez, L. (1947). *Des danseurs qui sortent du cadre*. Nyota Inyoka. S. l.: Susse.

⁶ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka]. (n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s]). *Nyota Inyoka (résumé biographique et activités de Nyota Inyoka)*, (unpublished typed document) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 6).

However, despite the good acceptance her work had, and her wide choreographic repertoire that included solo compositions as well as for her company, the figure of Nyota Inyoka has gone deeply unnoticed in the 20th-century history of dance. Jacqueline Robinson included her in *L'aventure de la danse moderne en France* among «the Orientals» Jeanne Ronsay, Djemil Anik, Uday Shankar, and Raden Mas Jodjana⁷. Robinson offered a brief approach to her figure that began excluding her from the pantheon of modern dance, although her proposal was labeled as «creative»⁸. Subsequently, Anne Décoret-Ahiha's exhaustive study of exotic dances in France began to shed some light on her biography and repertoire, although through very incomplete information⁹. Nyota Inyoka is often absent from studies devoted to dance in the 20th century European context. Furthermore, the works specialized in the exotic aspect present in the Western dance circuit of the first half of the 20th century, and even those focused on the influence of the Indian imaginary in this context, have devoted very secondary attention to Inyoka, only naming this figure among other better well-known contemporary dancers, or even ignoring her¹⁰. None of these studies offer a critical analysis of her choreographic proposal or of the preserved documentation. These omissions seem to be a consequence of the scant available information about this dancer until recently.

However, in recent years Nyota Inyoka has aroused the interest of researchers. On the one hand, in my dissertation devoted to analyzing the impact of South and Southeast Asian dances in France, Nyota Inyoka had a leading place, along with many other dancers. These figures took part in the reception and re-creation of Indian dances in the Western context, and their contribution was essential to challenging European dance codes. That dissertation was the first research in undertaking an initial analysis of the Nyota Inyoka collection in the French National Library. It was carried out by establishing this archive as a fundamental baseline for the development of the whole research¹¹. The extension of that first study has crystallized in recent publications devoted to Nyota Inyoka, such as the present one¹². On the other hand, in 2019, a project was born in University of Salzburg with the aim of studying Nyota Inyoka's figure and work, offering a reading of her work through racial critics, applying the

⁷ Robinson, J. (1990). *L'aventure de la danse moderne en France (1920-1970)*. Clamécy: Éditions Bougé, 90-92.

⁸ Ibid. Italics are from the author.

⁹ Décoret-Ahiha, A. (1998) op. cit.; Décoret-Ahiha, A. (2004). *Les danses exotiques en France (1880-1940)*. Pantin: Éditions Centre National de la Danse.

¹⁰ Warren, V. (2006). Yearning for the Spiritual Ideal: The Influence of India on Western Dance 1626-2003. *Dance Research Journal*, Vol. 38, n° 1/2, 97-114; Suquet, A. (2012). *L'éveil des modernités. Une histoire Culturelle de la danse (1870-1945)*. Pantin: Centre national de la danse. Coutelet, N. (2014). *Étranges artistes sur la scène de Folies-Bergère*. Paris: PUV, Université Paris 8, Saint Denis; Palazzolo, C. (2017). *Mise en scene de la danse aux expositions de Paris (1889-1937). Une fabrique du regard*. Paris: L'œil d'or; Brenscheidt, D. (2017). Indian Influences on Modern Dance in the West. In E. Schenini (Com.) *The Myth of India in Western Culture 1808-2017* [cat. exp] (pp. 184-203). Milano: Skira.

¹¹ López Arnaiz, I. (2018). *La impronta de las danzas «indias» en Francia. El encuentro de las artes plásticas y escénicas, entre el exotismo y la modernidad (1838-1939)* (Doctoral thesis). Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid.

¹² López Arnaiz, I. (2021). Movimientos imaginados, gestos rastreados. Nyota Inyoka, una (re)creación mestiza de las danzas indias. In E. Fernández del Campo and S. Román Aliste (Eds.). *Las mujeres que inventaron el arte indio* (pp. 268-297, notes pp. 396-403). Madrid: Asimétricas; López Arnaiz, I. (2020). Sculptures vivantes: la réception des danses indiennes en Occident (1900-1939). *Perspective. Actualité en histoire de l'art. Danser*, n° 2, 179-194. Besides, the text entitled «Bajo el esplendor del esoterismo. Prácticas educativas y comunitarias en la Denishawn y los Ballets de Nyota Inyoka» is expected to be published in a collective book in the near future.

concept of ‘*créolité*’ proposed by Édouard Glissant¹³. Likewise, in 2021 came to light a publication that reflects on museographic mediation from trans-artistic and performative dimensions proposed by the group *Créons au musée*¹⁴.



Figure 1. Nyota Inyoka before her Buddha. Published in *Les Dimanches de la Femme* (28 September 1930). BnF-Gallica

The lack of information about Nyota Inyoka’s life is not only the result of the limited dissemination the collection kept at the French National Library has had until recently. It also responds to the identity fiction mechanisms generated by the dancer, and amplified by her critical reception. Like other Hindu dancers such as Mata Hari, Tórtola Valencia, Sahary Djeli, Roshanara, or Ragini Devi, she adopted a stage name that would go beyond the stage context, constituting her own identity¹⁵. The

¹³ Research project: *Border-Dancing Across Time. The (forgotten) Parisian choreographer Nyota Inyoka, her oeuvre, and questions of choreographing créolité* (Paris Lodron University Salzburg). One member of the team has published the text: Cramer, F.A. (2021). Nyota Inyoka, Biographie. Archiv. Retrieved from: www.perfomap.de/map11/werk-geschichten/nyota-nyoka-biographie-archiv [Consulted: 12/02/2022].

¹⁴ Légeret, K. (dir.) (2021). *Danser Nyota Inyoka et autres médiations artistiques au musée*. Paris: Geuthner. Although it approximates the life and work of the dancer, there is a lack of analysis of Nyota Inyoka’s archival documentation and repertoire.

¹⁵ For more information on the identity fiction processes of these dancers, see: López Arnaiz, I. (2020). De la creación escénica a la ficción autobiográfica. Las bailarinas hindúes encarnan su propio mito. In E. M^o. Ramos Frenedo, *Géneros y subjetividades en las prácticas artísticas contemporáneas* (pp. 56-69). Sevilla: Arcibel Editores. The term ‘Hindu dances’ or ‘dancers’ is used to designate choreographic proposals inspired by traditions and cultures of South and Southeast Asia performed during the first half of the 20th century from the West and for Western audiences. These dancers, most of them women, generated autobiographical fictions that highlighted more or less legendary oriental origins. Most of these women were educated in the West, from where they accessed exotic cultures under the filter of orientalism. The appellative ‘Hindu’, recurring at the time to designate

name Nyota Inyoka should not, therefore, be reduced to a stage name. But it should also be understood as an evidence of the identity construction, through which she embodied the orientalist imaginary in her own body, subverting, in turn, its racialized perception. In this way, she mixed her public and private life, fiction and reality. This enabled her to question the very limits of the creative act and also to make evident the power dynamics that directed the construction of the exotic imaginary in the colonial period. This act of identity construction must therefore be re-read from contemporary parameters, as a performative activity that contributed to questioning the limits of the artwork and the creative process.

During the first years of her career, the spelling of her name varied. It will finally settle as Nyota Inyoka or Nyota-Inyoka. However, the Folies-Bergère presented her in 1917 as Nioka-Nioka, and a few days later as Nyota-Nyoka. She is also mentioned in the early year's documentation as Nyota Nioka. Her self-presentation as Nyota Inyoka becomes clear if we take into consideration her signature and her columbarium inscription: «Nyota Inyoka. Hindu choreographer»¹⁶. In an article about the pseudonym of the dancer, it was considered as «a true name full of hidden meaning that is, more than a baptism, a consecration». The dancer claimed that Swahili priests imposed it on her: «Nyota is a star, Inyoka, a snake. Living under these signs is the great means to please the Gods», she declared¹⁷.

