WHY DANCE: The impact of multi arts practice and technology on contemporary dance.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the influence of hybrid theatre practices, media and technology on contemporary dance performance and questions if dance is endangered by developments in hybrid cultures. Through a consideration of dance genealogies, the thesis suggests that notions of identity play a significant role in power structures within interdisciplinary relationships.

Contemporary dance has gone through many changes in the last century. In particular, contemporary aspects of performance have demonstrated that the body is not the only site for dance. *Why dance*, is a culmination of questions that surfaced during the course of my own practice. It refers to questions that many dancers have asked themselves in the years following the arrival of postmodernism, when notions of body identity confronted conceptual possibilities in the terrain of interdisciplinary and mediated spaces.

Incorporating my own experience as a practitioner and observer with theoretical perspectives in the field, I have attempted to give voice to some of the ambiguities and paradoxes that inhabit dance and its hybrid postmodern affiliates. I make use of various genealogies that have led to hybrid and interdisciplinary interactions as a means to define relationships of power that exist within interdisciplinarity. The use of case studies and examples of performances from Europe and Australia provide material through which to examine performance methodologies that have arisen out of interdisciplinary practice. My reading and suggestions express the concern that disciplines outside of the body may have become more important as defining element in dance. Through an examination of new ways that dancers now speak through media other than their bodies, the thesis examines what affects this has on the discipline of dance and questions if notions of disciplinarity are still relevant. While it has become necessary to reconstruct, reinterpret and demystify the body, the outcome suggests that autonomy rests with recognition of the body as the site for further development within negotiated spaces.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

The thesis comprises only my original work except where indicated in the preface;

Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;

The thesis is 35,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps appendices and bibliography.

Anny Mokotow,
March 2007
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This thesis is an acknowledgment of all the dancers and choreographers who continue to challenge the possibilities that the dancing body provides.

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Introduction

Is dance endangered by developments in hybrid cultures?

This thesis investigates the influence of hybrid theatre practices and visual disciplines, including digital media, on the development of contemporary dance performance. A major objective will be to examine what happens to dance when combined with other media and, further, to establish if dance, as an autonomous contemporary arts practice, is endangered by developments in hybrid cultures. Consequently, this thesis presents the changing face of contemporary dance performance.

Motivation

My passion for dance drove my dancing, as it now drives my viewing. This thesis reflects something that puzzled me during my career and puzzles me still. Around the 1980s and 1990s I, and many like me, for whom dancing had been a life’s ambition, found themselves moving from dance to work and experiment with other practices. At the time I considered this as a normal artistic pursuit that was stimulated by influences from the postmodern dance movement. I still believe this is so; however, now I think that more things were influential in this process. Participating in the development of hybrid dance theatre, dance film, visual theatre and total theatre was exciting, as was working with companies outside of dance. Sometimes we danced more, sometimes less - there was so much more going on that made the experience significant. What gradually troubled me was the slow, pervasive idea that dance could communicate better through the intervention of other media, as if it could no longer speak on its own. I began to feel a kind of nostalgia, or withdrawal symptoms. After years of training and hard work, dancers were regularly negative about dance performances in which there was “too much” dancing, “dance for dance’s sake”; dance was “tedious”, dance could “not communicate”, there was “too much navel gazing” and too much “moving for the sake of moving”. Quite legitimate accusations to a point, although as a dancer, I still feel that there is nothing quite as exhilarating as moving for the sake of moving.

Why were many dancers becoming disillusioned with dance and what was behind the lure of interdisciplinarity? Was dance going through an artistic crisis? Is dance more exciting when seen (and read) in combination with other disciplines? Was it a search for difference, or
homogeneity? I wondered if new developments in dance could only be found outside the body. This thesis is an attempt to understand some of these questions.

**Aims**

My intention in this thesis is to problematise the generally healthy appearance of interdisciplinary dance practice of the present day. I attempt to demonstrate that interdisciplinary practice has become widespread in the dance community not only because dance lends itself to intermedia practice, but also because it has become an accepted and almost mandatory part of performance making. While this thesis takes a definite stand for multidisciplinary performance, it attempts to emphasise that hybrid and multidisciplinary practice, while an historic imperative, demands consideration and thoughtful examination.

The aims of this investigation are twofold. Firstly, I establish a cultural lived history of dance by tracking the genealogy/ontology of contemporary dance. In part, this is an investigation of the borders in which dance collides with text, film and theory, as well as an analysis of the impact that these areas have on the development of dance. In addition, I consider the medium of computer-driven technology as a site where virtual bodies, in conjunction or separated from the living body, converge in and out of live performance. Secondly, I attempt to explore the reverberation, resonance and repercussion that these disciplines have had on dance practice and consider the position of dance in these relationships. This will help establish the way in which dance is influenced by developments in hybrid performance and interactions with multimedia.

The major area of investigation is contemporary dance. The criterion here relates particularly to the word ‘contemporary’, and includes dance works, choreographers and theorists who are involved with new dance-cultural trends that are constantly under development. This removes from consideration categories that are stylistically bound by a predetermined form or structure, such as classical ballet or ballet companies, ritual dance and folkdance. It is not my intention, within the confines of this thesis, to establish what dance is or is not. Nevertheless, ambiguities around the question "What is dance?" persist as background noise in any discussion of contemporary dance. I am content to leave them there.

**Rationale**

The integration of various disciplines within choreography has created dynamic and inventive performance strategies. Many exceptional initiatives arose and still rise out of interdisciplinary
investigations. Interdisciplinary work by the early ‘modern’ choreographers like Emile Dalcroix, Loie Fuller and Kurt Jooss, bought exciting new theatrical and artistic experiments that questioned conceptual notions of performance making possibilities (further explored by artists like Merce Cunningham). The postmodern dance that further developed interdisciplinary work was deconstructive of form and content but pluralist in its relationship to other disciplines. While postmodern dance is often considered to be the terrain of the American ‘postmodern’ dancers of the Judson Church period, I use the term postmodern more broadly. I consider that postmodern dance arose on both sides of the Atlantic as a consequence of, and a reaction against, ‘modern’ dance which had come to be seen as stagnant and restrictive.1 From the 1960s to the 1980s new forms of hybrid theatre were developed, such as dance/theatre, visual theatre and dance/film. As a consequence, a new hermeneutics regarding dance, theatre and performance evolved in which structure and narrative were dismembered and a new visual logic developed in performance dramaturgy.

Notwithstanding, the experimental use of text to the popular use of video images in dance performance, the apparent subservience of contemporary dance to the dominant fashion in theatre practice cannot go unnoticed. Frequently carrying separate agendas, different contemporary dance ‘styles’2 emerged which challenged assumptions about the body of the dancer and required new technical training. As postmodern dancers were united in an attempt to shatter expectations, the performance practice that accommodated these styles progressively formed new hybrids. More recently, the possibilities of extending the body into a cyborgian or virtual space have become particularly attractive to dancers who use their bodies as vehicles for exploration. The creation of virtual bodies and the distribution of dance through tele-space have connected two seemingly opposing worlds: the world of high technology with that of the corporeal. Under discussion will be the belief that this technology, like postmodernism before it, can provide a ‘utopian’ meeting point of politics, art, psychology and philosophy (Haraway 2001, Birringer 2002).

Fertile ground has been created for theorists and critics to develop, challenge and thus invigorate discussion regarding performance, dance theory and interdisciplinary practice. One of the important issues to arise from this development in interdisciplinary practice is the semiotics of the body and the demystification of the human form. The overwhelming influx of theatrical and technical possibilities on a genre concerned primarily with the body questions the validity of

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1 ‘Modern dance’ is also a broad (and contested) term that encompasses those dancers who had moved away from earlier classical structures into a more individual style of expression. While it is not my intention to box dancers into specific genres, the terms ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ provide guidelines through which to understand different periods in which conventional norms regarding dance and theatre were being challenged and deconstructed. This thesis looks particularly at the subsequent forms of reconstruction.

2 The word ‘styles’ denotes different movement techniques or training. Some of the best known of these are: release, contact improvisation, Cunningham and Graham technique. Derivatives of these styles are widely taught in many dance and contemporary dance academies and studios across the world.
the live body as the prime protagonist in the artistic practice of ‘dance’ (however unstable that title may now have become). It is through many of these theories and discussions that I will try to elaborate on a current perspective of a multifaceted contemporary dance. The analysis will establish that the dancing body (while at times under threat) still retains the capacity to impact kinaesthetically as a live experience as well as function as a receptor for new media.

**Methodology**

The areas and performances under examination are framed from within a history of contemporary dance and illustrated by examples from this period: Tanztheater, visual/total theatre, post-dramatic theatre, intercultural intertexts, dance/film, dance and technology and virtual dance. Pina Bausch, Yvonne Rainer, Jan Fabre and Ballet Les C de la B (particularly the work of Alain Platel) will feature throughout, as their work stands at the forefront of contemporary interactions and the creation of new hybrid forms. I have seen most of the performances or dance/films and installations referred to; if not, then these are examined through a close reading of reviews and other writings concerning the production.

My own personal experience as a dancer ultimately also informs this thesis, and it is from within the artistic environment of postmodern European dance of the 1980s and 90s that many of my observations and opinions were formed. Having studied and worked professionally in Holland with early practitioners of release practice, through the more technically trained Cunningham/Graham styles to the acrobatic physical theatre of the early 1990s, my experience was intense and intimate. Surviving as a contemporary dancer included learning to deliver text, use a camera and familiarity with multimedia, but also, curiosity and interest in varying performance practices. Relying on my experiential and somewhat diffracted perspective; I choose, assess and evaluate the contents and outcomes of this research.

The theoretical discussions to which I respond are based on research derived from dance and performance theory, dance history and criticism. Some of the theorists that have informed my thinking and whose work underscores this thesis are Johannes Birringer, Phillip Auslander, Hans Thies Lehmann and Ramsay Burt, as well as historian philosophers Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.

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3 The Modern Dance Department of the Theatre School in Amsterdam, where I obtained my degree in 1983, was idiomatic of struggles between different dance practices and ideologies. Struggles between release and Cunningham oriented movement styles eventually led to the creation of two departments within the Theatreschool: the SNDO (now well known in Europe for its innovative approach to creative development) and the Modern Dance Department.

4 Deleuze’s descriptions of rhizomatic interactions in art and life, if not used extensively in the final version of this thesis, remain an inspirational analogy for the nature of postmodern towards poststructuralist performance, and indeed modes of living and being.
Johannes Birringer's work is deeply informed by his own practice as an active agent in the field of dance, in live as well as mediatised spaces. His work deals with the boundaries where dance intersects with culture, technology and theory: as he calls it, “to cut across borders” (Birringer, 2002). Birringer works in different countries, combining diverse cultures and artists by incorporating images of these differences and experiences into his multi(digital) media, multicultural performances. Of interest to me in this thesis are writings in which he grapples with the boundaries delineating live and virtual performance.

Philip Auslander considers performance as essentially mediated, and mediatisation as relevant and crucial in cultural development. For Auslander, the central issue lies in an evaluation of live versus not live performance presence and his work examines “presence” in mediated spaces. As this essay is concerned with realigning the dancer and the dancing body to a more powerful position - irrespective of whether that dancer is in a live or ‘virtual’ space – Auslander’s contention that presence does not need to be live in order to be active and relevant gives emphasis to my argument that kinaesthetic empathy should not be underestimated in any space, live or otherwise (Auslander 1998, 1999, 2002). Ramsay Burt (2002, 2003) believes that dance is at the heart of new theatre productions that challenge normative ideologies of performance. Burt calls into play Michel Foucault’s ideas of the body as a passive recipient of cultural inscription. Burt emphasizes that a genealogical understanding of conventions and traditions relating to dance, along with social and psychological processes, enables an understanding of the manner in which some of the postmodern dance artists have been able to develop subversive independent productions. I use the work of Foucault similarly to emphasise the interiority of dancer’s histories, but also to acknowledge some of the more subversive aspects of their genealogies. In particular, Foucault’s implication that power is inherent in all working relationships provides a basis on which to examine interdisciplinary relationships (Rabinow 1984, Foucault 1975-84). While this is more a pessimistic approach than that of Burt, acknowledgement (of relationships of power), is as Foucault suggests, the step towards further knowledge and development. The new post-dramatic theatre described by Hans Thies Lehmann (1998, 2006) provides the ground for deeper analysis. Allowing for a panorama of performative possibilities to coexist, post-dramatic theatre is a multidisciplinary hybrid in which many of the artists in this thesis reside.

These central concerns arise out of the above areas of discussions: what happens to dance, what is the role of the body of the dancer, and what happens to the artistic contribution and identity of the dancer in these multi/inter/media productions?

5 Kinaesthesia, the experience of moving, can be kinaesthetically and sympathetically experienced. That is, you can have a kinaesthetic feeling of movement without moving (Marc Boucher, 2005).
**Structure**

Chapter 1 looks at the ambiguous role of dance in contemporary culture. It identifies some the genealogies (after Foucault) of dance history, including postmodern dance, writing dance and mediatisation that have shaped perceptions around dance as a performance practice. It also identifies the way in which cultural inscription and notions of dance as abstract and ephemeral have played a role in the drive to interdisciplinary practice and the manner in which that practice is put into effect. The outcome suggests that the fascination with different disciplines may have a more complex nexus than a purely artistic one.

Chapter 2 highlights some of the major categories in dance and hybrid theatre by presenting an historical framework with which to understand their impetus and progression. It highlights in particular gesture, the object body, film and text as contemporary hybrid methodologies that facilitate ways of interpreting and understanding the body. I suggest that these modes of ‘signposting’ the intention and meaning ‘on the body’, reduces the possibility for dance to explore or expand on further abstract representations. As a consequence, the body is no longer the only site of meaning making in dance.

The following, Chapter 3, is a casestudy of the performance *Wolf* (2004) by Les Ballets C de la B. Directed by Alain Platel, *Wolf* figures as an illustration of the hybrid performance practices discussed in the previous chapters. The analysis comments on some of the complexities and problems that arise in a performance that overlaps disciplinary boundaries and (engages) cultural and political subject matter.

The fourth chapter reflects on the exchange and interaction of dance and technology and considers the creation of future cyborg bodies. Acknowledging the consequences of the rising dominance of mediatisation in performance, Chapter 4 develops the argument that the relationship between dance and technology is not always an equal one. A number of projects will be considered as a way to gain insight into various tensions that exist in technological spaces. These tensions are literal, as well as figurative. The chapter describes tension in working within technological spaces, as well as tension in creating and viewing cyborg bodies. I attempt to underline that in order to produce creative and generative outcomes, a dancer’s ‘body technology’, produced by years of training and exploration, needs to be considered as equal to that of technology, regardless of new digital developments.

The conclusion will address a central question: If it is necessary to reconstruct, reinterpret and demystify the body, what role does contemporary dance have as a progressive and autonomous art form?
While the title of this chapter may seem to suggest that hybrid culture is detrimental to dance, it is not my intention to stigmatise hybrid culture as a negative phenomenon. On the contrary, I believe that many hybrid cultures, particularly the ones that I describe further on in this thesis, have been prominent in opening up new movements in theatre practice of the last half century. However, my intention is to examine if the ease with which dance has blended in with these cultures or forms of theatre in some way affect its development as an independent art practice. Questions regarding homogenisation, assimilation and protectionism are conducted across all areas of cultural, political and social practices; dance should also be open to such discourse. At issue politically is the need to clarify new perspectives in order to open dialogue between diverse dance disciplines, funding bodies and stakeholders. At issue culturally is the necessity to expose some of the workings and basic problems of mythologies surrounding contemporary dance and its genealogical pathways. At stake fundamentally is the need to investigate the relationship of the body to the dancer and the role of the body and the dancer to the dance. As components, the body, the dancer and the dance have historically formed a triad to create what is known as dance. This thesis examines the role of dance/body/dancer in contemporary dance practice.
Chapter 1

The ambiguous role of the dancing body and the drive to interdisciplinary practice

This chapter describes some of the issues surrounding the genealogy and history of contemporary dance, with a view to uncover what drives interdisciplinary practice. Through an examination of the background against which dance and new performance practices have become interwoven, issues regarding the self-image of dancers and dance will be addressed.

Experimentation with dance and other media is in part born from artistic innovation; notwithstanding this fact, there are other reasons that drive the current trend towards interdisciplinary practice. Beginning with the ambiguities in the naming of dance and its placement within contemporary theatre, the chapter identifies some of the genealogies, such as postmodernism and mediatisation, which have led to the development of interdisciplinary practice. The chapter will highlight the significance of inscription (after Foucault), as being influential to the manner in which dancers respond to their position within the arts community. Under consideration is the nature of the imbalance of relationships in interdisciplinary practice, arising from the cultural stigmatisation of dance as abstract and ephemeral, and dancers as subservient or subversive. It will question the hegemony of writing as the manner in which to best compensate for a perceived ephemerality of dance performance and highlight the dependence on interdisciplinary practice to be a bridge between dance and audience. The chapter concludes with the concern that as a consequence of such an imbalance the role of the body as an independent and intelligent agent may be compromised.

Genealogy and power

Although there are numerous genealogies that run through the histories of contemporary dance, this thesis has scope to highlight only those leading to the involvement of dance with interdisciplinary arts and new media. In order to situate the conditions under which interdisciplinary relationships have developed and been represented, genealogies provide a framework of knowledge through which to consider divergent features regarding embodied subjectivity and considerations of power.
A critical tool with which to examine genealogy and power is provided by the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault suggests that “an analysis of descent”, the genealogy of the individual (or the group) can shed light on the position they come to take within a relationship. These positions correspond to active systems of subjection and domination inherent in most relationships. Foucault illustrates that the power which often inhabits partnerships is not arbitrary or coincidental, but the outcome of ontological and genealogical developments. (Foucault in Gordon 1980) Foucault’s notion of genealogy suggests that we are inscribed upon by the political, cultural and social factors behind our histories. The “subject”, he proposes, interiorises the unfolding and subtle power of institutional, cultural and political structures, as they respond to social and political conventions. Foucault’s proposal that a structure of power is specific to each social and thus working relationship offers a way in which to problematise areas of dance and hybrid space in which politics of co-habitation arise.

An assessment of hybrid spaces and performance practice following Foucault would suggest that hierarchies within hybrid spaces respond to each discipline’s individual genealogy. To problematise this further, the relationship within each discipline responds to inherent power structures. In the working world of dance and interdisciplinary practice, the relationship of dancers to instructors, ballet masters, institutions, choreographers and directors, informs their position within the working environment. In such environments, notions of compliance may not always be acknowledged, but they are often an issue.

Importantly, Foucault situates genealogy and history in the articulation of the body. It is through the body and its corporeality that history can be acknowledged and is, as such, understood (Foucault 1984: 19, 1975: 171-175). The subjugation of the body has been at the forefront of ethical, moral and social manipulation since before the Enlightenment. Foucault offers a method of resistance to what he calls “the destruction of the body” through the revaluation and acceptance of genealogical ethos (Foucault 1984: 83). Such knowledge, he suggests, allows for a sense of empowerment and resistance. The relationship of the body to power and society plays itself out in dance and interdisciplinary relationships just as it has in earlier historical contexts. For this reason it seems important to identify the body’s role in dance now.

What is dance now? The diversity and range of dance styles in contemporary dance practice makes any definition of contemporary dance complicated. Complicated even more through the interaction of dance and other art practices, current contextual investigations in contemporary practice have blurred boundaries even further. Now, as Hans Thies Lehmann defines, “categorical distinctions are becoming increasingly meaningless”. Even so, the “unsettled terrain

6 There are many forums, discussions and blog sites regarding what constitutes ‘dance’ in contemporary performance. Defined outcomes are difficult to achieve and dance practitioners, curators and public are often deeply divided (Tjallinkii 2003).
of performance practice” may still provide within it a strategic means to understand the interaction between disciplines. (Lehmann 2006: 96).

**Ambiguity in interdisciplinary practice**

The question “What is dance?” is an extensive and exhaustive one and is taken up by theorists and critics such as Johannes Birringer (1998), Gregory Scott (2001), Arlene Croce (1994), Selma Jean Cohen (1972) Roger Copeland (1983), Carol Martin (1996) and others. In her doctoral research paper *Dans om Dans*, Ninke Tjallingi (2003) suggests that the plethora of dance styles in contemporary dance has made it difficult for the audience to know what to expect when they go to a dance performance. Such confusion clouds audience as well as dancer perspectives. Tjallingi attributes a major cause of this to the trend amongst dance programmers and curators to establish their own criteria in regards to what they expect dance to embody, thus further complicating any clear definition. *Spr

Dance has indeed been a ‘contributing factor’ to the interdisciplinary practice that has stimulated some of the foremost theatre initiatives since early this century. As a kinetic, gestural, sensual but silent medium, it has accelerated the destabilization of the logocentric nature of European theatre, a theatre tradition in which word and text have traditionally been dominant. Hans Thies Lehmann discusses a new theatre dramaturgy in which:

Contemporary theatre, leaving behind the absolute dominance of the text, does not by any means abandon poetry, thoughtfulness of the glamour of speech, but brings back into focus the de-semanticizing potential of body and visuality as such. (Lehmann 1997: 60)

The “de-semanticizing” potential of the (dancer’s) body has enabled theatre artists, like those referred to by Lehmann as contributing to new theatre practice – Jan Lauwers, Jan Fabre, Robert Lepage, Robert Wilson and others – to use dance in order to destabilise the traditional signification of signs and pervert semantic symbolism: in many cases causing the destabilization of conventional assumptions about morals and ethics (Jan Fabre’s I am Blood (2001) is an example). If dance has been constructive in initiating new performance practice then dancers can be pleased. Nevertheless, if in an interdisciplinary context dance functions primarily as an element of a ‘greater performance experience’, questions concerning the role of the dancer within these performances need to be addressed.