Nyota Inyoka was born as Aïda Étienne Guignard, on September 14th, 1896, at the Broca Hospital, in the 13th arrondissement of Paris. Her birth certificate recognizes her as the daughter of Mélanie Guignard, a domestic worker, and an undeclared father¹⁸. She died at home, at 2 Porte d'Auteuil in the sixteenth arrondissement, on August 24th, 1971¹⁹.

Even today we do not know her father's origin, but he would have probably been from India or Egypt. Inyoka's mestizo body led to the distortion of her own birthplace, placing it between these two territories that became the fundamental cultural references for the creation of her choreographies. The press focused the attention on the dancer's body from racist perceptions: «Nyota Inyoka, who was born in Upper Egypt, of a black mother and a father who was less black, possessed the charm of always revitalizing blood mixture»²⁰. At the same time, various hand programs and

this type of dancer has been transferred to the field of dance history to designate this genre and thus differentiate it from the dances developed in Asia. As Tiziana Leucci has underlined, it is worth clarifying the Orient-West / Oriental-Western terminology used throughout the text to facilitate an approach to the cultural encounters analyzed here. Keep in mind, however, the limitations that these concepts entail, as well as the debates generated from their inclusion and questioning in academic studies.

¹⁶ It is located in a columbarium at the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, concession number: 4794, division: 87.

¹⁷ Chamine. (5 February 1932). *Le Mystère du pseudonyme. L'Intransigeant*, 2.

¹⁸ Birth certificate in the 13th arrondissement of Paris (Archive of Paris: V4E 9521, n° 2118). This source has been located thanks to the brief and recent entry of an anonymous author on French Wikipedia. In contrast to the group *Border-Dancing Across Time* (Cramer, F.A. [2021] op. cit.), and without ignoring at any time the self-identification of the dancer as Nyota Inyoka, I consider it appropriate to bring to light her birth name, since I believe that its publication can contribute to expanding the existing information, as well as to encourage the discovery of new documents. In the same way, her birth certificate confirms her French and apparently humble origins, as the daughter of a mother who was a domestic worker and without a recognized father. Therefore, it is necessary to deepen the investigation in order to find out by what means could she have had access to the high cultural and educational level she reached as the documentation in the archive suggests. There is no doubt that further research is needed in this regard.

¹⁹ Death certificate in the 16th arrondissement of Paris (Archive of Paris: 16D 237, n° 1287).

²⁰ Anonymous. (1921). Nyota Inyoka. *L'Œuvre*. S.I. (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 2).

articles referred to her Indian origins²¹. Appellatives such as princess or priestess, evoking the idealized –and stereotyped– image of an archaic and far East, accompanied many comments about her. In an interview, the dancer stated having seen Indian dancers for the first time, while attending a marriage ceremony with her family in Pondichery –at the time part of the French India²². Artist Paul Landowski, who in 1947 made four bronze sculptures of the dancer, traced her origins to Algeria, describing her apartment as an «Algerian bazaar»²³. In fact, Inyoka appears in many photographs with turbans, accessories, and clothing in oriental style, which again show her identification with the character she had been creating. The press described her «in her apartment at the Porte d’Auteuil [...] surrounded by carved wooden Hindu deities, paintings, chests, and vessels; everything is Asiatic»²⁴. As I will show later, Egyptian and Asian art constituted fundamental sources for her creative process.

Of Indian origin, Nyota Inyoka is inspired by the epic and religious mythology of India. She adds to her research the study of the iconography and ancient sculpture of Egypt, Assyria, and all the great civilizations of the East... [...] Through her art she brings us the atmosphere that emanates legends of the past; it translates to our eyes the thousand-year-old gestures and offers them to us renewed, alive, accessible. [...] Her conception of dance is based on a high ideal, Nyota-Inyoka «dances the Orient, but a pure Orient»²⁵.

At some point, and probably with the intention of vindicating the authorship, the dancer herself admitted her Parisian origins, referring to the French institutions where she had access to the visual sources that gave her an approach to Indian and ancient Egyptian dances. «Nyota Inyoka, widely known in Paris and abroad as a “Hindu dancer” has just declared: “I am a Parisian. I was not born in India, where I have only been once. I have learned to dance at the École du Louvre and at the Guimet Museum”»²⁶.

So far, I have not been able to confirm this stay in India, although the trip undertaken in September, 1919 to Papeete, via New York, has been corroborated²⁷. Likewise, Loulou Roudanez wrote down the memory she shared as follows:

It was while returning from one of my great voyages around the globe where I had the good fortune to contemplate, during many full moon nights, beautiful primitive dances. That one day I had a vision on board in the boat that was bringing me back to Europe. It was a thundering vision: it was siesta time; without being asleep, with half-closed eyelids, I suddenly saw a golden gleaming god on his pedestal,

²¹ For example, the hand program: *Une unique gala: les danses de Nyota Inyoka. Danseuse de l’Inde*, Paris: Théâtre Fémina, 27 November n.d. (Bibliothèque Musée de l’Opéra [BMO]: PRO.A.525).

²² Nyota Inyoka. (n.d. [c. 1949]). Voyage autour de la danse. *Connaissance du Monde*, 48-60 (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 3).

²³ Landowski, P. (31 July 1947). *Journal*. Retrieved from: <http://journal.paul-landowski.com/node/168> [Consulted 10 July 2018]; Landowski, P. (10 November 1948). *Journal*. Retrieved from: <http://journal.paul-landowski.com/node/162> [Consulted 10 July 2018]. The four works are kept in the Musée des Années Trente de Boulogne-Billancourt. On these works see: López Arnaiz, I. (2018). *Op. cit.*, 467-471.

²⁴ Rollot, J. (19 April n.d.). La danse hindou aux Variétés. *Ce matin* (Archives Musée Guimet, Paris).

²⁵ Hand program: *Nyota Inyoka*. (n.d.) s.l. (BnF: 4°ICO PER 13162).

²⁶ Anonymous. (n.d.). Le Tour du Monde en 80 pirouettes. *La Lanterne* (Archives Musée Guimet, Paris).

²⁷ List of incoming passengers and crew, New York, United States, from Le Havre (6 September 1919) (unpublished document). Retrieved from: <https://acortar.link/MM0265> [Consulted: 15 January 2022].

performing an extraordinary dance seated with marvelous gestures of arms and hands, accompanied by reptilian movements of the torso; on his face shone a smile of a strange expression which seemed as if detached from the act he was performing and that filled my heart with joy and gratitude. I understood without hesitation that Vishnu, the protective god of the Trimurti or Brahmanic Trinity, had just appeared to me in the form of fighting Rama. It was a flash of light like an order from above. [...] This was the origin of my first dance²⁸.



Figure 2. Nyota Inyoka in a later version of *Vishnu-Rama*, with a different costume than the one designed by Paul Poiret for the premiere. (c. 1930s). BMO, Paris

An evocation in which two deeply interconnected stereotypes of non-European cultures converge, moving between primitive and spiritual idealization. On the one hand, the longing for a journey towards the primitive has clear resonances with the myth of Gauguin's lost paradise. It was not in vain that her stay in French Polynesia must have inspired her Tahitian dance, as preserve photographs and drawings show²⁹. On the other hand, the creative act of Nyota Inyoka starting from a vision, the desire to incarnate the divinity, connects with a conception of her practice linked to questions of a spiritual and transcendental order. In 1921 Nyota Inyoka would present her first choreography, *Vishnu-Rama* at the Théâtre de l'Oasis –installed in Paul Poiret's garden– and in the Salon d'Automne³⁰. But this testimony, far from being limited to

²⁸ Roudanez, L. (1947) op. cit., 73-74.

²⁹ Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 2 and FOL.COL119 Box 10.

³⁰ Hand programs: Théâtre de l'Oasis. (24 June – 7 July 1921). Paris: Théâtre de l'Oasis (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 2). *Nyota-Inyoka*. (10 November 1921). Paris: Salon d'Automne. Section de la danse. (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 2). See: López Arnaiz, I. (2021) op. cit., 283-284.

the creation of this piece, refers to the creative project that Nyota Inyoka developed throughout her extensive career, in which the visions of an exotic and mystical nature intermingle with an earnest study of these cultures and traditions.

The magazine *Les dimanches de la femme* in which she appeared next to a Thai-style Buddha, presented her as «the famous dancer». These types of statements are recurrent in press reviews, interviews, programs, and publicity material. A document that compiled her artistic activity highlighted the «world reputation» that she had conquered after her tours in Paris, New York, London, Sweden, Norway, Italy, Portugal, Poland, Belgium, Romania, Hungary, and former Yugoslavia³¹. The Nyota Inyoka archive and other collections of the French National Library preserve programs and brochures of many performances in Paris, both solo and with her ballet, in venues such as the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Théâtre de l'Œuvre, Maison Gaveau or Salle Pleyel. Beyond France, her presence in Italy is noteworthy. There she danced in cities that included Milan, Siena, Messina, Palermo, or Venice, as well as her North American around 1923-1924. In 1935 she performed at the Ginasio Theater in Lisbon, as not only the hand program, but also her journal corroborates³². In addition, she and her company performed in Spain on several occasions, first at the Teatro Coliseum (1927), later at the Teatro Apolo, both in Barcelona and at Joan Magrinyà's studio (1933)³³. Furthermore, in 1935 she presented a solo recital at the Salón Miramar in San Sebastián³⁴.



Figure 3. Les Ballets de Nyota Inyoka in *Cortège (d'après Thèbes)*, c. 1932. BMO, Paris

³¹ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka]. (n.d. [c. 1954]). *Activités récentes de Nyota Inyoka (1948-1954)*. Unpublished typed document (Archives Paul Landowski - Musée des Années Trente).

³² Journals and notebooks are preserved where Nyota Inyoka wrote down her dreams. One of them begins with an entry dated November 24, 1935, which she places in Lisbon. See: *Journal and Petit carnet de rêves* at: Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 4.

³³ Anonymous (1 June 1927). Coliseum. *La Publicitat*; Gasch, S. (4 February 1934). Una estrella ha passat. *Mirador*, 5.

³⁴ *Nyota Inyoka. Bailarina India*. (30 August and 1 September 1935). San Sebastián: Salón Miramar (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 3).

Although it is not possible to conduct an exhaustive classification and analysis of her repertoire, which should be completed in future research, her specialization in Indian and Egyptian traditions is undoubted. Her programs are based on the origin of her dance imageries, classified in turn into Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Modern India³⁵, and Ancient and Modern Egypt. Additionally, both the programs and the preserved photographs show the importance that Khmer art acquired in her choreographic creation and also –although to a lesser extent– Champa, Javanese, Tibetan, or Nepalese art.

As I will show later, Nyota Inyoka's creative process was strongly linked to the in-depth comparative study of the ancient civilizations and religions that inspired her choreographies. She became interested in the archaeology, art, history, mythology, literature, and religions of Asia and ancient Egypt. And, in these processes, she immersed herself in forms of thought linked to Buddhism and Hinduism that overflowed her purely creative and intellectual sphere, incorporating them into her way of living. According to Anton Giulio Bragaglia, following religious rules, she was a vegetarian and she did not drink alcohol or smoke³⁶. She had knowledge of yoga practice and philosophy, and she incorporated exercises related to this practice into her dance training. Following these inclinations, in the 1950s Nyota Inyoka planned the creation of a Dance Theater and Center for Art and Philosophy that never materialized. As a kind of *ashram*, she projected the installation «in front of an admirable landscape, on one of the most beautiful hills in Saint Paul de Vence, belonging to great dilettantes». There, in addition to holding dance performances, she would teach «new aesthetic notions, based on her discoveries, revealing an unprecedented science for choreographic, pictorial and sculptural composition»³⁷. Those discoveries referred to the theoretical work that she had developed in her unpublished book *Clef des attitudes et du geste esthétique*, where she proposed a sort of universal grammar of dance that would serve to renew the aesthetics of movement based on rules of mystical order. Both the Saint-Paul-de-Vence center and that book seem to be the result of a thoughtful research process regarding the definition of dance she had been developing in parallel to her creative proposal. In this sense, they can be seen as closely linked to the pedagogical activity undertaken since the creation of Les Ballets de Nyota Inyoka, in 1932, halfway between school and dance company. The character of the company evolved, along with Inyoka's repertoire, from the 1930s to the 1950s, through the combination of oriental dances and modern dances, and the study of Indian classical dances sources³⁸. The enthusiasm for exotic dances prevailing in the colonial context, in which Nyota Inyoka had started her career, would be transformed after the Second World War because of the crisis of Imperialism. Besides, Nyota Inyoka's activity concurred in time with the complex processes of «Sanskritization» or «classicization» of dance that

³⁵ In some cases, we find major divisions between Vishnuite, Shivaite, Vedic, Buddhist, and Brahmanical themes. Bragaglia, A.G. (1928). *Scultura Vivente*. Milano: L'Eroica, 71.

³⁷ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka]. (n.d. [c. 1950]). *Création d'un centre d'art et de philosophie à Saint Paul de Vence*. (Unpublished typed document) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 6). The activities to be developed in the center are described in another document, a draft of the constitution document of the company for the construction and operation of the center details the spaces to be built and the capital to be collected for its creation. Likewise, letters addressed to different personalities requesting support for the constitution of this center are preserved. All these documents are in: Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 6.

³⁸ Unpublished I. López Arnaiz interview with Malavika (Christine Klein) at her home in Paris, 22 April 2016.

took place in India. This would lead to the development of national revindications, at the same time in contact with the European context. In this sense, Cramer points to an evolution in Nyota Inyoka's style towards spiritual and universal themes, as the result of paradigm changes in the reception of these dances after World War II³⁹. However, my conclusion is that a spiritual dimension is present in her approach to dance since the 1920s, when other dancers as Ruth St. Denis, Nadja, or Tórtola Valencia created her own «spiritual choreographies». This is especially evident if we take into consideration Inyoka's links with the Parisian Theosophical Society. She danced there on several occasions in the 1920s and in 1957 she presented, along with dancers from her company, her discoveries around *Clef des attitudes et du geste esthétique*⁴⁰.

1.2. Brief approach to Nyota Inyoka Archive

In this section, I will focus on the documentation on Nyota Inyoka kept in the French National Library, although other libraries in the world hold additional documents. In this sense, it is necessary to differentiate between the personal collection of the dancer (Fonds Nyota Inyoka), and other sets, dossiers, and even isolated documentation referring to Nyota Inyoka. It must be mentioned that the personal archive Fonds Nyota Inyoka is not the only collection in the French library with documentation on Nyota Inyoka.

On the one hand, the Library of the Opera Museum⁴¹ preserves a *Dossier biographique*⁴², which contains a small number of programs, brochures, press clippings, and documents. Other programs and brochures are also kept in the *Dossier Programme*⁴³. In addition, the same library preserves some dossiers of photographs and visual material of her performing solo and her company. One of them includes a valuable photograph of the *Shiva Dance* notation (1926)⁴⁴.

On the other hand, the Department of Performing Arts of the French National Library preserves several '*recueil factice*' with Inyoka's programs and press clippings, as well as an iconographic collection with photographs and visual material⁴⁵.