“The de-hierarchization of theatrical means is a universal principal of post-dramatic theatre,” suggests Lehmann (Lehmann 1997: 86). As such, post-dramatic theatre establishes autonomy between theatre disciplines and affords the viewer a non-hierarchical reading of signs. As Lehmann indeed suggests, for the viewer the hierarchy may have disappeared but as Foucault counters, historical hierarchy remains within such relationships. For Foucault, the question is not to abolish hierarchies, as “a society without power relations can only be an abstraction” (Foucault 1982: 208). Indeed, the appeal of linking and reversing possibilities in “adversarial” relationships are what gives fruit to mechanisms of power. It is probably too early to assume total equality, even in post-dramatic theatre.

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9 Pinpointing the beginning of interdisciplinary practice is difficult: Loie Fuller (Paris, 1890’s), Oscar Schlemmer (Germany, 1920s), the Black Mountain College happenings (1950’s), Judson Theatre (New York 1960’s) are a number of key artists and events.

10 See also Auslander (1987) and Ramsay Burt (2002) for similar descriptions of the way in which deconstruction of conventional theatre ‘presence’ opens possibilities for new readings. Auslander supposes a new postmodern political theatre, Burt an opening towards marginalised or unarticulated points of view.

11 The body, Lehmann suggests, is the place in which a new reading of signs eventuates. Post-dramatic theatre’s “present” body stands it appears, in contrast to Foucault’s historically inscribed body that only exists as a blank surface before the process of cultural inscription.
In Robert Wilson’s *Civil Wars* (1984) and *Hamlet Machine* (1986), Jan Fabre’s *Danssecties/Das Glas im Kopf wird vom Glas* (1984-90), Lauwers’ Need Company’s *Need to Know* (1987) and *Snakesong Trilogy* (1996-96) – some of the most influential performances of the last three decades – dancers’ trained articulated bodies carry costumes and describe the space. They provide the place on which to define poetry and depict new visual hermeneutics. They provide bodies that are viscerally ‘present’ but have no identity. In *Danssecties* (one part of Jan Fabre’s Opera Tryptich, 1987), the dancers (on point) were stylised, regimented and devoid of personality. As a “political statement” and reaction to Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Fabre used dancers’ “disciplined body” to comment and critique the valorisation of “perfect” bodies in sport advertising and art markets (Fabre in Smee 2005/6: 10). Kept in strict formation and dancing tediously slow and static combinations, ballet dancers were used to parody their own technique.

My friend Anne was a dancer in Fabre’s *Danssecties*. We discussed the conversations and veiled accusations we heard in corridors and cafes. Dancers who performed with Fabre on this piece were accused of being manipulated and abused; bleeding feet was often an outcome. Was she being manipulated? She thought she probably was, although she loved and hated every minute of it. Even though the work was successful and much admired, some dancers found it difficult to accept the commitment of others to such a project. I suspect that the accusation of manipulation was exacerbated by the fact that most of the dancers were young, and very committed. It was assumed that the institution behind such a large production could compromise their youth and individuality. Fabre’s *Danssecties* played out Foucault’s disciplined bodies by using real disciplined and conforming bodies. As such, he was complicit in reaffirming his own critique that bodies can easily be appropriated. What then, allows such easy appropriation of bodies?

The dancers used by Fabre, Wilson, Platel and others of this genre have the capability to metamorphose. That is, they “present the body’s visceral presence over the logos” (Lehmann 2006: 145). They are able to step in and out of personalities, characters and egos. They need no dramatic narration or representational signs, as do actors; they can become, as Lehmann describes, an “agent provocateur” (2006: 162). This seems too convenient. Very handy for the directors and choreographers, but what makes it so desirable for the dancer to become an agent provocateur and to render themselves visible yet invisible? In informal discussions and organized symposia, the age-old axiom is invoked. Is the dancer merely an instrument in the hands of the choreographer or director? How far is their identity as a dancer or as an artist important, and is there a difference between a dancer and an artist? What does it mean to be ‘a contributing factor’?
In ‘Docile Bodies’, Foucault defines that the “art of the human body” was developed and regulated, defined and refined through the power of political, social (and cultural) control on bodies, “…not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines…discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies” (Foucault in Rabinow 1984: 182).  

In theatre spaces and foyers, the dichotomy of being docile – meaning pliable and responsive – and powerful – meaning receptive, strong and independent – is brought into play throughout a dance career. The powerful dancing body is subject to discipline in the case of institutional requirements as well as the dancers’ own ambition. It is subject to the will of the choreographer or director and regularly obedient to cultural and aesthetic trends. 

From early on dancers are trained to be obedient. They are kept under like children. While being a dancer has everything to do with maturity, developing your own personality. You are only really a dancer when you can make your own artistic choices. (Jennifer Karius *grand sujet* Dutch National Ballet in Steenbergen 2003: 27) 

Importantly Foucault argues that we are active agents in the manner in which we are docile. While scars and traces arising from historical experience are what constitute the modern subject, histories are not inescapable. 

Undoubtedly dancers realise that in order for them to succeed they must first achieve technical proficiency. The important and perhaps fundamental dilemma quickly arises in the independent professional circuit. On the one hand, dance discipline requires strict mental and physical training in which the dancer conforms to an unquestioning imitation of aesthetic ideals. On the other, the dancer quickly realises that as well as being virtuosic they need to develop their own ’personality’, to become mature and to make their own artistic choices. Don Asker suggests that the ultimate goal of a dancer is to find and perform their individual identity (Asker 1995). Ideas of a dancer’s selfhood may well need to be reconsidered if one is to accept dance taking place within mediated spaces. However, the identity of a dancer relates to genealogies that suggest layers of inscribed process. 

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12 In ‘Docile Bodies’, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault presents the analogy of the soldier whose physical development (as a result of the military institution) becomes extremely powerful. Consequently, the soldier is able to assume power through his physicality. However, the real power does not rest with the soldier. He is an institutionalised subject, exceedingly mediated and regulated. The power of his body is not his own. It is a secondary power, organised, developed and regulated by the institution. 

13 The “subtle coercion” of social control in the case of Foucault’s military and ‘ordinary individuals’, also echoes in the gendered bodies invoked by Judith Butler. Foucault’s human subjects are given a social and personal identity by means of their social objectification and categorisation. Foucault’s subject may be inscribed, but is not entirely docile. (see Docile Bodies, 1976, and ‘Foucault’ in *Dictionnaire des Philosophes* 1984: 942-944 – this entry in the dictionary was written by Foucault himself under a pseudonym.)
Inscription and institutions

As early as the Baroque period, Western theatrical dance interiorised cultural perceptions and criticisms based upon notions of gender, sexual deviance and criticism of artistry. Historically, the body, aligned to sexuality and deviance, has been mistrusted. Female dancers of the romantic period were stigmatised as loose women: on the one hand held up as a poetic beacon, on the other as whores. Arguments in which dancing was categorised as deviant and a sin against God continued on to the end of the nineteenth century (Boiseul 1606). As Foucault demonstrates in his treatise on mental illness, deviance and power in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, “the body’ was seen as a secret, mysterious and sexual power” (Foucault 1976: 179). It was feared as powerful and subversive. The subsequent development of different methods of subjugation, delivered through laws devising moral and ethical standards, was instigated primarily through institutions.

Institutions function, as Foucault has demonstrated, within strategies of aesthetic, social and cultural priorities (Foucault 1975). For the most part dance has been institutionalised, regulated and under the protection of the state for the best part of two centuries. Undeniably, power relations are endemic within institutions that, in turn, respond to social and political conventions. Individuals (Foucault’s “subjects”) within the institution interiorise the subtle power of institutional cultural and political structures (Foucault in Rabinow 1984). Accordingly, the body is subjected to an inscription that has its traces in the political machinations of an extended bureaucratic reality. Categorisations around gender and body image, style and artistic preference are constituted within the structure of institutional walls. While dancers are not simply passive recipients of social conditioning, institutionalisation of dance has made deviance difficult within often-antiquated institutional systems.  

At the theatre school where I trained as a dancer, we shared the building with the acting school. During breaks the dancers would sit around and rarely participate in the rigorous discussions, arguments or daily theatrics that were taking place in the canteen. Not because we had nothing to say, but we because we had no real desire (hence no real ability) to vocalise our presence. Many of us would look in awe, but with some humour, and envy, at the confident exhibitionism of the acting students. We were developing a technique(ology) of bodily language that we didn’t really flaunt on the street, or even in the canteen. Our power lay in the studio and on the stage; outside of the dance space, we shut ourselves up in our dumb bodies and kept our

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14 See Gregory Sholette (2001) Sholette examines the juxtaposition between inherent institutional power, curatorship and artist demands.

15 Dance students in cantines and foyers today are very aware of trends relating to body glamour and image and this reflects in physical confidence.
distance. We could not be easily read and therefore not easily understood. Notwithstanding, for the acting students we were mysterious and slightly intimidating. Later I learned that they also were wary, suspicious and envious of us: our physicality was mystifying but desired. While we were considered cloistered and naïve, shy or voiceless, we were also imagined to be powerful, mysterious and sexual.\textsuperscript{16}

The notion of a subversive but inscribed body that cannot always be (successfully) read has created ambivalence in the way that dance and dancer are perceived. Mark Franko's examination of Baroque dance and its influence on the politics of the time, identifies early symptoms of such ambiguity (Franko 1995b). Attempting to create what Franko calls “the politically autonomous body”, Baroque artists sought to make dance significant and responsive to the political situation by discarding any particular movement lexicon (Franko 1995b: 88). Much like Lehmann’s \textit{agent provocateur}, the body that detached itself from an explanatory text, had freedom to exhibit cynicism and satire, and was potentially subversive. The reaction of Louis XIV was to decimate dance’s potency by institutionalising court dance and overseeing each work through means of a tribunal. Foucault’s example of subjugation corresponds to the manner in which dance was institutionalised and bodies made “textless”. Institutionalised Baroque dance is what ultimately became known as ballet, or more broadly, Western dance (Franko 1995b). Euphemisms such as ‘the body beautiful’, ‘the voiceless dancer’ and ‘ephemeral dance’ were to inhabit the psychology of the next few hundred years of dance and its dancers.

Notwithstanding these developments, there have been different stages of defiance and attempts by dancers to develop methods through which to “find their own identity” and revoice. Most notably the dancers and choreographers of the postmodern movement took up a resistance to such passive inscription.\textsuperscript{17} Postmodern traditions that are “contingent, pluralistic, ambiguous, freed (or jettisoned) from the certainties of yesterday” (Lincoln and Denzin in Ellis 2005: 11) have provided the interface for contemporary interdisciplinary practice.

\textsuperscript{16} Later, I became friends and worked with some of the actors; we would often reminisce. Their verbosity and our silence was a bizarre juxtaposition that - in spite of postmodernism and cultural trends - led to mutual inquisitiveness that culminated in the eventual exploration of each other’s stage spaces. There were other differences as well. While extremely confident in our artistic endeavours, we were also well aware of the differences in cultural value afforded actors – ‘star’ status for instance. As dancers, we may have been developing an individuality of expression, but much of the work we would get would be less individual, in ensembles or as part of a group.

\textsuperscript{17} Ramsay Burt has voiced his dislike of the term postmodern dance and argues that the principles of modern dance have never clearly been defined. He considers both Banes’ and Seigel’s definitions of the postmodern as unfounded (Burt 2004). However, my own definition draws from the more casual referencing of my contemporaries and peers and dance history lessons at the Theatreschool and, as explained on page 3, acts a guide to a series of events and consequences.
**Regaining power: postmodernism**

Postmodernist theory or theory of postmoderism, names and correspondingly closes off the very world of cultural difference and plurality which it allegedly brings to visibility. What is striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of consensus. (Stephen Connor 1998: 10)

The postmodern movement provides the nexus through which many of the genealogies of contemporary dance can be read. The dancers of this period sought for ways to destabilise expectations of the public, other practitioners and of themselves. They rebelled against the modernists whose influence and rigidity they found stifling. Dance was directly interacting with the gestalt of a broader postmodern arts thinking that related to notions of authorship and conceptual deconstruction. Ramsay Bart draws attention to the similar articulation of ideas developed in the work of Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon and others, as to that of Foucault who was presenting his ideas on power and self-introspection in the late 1960s and early 70s. As Bart suggests, the development of Foucault’s theories and the postmodern dance movement harbour within them a reflection of a more self-conscious knowledge of the body (Burt 2004: 30). Foucault’s concern that the subject “observe himself, analyse himself, interpret himself, recognise himself” in order to realign systems of institutional and inscribed forces were echoed in postmodern dancers’ attempts to interrogate and disturb expectations of themselves and others (Foucault 1982: 83).

Yvonne Rainer is perhaps the most iconic of the dancers from the early postmodern period. Reacting against the human and mythical elements present in the work of the modern dancers like Martha Graham and Jose Limon, she said “no” to almost every conceivable element of modern artistic expectation. Part of her **NO manifesto** of 1965 states:

*No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe no to glamour and transcendence of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved.* (Rainer, 1995a, 166)

Her manifesto echoes Connor’s quote (above) with its insistence on destabilizing consensus, expectation and boundaries. Foucault's postructuralist analysis of the manner in which the

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18 The “modern dancers”, such as the Americans Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, the Germans, Mary Wigman, and Kurt Joost had also disassociated themselves from the traditionalists in order to ultimately create their own traditions. This will be examined further in Chapter 2.

19 It is important to note that Rainer studied for a time at the studio of Martha Graham as well as taking regular classes at the Cunningham studios. She was close to the aesthetic of Cunningham’s minimalist perspective but could not reconcile with his insistence on virtuosity in his dancers and performances.
individual participates in culture and society also called for investigations to re-establish new notions of body and presence.

In order to further disrupt expectations of process and outcome in performance, the ‘minimalist’ group, influenced by John Cage, attempted to expand the creative process “by eliminating the domination of the imagination and limiting choices” (Gordon 1971). By doing so, they aligned the psychology of the imagination with passive inscription of their dance genealogy and thus sought to find simplicity of form and concept. Refusing to be categorised, David Gordon declared, “I don’t think I am a minimalist” (Gordon in Blackwood 1980: np) while in one of his solo works his fall to the ground took 20 minutes. Gordon and Valda Zetterfield pioneered the use of text and dance marked by their own particular ironic humour. Steve Paxton worked on the notion that movement coming from improvisation would be able to resist the powerful inscription of social and cultural dance history and thus, he sought to find the interior and pure movement of the uninscribed and unadorned body.

Many of the artists and dancers, including Kenneth King, Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs and Meredith Monk, were concerned with the disjunction between narrative and real life as well as with minimalist performance aesthetics. Of the early dance works concerned with destabilising and inverting the dichotomy of intellect and intuition, Yvonne Rainer’s The Mind is a Muscle (1967) and the larger work Trio A (1969), performed as a solo, a trio or in relay teams of ten, highlights projects of the Judson Church. Rainer’s Mind is a Muscle used ordinary street movements, shuffles and various orders and choreographic constructions to show that natural and ordinary economical movement could be unpretentious and not technically difficult. In this piece, the pedestrian movement is choreographed in such a way that the dancers can carry out their tasks in seemingly effortless and detached fashion. However, many of the dancers involved in Judson Church, Childs, Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, Gordon, Zetterfield, Dunn and others, hailed from a ballet background. This, as much as anything gave them the irony with which they could perform against the ballet tradition. Foucault had aptly highlighted the inconsistencies of understanding past hierarchies as the building blocks on which to accept rather than reject history (Foucault 1985).

On the other side of the Atlantic, Pina Bausch extended a European reaction to modernism. Also rejecting narrative structure and destroying previous ideas of conventional dance mannerisms, Bausch sought to disturb public expectations by disrupting emotional complacency. Her use of relentless repetition in Café Muller (1978) and Bluebeard (1977)

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20 Unfortunately, I have not been able to trace the name of this solo, but I saw it in 1981 in a show he performed together with Valda Zetterfeld at Werkcentrum Dans in Amsterdam.
21 As the founder of “contact improvisation” Paxton stressed exploration in laws relating to physical friction, gravity and momentum through the development of body contact between dancers. Breaking performance boundaries in his studio performances, audience members were often invited to participate.
aggravated the dancers’ physicality by showing pain through repeated action.\textsuperscript{22} As in Café Muller, a piece in which the dancers continually throw themselves onto one another, and Bluebeard, (an adaptation of Bela Bartok’s one hour opera Bluebeards Castle) in which the dancer repeatedly tries to climb the wall, Bausch’s ‘dances’ worry politics and morals. In these performances, the dancers attempt to define as well as exorcise their subjugation to social and sexual definition. As Burt so succinctly evaluates in his discussion of the characters in Café Muller, “In Foucault’s terms, they are risking the “destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge” (Bart 2004: 39). In physical theatre of the 1980s and 90s, Wim Vandekeybus’s company Ultima Vez, Lloyd Newson’s DV8 and Alain Platel’s company Les Ballets C de la B, took the body to the extremes of safety while they explored consciousness through masochistic explorations of the body’s boundaries. The early work of Meg Stuart, Joseph Nadj and Jan Fabre further exploited the body as the only site on which all types of social interaction could be defined. While Foucault had defined the body as a political field through which to understand relations of power, domination and productivity, so the physical theatre artists sought to stretch the line between theatre and reality, suffering and punishment.

The postmodern dance movement set a precedent for exploration into interdisciplinary practice. The deconstruction of logical assumptions about the relationship of the body to the artwork was a prelude to the identification of similar possibilities in technology. By defying literal connections, deconstructing any logical assumptions about performance definitions and denying art historical definitions and sub-divisions, dancers could form associations and interact with other art communities. Hybrid practice arising out of interdisciplinary investigations has culminated, in the work of Teshigawara and Wilson as well as Bausch, Alain Patel and countless others, in a break with the confines of narrative and linear development regarding content or participation. In fact, it also defined a manner of performance making representative of the manner in which society was evolving; media savvy, interactive and globally aware. As a consequence, culturally significant arts practices were largely expected to function along pathways etched out by postmodern ideals.

While postmodern dance, with its egalitarian and pluralistic approach to performance making opened many channels of communication, it also developed new standards based on older assumptions. Namely that dance, principally the domain of physical movement, needed an intellectual and conceptual approach if it were to be considered on an intellectual par with other theatre. The resistant dumb dancer myth, compounded by the Cartesian dichotomy that the physical (feeling and movement) is inferior to the mental (ratio, language), is a dogma that still pervades Western society. Attempting to articulate some of the clichés that inhibit dance from consideration as an intelligent arts practice and dancers as intelligent artists, the philosopher

\textsuperscript{22} Repetition remains a constant highlight in Bausch pieces.
Jan Flaming reminds us; “We live in a ‘knowledge society’: that says enough” (Flaming in Steenburgen 2005: 27). Flaming invokes Nietzsche to describe the complexity between types of intelligence. “The dancing man/woman produces a kinaesthetic worth that Nietzsche perceived as greater than the strict intellectual. For Nietzsche, dancing is everything apart from the “purely physical”, apart from “pure aesthetic” (Flaming in Steenburgen 2005: 27).

Postmodernism, philosophy, dance and feminist theory and criticism contribute to revoicing the dancer. Regaining agency in recognition of physical intelligence, however, remains in part compounded by differences in practice and theory. In theory, the ‘writing of dance’ aids acknowledgement of dance as performance theory, but does it also establish a precedent for the written over the moved. In practice, using text as accompaniment or during a dance performance has become an essential method to regain control or embellish the movement context. Through the valorisation of the written word, ‘writing’ and ‘reading’ have become essential in the dance gestalt. Without wishing to conflate theory and writing, the very need to textualise dance through writing or reading may undermine Nietzsche and Foucault’s attempts to validate the purely physical.

The semantic conundrums caused by using ‘speak’, ‘read and ‘write’ to exemplify understanding and intelligence (even interpretation) are, I believe, at the heart of what causes dance to be in a constant state of apology. I will look at a number of ways that ‘writing’ impacts on the idea of dance being able to ‘speak’ for itself. Does the quest to aid dance through writing contribute to, or in fact stand at the beginning of an assumption that the ‘body’ may need a helping hand?

Writing out the ephemeral
“once danced then gone” (Copeland 1996).

“Choreographers and dancers have always been aware that dance is the most ephemeral of arts” (Thorousch 2003: introduction CD rom). The search to translate movement into writing, to classify and to capture movement in words literally and figuratively has been a way to counter perceived notions of ephemerality: to counter the idea of dance as a disappearance. This section questions whether only writing and documentation keeps dance alive, and wonders if it is any more ephemeral than other live performance. I argue that consistently assigning ephemerality to dance compromises recognition of its potential to communicate.