³⁹ Cramer, F.A. (2021), *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Hand program: *Nyota Inyoka*. (4 April 1926). Paris: Salle Adyar (BMO, Paris: PRO.A.525); *Les danses divines et rituelles de Nyota Inyoka accompagnée d'un groupe de danseuses de son ballet*. (3 February 1957). Paris: Salle Adyar (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 8). I am currently extending the research of Nyota Inyoka's links with the Theosophical Society, with the hypothesis that they were a determining factor for her understanding of dance.

⁴¹ The Bibliothèque Musée de l'Opéra (BMO) belongs to the French National Library (Bibliothèque nationale de France).

⁴² BMO, Paris: Nyota Inyoka: Dossier biographique. Part of the documentation preserved in this dossier and in the one mentioned in the following note, come from the Archives Internationales de la Danse, created by Rolf de Maré. About them see: Robinson, J. (1990) *op. cit.*, 112-120; Décoret-Ahiha, A. (2004) *op. cit.*, 273.

⁴³ BMO, Paris: Nyota Inyoka: Dossier programme: PRO.A.525. Some documents are repeated in these dossiers and in the Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF.

⁴⁴ BMO, Paris: Photo G.F.; Portr. / Ph I-II.

⁴⁵ Recueil factice d'articles de presse, programmes et documents divers concernant Nyota Inyoka, 1921-1945, BnF, Paris: 4-RO-12344 (1) y 8-RO-12344 (2); Recueil. Nyota Ynioka [Document d'archives] 1932-1979, BnF, Paris: WNN-1271; Nyota Inyoka, danseuse [Image fixe]: documents iconographiques 1926-1946, BnF, Paris: 4-ICO PER-13162; Fonds Légrand-Chabrier (cirque, music-hall), VI. 9. Coupures de presse relatives aux personnalités: Nyota Inyoka, BnF Paris: 4-COL-147(400).

After having mentioned the scattered material in various dossiers of the French library, I am going to analyze in more detail the nature of the documents preserved in the Fonds Nyota Inyoka in the French National Library. This collection was donated by her niece in 1983 –twelve years after the dancer’s death. It preserves the documentation compiled and generated by Nyota Inyoka herself, which could have been also subjected to a selection and organization process after her death. It contains twenty-eight boxes of documents: press clippings, programs, photographs, manuscripts, unpublished drafts, drawings, musical scores, etc. In addition, it preserves some costumes, jewelry, and accessories. It is, therefore, an extensive collection, full of valuable documentation for the study and recovery of this figure and her work.

It is necessary to point out the state of the archive, which is still uncatalogued. However, the curator in charge, Valérie Nonnenmacher, has made a first description that is extremely useful for researchers. Although the documentation is divided into boxes and these, in turn, into folders, we often find multiple drafts of the same writing or repeated copies of numerous photographs in different folders. Likewise, materials that are related to each other (drafts of the same text, photographs of the same choreography, repeated programs or brochure, etc.) are often scattered in different boxes or folders. This makes it difficult to develop a global and comparative analysis of the archive, since the folders must be consulted individually. In addition to this, it is forbidden to digitize the unpublished material of the archive, both for personal use, as well as for publishing. With no available images, it is difficult to transmit the variety and great interest of the documentary collection. In any case, there is no doubt about the enormous value of this collection for a historian, even more for the study of an artistic discipline as dance, whose ephemeral nature difficulties any analysis. The research on the archive is still in progress and, although a first examination of all the documentation preserved has been conducted, it is necessary to delve into a part of it, as well as to coordinate a critical study of all the sources by relating the materials to each other to prepare a complete and comparative analysis of the whole Nyota Inyoka’s work. There is no doubt that an exhaustive analysis of both the documentary and scenic elements of the collection will increasingly shed light on her whole production, enabling us to trace the evolution of her repertoire, her theoretical approach, and the whole of her vital and creative proposal.

Despite the large volume of the archive, its personal nature must be specially considered. It contains the documents and objects preserved by the dancer herself. Therefore, it gathers programs, reviews, and press material that are supposed to have pleased her, along with personal documentation such as letters written by her, publication projects, and other types of unpublished material related to her professional activity. However, there are few personal documents or any type of administrative documentation that could refer to the private life of the dancer. The most personal documentation analyzed to date is related to contracts and Nyota Inyoka artist’s fee between 1926 and 1956⁴⁶. In this sense, it is wondering about what happened to certain materials and documents that would be useful to establish a complete approach to Nyota Inyoka’s creative process. I am particularly referring to her personal library. Considering her knowledge about Egyptian and Asian art and culture, it could be assumed that the dancer gathered an interesting bibliographical collection that would

⁴⁶ Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 6.

enrich her visits to the Guimet Museum, the Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie Jacques Doucet, the École du Louvre, and the Sorbonne. There are also no photographs, postcards, or press clippings relating to other contemporary dancers with whom she could have established contact and generated synergies or even rivalries⁴⁷. Similarly, I assume there has been a selection (previous to the donation) of the correspondence addressed to Nyota Inyoka, since the amount kept is not high. Still, I have also not identified any documentation related to her family and more personal friends, except for the condolence letters addressed to her niece in 1971.

The number of photographs in the collection is especially noteworthy, not only because of its volume but also because of the value of this source for dance studies. The ephemeral nature of this art makes it extremely difficult to conduct a formal analysis of the choreographic pieces. This difficulty has stimulated in the last years the development of proposals for the reconstruction and reenactment of historical pieces, based on preserved visual and textual sources. And, in this sense, the volume of documentation in the collection motivates to work with practice-in-research methodologies. The Archive contains a large number of black and white images of both her and her company, which have been partly classified according to their repertoire. This material deserves further investigation to sort duplicates, confirm their identifications, adjust the dating, and link them to the transformation of Nyota Inyoka's dances. In addition, we can find some drawings made by Nyota Inyoka of the staging of some of her performances, costume designs, and notations of late choreographies⁴⁸. There are also several black and white photographs of paintings of the staging of different pieces created for her company –called *maquettes*–, most of them signed by Suzanne Raphaëlle Lagneau⁴⁹. This material provides interesting information about Nyota Inyoka's choreographies, as well as costumes and set design⁵⁰.

It is necessary to highlight the shortage of filmed material related to Nyota Inyoka's dances, which makes this type of visual document a fundamental source. A brief film of two fragments of dances by Nyota Inyoka has been found in the Gaumont Pathé Archives, an unbelievably valuable starting point for appraising the character of her choreographic proposals⁵¹.

⁴⁷ This contrasts, for example, with the Tórtola Valencia Archive of the Museu de les Arts Escèniques – Institut del Teatre de Barcelona, which houses images of dancers such as Ruth St. Denis or Sahary Djeli.

⁴⁸ For example: Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 8 and FOL.COL119 Box 10.

⁵⁰ Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 4.

⁵⁰ Although Nyota Inyoka would design the costumes for her compositions since 1930, Paul Poiret is mentioned as the costume designer in the programs of the 1920s. The contact between Nyota Inyoka and Paul Poiret is remarkable and deserves an in-depth investigation that must be related to the role played by the designer in the artistic, cultural and social context of the interwar period. The couturier mentions Nyota Inyoka in his memoirs, that account for his contact with other artists of the period: Poiret, P. (2017). *Vistiendo la época* (1930). Valencia: Editorial Renacimiento, 78 and 191-198.

⁵¹ *Danse hindoue* (1 March 1933), GP Archives, Saint-Ouen: AF 22 4. I have identified the choreographies with *Cortège (d'après Thèbes)* (1932), with music by Naggiar, and *Gôpi* (c.1925), the music is noted as «Hindu raga». This piece is also identified as *La Gôpi et l'oiseau indocile* or *La danse Gôpi et le oiseau*, and the plot revolves around the shepherdess who sends a message to the god Kṛṣṇa by an indocile bird. I am currently initiating a project proposing collaboration with researchers and dancers around practice-in-research methodologies for the reconstruction and reenactment of these and other choreographies, while considering the resources of digital humanities for its research and diffusion. This line coincides with the first results achieved by the projects *Créons au musée* and *Border-Dancing Across Time*. The latter has worked on the reconstruction of Inyoka's choreography *Prière aux dieux solaires* (1921). Retrieved from: <https://vimeo.com/654596922> [consulted: 11/01/2022].

Together with the visual material, the Nyota Inyoka Archive contains a large group of essential writings and documents to understand the dancer's work. Programs and brochures have already been mentioned, as well as the numerous press clippings that provide essential information to date and order Nyota Inyoka's repertoire, and to analyze the processes of transformation of her choreography. Furthermore, since it is her personal collection, it houses a large amount of unpublished material that provides plenty of information about her work. For instance, documents describing Nyota Inyoka's career, biography, and creative sources of her work, along with a selection of remarks and reviews from various personalities about her choreographies. Some of these papers look like drafts for brochures and programs. There is also her correspondence and material for the establishment of the Saint-Paul-de-Vence Center for Art and Philosophy, mentioned earlier.

Among the unpublished material, the writings of Nyota Inyoka stand out. The dancer planned two publications that never saw the light. The first was an *Anthology of Indian Love Poetry*, which shows Inyoka's knowledge of the importance of this topic in Indian dance⁵². The second publication, entitled *Clef des attitudes et du geste esthétique*, is key to understand Nyota Inyoka's creative proposal⁵³. In this work, her choreographic activity is combined with a deep theoretical reflection, establishing evident links with Indian aesthetic theory. Her proposal reveals the philosophical and religious dimension in her work's conception. Something that was already revealed in the interest in sacred and ritual themes from her first choreographies. There are several drafts of this text, which I consider key to understanding Nyota Inyoka's whole work, as well as to establishing a complete analysis of her creative conception. The theoretical argumentation proposed in the text is accompanied by drawings and gouaches following a precise order in notebooks and loose sheets that have been arranged in folders. In them, she materializes the movements and positions that shape these essential *keys* or *rules* to create her «new science of gesture and movement». Drawings are conceived by the artist as centripetal compositions, in the form of diagrams, *maṇḍala*, and archetypes⁵⁴. Once again, these visual sources must be studied taking into account both the information they provide about her dance and theoretical proposal, as well as Nyota Inyoka's own creative process. Somehow, the profusion of drawings and visual material in this collection anticipates a profoundly transdisciplinary artistic activity. This orbits between the experience of the body in motion and the need to capture the ephemeral drawing of gesture and movement in space on a material medium. This, in turn,

⁵² Nyota Inyoka. (n.d.). *Anthologie de poésie amoureuse indienne*. (Unpublished typed document) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 5 and FOL.COL119 Box 6). About the relation between Indian dance and love topics see: Leucci, T. (2008). L'apprentissage de la danse en Inde du Sud et ses transformations au XXème siècle: le cas de devadâsî, rājadâsî et nattuvanâr. *Rivista di Studi Sudasiatici*, Firenze, Firenze University Press, 53-87; Leucci, T. (2015). 'Partout où va la main, le regard suit ; là où va le regard, l'esprit suit'. Le langage des mains dans le théâtre dansé de l'Inde. *Ethnographiques.org. Revue en ligne de sciences humaines et sociales*, no. 31, December, Retrieved from: <http://www.ethnographiques.org/2015/Leucci> [Consulted: 3 June 2017].

⁵³ Nyota Inyoka (n.d. [c. 1957-1969]). *Clef des attitudes et du geste esthétique* (unpublished typed document, multiple versions). The archive preserves in different boxes other drafts, visual and textual documents related to this unpublished project.

⁵⁴ In 2022 I am developing the project *Écrire le geste et dessiner la danse. Nyota Inyoka et ses Clefs des attitudes et du geste esthétique*, as *Chercheuse Invitée* of the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, Paris, in which I propose to deepen the analysis of this work (drawings and texts) in relation to Nyota Inyoka's repertoire.

connects with the physical act of transcribing the gesture of the hand, and of the whole body, on paper.

In addition to her unpublished books, we can find the description of the staging of her ballets *La Chrysalide* (1952) and *Ramayana*⁵⁵. She also composed poems related to her dances and other themes, as some drafts show. Also important are the notebooks and journals, in which she writes about her experiences and about her dreams. In those dreams she glimpses some movements and gestures for her choreographies.

Among the documentation, it is necessary to mention the manuscripts and sketches focused on yoga. These materials evidence Nyota Inyoka's interest and training in this discipline and philosophy, particularly in hatha-yoga, and the use of stretching and exercises derived from yoga in her training proposals. In this sense, her work could be related to other methods of physical education that emerged in the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, such as those enunciated by François Delsarte, Genevieve Stebbins, Ruth St. Denis, or Nadja⁵⁶. The work with the body, gesture, expression, rhythm and esthetics presents important synergies both with yoga and with circuits and teachings related to esoteric proposals. In this sense, I believe that Inyoka's incursion into yoga reveals the depth and nature of her devotion to the study of Indian philosophy, as well as in the implementation of her teachings from an integrating dimension where physical and mental work converge. Besides, five boxes of the Fonds Nyota Inyoka include musical scores, an essential material to analyze her choreographies and to appraise the role of music in her creative process.

Finally, the photographs of collages or photomontages made by Nyota Inyoka deserve special attention, on which I dwell briefly on the following pages. These documents evidence the importance that Asian art acquired in the dancer's choreographic creations.

It is only necessary to place Nyota Inyoka in front of a Dravidian bronze, a Khmer bas-relief, a Memphite statue, to be convinced of her evocative purity. Let us follow her with attention and note that she does not slavishly imitate the plastic models. Her poses, while maintaining an exact style, remain living creations⁵⁷.

2. Embodying Nyota Inyoka's Archives

2.1. Archeology of dance and body archive

It was Nyota Inyoka herself who compiled the academic and cultural sources for her work. The unpublished document entitled *Studies and Research*, enabled her to highlight the importance that the study of textual and visual sources acquired in her

⁵⁵ Nyota Inyoka. (n.d. [c. 1952]). *La Chrysalide. Mise en scene*. (Unpublished typed document) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 4). Nyota Inyoka. (n.d.) *Ramayana* (unpublished) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: FOL.COL119 Box 4).

⁵⁶ Leucci, T. (2018). 'Liberare il corpo e la mente': G. Stebbins, R. St. Denis e Mata Hari. *Arti dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts*. Year IV, No. 4, 16-30. López Arnaiz, I. (2022 [in press]). Nadja, Marcel Moore, Claude Cahun: Danses esotériques. In: A. Sina (ed.). *Feminine Futures 2 – Expression / Abstraction*. Dijon: Presses du reel.

⁵⁷ Guillon, A. (1939). Untitled (unpublished manuscript) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris:4^oCOL119 Box 6).

creative process⁵⁸. This paper mentioned the École du Louvre, the Musée Guimet, the Sorbonne Université, and the Bibliothèque Nationale as the institutions in which Nyota Inyoka developed her study of India and ancient Egypt. It also referred to the advice of Victor Goloubew, and the courses in Buddhist philosophy and Vedanta taught by Masson Oursel. The document highlighted the exchange established in New York with Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, mentioning his translation of the *Abhinaya Darpana*⁵⁹. This book was essential for Nyota Inyoka's approach to Indian dance while constituting a key work in the contemporary processes of reconfiguration and Sanskritization of Indian classical dance⁶⁰. Maurice Dupont and Louis Finot would have given her access to the *Nāṭyāśāstra*, the Indian performing arts treatise. She discovered this text in the 1920s, but the access to different versions and translations led her to rework her choreographies between 1940 and 1942⁶¹. As early as 1926, Finot told her about the Cidambaram temple reliefs depicting the 108 *karāṇa* described in the *Nāṭyāśāstra*, another key visual source for Indian classical dance, as well as for Inyoka herself⁶². The Sanskrit scholar Sylvain Lévi gave her his book *Le théâtre indien* (1890), as well as some Nepalese manuscripts on Buddhist *mudrā*. Her approach to Khmer art came from Georges Groslier, Sappho Marchal, and Philippe Stern. The dancer also mentions the teachings of «Hindu masters» regarding Indian philosophy, music, and dance, which still need to be studied in greater depth.