23 Thomas Thorousch, in the introduction to the CD rom William Forsythe: Improvisation Technologies (2003), equates this ephemerality with the lack of being able to commit movement or choreography to writing. Dance has not been written down, made concrete, and therefore its existence is dubious or threatened. The writing that Thorousch referred to concerned the use of words or notation to record movement. He was suggesting that by recording dance it became less ephemeral and that Forsythe’s CD rom was ultimately a solution to this.
Attempts to counter the ephemerality of dance through writing and text have been at the forefront of Western theatrical dance since the Baroque period. Jean-George Noverre (1727-1810) developed ballets with narrative structures in order to defy the highly formalised and evanescent nature of the ballet of the Baroque era. He also began to write down ballet in words and notation as well as publish his treatise on the rules and principles of ballet, *Letters on Dancing and Ballet* (1760). Thoinot Arbeau (1519-1595), prior to Noverre, had also searched to stabilise, through writing and notation, the perceived ephemerality of Romantic ballet. 24 His dance manuscript from 1588 contained instructions and tabulations for steps aligned with the musical notation.

Andre Lepecki suggests that choreography is itself ‘a writing’, linked, as he outlines, to the Derridian “trace” and thus functioning as an act of inscription on the body. For Lepecki, dance and writing coexist and consequently, are mutually dependant. “Shared ground: dance cannot be imagined without writing, it does not exit(s) (sic) outside writings space, just as dance cannot be perceived without the apparition…of the feminine.” (Lepecki 2004:124). As a poetic or even philosophic dependence, this is a fruitful co-existence; however, as a literal one it raises some questions.25 Namely, can a body only be read through writing, and what does reading dance really mean? Is the dance really invisible or is writing dance a way in which to invent body theory? Writing has become a form not only of remembering and containing the dances and the steps, but a manner in which to prove intellectual currency, paradoxically perpetuating the Cartesian view privileging words, literature and (now) technology. It seems that the more that is written about dance the more invisible the dancer becomes, and the more opportunity to idolise the ‘body’ as concept, but not as a moving, thinking dancer.

The logocentrism of Western metaphysics has led to the belief that communication is strictly bound up with representation and meaning. Susan Foster (Foster 1986: xv) states that contemporary Western culture “esteems the verbal and the mathematical over all other forms of discourse.” The “abstract” (non-representational) nature of dance has been given as a reason why it may be hard for audiences to connect with dance performance. 26 Foster offers a solution to this ‘problem’ in her seminal work, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (1986), in which she advocates that we learn to “read” the dance in order to be able to understand it more fully (Foster 1986: preface). Foster suggests that understanding choreographic signification and having the ability to “read” the dance enables us to be “moved” more meaningfully by the dance – implying that if we become more literate in the art form that we are watching we will be more easily able to understand and interpret its otherwise

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24 In *Inscribing Dance*, Andre Lepecki discusses conversations between Arbeau and his pupil in which the latter urges the former to prevent dance from “disappearing”. (Lepecki 2004: 125)

25 Lepecki for instance refers to Heidegger and Derrida’s notion of writing as “to put writing under erasure is not yet to negate writing” (2004: 171).

ephemeral (disappearing) and symbolic nature. Ann Daly (1992), on the other hand, proposes that in order to “get” dance we must “know” it at the level of communication, which does not preclude pre-verbal knowledge" (Daly 1992: 309). Pre-verbal appears in this context to mean instinctive, ritualistic, perhaps even ‘primitive’.27 The suggestion that an understanding of dance is necessary in order to overcome the inherent ephemerality of dance sounds logical. But how do we read it and what writing do we use to explain or interpret it? Foster’s reading requires familiarity with the dance, but which one? Within contemporary dance, there are innumerable styles and genres with many different movement qualities. There are conflicting ways of reading the dance. (Just consider the difference in reading physical dance theatre and release technique.) Daly suggests that we give ourselves over and be open, possibly in a somatic way, to the experience of watching dance. Andre Lepecki also suggests that reading, getting and knowing come down in part to the logocentric nature of the medium: because if it is not written it remains an art of self-erasure (Lepecki 2004: 124-128). But is it only writing that substantiates dance? ‘Reading’ the dance, is helpful to understanding and theorizing an arts practice, however, it seems that there is more to dance outside of writing than just its disappearance.

Considering physical and kinetic memory as a major part of what keeps the dance from disappearing may be helpful. William Forsythe:

I try to think of the kinesphere – the space of the body’s motion as a field of memory. Could it be that the memory is in fact provided by proprioception - the body’s sense of these spaces? In other words, can memory of the body in certain position - just like a smell - trigger the senses? (Forsythe in Sulcras 2004: 48)

As Forsythe suggests, the dancer’s movements are committed to memory - to the memory of sounds, beats, phrases and spaces. Memory forms the basis for the act of dancing, for the moves, manipulations and directional changes. A dancer’s body is “a vessel of memory” (Birringer 2002), and the act of dancing a showcase of remembering.

The remembering is not an embodied experience for the dancer alone. The kinaesthetic transmission, the feeling of dancing with the dancer, the lived experience of the performance remains alive in the memory of the viewer after the performance. Drid Williams (2005) also suggests that the ‘life’ of a dance is not solely dependent upon its performance.

If we identify dances only as performances (in Saussurian terms, only at the level of la parole), we see them only phenomenologically-simply as “appearances,” therefore as things that have no real character or structure, which in any of their manifestations do not lend themselves to any kind of rational treatment. To identify dances only as

27 Francis Sparschott (1981) also claims that dance and the ‘body’ remain connected to the primordial, causing an inarticulation (primitivism) of dance, thus impeding its qualification as a true art form that can be historically recognised.
performances trivialises them, just as we trivialise language if we identify it only as speaking. (Williams 2005: np)

Similarly, Patrice Pavis suggests that the merger between the motor action of the dancer and the mental action of the spectator provides the possibility to transform the dance into experience anytime during or after the performance (Pavis 1996). As the present and the past remain interlocked within experience, dance cannot be considered anymore ephemeral than any other performative event.

**Accessibility and communication**

If it is too hard to read, understand, and capture the dance, then other methods will be created to clarify body language and make dance communicate. One way, has been to develop methods to understand what is being danced by reading dance, the other, the dancers themselves. Working within the genre of multidisciplinarity has become essential for dancers wanting to remain employed and relevant. Analysing the Australian condition, Amanda Card (2006) notes that dancers once joined ballet, modern dance groups or chorus lines and were primarily expected to do what the choreographer or director wished. Now that choreography is essentially a more democratic process, the relationships between dancers, choreographers and directors are interdependent. “The best dancers today are ‘bodies for hire’, those who are versatile, open-minded, independent and comfortable in every genre.” (Card 2006: 46) While I agree that this creates autocratic and even “beautiful” dancers, it also creates a new hybrid, one apt to follow the pattern of conformity. In the collaborative, contemporary dance field of today there are too many graduating students and little steady work, few auditions and decreasing opportunity for newcomers (Card 2006: 47). The notion of Card’s “bodies for hire”, while primarily an Australian perspective, offers a paradigm for the European experience as dancers move into more international, albeit competitive, performance making ventures.

Filmed images, digestible media and cultural trends that move away from the abstract minimalism of the postmodern decades to the fantasy and opulence of many of today’s performances, have all created new demands on artists. While figures show that attendance of dance performances has risen, and that dance classes are hugely popular and the number of dance companies is steadily increasing, dancers and their stakeholders remain concerned about the possibility of gaining and containing audiences.  

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28 Amanda Card evaluates Susan Foster’s critical rendering of the ‘body for hire” with her own positive rendition. Card holds that dancers who are capable of being “bodies for hire” are the most versatile and valuable in a contemporary moving dance climate.

29 I am thinking here of examples from performers like Fabre, Wilson, DV8, C de la B and Decouffle, where most of the performances are highly designed and elaborately staged.

music videos and dance classes, but these are a commodity of mediatisation and play a different role in their cultural significance than dance as an arts practice. The homogenizing effect of current interdisciplinary practice that has arisen in the mediatised and globalised cultural environment of the post postmodern era has not spared the dance community.

A complex set of negotiations between body and space, performer and viewer interactions, has arisen with the evolution of inter media and mixed media. The artist's performative body and the spectator's participatory body together constitute the notion of a body increasingly immersed in the dialectics of mediated experience (Jeffrey Shaw 2003). An analysis of the position of dance within a mediated performance culture will help establish a more complete picture of the way dance functions within an increasingly mediated environment.

Mediatisation/new ways of seeing

Culture has expanded not because of any actual enlargement of opportunities for and varieties of cultural experience, but because of an expansion and diversification of the forms in which cultural experience is mediated. (Connor 1989: 17)

Phillip Auslander has already problematised the distinction between live and mediated performance by developing arguments to counter the validation of live performance over that of the mediated virtual or digital performance (1999, 2002, 2004). He does this by critiquing the ontological and essentialist arguments of Peggy Phelan in particular - but also of Bogosian, Burt and Pavis - that the nature of performance depends on its liveness, its flesh and bloodness, and its “representation without reproduction” (Phelan 1993). Auslander, drawing on Deleuze, suggests that art is always mediated, as it exists as part of the context within which it is placed (Auslander 1999, 2002). To dance one needs nothing, except a body, even an imagined one; nevertheless, in a performative situation mediation is inevitable.

The hierarchy between the live and mediated has been played out in various ways in dance performance since the early work of Loie Fuller and celebrated early dance/film artist Maya Deren. In many ways, it has been successfully destabilised in the area of film and dance by companies such as DV8 (which stands for Dance and video8) and Lea Anderson’s companies the Fetherstonehaughs and the Cholmondeleys. As text, sign, words and readings mediate the live dancing body, the technologically mediated dramatises the notion of the disappearing body further as it allows for a new consignment of visual experience and interpretation; in particular, the ease with which the filmed image takes over from the live as a form of

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31 See also Phelan (1993), Reason (2004), Auslander (1999)
32 Currently dance/film has become a separate discipline where problems of hierarchy are less evident.
representation, and the possibilities of the cinematic image to uncover aspects of emotional and kinetic empathy that are more easily accessible to audiences.

Referring to such accessibility and interpretation, Bill T. Jones responded to the debate on hierarchy by classifying live dance as the conscious live action and filmed dance as the “unconscious filmed action”. While involved in digital video installations (Ghostcatching 1999), Jones still sees the two as competing. He admits that film on stage is ultimately the more compelling (Jones in Auslander 1999:19). This is born out in Jones’ own Still/Here, where the performers tell stories of their life-threatening illnesses on video screens, while also ‘dancing’ some of their text in the live performance. The filmed image creates a catalyst, or an entrance point, through which to engage the ‘unconscious’. There is, I believe, a voyeurism inherent in watching film that supersedes the spectatorship of live performance. Getting ‘close’ to the performers on stage would have been much more difficult without their filmed presence. Gerald Mast describes this as a visual kinetic empathy that goes hand in hand with a physiological attraction in which the eye is drawn to the screen. This creates an unencumbered visual perspective, an easy immersion (Mast 1977: 53-60), and suggests also that visual kinetic empathy maybe stronger than movement’s kinetic empathy.33 A point for consideration – the dancer and media artist Robert Wechsler echoes similar thoughts: “Put a live event and a screen side-by-side and watch where the eyes go” (Wechsler in Wesseman 1997: 32).

Popular as well as less popular culture tends towards the projected and mediated in preference to the live. Auslander’s writings suggest that as a mediatised culture, we have changed our perception of what we want and what we expect to see (Auslander 1997, 2003). What we expect to see is a multifarious combination of possibilities in performance. Copeland’s “intelligent public” and technically well-informed audiences have every right to expect their knowledge to be reflected in the performance making.

A shift from the immediate or live body to a constructed body has been seen through influences of conceptual art and the increasing currency of video and, subsequently, the computer-based media and imaging technologies. Contrasts between live dancing bodies and bodies in hyper or digitalised spaces create a disjunction between our attitudes to the body itself and our relationship to the interface (the artwork), which the body materialises, or dematerialises.

33 Gerard Mast discusses suspension of disbelief (of physical, emotional or situational), and the nature of the screen ‘eye’, where vision is drawn to the moving image in Film, Cinema, Movie (1977).
**Closing remarks**

There are a number of tensions that arise out of the previous discussion which need further consideration.

a) the dependence on interdisciplinarity to be a bridge between the audience and an 'ephemeral' dance practice.

b) the embodied experience and development of dancers that impacts on the role of dance within an interdisciplinary context.

c) the question whether interdisciplinarity requires a disembodiment from dance knowledge and intelligence.

Carol Martin’s hypothesis that dance is not always meant to be looked at as dance but serves only part of the production of meaning brings the role of dance and thus the body and dancer into a larger perspective. Burt, Martin, Lepecki and Lehmann believe that dance stands to service the greater performance experience; it is part of the production of meaning. Conceptually this is not so disturbing, as it constructs new areas of perception in performance hermeneutics.34 To offer a purist perspective of dance in the face of developments in multidisciplinary practice is neither desirable nor relevant: rather, a dissemination of these practices can allow a revaluation of the manner in which dance and body is defined and expected to be defined in modern practice. A return to Foucault’s idea of the body as a recipient of cultural inscription may be necessary here. Because dancers work in increasingly interdisciplinary ways and dance is seen from within an increasingly interdisciplinary perspective, the value of articulating an individual perspective may be useful but prove difficult. Looking through the lens of Foucault has offered a manner in which to explain dancers’ self-image and self-perception in an historical as well as a contemporary framework.

Inherent inscribed memory plays a major role in the manner in which dancers approach their position in artistic practice. The genealogies of historical stigmatisation along with cultural and artistic developments create a labyrinth of influences through which dancers take action. A conclusion seems to suggest that much major development needs to be assessed on these terms in order to create an awareness of the manner in which dance and dancers bodies now participate in creative spaces.

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Historically, the accumulation of knowledge about the human body by the human sciences (medicine, physiology, psychology, ethnology) is intimately connected with the management of the body and the disciplining of behaviour. As a consequence, bodies have not only been literally mined and exploited for their productivity and value, but also been categorised as normatively legitimate or undesirable. (Anka Bangma 2004: np).

I suggest that historically there is a tendency to disregard the power and inventiveness of the dancers’ physicality and knowledge: i.e. the learned and inherent physical technology of dancing. But precisely because the body is a site of cultural manipulation, artists and theorists have also put it forward as a site for transgressing the cultural constraints of meaning and behaviour. Can dance, as representation of cultural affirmation, but also as a site of embodied experience, still be subversive and in what way is this experience influenced by other protagonists in its ability to exploit its full potential?

The developments in hybrids that have arisen out of interdisciplinary practice will be the central focus of Chapter 2. The chapter will identify various types of mediation that have led to the development of new hybrids and new ways of speaking and communicating with the body through other technologies. It will provide highlights of some of the major categories in dance and hybrid theatre by presenting an historical framework with through which to view their impetus and progression.
Chapter 2

Moving towards new disciplines: signposting bodies

Two elements in conjunction form a third or even a fourth element. What is more, the result should generate at least one special relationship. (Robert Rauschenberg 2006)

In dance performances of the 1980s and 1990s I found myself often coexisting on stage with 90 chairs wired to collapse, swinging myself around hydraulically powered beds, reciting slabs of text, dancing under huge projected images of my pre-recorded self, or jumping over television screens that were recording our real-time movement in close-up. Outside of the ballet companies in Holland, there was hardly a group that was not working with an interdisciplinary approach. The principles of postmodernism, emergent at the time, had exploited the mediating possibilities of arts practice. As dancers we were not only eager to participate - feeling that our profession had finally gained recognition as competitive theatre practice - but we were anxious to extend our arts practice into new areas. I was definitely a child of the postmodern era, and the work that I was involved in was heavily influenced by postmodern ideals. But we were moving away from such idealism. As dancers we recognised that using media and technology, like film and video and theatrical devises such as text and visuals, made dance more accessible to the younger, more media savvy and literary arts public. We were striving to project our work across a wider general audience. As well as this, the demand for "innovative" work, as specified by curators, funding bodies and arts critics 'expected' explorations with other media. In time, it became impossible to go to a dance performance that was not heavily mediated by another discipline. Soon I came to consider myself as more than a dancer: I was a ‘performer’, and I would give my status as such. I had indeed learnt new disciplines – speaking on stage, using film cameras, computers, and visualising ideas in other ways than through my dancing – but what was happening to my dancing? Did I care, and did others care? As this chapter will address it seems that I did care – what was happening was important to my own career as much as it was to the development of contemporary practice.

Chapter 1 discussed how the independence of dance could be compromised by a dancer’s own disposition to consider their bodily knowledge inferior to that of other theatrical or intellectual knowledge. Chapter 2 questions if various performance aspects developed in multidisciplinary practice have caused a further distancing from the body as prime agent in dance hybrids.
Towards a different dance

Different forms of hybrid dance/performance have developed through which to question historical notions of dance. The importance of hybrid practices to the general performance paradigm and to dance of the twentieth and twenty-first century is (has been made) apparent. In order to access the relationship of the various media within the hybrid interface to dance practice, this chapter will consider different elements within interdisciplinary/hybrid practice for their “singularity and influence” (Foucault 1977: 76). Foucault’s non-linear approach to genealogy can once again prove useful for an assessment of the elements born of hybrid and interdisciplinary practice. As well as this, the non-linear development of contemporary dance practice can be deconstructed by such an approach. Growing from the same genealogical tree, different branches or areas of a contemporary dance genealogy develop and mutate within the contemporary dance diasporas. I will explore areas within interdisciplinary practice in which the role of the body has been subject to new performance methodologies that ultimately impact on the ontological development of dance and theatre. More specifically, they describe a semiotic coding of the body that has occurred in conjunction with a new, or post semiotic, coding in the theatre. These provide the terms to develop the inquiry into some of the impacts of dance with new performance practices.

The areas under consideration are gesture, body as object, text and film. I call these areas signposts, as they make explicit the meaning that often lies concealed in the more ambiguous movement vocabulary of dance. The significance of these different developments in performance practice and the manner in which they have impacted on dance illustrate the move away from dance into more theatrical, cinematic and, finally, technological manifestations of the body. An appraisal of these signposts can also be used as a means with which to enter the debate on dance as a domain of the body rather than a purely artistic conceptual construction. The outcome provides a critical interpretation of their influence on dance as an autonomous discipline.

In order to locate and highlight the manner in which, gesture, body as object, text, visual theatre and film have infiltrated the gestalt of dance practice, each of the subtopics are best demonstrated through different aspects of case studies situated within a genealogical framework. Under discussion will be Tanztheater/dance theatre, where the work of Pina Bausch in particular provides a basis through which to examine the ascendency of gesture in dance practice. The performance Bernadetje (1996) from Alain Platel describes notions of ‘real life’ through drama and dance. The idea of ‘real’ in performance is also assessed through explorations in the development of gesture in postmodern dance in America. The work of Yvonne Rainer highlights some of the problems that arise in trying to develop the ‘body as object’ and still conform to notions of ‘real’ in a dance and theatrical setting. Text (the spoken
word) was used in various ways and to various degrees in dance and dance theatre. Used by
dancers like Trisha Brown and Douglas Dunn, of the Judson Church, as a means to expand on
the discipline of dance, text became, unwittingly perhaps, an almost mandatory vehicle for
communication. The use of film and dance, particularly the use of filmed images on stage, has
done more than just ignite questions regarding live or mediated performance. The work of
various artists from the period will provide examples of attempts to destabilise the hierarchy of
the live and the mediated.

Dick Higgins’ description of hybrid forms as “intermediums” (Higgins 1969, cited by Kaye 1996)
is an appropriate term for the works discussed here. Nick Kaye analyses Higgins’ meaning as
defying boundaries and resisting “formal resolution” (Kaye 1996: 145). In the works under
examination, the means used do not remain independent but fuse together because of their
joint interaction. The integration of different acts of performance or art making leads to a
questioning of the genre or the form itself. The descriptions in this chapter, while at times critical
appraisals, attest to the many artists who have had the desire to take their art out of the
confines of expectation and conservatism and develop previously embryonic ideas. However, it
also attempts to draw attention to the spaces in between the high points of artistry: into the
murkier and often exasperating areas of creative development. The intermediums referred to in
this chapter take place primarily in live theatre spaces.

The development of tanztheater and the emergence of gesture as a
representation of dance

Often used as an incarnation of dance in multidisciplinary performance, ‘gesture’ has become
synonymous for ‘dance’ in hybrid theatre. Developed from a reaction to dancers’ own critique of
‘excessive movement’, ‘movement for movement sake’ and ‘dance that is only about itself’,
gesture is a way to simplify movement to its more essential or comprehensible elements.
Gesture, it could be said, offers a semiotic definition of an “abstract” and visceral medium.

The importance of gestured movement in dance developed simultaneously with the history of
the European tanztheater, one of the most influential early manifestations of hybrid theatre. As
the dramaturgy of tanztheater became increasingly developed, new notions of dance
crystallised which transformed dance across many genres. In the search for the real, for the

35Mike Higgins coined the term intermedia in the mid 60s to describe the tendency of new art to cross
boundaries of recognised media: even to fuse art with media that had not previously been considered art.
Intermedia referred to a tendency in the arts that became both a range of art forms and a way of
approaching the arts.