Although in lesser detail, Nyota Inyoka also refers to her study of Egyptian art at the Sorbonne, and her contact with Egyptologists such as Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, Jean Sainte Fare Garnot, and Claire Lalouette⁶³.

Inserted in the mechanisms of legitimation of the art of dance, and in tune with other dancers of the 20th century such as Ruth St. Denis and Isadora Duncan, Inyoka approached disciplines of an intellectual nature to demand a higher and respectable space for an art performed with the body. In this sense, archeology was especially helpful, since it referred to ancient civilizations where dance occupied a central

⁵⁸ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka] (n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s]). *Madame Nyota Inyoka. Études et recherches*. (Unpublished typed document) (Archives Paul Landowski – Musée des Années 30, Paris).

⁵⁹ Coomaraswamy, A. K. (Ed.). (1917). *The Mirror of Gesture. Being the Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeśvara* (Ananda Coomaraswamy & Gopala Kristanaya Duggirala, trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press. I must add: «The Dance of Siva», published along with other texts in: Coomaraswamy, A. K. (1918). *The Dance of Śiva*. Fourteen Indian essays, New York, The Sunwise Turn, INC. For more information on Coomaraswamy's influence on Nyota Inyoka's work see: López Arnaiz, I. (in-press). La danse de Śiva d'Auguste Rodin à Nyota Inyoka. La métaphore de la cosmogonie et de la création artistique. In: T. Leucci and R. Rousseleau (Eds.). *La danse de Shiva: icône du rythme et langage des gestes (Inde, Europe, Etats Unis)*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

⁶⁰ See: Coorlawala, U. A. (2004). The Sanskritized Body. *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 36, no. 2, 50-63. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20444591> [Consulted 26 June 2022]; Leucci, T. (2009). *Du Dāsī Āttam au Bharata Nāṭyam: ethnohistoire d'une tradition chorégraphique et de sa nationalisation dans l'Inde coloniale*, 2 vols. (Doctoral thesis). École des hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris; Ceballos, A. (2013). *La danza Odišī como construcción de un clasicismo regional. Estudio estético de una tradición coreográfica de la India contemporánea* (Doctoral thesis). Universidad del País Vasco, Donostia.

⁶¹ She mentions among the people who provided various translations from Sanskrit to Prince Damrong, Mr. Smat (attached to the Embassy of Siam), Rose Notton-Bressand, Princess Achille Murat, Johnny Grosset, Dr. Naidu and Dr. Pantulu. Future research will delve into the contact with these personalities and their influence on Nyota Inyoka's work.

⁶² Finot, L. (7 October 1926). Letter to Nyota Inyoka. Paris (unpublished) (Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°C0L119 Box 6).

⁶³ Although some of these contacts could not yet be evidenced, the fact that Nyota Inyoka places them among her references indicates the importance she grants to the study of these traditions. In future research I will deepen in the analysis of these exchanges.

place linked to ritual and sacred practices⁶⁴. «Nyota Inyoka's dances are integrated, to a large extent, in the archeology of the East, its mythology, its sacred science, its philosophy», claimed another unpublished document defending the theoretical, conceptual, sacred, and idealized character of her approach to Eastern civilizations⁶⁵. Already in 1921 Lugné-Poe considered Nyota Inyoka's proposal «archaeological reconstructions» and described the dancer as a

bookworm or museum one [...]. Holding a pencil [...] in front of a Vishnu at the Guimet Museum or an Ammon Ra in the Doucet Library. She perceives the poses captured for forty centuries by our restless and distressed humanity. And then she dreams. She fills with fantasy the interval that exists between the two drawings of the same God she contemplates⁶⁶.

Following Lugné-Poe's comment, Nyota Inyoka's choreographies seem to be heir to the new free dance, inspired by works in museum galleries. This appropriation of historical models, which refer to antiquity and Asian art is established –according to Gabriele Brandstetter– from their expressive dimension as representations of Aby Warburg's pathos formulas⁶⁷. Taking into consideration the analysis offered by the author on the influence of Greek art in dancers as Duncan, it is also necessary to emphasize the circulation of images related to Asian art throughout the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century, both in museums and universal and colonial exhibitions, as well as in specialized magazines and publications. That coincided with the consolidation of Indian art historiography, undertaken in the colonial period under complex cross-cultural dialogues, with archaeological campaigns launched by the colonial powers on the one side, and the recovery of their own artistic traditions under nationalistic parameters claimed by the Indian elites on the other. As evidenced by the preserved documentation, Nyota Inyoka's work was nurtured by texts, publications, collections and maintained contact with important authors who contributed to the development of Indian studies in the academic field.

In addition to the influence of writings –linked to a historical or theoretical understanding–, art images constitute a fundamental source in her choreographic process. Similarly to how archeology had discovered Egyptian and Asian art, Nyota Inyoka would try to reconstruct those same traditions through her dances. Furthermore, based on transcendental parameters articulated by herself, she ended up transforming those «reconstitutions» into a kind of incarnations or revitalization of ancient traditions. Somehow, her body became the point of union between the reconstruction of the past and the incarnation of the present, succeeding in the field of modern dance through this mechanism. Through her dance, she established a dialogue that was both transcultural

⁶⁴ López Arnaiz, I. (2018) op. cit., 297-325.

⁶⁵ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka]. (n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s]). *L'art de Nyota Inyoka*. (Unpublished typed document) (Archives Paul Landowski – Musée des Années 30, Paris).

⁶⁶ Lugné-Poe (November 1921). La danseuse Nyota Inyoka. Évocatrice de l'Orient. *La Danse*. Nyota Inyoka's contact with the Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie Jacques Doucet is demonstrated by her appearance among the library's adherent members in 1928. See *Bulletin de la Société des amis de la Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie de l'Université de Paris*. (1st semester 1929), No. 1, 7. I thank the research project "La Bibliothèque d'art et d'archéologie de Jacques Doucet : corpus, savoirs et réseaux" of the Institut national d'histoire de l'art, and specially Ilaria Andreoli and Sophie Lesiewicz, for their help in finding this important document.

⁶⁷ Brandstetter, G. (2015) op. cit., 31-88.

–among India, Egypt, and France– and trans-temporal –between past and present, between tradition and modernism–. Many press reviews highlight her ability to embody, give life, and set-in motion the works of art of the past. René Grousset, historian and curator of the Guimet and Cernuschi museums, offered a comment in this vein:

From Beni-Hassan to Angkor, across all of India, I have seen the immortal bas-reliefs brought back to life with infinite science and nobility, and our Dravidian bronzes arise, chaining their ritual poses and finally revealing the secret of their inner rhythms...

You are the living explanation of what stands still in our galleries.

You give back to our gods their divinity...⁶⁸.