36 This is not the case for choreographers such as Merce Cunningham or William Forsythe. Cunningham,
for example, is noted for retaining autonomy in the individual elements that combine to make up a
performance. Because of the absolute autonomy of the single elements like dance, music or design, his
work, while using different media, remains ‘pure dance’, or rather, not hybrid.
communicative, and for an emotional connection, the use of gesture developed as a theatrical methodology to simplify and define dance/movement language. One of the first to define each gesture for its communicative value was Rudolph Laban. Laban’s wish was to construct a phenomenology of movement that expressed the movement’s dynamic value. His descriptive movement analysis, based on weight, space, flow and energy, provided a breakdown of gestured movement components. According to Laban, the gestures, if performed correctly, could themselves contain expressivity and meaning and were as a result independent from the performer.

Other than Laban’s analytically devised structures, his student Mary Wigman’s (1886-1973) expressionistic gestured dances were heavily imbued with the psychology of her own personality (Wigman 1970). Informed and connected to psychoanalysis (described by Susan Manning 1993), her impassioned dance vocabulary became known as Ausdrukstanz. Different again, but influential in the development of gesture in dance and theatre, another influential student of Laban, Kurt Jooss (1901-1979) believed that dance could be socially critical but needed to regain an artistic form that had been misused, (as he saw it), by the expressionists. Jooss considered that dance could be invigorated by classical as well as the modern movement styles. Combining what he had learned from Laban with ballet and popular theatre, he was determined to, and did, develop a theatre dance hybrid to get across his political and social themes. While Wigman, on the other hand, eschewed using ‘popular theatre’ techniques, her highly symbolic dance language was extremely influential in bringing another kind of theatricality to the dance: one that made use of the interpretive element of gesture in dance.

In the spirit of Wigman’s Ausdrukstanz but influenced by the more calculated approach of Jooss (under whom she had trained at the Folkwangschule), Pina Bausch integrated concepts of the theatre into dance performance. When Bausch took over as artistic director at Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1967, she had begun to develop a methodology in rehearsal/performance construction that sought to accentuate the primacy of the physical gesture over narrative while exploiting theatrical elements like spoken word and dramatic settings: conventional theatre in a non-conventional construction. Norbert Servos’ quote characterizes the dramaturgical construction of Tanztheater: “If a logic exists it is not a logic of the consciousness, but of the body, one that adheres not to the laws of causality but rather to the principle of analogy” (1984: 37

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37 Rudolph Laban, 1879-1953, established choreology, the discipline of dance analysis, and developed a pedagogic movement style called eukinetics. Laban, a major figure in creating a new dance vocabulary other than ballet, created a gestured movement language that he further deconstructed into a series of signs that were developed into written dance notation, now known as Laban Dance Notation.

38 Wigman and Jooss were the two primary protagonists at the 2nd German Dancer’s Congress organised by Jooss in 1928. The congress dealt specifically with the dilemma regarding the future direction of Modern Dance. See Partsch-Bergsohn (1994), Manning (1989), Markand (1985).

39 Bausch’s period in America, in which she studied at the Julliard and worked with Paul Taylor, Lester Horton and others, was influential in the development of a more calculated approach to European expressivity. See Daly (2002), Burt (2002) and Servos (1984).
The body’s analogical logic was created (aided) by the use and development of a very refined gestured movement. In her work, *Blaubart* (1977), Bausch began to develop the form of *tanztheater* that included gesture more specifically.\(^{40}\) Her dancers did not ‘dance’ as they did in her earlier pieces, but used everyday movements like running, falling, jumping, crawling and walking. A normal movement phrase was distorted by being repeated sometimes eight or ten times. Coupled with repetition, gestures taken from daily life - “real phenomena” (Sevos1984: 97) - were designed to create an emotional involvement with the problematic suggested in the performances. Norbert Servos describes this form of analogy and metaphor in movement as “…releasing dance from the constraints of literature, relieving it of its fairy tale illusions and leading it towards reality” (Servos 1984: 98). The reality being explored in Bausch’s productions was one founded in a subjective and idiosyncratic vision, if not one closely aligned with the bizarre. In a display of avant garde (theory), art and the everyday were no longer each other’s opposites: precisely because the gestured movement language had its basis in the everyday. Action like swatting a fly, smoking a cigarette or adjusting a piece of clothing became the danced movement. In the performance *Kontakthof* (1978) members of the troupe presented to the audience as though being auctioned, emphasising their good and bad attributes, their crooked noses, large thighs or thinning hair. *Tanztheater* did not display the abstract aestheticism of other modern dance of the period, or the calculated formalism of the modern American movements. Neither did it strive to coincide with political interests, even while being revolutionary in theatrical approach. Bausch’s use of gestured gender clichés - the woman constantly throwing herself onto and sliding off the male dancer in *Café Muller*, tottering in high heels, (Kontakthof 1978, Waltzer, 1982), repeatedly being dressed and undressed, or being carried around like a piece of clothing (Kom tanz mit mir, 1977) - were provocative in their refusal to participate in any type of feminist political correctness. The gestures were real - taken from the experience of being a woman – and as such the interpretation was to be derived from an experience at once existential and introspective. While Bausch has often been characterized as a feminist performance artist, there was, in the 1970s and 80s, a general feeling that Bausch’s presentation of gender violence reasserted the position of female subjugation and suffering. In the time of these performances, her refusal to take an obvious political stand was criticised by (mainly) American feminists and dance critics. More recently, a new appraisal has reinstated her particular contribution to feminist issues (Daly 1986, Kaplan 1987).

In the performances between 1978-82, there was increasing use of text with gesture as the prime movement idiom. By the time of the piece 1980 - *Ein stuk von Pina Bausch* (1980) the dance had almost totally disappeared in place of gesture and text. Many dancers were enthralled but disconcerted. The performance 1980 saw some brief effort to reinstate dance

\(^{40}\) Bausch, while the most well known, was not alone in developing dance theatre and other artists like Suzanne Linke and Reinhild Hoffmann (Germany) and Caroline Carlson (America/France) were exploring similar terrain.
with small dance phrases, but these remained isolated attempts: it was impossible for Wuppertaler Tanztheater to do ‘beautiful’ dancing said Servos. Notwithstanding, it was still very much a language of bodies where the dancers were exposed, raw, expressive and individual in their gestures. Bausch had come to rely on the uniqueness of her dancers to individualise and express the concept of the performance. The dancers’ body was now speaking in a different way; it was more personalised, less abstract and possibly less ephemeral. Dance theatre artists subsequently working in an interdisciplinary terrain were doing more than previously expected of them as ‘just’ dancers. They were able to describe a situation and reveal a visceral and personal presence by being ‘themselves’. Marianne Van Kerkhoven describes this as the “disappearance of the character”; dancers were able to find a realness of performance that actors, trained in character driven techniques, found harder to achieve (Kerkhoven in Bleeker 2002: 118). This answered a desire for a more direct experience of dance and of theatre in general. In following the progression of her work, it seems that Bausch’s use of gesture was not an ultimate style choice (like the physical movement technique that is particular and necessary to Merce Cunningham’s choreographies). For Bausch, it was a choice of style only in so far as using ‘gesture’ in a particular way was a procedural path in the ongoing process of theatrical development. Bausch’s recent piece Rough Cut (2005) sees a return to a movement/dance-oriented performance with long expressive and technically virtuoso solos. Here the gestures have been turned into larger movements in which the gestured beginnings are still recognisable, but in which the allegory is left primarily to the visual imagery. Tanztheater/dancetheatre had moved dance away from the abstract into the more ‘theatrical’ – if not narrative, then allegorical manner of interpretation.

Similar to Bausch’s early period, in the 1990s Alain Platel used repetition, gesture and heightened realism in the socially realistic work Bernadetje (1996). Platel, who had built on dance theatre methods instigated by Bausch, further attempted to find social and political engagement outside of the normal theatre spaces. Bernadetje was set and performed in the dodge ‘em car section of a carnival; the performers were mostly teenagers recruited from the youth center near where the carnival was stationed in Gent, Belgium. Bernadetje was an extension of the ‘social romantic’ productions that had become the cornerstone of Platel’s work. In one scene, an adolescent, apparently drunk, comes onto the stage. He trips and falls, straightens up, trips and falls again: once, twice perhaps ten times. The realism of the actions of the drunken teenager slowly morph into a sharply defined movement. Performed in a working class environment with working class actors, the movement sequence was directly understood as the gestus of the larger context of difficult relationships between parents and their children by the mixed – local and ‘art’ – audience (including of course parents and friends of the actors). As

41 This is held up by the fact that many dancers at this time were invited to take part in theatre productions and visual theatre. They were admired for their ‘presence’ as well as their physical power.
42 Bernadetje was devised with Arne Sierens and produced by Stichting Victoria in Gent 1996.
the gesture of the drunken youth’s falling slowly transformed into its own choreography, the movement amalgamated its social and political commentary into an individual and choreographed dance coding. Such a development of the gesture allowed for a shift from recognisable gesture to autonomous dance (Jans 2002). The desired effect for Platel and Bausch – to infiltrate the viewers’ knowing by extending and breaking down recognisable and habitual gestures – has been successful.

However, the idea of finding a universal context in a gesture to directly express a political or emotional state of being belies a duality that can be problematic. This provides a second point of tension. In his writings, Foucault has suggested that even though there are significant inscribed processes on ‘disciplined’ bodies, there can be no specific universal position or even a universal nature (Rabinow 1984: 4) The search for universality through gesture (or image) can only have immediate reference to those that it speaks of and to. In Look Who’s Looking (2004), the theatre theorist Maaike Bleeker invalidates the persistent notion that the body speaks a universal language, instead suggesting that the universality perceived in the one being looked at says more about the viewer than the performer (Bleeker 2004). The reception of Bausch’s performances and criticisms of her portrayal of women by the American audiences of the 1980s revealed just that. In the context of the newly politicised feminist movement, Susan Kozel reminds us that Bausch’s work was seen by many as “regressive and indulgent, being an explosion of existential conflict between the sexes” (Kozel 1999: 102). Early on, Ann Daly was particularly concerned with the lack of resolution to the misogynist violence represented in Bausch’s work (Daly 2002: 8). Of course, theatre has the possibility to infiltrate the psyche and emotions as well as the intellect of the viewer. Good theatre acts as subversive to the complacency or position of the viewer. Daly later restated her reservations. She recognised that the intention of Bausch was to take possession of the situation by acknowledging it, while presenting the audience with material with which to contemplate an experience identifiable to all (Daly 2002). The gestured readability had created a direct responsive reaction, positive or negative. It had allowed the body to be ‘read’. Whether cultural or political differences allowed for a universal reaction to the reading, the reading was nevertheless universally understood. 43 The body had become readable.

I wondered when I saw Bernadetje (phenomenal as I thought it was) if the audience would have had the same reaction to the dance had it not had its beginnings in drunken gesture. Would the dance section remain inspirational alone? Similar thoughts occurred to me when I watched what I thought were the equally phenomenal performances of Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker. De Keersmaeker’s early work carried formal traces of gesture that had been recognizable in the earlier pieces of Bausch; however, she developed the gestured movement more fully (than

43 For discussions of the naïveté of an idea of the universal body, see Frans Anton Cramer (2003), Bojana Kunst (2004), Patrice Pavis (1995).
Bausch or Platel) into dynamic phrasing. Simple moves like a hand through the hair or a casual glance could turn into a extended head movement that created the dynamic for the dancer to catapult to the floor or to explode into a jump. In Rosas Danst Rosas (1983) and Elena’s Aria (1984), the gestures created the impetus for the dance and the ‘saga’ of the performance. Often, the dancers sat on chairs and for long periods performed only spasmodic and fragmentary gestures – a hand pushing back hair, a chin on the elbow, crossing and uncrossing legs. The recognisability of the gesture invited a voyeuristic identification with the dancer in which the power relations in spectatorship could be identified. As a spectator, one identifies and searches for recognition of the familiar: the textual gesture, the movement that has a name, a description and a place in semantic as well as emotional recognition. Where there had been an assumption that dance was physical and highly visceral, the successful use of gesture in dance theatre and dance shows contradictions in the forces within dance and contemporary dance: contradictions around the visceral and more ‘universal’ nature of the medium and that of its relationship to a more semiotic and defined medium.

Currently, when we talk about gesture in dance, we talk about movement that has a recognisable referent, is short, autonomous and symbolic, rather than an abstract or continual dance movement phrase. Brecht’s notion of the gesture “gestus”, that is larger than the movement itself, and that speaks for itself, identifies an ideology of the gesture that has become popular in theatre of the last century. For Brecht, the gestus could be the text, the movement or the visual imagery that encapsulated the idea of the play within it. However, the gestured movement that relates to dance comes from a different genealogy, one that crosses and breeds with a Brechtian rehearsal of political space, but follows its own physiological and stylistic path. The more scientific development of gesture in dance was a response led by Laban and Dalcroix to undertake a physiological and scientific approach to an artistic problem. Namely, how to best communicate through body language.

The socio-political resonances of gestus are now also no longer the same as the Marxist definitions that influenced Brecht, nor do they represent the preparation of form that defined the work of Laban. What is seen in dance and dance theatre is a search for the more communicative and real/theatrical form of dance. When the dancers of Pina Bausch pull down their shoulder straps, adjust their stockings or totter in their high heels, there is recognition of the manipulative effects of the coquetry, sexuality, seduction and shyness that they assume, bringing out the social content and significance behind the movement. Similarly, when a dancer of the company Rosas runs her fingers through her hair, self-consciously crosses her legs, there is a feminine ambiguity alongside the simplicity of the movement that offers the audience an entrance through which to understand the following and the preceding movement phrases. The development of gesture in dance performance broadened the manner of interpretation by accessing a more honest and representational, if not quite, universal method of communication.
I have attempted to separate the gesture from the dance in order to underline the use of gesture as a theatrical signposting used to connect the viewer with the dance. Such signposting, given the continual search to overcome the abstract and ephemeral nature of dance, may provide clarity, but it also sets a precedent for analogy and metaphor over abstraction. It sets a precedent for theatrical devices that contain the signs that dance supposedly lacks. Now, often, the gesture that Brecht and Bausch intended as being able to encapsulate the ‘idea’ in a movement has become a stylistic element that has little to do with its original political nature. In the end, the gesture is a theatrical representation of the dance.

**American pedestrian gesture and the body as object in Rainer, Childs, King…**

The objectives of the Americans were not unlike those of the Europeans – to move away from accepted and institutionalised representation, to break with suffocating traditions and to find new forms of meaning in dance. The early postmodern dancers of the Judson Church – Rainer, Brown, King, Gordon Paxton (and others) – as well as those of Grand Union (Anna Halprin and Simone Forti) developed their early experimentations of isolating gesture, text and movement and incorporating the everyday as well as the bizarre into performance. Performed in open studios, abstract settings or outdoor spaces, theirs was a controlled and unaffected expose of the odd and uncanny in everyday life. The emphasis on the casual and detached, the ‘pedestrian’ and the task-oriented caused a different problematic regarding concept, emotion and the nature of the real in postmodern dance.

The use of ‘pedestrian’ movement, in which gesture was an important element, was a part of the challenge to dispel the idea of the elitist dance aesthetic. In the wake of the Vietnam War, dispelling elitism was, as well, a response to and comment on the failure of democracy to deliver on rhetoric and to develop social and cultural equality (Jowitt 1988: 312). For members of the Judson Church the search for a democratic structure permeated working relationships, the performance methodology and audience dancer relationships. Between the years 1958-64, most dancers danced in one another’s works within a floating dance ensemble. The construction of material was, as in dance theatre, often task-based, giving the process of creation some sort of democratic cohesion. In order to establish a democratic relationship between the audience and the dancers, the dance movements were non-exhibitionist, pedestrian and not ‘arty’, and carried out with impartial efficiency. The detachment and neutrality were in effect beginning to develop on the concept of the ‘body as object’. Such neutrality also required a detached method of performance in which spontaneous enjoyment or natural discomfort was overtly avoided (Jowitt 1988: 312-322). Balancing on one leg, lunging or somersaulting was done with as much bland detachment as to reduce any signs of athleticism.
There was no level of dance training required and as dancing was ‘not dancing’ – untrained dancers and other artists frequently participated in dance performance.

Deborah Jowitt analyses this period as one that was as diverse and individualistic as its creators. However, she identifies a joint development: “One of the achievements of the period as a whole was a redefinition of the dancer as ‘doer’ and the dance as whatever was done…” (Jowitt 1988: 310). The idea of dancer as ‘doer’ had been initiated earlier by Merce Cunningham to develop dancers that were responsive to chance procedures as much as to working with mathematical dance structures. They performed the construction of the dance and not the characterisation of it (as Graham had): the dancer became a body in space, the ‘object’ with which to describe spatial constructions.44

With her iconoclastic work, Yvonne Rainer again provides an example through which to describe the problematic issue of body as object. The historical development of her work elicits clues to discrepancies in the creation and implementation of theory and practice. Rainer’s work fits in closely to the analogy of the dancer as ‘doer’, and her dance to the thing that was ‘done’. She attempted to disenfranchise the presence of the dancer, acknowledging the conceit of performance – being looked at and knowing it – and the hierarchical privileging of the author. The denial of authorship over the material implied not only that the dancers had just as much ownership of the material as the choreographer but also that none of them had ownership of the dance. The dance and the dancers were used as essential material, strictly necessary to describe ideas. As Sally Banes describes, “Movement itself became like an object, something to be examined coolly without psychological, social, or even formal motives. Like Alan Robbe-Grillet calling for a new novel without character, story, or commitment, Rainer proposed a new dance that would recognize the objective presence of things, including movements and the human body” (Banes 1987: 43).

In her objective to objectify, Rainer’s work was inspired and influenced by the minimalist ideologies of painting and sculpture artists such as Frank Stella and Robert Morris as well as those of musicians John Cage and Robert Dunn. These artists sought to emphasise the status of their works as objects, stripping them of any associative or representational quality. In becoming ‘an object’ - something of itself – the artwork demanded of the viewer an experience of its materiality (texture, shape, colour, pattern) in time and space. Jonathan Walley identifies problems Rainer encountered when attempting to emphasise object qualities of the human body in her dances while simultaneously de-emphasising their human qualities (Walley 2001). Walley,

44 In fact the “modernists”, pre-postmodernism, had attempted to realign the relationship of their expressive bodies to the objects that shared the same space: Graham to Nogushi’s set constructions, Cunningham to autonomous objects created by co-collaborators, Alwin Nikolai and Koert and Bart Stuif to geometrical structures or Schlemmer to the cyborgian prosthetics and costumes his dancers wore.
who is a film rather than dance scholar, provides a nuanced view on the work of Rainer. 45 He attempts to establish a lucid and logical transition of Rainer’s move from dance to film, and identifies some of the dilemmas of trying to don minimalist aesthetic principals created in painting and sculpture into a dance performance aesthetic.

Rainer could, through minimalism, as had Cunningham earlier, seek to eliminate the human qualities that earlier modern dance – that of Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey in particular – had amplified. Her dance also distanced itself from the technical virtuosity and high professionalism of the Cunningham dance style. In the place of these, Rainer’s choreography emphasised the simplicity and the object qualities of her dancers: their ability to perform constructions of ideas. Despite her attempts to present dance and dancer as objects, many of her pieces (and the written statements that accompanied them) still spoke to very human problems. The human element of dance performed by living dancers became difficult for Rainer to ignore. Although she claimed to see little difference between the dancers and the objects she incorporated into her dances, the contradiction inherent in the creation of a minimalist dance aesthetic became problematic. The contradiction lay in the notion of objecthood that was central to minimalism in the visual arts on the one hand, and the personhood of the live performer on the other. Walley believes that her quest to create real life within a minimalist or postmodern dance environment was largely counter intuitive. As well, he argues that Rainer’s move from live performance to film allowed her to utilise an art form which could more effectively interact with the numerous disjunctions and contradictions with which she had been faced in her work. (Walley 2002: np).

That Rainer eventually left dance for filmmaking Walley sees as a solution to the problematic of the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. That is, a distance that could be retained in film allowed for more narrative structure and emotional involvement. Erin Branningen (2002), in her assessment of Rainer’s work, suggests that her move should not be seen as a failed attempt at presenting the body as object. 46 Rainer’s concerns, it seems, lay with describing a more psychological and interpersonal form of communication. While Rainer’s move can only be understood by Rainer herself, if at all, I would add (to Walley’s argument) that after having said ‘no’ to everything historically and genealogically connected to live performance making, utilising narrative and emotion in dance would have been unacceptable. The bind of conceptually constructing a set of criteria in which the dance could only fulfil the function of participant, privileged the conceptual and the intellectual over the physical, thereby making it difficult to develop artistic concerns with dancing bodies. As well as this, the challenge to counter the authority of the choreographer as the only valid creator of choreographic content had proved

45 Jonathan Walley emphasises these problems as being the cause of her move from dance to film in his dissertation (Walley 2002)
46 Erin Branningen reaffirms Walley’s conviction in her article Yvonne Rainer in Senses of Cinema. (2002)
difficult. Rainer wanted her dances performed as she saw them, allowing the dancers more than an arbitrary role provided problems.

Lucinda Childs had more success in constructing the ‘object body’ in her choreographies. Also using minimalist concepts, she was able to use mathematics to digitalise the body in order for it to lose rational interpretation. In Robert Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) Childs choreographed a solo in which the gestural material gradually accumulated in a meticulously intensified way along three barely distinguishable diagonals (Bart 2002). *Einstein on the Beach* used dance, music and architecture to illustrate a historical point in time: a meeting of mind and matter, technology and the manipulation of science and nature. The use of mathematics, logarithms and structural technology to create choreography emphasised the notion of dance as a technology but also accentuated the non-naturalistic character of the gestures that allowed the objectness of the dance to remain intact. As Burt points out: “By undermining a traditional, naturalistic type of theatrical presence Child’s performance effectively closes off the spectator’s expectations of traditional narrative time” (Burt 2002: 4). However, precisely because the dance, in its final stages, reaches a frenzied climax, and the woman dancing becomes “incoherent” the persona of the dancer remains relevant. The dancer Childs, never quite disappears. For Childs, it was, as one critic remarked “…often her personality that came out in her ultra geometrical and object like constructions” (Dohse 2002 np). Audiences may not be able to identify the universal, but they are more than likely to search out the personal.

Whether or not Childs was successful in creating a body/object, it is hard to know. What is apparent is the need for critics and viewers to find a sense of human presence regardless of the disciplined rigour with which the dance is executed. The theorist Michael Kirby observed that the kinaesthetic response in the spectators of postmodern dance had been eliminated by a lack of excitement in the everyday of the objectified, non-technical movement language (Kirby in Jowitt 1988: 328). Kirby also suggested that there were other responses, and it was incumbent on the artists of the postmodern period to develop different strategies to counter the lack of kinetic connection. Principal amongst these strategies was to develop on the minimalist ideology of conceptualising the idea.

The problem of minimalist aesthetics on bodies that are developed from complex constructions like the human identity has provided the tension developed above. Another tension is the language that the object body speaks. The body as object speaks about something other than itself; it is an idea body for use in a work of art. It is Lehmann’s de-sematicized body (in Chapter

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47 Lucinda Childs also performed some very theatrical solos in her early performances at the Judson Church, such as the hysterical satirical piece *Carnation* (1964), in which she was attacked by an ordinary kitchen and household objects (Banes 1994)
1) through which a new hermeneutics creates a visual and conceptual language for signposted bodies.

The new diversity of methods or manners through which to create democratic or pluralist performance strategy has been able to make ideas visceral, but has not been able to escape Foucault’s concern that the body is subject for use as an instrument of exploitation. For the artist of the postmodern period, democratising the body was a manner with which to inhibit any power other than the conceptual. The concept, naturally, remained in the hands of the artist. Further developed in the genre non-dance, the object or conceptualised body has been developed as a site by which to question the very medium of dance.

Sally Banes identifies the conceptual or what she calls the “analytic postmodern dance of the seventies” as being essentially modernist. (Banes 1994: 204) Banes’ description of analytical or conceptual dance has strong overtones to the work being produced now. Conceptual dance now, as then, applies to performances where the dance may often not be apparent as outcome but where the performances are often process driven, like E.X.T.E.N.S.I.O.N.S. a laboratory conducted in 1999 by Xavier le Roy which investigated rehearsal process as product. The object in the context of non-dance has become the idea or the concept, the dance a consequence of the idea.

“A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for.” (Lyotard 1993: 46, cited Kaye 1996)

Using text in dance performance and conceptualising the performance are two ways in which dancers upheld the idealism of self-reflexive but noncommittal approach to the participation of the body in the act of dancing. The following section deals with text and speaking as experiments in projecting meaning onto movement and identifies yet another way to return to a logocentric inscription of bodies.

48 In terms of sexuality and feminist issues, the bodies used were often neutralised to such a degree that sex or sexuality remained cloistered. Even in contact improvisation, the body is a sexually neutral instrument and sexual readings are highly incidental/accidental, or a subjective of the viewer’s perspective. Artists/dancers like Carolee Schneeman however, moved into performance art that presented more possibilities to work on destabilising notions of gender and sexuality.

49 This thesis does not have the scope to deal extensively with “anti or non-dance”. For further reading and evaluation. See Birringer (2005), Huizmann (2002), Kirby (1987).

50 Banes invokes Greenberg’s consideration of minimalism, relating in particular to painting and the plastic arts, as being the modernist essentials pared down and devoid of emotion or intensity.
Incorporating text in dance: speaking bodies

In late 1980s and early 90s, when creating montage performances (after Bausch) had become second nature, I was involved in a number of multidisciplinary but dance driven performances. In Sartori (1989) by Blok and Steel, my role was dancer/actor. The text pieces that I spoke made the disjointed, associative and semi-narrative production ‘work’. The words, poetic and allegorical, glued, as it were, the performance fragments together. They offered the audience recognisable terminology through which to construct their own interpretation; an interpretation that was signposted by the title, the spoken text and the program notes. As I hung upside down and delivered my text, my incongruous position worked to disassociate the words from their original meaning (or indexical meaning) while at the same time providing reference points through which to ‘strengthen’ the choreographers’ intentions. At the time of Sartori, text was everywhere in dance, if not in the performance then as explanatory text in the program notes. Text was run on screens as background scenery and frequently used as a voice over. Much of the work was innovative and creative, some was not: what interested me was that our physical occupation had become verbalised. Texts had often been used as inspiration for creating dances, but now it remained with the dance on stage, and it was more than just an accessory.

“It is a constant concern within the project of modernity to define dance as a means of communicating in a more direct and more natural way” (Cramer 2004: 1). For the dance purist, speech and language are considered corrupt and insufficient as a media of exchange. On the one hand, the speechlessness of dance has been admired and discussed as the very reason that justifies its metaphysical capacities. On the other, “the same belief in speechlessness has come to stand for, or signify the intellectual and discursive deficiencies of dance” (Cramer 2004: 1). The conceptual as well as the communicative will be the two points on which this section on text develops further, as they both describe different but important reasons why the language of the body becomes so bound up with the spoken word.

In the heyday of postmodernist attempts to develop the contextual nature of a performance, text became an instrument with which to destabilise the movement. Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, David Gordon and others used arbitrary text and movement in accordance with their principals of a non representational and non-personal performance ethic – the text became ‘object’ and could be devoid of definition, like a chair which you threw around instead of sitting on. Brown saw “talking while dancing as a lecture form”, with the two of service, one to the other, but not mutually dependent (Brown in Blackwell 1985: video). Brown’s use of text emphasised the language of the breath and the language of the sound. It created a musical and rhythmic
accompaniment supplied by the dancer, who, according to the delivery, could play around with the significance of each word as a separate entity. It was this particular analytical and formalist use of voice and movement that saw its way into the vocabulary of European contemporary dance in the early 1980s. Early work from Amy Gale (Onhafhankelijk Toneel, Netherlands) and Emilyn Claid (UK) delighted as well as confused audiences by resisting representation in the text. They, like their contemporaries, played with the object-hood of the text as they did with the dance. As intermedium, they could playfully distort the terrain one to the other.

Also moving while talking, or talking while moving, Kenneth King’s work was different as well as original in its intellectual and holistic approach. King saw dance and text as interchangeable and used them as interlocking elements in his performance work. Drawing on the philosopher Susanne Langer’s theories that language and dance were a prelinguistic mode of expression and conceptualisation, King conceived that language and dancing are inextricably connected; that movement cannot disassociate from thought and that thought, in its turn, suggests language (Banes 1980: 169-185). Figuring that dance and text came from the same place (in the body) meant that they shared but did not need to combat for the same space, but that their existence was also mutually reliant.

In an article exploring the sharing of space, language and time in performance, Nikolaus Muller-Scholl enquires as to the communicability (after Benjamin) of communication. Scholl argues that the use of language “in its broadest sense” is a medium of communication rather than the instrument of communication (Scholl 2004: 42-56). While alluding to, but not using, choreographic performance in his examples, Scholl points out that text can work more successfully when it is not concerned with its own communicability – or rather, its semantic value alone – but when used as an intermedium, a performative element combined with other media. The voice (text) used in this way can be more politically forceful, and suggests that the modern viewer is capable and open to a perceptual rather than literal experience of performance. This is of interest, as it highlights the way that many dancers and artists were incorporating the spoken word in what is already a perceptual medium. Many, Scholl demonstrates, from Dada to Pollesch 51 have created performance pieces using jibberish or disconnected words and phrases to point out that “nonsense can sometimes communicate more than any rational theory of communication may imagine” (Scholl 2004: 55).

Correspondingly, theatre groups on the cusp of post-dramatic theatre had for some time been concerned with similar issues of deconstruction. Jan Fabre’s Theatre spelled with a K is a Tomcat (1980), used text as a graphic symbol, an objective piece of spoken text and as a body

51 Rene Pollesch is part of the ‘new’ German directors. He studied under Hans-Thies Lehmann and works regularly at the Volksbuhne Berlin.
covering. As Lehmann notes, the status of the text was changing with a new paradigm of theatrical representation. New theatre, he states (and this includes new dance theatre), “can be considered as the rediscovery of a space and a speech without telos, hierarchy, without structured meaning and inner unity” (Lehmann 1997: 59). For the dancer the task of disseminating text from any original meaning fitted into an ability to play with abstraction as well as generate a kinaesthetic encounter making meaning or ‘logos’ (rational thought) redundant. However acting, text analysis and interpretation is a technique not to be underestimated, as is skilled dancing: the novelty of ‘the authenticity of the amateur’ at times overestimated was apt to wear off.

The hegemony of text as intellectual and truthful is easily dismissed. Frans Anton Cramer points out the multiplicity of methods in using text to redefine dance, (in practice and theory) and redefines that intellectual practice, through language, has created new interactions between performance as self-explanatory event and speech as ‘contextualisation’ of the dancing body. However, heeding Foucault, even the power of historical hegemony can work to unbalance a relationship. While Cramer suggests that the union of dance and text signifies the end of the “split between bodily and linguistic expression”, I remain cautious. The essentialist desire to merit text as having prime communicative as well as conceptual value gives cause to suspect a repositioning of Cartesian value (see Chapter 1). The communicative aspect of text is at the heart of its overuse but also at the heart of its intrigue.

**Dance/film: dynamics and corporeal tension**

The relationship of dance and film has been discussed in the section on mediation in Chapter 1 where the value and possible dominance of the live over the mediated image was discussed. This section examines how dance and film function on stage as intermedia. There are many things that make film so interesting to a choreographer – all the obvious pragmatic reasons: speed, rhythm, movement and manipulation of time, and of course, editing. Some of the most difficult parts of choreographing in real time are moving from movement phrase to movement phrase, from idea to idea, finding the in-between bits that join phrases and connect movements. Camera editing is a perfect solution for fixing choreographing problems and manipulating space and time.

52 I use Fabre’s performance as an example as it was a breakthrough in European theatre that made not only Fabre but also the concept of deconstruction ‘famous’. However, conceptually, what he did was not new, and many experimental theatre groups earlier changed the function of text in performance and radicalised the presentation, delivery and hermeneutics of ‘text theatre’: Discordia in the Netherlands, Sydney Front in Australia, Wooster Group in the USA are just some less underground examples.

53 Dance/film has now become a separate art form. While it is very much a fully formed hybrid, this section investigates the area of hybridity in performance spaces where the live body interacts with another medium. Thus, I have not provided an analysis of the discipline dance/film.
Dance and film provide a natural intermedium. Both are concerned with moving through space, and both the movement of the image and the body in the space produces a kinaesthetic response from the audience. However, this union also confronts the bipolar nature of the live and the mediated: one moves in live space, the other in a mediated reproduced space. Does the audience that watches a live performance with filmed images have a different reaction to the two types of reality presented, and how does the dancer’s body play out in this situation? My own experience confronted the merging of identities in live and non-live space. Numerous times, I performed live with recorded images of others and myself on stage at the same time. Those images were small televisions, as in the case of *Dark Horses* (Blok and Steel 1994), or large film screens as in *Two Figures* (Fractured Fables 1990). As a live performer, I was aware of a certain friendly rivalry between the two mediums, and I could ‘feel’ that when moving images were present they commanded immediate attention from the audience. It was my own reaction in seeing other performances around the same time that confounded my experience. Watching Utima Vez perform *Mountains Made of Barking* (1994) I was aware that the dancers were doing spectacular things like hurling themselves and one another across the space, and yet I was drawn to the less dynamic screen image of an old man in the woods. In my experience of *Eve* (Ros Crisp 1997), the dancing body was made obsolete by the immediate recorded close up images of her filmed dancing. Perhaps I was trying to find something interesting in the film that I found lacking in her live dancing? In Angelica Oei’s (1989/94) performances, the filmed images by Rene Verouden moved Oei’s dancing. Regardless of Oei’s intentions to incorporate outside spaces as interactive in the confines of the smaller performance spaces, her ‘real’ body, until the time of projection, entirely riveting, became too easily dwarfed by her larger self. The overwhelming attraction of the minds eye to the screen is as disconcerting as the overwhelming attraction of dancers to the persistent incorporation of video technologies in dance performances.

While I agree with Phillip Auslander (1999) that the ontological purity of an image is not necessarily concerned with its liveness, the power that the filmed image seemed to possess was disturbing. Auslander argues that contemporary performance provides a “progressive diminution of previous distinctions between the live and mediatised” and clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatised ones are difficult to define (Auslander in Ellis 2005: 71). Mathew Reason, in a study of audience reaction to live performance, discerns that there may be a sense of liveness connected to live bodies on stage rather than their unlive counterpart, and determines that more empirical research needs to be done on audience response (Reason

54 Simon Ellis used these quotes to emphasis the value of documenting performance. He stresses the argument between Auslander and Phelan regarding Phelan’s assertion that documentation is underprivileged in relation to live performance (Ellis 2005: 71).
2004: np). In performances where dance and film are combined, both have immediacy on stage making the issue of liveness more complicated. According to Auslander, whose arguments are based around experience of play-black in rock concerts, there is no difference in the immediacy of the live and the mediated; both are experienced as live performance. Is the visual kinetics of cinema (as suggested by Mast) more powerful than the physically established kinetics of movement? While there are those that think that audiences make their own choices, I agree with the thesis of Mast and the views expressed by Jones and Wechsler (Chapter 1) that filmed images provide a voyeuristic complicity that is more difficult to experience in live performance. Is this a cause for concern?

Looking at video dance as an art form, Johannes Birringer suggests that a new constructivism has been developed in which the image cannot recreate the dance but obeys its own laws governed by a different hermeneutics specific to the medium (Birringer 1998). The development of video culture suggests a different set of hermeneutics that influence the way we watch and interact with live as well as mediated performances. Considering our long established experience with television and film, it would seem that new developments in hermeneutics have been developing even before dance video culture took root. As Mast suggests, since childhood we suspend areas of disbelief in which actions, movements and physical feats, which appear super human on screen are only just remarkable performed live (Mast 1977: 39). Auslander has more recently argued that audiences have become accustomed to experience performance events as mediatised happenings (Auslander 2004: np). This connects arts practice/dance with popular culture as well as stimulating the change in performance hermeneutics that originate from a more mediatised and postmodern era. The work in the post-dramatic era has been constituted by a hermeneutics that arises out of image driven performance works, in which dancers (as discussed in chapter 1), have played a major, albeit controversial part.

Just as the works of Bausch played clearly on notions of the marked and inscribed female body, so working with intermedia develops on notions of inscription and markings of dance as a genre. Such inscription appears to mark dance as in need of technological and intermedia intervention. The outcome of text, film, gesture and visual developments have helped dancers find new forms with which to work, but they have also reasserted that the dance needed more that just ‘dance’ through which to speak. They have helped intensify the discussion around ‘what is dance’. Given that the modern construction of interdisciplinary performance spreads deep into the roots and genealogies of many dance genres, it would be impossible to find any essentialist conclusions. And are such conclusions essential? Rather than wonder what dance

55 From a more practical perspective, the theatre designer W.K. Harrington responded to questions on his design methodology and choices by admitting that, “theatregoers have been raised on TV and a cinematic diet that one must deal with” (Harrington in Jordon and Allen 1993).
is, in the face of its new modes of speaking it would be more astute to make sure that dance remains, and to the best of its ability, keeps dancing.

**Closing tensions**

I have attempted to identify some new strategies of using dance with elements that have been born from other disciplines as tools to analyse shifts in new ways of speaking with the body. The desire to find different ways of speaking in dance – through gesture, through voice with sounds and text, with objects, using the body as object and through film – has been fruitful as performative element. However, at the same time the desire suggests a number of tensions:

a) a moving away from a more abstract making, reading and association of dance in the search for a universal and gestural relevance to define an idea
b) relying on film media to implicate and involve the public
c) using texts to communicate what the body can say
d) using the body as object in an attempt to speak about something other than itself, in an attempt to exclude the individuality of the dancer

Gesture and the object body suggest new ways of speaking with the body, text and film new ways of illustrating what the body can say. All suggest a signposting. Signposting offers clues and indications that were generally otherwise located in the abstract and choreographic interaction of bodies intersecting with time and space. My concern is that the body/choreography elements of dance can be left under-explored in the haste to develop the genre of interdisciplinary production.

While George Christof Tholen believes that hybridisation has become the "signature of our epoch for more than two decades", he warns that this "hermaphroditic" existence of mixed forms has been apt to lead to an aesthetic excessiveness, particularly in the area of cross-media performance art (Tholen: 2001). Ramsay Burt on the other hand, believes the development of hybridity on postmodern performance works as an opening up of the possibility of the spectator to experience time, space and science through a subjective perspective without rational constraints (Burt: 2002). They are both right. The relationships of new interdisciplinary methods to dance, such as gesture, text and film have created a scala of intertextual readings, some interesting some less so. It is Tholen’s warning in particular however, that rings most loudly in many performances, where the often unbridled use of signposting techniques suggest a lack of belief in the dancing body’s own vocabulary.

While there are many choreographers that still develop ‘new dance’ or ‘pure dance’, many of the large-scale productions that fall under a dance umbrella are now multimedia happenings. The
following chapter will discuss one of these performances in detail. A performance that arises out of the European dance theatre with influences from the visual arts, music, film and theatre: *Wolf* is a multidisciplinary hybrid through which some of the positive and negative consequences of working with a hybrid medium can be read.
Chapter 3

Wolf

I have the feeling that most important impressions you retain are the ones generated only after you have learnt how to look. This is the most fruitful period. (Alain Platel 2006: 76)

This chapter examines a hybrid performance in which dance functions as a major component. The objective here is to intercept some of the complexities in viewing a work that stems from the genealogies discussed in the last two chapters. The performance of Wolf by Les Ballets C de la B, under the direction of Alain Platel, provides a showcase through which to look at cross-disciplinary practice in the cross-national climate of Europe. The main focus for this chapter will be an analysis of Wolf from the perspective of interdisciplinarity, intertextuality and notions of hybridity. These factors will be seen in my reading of the aesthetic/dramaturgical structures of the work, alongside reading the work in the context of postmodern art and the contested space that is experienced in Europe under globalisation.  

Background to Wolf

The large-scale production of Wolf can be read as a point of synthesis of many types of influences, drawn from and responding to a range of contemporary styles of performance. It is a product of the Flemish cultural history from which it stems as much as the modern and postmodern dance history that has inspired it. Stemming from the avant garde fringe but now working within the competitive world of mainstream entertainment, C de la B’s production of Wolf attempts to convey a sense of homogeneity of art styles, distinctive and expert theatrical techniques, and entertainment within a political context. As a Flemish co-production, it reaffirms the solidity of the Flemish cultural ascendancy on European performance making.  

56 I saw Wolf at the Holland Festival in Amsterdam, June 2004.
57 Flemish dance theatre is characterized by artists such as Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Marc Vanrunxt, Wim Vandekeybus, C de la B, Michelle Anne de Mey, the school P.A.R.T.S. and the many small companies that blossomed, or faded, but inspired European dance in the last two decades of the twentieth century.
The years between the mid 1980s to mid 90s were a particularly fertile period for Flemish dance and theatre: a time when many small companies were attempting to break through the confines of ballet as the primary dance vocabulary. Marianne Van Kerkhoven notes that: “…the generation of artists from the eighties was perhaps the first to be able to rid itself of the previous decades' latent feeling of Flemish inferiority” (Kerkhoven 2002: 37), an inferiority that derived from a lack of investment in arts and the strong hold of Catholic morality that pervaded schools and art institutions. The development of Flanders as a politically independent and economically prosperous community gave artists the freedom to “forget the obligation ‘to serve the Flemish cause’…” and devote themselves with complete freedom to its artistic ends (Kerkhoven 2002: 37). With little financial resources, small production houses provided spaces for new initiatives that were fuelled by international trends and responded to developing social and cultural perspectives.\(^58\) The development in the work of companies such as *Rosas*, *Ultima Vez*, the *Need Company*, *Blauwe Maandag*, *Tg Stan* and *Les Ballets Contemporians de la Belgique* - companies of the post-dramatic theatre - runs parallel with an investment in cultural and artistic capital taking root within the Flemish arts system.

*Les Ballets C de La B*

*Les Ballets Contemporians de la Belgique* was started in 1984 in Ghent, and later known by the acronym *Les Ballets C de la B* (further referred to here as *C de la B*).\(^59\) The sardonic play on words in the title, was originally intended to emphasise the dispute between Flemish and French culture, as well as poke fun at the lack of diversity in the dance funding systems. Contrary to the name *Les Ballet Contemporians de la Belgique*, none of the original members had any formal dance training, with some members coming from professions other than the arts. However, it was as a dance company that they received their funding, attracted new artists and made their name.