This topic is combined in Nyota Inyoka's case with an understanding of Hindu and Buddhist art as the embodiment of divinity itself. From the 1920s Inyoka articulates dance, through her performing and theoretical work, in a framework where traditions link dance and other artistic manifestations with sacred values. This favored the insertion of her creative proposal in contexts such as the Theosophical Society, where the corporality of dance embodies spiritual concerns and combines different religions under universalizing aspirations. In this sense, I consider it necessary to generate a re-reading of early modern dance, exploring the civilizations immortalized in the art of antiquity and re-vivified in the bodies not only of well-known dancers such as St. Denis, but of many others who, like Nyota Inyoka, have gone more unnoticed. These corporal experiences meet the sacred nature related to visual and choreographic manifestations of the past and underline the symbiosis between the spiritual and corporal dimensions in the emergence of modern dance.

The bodily dialogue between Asian art and Inyoka's dance, between the past and her own present, between the physical and sacred dimensions of art and dance, was materialized in some interesting photomontages made by the dancer herself based in key works of Indian and Southeast Asian art⁶⁹. Photographs are preserved in her archive, reproducing several collages in which pictures of Inyoka herself in dance poses are superimposed on photographs of sculptures, reliefs, architectures and miniatures. In some cases, the dancer mimics the position of the figure she stands in for, and in others, she stands next to the characters depicted in the artwork⁷⁰. Because of space reasons, I cannot describe each of these suggestive images in detail. I will address this issue in the future, by identifying in detail the artworks as well as the publications or collections she could have had access to. It will also be necessary to relate these images with Nyota Inyoka's own photographs and her dance repertoire. In order to let the reader get an idea of how the visual archive contributes to shaping the dancer's imaginary, I will point out some of the works she *dances* within these photomontages. This

⁶⁸ Anonymous [Nyota Inyoka] (n.d. [c. 1940s-1950s]). *Madame Nyota Inyoka. Études et recherches*. (Unpublished typed document) (Archives Paul Landowski – Musée des Années 30, Paris).

⁶⁹ Fonds Nyota Inyoka, BnF, Paris: 4°COL119 Box 1. Tessa Jahn offers a brief approach to these materials, which however deserves a more in-depth analysis: Jahn, T. (2016). Cutting into history: the 'Hindu dancer' Nyota Inyoka's photomontages. In: C. Wulf (ed.) *Exploring Alterity in a Globalized World* (pp. 187-196). London: Routledge.

⁷⁰ I must remember that the French National library does not allow this material to be photographed or published. Therefore, it is very difficult to convey here the enormous interest of these images, both from a material and choreographic point of view.

kind of cross-cultural and material conversation ranges from Indian, Cambodian, and Javanese art, turning into a Khmer apsara or a Cidambaram dancer. She establishes a dialogue with several Cola bronzes and a Khmer one⁷¹, a Buddhist bas-relief from Amarāvati, the Angkor temples, Śiva's dance from Ellora, Javanese bas-reliefs from the Borobudur Stūpa and the Candi Sari, and a Naṭarāja bronze from the Guimet Museum, in front of which Mata Hari had already danced in 1905.



Figure 4. Hand brochure: *Nyota Inyoka au bénéfice de l'œuvre «Le colis tricolore»*. (25 April n.d.). Paris: Salle Gaveau (BMO)

I consider it relevant to emphasize the value of these images to highlight two essential issues in Nyota Inyoka's choreographic process. On the one hand, the association of her creative activity with antiquity through the incarnation and vivification of these bodies that refer to old traditions, watched –as Jahn points out– under the filter of archaeological studies developed in South Asia in a colonial context⁷². And on the other, for the transfer of her creative activity from the physical and corporeal field of dance itself, towards the material and manual work linked to plastic art.

Under these parameters, the global analysis of Nyota Inyoka's work reveals the expressivity and plasticity of her choreography, as well as the need to transcend the ephemeral nature of her dance by experimenting with material language. In these comings and goings between the ephemeral and the permanent, between the material and the immaterial, her body and her own creative process constitute archives in themselves. Just as Nyota Inyoka's documentation reveals, the dancer configured throughout her career a rich textual, visual, and material archive with which she established a dialogue through her own body. This documentation became known, in

⁷¹ For more information about these Cola bronzes see: López Arnaiz, I. (2020) op. cit., 187-188 and 193.

⁷² Jahn, T. (2016) op. cit., 193.

an ephemeral way, during her choreographies. Nowadays we can try to re-imagine them thanks to the same documentary heritage. Only subtle traces of those dances are preserved today, just visible in the sources that contributed to their creation. Inyoka and the dancers in her company brought to life this compendium of images and documents, turning their bodies into a sort of «living archive».

2.2. Living Archive. Choreographing a reenactment *avant la lettre*

From the 1920s, Nyota Inyoka's programs insistently stressed that her pieces were «restitutions» from ancient records and traditions. But at the same time, they pointed the creative side of Inyoka's dance, also accentuating the search for documentary sources among her priorities. The phrase: «all Nyota Inyoka dances are “restitutions” from ancient traditions and documents, and are exclusively her creation», is repeated successively⁷³. In the 1940s and 1950s, she would further emphasize her authorship in statements such as: «all of Ms. Nyota Inyoka's dances are entirely her composition: they are syntheses formed from ancient traditions and documents and are still her exclusive creation»⁷⁴. These affirmations, as well as to point out concerns related to intellectual property, evidence the character of Nyota Inyoka's choreographies from more complex parameters.

The allusion to documentation that refers directly to ancient civilizations, and to an approach to these cultures by theoretical and intellectual dimensions, can be read at first as a mechanism for legitimizing her work. This is underlined by providing explanations about myths, characters, readings, and images that inspired her choreographies. The mentioning of these sources somehow emphasizes the «authenticity» of the compositions. But these statements, while drawing attention to the documentary and scholarly work that I have already referred to in previous pages, highlight Nyota Inyoka's creative capacity from a contemporary dimension.

Her critical reception—as the one to other contemporary Hindu dancers—frequently revolved around the question of authenticity. In a certain way, by claiming that supposed authenticity and attachment to its oriental sources, the authorship of Nyota Inyoka could be overshadowed. While placing the focus on her creative capacity ran the risk of her proposals being considered fake and reduced them to a picturesque exoticism marked by colonial processes. Critical commentaries valued from a very reductionist parameter whether the work of the Hindu dancers, performed from and for the West, could truly be compared with that of South and Southeast Asia⁷⁵. At the same time, Nyota Inyoka's dance was outside the categories of Indian classical dance, as well as outside the beginnings of Indian modern dance. Somehow, these dynamics have been maintained in the analysis of the first dance studies and this is why many Hindu dancers have fallen into oblivion. For this reason, it is still necessary to emphasize the hybrid and deeply cross-cultural character, not only in the

⁷³ For example, hand programs: *Danze di Nyota Inyoka*. (24 February 1926). Torino: Teatro di Torino. *Les danses de Nyota Inyoka*. (13 December 1930), Paris: Salle Pleyel; *La célèbre danseuse Nyota-Inyoka*. (24 November 1937). Casino de Luxembourg. In French she uses the word «restitution», in which the emphasis is on re-forming something that had ended or disappeared, on re-shaping, returning something to its original state.

⁷⁴ Hand program: *Nyota Inyoka*. (27 February 1944). Paris: Salle Pleyel.

⁷⁵ See: Crawford Fritch, M. A. (1912). *Modern Dance and Dancers*. London/Philadelphia: Grant Ritchards LTD / J.B. Lippincott Company, 191-194.

proposals of dancers like Nyota Inyoka, but also in the foundations of modern dance. The same cross-cultural transfers affected the so-called sanitization or Sanskritization processes of Indian dance traditions⁷⁶.

The documentary work linked to Inyoka's choreographic act could be extrapolated –by bridging the gap and contextualizing it in its own moment– to dance reenactment proposed by Mark Franko⁷⁷. This term has been used in recent decades to refer to a dance phenomenon that emerged in the 1980s. Under poststructuralist notions, the theory of reenactment is based on the idea of movement as the *trace form* of an absent past⁷⁸.

Dance reenactment is characterized in part by the staging of the documentary evidence, which comes to an admission that the past work cannot simply reappear without the research work sharing the space and time of performance with the reconstructed work(s). The dancer's work, in other words, is no longer exclusively that of dancing, but also that of recovering (in its double meaning of unveiling and covering up again) traces (clues), following indications (leads), constituting background (texture). I call it «work» because it is integrated into the performance. These two forms of work –the work of dance and the work of research– constitute together the poetic structure of reenactment⁷⁹.

Somehow, Franko's description of reenactment is resonant with the documentary and creative work developed by Nyota Inyoka. Following the identification proposed by Franko of the dancer who moves through the archive as a historian, Inyoka's choreographic activity can finally be assimilated to that of historians who provided her documentary sources. In this process, Inyoka embodies textual and visual archives compiled by herself, becoming the living archive that André Lepecki describes. And moreover, the space of the stage becomes an «archival space»⁸⁰.

Nyota Inyoka searches for civilizations of the past where dance is constituted as a central element in social and religious practices. This exploration around the early days of dance was what motivated the naming of her pieces as «restitutions». She developed her activity, assuming a transdisciplinary proposal, through the study of sources, establishing a dialogue not only with (lost) choreographic forms, but also with ancient visual arts. The partial traces of those distant (in time or space) traditions invite me to move her proposal away from an «archeological reconstruction» to insert it into the categories of reinvention or (re)creation, with which reenactment can be identified. And the predominance that visual and material references have in Inyoka's work contributes to understanding both her references (compiled in her personal archive) and

⁷⁶ As suggested by studies as those by: Dickinson, E. R. (2017) op. cit.; Desmond, J. (1991). *Dancing Out the Difference: Cultural Imperialism and Ruth St. Denis's «Radha» of 1906*. *Signs*. Vol. 17 no.1, 28-49; Coorlawala, U. A. (2004) op. cit.; Leucci, T. (2009) op. cit.; Ceballos, A. (2013) op. cit.

⁷⁷ In future research, I will develop this assimilation of Inyoka's practice with the theory of reenactment, which I point out here, as a conclusion, by referring specifically to the documentary sources preserved in the Nyota Inyoka archive.

⁷⁸ Franko, M. Epilogue to an Epilogue. *Historicizing the Re- in Danced Reenactment*. In Franko, M. (Ed.). (2017). *The Handbook of Dance and Reenactment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 488-489.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁸⁰ Lepecki, A. (2010). *The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances*. *Dance Research Journal*. Vol. 42, No. 2 (Winter), 28-48. Franko, M. (2017) op. cit., 488.

her dancing body as a real archive, having images, testimonies, experiences and sensation converge in conversation at different times and territories. In this sense, Inyoka's reenactment turns her body-archive not only into a *translation* between bodies from different times, but also between bodies from different cultures⁸¹.

In this transfer from plastic arts and textual sources to performing arts, Nyota Inyoka proposes a creative exercise that activates her imaginative and expressive capacity. Her choreographing method fused creativity and research. Under these parameters, it is, therefore, suitable to re-understand the process of «restitution» that Nyota Inyoka talks about as a reenactment. This not being limited to an exercise of exact and accurate «reconstruction», nor to the «freedom» of an original work or even a revival, appropriation or an adaptation. Nyota Inyoka transfers her archive-references to her present, establishing through to her living body a relationship between them and her own time. It is in this journey from the past to the present through experience and the dancing body that the reenactment is activated. And it is at this point that the ephemerality of dance is questioned, considering that «reenactment tells us the past is not over: the past is unfinished business»⁸². If Franko defined the key to what would it later be called reenactment in finding the new in the old, in transferring a proposal from the past to the present⁸³, then this is the dilemma that goes through Inyoka's creative proposal. Likewise, her choreographies sought to embody, by the creative and dance act, cultures and artistic manifestations of other times and territories.

The theory of reenactment has been developed since the last decades and applied to choreographic proposals since the 1980s, taking into consideration from postmodern dimensions the complex processes of dialogue between dances from different times. Despite this, a reading of Nyota Inyoka's work under these asynchronous parameters can contribute to placing her choreographic proposal in the discourse of modernism. And, in this sense, the (documental and corporeal) archive takes on a remarkable presence, contributing to contemporize and resize her choreographic process, her stage act, and her self-construction performative proposal.

Therefore, the «dance in the museum» analyzed by Brandstetter as an essential strategy in the configuration of a new free dance in the early 20th century would be assimilated with the subsequent reenactment⁸⁴. I base this relationship on the convergence of creative and research work in this process.

In this way, it is possible to assert that Nyota Inyoka's fruitful and multifaceted work constituted a definitive contribution to modern dance. Understanding this phenomenon from its intrinsic plurality and complexity, it seems pertinent to attend to those cultural manifestations which, like those of Inyoka, are placed in imaginary milieus and hybrid representation spaces, visualizing the global and transcultural nature intrinsic to the very notion of modernism⁸⁵. Those images offered gestures of the past that in dancers' bodies, would be transformed into expressions of a dance of a timeless

⁸¹ About archive as *translation* see: Franko, M. (2017) op. cit., 497.

⁸² Ibid., 7.

⁸³ Franko, M. (1989). Repeatability, Reconstruction and Beyond. *Theatre Journal*. Vol. 41, no. 1 (March), 57-58.

⁸⁴ Brandstetter, D. (2015) op. cit.

⁸⁵ I use modernism to differentiate this cultural process from social, industrial, economic, and political transformation encompassed in the concept of modernity. See: Mitter, P. (2008). Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery. *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 190, n°4 (December), 531-548; Burt, R. and Huxley, M. (2020). *Dance, Modernism and Modernity*. London: Routledge.

present. As I have shown through the analysis of Nyota Inyoka's personal archive, her creative activity is particularly paradigmatic in terms of the symbiosis of the processes of construction-reconstruction, restitution-incarnation, from which dance reenactment emerges as a proposal that travels towards an eternal present. She embodied in her own dance a dialogue with times and places that, far from being limited to the «archaeological reconstruction», refer to contemporary choreographic creation strategies. In this sense, Inyoka constitutes a pertinent case study for the analysis of the complex processes of transcultural and trans-temporal exchange inherent to contemporary times. And finally, from this perspective it is possible to understand the «memory of humanity» from a corporal dimension, in which the archive treasures gestural and emotional traces, which can always be reenacted through dance.

A reconstitution? An evocation? A resurrection? A triumph of art? A triumph of science? A creation? –Sylvain Lévi wondered–. Yes, all that and even more. The hieratic poses, the noble attitudes, the effusive fantasies, the solemn and graceful gestures that the learned eye takes time to contemplate captured in stone or clay, like fossil imprints of a beautiful unnoticed humanity, Nyota Inyoka animates them with her powerful Magic⁸⁶.

3. Conflict of interests

None

4. Support

This paper has been carried out in the framework of a Juan de la Cierva Aid (FJC2018-035818-I) funded by MCIN/AEI /10.13039/501100011033. It is also framed in the R+D+i projects SILFIDE (ref. PGC2018-093710-A-I00), and TRAMA (HAR2017-82394-R), both funded by MCIN/ AEI /10.13039/501100011033/ FEDER «Una manera de hacer Europa». I would like to thank Valérie Nonnenmacher and other curators at the Département des Arts du Spectacle of the Bibliothèque nationale de France for their invaluable help and the facilities provided for the consultation of the Nyota Inyoka Archive.

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⁸⁶ Lévi, S. (c. 1929), in the brochure: *Nyota Inyoka. Danseuse de l'Inde dansera ses danses de l'Inde et de l'Egypte antique et moderne*. (30 November n.d. [1929]. Paris: Maison Gaveau.

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