Alain Platel, one of the founding members, began working with a number of friends in attics and lounge rooms. They were searching for forms of expression that were principally physically driven and required no text. As a collective they were dedicated to making collaborative work that would reconcile the chasm that had grown between the intellectual arts “elite” and mainstream entertainment. Unafraid to step out of art house circles, their theatre aimed to connect with a public from more marginalised social classes. Platel’s search for a textless physicality was an enabling force in the aim to reach an audience outside and often hostile to contemporary arts production. The performances, often uncompromisingly dark, portrayed

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\(^{58}\) Some of these were the Vooruit and Victoria in Ghent, artscentre Stuk in Leuven, Kaaitheater in Brussels.

\(^{59}\) Amongst themselves, the company members often just use the term ‘Les Ballets’ or in Flemish ‘de Balletten’.
without pretension, a mirrored image through which the more marginalised audiences could participate with an active interpretation. As in the work of Bernadetje (1997,) other early work like Mother and Child (1995) and All Indians (1996), used non-professionals actors and real locations as stage spaces in order to bring the performance directly to the targeted public.

The group’s production of Emma in 1988 had signalled Platel’s prominence as an independent director and his subsequent production of Bonjour Madame (1993) marked the initial breakthrough of the company. It was at this stage that Platel began to work more frequently with professionals and create work of a larger scale for wider audiences. After many years earning respect on the periphery of the established ‘fringe’, where C de la B were considered as an “alternative and left-wing group” (Platel 2005: 87), their performances were increasingly, automatically considered to be an artistic and commercial success. The comparative ease of success led Platel to re-evaluate his position in the theatre. After a three-year absence, Platel was persuaded to direct a large-scale work devised around the music of Mozart.60

As an interdisciplinary performance, using the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Platel’s compatriot, Gerard Mortier, the then director of the music festival Ruhr Triennale, conceived the project.61 Together with Sylvain Cambreling, the conductor of Klangforum Wein, Platel chose from three Mozart operas a collage of arias on which to construct the performance. Wolf had its premiere in Duisberg, May 2003.

**Intertextuality and notions of hybridity: aesthetic and dramaturgical features**

The opening of Wolf sets the scene for ambiguity and confrontation. A ‘Diva’ dressed in a red gown, red high heels and with voluptuous hair is “doing karaoke” to Celine Dion’s A New Day Will Dawn. The Diva introduces herself, and in cabaret fashion proceeds to entertain the audience in smatterings of English, German and French. She struts around the stage, all the while adlibbing a stream of consciousness tirade. For the most part she admonishes the current state of affairs: the current world and national politics, her personal situation, her current situation – on stage at 9pm in the largest theatre in the Netherlands, on a freezing summers day - until she has worked herself up to an angry and hysterical diatribe. The ‘identity-play’ in which the woman propels her internal voice through various characters that inhabit her consciousness, is not only funny and powerfully performed, it also suggests a ‘crisis of identity’. This sets up a core theme of the evening and relays an intention not to shy away from the critical, political or

60 Christine de Smedt took over as artistic director during Platel’s absence. While many consider that the work of C de la B is mostly large scale and extravagant, the company still functions as a collective in which work of Christine de la Smet, and some of the work of Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, remain small scale and experimental.

61 Mortier is currently (2006) the director of the Paris Opera. He has recently decided not to renew his contract.
the personal. The Diva deals with a mother tongue, and at least two foreign tongues: she is
South American, Jewish and pro Palestinian. She is also a dancer and a body for hire. The
actress-diva encapsulates multi-personalities and nationalities: she is neither proud nor
indifferent to either. She is the classical feminine muse as well as the modern female superhero,
expected to be all things at once. At that moment she is foremost a performing diva. The
continuous ambiguity and sense of fragmentation around the nature of body, subject and
identity is set up in this opening scene and given an actuality that implicates audience
knowledge and subsequent involvement.

Structurally, the ‘high camp’ first scene also sets the tone for another major ambiguity; one in
which ideas of good and bad taste immediately forfeit their power. Following the notions of
Bakhtin, the Flemish tradition of the carnivalesque aids escape from restrictions of taste and
correctness.62 As in much post-dramatic and dance theatre of the present, the boundaries of
the shocking and the bizarre are realigned through the use of caricature and persiflage. The
critic and theorist Miryam Van Imschoten says of Platel’s work that it is “like banality becoming
poetry” (Imschoten in Platel 2006: 87). She also cites the dangers in using the banal as a
vehicle to find a connecting image, suggesting that if the chemistry of banality and poetry
cannot be found the results remain trivial. Nevertheless, it is on this terrain that Platel develops
his theatrical language.

Twelve dancers (two of them deaf), fourteen dogs, twenty musicians and three singers act out a
seemingly unrelated sequence of events, singing, dancing, playing instruments or performing
acrobatics. The action takes place in and around the entrance to a seedy-looking shopping mall,
where karaoke plays 24 hours and characters lounge around the set. Whereas in Bernadetje
(1996), the stage space was transported to its real location, many of the subsequent
performances by Platel and others of C de la B, have recreated this no-mans land of the fin de
die in which the shopping mall or the streetscape defines the ultimate contemporary
wasteland. In Wolf, the 20-piece orchestra has been placed on the first floor of the mall-like
aluminium construction.63 Projected onto a wall, mid downstage to the right, is the filmed image
of the (real life) performers doing karaoke in various venues. While this positioning makes it not
easily visible to some audience members, the video, on a continuous loop, describes a
distancing from the material and a redefining of cultural significance of the performance as an
‘opera spectacle’.

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62 Johan Thielemans’ article in the Dutch Theatemaker (1999) outlines a clear Flemish tradition from
carnival through to Platel. He points to the work of the Russian theoretician Mikhail Bakhtin, in which
Bakhtin (Holquist 1984) demonstrates that carnival breaks through notions of convention, particularly in
gard to performativity, while also creating a platform of viewing in which to eliminate class distinctions.
Eagleton (in Kershaw 1996) deflects on criticism of the carnivalesque by questioning if one participates in
the radical under the guise of absurdity does this then undermine the seriousness of the performance, or
the statement that underlies the act?
63 The set design of Wolf is by Bert Neumann.
Shortly after the opening scene a man is attacked with wooden planks, violently and unprovoked. Unrelated, a girl in bright colours opens the local shabby clothes stall on the balcony floor. During the attack, the orchestra begins its first Mozart aria. It is not the diva who begins to sing however, but another girl also standing on the balcony, unassuming and as yet unobserved. Links and assumptions set up in the first section quickly unravel. The owner of the clothes stall throws herself into a virtuoso circus ‘tissue’ act in which she spirals dangerously down a large length of material. The act of violence and brutal everydayness suggested in the beat-up scene is juxtaposed with the almost casual display of professional circus entertainment. While the tissue artist acts out a struggle with this large umbilical cord and performs a defiant but ultimate submission to gravity, the beaten man lies forgotten under the rubble.

A pack of dogs patter on to the stage and gather around a boy who had, all the while, been hunched quietly downstage. The dogs are obedient, curious and a little explorative, not the unpredictable wolves and symbols of aggression the earlier press releases had implied. Throughout the performance, the dogs create their own quiet and often humorous choreography. At one point, the dog wrangler, unprovoked, screams abuse and points a gun at one of the dogs. The dog does not cower, nor does he show fear or aggression. He waits until the tirade has ended, then patters quietly over to his owner for a pat.

The use of animals suggests a more self-conscious dramaturgy that presents an added form of mediation. In a performance that is dependent on professional timing, the mediating element of live animals invites an element of improvisation in an otherwise strictly choreographed and timed performance. This is a self-aware rather than a self-reflexive theatrical dimension that points to its own theatricality while demanding to be taken seriously. The dogs may be humorous, but they are underdogs: their domestication enables a parallel insight into the nature of submission and uncertainty.

The tension in each scene moves imperceptibly from violence to humour and from isolation to inclusion. A diversity of dance styles come and go, ideas develop and dissipate, tension among the cast brews and dissolves. They follow each other or leave one other, bought together briefly by a cultural connection or a physical empathy. The boy who had previously taken a beating does an extraordinary street dance, a female ballet dancer and a male African dancer - who had both earlier danced individual and introverted solos - perform a fervent and skilled duet combining and integrating both African dance and ballet. They turn the contemporary, the African and Western ballet into a comical blaze of movement. The blurring of boundaries in the play between the traditional and the ‘ethnic’ creates only transient harmony. United only briefly by their skin colour, the dancers soon return to their isolated positions in the stage space.
The virtuosity of the singers is accentuated by their awkward integration in the performing space. Like the actors/dancers, they wander around participating when needed, looking on when not. The structural chaos allows for a diversity of styles. Mozart’s music is plucked from its original (habitual) context and given a new leaning: at times pure opera, at others intentionally disharmonious. It is sporadically combined with Celine Dion, and made minimal to pure rhythm as themes are played using sticks and hammers on skin drums, aluminium piping and kettledrums. This makes for an aggressive and intimate explosion of emotion. The members of the orchestra participate in a movement sequence and just as easily take centre stage to play Mozart in all seriousness by rubbing wine glasses filled with water. This busker’s trick performed on stage by professional musicians creates another incongruity, and accentuates high art with showmanship and entertainment. All the musical interludes, high or low art, attracted applause from the opera and music public – something the contemporary dance public found pretty amusing. *The Mozart Variations* also propose unexpected coincidences. The intertexts created by these disjunctions are the driving force of the production. They reflect a relationship between tradition and modernity in which any notion of cultural snobbery is shattered and all media is open for appropriation to a new hybrid.

Raphaëlle Delauney (an ex-Pina Bausch dancer), on point, manipulates her strangely deformed torso into grotesque contortions; she appears pregnant, distorted, and malformed. In the run of carnivalesque characters, her unusual presence is not out of character, nor is it that, notwithstanding her deformities, her dancing remains extraordinarily expressive and virtuosic. A small pointy-eared dog finally pokes its head out from under her leotard and after a little duet jumps out from between her breasts and runs around the stage. The distortion had been an illusion. Delauney was not malformed nor was she pregnant, but rather co-joined to another being. She and the dog had become the ultimate hybrid. The hybrids, actor/dancer, singer/actor, animal/human, black/white, hearing/deaf, Spanish/South African, extend on the notion not only of interdisciplinary performance hybridity, but cultural and artistic hybridity.

**Intertextuality and notions of hybridity: Europe under globalisation**

The explorations of the individual – the tragic comic personal portraits set down by the performers – accentuate the struggle to find individual relevance and acceptance within a wider community. *Wolf* is a continuation of Platel’s investigation into the nature of community, reflected in a European context. “One of my biggest fascinations is to see how the European Union transforms into Europeans. On one side, there is the wish to eliminate borders, on the

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64 Due to costs, the singers and the musicians were only able to rehearse with the cast for one month while the rest of the cast rehearsed for three months. Platel recounted how the singers in particular had found it a shame that they could not have been there for the whole process. (Platel 2004)
other, there is a growing need to define national identity and culture. …. Globalisation confronted by emerging nationalism” (Platel in Smeets 2004: p 14).

Perhaps the ultimate hybrid structure is that of the European Union. An analogy for the performance, this union, made up of economic imperatives, attempts to give rise to something new while still maintaining individualism within a wider national agenda. What happens to nationalism in the face of multicultural conversion? How do individuals represent their country and keep their own identity - particularly in performance? The European individual of the new millennium is currently part of two communities, and therefore has to oblige, answer and defend both.

National problems that could display particular insider rhetoric in a performance now need to be constructed in a more comprehensive and ubiquitous fashion. At the point in history in which Wolf was performed, 2003-6, the ultimate European collective enemy was the United States. Platel has seized on this image. A scene in which the actors wrap themselves in their own national flag culminates in them ultimately burning both the American and the Israeli flag on stage. The press expressed indignation regarding the lack of nuance in such a politically powerful action. The dramaturge Hildegard de Vuyst defended the scene, or anyway the right to include it. In her opinion, there is a disingenuous demand for political and cultural relevance that appreciates only superficial commitment but rejects outright political reference in performance. “You are allowed to introduce a whole rage of body cultures...in the dance world this is called “political’. But if the content contains political statements everyone gets up on their hind legs.” (Vuyst in Platel 2006: 136). The discussion in theatrical circles regarding politics in theatre is indeed conflicted. Marianne Van Kerkhoven offers a conjecture in From Brecht to Bernadette (VTI: 1996): after the politically engaged theatre of the 1960s and 70s, to what extent does politically engaged dramaturgy occur in contemporary theatrical performance, or how much do the theorists want to detect a political dimension in the theatre. In the context of the late 1990s and the beginning of self-reflexive and conceptual dance, in which the process and construction of work revolves around the questioning of the artist and the artistic intention behind performance work, Van Kerkhoven’s statement reflected a concern that the boundaries that had been broken, defined only the terrain of the discipline, and were not concerned with a broader intervention. More recently, the urgency of global politics has created a more specific engagement with politics in some theatre and dance practice. Platel and members of his troupe spent some months in Palestine and he was deeply affected by his experience there. It was apparent how difficult it was to translate the complex political situation of Palestine into a visual and theatrical image in what had until then been a performance dealing primarily with European

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65 The threat of terrorism and the fear of Islamic extremism also pervades the European consciousness, however from the left leaning perspective of contemporary theatre, and in the climate of a European stance against the Iraq war, America presents a powerful symbol of manipulation. This threat also has its roots in the discontent regarding America’s forceful cultural imperialism.
world identity. In what way could his sincere engagement have been integrated into a performance which had it roots in a different European history?

Vuyst protests that politics still need to be couched in conceptual ambiguity, she argues, “Just as ‘standstill’, the refusal to move, is now praised as a criticism of increasing mobility and globalisation. But if two dancers in Wolf burn the Israeli and American flags you are out.” (Vuyst in Platel 2006: 135). She identifies the necessity to find the balance between representation and identity and defines the theatrical space as automatically political. She also suggests that the act of engagement itself is important enough to be above criticism (Vuyst in Platel 2006). In the scene following the flag burning, the physicality and energy of gestured movement, a more contemporary form of ‘gestus’, reveals a possibility for a more interpretive yet clear representation of the larger idea surrounding the conflict. Shortly after, following an intensely poignant aria in which the dancers stood quietly by as the singers wandered around the stage, the sound of gunfire exploded. In slow motion, the group of dancers and singers clutched their wounded bodies, falling and crawling onto the floor. It was a slow and agonising scene carried out in silence. The literal burning of the flags appeared ideologically and visually simplistic against the more symbolic collective assassination. The difference between the two acts is made obvious. As Marcuse has said, “The more immediately political the work of art, the more it reduces the power of estrangement and the radical transcendent goals of change” (Marcuse in Opsomer 2001). The force of political theatre lies in its removal from the politically obvious. As such it is the carnivalesque that provides a technique with which to continue in a vein of political incorrectness - as demonstrated by the diva who, while displaying great physical elasticity, questions her inability to reconcile her Jewish South American heritage to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

Earlier performances of Platel’s, Moeder en Kind, Bernadetje and La Tristeza Complice, did not pay lip service to ‘political correctness’, but broke through political decorum with their lack of good taste, seriousness and explicit political motivation. They flirted with media clichés and a radically banal aesthetic, and yet these pieces were forceful and politically engaging. Perhaps the discrepancy between the earlier work and Wolf lies in its more populist approach. The larger audiences of such large-scale productions demand a broader and a more clearly defined textual language than the earlier ‘in house’ smaller productions. Coupled with the obvious ‘showmanship’ of productions such as Wolf political criticism can appear disharmonious. Wolf’s dramaturge Hildegard Vuyst, questioned the obvious choice for maximum size, maximum tour and maximum means as presenting a danger for the ideas involved. Platel, however, sees the large-scale production as a natural progression in his development and as a challenge to his

66 In an interview, Platel drew similarities with the double innuendo in Di scrivermi from the Cosí fan tute and that of the Palestinian Israeli conflict. As well, he found a “perfect alibi” in the fact that Mozart’s letters contain evidence of political engagement. (Platel 2004: 11)
ideas and creativity. Further, he suggests, that people from the same sector (dance) too easily undermine his progression. “People accuse you of producing ‘popular’ work...I don’t get that sort of criticism from the audience but from people in the sector. An audience is willing to follow you” (Vuyst in Platel 2006: 135).

The performance Wolf is partly an attempt to eradicate artistic as well as class barriers and boundaries. The artistic and political fragmentation that is a characteristic of this work mitigates against a stable notion of working class. The notion of economic standing being associated with artistic preference is a long held assumption. The performance of Wolf tries to intervene in this concept by presenting and creating a hybrid space that is not so much intercultural but provides intersections of representations of class and arts practice. Where the onus on the company was previously to take the performance directly to the street (read working class), the street had now been taken to the theatre. Opera with street dancers, rappers, dogs, cheap plastic and corrugated iron - the question had earlier been asked of Platel’s work: how long could it keep the well-intentioned use of fringe dwellers as major characters without them becoming fodder for recuperation? Paul Pourveur has indicated that the ‘little man’, the human-interest story in television and media, has become a mediatised, commercialised and recuperative product (Pourveur 2004:). In the case of Wolf, the use of the disenfranchised is not disingenuous, but Pourveur’s statement identifies the complexities in generating a realism in theatre where the act of appropriation remains at the heart of the theatre’s mimesis.

**Intertextuality and notions of hybridity: in post postmodern theatre**

Baz Kershaw notes that: “... to aim to be both oppositional and popular places performance on a knife edge between resistance to and incorporation into the status quo.” (Kershaw 1992: 8)

This is exactly where much of the criticism of Wolf lies. However, it is also precisely that which Platel has chosen to explore. Marxist critics such as Eagleton and Jameson and dancers such as Yvonne Rainer and David Gordon have argued that postmodernism has propagated an apolitical aesthetic, and while it does not make direct political engagement impossible, it does however make it difficult (Banes 1994). As the flag burning scene demonstrates, the confrontation with an unmediated political statement sits oddly if not defiantly. The seeds in this performance are deeply imbedded in a postmodern genealogy. However, such an ideology is no longer directly relevant to the contemporary theatre of Europe. Geert Opsomer, following Auslander, suggests that the post-modern theatre artist of this era must work with mediatised simulacra images in order to further recycle and criticise them. The avant-garde can no longer
restrict itself to the margins nor can it escape complicity within a mediatised society (Opsomer 1996). In the work of Les C de la B, culminating in Wolf, these assertions have significant relevance.67

True to postmodern montage performance, contrapositions in Wolf are abundant. With roots deeply embedded in the tanztheater of Pina Bausch and more recently affiliated with the works of Sasha Waltz (Berlin), Meg Stewart (Zurich), La Gaia Scienza (Italy) and Teshigiwara (Japan), Platel is in search of a structure that will incorporate the pluralist ideals of multidisciplinary theatre as well as engage with the politics of the world around them, and incorporate audiences from all persuasions. Wolf is the consummate hybrid. Classical music combined with pop, ballet with street dance, cabaret text in theatre performance and musicians on the podium. None of these combinations are new in the world of contemporary dance or theatre, nor is multicultural integration in a dance cast. Platel, however, uses the idea of difference to accentuate national extremities. Platel’s dancers come from Burkino Faso, South Africa, France, Argentina, Brazil, Vietnam and Belgium, the singers from Poland, Sweden and Italy. “Where they come from determines their physicality, how they move, and the way in which they regard the world. They bring their own baggage” (Platel: 2004). They also reflect and comment on difference and heritage with a communal framework.

The performers in Wolf follow and then leave one another, brought together briefly by a cultural connection or a physical empathy. These fleeting interactions of harmony are often the most telling of their differences. “I don’t believe in classical music”, says one of the dancers, “That’s what Black Sabbath is for”. He then proceeds to turn one pirouette after the other to an extraordinarily beautiful aria. He stops, irritated, to admonish a deaf actor, who has no comprehension of the sudden necessity for attentive listening, no comprehension of making too much noise, no way of knowing the beauty of the aria. The deaf actor holds questions as signs up on his forehead. “What is music?” “What is Mozart?” Frustrated with a lack of response he translates what he understands as the meaning of music and the nature of Mozart into his own gestured sequence. His gesture inspires and activates a gestured ballet done by the whole cast. Out in front, the deaf actor alone tries to sing. The differences remain palpable. Postmodernism had allowed for a pluralist and altruistic approach to theatre making. However, in Wolf the integration between dancer/actor, foreigner/national, ability/disability intensifies and underlines difference.

As a move away from the postmodern that spawned interdisciplinary theatre, new hybrids like Wolf have re-established older boundaries. The rejection of modernism and classical practice that defined the postmodern era has been inverted. The opera dance hybrid of Wolf follows

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67 The nature of discussions around political theatre reflects the concerns of theatre in the early twenty-first century. The postmodern desire to be apolitical can itself be read as a political statement.
Gerard Mortier’s pragmatic and modernist approach, “Mit dem Material der tradition Neues schaffen” (trans: Creating something new from traditional materials) (Mortier Ruherweb 2003). The intention was to create a performance that would rattle the concept of high and low art. Classicism restructured. Inverting the trends to create a new avant-garde, Platel says; “I am particularly unhappy with the polarisation that occurs in the dance world between ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The new attempts to redefine ‘art’ I very often find reactionary” (Platel 2006: 80).

**Concluding remarks**

So where was dance in all this? Wolf utilises the use of gesture, text, film, and the body as object, as means to create the intertexts. The outcomes of these lead to a high calibre, showy, but nevertheless politically engaged theatre, the reading of which presents a new set of problems. As a performance, it highlighted wonderful dancing, and the dancing enabled a construction of images. But was the dancing only a means to an end? Platel described Wolf as “a collage of Mozart, karaoke and dogs” (Patel 2004). The lack of mention of dance is significant. The term karaoke implies a copying and acting out of an original. Karaoke was present only superficially in the performance – on a wall centre stage right – and thus hard to view for half the audience. Dance was used in a karaoke fashion; that is, as a representation of dance, a method through which to achieve an outcome other than the dance itself. The actions if not being sung were danced. The dance, while impeccable, was there to function as “part of the production of meaning” (Martin: 1996: 326). It is this subservience of dance to the greater goal of projects such as these that has divided dancers and dance critics. Platel’s argument is that it is all quite irrelevant. You do the best you can with the methods that you have and the possibilities available to you. If you want (and can afford) ballet dancers, professional acrobats, skilled opera singers you can have them. If you want deaf actors, they will be happy to work for you. As it is many dancers aspire to work with Platel, and in doing so they provide him with the material and the versatility to develop further. As an artist, Platel cannot resist the opportunities made open to him, nor does he shy away from confrontation. For the over-mediated and subtly anaesthetised audiences of Europe it is perhaps left up to artists like Platel to do what they can with whatever means possible.

The interdisciplinary form found in Wolf together with its political engagement is a development of a more global positioning of art in a ‘world’ conscious, highly mediated and technologically developed world space. For those that are alone or alienated, the concept of ‘community’ may be enticing and suggest a utopian ideal. However, a compulsion for individuality or a stateless, nomadic existence is for dancers often no less ideal. Platel created a series of geo political and

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68 Mortier is interested in the perceived elitism of the opera, one created not so much by actual ticket costs as by cultural association.
aesthetic fragments that could function as a metaphor for a dancer’s body, one for hire, between disciplines and genres, at home in all, belonging to none. Dancers are the ideal nomads. Their knowledge and memory is inscribed and embodied, it does not reside in a suitcase or remain clamped to a place. Dance similarly, has become the nomadic practice within the arts and theatre disciplines. On stage with singers, actors, in music videos or visual extravaganzas, as a political tool, this versatility is at the heart of its existence and popularity. The new frontier of cyberspace offers possibilities to cross between the live and the virtual and move into areas usually uninhabited by live bodies. The following chapter examines further the role that dancers play in interdisciplinary relationships and the position that dance has within the gestalt of these relationships. It attempts to identify where the body lies in the area of live and virtual space, in what way dancers establish and create future bodies.
Chapter 4

Dance and Technology: Power and identity in technological and virtual spaces

I was a latch key kid, so when I was a teenager I would come home from school and before anyone would arrive I would close the curtains, put on my favourite albums, and dance slowly and repetitively to *In a Gada da Vida*, or Beethoven sonatas or Moondog or whatever. These sessions, in which I was absorbed into the dancing, sent me into a world where I did not feel as if I existed in the same way that I normally did. I could do anything, and, I always felt as if I was somewhere else: I had taken my self out of my body through my body and travelled with my body to another space. I was master of the technology of the record player (if it didn’t break down), of my body and of the special and enigmatic places that humans could inhabit. Knowing this body out-of-body experience, (something I also experienced during performance) made me aware of different sites of reality and being.69

This link to an out-of-body space, that many dancers have experienced, connects us to possibilities in technological virtual space that make the companionship between dance and technological exploration possibly even more intuitive than that of dance and other art forms. More dancers and many institutions are steadily exploring the realms of interactivity between dance and technology, and there is an increasing availability of hybrid performances/installations that have been made for audiences as performances, installations and interactive sites. As a hybrid practice it figures importantly: if not yet in the availability to a large audience, then as a site in which the role of the body and dance is considered in steadily increasing technologically defined interactions and communications. The conclusions from the preceding chapters have shown that choreographers and dancers stimulate development in new performative ideas through exploration with different media. They have also shown that the manner in which dancers exist in terms of their own identity can influence the position of dance in new performance practice. This chapter addresses structures

69 The phenomenological position of myself as a dancing teenager appears to run counter to the more distant position a subject holds in a Foucault’s mediated genealogy. The phenomenological and subjective experience of dance by the dancer may be considered antithetical to a Foucauldian analysis in which a more material body, mediated by social forces, is under discussion. However, these two are not incompatible in relation to a more full and idiomatic experience of living in the world. A dance genealogy as described in Chapter 1, that looks particularly at the way that dancers view themselves in a cultural and social light, crosses drastically the notion of inherent power that is evident in a phenomenological experience of dance. Thus, when considering dance and technology, the position of both individual genealogies and histories should be taken into consideration.
of power in the developing genealogy of dance and technology, the virtual spaces they have in common and the real and cyborg bodies that inhabit them.

The role of technology in dance and dance in technology

There are numerous discussions about the value of technology and dance as a joined force in artistic practice. For some it breathes the end of an autonomous era for dance, as they believe that technology disenfranchises the body from its own disciplinary explorations and can sabotage the ‘meaning making’ of live dance practice (Randolph 1995, 1998). For others the idea of disciplinarity has become irrelevant in the face of a future that is defined by technological explorations. Sally Jane Norman (1996), David O’Halloran (1995), Sophie Hansen (1998), David Salz (2001) and Ramsay Burt (2002, 2003) point out that while many dancers may use technology to cover a lack of creativity, the fact remains: technology is an ever-evolving part of our social and cultural heritage. David O’Halloran reminds us that interaction with this new media is imperative, primarily because it is so culturally and historically relevant and implies large social change (O’Halloran 1995). Hansen also dispels the pessimistic argument that dance, as we know it, will not survive the next millennium; however, she warns that the physical and virtual bodies that are now being ‘created’ are of a different order than that which has been known before (Hansen 1998). Hansen, like Donna Haraway in *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), elaborates the horrors of these nonsensical ‘Nerdvanas’, where "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert" (Haraway in Hansen 1998: 14). For Haraway, however, creating the cyborg myth is a necessary and "potent" political tool that can build on the ideology of a postmodern pluralism to construct a more feminist and subversive cyborg. Her cyborg "myth" asks if there is a tool for women/feminists to create future bodies and instigate reformation (Haraway 1991:153). It seems more than likely that dance may be the tool with which to further define or at least influence the cyborg’s development. There would be then more at stake than just providing a new dance avant-garde. Norman argues that virtual reality has already changed the way we understand ‘corporeal presence’ in which the body’s materiality and sense of presence can take on new meaning in and out of cyber space (Norman 1996: 55). For this reason, she warns, as does Johannes Birringer (2002), that dancers are obliged to retain agency in the development of new “future bodies” (Hansen 1998:14).

By way of gaining an insight into a range of perspectives around means to retain agency in imagining and finding future bodies, I will consider three different projects. *Pact* (2002), an educational workshop for dancers and technicians, will provide the basis for an examination of the

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70 One such major conference, held in Melbourne in 1995 by Green Mill Dance Project was, *Is Technology the Future for Dance?* The proceedings were printed in the *Greenmill Papers* (1995).

71 Jeanne Randolph contends that “technological ethos” cannot sustain a psychoanalytic interpretation of dance and thus destroys the manner in which dance makes meaning. (Randolph 1996)
power structure in the relationship between dance and technology. Company in Space provides the
material from which to examine the sharing of space between a virtual and a real body, and the
search to define a new identity for the dancer in virtual space through cyborg bodies. Seule avec
Loup (2006) from N+NCorsino is an example of a work created from digital technologies which uses
no live performers. Through this work, I will look at how the avatar functions as a replacement
dancer and whether the kinaesthetic experience can be continued in disconnected virtual space.

**Enacting relationships of power**

As is often pointed out, technology as a tool has always been a part of dance. Even before Loie
Fuller - whose use of veils and light redefined the relationship between dance and photography -
the lights in the theatre, the curtains and rolling sets were all part of the interplay between
technology and dance. Wolfgang Hagen insists there is little difference between the photography
used by Loie Fuller and the telematics and complex systems of engineered spaces created in
media labs today (Hagen in Leeker and Dinkler 2002). These are really versions of the same
scientific progress. This suggests that technology is not just a phase through which dance passes
but one that is being constantly re-entered. Hagen proposes that we are really asking ourselves the
same questions: how “does man react to a medium that he himself created but is not merely
human… (Hagen in Leeker and Dinkler 2002: 124)?” Technology is man made and yet leads its
own life, as well as leading ours. Hagen suggests that we play an endless game of power and
manipulation in an ever evolving confrontation; an unavoidable existential reckoning in which the
symbiosis of man and technology can either remain locked in a needless struggle or develop
methods of mutual recognition in which power is indeterminate, but in which roles of active and
passive fluctuate.

Foucault’s identification of the passive role of the body as subject and the active role of the body as
agent plays itself out in the manner in which dance moves through fields of practice, often
simultaneously enacting both the passive and the active. The workshop PACT is an example in
which this duality was played out in the approach of the participants as well as the workshop
directors. Foucault’s insistence on an assessment of the power and underlying hierarchy embroiled
in a relationship proves relevant here. An assessment of the nature of power within the relationship
between dance and technology may enable movement towards some constructive modes of
working practice. This can provide a tool with which to analyse the relationship between technology
(as a ubiquitous cultural ingredient) and dance.

In Germany in 2002, new media artists and dancers, including Wayne McGregor, Gretchen Schiller,
Paul Sermon and Robb Lovell, collaborated with dancers and choreographers in an education
project/workshop in which various methodologies of working with technologies were applied. Called
Dance and New Media, the workshops were given at the PACT Choreographisches Zentrum in Zollverein, Germany. The workshop, discussions and articles are documented in the book and accompanying DVD, Dance and Technology: Moving Towards Media Productions, edited by Solke Dinkler and Martina Leeker. The material presents an insight into the working relationship between technicians and dancers, some of whom were experienced in working with technology, others who were just beginning to work with the new medium. The workshop was intended to be an empowering experience that would provide the dancer with skills to interact more successfully with technology. While the outcomes of the workshop were primarily constructive, the material provided suggested a number of concerns. One concern was the suggestion that dance could only be progressive if it was able to interact with new technologies (Schiller 2002, Leeker 2002). Also of concern was the often-suggested assumption that the dancers had to unlearn their dance language in order to be able to interact with the new media (Schiller 2002, Sermon 2002).

In a final analysis of the workshop, Martina Leeker concludes that the dancers had participated from what she calls the “viewpoint of modern subject” or “sub-jectum”. Dancers, she implies, believe that “Dance is considered as a cultural field, where, as long as modern concepts of the subject continue to prevail, a relationship of man to technology can be drafted and tested out, in which man reigns supreme over and controls technology” (Leeker 2002: 386). This, Leeker explains, means that the dancer brings a specific hierarchical structure to the confrontation with electronic digital technologies, one that holds on to a cultural field that refuses to relinquish control to technology. Consequently (Leeker implies), the dancer remains locked in the modern concept of “subjugation to the machine” (Leeker 387). Form or technology on the other hand, are designed as more independent and contingent phenomena. Consequently, Leeker considered that the technicians (those working directly with the machines), were more likely to “undermine the modern concepts of the subject brought to bear in the self-images of the dancers and choreographers” (Leeker: 388). “In so far as the modern subject concept continues to prevail, and with it the hierarchical interpersonal relationships, as well as an instrumentalised idea of technology that ultimately subjugates the human to the machine, it is advisable to irritate this view by confronting it with post modern methods of design” (Leeker: 388). In Leeker’s analysis, the dancer is defined as the modern subject who refuses to move into postmodern or post structural methods by which modern subject concepts are undermined. My own experience gives me a contrary understanding; as does the analysis of the postmodern genealogy of dance history, which has shown a much more diverse and open reading of dances’ move away from such stigmatisation.

72 Regarding the DVD and the artistic outcomes: As with any workshop situation the outcomes should not be read too critically in terms of their artistic content, therefore, the accompanying transcripts played a role in my assessment of the dance and dancers’ contribution to the work that was being produced.
73 Martina Leeker was facilitator of the workshop and edited the publications together with Solke Dinkler. She is a founding member of transARTES, an academy that conducts symposia and education courses and compiles publications on the performing arts and media.
Divergent, also, was my reading of the statements from the participants. That the dancers were overwhelmed by the force and implication of technology was clear.74

“When I enrolled in the workshop I imagined the dancers carrying out movement and then working on this material together with the media artists…” (Reyes: 232). “I have mastered my language (editor’s italics) and can learn movements very fast…but … I can’t develop my idea without knowing something about the technical and aesthetic possibilities the media offers…” (Giunta: 238). “From my point of view, it would have been interesting to work together on an installation that was focused on researching movement. With an installation like that, I’d also be interested in working on the way dance and software influence one another.” (Perdomo: 234)

Actively looking to incorporate their knowledge of dance - their dance technology - with new digital and computer practice, the dancers conceded that this was not always easy if denied the means to use their own ‘language’. However, Leeker’s analysis was not that the dancers desired a more level playing field, but that this ‘wanting to retain an own language’ in some way meant that they were unwilling to integrate completely with their new environment. Such a reading denies an understanding of the body as a surface of flows and developments, the very postmodern body that dancers had made manifest over the last century. It denies the use of historical knowledge, training and body awareness.

Rayno Perdomo, one of the participants, reflected on the process and described a series of conclusions.

…Martina (Leeker) said something about like that dance could change because the computer reads it in a particular way…My experience with technology and dance have shown me that dancers moving in a digitally controlled space only think about what the computer can read, which changes their movements... As far as the semantic side of movement is concerned, the computer seems to me to be more of an instrument that thwarts my intentions than one that helps me to bring them across. (Perdomo: 236)

Discussing the end of the workshop, Pedermo adds “I also realised that dancers can take up a completely different stance to the computer. I didn’t move in a particular way because the technology supporting the installation required me to do so… Instead, it was the computer that did what I told it.” (Perdomo 2002: 236). Perhaps this bears witness to Leeker’s accusation that dancers search for a hierarchy within the relationship of dance technology, but it also demonstrates that knowledge of a hierarchy of power aids real reflection and development towards a productive work process.

74 The quotes in this section are all from in interviews and round table discussions presented in the book Dance and Technology: Moving Towards New Media Productions (Dinkler and Leeker (eds): 2002)
One of the workshop directors, Gretchen Schiller, a dancer-cum-media-artist, creates interactive installations. In her work, she attempts to generate “a kinaesthetic experience” in virtual space as a means to materialise what she calls the “liminal” spaces that dancers traverse (Schiller: 231). Though Schiller acknowledges that dancers inherently contain the knowledge of these “liminal” spaces, she stresses that only through technology can they more effectively question, “Why do I dance? What do I do exactly and what do I do without thinking about it? Am I just a marionette in a choreographic super-system” (Schiller 2020: 232)? Talking specifically about the dancers, Schiller adds, “I would be pleased if the contact with technology and the precise work on the conception of the installation had resulted in a culture of self-interrogation (Schiller’s italics), a culture that explores with what means, how and why they were constructed and constructed themselves as dancers” (2002: 232). My concern is with Schiller and Leeker’s implications that if dancers are not involved in technological developments they will be unable to reach their full potential, and that those that choose to remain outside of technological explorations are forever doomed. In this way, Schiller and Leeker invert the hierarchical order in Leeker’s accusation but leave the hierarchy intact.

Similarly, Paul Sermon considers that dancers need to “unlearn” their own vocabulary, “comeback to a common language that everyone understands” (Sermon: 272). Dancers are used to, but not immune from, views of their art being elitist, abstract, too figurative, too mythical, too technical or not conceptual. Paul Sermon, a renowned, accomplished media artist and a contributing technical mediator, works mainly with telematic spaces. He advocates, “Dancers must put down their baggage, put aside their knowledge as dancers…and begin to work with movement in the remote space... instead of with their own bodies” (Sermon in Dinkler and Leeker 2002: 272).

While working within new or ‘telematic’ spaces is often disorienting and requires calibration – “As I entered this space I felt that I lost the embodied knowledge that I had as a dancer” (Maria Nurmela: 290) – dancers are probably more capable of understanding their positionality and their relationship to the means of production than Sermon recognizes. As Heikyoung Kim describes, “Once we had gotten used to the way the camera translated our movements…I could see a composition in my head…I can form an intermediate space with my body or I can simply overlap with the other body” (Heikyoung: 290-92).

Why then are dancers asked to leave 100 years of history behind? Why is their embodied technology considered expendable and, if their baggage needs to be discarded, why use dancers? Paul Sermon suggests, quite pragmatically, that they have mastered a bodily awareness that

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75 Telematic spaces are created by projected images filmed outside of the performance/working space and projected live into that space. In this workshop, the dancers were dancing within the projected image; that is, they were moving and could see their movement projected in the telematic space, creating a very particular kind of orientation.
enables them to adapt in remote spaces (Sermon: 2002). However, this kind of opportunism fuels a history of misrepresentation and misunderstanding in which dance has been considered primarily a decorative, unfathomable albeit a fashionable medium. In light of different genres and styles, it may not be unusual for a dancer to be asked to ‘unlearn’ their learnt vocabulary. Nevertheless, the request to “come back to a language that every one understands” (Sermon: 272) seems indicative of a much larger issue regarding accessibility and communication that supports the insidious misconception suggesting that dance in its many current forms and incarnations remains inaccessible and elitist. Yet, the genealogy of hybrid dance culture suggests a strong questioning by dancers, and one that continually disrupts the foundation of dance practice. Furthermore, as Hagen suggests, in the lived world we remain constantly in discussion with technology.

Perhaps the attitude of Wayne McGregor - the only choreographer amongst the workshop facilitators - to the dilemma was more indicative of a working strategy that was complementary to both machine and body. “My aim was to show the participants some choreographic strategies to use digital media. We are researching our creativity from a completely different beginning, but one which is resourced by kinetic information that we already possess” (2002: 306). McGregor suggests that the work can be more effective in digitally controlled spaces if the dancer has control over their environment, if they use their skills to develop a kinesthetic relationship that connects and informs their body’s reaction to digital media. Requests for dancers to “unlearn” their own vocabulary, to “come back to a common language that everyone understands” (Sermon:), are all too readily accepted from dancers who are used to, but not immune from, views of their art being “elitist”, “abstract”, “too figurative”, “too dancey”, “too mythical”, “too technical” and “not conceptual”, too full of “self-abandon” and so on (not to forget the subversive and sexual body). There are many calls for education and inclusion of technology in dance departments, not an unwise request, but in order to really further the dialogue there needs to be mutual recognition of dance and choreographic intelligence.

There are different strategies with which to negotiate the shared space in a liaison with new media. Foucault suggests that the way forward is to develop more relations between practice and theory in order to engage, access and describe ownership of the histories that make up the ontology of a discipline. The following section engages with art and theory, in particular, as a way to define the shared space in which the live prosthetic moves into the virtual. The section looks at the new identities of bodies in cyberspace and questions the way they contribute to the identity of the dance and the dancer.

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76 Paul Sermon is genuinely working to discover the relationship of three-dimensional bodies to two-dimensional spaces such as those in telematic images. In this article he acknowledges that his interest lies in the special components that a dancer’s body provides “with” in that space. (Dinkler and Leeker, 2002: 294)
Technology as a lived experience: the dancer removed

Oscar Shlemmer envisioned the early cyborgs of the 20th century and was considered by many as the forefather of the integration of technology with the body in performance practice. His work exemplified a constructivist search for a method through which art and technologies could combine. Shlemmer went so far as to transform or inhibit the dancers’ movements through the use of prosthetics and ‘spatial-plastic’ costumes, the purposes of which were to allow ‘man’ to experience and perhaps live in ‘non-natural’ spaces. This attempt to create a new body, still at that time three-dimensional, reflected notions of interplay and reciprocity between body and surrounding space that underlie many contemporary performance works (Norman 1996). Shlemmer strove for a combination of aesthetics and technology not unlike that aimed for by artists today in mediated situations between body and mechanics. According to N. Katherine Hayles, the technology that now extends to the physical body, in the form of prostheses, (Stelarc’s robotic arm, motion capture suits, mobile phones), not only transforms the individual subject, but also radically transforms the nature of subjectivity by transcending earlier oral, written and virtual cultural evolutionary stages. Ultimately, claims Hayles, we have already become post-human, connected to prostheses (Hayles 2002). As diverse newly designed manipulations of the human body are being explored through virtual projection, animation, 3D imaging, digital recreation, etc., the ontology of a physiological, analog body – a body that speaks, feels, sweats and breaks – “is often awkwardly re-positioned” (Behm 2004: np). In light of the contemporary methods that bodies are using to ‘speak’ in areas outside of dance body norms, translating dance into virtual forms and live bodies into virtual bodies presents a new, if slippery, surface.

In her work Escaped Velocity and CO3 (2001), Hellen Sky from Company in Space wears a motion capture suit that she manipulates to send computer transmissions to a projected image.77 The motion capture creates a connective tissue from the live dancer to the manipulated animated being in projected space. Other pieces see her moving with her cyborg other in a projected space or connecting with dancers in telematic spaces. In her ‘performative paper’ Making Light of Gravity (2005) Sky exhibits and theorises on her previous work with a discourse on the sense of identity and rationale of the dancer working across live and technical spaces. She poses the question: “What is the dialogue between corporeality and the virtual? How do we engage our embodied sense perceptions in virtual worlds?” (Sky 2004: np). Sky questions these relationships from a personal, psychological and metaphysical perspective, in which she as a dancer attempts to find new dialogues and ways of being through the experience of a virtual universe. She identifies two things in particular as being important to her experience of dancing, together with virtual beings: the concept that her body is linked to all matter, “the universe of my body and all that reaches between

77 Motion capture technique involves placing sensors on strategic parts of the body in order to capture the motions on an infrared camera. This allows for a subtle and sensitive registration of the articulations of movement that can then be assigned to any form, giving it the movement qualities originally captured.
the cells of my brain and the cells of my skin" (Sky 2005: np), and her phenomenological experience of that matter. "My body is pix-cells, My body is code, Lumens are my wax, The screen is not a surface but the presence of my luminescent skin...(Sky 2005: np). Sky describes herself as a "synesthetic, idiosyncratic cyborg" that experiences new proprioceptive and motoric sensations essential in new dance systems (Sky 2005: np).

As put forward earlier, the metaphoric link to other spaces is one experienced in some way by most dancers. Sky sets up more than just a metaphoric or experiential link to liminal spaces, but suggests a more scientific one where live and digital matter is connected to a flowing construction of cells. Coupled with this is the belief in the virtual as real or equal space. The virtual dance artist, academic and researcher Susan Kozel links these same two concepts in her artistic projects, writings and research (Kozel 1997,1999, 2004). In order to explain the theory of perceptual engagement, Kozel combines Merleau-Ponty's concepts – that join incongruent lines of memory, experience and embodied tension - to the logic of connecting bodies to digital experience. Kozel considers "virtual reality as a sort of expanded materiality…and the logic of bodies in technologically enhanced environments as an extended or augmented physicality" (Kozel 1999: 30). Using Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'reversibility', where phenomenological experience incorporates and reciprocates with the matter of experience - we connect with the tissue that we touch, the smells that we inhale and the images that we see - Kozel identifies a connection to the prothesis that technology provides (Kozel 2004: 9).78 Her own experience explains the dancer's subjective participation in virtual space.

The only way (as a performer and deviser) I can make sense of what is happening and begin to build a physical and philosophical vocabulary is by spending hours and hours 'wired up', metaphorically, physically and visually. What emerges is often unexpected. Research into Figments at ZKM make me realize that dancing with a virtual body is like dancing with another being. (Kozel 1999: 61)

Sky echoes the experience of duplication: "As a performer kinaesthetic intelligence is a desire to extend experience into virtual space and connect it to somebody else" (Sky 2005: np). Both Sky and Kozel were relating to the cyborg bodies that they had created in the virtual space.

As she attempts to "articulate an experiential embodiment that proposes other concepts of the body", and "understand the potential dramaturgies" behind the dynamics in cyberspace, Sky's work presents its own dramaturgy (Sky 2005: np). In Escape Velocity, Sky performs - with shaved head and robotic costume - a duet with the virtual body of her mirror image. Touching heads and moving slowly around one another, there is an animalistic but emotionally unreadable quality to the connection between the cyborg and its mirror. The virtual body appears and disappears; it plays the

78 Kozel originally developed these ideas in her unpublished PhD thesis, As Vision Becomes Gesture (1993) and referred to them in later work (1997, 2002). In her later work she links this interconnectedness directly to an even more scientific approach in which interconnectability is caused by the "fascia", the scientific term for the intercells in the connective tissue that connect the structure of our bodies.
role of a conscience or an inner voice, but what is unmistakable is its complete adherence and conformity to the body that commands it. It is the projection of a perfect Sky, obedient and docile. The cyborg, instilled with movement derived from the motion of the dancers, takes on the representational role as human, as a dancer, but also as something decidedly “other” as Sky calls it (personal communication 2003). “She is in an intelligent environment, a synesthetic cyborg, a chemical compound, analysed through global networks. She is wired, downloading time…” she says of the other she has created (Sky 2004: np).

Separated from a live initiator, the ‘other’ in *Seule avec Loup* (2006) from N+N Corsino, an installation that consists purely out of digital technologies, is a digitally manipulated cyborg, now avatar that ‘dances’ through different environments.79 The dance duo, Nicole and Norbert Cosino, from Marseille, have been making digital installations since 1989 in their search to “experience dance from a different subjective perspective” (Corsino 2004).80 The images in *Seule avec Loup* are highly provocative and intensely stylised. They are vividly coloured, constantly undulating images of landscapes that span the breadth of the gallery space. Every few minutes the image is replaced by a new one with a different colour intensity. Audience members are invited to walk through the space, moving under electro-magnetic fields. By doing so they activate certain subtle changes in the image, such as the way the grass undulates or the pace and direction of the avatar. As well, sensors are set up in different clusters in the gallery to elicit other visual or sound responses in the space. The human avatar figure figures often, but not always in these landscape scenes. It is rarely a protagonist, rather a component of the scene which moves freely if a little out of place around the varying landscapes. A dancer’s movement is filmed with a motion capture program and then digitalised; the digitalised image produces an avatar whose movement is life-like, yet at the same time life-less. Unlike an animated figure in an animated story, it has no character, no personality, neither does it follow a plot or narrative theme: the figure is a graphic component of the visual imagery. Here the avatar functions as a replacement, the remains of the dancer, a moving form that makes shapes which technology can extend to make further even more beautiful shapes and forms, thus additionally complicating (questioning) the notion of presence in virtual space.

Two things stand out in the work and theory of the cyber-dance artists. One is the nature of presence in the technological space and another the question of identity in cyborg creations. Regarding the nature of presence, Sky, Kozel and Bench, taking their cue from Massumi, Deleuze and Guattari, invest the virtual with the same potential as the real. Harmony Bench claims that as the initiation of the cyborg has been stimulated by a live presence, the machinated beings retain

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79 I differentiate here between an avatar, a digital, three dimensional image used to represent a life-like entity in cyberspace, and a cyborg, a being that is part digital and part human.
80 *Seul avec Loup* was installed as a solo installation at the Centre Pompidou in Paris May-June 2006. N+N Corsino currently work with Thecla Schiphorst and Tom Calvert on Life Forms - a system of computer writing that creates anthropomorphic silhouettes formed by articulating skeletal movements within the computer – they experiment with placing dancers and audience in unlikely and ‘un theatre like’ situations. (Corsino 2004)
that presence by virtue of their original interaction with live beings (Bench 2006: np). The embodied experience may remain valid for the performer/cyborg, but translating this experience to the audience can be problematic. Even if we can concede that bodies are not just concrete identities (Massumi 2002), that embodiment does not reside strictly within the confines of our skin, that our notion of ‘real’ is “more and more artificial” (Deleuze and Guattari in Bench 2006: np), and borders of materiality and experience are porous; empathy, understanding and kinetic experience are not a priori. In many virtual dances, a presumed empathetic reaction from the audience to the dancing figure is uncertain. There is a difficulty in establishing a kinaesthetic connection with hyper-real bodies that have been disconnected from the live dancer. Phillip Auslander has written about his interaction with a cyborg identity (the Bot) in a computer chat program, where the interaction with the virtual identity provided the ‘live’ experience. He suggests that a new liveness is created by identities in internet technologies that distort the notion of performer and participant relationships (Auslander 2002: 16-21). In Auslander’s cyberspace, however, the possibility to interact with the avatar (seen or unseen) provided the experiential referent. Thus, complicating theory is the practice and experience of virtual space as a performance strategy, in which the hermeneutics that allows for the same sense of inclusion and understanding in the cyborgian universe has not yet been fully developed. Auslander was, in a sense, together with the avatar in virtual space. Where is the dancer and where is the viewer situated in-between the notion of liveness and pixilated image? In performance terms, I suggest that they reside somewhere in the poles established by Auslander and Phelan (1993) – in the space where the body may still be experienced as a metakinetic experience. The experience of Sky and Kozel remains a personal subjective experience for themselves as dancers. In Seul avec Loup the viewer is also left without the kinetic connection that the original dancer or makers had. It becomes a different kind of experience of dance, one without the kinetic memory of energised bodies. A new set of hermeneutics may be necessary to ‘read’ and ‘connect’ with the cyber bodies or identities in a performative situation.

Regarding the question of identity; identifying with the cyborg is the manner in which to expand on notions of being “in the work… where the body resides as it is extended via real-time…”(Sky 2005: np). The danger lies in perpetuating notions of conformity and homogenisation as the avatar, the re-constructed algorithm, quickly takes on the role of inverted identity. Jessica Behm (2005) problematises the question of identity in cyborg bodies from the practical perspective of technology and transference.

…in emerging dance works that integrate technology, the identities of specific bodies-of specific racial, ethnic, national, political, and sexual bodies-are often lost "in transmission." Paradoxically, though digital transmissions by definition "preserve" the original data with (deceptively) no information loss, significant degradation occurs when transmitting "bodies" and "bodily information" along optical fiber cables, S-video lines, and LAN networks. While the physical literality of the body being squeezed along these digital tributaries is certainly inconceivable, the potential for the body to be stripped of
its racial, ethnic, national, political, and sexual orientation is absolutely possible, and indeed already occurring. (Behm 2004: np)

Or as Judith Butler has said, “Not all bodies matter in the same way (Butler in Bangma 2004: np).” A concern here, in light of the hybrid identities of dancers, is the possibility that “being squeezed along digital tributaries” can be a literal as well as a figurative manner through which to form docile and disciplined bodies. I am not suggesting a ‘big brother’ theory in which unwitting dancers are rolled into clone like formations; as intelligent practitioners involved in digital media, Kozel, Sky, Birringer and many others are working to develop inclusive technologies. However, the potential loss of power by dancers in technological space, along with the vulnerability of cyborg identities, means the utopian body is precariously placed.

In a discussion on technological influences of cyberspace of the 1980s that still has resonance, Elizabeth Grosz warns,

> While presenting itself as a celebration of the body and its pleasures, this fascination bears witness to a profound, if unacknowledged and undiscussed, hatred and resentment of the body. The preferred body was one under control, pliable, amenable to the subject’s will: the fit and healthy body, the tight body, the street-smart body, the body transcending itself into the infinity of cyberspace. A body more amenable, malleable, and more subordinated to mind or will than ever before. (Grosz 1995: 1-2)81

**Closing tensions: negotiations in shared space**

“Since the whole planet’s been colonized the human body has become the last frontier. In this horror we find every conceivable variation of prosthesis, mutation and schizophrenia” (Frederic Flamand, in Ballet Tanz, article by Arnd Wesseman, 1997). Flamand, a dance and new media artist, gives voice to a precaution as relevant in 2007 as it was in 1997. As with the other hybrids: dance/text, dance/film and dance/technology, the quality of the work in the still infant dance and digital media movement has been uneven. Its infancy, however, does not place it above criticism. While it is an area that is gathering merit in art practice and art institutions, the excitement over the possibilities and eventual outcomes is still great.

The medium of computer driven technology provides an attractive venue for dancers to push the boundaries of physicality and experience. Perhaps the constant need to evacuate the body is part of the human quest to transcend the ordinary into the spiritual. Can digital technology lead us to the ultimate liminal experience, and does the liminal experience still require the live body? As Foucault suggests, deliberation is necessary when negotiating the power and

81 See also Johannes Birringer *Three Dance Screens, Dancing with Technologies* (1998) in which he takes issue with Stelarc’s “obsolete body” and the validity of its identity.
powerlessness of the body to make choices in relation to the sites in which it participates. The body, aligned to sexuality and deviance, has been historically mistrusted. (Foucault 1985) No less the dancer, who has been labelled dumb, subversive, ‘feminine’ and accused of being too body conscious. As a result, it is empowering when a dancer can take responsibility for interactions and influence outcomes in technological development. However, it is not always so simple to reinstate an autonomous body. While just “taking responsibility for our interactions with machines”, as Donna Haraway suggests, may not be enough, and ethical issues around sexuality, gender and cyber manipulation remain problematic, the idea that the body itself is a form of technology and a form of information can lead to more active means of resistance. “It is through the flesh and not in spite of it that we gain access to the virtual” (Kozel 2002: 109).

While Sky says that the body is no longer the main priority – “we will always have our bodies, it’s time now to see what else there is to help us experience and uncover … ‘truths’, new forms of expression and communication” (Sky 2003 personal communication) – Kozel defines that there is a “political need to take more seriously human bodies, and physical communication on a variety of levels, as our society becomes increasingly technologised” (Kozel 2004: 3).

Couched in Kozel’s statements is the knowledge that dance needs to pay heed to larger problems regarding future identities.82

Schiller’s suggestion of a “culture of self-interrogation” may still prove useful; but only if applied to media artists, dancers and all involved. There are many calls for dance departments to include technology in their education program, not an unwise request. When asked in a radio interview what influences working with digital technologies had on dance, dance departments and dance culture, Johannes Birringer was pressed to give a direct answer. He answered that it initiates and stimulates growth in technological and scientific industries, that technology is so much part of life for the younger generation that learning computer and visual techniques is imperative, and that multidisciplinarity breeds invention into new methods of performance practice and is therefore always necessary (Birringer 2006). Understandable yet somehow insufficient responses: apparently more concrete and specific answers remained elusive.

82 Sophia Lycouris’ evaluation of her own work stressed a point that plays on differences in working with diverse types of knowledge.

The key parameters for work that fuses the technological with the aesthetic are dependent upon the character of the constantly evolving relationship between the aesthetic and the technological. For this reason the quality of such work is never a matter of the degree of sophistication of the use of the technology involved, rather of how deeply aware of this relationship the contributing artists are. ...it is possible to produce work of high quality...if there is sufficient awareness of the medium (or type of technology) involved and its complex relationship with aesthetic decisions. (Lycouris 2001: np)
Conclusion

Towards a negotiated sense of dance

Writing this thesis presented a dilemma. How was I to critique, or give a critique of something that I found had produced some of the most valuable and innovative performance work of the last century? As a dancer, I am proud to have participated in the development of that practice and also to acknowledge that dance is a versatile and open medium that enables interdisciplinary creativity. However I have seen more bad performances than good ones, I have seen dance and choreography students and artists repeatedly grab a video camera and record their movement only to present poor choreography. I have seen them use text to cover a lack of bodily information and present ‘intellectual’ and philosophical texts that often come across as patronising and clichéd, and more recently, I’ve witnessed simple conceptual ideas made difficult and embedded in even more simple movement. My experience of dance and digital virtual dancing has often been unfulfilling, and watching cyborg dance has rarely brought me anywhere near my own virtual experience of dancing and moving. Johannes Birringer, expressing the polarisation evident in dance circles, states that ‘dance’ is now often used as “an almost pejorative oxymoron applied to those artists who want to express something through the craft and composition of their dancing” (Birringer 2005: 21). I have attempted to bridge this polarisation by identifying the role of the dance/body/dancer in postmodern interdisciplinary practice: perhaps with the hope of restoring the body in the dancing.

Chapter 1 shows that dance plays a significant role in interdisciplinary performance practices. However, the chapter reflects on a number of factors that contributed to its unstable position within performance hierarchies. Some of the reasons for this instability are derived from inscribed notions that dancers have about their own identity and the role of dance within a wider cultural identity. The chapter also establishes that literary criteria, like reading and writing, are not only metaphoric references, but are commonly used to make dance visible, readable and understandable. They help dance to communicate, but at the same time, their use suggests that kinetic and immediate emotional experience of danced movement is itself not a wholly viable communicator. The need to communicate plays a large role within a mediated cultural environment and the chapter acknowledges that the globally mediated cultural environment creates the desire, but also the pressure, to perform with media in a mediated context. Postmodernism enabled self-knowledge but left the boundaries of interdisciplinarity so open that there was little question of disciplinarity. To conclude, I suggest that while dancers have
become more adept at responding to styles, disciplines and intermedia, the sharp push towards interdisciplinarity was aided by a lack of faith in the role of the body as communicating element in dance. This played a major factor in searching for ways outside of the body to communicate.

Chapter 2 is about the legacy of postmodernism, which stimulated a new sense of direction in dance performance across the contemporary dance scene. The chapter describes performance methodologies arising out of postmodern hybrids. These methodologies I have termed ‘signposts’, as they signal meaning and provide direction. The positive elements found in the work of Pina Bausch, Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker, Alain Platel, Yvonne Rainer, Kenneth King and many others, have been to find a language that invigorates their intention and creates a connection to the audience’s understanding of ideas and emotions. The negative elements include oversimplification, homogenisation and a belief that a universal language can determine meaning or provide utopian definitions of meaning. The methodologies – gesture, text, object body, and film – have aided in voicing the dance and directing it towards other media. However, the chapter concluded and expressed the concern that they may, at the same time, devoice the body of its specifically kinetic voice.

Chapter 3 presents in the casestudy of Wolf, an accomplished multidisciplinary hybrid work that highlights some of the constructive modes of practice, as well as exposing elements that cause friction in audience, performer and disciplinary relationships. Here, dance plays an important role as part of the artistic language, but is not the primary element. As a performance that attempts to speak on all fronts, artistic and cultural, it displays tensions not only in its attempts to touch on politics and social issues – as well as to be entertaining and humorous – but in its presentation as a performance in which dance is only “part of the production of meaning”. This term was discussed in Chapter 1 and alluded to the pluralist use of disciplines, questioning notions of hierarchy and equality within interdisciplinary performance. Platel utilises the knowledge of his “bodies for hire” to good affect; however, exploitation in interdisciplinary practice remains an issue. In Wolf, there is a certain opportunistic use of all the latest fashionable elements across popular and high culture. Platel’s goals, nevertheless, are to develop a vision that will relate in a ‘real way’ (as Pina Bausch’s tanztheater before it) with his audience and retain respect for the versatility of the disciplines with which he works. This draws a distinction from the technological explorations presented in Chapter 4 where the notion of dance as an intrinsically deep and technological practice, one derived from the experience and knowledge that dancers have acquired historically, professionally and personally, can be too easily undermined in an attempt to suggest that the imperative use of technology and new media override earlier developments and experiences.

I have attempted to show in Chapter 4, that notwithstanding a metaphysical attraction to the virtual possibilities that technology presents for dancers, the stigmatisation of dance as
underdeveloped, unless boosted by new media and technology, supports the misconceptions that dance is elitist and inaccessible. The discussions from the workshop PACT reveal the assumption that technological knowledge is superior to body knowledge. The development of cyberbodies has provided only a very subjective experience of a new kind of dance. The experience of the dancer connected to the body is, it seems, stronger than the experience of the viewer to the cyberbody. This suggests that the kinetic experience of virtual and cyberbodies is not yet fully developed. The thesis has suggested that live dance presents a kinetic experience that is difficult to establish in virtual space. The disjunction between live and not live presented in virtual space, suggests that, at the moment, dance may be best served by clearly defining a role somewhere within the poles of live and mediated spaces; in a place where bodies are still able to move.

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As the thesis shows, there is a belief that other disciplines provide the voice, the form and the communicative elements that dance lacks. Extending disciplinarity in dance represented a possible opening of communicative methods to a widening public. This meant a move away from practice-based boundaries towards developing communication with, as well as through, other media. The media with which dance has been associated is exhaustive and ranges from using text in dance performance to the use of new media. Dance disciplinarity has its variants: multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, crossdisciplinary, and this thesis has suggested a few more. Dance, I believe, will most certainly, in the short term at least, retain its own disciplinarity, if only because there are still so many forms of dance being taught at institutions. However, retention will be more problematic and less progressive unless innovations for the body are developed within the perspective of interdisciplinary practice. This requires a respect and consideration for dancers as being not only ‘bodies for hire’, those that do what ever is required brilliantly, but respect for those bodies as retaining knowledge and history equal to any of the other more current disciplines. Thus while technology and media remain central to the development of contemporary dance and the hybrids forms that arise from it, an undisciplined and uncritical attraction to multimedia suggests a moving away from belief in the possibilities of the body as an expressive and theatrical medium. This reinstates the hierarchical element in dance genealogies. Foucault provides the case for a critique of the mythology of progress and offers a return to an acceptance of histories achievements. Looking at the scala of interdisciplinary achievements should not detract from patience and commitment to an understanding of dances’ historical content and context, nor from a critical assessment of the current situation. Removing the intensity and power of the body and its dancing potential would be detrimental for dance as well as for other performance structures.
The words of Kenneth King speak to me in a way that makes an ideal closing point for this thesis:

Dancing was about Moving until moving got in the Way. The Abstract Expressionist expressed Everything. Now there is nothing left to express: not even Alienation and Meaning-in-Life….That's why THE MOST PERFECTLY IMAGINABLE DANCE would take place in some sealed-off, empty, white-walled room with Nothing in it…I think the Best Dance, though, would have no movement because the movement would get in the way of its being Original. I mean movement was Invented a long Time ago already. I mean Moving is everywhere. Movement is Larger-than-Life. Television, you know. Movement Connects everything Up. Seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, thinking etc. are Forms of Movement…Sex is about Moving and Electricity…Our skin is one schizophrenic medium in which the Moving Under the skin in Connected-Up to the Other Moving Over the skin…..(Kenneth King in Banes 1980: 172).

Part of dancing is searching for extremes within the context of the discipline. When I go to see performances, when I dance, or when I think of dancing, I am searching for ways to bring the sense of movement experience – the sense that the body can do anything – that I experienced as a child, back into my experience. This thesis has been an attempt to recover the primary position of the dance for the dancer.
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